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The Social and the Religious in the Making of Tibetan Societies

New Perspectives on Imperial Tibet



Edited by
Guntram Hazod, Mathias Fermer, Christian Jahoda

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PRESS

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Mural painting from the Bon po house of G.yung drung 'dzin in Kong po (eastern Central Tibet). (Photo: G. Hazod 2005).

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Foreword

The present volume comprises the proceedings of an international workshop held in Vienna, November 2018.[1] The focus was on religion and its relation to social realities in early Tibetan societies, beginning with questions relating to the period of the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th cent.).

There is wide consensus in the literature that, with the adoption of Buddhism as the state religion in the eighth century, religion became an institution dominating polity and society, something which continued even more in the post-imperial period, in whose idealised memory the entire period of the Empire appears in the colouring of a Buddhist monarchy. At the same time, it is asked which religion (or religions) in the highlands were replaced by or superimposed with Buddhism, where it is often tacitly assumed that there must have been also a specific name for such pre-Buddhist beliefs (or for the religion of the élite whose specialists were known as *bon po* or *gshen*).

Such an academic search for religion seems to ignore the observation, especially common in anthropology, that points to the fact that in cultures before the emergence of religion as 'organised religion' (or 'world religion' / 'salvation religion' / 'book religion'), the religious was indissolubly connected with the social. In fact, social anthropologists doubt the existence of religion as a discrete analytical category, "that we can expect to find and study across the whole range of human societies" (Wengrow and Graeber 2015). Historically, the creation of a separate religion was a consequence of the collapse of Bronze Age states, it is argued, a residue from early state structures where the 'religious' and the 'political' were originally fused (Bloch 2013: 32-36). Similar assessments of religion, with a slightly different derivation, can also be found within religious studies (cf. Bergunder 2014).

Looking at early Tibet, this unity of the 'religious' and the 'social' seems to have been reflected by the somewhat succinct formulations of 'custom' or 'tradition' (*chos*, *lugs*) that we find in inscriptions and old Tibetan documents for the pre-Buddhist context. More specifically, reference is made to the 'tradition of the ancestors' of the emperor, where religious practices were integrated in social conventions that ideally served the maintenance of the kingship as a divine order. Here the religious was the everyday life of the social and vice versa, and as far as we can see, it did not constitute an independent entity provided with an individual name before the emergence of Buddhism.

As is well known, the archaic world did not cease to exist after the 8th century and lived on in the Highlands in different forms of a 'nameless religion' (Stein 1993 [1962]), which on the edge (or partly in the midst of) Tibetan Buddhist culture had preserved significant elements of the world

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[1] The workshop with the same title we give this volume was held at the Austrian Academy of Sciences' Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA), Vienna 21-23 November 2018. The meeting was part of the project "The Tibetan Empire and the Formation of Buddhist Civilization", itself a sub-project of the large Vienna-based interdisciplinary project "Visions of Community – Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (440-1600 CE)" (VISCOM), which ran from 2011 to 2019 (https://viscom.ac.at/). This project (SFB F42-G18) was supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF).

from pre-Buddhist times.[2] Stein was the first to point out the characteristic ritual entanglements of the individual, the society and the landscape in traditional Tibetan societies, as can be seen in particular in the analogies of deities of the individual, the household and the (religiously classified) settlement area.[3] In such an entangled cosmos, it makes methodically little sense, for example, to describe the respect one shows to a local deity as part of religion, and the respect for a person who represents this divine quality in society – the king, the (temporarily elected) chief of a village community, but in gradation also household father and household mother – as part of the social or political. Both are part of an abstract, larger whole, something that the anthropologist Maurice Bloch proposed describing as 'transcendental social' in his most exciting essay "Why religion is nothing special but is central" (Bloch 2013 [2008]).[4]

For these societies, academic classifications such as supernatural versus natural are also problematic, and do not find emic resonance in these communities. More recent suggestions in the literature are 'meta-human beings' or 'metapersons' for the designation of gods, demons, ancestors, ghosts, spirits etc.,[5] appearances whose otherworldliness does not prevent them from being immanent in nature, however.[6] In his *Unearthly Powers*, a theoretical work about the nature of religious changes in world history, Alan Strathern speaks of 'immanentist religion', which characterises a more monistic understanding of reality: all appearances – natural and apparently supernatural and society as a whole – are fused in a single cosmos. In such an 'immanentist society' it may well be that people encounter metapersons "inhabiting the world in exactly the manner that normal persons do" (Strathern 2019: 31), something that is well known to us from Tibetan ethnography, where it constitutes a prime example of the immanence of the religious in the every-day life of society-making.

This situation of an 'immanentist religion' is contrasted with the 'transcendentalism' of world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam) and other, less expansive religious traditions (Hinduism, Daoism and others), as whose core feature one identifies the "ontological breach between a transcendentalist and mundane form of being" (Strathern 2019: 6). Such a form of fundamental break is well documented from the earliest time in Tibetan Buddhist history, first in inscriptions of the late 8th century, where the explicit division into a world of the mundane deities (*'jig rten gyi lha*) and one outside of it (*'jig rten las 'da's pa*)[7] illustrates the encounter between Buddhism and the older indigenous tradition, the latter from now on also described as the "little religion" (*chos chu ngu*) in Old Tibetan documents.[8]

These recent discussions about religion include important developments from older concepts (such as the 'little and great tradition') and are undoubtedly useful in analysing historical transitions

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[2] Later formulations and further developments in the succession of Stein are Ramble's 'civil religion' (2008) or most recently Huber's 'mundane rites' (2020). Cf. also Langelaar in this volume.

[3] Cf. Stein 1993: 222f.

[4] Maurice Bloch's concept of the 'social' and the 'religious' is summarized by Christian Jahoda in this volume.

[5] Cf. Sahlins 2017; Strathern 2019: 4-6, 31f.

[6] Assmann 2012: 403, cit. in Strathern 2019: 32.

[7] Bsam yas stele inscription, ll. 14-16; Richardson 1985: 29-30.

[8] van Schaik 2013: 232; cf. also Hazod in this volume.

in the context of religious encounters and conversion. As Langelaar notes on Strathern's concept in connection with his analysis of ancestor cults (*mtshun*) in western Khams (in this volume), the notion of immanentist and transcendentalist religiosity represent a framework "that helps illuminate the dynamics behind Buddhism's ability to simultaneously embrace, challenge and gradually alter the ritual-cosmological landscapes it encountered."[9] Yet it should be noted that the identification of this dividing line remains chiefly a model, and in any case the distinction of two types of religion within one community is not something which is very common in Tibetan cultural history. True, the situation varies from region to region; thus in certain peripheral areas we indeed find a coexistence of Buddhist and pagan rituals, or forms of a syncretistic blend of Buddhist belief and older cultic practices, where the distinguishing features remain clearly recognisable (cf. Ramble 2008: chap. 7 *et passim*); on the other hand, it is rather doubtful, for example, to find such a coexistence of religions somewhere in Central Tibet, historically the core region for the development of 'transcendentalist religions' (Chos and G.yung drung Bon); it rather seems that the adaptation processes allowed the continuity of archaic forms of community building that dominated everyday life, in other words that outside its spiritual and intellectual core structures Buddhism itself occurred as an 'immanentist religion', and this probably from the very beginning of the religion's historical encounter with 'tradition'.

All this leads us to seeing old questions in a slightly new light: what actually happened after the introduction of the (salvation) religion in Tibet? Was the historically older 'custom' gradually replaced by religion in the adaptation processes that started with the vision of creating a Buddhist empire? While it is rather easy to demonstrate the enormous impacts of the (book) religion on society, it is less clear how religion actually operated in this new context. The observation in Tibetan studies that points to the different forms of continuation (or new clothing) of ancient beliefs as one characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism may provide a guide to a principal methodological reorientation. Actually, what is proposed is to sound out an approach that sticks to looking at the interaction with the social, in other words to ask how much of the old mechanisms of 'tradition' remained in the making of a Tibetan Buddhist society?

We see these reflections as an external framework of the present volume. Here, the thematic spectrum of the contributions ranges from ancestral cults and other peripheral ritual practices to burial grounds and their landscapes, from examples of the well-known narrative topos of heavenly descent to questions of Tibetan identity in imperial and early post-imperial Tibet – all subjects whose history traces back either to the time before or immediately after the appearance of (Buddhist) religion in Tibet.

To briefly address the individual contributions, the first one by Joanna Bialek considers the use of "Tibetan" in scholarly literature related to the period between the 7th and 10th century – in terms such as "Tibetan Empire", "(Old) Tibetan language", "Tibetan society / culture", "Tibetan religion" etc. As pointed out by the author, there are hardly any reflections on these terms as to what "Tibetan" means to researchers of this period, and in this context, the author examines the "Tibetan-ity" of core elements of the early Tibetan cultural sphere in two case studies – from *lha* and the title

[9] Langelaar in this volume; a more detailed discussion is in Langelaar 2021: 199f.

of the Tibetan rulers (*btsan po*) to the features of the "Tibetan" funeral ritual of the imperial period. Preceding these analyses is an illuminating look at the way the Tibetan word *bod* (later the word for "Tibet") is used in historical documents of the time in question. In contrast to earlier research, the author links the funeral ceremony described in PT 1042 to the Central Tibetan region of the imperial era, by pursuing a close linguistic examination of the Tibetan emperor's title, underpinning her hypothesis about the source with a contextualisation into related geographic and topographic, architectural, and art-historical evidence.[10]

Guntram Hazod's paper addresses the early (pre-Buddhist) Tibetan ruler image as an example of a "stranger king", the latter a concept of recent anthropological discussions on pre-modern kingship.[11] In their self-representation, such dynasties typically originated with a heroic figure from a greater outside realm, a situation which the author compares with the well-known legend of the celestial (*lha*) origin of the Tibetan ruler. This myth left traces in the landscape of Lower Yar lung, the homeland of the Tibetan kings, and the author refers here to a continuation of the stranger king in the form of the central protector deity of Khra 'brug – reportedly Tibet's first Buddhist temple situated in the heart of Lower Yar lung. He demonstrates that, in the context of the (post-imperial) cultic representations surrounding this temple's deity, older forms of the transcending union of the social and the religious spheres are to be found, and the classical dichotomies usually associated with a "temple", such as the sacred and profane, are actually rather blurred.

In his contribution, Mathias Fermer makes a detailed on-site inspection of an important district of the Southern Central Tibet (Lhokha) of the imperial period – the G.yo ru Gzhung valley. By drawing on a range of different evidence from post-imperial histories, photography, satellite imagery, cartographic material, ethnographic data and oral history, he meticulously looks at the historical geography of this area, in particular its links to imperial family lineages and their territories, as is claimed by later Tibetan historians. This relates to the presentation of the numerous burial mound sites in Gzhung and the neighbouring districts (Dol and Grwa) and their historical contextualisation as evidence of the presence of prestigious aristocratic families during the empire era. Fermer addresses general methodological issues for studying old Tibetan toponyms and discusses the task of proper localisation of old place names in case of limited or ambiguous textual data and under the natural condition of a constantly changing landscape.

The famous story of the heavenly arrival of the Buddhist religion in Tibet, known as "the advent of the sublime *dharma*" (*dam pa'i chos kyi dbu brnyes*), is the subject of Sam van Schaik's contribution. This central episode in Tibetan Buddhist history is (in the classical version) formally based on the older motif of the celestial origin of the mythical ancestor and thus actually provides an example of how elements of pre-Buddhist Tibet were absorbed into the new religion. On the other hand, there is also an approach among Tibetan historians who distance themselves from these details of the textual tradition, and in this context the author refers to an interesting debate on religion and rationality within the Tibetan historiographical tradition.

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[10] On *bod*, for more details see Bialek 2021.

[11] Graeber and Sahlins 2017.

In his contribution, Christian Jahoda focuses on Bloch's concept of the "transcendental social" (2013), and offers an illuminating re-examination of this theory on the basis of the relevant source material on the history of the West Tibetan kingdom of early post-imperial Tibet (10th-11th c.). The author engages in proofing its conceptual applicability to the creation of the West Tibetan kingdom under Skyid lde Nyi ma mgon and his successors in the wake of the collapse of the Tibetan empire. In search for transcendental agents or groups involved in successful forming of the new Buddhist kingdom of Mnga' ris Skor gsum (covering Gu ge, Spu hrangs, Mar yul, and lesser areas), Jahoda analyses largely unstudied, rare historiographical sources and material evidence from the region. We are made aware of a number of significant aspects of this seemingly essentially religiously dominated (and religiously defined) kingdom and in this context learn of certain continuities of the transcendental social and older forms of the fusion of the social with the religious.

Daniel Berounský's contribution leads us into the fascinating world of an as yet little-explored branch of non-Buddhist (and in its origin *pre*-Buddhist) ritual traditions from the broad spectrum of "Bon religion", whose origins the author finds in north-eastern Tibet (Amdo) and related to the people (and "clan") known as Dong (Ldong). It is a study that, on the basis of text and comparative local lay ritual traditions still practised until recently, contributes to the elucidation of the pre-Buddhist past and its characteristic combined forms of social and religious elements.

Anna Sehnalova and Reinier Langelaar both give examples from their text and ethnography-based studies on the Tibetan ancestor cult in eastern Tibet, each with their own accents and references to evidence from the time of the Tibetan empire. Reinier Langelaar examines a selected corpus of Karma Chags med's writings on *mtshun* ancestors. By drawing particularly on passages on the famed clan ancestor Ban thung of the 'Brong pa clan in Nang chen, he demonstrates how the 17th-century Bka' brgyud scholar makes effort in integrating beliefs of the 'immanentist' ancestor cult practised in this home region in the 'transcendental' cosmology of doctrinal Buddhism.

Anna Sehnalova compares funeral/burial practices and ancestor cosmology of the Tibetan Empire with the pre-modern and contemporary burial customs in Mgo log, reaching at the conclusion that "[b]oth the Spu rgyal and Mgo log tumuli can possibly be seen as creating a physical link between the origin of the dynasty, strongholds of its power, its divine apical ancestor and object of worship, and the passing and final resting place of its most noble members." (Sehnalova, this volume, p. 263). In both studies we not only experience different forms of Buddhist transformations of older local traditions but also significant comparative material on imperial traditions, specifically in the area of burial practice and the associated characteristic intertwining of social and religious realities.

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Hummelberg, Dehradun, Vienna
January 2022

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‘Tibetan’ – All-inclusive?

Rethinking the ‘Tibetan-ity’ of the ‘Tibetan Empire’

Joanna Bialek

1. Introduction

Scholarly literature devoted to issues that concern, broadly speaking, the ‘Tibeto-sphere’ of the period between the 7th and 10th century makes abundant use of terms such as: ‘the Tibetan Empire’, ‘the (Old) Tibetan language’, ‘Tibetan culture’, ‘Tibetan history’, ‘Tibetan society’, ‘Tibetan texts’, ‘Tibetan rituals’, and last but not least, ‘Tibetan religion’. Most frequently the other terms are reduced in their understanding to the ‘language’, ‘culture’, ‘society’ etc. **of** the ‘Tibetan Empire’. But a self-reflecting question is missing from any discussion: what does ‘Tibetan’ mean in the said period? Was ‘Tibetan culture’ any culture within the territory controlled at a given time by the Tibetan army, including Ferγana and Kābul? Did ‘Tibetan society’ include all the peoples subjected to any form of taxation imposed by the ‘Tibetan’ overlords, counting China? Were ‘Tibetan rituals’ those practised on the territory of the ‘Tibetan Empire’, by the ‘Tibetan society’, or were they those performed in the ‘Tibetan language’? To what extent did the texts written in the Tibetan script or Tibetan language mirror the ‘Tibetan’ ‘state of mind’? Familiar as it seems in English wording, the Tibetan language of yore did not even have an adjective like the English ‘Tibetan’! No term corresponding to the English ‘the Tibetan Empire’ appears to have ever been in use either. Thus, the urgent question is: what are we talking about when we are talking about ‘Tibetan’? The question is not only of linguistic-philosophical value. The answers we (can or cannot) deliver are absolutely crucial to the proper evaluation of the sources that, since their discovery at the beginning of the 20th century, have been taken for granted as belonging to or representing the ‘Tibeto-sphere’.

Disappointing as it may be, it is not the aim of this study to deliver the answers to the above questions. It is likewise not the aim to put forward a comprehensive definition of ‘Tibetan-ity’, just as it is not the leading hypothesis that there is/used to be only one ‘Tibetan-ity’. The objective of the paper is much more modest: it is concerned with two case studies that should demonstrate how complicated and fragile the matter of defining (or at least attempting to define) the ‘Tibetan-ity’ (i.e. the state of being ‘Tibetan’) in fact is. The examples represent two antithetical tendencies of change and invariance. The first example concerns the title of the Tibetan rulers (*btsan po*) and its variable character during the Tibetan Empire. In the second case study I will try to identify the common features of ‘Tibetan’ burial customs in the available sources, stemming from very distant places.

The chosen examples are also interesting for another reason: they demonstrate varying strategies in dealing with phenomena that are located on the borderline between the secular dimension of human activities and what is usually referred to as the religious sphere. On the one hand (Case study 1),

secular rulers of the Tibetan Empire, *btsan po*s, bore titles through which their identification with virtual beings (called *lha*) was established, at least in the language. On the other hand (Case study 2), a funeral ritual – a ritual which by definition most vividly addresses human anxiety about one's fate and the possibility of coming to non-existence – is presented in an OT text as devoid of any reference to eschatological concepts. The examples bring to the fore the mutual relationship between 'the social' and 'the religious'[1] and thus trigger the question of the boundaries (if any) between the two spheres in a Tibetan context.

The two problems broached in the paper are indeed rather disparate but they both touch upon the fundamental significance of definitions in Tibetan studies: what does 'Tibetan' mean and what is 'the religious'? I don't pretend to be able to answer these questions; my first concern is merely to direct the general attention to issues that are too often passed over in silence or taken for granted.[2]

2. Sameness in difference – Case study 1: *lha* in the title of the Tibetan *btsan po*s

The following juxtaposition presents all titles of the *btsan po*s which contain the syllable *lha* and are attested in the selected corpus of Old Tibetan (OT) historical documents.[3] The titles are arranged chronologically according to the reigns of the *btsan po*s:[4]

lha	*btsan po*	Śa khyi	(Rkoṅ 5)	
bod kyi lha	*btsan po*		(PT 1287: 519)	Khri γdus sroṅ (676-704)

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1 Cf. Bloch 2008.

2 The Tibetan script is transliterated according to the principles put forward in Hahn (1996: 1) with some minor exceptions that are particularised below. Only the first letter (even if not the root consonant) is capitalised. Following Hill's reconstruction of the Old Tibetan phonetic value of the ག letter as a voiced fricative [γ] (2009), I transliterate the letter as γ. If not otherwise stated, passages quoted from OT sources have been transliterated by myself on the basis of scans made available on the IDP and Gallica. The OT orthography is strictly followed. The 'reversed *gi gu*' is transliterated as *ī*. Reconstructed verb roots (√) are quoted in an IPA-based transcription. If not otherwise stated, the passages from Tibetan texts have been translated by myself.

3 The study is primarily based on historical documents that have been commonly considered as originating from Central Tibet: the *Old Tibetan Annals* (PT 1288, ITJ 750, Or.8212/187) and the so-called Central Tibetan inscriptions (Źol, Bsam, Bsam B, Rkoṅ, Ɣphyoṅ, Khra, Źwa, Skar, Khri, ST Treaty, Lcaṅ, Khrom, Lho). It is not assumed that these provide us with a complete picture of the issue, but rather that they constitute the most secure starting point for any historical analysis. In addition, I have also included the *Old Tibetan Chronicles* (PT 1286, PT 1287, ITJ 1375) and the Dgaγ and Dun inscriptions. The former text is undoubtedly based on official life stories of the most significant figures of the period. The Dgaγ and Dun inscriptions, even though not originating from Central Tibet, share their official language (vocabulary and phrasing) with the inscriptions from Central Tibet, suggesting that their texts might have been composed in a central chancellery.

4 The title *lha sras* has been excluded from the analysis for it was used not only with regard to the actually ruling *btsan po* but also to the heir to the throne even before his enthronement.

bod kyi lha	*btsan po*	NAME[5]	(Dgaγ 1)	Khri lde gtsug brtsan (704-54)
lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Bsam B 7)	Khri sroṅ lde brtsan (754-97)
lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Rkoṅ 1)	
lha	*btsan po*	*yab myes*	(Ɣphyoṅ 1)	
lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Ɣphyoṅ 5)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Ɣphyoṅ 16)	
γphrul gyi lha	*byaṅ chub chen po*		(Ɣphyoṅ 33)	
lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Khra 3)	Khri lde sroṅ brtsan (797-815)
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Źwa W 1)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Skar 1, 15)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	*myes*	(Skar 4)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	*yab*	(Skar 22)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(Źwa E 1-2)	
lha γphrul			(Khri 13, 22, 50)[6]	Khri gtsug lde brtsan (815-41)
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*		(ST Treaty W 2; E 16)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	NAME	(ST Treaty W 12; E 1, 51)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	Khri sroṅ brtsan	(ST Treaty E 22)	
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	Khri lde gtsug brtsan	(ST Treaty E 25)	
	btsan po	*yab lha γphrul*	Khri lde sroṅ brtsan	(ST Treaty E 34)
γphrul gyi lha	*brtsan pho*	NAME	(Dun 365)	

The title *lha γphrul* is used in two different inscriptions, Khri and ST Treaty, but always with reference to the deceased Khri lde sroṅ brtsan. Therefore, we may assume that this title was conferred upon him posthumously. Besides, we have three titles: *bod kyi lha*, *lha*, and *γphrul gyi lha.*[7] The

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[5] Unless otherwise stated, the label NAME refers to the contemporary *btsan po*.

[6] "Khri" is a funeral inscription and the titles used therein refer to the deceased Khri lde sroṅ brtsan.

[7] The newly discovered stone inscription (located presumably in front of the temple Pra dun rtse in Gro śod of Gtsaṅ) uses the title *lhaγi sprul pa* (ll. 2-3) with reference to Khri sroṅ lde btsan (l. 5; for the only thus far published text of the inscription see Dbus gtsaṅ rig mdzod, "Khri sroṅ lde btsan skabs kyi pra dun rtseγi rdo ring zhal bshus ma", posted 22.03.2019, URL: https://utsangculture.com/ཁྲི་སྲོང་ལྡེ་བཙན་སྐབས/ (accessed 16.09.2019). We notice here two inconsistencies with other historical sources. First of all, the title *lhaγi sprul pa* is not attested in OT. The only similar expression is *lha rnams kyis sprul pa* recurring in two manuscripts of the *Rāmāyana* (PT 981: r91; ITJ 737.2: r89-90; *apud* OTDO). In both cases it forms part of the clause *lha rnams kyis sprul pa maṅ po bkye γo* "Gods sent many transformations" (see also de Jong 1989: 15). It is apparent that *lha rnams kyis* and *sprul pa* belong here to two distinct arguments. The second problem with the inscription is the form of the name of the *btsan po*. Namely, its last syllable is spelled as *btsan*. In all OT inscriptions of Central Tibet, this syllable is always spelled *brtsan* (or: *rtsan*) when being

above juxtaposition demonstrates exactly this chronology of their usage. *lha* of Rkoṅ with reference to Śa khyi is an obvious anachronism confirmed in the inscription by the use of the same title for the contemporary and, contrary to Śa khyi, historical *btsan po* Khri sroṅ lde brtsan. *Lha* of Khra instead of the expected *γphrul gyi lha*, at first sight opposing my hypothesis, may be reasonably explained by the fact that the text is inscribed on a bell and so its composer had very limited space at his disposal. An interesting fact about the titles is that *btsan po*s prior to Khri γdus sroṅ (i.e. Khri slon btsan, Khri sroṅ rtsan, and Khri maṅ slon maṅ rtsan) did apparently not have a title based on the term *lha.*[8]

Therefore, we have the following titles used for the particular *btsan po*s:

bod kyi lha	*btsan po*	Khri γdus sroṅ
		Khri lde gtsug brtsan
lha	*btsan po*	Khri sroṅ lde brtsan
γphrul gyi lha	*btsan po*	Khri sroṅ lde brtsan
		Khri lde sroṅ brtsan
		Khri gtsug lde brtsan

Apparently two changes occurred with regard to the titles that contained the element *lha*. First, the 'mundane' restriction of *lha* by the determinant *bod kyi* "of the Tibetans" was given up by the *btsan po* Khri sroṅ lde brtsan.[9] Can we interpret this change as marking a turn in the self-perception of the Tibetan ruler from being a *lha* of the Tibetans towards being **the** *lha*? This change could have been an expression of consummation of the conquests done by the predecessors of Khri sroṅ lde brtsan who had expanded the empire in all directions. Now, it was up to Khri sroṅ lde brtsan to turn the conquered territories and their peoples into integral parts of one polity under the sway of the

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a part of a proper name of a *btsan po*. These two circumstances suffice actually to discard the inscription as a historical document from the imperial period.

[8] The use of the title *γphrul gyi lha* with reference to Khri sroṅ brtsan in Skar 4 and ST Treaty E 22-3 is an obvious anachronism just like the spelling of the last syllable *brtsan* instead of the original *rtsan* (see PT 1288). The inscriptions use the title with respect to Khri sroṅ rtsan only when juxtaposing his achievements with those of his successors, all of whom bore the official title *γphrul gyi lha*.

[9] As a matter of fact, we find the title *bod kyi lha* attested four times in non-historical documents: *bod kyī lha btsan po myi rje lhas mdzad pa khrī gtsug lde brtsan* (PT 16: 25v3); *bod kyī lha btsan po / γphrul gyī źa sṅa nas bźugs te //* (ITJ 751: 36r2); *bod kyi lha btsan po khri gtsugs ldem brtsan kyī sku riṅ la* (PT 1088 A: 1-2); *bod kyi lha btsan po khri gtsug lde brtsan kyī sku riṅs la* (PT 735: 2). The second occurrence concerns a clause that is apparently distorted; the idiom *źa sṅa nas* is otherwise not attested with the verb *bźugs*. In Bialek (2018: 2.45, fn. 3) I argued that the document PT 16/ITJ 750 is not a trustworthy witness of the Old Tibetan language because it abounds in grammatical and stylistic errors. Regarding PT 1088 A, not only its orthography but also the general character of the manuscript prove that this piece of paper was intended as a rough draft for various unconnected notes, some of which were exercises in preparation for official documents. Whether this unofficial character is responsible for using the 'incorrect' title remains unknown. The last example belongs again to a rough draft of an official document. The short passage contains orthographical errors, some of which have been corrected, some not (cf. *riṅs* instead of *riṅ*). In the case of all these documents it may be relevant to mention that they were not composed in Central Tibet and therefore their authors might not have been acquainted with the language protocol of official documents.

btsan po. To this aim it might have appeared advisable to elide the determinant *bod kyi* “of the Tibetans” from his official title.

The long reign of *btsan po* Khri sroṅ lde brtsan witnessed yet another change in the nomenclature: *lha* was added the determinant γ*phrul gyi.*[10] In historical sources at our disposal the title γ*phrul gyi lha* is attested for the first time in Ɣphyoṅ[11] – an inscription that on an earlier occasion addresses the same *btsan po* with the sole *lha.* The inscription clearly consists of two parts. The first part is an incipit and contains standardised formulas that praise the *btsan po* in traditional terms, but it also attests to the oldest occurrence of the title *chos rgyal* (l. 11) in historical sources. The second part of the inscription begins with the new title γ*phrul gyi lha* (l. 16) and is a eulogy for the *btsan po* as a Buddhist ruler. Here several clearly Buddhist phrases are used: *byaṅ chub spyod pa* (l. 27), γ*jig rten las* γ*das paγi chos* (ll. 28-29), *bka*γ *drin* (ll. 29-30, 31), *byaṅ chub chen po* (ll. 33-34).

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[10] The reader finds a detailed discussion of the title γ*phrul gyi lha* and in particular of the word γ*phrul* in Stein 1981 and Li and Coblin 1987: 82f. The point of departure for Stein’s analysis was the Chinese equivalent of this title in ST Treaty W 1: *sheng shen* 聖神. The latter is rendered in French by Stein as “Saint et Divin”. He assumed that the Tibetan form was a calque of the Chinese original (*ibd.*: 236). Already Stein’s translation “Saint et Divin” contains an interpretation at odds with the Tibetan original in which γ*phrul gyi lha* is a determinative and not coordinative phrase. (This argument was also put forward by Li and Coblin 1987: 83). Should it have been a loan translation, there would have been no problems for the Tibetans to render it simply as *γ*phrul lha*. The pre-existence of the forms of *bod kyi lha* and *lha* in Tibetan titles suggests that γ*phrul gyi lha* was coined on their basis as a natural continuation of a well-established native tradition. Moreover, a translation in a bilingual text of a diplomatic agreement must not denote identity of concepts expressed by the terms, an issue not considered by Stein. I will not pursue the issue in the paper for it lies outside of its main focus. For a more recent interpretation of the word γ*phrul* in OT see Bialek 2018: 2.558, fn. 1.

[11] This is true with respect to the historical documents. The absence of the title from earlier documents was already noticed by Stein (1981: 245), who concluded that it was used only in the period between 800 (or: 790?) and 830/840 (*ibd.*: 248). One occurrence of the phrase γ*phrul gyi lha btsan po* is attested in ITJ 1368: 18, a document popularly known as *Annals of the Ɣa źa principality* (cf. Uray 1978). As argued by Uray, the document concerns the years 706/7-714/5 (*ibd.*: 572), and so the occurrence of our phrase therein in the year 709/10 seems to contradict the hypothesis put forward in the present paper. However, notwithstanding the comprehensive analysis undertaken by Uray, a few details have escaped his attention and these suggest that the document is a much later redaction and/or copy of the original. Apart from the seemingly anachronistic usage of the title γ*phrul gyi lha btsan po*, the document mentions Mun śeṅ Koṅ-co instead of the expected Kim śeṅ Koṅ co, as convincingly argued by Uray. This is of course a grave mistake in an annalistic work and certainly could not have been made by a contemporary analist (cf. also “Les ‘Annales des Ɣa źa’ ont été visiblement manipulées”, Stein 1981: 254). Another puzzle connected with the princess concerns the use of the kinship term *lcam* in l. 43, which, according to Uray’s interpretation, narrates events of 712/3 (1978: 560). In the OTA she is already addressed with the title *btsan mo* in 710/1 (ITJ 750: 176), right after her marriage with the *btsan po* (ITJ 1368: 22). On an earlier occasion she is called *rgya rje*γ*i sras mo* (l. 22); *sras mo* does not surface in official documents of the Empire. Furthermore, ITJ 1368 always uses the honorific verb *bźugs* “to abide, stay” with terminative instead of the correct and ubiquitous inessive “to abide in TOPONYM” (*rkoṅ yul du bźugs* in Rkoṅ 6 should be read **rkoṅ yul du źugs* “entered the Rkoṅ-land”). Furthermore, Stein argued that because the title γ*phrul gyi lha* does not surface in the OTA one would not expect it to be used in the *Annals of the Ɣa źa* (*ibd.*: 254). In my opinion these facts indicate that the document at our disposal was re-edited sometime after the events described therein had taken place and the titles were adjusted to the contemporary court protocol.

It doesn't look like a coincidence but rather like a deliberately chosen rhetorical means; a newly coined image of the *btsan po* as a universal Buddhist ruler necessitated a new title – *ɣphrul gyi lha*. Doney (2014: 76, fn. 61) made a perceptive remark that the title *ɣphrul gyi lha* is introduced in Ɣphyoṅ in the context of territorial expansion in "four directions":

> (16) // *ɣphrul gyi lha btsan po khri sroṅ lde* (17) *brtsan gyi źa sṅa nas / mthaɣ bźiɣi rgyal po* (18) *gźan daṅ myi ɣdra ste / byin gyi sgam dkyel* (19) *chen po daṅ / dbu rmog brtsan pos / yar ni* (20) *ta źig gyi mtshams man chad / mar ni loṅ* (21) *śan gyi la rgyud yan cad / chab ɣog ɣdu* (22) *ste / chab srid ni lho byaṅ śar nub /* (23) *mthas klas par cheɣo* // (Ɣphyoṅ)
> *ɣphrul gyi lha*, *btsan po* Khri sroṅ lde brtsan, was equal to no other king of four directions; by the great versatility of [his] splendour and by [his] mighty helmet [the lands] upwards, from the borders of Ta źig down to the mountain range of Loṅ śan, gathered under [his] sway; [his] realm was great so that the south, the north, the east, and the west were filled with [its] frontiers.

The passage is a manifest of the unsurpassed military and political achievements of *btsan po* Khri sroṅ lde brtsan. His realm extended in all directions justifying the adoption of a new title for its ruler: *ɣphrul gyi lha*, lit. "deity of transformational mights".[12]

The above discussion based on data extracted from historical documents unequivocally attests to a shift in the title of the *btsan po*s. The change concerned the principal title used by Tibetan rulers apparently from very early times. The data reveals an internal logic and therefore leaves no doubt that the shift took place during the Tibetan Empire and was not a later invention. Moreover, it seems probable that the shift was related to the growing importance of Tibet in international relations in the region. It mirrored changes in the self-perception of the Tibetans from a regional polity with some military aspirations to the internationally acknowledged and respected (maybe even feared) political superpower. Hence, the title may well have reflected a natural development not necessarily triggered by external patterns or models.

But why *lha*? Why was the foremost title of a Tibetan ruler focused around the lexeme *lha*? In Old Tibetan the word *lha* had three principal usages: 1. a common noun "virtual being; deity, divinity"; 2. part of the *btsan po*s' titles (*lha*, *lha sras*, *bod kyi lha*, *ɣphrul gyi lha*); and 3. part of proper names.[13] In traditional cosmology *lha* were a class of virtual beings with explicit celestial connotations, cf.: *lha gnam* (PT 1286: 30) "the sky of the *lha*"; *gnam gi lha* (ITJ 738: 3v76; Khri 1-2) "*lha* of the sky"; *gnam lha* (ITJ 740: 74) "id."; *dguṅ gyi lhaɣ* (PT 1043: 43) "*lha* of the welkin";[14] *dguṅ las nī lha gśegs* (ITJ 738: 3v151) "*lha* came from the welkin"; *lha dguṅ du gśegs*

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[12] In Bialek 2018 (2.559) I explained *ɣphrul* as denoting "the capacity to change, to transform oneself" and proposed to tentatively translate the term as "transformational mights, magic powers".

[13] It must be stressed that although the syllable *lha* commonly occurs as a part of proper names, it is never used as a title with respect to persons other than *btsan po*s. Walter's assumption that "*lha* is [...] attested as a collective term for the nobility" (2009: 118) and the ensuing discussion are based on a misunderstanding of the passage from PT 1287: 148-9 (for a translation see below).

[14] For the etymology of *dguṅ* and its usage as an honorific see Bialek 2018: 1.413.

(ITJ 747: v8) "*lha* went back to the welkin".[15]

On the other hand, a *btsan po* never dies, he "goes to the sky" – *dguṅ du gśegs* is the standardised formula to inform about the ruler's death. Although Old Tibetan possessed honorific verbs of dying (like *noṅs* or *groṅs*), with respect to a *btsan po*, only the idiom *dguṅ du gśegs* was used. Its oldest historical occurrence is found in the OTA:

649/50
de nas lo drug naγ/ btsan po khrī sroṅ rtsan dguṅ du gśegso/ (PT 1288: 15)
Thereafter, in the sixth year, *btsan po* Khri sroṅ rtsan passed away.

In OT narratives, the sky is an important point of reference when speaking of a *btsan po*:

bla na rje sgam na/ khrī sroṅ brtsan/ γog na blon γdzaṅs na stoṅ rtsan yul zuṅ / (447) *rje nī gnam ri pywa γī lugs// blon po ni sa γī ṅam len gyi tshul// mṅaγ thaṅ chen po γi rkyen du/ jī daṅ jir ldan te/ pyi γi* (448) *chab srid nī pyogs bźīr bskyed// naṅ gī kha bso ni myi ñams par lhun stug/* (PT 1287)
Above, if the lord is profound, [it is] Khri sroṅ brtsan; below, if the councillor is wise, [it is] [Mgar] stoṅ rtsan yul zuṅ. As for the lord, [his] custom of the *mountain peaks*[16] of the sky, [and] as for the councillor, [his] nature of the ravines of the earth, equipped with everything as bases for (lit. of) great authority, extended dominions of the exterior in four directions [and] (made) the prosperity of the interior grand so that [it] was unimpaired.

bod kyi lha btsan po daṅ / gnam gñis kyīs bdud bchad na// γbal ljī rmaṅ las che (520) *ba myed pa γī bu// sa dguγ rīm γog du sbas pa yaṅ bthud de bsad do//* (PT 1287)
When both, the *lha* of the Tibetans, the *btsan po*, and the sky, have suppressed the demon, [they] have killed also a child, not bigger than Ɣbal lji rmaṅ, who had hidden below the nine-storeyed earth.

(1) *// btsan po lha sras/ γo lde spu rgyal// gnam gyī* (2) *lha las myīγi rjer gśegs pa//* (Khri)
the *btsan po*, the Divine Son, Ɣo lde spu rgyal, who came as a lord of men from the *lha* of the sky

lha sras gnam daṅ γdra baγi chags γog na / (Rkoṅ 8)
at the feet of the Divine Son who equals the sky

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[15] As far as I am aware, no etymology of *lha* has been proposed yet. Walter's assumptions that "*lha* meant [...] figures such as Ɣod lde spu rgyal and previous *btsan po*s, all imperial **ancestors**, real and (to our minds today) mythological" (2009: 111, emphasis – JB) and further "Deceased rulers, back to what many consider their mythological predecessors, were *lha*, i.e. *gnam* [*gyi*] *lha*, and *myes*, "ancestors"." (*ibd.*: 112), does not find confirmation in OT textual material known to me and Walter does not provide any quotations that would support his words. His interpretation of the phrase *γphrul gyi lha btsan po myes khrī sroṅ brtsan* (Skar 4) as "Sroṅ btsan sgam po was a *lha* to Ral pa can" (*ibd.*: 112) is yet another example of a falsely interpreted OT passage. The same inscription refers to the reigning *btsan po* as *γphrul gyi lha btsan po khri lde sroṅ brtsan* (ll. 1 and 15) but one would never assert that Khri lde sroṅ brtsan was a *lha* *"ancestor" to himself.

[16] For this reconstruction see Bialek 2018: 1.484ff.

Now, it appears that the sky was the domain common to both *lha* and *btsan po*s. We may never be able to establish what was first, the *btsan po*'s connection with the sky as his place of departure, or rather his affiliation to *lha* that enabled him a 'celestial death'. The first option seems more convincing in so far as it identifies a common domain that forms part of the material world and thus would be a more concrete basis for the association: "because a *btsan po* goes to the sky, he is a *lha*". In the preserved historical documents, the idiom *dguṅ du gśegs* is attested earlier than the title *lha* for a *btsan po*. This, however, is only negative evidence that may result from accidental gaps in our data. It is also rather unlikely that the formula *dguṅ du gśegs* was coined based on a particular funerary practice of burying rulers in higher areas or even on mountains. Assuming that the transmitted identification of the royal tombs is correct (see Hazod 2018: esp. Fig. 1 on p. 73), it occurs that other *btsan po*s were not buried on mountain slopes, apart from Khri lde gtsug brtsan and Khri sroṅ lde brtsan. But even if the identification of the tombs contains some errors, the fact remains that only two of the royal tombs are located on a mountain slope of Mu ra ri.

A mythological narration from PT 1287 establishes yet another relation between a Tibetan ruler and *gnam*:

> *btsan po dri gum lde* (18) *bla guṅ rgyal gyis gnam du draṅs na / lo ṅam gyīs mchan nas spre ɣu pyuṅ bas/ lde bla guṅ rgyal ni ti tse gaṅs* (19) *rum du ɣphaṅste gśegs so //* (PT 1287)
> When Lde bla guṅ rgyal led *btsan po* Dri gum to the sky (*gnam*), because Lo ṅam drew out a monkey from the side of [Dri gum's?] breast, Lde bla guṅ rgyal went, being thrown away to the glacier Ti tse.

One feels justified to ask, why it was *gnam* that Dri gum was led to? The passage certainly does not warrant the interpretation given to it by Walter that Dri gum is drawn back "to his heavenly home, *gnam*" (2009: 149, fn. 47), but it confirms a unique relationship that *btsan po*s had with the sky, be it *gnam* or *dguṅ*.

If we accept the second option, "because a *btsan po* is a *lha*, he goes to the sky", then the question remains "why is he a *lha*"? Below I will examine several OT passages that bring together *btsan po*s and *lha*. It seems that the title *lha* of Tibetan *btsan po*s was a derivative of *lha* as a common noun. However, the basis for the derivation is unclear. In order to throw light on the issue I shall quote several passages from OT texts that illustrate various kinds of relationship the *btsan po*s could have with *lha*s. An interesting starting point for the discussion is delivered in the opening words of the Źwaɣi lha khaṅ inscription:

> *myīɣi rgyal po lhas mdzad pa // ɣphrul gyī lha* (2) *btsan po khri / lde sroṅ brtsan gyi / bkas ///* (Źwa E)
> by the order of the king of men, the one *mdzad* by *lha*s, the *lha* of ɣ*phrul*, the *btsan po* Khri lde sroṅ brtsan

The meaning of *mdzad* is crucial in resolving the role of *lha*s in "making" Tibetan rulers. The phrase *lhas mdzad pa* also recurs in other OT texts:

> *bod kyī lha btsan po myi rje lhas mdzad pa khrī gtsug lde brtsan* (PT 16: 25v3)
> the *lha* of the Tibetans, the lord of men, the one *mdzad* by *lha*s, Khri gtsug lde brtsan

myī srīd nī lhas mdzad kyis/
srīd che ni mthaγr myi γgyur/ (PT 1287: 359)
Because the dominion of people is *mdzad* by *lha*s,
The dominion is great, [its] borders do not change.

myī rje lha{s} mdzad gtsug myi γgyurs // (PT 1290: r2)
[If] the lord of men is *mdzad* by *lha*s; [his] principles do not change.

rgyal po lhas mdzad na źal mtho / rgyal γbaṅs rjes mdzad na go mtho (ITJ 740: 70-1)
If a king is *mdzad* by *lha*s, [his] face is elevated. If the king's subjects are *mdzad* by the lord, [their] position is high.

The clauses *myi srid lhas mdzad* (PT 1287) and *rgyal γbaṅs rjes mdzad* (ITJ 740) demonstrate unequivocally that a relation of power (rather than creation) was involved in the meaning of *mdzad* here.[17] When the patient of the verb had a human referent, its meaning might have been specialised as "to guide". This latter sense is especially evident in PT 1290 where the fact that a lord is *mdzad* by *lha*s results in his principles being unchangeable. It is conspicuous that the remaining passages are metrical, apart from *lhas mdzad pa* in titles (cf. Źwa, PT 16).

Beside *lhas mdzad pa*, there is yet another phrase that recurs in OT documents and that involves both words *lha* and *mdzad*. This is *lhas thugs dgoṅ mdzad* (PT 1046B: 40; ITJ 740: 7, 97, 101, 160), lit. "*lha*s give thought to". In some cases, this phrase is preceded by a nominal phrase in absolutive, which is then to be interpreted as a recipient. I argue that this very phrase gave rise to our *lhas mdzad pa* and the development may be sketched in the following steps:

1. NP_{ABS} *lhas thugs dgoṅ mdzad* "*lha*s give thought to NP" > "*lha*s think caringly about NP"
2. PROSODY NP_{ABS} *lhas mdzad* "*lha*s take care of NP" > "*lha*s guide NP"
3. TITLE "guided by *lha*s"[18]

Although revealing another puzzle of the Old Tibetan language, this analysis still does not answer our question about the relationship between a *btsan po* and *lha*s. We now know that a *btsan po* was titled *lha* and that he was conceived of as guided by *lha*s. Yet another passage has *btsan po*s ruling over *lha*s:

lha btsan po yab myes lha daṅ myiγi (2) *rjer gśegs te* (ɣphyoṅ)
The *lha*, the *btsan po*s, fathers and grandfathers, came as lords over (lit. of) *lha*s and men.

On the other hand, at some point the idea that *btsan po*s come from *lha*s must have also been created. This is attested in the title *lha sras* and the following passage:

chab chab (149) *nī pha rol na/*
yar chab nī pha rol na//

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[17] Were *lha* is meant as progenitors, at least in phrases concerning *btsan po*s, the expected verb would have been *bśos* and not *mdzad*.

[18] *lhas mdzad pa* was translated as "qui est un dieu" by Stein (1981: 233), without any remark on the ergative *-s* in *lhas*, and as "made by the *lha*" by Walter (2009: 112).

myī γi ni myī bu ste/
lha γī ni sras po bźugs// (PT 1287)

On the other side of the river,
On the other side of the Yar [luṅ] river,
Being a man's son,
A son of *lha* abides.

This is part of a song that praises Spu rgyal stag bu as a true ruler and contrasts him with *ziṅ po rje* Khri paṅ sum. The following verses use the metaphor of true ruler (*rje bden*) and true saddle (*sga bden*), called a metaphor of horse and rider by Dotson (2013: 215). In Bialek 2019 (151f.) I suggested that this metaphor might have been of Iranian provenance and entered Tibetan literature in Central Asian centres of cultural exchange. Whether the same could be said of the phrases *myi bu* and *lha γi sras po* (> *lha sras*), remains to be established by future research.[19] This passage, and a few others that mention *myi bu*, attests to the existence of a literary topos of *btsan po*s as coming from *lha*s.

To sum up, *btsan po*s were conceived of as guided by *lha*s, ruling over *lha*s, and coming from *lha*s. Were these ideas mere mythological explanations of the fact that *btsan po*s held the title *lha*? The sober answer is that as long as we are not able to date OT texts, we will not be able to trace the history of the most formative ideas of the epoch. Consequently, the question of the origins of the royal title remains open.

The above survey has revealed that the principle titles of Tibetan *btsan po*s, although liable to major changes, persistently revolved around the concept of *lha*. The changes can be perceived as a reflection of socio-historical processes in the Tibetan Empire. We may notice that the changes occurred within 'the core' of the Empire; all the titles using *lha* are attested in Central Tibetan inscriptions. What remained constant was that Tibetan rulers sought to legitimise their mundane power by referring in their title to a supra-mundane sphere.

3. Sameness in difference – Case study 2: Uniformity of funeral rituals across the Tibetan Plateau[20]

The second case study intends to identify common features of a 'Tibetan' funeral ritual across the

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[19] An alternative origin of the term *lha sras* was proposed by Uray (1968: 292, fn. 3). His hypothesis was, however, partly based on a false reading of *lte bu* in PT 1287: 398 as *lde bu* and the identification of the latter as a variant of the title *lde sras*. He further argued that the originally Tibetan *lde sras* was "ousted by the title *lha sras* ≲ Skt. *devaputra*". Because the meaning of *lde* remains an unsolved problem, Uray's hypothesis cannot be verified. Prior to Stein, Tucci suggested that *lha sras* was a calque from Skt. *devaputra* that entered Tibetan either via Khotan or China (Tucci 1950: 77, fn. 37).

[20] The research, the preliminary results of which are presented in this contribution, has been carried out within the project "The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet. Part II" financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF P 30393). I wish to thank Guntram Hazod for the invitation to collaborate on the project. Hours of constructive discussions held with Guntram on many occasions have undoubtedly deepened my understanding of the ritual setting of PT 1042.

space. By comparing textual, archaeological, linguistic, and art historical data I hope to be able to bring to light pieces of ‘Tibetan-ity’, stemming from various distant places in- and outside the Tibetan Plateau.

The vast majority of the so-called ‘Old Tibetan texts’ were found far away from Central Tibet (i.e. Four Horns of the Tibetan Empire), the cradle of the Tibetan culture.[21] Among these texts, manuscripts that form the basis of our knowledge about the culture and religion of the Empire were excavated in the vicinity of Dunhuang, a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual trade centre located on the crossroads of the Northern and Southern routes of the Silk Road. Previous research has already demonstrated that some of the manuscripts that contain narrations intrinsically bound to Tibetan history (e.g., PT 1287) attest to elements borrowed from non-Tibetan cultures.[22] Some other secular texts were translated from local vernaculars (e.g., PT 1283),[23] whereas yet another group of texts were only written in Tibetan script but their language is demonstrably not Tibetan (Chinese, Old Uighur, Źaṅ źuṅ [?]). Therefore, the question whether manuscripts written with Tibetan script and in Tibetan language, all represent ‘Tibetan’ culture (i.e. culture of Four Horns) is more than justified. In the following sections I will attempt to demonstrate that one such manuscript discovered in Dunhuang, PT 1042, not only represents the culture of Central Tibet, but was also composed by an eyewitness of a funeral ritual that was held in Central Tibet.

3.1 Common characteristics

PT 1042 contains a description of a funeral ceremony referred to in the text as *mdad chen po* (ll. 81 and 97) “a great funeral”.[24] The text relates a lavish and complex ritual that must have involved large numbers of participants, including humans and animals, and sumptuous grave-gifts. I assume that this extraordinary character of the ceremony was expressed in the very attribute *chen po* “great”. The funeral was certainly held for an elite member of society, whose family had enough political power and financial means to afford it. The elaborate character of the ceremony also suggests a complex eschatological system shared by the group.

In the following I will attempt to relate chosen elements of the ritual as presented in PT 1042 to the known facts about the Tibetan culture of yore.

3.1.1 Time schedule

The following passage from PT 1042 provides very detailed information regarding the most suitable time for a great funeral (*mdad cen po*):

> *mdad cen po ni thog ma groṅs ṅog du* / (82) *gyur nas* // ***lo gsum*** *gyi du{s} su bgyi γtshal te* // *mdzad paγi tshe* / *zla ba daṅ skar mar sbyar te* // ***zla ba*** *yar gyī myi ṅo* / (83) *mar gyi myi*

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[21] On Four Horns as administration centre of the Tibetan Empire see Uray 1960; Hazod 2009.

[22] Cf. Takeuchi 1985; Dotson 2013: 71ff. and 79ff.; Bialek 2019.

[23] Cf. Bacot 1957; Clauson 1957; Venturi 2008.

[24] In Bialek (forthcoming-a) I argue that the text is a quasi-ethnographic report of a funeral originally written by an eyewitness. However, the manuscript which came down to us is indisputably a copy of another written document.

ṅo / gar (read: ***gaṅ***) *mdzad kyaṅ ruṅ ste // dgun sla γbriṅ po la / gor γkhyags śiṅ γkhyags te / mdad śid /* (84) *btaṅ yaṅ phan myi thogs so // dbyar sla γbriṅ po la / gor sṅo śiṅ sṅoγi dbal te sman myi thogso //* ***ston sla*** */* (85) ***tha chuṅs tshes ñi śu gsum phan chad taṅ // dgun sla ra ba tshes gsum tshun chad // źag bcu*** *la mdad /* (86) *śid btaṅ na //* [–] *nam gyi mthaγ la bab ste / mdad* {*śid*}[25] *btaṅ na / γdaγs pa la yaṅ myi sman // slad ma la yaṅ dṅo sdig /* (87) *du mchīγo //* (PT 1042)

Regarding the great funeral, first, after the death occurred (lit. [one] became dead), [one] wishes [it] to be prepared within (lit. at) the period of **three years**. At the time of preparations, having consulted the moon and the stars: when preparing not during the waxing moon, not during the waning moon, but during the **full moon**, [it] is appropriate. In the mid-winter month, while the gravel-soil is frozen, being frozen, even if [one] prepared the funeral, it would not be beneficial (lit. benefit would not be achieved). In the mid-summer month, while the gravel-soil becomes green, being the high season (lit. the peak of greening), it would not be favourable (lit. welfare would not be achieved). If [one] prepares the funeral **within ten days between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter-month**, [–] (A clause saying that this period is auspicious is missing from the text here).[26] If one prepares the funeral at the end of the night, it will not come as welfare for the deceased, but as great harm to those who remain alive.

Thus, a great funeral should be held within three years after the death. The most favourable time period comprised the ten days between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter month. In addition, the day of the funeral shall fall on the full moon. From the last sentence we may infer that the funeral should be held during a full moon night but the full moon should not occur at the end of the night.[27] These are very detailed data that we may be able to partly verify with other sources.

In the OTA-I (PT 1288 + ITJ 750) the following deaths and funerals of members of the royal family are recorded:[28]

Title	Person	Death	Funeral	Years
btsan po myes	Khri sroṅ rtsan	649/50 (l. 15)	651/2 (ll. 19-20)	2
btsan po yab	Khri maṅ slon	W 676/7 (l. 66-7)	679/80 (l. 74)	3

[25] I have reconstructed **mdad śid* by analogy with the verbal phrase *mdad śid btaṅ* in ll. 83 and 85-6.

[26] Lalou observed that a part of the text was inadvertently omitted by the scribe and complemented her translation with "[cela est bien]" (1952: 355).

[27] Theoretically, in every non-lunar calendric year full moon occurs twelve or thirteen times. Lunar calendric year comprises by definition always twelve full moons. Statistically about a half of the full moons occur during the day, the other half during the night. This clarifies the condition that a funeral should be held when the full moon occurs during the night. Haarh (1969: 369, 371) passed over in silence the word *gar* which I have proposed to amend with **gaṅ* "full [moon]". This allowed Haarh to state that the funeral could be held either on full or new moon (*ibd.*: 371).

[28] The abbreviations used are: W = winter, S = summer, A = autumn, Sp = spring.

btsan mo	Mun caṅ koṅ co		W 683/4 (l. 85)	
btsan po yab		W 704-5 (l. 148)	W 706/7 (ll. 158-9)	2
pyi	Maṅ paṅs	W 706/7 (l. 159)	A 707/8 (l. 162)	1
btsan mo ga tun			Sp 708/9 (l. 170)	
pyi	Khri ma lod	W 712/3 (l. 186)	W 713/4 (ll. 190-1)	1
yum	Btsan ma tog	W 721/2 (l. 223)	W 723/4 (l.229)	2
lcam	Lha spaṅs	S 730/1 (l. 256)	W 732/3 (l. 264)	2
sras	Lhas bon	S 739/40 (ll. 281-2)	W 741/2 (l. 287-8)	2
btsan mo	Kim śeṅ khoṅ co	W 739/40 (l. 282)	W 741/2 (l. 287-8)	2
yum	Maṅ mo rje	742/3 (l. 292)		
jo mo	Khri btsun		W 745/6 (l. 302)	

It occurs that a funeral was held one to three years after the death. Because according to PT 1042 the ideal time frame encompassed only ten days, within which full moon must have additionally taken place, it is reasonable to assume that the three years marked the upper limit. That is why PT 1042 states *lo gsum gyi du{s} su* “within the period of three years” and not for instance **lo gsum na.*[29] We can assume that the funeral was held on the first appropriate date after all the preparations, including building the grave, had been accomplished.[30]

PT 1042 agrees with OTA-I in one more detail: the most auspicious time for a funeral was between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter month. Except for two funerals, the remaining ceremonies mentioned in the OTA-I are said to have taken place in the winter. On one occasion a funeral was carried out in the autumn, which also agrees with PT 1042. The only violation of the rule concerns the funeral of a foreign princess, *btsan mo ga tun*, in the spring 708/9. Here we could speculate that she was interred according to customs of her native culture.

Unfortunately, we know very little about the calendar used in the Tibetan Empire.[31] We know that a year was divided into four seasons: summer (*dbyard*), autumn (*ston*), winter (*dgun*), and spring (*dpyid*). Each of the seasons consisted of three months: the first (*ra ba*), the middle (*γbriṅ po*), and the last (*tha chuṅs*). I call these months ‘seasonal’ in order to distinguish them from lunar months. Thus, a ‘seasonal’ year consisted of twelve ‘seasonal’ months. The phrase *ston sla tha chuṅs tshes ñi śu gsum phan chad taṅ dgun sla ra ba tshes gsum tshun chad źag bcu “*within ten

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[29] The phrase *lo gsum gyi du su* was falsely understood by Haarh (1969: 357, 369) and Chu (1991: 137) as denoting the third year. For **lo gsum na* compare *lo gsum na* “in the third year” in PT 1288: 13 and *lo drug naγ* “in the sixth year” in l.15 of the same document.

[30] A rough calculation by Feiglstorfer has yielded that for a tomb like that of Khri sroṅ lde brtsan (appr. 120x120x26m) 200 people, working seven days a week ten hours a day not using working animals, would require two years “just for the movement of the rammed earth” (Hazod 2018: 27); the details of the calculation can be found in Feiglstorfer (2015: 29). This of course doesn’t say anything about the actual working flow apart from the fact of how labour-intensive the building of one tomb could have been.

[31] Brief discussions of the imperial calendars may be found in Haarh (1969: 422-424) and Dotson (2009: 12-13). More detailed studies, albeit not restricted to the imperial calendar, may be found in Schuh 1974, Uray 1984, and Yamaguchi 1984. Schuh 2012 is a comprehensive description of various calendric systems and calculations that were in use in Tibet starting with the 13th century.

days between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd day of the first winter-month" suggests (presuming that the same calendar is applied) that at least the last autumn month had 29 days. Certainly not all seasonal months had 29 days because this system would be formally identical with a lunar calendar. We can speculate that, for instance, the first months (*ra ba*) had 31 days, the middle ones (*γbriṅ po*) 30, and the last months (*tha chuṅs*) only 29 days. This would yield 360 days in a year. But this is pure speculation. OT texts do mention intercalary months:

> *byi ba loγi śol bor baγi ston sla tha cuṅs gyi tshes bchu drug la//* (SI P/135: r1; trslr. *apud* Takeuchi 1995: 279)
> "on the sixteenth day of the last autumn month, an added intercalary month of the rat year"
>
> *lan γdīγi ston sla śol bor baγi ston zla γbriṅ po tshes* / (5) *lṅa la* (Or.15000/426: r4; trslr. *apud* Takeuchi 1998: 2.179)
> "on the fifth day of the middle autumn month, an intercalary month added to the autumn month of this year"
>
> *khyiγi lo γi śol bor baγi dgun sla γbriṅ po tshes* [-] (Or.15000/470: 2; trslr. *apud* Takeuchi 1998: 2.198)
> "[on the X] day of the middle winter month, an added intercalary month of the dog year"

The passages suggest that an intercalary month could be added to any month of the year. A brief notice on modern Tibetan calendar calculation might throw light on the issue. According to Shakabpa, in order for the lunar year to correspond to the solar year in number of days "an intercalary, or extra, month is added every third year. Unfortunately for the purposes of conversion, the intercalary month is not added consistently at any point, but anywhere among the twelve regular months that is considered lucky for that particular year." (1967: 16). It seems that there might be some continuity between the imperial and modern calculation systems, although Schuh points to the existence of several different systems of calculation of an intercalary month in post-13th-century Tibet (2012: 1.cxv). Another problem is that all the above passages come from Central Asian contracts. Albeit they are written in Tibetan, we cannot be sure that the dates followed the same calendar as the one used in Central Tibet.[32] No document undeniably originating in Central Tibet mentions intercalary months but the texts contain very few time specifications anyway.

In the vast majority of the annual entries of the OTA-I the first event recorded took place in the summer.[33] However, in two instances events of the spring preceded those of the summer, cf.:

> 675/6
> (62) § */:/ phagī lo la bab ste* / *btsan po* ***dpyid*** *źe śiṅ du gśegste* / [...] ***dbyard*** *bal po na bźugs*

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[32] Of course, it is possible that they were in accordance with the Central Tibetan calendar, but we are not in a position to relate the calendars to each other on an independent basis. Nevertheless, such an identity was assumed, for instance by Yamaguchi (1984: 408) and Dotson (2009: 12). According to Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya (1992: 91), calendars based on the animal cycle started to be used in Central Asia (East Turkestan) only during the second Tibetan occupation.

[33] Most frequently, only events of the summer and the winter are reported in the OTA-I. There are only two mentions of autumn and altogether six mentions of spring events.

(64) *śīṅ* / [...] (65) ***dgun*** *btsan pho* γ*on gyī sna bo na bźugs par lo gchīg* / (ITJ 750)
[This is] an annual report: in the swine year, the *btsan po* went in the **spring** to Źe śiṅ. [...] In the **summer** [he] was abiding in Bal po. [...] In the **winter**, the *btsan pho* abode in Sna bo of Ɣon.

704/5
(146) § / γ*brugī lo la bab ste* / ***dpyīd*** *kho braṅ tsal du rgyal gtsug ru bltam* / ***dbyard*** *btsan po yab rma grom gyī yo* (147) *tī cu bzaṅs na bźugs śīṅ* / [...] ***dgun*** *btsan pho chab srīd la mywa la gśegs pa las* / *dguṅ du gśegs* / (ITJ 750)
[This is] an annual report: in the dragon year, in the **spring** Rgyal gtsug ru was born in Kho braṅ tsal. In the **summer**, the *btsan po*, the father, was abiding in Yo ti cu bzaṅs of Rma grom. [...] In the **winter**, the *btsan po*, upon going on a military campaign against Mywa, passed away.

On the other hand, spring is mentioned as following the winter season in years 701/2, 708/9, 725/6, 726/7; compare, for instance:

708/9
(166) § / *spre*γ*u lo la bab ste* / *btsan po* ***dbyard*** *bal po*{*e*} *śa ru mkhar na bźugs* / [...] ***dgun***
(168) *btsan po*{*e*} *pho braṅ brag mar na bźugs* / [...] ***dpyīd*** *btsan mo ga tun gyī mdad btaṅ bar lo gchig* / (ITJ 750: 170)
[This is] an annual report: in the monkey year, in the **summer**, the *btsan po* was abiding in Śa ru mkhar [of] Bal po. [...] In the **winter**, the *btsan po*’s court abode in Brag mar. [...] In the **spring**, [one] held the funeral of the *btsan mo*, the *ga tun*.

From the quoted passages we may infer that the four seasons divided into three months were independent from the New Year day. The latter could apparently fall in the spring or in the summer.[34] We may hypothesise that it was either in the last spring month or in the first summer month. According to PT 1042 full moon should occur within the 10 days between the 23rd of the last autumn month and the 3rd of the first winter month. This means that ‘seasonal’ months themselves were not determined according to the phases of the moon, as opposed to the modern Tibetan calendar, in which each month begins with a new moon and therefore the full moon always

[34] Haarh’s statement that “the order of the seasons was: summer, autumn, winter, and spring” (Haarh 1969: 422) is therefore inaccurate. Yamaguchi (1984) noticed that two consecutive clauses in PT 1089 confirm that the last spring month might have belonged to one year together with the following summer: *byī ba lo*γ*i dpyid sla tha cuṅs*/ (r52) *tshes bźī la* “on the fourth day [of] the last spring month of the rat year” and *byī ba lo*γ*i dbyar* “[in] the summer of the rat year” (PT 1089: r52). This however does not entitle us to automatically identify the calendar followed in this document with the one used in Central Tibet. And it is certainly not justified to assert that “the Tibetan calendar started from the first day of the third month of spring in the Tibetan calendar” (Yamaguchi 1984: 208). Likewise unwarranted is Haarh’s conclusion, accepted by Schuh (2012: lxxix), that “the old Tibetan calendar of the Yar luṅ dynasty placed the New Year at the beginning of the summer” (1969: 423). Even though in ITJ 1368 *lo sar* (CT *lo gsar*) “New Year” is coordinated in one phrase with the first summer month: *lo sar daṅ dbyar sla ra ba* (ll. 5, 21, 36, 42, 50), other data indicate that the New Year day must have varied.

falls on the 15th day of the lunar month (Schuh 1974: 555 and Schuh 2012: 1.lxxxiv). This must have been different in the Tibetan Empire, where the beginning of the New Year was determined according to the lunar calendar, but the administration preponderantly used the 'seasonal' calendar.[35]

In addition, the passage from PT 1042 provides arguments for the short period appropriate for a funeral: before that period (or at least in the mid-summer month) plants are still growing, after that period (starting with the mid-winter month) the soil freezes. This suggests that the period between the 23rd day of the last autumn month and the 3rd of the first winter month had a constant place in the natural cycle of vegetation independent from moon phases. This period fell approximately six 'seasonal' months (three summer months + three autumn months) after the New Year day, presuming that the New Year day was in the last spring month or the first summer month.

In Bialek 2018 (1.417ff., s.v. *dguṅ sla*) I argued that Tibetans had two parallel calendric systems – a fact reflected in the language: *zla ba* referred to a month as a unit of time within the seasonal division of the year, whereas *dguṅ sla* denoted a lunar month. This again supports the above conclusion that the 'seasonal' calendar was not based on lunar phases. Administrative means were recorded according to the 'seasonal' calendar but royal funerals were partly determined by the lunar calendar. Moreover, in PT 1042 (79-80) post-funeral offerings are said to be made on every full moon of a lunar month (*dguṅ sla*).

Does the whole analysis help us to relate the data from the OTA-I to the information provided by PT 1042? The texts agree on three points:

1. 3 years. According to PT 1042 a royal funeral should take place within three years after the death; the funerals recorded in the OTA-I were held one to three years after the death. Not even a single funeral was held in the year of the death.
2. Autumn/winter. On the authority of PT 1042, a funeral should be held at the end of the autumn or at the beginning of the winter. With one minor exception (a funeral of a foreign princess) all the remaining funerals took place in either autumn or winter.

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[35] According to Yamaguchi (1984: 205), Chinese historiographical sources are in agreement in stating that the year of Tu fan (identified with Tibet) starts "when barley ripens". Because later Tibetan and Chinese sources have limited historical value when it comes to the period of the Tibetan Empire, Yamaguchi's calculations must be treated with due reservation. On the other hand, two dates of OT documents can be identified with dates of the Western calendar. These are the dates of taking the oath in Chang-an and in Lhasa, reported in the ST Treaty:

Tibetan calendar	Chinese calendar	Western calendar
10th day of the first winter month	10th day of the 10th month	8th November 821
6th day of the middle summer month	6th day of the 5th month	1st June 822

However, as already argued by Li (1955: 10) and Uray (1984: 349), the Tibetan dates are adapted to the Chinese calendar and cannot be taken as orientation points for other calculations. Were the first winter month the tenth month and the middle summer month the fifth month of the year, the Tibetan year would have always started with the first spring month. The above analysis proves that this is not correct.

3. 2 calendars in use. PT 1042 determines the rough time of a funeral according to the 'seasonal' calendar, but specifies it with moon phases. The text also reports on other funeral rites that are to be carried out in accordance with the lunar calendar. The reference to a calendar is less prominent in the OTA-I. The text regularly uses most general season descriptions, clearly dividing the year into four seasons: summer, autumn, winter, and spring. On the other hand, sporadic reference to spring as once beginning, once ending, a year, makes it clear that the New Year day was not determined according to the 'seasonal' calendar; an alternative calendar must have been in use as well.[36]

The similarities cannot be a result of a mere coincidence. They point to a common cultural background behind both texts.

3.1.2 Architecture

The royal tombs of Phyiṅ ba[37] and the most impressive from among other tombs scattered throughout Central Tibet share several architectural features that make them unique in this part of the continent.[38] These are:

1. Relative location towards a river and a mountain slope
2. Square or trapezoidal shape of the tumulus

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[36] Compare in this context Haarh's notice: "The continuous correlation between the dates of the Tibetan documents and the Chinese historical sources indicates that the Tibetan calendar of lunar months was a lunar-solar calendar. This involves the occurrence of intercalary months and (or) days and a movable beginning of the years within a fixed cyclus" (1969: 423). However, his statement that "the New Year is probably connected with the summer solstice" (*ibd.*) is premature. As indicated above, the New Year must have been calculated according to the lunar calendar. Otherwise there would be no reason why a new year should once begin in the spring, and once in the summer. It is however conceivable that the 'seasonal' calendar was based on solstices and equinoxes with the spring equinox starting the new 'seasonal' calculation.

Schuh (1974: 557) expressed the opinion: "[...] den tibetischen Kalender im Sinne eines einzigen in Tibet verbreiteten Systems der Zeiteinteilung und Zeitzählung (dürfte es) wohl nie gegeben haben". As for the imperial period, Uray proved that already then two distinct calendars based on sexagenary cycle were in use (Uray 1984).

[37] Because the paper is based on OT documents, I use the OT name Phyiṅ ba instead of the modern Ɣphyoṅ rgyas (cf. Richardson 1963: 75-76). The latter is not attested in OT and it is not possible to ascertain whether the two toponyms referred exactly to the same locality. According to Tucci (1950: 31), Ɣphyiṅ ba is the name of the hill on which the fort Ɣphyiṅ ba stag rtse (OT P(h)yiṅ ba stag rtse, PT 1287: 58, 118, 470, 477; Rkoṅ 4-5) is built. This however must be a later tradition for in the OTA Phyiṅ ba is the place of royal funerals whereas in the OTC it is a name of a fort (*mkhar*), probably identical with Phyiṅ ba stag rtse. As it seems, Tucci was the first western scholar who identified the burial grounds of Ɣphyoṅ rgyas as belonging to the royal family (Tucci 1950: 31-32).

[38] Cf. Caffarelli 1997: 239. Hazod (2019: 23f.) roughly classified Tibetan mound graves from the imperial period according to their size in the following groups: 10-15m, 20-25m, 30-35m, 40-45m, 50-55m, 60-65m, 70-75m, 80-85m, and more than 85m, i.e. up to 130m. They are thought to represent the so-called 'elite tombs'. In Hazod's opinion, these graves belonged to either the members of the royal family, rank-holding nobility, military leadership, or "battle-tested heroes" (Hazod 2018: 14; Hazod 2019: 24).

3. Horizontal trenches in front
4. Pits in the back.[39]

Thus far this kind of grave was reported only in Central Tibet, most frequently within the Four Horns, and in the Dulan region (including the most renowned Reshui cemetery).[40] Below I will discuss each of the features separately with the aim of relating, whenever possible, the archaeological findings from Central Tibet and the Dulan region to the textual witness of PT 1042.[41] In this way two planes of comparison arise. On the one hand, I confront the archaeological data from Central Tibet with the data from the Dulan region and see whether they could represent the same culture. On the other hand, the textual evidence of PT 1042 is juxtaposed with the archaeological data to check whether the two kinds of data point to any shared features.



Fig. 1: TTT 0092 Slebs-E (28 58 53, 93 21 02; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2013; modifications and additional data by the author)

[39] Pits in the back of elite tombs have been confirmed only in a few cases in Central Tibet thus far. The issue can be settled first when more thorough excavations have been carried out and their results meticulously documented and published. Heller (2013: 117) lists more features characteristic of tombs of Central Tibet and of the Kokonor region. However, not all of them are relevant to the present discussion.

[40] Hazod 2018: 15; Hazod 2019: 14. For an overview of all cemeteries from Central Tibet dated to the imperial period see Map Burial mound sites recorded by the TTT, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/maps/overview/ (accessed 17.09.2019). Dulan is a modern name. The earlier Chinese name of the region was Bailan (Heller 2007: 63, fn. 10).

[41] For the location of the most important sites discussed in this section of the paper see Map 1 in Appendix.

Re: 1. The most frequently encountered location of imperial burial sites has been classed as FT-A by Hazod and characterised as: "The cemeteries are situated in the non-arable zones, usually in the upper or lower part of the fan-shaped niches of the valley and settlement area. This is by far the most common type."[42] A typical example of this type is the burial site 0092 (Fig. 1).[43]

The tombs face the valley floor with a mountain slope at their backs. Naturally, the location of the tombs towards the floor of the valley and a river that flows through it can be at least partly explained by the topographical features of the terrain (Central Tibet is cut across with innumerable valleys) and limitations it imposes on the construction.

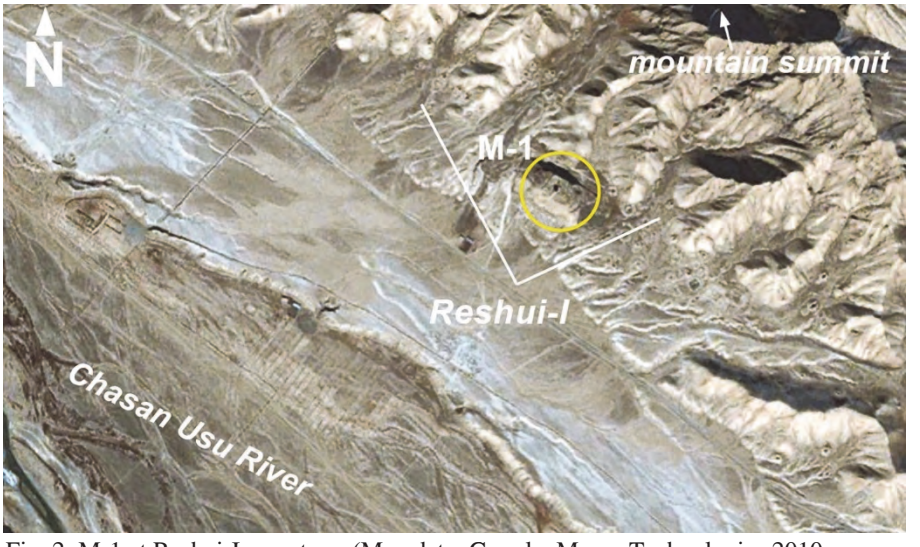


Fig. 2: M-1 at Reshui-I cemetery. (Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2010; modifications and additional data by the author)

The main grave in the Reshui-I cemetery, M-1 (geogr. position: 36°10'42.57"N, 98°17'54.55"E), is directed with its longest side towards the Chahan Usu River that flows through the valley (Fig. 2).[44]

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[42] TTT, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/introduction-and-legend/ (accessed: 23.08.2019); cf. also Hazod 2018: 9ff.

[43] The site numbering follows the one proposed on TTT.

[44] The local tradition considers this tomb as belonging to great councillor (*blon chen*) Mgar (Hazod 2018: 54, fn. 53). According to *Old Tibetan Chronicles* (OTC, PT 1287), five members of the Mgar family held the office of a great councillor: Mgar khri sgra ɣdzi rmun (l. 79), Mgar maṅ źam sum snaṅ (l. 87), Mgar stoṅ rtsan yul zuṅ (l. 102), Mgar btsan sña ldom bu (l. 105), and Mgar khri ɣbriṅ btsan brod (l. 109; see also the list in Hazod 2019: 110). Three of them occur as great councillors in the OTA: Mgar stoṅ rtsan yul zuṅ, Mgar btsan sña ldom bu, and Mgar khri ɣbriṅ btsan brod. If the local tradition is correct, the tomb could have been built only after the conquest of the Ɣa źa in 663. Therefore, only the last three great councillors from the Mgar family are relevant for verifying the local lore. Mgar stoṅ rtsan yul zuṅ was responsible for conquering the Ɣa źa but died in Ris pu, Central Tibet, in 667 (PT 1288: 48). Mgar btsan sña ldom bu died in Sum chu bo of Śaṅs (Right Horn; cf. Dotson 2009: 212 and Map 6a-c, p. 202) in 685/6 (ITJ 750: 91). Mgar khri ɣbriṅ btsan brod was accused in 698/9 (ITJ 750: 128) and, according to Chinese sources (Garatti 2015: 162), committed suicide. Thus, we are left with no candidate for the resident of the Reshui tomb.

It is located on a slope of a mountain where the mountain just starts to rise from the valley floor.

PT 1042 concentrates on the description of a funeral ritual and unfortunately does not treat the general location of the tomb in any detail. The text uses several technical terms to refer to various architectural details of the burial place itself but none of them allows us to reconstruct the topographic characteristics of the spot.

Re: 2. The most majestic of the Central Tibetan tumuli are those of rectangular or trapezoidal shape. They have been classed by Hazod as MT-C mound types: "The coffer-shaped, walled tomb; the tamped earth above the chamber(s) is enclosed by one or more thick walls made of a mixture of stone (or stone slabs) and earth, often reinforced by timber. The space between the walls is filled with stones (or pebbles) and earth. The whole wall construction seems to have been originally covered in earth to accent the hill or mountain-like shape, but in most cases due to erosion the outer earth has partly disappeared so that the parts of the walls are exposed. This is the most common type of the larger burial mounds. [...] Tombs of the MT-C types are rectangular, mostly trapezoidal. They are to be found in the size range of small (5-20m), medium (20-30m) and large (up to ca. 130m). [...] Usually the height of a larger tomb is not more than 5 to 10m."[45] The longest side of a trapezoidal tumulus faces towards the valley floor and the river, whereas its opposite side is oriented towards the mountain in the back of the tomb (see Fig. 1 above). Their tops are flat (cf. Hazod 2014: 60; Feiglstorfer 2018: 110). As observed by Feiglstorfer, the trapezoidal shape of tumuli that are located on hillsides with their longer side facing towards the river valley can be explained by geological features of the terrain: this shape gives the tombs greater stability. However, as the author rightly notes, tombs of this shape are also found in the plain (2018: 109), indicating that other considerations must also have played a role in devising the tombs.[46] Furthermore, Feiglstorfer noticed that the outer orientation of the tumuli

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Moreover, as already noticed by Hazod (2019: 50), the recent dendrochronological dating of parts of Reshui-I M-1 to 715 or 716 (Li *et al.* 2015) clearly excludes any great councillor from the Mgar family to be buried in the tomb. If that is the case, one must ask about the reliability of local traditions when it comes to verifying historical facts.

[45] TTT, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/introduction-and-legend/ (accessed 23.08. 2019)

[46] I put forward the hypothesis that elite tombs were originally square and located on top of mountains or in valleys (cf. the first royal tombs in Phyiṅ-ba on Fig. 1 in Hazod 2018: 73). At the beginning their shape might have been influenced by the architecture of square defence towers or maybe square walled households. First with the relocation of grave grounds towards non-arable piedmont areas (triggered most probably by the scarcity of arable land in Central Tibet and the demographic boom in the early imperial period) their shape was changed to trapezoidal in order to provide them with greater stability in the sloping terrain. This shape was popularised so that some of later tombs built in the plains were arranged accordingly too. The generalisation of the trapezoidal shape possibly ensued from the mythical interpretation of the tombs and their new association with the typical Tibetan tent – *sbra*. This hypothesis is additionally supported by the fact that trapezoidal mound tombs have not been attested anywhere else in Central Asia. We may assume that they were 'invented' due to the limitations of Central Tibetan landscape. The trapezoidal shape resulted from adaptation to local topography and subsequently received a cultural significance by being juxtaposed with the traditional Tibetan form of housing – the *sbra* tent. Round graves of Central Tibet are generally much smaller than the trapezoidal ones. One could assume that they were round also due to economic factors; not all families could afford paying for a stone construction that would

doesn't have to parallel the orientation of the tomb it conceals. Actually, the data at our disposal suggest that they didn't match at all.[47]

Similar architectural features can be ascribed to the Reshui-I tomb M-1 excavated near Dulan: "In terms of the methods and materials used in its construction, as well as its dimensions and shape, the tomb very strongly recalls those of the Yar lung valley royal necropolis in central Tibet" (Heller 1998a: 85). According to Xu, the tumulus measures approximately 65m in front and 55m in the back (Xu 1996c: 24; see Fig. 6 below). Likewise, M-2 from Reshui-II has trapezoidal shape (cf. Fig. 6.1.1-9/2 in Tong 2008: 317). Furthermore, most of the larger tombs of the cemeteries in the Dulan County, Delingha City, and in Ulan County also have a trapezoidal shape with the longest side located towards the river (Tong 2008: 86).

PT 1042 uses terms that denoted various architectural structures that belonged to the tomb. The majority of the structures were to be located within the tumulus. It is to be expected (and is in fact implied by the text) that the tumulus was built after all the funeral ceremonies had been completed. In Bialek 2018 I have proposed interpreting OT *se gru bźi* as an epithet of grave, lit. "a small spot of four corners". The term recurs in many OT texts that deal with funeral rituals but its denotation is far from clear. We know that the rectangular (trapezoidal or square) walls were built to strengthen the construction of larger tumuli (Feiglstorfer 2018: 108ff.). In the next paragraph I suggest that the walls of the tumuli were erected prior to the funeral ceremony but following building of the grave chambers. In this case *se gru bźi* could have referred either to the proper grave construction or to the rectangular walls that were later concealed under the tumulus.[48] It is hoped that the future research into the technical vocabulary of PT 1042 will clarify the relationship between the archaeological data and PT 1042.

Re: 3. Another commonly observed characteristic of the tumuli is the presence of a few horizontal rows in front of larger graves. These are trenches that always run parallel to the front wall of the tumulus construction. This position of the trenches suggests that they were dug after the rectangular

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support a trapezoidal (or earlier: square) shape. It is not possible to make a trapezoidal mound without a permanent support. As Feiglstorfer remarks, "[i]ndividual buildings decisions may be related to a mound's total size, the topographical situation, the material available on site, and certainly also the principal's capacity regarding the expenditure on labour." (Feiglstorfer 2015: 4). Therefore, for the period of the Tibetan Empire three basic shapes of burial mounds are attested: round, square, and trapezoidal. The chronology of their occurrence was most probable: round (less labour-intensive and thus requiring less economic means) – square (more labour-intensive because of the need for a more stable construction and so introduced by the elites) – trapezoidal (an adaptation of the square shape triggered by topographic constraints). An indirect implication of this hypothesis would be that as soon as trapezoidal shape was generalised and applied to tumuli erected on plains, square shape would have been abandoned. The verification of the proposed hypothesis will be possible first when large-scale excavations (including dating) have been carried out, meticulously documented, and their results published.

[47] Feiglstorfer 2018: 126f.; see also Caffarelli 1997: 237.

[48] Cf. in this context Feiglstorfer's comment: "Reconstructing the building phases, the inner core must have been the starting point of a grave-mound construction and the following steps towards the outer shells seem to follow a structural logic. From inside to the outside was the ideal method [...]." (2015: 4).

walls of the tumuli had been erected. Hence, the rectangular walls must have been completed before the funeral ceremony started. The rows have been identified as offering trenches. Fig. 3 presents the burial ground of Lha rtse Khrom chen (TTT 0339) with 28 identified sacrificial pits (Hazod 2018: 13, fn. 11). In Skyid stod (Fig. 4; TTT 0065) 68 mounds and 36 sacrificial pits with animal bones inside were counted (Hazod 2018: 48).[49] Trenches are also clearly visible in front of two of the royal tumuli situated in Phyiṅ ba (Fig. 5; TTT 0032). The remaining royal tumuli are now located among arable fields and so their original burial grounds have not been preserved on the surface.[50] Sacrificial trenches are also clearly visible on satellite photographs of the following cemeteries recorded in the TTT database: 0003, 0024, 0092, 0112, 0113, 0134, 0171, 0172, 0176, 0237, 0278, 0284, 0337, 0532, 0560, 0581 and 0592.[51]

An interesting and heretofore not recognised feature of these trenches is that there seems to be always an odd number of them (3, 5, 7, or 9; cf. the numbered trenches in Figs. 3-5). The highest number of nine trenches has thus far been attested only in the royal tomb identified as belonging to

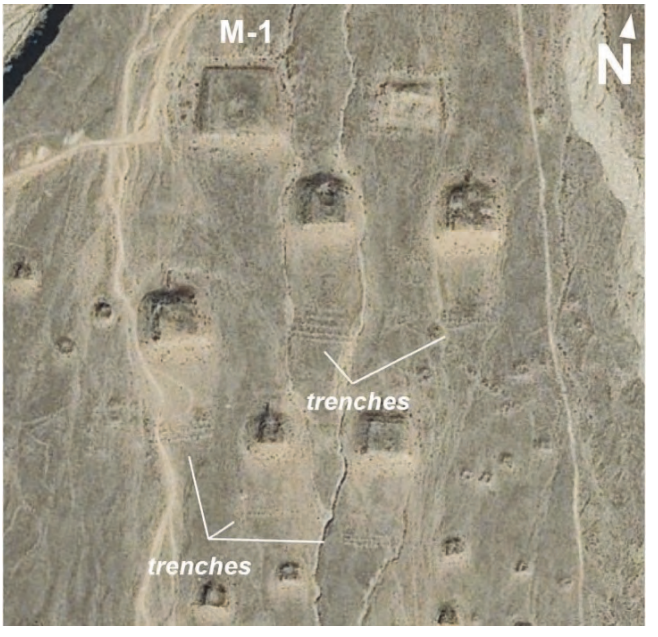


Fig. 3: TTT 0339 Lha rtse khrom chen (29 21 33, 87 48 42; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2012; modifications and additional data by the author)

[49] From the quoted descriptions of the Lha rtse khrom chen and Skyid stod cemeteries it is not clear whether the word 'pits' refers to the sacrificial trenches only or include also sacrificial pits (see the next paragraph).

[50] According to Feiglstorfer, the stone inscription (*rdo riṅs*) of Khri lde sroṅ brtsan's tomb is now located 2.5m below the ground. This has been caused by the successive erosion of the surrounding terrain over centuries (2015: 5 and the graphic on p. 31). From this we can infer that also in the case of other graves built on a plain, their supplementary constructions (like trenches and pits) will not be easily recognisable on the ground anymore.

[51] As for the moment (21.09.2019), TTT has indexed 616 potential imperial tumulus fields in Central Tibet.

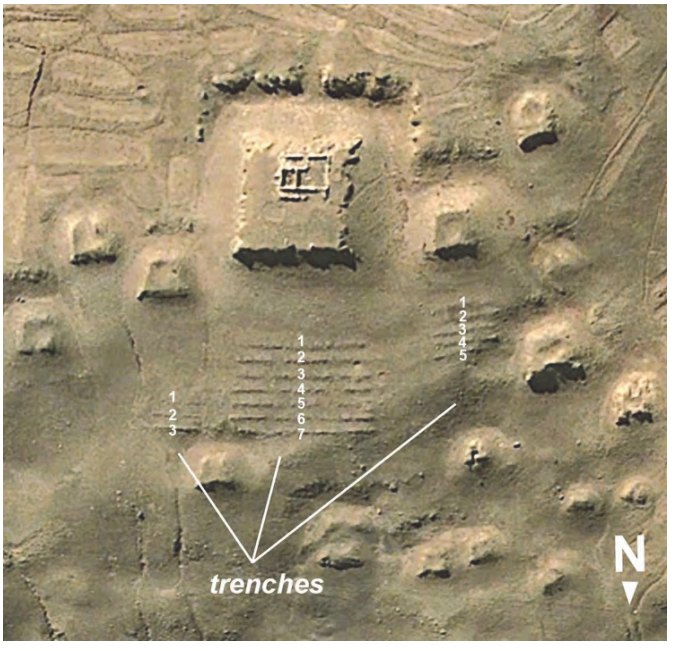


Fig. 4: TTT 0065 Skyid stod (28 22 57, 90 47 53; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2011; modifications and additional data by the author)

Khri lde gtsug brtsan (see Fig. 5; Hazod 2018: 73, Fig. 1).[52] Regarding the second royal tomb in Fig. 5, remains of only 5 trenches can be seen, but this situation obviously results from the erosion of the site. No trenches could be identified in front of round or *stūpa*-shaped mounds and apparently not all trapezoidal tombs had trenches. I put forward the hypothesis that some trapezoidal tombs were devoid of trenches for religious reasons. In *Dbaγ bźed* we read: "So, it was decided that from then on Bon po should not perform funerals and it was also decided that cattle, horses and other animals should not be slaughtered for the deceased and the meat of these animals offered in sacrifice" (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 62).

The prescription was presumably made during the reign of *btsan po* Khri sroṅ lde brtsan. On the other hand, it was suggested that stone lions found in the direct proximity of several tombs should be related to Buddhist influences (cf. Heller 2007; Tong 2008: 105; Hazod 2015; Hazod 2019: 72).[53]

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[52] As a matter of fact, a considerable mismatch prevails in the Tibetan literature concerning the identification of single tombs in Phyiṅ ba (cf. the concise description of earlier comparisons in Haarh 1969: 393, esp. Tab. XIII on pp. 395-396). Recently Hazod has identified all the tombs according to the section *Gsaṅ ba yaṅ chuṅ* from the *Mkhas pa ldeγu chos γbyuṅ* (2018: 61ff.). It is apparent that the reconstructions of Haarh and Hazod do not match each other in some points. A thorough comparison of the most important written sources made available after Haarh's publication is necessary before we may proceed with further examination of the royal necropolis. It is likewise not certain whether the names transmitted in later sources are indeed original and 'correct'. For instance, the OT name of the tomb of Khri lde sroṅ brtsan seems to have been Rgyal chen γphrul (Khri 59) whereas GLR has Rgyal chen baṅ so (Bsod nams rgyal mtshan 1966: 183, 89v) and *Gsaṅ ba yaṅ chuṅ* gives ɣphrul chen bźer (*apud* Hazod 2018: 66 and Fig. 1 on p. 73).

[53] This in my opinion however does not mean that, as assumed by Hazod (2019: 72), the lions must have started occurring after the model of the tomb of Khri sroṅ lde brtsan. Because lions belong to the general iconography of Buddhism their implementation in architecture was not dependent on *btsan po*'s order. The



Fig. 5: TTT 0032 Mu ra (29 00 55, 91 41 62; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2011; modifications and additional data by the author)

For instance, in front of M-1 in Khrom chen (29°21'33.00"N, 87°48'42.00"E) two lions have been found (Hazod 2019: 72). Even though M-1 is the largest tomb in this cemetery (TTT 0339) and the remaining big trapezoidal tombs all have trenches in front (see Fig. 3 above), no trenches can be seen in front of M-1. Lions could have indicated a turn in a person's or family's religious affiliation. Trenches were abandoned in Buddhist circles because they were intrinsically bound to animal sacrifice – a rite condemned by Buddhism. The only known exception thus far is the tomb of Khri sroṅ lde brtsan which has both lions and trenches. This results from a particular position of a *btsan po* towards his subjects and the society. Consequently, a *btsan po*'s tomb was devised on the basis of a political rather than a personal decision.

In front of the main Reshui-I grave M-1 five trenches stretch 3 meters apart from each other (see Fig. 6 above and Fig. 9 in Heller 1998a: 87; cf. Heller 2006). Inside them one found skeletons of 87 horses. In addition, in front of the grave there are 27 pits, 14 on the eastern, and 13 on the western side of the trenches (Xu 1996b: 15; Xu 1996c).

Re: 4. In addition to the trenches, in some cases sacrificial pits behind a tomb can be seen. In Ɣon (Fig. 7; TTT 0024) ten pits arranged in one row behind the tomb have been identified.[54] This is very exceptional for usually only single sacrificial pits behind the mound are reported. In this case remains of trenches in front can likewise be recognised. Less clear is the situation with the M-2 in

use of lions in tomb architecture might post-date their application in other contexts. For instance, Heller (1998b) describes lions represented on Tibetan textiles. Another example is a stele (*rdo riṅs*) dated to the reign of Khri sroṅ lde brtsan on which an elephant and a lion are sculpted (Heller 2007: 61f.). The stele is located near Glaṅ dkar village (Sman gliṅ county). Lions seated on a lotus pedestal (a typical Buddhist pose) ornament a brass plaque dated to eighth-ninth century (Heller 2007: 62).

[54] Cf. Feiglstorfer 2015: 5 and TTT, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites_by_id/0024/ (accessed 31.12.2020).

Sñe mo (Fig. 8; TTT 0274). Behind the left back corner of the tumulus, about 20m away from the bottom of the tumulus, a round shape can be seen on all satellite pictures (29°30’1.83"N, 90° 9’49.48"E). Whether this is a sacrificial pit or not, can only be established on site. In Sri (Fig. 9; TTT 0157), again in the left back corner behind the tumulus, in its immediate proximity, a clear round object can be seen on satellite photos (29°36’59.74"N, 91°14’34.79"E) that could be a sacrificial pit. A structure-from-motion (SfM) 3-D visualisation of a sacrificial pit from the burial ground 0172 is presented in Feiglstorfer (2018: 139, Fig. 16). The exact position of the pit is not provided in the publication, but Guntram Hazod (personal communication, 03.01.2020) kindly informed me that the pit lies outside of the proper burial ground.

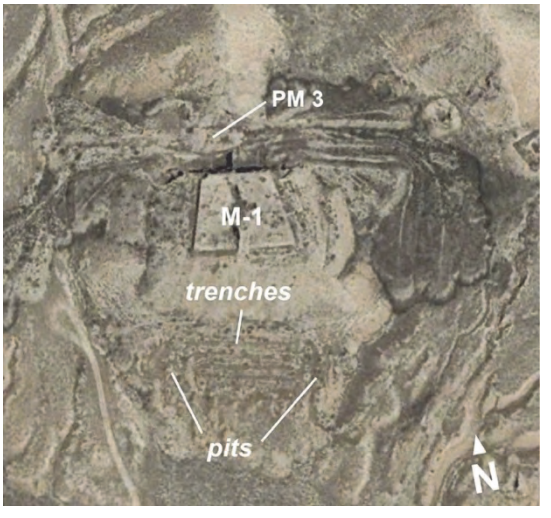


Fig. 6: Reshui-I M-1 (36 10 42, 98 17 54; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2006; modifications and additional data by the author)

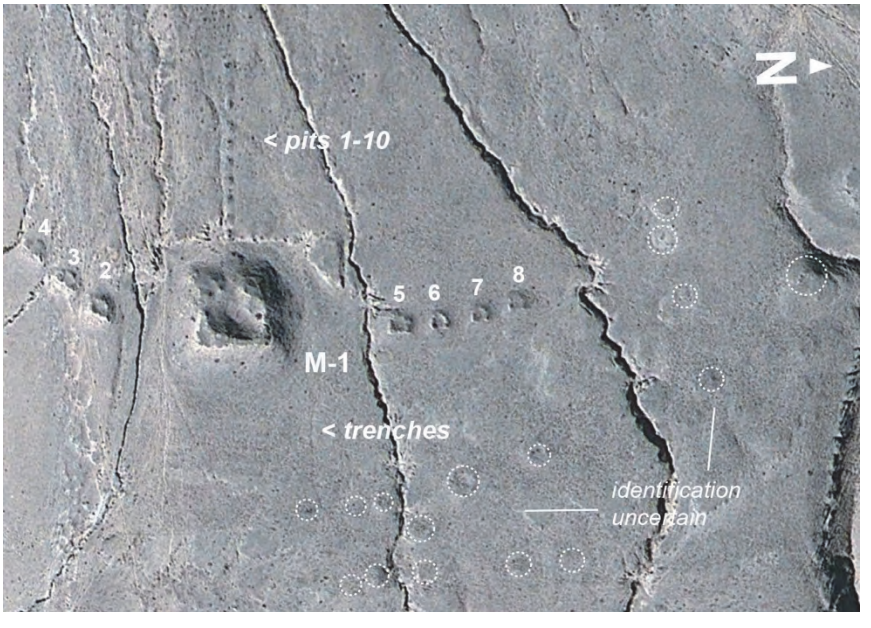


Fig. 7: TTT 0024 Ɣon (29 20 08, 91 49 28; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2010; modifications and additional data by the author)

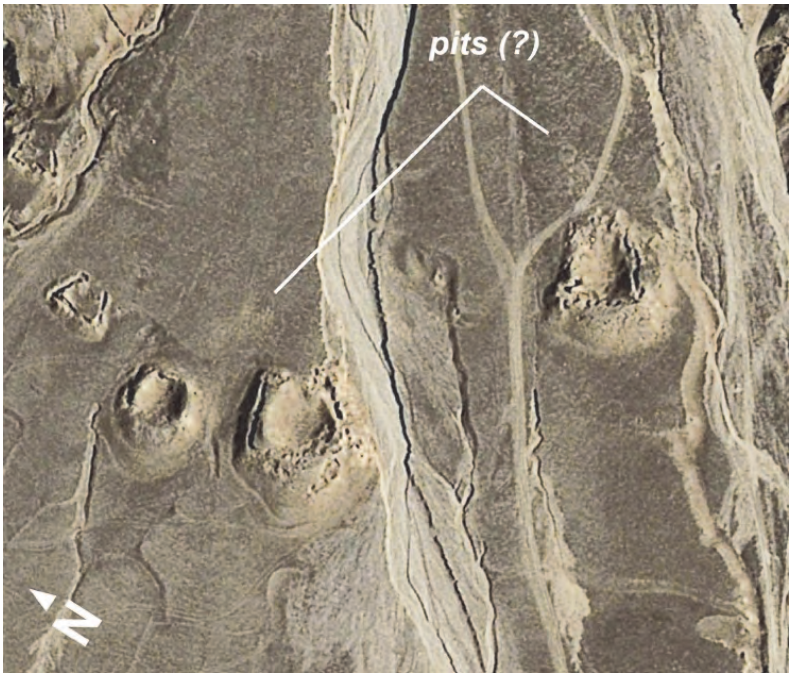


Fig. 8: TTT 0274 Sñe mo (29 30 00, 90 09 48; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2012; modifications and additional data by the author)

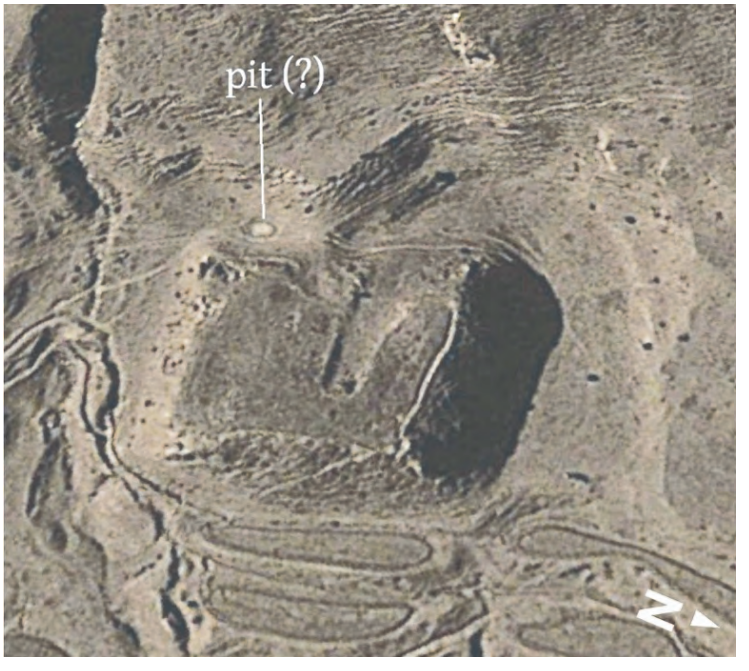


Fig. 9: TTT 0157 Sri (29 36 60, 91 14 36; Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2012; modifications and additional data by the author)

The round pit behind the Reshui-I grave M-1 (PM-3, see Fig. 6) contained yak and sheep skulls (Xu 1996b: 14; Xu 1996c: 25). According to Tong, PM-3 is located 20m to the north-west of the tumulus

(2008: 88), although Xu gave his position as north-east of the tomb (Xu 1996b: 14). Satellite images are too im precise to allow us settling the issue, but the location to the north-west (i.e. behind the left back corner of the tumulus) would correspond to the position of the assumed sacrificial pits in TTT 0274 and TTT 0157 (see above Figs. 8 and 9).

Concerning the external structure of a burial ground, in PT 1042 (93) we read of *thog maγi γon kuṅ* “offering pits of the front part” and *tha maγi gtaṅ khuṅ* “gift-pits of the back part”:

> *spyi groṅs ṅog du gyur pa la / thog maγi γon kuṅ / tha maγi gtaṅ khuṅ lastsogs /* (94) *te sa lan gsum las* {*lhag pa*} *thur du rkor myi ruṅ ṅo //*
> Generally, it is not proper to dig down earth like offering-pits of the front part [or] gift-pits of the back part, among others, more than three times for those who died.

The passage is very enigmatic and seems to be taken out of context. The meaning of the clause “to dig down earth three times” is unclear. I tentatively assume that this prescription meant that in order to dig an offering pit one was allowed to spade (i.e. remove the necessary soil with a spade) not more than three times. This would have yielded rather shallow pits, but might have been dictated by pragmatics: many of the mound tombs identified so far are located on mountain slopes, i.e. they must have been dug in rock or similar hard substrate. Apart from that, religious concerns might have been involved too; one could fear harming virtual beings considered to inhabit the soil, like *sa bdag* etc. Alternatively, “three times” could mean three series of pits, i.e. three trenches or three pits.[55] Despite the problems of its interpretation the passage establishes an important connection between PT 1042 and the archaeological facts revealed above about the imperial mounds.

Another passage relevant to the discussion can be quoted from PT 1287:

> *btsan pos bkaγ stsald pa // dbyī tshab glo ba ñe bas // gum na mchad pyag dar te brtsig par gnaṅ /* (265) *rta nī brgyaγ dgum bar gnaṅ // bu tsha gaṅ ruṅ ba gchig // gser gyī yi ge myī chad par stsald par bkaγ /* (266) {*s*}*tsal to //*
> The *btsan po* [Khri sroṅ brtsan] ordered: “Because [Dbaγs Phaṅs to re] Dbyi tshab is loyal, when he dies, [it] is allowed that [his] tomb, being *pyag dar*, is built. As for horses, [it] is allowed that one hundred are killed (for his funeral). The one of [his] descendants who is capable will interminably (lit. so that it does not stop) be given a letter of gold.”[56]

It follows that horse-sacrifice (at least, of this size) had to be permitted by the *btsan po*. The only remains found in trenches of the Reshui-I M-1 grave belonged to horses, although other sacrificial pits contained bones of various species, like yaks, dogs, and sheep. One can speculate that trenches were reserved for horse-sacrifice. It is possible that, due to the high value of horses for military purposes, not everyone was allowed a horse-sacrifice at his/her death. This, beside Buddhist affiliation, could be another reason explaining why not all trapezoidal tombs have trenches.

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[55] For a more detailed discussion of the passage and the proposed reconstruction see Bialek forthcoming-a.

[56] This passage makes the distinction between OT *gnaṅ* “to allow” and *stsold* “HON to bestow” clear. The former is also commonly used in this meaning in OT inscriptions. The CT meaning “to give” apparently developed later.

The above analysis has proved that sacrificial holes were dug in front of tumuli (trenches) and in their back (pits). These constitute the basic feature that distinguishes imperial tumuli of Central Tibet and the Dulan region from other burial constructions of Eurasia.

To conclude, the discussion has shown that Central Tibetan tumuli share some characteristic architectural features with the mounds situated in the Dulan region (foremost, in the Reshui cemeteries). These are: location in a non-arable zone in a piedmont, trapezoidal shape with the longest side facing towards the valley floor and the river, front sacrificial trenches, and back sacrificial pits.[57] The last two characteristics are also addressed in PT 1042. Furthermore, the term *baṅ so* "funeral mound" is mentioned in the text, but its exact meaning (and denotation) in relation to other spatial terms needs further research. Other architectural terms occurring in the text refer to the inner architecture of a tomb. Unfortunately, due to the lack of solid archaeological excavations in Central Tibet our knowledge about the internal structure of the imperial tombs is more than scanty. In this regard PT 1042 and the archaeological data diverge: the first gives us more detail on the internal, the latter on the external architecture of the tumuli.

3.1.3 Economy

The economy of the social group behind the funeral in PT 1042 was apparently related to four species of animals that also acquired a principal role in the ritual: horses, yaks, *mdzo*s, and sheep.[58] These animals recur, for instance, in the OTA or in the OTC – texts of whose cultural affiliation there can be no doubt. According to PT 1042 (116 and 121), horse mounts (*chibs*), sheep (*lug*), and horses (*rta*) were sacrificed in the grave during the funeral ritual. The fate of the remaining animals is not directly addressed in the text. We only learn that they participated in the funeral procession (ll. 15-18, 28-40, 123-134).

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[57] There are however many more features that indicate that the tombs of the Dulan region should be related to the culture of the Tibetan Empire. Objects with Tibetan inscriptions were excavated from several tombs: wooden slips (Reshui M-10, 99DRNM3, 99DRNM2, 99DRNM1), a horse skull (Kaoxiaotu), and a silk fragment (DRNM1; Tong 2008: 143ff.). In addition, four stones, used to seal the entrance to 99DRNM3, had Tibetan inscriptions: *blon*, *khri*, *śeγu*, *ka* (Tong 2008: 144 and 413, Fig. 6.2.10-4, the third stone with the syllables *śeγu* is reproduced upside down). Taken together they yield "councillor (*blon*) Khri śeγu ka". *Śeγu ka* does not seem to be a Tibetan name, but *khri* is an element frequently encountered in Tibetan names. Chinese inscriptions were found only on silk-ware and vessels, whereas one piece of silk had a Pahlavi inscription (Tong 2008: 145f.). The wooden slips and the stones were undoubtedly inscribed for the sole purpose of the funeral; the slips contain inventories of goods that were laid down in the grave and the stones apparently identify the deceased as a councillor (*blon*). The remaining inscribed objects might have been produced for other purposes but eventually found their way into the tombs. The recent dendrochronological dating of wood used to roof Reshui-I M-1 has proven that the tomb was built not earlier than in 715 (Li *et al.* 2015) and thus certainly after the Tibetan conquest of the Ɣa źa (= Tuyuhun). The owner of the tomb cannot be identified yet but mitochondrial DNA analysis of human bones excavated from 99DRNM2 and 99DRNM4 confirmed that it "corresponds to the DNA of modern Tibetans" (Heller 2016: 158, fn. 21).

[58] PT 1042 attests to a very rich vocabulary connected to these species; for each at least a few distinct terms are used. A detailed analysis of the terms will be presented in Bialek forthcoming-a. No other animal species are mentioned in the text.

Recent archaeological and art historical research has delivered a fair amount of data on funerals and tombs that have been associated with the culture of the Tibetan Empire.[59] Two kinds of data are of special interest to the present discussion: 1. remains of animals found in graves or in their immediate proximity; and 2. illustrations on coffin panels that were made with the clear purpose of being laid down in a grave.[60] Below I will discuss the available data.

Tomb sacrifices: At Guolimu, in the Delingha county, a tomb with two rectangular coffins of a buried couple was excavated. On either side of the coffins there were "complete skeletons of a horse and a camel" (Heller 2013: 11; cf. also Tong 2008: 95). Above a cypress board, with which another tomb chamber of the same grave was covered, "there were scattered bones of sheep" (Heller 2013: 11). The human remains were buried in wooden coffins, some painted panels of which have been preserved (see below). On the basis of the paintings presenting Tibetan-clad people, the tombs were identified as Tibetan and dated to the period 700-750 (Tong 2008: 95).

In the Reshui-I tomb M-1 "[a]bout 4.5 metres below the top, a rectangular pit (designated PM-1 – JB) for animal burial was discovered, containing the bones of sheep, horses, yak and deer" (Heller 1998a: 85).[61] Round pits in front of the tumulus (see Fig. 6 above) contained yak heads and hooves, and dogs. According to Xu (1996a: 7), eight complete skeletons of dogs were found.[62] Furthermore, 87 horses were buried in the trenches before the tumulus (Xu 1996a: 10). The round pit behind the tumulus (PM-3) contained yak and sheep skulls (Xu 1996b: 14; Xu 1996c: 25). The excavations also comprised other tombs from the Reshui cemetery. 84% of them contained animal remains, of which the majority belonged to horses, yaks, goats/sheep, and dogs (Xu 1996b: 15).

In Kexiaotu (36°1'56.20"N, 98°5'49.96"E), a site in Dulan county, two horse skulls were excavated from a tumulus (Heller 1998a: 89). One of them is inscribed with Tibetan text and drawings identified as *linga* by Heller (2006; see Fig. 13 in Heller 1998a: 89).[63] Besides the horse skulls, an inscribed sheep's rib and a sheep shoulder blade with drawings were discovered. A few wooden slips with Tibetan inscriptions were found as well (Heller 1998a: 89-90).

Archaeological excavations within the historical Four Horns are rare. Xu reported pits with horse sacrifices in Qielongzemu (Tib. Mchims luṅ rtse mo; 29°22'20.89"N, 91°49'19.69"E, Naidong (Tib. Sne gdong) county, Shannan (Tib. Lho kha) prefecture), from the imperial period

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[59] Cf. Heller 1998a; Xu 1996a; Heller 2013; Heller 2016.

[60] Designs found on textiles or vessels are less indicative, for these objects could have been primarily manufactured for other purposes and only secondarily laid down in graves.

[61] See also Xu 1996b: 14.

[62] In Xu's opinion (*ibd.*), this fact indicates that the deceased stemmed from Tuyuhun (OT Ɣa źa). However, in another publication, Xu characterised the deceased buried in the tomb as "Tubo aristocrat" (1996c: 24). The latter view was apparently expressed in order to 'facilitate' the discussion on the inner architecture of Tibetan tombs, by comparing the excavated Reshui-I tomb M-1 with Tibetan textual sources. In this way Xu attempted to avoid the question of the relation between archaeological finds and textual witnesses.

[63] Heller originally described the skulls as belonging to a camel but later re-identified them as horse skulls (Heller 2006; see also Tong 2008: 144).

(1996b: 16).[64] In sacrificial trenches and pits of another unnamed tomb one found bones of horses, sheep, cows (yaks?), dogs, deer, chicken and doves. Apart from the horses, all the other animals had been cut into pieces, which means that dogs were not conceived of as psychopomps (Feiglstorfer 2018: 113, fn. 4).

Coffin panel paintings: In two tombs (M-1 and M-2) of the Guolimu cemetery three painted wooden coffins were found.[65] Plank I (Fig. 6.5.1-1 on p. 418 in Tong 2008) of the coffin from M-1 contains pictures of horses, yaks, deer, and a dog in what seems to be a hunting scene. Another scene shows horses and a camel. In a third scene a yak bound to a stake is depicted. The painting of plank II (Fig. 6.5.1-2 on p. 419 in Tong 2008) is badly damaged and so its contents are less certain. It also contains various scenes, some of which include animals such as: decorated horses, a camel loaded with goods, and cattle (yaks?). Plank I of the coffin of M-2 depicts horses, deer, yaks, wild donkeys, and a dog. Plank II is only partly preserved and only horses are visible.[66]

Planks of another coffin, that are now in a private collection and their provenance is not certain (Tong 2008: 163 and Fig. 6.5.1-11-12 on p. 425), depict horses, deer, camels, dogs, sheep, and yaks. The deceased for whom the coffins were prepared can be identified as either Tibetans or Tibetanised Ɣa źa on the basis of the headdresses and costumes of the main figures on the panels (Tong 2008: 165ff.).

Yet two other coffin panels (from an unspecified site) kept in an anonymous collection are connected by Heller with Tibetan culture and its spread in East Turkestan. The author identifies it on the basis of a picture of "a man dressed in a typical Tibetan white robe with multi-colour medallion cuff, wearing low turban" (Heller 2013: 18).[67] Regarding animals, the panel contains pictures of grazing horses, white goat being slaughtered, and two dogs. Another illustration presents goats, sheep and a camel with an empty saddle (*ibd.*). In Heller 2016 (182) the author interpreted the scene as presenting animals "destined for sacrifice". On panel II of the same coffin a hunting scene is shown with a yak, wild donkey (*rkyaṅ*s), Tibetan antelopes, a tiger, and horses, whereas a distinct scene has a yak tethered to a pole (Heller 2016: 178 and 184). A 'caravan' scene depicts a laden camel led by a man on horseback (Heller 2016: 181).

The very custom of painting wooden coffin panels might not have been Tibetan and, in fact, no such objects have been reported from Central Tibet thus far.[68] Instead, painted coffins were popular

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[64] This site corresponds to Ɣon-3 (0023) of TTT. As Guntram Hazod kindly informed me, the name Mchims luṅ rtse mo does not seem to be known in his sources for this area (personal communication, 03.01.2020).

[65] It was not possible for me to establish the exact geographic position of the cemetery. Detailed descriptions of the coffin panels including reproductions can be found in Tong (2008: 154ff.) and Heller 2016. Heller speaks of four coffins excavated at Guolimu county and one of unknown provenance, now in a private collection (2016: 156). "Four coffins" might be a slip of tongue for "four panels".

[66] The third coffin excavated in Guolimu is in a private collection and its description is missing in the literature.

[67] Side by side with three spherical white tents, the panel depicts a black trapezoidal tent (Heller 2016: 157 and Panel I on pp. 161 and 162) – an important element missing from Guolimu panels which contain only drawings of white spherical tents.

[68] So far, painted coffins with motifs that can be identified as Tibetan have been discovered only in the Dulan region; cf. Heller 2016: 147. The latter author nevertheless sees the use of painted wooden coffins as a "common characteristic of Tibetan burial practices" (*ibd.*: 149). Because no wooden coffins have been

among Xianbei (Tong 2008: 175) from whom they might have been adopted by Ɣa ź́a (possibly a confederation of ethnic groups of at least partial Xianbei provenance) and then by the Tibetans in Central Asia.[69]

To conclude, there is limited overlapping between the archaeological data and the information delivered by PT 1042. Table 1 gives an overview of the animals occurring in these sources:

Animal	PT 1042	CA Excavations	Coffin panels
horse	+	+	+
yak	+	+	+
mdzo	+		
sheep	+	+	+
camel		+	+
deer		+	+
dog		+	+
wild donkey/*rkyaṅ*			+
goat			+
Tib. antelope			+
tiger			+

(Tab. 1)

Only horse, yak, and sheep recur everywhere, therefore more important is the question what is missing in the particular sources, and why? *Mdzo* is only present in PT 1042. Furthermore, camels, deer, and dogs were both excavated and presented on the coffin panels. Their remains in tombs indicate that they were sacrificed during the funeral. Camels are not native to the Tibetan Plateau but to Central Asia – wild camels (*Camelus ferus*) still live in the northern parts of China, in the Kokonor region, and in southern Mongolia. In the graves of the region around the Kokonor Lake there seems to have been a longer tradition of burying dogs with the deceased. Some of the oldest of such graves from the common era were excavated in the Shangsunjiazhai cemetery (36°45’42. 89"N, 101°45’23.03"E; 14km north of Xining) that has been dated to the period between the 1st c. BCE and the 3rd c. CE (Tong 2008: 42ff.). Beside the more general assessment that certain animal species were buried in graves or in their proximity, we shall distinguish between animals that were dismembered (horses, dogs, sheep, camel) and those buried whole (horses, dogs). Sacrificial dismembering is indeed mentioned in PT 1042:

> (96) *thugs dbab pa daṅ / sñun śan gdab pa yaṅ // lhu bcu gñis mgo daṅ bcu gsum ste / ɣdi las maṅs /* (97) *na yaṅ drags // ñuṅs na yaṅ chad de myi ruṅ ṅo //*
> Regarding the *thugs* that was cast down and *sñun śan* that was thrown, [there] being twelve portions, thirteen together with the head; if [there] were more than these, [it would be] too many; if [there] were less [than these], [it would be] too little. That would not be appropriate.

Some of the animals buried in the Reshui cemetery must have been dismembered. Sacrificial pits

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reported from Central Tibet, Feiglstorfer assumes that they must have been extremely rare. On the other hand, stone coffins were found in several graves of Central Tibet (Feiglstorfer 2018: 124f.).

[69] Painted wooden coffins are found already in Xiongnu tombs (Miller *et al.* 2009: 11; Miller 2011: 570).

contained hooves (yaks), skulls (sheep, bharal (blue sheep), yaks, goats, red deer, horses), and other bones (horses, yaks, sheep; cf. Xu 1996b: 14f.).

The coffin panels present saddled camels and horses without a rider. This motif was interpreted as representing animals destined for funeral sacrifice (cf. Heller 2016: 182). According to PT 1042, a *do ma* horse and, first of all, a psychopomp sheep (*skyibs lug*) were adorned and equipped to accompany the deceased in the afterworld. Tong (2008: 216, Table 5) lists parts of saddles excavated from five different tombs but it seems they were not connected with any animal remains (or, at least, such a connection was not addressed in the publications).

The coffin paintings (presenting main participants of the event in Tibetan attire) and Tibetan inscriptions on wooden slips, as well as the acknowledged historical facts on the presence of Tibetans in this region from the second half of the 7th century onward, allow us to interpret the graves as belonging to either Tibetans or highly Tibetanised locals. The divergence in the use of animals attests to local adaptation of Tibetan funeral rituals. Dog companions were a long-standing custom practised in the region, whereas camels (unknown in Central Tibet but commonly used in Central Asia) supplemented the funeral 'gifts'. The composition of the remains in the graves reflects the local economy. From this an important conclusion can be drawn: because PT 1042 does not mention animals whose bones are frequently found in Central Asian graves (foremost, dogs and camels) but limits itself to the species known from Central Tibetan context, we may infer that *the text depicts a Tibetan funeral held in Central Tibet*.

3.1.4 Political geography

Besides the OTA, there are only two known OT documents that mention Mdo smad – a historical region located to the north-east of Central Tibet – one of them being PT 1042.[70] According to the OTA, a council was held there on a regular basis once or twice a year, cf.:

> *mdo smad gyī dgun* γ*dun* (113) *rgyam śī gar du* γ*duste / sum paγī śo tshigs bzuṅ bar lo gcig* / (ITJ 750)
>
> [This is] an annual report: the winter council of Mdo smad, having convened at Rgyam śi gar, adopted the dice code of Sum pas.

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[70] In the Tibetan Empire, Mdo smad did not form part of Four Horns and had its own administration (cf. also Uebach 2003: 24). The attempt to define its location and extent on the basis of later documents is anachronical and should be avoided. Many local toponyms mentioned in the OTA as related to Mdo smad seem to be of non-Tibetan origin. However, concerning its word-formation, Mdo smad is a toponym formed according to the rules of Tibetan morphology; *smad* was frequently added as the second element. Generally, Mdo smad makes the impression of being a native Tibetan term.

Another OT document that contains the toponym is ITN 1093A (old shelf mark: M.I.lviii.005). The woodslip has many illegible letters and therefore its interpretation in not possible. Thomas (1935-55: 3.57b) also listed ITN 1097 (old shelf mark: M.I.lviii.009) as mentioning Mdo smad, but I was unable to trace the toponym in this woodslip. Uebach 2003 stated that "[i]n documents dating from the period of Tibetan occupation of Central Asia there is the interesting reference to the office of 'councillor of Domä' (i.e. Mdo smad – JB). However, she didn't specify the documents and I suspect she thought of ITN 1093A in which the word *blon* occurs in one line with Mdo smad, but it is more than uncertain that a *blon* of Mdo smad was meant in the document.

Mdo smad was the only place outside of Central Tibet for which the OTA report councils. This fact attests to the political significance of the region. The same place recurs in PT 1042 in the following sentence:

> *źaṅ lon źig mdo smad na ñam noṅs lags* / (141) *par btaṅ naγ // phaṅs cha rī{ṅ} gaṅ du gśegs kar gsol* /
>
> When [one] had sent an aristocrat to be a mourner in Mdo smad, [one] offered items of archery that should go to *ri gaṅ*.

Mdo smad is the only toponym mentioned in the ritual description of PT 1042.[71] The sending of a *źaṅ lon*, a person with a clear political status, to a place of such political and military significance as Mdo smad can itself be considered a political act. We don't know whether this was a single occasion of one particular funeral that a *źaṅ lon* was sent to Mdo smad, or maybe rather an established custom required each time a royal person died. Indeed, sending a *źaṅ lon* is a strong indication that the rite described in PT 1042 concerned a royal person. Otherwise, if an important person from aristocracy died, one would rather expect a member of her own family to be sent (if at all) to the 'second political centre' of the Empire. The rite of sending a *źaṅ lon* to Mdo smad is an acknowledgement of the importance of the region for Tibetan politics.[72]

The OTA attest to Mdo smad as an important place for the politics of the Tibetan Empire. Its mentioning in PT 1042 supports the assumed relationship between the funeral ritual and the Tibetan culture and politics.

3.1.5 Language

In general, the language of PT 1042 can be said to be Tibetan throughout. Correctly formed collocations and no foreign syntactic structures prove that it was written in Tibetan and not, for

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[71] The second colophon of the text mentions also the place Phreγu luṅ of Yur śar po. In Bialek forthcoming-a I speculate that this might have been the place where the reported funeral ritual took place.

[72] The occurrence of Mdo smad in PT 1042 raises yet another question concerning the text and its relation to the Tibetan Empire: can we be more specific about the time of the composition of the text? In the OTA Mdo smad is mentioned as a place of councils between 692/3 and 764/5. The preserved versions of the OTA end shortly before the Tibetan second occupation of Dunhuang (ca. 787-848). The OTA do not report on such places of council (γ*dun sa*/*tsa*) as Kwa cu khrom (PT 1078: 4), great *khrom* (PT 1217: 1), or *khrom* (Or.15000/439: 1; Or.15000/315: 1; Or.15000/426: r1). Therefore, the question arises: was PT 1042 composed before the conquest of the Central Asian territories or rather did Mdo smad retain its central role in Tibetan politics thereafter? We can only speculate that the conquest of Dunhuang and the neighbouring regions secured Tibetan presence in Central Asia and must have led to the decrease in importance of Mdo smad. The latter became a quasi-internal region with no urgent relevance for foreign policy or international trade. This assumption seems partly confirmed by the fact that the so-called first edict of Khri sroṅ lde brtsan (issued in connection with the erection of the Bsam yas temple; Tucci: 1950: 43-4) was copied and sent to "the Bru źa land (*bru źa yul*), Źaṅ źuṅ land (*źaṅ źuṅ yul*), Mdo smad, and to the regions of the Sde khams (OT *bde gams* < **bde khams*) councillors"; KhG *ja* 109v3-4, the text of the edict is transliterated in Tucci 1950: 95-97). In this short passage we see that Mdo smad followed Bru źa and Źaṅ źuṅ which fact points to its secondary significance in the Tibetan politics, even though the region apparently retained enough autonomy to be included in the list. Therefore, it is possible that PT 1042 describes a funeral from a period preceding the second conquest of Central Asia, although the manuscript itself is evidently a later copy.

instance, translated from another language. Frequently used discourse markers of the spoken Tibetan language (*de nas*, *deγi γog du*) allow us to assume that the text was an oral account narrated in Tibetan vernacular and subsequently committed to paper. Its native Tibetan origin is confirmed by the lack of loanwords or syntactic calques. PT 1042 contains quite a few *hapax legomena* (like *rkya rol*, *sku gśen*, *thugs gur*, *źal ta pa*, *zi mo*, *zug skyan*, *zo rig*, *g.yag rol* etc.) but, on the other hand, it shares some technical terms exclusively with the OTA-I (*btol* "?", *riṅ* "dead body", *riṅ khaṅ* "mortuary") and/or other Dunhuang texts devoted to funeral rituals or afterlife (*rgyal thag brgyad*, *do ma*, *mdad*, *se gru bźi*, *skyibs lug*, *dbon lob* etc.). The shared specialised vocabulary of the ritual language suggests a common cultural background of the rites. Lexicological analyses (see Bialek 2018 and Bialek forthcoming-a) demonstrate that the technical terms were native Tibetan words that accorded with the semantics and rules of word-formation of the OT language.

3.1.6 Material identity

The list of goods that were laid down in the grave, according to PT 1042, contains an object called *dmyig maṅs*:

> *gtaṅ du stsold pa ni / na bza skyes kor mtshon cha sna tshogs / byes cha sta spyad / źugs cha /* (103) *thugs rag pos phul baγ / **dmyig maṅs** / rol mo cha / γphral du ma mchis su myi~~ṅ~~ ~~b~~ruṅ baγi dkor /* (104) *cha sna tshogs / phyag tsaṅ skyem mal paγī cha rkyen / daṅ / bśos kyi phyag tsaṅ gi cha rkyen / źal zas taṅ skyems /* (105) *las stsogs te / yo byad du γtshal baγi cha rkyen / ril gtaṅ du mchi γo //*
>
> Regarding [the things] offered as gifts: all sorts of garment, presents of movable property, [and] weapons, travel utensils [that are] personal equipment, embers; [things] given by friends: ***dmyig maṅs*** [game and] musical instruments, all kinds of movables that are indispensable in daily use: necessaries of a cook who is a butler and necessaries of a victuals' cook, meals and beverages, among others, [all these] necessaries required as equipment were going as *ril*-gifts.

The remaining objects from the list are utensils of daily use that could be found in any grave of a wealthy or influential person; *dmyig maṅs*, on the other hand, is a proper name of a popular Tibetan game. It is also mentioned in other OT texts, cf.:

> *spuṅ sad zu tse γdzaṅs kyad kyi tshad ni // rtsīs gra gsum* (97) *źal ce gra bźī yaṅ rna bas ñan źiṅ gchod / myig maṅs gra chig kyaṅ zla la rtse na / rgyal //* (PT 1287)
>
> Spuṅ sad zu tse, as concerns the measure of [his] wisdom, was deciding while listening (lit. with [his] ears) to three schools of calculation, four [together with] the school of law, and was victorious when playing in the *myig maṅs* school[73] against an adversary.

The word *dmyig maṅs*, lit. "(one) possessing many eyes",[74] is certainly a Tibetan term. Two factors

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[73] Lit. "*myig maṅs* corner". On the meaning of *gra* in the compounds *rtsis gra*, *źal ce gra*, and *myig maṅs gra* see Bialek (2018: 1.408).

[74] For the word-formation of the compound see Bialek 2018: 1.230. The compound is also attested in PT 1120: r12 and PT 1285: v46.

support the hypothesis that it was coined as a native Tibetan term: 1. no analogous names for the game in the languages of the region;[75] and 2. the OT word-formation with the derivative suffix *-s* added to the second element *-maṅs*. This derivation was productive most probably only in the earlier phases of OT, since the number of analogous formations is limited in the language. This of course does not preclude that the game as such could not originally have been borrowed from a Chinese game. However, Hazod (2019: 43) noticed that the above passage from the OTC, that describes Khyuṅ po Spuṅ sad zu tse as an experienced *dmyig maṅs* player, suggests that the game was already known in Tibet in pre-imperial times. If we believe the accounts given in the OTC, Khyuṅ po Spuṅ sad zu tse was a councillor and great councillor during the reigns of Khri slon btsan and Khri sroṅ rtsan,[76] even though some doubt remains as to the exact years of his office.[77]

Dmyig maṅs is a well-known Tibetan board game. An ancient stone board for playing *dmyig maṅs* has recently been discovered during renovation work at Rgya ma khri khaṅ (29°45’25.46"N, 91°39’59.99"E) in Rgya ma valley, east of Lhasa (Hazod 2014: 62).[78] Another stone with a *dmyig maṅs* board was earlier discovered by Tsering Gyalbo and Guntram Hazod in the ruins of Byams pa mi γgyur gliṅ likewise in the Rgya ma valley (Hazod 2019: 42 and Fig. 16, p. 127). Apart from the geographical proximity of the findings, both stone boards have the same number of grid lines: 17x17 (Hazod 2019: 42). According to Hazod, “remains of the walls of the former palace”, that have been uncovered in connection with building of a new museum at the place of the finding, allow to date this *dmyig maṅs* stone to the imperial period (*ibd.*).[79] However, since no archaeological work has been conducted accompanying the excavations, the provenance and the dates of both stones must be considered unsettled.

To conclude, we know that the *dmyig maṅs* game was played in (pre-)imperial Tibet (OTC), the word was a native Tibetan term, and some ancient stone boards were found at historically significant sites within the Four Horns. These are again strong indications (albeit not hard evidence) that the funeral ritual of PT 1042 was held in the Tibetan cultural context.[80]

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[75] Its Chinese name is *weiqi*, lit. “surrounding game”.

[76] Both were *btsan po*s in the first half of the 7th century. Apart from the fact that Khri sroṅ rtsan died in 649 (see PT 1288: 15), the exact dates of their reigns remain unknown.

[77] See Uray 1972: 40f., Dotson 2013: 19ff. and Hazod 2019: 39f. for a more detailed characterisation of this person.

[78] Fig. 7 on p. 63 of the same publication contains a picture of the stone with the engravings of a *dmyig maṅs* board.

[79] The walls (of unknown extension) within which the *dmyig maṅs* stone of Byams pa mi γgyur gliṅ was found could have belonged to a *dmyig maṅs gra* – an enclosed (*gra*) place in which the game was played (see the above quotation from PT 1287: 96-7).

[80] As I argue in Bialek forthcoming-a, PT 1042 is an ‘ethnographic’ account of a funeral that was observed by the author of the text. A *dmyig maṅs* game laid in the tomb of the deceased might hint at his social position. We can speculate that the deceased was male, of higher social standing (aristocratic or royal), and his official duties were related to political or military activities – whatever its exact rules, *dmyig maṅs* was a strategic game.

3.1.7 Titles and social groups

PT 1042 makes use not only of Tibetan kinship terms (*źaṅ*, *dbon*), but also of titles typical for Tibetan society: *źaṅ lon*, *źal ta pa*, *źa* γ*briṅ*. As demonstrated by Dotson (2004: 82), *źaṅ lon* denoted a social group within Tibetan society, to be specific, the aristocrats. In Bialek (2018: 2.454) I argued that the compound originally referred to persons allowed by virtue of their birth to receive the position of a *źaṅ*, a maternal uncle, to the heir. Thus, the term *źaṅ lon* was not only bound to the native Tibetan kinship system, but also to the political system of the Tibetan Empire. *Źa* γ*briṅ* denoted a function in the retinue of a *btsan po* or another member of the royal family (see Bialek 2018: 2.442ff.). To conclude, PT 1042 uses technical terms (kinship terms and titles) that reflect the social and political structure of the Tibetan Empire.[81]

3.2 Does PT 1042 describe a 'Tibetan' ritual?

The preceding sections aimed at relating the textual evidence of PT 1042 to historical facts established from various other sources, textual, archaeological, and linguistic. In Walter's opinion, PT 1042 "has no clear, direct relationship to the Imperium" and therefore is not an authentic text of the time (2009: 192). As with so many other statements in his book, this one is likewise supported neither by a textual analysis nor by any other data.[82] Another unwarranted conclusion is that PT 1042 "was written down long after the Imperium fell" (*ibd.*: 194). The question of why should it have been written after the fall of the Tibetan Empire, remains unaddressed. Walter's true concern is not about the content of PT 1042 (in fact, he does not really care about what the text says), but about the relation of PT 1042 to the organised Bon religion. However, the claim that PT 1042 depicts a Bon ritual (cf. Lalou 1952 and Chu 1991, but Haarh 1969: 366 against this idea) is as false as Walter's assumption that it is a post-imperial fake.

I argue that PT 1042 presents one concrete funeral ceremony that was held in Central Tibet (Four Horns) during the Tibetan Empire. The text contains no indications that it was a Bon ceremony. It is however important to distinguish between the ceremony itself and the text that came down to us in the manuscript PT 1042. A detailed philological analysis of the text, that will be published together with a new translation,[83] has revealed that the text is based on an eyewitness report. It does not constitute one continuous text, as has been previously assumed, but consists of a descriptive part (an eyewitness report) and an explanatory part ('field notes' of the observer). It could likewise be demonstrated that the version of the text we have is a copy of yet another written document, maybe not even a direct copy, but a copy of a copy of a copy. Moreover, this copy contains plenty of orthographic errors and evidently lacks some parts of the original text.[84] And

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[81] By way of contrast, we may add that PT 1283, that contains two texts translated most probably from a Turkic language, uses neither *źaṅ*, nor *źaṅ lon* or *źa* γ*briṅ*, although the texts concern social and political issues.

[82] Apparently, for Walter only elements that he can relate to the Scythian culture or Central Eurasian Culture Complex (CECC) are of truly imperial character (Walter 2009: 193).

[83] See Bialek forthcoming-a.

[84] The author of the text, a certain Dge dpal (l. 146), was apparently a Buddhist monk with the ordained Tibetan name, but stemmed from a Chinese family. His birth name was Meṅ Śi γgi (l. 147).

still, the historical value of the text cannot be denied.

In the preceding discussion I have demonstrated that many of the elements of the funeral described in PT 1042 can be related to information from other sources. Here I summarise the overlaps:

- Time schedule: PT 1042 makes detailed prescriptions concerning the appropriate time of a funeral ceremony. The instructions agree with the time frame of the royal funerals documented in the OTA. Both PT 1042 and the OTA attest to the use of two calendars, a ‘seasonal’ and a lunar one.
- Architecture: Burial mounds excavated in the Dulan region were built according to the same principles as elite tombs of Central Tibet. Their shared elements (the rectangular shape and sacrificial trenches and pits) are also addressed in PT 1042.
- Economy: Animals that participated in the funeral of PT 1042 belonged to typical Central Tibetan species, whereas funerals held in the Dulan region adapted to the local fauna, ‘exchanging’ *mdzo* for camels. This is an important hint that indicates that PT 1042 is a description of a Central Tibetan funeral.
- Political geography: PT 1042 mentions Mdo smad – a politically important region of the Tibetan Empire.
- Language: Notwithstanding orthographic errors in which the text abounds, its language is Old Tibetan, with OT *hapax legomena*, no borrowings or syntactic calques.
- Material identity: In PT 1042 a known Tibetan board game *dmyig maṅs* is presented to the deceased as a grave-gift.
- Titles and social groups. Typical OT titles (*źaṅ lon*, *źal ta pa*, *źa* γ*briṅ*) and kinship terms (*źaṅ*, *dbon*) surface in PT 1042 reflecting social strata of the Empire.

I think we can now safely state that PT 1042 contains the account of a funeral ritual that was customarily practised by elite members of Tibetan-speaking groups in Central Tibet.[85] The data used in the discussion stem from distant regions: Central Tibet, the Dulan region, and Dunhuang. Nevertheless, the degree of overlaps and similarities indicates a common cultural background, the origin of which must be sought in the Four Horns of the Tibetan Empire.

3.3 ‘The religious’ in PT 1042

PT 1042 concerns a funeral ceremony but no mention is made of the netherworld or any other destination towards which the deceased shall proceed. We are not informed what happens to the deceased after death; no afterlife is depicted. One could say PT 1042 is a purely behavioural description of actions undertaken during the ceremony, without any interest in eschatological considerations or virtual beings. And yet, a few elements indicate that ‘the religious’ was also involved in the ritual, which is not plainly exposed in the text.

As I mentioned before, PT 1042 consists of two clear cut parts. In the first part, the proper ritual

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[85] As rightly observed by Haarh (1969: 357), we have no reason to assume that every funeral ceremony of an elite member followed exactly the same scheme. However, the shared features taken together are so remarkable that they allow us to recognise a Tibetan type of burial as performed in historical times. On the other hand, Haarh’s assumption that PT 1042 presents a funeral of a *btsan po* (1969: 362) seems too far-fetched.

description, the only elements that can be associated with religion are ritual specialists: various kinds of *gśen* and *bon* priests, for whom the generic term *sku gśen* is also frequently applied. The names by which they are addressed refer to their functions in the ritual. Thus it is not possible to establish whether those were professional ritual specialists or rather lay people entrusted with particular duties for the time of the ceremony only.

The situation is slightly different in the second, 'explanatory' part of PT 1042. Here, ritual specialists are likewise mentioned although preponderantly as *sku gśen*; more specific denotations are used only a few times: *bon po* (l. 114), *phaṅs bon po* (ll. 110, 112), *mjol bon po* (l. 113), *γor gyer* (l. 117). What makes this part special is the occurrence of virtual beings like *yul lha* (l. 99) "local deities", *yul bdag* (l. 99) "local protectors", and *bdud* (ll. 102 and 111) "demons". The first two are listed together with humans, all of whom seem to become beneficiaries of a *thugs*-ransom, probably a ransom for the spirit of the deceased. On *bdud* we read that they were averted (lit. cut off) from objects offered to the deceased:

> *rgyal* (read: *rgya bon*) *gyīs mṅaγ thaṅ bcad de // gtad du gnaṅ baγi rnams /* (102) *bdud gcado //*
> The *bon* priests [responsible for preparing] the eight-threaded nets determined the extent of power; demons were separated [from the objects] that were allowed to be delivered.

> *sku gśen phaṅs bon po rnams kyis kyaṅ / gtaṅ du stsold /* (111) *paγi rnams / spad de bdud bcad nas / sku gśen gśog thabs stsalto //*
> *sku gśen phaṅs bon po*, having *spad* what one was giving as gifts, separated demons. Subsequently, *sku gśen*s were given *gśog thabs*.

Though the elaborate character of the ceremony suggests a complex eschatological system shared by the group, no such thing is alluded to apart from the mention of these few virtual beings.

4. Conclusions

Lha in the official title of the Tibetan *btsan po*s and a funeral ritual with very limited references to 'the religious' present two different modes of the co-existence of 'the religious' and 'the social'. But did the Tibetans of yore distinguish between 'the religious' and 'the social' at all? The rational answer is: they all remain quite dead and so we shall never learn what they did and did not distinguish. What we know is that written Tibetan and also modern Tibetan vernaculars do not possess a general term like the English *religion*. Instead, in OT we read about behaviours (*tshul*), customs (*lugs*), practice (*chos*), rites (*cho ga*), or principles (*gtsug lag*). The names of two modern Tibetan religions, Bon and Buddhism, have resulted from specialisation of terms that had been used in connection with various values-oriented activities of pivotal significance for the maintenance of the group coherence and thus the culture: *bon* "worship" > "Bon religion"[86] and *chos* "manner,

[86] The noun *bon* "worship" was derived by conversion from v3 of the verb √γ*on* "to give, offer" (v1 **don* (?), v2 **bond*, v3 *bon*): *"what was offered" > "offering" > "worship". For the deverbal derivation from v3-stems see Bialek forthcoming-b. Another member of the word-family is *yon* "gift, offering".

practice" > "good (*bzaṅ*) practice" > "Buddhism"[87]. However, they seem to have never had a common hypernym in Tibetan. The use of the term *lha* in official title of the political rulers indicates that the spheres of 'the religious' and 'the political' were not separated, or maybe rather they were deliberately interwoven. In the present paper we have seen that the *btsan po*s were not only guided by *lha*s but also, coming from *lha*s, they were themselves *lha*s, or at least they were spoken of as being *lha*s. These concepts belong of course to the narrative level, and for now we have no means to deduce the actual practice from them. The question that needs to be answered before one can proceed with reconstructing the political system of the Tibetan Empire and the position of the *btsan po*s within it, is: were the *btsan po*s also treated and venerated as *lha*s? Any future research that would tackle the question must not restrict itself to the textual corpus but confront it with archaeological and art historical data. In textual sources we encounter competing ideologies in portraying the *btsan po*s that may point to various influences to which the Tibetan Empire and its literate elites were exposed. On the one hand, we have Khri slon btsan described as *primus inter pares* (PT 1287: 173ff.) but, on the other hand, *btsan po*s are said to be coming down from the sky. Their exalted nature seems to have been also addressed in the word γ*phrul* "transformational mights" – reminding one of shamans' characteristics – that was used in the official title γ*phrul gyi lha*. Yet another motif – *btsan po*s as protectors and life-giving rain – was recently identified as being of Central Asian (possibly Zoroastrian) provenance.[88] These are very different images of *btsan po*s that might not only reflect various origins of the single motifs but also distinct motivations that triggered their introduction. However, whether each of the narratives, including *btsan po* as *lha*, was reproduced in ritual seems less probable.

The two examples chosen as case studies in the paper demonstrate antithetical tendencies in the history of the Tibetan Empire: change and invariance. The title of Tibetan *btsan po*s and the funeral ceremony of PT 1042 illustrate to what extent concepts were changing in time, but could remain constant across space. On the one hand, the most prominent attribute of the Tibetan *btsan po*s (by which they were juxtaposed with virtual beings of the sky), the title *lha*, was being deliberately changed and adapted so as to justify the position of the ruler in new historical circumstances. These changes were initiated in Central Tibet during the 8th century. On the other hand, PT 1042, a text found in a place that was a Central Asian colony of the Tibetan Empire, depicts a funeral ritual with many details of which can be identified with facts and artefacts known from Central Tibet: the time frame, shape of the burial mound, general structure of the burial ground, economy based on horses, yaks, *mdzo*s, and sheep etc. The ceremony described in PT 1042 was lavish and ostentatious. Its impressive form was dictated by the high social status of the deceased and/or his family, as well as their good economic condition. The person buried in this way must have been a member of a group with considerable political power or influence. Cemeteries around the Kokonor Lake, including the Reshui cemeteries, each encompass dozens of graves, thus making the hypothesis probable that

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[87] *Chos* is a deverbal derivative from v4 of the verb √tɕa "to prepare" (v1 γ*cha*γ, v2 *bcas*, v3 *bca*γ, v4 *chos*). Its etymological meaning can be reconstructed as "what is established". For further details on the word-family and the deverbal derivation from v4-stems see Bialek forthcoming-b.

[88] Cf. Bialek 2019.

they belonged to sedentary or quasi-sedentary cultures. It is true that groups populating the regions on the Silk Road were multi-ethnic and the region itself was a melting pot for various cultural and religious trends. However, not all the groups had a comparable political and economic power at one time. Considered jointly, these facts indicate that PT 1042 contains a text of a funeral ritual that was practised by wealthy and influential Tibetans – the only group the culture of which agrees with the above description. Historically Tibetans started settling permanently in the Kokonor region after they had conquered the Ɣa źa in 663. Sometime earlier they established an important administrative unit called Mdo smad with its own regular councils – the only ones from outside Central Tibet that are reported in the OTA.[89] Dunhuang (OT Śa cu) was occupied twice by Tibetans: briefly at the end of the 7th century and in ca. 787-848. The Tibetan administration of the latter period had a considerable impact on the administrative practice in the region even after the fall of the Empire.[90] Thus, the Tibetans left a lasting trace in this region and we have no reason to assume that they would not, as the occupying power, have brought their customs and rites there. The presence of the Tibetan-style graves at the Reshui cemeteries, burial mounds of Central Tibet, the textual witness of PT 1042, and the historical facts recorded in the OTA, all attest to a cultural continuity between very distant places on the Tibetan Plateau and even beyond, wherever Tibetans could establish their rule over a longer period of time.

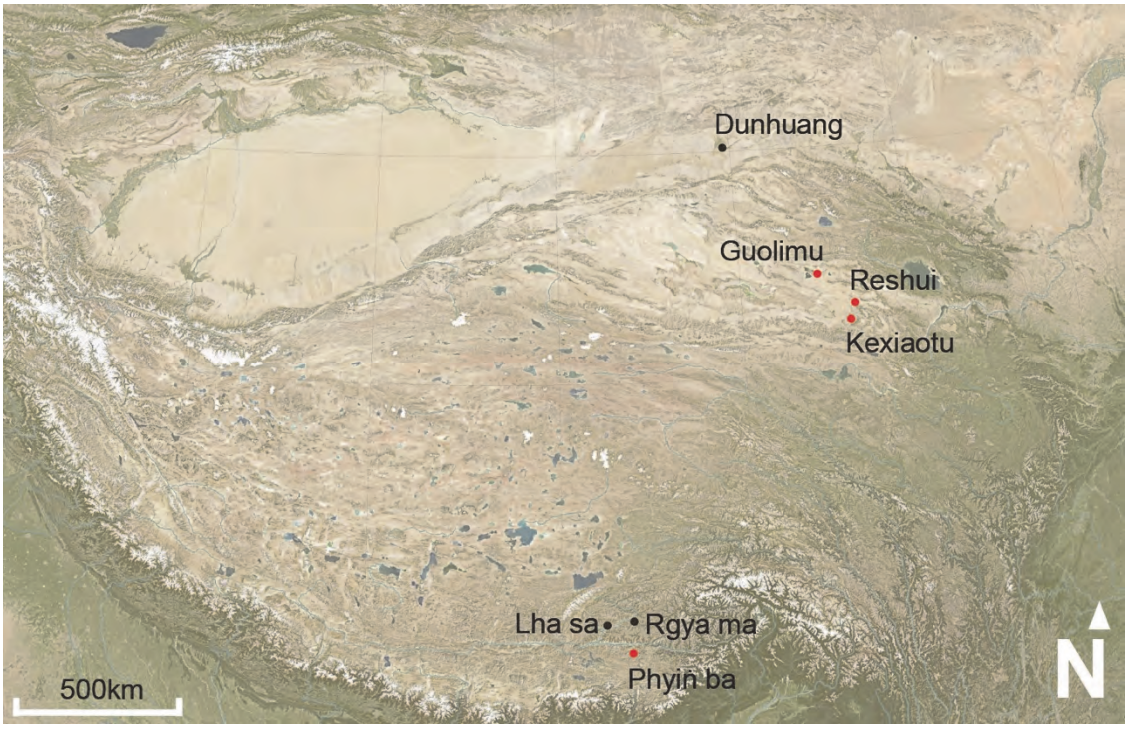
Concluding, I propose an inclusive understanding of Tibetan-ity. If we can prove that a particular custom or rite were adapted and cultivated by Tibetan-speaking groups of Central Tibet. This is a sufficient reason to refer to the custom or rite as 'Tibetan' for the particular period in question, whatever their origins might have been. This of course should not exempt us from tracing the roots of the custom and establishing the ways and channels through which it came to be practised by Tibetans. By 'inclusive' I also mean that the same or very similar custom or rite might be practised by other neighbouring groups that may or may not speak a Tibeto-Burman language. In some cases, such a situation might have resulted from a borrowing from a more prestigious culture, but in others it might be due to the common history predating the splitting up of the proto-culture, e.g. a culture common to Proto-Bodish speaking communities. Certainly, the fact that a particular cultural phenomenon is described in Tibetan language is not a sufficient proof that it was also acknowledged or practised by Tibetan-speaking groups. Therefore, the confirmed relationship of the funeral ceremony reported in PT 1042 to the culture of Central Tibet should not be automatically extended to all the other OT texts discovered in Central Asia. Each text or a group of thematically and linguistically related texts should be examined in itself and set in a broader context of material and literary culture shared by Tibetan-speaking groups.

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[89] The first mention of Mdo smad in the OTA comes from the year 653/4 (PT 1288: 25), but the first council of Mdo smad is reported only in 692/3 (ITJ 750: 112).

[90] Cf. Uray 1981 and Takeuchi 2004.

Appendix



Map 1: Archaeological sites of the Tibetan Empire. (● Cemeteries from the period of the Tibetan Empire; ● Historical sites related to the Tibetan Empire; Map data: Google, Landsat / Copernicus; modifications and additional data by the author, JB 2019)

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Abbreviations

Ɣphyoṅ	Ɣ phyoṅ rgyas inscription
Bsam	Bsam yas inscription
Bsam B	Bsam yas Bell inscription
Dgaγ	Dgaγ ldan byin chen inscription
Dun	Dunhuang cave no. 365 inscription
GLR	Bsod nams rgyal mtshan. *Rgyal rabs gsal baγi me loṅ* (see References)
IDP	International Dunhuang Project (see Online Resources)
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
ITJ	IOL Tib J
ITN	IOL Tib N
KhG	Dpaγ bo gtsug lag 1962 (see References)
Khra	Khra γbrug Bell inscription
Khri	Khri lde sroṅ brtsan's Tomb inscription
Khrom	Khrom chen inscription
Lcaṅ	Lcaṅ bu inscription
Lho	Lho brag inscription
Or.	Oriental Collections of the British Library
OTA	*Old Tibetan Annals*
OTA-I	PT 1288 and ITJ 750
OTC	*Old Tibetan Chronicles*
OTDO	Old Tibetan Documents Online (see Online Resources)
PT	Pelliot tibétain
PT 1042	Old Tibetan funeral text
Rkoṅ	Rkoṅ-po inscription
Skar	Skar cuṅ inscription
ST Treaty	Sino-Tibetan Treaty inscription
TTT	Tibetan Tumulus Tradition website (see Online Resources)
Źol	Źol inscription
Źwa	Źwaγi lha khaṅ inscription

√	reconstructed verb root
*	reconstructed form
A	Autumn
CA	Central Asia(n)
CT	Classical Tibetan
E	East
JB	Joanna Bialek

OT	Old Tibetan
S	Summer
Sp	Spring
trslr.	transliteration
v1, v2, v3, v4	verb stems
W	1. West; 2. Winter

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The ‘Stranger-King’ and the Temple

The Tibetan Ruler Image Retained in Post-imperial Environments – the Example of the *lha* of Khra ’brug

Guntram Hazod

1. Introduction[1]

There is a certain basic problem in the social sciences: on the one hand, one needs concepts and categorisations in order to organise and analyse the data; on the other hand, we cannot always be sure that the result will then capture the real world, or rather remain only consistent within these academical classifications. Religion is seen as such a critical category. Leading social anthropologists have taken up and further extended an old discourse about religion in recent years, which “questions the existence of religion as a discrete analytical category, one that can be expected to find and study across the whole range of human societies” (Wengrow and Graeber 2015: 597). One argues: “what we term ‘organised religion’ is a historical residue, left over from the collapse of Bronze Age states where sacred and political power were initially fused” (Wengrow and Graeber, *ibd.*). These anthropologists notice an inseparability for these “pre-religion” societies, where categorical oppositions usually associated with religion in academic applications, such as those between the natural and the supernatural, the ‘real’ and the religious, or even the holy and the profane, do not actually exist.[2] Both the constituents of the religious (the dealing with the metahuman beings in the widest sense) and the individuals that form the social are part of one and the same larger coherent whole, something which Maurice Bloch (2013b) proposed describing as the “transcendental social”.

For Tibet, this understanding is actually not that new: Rolf Stein’s concept of the “nameless religion” seems to point to a quite similar situation, where the religious existed as nothing separate but as something absorbed in the everyday mechanism of society-making.[3] Yet this observation is not restricted to what is otherwise often termed the “folk religious tradition”, but is also immanent to core parts of the Buddhist system, most evident with protective deities. The *’go ba’i lha* here represent only one of the more prominent examples, where it is obviously insufficient to describe

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[1] The present contribution is based on a paper given by the author at the seminar “The Social and the Religious in the Making of Tibetan Societies”, Vienna, Nov. 2018. The writing of this article was part of the TTT project P 30393-G25 financed by the Austrian Science Fund. (For TTT see References below.) I wish to thank Joanna Bialek, Christian Jahoda and Per K. Sørensen for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

[2] Cf. Bloch 2013b: 25, 29f.; cf. also much earlier Goody’s critical statements on Durkheim’s universal approach of “the sacred and the profane” dichotomy (Goody 1961: 157f.); cf. also Maddock 1998: 496-497; van der Veer 1998: 482f. and more recently the discussion in Strathern 2019: 4ff., *et passim*; see also below Chap. 6.

[3] Stein 1993: 222ff.; cf. here not unlike Huber’s concept of “mundane rites” (or “rites for mundane goals”, Huber 2020, vol. 1: 14) or earlier Ramble’s “civil religion” (Ramble 2008: 11ff.).

the exchange with deities who are said to reside in the body of an individual (and in a broader sense in the body of the society) as part of religion. In Brandon Dotson's recent analysis of these deities' antecedents in Old Tibetan divination texts, we at the same time find demonstrated how an older model of human-divine interaction was transformed into a Buddhist concept – by changing its meaning, but not its range of social reference (Dotson 2017). This all opens a larger field of discussion: not only to examine the historical model that draws a line between the religious and religion (or book religion), but also to ask how and in what specific context older forms of socio-religious interactions were continued in the later period. My contribution addresses these questions through the example of ritual practices in the temple of Khra 'brug (spelled Tandruk) in Yar lung, namely those related to the deity at the centre of this cult, the *lha* Tshangs pa, which, it seems, includes significant elements of the older account of the Tibetan progenitor king. This relates to the contours of a "stranger-king" (Sahlins 2008), which we find addressed here and which we wish to present separately in the Appendix with respect to the accounts given in the Old Tibetan document PT 1038.

2. In Lower Yar lung: traces of religion and various ritual traditions in the imperial time

For imperial Tibet (7th-9th cent. CE), the source situation seems indeed to confirm the proposed distinction between the period before and after the appearance of religion, as it suggests that there was no religion designated by a specific name before the actual establishment of Buddhism.[4] Yet this dividing rule should not be seen too strictly, as it does not necessarily mean the absence of any attempt at organising the religious in a more centralised form. Moreover, from the seventh century at the latest, components of a (book) religion formed a significant part of the intellectual history, where we find it combined with various ideas and practices related to the vision of political leadership long before the idea of a Buddhist king became reality.

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[4] There is a long discussion about this topic; see van Schaik 2013. It has been stated that designations like *bon chos*, the "Bon tradition / religion", mentioned in Old Tibetan documents with reference to the (late) imperial period evidently came from the (critical) pen of a Buddhist author from that time. The statement in Text 84 of the *Stein Collection* Or.8210, Attached Paper recto, ll.3-4: *sngon cad mdad 'do (la) bon chosu bgyis pa,* "in the former time, the funeral was practised according to the Bon religion" (SC 122-123) seems to be such an example of a commentary by a representative from the early Tibetan Buddhist milieu and thus is not to be understood necessarily as evidence for the existence of an older "Bon religion". Cf. van Schaik 2013: 252; see also his weblog (van Schaik 2009), URL: https://earlytibet.com/2009/08/24/buddhism-and-bon-iv (accessed: 15.12.2020). Similarly, the Old Tibetan document Tib J 1746, which speaks of the non-Buddhist belief system(s) and their rituals as the "little religion" (*chos chu ngu*) is located in the same milieu. This is characterised somewhat dismissively but at the same time not inaccurately with the words: "Those who are attached to the little religion propitiate the deities and the sky, and if even a single good thing occurs, they say that they don't need the excellent religion (*legs pa'i chos*, i.e. Buddhism)"; van Schaik 2013: 232; bracket expression by the author, GH.

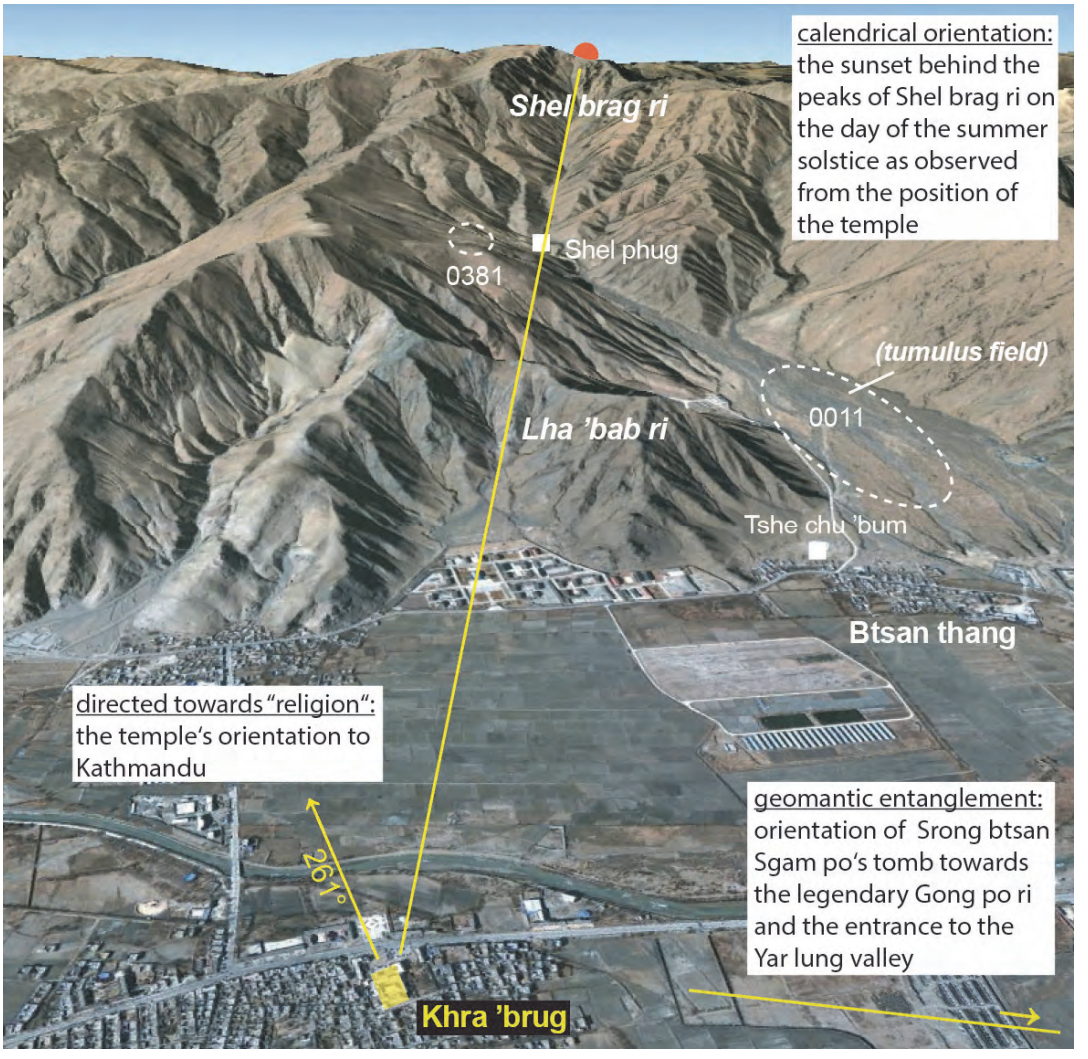


Fig. 1: In Lower Yar lung (Yar mda'): The spatial position of the Khra 'brug *vihāra*.
(Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2014; modifications and additional data: G. Hazod 2018)



Fig. 1a: Ground plan of the Khra 'brug temple.
(Alexander 2008)

The illustration of Fig. 1 gives an idea of what happened in the mid-seventh century in terms of ritual practices and the political visions behind them. At the centre is the temple of Khra 'brug, which was most likely founded during Emperor Srong btsan Sgam po's second reign (in the late 640s),[5] this means about 130 years before the founding of Bsam yas and the beginning of the monastic tradition in Tibet. There is some archaeo-astronomical evidence that relates to the temple's spatial position; this combines a complex set of different orientations, which cross each other within this small section of Lower Yar lung: the temple is precisely oriented towards Kathmandu, figuratively, towards religion.[6] It still remains unknown how ancient astronomers and geomancers were able to make such long-distance measurements, and this across extremely difficult terrain. The same can be said of the geomantic entanglement, which a recent archaeo-astronomical study has revealed with respect to the royal tombs (Romain 2020). The grave mound commonly ascribed to Srong btsan Sgam po as well as the mounds of three successor emperors[7] – all situated in the royal Mu ra grave field of 'Phyong rgyas – appear to be aligned almost exactly to the cave complex of the Gong po ri (Fig. 2),[8] the famous mountain behind Khra 'brug, which in the founding story of the temple is ascribed a crucial position.[9] This newly discovered geomantic indication still needs

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[5] Dotson 2009: 143. The temple is first mentioned in an eighth-century edict under the name Khra 'brug gi bkra shis lha yul gtsug lag khang (*KG* 372.11), later in the Buddhist tradition classified as Tibet's first temple; for its history see TF (Sørensen and Hazod 2005). As to the original layout of the temple, it has been pointed out that Khra 'brug was probably constructed as a multi-celled *vihāra* like the Lhasa Jo khang (Alexander 2008: 10).

[6] This is related to the historical context, according to which Buddhism was brought to Tibet from Kathmandu, the Licchavi centre – reflected in the story of the invitation of the Nepalese princess Khri btsun (Sørensen 1994: 199ff.). The temple's orientation (261° west) refers to the view of the main statues through the entrance gate; measurements after Reinhard Herdick (FL 267). A similar orientation is ascribed to the burial mound of emperor Srong btsan Sgam po, or more precisely to the temple which was reportedly erected inside this mausoleum (Hazod 2016: 128). For further aspects concerning Khra 'brug's (western) orientation see recently Romain 2021: 51-52.

[7] I.e. the tomb of Khri 'Dus srong (r. 686-704), no. VIII of Fig. 2, and the tomb of Empress Khri ma lod (r. 705-712), no. IX. Note that here the positions of the tombs nos. IX and XVII have been changed as opposed to earlier representations (cf. recently Hazod 2018: 73); this suggests a new reading of the relevant information in the sources, but still requires further clarification.

[8] The plotted lines of the graves V and VII (Fig. 2) fall ca. 300m west of the peak of Gong po ri, with a distance of 27km (Romain 2020: 12-14). The situation is similar to the other two graves (VIII, IX); cf. Romain 2020: 15 (with a different numbering of the individual graves). At other tombs of Mu ra one finds further geomantic references, including the Shel brag ri, the mountain sanctuary on the west side of Lower Yar lung, which is closely associated with the legends of Padmasambhava and the beginning of the tantric tradition in Tibet in the late eighth century. The respective tombs which face the peak of this mountain are nos. XVI and XVII (Khri U'i Dum brtan and Khri 'Od srung); further entanglements include *inter alia*: Mount Yar lha Sham po (connected with no. X, Khri Lde gtsug brtsan, 35km distant) and Mount Gang pa bzang po (no. XIV, Khri Lde Srong btsan, 144km distant); Romain 2020: 20f., 28, 32; cf. also Romain 2019.

[9] This concerns the tradition, according to which the temple's main statues, the Rgyal ba Rigs lnga, emerged naturally in a cave, i.e. the Klu 'dul Khyung gtsang phug ("cave – nest of the *khyung* bird, which overcame the *nāga*") on Mount Zo thang Mgon po ri (or Gong po ri) and were discovered there by the *dharmarāja* (Srong btsan Sgam po) during the time of the temple construction (TF 60-61). The same mountain is much

further verification; otherwise it would only confirm what is stated in classical sources, where the concept of such mantic calculation of territory is chronicled as having been introduced from China at this time.[10]



V = tomb of Srong btsan Sgam po; VII = Mang slon Mang rtsan; VIII = Khri 'Dus srong; IX = Khri ma lod (?)
X = Khri Lde gtsug brtsan; XI = Khri Srong lde brtsan; XII = Mu ne brtsan; XIV = Khri Lde srong btsan;
XVI = Khri 'U'i Dum brtan; XVII = Khri 'Od srung (?)

Fig. 2: The royal tombs in 'Phyong rgyas, section of the Mu ra grave field (0032 of the TTT database) and orientation of the tomb of Emperor Srong btsan Sgam po. (Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2014; modifications and additional data: G. Hazod 2020)

Much of what we see in this small section (Fig. 1) is also true on a larger scale: the two burial mound sites 0011 and 0381 are two of more than two dozen grave fields in the Lower Yar lung (Fig. 3: red circles on the map); they are situated within the characteristic settlement pattern of relatively close proximity between the place of the living (villages, arable land) and the dead; we find this same situation across the Central Tibetan districts, which with their hundreds of tumulus fields, many of them with stately elite mounds from the imperial period, possibly represent one of

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more popular as the place of the Monkey Cave (or "monkey cave of the fish skin", Nya ko'i Spre'u phug; TF 107), i.e. the celebrated site of the Tibetan anthropogenesis (CFS 51-58), which is also included in Khra 'brug's ritual tradition (TF 257, 295).

[10] For details see Sørensen 1994: 253f., 552-561; TF 171f.

the densest burial-mound landscapes in the world.[11] This tradition, in its own right a huge issue in terms of orientation and the ritual intersections of the social, goes back to the time before the seventh century, and thus originally had nothing to do with the idea of creating a temple for the emperor.

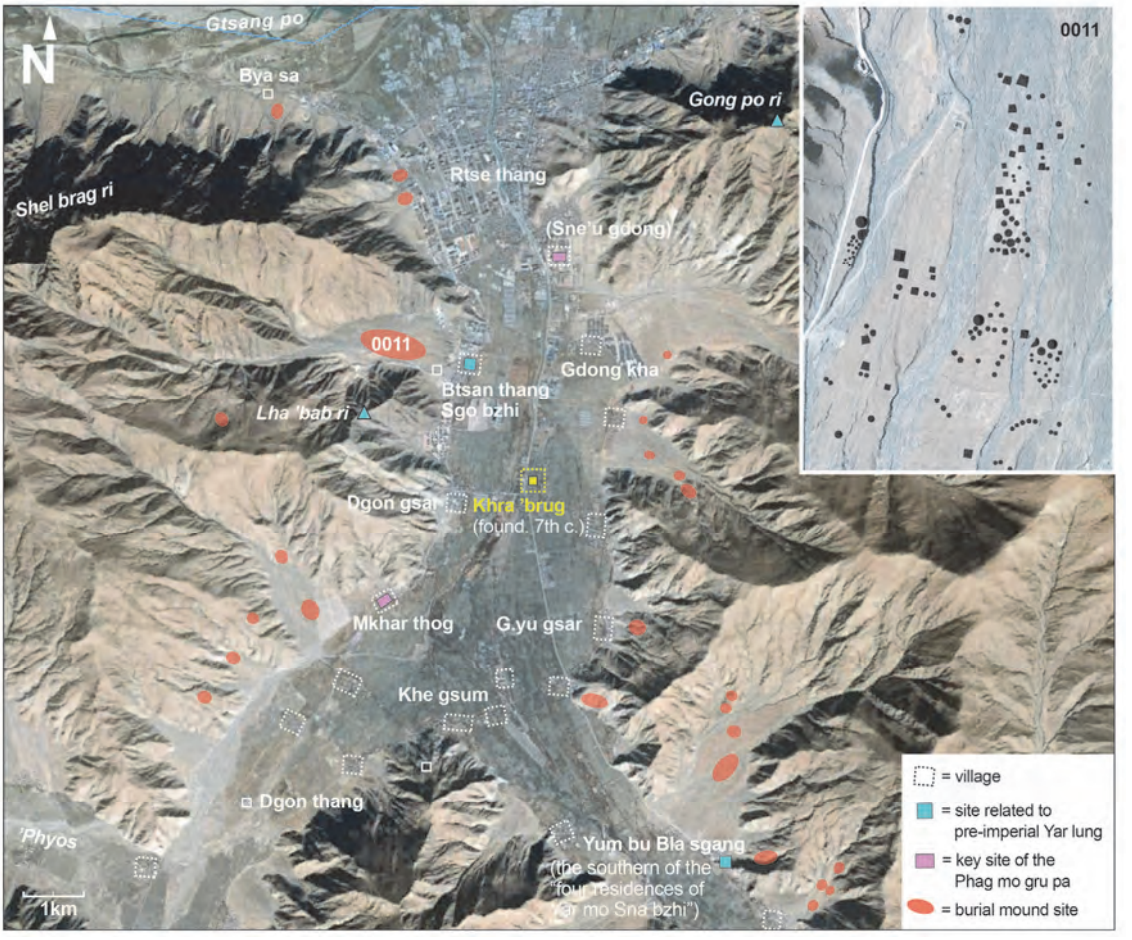


Fig. 3: The historical landscape of Lower Yar lung. (Map data: Google, Maxar Technologies 2014; modifications and additional data: G. Hazod 2018)

On the other hand, as already noted in our earlier Khra 'brug study, the position of the temple seems to consider the older ritual landscape, provided that our conclusion is correct in seeing that the line that connects the temple with the point of the sunset behind the famous Shel brag mountain on the day of the summer solstice was intended to connect the place with a calendrical orientation, perhaps one that was used locally long before the temple foundation.[12] This line crosses the "hill where the god descended" (Lha 'bab ri), a foothill of the Shel brag mountain range (fn. 8); it is to be identified

[11] See most recently Kriz and Hazod 2020 for the mapping of the sites' geographical position in the Horn regions of Central Tibet (current state of site numbers: 0001-0683); for details concerning the topographical setting and the issue of historical identification see Hazod 2018, 2019; see also the website of the Tibetan Tumulus project (TTT), URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition.

[12] Hazod 2005: 267, data after Reinhard Herdick.

with the place in Yar lung that sources describe as the spot where the ancestor of the royal family arrived after his journey to Earth. Based on further data from ethnography we indeed proposed observing a significant ritual place of the pre-imperial Yar lung behind this site.[13] To put it figuratively, on the day of the foundation of Khra 'brug, ritualists and craftsmen practised, measured and hammered side by side to realise an evidently highly pragmatic vision of sovereignty that combined various religious and intellectual concepts.

3. The "stranger-king"

My interest here is in the god of the Lha 'bab ri. This evidently recalls the well-known legendary origin of the imperial dynasty, which says formulaically (in the opening of imperial inscriptions and in Old Tibetan documents) that the divine ancestor of the Tibetan royal family came down from the gods of heaven as lord (or king) of men. There are a few variants of this *rjer gshegs* (or "come as lord") topos, as Nathan Hill (2013a) has summarised this legend, where the divine figure more precisely came as lord of the black-headed (*mgo nag*) and upright (*'greng*), as well as the owner of the maned and bent (i.e. animals), or it says simply (in PT 1286): he came as the lord of all below heaven (*gnam mtha' 'og gi rjer gshegs pa*; PT 1286, TDD 198, l.35), interestingly including the *lha*, so named in the pillar inscription at the 'Phyong rgyas bridge (*lha dang myi'i rjer gshegs te*).[14]

In a most inspiring essay, Joanna Bialek (2019) has analysed the specific variant given in the Dri gum account of PT 1287 (ll.52-53; ll.59-60) and in PT 1286 (l.31-32; l.42-43), which depicts the ruler as a life-giving kingly being who rules over the "patriarchs of the country" (*yul yab*), oversees the pastures and brings the rain of the "fathers of the Earth" (*dog yab*).[15] Here the author identifies striking parallels to the attributions of Mithra in the *Mihr Yašht*, the fifth-century hymn of the Zoroastrian Avestas dedicated to this Iranian god.[16] While it is exciting to consider not only

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[13] CFS 58-59, TF 222-223; and below Chapter 4.

[14] OTI 13, ll.1-2; Richardson 1985: 38-39.

[15] Cf. TDD 202, 198. In the two (almost identical) passages of PT 1286 ("catalogue of principalities") the divine ruler is the ancestor Khri (/Lde) Nyag khri Btsan po, i.e. the Nya gri Btsan po of the Rkong po inscription, commonly known from the later chronicles as Gnya' khri Btsan po who appeared in Yar lung, which the above-mentioned Lha 'bab ri refers to (fn. 13; and below Chap. 4). The often-quoted passage of PT 1286 (l.31-32) reads: *khri'i bdun tshigs kyI sras / khri nyag khrI btsan po*' // (32) s*a dog la yul yab kyi rje / dog yab kyi char du gshegs s'o //*. Bialek (2019: 143) translates: "The son of the fourth one from among the *khri*s, Khri Nyag khri Btsan po, came [down] to (lit. on) earth as a ruler over (lit. of) the patriarchs of the country, as rain [sent by] (lit. of) the protector of earth." The last phrase *dog yab kyi char du* does not seem quite conclusive to me in this reading. I understand *dog yab* as a pendant to *yul yab*, as well as reading *rje* and *char* (PT 1287, l.59 reads *chab*) as corresponding entities: he came as lord of the *yul yab* and as rain for (lit. of) the fathers of the Earth. Cf. here similarly Hill 2013a: 169; see also Richardson 1998: 124; Haarh 1969: 312.

[16] These parallels relate to Mithra as the god of contract, and related functions – protector of the country, bestower of water / rain, provider of wide pastures; Bialek 2019: 145ff. In addition, also the well-known "rider and horse" motif in the representation of the Tibetan good ruler (or "true ruler", *rje bden*) image – the guarantor of the social contract between ruler and his subjects (or comitatus, respectively) in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* – possibly had its origin in the hymn to Mithra; Bialek, *op. cit*., 151-152.

this specific topos but the "come as lord" motif in general as possibly being of foreign origin, the point that I see as even more significant here is the situation conveyed in the story, namely that it makes one believe that the society lacked a ruler; it was almost in a state of expecting such an overall kingly being who finally arrived from outside.[17]

This seems to be exemplary for a "stranger-king", the theory originally introduced by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (2008) as a framework to understand global colonialism, which means explaining why indigenous people subjugated themselves to an alien colonial power. This usually happened in a state of crisis where only such an authority from outside was conceded the ability to permanently solve problems. In a recent publication (Graeber and Sahlins 2016) this theory was further developed in seeing stranger-king formations generally as the most widespread, if not original, form of pre-modern kingship. In their self-presentation, such dynasties typically originated with a heroic figure "from a greater outside realm: near or distant, legendary or contemporary, celestial or terrestrial" (*op. cit*., 5); the historical kings were imitations of this foreign being and in this way inherited its unrivalled authority, which explains the characteristic dual polity of ruler and subjects, with the latter having been the original owners of the country, who surrendered the rule to the "foreign king" (Graeber and Sahlins 2016: 5-7).

We find all of this embedded in the much larger concept of a "cosmic polity", which sees the existence of sovereigns as a basic constant in human societies, even in small-scale or more egalitarian ones:

> "Human societies are hierarchically encompassed [...] – in a cosmic polity populated by beings of human attributes and metahuman powers who govern the people's fate. [...] these metapersons are endowed with far-reaching powers of human life and death, which, together with their control of the conditions of the cosmos, make them the all-round arbiters of human welfare and illfare. Even many loosely structured hunting and gathering peoples are thus subordinated to beings on the order of gods ruling over great territorial domains and the whole of the human population. *There are kingly beings in heaven even where there are no chiefs on earth*." (Graeber and Sahlins 2016: 2 (emphasis by the author); cf. also recently the discussion in Strathern 2019: 107ff.; see also Langelaar in this volume)

Here we encounter indeed striking parallels with the situation of the Tibetan "come as lord" legend, and it is these characteristics of the cosmic polity, which also provides us with an explanation for the spontaneous acceptance of the ruling structures which, as it were, were realised within a long-known world of dependency on metahuman (*lha*-) beings.

It remains unclear when this form of sanctification of the Tíbetan king was introduced, perhaps at the time when the *rjer gshegs* first appeared – in the inscriptions of the eighth and ninth centuries. This would mean that (similar to other borrowings, such as the term *'phrul gyi lha* from Chinese

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[17] The versions differ with regard to the composition of the group that received the lord, or also in whether the community had explicitly searched for a ruler or not. In any case, the stranger is always happily received (cf. also Ramble 2008: 313). For the various versions see Haarh 1969: 233-234, 291-293; Hill 2013a: 170-171, and Appendix below. It should be noted that this situation, according to which a regional group is looking for a ruler from outside and finally invites one, can also be found in the depictions of the later political history of Central Tibet (cf. e.g. the case of the Bug pa can pa in Yar stod, CFS 27ff.).

concepts) the "come as lord" represents a rather late addition simply to underline the unique quality of the emperor, which at the same time was used to indicate ancestry and consistently placed at the beginning of the dynasty. However, there are indications, albeit somewhat vague, that speak against this assumption: the representation of the *rjer gshegs* in the Kong po tradition combined with the story of Dri gum Btsan po's burial there (in PT 1287, Hill 2013b) suggests that this legend was related to the beginning of the Tibetan tumulus tradition, which, as noted above, dates back somewhere to the period of pre-imperial Yar lung; and in this context I also wonder whether both the ritual specialists of the funeral, the *bon po*, who in later chronicles are described as having arrived from abroad, and the "come as lord" have their origin in the same (Iranian-influenced) Central Asian cultural milieu (Hazod 2018: 20; Hazod 2022). This would in fact rather point to a chronologically much older presence of the Tibetan "stranger-king" (see here also Appendix below).

It should be noted that the *rjer gshegs* account seems to be combined with an even greater story, according to which, with the arrival of the *lha* son, the tradition or custom of the gods (*lha'i lugs*) also came to the people. Thus it says in inscriptions, similarly stereotypically about the historical emperor, that his power was great etc., because he acted in accordance with the "custom of (his) father and forefathers" (*yab myes kyi lugs*); in parallel it also speaks of *gnam gyi chos*, with *chos* here having apparently the similar meaning of custom, the latter also specified as the "good custom of ancient principles" (*gna'i gtsug lagi chos bzang po*).[18]

I understand "custom" or tradition as an umbrella term for the social conventions related to the key institutions of the early Tibetan polity. From the seventh century this was the society of a typical Silk Road empire, which at its political core was based on the lifelong covenant of the lord and his entourage, summarised by Beckwith (2009) as the "ruler and his comitatus" order. If we trust the later chronicles, this entourage system was apparently already a key institution in pre-imperial Yar lung, where a selected group of six "paternal subjects" (*yab 'bangs*) took care of the body of the king, and were also buried with him, as noted in Chinese sources.[19] In the same (later) chronicles this entourage appears to be directly combined with the "come as lord" account – namely in the version where the arrival of the king is located in Yar lung (see next Chap.). In older documents, we find this combination also addressed in the fragment of PT 1038, a text of which there are different readings in the literature (see Appendix).

4. The god's arrival in Btsan thang Sgo bzhi

To come back to the "hill of the god's descent" (Lha 'bab ri) in Yar lung, this place evidently

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[18] The examples quoted here refer to the two *rdo rings* inscriptions in 'Phyong rgyas (at the 'Phyong rgyas bridge, and at the tomb of Khri Lde srong brtsan; Richardson 1985: 38, 86) and to an entry in IOL Tib J 733, l.20 (TDD 274), Bialek 2018, vol. 1: 585, 508, 400. See also Hazod 2014b for the contrast between "custom" and "religion", and above fn. 4.

[19] Cf. Hazod 2018: 17, 20-21, 26, 41 for references. In the *Old Tibetan Chronicl*e (PT 1287) they correspond to the six "clans" (named in pairs) that accompanied the lord in the "royal hunt" (Dotson 2007: 79), and in PT 1038 and parallel later sources they appear in the positions of minister (*blon po*), priests (*bon po*) and servants (*phyag tshang*). See Appendix below.

corresponds to the Lha ri Rol po (also Lha ri Yol ba) of the written accounts,[20] which is usually mentioned as the first arrival place of the ancestor (Gnya' khri Btsan po) in those Buddhist versions that link the origin of the Tibetan progenitor king with an Indian royal dynasty – identified with a prince (Rupati) and drawn as a typical "stranger-king" figure, who was, as it were, adapted to the Tibetan sky when he had fled to Tibet and descended to this Lha ri Rol po as Gnya 'khri Btsan po before proceeding to the place called Btsan thang Sgo bzhi (situated immediately below).[21]

As is well known, in origin accounts that are commonly described as belonging to the "Bon po tradition" Yar lung is not the ancestor's first station on Earth; this was rather Mount Lha ri Gyang mtho in Kong po, from where he travelled to Yar lung over a number of stations, the so called "27 places of arrival" (all located in the southern region) – so according to the most detailed version of the *Yo ga* (*yi ge*) *lha gyes can* (one of the *Can lnga* texts, in *Lde'u-2*). There is also the short version: "First he descended to the peak of Lha ri Gyang tho, then he arrived at [the places of] Lha ri Rol po [and] Btsan thang Sgo bzhi." (*dang por lha ri gyang tho'i rtse la bab // lha ri rol po btsan thang sgo bzhir byon //*; *KG* 159.15-16).

In Btsan thang Sgo bzhi ("four doors of the mighty plain") he is welcomed by a group of 12 wise men (*shes pa mkhan mi bcu gnyis*, in some versions specified as 12 learned *bon po* or as a group of *bon po* plus the "six paternal subjects"); the classic (Buddhist) version has it that he was placed on a throne and carried on the shoulders or necks of the people, in a similar way as large statues are still carried in processions today (CFS 59; below Fig. 6).

One also finds this picture taken up in the local tradition when it says that the original families, the Btsan thang *sgo bzhi*, brought the Lord Gnya' khri Btsan po from the Lha 'bab hill to Btsan thang – to a temple that was under the care of the *sgo bzhi* and described as a forerunner of the famous Btsan thang G.yu'i lha khang, the latter classified as a branch temple of the Khra 'brug *vihāra*.[22]

It is highly feasible that this place on the west side of the valley (Fig. 3) was associated with the memory of special, historically relevant events from the earliest epoch, and may have formed the background for locating the "come as lord" legend precisely here.[23] Possibly the first version of this

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[20] For this identification see CFS 59.

[21] CFS 59; TF 219-223 and the references given there.

[22] TF 102-103. As to the "four doors of the mighty plain", such *sgo bzhi* toponyms are often described as crossroads for trades, related to the imports of substantial goods from the four directions (such as salt, iron; cf. Akester 2016: 49, after *Myang chos 'byung* 33; for other classifying uses of the term; cf. e.g. Karmay 2007: 222); but here, in the local context, the term is used to describe the four families originally resident at this place. It more precisely speaks of the Sgo bzhi lha khang, which was in the custody of these four families of Btsan thang; it later developed to became the Khang brgyad lha khang ("temple of the eight houses / families") before it was renamed into Btsan thang G.yu'i lha khang (TF 103; for the temple's naming, see *KG* 145.3-6).

[23] In fact, there was apparently a residence of the early Yar lung House next to Btsan thang, listed as the oldest one in Lower Yar lung, founded still before the famous Yum bu Bla mkhar castle (cf. *KK* 84.8-11; *Dba' bzhed* 27b, in Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 98). It corresponds to the western of the four *sku mkhar* of Yar mo Sna bzhi ("four parts of Yar mo"), the latter a name for the area of Yar mda' (Lower Yar lung), where citadels were built on the four sides of the valley (FL 228-229). Other sites of the "27 places of arrival" (*gshegs rabs nyi shu rtsa bdun*) have similar associations with old ritual places, such as the Ri De'u of Gnyal (FL 220).

Yar lung arrival story already existed at the imperial time, in the immediate post-Bsam yas period, when the ritual landscape was fundamentally re-arranged, with the founding of the G.yu'i lha khang as one of these local extensions (TF 102).

Anyway, what we want to note is that this tradition conveys a certain image of community: both the *lha* in the midst of 12 wise men (or the variant, in the midst of the *sgo bzhi*) is an image of society at large. A similar model can also be found in Khra 'brug.

5. The *lha* of Khra 'brug and its invitation

The deity we are discussing here is the Conch-Crowned Tshangs pa,[24] a form of Brahmā (or Sita Brahmā, Tshangs pa Dkar po), who as the chief guardian of the Khra 'brug temple (*gnas srung ma*) and as *yul lha* (territorial god) of this area occupies the position of the leading *lha* within the local representation of what Buddhism classifies as the realm of the *'jig rten gyi lha*. It has been suspected that the ancient Phvya god called Tshangs pa, known from the later (11th century) *lha rabs* classification (in the *Yi ge lha gyes can*), possibly formed the model for the Tibetan naming of Brahmā, one of whose first links with the geography of the Plateau Lands seems to have been the Gnam lha Dkar po, the central mountain (and mountain god) in Nyang po district in eastern Lhokha, on the border with Khams.[25] The deity in fact seems to have been linked to such an older heavenly god position, namely so in the origin account of the Rlangs Lha gzigs (evidently placed in Nyang po), where eight *gnam lha* brothers of the realm of Lha Tshangs pa formed the ancestral background of this family of the Rlangs Phag mo Gru pa.[26]

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[24] Tshangs pa Dkar po Dung thod can, or Tshangs pa Dkar po Dung gi thor tshugs can ("white Tshangs pa with the conch hair-knot"), a title which the deity reportedly received from Vajrapāṇi; cf. FL 275 and the references given there.

[25] Cf. FL 275-279, *et passim*, and Hazod 2009: 176 for a map of ancient eastern Lhokha (see also following note). A recent discussion on Tshangs pa is to be found in Huber 2020, vol. 1: 93-94 – in the context of the deity's position in the *srid pa'i lha* rituals of eastern Bhutan. For some new aspects regarding the identity of Tshangs pa see also FitzHerbert 2016: 318-320.

[26] This is the story of the ancestral figure of the Rlangs Lha gzigs, Mang ldom Stag btsan, who is said to have come to the land of the gods (*lha yi yul*) to save his endangered line. There he was accepted by the "seven *gnam lha* brothers" (*gnam lha mched bdun*) as the eighth brother, who advised him to meet the daughter of the *lha* Tshangs [pa], Sman btsun ma, and to produce offspring with her. The meeting took place in the Myang yul Gser mo region (evidently the Myang yul (Nyang yul / po) in eastern Central Tibet (with Gser mo being possibly a misspelling of Se mo, cf. parallel to the names of the old principalities of Dags yul Se mo, Rngegs yul Se mo; for *se mo* (also *se mo gru bzhi*) in this context see Bialek 2018: 582-586; Hazod 2018: 10-11) – in the area "nine passes and nine valleys" (*la dgu lung dgu*), which is probably based on the La dgu Lung dgu from Brag gsum mtsho (at the foot of the Gnam lha Dkar po), a central area of the Gesar epic, and, as we believe, probably also the area of origin of the Tshangs pa Dkar po in his function as the heavenly father of Gesar (Hazod 2006). From this connection comes the actual ancestor of the Rlangs family, who was connected to Tshangs pa not only through the mother, but also through the paternal line: although not explicitly noted, Mang ldom Stag btsan himself (as also his brothers) appears to have been a descendant of the *lha* Tshangs pa, at least he comes from the latter's heavenly realm, indicated by the Brahmā's mount, the "white goose with turquoise wings" (*ngang dkar g.yu gshog*) with whom the hero (in his position as *gnam lha*) was under way during his military campaigns (*Rlangs* 12.19; for the identification of the goose as the vehicle (or one of the vehicles) of Brahmā see TF 156-57; for the *ngang pa*

What made Tshangs pa Dung thod can a deity of supra-regional if not "national" importance in post-imperial Tibet was the attribution of being the *skyes lha* (birth god) of the founder king Srong btsan Sgam po, something which also seems to explain why in a later context this *lha* appears as first ranked among the oracle deities regularly consulted by the Ganden Phodrang government.[27]



Fig. 4: Tshangs pa Dkar po Dung gi thor tshugs can kept in the Tshangs pa lcog of the Khra 'brug temple. (Photo: G. Hazod 2001)

This position of Tshangs pa as a life-giving deity was probably a fabrication from the eleventh-century milieu of the emperor's birthplace (in Rgya ma, at the Skyid chu), but this is here a secondary question.[28] In the self-perception of the Khra 'brug internal cultic tradition, the deity arrived at this place together with the founder king,[29] who is said to have been offered the place to

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representation in Khra 'brug – a dough figure in the *klu khang* of the temple see below Chap. 6). It is interesting that Mang ldom Stag btsan speaks of his kinship position as being the youngest of the five elder ones of the eight *gnam lha* brothers, and the eldest of the four younger ones (*nga gnam lha mched brgyad kyi che ba lnga'i chung ba yin / chung ba bzhi'i che ba yin /*) (*Rlangs* 14.18-20; Czaja 2013: 38; Langelaar 2021). This is reminiscent of the well-known situation of the seven Yab lha Bdag drug sons, of whom the middle son (Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs) came to Earth as the ancestor of the Tibetan kings. A conscious reference to this concept of the Phyva origin of the progenitor king can be assumed here (see Appendix below), and thus also the adoption of the idea of a "stranger-king"-like origin, the latter underlined by the statement that the Rlangs progenitor did not look like a human descendant, but like the son of a *lha* (*mi'i bu mi 'dra lha'i sras 'dra ba*) (*Rlangs* 16.5; Czaja 2013: 38; Langelaar 2021).

[27] FL 236, 278, 289; Smith 2001: 141 (the latter referring to the interesting situation that oracles possessed by the same deity did not necessarily give identical answers – as in the case of inquiries in connection with the search for the Eighth Dalai Lama).

[28] For the presence of Tshangs pa at the Skyid chu (in La mo and in the birth story of Srong btsan Sgam po etc.) see FL 233, 235-36; see also Hazod 2014a.

[29] Cf. *Tshangs pa mchod bstod* 36a (= *Text F* in TF 165)

construct the temple by the local community represented by the Khra 'brug *sgo bzhi*;[30] the royal court (Srong btsan Sgam po, his consort and the ministers) as it were took a seat in the middle of the village community for the time of the temple's construction, to which certain symbolic representations, such as the hearth of the Kong jo refer (FL 256).

This situation also explains the involvement of the lay community in the ritual of invitation of the deity and its presentation to the public on the occasion of the great annual festivals. Above all this refers to the spectacular Flower Offering (*Me tog Mchod pa*) held on the fifteenth of the fifth



Fig. 5: The Mkhar thog pa in front of the Tshangs pa house (Tshangs pa lcog) on the roof of the temple: invitation of the *lha* Tshangs pa on the morning of the first day of the Khra 'brug *Me tog Mchod pa*. (Photo: G. Hazod 2001)

month (the time of the summer solstice), which is combined with a great public *'cham* performance at which the local political leadership was traditionally present and which ended with a great offering of presents by the lay population.[31] The festival is described in later sources as the post-imperial successor of the "Three Basket Offerings", reportedly introduced in the early ninth century at the three key *dharmacakra* sites (*chos 'khor gnas gsum*, i.e. Lhasa, Bsam yas and Khra 'brug), where

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[30] This is according to the local founding story; see for details FL 253, *et passim*. The Khra 'brug *sgo bzhi* refer to four families of Khra 'brug village, whose ancestors are said to have lived here at the time when the temple was constructed. Their place in the village, which has more or less disappeared since the renovations in recent years, was part of the complex ritual architecture of the temple, which took its significant shape in the early days of the Lhasa Central Government (Ganden Phodrang).

[31] See for details FL 290-294.

as part of a celebrating of the Tripitaka for the first time the lay population was also involved as the giver of certain offerings.[32]

In Khra 'brug, the task of a selected group of village people known as the Mkhar thog pa was to invite the *lha* Tshangs pa to this place and then to carry the deity from his residence on the roof of the temple, the Tshangs pa lcog, down to the dancing and ritual place, the Lcang ra Smug po,[33] where the statue was placed next to the throne of the Khra 'brug oracle (Khra 'brug *chos rje*).[34] The way in which the great Tshangs pa Dkar po statue was transported downwards by this lay group,



Fig. 6: Carrying the god: The Mkhar thog pa in association with monks and the temple overseer (*dkon gnyer dpon*) bring the *lha* Tshangs pa from his residence on the roof of the temple down to the dancing ground (Khra 'brug *Me tog Mchod pa*, first day). (Photo: G. Hazod 2001)

through the accompaniment of religious protagonists and groups of dancers from the temple and the audience gradually increasing towards a remarkable socio-religious procession, is strongly reminiscent of the *lha 'bab* story and the portrayal of the bringing of the progenitor king to Btsan thang Sgo bzhi.[35]

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[32] Cf. *KG* 402.22-405.2; Martin 2002; FL 290; RCP 585.

[33] More precisely: Li yul Lcang ra Smug po; on this toponym see TF 62f., 251-252; van Schaik 2016: 45.

[34] The position of the oracle was hereditary within a family – the Myang (or Nyang) family. There was a second oracle institution, a female oracle (*sku khog*) based in Rtse thang, which was connected to the *klu*s of Khra 'brug Village and other districts of Yar mda', which reportedly also came from a Myang family (TF 274; on the old "southern" lineage of Myang see most recently Hazod 2019: 31ff.).

[35] The statue was mounted on a frame with a carrying device into which the aged temple overseer (*dkon gnyer dpon*) slipped as the bearer (Fig. 152 in TF 301). The Mkhar thog pa placed on the side supported the statue. The group used to be accompanied by monks (from Khra 'brug and its associated religious sites in

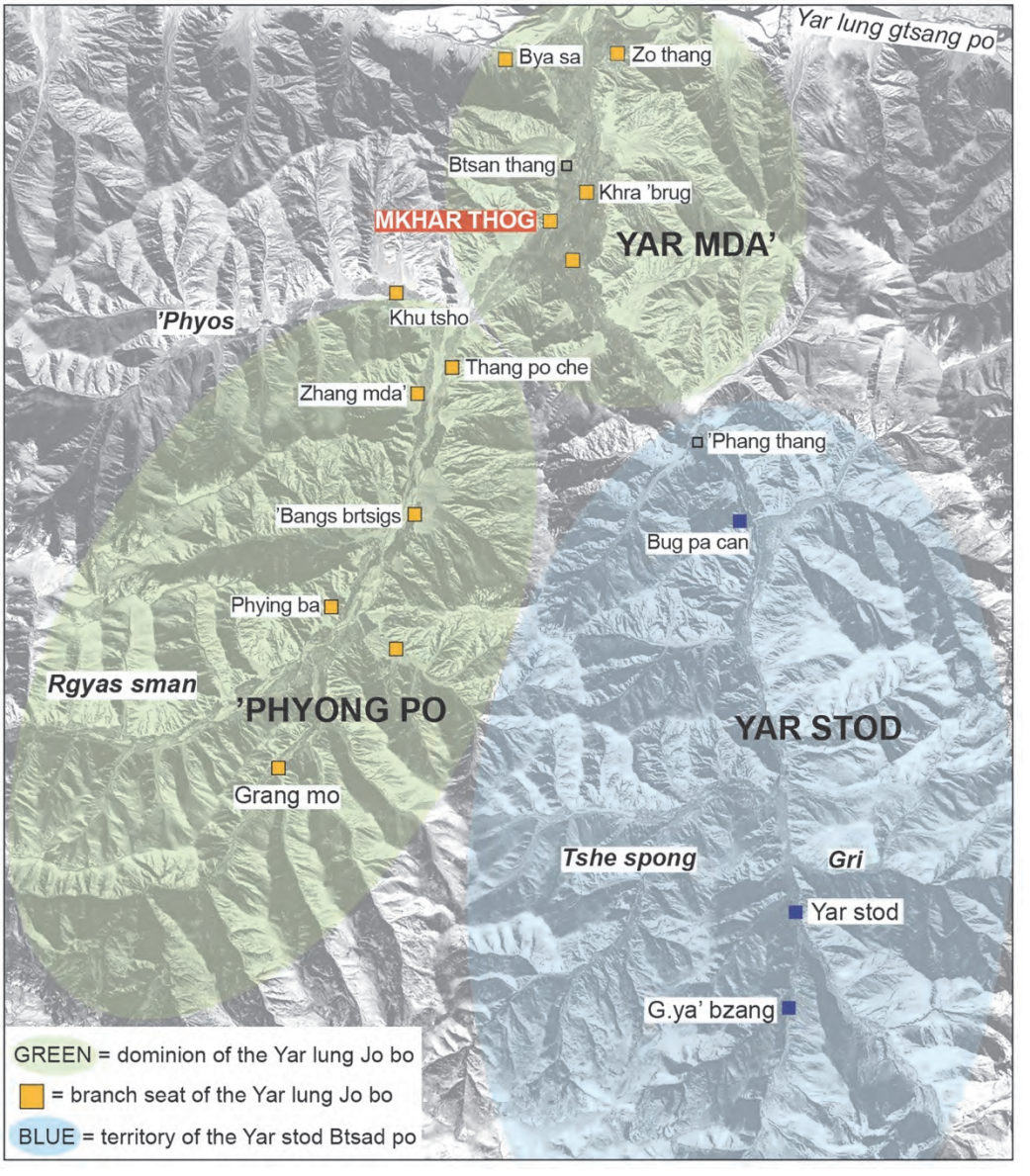


Fig. 7: Mkhar thog, the residence of the Yar mda' pa (and later of the Rlangs Gdung brgyud pa) and the dominion of the Yar lung Jo bo in the 11th / 12th century (green circle; blue circle = the territory of the Yar stod *Btsad po*). (G. Hazod 2018, based on satellite photograph, Corona 1970)

This group of the Mkhar thog pa traditionally consisted of four male and four female dancers and singers (*gar pa*, *gzhas ma*), whose appearance before the Tshangs pa lcog was connected to the presentation of a song in a "secret language" related to the invitation of the deity (Fig. 5).[36] This took place in combination with the *bskang gso* (propitiating ritual) held by monks inside the

Yar lung and 'Phyong po), as well as by dancers of the "nine *gying*" from the retinue of Tshangs pa Dkar po.

[36] Film and sound recordings of the song (by Tsering Gyalpo, May 2001) are on the DVD in the TF book.

Tshangs pa house, formerly also in the presence of the Khra 'brug oracle, which began its trance as soon as the deity arrived.

The Mkhar thog pa refer to the inhabitants of the village and small district of Mkhar thog on the west side of Lower Yar lung (Figs. 3 and 7). This is the area in the Khra 'brug founding story where the flood-bringing *nāga* monster was killed by a giant bird – the "thundering falcon" (*khra 'brug*), who lived in one of the caves at Mount Gong po ri (above fn. 9).[37] While we originally thought that the mystery ascribed to this place may have been the background for the appearance of the Mkhar thog pa in Khra 'brug, we see this in a slightly different light today.

Mkhar thog is registered as the chief residence of the so-called Yar mda' pa, one of the many branch-seats of the Yar lung Jo bo – the successor lineage of the royal dynasty that settled down in the 'Phyong po district and Lower Yar lung from the eleventh century.[38] (At about the same time, the Upper Yar lung became the dominion of another successor lineage (or a ruling family, who declared itself as a successor lineage) – the Yar stod ruler; CFS; Fig. 7). Eventually, probably in the fourteenth century or even a little earlier, Mkhar thog became the headquarters of the "Gdung brgyud pa", the lineage-holder of the Rlangs Phag mo Gru pa to which the religious and secular lords of this ruling family belonged.[39] In this light, the appearance of the Mkhar thog pa in Khra 'brug may either be related to an institution originally established to celebrate the ancestral origin of the Phag mo Gru pa or the Mkhar thog, and the *lha* Tshangs pa combination already goes back to the Yar lung Jo bo; clear evidence in this matter is still lacking.[40] In either case, it was evidently

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[37] This happened at the confluence of the Yar lung and 'Phyong po rivers, not far east of Mkhar thog Village (Fig. 7), a legendary place that is said to be connected to a holy well in Mkhar thog Village; the well is called "*ashag*", from which, as our informants affirmed, strange noises can regularly be heard (FL 253).

[38] For the genealogy of the Yar lung Jo bo see TF 314-19. The branch of the Yar mda' pa lineage of Mkhar thog represents a relatively late generation, a sideline of the Bya sa ruler that goes back to one Shag khri (Sha khri), a descendant in the ninth generation after *mnga' bdag* Khri chung, the founding figure of the Yar lung Jo bo (TF 317); this seems to correspond to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.

[39] TF 56-57. This headquarter is also given in the sources in the form of Mkhar thog Dgon gsar (or only Dgon gsar, the name of the neighbouring village), cf. Czaja 2013, s.v. index; the Mkhar thog *rdzong* (or Mkhar thog Dgon gsar) later became a central outpost of the Rin spungs pa in the fifteenth century (TF 57, 70; Czaja, *op. cit*., 233, 244, 486, and following note).

[40] It should be noted that even Khra 'brug itself is listed among the dominions of the Yar lung Jo bo – i.e. the branch of the "Khra 'brug pa", of which five generations are listed in the sources, starting with the descendant Thang la dga', fifth generation after Khri chung (TF 319); he or his successor was possibly the "lord of Khra 'brug" that Atiśa (982-1054) encountered while visiting the temple (see TF 84 for references). Otherwise nothing is known of this local ruling house and of its possible relation to the temple's cultic tradition. An important political role in the area around Khra 'brug was ascribed to the "clan" known as Dgyer pa (Sger), who (according to post-imperial sources) already resided in Yar lung during the temple's early days, and from which a branch moved to Rgya ma (on the Skyid chu) in the eleventh century to become the famous Gyer pa family of the Rgya ma pa (religious and secular lords of this district and later myriarchy); this was at a time when this family provided the *dpon gnyer* (overseer) of the Khra 'brug temple (FL 230-236, 319; RCP 707ff.). We have suggested that the religious environment of this family was probably closely involved in the cultic formation of the Srong btsan Sgam po vita in Khra 'brug and Rgya ma (Hazod 2014a: 54-55), possibly including the installation of the Tshangs pa Dkar po in these places. The same family also had a connection to Mkhar thog; this relates to the time of the early Rin

the genealogical link to the *lha* (and personal deity) of the founder king Srong btsan Sgam po that formed the point of reference for this Mkhar thog pa institution of Khra 'brug.

5.1 Another example: the *lha* of Grib and its representatives

Such a form of ritual responsibility to a central Buddhist deity (from the class of teaching and place protectors) by lay people was by no means unique and is, for example, also to be found in the *Me tog Mchod pa* festival of Tshal Gung thang, where 12 *sku tshab*, "representatives", appear as the entourage of the god and bearers of the divine statue (Fig. 8).[41] The deity concerns Grib Rdzong btsan, the powerful Lhasa protector with his seat in the Grib valley (south of the city), where the deity also used to function as the common *yul lha* of the Grib people. The 12 *sku tshab* came from 12 of the approximately 60 families of the Grib district, originally divided into three – at the time of our recordings (2000) four – *grong tsho*, villages. Similar to the Khra 'brug *sgo bzhi*, there is a tradition here that these 12 Grib families go back to the time of Srong btsan Sgam po. Rdzong btsan is seen as the Tibetan form of the Chinese god of war Guanyu (Guandi), which the Chinese Princess Wen cheng reportedly brought from China to Tibet accompanied by the great councilor (*blon chen*) Mgar, a story that is also associated with historical traces ascribed to the Mgar family in this part of the Lhasa valley.[42] Interestingly, the stations of the spreading of the deity in Central Tibet also include the Lower Yar lung, where Rdzong btsan is worshipped as one of the protectors of Khra 'brug, based at Mount Shel brag, on the west side, behind Btsan thang Sgo bzhi and the Lha 'bab ri (RCP 574; FL 268ff.).

The 12 *sku tshab* of Grib are bound to the deity by oath; this actually refers to the observance of certain rules of purity, which – so it says – empowers them to carry the god after he became

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spungs pa, when Mtsho skyes Rdo rje (1450-1510/13) seized the Phag mo Gru pa *rdzong* of Mkhar thog (TF 97; Czaja 2013: 486, *et passim*). The family behind the Rin spungs pa was a branch of the Sgyer pa, which was affinally related to the Rlangs Lha gzigs. Thus, one may see the Sgyer pa as a third candidate in the identification of the Mkhar thog pa group of the Khra 'brug *Me tog Mchod pa*, but this all remains rather uncertain. Our favourite on this issue are the Phag mo Gru pa, the power that as the Phag gru *khri dpon* in the thirteenth century replaced the territorial dominance of the Yar lung Jo bo (and partly also the Yar stod ruler) before becoming the rulers of Tibet in the post-Yuan period. Here there is the conceivable scenario in which this ideal connection to Khra 'brug and the birth god of Srong btsan Sgam po was fabricated in Mkhar thog, in the vicinity of the Phag gru Gdung brgyud pa. In this sense, the privilege of the Mkhar thog pa to invite the deity may indeed reflect this new ancestral link with the *lha* Tshangs pa as part of the Phag mo Gru pa identity. Here it should be mentioned that the specific forms of the Tshangs pa Dkar po cult were largely from the Ganden Phodrang period, created in connection with the restructuring of the religious festivals of Khra 'brug and the installation of the oracle there, so that it remains difficult to say which of the cultic representations (such as the Mkhar thog pa) were actually reshapings of older institutions.

[41] For the Gung thang Flower Offering, another one of the "Three Basket Offerings" (above fn. 32), which is traditionally held on *sa ga zla ba* (middle of the fourth Tibetan lunar month) see RCP 573-593.

[42] RCP 581-584. On Guandi in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, see most recently FitzHerbert 2020. The connection to Mgar is related to the popular legend that Wen cheng and the Great Minister were a couple, and that Mgar was exiled to Grib by the emperor upon his arrival in Lhasa – a story that forms a central element in the *Me tog Mchod pa*. The festival is said to have been introduced in the fourteenth century (RCP 585), but like the festivals in Khra 'brug or Bsam yas, it only got its significant characteristics in the Ganden Phodrang period.

"present" in the course of a longer invitation ceremony on the eve of the Gung thang Flower Offering – in a splendorous outfit and riding a highly decorated horse (Fig. 9):

> A device inside the horse makes it possible to carry the heavy statue and get it moving. Accompanied by drums and cymbals, a brief dance of the divinity begins before which the twelve men prostrate themselves one after another and show their reverence (RCP 585).



Fig. 8: The 12 *sku tshab* of Grib, meeting in the morning on the second day of the Flower Offering of Tshal Gung thang. (Photo: G. Hazod 2001)



Fig. 9: The god Grib Rdzong btsan in front of his *lha khang* in Grib, prostration of the statue-bearer, first day of the Gung thang Flower Offering. (Photo: G. Hazod 2001)

It is a longer journey that the group travels – from the Grib *lha khang* via several stations and accompanied by an ever-increasing crowd of spectators the Skyid chu upstream to Tshal Gung thang, where Rdzong btsan meets with his beloved, the Gung thang Lha mo, for one day and one night at the Gung thang *vihāra* (RCP 585-87). Somewhat unclear is the classification in the local tradition of Grib, which calls the entourage group of Rdzong btsan the 13 *sku tshab* (*sku tshab bcu gsum*), which means that the statue itself is included in this group of representatives. The question is, what are they the representatives of?[43] Anyway, what we see in this Grib example is obviously another variant of the "stranger-king" model, where a group of lay people on behalf of a larger community carries out the invitation of the deity and, as it were, introduces it to the society.

[43] No. 13 apparently refers to the bearer of the statue, who changed several times during the procession; in my memory the bearers were all members of the *sku tshab* group.

6. The religious and the social: blurred boundaries

It is easy to identify such institutions in Khra 'brug and Grib / Tshal Gung thang as examples of a ritualistic staging of certain historical events, which (as demonstrated in many Western studies) often served the respective political power to introduce itself as the heir of a glorious past and accordingly to convey this image to the public.[44] Yet, as I see it, the point is that such institutions created their own reality, one that evidently revealed ancient patterns of socio-religious entanglements: in Khra 'brug, the lay group that regularly entered the stage with its god was, so it appears, formally modelled on the god's arrival in Btsan thang Sgo bzhi, itself a re-formulation of the old "come as lord" account. At the same time, this performance in the midst of the strict architecture of religion seems to be almost exemplary for a situation where the religious and the social become blurred. In this specific context the temple extracts itself from any interpretation that seeks to explain its position in society as the holy separated from the profane. A few more words may help to clarify our position on this issue.

The opposition of sacred and profane is literally understood in terms of space – *profanum* (lat.) means what lies "in front of the sacred area (*fanum*)" – and while Durkheim's generalised concept of the "division of the world into two areas" (i.e. the sacred and profane world), "which exclude each other" (Durkheim 1994 [1912]: 62, 429) is often questioned today,[45] it is clear that in major religions (beyond the fact of constructional separations) this division is always visible and is also practised ritually. The Khra 'brug *vihāra* is no exception and the above noted bringing of the offering by the village people before the statue of the *lha* Tshangs pa at the end of the *Me tog Mchod pa* is just one of the spectacular examples of the *profanum* situation of the temple's ritual tradition. At the same time, there are aspects within the same cult, where the dissolution of this boundary is apparently deliberately sought. Perhaps even more than in the appearance of the Mkhar thog pa this becomes clear in the performance of the oracle, the position of which was occupied by a layperson (above fn. 34), and not least in the spectacular role of the butcher (*bshan pa*) in the tantrically defined cult of the identification of the *lha* Tshangs pa in the deity's demonic manifestation, performed by the *bshan pa* in one major sequence of the *Me tog Mchod pa* ritual circle (FL 291-94). The same butcher, who traditionally came from a family of Khra 'brug village, had a permanent presence in the temple: he acted as the custodian of the *klu khang*, that is the small chamber (supposedly built on the site of an older underground hiding place from the imperial time) in which representative *nāga*s of the country were kept, led by the goose (*ngang pa*) of Tshangs pa (FL 256; above fn. 26). (The sounds that were supposed to be heard from the *klu khang* at certain times of the year are ascribed to the *ngang pa* and interpreted as indication of a good harvest year).[46] One may define

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[44] Cf. here most exemplary the historical contexts of the ceremonies of the Lhasa year (Richardson 1993); cf. also more generally Schwieger 2013.

[45] It has been argued that such a distinction is not known to many societies at all (cf. e.g. Goody 1961: 150); the same applies to the distinction between natural and supernatural Maddock 1998: 496).

[46] After the renovation work and the restructuring of the temple towards a museum-like institute in the past years, all of these facilities have disappeared, and also Khra 'brug Village mostly no longer exists.

the role of the butcher, who (in contrast to the oracle) acted in his everyday clothing, as religious or part of the religion present in the temple, but as in the case of the Mkhar thog pa, it seems that the cult makes visible this aspect of the inseparability of the two "worlds" – the holy and the profane.

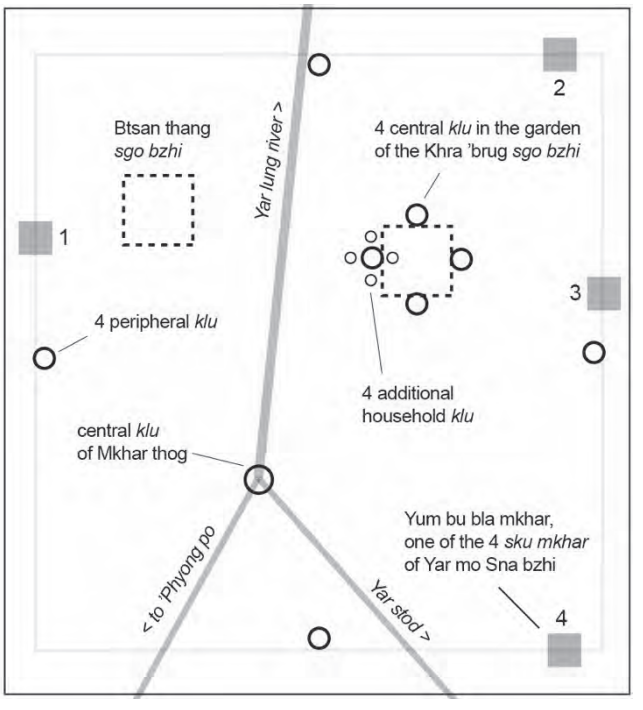


Fig. 10: The quadrangular defined *klu* (*nāga*) landscape of Lower Yar lung. (G. Hazod 2020)

This situation can easily be transferred to the outer region: in Tibetan Buddhist concepts the *vihāra* (*gtsug lag khang*) is only the concentration of a much larger idea of spatial order, in the Lower Yar lung, in the zone of the old Yar mo Sna bzhi (above fn. 23), this was gradually established in the form of the *sgo bzhi* and other quad arrangements marked by *nāga* abodes and place gods to which the regional pilgrimage routes to the Yar lung- and 'Phyong po sanctuaries were connected (FL 268-274; Fig. 10). In such a concept of civilising the country according to Buddhist criteria, the borders of the "holy district" increasingly shifted outwards or even disappeared altogether. Western literature uses to speak of such concepts as "sacred landscape" or "religious geography", which is not wrong as long as one makes it clear that both the sacred and the profane, or the related opposition of the religious and the social, actually are congruent levels. Everyday life illustrates this well: in his daily routine a Tibetan peasant may go past the rock or stone settings that mark the seat of a local divinity without paying them much attention. On the day of the pilgrimage (or other festive events such as the *'ong skor* festival) [47] he offers up a prayer there – on this day he travels as it were through an *imagined landscape*.

[47] I.e. the auspicious festival of circumambulating the fields in spring and summer, a community festival traditionally also held in certain districts of Lower Yar lung.

In fact, the "holy" has no other boundaries than the everyday life, something which is also addressed in Bloch's concept of the "transcendental social" and, by the way, was also not unfamiliar to Durkheim.[48] This concept, with the religious actually being part of the social which we observe here on a small scale in the Buddhist landscape of Lower Yar lung, seems – in its formal contours – to be not really distinguishable from the much older "pre-religion" world in which the arrival story of the Tibetan "stranger-king" was proclaimed.

[48] Cf. Maddock 1998: 496; Bloch 2013a; 2013b: 27.

Appendix

The "stranger-king" in PT 1038

The Old Tibetan document PT 1038 is known as the short text about the genealogical origin of the Tibetan emperors, which is explained in three versions.[49] The characteristic part of this text is that the author did not commit himself to any of the "theories" he mentions, as if he were an outsider who summarised what he had heard or seen in older recordings. It has been noted that the text or its original was evidently written at a time when Buddhism was already established in Tibet, but apparently the tradition according to which the Tibetan royal lineage originated from an Indian dynasty did not yet exist (cf. Karmay 1998: 287).

(ll.1-5) The text begins with the name of the country in which the kingship originated – the "country with strongholds", one of these being the *yul* Bde bzhi, in which the "*lti'u rgyal po* Thod rgyal, the *btsan po* of Spu rgyal Bon (read: Bod) arose". What is probably meant here is Yar lung, the historical country of origin of the Tibetan emperors, even if the forms Bde bzhi and the *lti'u rgyal po* are not clearly assignable in this context. [50] The author is unsure whether this kingship should be counted as one of the "12 minor principalities" (*rgyal phran bcu gnyis*) or not, an uncertainty that can also be found in the *rgyal phran* lists with respect to Yar lung.

The remaining lines (l.5-17) offer theories concerning the "origin of the line of the (Tibetan) emperors" (l.5); firstly, this is the origin from the *lha* Ku spyi Ser bzhi, a not really identified deity from above the heaven, described as the lord (*bdag po*) of the mountain spirits (*ma sangs*), and as

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[49] TDD 33: (1) *yul dang mkhar du bcas pa' / so so yul bde bzhI* (2) *las / / spu rgyal bon* (= *bod*) *gI btsan po ltI'u rgyal po thod rgyal* (3) *byun te / / la la'I [m]chId nas nI rgyal phran / bcu gnyIs* (4) *la gtogs shes kyang mchI / / myI gtog shes kyang* (5) *mchI / / btsan po 'I gdung rab kyI khungs smos pa' / /* (6) *gnam dgung gI steng na / / lha ku spyI ser bzhIs brgyI ba' / /* (7) *ma sangs tham cad gI bdag po / / srId pa kun la mnga'* (8) *mdzad pa' / / phyva'I yang phyva lags shes kyang mchI / / rnam* (9) *gnyIs su nI gdol par sha za'I rIgs / / rgyal po gdong* (10) *dmar gyI rIgs / gangs rI byud kor gyI nI bdag po / / gnod* (11) *sbyIn dza zhes bgyI ba'I rIgs lags shes kyang mchI* (12) *rnam gsum du nI gnam rIm pa bcu gsum gyI steng na /* (13) *khrI bar la bdun tshIg / shes bgyI / / gnam gI lha las / sa* (14) *gdog drug du* (= *sa ga dog drug*; Zeisler 2011: 175) */ / 'greng 'go nag gI rje myed gI rje / / dud rngog chag* (15) *bla myed kyI blar / blon po lho rngegs / bon po mtshe gco / phyag* (16) *tshang sha spug / / myI rje lha dang bdud / du brgyIs nas / / yul bod ka* (17) *g.yag drug du byon zhes mchI / / gang lags kyang myI mngon ste /* (18) *gdung spu bod dang / spu rgyal du gsol / / sde yang myI bdad* (round brackets by the author, GH). Earlier discussions include Lalou 1953; Macdonald 1971: 215-218; Haarh 1969: 307f.; Karmay 1998: 285-288; and more recently Hill 2013a, Zeisler 2011: 174-176; Bialek 2018, vol. 1: 191, 572.

[50] *lti'u*, it is assumed, could be a place name (Karmay, *op. cit.*, 285); Haarh (1969: 307-308, 450) incorrectly spelled it as *lte'u – lte'u rgyal po*, king of the *lte'u*, where the latter he reads as *the'u* (*the'u brang*), the deity that indeed appears in one of the etiological theories as the ancestor figure of the Tibetan kings. This concerns the "ultra-secret tradition" (*yang gsang lugs*, i.e. the first of the three etiological theories in the *Lde'u* chronicle), which names Spu bo (Spo yul) as the geographic origin; *Lde'u-2* 226.9-227.4. On the other hand, Thod rgyal, the name of the progenitor king is not very clear in this context (but see Karmay, *op. cit*., 286).

"Phyva of the Phyva", who rules over the whole world (*srid pa kun la mnga' mdzad pa*).[51] The second "theory" describes a less exalted origin, namely either from the caste (*rigs*) of the carnivores (*sha za'i rigs*), that of the red-faced king (*rgyal po gdong dmar gyi rigs*) or of the *gnod sbyin* Dza.[52]

Finally, the third "theory" is the much-quoted passage that describes the origin of the *spu rgyal* as that of (the god) Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs, who came to Earth from his residence above the thirteenth stage of heaven, a variant of the "come as lord" legend for which, due to the somewhat invalid text, we find at least three different readings in the literature:

1. Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs descended from the gods in heaven to Earth as the lord of the black-headed men etc., namely *together with* the three groups of two ministers, priests und servants (known from other sources as the king's entourage; above fn. 19) as if the structural core of the society itself was of heavenly origin; and finally (and quasi corresponding to it) he came to Bod ka G.yag drug as lord of men and demons (Karmay 1998: 286; similarly Hill 2013a: 172-173; Dotson 2007: 78).
2. Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs descended from the gods of the sky as lord for the upright, the black-headed ones etc. to Sa ga Dog drug, interpreted as the "six spheres of the Libra", where he met the entourage groups. This level is understood as a kind of intermediate stage on the way to Bod ka G.yag drug, where the lord finally arrived after the three social groups have searched for such a "lord for the men" among the gods and demons (Zeisler 2011: 174-175; 2015: 757-758).
3. A distinction is made between three actions: a) Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs came to Earth from the gods of the sky (as ruler of the black-headed ones etc.); b) he made (*bgyis*) the ministers, priests and servants – the officiators of gods and demons – the rulers of men (before he finally); c) arrived in Bod ka G.yag drug (Bialek 2018, vol. 2: 191, 572).

It is beyond my competence to comment from the linguistic side on what might be the correct reading in this obviously syntactically disturbed text passage. Compared with parallel traditions, it can be stated that there is no version where the god comes to Earth *together with* his entourage,[53] and also the reading that the rulers of men, the ministers, priests etc., were "made" before the final arrival of the lord to my knowledge has no parallel. Zeisler's astronomical interpretation of *sa ga dog drug* is interesting, not least since in a different context the same author quite convincingly refers to possible astronomical relations in the representation of the kings of the mythical period (in particular related to the formulation of the seven heavenly *khri* / *dri*; Zeisler 2015: 758f.). But it was just as convincingly noted by Bialek that *sa ga dog* is here to be understood simply as *sa dog*

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[51] Karmay (1998: 395-96) identifies him (without giving more precise information) with the *lha* Khu yug Mang skyes, the name, which (the Yab lha Bdag drug son) 'Ol lde Gung rgyal is described to bear on Earth (*sa dog*) (*Lde'u-2* 230.3), or he is associated with Ku byi, the spider-riding deity from the Bon po pantheon.

[52] See Karmay 1998: 287-288 for identifications.

[53] This is not entirely correct: in later representations the progenitor king (Gnya' khri Btsan po) comes to Earth together with his priests, Mtshe mi and Gco mi; these are two of the "clans" mentioned in PT 1038 and elsewhere as part of the lord's entourage. Cf. also Huber 2020, vol. 1: 134.

(*mo*), which is usually rendered as Earth (or narrow earth), also closer understood as an expression for the zone of the (agriculturally usable) valley (Bialek 2018, vol. 2: 572). This means that *sa ga dog drug* most likely does not describe a sky layer, but rather is on the "same level" as the last station, Bod ka G.yag (= g.yang) drug ("six precipices of Bod ka"), evidently a term for Central Tibet.[54] Thus, similar to the "classic version", the text actually seems to say: After his arrival on Earth in Bod, the god was welcomed by a social group that had previously explicitly looked for such a ruler or not (cf. Zeisler's note on *brgyis* (= *byis*) of line 16; Zeisler 2011: 175-176). This is exactly the central characteristic of the "stranger-king model": the voluntary submission of a community to an external divine rulership. The three groups of two represent "society" and, as in the above-noted arrival story located in Yar lung (Chap. 4), are probably an allusion to the (historical) ruler and his entourage system, which here serves as a model for portraying the "come as lord" legend. (Parallel versions mention the *yul yab*, or the *pha dgu* ("nine fathers" related to the lords of the *rgyal phran bcu gnyis*; *Lde'u-2* 233.10), or also the *zhang gsum blon po bzhi* (plus) *yab 'bangs rus drug* (*KT* 435.14) who occupy this position of the recipient; cf. above Chap. 4.)

Another inconsistency concerns the protagonist Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs. Even though (in contrast to Ku spyi Ser bzhi of the first "theory") the Phyva kinship is not explicitly mentioned here, it can be assumed that this deity means the (fourth) son of the Phyva lord Yab lha Bdag drug of the classical Phvya genealogies. Yet, as we know, in the classic version of PT 1286 and parallel in later accounts it is not Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs (var. Khri Bar gyi Bdun tshigs) who comes to Earth but his son (PT 1286: *khri'i bdun btsigs kyi sras* / *khri* (~ *lde*) *nyag khri btsan po*; above fn. 15). An exception is Bialek's reading of PT 1286, l.30-32, which says that all the sons of Yab lha Bdag drug

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[54] In the *Dbu nag mi'u 'dra chags* (15b; Karmay 1998: 276), which describes a different context of heavenly descent, *sa ga dog drug* similarly represents the final station that the god reached after having crossed the 13 layers, which means that here and there the number 13 represents the totality of the heaven-earth vertical – indeed one of the most common representations of the sky. Note that there are (in pre-Buddhist contexts) also other numbers that speak of 5, 7 or 9 levels (often in the variants of one and the same story), and also 14, 15 or even 18 sky layers are mentioned, for example in connection with the heavenly places of the *bla na bzhugs pa bco brgyad*, "18 deities residing in the upper spheres", listed in the *Zangs ma gzhugs ral can* (*Nyang ral* 497: *Za bzhugs rgan rabs can*), a text reportedly written by the paternal subjects (*yab 'bangs*), and included in the *Can lnga* text group (*Lde'u-2* 243, and 228.20-21 for the identification of the gods' residences and individual layers of the sky; cf. also Huber 2020, vol. 1: 70, 572). It is interesting to note in this context that deities of the same generation, including lateral relatives, live in different heavens, which means that the concept of sky layers (*gnam rim pa*) in the (pre-Buddhist) Tibetan adaptations apparently had nothing to do with generations of gods. It is notable that the "narrow earth" (in the form of Dog mer) is also listed among the heavenly residences of the *bla na bzhugs pa bco brgyad*, namely the one of Sa lha Mgon po (Sa Mgon bu) from the same generation as the Khri Bar gyi Bdun tshigs (*Lde'u-2* 233.19-20, 243.11-12). For the sake of completeness, one may add that in Old Tibetan contexts the capability of descending from the sky (or from one layer to another one) included also animals, and horses respectively, the latter related to the establishing of the Great Beyond; so in IOL Tib J 731; see Dotson's recent analysis of the stories included in this Old Tibetan document; Dotson 2018. For the idea of layers of heavens and their meanings in Eurasian cultural contexts and beyond see Kelley and Milone 2005: 347ff.

came down from the heights of the sky, but only Nyag khri Btsan po became a ruler.[55] A rather rare variant is the Bon po text *Nyi zer sgron ma* (147a), where [Bar gyi] Bdun tshigs was appointed ruler of Tibet by his father (*yab kyis bod khams yi rje ru bskos*).[56] Otherwise, this fourth Yab lha Bdag drug (var. Ya lha Brdal drug) son is known as the Phyva god, who moved to Dmu, the country of the (classificatory) mother brother and who with the daughter of the Dmu lord begot the future progenitor king (Gnya' khri Btsan po) – the latter accordingly described as the "descendant of the [Phyva] *lha*, nephew of the Rmu (Dmu)" (*lha'i gdung rmu'i tsha*).[57] In this version (in the *Yi ge lha gyes can*) the "stranger-king" motif is most detailed when it says that Central Tibetan chieftains (the *pha dgu* of the 12 *rgyal phran*) decided at an assembly to look for an extraordinary ruler with magical powers, and made a find, and, finally, with the help of Skar ma Yol sde, realised the invitation of the Gnya' khri Btsan po etc.[58]

It seems this section in PT 1038, which describes the transition from Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs to his son, was lost or otherwise neglected by the author, who himself apparently was not an insider; but it is also conceivable that this passage represents the fragment of an authentic version of the *rjer gshegs* legend and the Nyag khri Btsan po part is a later addition. This remains speculative, just as it is not entirely clear whether (and if so how) in historical times this Yab lha Bdag drug son was related to 'O lde Spu rgyal, the historically earliest evidence of a heavenly progenitor of the Tibetan royal house.[59]

Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs is actually not a name, but the expression of a family position – that of the middle of seven brothers. Anne Chayet (1994) sees this term as related to an old throne regulation that saw the middle son as the ideal type for the succession to the throne. Such a regulation is described for the "mythical period", where in the time after Spu lde Gung rgyal (the actual founder king, number eight in the genealogy of PT 1286) the wise ministers (*blon po rig pa can*) reportedly determined who within the closer agnatic kinship should be excluded as a candidate for the succession to the throne, paraphrased by the expression *thang mtshams su phab pa* ("brought

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[55] Bialek 2018, vol. 2: 191. Later representations describe the seven sons (often called *lhe rje*) as gods of magic (*rdzu 'phrul gyi lha*), usually with a sister on their side, one Thang nga Lha mo (*Lde'u-2* 232.4-5), a family constellation, which much later seems to have been taken up and further varied in the fabrication of the Rlangs Phag mo Gru pa origin myth (above fn. 26).

[56] Cit. in Karmay 1998: 179.

[57] *Lde'u-2* 233.15-16, similarly *Blon po Bka'i thang yig*; *KT* 435.16. A formal parallel of this journey from Phyva to Dmu is to be found in the account of PT 0126/2, which also represents a special variant of the Tibetan ruler invitation topos (Drikung 2011: 33-41).

[58] *Lde'u-2* 233.10-235.7; Karmay 1998: 299ff.; Haarh 1969: 234-235. This Skar ma Yol sde (also known as the god born from the ribs of his (Dmu-) mother, thus called *rtsib kyi lha*) is classified as the maternal cousin of Gnya' khri Btsan po (i.e. son of the aforementioned Sa lha Mgon bu, fn. 54). There is another Skar ma Yol sde, a name evidently related to a star or constellation(s) (cf. Haarh 1969: 141), who is registered for the earlier generations of the Phvya genealogy (*Lde'u-2* 228.7), and probably identical with the Skar ma Yol sde from the catalogue of the *bla na bzhugs pa bco brgyad*, above fn. 54), who is listed in third place – the place in Sprin phub ("cloud deck").

[59] On 'O lde Spu rgyal and the question of his identification see most recently Huber 2020, vol. 1: 87-88, 578-579.

down to the border [of the] plain"), a regulation that concerned the younger and older brothers (including half-brothers) and apparently preferred the middle one as heir to the throne.[60] Such a preference is not really attested for historical times (cf. Dotson 2009: 26f.), but it may well be that this once idealised form of succession to the throne and the idea of sanctifying the Tibetan king (or *rgyal po* of Yar lung) as the manifestation of a "stranger-king"-like figure have a common history in the narrower sense.[61]

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[60] *Lde'u-1* 104-105; Hazod 2018: 31 for further references.

[61] In the origin story of the Rlangs family, which seems to be based on the Khri Bar la Bdun tshigs account, the progenitor figure is similarly portrayed in the ideal position of the middle one, here the middle one of eight brothers (above fn. 26), something which to my knowledge has no equivalent in the Phag mo Gru pa history. In addition, there are also traditions related to the genealogy of the heavenly Phyva, where (in a completely different context) the youngest of the (altogether 37) sons of Ya bla Bdal drug (*so bdun pa'i chung ba*) is the hero who comes to Earth (*Dbu nag mi'u 'dra chags* 15b; in Karmay 1998: 276). It is also the younger one of the two sons in the Dri gum account who takes the throne (i.e. the *gcung* Sha khyi of the Kong po inscription; Hill 2013b), yet in the version of the later chronicles, who speaks of three sons of the Gri gum Btsan po, it is the middle one who became king.

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Abbreviations

CFS = Gyalbo *et al*. 2000.

Dba' bzhed = Wangdu and Diemberger 2000.

Drikung 2011 = H.H. the Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang ('Bri gung Skyabs mgon Che tshang Dkon mchog bstan 'dzin 'phrin las lhun 'grub). 2011. *A History of the Tibetan Empire: Drawn from the Dunhuang Manuscripts*. Translated by Meghan Howard with Tsultrim Nakchu (Originally published as: *Bod btsan po'i rgyal rabs: Tun hong bod kyi yig rnying las byung ba* 2010). Dehra Dun: Songtsen Libary, Center for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies.

FL = Hazod 2005

KG = Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba, *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. 2 Vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1986.

KK = *Bka' chems Ka khol ma*. Lanzhou: Kan su mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1989.

KT = O rgyan gling pa, *Bka' thang sde lnga*, 5 books. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1986.

Lde'u-1 = Lde'u jo sras, *Chos 'byung chen mo bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan lde'u jo sras kyis mdzad pa*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang 1987.

Lde'u-2 = Mkhas pa Lde'u, *Rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1987.

Myang chos 'byung = Tārānātha, *Myang yul stod smad bar gsum gyi ngo mtshar gtam gyi legs bshad mkhas pa'i 'jugs ngogs*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi rigs dpe skrun khang 2002.

Nyang ral = Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang 1988.

OTI = Iwao, Kazushi, N. Hill, and T. Takeuchi (eds.). 2009. *Old Tibetan Inscriptions*. Tokyo: Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

PT = Pelliot tibétain; see *TDD*.

RCP = Sørensen and Hazod 2007.

Rlangs = Byang chub Rgyal mtshan, *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru rgyas pa*. Gangs can rig mdzod 1. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang 1986.

SC = Iwao *et al.* (eds.) 2012.

TF = Sørensen and Hazod 2005.

TDD = *Tibetan Documents from Dunhuang*, see Imaeda *et al.* (eds.) 2007.

TTT = *The Tibetan Tumulus Tradition* (*TTT*). *The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet: A Historical-anthropological Study and Documentation of the Tumulus Tradition of Early Central Tibet (4th-10th century CE)*, website of the FWF research project based at the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA) and the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (project leader: Guntram Hazod).
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Imperial Traces of G.yo ru Gzhung[1]

Mathias Fermer

[You] should be concerned about the three [valleys of]
Grwa, Dol and Gzhung.[2]

1. Introduction

Gzhung (or G.yo ru/G.yor po Gzhung) is the old name of the valley where the Lhasa-Gonggar airport is located.[3] This broad valley complex just south of the Gtsang po river lies 50 km south of Lhasa and 80 km to the west of Yar lung, the homeland of the Tibetan kings. Together with the neighbouring valleys in the east, Dol and Grwa, the Gzhung valley constitutes a central part of Southern Central Tibet and is counted among the most fertile plains in the region. Today, the main part of the valley, to the south-east of the airport, is referred to as Rnam rab Gzhung, or Rnam rab in its contracted form, a toponym that goes back to an ancient estate with the name Rnam rgyal Rab brtan.[4] Rnam rab Gzhung belongs to present-day Gong dkar County (Ch. 贡嘎县, Gònggá xiàn) in Lho kha Prefecture (Ch. 山南地区, Shānnán dìqū).[5] It runs from the lower Gtsang po banks to the valley's upper ranges (i.e. Gzhung phu) towards Yar 'brog in the south. At the time of the Tibetan empire, Gzhung embraced a central area in the heartland of the Left Horn Province, in close proximity to the emperors' residence at Yar lung and to Tibet's first monastery on the other Gtsang po side.

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[1] The present paper is dedicated to my friends from Gzhung, most of whom left their homeland long ago. I am truly grateful to them for sharing their stories and local knowledge with me over the years. I would also like to thank Losal Dondrub (Gongkar Choede, Dehradun), Guntram Hazod (IKGA, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) and particularly Reinier Langelaar (IKGA, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) for corrections and valuable comments on this article. The research for this paper was generously funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): F42 Visions of Community.

[2] Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan (1302-64), *Po ti bse ru*: 361.10-11: *grwa dol gzhung gsum la sha tsha byed dgos/*. For an alternative translation see Czaja 2013: 160, fn. 155, "[...] the estates of Grva, Dol and Gzhung should be governed with loyalty and love (*sha tsha*)".

[3] The Lhasa-Gonggar airport (Lha sa'i gong dkar gnam gru 'bab thang; Ch. 拉萨贡嘎国际, Lāsà Gònggá Jīchǎng) was built in the 1960s and has been operational since 1968.

[4] This estate has existed since at least the fifteenth century; see Rgya ston Byang chub dbang rgyal, *Rdzong pa kun dga' rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar*: 97, here Sger gzhis Rnam rgyal rab brtan; see also Akester 2016: 263, fn. 18; Fermer 2017: 75f.

[5] In 2015, the township of Rgyal grub gling (Ch. 甲竹林镇, Jiǎ zhúlín zhèn) became part of the Tibet Airport New Area (Ch. 西藏空港新区, Xīzàng kōnggǎng xīnqū), whose management has been entrusted to Lhasa City (Ch. 拉萨市, Lāsà shì). As this area surrounding the airport has not yet been established as a separate administrative unit, it currently remains part of Rgyal grub gling township of Gong dkar County; see 西藏空港新区管理委员会 (Bod ljongs mkha' 'grul khul gsar do dam u yon lhan khang), 西藏空港新区行政区划, URL: http://www.lasa.gov.cn/xzkgxq/xzgh/ypwz.shtml, accessed: 29.01.2021.

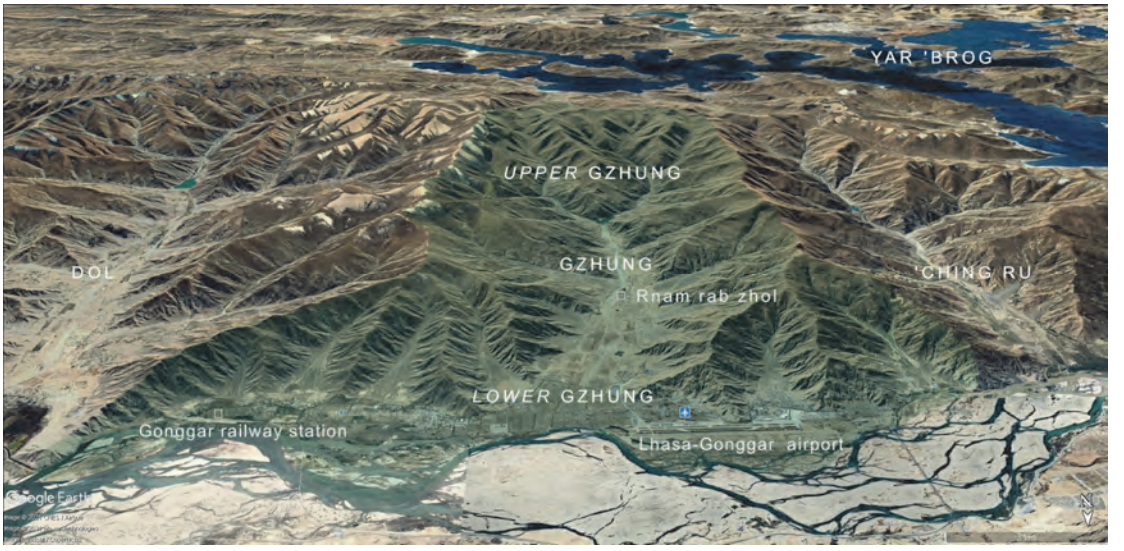


Fig. 1: The valley complex of G.yo ru Gzhung, view towards the upper valley. (Map data: Google Earth, 2021 CNES/Airbus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, Landsat/Copernicus; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

This contribution will inquire into the valley's imperial past (7th-9th cent.) by drawing on (a) textual claims from early and late medieval literature (Old Tibetan and post-dynastic), (b) aerial and on-site photographs, (c) satellite imagery (images taken between 2003-2021) and (d) interviews with Gzhung natives.

2. Methodological considerations

2.1. Source evidence and toponyms

Before inquiring into the valley's past, it should be frankly stated that most textual claims about the Tibetan empire examined for this paper are drawn from much later, post-imperial sources (spanning from the 11th to the 19th century). This highly disrupted state of the available evidence allows for only a very limited understanding of the religious, political, and social topography of the valley during the imperial period. Because this area experienced radical transformations in the past, we must also wonder to what extent claims about imperial territory and the presence of different family lineages can be linked to present-day Tibetan (and Chinese) place names, and to the contemporary oral accounts by locals and to recent aerial and satellite photography. These methodological issues will first be briefly addressed.

High-resolution satellite images, widely accessible through online satellite imagery providers such as Google Earth or Baidu Maps (Ch. 百度地图, Bǎidù dìtú), demonstrate that the valley has undergone substantial change within the past two decades. Particularly the lower valley (*mda*') has seen significant growth in infrastructure around the airport area at Rgyal grub gling (Ch. 甲竹林镇, Jiǎ zhúlín zhèn) and in the environs of the county's headquarters around Skyid gshongs (var. Skyid mo gshongs; Ch. 吉雄镇, Jíxióng zhèn). Here, near the settlement of Grags chen, at present-day Hang



Fig. 2: Aerial view of Gzhung. (Photo: Gerd Eichmann, 31.06.2014, Wikimedia Commons, "Gonggar County in Tibet from the air", CC-BY-SA-4.0, URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gonggar_County-from_the_plane-06-2014-gje.jpg, accessed: 20.01.2021; additional data: M. Fermer 01.2021)

grong (var. G.yang rong; Ch. 夯仲, Hāng zhòng), a new railroad line has recently been completed.[6] Furthermore, besides such recent infrastructural developments and the ideologically driven destruction of the 20th century, Tibetan historical sources attest that even before the arrival of the Chinese, the environment and old buildings were occasionally destroyed and the territory altered.

Like other districts of Central Tibet that look back upon a rich history of changing inhabitation, rulership and religious rivalry, Gzhung must have seen a constant transformation of its environment throughout history, both on a physical and symbolical level. This expressed itself through the emergence of new sites, the adaption or conversion of existent sites, as well as their occasional relocation or even complete abandonment. During such processes the names for those sites too could change, obtain new meanings, or be replaced entirely.

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[6] The construction of Gonggar Railway station (Ch. 贡嘎站, Gònggá zhàn) in the eastern part of the lower valley began in 2014. It is part of the large infrastructure project of the Lhasa-Nyingchi railway (Lha sa Nying khri me 'khor; Ch. 拉林铁路, Lā lín tiělù), whose tracks were completed in December 2020. This final section of the Sichuan-Tibet railway (Ch. 川藏铁路, Chuānzáng tiělù) is expected to be completed in 2021. Situated in the middle of Skyid gshongs, Rwa ba smad monastery was utilised as Party offices by the Gong dkar county officials; personal communication with Gzhung natives, 01.2021; cf. also Dowman 1988: 155; Mkhan po Tshul khrims Rgyal mtshan, *Thub bstan ra smad dgon pas gong rim la phul ba'i zhu yig*: 406.

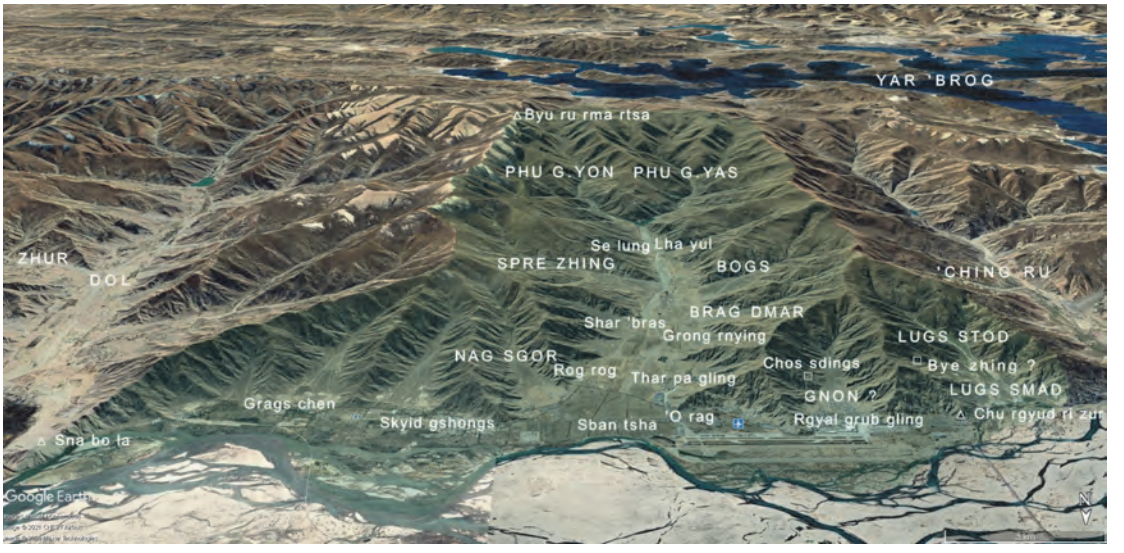


Fig. 3: Historical landscape of Gzhung. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 CNES/Airbus, 2021 Maxar Technologies; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

These developments in the perception, utilisation and naming of the land need to be kept in mind when one, as here, attempts to reconstruct history on the basis of place names preserved in the literature and in the oral tradition. On the Tibetan plateau, fortunately, a high level of historical continuity can be observed for place names,[7] despite the tendency of toponyms to have somewhat shifting spatial connotations (i.e. geographical locations and demarcations of toponyms can shift, expand, diminish or move over time). Without ethnographic or archaeologic investigations, at best conducted in the field, such dynamic aspects of toponyms are at risk to be overlooked.[8] From extensive field work in Tibet, Hazod (2009: 163) observed "that toponyms are generally very long-lived and have a high degree of continuity; even if they are often covered by later historical structures, they can usually nevertheless be traced, whether through the fact that the name is still in local usage or just appears in the memory of a local oral account." It is this strong persistence of place names that makes it possible to both identify historical toponyms and to provide contextualisation in terms of geographic regions. The anthropological practice of localising toponyms from literary sources with the assistance of locals "allows one to pin down narrated [hi]stories and to recognise them as part of a particular landscape", a method which Hazod aptly

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[7] Hazod 2009: 163. To this day, Tibetans both in- and outside of Tibet use the place names from before the arrival of Chinese rule, although the old names and history of sites are increasingly disappearing from local memory. Simultaneously, oral tradition, too, is increasingly vanishing in modern Tibet. The youth of the present generation, who often live, work or study away from home, seem to be more acquainted with the Chinese rendering of place names introduced with the country's absorption into the PR China. See also *idb.*: 163f.; Hazod 2010: 10.

[8] See also Hazod 2009: 163f. The inclusion of local topographic knowledge in the present study has, for example, illustrated that Rnam rgyal Rab brtan, a major fifteenth-century stronghold under the Gong dkar district, was relocated at some point in the past; see *Rnam rab guide*: 181 (see also below).

describes as the "geographic anchoring of texts" ("geographische Verankerung").[9] At the same time, the linking of written sources to the physical environment in which the narrations take place helps to understand the complex relation between communities described in the sources and the landscapes they inhabited. Nevertheless, the localisation of toponyms through a combination of textual inquiry and local oral history remains a challenging undertaking that is by no means flawless.[10] The toponyms identified in the present study derive from repeated interviews and satellite imagery sessions conducted with natives from the Gzhung valley over many years. With their assistance I was able to localise toponyms mentioned in the sources, which often – unexpectedly and sometimes long after the field inquiries – turned out to be preserved in local memory.[11] Since the work of Sørensen, Hazod and Tsering Gyalpo in particular,[12] the identification and localisation of historical sites with the help of Tibetan language scholars and locals has become a crucial method for exploring the regional hegemonies on the Tibetan plateau, as far back as the Yar lung dynasty. As the present paper is concerned, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that many localisations, despite careful attempts to verify them remotely, remain approximate until archaeological, geological, or anthropological assessment can be carried out in the field. In addition to toponymic data from interviews with Gzhung natives, I have also relied on the work of Ngag dbang Thub bstan from Rnam rab zhol, who took great effort in documenting the valley's historical landscape from the accounts of elders. His account, titled *Rnam rab lung pa'i gnas dang gnas shul khag gi ngo sprod*, has been very helpful in preparing this paper.[13]

2.2 Transformation of the landscape

The histories considered for this paper recount several instances of historical transformations of the landscape. The accounts on the Central Tibetan uprisings (*kheng log*) in the 9th and 10th centuries

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[9] On this method developed for historic-anthropological research on Tibet see Hazod 2010: 4f., 9f. On the identification of historical toponyms in the field see also Hazod 2009 (as above).

[10] See also *ibd.*: 164.

[11] The linking of textual evidence to contemporary places is often possible only after the acquisition of sufficient data. I rely on a large kml dataset of Tibetan place names with geographic positionings recorded in a series of satellite imagery interviews (Google Earth) that began in 2012 and continued until the completion of this paper. The geographical localisation of each site was done by considering the information provided by several informants who were interviewed independently from each other. This method of toponymic identification via aerial and satellite imagery proved very fruitful under the current circumstances, which make *in situ* investigations and historic interviews in the TAR (PR China) almost impossible. As regards the acquisition of information, my experience is similar to that of Hazod (2009: 163), who asserts that "[t]he identification of particular places is not always the result of a targeted search, but not infrequently a by-product of an investigation of a completely different (local) historical context."

[12] See respective publications cited in this paper, foremostly, the joint publications on the G.ya' bzang ruling house (i.e. Gyalbo *et al.* 2000), on the imperial Khra 'brug temple (i.e. Sørensen and Hazod 2005) and on Tshal Gung thang (i.e. Sørensen and Hazod 2007), as well as Hazod's cartographical survey of imperial Central Tibet (Hazod 2009) and the recent study on the chief ministers (Hazod 2019). See also Hazod 2010: 4-6.

[13] See *Rnam rab guide*: 169-195.

remarkably exemplify the region's thorough reshaping in the wake of the Tibetan empire's collapse.[14] The civil rebellion that resulted in the collapse of the old territories and the plundering of the royal tombs must have likely hit Gzhung as well, which lay at Tibet's geopolitical centre. Several burial mound sites have been identified in the valley and the bordering area (see Chapter 4).

In the mid-13th century, the region witnessed destruction from outside forces when the Mongol troops marched into Central Tibet. The historian Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba reports two invasions during which the heartlands of southern Central Tibet were attacked (and presumably conquered).[15] In 1252, an army led by Do be ta (var. Du pe ta Bā dur) reportedly razed Mon mkhar Mgon po gdong fortress (?) near Yar lung,[16] while the neighbouring region to the west suffered from another invasion by the Hur ta troops (var. Hur tang) in the following year. The Hur ta attacked territory along the Gtsang po, including Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba figuratively alludes to the hardships of the days, recounting that the valley's inhabitants were unable to cultivate their fields:

Mkhas pa'i dga' ston (ed. 1980), vol. 2, 596.2:

> *gra dol gzhung gsum 'jag skyar 'phyur ba'i dus/ ces pa de byung/*
> There arose what [is] referred [to as] a period of overgrowing weed [on the fields of] the three [valleys] Gra, Dol [and] Gzhung. (trans. by author)

According to another source, the same region saw military confrontations about a century later when Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan (1302-1364) fell into dispute with the Tshal pa over the estates (*mi sde*) of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung in the years 1348-1349.[17] According to Byang chub

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[14] Regarding the plundering of the royal tombs (*bang so*), Hazod (2013) has carefully worked out this key historical event from Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba's (1504-64/66) detailed account in the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. See also Dotson 2012 on the creation of regional principalities (*rje dpon tshan*) in post-imperial Tibet.

[15] *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 2, 596.1-2: *'di'i snga lo lcags byi* (= *chu*?) [1252] *la mong gor gan rgyal sar phebs cing bod tu* (= *du*) *byang ngos nas do pe ta'i hor dmag btang mon mkhar mgon po gdong du mi dpag med bsad/ /de'i phyi lo* [1253] *hur ta'i hor dmag yongs rgyal tsha jo 'ber sogs bsad/ /gra dol gzhung gsum 'jag skyar 'phyur ba'i dus/ ces pa de byung/.* On those Mongol military expeditions into Central Tibet see also Szerb 1980: 277-279; Petech 1990: 12f.; Dung dkar Blo bzang 'Phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*: 525; Haw 2014: 46f.

[16] Several estates with the name Mon 'gar (var. Mon mgar, Mon mkhar) existed in Yar lung and the adjacent areas. The exact position of Mon mkhar Mgon po gdong, the seat of one of the Yar lung jo bo, remains unknown, but can apparently be localised somewhere around Yar lung; cf. Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 79, fn. 175; see also Czaja 2013: 446f.; Dung dkar Blo bzang 'Phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*: 525; Petech (1990: 13) assumes its location to be in Snya mo (?) and Pasang Wangdu (Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 79, fn. 175) in present-day Grwa nang. See also *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 75.13-14, here Spu gu rdo 'bum Mon mkhar mgon po gdong.

[17] For details and references on the Phag gru - Tshal pa dispute and military confrontations in Bying, Grwa and 'Phyong rgyas see *Po ti bse ru*: 192-201, 216f.; cf. also Czaja 2013: 130-132, 135f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423. The Phag mo gru pa were victorious in the conflict over the territories and the Tshal pa had to surrender. On the agreement for settling the conflict see *Po ti bse ru*: 216f.; Czaja 2013: 136f., fn. 94.

Rgyal mtshan's testament, the fighting concentrated around Mon 'gar in Bying,[18] Grwa phyi, Rgyal chen[19] and 'Phyong rgyas, but the conflict may have well reached into Gzhung, which was a part of the disputed Tshal pa territory further up the Gtsang po river.

In the early fifteenth century, shortly after the three valleys had fallen under the command of the Yar rgyab family, the region witnessed further armed clashes. In the conflict over the Phag mo gru pa succession of the year 1434, the Yar rgyab district (i.e. Grwa and Dol) is reported to have turned into a battlefield.[20] Mon rtse pa Kun dga' Dpal ldan (1408-1475?), a local of Ba ri sgang, a settlement located between Dol and Gzhung, witnessed the turmoil in his homeland, stating in his autobiography: "In the Tiger year (1434) when I was twenty-seven, the Phag mo gru pa troubled times erupted. The levies of the armies of Dbus and Gtsang in a large sense divided Dol and Gzhung in two. The route of march for both the Great Army and the Gtsang Army came through Ba ri sgang."[21]

For the second half of the same century, the historian Paṇ chen Bsod nams Grags pa (1478-1554) records that the Yar rgyab family, who had become the new regional power administering the Yar rgyab and Gong dkar district, repeatedly joined campaigns against the Phag mo gru pa.[22] Bsod nams Grags pa does not elaborate on the military operations against the Sne gdong court and it remains unknown whether Gzhung under the Gong dkar district officer was also affected by the confrontations. Likewise, the extent to which the demise of the Yar rgyab pa at Grwa involved direct military actions is as of yet unknown.[23]

Unquestionably, the region suffered severe destruction during the Dzungar invasion in the early 18th century. The targets of the Mongol invaders' vandalism in the years 1717/18 were mostly, though not exclusively, Rnying ma and Bka' brgyud institutions in the Lhasa region and along the Gtsang po valleys in Lho kha. Later histories report that the Rnying ma monasteries of Smin grol gling and Rdo rje brag suffered complete destruction.[24] According to contemporary local accounts, religious institutions of the Gzhung valley also fell victim to the plundering and destruction, among them the Rngog pa monastery of Spre zhing (founded by Rngog Kun dga' Rdo rje, 1157-1234) and

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[18] I assume that Bying refers to the region west of Yar lung around present-day Bying (Ch. 金, Jīn) to the east of Mon mkhar Rnam sras gling (personal communication with Skyid gshongs native, winter 2012/13). For the geographical position (29.244643, 91.612510) see also Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 12, Sat-Map 1, N11.

[19] *Po ti bse ru*: 199.9, 194.9-10, here Rgyal chen gzhis kha; probably identical with Rgyal chen gling (Ch. 吉林村, Jílín cūn) of present-day Grwa nang; see also Fermer 2017: 84f.

[20] *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 21b5-6; see also Fermer 2017: 71f., fn. 19; Czaja 2013: 221, fn. 43. The conflict over the succession of the Phag mo gru pa throne was between Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414-1444/45) and his father, the Che sa Sangs rgyas Rgyal mtshan (1389-1457). Addressed in several Tibetan histories, the detailed circumstances of these events remain unknown.

[21] Translation acc. to Smith 2001: 50, see also 282, fn. 121.

[22] *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* (Tucci 1971): 222, 224f.; also Czaja 2013: 227, 230f., 235f.

[23] The Yar rgyab seat of Lhun grub gling in Grwa phyi was conquered in the mid-sixteenth century by the Dga' ldan Skyid shod ruler Bkra shis rab brtan (1531-1589); cf. Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 768, fn. 9, 174, fn. 423. Under the command of Karma phun tshogs Rnam rgyal (?1597-1621), the Gtsang pa rulers defeated the Yar rgyab pa in 1610 and took possession of their territory; see Czaja 2013: 306f.

[24] Smith 2001: 18ff.

the Bka' brgyud monasteries Lcang lo can and Btsun dgon Smon 'gro Dgon gsar.[25] Several sites of cultural and historical significance must have fallen into complete extinction in those days. Any that survived would have subsequently been destroyed during the "Cultural Revolution" that brought a wave of unprecedented destruction and desecration over all of Tibet. Only a few religious sites were spared from total destruction in the 1960s and 70s for purely practical reasons: their solid, multi-storeyed stone buildings particularly suited the new administration as grain depots (i.e. Dwags po Grwa tshang monastery, Rnam rab zhol), storage houses (i.e. Bka' 'gyur lha khang, Sban rtsa) or as government offices (i.e. Rwa ba smad monastery, Skyid gshongs).[26] Since the 1980s, these and other sites have been handed over again to local communities, under whose intitiative restorations could begin.

3. Geographic contextualisation

3.1. Gzhung of the Upper Left Horn

In the imperial period, Gzhung[27] was part of the Left Horn province (G.yo ru/G.yu ru or G.yon ru) of "Central Tibet" or Bod, as this larger region was known from the mid-seventh century onward. In post-imperial histories the valley is frequently called G.yo ru Gzhung, G.yor po Gzhung or G.yon ru Gzhung.[28] The Left Horn province covers the south-eastern part of Central Tibet, roughly

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[25] *Rnam rab guide*: 171, 172, 186f.; Akester 2016: 266; Ducher 2017: 356; Ducher 2020: 161. Earlier, in the 17th century, Spre'u zhing monastery and Nya [mo] skyur temple had been restored; *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8 (*nya*), 443, 444f. (see below). Gzhung natives trace the destruction of several other monasteries in the valley to the Dzungar presence, including Se lung (see below), Bde thang (geographical position: 29.246375, 90.910736), Bsam gtan gling (approximate geographical position: 29.245147, 90.901194), 'Bu thang (see below and *Rnam rab guide*: 187f., here 'Bu gdang); personal communication, winter 2012/13. The Mongol invaders are said to have vandalised other monasteries on the southern Gtsang po side, including Bya sa temple (personal communication with the Bya sa temple caretaker, 2015), Gsang sngags Chos 'khor gling of Mon mkhar (*Lho kha sa khul gyi gnas yig*: 39), Ri bo rnam rgyal (*Lho kha sa khul gyi gnas yig*: 26), Grwa thang (Chan 1994: 394; Akester: 274), Snye mdo (Chan 1994: 504) and Sdings po che (Chan 1994: 506; Akester: 281). Apart from religious establishments, it can be assumed that other sites of socio-cultural and political significance (fortifications, shrines, burial mound sites, etc.) suffered during the Dzungar troubles. Chan states that the Ser khung tombs (1994: 367) and burial tombs in 'On (*ibd.*: 372) suffered desecration under them, while Richardson (1998: 222) reports that the royal tombs at Yar lung were ransacked.

[26] Personal communication with Gzhung natives, winter 2012/13, 01.2021; cf. also Dowman 1988: 147, 153, 155.

[27] Another Gzhung in the Left Horn is Sne gdong Gzhung of Yar lung, known as the birthplace of Sman lung pa (*Blo mchog rdo rje'i rnam thar*: 194.8, here G.yu pa (= ru) gzhung) and Sangs rgyas Sgom pa Rdo rje Gzhon nu (13th cent.) (*Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 364.5; *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*: 359.6; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 735.6); see also 'Jigs med Gling pa's (1729/30-98) autobiography citing a prophecy of O rgyan Gling pa (*'Jigs med gling pa'i rnam thar*: 485.20-21, here Dbus g.yor gzhung).

[28] Occasionally, other spellings are also encountered. See, *inter alia*, *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 220.2-3, here Shar lho g.yu ru gzhung; *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 5.1 (cited below); *Klong chen pa'i rnam thar*: 124.20, 196.5, here G.yor po gzhung; Rta tshag Tshe dbang rgyal, *Dam pa'i chos kyi 'byung ba'i legs bshad lho rong chos 'byung ngam rta tshag chos 'byung*: 665.4, here Yor po gzhung (= G.yor po gzhung); *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*: 356.10-11, here G.yon ru gzhung.

corresponding to the later Lho kha province.[29]

The Fifth Dalai Lama, in the biography of his teacher Blo gros mchog gi Rdo rje (1595-1671), explains that the toponyms G.yor po and G.yo ru are contemporary (i.e. 17th-century) and corrupted phonetic renderings (*sgra zur chag pa*) of G.yon ru, one of the Four Horn divisions (Dbus gtsang ru bzhi) of the dynastic period.[30] Géza Uray (1960: 41), on the contrary, claims that "the original name of the horn [was] *G-yo-ru*".[31]

Whatever the original name of the Left Horn may have been, the literature refers to it by the toponymic forms G.yo ru/G.yu ru, G.yon ru or G.yor and occasionally offers divisions into further parts and sub-regions.[32] Don dam Smra ba'i Seng ge (15th cent.), in his compendium of knowledge (*Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*), presents a geographical classification (*sa dbye ba*) of the Left Horn (G.yu ru) into a Northern and Southern part (*g.yo ru lho byang gnyis*), each of which are divided into upper (*stod*), middle (*bar*) and lower (*smad*) sections consisting of three further sub-regions, thus resulting in a total of eighteen sub-regions of the Horn.[33] According to his classification, Gzhung, together with Gra and Dol, constitute the Upper part of Northern G.yu ru. Its geographical shape resembles a king resting on a throne (*gdan*). Like here, the sources usually localise Gzhung in the Upper part of the Left Horn (G.yo ru stod).

Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu (ed. 1969), 196.2-3:

> *stod kyi gra dol gzhung gsum te/ rgyal po gdan la bzhugs pa 'dra/*
> As for the [valley] trio Gra, Dol and Gzhung of the Upper [Left Horn], [its shape] resembles a king resting on a throne (*gdan*). (trans. by author)

Other authors speak of Upper and Lower G.yo ru[34] (G.yo ru stod, G.yo ru smad), of Upper and Lower G.yor po[35] (G.yor po stod smad) or distinguish between an Inner and Outer G.yor po (G.yor

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[29] Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 8, 68, fn. 107; Hazod 2009: 198, Map 5, 202f., Map 6b-c.

[30] *Blo mchog rdo rje'i rnam thar*, 194.3-5: [...] *dam pa 'di nyid 'khrungs pa'i yul ni chos rgyal mes dbon gyi dus dbus gtsang ru bzhir grags pa las g.yon ru ste/ deng sang g.yor po dang g.yo ru zhes sgra zur chag pa'i 'don tshul snang zhing /* [...].

[31] Uray (1960: 40f.) argues that G.yor po derives from G.yor which is a secondary form of G.yo ru; also Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 68, fn. 107. Uebach (1987: 69, fn. 237) likewise proposes that G.yor is an abbreviation of G.yo ru. In this context, the various occurrences of the toponymic phrase Dbu[r] g.yor [gnyis] in the historical literature should also be considered.

[32] The traditional Four Horn division obviously changed over time; cf. Smith 2001: 323f., fn. 733.

[33] Not surprisingly, Don dam Smra ba'i seng ge places the Phag mo gru pa powerbase at Sne gdong at the centre of the Left Horn in his work compiled during the Rlangs Phag mo gru pa dominance of the region; *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*: 196.1-2. For the division of G.yo ru see *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*: 196.2-197.2 (here G.yu ru); cf. also Smith 2001: 222; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 43f., fn. 15; Hazod 2009: 197. For G.yo ru's boundaries in the four cardinal directions see *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*: 194.6-195.3, 24, fn. 56.

[34] Cf. *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 164.25, 165.2; *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 439.15, 439.19; cf. also Uray 1960: 38; Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 14; Hazod 2009: 198, Map 5.

[35] *Rwa lo tsā ba'i rnam thar*: 239.1-2.

po phyi nang).[36] Two important figures of the religious and political scene of the fourteenth century, the first Phag mo gru pa ruler Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan and the Sa skya pa hierarch Bla ma Dam pa, speak of "the Nine lands of G.yor po"[37] (*g.yor po yul dgu*) and "the Four lands of G.yor po"[38] (*g.yor po yul bzhi*). The two leaders place their respective strongholds in Dbus – Yar lung and Bsam yas – prominently at the centre of this geography, but do not lay out their divisions into nine and four lands. Traditionally, it is the ancient Khra 'brug temple in Lower Yar lung that is regarded as the centre of imperial G.yo ru.[39] The *Bka' thang sde lnga*, on the other hand, counts "Sixteen lands of G.yon ru" (*g.yon ru'i yul gru bcu drug*), twelve of which are identified by name.[40] Etymologically, one could speculate that the Gzhung valley complex might have once constituted a "central body" of a larger region (of Ngam shod or G.yo ru).[41]

3.2. Legendary sites of Padmasambhava

As the above passages illustrate, Gzhung is often mentioned as a geographic unit along with the valleys of Dol and Grwa.[42] The first literary appearance of the trio of valleys on the southern Gtsang po banks, typically listed from east to west, can be attested by the *Testament of dBa'* (circa 11th cent.), as was pointed out by Sørensen and Hazod.[43] In the *Dba' bzhed*, the three valleys are associated with the miraculous activities carried out by Padmasambhava for transforming the

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[36] Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423 (citing from a work by the seventh Dalai Lama Bskal bzang rgya mtsho); also *Rnam rab guide*: 169.10-11, here [...] *g.yor po phyi dang g.yor po gzhung g.yor po nang sogs* [...]. A Rnam rab zhol native explained to me that G.yor po phyi might have once referred to Phyi[ng] ru, G.yor po gzhung to Gzhung Rnam rab and G.yor po nang to the Dol valley; personal communication, 02.2015.

[37] See Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan's (1302-64) *Bstan bcos 'gyur ro 'tshal gyi dkar chag yid bzhin gyi nor bu rin po che'i za ma tog* [Catalogue of the Sne gdong Bstan 'gyur compiled in 1362]: 457.7. A classification of G.yor po into nine lands is also given in *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 3b5, here *g.yor po yul dgu'i nang nas* [...].

[38] See Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams Rgyal mtshan's (1312-1375) *Bsam yas su chos 'khor mdzad pa'i mos pa mdzad pa:* 649.6, 653.6.

[39] Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 22; cf. also Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 14, 37, fn. 92; Hazod 2009: 197.

[40] *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 185.18; Hazod 2009: 209, Table 2, 205, under "administrative districts".

[41] Gzhung's characteristic topography with its broad valley entrance at the Gtsang po shore, stretching approximately 23 km in a west-east direction from Lugs smad to Sna bo la, might itself have inspired the valley's naming. On the term *gzhung* (var. *gzhong*) denoting a "main valley of an area, i.e. a (usually broad flat) valley of the core river" see Anna Sehnalova in this volume. In former times, the area by the riverside at Lugs smad and Gling stod might have stretched much more into the Gtsang po river.

[42] The toponymic triad of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung is frequently mentioned by Byang chub Rgyal mtshan; *Po ti bse ru*: 170.3, 194.18, 196.4, 196.10, 200.1, 201.19. 361.10-11 (cited above); see also citations from other histories below. Atiśa's journey through the valleys of 'Phying ru (var. 'Ching ru), Gzhung, Dol and Grwa is recorded in *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 162-164; *Snar thang gi gdan rabs*: 134-136; *A ti sha'i rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*: 601ff.; *Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 313f.; see also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 249-251.

[43] Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423.

environment into a fertile landscape. The text recounts that the tantric master proclaimed the appearance of springs in Drwa (i.e. Grwa), Dol and Gzhung.

Dba' bzhed (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000), 13a3:

> *drwa dang dol dang gzhung gi phug shod dang stag la man chad chu mig cher phyung la*
> [...]
> [...] in the inner (i.e. upper) and lower [lands] (*phug shod*) of Drwa and Dol and Gzhung, and as far as [the] Stag la[44] [pass], springs will appear in great [number].[45] (trans. by author)

This passage, wrapped in legendary content, alludes to the fertility of the land in ancient times.[46] The oral local history and the *gter ma* literature also recount Padmasambhava's activities in the valley. The people from Gzhung locate the sacred mountain Byu ru Dmar rtse, where Guru Rinpoche is believed to have subdued demons, in the eastern branch of the upper valley (i.e. Phu shar, Phu g.yon),[47] and place caves associated with him and his consort, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, in the western upper valley (i.e. Phu nub, Phu g.yas).[48] The *Padma bka'i thang yig*, Padmasambhava's famed biography reportedly revealed by Gter ston O rgyan gling pa (1323-1360/1367/1374), lists two treasure sites in the valley.

Padma bka' thang (ed. 1996), canto 91, 555.17-556.3:

> *gra phyi'i brag* [556] *po che la bod gter sbas: gra yi sne gdong zur la ral gri sbas: dol gyi lce ti'i zur la khrab rmog sbas: gzhung gi ra skong rgyab la gter ka sbas:*

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[44] Stag la (unidentified) seems to be situated to the west of Gzhung, maybe around lower Skyid smad.

[45] Alternative translations by Wangdu and Diemberger (2000: 57) and recently Doney (2021: 125): "[...] large numbers of springs will appear in the inner valleys of Drwa, Dol and Gzhug (*sic!*) as far as (the mountain of) Stag la". The 1982 edition misses Gzhung, cf. *Sba bzhed*, 31.3-5: *grwa dang dol stag la phul po la sogs pa chu dkon pa dang / chu chung pa rnams su chu phyung la/ gram pa thams cad zhing byas la/ zhing gis bod kun 'tsho bar bya/.* Later histories omit Gzhung in this episode, e.g. *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 323.5 and *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8, 140.9-10.

[46] Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba in the passage cited above also seems to point to the fertility of the soil in the three valleys. In the biographies of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, the fertile land of the neighbouring Dol valley is compared to the central regions of Nepal and Mang yul grong; see *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 163.14-16; *Snar thang gi gdan rabs*: 135.7-8; *A ti sha'i rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*: 602.8-9; see also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 250. Ernst Schäfer (1910-92) and his expedition team passed through Gzhung in 1938. The unpublished, type-written itinerary of the German expedition, now preserved in the German Federal Archive (Berlin-Lichterfelde), explains the valley's fertility in view of its topographic characteristics; see R135-56, *Routenbeschreibung*: 51 (165124): "Seit Dschettäschöh [i.e. Lce lte zhol of Lower Dol] ändert sich anscheinend etwas grundlegend: die Äcker liegen nun vielmehr in der Tsangpoebene, z.T. bis an den Fluß heran, so daß der Weg besonders vor und nach Gehschong [i.e. Skyid gzhongs] nur durch Äcker führt. Bis vor Dschettäschöh beschränkte sich der Ackerbau in der Hauptsache auf die Seitentäler. Der Grund für diese Wandlung mag darin liegen, daß es sich hier um humusreiches Schwemmland des Tsangpo handelt; womöglich haben sich aber auch die Windverhältnisse aus irgendwelchen Gründen gebessert. Jedenfalls ist die andere Seite der Tsangpoebene weiterhin wüsten- und steppenähnlich mit sehr wenig Siedlungen."

[47] *Rnam rab guide*: 182f.; see also Akester 2016: 263, fn. 18, here Ma rtsa'i nor bu/Byu ru ma rtsa.

[48] *Rnam rab guide*: 184.1-3.

> At Brag po che of Gra phyi, [a] Tibetan treasure was hidden; by the side of Sne dgong of Gra, [a] sword was hidden; by the side of Lce ti of Dol, armour and [a] helmet were hidden; behind Ra skong of Gzhung, a treasure was hidden.[49] (trans. by author)

Here again, Gzhung is mentioned as part of the valley trio. The treasure site of Ra skong, where Padmasambhava is said to have buried a treasure, remains unidentified.

Padma bka' thang (ed. 1996), canto 91, 554.13-14:

> *lug stod brag dkar gdong la nor g.yu sbas:*
> At Brag dkar gdong of Lug stod, jewels and turquoises were hidden.[50] (trans. by author)

Lug stod, on the other hand, can probably be identified with the upper portion of a short valley in the western part of Gzhung that still bears the same name (Fig. 3).[51] This toponym is also registered in the *Testament of Dba'*. According to the text version below, statues for a minor temple of Bsam yas were casted at Lugs stod in Gzhung before being installed at Tibet's first monastery in the 8th century. The patroness of this temple, named Dge rgyas, was none other than the emperor's wife, 'Bro gza' Khri Rgyal mo btsun (var. 'Bro za Rgyal mo brtsan), also known by her later ordination name, Byang chub rje. The set of cast statues featured Buddha Amitābha as the central image, accompanied by a retinue of nine figures, two of whom, as the story goes, sank into the Gtsang po when they were being shipped to Bsam yas.[52]

Rba bzhed phyogs bsgrigs (ed. 2009), 131.11-15:[53]

> *'bro gza' khri rgyal mo btsun sras med pas rab tu byung pa'i mtshan byang chub rjer gsol ba'i phyag ris dge rgyas kyi gtsug lag khang lags te/ snang ba mtha' yas gtso 'khor dgur*

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[49] For an alternative translation see Douglas *et al.* 1978: 617.

[50] For an alternative translation see Douglas *et al.* 1978: 615.

[51] Lugs stod (Ch. 拉堆, Lā duī); see also *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 49.13, here Lug stod. The lower part of the valley can probably be identified as Lugs smad, which might correspond to G.yor po Lugs smad, which is mentioned in the *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 2, 826.5; Roerich 1996: 706).

[52] On the patronship of the Dge rgyas temple (var. Dge rgyas Bye ma'i gling) see also Uebach 1987: 108f. (cited below); Sørensen 1994: 388f., 569; Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 68. The 'Bro lady Khri rgyal Btsan mo, who later became a Buddhist nun, is also credited with the founding of a temple in Upper Gtsang (Gtsang stod) in the domain of her own family lineage; see *Sngon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba* (Uebach 1987), 108f. (f. 12b1): *'bro gza' byang chub* {gloss: *rab tu ma byung ba'i gong du khri rgyal btsan mo zer:*} *kyis dge rgyas dang: rtsang kyi stod kyi gtsug lag khang bzhengs:*. See also *Yig tshang gsal ba'i me long*, 83.7: *'bro* {*gloss: sad na legs gyi btsun mo:*} *bza' byang chub sgron gyis: dge rgyas bye ma gling dang : gtsang du spyod mdzes kyi lha khang bzhengs so/.*

[53] For parallel text passages see also *Sba bzhed*, 54.8-12: *'bro bza' khri rgyal mo btsun sras med pas rab tu byung ba'i mtshan byang chub rjer gsol ba'i phyag ris dge rgyas kyi gtsug lag khang lags te/ snang ba mtha' yas gtso 'khor dgur mdzad pa lugs stod du btab nas gtsang po la spyan drangs pas/ 'khor gnyis chab la shor/*; see also *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 346.1-2: *'bro bza' khri rgyal mo btsan phyis rab tu byung nas byang chub rjer mtshan gsol ba de'i phyag ris dge rgyas kyi gtsug lag khang lags te snang ba mtha' yas gtso 'khor dgu gzhung gi lugs stod tu* (= *du*) *lugs btab nas chab la spyan drangs pas 'khor gnyis chab la shor/*. The founding of the Dge rgyas temple is also mentioned in *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 143.6-8.

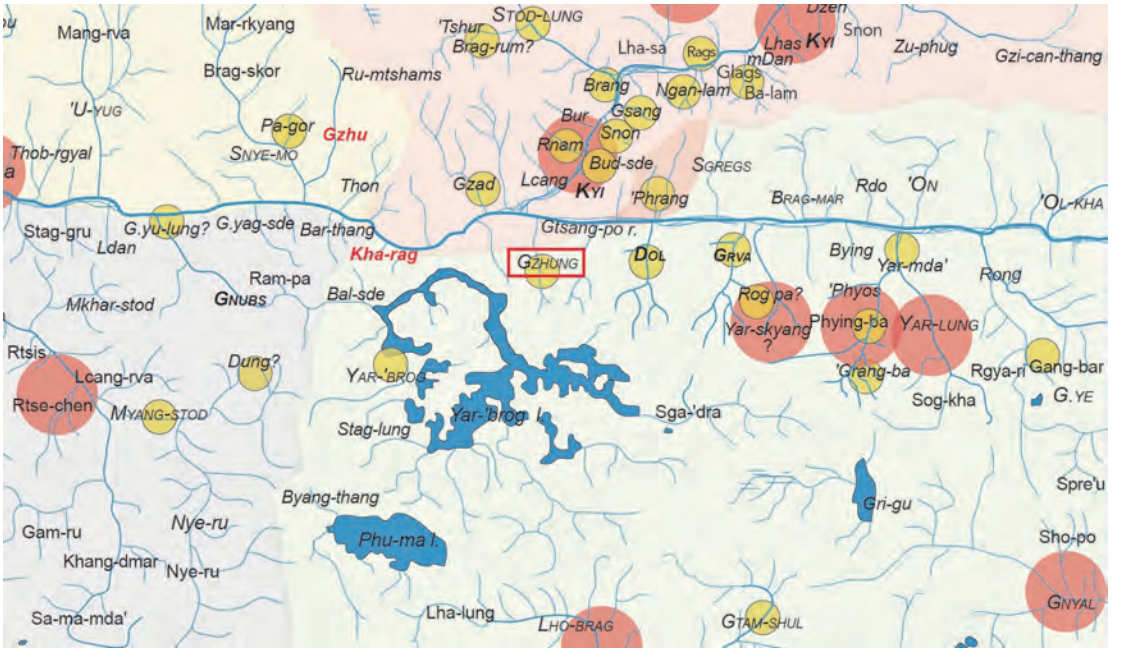


Fig. 4: Grwa, Dol and Gzhung of the Upper Left Horn (G.yo ru stod); detail from *The districts of the four Horns* (Hazod 2009: 202, Map 6b; red circle = *stong sde*, yellow circle = *yul sde*; red box on map by M. Fermer).

> *mdzad pa gzhung gi lugs/ stod du lugs btab nas gtsang po la spyan drangs pas 'khor bra* (= *gnyis*) *chab la shor/*
>
> The temple of Dge rgyas is the legacy (*phyag ris*) of the 'Bro lady Khri Rgyal mo btsun, who was given the name Byang chub rje upon her ordination, [which she undertook] because she had no sons. After [an image of] Amitābha (Snang ba Mtha' yas), surrounded by a retinue of nine, had been casted (*lugs btab*) at Lugs stod of Gzhung, two of the retinue [figures] were lost to the water (*chab*) when being shipped (*spyan drangs*) over the Gtsang po. (trans. by author)

3.3. Imperial district

The *Bka' thang sde lnga* and the *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa* list Gzhung and Dol (old spelling: Dold) collectively as a territorial unit of the Left Horn province (Fig. 4).[54] The *Old Tibetan Annals* (i.e. PT 1288, IOL TIB J 750) note that the council site of Drib nag and the royal residences Zhur and Mar ma are in the Dol valley, and these have been approximately localised.[55] For Grwa (old

[54] *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 185, Gzhung and Dol are listed here under *G.yon ru'i yul gru bcu drug* (as above); *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 162.20-21, Gzhung is listed here under *G.yu ru'i yul dpon tshan bcu drug*. See also Hazod 2009: 205, 209, Table 2. Contrary to what Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423) state, Grwa, Dol and Gzhung are not listed as *stong sde* unit, but as administrative districts in the *Bka' thang sde lnga*.

[55] For Dold gyi Mar ma and Drib nag see Dotson 2009: 100, 113f., 242, 247; Hazod 2009: 215; also shown on maps on pp. 214 (Map 7.2) and 219 (Map 7.3); Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 173, fn. 423. For Zhur, a long side valley located in Dol, see Chapter 4 (below) and Dotson 2009: 103f., 244; Hazod 2009: 218. A place called Mar ma Gser stengs of Lower Dol figures in Gtsang pa rgya ras's biography; see *Deb ther*

spelling: Dra), the *Old Tibetan Annals* list the council sites of Dra'i Rtse gro, Dra Bye, Dra'i Gro pu and 'Dra'i Zar phu.[56] However, the *Annals* do not register any sites in Gzhung. In contrast to this relatively meagre information, the later sources yield more on the different family lines that inhabited the three valleys.

3.4. Lineage distribution

3.4.1 The Zhang Sna nam

The Sna nam or Zhang Sna nam were one of the chief aristocratic families of the dynastic period. As the epithet *zhang* ("maternal uncle") implies, they belonged to the important family houses that provided heir-bearing queens to the Tibetan royal line. The family's original territory lay in Lower Stod lung (Stod lung smad), in the Central Horn (Dbu ru).[57] Several later historians claim that the Sna nam pa became the rulers of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. In his biography of Padmasambhava, Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624) recounts that the three valleys were conferred on the Sna nam as compensation for the murder of the son of Khri Srong lde btsan's minister, Sna nam Zhang Rgyal tshan Lha snang.[58]

Padma 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar (ed. 2010), 65.10-12:

> [...] *sras mu rug btsan po mtha' 'dul ba'i dmag la lo gsum thongs/ zhang gi bu'i stong la oṃ bag gi wa chu nga byin/ rje 'bangs byin po bder chug zer bas thams cad dga' ste/ zhang gi bu stong la grwa dol gzhung gsum byin/ grwa dol gzhung gsum la rje med zer ba'i gtam yang de yin zer/*
>
> The prince Mu rug btsan po was sent to war for three years [to] pacify the border [region] (*mtha' 'dul ba'i dmag*). As wergild (*stong*) [for the murder] of the son of the Zhang, [the Sna nam] were given the five? ([*l*]*nga*) irrigation canals of Oṃ bag (?). Because [the Zhang (i.e. Rgyal tshan Lha snang) (?)] said that the general [populace] – lord and subjects – should rest at ease, everybody rejoiced.[59] The three [valleys of] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung were conferred

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sngon po: vol. 2, 782.19; Roerich 1996: 667. Gser stengs (of Mar ma) might correspond to present-day Gser thang/Gser theng village in the lower valley (geographical position: 29.276950, 91.089723), reported by several Dol natives. Ta'i si tu passed through Dol Mar ma on his way to Gtsang; *Po ti bse ru*: 122.15.

[56] Cf. respective references in Dotson 2009 and Hazod 2009; on Dra'i Rtse gro (Dotson 2009: 127f., 253; Hazod 2009: 215), Dra bye (Dotson 2009: 124; Hazod 2009: 215, 220, Map 7.4), Dra'i Gro pu (Dotson 2009: 98f., 110, 242, 247; Hazod 2009: 215, 220, Map 7.4), 'Dra'i Zar phu (Dotson 2009: 111, 247; Hazod 2009: 215, 222, Map 7.7).

[57] Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 30f., 75, fn. 11, 564.

[58] Sna nam Zhang Rgyal tshan/tsha Lha snang (d. 796) was one of the four ministers of the Sna nam family who reigned from 783-96 under Khri Srong lde brtsan; Hazod 2019: 110. On him, see also Sørensen 1994: 387, fn. 1302. The name of his murdered son was 'U rings.

[59] I.e. Wergild is paid out, and Zhang Rgyal tshan Lha snang agrees with this compensation and therefore proclaims (*zer*) that the people can remain at peace. No further retaliation will take place.

as retribution for the Zhang son. The saying "There is no ruler for the trio Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung" also expresses this.[60] (trans. by author)

This incident is also recounted by Gter bdag Gling pa (1646-1714) in his autobiography, where he notes that the Sna nam received control over the three valleys as compensation for Mu rug btsan po's (r. 800-02; var. Mu rug brtsan) murder of Zhang Sna snam's son (i.e. 'U rings).[61] This passage also points to later affinal relations between the Sna snam and the Gnyos lineage from which Gter bdag Gling pa hailed.

Gter bdag gling pa'i rnam thar (ed. 1982), 32.2-4:

de'i tshe sngon lha sras mu rug btsan pos zhang sna nam gyi bu bkum pa'i zhal lce 'gos rgan gyis bcad de grwa dol gzhung gsum gyi bdag por dbang ba'i zhang gi stobs 'byor rnams kyang bags kyis bri zhing khyad par brgyud mtha' rdzogs pa na/ gong ma'i zhal tas smyos grags rgyal gyi sras jo 'bum dpal gyis zhang gi sar sku mag tu byon pa [...]

At the time when the powerful and prosperous [rulers] (*stobs 'byor rnams*) of the Zhang [Sna nam] – [the family which], due to the 'Gos rgan's (*'gos rgan gyis*) adjudicating in the murder case of Zhang Sna nam's son by prince Mu rug btsan po, [came to] rule as the lords of the three [valleys] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung – had gradually declined and the [family] line came to an end, Jo 'bum dpal (ca. 14th cent.), the son of Smyos (i.e., Gnyos) Grags rgyal, by the order of the [Phag mo gru pa] sovereign (*gong ma*), went as bridegroom to the Zhang territory [...] (trans. by author)

The post-dynastic presence of the Sna nam pa in the region is also attested to by 'Gos lo tsā ba (1392-1481) and Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba (1504-1564/66), who recount that Grwa pa Mngon shes (1012-1090) built the Grwa thang temple in Lower Grwa at the border of the Sna [nam] and Shud [phu] territories.[62] Grags pa Smon lam Blo gros (13th cent.) and Mkhas pa lde'u (13th cent.),

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[60] This phrase may be understood in two different ways: There was no ruler for the three valleys due to the loss of the land to the Sna nam, or alternatively, due to the murder of Zhang Rgyal tshan Lha snang's legitimate heir.

[61] This information from Gter bdag gling pa's autobiography has been incorporated into later Rnying ma histories; see O rgyan chos kyi grags pa (b. 1676), *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 267a4-6: *de'i sras jo 'bum dpal la gong ma'i zhal tas/ sngon lha sras mu rub btsan pos gra dol gzhung gsum gyi bdag por dbang bar byas pa'i zhang rnam snang gi sar sku dmag tu byon pa las* [...]. *Gu ru bkra shis chos 'byung*, vol. 2, 312.20-313.1: *de'i sras jo 'bum dpal la gong ma'i zhal tas/ sngon lha sras mu rub btsan pos gra dol gzhung gsum gyi bdag po byas pa'i zhang sna snam gyi sku mag tu* [313] *byon pa las* [...]. This claim has been referred to by Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423). For more details on the figure of Mu rub btsan po, the murder of the Zhang son and further references see Hazod 2019: 95, 98-100.

[62] *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 1, 126.18-19 (Roerich 1996: 96), 105.8-11: *yongs kyi dge ba'i bshes gnyen grwa pa mngon shes kyis sna shud gnyis kyi so mtshams su bzhengs pa'i gtsug lag khang / lha khang gis khyad par du 'phags pa grwa thang yin no/* (Translation in Roerich 1996: 77); also *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 474.1: *rna shud* (= *sna shud*) *kyi so mtshams su gnod sbyin gyis lung bstan ste gra thang brtsigs* [...]; see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 76f., fn. 15, 660 (ivb). The bordering territories, one can assume, facilitated affinal bounds between the two families; cf. *ibd.*: 31, 77, fn. 15.

on the other hand, report that the chief minister (*blon chen*) Sna nam Rgyal tshan Lha snang (r. 783-796) already had a temple in Grwa (var. Gra; old spellings: Dra, Drwa) during the imperial period.

Sngon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba (Uebach 1987), 114 (f. 13b2-3):

sna nam rgya tsha lha snang gis: gra'i lha khang bzhengs:

Sna nam Rgya tsha Lha snang built the temple of Gra.[63] (trans. by author)

Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa (ed. 2013), 186.19:

[...] *sna nam gyis dwa'i lha khang /* [...]

[...] [The] Sna nam [built] the temple of Dwa (= Dra/Drwa) [...]. (trans. by author)

According to Hazod (2019: 95), the unnamed dynastic temple associated with Rgya tsha Lha snang can probably be linked to the ancient site of Gtsang grong in Grwa phyi (Ch. 扎其乡, Zhāqí xiāng) or to the Grwa thang temple in present-day Grwa nang (Ch. 扎囊县; Zhānáng xiàn). At present-day Gtsang grong (Ch. 藏冲, Zàng chōng), a stone stele (*rdo ring*) from the late imperial period has been preserved.[64] Interestingly, the *Padma bka' thang* links Grwa pa Mngon shes's most famous temple in Lower Grwa to an earlier sanctuary, which had reportedly been erected by a king.

Padma bka' thang (ed. 1996), canto 92, 563.1-4:

[...] *gter ston gra pa mngon shes bya ba 'byung: sa steng gnas gzhi brgya dang rtsa brgyad 'gengs: gro mda'* (= *gra mda'*) *'di la gtsug lag khang zhig 'byung: rgyal pos bzhengs pa'i lha khang bdag po byed:*

[...] one with the name Gter ston Gra pa Mngon shes will appear, [who] will cover (*'gengs*) the earth with 108 sacred foundations (*gnas gzhi*). At Lower Gra, a *vihāra* will emerge [and] [he] will take over (*bdag po byed*) the temple erected by [a] king. (trans. by author)

Taking this prophecy at face value would rule out the identification of the temple of the Sna nam chief minister with the 11th-century Grwa thang temple. Interestingly, the anonymous king referred to in the *Padma bka' thang* is identified in Khams smyon Dharma seng ge's *Zhi byed History* as the legendary figure of Khyi kha Ra thod. This source reports that Khri Srong lde'u btsan's son Khyi kha Ra thod had built a *vihāra* at Grwa thang in Lower Grwa, the site where Grwa pa Mngon shes later erected a temple due to his auspicious mastery (*sgrub pa'i rten 'brel*) in the practice of

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[63] For an alternative translation see Uebach 1987: 115; cf. also Hazod 2019: 95, 97.

[64] See Richardson 1985: 155. The Gtsang grong Rdo rings is preserved in a small temple courtyard at the following geographical coordinates: 29.247074, 91.388049. On the imperial inscription pillar at Gtsang grong, see Sha bo Kha' byams, *Grwa phyi gtsang grong rdo ring dang de'i da lta'i gnas stangs skor gleng ba*, *TsanPo.com* (*Btsan po dra ba*), posted 30.10.2020; URL: https://www.tsanpo.com/forum/32843.html, accessed 12.11.2020 (website down when this article went to press) and the references quoted there. Sha bo Kha' byams understands "Gtsang grong" literally as referring to its close proximity to the Gtsang po river: *rdo ring 'di* [...] *grwa phyi gtsang 'gram grong tshor 'dug cing* [...]. The village is said to have previously accommodated an estate called Gtsang grong gzhis ka; personal communication with Grwa phyi native, winter 2012/13. I wonder whether Gtsang grong might be phonetically linked to Rtse gro, the royal assembly site in Dra (i.e. Grwa) where the minister Mang pho rje, Zhang 'bring rtsan and others convened the winter council in 747/748 (Dotson 2009: 127f., 253; Hazod 2009: 215).

Rakta Jambhala (Dzam dmar).[65] Note that prince Khyi kha Ra thod's mother, the queen Tshe spong bza' Dmar rgyan, is also associated with Lower Gra Gzhung in a treasure text revealed by Padma gling pa (1450-1521).[66]

Whatever the case, Hazod (*op. cit*., p. 95) concludes that Rgyal tshan Lha snang's founding of a Buddhist temple in the Grwa region "confirmed (or extended) the former estates of the [Sna nam] lineage" in this pivotal valley.



Fig. 5: Grwa thang monastery in Lower Grwa, as seen from Byams pa gling. (Photo: Edmund Geer, April 1939; German Federal Archive, Bild 135-GA-2-02-30, detail)

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[65] *Zhi byed chos 'byung* (late-19th century), 492.5-493.1: *khyad par grwa mda'i gtsug lag khang ni shrī ko ṇa sthā la ste dpal grwa thang du 'bod pa sa gzhi la chos rgyal khri srong lde'u btsan gyi sras/ bzhin mi legs par khyi kha ra thod du grags pas bzhengs pa'i gtsug lag khang byang gi sa phug tu dzam dmar sgrub pa'i* [493] *rten 'brel gyis lha khang bzhengs/* (Translation in Kollmar-Paulenz 1993: 161). On the ancient Vairocana image housed at Grwa thang see Sørensen 1994: 495; see also *Zhi byed chos 'byung*, 493.3: *rten khyad par ba yang rnam snang blugs ma/*; cf. also Kollmar-Paulenz 1993: 162. The same source mentions another temple with the name Rgyal gyi lha khang Gra'i rdo 'phrang in the vicinity or temple complex (?); see *ibd.*: 140 and *Zhi byed chos 'byung*: 455.6-456.1, here *rgyal gyi lha khang gra'i rdo 'phrang la byon 'ongs pa* [...].

[66] According to this source, she was exiled to Lower Gra Gzhung of Gtsang po Yar rgyab for the murder of Mu khri btsan po, the son of the king's consort, Mendhe bzang mo (?). Here, Dmar rgyan is said to have founded the temple of Sgra tshad, the consecration of which Śāntarakṣita was invited to. See Aris 1979: 66, 303 (*Sbas yul mkhan pa ljongs kyi gnas yig padma gling pa'i gter ma*, f. 4b): *de dus rgyal po'i btsun mo mendhe bzang mo la 'khrungs pa'i sras mu khri btsan po la rgyal srid gtad pas dmar rgyan gyis phrag dog byas te gsol gyis bkrongs pas + rgyal po mya ngan gyis non + dmar rgyan la chad pa phab ste + gtsang po yar rgyab gra gzhung gi mdar yul bton pas + dmar rgyan gyis sgra tshad kyi gtsug lag khang bzhengs + rab gnas la mkhan po zhi ba 'tsho spyan drangs + dmar rgyan gyis phyi mjug bka' gdams ma gtogs gsang sngags mi dar ba'i smon lam btab bo +*. See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423, the authors suggest reading "Grva tshad" for Sgra tshad.

He further suggests that the large, central mound of the Gser khung field in Grwa (late 8th/early 9th cent., 70-80m; M-1 of TTT 0047) might be the elite tomb of the Sna nam chief minister (*op. cit.,* 95, 97; see also 148f., Fig. 58). This is supported by the historic claim that the Sna nam family held sway over the Yar rgyang[67] thousand-district (*stong sde*), which can likely be identified with the Yar skyang of modern maps.[68] Located in the Left Horn to the south-east of present-day Grwa nang, the Yar rgyang *stong sde* was likely centred around the larger Grwa region (i.e. Grwa and Grwa phyi).[69] Yar rgyang, one could speculate, might have orthographically changed into Yar rgyab, as Yamaguchi and Hazod have suggested.[70] By around the late fourteenth century, Grwa became the headquarters of the Yar rgyab ruling house, who claimed descent from Thon mi Sam bho ṭa (7th cent.) and controlled a large territory on the southern banks of the Gtsang po.[71] The region's longstanding territorial links to the Sna nam lineage might explain how the three valleys had, prior to the Yar rgyab pa, come under the control of the Tshal pa rulers in the 13-14th centuries. The Tshal pa founder, Gung thang Bla ma zhang (1123-93), after all, had himself been born into the renowned Sna nam line.[72]

3.4.2 The Shud pu[73]

The Shud pu, who shared a border at Grwa with the Sna nam in the 11th century, are already registered in the region in the late imperial period. The family's ancestral origin appears to have

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[67] *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 163.10 (here Yar rgyang), 164.24 (here Yar rgyangs); see also Uebach 1987: 21, 52f. (f. 2a4), here Yar rkyangs, also G.yar skyang (*ibd.*: 52, fn. 145); Hazod 2009: 205 (here Yar rgyang, Yar rkyangs, Yar skyang), 208, Table 1: *The Ru-bzhi stong-sde Lists*; Fermer 2017: 80f., fn. 57.

[68] Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 12, Sat-Map 1, here Yar skyang. Map no. 2991 of the Tibet Map Institute (Serie 90, Edition July 2009) locates "Yarkyang" in the western part of Upper Grwa phyi; see URL: http://www.tibetmap.com/2991o150.jpg, accessed: 11.04.2011; this map is archived by Wayback Machine; see URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20160315125651/http://www.tibetmap.com/2991o150.jpg, accessed: 02.06.2021). The TAR map of 1981 (i.e. *Bod rang skyong ljongs srid 'dzin sa khul gyi sa kra*) gives the name Yar skyar (*sic!*) in the Upper Grwa phyi valley. It should be noted that Gtsug lag Phreng ba (*Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 188.7) has Yar mtshams; see also Ryavec 2015: Map 12, here Yartsam; Hazod 2009: 205, 208. The *Blon po bka'i thang* reads *Ljang kyang lung pa gnyis po* for the two thousand-districts under the Myang and Sna nam; see *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 439.12-13; cf. also Hazod 2009: 208.

[69] As a side note, there is a village with the name Btsan yul (Ch. 赞隅, Zàn yú; geographical position: 29.188731, 91.343879) registered in Rgyal gling shang (Ch. 吉林村, Jílín cūn) of Grwa nang, see also *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 71.8.

[70] Yamaguchi 1995: 102 and Hazod 2009: 205; see also Fermer 2017: 80f., fn. 57; Hazod 2019: 95.

[71] See Fermer 2017: 67, Fig. 2.

[72] See Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 30, 564, 171, fn. 423. As has been mentioned in Chapter 2, Grwa, Dol and Gzhung constituted individual "lay communities" (*mi sde*, i.e. taxable estates/units) of the Tshal pa myriarchy (*khri skor*) during the Phag mo gru pa supremacy. See *Gung thang dkar chag*, in Sørensen and Hazod 2007: Appendix vi.1, f. 31b1, here *Gra dol gzhung gsum*; see also 171, fn. 423 and Map 1 (*The mi sde units of the Tshal-pa territory*), nos. 26-28.

[73] Registered orthographic variants include Shud phu, Shud bu, Shul pu, Shul phu, Shul phul, Shod bu.

been Yar 'brog[74] or Lho brag.[75] According to the Shud pu genealogy included in the biography of Lho brag Grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1326-1402), a family branch headed by Shud phu Bsod nams seng ge is said to have governed the valley trio of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung in the 9th century.

Phyi'i rnam thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa (ed. 1985), 648.2-3:

> *shud phu dpal gyi sengge'i sras/ shud phu bsod nams sengge dang / chos kyi sengge gnyis 'khrungs/ bsod nams sengge ni/ grwa dol gzhung gsum gyi rje dpon mdzad/ srid pa ma mo'i grub pa thob/ rgyal khams la dbang sgyur/ dbang stobs dang ldan pa gcig byon/*
>
> The two, Shud phu Bsod nams Seng ge and Chos kyi seng ge, were born [as] the sons of Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge. Bsod nams Seng ge acted as local ruler (*rje dpon*) of the trio [of] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung. [He] gained accomplishment in [the practice of] Srid pa Ma mo, governed the realm [and] appeared as a [man] of power.[76] (trans. by author)

Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge (late 8th cent.), who typically figures among Padmasambhava's twenty-five disciples (*rje 'bangs nyer lnga*),[77] is registered as a religious minister (*chos blon*) under emperor Khri Srong lde btsan (742-c. 800). Several alternative monikers of his are registered in the text cited above: Khri 'gri Thog btsan/rtsan, Khri 'bring Thog btsan and Shud phu Khong leb.[78] If Khri 'bring Thog btsan (one of Dpal gyi seng ge's monikers) is in fact the same name as Shud pu Khri 'bring Khong btsan, thus the Lde'u chronicles, he served together with Sna nam Rgyal mtshan Lha snang and Lde sman Gur bzher Lde chung as a principal minister of Mu ne Brtsan po (r. ca. 797-98).[79]

Interestingly, the Shud phu genealogy places Dpal gyi seng ge's miraculous activities in the immediate vicinity of Grwa. At the Gtsang po river around Yar rgyab, the text recounts, the accomplished yogin jabbed a ritual dagger into the ground and caused the river to separate into two streams for seven days.[80] One may wonder whether the unidentified temple of Brag sna, whose

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[74] *Phyi'i rnam thar bdud rtsi phreng ba*, 2.5-3.1: *che ba rje gnya' khri btsan po bya ba cig yod pa de spyan drangs* [3] *mgo nag yongs kyi rgyal po mdzad pa yin/ chung ba de shud phu ba'i pho lhar byon te yar 'brog dgra lha yin/*; see also *Phyi'i rnam thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*: 645.2, here Yar 'brog sba tshal kha; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 76, fn. 15; Hazod 2013: 99.

[75] In the aftermath of the *kheng log* uprisings, the Shud pu are said to have gained foothold at Gtam shul in Lho brag for which there seem to have existed earlier, imperial (?) links; see *Phyi'i rnam thar bdud rtsi phreng ba*: 4 (cited below) and *Phyi'i rnam thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*: 648 (cited below). See particularly Dotson 2012: 165, 167, 176f., 192f. and given references; cf. also Vitali 2004b: 116f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 76, fn. 15, 711, fn. 5; Hazod 2013: 99, 100, fn. 46; Hazod 2019: 68.

[76] For this passage see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423; Hazod 2013: 99.

[77] See Neumaier-Dargyay 1998: 34; cf. also *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 131f., here listed under *thugs kyi sras brgyad rje 'bangs bcas pa*.

[78] Shud pu Dpal gyi seng ge's life is briefly retold in *Phyi'i rnam thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*: 646.2-648.2.

[79] *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 224.10-11; see also *Lde'u chos 'byung*: 133.6-7, here Rna nam Rgyal tsha lta snang (= Lha snang), Shud pu Khri 'bring Khong btsan and Lde dman Gung bzhir lde chung; Hazod 2019: 99f.

[80] *Phyi'i rnam thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*, 647.1-2: *rdo rje phur pa dang ma mo'i grub pa thob/ sgrub rtags su phur pa yar rgyab kyi gtsang po la btab pas/ chu yan man du chad pa zhag bdun byung / brag la*

founding is ascribed to Dpal gyi seng ge, might have been located within the territory controlled by his son Shud phu Bsod nams Seng ge (i.e. Grwa, Dol and Gzhung).[81] In the 9th century the family branch seems to have abandoned their land in Grwa and returned to former Shud pu territory in Lho brag where they settled at a place called Gnam thang. The short genealogical sketch in Lho brag Grub chen's biography contextualises this event in the (third or) fourth generation after Dpal gyi seng ge at the outbreak of the G.yo ru revolt (*kheng log*).

Phyi'i rnam thar bdud rtsi phreng ba (ed. 1985), 4.2-4:

> *shud phu dpal gyi seng ge nas mi rabs bzhi na grwa yi ru rje la 'kheng log byung nas/ tshur byon nas yugs nags su yod pas / rtsangs dkar phu nas gzigs pas / gnam mthong ba ma gi ru yul 'debs gsungs/ gnam thang du chags phab yul btab/ rim pa bzhin du yul bcos pa yin par gda'/*
>
> In the fourth generation after Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge, after the civil revolt (*'kheng log*) had emerged against the local ruler (*ru rje*) of Grwa, [Shud phu Zla ba'i seng ge] went back to [the family's former territory.] While at Yugs nags, as [he] looked down from Upper Rtsangs dkar, [he] said: "Let's establish [our] land down there, where [we can] see the sky". [He] went downhill (*chags phab*) to Gnam thang and founded a land (*yul*). There [they] dwelled (*gda'*), gradually restoring [their former] land.[82] (trans. by author)

Another indication for the Shud pu's presence in or around Grwa is a marriage alliance registered with the Rngog, who held land there around the same time. Rngog Btsan gnya' (8th cent.), a mighty warrior who had served the emperor Khri Srong lde btsan, took as a bride a Shud pu lady, who subsequently gave birth to his heir Rngog Brtsan pa rin po che.[83] In contrast to claims of the clan's

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btab pas brag ral ba la sogs byung / sgrub rtags khyad par can mang du byung /. The condensed passage in *Phyi'i rnam thar bdud rtsi phreng ba* (4.1-2) reads Ngam shod for Yar rgyab: *rdo rje phur pa dang / ma mo'i grub pa thob nas / phur pa ngam shod chu la btab pas chu yas man* {gloss: *du*} *chad pa byung /.*

[81] On the dynastic Brag sna'i lha khang; cf. Uebach 1987: 114f. (f. 13b2); *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 186.19.

[82] For an alternative translation of the passage see Vitali 2004a: 9, fn. 9. Compare the cited passage with the section on Shud phu Zla ba'i seng ge's life in *Phyi'i rnam thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*, 648.4-5: *de nas bra yer* (= *grwa yi ?*) *khen log* (= *kheng log*) *byung nas/ gtam lha pho dgus gdan drangs/ yugs rtsang dkar gyi phu na phebs/ yugs nags su yod pas/ gnam mthong pa'i thang ma gir yul byed zer/ gnam mthong bzung zhing lung pa dang rigs rgyud mang du dar ro//.*

[83] *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 3a5: *jo mo shud bu bza' blangs: de'i sras rngog brtsan pa* {gloss: *rnam thang du babs:*} *rin po che bya ba lags:*; see also below and Ducher 2017: 212, 375f. The daughter of Rngog Btsan gnya' was given as a bride to 'Chims G.yu ber; see *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*: 3a5, here 'Phyims G.yu ber; *Rngog pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 3a8, here 'Chims G.yu ber. Though not further addressed in this paper, affinal relationships between other dynastic families in the region can be assumed.

resettlement to Lho brag following the *kheng log* uprisings, another source seems to suggest that a branch of the Shud pu had remained in the region.[84]

3.4.3 The Mchims

Gter ston Grwa pa Mngon shes, the founder of the aforementioned Grwa thang temple, is considered an incarnation of Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge by some later Rnying ma historians.[85] With regard to his biological descent, these and other sources state that the master was born into the family line of Khri Srong lde btsan's chief minister Mchims Rdo rje Spre chung (8th cent.), on the central plains of Grwa at Skyid ru[86] (var. Skyid, Skyi ru, Dkyil ru).[87] Rdo rje Spre chung from the mighty lineage of the Mchims[88] (var. 'Chims) is credited for founding the temple of Bya 'ug (Bya 'ug gi lha khang) which, according to later hagiographies, might have been located in the Grwa region.[89] 'Gos lo tsā ba's history is the earliest source to mention Grwa pa Mngon shes's descent from this branch of the Mchims that had settled in Grwa at an unknown time.

Deb ther sngon po (ed. 1984), vol. 1, 124.12-16:

> *khri srong lde btsan gyi blon po mchims rdo rje spre chung zhes bya ba/ nor ha cang mi che yang shes rab che zhing smra mkhas pas rgyal po dgyes pa zhig byung / des bsam yas kyi mchod rten sngon po dang byang chub gling gong bzhengs/ de la bu gsum las 'bring po lhar chos grwa'i skyid ru gzung /*

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[84] For the first half of the 11th century, a military conflict between the Sna and Shud families (*sna shud kyi 'khrug pa langs*) is reported, probably referring to the area in question (i.e. Grwa); see *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 149.16-17; cf. also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 240.

[85] Neumaier-Dargyay 1998: 95; Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 753.

[86] According to Grwa nang natives, Skyid ru (Ch. 吉汝村, Jí rǔ cūn) is located in present-day Grwa nang rdzong (Ch. 扎囊县, Zānáng xiàn; geographical position: 29.133943, 91.307450); personal communication with Grwa nang natives, 2012, 2021. Skyid ru temple, another sanctuary founded by Grwa pa Mngon shes, can be localized at the centre of the village at the geographical position 29.133714, 91.306672; communication with Grwa nang native, 02.2021.

[87] *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 157b2-5: *dge bshes gra pa mngon shes ni/ khri srong lde'u btsan gyi blon po 'chims rdo rje spre chung zhes bya ba shes rab che zhing smra mkhas pas rgyal po dgyes pa zhig byung/ des bsam yas mchod rten sngon po dang byang chub gling gong bzhengs/ de la bu gsum las 'bring po lhar rjes grwa'i skyid ru bzung/ de nas brgyud pa lnga'i bar mchims su 'bod/ lnga pa zhang se tsha logs brtan nas zhang du 'bod/*; *Zhi byed chos 'byung*: 484.3-4, here *grwa'i dkyil ru na yab kyi cho rigs zhang stag dkar zhes pa* [...] *la bltams te* [...]; see also Neumaier-Dargyay 1998: 95; Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 753.

[88] Mchims Rdo rje sprel chung (var. 'Chims Rdo rje Sprel chung) is counted one of the four ministers from the Mchims family; cf. Sørensen 1994: 388, fn. 306. The Mchims were another of the four so-called *zhang* families who provided the emperors with queens to produce heirs.

[89] The temple founding is recorded in Nel pa paṇḍita's chronicle, see Uebach 1987: 114f. (f. 13b3): *'chims rdo rje sprel chung gyis: bya 'ug gi lha khang bzhengs:*; see also *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*, 186.20, here Bya zug lha khang; Sørensen 1994: 388, fn. 306. The dynastic temple might be linked to Klong chen pa who extensively dwelt in the Grwa region in the fourteenth century; cf., for example, *Klong chen pa'i rnam thar*, 182.15-17: *bya 'ug lha khang du mgon po phyag bzhi pa/ rdo rje bdud 'dul/ dge bsnyen nyer gcig gzigs so/*. A possible relation to Bya 'ug sa tshigs (var. Bya 'ugs sa tshigs), the territory under the Drang rje Pha lha, has been noticed in Hazod 2009: 193.

> [There] appeared [a man] called Mchims Rdo rje Spre chung, Khri Srong lde btsan's minister, who, though not very great in wealth, pleased the king with his great intellect and eloquence (*smra mkhas pa*). He (*de*) built the blue *stūpa* of Bsam yas and the upper (*gong*) [branch of] Byang chub gling. Lhar cho,[90] the middle of [his] three sons, took hold of (*gzung*) Skyid ru of Grwa.[91] (trans. by author)

Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho (1653-1705) records his name as Lha rje and states that he governed Gra Dags po grong, which is also known as Skyi ru (i.e. Skyid ru).[92] In around the late 9th or early 10th century the family's name is said to have changed from Mchims to Zhang,[93] which may be explained by the Mchims's earlier role as bride-givers (*zhang*) or by the affinal relations that might have existed with the Zhang Sna nam active in the region.[94] In the wake of the uprisings (*kheng log*), the Mchims gained new principalities in Yar lung stod, while their ancestral homeland has been localised in the eastern part of the Left Horn, in the Skyems stong district, east of Dwags po. In this area, at the hill behind Slebs Village, one of Tibet's largest imperial burial mound field is found, a site associated with the Mchims family (or Mchims rgyal) that has more than 200 mound graves (10m-80m; TTT 0092, 0093; see Hazod 2019: 85-92).[95]

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[90] An old block print of 'Gos lo's *Blue Annals* seems to read Lhar che (?); see BDRC: W3CN15333, *kha* 14b2.

[91] For an alternative translation see Roerich 1996: 94-95. The Mchims branch at Grwa, who claim genealogical origins from Rdo rje Spre chung's son, is discussed in Hazod 2019: 98.

[92] Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho, *Gso ba rig pa'i khog 'bugs bai dūrya'i me long*, 126.17-20: *chos rgyal khri srong lde'u btsan gyi blon po mchims rdo rje spre chung zhes bya ba nor ha cang mi che yang shes rab dang ldan zhing smra mkhas pas rje'i thugs zin pa zhig byung ste/ bsam yas kyi mchod rten sngon po sogs bzhengs pa'i lag dpon mdzad/ de la sras gsum las/ 'bring po lha rjes gra dags po grong ngam skyi ru bzung /.*

[93] *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 1, 125.1-2: *de yan du mchims nas 'bod/ se tsha nas zhang du 'bod/*; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 473.4: *mchims rdo rje spre chung gi rgyud pa yin la bar*? *cig nas zhang du 'bod/.*

[94] Hazod (2019: 85) notes on their role as bride-givers for the royal line: "The position of *zhang*, heir-bearing lineage, was once again attributed to them in the early eighth century (Khri Lde gtsug brtsan's mother was Mchims), which resulted in the altered name of "Mchims zhang" (also "Zhang Mchims"), an addition that seems to have been common since the 'Bro zhang of the early eighth century [...]".

[95] Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 609, fn. 70; Hazod 2009: 173f., 175, 198 (Map 5), 203 (Map 6c); Dotson 2012: 190f.; Hazod 2019: 89-92; Hazod 2013: 90, fn. 14: "The core area of mChims, the ancient territory of the mChims-rgyal dynasty, corresponds to present-day sKyems-stong, the district at the border between Dvags-po and traditional (Lower) Kong-po, and according to this location it is variously given in the sources as Dvags mChims or Kong mChims."

3.4.4 The Sbal ti[96]

Yet another post-dynastic history claims that a branch of the Sbal ti family ruled over the three valleys in the 9th century. The monastic history of Skyor mo lung,[97] compiled in the early 19th century, claims that Grwa, Dol and Gzhung were granted to three brothers from the Sbal ti lineage as a reward for their military accomplishments.[98] Seng ge Gung btsan, having apparently returned successfully from war, was given authority over Gzhung, where he and his descendants settled.

Skyor lung chos 'byung (ed. 2007), 149 (f. 13ab):

> *de dag gi bdag rkyen du gung* [13b] *btsan sku mched gsum la grwa dol gzhung gsum gnang / de yang seng ge gung btsan gyis gzhung / stag gung btsan gyis dol/ gzig gung btsan gyis bzang yul bzung nas bzhugs so/*
>
> The three Gung btsan brothers (*gung btsan sku mched gsum*) were given the three [valleys of] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung as a reward (*bdag rkyen*) for those [military achievements] (*de dag*). Indeed, Seng ge Gung btsan took control of (*bzung*) Gzhung, Stag Gung btsan of Dol [and] Gzig Gung btsan of Bzang yul[99] (i.e. Grwa?) and [they] settled [there]. (trans. by author)

Earlier in the text, it says that the three sons of Sbal ti Dge ba rgyal mtshan, referred to as Gung btsan spun gsum and Gung btsan gsum, served as commanders during a military campaign against China and Mongolia, which was led by Khri Srong lde'u btsan's son, the prince Mi khri btsan po (i.e. Mu khri btsan po / Mu tig btsan po).[100] Under Seng ge Gung btsan, a branch of the Sbal ti settled in Gzhung, where the family appears to have retained territory even after the empire's decline. The founder of Skyor mo lung, Dgra bcom pa (1129-1215) of the Sbal ti clan, was born at Shel dkar in Upper Gzhung,[101] and took ordination at Nya mo skyur in the lower valley.[102]

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[96] Registered orthographic variants include 'Bal ti and Wal ti. According to Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423, 697, fn. 11) the name Sbal ti may historically associated with the Dpal sde area located west of the Yar 'brog. See also Uebach 1987: 79, here Yar 'brog Sbal pa; Hazod 2009: 172, 215; Hazod 2019: 73f.

[97] The monastic institution in Stod lung was headed by the Sbal ti family members until the early 16th century; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 689.

[98] *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 149 (ff. 12a-13a); see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423, 697, fn. 11; Hazod 2019: 98. The conferment of the valley trio to the Sbal ti family is also retold in Bshes gnyen Tshul khrims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan*: 250f.

[99] Bzang yul seems to refer to (a place in) the Grwa region. A place with the name Zangs yul (Ch. 桑玉村, Sāng yù cūn) can be found 10km to the west of Grwa nang (geographical coordinates: 29.236871, 91.221227); personal communication with Lce bde zhol native, 07.2015.

[100] *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 149 (ff. 12ab); see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423; Hazod 2019: 98.

[101] *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 148f. (ff. 12a, 14a). Bshes gnyen Tshul khrims (*Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan*: 251) summarizes that Sbal ti Dgra bcom pa descended into the Sbal ti lineage at Shel dkar of Gzhung, which had earlier been conferred to Seng ge gung btsan. Rnam rab Ngag dbang thub bstan (*Rnam rab guide*: 185) locates Shel dkar lung pa in the Upper Gzhung valley.

[102] *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 149 (f. 14a). Sbal ti Dgra bcom pa took ordination from a certain Rgya Nya mo skyur pa, a disciple of Gsal ba Shes rab who apparently headed Nya mo skyur during the mid-12th century; see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 690.

3.4.5 The Gnyos[103]

Two chronicles of the Gnyos report that a family member migrated to G.yor po in the 8th or 9th century, where the family subsequently obtained territory on the southern Gtsang po banks at Gzhung and Kha rag. The Gnyos is another important lineage that reportedly hailed from Skyid shod near Lha sa. From here, the lineage split into several sub-branches and settled in different Central Tibetan regions and beyond.[104] The Gnyos genealogies, a fifteenth-century work (compiled in 1431) and a more recent, nineteenth-century work, recount these events in the following manner:

Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs (ed. 1978), 4.5-5.2:

> *che shos rta mkhar rje rdzings du bcas nas chab kyi gzhung la byon/ yul gyi gzhung gcig 'tshol* [5] *zos nas g.yor po gzhung du byon/ de la sras thug ge dang / zheng gnyis zheng nges g.yor stod zhal gyi srin mo gung mkhar du byon/ kha rag dang 'grang sil bzung /*
>
> The eldest [son], Rta mkhar Rje, travelled along the river stream (i.e., the Skyid chu) by boat (*rdzings du bcas*).[105] Searching for a central (i.e. broad?) portion of land (*yul gyi gzhung*), he went to G.yor po Gzhung. From his two sons, Thug ge and Zheng [nge], Zheng nge went to Zhal gyi srin mo Gung mkhar of Upper G.yor (G.yor stod), where [he] took control of (*bzung*) Kha rag and 'Grang sil.[106] (trans. by author; *zos* (line 5.1) untranslated)

'Brug gi smyos kyi gdung rabs (ed. 1983), 66.1-9:

> *dang po bkra mkhar rje ni/ chu la gzings bcas te g.yor mo'i gzhung du byon/ mgo nag gi rje bor khur zhing der bzhugs pa las/ sras smyos rabs lnga pa thugs rje dang zhang nge bcas spun gnyis byung / dang pos gzhung bzung bas smyos sban tsha ba rnams byung bar grags/ gnyis pas phyams g.yor stod zhal gyi khrims mo gur mkhar dang / 'brang sil kha rag rnams bzung bas kha rag gi smyos zhes grags pa rlung ltar khyab/*
>
> The first [son], Bkra mkhar Rje, travelled by boat along the river to Gzhung of G.yor mo (= G.yor po). [He] took up the burden (*khur*) as ruler of the black-headed [people][107] (*mgo nag*) and settled (*bzhugs pa*) there. For sons, [he] begat Thugs rje and Zhang nge, two brothers of the fifth Smyos generation. Because the first [son] governed Gzhung, [his family branch]

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[103] Registered orthographic variants include Smyos, Snyos and Mnyos; also Kha rag Gnyos. The Gnyos clan is also counted as one of the sub-clans of the Dmu/Rmu; cf. Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 672, 674, fn. 2f.

[104] Cf. *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 3ff.; see also Vitali 2004b: 133f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 415ff. The authors (*ibd.*: 416) resume: "[D]uring the fou[r]th generation counting from the common ancestor [...] the different lines ramified by gradually crossing [the] gTsang-po to spread out into g.Yor-po, into western lHo-kha and into the gTsang province itself [...]". For a genealogical synopsis of the Gnyos family lineage see *ibd.*: 671-681. For later branches of the family line see *ibd.*: 681, Map 3 (*Main stations of the Gnyos clan settlement history*).

[105] *chab gyi gzhung la byon* means to travel downstream a river (in its middle) by boat (e.g. coracle), rather than to cross a river from one side to another; cf. with the meaning of *gzhung ko* in Krang dbyi sun 1985, s.v. *gzhung ko: chu bo'i gzhung du gtong ba'i ko ba*.

[106] For an alternative translation see Vitali 2004b: 133f., fn. 31. See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 672, 674, fn. 8f.

[107] This is a euphemism for "common people or subjects"; see Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 674, fn. 4.

became known as Smyos Sban tsha ba. Because the second governed Zhal gyi khrims mo Gur mkhar and 'Brang sil Kha rag of Upper G.yor (G.yor stod), [his family branch] became widely known as the Smyos of Kha rag. (trans. by author; *phyams* (line 66.6) untranslated)

Around the 8th century, in the fourth generation that descended from the Gnyos clan's heavenly ancestor (Bya thul dkar po), Rta mkhar Rje (var. Bkra mkhar Rje) left behind his homeland in the Central Horn and travelled downstream the Skyid chu river. He settled at Gzhung of the Left Horn (G.yor po) where his son Thug ge (var. Thugs rje) established the family lineage at Sban tsha. His second son Zheng nge (var. Zhang nge) moved further westwards to Kha rag (var. Mkha' reg) which became the Gynos's future stronghold. It is due to this fact that they became known as the Kha rag Gnyos.[108] Rta mkhar Rje and his descendants, who became known as the Smyos Sban tsha ba, apparently settled near the southern Gtsang po shore at present-day Sban tsha village[109] (Ch. 变扎, Biàn zā/zhā/zhá) in the lower valley. This small settlement is known for a former government ferry station (Sban tse gru kha; functional up to the 1950s) and a small, two-story Kanjur temple with the name Sban tsha Bka' 'gyur lha khang.[110]



Fig. 6: The ancient Gnyos settlements of Sban tsha and Nya mo skyur of Lower Gzhung. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2005; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

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[108] Vitali 2004b: 133f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 417.

[109] Geographical position: 29.290675, 90.945800; alternative spellings include Sban rtsa (*Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 44.4, 44.16), Ban tsa (*Rnam rab guide*: 191), Sban tse (Lange 2014: 80).

[110] Personal communication with Gzhung natives, winter 2012/13; see also *Rnam rab guide*: 191.3-12, here Ban tsa Bka' 'gyur lha khang. Prior to the 1950s, Sban tsha accommodated an estate building (*gzhis ka*) in the middle of the village; personal communication with a Rgyal grub gling native, 2012/13, 2015.

The Gnyos's presence in the surrounding area continued after the dissolution of the empire. According to various historical sources, 'Byung gnas Shes rab (10th/11th cent.) of the Gnyos established several *vinaya* communities during the period of Buddhist revival. 'Byung gnas Shes rab was the elder brother of Gnyos lo tsa bā Yon tan grags (b. 973) and a disciple of Dbya' btsun Dkon mchog rgyal ba.[111] Drawing on the fifteenth-century Gnyos genealogy, Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 418) identify him "as the founding figure behind the establishment of up to thirteen further monastic 'Bring settlements, among them Khi-ldir of sKul and Nya-mo-skyur (~ -'gyur) of gZhung [...]".



Fig. 7: The ruin site of Nya mo skyur in Lower Gzhung. (Photo: Mathias Fermer 2010)

Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs (ed. 1978), 16.4-17.1:

> *mnyos 'byung gnas shes rab ni/* [...] *gzhan yang skul gyi khi ldir/ 'brog zad/ gzhung* [17] *nya mo skyur/ gzad sogs pa ri la sogs pa gnas gzhi bcu gsum gyi rmang bting /*
>
> Mnyos 'Byung gnas shes rab [...] additionally laid the foundations (*rmang bting*) of thirteen sites (*gnas*), including Khi ldir (= Khe ldir) of Skul, 'Brog zad (= 'Brog bzad/gzad), Nya mo skyur of Gzhung and Gzad Sogs pa ri.[112] (trans. by author)

Gzhung Nya mo skyur[113] can probably be located in the Lower Gzhung valley at a place that is

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[111] Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 418, 672, 675, fn. 12; Uebach 1987: 148f. (f. 22b, cited above). On him see *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 16.4-17.3; cf. also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 664 (IIIb).

[112] Remains unidentified.

[113] Registered orthographic variants are Nya mo gyur, Nya mo kyur, Nya mo skyur and the shortened form Nya skyur. On Nya mo gyur see *Rgya bod yig tshang*: 255.13, here Nya mo gur (*sic!*); *Deb ther dmar po*: 76.9 (here Nya mo kyur), 76.15 (here Gzhung Nya mo gyur). See also *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 23f., here Nya mo skyur lha khang. Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho traces its foundation

locally known by the name "Myang khyug" / "Nyan rgyud" (Ch. 念久, Niàn jiǔ),[114] a phonetic shortening of the original toponym. Today, the site features a small protector shrine dedicated to Rgyal po Li byin ha ra and the wall traces of a larger building (dimensions of the outer walls ca. 29x26m; geographical position: 29.291692, 90.939760).[115] Up to the 1950s, this site, located half a kilometre to the west of Sban tsha, constituted an estate (*gzhis kha*) with a protector chapel under the control of Gong dkar Chos sde.[116] While another fifteenth-century history ascribes the founding of Nya mo gyur to Rba Tshul khrims blo gros,[117] elders from Gzhung claim that the site originated as a border-supressing temple (*mtha' 'dul gyi gtsug lag khang gyi ya gyal*) from the imperial period.[118] Nel pa paṇḍita Grags pa Smon lam Blo gros (13th cent.) credits Gnyos 'Byung gnas Shes rab with the founding of another community in the Gzhung valley.

Sngon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba (Uebach 1987), 148 (f. 22b3-4):

> *yang dbya' rgyal ba'i mkhan bu: snyos 'byung shes rab kyis:* [...] *yang khe ldir nas gzhung gi skam bu'i gnas btab: de nas nya mo gyur btab:*
>
> Yet [another] ordinand (*mkhan bu*) of Dbya' [Dkon mchog] Rgyal ba, Snyos 'Byung Shes rab, [...] moreover founded Skam bu'i gnas of Gzhung from (i.e. as a branch of) Khe ldir.[119] Subsequently, [he] founded Nya mo gyur.[120] (trans. by author)

Evidently, the Gnyos were prominent *vinaya* proponents of the region with several *phyi dar* settlements (i.e. 'Bring tsho) in the Central and Left Horn provinces, namely at Gzad (var. Bzad) of

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back to Klu mes; cf. *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8, 443.10, here *klu mes kyi gtsug lag khang skyid gshongs nya mo skyur*; cf. also *ibd.*: vol. 9, 357.14.

[114] Personal communication with Gzhung natives, 2010, winter 2012/13.

[115] Field visit, 2010; see also *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 24.

[116] Personal communication with a pre-1950 Gong dkar Chos sde monk from Rgyal grub gling, winter 2012/13; cf. also *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 24; Jackson 2015: 245, no. 8. The informant further explained that one Gong dkar Chos sde monk was permanently based at Nya mo skyur to be in charge of the rituals; personal communication, 2010, winter 2012/13.

[117] *Rgya bod yig tshang*, 236.20: *sbas kyis gzhung nya mo gyur dang / lan pa spyil bu btsigs/*; see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 665 (Ib-1), here Rba btsun Blo gros Dbang phyug (*sic!*).

[118] *Rnam rab guide*: 191.3-5; personal communication with Rnam rab zhol native, winter 2012/13. In addition to this, Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho mentions in his supplemental volumes to the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography a religious establishment in Rnam rab (i.e. Gzhung) with the name Zil gnon Bdud 'dul gling, which is most likely a reference to Nya mo skyur; see *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8 (*nya*), 469.2-3: *rgyal grub gling sngags pa gnas chung pa gra slob dgu/ rnam rab zil gnon bdud 'dul gling du gra pa sum cu tham pa/.*

[119] Khe ldir can be localized in Skul, the short valley below Gong dkar fortress to the west of 'Phying ru (see citation below).

[120] For an alternative translation see Uebach 1987: 149. For a parallel text passage see the anonymous *Rgyal rabs sogs bod kyi yig tshang gsal ba'i me long* (dated to the 15th cent.), i.e. *Yig tshang gsal ba'i me long*, 88.5-6: *yang dmar gsal ba'i shes rab kyis: skul gyi khe 'dir gnas dang : gzhung gi dkon phu gnas dang : nya mo kyur dang : 'brog zad gnas dang : nu ma sgang dang dbya zhing gnas dang : sha zan gnas la sogs pa rnams btabo// yang dmar gsal ba'i shes rab kyis* (= *kyi*) *slob ma: dmar phu rangs pa bya bas:* [...]. See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 418, 664 (IIIb); *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 23.

Skyid smad, as well as in Kha rag and Gzhung.[121] In Gzhung, Gnyos 'Byung gnas Shes rab, apparently with good access to land property, established communities at Nya mo skyur and Skam bu'i gnas (var. Dkon phu gnas) in the 10th and 11th centuries. Nel pa paṇḍita, in the subsequent sentence, lists another community with the name Bye zhing that might also go back to the vast founding activities of the Gnyos scion.[122] The toponym Bye zhing (var. Dbya zhing gnas) may be localised at Lugs stod in the western part of the valley (see Fig. 3).[123] The Gnyos's influence during the *phyi dar* movement might go back to family's migration to G.yor po in the imperial period.

3.4.6 The Rngog[124]

In the late 1040s, perhaps while Gnyos 'Byung gnas Shes rab was still alive, Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982-1054) passed through Lower Gzhung. Biographical sources report that the Bengali master and his entourage found themselves in front of closed doors at Nya mo skyur, not welcome by its inhabitants.[125] No more than a century later, Nya mo skyur was taken over by

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[121] *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 16.5-17.2 (cited above); see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 664 (IId and IIIb).

[122] Uebach 1987, 148f. (f. 22b4): *de nas 'brog gzad dang: ra la sgang dang: bye zhing dang: sha zan gnas la sogs pa gyes:*; see also *Yig tshang gsal ba'i me long*: 88.5-6 (cited in footnote above); also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 664 (IIIb).

[123] An abandoned ruin site on the eastern mountain slope of Lugs stod is locally known as "Bro pa" or "Gye? *zhing rgyang ro*" ("ruins of Gye? zhing"); personal communication with Rgyal grub gling native, 02.2021, geographical position: 29.271202, 90.868210. Bye zhing figures repeatedly in Ta'i si tu's testament as a location where the Phag gru ruler sojourned or passed through; cf. *Po ti bse ru*: 122.15, 180.8-10, 281.17-18. According to a fifteenth-century lineage history, the Tsha mig tshogs pa from among the Four Communities safeguarding Śākyaśrībhadra's *vinaya* tradition (i.e. Jo gdan tshogs pa sde bzhi) reunited in the second half of the 14th century at Bye zhing temple of Gzhung under the mediative efforts of the Gong dkar district officer Sangs rgyas Dpal rin; see Shākya dge slong Grags pa rdo rje, *Mkhan rgyud rnam gsum byon tshul gyi rnam thar*: 23a6, here Gzhung gi bye zhing lha khang; see also Heimbel 2013: 196. The Gzhung valley counts other, unlocalised *phyi dar* settlements that might go back to earlier, imperial (?) foundations, e.g. Ra srags kyi gtsug lag khang in Lower Gzhung (est. by 'Be so ker ba; cf. *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 727.5-6, here Ra sregs kyi lha khang) and Sgre mkhar (est. by 'Be so Ker ba or Bhe ston Rdo rje Shes rab; cf. Uebach 1987: 140f. (f. 20b7); *Yig tshang gsal ba'i me long*: 87.3, here Gzhung gi Sgre 'khar; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 475.1-2). Sgre mkhar might be related to the Atiśa cave preserved at present-day Thar pa gling, locally known by the name Stag dkar Gad phug (geographical position: 29.274428, 90.929793; see also *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 163.9-10, here Gzhung gi Stag dkar gyi Gang phug; *Rnam rab guide*: 190, here Rta dkar Gad phug). The unidentified Gong dkar temple of the Five Buddha families (Gong dkar gyi Rigs lnga lha khang), mentioned in fifteenth-century hagiographies (e.g. *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 18a4), might have also been located in Gzhung of Gong dkar district. An old map of Lama Ugyen's itinerary (i.e. *Parts of Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan showing Lama Ugyen Gyatso's third season's explorations in Tibet in 1883*. Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1916) locates the "Rianga lha khang" between Sban tsha (here "Pan dsa") and Rwa ba smad (here "Ra medh").

[124] Registered orthographic variants include Rngogs, Rngegs, Ngegs, Gnyags; cf. Hazod 2009: 173; Hazod 2019: 66f.

[125] *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 163.8-9, here Nya mo gyur; *Snar thang gi gdan rabs*, 135.1-2: *de nas nya mo gyur du byon pas lo paṇ mi theg zer te sgo bsdams/*; *A ti sha'i rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, 601.19-602.4: *de nas nya mo kyur du byon pa dang sgo bsdams* {gloss: [...] [602] [...] *dge bshes spyan*

another prestigious family that came to shape the valley's landscape in centuries to come. The estate that sprawled across the lush fields of the lower valley became the residence of Rngog Mdo sde (1078/90-1154/66), the son of the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud founder Rngog Chos sku Rdo rje (11th cent.). Mdo sde continued the family lineage at Nya mo skyur, where he held a religious council in the mid-12th century and would later pass away.[126] The estate may have already passed into the hands of his father, who was born in Gzhung[127] and given the epithet Rngog Gzhung pa. Rngog Chos rdor had invited Mar pa Lo tsā ba (1012-97) to his homeland and established the family seat of Gzhung Ri bo Khyung lding in the upper valley at present-day Gzhung steng (Ch. 雄达, Xióng dá). In the following centuries, the Rngog Gzhung pa line, as they became known, gained dominance over large parts of the valley. Rngog Chos rdor's descendants founded several temples and family abodes (*bla brang*) throughout the valley, many sites of which can still be traced back to their activities (Fig. 8).[128] Foremost among these are Nya mo skyur, Gzhung Ri bo Khyung lding (geographical position: 29.193333, 90.983551), Spre zhing (var. Spre'u zhing, Sprel zhing; Ch. 雄扁兴, Xióng biǎn xīng; geographical position: 29.210653, 90.964235), Dben tsha thel (var. Sben tsha thel;[129] geographical position: 29.209510, 90.961109), Zlum khyung (var. Ldum chung (?);[130] geographical position: 29.211639, 90.962136), Se lung (var. Si lung; geographical position: 29.197139, 90.933056), Bsam gtan gling (approx. geographical position: 29.178786, 90.951001), Chos 'khor gling (Ch. 琼格岭, Qióng gé lǐng; geographical position: 29.236585, 90.891882), Sras thog bla brang (Ch. 色拖; Sè tuō; geographical position: 29.129770, 90.899018), Sras mgon bla brang (Ch. 散圭, Sàn guī; approx. geographical position: 29.163779, 90.905295), 'Bu thang (geographical position: 29.225941, 90.890397) and Rngog tshang 'og ma Thar pa gling (var. Dbon skya Thar pa gling; Ch. 塔尔巴林, Tǎěr Bālín; geographical position: 29.273433, 90.922913). Until

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snga ba'i zhal nas/ gzhung pa'i gra pa byung ba kun la shog med glags med g.yog po og nag pa nga'i jo bo la sgo bsdams phod pa gsung skad} nas lo paṇ mi theg zer ba dang /[...]; cf. also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 249.

[126] Rngog Mdo sde, also known by the pen name Zhe sdang Rdo rje, had gathered Mar pa's relics at Nya mo skyur and built a reliquary; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 792.6-7; *Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 491f., here Nya mo gyur (Translation in Roerich 1996: 406f.); see also *Pad dkar chos 'byung*: 459; also Ducher 2017: 258f., 262ff., 397f. (on the religious council), 268, 399f., 417f. (on his death); Ducher 2020: 156. Nya mo skyur represented the seat of one branch of the Rngog family in the following centuries.

[127] *Deb ther dmar po*: 75.18-19, here Gzhu Ri bo (*sic!*); *Rgya bod yig tshang*: 255.3; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 790.5, here *'khrungs yul gzhung ri bor 'khrungs/*; cf. also *Pad dkar chos 'byung*: 459.4; *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 17.

[128] Coordinates according to Gzhung natives, personal communications, winter 2012/13, 2015, 2018, 2021. See also *Rnam rab guide*: 169-195, *Rnam rab lung pa'i gnas dang gnas shul khag gi ngo sprod* for a detailed geographical survey. On the Rngog sites of Chos sdings and Rngog pa'i bla brang, see Chapter 4 below.

[129] *Deb ther dmar po*: 75.23; nowadays referred to as Dben gnas sgang, see *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 20-22.

[130] *Rgya bod yig tshang* (255.17) and *Deb ther dmar po* (76.14) mention a site called Ldum chung. See also *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 22f., here Khyung lding lha khang.

the decline of the family line in the 17th century,[131] Gzhung constituted the headquarters of the Rngog pa sect, the area where their teachings were transmitted from one generation to the next.[132]



Fig. 8: Post-imperial Rngog pa presence in Gzhung. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 11.2017; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

The valley's links with the family line, however, go back in time much later. The lineage histories of the Rngog recount that family members had been granted land on the southern Gtsang po already during the time of Khri Srong lde btsan (r. 756-ca. 800). Rngog Bsod nams dpal (15th cent.) gives the following account in the *Rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, a work based on an earlier family chronicle authored by Dpal gyi rdo rje (14th cent.):

Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba, 3a4-5:

> [...] *dgos su rngog gnya' la: stag gsum gyi glag pa la seng ge dkar mo'i gung btang ba gnang: gser gyi yi ge rtseg mar mnos nas: yul yang gra'i yid dgur zhing dor brgya'i gling dang: bran bzi' dang : 'or brgyad dang : chu mi dang : kha gze la sogs ste mi khyim nyi shu 'bangs su bcad: jo mo shud bu bza' blangs:*

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[131] Smith 2001: 325, fn. 740; Ducher 2017: 351-354; Ducher 2020: 142, 161. According to Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho's supplement volumes to the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, Nya mo skyur and Spre'u zhing passed into the hands of Bla mkhyen Ngag dbang in the 17th century; see *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8, 443; *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 9, 357. A restoration under Bla mkhyen Ngag dbang, whose full name seems to have been Nang ra ba (= Rnam rab pa ?) Bla mkhyen Ngag dbang 'Jam dpal blo gros, is recorded for Nya skyur temple in the fire-hare year (*me yos*) and again in the iron-horse year (*lcags rta*); *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8 (*nya*), 443f.; also *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 9, 406. Rnam rab Spre zhing was restored at the same time; cf. *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8, 432.

[132] On the central teachings of the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud see Ducher 2020: 146-153.

> In particular, Rngog [Btsan] gnya' was given [by the emperor] skin [made from] three tigers (*stag gsum gyi glag pa*) with a white lioness [coat] as the lower part (*gung btang ba*). He obtained [insignia] with golden letters attached to it (*rtseg mar*) [and] also lands: in Yid dgu of Gra, fields (*zhing*) [in the size of] a land plot (*gling*) of hundred ploughing units (*dor*), and as subjects he was assigned (*'bangs su bcad*) the *bran* Bzi' and 'Or brgyad and Chu mi and twenty households including Kha gze and others. He took a Shud bu lady as wife.[133] (trans. by author)

Earlier in the text, Rngog Btsan gnya' (b. 744) is portrayed as a terrifying warrior under Khri Srong lde'u btsan who, for his successful warfare at the Tibetan-Chinese border, was awarded with land and subjects: The emperor rewarded him with insignia, hundred fields in Yid dgu (var. Yi gur) of the Grwa region, servants (*bran*) and households (*mi khyim*). Rngog Btsan gnya' also figures in the *Blue Annals* and in Gu ru bkra shis's religious chronicle (early 19th cent.) where he is portrayed as the emperor's minister (*blon po*) called "the Great Rngog" (Rngog chen po).[134]

The lineage history by Bsod nams dpal also conveys that Btsan gnya's grandfather, Rngog Dpal khrom, had served as representative of a thousand-district (*stong tshab*) headed by the Mchims family.[135] Hazod (2019: 67, fn. 17) contextualises this piece of information by clarifying that "[t]his either refers to the Mchims-dominated area of eastern G.yo ru (G.yo ru smad) or to the Mchims branch of Grva". The text continues with describing the merits of Btsan gnya's grandson, Rngog Btsan gzigs Snang ba from Snang thang (?).[136] In Dol Phu mangs/mda' (?) (var. Dol phu Ma bu), Btsan gzigs Snang ba had obtained arable land in the size of three hundred ploughing units, together with forty households as subjects. The Blo bo from among his subjects/servants built the Zangs mkhar fortification[137] and controlled the means of transportation (?) in the area.

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[133] Alternative translation in Ducher 2017: 212, 376. The parallel text passage in the *Rngog pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* (3a7-8) reads: *dgos su rngog gtsan bnya' la stag gsum gyi blag pa dang : seng ge dkar mo'i gung btang pa snang // gser gyi yi ge rtser mar*? (= *rtseg mar*) *mnos nas: yul yang grwa'i yi gur/ zhing dor rgya'i gling dang : bran gzi dang/ 'or brgyad dang : chu ma dang/ kha bze la sogs ste mi khyim nyi shu 'bangs su bcad: jo mo shud bu bza' slangs.* (Translation in Walther 2012: 95f.). See also Hazod 2019: 67, fn. 17.

[134] *Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 391.19; Roerich 1996: 324. *Gu ru bkra shis chos 'byung*, vol. 1, 545.3-4: *rgyal po khri srong lde'u btsan gyi blon po rngog chen po'am gnyan btsan gyis* [...], here referred to as Gnyan btsan.

[135] *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 2b1: *stong dpon ni 'chims: stong tshab ni rngog dpal khrom gyis bgyis so//*; parallel text passage in *Rngog pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*, 2b3-4: *stong dpon ni mchims stong tshab ni rngog dpal khrom gyis bgyis so:*. See also Walther 2016: 519; Ducher 2017: 209, 374.

[136] Mentioned as the birthplace of the two successive family members, Rngog Btsan pa Rin po che and his son Rngog Btsan gzigs snang, Snang thang (var. Rnam thang) seems to have been an important family residence in the vicinity; cf. *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 3a5 and 3a6 (glosses).

[137] A place named Bzang mkhar (Ch. 索康定, Suǒ Kāngdìng) can be located in Upper Gzhung; personal communication with Gzhung native, 2012/13; see also *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 46.9, here Bzang mkhar; *Rnam rab guide*: 169.15, 184.6, here Zangs dkar.

Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba, 3a6-7:

> *de'i sras rngog btsan gzigs snang* {gloss: *snang thang* (= *rnam thang*?) *du babs*} *ba lags: bu mo sbas che btsan la sjangs: dol phu mangs/mda['] (?) su zhing dor sum brgya bcad: bran li dang : bya dang : rang 'gro dang: rang rta dang: blo bo dang: mi khyim bzhi bcu 'bangs su bcad: la khra la khre la dang: 'brog phar cham tshur cham dang tshun chad kho ra khor yug du bcad: blo bos zangs ril gyi thang du zangs 'khar byas: chu rta 2 ka la dbang mdzad: jo mo lde sman bza' blangs:*
>
> His [i.e. Rngog Btsan pa Rin po che's] son was Rngog Btsan gzigs Snang ba {[who] descended to Snang thang}. [His] daughter (*bu mo*; i.e. Rngog Btsan pa Rin po che's) was sent [as bride] to Sbas che btsan. In Dol Phu mangs/mda['] (?),[138] fields [in the size of] three hundred ploughing units (*dor*) were assigned (*bcad*) [to him]. As subjects [he] was assigned the *bran* Li and Bya and Rang 'gro and Rang rta and Blo bo and forty households. [He] was assigned passes and nomadic pastures and the boundaries of the dominion.[139] The Blo bo erected the Zangs fort (Zangs 'khar) at the plain of Zangs ril and exerted authority over both, the water and horse [transportation?]. [Btsan gzigs Snang ba] took a Lde sman lady as his wife.[140] (trans. by author)

Gu ru Bkra shis portrays Rngog Btsan gzigs snang as a disciple of Padmasambhava and the tantric ritual preceptor (*sku rim pa*) of the king (i.e. Khri srong lde'u btsan). Gu ru Bkra shis links his lineage to the Yar 'brog lake area,[141] as does 'Gos lo for the lineage descending from Rngog chen po *aka* Rngog Btsan gnya'.[142] Considering the acquisition of land in Grwa and Dol in the late 8th or

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[138] The toponym Dol Phu mangs (var. Dol phu ma bu) can also be understood as "Mangs" (Ma bu) of Dol phu (i.e. Upper Dol). Alternatively, the text might indicate here a contracted form for *phu mda' su*, referring to fields granted in the Upper and the Lower Dol valley.

[139] Translation of this sentence uncertain.

[140] Alternative translation in Ducher 2017: 214, 378. The parallel text passage in *Rngog pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* (3b1-3) reads: *de'i sras rngog btsan gzigs snang pa lags so/ bu mo sbas lce tshan la sdzangs// dol phu ma bur zhing dor sum rgya gcad/ bran li dang/ bya dang/ rang {'}gro dang/ rang rta dang/ blo bo dang/ mi khyim bzhi bcu 'bangs su gcad/ la khra la khre la 'brog phar cham dang tshur cham tshun chad: 'khor ra 'khor yug du gcad: glo bas zangs ril gyi ltems su zangs 'khar byas chu rta ra ga la dbang mdzad jo mo lhe sman bza' blangs* (Translation in Walther 2012: 96). See also Walther 2016: 520f.; Hazod 2019: 67, fn. 17.

[141] *Gu ru bkra shis chos 'byung*, vol. 1, 545.9-12: [...] *yar 'brog de'i phyi rol mtsho chen po'i 'gram du grong chags pa'i slob dpon padma'i dngos slob rngog btsun gzigs snang* (= *btsan gzigs snang*) *zhes pas rgyal po'i sku rim gyi sngags mkhan chen mo mdzad/.*

[142] *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 1, 392.5-7: [...] *zer ba de'i brgyud pa/ ya 'brog do'i phyi rol gyi mtsho chen po'i 'gram du grong chags pa'i sngags rnying ma ba'i dge bshes rdo rje gzhon nu zhes bya ba la sras lnga byung ba'i che ba rngog legs pa'i shes rab/.* (Translation in Roerich 1996: 324). Rngog Btsan gnya' and Rngog Btsan gzigs snang are also mentioned in *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 790.6-7: *rngog gtsan gnyan* (= *btsan gnya'*) *gyis chos rgyal khri srong gi sku srog bton zhing rngog gtsan gzigs snang* (= *btsan gzigs snang*) *zhes slob dpon padma'i dngos slob tu gyur pas rgyal po'i sku rim pa sngags mkhan chen po mdzad/.* See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 175, fn. 423(†). The authors locate Yar 'brog Do in the middle of the Yar 'brog G.yu mtsho lake; cf. *ibd.*: 169f., fn. 422, Map 2 (*The westerm* (*sic!*) *section of gZad Chu-shul*), here Do nang; Hazod 2009: 173, 220, Map 7.4, here Rdo nang ri); Ducher (2017: 216) points out that a

early 9th century, the Rngog presence in Yar 'brog can probably be explained as a later settlement of the family line.[143]

Unmentioned by Bsod nams dpal, the Lde'u chronicles mention two further Rngog descendants named Sngog Dpal gsum sgra che and Rngog Rgyal to ro rgyal. Together with a certain *blon po* Dgu khri thog sgra, they served as Khri 'Od srung's ministers (*blon po*) and must thus have lived at the time of the civil revolt (*kheng log*) in the middle of the 9th century.[144] According to the historical accounts, Tibet's last emperor Khri 'Od srung and his fraction controlled the Left Horn with Yar lung at its centre after the empire had split into new regional principalities.[145] One can assume that the three ministers administered lands in the realm of their king – maybe in those parts of G.yo ru for which the above sources have claimed presence of the Rngog family.

The analysis of historical works in combination with interviews on local geography allowed me to map toponyms linked to the region's ancenstral family lineages. With the exception of the branches of the Rngog and Gnyos, however, the identification of any particular "lineage territory" proved difficult due to the fragmentary state of evidence. Because the histories assert the regional presence of different ancestral lineages for the period of the 8th/9th century, it remains impossible to connect them to more specific territories in the area. Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423) have also noted for Grwa, Dol and Gzhung that "[t]he clan distribution in the area down through history remained complex." Some of the sources cited here claim that descendants of the Sna nam, Shud pu and Sbal ti exerted power over the entirety of the three valleys of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. Without further evidence such claims seem historically too simplified. One might speculate whether these family branches were in control of mountain passes and transportation routes next to each other and inhabited distinct settlements, portions of arable land and pastures within the same valleys. Such a scenario in which family lineages would have been scattered across the landscape would make it extremely difficult to reconstrue individual clans' territories and their spheres of influence.[146]

4. Burial mound sites

This pertains also to the identification of imperial grave fields that have been located in the region. Among the several hundred burial mound fields surveyed for the *Tibetan tumulus tradition* (TTT)

Rngog ancestor with the name "Yul sbyin settled in sGog, which is a place on the peninsula called Do, on the northern shore of the Yar 'brog Lake". See also SRC: L821.

[143] Hazod 2019: 67, fn. 17.

[144] *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 231.12-13; *Lde'u chos 'byung*: 142.1-2, here *blon po ne'u khri thog sgra spyang sprel dang rdegs dpal gsum sgra rje spangs dang / rngog rgyal tho re gel pa rnams kyis byas te /* [...]; see also *G.yu yi phreng ba*, vol. 1, 436.11-12: [...] *blon po dgu khri thog sgra dang / rngog dpal gsum sgra che/ rngog rgyal to re rgyal rnams kyis byas/*; Vitali 2004b: 110, fn. 6.

[145] Hazod 2013: 101f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 23; *G.yu yi phreng ba*: vol. 1, 441-443.

[146] Elsewhere, Hazod (2018: 20) identifies the mobility and the transregional presence of families as further challenges for determinating (ancestral) territories.

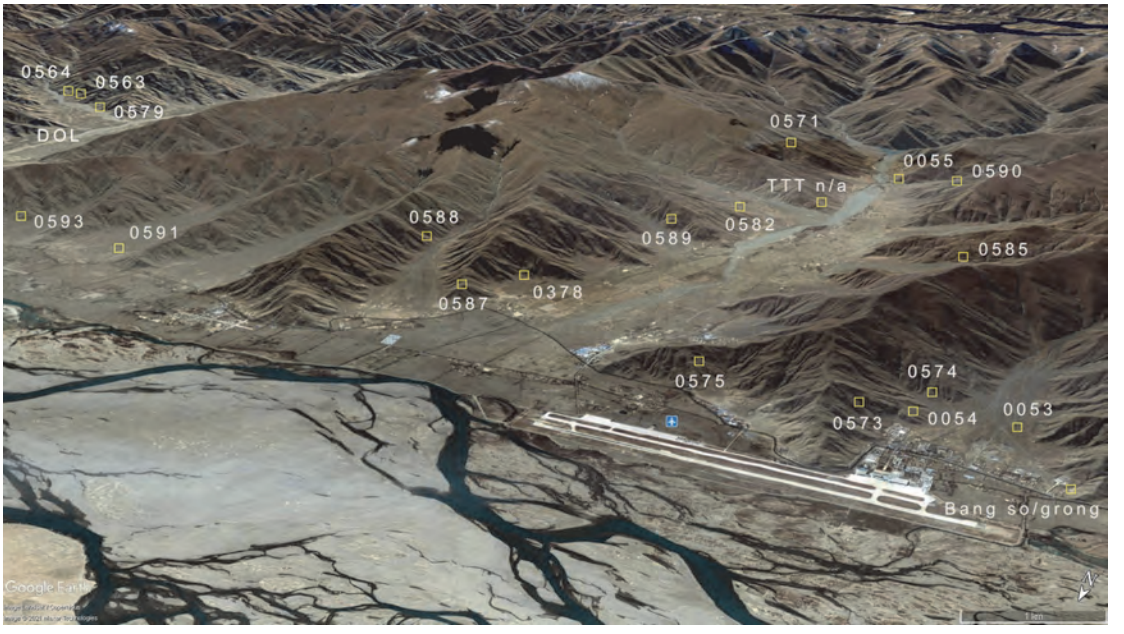


Fig. 9: Burial mound sites in Gzhung (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2005; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

project,[147] there are sixteen tomb sites recorded for the Gzhung valley (Fig. 9). To link those sites to any dynastic family, however, has so far been impossible. Hazod notes in this regard that "it is often exactly this regional multi-presence in the history of the clans that makes it difficult to identify a lineage's principal home territory and place of its (chief) burial ground."[148] It follows that all family lineages for which the histories claim presence – the Sna nam, Shud pu, Mchims, Sbal ti, Gnyos and the Rngog – must be considered as possible candidates for the burial grounds discovered in the Gzhung valley. At the same time, one should admit the dominance of the Rngog gzhung pa line from at least the 11th to the 15th century. Though unreported in the available sources, their prevailing might have resulted from longstanding ancestral links to the region.

Following Hazod's previous work, this final chapter will briefly introduce the burial mound sites of the valley and put them into a regional context.[149] Certainly, most impressive among the grave

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[147] The long-term FWF project on the tumulus tradition of imperial Central Tibet is conducted at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The project research involved extensive *in situ* surveys and remote topographic analysis from satellite imagery over the past decades. The surveyed sites of the project (616 entries) were recently published as a map with an annotated index (scale 1:800.000); see Kriz and Hazod 2020. As for March 2021, the TTT project website lists 636 sites, see URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/sites-by-id/, accessed: 03.2021.

[148] TTT website, *Tombs and clan*, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/tombs-and-clan/, accessed: 01.29.2021.

[149] For a classification of imperial burial sites see recently Kriz and Hazod 2020: 9f. and TTT website, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/introduction-and-legend/, accessed: 19.01.2020. An evaluation of presently registered site types is presented in Hazod 2019: 22-25. Size specifications relate to the front of the (trapezoid) mounds at ground level, where rather than the actual walls, the earth sloping at the side of the mounds was taken as the reference point (*ibd.*: 111).

fields of Gzhung are the tombs behind Rgyal grub gling town (Ch. 甲竹林镇, Jiǎ zhúlín zhèn) registered under TTT no. 0053.

> TTT 0053
> 3630m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);
> coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (35m);
> not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);
> Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.280000, 90.89361;
> References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Hazod 2019: 112; Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L758.

TTT 0053 features ten middle-sized, rectangular tombs (around 10-35m) that can be seen from the plane when approaching the Lhasa-Gonggar airport on a clear day (Fig. 12). According to an exiled Rgyal grub gling native the site where the six smaller tombs are located (geographical position: 29.277512, 90.889916) is called "Min ji" or "Min ji'i pu" (spelling uncertain; Min ci ?).[150] In 2010, I captured the tomb field while visiting the Gong dkar Chos sde branch temple of Chos sdings (var. Chos lding; Ch. 曲定, Qū dìng) on the eastern mountain slope behind the airport town (Fig. 10).[151]



Fig. 10: TTT 0053 Burial mound field behind Rgyal grub gling, seen from Chos sdings temple. (Photo: Mathias Fermer 2010)

[150] Personal communication, 02.2021: *smin bye'i pu/ yul mi tsho'i kha rgyun la smin bye zhes zer.*
[151] See also Jackson 2015: 246, no. 9.

According to Gong dkar Chos sde senior monks (i.e. pre-1950?), the origin of the temple below the grassy pasture known as Spang kha che goes back to the period of the early dissemination (*bstan pa snga dar*; i.e. 7th-9th cent.),[152] a thrilling claim for which I could not find any textual support. The restored temple is part of a larger complex with a damaged *stūpa* and several building ruins including the wall remains of a building referred to as Rgyal po khang (now a *yul lha* site).[153] Formerly, a Buddha image (Ston pa) surrounded by a retinue of eight great bodhisattva sons (*Nye ba'i sras chen brgyad*) had been the main support of Chos sdings's central chapel (*gtsang khang*).[154]



Fig. 11: Restored Buddha statue in the *inner sanctum* of Chos sdings (Photo: Mathias Fermer 2010)

[152] *Gong dkar chos sde'i gnas yig*: 95, here Chos lding ri khrod.

[153] Personal communication with pre-1950 monks from Rgyal grub gling, 2010, 2012.

[154] Personal communication with pre-1950 monks from Rgyal grub gling, 2010, 2012. According to another Gongkar Choede monk from Rgyal grub gling, the lower part of the Buddha clay image (*'jim sku*) with its solid throne foundation survived until the 1980s and was later restored; personal communication, 02.2021. The same informant reports that Gongkar monks performed rituals for Lha mo 'Dod khams ma (i.e. Lha mo Dud sol ma; Skt. Dhūmāṅgārī) in the Lha mo chapel on the second floor; personal communication, 02.2021. This might hint at a connection with the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud of the valley. In fact, a large fifteenth-century Rngog pa monastery with the name Gzhung Ri bo Chos lding gi *chos grwa chen po* is mentioned in Ducher 2017: 349.

Several natives that were asked about the rectangular shaped structures in the back of their hometown have never recognised them as imperial-time Tibetan tombs (*bod kyi bang so*).[155] In close distance to the large tombs, on a mountain offset to the south-east of the town, lies the site of TTT no. 0054, another field of several small tomb ruins (5-10m), round and rectangular in shape.

TTT 0054
3665m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.28138, 90.90083;
References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L759.

Behind the settlement of Rog rog (Ch. 若若, Ruò ruò) in the lower part of the central valley stretch (see Fig. 6), lies TTT no. 0378 which is classified as a middle-sized tomb ruin measuring a front length of approximately 25m. According to local accounts, several clay images (*phyag tsha*) of Rwa lo tsā ba Rdo rje grags (1016-1128/98) surfaced under a white earth *stūpa* (*sa 'bum dkar po*) at Rog rog.[156]

TTT 0378
3630m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (25m) (?);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
Rog rog, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.26475, 90.95681;
References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L757.

At Lha yul (Ch. 拉玉, Lā yù), in close proximity to the valley's water reservoir[157] (*chu mdzod*) at the convergence of the two upper valley branches (i.e. Phu gnyis), Hazod identified rectangular, coffer-shaped tombs during a field trip in 2010 (TTT site no. 0055; see Fig. 14). The burial field on a mountain slope above Lha yul, at an elevation of 3810m, features at least three middle-sized tomb ruins (ca. 25-36m). Online satellite maps indicate the name Pí jiāng (Ch. 皮江) at this geographical position (Tibetan orthography unknown).[158]

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[155] Hazod reports similar experiences from his fieldwork. He told me about common synonyms used by the locals to refer to burial mound sites: "Little Lhasa" (Lha sa chung ma), earth heap (*sa phungs*), landing place of a Garuḍa (Bya khyung 'bab sa), etc.; personal communication, 11.2018; see also TTT website, *Tumulus fields in Central Tibet: local perceptions and classifications*, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/perception/, accessed: 29.01.2021.

[156] *Rnam rab guide*, 171.19-172.2: [...] *rog rog ces pa'i lung gshongs nang sa 'bum dkar* [172] *po yod pa'i 'og nas rwa lo tsā ba'i phyag tshwa yin par grags pa'i byin can gyi swatstsha 'ga' zhig thon/.*

[157] The reservoir, locally referred to as Mdo la'i chu mdzod, was constructed in 2013; geographical position: 29.173941, 90.931804.

[158] Google Maps, accessed: 19.01.2021. On Lha yul see *Rnam rab guide*, 169.16, 186.15-16: *lha yul grong tsho'i byang gi ri steng du gdengs phyi dgon pa'i shul dang* [...]; *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 46.7.

TTT 0055
3810m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (35m);
visited (2010);
Lha yul, Rgya ri, central valley, geographical position: 29.19597, 90.92458;
References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Hazod 2019: 112; Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L760.

In preparation for the present paper, Hazod and myself were able to detect further grave fields in the valleys of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. These tumulus sites, identified exclusively through aerial and satellite imagery have meanwhile been added to the TTT database,[159] and are mentioned in Hazod's recent study on the chief ministers' graves (Hazod 2019).[160] The sites also figure in the project's recent cartographic realisation of an annotated map of *The Burial Mound Sites of Imperial Central Tibet*.[161] Considering the historical and physical transformations of the environment addressed in Chapter 2, it needs to be pointed out that the findings in this domain also remain provisional until the sites can be inspected *in situ*. What might at first look like the traces of ancient tombs on satellite images may occasionally turn out to be the remains of much later building structures (e.g. fortifications, monasteries, temples, *stūpa*s, shrines) or simply geometrical rock formations on the surface.

The burial sites studied in preparation for this workshop are mainly of mound type C (coffer-shaped) with front side or diametral dimensions of 20m or more. While completing this paper, locals informed me about two further sites that might have retained tombs until their disappearance in the 1990s. A Rnam rab zhol native told me about a potential burial ground in the Lower Spre zhing valley, not far from the bank of the Shar 'gram pa river (Fig. 6).[162] According to him, valuable findings (scriptures, gold, relicts, sculls?) surfaced when chunks of the mountain side were blasted away in the 1990s (geographical position: 29.218672, 90.930210). The history of the place could not further be verified, and it cannot be excluded that it constituted a later, post-dynastic Buddhist relict site or a place where locals may have buried precious religious artefacts to save them from

[159] TTT website, under *Sites in Lokha prefecture, I.4 Gong dkar county*, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/i-lokha-prefecture/, accessed: 19.01.2020.

[160] Hazod (2019: 117) lists the TTT IDs 0563-0579 and 0582-0593. Among those, the ten new burial sites in the Dol (Dold) valley (i.e. TTT 0563-0569, 0576, 0578-0579) that constituted with Gzhung an administrative district of the empire will not be addressed here. Three burial grounds in the Zhur valley of Dol (i.e. TTT 0563, 0564, 0579) should nevertheless be mentioned. Dol gyi zhur, which is mentioned in several medieval sources (e.g. *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 44b2), can probably be identified as the valley where royal residence of Btsan po Rgyal gtsug ru (cf. Dotson 2009: 103f., 244) was located. The burial fields of Zhur accommodate coffer-shaped tomb ruins of middle-size (25-35m) on the lower hillocks of the southern valley (see Fig. 9). Nowadays, Zhur (var. Shur; Ch. 秀伍村, Xiù wǔ cūn) belongs to Rnam rgyal zhol xiang (Ch. 朗杰学乡, Lǎng jié xué xiāng) of Dol.

[161] Cf. Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13, under *Gong dkar County*.

[162] Personal communication, 02.2021. On the other potential tomb site located behind Rgyal grub gling see below under "Bang grong/so".

destruction during the "Cultural Revolution".[163] Satellite images show a small shrine on the top of the slope at the mountain foot. In higher elevation, about 350 meters above the shrine, lies another possible grave field of with heavily eroded, dispersed round mounds measuring about 6m in diameter, which also has not yet been included in the TTT database:

Spre zhing *bang so* [TTT n/a]
3770m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
Type and size of grave field unknown (site strongly damaged);
Spre zhing, Rgya ri, central valley, approx. geographical position: 29.215857, 90.932361.

The satellite images convey another grave field (TTT 0582) on the opposite, northern mountain ridge of the Lower Spre zhing valley.

TTT 0582
3760m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);
Spre zhing, Rgya ri, central valley, geographical position: 29.22609, 90.94035;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

Further tomb fields have also been identified in the lower valley at Rgyal grub gling (TTT 0573, TTT 0574). The fields in close distance to TTT 0054 feature small round and rectangular-shaped mounds (under 10m) scattered on the eastern mountain slope of the town and to the south of TTT 0054.

TTT 0573
3660m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C), round tomb (MT-A);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);
Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.28444, 90.90472;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0574
3660m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C), round tomb (MT-A) (?);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);
Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.27833, 90.89944;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

Assuming that tombs were established in close proximity to settlements,[164] the area around Rgyal grub gling must have been the homeland of an influential imperial family lineage, maybe from among those attested in the above histories. The area shows the highest density of grave fields and

[163] Personal communication with Rnam rab zhol native, 06.2021. Later, since the 1980s, this mountain side became a major spot where the local community of Rnam rab zhol used to extract stones (*rdo brkos sa/~ thon sa*) for the construction of buildings.
[164] Hazod 2018: 9 and Hazod in this volume (Chapter 2).



Fig. 12: Burial mound sites around Rgyal grub gling, south of the Lhasa-Gonggar airport (Photo: David Cowhig, [Virginia], 18.10.2009, URL: https://m.flickr.com/photos/74568056@N00/4094137965/, accessed: 14.03.2021; additional data: M. Fermer 01.2021)

accommodates the most impressive and largest tombs of TTT site no. 0053. In addition, there is evidence for the existence of another burial ground in the vicinity. An exiled Rgyal grub gling native informed me about a place near Lha dkar po ri zur that was locally called "Bang gro[ng]" or "Bang so" (in the 1970s/80s and apparently before the Chinese arrival) and most probably constituted a tomb site (*bang so'i grong*; see Fig. 12).[165]

> Bang grong/so [TTT n/a]
> 3595m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);
> Type and size of grave field unknown (site strongly damaged);
> Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, approx. geographical position: 29.289029, 90.885523;
> References: personal communication, Rgyal grub gling native, 02.2021.

An old xylograph carved in the fifteenth century at Rgyal grub gling points to the village's former wealth and glory by referring to it as 'Byor ldan Rgyal grub gling.[166] In addition to that, some locals pointed out to me that Rgyal grub gling was called "Gnon" (spelling uncertain) in ancient times. In the 1970s/80s, according to several informants, the neighbouring village of Gling stod (Fig. 12) was

[165] Personal communication, 02.2021.

[166] Cf. Bsod nams Rtse mo, *Don yod zhags pa lha lnga'i stod pa lo rgyus bsdus don rgyud chung gi ṭi ka dang bcas pa bzhugs*: 13a7. Rgyal grub gling is also mentioned in *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 46.12.

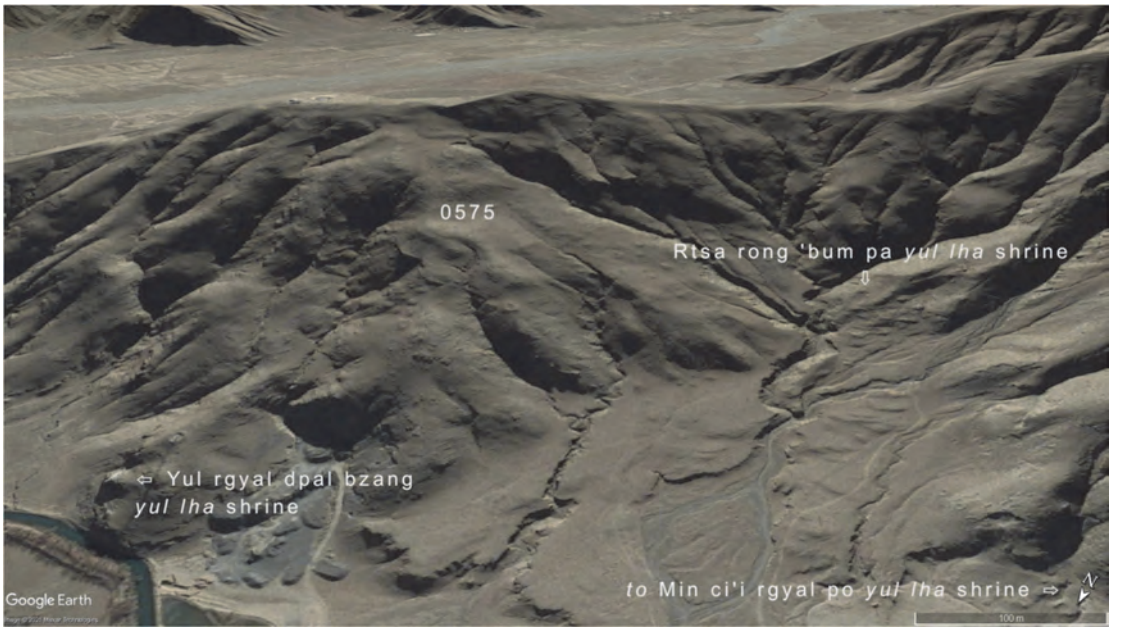


Fig. 13: Burial mound field TTT 0575 on the back mountain of 'O rag, locally known as Yul rgyal Dpal bzang. (Map data: Google Earth, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2003; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

still referred to as "Gnon stod" and the valley's upper part as Gnon phu (or Gnon gyi phu).[167] This oral toponym may allow to link the valley to the ancient Mnon family (var. Rnon, Snon, Gnon), although this requires further research.[168]

Not far from Rgyal grub gling lies TTT site no. 0575. The field on the wide-stretching mountain behind present-day 'O rag (Ch. 沃拉, Wò lā) comprises numerous coffer-shaped tumulus ruins dispersed throughout the place (Fig. 13).[169] Among locals, this part of the mountain slope is known as Yul rgyal Dpal bzang or Yul rgyal/G.yul rgyal (spelling unverified).[170]

> TTT 0575
> 3675m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
> coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m); additional mounds in vicinity;
> not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);
> Yul rgyal Dpal bzang (var. G.yul rgyal Dpal bzang, Yul rgyal), 'O rag, Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.281800, 90.92295;
> References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L876.

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[167] Personal communication with Gzhung and Rgyal grub gling natives, 06.2021.

[168] The homeland of the Mnon family has been localised in the area of present-day Rgya ma; see Fig. 4 above (here Snon on map); cf. also Hazod 2009: 216, 223, Map 7.8; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 182, fn. 433.

[169] For a close-up of the grave field with marked tomb mounds, see also TTT website, no. 0575, Fig. 1, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites_by_id/0575/, accessed: 19.01.2021.

[170] Personal communication with 'O rag natives, 08.2018, 01.2021.

The toponym Yul rgyal can be linked to the place deity (*yul lha*) of the same name which is worshipped at the mountain foot (geographical position: 29.284919, 90.924061) by the villagers of 'O rag Bsam grub khang. The shrine of Yul rgyal is one among several *yul lha* sites on the back mountain of 'O rag (Fig. 13).

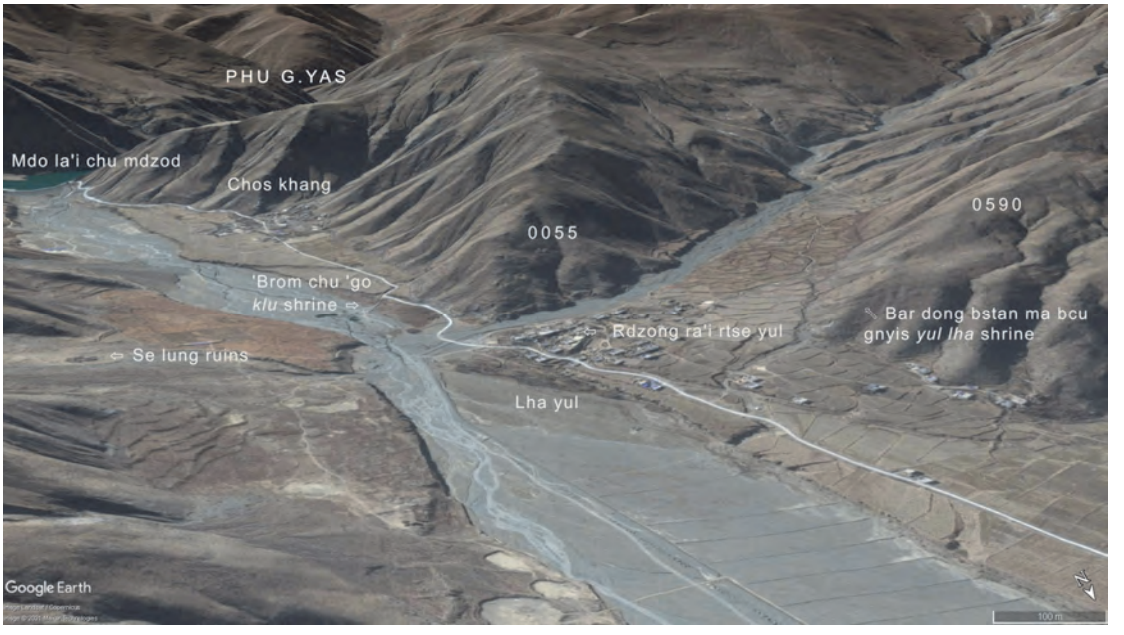


Fig. 14: Burial mound fields and *yul lha* shrines at Lha yul. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 13.2016; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

The *yul lha* sites of "Rtsa rong 'bum pa" (spelling uncertain) and of "Min ji rgyal po" (Mi'am ci'i Rgyal po?) are located in close proximity of Yul rgyal,[171] while the villagers of 'O rag Kha byang worship their local place deity, Lha tshangs pa [dkar po?], on a low ridge on the eastern part of the mountain (Fig. 2). The presence of *yul lha* seats in the environs of the Yul rgyal grave field might point to the remains of an earlier, imperial-era (?) landscape at 'O rag.[172]

A second burial field (TTT 0590) has been discovered at Lha yul, which is already known for TTT 0055. On a mountain to the north-west of Lha yul village, TTT 0590 features heavily eroded cemeteries scattered over different parts of the mountains at an elevation up to 3925m (Figs. 14, 15).

> TTT 0590
> 3925m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B), in non-arable zone (FT-A);
> round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m), large number of tombs;
> not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

[171] Personal communication with 'O rag natives, 01.2021.

[172] On possible relations between burial grounds and the worship of territorial deities see references below (under Lha yul).

Lha yul, Rgya ri, central valley, geographical position: 29.20056, 90.91745;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

A conversation with a native revealed interesting information about the Lha yul village that rests on a small hillock. At its centre, which is the highest point of elevation, the village houses a shrine for worshiping the territorial deity *Rdzong ra'i rtse yul lha.*[173] Considering other instances of grave fields that later turned into sites for *yul lha* worship, one wonders whether the seat of the local *yul lha* at the summit of Lha yul might be the indication of a former burial mound or earlier fortification (*rdzong*).[174]

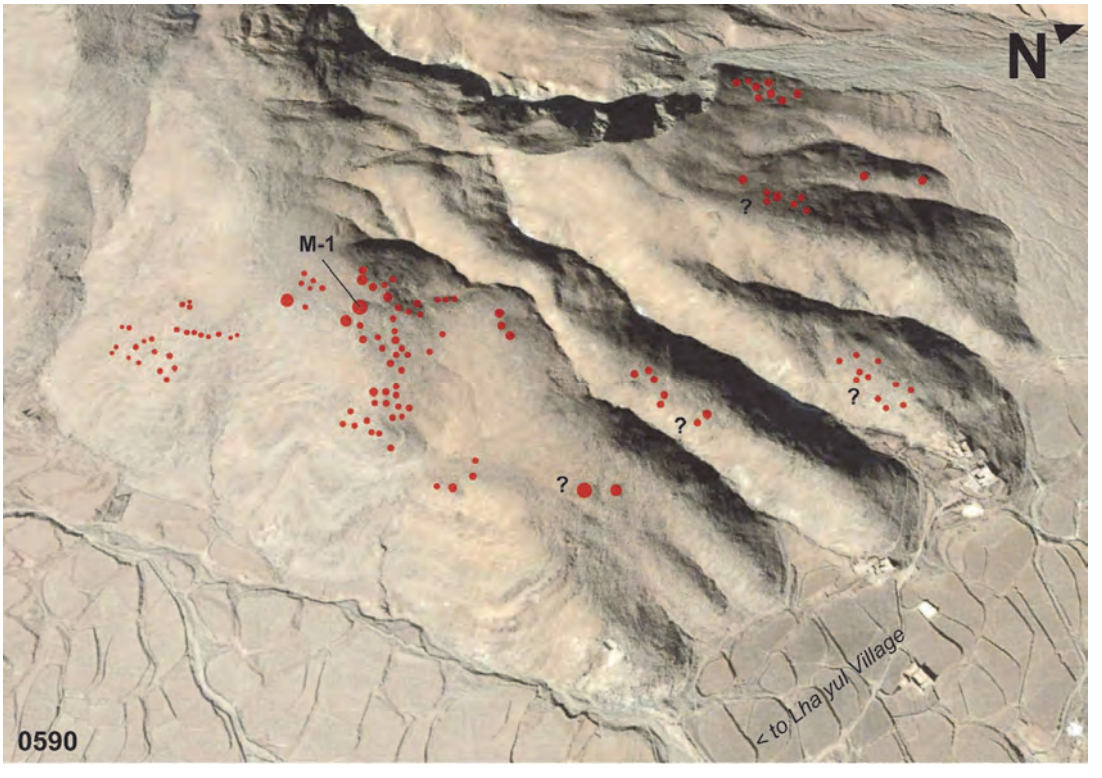


Fig. 15: Burial mound field TTT 0590 at Lha yul. (Satellite photo: Google/DigitalGlobe (01/2003), TTT website, edited by Hazod 2018)

The area on the other riverside at Se lung (Ch. 斯隆, Sī lōng) is pocked with many traces of building walls, albeit extremely eroded, indicating the existence of a vanished settlement of considerable size (geographical position: 29.199876, 90.929653). One of the remains must be the

[173] Communication with Lha yul native, Wechat, summer 2018.

[174] On tumulus sites as places for the *yul lha* worship see Hazod 2009: 185, 181; Hazod 2010: 7f.; Hazod 2018: 25; Hazod 2019: 41, 59. See also TTT website, *Tumulus fields in Central Tibet: Local perceptions and classifications*, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/perception/, accessed: 29.01.2021. For examples of burial mounds that turned into the seat of a local place deity see TTT 0126, 0184, 0257. Hazod noticed elsewhere that the name and history of the *yul lha* can "often turn out to be important indications for the identification of ancient clanscapes".

former walls of Gzhung Se lung (var. Si lung),[175] a monastery from the time of the Buddhist revival where Dge bshes Dgyer chung ba[176] (11th cent.) resided. In this context it should be mentioned that the area at Se lung, according to the accounts of elders, is the original site of Rnam rgyal rab brtan before it was relocated to present-day Rnam rab zhol.[177]

The upper ranges above Se lung feature another tumulus site (TTT 0571) at a place called Skyid sdings[178] (Ch. 杰廷, Jié tíng) high on a mountain slope at an elevation of 4130m. The mound field is located approximately 500m above a former, post-dynastic Rngog family residence known as Rngog pa'i bla brang[179] (an old *mchod rten* seems to be all that remains of this ancient site). The grave field constitutes three or four rectangular tombs measuring up to 40m (Fig. 16).

TTT 0571
4130m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (40m);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);
Skyid sdings (var. Dkyil lding), Rgya ri, central upper valley, geographical position: 29.19367, 90.94607;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L761.

Further burial fields are Sgang brgyud (TTT 0587), Nag sgor (TTT 0588) and Grags chen (TTT 0591) in the valley, G.yang rong (TTT 0593) in the lower valley and at Brag dmar (TTT 0585), (?) Shar 'bras (TTT 0589) in the central valley plains.

TTT 0585
3805m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);
round tomb (MT-A) (15m);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
Brag dmar, Rgya ri, lower valley, geographical position: 29.23861, 90.90354;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0587
3720m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

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[175] *Rnam rab guide*: 180f. The ruins of the former monastery are said to have been utilized as sheep enclosures (*lug tshang*, *'brog ra*; Ch. 牧场, Mù chǎng); personal communication with Rnam rab zhol natives, 08.2018, 03.2021.

[176] Var. Dge bshes Sgyer chung ba. Considering that Padma dkar po refers to him as Gtsang Sgyer phu'i dge bshes Sgyer chung pa can (*Pad dkar chos 'byung*: 459.4-5) one wonders whether he can be identified with Mar pa's disciple Dgyer phu'i Klog skya jo sras, from La stod Gtsang.

[177] On the original site of Rnam rab zhol and its relocation at an unknown point in time see *Rnam rab guide*: 181.

[178] Spelling uncertain; alternately Dkyil lding. One might wonder whether the toponym "Skyid sdings" may phonetically be linked with the vanished Rngog pa seminary of Gzhung Ri bo Chos lding; see Ducher 2017: 349 (see also above under Chos sdings).

[179] *Rnam rab guide*: 182.1-3.

round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
Sgang brgyud, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.27221, 90.96086;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0588
3770m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (15m);
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
Nag sgor, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.26182, 90.97504;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.



Fig. 16: Burial mound field TTT 0571 at Gzhung Skyid sdings. (Map data: Google Earth, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2005; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

TTT 0589
3800m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m), single tomb;
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
Shar 'bras, Rgya ri, lower valley, geographical position: 29.23776, 90.948900;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0591
3595m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);
coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (30m) (?);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
Grags chen, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.27851, 91.01665;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0593
3635m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);
round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (15m)?;
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);
G.yang rong (i.e. Hang grong), Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.27805, 91.04416;
References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

This contribution has focused on the geography of the fertile and well inhabited Gzhung valley on the southern banks of the Gtsang po river, in the central lands of the Left Horn province. While the evidence in this case is limited, the choice of written toponyms as the primary evidence for sketching the valley's historical landscape has allowed me to produce a reasonable sketch of this region's imperial past. Several of the old place names were able to be localised through previous research findings and fruitful, long-term collaboration with natives from Gzhung. The toponymic connotations for Gzhung and its adjacent valleys (Dol and Grwa) differ in the sources and it can be assumed that they would have changed over time and in real-life scenarios of shifting social contexts (see Hazod's example of a Tibetan peasant passing the seat of a place deity in this volume). The narrations about the imperial period that have been examined for this article link the land to different domains of human activity, including the categories of the so-called "religious" and the "social", which represent the conceptual framing of the present volume. While most of the text passages draw a close connection between region and ancestral lineages, they also describe how its inhabitants and rulers reportedly related to their environment. This finds expression in the depiction of the land in different ways: as an area of fertile and arable soil, as a favourable region for settlement, as an administrative unit of the empire, as a reward granted by the emperor, as retribution in legal matters, as a stage for religious activities pursued by Buddhist adepts, and most prominently of all, as territory belonging to particular families of prestigious descent.

References

Abbreviations

BDRC = Buddhist Digital Resource Center. URL: https://www.tbrc.org/

SRC = Sakya Research Centre. URL: https://sakyaresearch.org

TTT = *The Tibetan Tumulus Tradition* (*TTT*), project website: *The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet: A Historical-anthropological Study and Documentation of the Tumulus Tradition of Early Central Tibet (4th-10th Century CE)*. URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/

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The Advent of the *Dharma*

Religion and Rationality in the Coming of Buddhism to Tibet

Sam van Schaik

It is an open question whether the religious practices that existed in Tibet before Buddhism should be called 'Bon' or should even be categorised as 'religious'. There were certainly various complexes of rituals and narratives practised throughout the Tibetan cultural area, but the hierarchical structures and generally accepted metanarratives that we associate with the religion were absent. It may be better to understand the rituals and narratives before the institution of Buddhism in terms of the idea of tradition, 'an unsystematic array of cultural elements that have been made available to particular social groups in different times and contexts.'[1] Research into early Tibetan documents, especially those found in the hidden cave in Dunhuang at the beginning of the twentieth century, has suggested that the idea of Bon as an alternative religion (or in Tibetan terms, as *chos*) in opposition to Buddhism actually came from Buddhist polemical writings.[2]

Nevertheless, the cultural elements of pre-Buddhist Tibet did not disappear, and to some extent were absorbed into the new religion. A potent example of this is the mythos that developed around the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet. This fundamental episode in Tibetan Buddhist history is known in Tibetan as "the advent of the sublime *dharma*" (*dam pa'i chos kyi dbu brnyes pa*). This story, which goes back to the earliest Tibetan Buddhist histories, tells us that Buddhism first came to Tibet during the reign of King Lha Tho tho ri Snyan btsan. This king ruled five generations before Srong btsan Sgam po, the great empire-builder who ruled in the first half of the seventh century.

One day, the story goes, a number of Buddhist objects fell from the sky and landed on the roof of the royal palace, often identified as the Yum bu temple. The objects differ in different accounts, but often include a cubit-high golden *stūpa* and a mold or stamp of the *Ciṇṭamāṇi dhāraṇī*. The texts include the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra* and a more obscure text called the *Pang kong phyag rgya pa*. At that time nobody in Tibet, including the king himself, could read, and so the books were placed in a casket. The king regularly made offerings to the casket of books, which he called the "holy secret" (*gnyan po gsang ba*). The title refers to the books being sacred, yet unreadable. Despite being unable to benefit from the texts themselves, when the king reached the age of eighty his devotions to the holy secret caused him to become youthful again, so that he was able to live twice in one lifetime.[3]

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1 Honko 1996: 19.

2 For the basis of the argument here, see van Schaik 2013.

3 The story is found in the various versions of the *Testament of Ba*, including the *Dba' bzhed* (see Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 24-25). Another early source is the *Bka' chems ka khol ma* (1989 ed.): 91.

It is said that the books of the holy secret were not deciphered until five generations later, when Srong btsan Sgam po sent a young man called Thon mi Sambhoṭa to India to create a Tibetan alphabet. After returning to Tibet, Thon mi Sambhoṭa opened the casket and translated the books inside. What he found when he opened the casket differs slightly in various accounts, but is usually said to include the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra* and a more obscure text which is probably of Chinese origin and can be traced back to a prayer called the *Pang kong phyag rgya pa*.

The objects that fell upon the palace roof in these stories have considerable cultural significance. The descent itself mirrors the traditional Tibetan legends of the descent of the divine ancestors of the *btsan po*, but here the ancestor figure is replaced with textual and material religious objects. The golden *stūpa* is a representation of the buddha's body, while the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra* is the scriptural source of the six-syllable mantra of Avalokiteśvara: *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. The reason for the presence of the much more obscure prayer, the *Pang kong phyag rgya pa* is somewhat less obvious, although this is the object that appears most consistently across different versions of this story.

The canonical versions of this prayer tend to have the Tibetanised name: *Dpang skong phyag brgya pa*. In the histories we usually find the title given as *(s)Pang kong phyag rgya pa* or as *Mu tra'i phyag rgya*. Both titles appear in Nel pa Paṇḍita's history, and it is not clear whether he regards them as different texts or not.[4] Several copies of the prayer are found among the Dunhuang manuscripts; and the fullest title given in these versions is *Pam kong brgya rtsa brgyad* (IOL Tib J 315/4). The first part (*Pam/Pang kong*) is probably a transcription of a Chinese term. The most likely explanation is that it refers to the repentance prayer text known in Chinese as *Datong fangguang* (大通方廣). This sutra was translated into Tibetan, and appears in the Dunhuang manuscripts with the title "Great Pang kong" (*Pang kong chen po*). A shorter prayer that also appears in Dunhuang is known as the "Lesser Pang kong" *(Pang kong chung ngu)* or "The Hundred Pangkong" *(Pang kong brgya pa).* The similarity of this last title to the ones in the histories suggests that this was the text that was held to have fallen on the palace roof. This repentance text is an emblem of the key monastic ritual of Buddhism, the regular repentance ceremony. In Chinese Buddhism, it also played a role in the interface between Buddhist monastic communities and the rulers who patronised them.[5]

In any case, the motif of descent from the sky is a potent one in Tibet's pre-Buddhist traditions, particularly in the stories of the advent of the lineage of Tibetan rulers. Thus, the story of the advent of the *dharma* quite deliberately takes the pre-Buddhist motif and turns it to a Buddhist use, swapping Buddhist books for the imperial ancestor. The imperial line is still there, but now the Tibetan king is the recipient of the advent of the new religion. And the emblems of this new religion emphasise that the new order is a written one, that a religion of the book is replacing the old order.

Yet for some Tibetan Buddhists, this story, which was supposed to celebrate the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet and foreshadow its victory over Tibet's earlier traditions, contained a bit too

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[4] Uebach 1987: 86-87.

[5] On this text and its Chinese counterparts, see van Schaik 2018.

much of the flavour of those earlier traditions. In the thirteenth century, when the stories of "the advent of the sublime *dharma*" were circulating in numerous histories of Buddhism in Tibet, Nel pa Paṇḍita (b. 13th c.) wrote a history of Buddhism known as *The Flower Garland (Me tog 'phreng ba)* in which he disputed the accepted version of the episode and offered an alternative in its place. Nel pa Paṇḍita agreed that the first appearance of the Buddha's teachings in Tibet did indeed occur during the reign of Lha Tho tho ri, but, he said, the books did not fall from the sky. In Nel pa Paṇḍita's version, the books were brought to Tibet by an Indian scholar, who hoped to teach Buddhism to the king. But since the king couldn't read, he gave up on that plan, and set off for China instead, leaving behind some of his books and suggesting that the king pay homage to them regularly.

Nel pa Paṇḍita castigated those who repeated the story of the books falling from the sky as "rumor-mongers" (*g.yom rgyug*). He also claimed that the source of this story was the Bon po. I have translated Nel pa Paṇḍita's account of the episode here in full:

> "Our Teacher, He who has Gone to Bliss, the Perfect Buddha Śākyamuni, turned the wheel of the *dharma* in Jambudvīpa for a long time, but not in Tibet, the land of snowy mountains, with its hillsides of flint and grass and its masses of dense forests. Since the Teacher never set foot in this kingdom of mountains and snow and it was not pervaded by the light rays of his speech, this was an unfortunate period. In this situation, when even the words "the three jewels" were unknown, the advent of the sublime *dharma* came during the reign of Lha Tho tho ri Snyan btsan.
>
> Now, let us explain the historical account in detail. At the time when this sublime sage controlled the kingdom, Li The se and a translator from Tukhāra called Blo sems mtsho invited the Indian *paṇḍita* Mkhas pa Legs byin, who taught the *dharma* to the king. Because there was no writing in Tibet at that time, it proved impossible to train [the king]. So then they wrote down and offered the king the *Kāraṇḍavyūha sūtra*, the six-syllable mantra written in gold, and the *Mudrā Gestures* (*Mu tra'i phyag rgya*).[6] [The *paṇḍit*a] said: "Pay homage to [these books] by prostrating to them, circumambulating them, and making offerings, and whatever blessing you desire will arise. Even if I were to stay in Tibet, there would be no further benefit." With that, he left for China.
>
> Most people, relying on rumor-mongers, say, "tied to a sunbeam, the *Hundred Pang kong* descended onto the upper story of the royal palace." Those who claim that this came from the sky have allowed themselves to be corrupted by the Bon pos.
>
> Then the king gave [the objects] the name "secret power" and placed them on a throne of precious jewels, inside a silver-gilt casket, and prayers and offerings were directed to it.[7]

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[6] In the manuscript edition of Uebach 1987, an interlinear note appears here, stating that the six-syllable mantra was written "in the Rañjana (*lan tsha*) script, on a yellow scroll."

[7] The text here in fact gives "curtain" (*yol ba*) rather than the usual casket (*sgrom bu*), but since the books are to be placed "inside" (*nang du*), it seems that a casket is probably intended, and *yol ba* may be a scribal error.

> [Vessels] filled with butter, beer and the like were offered, and prostrations and circumambulations were performed. Due to this, the king's authority and dominion were greatly increased. The ruler obtained two bodies in one lifetime, so that his reign was very long; a certain blind prince was able to open his eyes; and the subjects had great good fortune.
>
> I have heard that later, when Bsam yas was constructed, the "secret power" was placed inside a white *stūpa*.
>
> Such is [the historical account of] the advent of the *dharma* [in Tibet]."[8]

As we can see here, in his version of the advent of Buddhism in Tibet, Nel pa Paṇḍita specifically associates the story of books falling from the sky with the Bon po, and accuses other Buddhist historians who repeat the story of having been corrupted by the Bon po. When he attributes the story of the books falling from the sky to the Bon pos, Nel pa Paṇḍita is not just making an observation about Bon po beliefs, but engaging in an ongoing polemic between Buddhist and Bon po versions of Tibetan history. Buddhists and Bon pos often gave alternative versions of the same events in their historical texts; for example, the Buddhist activities of Srong bstan Sgam po celebrated by the Buddhist historians are lamented by the Bon po historians as an adoption of a foreign religion and a persecution of the genuine Tibetan religion. By placing the story of the books falling from the sky on the Bon po side of history, Nel pa Paṇḍita attempts to take it out of the purview of Buddhist historians entirely.[9]

The story he puts in its place eschews the miraculous entirely, and relies on the Buddhist trope of missionary activity. Once Nel pa Paṇḍita's version was out there, later Tibetan writers of Buddhist histories usually felt it necessary to consider it alongside the story of the books falling from the sky. For example, the fifteenth-century scholar 'Gos Lo tsa ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392-1481) considered both versions in his *Blue Annals*, before coming out in favour of Nel pa Paṇḍita:

> "Nel pa Paṇḍita said that the Bon po claim that things fell from the sky because they adore the sky. The truth behind this Bon po tale, he said, is that the *dharma* was brought by the *paṇḍita* Blo sems 'tsho and the translator Li The se. Since the king could neither read the writing nor understand the meaning, the *paṇḍita* and the translator went back again. This seems to be correct."[10]

Others were less sympathetic to Nel pa Paṇḍita's version. The Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang Blo bzang Rgya mtsho (1617-1682) mentioned both versions in his *Song of the Spring Queen*, before directing this *ad hominem* thrust at Nel pa Paṇḍita:

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[8] Translated from the Tibetan edition in Uebach 1987: 84-86 (ff. 7a1-7b4).

[9] On the interplay between Buddhist and Bon po histories, see Bjerken 2003. On Bon po – Buddhist polemics see Martin 2001, which also has an extensive bibliography of Bon po studies.

[10] *Deb ther sngon po*: 63-64; Roerich 1949: 38. Note that this retelling actually simplifies Nel pa Paṇḍita's version slightly, and does not mention the Indian *paṇḍita* Mkhas pa Legs byin.

> "Nel pa Paṇḍita's claim that it is irrational for things to fall from the sky is proof of his small-mindedness. In the auspicious circumstances of the advent of the *dharma*, the magical activities and compassion of the noble ones are beyond rational thought."[11]

The Fifth Dalai Lama, in defending the story of the books falling from the sky, considers this a debate about the role of thinking (*bsams*). He suggests that Nel pa Paṇḍita simply couldn't bring himself to believe that books could fall from the sky, and came up with a more reasonable version of the episode because he considered the story "irrational" (*mi 'thad pa*). But this merely goes to show his limited outlook, which does not have room for events that transcend the rational. The Fifth Dalai Lama then argues that things do happen that transcend rational thought, especially in special circumstances like the first appearance of Buddhism in Tibet.

It is often assumed that historical writing in a religious context is very different from our modern, critical approach to history. Accordingly, much of what we find in traditional Tibetan histories is often considered within the category of religious legend. It then becomes the modern historian's task to try to discern what true events might lie behind such legends. Yet we should be cautious of these assumptions, not only because they limit our own appreciation of Tibetan historical writing, which becomes mere raw material to be mined for nuggets of truth, but because they do a disservice to the Tibetan Buddhist historians themselves. However, we should be careful not to fall into the trap of seeing this merely as case of a rational account opposed to an irrational one. If we look closely at Nel pa Paṇḍita's version, it is not an example of thoroughgoing rationalism as we would understand it. He provides no previous source for his own version of the episode, and leaves undisputed the miraculous occurrences that came of the king's worship of the "secret power." The struggle here is more about controlling the history of Buddhism in Tibet and its relationship to the tradition that preceded it.

In conclusion, let us take note of a few interesting points: (i) Nel pa Paṇḍita does not believe that a story is accurate merely because it has appeared in previous historical accounts, and for him the religious authority of Buddhism is cast into doubt by the suspicion that the narrative of books falling from the sky is actually Bon po in origin. (ii) Historians coming after Nel pa Paṇ-ḍita don't try to smooth over this wrinkle in the historical account. 'Gos Lo tsa ba gives both versions, and also considers it his duty to assess them, offering his opinion that Nel pa Paṇḍita's version "seems to be more correct" (*dag pa 'dra*). (iii) Some other historians prefer the narrative of the books falling from the sky, and the Fifth Dalai Lama, recognising that the strength of Nel pa Paṇḍita's version is that it seems more rational, argues that important historical events in the transmission of Buddhism may go beyond the limits of the rational mind.

Thus, the story of the advent of the *dharma*, and Tibetan Buddhist historians' response to it reveal some of the tensions in the self-identity of Buddhists in Tibet, specifically in how Tibetans attempted to distinguish themselves as Buddhists from the tradition that came before them. In this case, the debates involved the role of intellectual thought and rationality in Buddhism. The original story cleverly took a motif from Tibet's pre-Buddhist traditions and made it a feature of the turning

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[11] Nor brang O rgyan, *Dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs kyi 'grel pa yid kyi dga' ston:* 60-61.

point between pre-Buddhist Tibet and Buddhist Tibet. But this had repercussions later for Tibetan Buddhists' arguments for the superiority of Buddhism over what came before. For if Buddhism came to Tibet in a style so reminiscent of the Bon po, how could it be held up as a rational religion of the book?

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The Social and the Religious in Early Post-imperial Tibet

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

Christian Jahoda

1. Introduction[1]

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 Sahlins (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'.

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[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).

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[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]

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[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

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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]

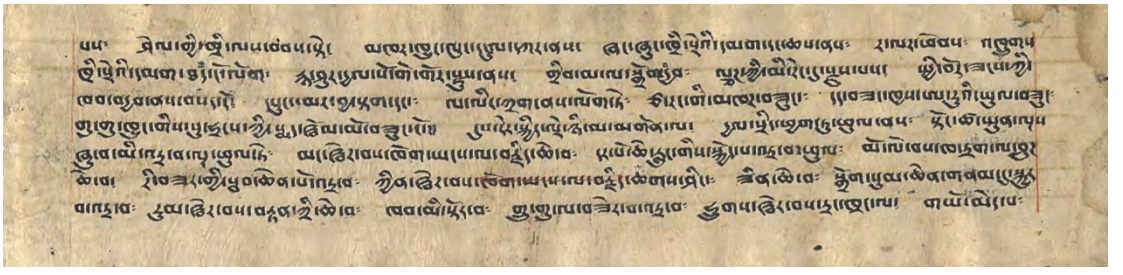


Fig. 1: *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*, folio 128b. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po, ca. 2010)

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]

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[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 rlung 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 khams 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 khams kyi lha drug gi tshul du mdzad nas / bka' rtags kyi rgya re re / che stags* (*read: rtags*) *so so dang bcas pa gnang 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*

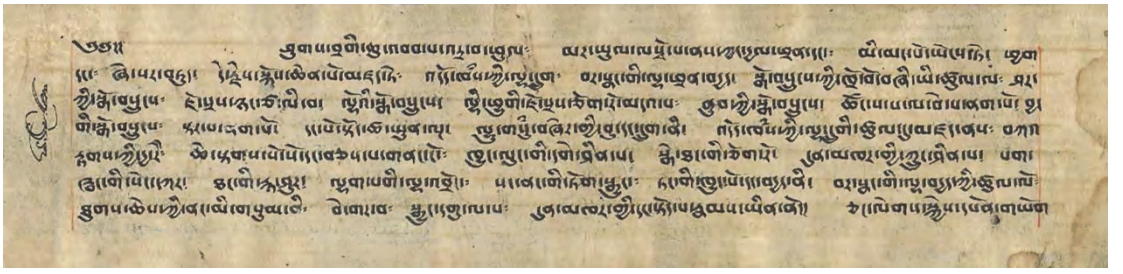


Fig. 2: *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*, folio 129a. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po, ca. 2010)

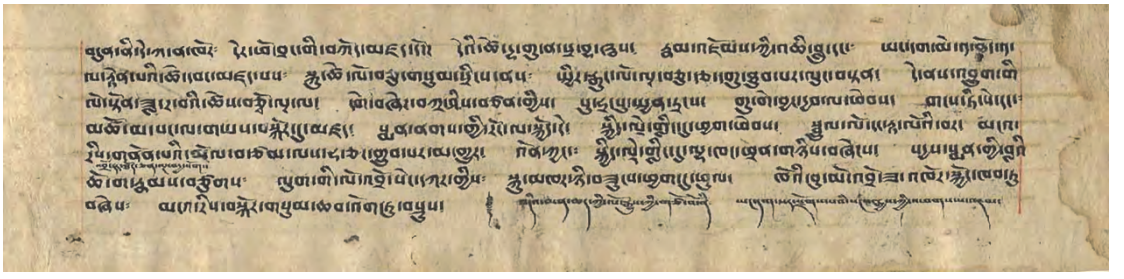


Fig. 3: *Nyi ma'i rigs kyi rgyal rabs*, folio 129b. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po, ca. 2010)

Many people came from Mar yul[12] 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 khams 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]

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g.yog bdun ni de ka na khor / der pho brang gi bkod mdzad do/ (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 srong 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

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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 rnams*) 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 *Dba' 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 rnying* [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

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[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 *Dba' 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 sbra[22] 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

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[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 rnying*, 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 rnying*: 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 rnying* [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]

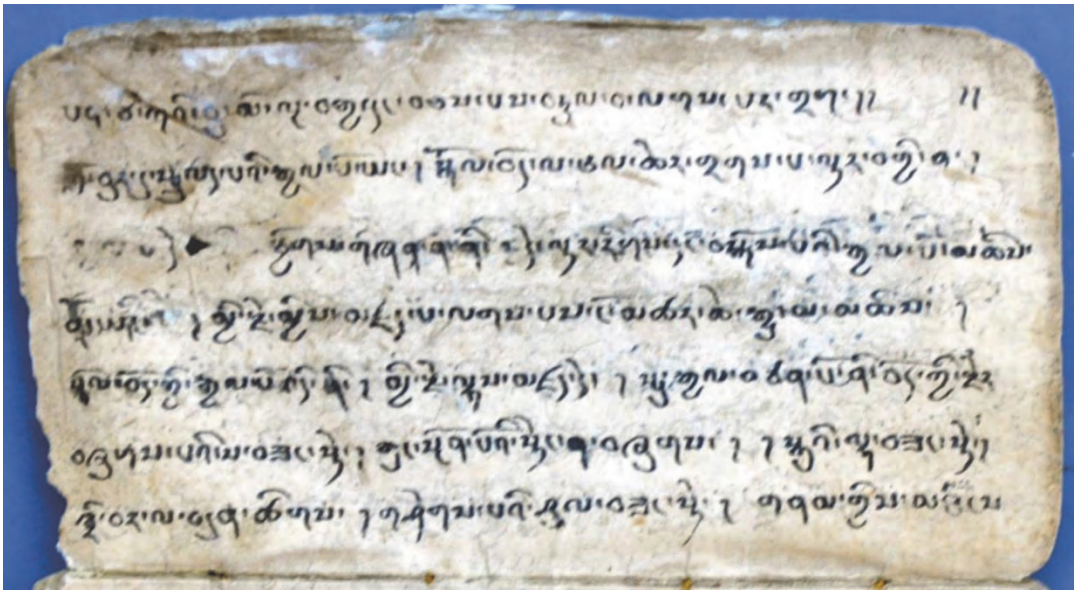


Fig. 4: *Yig rnying*, page 4. (Photo: Gu ge Tshe ring Rgyal po 2012)

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[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:

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[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. **sūryavaṃśa*) and "lunar lineage" (*zla ba'i rigs*, Skt. **candravaṃśa*) 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*, **candravaṃśa*) 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 spruld 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 *Purāṇa*s 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 legitimation 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 legitimation of the socio-religious project, in particular with the thorough Buddhist transformation of this kingdom initiated in 986. Through the legitimation 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 legitimation 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

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[30] In addition to and beyond the legitimation 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 *paṇḍita*s; 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 traditions[32] 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 tshe, 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 tshe* / *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".

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[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 legitimation 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

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[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

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[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 bsdus 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 bsdus 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 *Dba' 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]

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[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 *Dba' 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 *Dba'/Rba' 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

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[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 principles[43] can be assumed to have been present already at this time but, as it did not 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 funery 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

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

de na bod kyi chos mying pa ma lags la / sku lha gsol ba dang cho ga myi mthun pas / kun kyang ma legs su dogs te / la la ni sku la dmar yang dogs / la la ni chab srid gong gis kyang dogs / la la ni mi nad phyugs nad byung gis kyang dogs / la la ni mu ge langs bab kyis kyang dogs so / / (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 / chos 'di gtang ngam mdzad dam ci rigs shes / 'bangs su mnga' ba rgyal phran 'a zha rje la bstgogs* [sic!] *pa dang phyi nang gi blon po rnams la bka's rmas / bka' gros su mdzad nas / gcig tu na sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das kyi bka' lung la bsten / gnyis su na yab mes kyi dpe lugs la 'tshal / 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 administrating 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 *Dba' 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

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[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).

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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 ruler[50] (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

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[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

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[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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The Early Tibetan Tradition of the Dong (Ldong) People

The *Nyen Collection* and its Connections with the *leu* Ritualists of Amdo

Daniel Berounský

1. Introduction

This contribution presents an attempt to summarise the main points of research conducted during the past years.[1] It focuses on diverse and little-explored textual sources related to the Bon religion of Tibet. These texts, however, cannot be identified with the core doctrines of the monastic Bon as known from the contemporary tradition and its numerous scriptures. It will firstly introduce the *Nyen Collection* (*Gnyan 'bum*), which is an exceptional voluminous source with ancient traits to be found in the Bon Kanjur. There appear a number of names in Tibetan and in the language of Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong) in it, which make clear that this collection of myths is related to this particular branch of the Dong clan. My paper focuses on the ritual tradition from north-eastern Tibet known as *leu*. A tradition and divinities of the same name are reported in the older Bon sources, and the presence of a lay ritual tradition of the same name is attested in the mountainous and mostly forested areas of Thewo (The bo), Drugchu ('Brug chu), Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu) and Zungchu (Zung chu) prior to the Cultural Revolution in China, but since then it has reached the point of extinction. What is surviving are hundreds of little-researched manuscripts recently collected from the households of these areas. These texts are difficult to read, the *leu* ritualists were apparently subject to suppression from the dominant monastic traditions and far from immune from incorporating new rituals over the centuries. The concrete examples of the ritual of *Smoke Purification by Fox* (*wa bsang*) and a myth on the retribution for killing a *nyen* spirit (*gnyan stong*) provide examples of clear, but not straightforward connections between the *leu* tradition and that of the *Nyen Collection*. But some new and surprising links with the Mongols, Naxi people, etc., suddenly appear. It is argued that the tradition of the Dong people goes back to these ritual traditions that until recently were present in Amdo and the neighbouring regions. As a living tradition of lay

[1] The research on this article was kindly supported by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic (GACR), project no. 17–01246S, "Nyen Collection (*Gnyan 'bum*) in the Old Tibetan Literary and Ritual Tradition." I would like to express my thanks to Charles Ramble and Nyima Woser Choekhortshang with whom I consulted the difficult parts of the Tibetan texts, namely in the third chapter of this paper. Ngawang Gyatso has shared with me a number of *leu* texts he collected himself as well as all kinds of information resulting from his own research. This paper would not be possible without his generous help and I would like to express my gratitude to him.

people, probably primarily based on oral tradition, the Dong (Ldong) remained hidden and silent in the official documents and histories.

2. The *Nyen Collection*

The most extensive version of the *Nyen Collection* (*Gnyan 'bum*) appears in the Bon Kanjur.[2] It is a vast collection of myths which mostly deal with the origin of the *nyen* spirits (*gnyan*) and the origins of the people of the Dong clan (Ldong). It was first mentioned by Samten G. Karmay, who also translated a myth contained in this collection (Karmay 2010). A few articles by me then followed (Berounský 2016, 2017). At the current state of knowledge, one can state the following facts concerning this collection.

There are reports about its origin contained in the chronicles of the Bon religion related to the story of one of the earliest discoveries of the Bon texts by the turn of 10th and 11th centuries near Purang (Spu rang) in western Tibet. These reports, however, appear only in sources that are dated several centuries after the event described; to the best of my knowledge, the earliest is datable to the eighteenth century.[3]

The volume of this collection is presented as a part of the *Fourfold Collection* (*'Bum bzhi*) containing also separate volumes dedicated to spirits called *lu* (*klu*), *sadak* (*sa bdag*) and *tö* (*gtod*).[4] Yet the evidence is relatively clear that the content of these volumes comes from different times and places.

Quite significant are two features. The first is the personage of Shenrab Miwo (Gshen rab mi bo), the mythical founder of the Bon religion as known from the contemporary monastic tradition. The second are the mentions of various languages that apparently played a role in consciously broadening the self-understanding from merely local tradition to a universal one.

The personage of Shenrab Miwo appears in all the four volumes of the collection. In three of them – the *Lu Collection* (*Klu 'bum*), the *Sadak Collection* (*Sa bdag 'bum*) and the *Tö Collection* (*Gtod 'bum*), his appearance mostly resembles that of the Buddha – his appellation is teacher / Buddha (*ston pa*). While the *Tö* and the *Sadak Collections* mostly mention Shenrab Miwo as universal teacher, but contain also parts that probably predate this development, it is solely the *Lu Collection* that contains scenes clearly inspired by the Mahāyāna sūtras in which the teacher Shenrab Miwo appears in the opening parts of the individual chapters surrounded by the retinue of his followers. By contrast, the *Nyen Collection* is the only of them which has almost no allusion to the universal role of Shenrab Miwo as Buddha. He simply figures among the ritualists to be invited for the ritual resolving of the

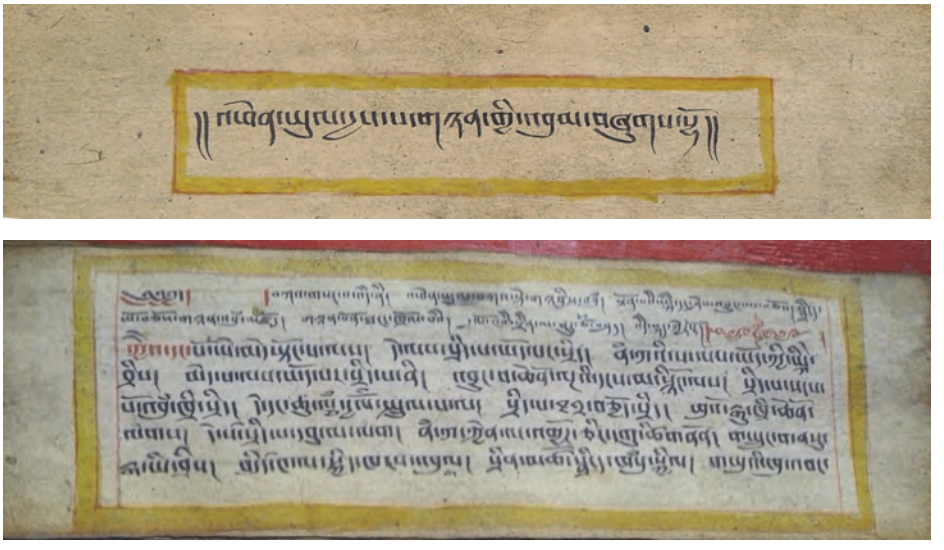
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[2] *Rnam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rin po che gnyan gyi 'bum bzhugs so* (i.e. *Gnyan 'bum*). Bon Kanjur (1999 edition), vol. 141, 165 ff. There is a confusion caused by re-editing the Bon Kanjur in different text order. I am following the edition from 1999, which contains the same texts, but in different order when compared with the earlier edition, where this text appears as vol. 78. For details and charts enabling access to these editions, see Martin, Kværne and Nagano 2003.

[3] *Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi 'byung khungs*, 310; written by Kundrol Dragpa (Kun sgrol Grags pa) in 1742. For more details see Berounský, forthcoming.

[4] These form the volumes 139, 140, and 142 of the 1999 edition of the Bon Kanjur.

conflict between the *nyen* spirits and the Dong people. One can assume that, despite presenting the *Fourfold Collection* as a single unit, the actual time of composition varies for the individual volumes in the collection.



Figs. 1-2: First folio of the *Nyen Collection* found in Amdo among the *leu* texts. (Photo: Ngawang Gyatso)

The occurrences of different languages support the findings mentioned in the previous paragraph. The *Sadak Collection* presents itself as a Chinese lore that was transformed or translated from Chinese.[5] There are several cases of names given both in Chinese and Tibetan in the text. The *Tö Collection* represents a not very sophisticated and not very organised attempt to include the use of various languages in order to present the tradition as grand and universal. It contains some bilingual names, but in some cases, it gives names in several languages (Sumpa, Tangut, eternal language of gods, etc.). This becomes much better organised in the *Lu Collection*. In this text, the chapters are typically introduced in the style of Mahāyāna sūtras and the title of the respective chapter is given in several existing and fictive languages. This follows the custom of the Buddhist translations where the title is given in the original language first, followed by its translation into Tibetan.[6]

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[5] The colophon states so (Bon Kanjur, vol. 140, f. 125): The propitiation of *sadak* of the first, middling and last (parts) are concluded. This is a tradition of Ston pa lha bdun. These are rituals (*gto*) composed by eastern Chinese and translated ("transformed") on the request of A nga'i gser ston. It is beneficial for both teachings for deceased and living, for both relaxed and violent behaviour, for (treating) death and loss, diseases and disturbances. Virtue! (*sa bdag bsgyur bcos/ rab 'breng* (= *'bring*) *tha gsum rdzogs so/ ston pa lha bdun gyi gto rgyud lags so/ de la a nga'i gser ston gyi* (= *gyis*) *zhus/ shar phyogs rgya yis mdzad pa'i gto bsgyur lags so/ gson chos gshin chos gnyis/ spyod pa dal drag gnyis/ shi chad na tsa'* (= *tsha*) *'khrugs long kun la bon no/ dge'o/*).

[6] There are quite a few versions of the *Lu Collection* available since recently and some general conclusions would be thus premature before some research on their comparisons is undertaken. What is stated here is valid for the Bon Kanjur versions, but for example the version found in Phenchu by Ngawang Gyatso

This apparently aims to present the tradition as a universal, following the pattern of Tibetan translations of Buddhist texts, but including several languages in order to strengthen its universality in a much wider way. The *Nyen Collection* is in sharp contrast to it. There are some 25 occurrences of bilingual names in Tibetan and the language of the Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong), the people of the Dong clan. Besides that, there is one longer myth giving names in Tibetan and in Tangut (Mi nyag), which is addressed below. In this case, the text presents itself as a specific and local tradition connected with the Dong people.

Thus, one can clearly discern that the *Fourfold Collection* does not contain texts from the same period and provenance, but that these texts reflect a development from a local tradition (the tradition of the Dong clan in case of the *Nyen Collection*) towards a universal doctrine of eternal Bon (it probably incorporated freely rendered expressions from the Chinese tradition and finally presented the most developed *Lu Collection* as a universal doctrine). The same is valid for the figure of Shenrab Miwo. While he is simply one of the priests summoned for the performance of ritual, containing often animal offerings in the *Nyen Collection*, we encounter him as a universal teacher and Buddha (*ston pa*) in the *Lu Collection*. Both the *Tö Collection* and the *Sadak Collection* lie in between of these two extremes.

It is particularly interesting that the Dunhuang document ITJ 371, containing the name of Shenrab Miwo, has similar occurrences in the Nampa Dong language. The same language use can be attested also for the Dunhuang document ITJ 372. We do not know exactly where to locate the people of Nampa Dong, but the *Nyen Collection* conveys a connection to the north-east of the Tibetan Plateau and wider area of the Mount Machen Pomra range including the upper reaches of the Yellow River. An interesting idea about the possible origins of the tradition connected with Shenrab Miwo from eastern Tibet immediately comes to mind.[7]

The *Nyen Collection* thus features the oldest elements when compared with the other three volumes of the *Fourfold Collection*. However, the *Nyen Collection* itself is probably also of composite nature, which might be deduced from the fact that parts of it are written in different style and language. The text itself mentions that there were various such collections of myths dealing with *nyen* spirits.[8] In fact, there are currently three different texts available. The most extensive is the one contained in the Bonpo Kanjur. There is also a shorter text as part of the "treasure revelations" by Ponse Khyung Gotsal (Dpon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal, born in 1175).[9] Another

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seems to retain some older features. The topic of the *Lu Collection* is currently researched by Zeren Bazhen (Tshe ring Dpal sgron) as her Ph.D. project at EPHE, Paris.

[7] For more arguments and details see Berounský 2017.

[8] For example, on f. 178 it is said: [...] this is explained in a certain tradition of *Nyen Collection*. (*/.../gnyan 'bum rgyud cig las bshad do/*).

[9] The date of his birth is given by Nyima Tendzin (cf. Karmay 1972: 173, fn. 3). There are some sources, which consider him to be identical with Rigdzin Godemcan (Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem can, 1337-1409). This is also stated by Karmay (*ibd.*). This appears in the eighteenth century-chronicle *Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi 'byung khungs* (329-336, 371-375) by Kun sgrol grags pa, where his name is given as Ponse Khyung Thog or Ponse Khyung Thog Godempa (Dpon gsas Khyung thog rgod ldem pa). His surviving hagiography contains names of his contemporaries, which are in agreement with the suggested year of birth (1175) and

version was found by Ngawang Gyatso among the so-called *leu* scriptures in the Thewo region of Amdo.[10] This version is by no means a copy of the Bonpo Kanjur edition. It contains myths on similar topics, but their wording is different.[11] There is second-hand information about another manuscript version kept in the Lanzhou Museum, but it is inaccessible to researchers for the time being.[12]

3. The *leu* or *legu* tradition of the older Bonpo texts

The following chapters focus on the relationship between the tradition of the Dong as represented by the *Nyen Collection* and the recently discovered lay ritual tradition of Amdo called *leu* (*le'u*). But before coming to the *leu* in Amdo, the mentions of *le'u* or *le gu* in older Bonpo texts will be touched upon first.

There are several older Bonpo sources containing some enigmatic mentions of certain *le gu* or *le'u*. One finds, however, hardly any clear-cut explanation what this term implies. In the following I present those mentions of greater significance.

A group of sources speak about *leu* or *legu* divinities in the context of virtuous conduct. One of the early examples is to be found in a work ascribed to Azha Lodroe Gyaltsen ('A zha Blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1198-1263). The text is entitled *Dromgon Azha Lodroe's prayer for knowledge* (*'Gro mgon 'a zha blo gros kyi mkhyen gsol zhe bya ba*). Azha Lodroe Gyaltsen came from a family based in Azha principality of the time, i.e. from the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau. In one passage of the text he lists bad deeds against the doctrine of Bon to be avoided and asks the protectors of the Bon doctrine to destroy them. It contains also the phrase *le'u lha log*:[13]

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since the dates of Rigdzin Godemcan are relatively well established, it is impossible for them to be one and the same person.

[10] Entitled *'Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum*; the text comes from a household in the Phenchu ('Phan chu) valley near the Thewo (The bo) valley of the border region of Amdo along the border of the Kansu and Sichuan provinces of the PRC. It has been photographed by Ngawang Gyatso who is a native of Thewo. It is contained in the recently published 10 volumes of reproductions of the texts (Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso eds.), most of them forming the lay tradition of *le'u* ritualists of the given region.

[11] This is unlike the cases of the *Tö* and *Sadak Collections*, which are mostly identical with its corresponding parts in the Bonpo Kanjur version.

[12] Personal communication with Ngawang Gyatso during summer 2018. He was given permission to see it (but not make a copy of it) and according to him this version is not identical with that of the Bon Kanjur.

[13] 'A zha Blo gros rgyal mtshan, *'Gro mgon 'a zha blo gros kyi mkhyen gsol*; available from the online text repository of the *Zhang bod rig mdzod kun snang khyab pa* (象藏文库衮郎恰巴), URL: http://xxb.qiongbuwang.com/index/category.html?tid=12843 (accessed: 20.08.2019): [...] *bon gyi bstan pa bshig pa/ gshen rab dbu phang smad pa/ rnga thog bkor* (= *dkor*) *la 'bag pa/ zab mo'i dam la ldog pa/ slob pa'i slob bu dam log/ nyos pa'i chung ma brang log/ bcol ba'i le'u lha log/ rus kyi pha tshan sde log/ dam la 'das pa'i las ngan log/ g.yung drung bon gyi spyi dgra/ gshen po bdag gi dgos* (= *sgos*) *dgra/ sgral ba'i zhing du gyur ba/ kha ngan du smra ba/ lag pa sdig tu bsngo ba/ bsam pa ngan du byed pa/ bon dgra dam nyams 'di lo dang zla bar ma bzhag par/ zhag dang za mar myur du sgrol/ tshe phyi ma la dus ma 'debs par/ nam mkha' stong pa la mtshan ma ma 'dzugs par/ las kyi rnam par smin pa la/ khungs ma 'byin par dus da lta nyid du sgrol cig/* [...]

> "[...] Destroying the Bon doctrine; lowering the high position of Shenrab; stealing harvest and property; violation of profound vows; violation of vows by a disciple who is in training; a wife's betrayal of her [husband at] home (?);[14] rejection of the ***leu* divinity** with whom one has a relationship of trust; betrayal of the community of one's patrilineal kin; wrong actions through violation of one's commitments; general enemies of eternal Bon; personal enemies of us, the priests; those in the category of people who are to be 'liberated' (i.e. 'killed'); speaking ill with one's mouth and dedicating one's hands to non-virtue: may these enemies of Bon not remain for years or months, but may they be 'liberated' within days or the duration of a mealtime; without a time being allocated to them for a future life, or without a sign being established for them in the empty sky, may their deeds come to ripening, and may they be uprooted from their source and 'liberated' at the very moment! [...]"

It is notable that the mention of *leu* divinities appears within the context of family ties in this extract. What precedes in the list is "a wife's betrayal of her [husband at] home" and it is followed by "betrayal of the community of one's patrilineal kin". The *leu* divinities are mentioned between these two actions and somehow stand out from the rest of the list, which is either more general, or concerned with the doctrine of monastic Bon. This could well indicate that *leu* divinities appear in the proximity of very intimate ties, perceived to be similar to family relationships.[15]

What the *leu* divinities might be is further indicated in the following extract. It appears in the large fourteenth-century compendium of the *Ziji* (*Gzi brjid*) and narrates a story of a king of a country called Hömo Lingdrug (Hos mo gling drug), whose wife becomes ill. The illness is caused by a *lu* (*klu*) spirit (i.e. an underground or serpent spirit). Various diviners and physicians are invited and a diviner learned in the *jutig* divination (*ju thig*) appears at the court. After several interesting narrations on the origin and details on *jutig* divination, which is based on the use of cords from divine sheep, the story eventually addresses the state of the king and his wife:[16]

> "All the illness of the queen and the epidemics of the kingdom must have appeared because of turning your back on the ***leu* divinities** who are related to you. Then, from what appeared

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[14] The meaning is uncertain. Here, the expression *brang* is taken as meaning 'home'. *Brang log* could mean 'cheating' (lit. 'turning the breast away') as well.

[15] Ngawang Gyatso (Ngag dbang rgya mtsho 2005, 2016, Ngawang Gyatso 2016) cites a similar passage from the *Ziji* (*Gzi brjid*) – a compendium systematising the Bon teachings, which was revealed as a 'treasure' in the fourteenth century. It contains the slightly different phrase *bcol ba'i le'u lha log mkhan*. Ngawang Gyatso suggests the spelling *le'u lta log mkhan* (i.e. *leu* - the one with wrong view) and understands it as a polemic with regard to the *leu* ritualists. The evidence presented here – and other occurrences in the *Ziji* speaking about *leu* as certain gods – show that *leu* divinity is most probably meant here (*le gu/le'u lha*), and not a practitioner or proponent of some tradition (*le'u lta*). It might thus more probably mean "the one with wrong *leu* divinity entrusted".

[16] *Gzi brjid*, vol. *cha,* p. 449: *btsun mo'i nad dang rgyal khams kyi yams thams cad/ rang gnyen le'u lha la rgyab kyis phyogs pa las byung bar 'dug go/ da le'u lha'i gnyen phya'i nang nas/ gto phya'i g.yas* (= *yo*) *bcos kyi nang nas/ ston pa spyan drangs nas nyes ltung gi bshags pa dang/ nyams bskangs kyi cho ga rnams byas na/ gtos phan cing dpyad rtsis ste/* [...]

> in the prognosis of the divination concerning the "friends" (*gnyen*)[17] of ***leu* divinities**, and from what rituals might be performed for straightening the crooked, if the teacher is invited, and confession of the misdeeds along with performance of the ritual of remedying faults will be performed, such a ritual would be beneficial, and the diagnosis would be substantially better [...]."

Bearing in mind that *lu* (*klu*, underground or serpent spirit) was mentioned as the primary cause of the illness, it follows that the *lu* spirit is considered to be one of the *leu* divinity in this case.

Another interesting mention of *legu* divinities appears in a tantric text of the Bon Kanjur being entitled *Mkha' klong rab 'byams bskang ba'i 'phyong bzhugs*. This text is, however, difficult to date. It is ascribed to a certain master Ma (Rma) from the Dru (Bru) family. Master Ma might be one of the masters otherwise known as Maton (Rma ston – "teacher from Ma clan"), but there were several persons with this name living in 11th-13th centuries.[18] The text is dedicated to the ritual of ransom offering (*glud*) and consists of several stories presented in a series of narrations (*rabs*) recited customarily in the Old Tibetan rituals. Many of such narrations contained in this larger text are pronounced by or related to Shenrab Miwo, the founding figure of the monastic Bon. *Legu* divinities are mentioned only in one story, which is also specific to the divinities it mentions. These are unknown in other parts of the text. The composite nature of the text leaves us with the question what the source for the following part might have been:[19]

> "Again, there was one named Camdel Thangpo, who was a king of the country. His fortress was high; he was of virtuous conduct and possessed many riches. But he forgot about the gods above to be propitiated. The protective power of the ***legu* divinities** faded away. The [balanced] state of the eight classes [of spirits and divinities] terminated. [The king] thought of himself as

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[17] This is a category mentioned earlier in the text for which the divination is cast. It resembles *grogs* ("friend") of more common astrological calculations and is the opposite to "enemy" (*dgra*) in both cases.

[18] The colophon states that the text was revealed as a "mind treasure" by Bla ma Rma in Khyung rdzong and that it was faithfully copied from an old original by Bru btsun Rgyal mtshan 'od zer, who is from the lineage of transmission [...] *gyer gyi bka' gter khyung rdzong la/ dngos slob bla ma rma la bab/ rgyud du bdag la'o/ bru btsun pa rgyal mtshan 'od zer gyis dpe rgan la zhal bshus so/.*

[19] *Mkha' klong rab 'byams bskang ba'i 'phyong bzhugs pa'i dbu phyogs lags+'o*, pp. 19-73, 26: *yang 'brel lcam dal thang po zhes bya ba/ yul gyi rje byed/ mkhar gyi bzang mtho/ bzangs* (= *bzang*) *spyod kyi skor* (= *dkor*) *ldan te/ steng du gsol ba'i lha yang brjed/ le gu lha bsrung kyi mthu rnal/ sde brgyad stabs la bcad/ dmu bdud btsan gsum bas kyang nga che/ gnyan klu gtod gsum bas kyang nga btsan par dgongs pas/ de la lha srin sde brgyad kyis bka' chad dam ste/ mi de la bdud kyi than babs/ dmu'i* (= *dmu yis*) *byin bsnyil/ btsan gyis khroms 'grol / brnyen* (= *gnyan*?) *gyis zer 'phros/ bdud kyis byad rdol/ mi la nad byung/ phyugs la god babs/ ci bsam yang char song te/ 'di ci cho ci 'brang snyams nas/ srid pa'i bon mo ting ber shel lcags zhes bya ba la/ gto byas pas bon mo de na re/ 'di phyi ma cis kyang ma len te/ 'go ba'i lha spang/ le gu sles la bor bas nongs/ lha srin sde brgyad stabs la bcad pas nongs/ 'go ba'i lha bas med/ lha srin za lam skyes pas/ da lha la yon 'bul/ bgegs la glud thongs/ mi nor gyi phywa g.yang skyob cig skad do/ der 'bel 'bang rkang phran gribs/ thar bon dang/ klu bon zor gnyer nas/ lha la rten btsug/ bgegs la glud btang/ le gu'i srungs btsugs te/ che bar gser dang g.yu gzi/ spug/ g.yag/ lug/ rta/ dar zab 'bru bang rnams phul/ chung bar sku glud rings* (= *ring*?) *tshad dang/ gnam bya ri dwags 'phen/ dud 'gros na tshogs rnams/ gzugs dang gsob du byas nas phul bas/ rgyal po de yi mi nad dang/ phyogs nad yams nad chad do/.*

being greater than *mu*, *dü* and *tsen* spirits, the three. He thought of himself as being more powerful than *nyen*, *lu* and *tö* spirits, the three. The eight classes of spirits and divinities pledged themselves to punish it. Bad omens of *dü* demons fell down to the people. The malevolent charisma of *mu* spirits caused destruction. A violence was released by the *tsen* spirits. The *nyen* spirits projected the pain.[20] The harming power of *dü* demons broke out. Sickness appeared among people; loss befell the cattle. All thinkable trouble came to them and they thought: What is the reason of it? What should be pursued?

A female ritualist named Tingber Shelcag was asked to perform the ritual and she said: "Such [conduct] should not be adopted by anyone in the future.[21] Enveloping divinities[22] diminished. It was fault that the ***legu*** [divinities] were left abandoned. It was fault that the power of the balanced state of the eight classes of divinities and spirits was terminated. Nobody except for enveloping divinities is here.[23] The livelihood[24] of the divinities and spirits should be produced. Now, present valuable gifts to the divinities. Send ransom offerings to the spirits of obstructions. Protect the good destiny of people and well-being of cattle!" Thus she said.[25]

The ritualist Tharbon and Lubon Zornyen erected the supports of divinities. They sent the ransom offerings to the spirits of obstruction. They established the protection of ***legu*** [divinities]. They presented large treasures of offerings of gold, turquoise, onyx, coral, yak, sheep, horse, fine silk, grains. Then ransom offerings of the body of the smaller proportions: birds of the sky and wild ungulates were cast. The bodies of the various animals were stuffed and offered. And the human sickness of the king and the loss of cattle were stopped."

I would like to turn the attention to a seemingly minor detail. The *legu* divinities appear in the proximity of so-called "enveloping divinities" (*'go ba'i lha*) and spirits named as *lu* (*klu*), *nyen* (*gnyan*) and *tö* (*gtod*). It is namely the mention of *tö* spirits – otherwise very little known in Tibet – that again indicates its proximity to the *Fourfold Collection* mentioned in the first chapter. Unfortunately, the various categories of the spirits and divinities mentioned in this extract are of mixed-up nature and are often ambiguous. Typically, the lists of the particular spirits and divinities

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[20] The text mentions *brnyen* (for *brnyan*), "images," and *zer*, "beam of light." It is, however, probable that the text speaks about the *nyen* spirits (*gnyan*) and "pain" (*gzer*). *Gzer* is also a disease listed among those caused by *gnyan* (*gnyan rigs bco brgyad*), but it at the same time means "pain".

[21] The translation is only tentative. The expression in Tibetan is so general that it could be rendered in a number of ways.

[22] These divinities are considered to reside in the body of individuals and according to the Buddhist sources consist of the male-divinity (*pho lha*), female-divinity (*mo lha*), warrior divinity (*dgra lha*), maternal uncle-divinity (*zhang lha*), etc. Older sources of Bon, however, include more divinities. I am translating their designation *'go ba'i lha* here only provisionally as "enveloping divinities". Later Tibetan sources understand them to be attached (*'go ba*) to the individual's body as shadows. For more information, see Berounský 2007; for the term *'go* in Dunhuang documents, see Dotson 2017.

[23] The sentence is strange and gives the impression that some part is missing.

[24] Literally "food and path" (*za lam*).

[25] The next sentence is omitted since its meaning is altogether not clear: *der 'bel 'bang rkang phran gribs*.

representing them vary to a high degree in the textual sources. Yet, there is an indication in this extract that the *legu* divinities are perceived as representing the sphere lying in between the gods (connected with the sky) and the demons (probably bound with earthly characteristics), or standing between the extremes between distant gods and demons. Their protective power for people is stressed. In the beginning of the text three categories are mentioned: gods above, *legu* divinities, and eight classes of divinities and spirits. These seem to be a symbolic representation of the three vertical layers of the world. At the conclusion, again, it is mentioned that offerings were presented to the gods, ransom offerings to the spirits of obstruction. These are clearly two extremes. Only then it is stated that the "protection of *legu* divinities was established," which implicates that the *legu* divinities are seen as very close to the people and at the same time as being somewhere between the gods and demons (or spirits of obstruction). It is, however, not clear, what the relationship is between the "enveloping divinities" (perceived as divinities present in the bodies of the individual), the *nyen*, the *lu*, the *tö* on the one side and the *legu* divinities on the other side. Since all of them are seen as divinities and spirits closely connected with people, it could well be assumed that there is some overlap in these categories. Nevertheless, the text lacks any further indications of details which would provide some basis for better understanding the relationship between them.

Yet another interesting text passage speaks of not only the *leu*/*legu* divinities, but of *legu bon* (be it the ritual tradition, doctrine, etc.). This occurrence appears in an extracanonical text exposing the doctrine by Shenrab Miwo entitled as *Mdo rnam 'grel bar ṭi ka*, which must be dated earlier than the fourteenth century.[26] The text mentions the "Bon of the *legu* of ten knowledges" (*le gu shes bcu bon*) and it is apparent that this is to be understood as the basis of the doctrine of Bon. It is not clear whether *legu* means divinities here. It might well be that the meaning expanded in this case and that practises and rituals connected with *legu* divinities are meant here. This expression appears in the context in which 12 bon(pos) of various points of compass address their questions concerning the practice. The *legu* is mentioned only in the answer to the 12 bon(pos) of the East, which is an interesting detail:[27]

> "Again, twelve *bon* of the East asked the following unanswered questions: "After the demise of the sole father Shenrab Miwo, who will be the teacher of Bon? Who will be the friend of the Doctrine? Who will further expose arts (*gtsug lag*)? How will the traditions of narration on origin be differentiated?" Shenrab said: "Knowledgeable ones will be the teachers. Search friends among those of loving attitude. When the ***bon* of *legu* of ten knowledges** will be enacted to the disciples of body, speech and mind, great core treatises of arts (*gtsug lag*) will

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[26] This text is cited in *Bon sgo gsel byed*, which is from fourteenth century; see Mimaki 2000. For the Tibetan text, see *Mdo rnam 'brel* (= *'grel*) *bar ṭi ka*.

[27] *Mdo rnam 'brel bar ṭi ka*, chap. 30, fols. 108a-108b, *Sangs po 'bum khris ston pa spyin drangs ba bstan pa*: [...] *yang shar bon bcu gnyis kyis zhal na re/ ma byung ste 'di skad zhus/ gshen rab yab cig 'das 'og tu/ bon gyi slob dpon su la bya/ bsten pa'i grogs po su la bya/ gtsug lag rgyas par su la bshad/ smrang rgyud dbye ba ji ltar dbye/ gshen rab yab kyi zhal na re/ shes pa can la slob dpon gyis/ brtse gdung can la grogs po tshol/ sku gsung thugs kyi slob bu la/ le gu shes bcu bon byed na/ gtsug lag gzhung chen de la bshad/ gyer thabs re zhing smrang rgyud dang sprad/ 'on tang srid pa kun gyis go/* [...]

be exposed there. The specific way of recitation will be passed on in each tradition of narration on origin. And thus, all the creation will be understood."

Quite surprisingly, *legu* is presented here as the principle means of continuity of the practice of Bon. One, however, must bear in mind that this concerns the twelve bon(pos) of the East. It is also clear that the extract addresses a certain tradition of *legu*, which is called bon, although it might mean a tradition related to *legu* divinities. The *legu* is described as containing "arts" (*gtsug lag*), a Tibetan term often understood as related to the art of astrology. It is interesting to notice that the *Nyen Collection* and the *Sadak Collection* (Bon Kanjur versions) mention the term *gtsug lag* often when referring to the practices related to these spirits in general. The extract also says that *legu* is bound with recitation of myths on original events and specific ways of reciting them. Although it might be valid also for other pre-Buddhist ritual traditions on the Tibetan Plateau, it is still the very core of the practices related to these collections.

Coming back to the *Fourfold Collection*, there is at least one mention of *leu* in the *Sadak Collection*, and one mention in the *Nyen Collection* of the Bon Kanjur.[28]

These mentions do not reveal much, they are typically located in the conclusive parts of the narrative where suddenly an exclamation wishing prosperity and happiness to the "*leu* and donors" or "donors of *leu*" (*le'u yon bdag*) appear. It does not seem that divinities are meant by *leu* in these cases. Similar to the Bon and Buddhist texts one would expect the ritual master to be addressed by this term in analogy to similar (and frequently occurring) phrases referring to *yogis* (*rnal 'byor pa*) and sponsors in Buddhist texts, and priests (*gshen*) and donors in the Bonpo sources.

When looking into the short version of the *Nyen Collection* rediscovered by Ponse Khyung Gotsal (b. 1175), there are seven mentions of *leu* in this relatively short text.[29] Again, these mentions do not reveal much, they appear in phrases addressing the "donors" at the conclusion of some myth or in sections dealing with rituals. It is striking that one of the most frequent early references to the *leu* are again associated with a source that deals with the *nyen* spirits and comes from the tradition of the Dong people – the *Nyen Collection*.

4. The *leu* tradition of Amdo

It is not known in greater detail what *leu* or *legu* means in the older Bon sources. But it is used to refer to a type of spirits or divinities, who are perceived as intimately related to the individual. *Nyen*, *tö* and *lu* spirits seem to be identified with them and "enveloping divinities" appear in their proximity. In one of the texts presented above the term designates also a tradition, which might reflect tendency towards creating a universal tradition out of the local one. The term *leu* or *legu* probably expanded its meaning and designates a ritual tradition related to *legu*/*leu* divinities. The mentions of *leu* in the *Nyen Collection* then demonstrate that the meaning of *leu* refers to a ritual

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[28] *Gnyan 'bum*, p. 317: [...] *le'u yon bdag* [...]; *Sa bdag 'bum*, chap. 11, p. 57: [...] *le'u yon bdag 'di dag gis* [...].

[29] See *Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum*.

specialist dealing with *leu* divinities. Eastern Tibet is alluded to as a source of origin and it has been shown above that the *Nyen Collection* is somehow related to it as well.

Apart from the mentions in the written sources, there was a living tradition also called *leu* present in Amdo until the time of the Cultural Revolution. Until recently, the existence of it was totally unknown to modern scholarship. It was only in 2005 that a Tibetan article by Ngawang Gyatso (Ngag dbang Rgya mtsho) in the Amdo Research journal (*Mdo smad zhib 'jug*) revealed sensational information about this local ritual tradition of lay priests called *leu* or *amnye leu* (*a myes le'u*).[30] Although Ngawang Gyatso himself comes from the area of Thewo (The bo), where the tradition was present, he did not know about its existence until his adult age. He spent years collecting manuscripts related to the *leu* from households of this area.[31] Today, this tradition has vanished and what remains are hundreds of cryptic manuscripts difficult to understand, and a few very old individuals knowing about the rituals from the times predating the Cultural Revolution. Given the fact that Ngawang Gyatso's article is written in Tibetan and published in Amdo, the new findings on the *leu* tradition have not spread to Western scholarship either.

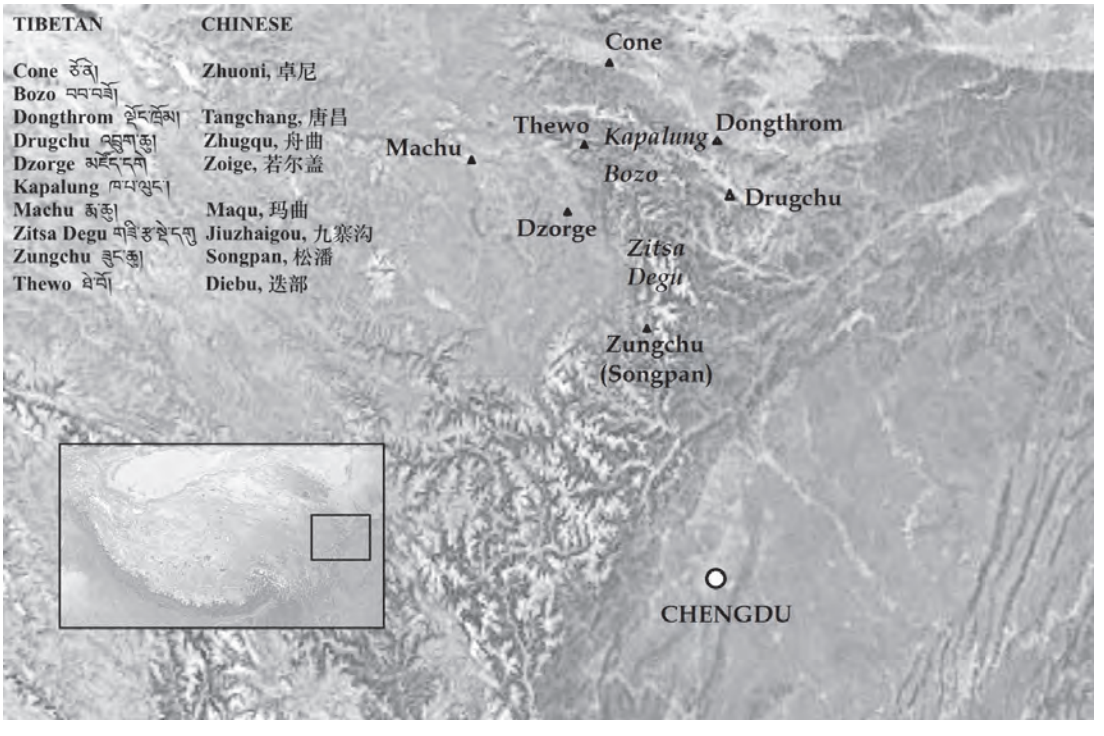


Fig. 3: Distribution of the *leu* tradition in Amdo. (Map prepared by the author, based on Google Maps 2019).

Hundreds of *leu* manuscripts have been collected and published in the last decades. Facsimiles of the texts from Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu), Thewo (The bo) and other places were published in

[30] For this text published in Tibetan, see Ngag dbang rgya mtsho 2005, 2016. For a similar article by the author, see Ngawang Gyatso 2016 (translation by Charles Ramble).

[31] Personal communication in summer 2017.

60 volumes in 2003. This large collection contains not only *leu* texts, but is a mixture of manuscripts of various provenance including monastic Bon.[32] The editors, however, did not recognize that parts of the texts are connected with this specific tradition. Then news about the sensational discovery of ancient texts from Amdo from the imperial period appeared in the Chinese media and 30 volumes of texts from the area of Dongtrom (Ldong khrom) to the east of Thewo were also published as facsimile. Confusingly, the title mentions Datshang (Mda' tshang) as its place of provenance.[33]

Ngawang Gyatso's research on the topic resulted in his Chinese language dissertation (submitted in 2011, Sichuan University in Chengdu) and facsimile reproductions of texts belonging to the *leu* tradition collected by him in Thewo (published in 10 volumes in 2016).[34] Recently another discovery of similar texts has been announced from the Drugchu ('Brug chu) area southeast of Thewo and another 20 volumes containing facsimiles of the manuscripts are being published at the time of writing this paper.



Fig. 4: Younger *leu* ritualist during a ritual dedicated to the *nyen*. This is an attempt to revive the tradition. Note the typical headgear formed by a strip of bear's wool (*dom ra*/*ral*), Khapalung. (Photo: Aben, June 2018)

The area where *leu* ritual specialists were present until the time of the Cultural Revolution comprises the wider region stretching south from Cone (Co ne) to the south through Thewo (The bo), Phenchu ('Phen chu), Drugchu ('Brug chu) and Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu). These areas are mostly forested. The tradition has received almost no mention in the written sources of the Bon, the Gelug

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[32] *Mdo khams yul gyi bod yig gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba 'dzum bzhad*. 60 vols.

[33] Mda' tshang is an attempt to render in Tibetan its Chinese name Tanchang (宕昌). To Tibetans it is known as Ldong khrom. See *Mdo smad mda' tshang yul gyi gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba don ldan*, 30 vols. The volumes are poorly edited and do not list the manuscripts they contain. For a list of the texts and other *leu* scriptures contained, largely unpublished, see Charles Ramble's website on Bon rituals, *Kalpa Bön*, URL: http://kalpa-bon.com (accessed: 16.12.2020).

[34] *Gna' rabs bon gyi dpe dkon bris ma*, vols. 1-10.

and the Sakya tradition in the area, despite its strong influence in the vast areas of Amdo at the edge of the Tibetan Plateau. We know now that the term *leu* (*le'u*) or *amnye leu* (*a myes le'u*) was used in the Thewo region and Phenchu area where the term *gompo leu* (*mgon po le'u*) refers to those familiar with Buddhist tantric rituals. Similar specialists are named *shipa* (*srid pa*, sometimes written as *shes pa*) in Zitsa Degu and *kongpa* (? *kong pa*) in Drugchu. The specific texts from Cone region, which were edited by Gelugpa monks, are called *tshe bcu yi ge* there. The term *leu* (written also as *lhe'u*, *le gu*, etc.) is nevertheless the appellation appearing in the texts themselves.[35]

So far, the efforts concerning the exploration of these traditions – with an exception of the research by Ngawang Gyatso – lay on preserving and publishing the surviving texts. This is a highly urgent task, since many of these texts were sold to private collectors in China and their disappearance deprives researchers of studying the last traces of this remarkable tradition and its socio-religious context. The texts collected mostly come from the possession of households in the vast area mentioned above.

For a number of reasons these manuscripts are very difficult to deal with. They are mostly written in classical Tibetan, in the "headless" *dbu med* script, often with a very distinctive shape of letters, and they retain many features of the Old Tibetan orthography. They contain frequent subscribed *ya* to the syllable *ma* (*myi*, *mye*, etc.), they frequently add *a chung* to particles such as *pa* (*pa'*) and the genitive particles (*gi*) are frequently used instead of the ergative (*gis*). The texts contain many contractions, some of them rather specific for these texts, for example the number 2 for *gnyan* or the letter *sa* with an above stroke added to it for *sa bdag*. Certain numbers unknown to the classical Tibetan script are also specific to the texts.

Although these texts are mentioned as coming from the imperial period in the facsimile publications, their physical appearance and palaeographic features do not correspond to such a statement. The manuscripts themselves are certainly of a much later date. Some of them are almost unintelligible, with incorrect spellings according to the classical orthography. This might be due to the local spellings in the various dialects present in the area, but seems to witness a strong influence from the oral tradition. There are indications that the tradition was transmitted mostly orally.[36]

When dealing with the origins of this tradition, Tibetan authors and the editors of the abovementioned facsimile collections connect it again with the Imperial Period of Tibetan history and the presence of soldiers from Central Tibet in the area. This repeated explanation based on legendary narrations projected back to the ancient past does, however, not satisfy a critical researcher.

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[35] This is partly based on discussions with Ngawang Gyatso, cf. also Ngawang Gyatso's introduction to the 10-volume facsimile edition of the texts from Thewo, i.e. *Gna' rabs bon gyi dpe dkon bris ma.*

[36] We are mostly left with the published editions which do not give details on the manuscripts' origins. During my fieldwork in Thewo in 2017 and 2018 I tried to find out about the background of the collection of the *leu* texts coming from the Khapalung (Kha pa lung) area of Thewo. The owner of the manuscripts said that they were written down by Bonpo monks of the monastery before the Cultural Revolution. There is an old *leu* in Thewo, probably the only ritual specialist surviving there, who possesses almost no texts but knows them from memory. These are clear indications for the primacy of orality, which also explains why similar texts are written down in different ways and phonetic rendering.

Despite the absence of any detailed survey of the texts, one can generally notice their diverse background. There are some *leu* texts with stronger influence of the monastic Bon, some of them are only fragmentary with apparently missing parts and many of them bear signs of being censored; this concerns mostly texts related to animal sacrifice. Some of the texts are shared with the monastic tradition of Bon, but many seem to be specific to this tradition, albeit mostly in an unintelligible and fragmented manner. One could hardly postulate a single origin of the surviving texts. Doubts also concern the identity of texts that mention the *leu* or *legu* from the older Bon sources. It is known that the tradition was subject to persecution, but at the same time also open to various influences throughout the centuries.

It is striking that this lore is strongly permeated by a layer connected with the worship of the *nyen* spirits. This could in turn be related to the Dong clan and the *Nyen Collection*. The following part of this paper will try to highlight some evidence for this hypothesis.

A *leu* text from Thewo entitled *Abo Ya-ngal* (*A bo ya ngal*),[37] for example, lists in its conclusive part the names of divine stones (*gsas rdo*) in two different languages. In this case not the language of Nampa Dong, but the "Nyen language of the Tanguts" (*mi nyag gnyan gyi skad*) in addition to the Tibetan. This can be considered as a further elaboration of the "Dong language" via the Tanguts (as one of the Dong tribes) and apparently associated with the Dong clan through the worship of *nyen* spirits.

If one leaves aside, for a moment, the surviving *leu* texts and looks into what *nyen* means for the people living in these areas nowadays, one would recognise an enormous influence of the *nyen* spirits in society there, which I think is extraordinary on the Tibetan Plateau.[38]

Most mountains in the area are considered to be abodes of *nyen* and a common term used for high mountains is "*nyen*-mountain" (*ri gnyan*). According to Sherab Dragpa, a younger *leu* ritualist from Bozo, the *nyen* represent an area of higher elevation and outside the reach of the habitat of the people – in contrast to the living space of the people represented by *yulsa*, "divinity of the living place" (*yul sa*). *Nyen* are distinguished from *yulsa* by their fierce and self-willed nature which makes it difficult to appease them. An old *leu* named Gendun (Dge 'dun, aged over 80), one of two *leu* ritualists from Bozo who remember the time before the Cultural Revolution, burst into laughter when recalling how Bonpo monks attempted to make *nyen* into the protectors of their monasteries. He said that this shows their ignorance about the real nature of the *nyen*, who are naturally fierce, headstrong and follow only their own mind.

The worship of *nyen* is a business carried out by males who address the spirit through the propitiation ritual mostly called *brngan*, which takes place at *labtse* (*la btses*), although many of such places are also addressed by names associated with birds (*bya bskyal*, *bya shing*, *bya bro*).

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[37] This text is not yet published. I am indebted to Ngawang Gyatso who generously provided me with photos of the manuscript.

[38] The following information was collected during research trips to the areas of Thewo, Phenchu and Bozo in 2017 and 2018. For most information I am indebted to Ngawang Gyatso, but also to the younger *leu* ritualist Sherab Dragpa (Shes rab Grags pa) from Bozo, who had learned the rituals from the 95 years old *leu* ritualist Walse (Dbal gsas).

Birds represent the *nyen* in general, they are messengers of the *nyen* and when speaking about *nyen*, people use the word "bird" as a synonym for the *nyen*. The *leu* ritual texts frequently mention the "artemisia bird" (*mkhan bya*), which used to be an effigy of bird made from the artemisia plant. It was offered to the *nyen*. This ritual seems to influence another frequent ritual called "bird-poles" (*bya rdang*) addressing primarily "warrior divinities" (*sgra bla*). In the numerous ritual texts of "bird-poles" the *nyen* are frequently mentioned. The texts leave the impression that the *nyen* have been mixed up with "warrior divinities". During the ritual a ritual construction is used, on which depictions of birds appear.[39]



Fig. 5: "Bird-poles" construction (*bya rdang*) in use during a ritual dedicated to *nyen*. There are depictions of various birds on the paper, the Garuda is on the top; Khapalung. (Photo: Aben, June 2018)

The position of the *nyen* is juxtaposed with the worship of *lu* (*klu*) spirits. Females make offerings to the *lu* spirits through the *bsang* ritual. Customarily, women used a spindle during the worship of *lu* in contrast to the arrows and spears used for the propitiation of the *nyen* by males. According to informants from various places, each household had several specific places where the *lu* were worshipped by females in the past. Such places of worship did not have a single common name, but were designated as "tree of *lu*" (*klu shing*), "place of *lu*" (*klu sa*) and others (*klu skyel*, *klu bro*, etc.). This tradition of specific female rituals is nowadays disappearing. The importance of the *nyen* and *lu* is also stressed by the fact that according to Gendun, *leu* ritualists used to employ two different styles of chanting during the performance of the ritual – the "voice of *nyen*" and the "voice of *lu*" (*gnyan skad*, *klu skad*), the "voice of *nyen*" being the most common style employed.

Both *lu* and *gnyan* were intimately connected with society. It had been the custom that childless women addressed their prayers to the *nyen* for granting them a child (*gnyan la bu slong ba*). When the child was born, it received a name in which *nyen* figures. This explains why

[39] This again is very much in agreement with the texts of the *Nyen Collection*. For my article presenting examples of the offerings of birds to the *nyen*, see Berounský 2016.

frequent names in the area are "Child of *Nyen*" (Gnyan phrug), "One Achieved by *Nyen*" (Gnyan grub), "One Protected by *Nyen*" (Gnyan skyab), "One Released by *Nyen*" (Gnyan thar), "Pleasure of *Nyen*" (Gnyan dga'), "Virtue of *Nyen*" (Gnyan dge), "*Nyen*-Män" (Gnyan sman), "One Reared by *Nyen*" (Gnyan 'tsho), etc. It also had been custom to consider extraordinary males – typically brave and fierce characters – to be *nyen* in fact. Some people were believed to understand the language of the *nyen*.



Fig. 6: Gendun (aged over 80), one of the two surviving old *leu* ritualists from Phenchu and Bozo, with Sherab Dragpa to the right and Ngawang Gyatso to the left. (Photo: author, June 2017)

The might and influence of the *nyen* is eventually illustrated by events that took place in the village of Khapalung in Thewo about seven years ago. The village was flooded by a usually small creek and several people died. The collecting and selling of Yartsagungbu (*dbyar rtsa dgun 'bu*; caterpillar fungus), which grows abundantly in the area and fetches a high price on the market, had become a major factor for the increase of wealth of the otherwise poor village. The flooding was interpreted as a manifestation of the anger of the *nyen* who is believed to reside in the steep mountains above the valley. Despite the enormous profit Yartsagungbu had brought to the village people, the collecting of the medicinal mushroom was banned and stopped.[40]

5. The case of the "Smoke Purification by Fox" (*wa bsang*)

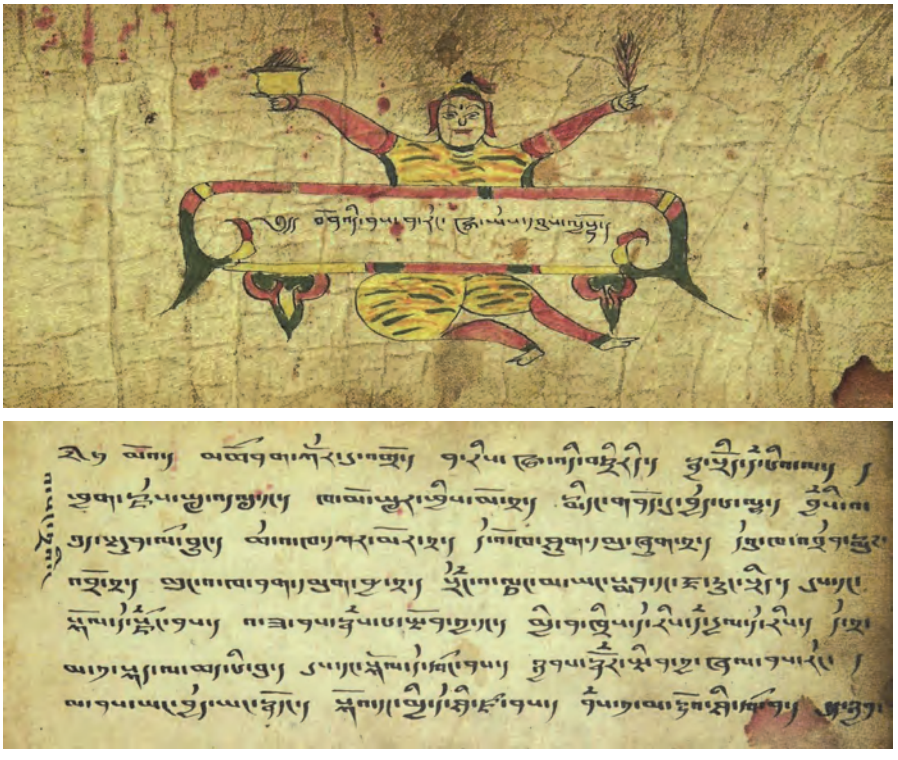
In order to exemplify the connections between the *leu* tradition of Amdo and the *Nyen Collection*, two examples will be given. Both demonstrate that the situation is much more complex and that the above-mentioned relationship is not simply linear.

The first example touches on the ritual tradition of burning foxes (*wa bsang*), which has been addressed elsewhere in detail (Berounský 2019). Here, a very brief description of it will be given to show the connections with the *Nyen Collection* and the *leu* tradition of Amdo.

To begin with, there are rather brief and enigmatic mentions of the smoke-purification ritual by [means of the] fox (*wa bsang*) in each of the three versions of the *Nyen Collection*. The mentions

[40] Aben, native of the village, personal communication, August 2018.

are rather sporadic and lacking details. The first version of the *Nyen Collection* from the Bon Kanjur contains a mention of the *Smoke Purification by Fox* in its very first myth entitled the *Smoke Purification of the "Nol" Pollution of the Nyen* (*Gnyan mnol bsang*).[41] The text is only fragmentary, and the context of the ritual is not fully revealed. It narrates a story of Kula Machen Pomra (Sku bla Rma chen bom ra) – the famous mountain divinity of Amdo – who is one of the eight Ma (Rma) brothers. Machen Pomra searches for his bride and a lady called Lharimo (Lha ri mo), related to the *nyen* spirits, becomes his spouse. Nevertheless, she gives birth to an illegitimate child, whose father seems to be one of Machen Pomra's brothers. This causes Machen Pomra's anger and eventually pollutes all divinities and spirits. The pollution is then ritually treated by lustre (*tshan*) consisting of the blood of birds and finally by a fox that is ritually killed with a golden sword.



Figs. 7-8: First pages of the text on fox entitled *Bon 'di nas na ro wa yi dbu lags+ho* (reading emended). From *Mdo smad mda' tshang yul gyi gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba don ldan*, vol. 26, p. 1.

The second version of the *Nyen Collection* from Phenchu[42] ('Phen chu) narrates a myth on the creation of various beings including the *nyen*, who are then subject to the intrusion by demons (*bdud*). They have several *nyen* as wives and with the killing of the demons, pollution appears –

[41] *Rnam par dag pa'i 'bum bzhi las rin po che gnyan gyi 'bum bzhugs so* (i.e. *Gnyan 'bum*), pp. 4-17.

[42] *'Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum bzhugs s+ho*, ff. 13-17. The whole section is entitled *wa bsang* (smoke purification by [means of the] fox).

probably due to the killing of relatives (*dme*). Birds are used for purification and eventually also a fox is used for the smoke purification ritual (*bsang*) related to Shenrab Miwo.

The third version comes from the revelation by Ponse Khyung Gotsal and contains only a longer myth on the killing of a son of *Nyen* by a son of the Dong clan. In the parts dealing with the ritual (which is not necessarily connected with the myth), a fox is mentioned along with other animals (badger, cow, goat, etc.) to be offered for the smoke purification ritual (*bsang*).[43]

The *Smoke Purification by Fox* (*wa bsang*) is known to all the versions of the *Nyen Collection*, although the details are unclear and the context varies. The ritual can nevertheless be considered as a ritual purifying improper sexual behaviour (*mnol*, or incest, *nal*) and the killing of relatives (*dme*). It appears in the context of worship of the *nyen* spirits.

Looking into the facsimile edition of *leu* texts from the Dongtrom (Ldong khrom) area of north-eastern Tibet in Amdo (30 vols.), one finds five Tibetan texts dealing with foxes. The titles of the texts are mostly given as Naro Fox (Na ro wa; containing obvious scribal errors such as Na res wa, Na ris wa, Nas reng wa, etc.). The enigmatic term *naro* designates a group of animals such as fox, badger, flying squirrel, bear and others.[44]

These texts are introduced by a myth on the creation of seven (or nine) foxes, who originated from the mating of the ancestor figure Yabla Daldrug (Yab lha 'Dal drug) with Khamo Yarla Chimo (Kha mo Yar la phyi mo). According to the text the intercourse was polluted by incest (*nal*) and the murder of relatives (*dme*), without giving further details. This explains that the foxes originated from a polluted relationship and this probably explains their efficiency regarding pollutions.

The text then continues with a story on seven sons of the *nyen* and two humans, who came from a single mother. Their mother passed away and a fox is sent as a messenger to warn the people not to bury the mother among the *nyen* – this would provoke pollution. The fox, nevertheless, forgets to deliver the message and the burial of the mother pollutes the *nyen*. The fox is then caught, its back is ripped off by the golden sword and turned into an offering to be burnt during the smoke purification ritual. During the ritual the wool of the fox is said to purify the *nyen* of trees, the bones to purify the *nyen* of the rocks, etc.

The same elements are present here, but there is a clear development of the details. There are more ritual texts dealing with the *Smoke Purification by Fox* (*wa bsang*) both among the *leu* texts and beyond (cf. Berounský 2019), but this version seems to be the most widespread. It was used for the purification of incest and murder of relatives and it is nowadays reported that only a small bunch of wool from the fox is burnt instead of the whole animal.

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[43] *Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs swo*, p. 631.

[44] *Mdo smad mda' tshang yul gyi gna' dpe phyogs bsdus mthong ba don ldan*, *Wa'i dbu lhags+ho* (vol. 22), *'No'di nas na res wa yes dbu lags+ho* (vol. 2), *Na ris wa yin dbul+s+ho* (vol. 10), *Na ris wa ba'i dbu lags+ho* (vol. 24), *Bon+'di nas reng wa yes dbus lya+s+ho*, vol. 26. The titles illustrate that they were written down phonetically which makes it almost impossible to understand the texts. After publishing an article on the topic (Berounský 2019) I came across more related texts. Among them is one from the Zitsa Degu (Gzi rtsa Sde dgu) region, generously shared with me by Sherab Dragpa (Shes rab Grags pa), which enabled me to understand the meaning of the text.

Over the centuries, there was certainly some development in the *leu* texts from Amdo and various versions of the *Nyen Collection*, which itself contain several unclear versions of it and cannot be considered as a single coherent source. But the connection between them seems clear. They deal with the purificatory ritual over the pollution caused by incest and the murder of relatives and the context remains the worship of the *nyen*.

Most surprising is that until recently – before the Tibetan versions became available – the myth contained among the *leu* texts had existed in translations into Mongolian and had been the subject of discussions in Mongolian studies for decades, without noticing its Tibetan origin, which now seems to be an established fact.[45] The Mongolian translations frequently speak of the "seven fierce stars" instead of the *nyen*. The *nyen* are not known to Mongols and since this expression can designate also something like 'fierce' (*gnyan po*), they became "fierce stars". Ten Mongolian versions are known from all across Mongolia. This might reveal the surprising influence of the *leu* texts, which until recently were totally unknown to scholarship on the Mongols. The ways of their diffusion to Mongolia probably avoided the Buddhist or Bon clergy in this case.

6. The case of the myth on retribution for killing the *nyen* spirit

Coming to the second example, a single myth from the *Nyen Collection* is investigated.[46] Although the different versions bear different titles, the most common title points to its content being titled *Retribution for Killing the Nyen* (*gnyan stong*). This text again is contained in all three versions of the *Nyen Collection* and each version is different. The basic plot of the myth is very similar in all versions, although the wording is different. In addition to the *Nyen Collection*, a very long version is also included in the *Tö Collection*. This version is rather exceptional in the sense that it occasionally speaks about the *nyen* as *tö* spirits. Nevertheless, it describes the *nyen* not very consistently (here, it was the son of *Nyen* who was killed, yet, the *tö* being leads the armies of the *nyen*, etc.). It seems that *tö* beings have simply replaced the *nyen* in parts of this version.

A connection with the *leu* manuscripts can be observed by the fact that one of the main characters – the Old Nyen Darba (Gnyan rgan Dar ba/de ba) – is a mountain god from Thewo, the region from which many of the *leu* ritual texts come. One of the versions locates the geographical context of these events in Thebchu (Theb chu), which is an alternative spelling for the Thechu river (The chu) flowing through the Thewo region.

There is no space for details here and thus the core of the myth will be introduced without diving into the ocean of specifics of the different versions.

The myth starts with the creation of the land of the *nyen* and the land of the people of the Dong clan. The ancestors of the *nyen* and the Dong are mentioned in the texts. Each couple gives birth to a son and a daughter who are mostly referred to in the text by the appellations "son of Nyan" (*gnyan*

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[45] For studies on Mongolian versions of these texts, see Serruys 1970, Heissig 1976, Bawden 1976, 1978, Beffa and Hamayon 1984, Coloo 2001, Sárközi and Sazykin 2001.

[46] Although written some time ago, an article by me on this topic with more details still awaits publication. See Berounský, forthcoming.

bu) and "daughter of the Nyen" (*gnyan lcam*) and the "son of Dong" (*ldong sras/bu*) and "daughter of Dong" (*ldong lcam*).



Fig. 9: The Old Nyen Darba (Gnyan rgan Dar ba) in Thewo. (Photo: author, July 2017)



Fig. 10: The Old Nyen Darba depicted on a mural in the Gelugpa Lhason monastery near Dongbo village.

The son of *nyen* then descends onto the earth. There is an interesting detail describing the son of Dong climbing up to graze yaks and the daughter of Dong descending to work on the fields. This allows for a geographical location at the borders of the Tibetan Plateau, which also (besides many other places in Tibet) fits Thewo, where people keep yaks in the higher pastures and cultivate fields in the places of lower elevation at the same time.

The son of Nyen encounters the daughter of Dong at the field and they fall in love. They make love in the field and, according to some versions, the world order becomes reversed: the beasts of prey start to take care of the cattle, the birds are weeding the field, etc.

The message about these strange events happening reaches the brother – the son of Dong. According to the different versions it is delivered to him by his servant or by a mythical creature of a wise bat (*pha wang sgam po*); the other versions are silent on this.

The son of Dong then approaches the couple making love in the field and becomes very furious. The son of Nyen transforms himself into a snake and the son of Dong cuts him with his sword into many pieces. The daughter of Dong reveals to her brother that the snake was in fact the son of Nyen. Worried about the consequences they bury him deep under the ground and thereby pollute the surface of the place (according to some versions the daughter steps on the spot; in other versions this is not clear).

Meanwhile, the father of Nyen – the Old Nyen Darba (Gnyan rgan Dar ba) – starts to search for his son everywhere, but due to the pollution of the site where his son was buried, he cannot find him. He gathers the armies of the *nyen* and descends with them to the land of the Dong.

Then all versions have a rather unclear part in which the son of Dong's murder is identified and the father of Nyen gets to know about him. This is connected to a dice game, but the sources are rather unclear about who played the dice and for what purpose. According to the version from Phenchu the sons of the terrestrial divinity (*sku bla*) play the dice game for the inheritance of the father. The son of Dong empowers the dice of the younger brother who wins the game. The older brother gets angry and the son of Dong realises that the empowering of the dice by his spell was caused by the demons who were involved in the act of murder. He reveals that it was him who killed the son of Nyen and the wind carries this to the ear of the father of Nyen.

Then comes a longer part of the myth in which the son and the daughter of Dong are chased by the armies of *nyen*. The order of events and some details are not identical in the different versions, although they bear similar features and characters.

The texts also describe why the *nyen* are considered to dwell in lakes, trees and in rocks: Being chased, the son of Dong throws a mirror, comb and golden ring behind himself. These turn into lakes, trees and rocks. Parts of the armies of the *nyen* then get attached to them. The text mentions that this is the origin for *nyen* residing in lakes, trees and rocks. Other versions speak about *lu* (*klu*) being stuck to lakes, *tö* (*gtod*) to the rocks, etc.

The son of Dong and the daughter of Dong seeking refuge with a mountain divinity, which according to some versions, is related to them. All versions recount that the refuge is provided by Kula Machen Pomra (Sku bla Rma chen pom ra), the famous mountain god of Amdo. In some versions, Machen Pomra is presented as the lord of the terrestrial gods (*yul sa'i rgyal po*), who are described as different from the *nyen*. In another version the mountain divinity Kula Kyongte Dongdra (Sku bla Skyongs te Ldong bra) plays a similar role being presented as the lord of terrestrial gods (*yul sa*). According to some versions, the conflict is mediated by the mountain divinity Nyenje Gong-Ngon (Gnyan rje Gong sngon), who invited ritualists to appease the *nyen* and to decide the payment for killing the *nyen* (*gnyan stong*). Two versions, the one from the *Nyen Collection* and the *Tö Collection* of the Bonpo Kanjur, continue in a series of narrations added to this story. There is also a short text included in the conclusive part of the *Nyen Collection* of the Bonpo Kanjur (i.e. contained in a different part of the collection), which provides some addendum

to the story. It describes how the wise bat visits the deceased son of Nyen and reveals to him that he begot a son from engaging with the daughter of Dong. The bat then carries him back to the living ones.

What matters, apart from the plot, are the toponyms connected with the story. The area where the events of the myth take place cover large parts of Amdo.

The name of the father of Nyen whose son is murdered is given as Nyen Gen Deva or Nyen Gen Darba (Gnyan rgan De ba/dar ba, i.e. "Old Nyen Darba/Deba") in most manuscripts. A mountain with the same name Nyen Gen Darba is located close to the Thewo valley. Remarkably, the nearest village that worships the mountain is called Dongbo (Ldong bo), pointing clearly to the background of the Dong clan.



Fig. 11: Nyenje Gong Ngon (Gnyan rje Dgong/Gong sngon) as seen from Amchog (A mchog). (Photo: author, June 2017)

Another divinity mentioned in the myth is Nyenje Gong-Ngon (Gnyan rje Dgong/Gong sngon). He figures as a heavenly priest, but at the same time appears as a maternal uncle of the Dong brother and sister in another version. A mountain with the same name is located not far from the Thewo and Phenchu regions in the higher pastures west of Thewo, close to the area nowadays known as Amchog (A mchog).

Two other mountain divinities of the myth can be identified. Machen Pomra is frequently worshipped in Thewo and surrounding valleys. He is one of the main protectors of the Bon monasteries there, but more important is that also lay people worship him as a personal protector divinity. The large number of surviving *leu* manuscripts dedicated to this divinity point to the popularity of the Machen Pomra cult in the region.

Another divinity present in most of the manuscript versions is Kula Gyogchen Dongdra (Sku bla Skyogs/Sgyogs chen Ldong bra).[47] This divinity appears in the list of Thirteen Gurla divinities (Mgur lha bcu gsum) or gods (cf. De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993 [1956]: 213; Karmay and Nagano 2003: 171). He is nowadays better known as Gatö Jowo (Sga stod Jo bo) and can be located in the remote area of Yushu (Yu shul), on the border between Chumarleb (Chu dmar leb) and Trindu (Khri

[47] In the later Tibetan texts his name is mostly written as Sgyogs chen Gdong ra.

'du) counties of Qinghai Province, some 300 km west of Mount Machen Pomra, close to the place where the Yellow River issues.

The identification of these mountain divinities enables us to locate the itinerary of the son of Dong's escape from the armies of *nyen*. It starts in the Thewo region and leads north-west to Machen Pomra and further west. This region is called the "homeland" (*pha zhing*) in one version and it can be deduced that the geographic origin of the Dong clan was considered to lie in this area.

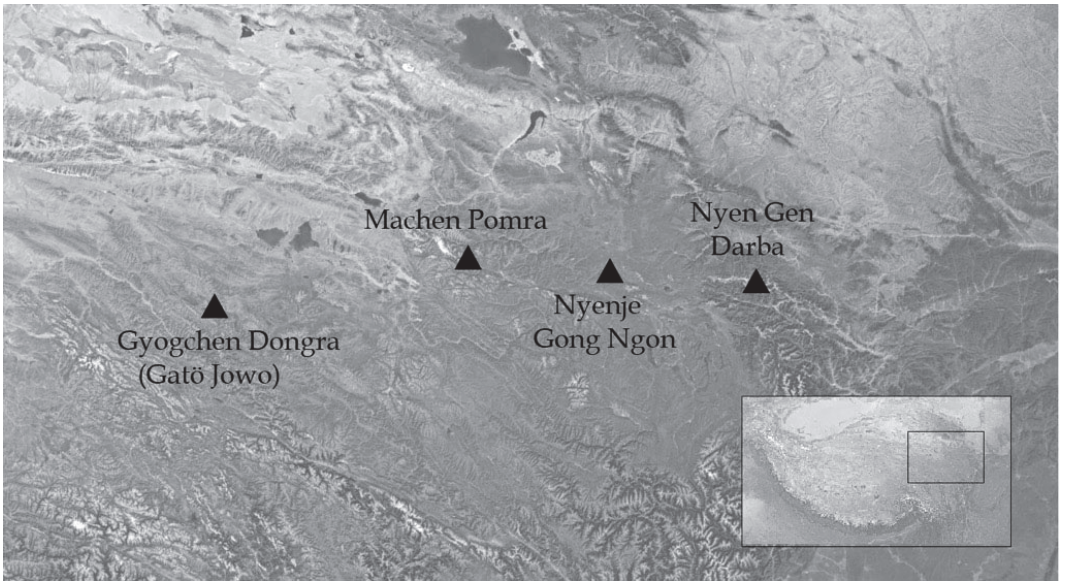


Fig. 12: Map of the mountain divinities appearing in the myth. (Map prepared by the author, based on Google Earth 2019).

It is surprising that the version contained in the *Nyen Collection* from the Bonpo Kanjur provides many names in Tangut (Mi nyag), but not in the language of the Nampa Dong (Nam pa Ldong) as is the case in other myths. This is the only myth from the *Nyen Collection* where Tangut names appear. This illustrates that the text sees its origin related to the Tangut people. The Tangut kingdom (1038-1227) did not encompass the localities presented in this myth but was situated to the north of them. Nevertheless, the Tanguts see their origins in the area where the Yellow River originates, and this is the place of Mount Gyogchen Dongra mentioned in the myths (see Kepping 1994: 363. It might be that the myth reflects the tradition of a particular branch of the Dong clan, which had settled in the Thewo region, but whose original homeland lay in the Yushu area and was related to Tanguts.

Two more surprises come to light with the other versions of this myth. The manuscripts found in Gathang Bumpa stūpa (Dga' thang 'Bum pa) of southern Tibet include a version of the myth with a very similar plot.[48] These manuscripts are of uncertain date, but can hypothetically be dated to the

[48] For the original text, see *Gtam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdams bsgrigs*. For a rendering into English, see the two, in many respects, different translations by Karmay (2009) and Bellezza (2010).

eleventh century or earlier (Karmay 2009). In this version the conflict does not occur between the *nyen* and the Dong, but between *lu* (*klu*) underground spirits and the people designated as Ma (*smra*). The two existing translations of the myth into English do not recognise that the main character called Maphodra (Rma pho 'bra) is none other than Machen Pomra (Rma chen pom ra), the famous mountain god of eastern Tibet. This narration was incorporated into a series of myths (*rabs*) dealing with *byol* rituals (probably averting the "bad omens", *ltas ngan*), otherwise situated in Central and western Tibet. The fact that Machen Pomra figures here as a main character points to the transfer of this myth from eastern Tibet to the area of Gathang Bumpa in southern Tibet.



Fig. 13: First folio of the Naxi manuscript B-42 with the son of Dong Ngothur to the left. (Mss. kept at the Harvard-Yenching Institute).

Joseph Rock's two volumes on the *Na-khi Nāga Cult* contain yet another version of the same myth in Naxi's pictographic script, which the author paraphrased with the help of a Naxi ritualist (Rock 1952: 307-14). Another version of a similar manuscript in pictographic script is part of the Harvard-Yenching collection.[49] In addition, three more Naxi versions of the myth are to be found in the collections kept in Berlin (Janert 1977: 861).[50] In these versions the core of the narration is well preserved (compared to the Tibetan versions), but due to the pictographic script the identity of the main characters is obviously blurred. The fact that it primarily concerns the *nyen* beings is not apparent from Rock's English translation and the identity of the mountain god Machen Pomra remains unnoticed too, etc.

The name of the main protagonist that appears in the title as ^{1}Ddo-^{3}ssaw-^{1}ngo-^{2}t'u is evidently a phonetic rendering of Dongse Ngothur (Ldong sras Ngo thur/thung) of the Tibetan versions.[51]

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[49] These are the manuscripts B-41 and B-42; for digital versions, see *Naxi manuscripts collection, 1826-1910 and undated* (collection identifier: hyl00002), Harvard-Yenching Library, HOLLIS for Archival Discovery, URL: https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/25/resources/4415 (accessed: 17.12.2020).

[50] I am indebted to Michael Friedrich (University of Hamburg) for pointing out to me the existence of three other versions kept in Berlin.

[51] The transcription system employed by Joseph Rock is no longer used among scholars. I am relying on his rendering of the myth and therefore follow the transcription employed in his book.

Ngothur is the proper name and Dongse means "son of Dong". The Naxi version of the myth thus speaks also about the ancestors of the Dong clan.

Moreover, the main character of the story, who is killed by the son of Dong, is mentioned as Nāga ^{3}Nyi-^{2}ssâ-^{2}kyo-^{1}lo. This is apparently Nyen se (Gnyan sras) in Tibetan, i.e. the "son of Nyen".

The whole myth therefore addresses the conflict between the ancestors of the Dong clan and the *nyen* beings. This information is missing in Rock's translation of the story.

Puzzling is Joseph Rock's translation of the different classes of beings that are referred to by the collective term *nāga*, the term *^{1}ssu* in Naxi pictographic writing. Although it seems to stand for the Tibetan *lu* (*klu*) in a number of cases, which is *nāga* in Sanskrit (denoting underground or serpent spirits). Unlike in the Tibetan tradition the term *^{1}ssu* is applied as a general term comprising the following divinities and spirits:

i. *sadak* – Tibetan: *sa bdag* – Naxi: *^{1}ssaw-^{3}ndaw*
ii. *nyen* – Tibetan: *gnyan* – Naxi: *^{2}nyi*
iii. *tö* – Tibetan: *gtod* – Naxi: *^{2}dtü*

This is rather confusing, since *lu*, *sadak*, *nyen* and *tö* beings are considered as a fourfold group of spirits in the Tibetan texts. Apparently, they can take on the characteristics of another class from time to time, but there is no indication in the Tibetan texts that *sadak*, *nyen* and *tö* are a subclass of a more general group of *lu*, i.e. *nāga*s. In light of this new evidence deriving from the Tibetan texts, the title of Rock's monograph *The Na-Khi Nāga Cult and Related Ceremonies* should be reconsidered. It can be assumed that the Naxi (Na-khi) term *^{1}ssu* is a rendering for the Tibetan term *sä* (*gsas*). This is a general term used for divinities and the expression *sä-nyen* (*gsas gnyan*) is attested in Tibetan texts. The title of the Rock's book should more correctly read the *Na-khi Sä Cult*.

More important in the context of the present paper is, however, that traces of the old tradition of the Dong clan are also abundantly found among the ritual texts of Naxi people.

7. Concluding remarks

The present paper has marked some spots and connections by having presented fragments contributing to the larger picture of the ritual and mythical tradition of the Dong people in Tibet. It has fleshed out a few instances and much more remains hidden.

The particularly early text material of the *Nyen Collection* contains by far the most detailed information on the *nyen* spirits available. There are many questions concerning the surviving manuscript versions. We do not know their history, the circumstances of their compilation, nor the possible changes the manuscripts might have undergone in the past. Yet, it has become clear that they present themselves as the lore of the Dong clan, largely the Nampa Dong, but also Tangut or proto-Tangut people (Mi nyag) related to the Dong clan. The Dong people can be identified with a larger group of people referred to as Qiang in Chinese by the Old and the New Tang dynasty histories (*Jiu Tangshu*, *Xin Tangshu*), and who are depicted as pastoralists inhabiting large areas of present-day Amdo. The fact that two old manuscripts of the *Nyen Collection* are reported to have appeared in western Tibet around the 10th and 11th centuries and in the 12th century, might point to

the large-scale movements on the Tibetan Plateau already in the early phase of the post-imperial period. Naturally, a question arises: is the pan-Tibetan cult of the *nyen* spirits heritage of the Dong tradition? The *nyen* spirits are known all over the Tibetan Plateau, but one hardly finds any detailed information on them in the Tibetan sources. The region of Thewo with its vivid cult of *nyen* spirits is exceptional, as well as the *Nyen Collection* as a unique textual source on the *nyen*.

The presence of Shenrab Miwo in the myths of the *Nyen Collection*, portrayed in the form of a priest (*gshen*) and not as a universal Buddha-like teacher (supported by the Dunhuang manuscript ITJ 731 that contains Nampa Dong language and likewise portrays him as a priest), leads to the question of whether the tradition of the Dong people might have been the source from which the founding figure of monastic Bon evolved with Buddha-like features.

The paper has presented some evidence for links between the *Nyen Collection*, the *leu/legu* divinities as mentioned in older Bon sources, and the *leu* tradition that existed in the forested border regions of Amdo prior to the Cultural Revolution. One cannot say that these are identical. The older text material seems to refer to divinities as *lu* and *nyen* with the broader designation of *leu/legu* divinities and relates them to the east of the Tibetan Plateau. This could concern the tradition of which the *Nyen Collection* possibly forms just a fragment.

The *leu* tradition present in Amdo until recently represents a tradition which underwent considerable change over the centuries. It was namely the custom of the bird and animal offerings which led to the suppression of such practices under the influence of the monastic milieu in these areas. At the same time, the tradition also integrated elements from the monastic traditions of Bon and Chö ("Buddhism"). Among the surviving *leu* material are many texts dealing with the *nyen*. Most striking, however, is the vivid cult of *nyen* among the lay people from which the *leu* texts come. The cult of *nyen* is exceptionally strong here.[52] One can assume that the important (and probably older) layer of the *leu* rituals in Amdo is connected with the tradition of the Dong clan. There are clear common features shared by both the *Nyen Collection* and the local cult of the *nyen* represented mainly by the worship and offering of birds in connection with the *nyen*.

The first case study highlights that the traditions represented in the *Nyen Collection* are familiar with the ritual of *Smoke Purification by Fox* (*wa bsang*). The ritual was also popular in the *leu* tradition of Amdo but underwent some change and the myth surrounding it is different. What remains the same are the context of the worship of *nyen* and the context of the ritual for purifying the pollution caused by incest (*nal*) and the murder of relatives (*dme*). Surprisingly, this ritual somehow found its way to Mongolia.

The second case study presented a single myth on the retribution for killing the *nyen*. This myth was influential and is very well known in the oral tradition. It appears in several Tibetan versions. The main characters are mountain divinities either of *nyen* or *yulsa* type. Their names allow for the geographic mapping of events of this myth and for connecting them with the origin of the Dong

[52] So far, I am not aware of any other Tibetan region with such a developed cult of *nyen*. This, of course, may merely be due to my ignorance about other such societies existing in Tibet. I have no detailed information about the regions of 'Brug chu, Zung chu, Gzi rtsa Sde dgu. My conclusions are solely based on observations and information concerning the The bo, 'Phen chu and Bab bzo regions.

clan. This territory stretches from Yushu through the Machen Pomra range, including nomad pastures to the north of Thewo and Thewo itself. It revealed that the Thewo region, where the *leu* tradition is widespread, has long been related to the Dong clan. Surprisingly, several Naxi versions of this myth were also identified. This opens a new field for research, which may help to determine to which degree the Naxi rituals are influenced by the *leu* tradition of Amdo and the tradition of the Dong clan that is represented by the *Nyen Collection*, but also in relation to the *Sadak*, *Tö* and *Lu Collections*.

It is hoped that further research into this field will lead to a better understanding of the pre-Buddhist past on the Tibetan Plateau, being more than a unified single Old Tibetan tradition. Having described here in some detail the tradition of the Dong clan might be helpful for understanding the early local specifics of other regions on the plateau. As a result, we could gain a more nuanced picture about the past of the societies of this fascinating place on earth.

Appendix

A list of texts containing the myth on retribution for killing the *nyen* spirit

Version A of the Bon Kanjur (vol. 141, eighteenth chapter (*le'u*) entitled *Chapter on Reconciliation of People and Nyen* (*Mi dang gnyan bsdum pa'i le'u*), pp. 122-201). This version constitutes various narrations of apparently diverse background. The shorter story under focus here appears only on pages 122-143, which, however, continues with some extensions up to page 180).

Version B of *Gtod 'bum* of the Bon Kanjur (vol. 142, chapter entitled *Breaking the Egg of Khyung* (*Khyung gi sgong nga bcag pa'i smrengs so*), pp. 378-400).

Version C, addendum to a longer version without title (*Gnyan 'bum*, Bon Kangyur, vol. 141(316)-17, *le'u* 25, pp. 316-318).

Version D, *'Phen yul rgyas pa gnyan gyi 'bum*, found in Phenchu, introduced as *Yo chu'i gnyan stong*, ff. 29a-34a, in: Tsering Thar and Ngawang Gyatso (eds.), *Gna' rabs bon gyi dpe dkon bris ma*, vol. 3, pp. 55-65.

Version E contained in the *Nye lam sde bzhi* corpus of texts (New Bonpo Katen, 253-25, pp. 615-623, *le'u gnyis pa* of *Nye lam sde bzhi'i gnyan 'bum bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs so*).

Version F, G, H, I, J Naxi manuscript of *The Story of* ^{1}*Ddo-*^{3}*ssaw-*^{1}*ngo-*^{2}*t'u*. Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, manuscript B-41 (north of Li-chiang/Lijang), for a translation, see Rock 1952: 307-14; **(F)** Library of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, manuscript B-42 (west of Li-chiang/Lijang); **(G)** (For F and G, see URL: https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/25/archival_objects/1184068, accessed: 17.12. 2020). Three versions kept in Berlin (**H, I, J**), for references, see Janert 1977: 861.

Version K, untitled narration forming a part of the *Byol rabs* cycle of myths found in Gathang Bumpa stūpa, see *Gtam shul dga' thang 'bum pa che nas gsar rnyed byung ba'i bon gyi gna' dpe bdams bsgrigs*; Karmay 2009; Bellezza 2010.

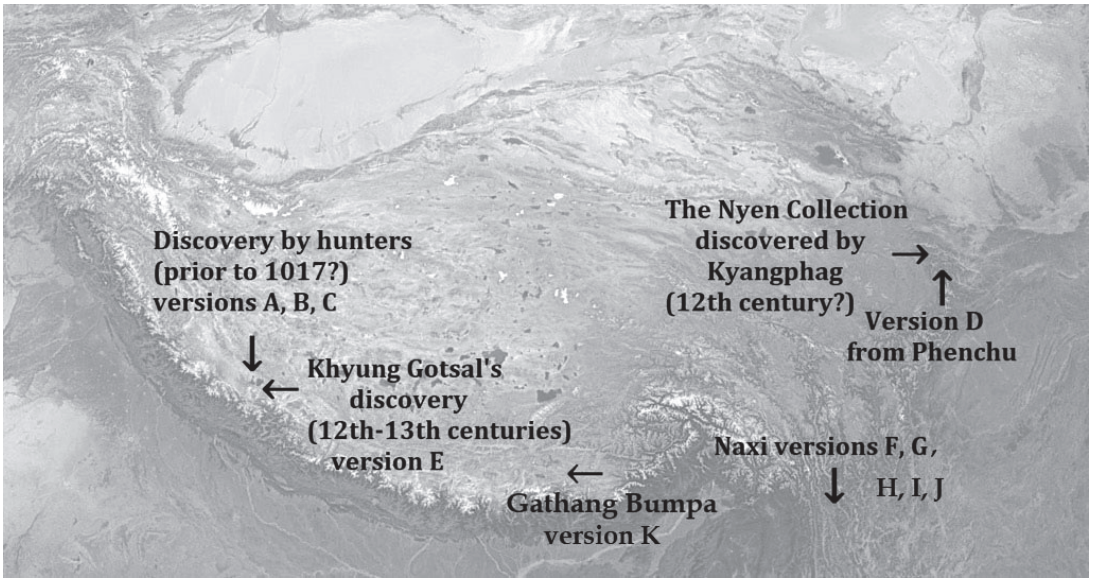


Fig. 14: Map indicating the places of origin of the manuscripts. (Map by the author, based on Google Earth 2019.)

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Tombs and Treasures

Tibetan Empire and Ancestor Cults in Present East Tibet

Anna Sehnalova

1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the debate of the 'social' and 'religious' as finely intertwined domains in both cosmological understandings and actual practice, within which we can find certain resonances and actual similarities between imperial Tibet and present-day East Tibet. The work does not examine the concepts of the 'social' and the 'religious' theoretically but rather tries to point out to the multiple intrinsic 'social' dimensions inherently embedded in what is commonly etically conceptualised as 'religion.'

The case I study is the burial practices of social elites. These practices clearly manifest high or the highest social status and supremacy of political power. Hence they reveal notions of social arrangements and stratification, and yet Western academic audiences usually view them primarily as religious ritual. In this paper, I suggest reconsider these notions and practices and thus revealed perceptions of kingship and rulership, social power and identity, ancestry and progeny, prosperity and territorial integrity as prevalently 'social' and 'political' elements. Within these elements arise traditions of ancestor cults that derive from and also govern local social order and organisation in terms of both kinship and social hierarchy, in contrast to the transcendentalism of the universal doctrine of Buddhism. They pertain to treasures (*gter*) and perceived forces of vitality and prosperity, above all *bla* and *g.yang*. The article draws attention to significant cultural continuities of divine noble ancestry and kingship, territorial divinities (*yul lha, gzhi bdag*, etc.), funerary treatments, and specific treasure practices.[1]

I juxtapose the context of the Tibetan Empire with recent ethnographic and textual material collected in East Tibet, accenting several re-occurring notions and shared practices. By 'Tibet', I mean the area of the Tibetan Plateau and its Tibetic languages' speaking communities; by 'East Tibet' I refer to this cultural constellation in the east of the Plateau. East Tibet is currently roughly within the Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces, and eastern parts of the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The short case study presented here derives from the region of Mgo log on the contemporary boundary of Qinghai and Sichuan. The article builds on evidence from the imperial era (7th-9th century A.D.), Dunhuang documents (up to the 11th century), and presentations of

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[1] The work has been evolving in discussions with Rob Mayer and is written in relation to Reinier Langelaar's contribution to this volume, both of whom I express my thanks. I am very grateful to Cathy Cantwell and Rob for help on the *gter ma* material and with the identification and transliteration of mantras, to Jiří Holba with Sanskrit identifications, to Per Sørensen and Guntram Hazod for generous feedback, to Hannibal Taubes for English corrections, and to the wholehearted people of Mgo log. I present here the mentioned topics only briefly, in length see my forthcoming D.Phil. thesis (University of Oxford).

14th-century sources relating to this era, especially in Erik Haarh's analyses; and further on a currently used ritual text for the most part authored by Karma chags med (17th century, edited later); historiographical literature from East Tibet from the 19th century; and on recent publications circulating in East Tibet. The fieldwork was conducted between 2014 and 2018 over repeated visits lasting from weeks to several months, and concentrated on the vicinity of the sacred mountain of Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Interlocutors included locals from all walks of life and different age groups: lay people, monastics, intellectuals, illiterate, both men and women of varying occupations.

2. Tibetan Empire: divinity, kingship, and treasures

2.1 Divine kingship and the occurrence of tombs

In the most prominent narratives, the Yar lung Spu rgyal dynasty of the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th cent. A.D.) derived its origin and patrilineal genealogy from their first appointed king Gnya' khri Btsan po. He supposedly descended either on the mountain Lha 'bab ri, literally "mountain of the descending god" (var. Lha ri Rol po, Lha ri Yol ba, *et al.*), in the lower Yar lung valley,[2] or the Lha ri Gyang to (var. Gyang to (Gyang tho/mtho) Bla 'bubs) mountain in the Kong po region, or alternatively hailed from the Spo bo area east of Kong po.[3] The Yar lha Sham po mountain in Central Tibet also features as the descending ground of the dynasty's apical ancestor, whose identity can differ from Gnya' khri Btsan po (Stein 1972: 42, 203). This mighty glacier-topped peak and its warrior deity of the same name are still worshipped as a very important territorial protector at the present.[4] The *Dba' bzhed* chronicle (11th-12th century)[5] mentions the god Yar lha Sham po as the dynasty's worshipped *sku lha*.[6] The very early Tibetan kings initiating the dynasty therefore supposedly descended from the celestial realm of the gods into the realm of the humans, and were expressively titled "divine sons" or "divine princes" (*lha sras*).[7] They were to govern humans as the "ruler of men" (*mi yi rje*).[8] This story has been recorded in Tibetan historical and religious

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[2] Hazod in this volume; Sørensen 1994: 139; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 223; Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 58-59, esp. fn. 71, as in sources from the 12/13th century onwards.

[3] Haarh 1969: 381; Stein 1972: 42; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 36-37; Karmay 1998: 220-225, 282-309, based on the Dunhuang PT 1287, *in situ* inscriptions from the early 9th century (Richardson 1985: 66-67), and the *Lde'u Chronicles* (for references see e.g. Sørensen 1994: 137, *et passim*).

[4] Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 61, fn. 79; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 203-04; Karmay 1998: 297, 342, fn. 23.

[5] Tentative dating of the extant versions (containing material likely from the 9th century), a supplemented version probably dates to mid-14th century. See Sørensen's dating in the preface (xiv-xv), and the introduction, Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 1-2.

[6] Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 98-99. On *sku bla/lha* see most recently Dotson 2019.

[7] Tucci 1955: 201; Haarh 1969: 342. The genealogy of the dynasty as recorded in various Tibetan sources is presented in Haarh 1969: 33-44; on varying genealogies: Karmay 1998: 282-309; reign of historical kings' chart: McKay 2003: 615; re-evaluated dating in Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: xxix-xxx; Dotson 2009: 116-19.

[8] See Hill 2013; Bialek 2019.

writing over subsequent centuries with substantial Indo-Buddhist influence,[9] and still continues to be a widespread notion in Tibet today. For example, the popular 16th-century *A Scholar's Feast of Doctrinal History*[10] (*Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*) authored by Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504-1564/66) renders these notions as follows – in the translation by Erik Haarh:[11]

> "Like day they came to Earth; like night they went to Heaven.
> When the sons were able to master the bridle
> They seized the *rMu-thag* and went to Heaven, it is said.
> As there is no corpse of *lHa*, they vanished like a rainbow.
> The tombs of the deceased ones are said to be placed in Heaven."

Similar lines feature already in the Dunhuang *Royal Genealogy* (PT 1286) of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (9th-10th cent., PT 1286, PT 1287; Dotson 2011: 85), the earliest known Tibetan historical narrative, and in the *Dba' bzhed* chronicle describing events of the imperial period (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 98). Later writings recall them again, among the important ones are: *The Chronicles of the Kings* (*Rgyal po bka'i thang yig*), a part of the treasure collection of *The Five Chronicles* (*Bka' thang sde lnga*) 'discovered' by the treasure revealer (*gter ston*) O rgyan Gling pa (b. 1323);[12] and the *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (*Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*) attributed to the Sa skya scholar Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams Rgyal mtshan (1312-1375, Sørensen 1994: 140).

The very first mythical kings, to whom this passage relates, appear as the "seven heavenly kings" (*gnam gyi khri bdun*) in the Dunhuang material as well as in later sources. They were presumed to temporarily visit the humans by means of a celestial cord (*rmu thag, smu thag, dmu thag*) connecting the heavenly sphere of gods with the sphere of humans and other earthly beings. Upon passing, the rulers returned to heaven, or the sky, by ascending on the cord. Arising from the gods, their identity was divine (as the world *lha*, "god, deity, divinity", in the above excerpt indicates), and remained divine after their corporeal death on the earth. Since they also possessed a "divine body" (*lha lus*, cf. Haarh 1969: 330), they did not leave corpses behind on earth after their ascent. They might have had an ascribed cosmological and civilising role of guaranteeing social continuity, order, fertility and prosperity on both celestial and terrestrial levels.[13]

Only by an ill-fated coincidence of king Gri gum Btsan po (var. Dri gum Btsan po), still a pre-historic and likely mythological figure, was the direct heavenly connection broken. Gri gum Btsan po is remembered for unintentionally physically cutting off the exquisite celestial cord during a fight. Since this rupture, deceased kings could not return back to the sky as before, but had to remain on the surface of the earth. As a consequence, tombs were built to enshrine their bodies, of which

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[9] Doney 2013, 2015, 2019; Walter 2009; Kapstein 2000; Ramble 2006.

[10] The title translation follows Buswell and Lopez 2014.

[11] Haarh 1969: 119, based on *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, Delhi ed. 1962: 64.6v-7r; Beijing ed. 2017: 87.

[12] Haarh 1969: 199, following the Potala ed. 1889 (O rgyan Gling pa 1889); modern editions: Beijing ed. 1986 (O rgyan Gling pa 1986); Tshang po 2010.

[13] See Dotson 2011; Hazod 2018: 63, and provided references.

the first one sheltered Gri gum Btsan po himself.[14] He was supposedly buried by his sons at the foot or on the slope of mountain Lha ri gyang to (var. Gyang to Bla 'bubs) in Kong po, or alternatively in Upper 'Phyong po. In some accounts, his body was transported from the first location to the second (initially starting at a third, earlier, location in Myang ro Sham po, from which the Gtsang po river carried it to Kong po), and was thus buried twice; Hazod (2007) has tentatively located the actual tomb in Upper 'Phyong po where the dynasty in fact historically originated. Gri gum Btsan po's tomb set a model for his royal successors.[15] Even without physically returning to the sky and leaving corpses, the rulers continued to enjoy divine status both during their lives and afterwards posthumously rising to heaven.[16] Each received a necronym when becoming a royal ancestor (Dotson 2015: 14ff.).

The resulting grand royal earth burial mounds from the whole duration of the dynasty, constructed between the 7th and 9th centuries, still at the present embellish the 'Phyongs rgyas site in the 'Phyong po valley of southern Central Tibet. The broad flat valley is thus close to the actual historical place of origin of the imperial royal dynasty in Upper 'Phyong po, and also to one of its supposed mythological origin sites. Square, round, and trapezoid tombs on the river plain and surrounding hill slopes overlook the valley and the 'Phyong po river, some rise from natural hillocks (Tucci 1950: 32). The individual tombs have been identified as to which emperor was buried in which tomb.[17] The main necropolis is located opposite the 'Phying ba Stag rtse fortress of the dynasty, on the left bank of the river 'Phyong po. Trapezoid tombs point with their long frontal side to the river, as is typical for Central Tibet (Hazod 2016b: 128, fn. 41). Each of the royal tombs historically featured one or several specific four-syllabic names often containing the mono-syllabic word *ri* signifying "mountain".[18] From the same period, the imperial Chinese *Tangshu* chronicle mentions tombs distributed "on the mountain slopes located above rivers". Haarh locates the site far from the centre of the Plateau, on the then Sino-Tibetan frontier west of Chiling (Chì lǐng in Pinyin, Ch'ih-ling in the Wade-Giles romanisation, Haarh 1969: 382) near the Kokonor lake (map in Stein 1972: 87). The majority of Central Tibetan tumulus fields occupy similar locations: on mountain slopes and on alluvial fans above rivers.[19]

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[14] Haarh 1969: 330, 342; Stein 1972: 48-49; list of studies on the myth in Dotson 2011: 88, fn. 18.

[15] Haarh 1969: 115; Karmay 1998: 221; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 38-41; Hazod 2007, 2018: 63, 2019: 19ff., Tibetan Tumulus Tradition (TTT) website, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/first-tomb/ (accessed 13.10.2020); Dotson 2011: 88-89, following the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*.

[16] Tucci 1950: 52; *Old Tibetan Annals*, administrative register of the court between 650-765: Dotson 2009: 82, 91, 103.

[17] Haarh 1969: 380; Hazod 2009, 2018, 2019: 97, TTT website, see URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/royal-tombs-1/ (accessed 13.10.2020).

[18] Haarh 1969: 391-93; Tucci 1950: 3-4; Stein 1972: 202; Hazod 2018: 65ff.

[19] TTT website, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/placement/ (accessed 01.12.2020).

Romain (2019, 2020) has recently proposed a theory of geomantic orientation of the emperors' tumuli. Following his measurements, most tumuli are by their axes aligned to the peaks of nearby sacred mountains of cosmological and mythological significance: (1) Yar lha Sham po to the south-east; (2) Mgon po ri (var. Gong po ri) to the north-north-east, the assumed place of the origin of the Tibetan people (Stein 1972: 37; Langelaar 2018: 334); (3) Shel brag range (incl. the Lha 'bab ri of Gnya' khri btsan po's descent; cf. Hazod in this volume). Yet, the direct sight lines from the tombs to the peaks are prevented by other ridges. All three peaks together 'embrace' the Yar lung valley, being located around its edges. Further, one tomb aligns to the 'Phying ba Stag rtse fortress and one precisely to the four cardinal directions. One of the tumuli not aligned to any of these markers seems to parallel the 'Phyongs po river. Guntram Hazod in this volume suggests that more evidence is needed to support this geomantic theory.

For ancient Central Tibet in general, Hazod (2016a: 3) does not suppose recognisable geomantic schemes in the tombs' placement but rather "topographical adjustment". He argues that "basically we see a pattern where the cemeteries were established in close proximity to the settlements, in whose position in the landscape we can recognise a largely high level of historical continuity." Mostly the tombs are close to villages, less frequently they are on mountains and ridges above, and rarely in cultivated land (Hazod 2018: 9). Hazod (2019: 37-38) also shares an example of a burial ground facing the local sacred mountain and progenitor to the there-buried community in Upper Nyang po in eastern Central Tibet. The Central Tibetan tumulus sites reflect the constellation of pre-imperial principalities led by hereditary lineages, and also later political entities; some were likely specific to a particular lineage, but that does not seem to be common.[20]

Haarh (1969: 381-382) assumed that the royal tombs were used as sites of ancestor worship. The one of Srong btsan Sgam po (d. 649), the celebrated emperor and founder of Tibet's first Buddhist temples, further received a Buddhist shrine on its top in the 13th century (Hazod 2016b: 127, fn. 41) which is still functional today. Whether by a specific articulated preconception or (in some cases) rather due to situational practicality, other ritual sites can be situated close to or at ancient grave fields – for instance with a Buddhist monastery lying opposite (Hazod 2016a: 4), but more often local non-Buddhist cultic traditions are prominent. Some funerary mounds are now topped by a *yul lha* cairn or shrine (Hazod 2016a: 2), and can be worshipped as a *yul lha* deity, as the one in Khu in 'Phyong po neighbouring Yar lung from the west (Hazod 2019: 59), or similarly in Thang stod of the Dbus sde district (Hazod 2018: 25). In another case, the grave field is located next to a sky burial site and a presently functional *yul lha* shrine (Hazod 2016a: 2). Also the artificial mound of Gri gum Btsan po's assumed tomb in Upper 'Phyong po was worshipped as a sacred site and circumambulated, a practice which "is associated with the image of the Gri-gum burial, according to which the spirit of the dead is worshipped as the deity of the place" (Hazod 2007). These arrangements recall the imperial one in 'Phyongs rgyas, of individuals of local provenience

[20] Hazod 2019: 28ff., 52, TTT website, URL:
https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/tombs-and-clan/
https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/placement/
(accessed 13.10.2020).

receiving an earth burial not far from the mountain seat of their divine protector and also potentially the presumed site of their divine ancestor's origin. The examples attest the physical proximity of residence, burial sites, and worshipped local territorial deities of particular communities which in some cases represent genealogically related groups.

The continuation of the successive genealogical line of the living royals as deceased ancestors was expressed in the ritual practice of the dynasty. A Dunhuang manuscript translated by Marcelle Lalou (1939) states that some of the sacrifices at the royal funerals were performed "under invocation of the *yul-lha*, the *yul-bdag*, the *yab-mes*, the *yum-phyi*, and the *yogs-che*" (Haarh's rendering, 1969: 369). This suggests the rites included beseeching the local territorial deities (*yul lha*, *yul bdag*) along with the dynasty's paternal and maternal ancestors (*yab mes* and *yum phyi* respectively), and the, in Haarh's understanding, general "powerful beings of the world of the dead" (*yogs che*, Haarh 1969: 372).[21]

2.2 Emperors' tombs as depositories of treasures

Descriptions of the disposition of some of the emperors' tombs emerged several centuries after their construction in the milieu of the rising *gter ma* treasure cults. The tombs of prominent importance have received most attention, namely those of Srong btsan Sgam po and his great-grandfather 'Bro Gnyan Lde'u (also 'Brong Gnyan Lde ru and other spellings, early 6th cent.).[22] In *The Chronicles of the Kings* the latter is conveyed as follows, in Haarh's translation:

"When King *'Broṅ-gñan-lde-ru*
Fell ill with disease in his body,
A tomb was built in *Źaṅ-phu'i-mda'*.
In the middle one of its nine sections
Was made a lDeṅ-khri of sandalwood beams.
An image (*sku-tshab*) of the king was made of gold.
He (it) was placed in a *zaṅs-chen-kha-sbyar* (a copper vessel with a closed mouth).[23]
Nine *bre* of gold and eight *bre* of silver,
Together with the king's treasures all this
Was sealed up with earth, stones, and wood.
The treasures were hidden (for) the future royal generations.
There was nobody to put in charge as guardian of the *Gter*.
Seasons, months, and days innumerable,
So it is told.

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[21] Haarh (1969: 368) following Lalou, based on a Dunhuang funeral text.

[22] Haarh (1969: 384) notes that in known literature only the supposed tomb of Lha Tho tho ri Gnyan btsan (among the later kings of the earlier pre-historic mythological period) received such attention.

[23] Bialek (2015: 51, 104, 363-65, esp. 363, fn. 3) proposes to read *kha sbyar* rather as "mouth/opening prepared/made ready [to put sth. inside]", and understands *zangs chen* as an equivalent of *zangs brgya(')*, "a large copper vessel".

> The tomb in *Źaṅ-phu'i-mda'* has nine sections. In the central one, there is placed a black slab of slate, *g'yam pa*, with a white head besmeared (with its head or top painted white?).
> [...]
> In the upmost part there is made a level of slabs of slate."[24]

According to this source, the tomb of 'Bro Gnyan Lde'u was located in Zhang phu'i mda' (present-day Zhang mda' Village) outside the royal necropolis of 'Phyongs rgyas,[25] a throne of sandalwood was placed into its middle bearing a golden representation of the monarch, and the corpse was inserted into "a copper vessel". Gold and silver, and king's treasures (*rgyal po'i dkor nor*) accompanied the arrangement. The tomb was sealed and "[t]he treasures were hidden (for) the future royal generations" (*phyi rabs rgyal brgyud nor du sbas*). No one, either a human or a numen, was entrusted as the "guardian of the treasure" (*gter srung gnyer du gtad pa med*).

The passage is extracted from *The Chronicles of the Kings*' chapter numbered eighteen in its modern editions (*Rgyal po bka'i thang*: 153-208; Tshang po 2010: 144-203). In the edition Haarh used (Potala ed. 1889), the chapter is titled *Ma 'oṅs rgyal brgyud nor skal dang: rgyal brgyud bla mchod man ngag rgyas btab ni*,[26] which Haarh renders as "The hiding of the inheritance for the future royal generations, and directions as to the royal family's offerings (*bla-mchod*), and the sealing (of the tomb)" (Haarh 1969: 352). The case of 'Bro Gnyan lde'u is followed by a whole spectrum of treasures. The chapter systematically lists dozens (I counted over forty entries) of concealed "treasures", or treasure caches, in 'Bro Gnyan lde'u's tomb, in the individual parts of Srong btsan Sgam po's tomb which occupies a long and elaborate section, and further in other tombs and localities. This is presented in a fairly regular pattern: the separate sections describing the particular treasures usually open with the name and location of the treasure in question; then provide its detailed overview, a list of its items, which can be quite extensive and count several pages; and finally conclude with repeating the name and placement of the just concerned treasure, the name of the protector (*srung ma*) put in charge of guarding it (titled a "treasure lord", *gter bdag, dkor bdag*) or a remark that no protector was appointed (as in the above passage). Sometimes at the very end occurs a brief statement that the contents presented constitutes a "guide list" (*kha byang, gter byang*) and "key" (*lde mig*) to the given treasure. Such catalogues are a typical feature of the Tibetan treasure literature developing from the 10-11th century onwards (Gyatso 1996: 148, 161, fn. 2) which *The Five Chronicles* represent. The titles or specifications of the different treasures enumerated in the lists often repeat across the various treasure repositories, for instance we repeatedly find the "divine treasure" (or the "treasure of the gods", *lha nor*), the "*klu* treasure" (or the "treasure of the *klu*", *klu nor*); rarer is the "(great) royal treasure of the *bla* force" (*rgyal po'i*

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[24] Haarh 1969: 349-350, 362, 364 (*Bka' thang sde lnga*, Potala ed. 1896); cf. Beijing ed. 1986: 155; Tshang po 2010: 146.

[25] About five kilometres north, see the burial mound site 0037 on TTT website, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites-by-id/0037/ (accessed 16.10.2020), cf. also Hazod 2016b: 130, fn. 44, 2018: 40-42.

[26] The modern editions render the title in slight alternations.

bla gter [*chen po*]), etc. The treasures are explicitly stated to be "ancestral treasures" (*yab mes kyi dkor nor*), and often to be hidden for the prosperity and support of future generations (*phyi ma'i dus su las 'phro can zhig gis thon nas dar zhing rgyas par 'gyur*, *phyi rabs gtsugs lag rkyen du bzhag*, *phyi rabs rnams kyi rkyen du bzhag*, *phyi rabs gtsugs lag gso ba'i rkyen du bzhag*, etc.), for "great sustenance of Tibet" (*Bod khams kyi rten 'brel che ba'i gter*), or for "the future royal generations" (*phyi rabs rgyal brgyud nor bu sbas*, *ma 'ong rgyal brgyud nor skal sbas ba*) as in the above extract. The "treasures" are rendered by various terms: *nor, gter, nor gyi gter, dkor nor, dkor cha, rin chen, rin po che, nor bu rin po che, nor rdzas rnams*, etc. The part on 'Bro Gnyan lde'u's tomb exemplifies this chapter of *The Five Chronicles*.

Another example is conveyed in the chapter's opening section on Yum bu Bla mkhar (or Yum bu Bla sgang), the early royal fortress in Lower Yar lung. Haarh (1969: 352) translates:

> "In the life-time of King *Thi-ri-sñan-śal*,
> At the highest part of the mountain ridge of *Yum-bu-bla-mkhar*,
> In the middle of a large red rock,
> There was a treasure-tomb (*nor-gyi baṅ-so*) with five sections (*dra-mig lṅa-pa*)."[27]

Further the text mentions the upper coverage of the tomb as made of slab stone (*g.yam pa*), and also "[t]he thirteen treasures of the King" (*rgyal po'i dkor cha rin cen bcu gsum*) inserted into the tomb (Haarh 1969: 353). Various other jewels and royal insignia accompanied them, some, as gold dust, were concealed in pots (*rdza ma*). The mountain god Yar lha Sham po, in the source referred to as "the *btsan* of the Sham po glacier" (*sham po'i gangs btsan*), was entrusted as the guardian (*srung ma*) of the "treasure-tomb". For this role, he received appropriate offerings of ritual cakes ("butter yaks", *mar gyi g.yag*), food and a "golden libation" (*gser skyems*) of alcohol. The "guide list" (*kha byang*) to the tomb itself became a treasure and "was hidden as a *gter* in a rock looking like a finger" (*brag lag sor 'dra ba la gter du sbas so*, Haarh 1969: 354, 377). Haarh dates this tomb to "the very early part of the Yar-luṅ Dynasty" epitomised by the Yum bu Bla sgang palace. He moreover assumes that "[i]n a later time this grave or tomb has been transformed into a kind of treasury of the Yar-luṅ kings" (1969: 356), more specifically into "a treasury for the relics, the regalia and treasures of the kings of the Dynasty" (1969: 377).

These 'treasures' typically imply material objects of prestige and wealth composed of precious metals and other valuable materials, and are presented as intended to bring prosperity for future (royal) generations. This chapter constitutes the longest of the entire *Five Chronicles*, at least in the editions available to me (*Bka' thang sde lnga*, Beijing ed. 1986; Tshang po 2010). In these modern prints it counts over astonishing fifty and sixty pages respectively (in Western style book format), which makes it many times longer than any other of the chapters of *The Five Chronicles*, which are usually rather short. The length presumably indicates that its topic was perceived as important at least as reflected in the 14th century environment of *gter ma* treasure cults and revealers. Hazod (2016b: 127-128) has also noticed the similarity of these descriptions of the tombs with *gter ma*

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[27] The passage in later editions of the *Bka' thang sde lnga*: Beijing ed. 1986: 153; Tshang po 2010: 144. In both the king's name appears as Tho re snyan shal.

treasure literature and revelations. He assumes that the burial mounds reported in this literature, such as the 'treasure-tomb' of Yum bu Bla sgang, were likely in this period re-established as *gter ma* sites for treasure excavation. So far, there is no actual evidence for Buddhist *gter ma* extraction from the tombs. Hirshberg's (2016) detailed study locates the discoveries of Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124/1136-92/1204), the first of the great revealers (*gter ston*), at old temples, and miraculously opening cavities in mountains, never at tombs. Nor does the other key figure of early *gter ma*, the master revealer Gu ru Chos dbang (1212-70) in his work *The Great History of the Gter ma Tradition* (*Gter 'byung chen mo*) mention *gter ma* extraction from tombs (Gyatso 1994). Ronald Davidson likewise believes that early Buddhist *gter ma* were not extracted from old tombs, but from old temples.[28]

The descriptions of *The Five Chronicles* might have intentionally focused only on graves conceptualised as treasure repositories at this later period. Moreover, these graves might have been actually opened for the purpose of either illicit or socially approved non-Buddhist treasure removal around this time and earlier after the fall of the Spu rgyal dynasty. Some alleged items of personal possession of the royals have become such revealed treasures, including the *bla g.yu*, the "turquoise of vitality" stone, of the early kings.[29] As Mayer points out, in any discussion of the period when the *gter ma* tradition emerged, a time when rich burial tumuli were vulnerable to looting, it is crucial to make a clear distinction between (i) Buddhist and Bon *gter ma* discovery, (ii) illicit treasure hunting, and (iii) legitimate socially sanctioned recovery of grave goods (Mayer 2019: 150).

Another source from the same time but not from the *gter ma* literary tradition, the 14th-century chronicle *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*, also mentions a treasure in a tomb of a member of the royal genealogy (who, nevertheless, died young and was never enthroned). Again, I cite Haarh's translation (1969: 384):

> "The tomb of lJaṅ-tsha lHa-dbon is in front of his grandfather's. It is built round. A treasure is hidden (in it). So it is said."[30]

The line also stresses the physical proximity of the individual graves of the members of the royal patriline. The work further discloses that treasures (*nor*) were deposited into Srong btsan Sgam po's tomb (Haarh 1969: 363; Sørensen 1994: 345).

Continuation of these perceptions tied to the royal tombs is attested in later literature as well. For instance, the 16th-century *A Scholar's Feast of Doctrinal History* details Srong btsan Sgam po's tomb as having the shape of a mountain, moreover adding an insight into the ritual practices supposedly performed at it. In Haarh's rendering:

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[28] Davidson 2005, 2006; reconfirmed in personal communication with Rob Mayer, 19.08.2017.

[29] Karmay 1998: 326; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 22; Hazod 2016b: 127, fn. 38.

[30] Sørensen (1994: 356) offers a bit different translation conveying the same meaning. On the tomb further see Hazod 2018: 72.

> "Outside it had the form of a mountain. One year (later [i.e. at the one-year anniversary of the funeral]) [the incumbent] king, ministers, and subjects made circumambulation, and later at the anniversary they made offerings and circumambulation."[31]

The 14th-century descriptions of the burial chambers of the monarchs 'Bro Gnyan lde'u, Srong btsan Sgam po, and also Khri Lde srong btsan (r. ca. 798-815)[32] propose the insertion of the body into a copper container (*zangs*) or box (*ga'u*) (Haarh 1969: 364). This might suggest a certain dismemberment of the body, after which bodily remains would be placed into the receptacle (Haarh 1969: 344, 346, 349, 361). Haarh speaks of a 'preliminary', i.e. primary, and 'final', i.e. secondary, burial.

Based on these sources, Haarh (1969: 381) concludes that one constituent of the royal burial mounds was "the depository or depositories, *nor-gyi baṅ-so*, of the personal treasures of the king or of the treasures offered at his funeral". This idea resonates with the term used for royal tombs, *bang so* (*bang po*), related to *bang ba*, *bang mdzod*, "store-room", "store-house", "repository", "treasury",[33] both derived from the reconstructed *'*bang* meaning "to have something/someone under/at one's feet".[34] Hazod understands the various treasures mentioned in the tombs as "personal treasures and valuables of the deceased (*rgyal po'i dkon nor*)" (following *The Chronicles of the Kings*) based on patrilineal and matrilineal descent. He suggests that they might have comprised the "18 heirlooms of paternal and maternal ancestors" being "bequeathed from the father's and mother's side and by brothers and sisters".[35]

In historical Chinese sources, Haarh noticed other types of funeral procedures of insertion into soil found to the east and north of the area of Central Tibet in the time of the Tibetan Empire or slightly later. For example, the nomadic group called Yangtong (Yang-t'ung in Wade-Giles used by Haarh), supposedly affiliated with the Tibetan royal dynasty, was reported to bury its chiefs into cliffs and caves, hidden from the eyes of others. Another group likely related to the Empire, the Sum pa, buried persons of high rank into vases filled with golden dust. For this purpose, the corpses were dissected into skin, bones, and flesh, to be mixed with gold (Haarh 1969: 347-48).

Haarh has also made an interesting observation about the *bla* force of vitality, usually translated as "soul",[36] which he renders as "life-power", in relation to the royal burials. He understands the *bla* as the main distinguishing quality between the living and the dead: the living are sustained by

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[31] Haarh 1969: 363 (square brackets are mine); *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, Beijing ed. 2017: 155.

[32] Dates follow Dotson 2009: 143.

[33] Das 1991; Jäschke 2007; Zhang 1993.

[34] Bialek 2018 (vol. 2: 310ff., 332ff.) provides the old Tibetan etymology.

[35] Hazod 2016b: 126; Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 192-97.

[36] In the imperial context: Dotson 2019; Walter 2009, also "guiding power within an individual", p. 107; later contexts and generally: Stein 1972: 226-229; Samuel 1995, also "life-force", "life-essence"; Karmay 1998: 310-338; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 264 and elsewhere; Maurer 2012: 75: "vital principle". As "soul" in ethnographies from the 20th and 21st century: for ex. Karmay 1998: 326ff.; Mumford 1989; Oppitz 1982; Vinding 1982; Diemberger 1994; whereas Diemberger 1997: 311 has "spirit"; da Col 2012: 79 understands it as "life support". My rendering of *bla* as a "force" rather than "soul" will become apparent below.

it, loosing it at the moment of death. At this instant, the dead leave their *bla* in the world of the living and with the living. Haarh comprehends the so called *bla mchod* offerings at the tombs mentioned in *The Chronicles of the Kings* as an "offering to the deceased", an "offering for that which distinguishes dead and living" (1969: 315, 378, 451, fn. 68).

2.3 End of the tumulus tradition?

We do not know to what extent the sources coming from periods after the fall of the Tibetan Empire and the Spu rgyal dynasty in the 9th century actually reflect happenings and practices of the imperial period. The accounts might instead reveal later perceptions of the Empire and emperors (as recently stressed by Mayer 2019: 126-127). Nevertheless, certain described accessories in these later accounts have been confirmed by archaeological evidence, such as the content of precious objects inside tumuli. An outstanding example are the recently excavated eastern Tibetan massive and rich tombs of Dulan (Heller 2006) to the west of Kokonor lake (Mtsho sngon po). Central Tibet so far demonstrates 619 recognised grave fields.[37]

Along with most of the thousands of Central Tibetan tumuli, almost all the emperors' tombs were looted shortly after the end of the dynasty, thus their details will remain unknown. The first looting, related to the emperor tombs in 'Phyong rgyas, took place already in the early 10th century as an overt symbolic political act, rather than a mere pursuit for material enrichment. The treasures or precious objects concealed in the tombs triggered the plundering – their extraction stood for destroying the previous political power and order of the Spu rgyal rulers (Hazod 2016b). The ensuing political principalities emerging from the unrests of the 9th and 10th century were based on territorial divisions governed by individual clans, partially existing already before the Empire. The re-establishment of these local powers was centred around their respective territorial deities (*yul lha*), the protectors of social and political order (Dotson 2012; Hazod 2016b: 117-121). At this occasion, the clans regaining power divided the royal tombs among themselves to execute the plundering (Hazod 2016b: 121). Of the emperors' graves, only that of Srong btsan Sgam po escaped this fate, for unclear reasons (*ibd*.: 137).

This end of the imperial era has been thought to signify the end of the Tibetan tumulus tradition: "This meant the end of the practice going far back into the pre-historic period of burying the dead in barrows – associated with a specific conception of the afterlife as part of the pre-Buddhist religious system, which likewise has ceased to exist" (Hazod 2016b: 113). The succeeding political entities did not embrace the custom, in which gesture the ongoing adoption of Buddhism was the decisive drive. Disputes on proper (royal) burials between *bon po* funeral specialists and incoming Buddhists took place already during the time of the Empire (Dotson 2016). The *Dba' bzhed* chronicle (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 92-105) gives the story of the famed Buddhist scholar Vairocana (Bai ro tsa na, 8th century) during the preparations for Emperor Khri srong lde btsan's interment: In the episode, the *bon po*s propagate the continuation of non-Buddhist funerals arguing that the power of the mountain god Yar lha Sham po is strong enough to protect the dynasty, whereas Vairocana claims that it is the Buddhist Doctrine to be followed also for funerary practice

[37] TTT website, URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/sites-by-id/ (accessed 16.10.2020).

and post-mortal benefits such as a good rebirth. Vairocana succeeds, and therefore:

> "From that time onwards all the funerals have been celebrated according to the dharma tradition. It is said that the foolish followers of the Bon tradition hid great wealth as *gter*."

This implies the substitution of animal sacrifices and wealth offerings by ceremonies to Buddhist deities, but not yet the abandonment of tumulus entombment. The translators further explain that "[t]he hiding of precious objects by the *bon po* could refer to the custom of burying precious items in the tombs" (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 101; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 150-55). By its focus on treasures, this restriction evokes the edict issued by Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od (947-1019/1024)[38], the ruler of Gu ge, to prohibit "the tradition of interring treasures in tombs for the deceased" (*gshin po'i don du nor dur sped pa'i lugs*, Hazod 2016b: 133, fn. 56).

According to these two narratives, the process of Buddhicisation of Tibet has discarded earth burials containing riches as incompatible with the new Doctrine. The rest of this article will try to show that these traditions still exist albeit in altered form.

2.4 Later imaginations and interpretations

Do these accounts simply refer to the fact that various precious objects were inserted into the tombs as offerings for ensuring an enjoyable post-mortal existence of the deceased? Or, could one interpret the custom as rather aimed at the bereaved and the living even from the emic perspective of the deceased monarch's contemporaries and future generations? Whereas imperial evidence indicates the former, later writings from the 14th century onwards discussed above, mainly the treasure text of *The Five Chronicles*, often suggest the latter.

Ronald Davidson, like Rob Mayer and Janet Gyatso, sees multiple causes for the *gter ma* revelatory traditions popular in both Buddhism and G.yung drung Bon, particularly the Rnying ma school, since the 12th and 13th centuries. Davidson has produced a social historical analysis of nostalgia for the lost Empire as a major cause for the appearance of the *gter ma* traditions, and he also emphasises the importance of Indian influences (2005: 212, 215, 216, 217, 219). One of his main contributions, of particular interest here, has been the exploration of the imperial royal funeral treasures and their looting as one of the contributory origins of the *gter ma* revelatory tradition. With the collapse of the Empire, the following second diffusion of Buddhism (*phyi dar*, 10th to 13th century) and the formation of G.yung drung Bon, their driving forces intentionally modelled upon the Empire. Davidson (2005: 213) argues that early treasure revelations focused on religious, political, and legal imperial legacy rather than on their later central figure, the Buddhist master Padmasambhava (Padma 'byung gnas, 8th century); and that among the early treasure excavations were material objects directly associated with the Empire rather than with general Buddhist themes as in later periods.

Later scholarship has revealed a different picture. Apart from Grwa pa Mngon shes's (1012-1090)[39] *Four Medical Tantras* (*Rgyud bzhi*) there is only one extant *gter ma* that fits this description which might fully precede the *gter ma* of the two great architects of the Padmasambhava cult Myang

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[38] The dates follow the BDRC, The Treasury of Lives.

[39] *Ibd*.

ral Nyi ma 'od zer and Gu ru Chos dbang – *The Pillar Testament* (*Bka' chems Ka khol ma*), attributed to the 11th-century figure of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (972/982-?1055), but surely a later compilation. This text deals with the early emperors' establishment of Buddhist civilisation in Tibet, with special emphasis on Srong btsan Sgam po, and a chapter on Avalokiteśvara as tamer of the demons of Tibet (chapter 13). No more *gter ma* texts prior to Myang ral and Chos dbang are extant. Recent studies of the textual sources of Myang ral's *gter ma* (Hirshberg 2016) show that Myang ral was operating in a culture of revelation, sharing with or receiving revelations from others. His network of tantric contemporaries and predecessors, as his teacher Dngos grub, were already engaged in *gter ma* revelations. Hence these *gter ma* texts of Myang ral's predecessors were as early as *The Pillar Testament* or even earlier; yet unlike *The Pillar Testament* they focused on Rnying ma tantric traditions. In his most important *gter ma*, the massive *Eight Teachings of the Sugata Assembly* (*Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*), Root Tantras which originated with Padmasambhava were transmitted to his student the Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan; thus they focused already on Padmasambhava as the original source (Cathy Cantwell, personal communication, 29.09.2020). Similarly, Myang ral's *Zangs gling ma* religious biography of Padmasambhava describes this work as originating with Padmasambhava (Doney 2014; Hirshberg 2016). Another early *gter ma* not centred on Padmasambhava, and drawing on the the *Pillar Testament*, is the *Mani bka' bum*. Several authors contributed to this text, notably Myang ral and Chos dbang. Their central intention in the *Mani bka' bum* was to promote the cult of Avalokiteśvara as patron *bodhisattva* of Tibet, still a major concern of the Padmasambhava school. Another purpose was to emphasise the subordination of the emperors to the forces of Buddhism, and thus also by implication the grand imperial pedigrees of the various Rnying ma traditions in Tibet. The Rnying ma *gter ma* tradition has never just been Padmasambhava centred, numerous *gter ma* are said to be primarily concerned with persons of the imperial period other than Padmasambhava.[40]

In Davidson's evaluation, Myang ral engaged with two kinds of treasures: Dharma treasures and material wealth treasures, both of which open themselves in times of disasters – not only assumed religious collapse as the decline of the Buddhist Dharma, but also social upheavals and political disintegration (2005: 214). Likewise, Chos dbang was involved with both these treasure types, the latter in his case Davidson renders as *rdzas gter*, literally "material treasure" (2005: 213). Such a dichotomy might not be precise if compared with the Chos dbang's *Great History of the Gter ma Tradition* (Gyatso 1994). The work lists four main treasure categories with numerous sub-categories, several of which are material, but in all kinds of different and often magical ways. In addition, many of the Dharma treasures are material, and none of the material categories or sub-categories *per se* relate to the emperors or their tombs, even if a very small proportion of discrete items that fall within a subcategory can be associated with emperors. Some of material categories

[40] For a very old example, the highly influential Rdzogs chen *gter ma* of Zhang ston Bkra shis rdo rje (1097-1167) were focused on another contemporary of Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra. For a very recent example, the first major treasure of the late Dil mgo mkhyen brtse (1910-91), the *'Jam dpal snying thig*, was as its name suggests focused not on Padmasambhava, but on his contemporary Mañjuśrīmitra. There are a great many suchlike in between. Rob Mayer, personal communication, 29.09.2020.

and sub-categories do reference the kinds of natural resources that are often attributed into the control of territorial deities, but do not mention burials as *gter*. The twofold dichotomy into material and Dharma treasures might possibly be manifested in some instances in the discussed chapter of *The Chronicles of the Kings*, as implied by its dichotomous phrase "wealth and *dharma* treasure" (*chos dang nor gyi gter*) (*Rgyal po bka'i thang*: 201; Tshang po 2010: 194-95). In this way, the royal treasures of material riches would have gained Buddhist spiritual significance and the potential to support its central aim of awakening.

Davidson's theory further points to a strong role of the imperial elite ancestor cult. In his view, mountain deities, like Yar lha Sham po, became associated with the treasures as their guardians based on the notions of being ancestors of the royal lineage and of particular communities in their areas, combined with the perception of the treasures as ancestral legacy (2005: 218). Furthermore, he links this to the *bla* principle to assume that "the sacred relics of their ancestors [...] constituted in some sense an extension of the king's soul or person (*rgyal po'i bla*)" (2005: 220). He stresses that the "King's Personal Treasure" (*rgyal po'i bla gter*), or the "royal treasure of the *bla* force" (my rendering), often features as the foremost one in the lists of such treasure objects, for instance in "the personal text of the royal ancestor (*yab mes kyi bla dpe*)" buried in Lho brag. Scriptures titled "the person/soul treasure (*bla gter*) of the emperor" might have represented his final statement of testament as his inheritance for future generations (2005: 221-22). Davidson (*ibd.*: 223) concludes that "[e]ventually, the entombment of the kings and emperors of Tibet was understood as establishing a place for the residence of their collective spirits and was identified with many of the properties of the Buddha's relics in *stūpa*s, so that the king's residual presence in the tomb protects all of Tibet."

Rob Mayer (2019: 136) has recently summarised Davidson's thesis as follows: "The imperial *bla* had the power to enrich and bless, hence he proposes that there was a pre-Buddhist ritual tradition for blessing the realm, by distributing the emperor's *bla* across the Empire via material treasures in which the imperial *bla* resided." The treasures would later be excavated and processed across the country as a display of the rulers' power and to distribute the prosperity imbued in the *bla*. Mayer warns that this hypothesis requires more evidence. Hazod's (2016b: 126-127) understanding of the background of the royal tombs' looting resonates with Davidson's interpretation: some of the royal insignia as symbols of governance were with the fall of the Empire hidden by a faction aspiring for political power, to reappear only later, from the middle of the 11th century, as insignia of rulers of principalities.

Such funeral royal objects perceived as powerful and available for excavation have inspired scholarly views on the origins of the *gter ma* tradition as derived from these imperial, likely indigenous, and non-Buddhist, antecedents. Below, I engage with these notions through contemporary literary and ethnographic material.

3. Contemporary Mgo log, East Tibet: divinity, rulership, bones, and treasures

3.1 Divine rulership and ancestry

Many descent lines and communities in Tibet and the Himalayas have maintained similar

narratives of origin to that of the Spu rgyal emperors. Lineages of power, both monastic and lay, as well as those concentrating both temporal and spiritual authority, have propagated divine origin of own genealogies as an integral and essential feature of self-representation. Typically, the apical ancestor is perceived to be a numinal male figure, a *lha* being, descending from the upper celestial sphere. He can be identified as a representative of the class of territorial deities. The god can spring out of an egg, beget a son after encountering a human woman who he has chosen for her exceptional qualities, or give his own daughter in marriage to a human male again selected for certain assets. Buddhist records analogously propose ancestry from awakened Buddhist deities dwelling in the heavens of Buddhist cosmology.[41] Historical examples include prominent families such as the one of the master Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1002/1012-1097/1100),[42] the 'Khon of the Sa skya school,[43] the Rlangs dynasty ruling Central Tibet in the 14th and the beginning of 15th century (Czaja 2013: 28, fn. 2, 31-38), the descent line of the 5th Dalai Lama (MacCormack 2020), etc. Likewise, ethnographic studies show the self-identification of ethnic and social groups and ruling patrilines with divine progenitors, to provide a few examples: leaders of the Ldong 'Brong group in Rdza stod, Yul shul (Fitzgerald 2019), and of the Wa shul gser thar group (Gelek 1998: 54), in East Tibet; the Thakali (Vinding 1998: 169-71), Gurung nobility (Mumford 1989: 31), and certain lineages in Khenbalung in Nepal (Diemberger 1994, 1997); and likely also leaders' lineages in Bhutan.[44]

In contemporary East Tibet, such perceptions are still alive. One often hears stories of mountain gods, mainly of the chief one in the region, A myes Rma chen aka Rma chen spom ra, visiting beautiful women of his vast territory at night and thereby providing great leaders to individual communities. Those born from such encounters exhibit special signs and are thus best qualified to establish their own ruling patrilines. Many communities regard their associated local deity of land, customarily a mountain god, as their ancestor.[45] In north-eastern Tibet, people often refer to such deities as '*a myes*', meaning "grandfather" or "ancestor", and simultaneously being an honorific address for elderly men. Hence the title itself does not necessarily determine assumed ancestry, yet often it overlaps with this notion. Whole social groups extending singular genealogies, such as villages or valley populations, claim descent from numinal beings. The claims are typically rather vague, lacking expressed descent lines or any details. By its more communal sense and identity, this model contrasts with the individualised elite descent lineages exemplified above.

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[41] Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 25, fn. 2; Roberto Vitali mentions this Buddhicisation of genealogical literature in his introduction to *The Genealogy*, Gyi lung Bkra shis rgya mtsho and Gyi lung Thugs mchog rdo rje 1991: xi.

[42] Per Sørensen, personal communication, 26.06.2020.

[43] Stein 1972: 193; Czaja 2013: 31.

[44] The last example is based on a Facebook post by Sangay Tenzin (21.06.2020) within the group Druk ge Ney: 'Brug lu byin rlabs can gyi gnas (Pilgrimage sites of Bhutan), thus requires further verification.

[45] For ex. Karmay and Sagant 1998; Karmay 1998: 423-462; generally, for Tibet see Stein 1972: 207, 228; Kornman 1997: 80.

One community known to me formulates an actual divine pedigree. Members of the Mgo log clan identify with their mountain deity, their "master of place" (*gzhi bdag* – the favoured term for territorial deities in East Tibet) and "deity of land" (*yul lha*), called Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the "Powerful one of the Turquoise peak". The stunning mountain range of the same name that the deity supposedly inhabits (Fig. 1), expands over approximately eight hundred square kilometres, covering an area of about twenty kilometres in the east-west orientation and forty kilometres north-south. The massif lies on the border of the present Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces of the PRC, in the Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Mgo log bod rigs rang skyong khul, Ch. Guoluo Zangzu zizhizhou) and by a smaller part in the Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Rnga ba bod rigs dang chang rigs rang skyong khul, Ch. Aba Zangzu Qiangzu zizhizhou). Around the northern, western and southern foot of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range lives a group with shared identity referring to themselves as Mgo log. They mainly inhabit the area of the current Counties of Gcig sgril (Ch. Jiuzhi xian), Dga' dbe (Ch. Gande xian), Dar lag (Ch. Dari xian), and Padma (Ch. Banma xian) in t he Mgo log Prefecture (see map of Fig. 2).[46]



Fig. 1: The Gnyan po G.yu rtse mountain range. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

[46] The core Mgo log group has not inhabited the area around the A myes Rma chen range in the north-west of the Prefecture, albeit claimed the area and particularly its revenues collected in taxes from other groups settled there. See 'Ba' Don grub rgyal 2012; 'Ba' Don grub rgyal and Rgya mo thar 2012; Sulek 2010. Introductions to the region and its history: Cai Bei 2012: 55-58; Horlemann 2002: 245-246; Jacoby 2010; Don grub Dbang rgyal and Nor sde 1991; Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007; Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016.



Fig. 2: The current Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and its counties. (Map by G. Hazod)

The god Gnyan po G.yu rtse (Fig. 3) is believed to dwell in the highest peak of the range reaching 5369 metres[47] and covered by a glacier. Gnyan po G.yu rtse epitomises the *gzhi bdag* or *yul lha* divinities who reside and actively engage in both the upper celestial realm, touched by their summits, and the lower middle realm; as *lha* deities they, in the current vernacular, origin from the divine skies. In iconography and oral and written recitals,[48] Gnyan po G.yu rtse appears anthropomorphically as a mighty and fierce armoured warrior mounted on a horse. His depiction is quite variable: the colour of his body, armour, and horse range from warm tones of red and yellow to blue and turquoise (*g.yu*) reminiscent of his name. Usually, Gnyan po G.yu rtse features a red body, shielded by a golden helmet and armour, and rides a yellowish horse of a turquoise mane (as in Fig. 3).[49] The horse can also be of a blueish or turquoise body. In some depictions, Gnyan po G.yu rtse's whole body turns blue to turquoise. Then himself, his mount, as well as his palace on the mountain top shine with turquoise lustre.[50]

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[47] Mapy.cz, URL: https://en.mapy.cz/ (accessed 15.12.2020); Gcig sgril rdzong yul skor cu'u and Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skye khams khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa (n.d.: 2, 3) gives 5380 metres. The site and deity are mentioned in Rock 1956: 125f., maps in appendices.

[48] For ex. collections: Kar rig 2009; *Gangs ljongs gnas chen* 2015. Many more texts, including unpublished manuscripts, exist.

[49] Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007: 69, a popular depiction in monasteries (for ex. Lung dkar dgon, Gcig sgril rdzong), on posters, etc.

[50] Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007: 70; Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skye khams khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa 2019; mural in the monastery Rgyud sde dgon, Padma rdzong.



Fig. 3: Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the "Powerful one of the Turquoise peak", as depicted in Lung dkar monastery. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2016)

The attributes Gnyan po G.yu rtse carries are of warfare and affluence, characterising the worldly concerns people approach him for: in his right hand he brandishes a spear (*mdung*), while his left hand holds a bowl of jewels (*nor bu*, *gter 'bum*). Alternatively, and less frequently, Gnyan po G.yu rtse appears in other colours displaying different attributes, usually with varying pieces of weaponry. His images in monasteries and (much less often) households in the vicinity of his mountain range indicate the main spread of his cult in both Mgo log and Rnga ba, and lay and monastic communities of all present denominations: mostly Rnying ma, then Dge lugs, Jo nang, Bka' rgyud, Sa skya, and G.yung drung Bon.

The ethnonym 'Mgo log' locally applies in two different meanings: (1) the patrilineal, ideally exogamous, leading group recognising their apical ancestor, which can thus be called a 'clan' (Godelier 2011: 558);[51] and (2) in a broader sense the members of the confederation which this clan became to govern, organised into settlements and clusters called *tsho ba* and *sde ba* encompassing many other patrilines of various other groups.[52] Two main historical scholarly chronicles record their developments, mainly of the Mgo log clan's ruling elite: *The Doctrinal History of Mdo smad* (*Mdo smad chos 'byung*) by Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1801-1866) and *The Mgo log Genealogy* (*Mgo log rus mdzod*), aka *The Garden of Flowers: Genealogy of the Six Tibetan Clans* (*Bod mi bu gdung drug gi rus mdzod me tog skyed tshal*) by Gyi lung Bkra shis

[51] 'Clan' concept in Tibet is summarised and discussed in Samuels 2016; Langelaar 2017.

[52] See Dhi nang Lha rgyal and Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2011: 141-43; Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skye khams khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa 2019: 41-42. A similar arrangement is described by Gelek 1998, further Jacoby 2010.

rgya mtsho (b. 19th century) and Gyi lung Thugs mchog rdo rje (d. 1939).[53] Another document is the autobiography of Mdo Mkhyen brtse Ye shes rdo rje (1800-1866)[54] studied by Robin Kornman (1997). According to these sources and present oral history, the male progenitor was the hero (*dpa' bo*) chief (*dpon po*) 'Bri Lha rgyal 'bum (var. 'Bri Lha rgyal, 'Bru Lha rgyal). He allegedly hailed from the 'Bri clan of the primary 'six clans' of Tibet (Karmay 1998: 245-281; Vitali 2003). He led his people from the 'Bri lung ('Bri klung) valley in southern Nang chen (current Nang chen County, Ch. Nangqian xian, Qinghai) in northern Khams to the 'Gu kho (also 'Gu log, 'Go log) valley in the Dpal yul area south of Sde dge (in current Sde dge County, Ch. Dege xian, Sichuan). Some accounts propose a prior gradual migration of the lineage from Mnga' ris in West Tibet or La dwags in the Western Himalayas via 'Dam khog (or 'Dam zhung) north of Lha sa.[55] Bri Lha rgyal 'bum is said to have followed both Bon po and Buddhist Rnying ma masters, with the latter he established firm contacts at the Rnying ma Kaḥ thog and Dpal yul monasteries close to where they were settled south of Sde dge. His son and chieftain successor 'Bri A 'bum took the move to the north-east towards the Gnyan po G.yu rtse mountain range, leading his subjects. The group acquired their name after their home in Sde dge in the form of "Mgo log". This supposedly happened about six hundred years ago in the 14th century (Jacoby 2010; Don grub Dbang rgyal and Nor sde 1991: 13ff.).[56] The migration entailed a partial switch from agriculture to pastoralism for higher located settlements. The historicity of these accounts has not been attested, here I present the content of the given sources and current understandings.

There, A 'bum encountered the Gnyan po G.yu rtse god in his celestial palace. After a trial, he won Gnyan po G.yu rtse's youngest daughter Gnyan bza' Me tog thod mdzes ("Beautiful(ly) flower-garlanded lady of the *gnyan*") as a bride for his youngest son 'Bum yag. Hereby Gnyan po G.yu rtse established his relation to the clan as a matrilineal ancestor and a maternal uncle, i.e. a bride-giver (*a zhang, zhang po*),[57] and the clan's protector. The written genealogy states that already Bri Lha rgyal 'bum married a daughter of Gnyan po G.yu rtse called "Queen of the *gnyan*" (Gnyan rgyal mo), and also another, further unnamed, "Lady of the *gnyan*" (Gnyan bza'). A 'bum was the

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[53] Gyi lung Bkra shis rgya mtsho and Gyi lung Thugs mchog rdo rje 1991. All dates follow the BDRC. The year of composition of *The Genealogy* remains unclear (Langelaar 2018: 329, fn. 3). Its authors likely lived within the suggested time frame (The Treasury of Lives, current local oral history) but some local scholars argue for dating into the 18th century (Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros, interview August 2018).

[54] The dates follow BDRC, The Treasury of Lives.

[55] Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016: 43; Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skye khams khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa 2019: 36; in mythology of origin in Kornman 1997: 84.

[56] The paragraph follows (if not stated otherwise) the *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 234-35 and *The Genealogy*: 26-27.

[57] On the social role of maternal uncles see Samuels 2013; in imperial times Dotson 2004: 90-96, 2012. In Bon po mythology, *gnyan* divinities are the maternal uncles (bride-givers) of three of the initial 'six clans' of Tibet, including the 'Gru aka 'Bru ('Bri), through the marriage of the progenitor Khri tho chen po (see below) with a female *gnyan* (Karmay 1998: 254, 270). On *gnyan* divinities inhabiting the land see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 288-90; Samuel 1995: 162-63; Karmay 1998: 253ff., 2010; Berounský 2014, 2016, 2017, and this volume.

latter's son. Yet, in contrast to Bum yag's wife, this account is neither developed in any detail, nor popularly known among the Mgo log today. Similarly, two other chieftains in the subsequent generations married divine female *gnyan* beings (*gnyan mo*) perceived as coming from Gnyan po G.yu rtse's retinue and kin.[58] Men born into the lineage can acquire personal names Gnyan sras, "son of the *gnyan*", or Gnyan phrug, "child of the *gnyan*", both in historical genealogies and in current practice, evocative of the imperial royal epithet *lha sras* featuring in later genealogies as well (for instance of the Rlangs, Czaja 2013: 33, 38).

Thanks to this bond with Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the Mgo log leaders, namely 'Bum yag and later his and Gnyan bza' Me tog thod mdzes's son Phag thar, conquered the area of the Three [valleys of] Rdo, 'Dzi and Smar (Rdo 'dzi smar *gsum*) west and south of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range as their main domain.[59] Gradually, they spread further north and north-west to their present distribution (Gcig sgril, Dga' dbe, Dar lag, Padma Counties of the Mgo log Prefecture), giving their name to the whole region. They have shared it with other groups keeping dominance and rulership over them, as well as the majority in population. Soon after Phag thar, the areas of Rdo and 'Dzi were lost to others, and Smar remained as the fertile agricultural heartland of the Mgo log clan and confederation – the present-day Smar valley of the Smar river, the backbone of Padma County. Phag thar divided the seized dominion among three of his descendants and political successors, in order of seniority: Padma 'bum, Dbang chen 'bum, and A skyong. This corresponded with a split of the clan into three subclans of the same names, collectively known as the "Three Divisions of Mgo log" (Mgo log *khag gsum*).[60]

A colloquial saying expresses the understood status of the Mgo log ruling nobles (*dpon po*) as follows: *mgo log gi dpon po ni/ myi gi rgyud pa ma red/ lha gi rgyud pa red/*: "The chieftains of Mgo log are not of a human lineage, they are of a divine lineage." They continue to be perceived as of the *lha* and *gnyan* divine status rather than of men. Their position thus blurs the distinction between the two and between mythological and historical ancestors. Their patrilineal genealogy derives from Bri Lha rgyal 'bum generation by generation. The Mgo log genealogy concludes with its contemporary generation and Mgo log settlements, i.e. Mgo log clan members in likely the late 19th and early 20th century. Recent publications follow up by tracing the leaders' genealogies of the three sublineages, and their sub-sublineages, based on social memory and oral accounts of local elders, until the present.[61] People identifying themselves as Mgo log still nowadays either trace their origin to one of the "Three Divisions", or count themselves and own patrilines as the Three Divisions' historical subjects.

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[58] *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 235; *The Genealogy*: 27-29. Here I provide selected details from the genealogies in both works, their slight differences will be analysed in my D.Phil. thesis. See Dhi nang Lha rgyal and Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2011: 119-127; Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016: 43-54.

[59] *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 236-237; *The Genealogy*: 39-44.

[60] *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 236-237; *The Genealogy*: 45-46, 49-51.

[61] For ex. A skyong 'Jigs rnam 2010; Dhi nang Lha rgyal and Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2011; Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016.

Gnyan po G.yu rtse, colloquially Gnyan rtse, G.yu rtse, and Gnyan po, is their prime venerated *gzhi bdag*. He brings success in mundane affairs, political and social issues, grants protection, abundance, prosperity and fertility to people, animals, and fields, helps in banditry and warfare. He governs the surroundings of his mountain range and the Mgo log territory. Within it, his divine retinue (*'khor*) is dispersed – its members occupy peaks, hills, boulders, lakes, springs, trees, and so forth. *The Genealogy* (pp. 84-85) lists other ancestor deities of the clan, collectively called *mtshun lha*, presented as certain individuals once born into the 'Bri lineage. Their 'Bri descendants, including the Mgo log clan, should worship them along with several named warrior *dgra bla* divinities, one of whom features as the deity of the "vitality of the lineage" (*rus bla'i lha*). Origin myths and proposed genealogical descent thus correspond with ritual practice. In the articulated ancestor cosmology, landscape deities (*gzhi bdag, yul lha, yul sa, gnyan, a myes*) and ancestor deities (*myes po, a myes, yang myes, mes mtshun, pha mtshun, ma mtshun*) overlap and merge.

3.2 Ancestral and rulers' tombs as treasures

3.2.1. Ritual distribution of ruler's relics

The emergence of the Three Divisions of Mgo log was a social and political, as well as ritual, act. According to *The Genealogy*, it accompanied the passing of the heroic ruler Phag thar. Satisfied with territorial advances and consolidation of his dynasty's power, at the age of eighty-nine Phag thar gathered his subjects on the roof of his palace and delivered a sung message:

> "I have become old, my time is exhausted, I will depart today! My forefathers and ancestors (*pha myes yang myes*), come to welcome me! I will go to maternal uncles (*zhang bo yang zhang*), [and you,] sons and grandsons, and all subjects, remain in peace!"[62]

Phag thar mainly appeals to his male patrilineal offspring. He calls his ancestors and maternal uncles to "receive", or welcome, him (*bsu ba*). Coming from Gnyan po G.yu rtse's lineage, he anticipates rejoicing with the god and numinal ancestors after death in the celestial realm. He invokes generations of paternal ancestors (*pha myes yang myes*) along with a succession of maternal uncles (*zhang bo yang zhang*), epitomised by no one else than Gnyan po G.yu rtse.[63] In current popular and scholarly understandings among the Mgo log people, Phag thar has indeed returned to the sky to join Gnyan po G.yu rtse's retinue becoming a *gzhi bdag* himself. Many other celebrated past Mgo log rulers are believed to have turned into *gzhi bdag* divinities, during which transition they usually acquired a new name in their new role, i.e. a kind of a necronym, and often also a physical seat in the form of a natural landscape feature and a cairn (*lab tse*, *la btses*, *lha rtse*, *lha btsas*).[64]

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[62] *The Genealogy*: 48, see Appendix 1. All English translations provided are my own. For an alternative translation of *The Genealogy* see Gyilung Tashi Gyatso and Gyilung Thugchok Dorji 2009, the accompanying Tibetan edition slightly differs from the one I use mainly due to typing errors.

[63] Maternal uncles called at death are also mentioned by Vinding (1982: 297) for the Thakali, and Oppitz (1982: 378, 399) for the Sherpa.

[64] Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007: 104-106. For comparison, Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 233ff.) provides many examples from Tibet and the Himalayas of heroes and outstanding personalities deified

The process continues with the current members of the power lineages and other "heroes" (*dpa' bo*). A remark of a Mgo log pastoralist captures the bottom line: *dpon po rtsa ya zig / dpon po zhe gi yag po zig / 'di mo zig gzhi bdag la 'gyur rgyu red /*: "an amazing leader, a really great leader, such becomes a *gzhi bdag*". Unlike the Tibetan emperors, the Mgo log rulers do not need a *dmu* cord to ascend to the sky, but apart from pro-per descent they usually need good social and political reputation during life among humans.

In *The Genealogy*, Phag thar's son Chos 'bum pa, a newly trained monastic at Kaḥ thog, led the funerary arrangements for his father. In a proselytising message, he warned the congregation:

> "From the time of [our ancestor] 'Bru Lha rgyal until our father [Phag thar], although the customs (*tshul*) of our ancestors seemed very good, and appeared as the best, in reality they were not good. For them, the *gzhi bdag* were the main [deities] they embraced as their tutelary deities (*yi dam*). At death, both their *bla* force and consciousness (*rnam shes*) were led away by the *gzhi bdag*. Yet, as at a certain point former actions have to bear consequences, it is necessary to "practice the Great Dharma" (*chos chen po byed*). [...] It will be also beneficial to diligently perform fumigations and other offerings to the great *gzhi bdag*, and especially the *yul lha*."[65]

Bla ma Chos 'bum pa urges the people to complement the local cult of Gnyan po G.yu rtse with Buddhism, stating that until now, both the *bla* force and consciousness (which is a Buddhist concept) of the Mgo log rulers, and presumably others, have after death joined the *gzhi bdag* deities of land. This should now change with Buddhism helping the consciousness to gain a better rebirth.

After a supposed cremation of Phag thar's body,[66] Bla ma Chos 'bum pa handled the bones of his father:[67]

> "Bla ma Chos 'bum pa divided the bones (*rus pa rnams*) [of the deceased Phag thar] among all sons and grandsons. The bones were dispersed to their respective great strongholds: Dkar mdzod ("White treasury"), the "back mountain" (*rgyab ri*) of the A skyong [subclan], and the "back mountain" of the Dbang chen 'bum [subclan] in Chen mo'i gser gzhung, into [these] mountains of the *yul lha* territorial deities. Since then, [these mountains] became their respective "*bla* mountains" (*bla ri*). Pad ma 'bum held the bones and from the foot of [the mountain called] Gter threw them towards [its peak] Ri 'bur le rtse. Since then, [this mountain called] Smar gter (i.e. the "Treasure [mountain] of the Smar [valley]") has become the "*bla* mountain" of the people of Pad ma 'bum."[68]

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after death to become local protectors. Such single cases are common, yet to constitute a genealogy and a part of an independent cosmology as in Mgo log seems uncommon.

[65] *The Genealogy*: 48-49, see below Appendix 2.

[66] Here as in the lines below I present the current local reading of the chronicle. The text does not explicitly mention the immediate post-mortal treatment of the body.

[67] Parallels of sons taking care of father's funeral in Vinding (1982: 301) and Oppitz (1982: 386-387).

[68] *The Genealogy*: 49, below Appendix 3. The final name appears spelled as both Pad ma 'bum and Padma 'bum. I use the latter unless directly quoting a source which applies the former as in this excerpt.

The three hereditary political successors of Phag thar representing the "Three Divisions of Mgo log", Padma 'bum, Dbang chen 'bum, and A skyong, received a portion of the patriarch's relics. They placed it into the ritual and political centre of the respective territory ascribed to each of them by Phag thar himself (for the following locations see map in Fig. 4).

The most senior of the three, Padma 'bum, Phag thar's own (and third-born) son, and his subclan gained the core area of the Lower Smar valley (roughly present Padma County, named after them). Padma 'bum deposited his father's bones into the "Treasure mountain of the Smar valley", today colloquially also known as the "Treasure peak" (Gter mgo) or the "Treasure *bla* mountain" (Gter bla ri).[69] Phag thar's grandson, his eldest son's son, Dbang chen 'bum seized the Upper Smar valley and buried the bones there into a hill slope of the wide valley of Chen mo'i gser gzhung.[70] The Dbang chen 'bum subclan has settled there, in the northern Padma County and the adjacent Dar lag County further to the north. The youngest, Phag thar's great-grandson, A skyong also occupied a site in the Upper Smar valley where he hid his share of bones into the "White treasury" rock, now also called the "Divine rock of the White treasury" (Lha brag dkar mdzod), on a hill. The hill has been the supportive "back mountain" *(rgyab ri*) of their central A skyong monastery recorded to have been established by Bla ma Chos 'bum pa himself (A skyong dgon pa, founded in 1433, 'Phrin las 2008: 414). Most members of the A skyong sub-clan migrated further to the north, north-west and north-east along the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range into the current Dga' bde and Gcig sgril, and to a lower extent also Dar lag, Counties. Later, they created new repositories of ancestral bones there (see below). Besides this main A skyong's geographical diffusion, there are small enclaves of the subclan in areas surrounding Mgo log.

All the three sites mentioned are generally known in contemporary Mgo log and reflect the gradual advance of the Mgo log clan in the region. Locals precisely recognise the three burial locations. All are on hill slopes, in the upper part of each hill. All slopes overlook the Smar river, either from the west or the east. For each subclan, their hill is sacred and hosts a resident territorial deity in Gnyan po G.yu rtse's retinue. Each god guards the entrusted relics as well as his subclan and their domain. People observe certain codes of behaviour at these sites and venerate each deity through different rituals elaborated to varying degrees, some also in monastic settings. Moreover, each subclan see their hill as their *bla ri*, "*bla* mountain", the repository of their communal *bla* force of vitality and prosperity, upon which the survival of the given group and its leaders, and the abundance of their land, depends. The *bla* is retained in the hills and the ancestral patriarch's bones. The *bla* force pervades the landscape, can spread or be divided into several repositories, and can simultaneously also depart for the upper sphere of the sky to constitute a *gzhi bdag* deity, thus it implies a certain force and quality rather than an individual person's 'soul'. The peaks holding it represent "back mountains" (*rgyab ri*) supporting the distinct clan branches. The heartland of the Mgo log in Lower Smar and its treasure mountain have remained important to all branches as a point of shared ancestral identity.

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[69] Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2017: 178-79, 384; Pad ma rnam rgyal *et al*. (forthcoming): 219, 425-426.

[70] Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2017: 343; Pad ma rnam rgyal *et al*. (forthcoming): 385.

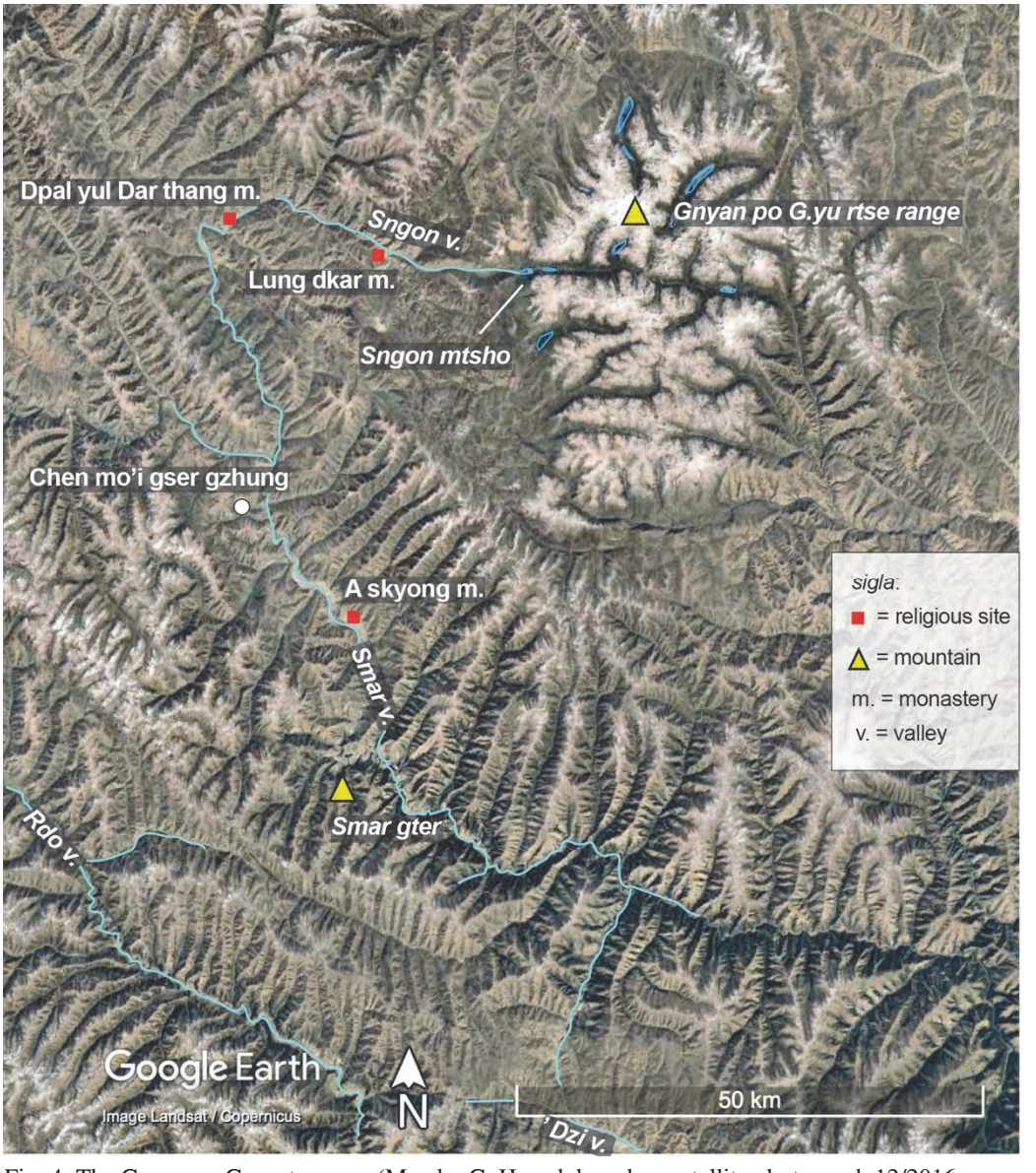


Fig. 4: The Gnyan po G.yu rtse area. (Map by G. Hazod, based on satellite photograph 12/2016; Map data: Google, Landsat Copernicus; modifications and additional data: A. Sehnalova)

The Genealogy (p. 57) further mentions a nother ruler's tomb, this time referred to as *bang so*. Phag thar's son Padma 'bum fathered a son named Thar ba. Whereas Padma 'bum buried Phag thar's relics into the treasure mountain of Smar backing the important Klu mkhar fortress, Thar ba's tomb, *bang so*, was established behind another of the dynasty's fortresses used by his own progeny (Dbang rol gdong mkhar, said to have been located in the Lower Smar valley). Again, Thar ba passed away at the respectable age of eighty-six and his final resting place as disclosed in the text might have been the supportive "back mountain" (*rgyab ri*) of this fortress. The two stories of a ruler's final depository thus parallel each other.

Within Buddhicisation efforts, Bla ma Chos 'bum pa did not agree with the *bla* force merely joining the *gzhi bdag* in the sky and retaining in the soil of their land, according to current understandings in Mgo log. The upper and lower, as well as the middle, sphere are in Mgo log governed by Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Even though the account recalls the apportioning of Buddha's remains into eight shrines across the land and later dispensations of relics of Tibetan Buddhist saints (Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 463), *The Genealogy* does not describe any Buddhist funeral rites for Phag thar to guide his consciousness. Some Buddhist masters aimed at merging such local burial practices and notions with Buddhism, as the below section shows.

3.2.2. Rite of the burial vase of ancestral bones

A majority of the A skyong subclan continued further migration in the direction of the Mgo log, northwards to the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range and beyond. They split into three patrilineal sub-subclans called the "Three Divisions of A skyong" (A skyong khag gsum): Khang rgan tshang ("Household (division) of the Old House"), Khang gsar tshang ("Household (division) of the New House"), and Gong ma tshang ("Highest household", i.e. division).[71] Each division has been ruled by a patriline derived from Phag thar's descendant A skyong, and each has settled in different areas of Dga' bde, Gcig sgril, and Dar lag Counties.

Khang rgan tshang has occupied the western foot of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range with its centres of power in the settlements of Dpal yul ("Glorious land") and Lung dkar ("White valley") in south-western Gcig sgril County. Their contemporary leader is based in Lung dkar and enjoys some social power and prestige. Grand monasteries of the same names dominate both settlements:

1. Dpal yul Dar thang monastery (est. 1838, 'Phrin las 2008: 277) of the Rnying ma school, a branch of the Dpal yul monastery near Sde dge from which the Mgo log allegedly migrated. This monastery also maintains links with Kaḥ thog monastery.
2. Lung dkar monastery (est. 1769, 'Phrin las 2008: 285) of the Dge lugs, presently affiliated with the Rwa brgya monastery (var. Rwa rgya) in northern Mgo log Prefecture.[72]

Both monasteries have been closely associated with Khang rgan tshang leaders. They have existed thanks to their support and have acted as their main providers of ritual services, often performing side by side despite of the different denominations. Both institutions are also responsible for funeral rites for the ruling elite when needed (apart from conducting standard funerals for the public). At such rare sorrowful occasions, the Jo nang school joins them to represent all the main monastic forces in the Khang rgan chief's territory and assure a more powerful ritual action. The Dpal yul Dar thang monastery holds one of the key ritual texts used. It reveals a repeated pattern of burials: bones are conceptualised as a treasure. First, I provide its translation, then a short analysis below.

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[71] *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 236; *The Genealogy*: 53-55; Don grub Dbang rgyal and Nor sde 1991.

[72] On both monasteries further see Yang 'phags pa *et al.* 1991: 1-123.

The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness:
The Practice of Establishing Ancestral Bones[73]

(90) *Oṃ swa sti*,[74]
Having bowed down to the primordial wisdom of the Victorious Omniscient One, [the Buddha],
The Royal Prince of youthful emanation,
[the Bodhisattva] Sun of Speech [Mañjuśrī],
I shall compose the practice of establishing ancestral bones.

Namely, as for the practice transmitted by observation (*mthong brgyud*),
Best is to have a clay vase (*rdza yi bum pa*),
If [you] don't have such, [use] any new container (*snod*) [you] obtain,
Without a crack [or flaw], pour milk down [on it].
On the outside [of the vase with] white paint applied,
In the East [draw] a tiger, in the South a dragon,
In the West a red bird, in the North a tortoise,
[And] in the intermediate directions [draw] the eight auspicious symbols:
The baldachin and the others.[75]
Having drawn [these], burn incense inside [the vase],
Then, into the centre [of the vase insert] the Life-tree (*srog shing*),[76]
A juniper for a male, and a willow for a female,
Not upside down, and without knots.
As for the square carved on the top [of the Life-tree],
Cut this square itself,
Moisten it with saffron to make it yellow,
[And] on the very top [of the Life-tree], write: *Oṃ āḥ hūṃ swā hā*.[77]
Into the upper part [of the Life-tree] and the four cardinal directions write downwards,
In gold, silver, vermillion, and black ink in accord with good fortune,[78]

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[73] *Dkar rtsi 'debs pa'i lag len dge legs gter chen*. I obtained the text in *dpe cha* form and *dbu med* script in a recent printed edition. I keep the distinction of recited parts by a larger letter font, and performance instructions by a smaller font. The red highlighting follows the original, as does the pagination in Arabic numerals. Wylie transliteration is in Appendix 4. For a critical edition of the text, its dating and history, see Langelaar (forthcoming-a).

[74] In Sanskrit: *Oṃ svasti*.

[75] The Buddhist eight auspicious symbols: endless knot, lotus, baldachin, right-turning conch shell, wheel of the Doctrine, royal emblem, treasure vase, golden fish.

[76] Similarly noted for East Tibet by Langelaar in this volume, for the Himalayas by Oppitz 1982: 384.

[77] *Oṃ āḥ hūṃ svāhā*.

[78] The colours reflect the four cardinal points: gold stands for yellow (East), silver for white (South), vermillion for red (West), and black for the North. The sequence follows the Buddhist clockwise direction, likewise the four animals of the points enumerated above.

The clear sound of the essence mantra of interdependence:
Oṃ kṣi ti rā dza swā hā.[79]
Oṃ pṛ thi wī de wī (91) *swā hā.*[80]
Thus is the mantra of the earth essence mantra of the Brtan ma female spirits.[81]
This has to be observed.

Also, if one wishes for a long life,
[Add] the spell of Buddha Amitābha, and if one wishes [to become] rich,
[Add] the mantra spell of Jambhala, the stream of wealth,
If one wishes for great power, [add] the [spell of] Mahābala,
If one wishes to pacify various diseases, [add] the spell of the Medicine Buddha,
In order to pacify fierce fights, [add] the spell of the Eight Appearances,
Write these [spells] on separate scrolls of paper,
Insert them [into the vase] and wrap them around the Life-tree.
For a male, put the letters facing outwards,
And wrap [the scrolls] around solely to the right.
For a female, put the letters facing inwards,
And wrap [the scrolls] around solely to the left.
All letters [have to be] "head letters".[82]
Then, in accordance with the colour,
Of the element of the body of the deceased,
Cover [the Life-tree] with fabric in a corresponding colour,
[And] tie it with a colourful thread of the five colours.
Fastening the Life-tree in the centre of the vase,
At the same time, recite this mantra along with a rosary:
Oṃ a mṛ te a dā swā hā.[83]

Then, according to the structure of the body,
Insert feet and legs, hipbones, back bones, and ribs,
Hands and arms, neck bones, and the skull.
(92) Add various kinds of medicines without poison,
Various kinds of grains without bad grains,
The three [metals of] iron, brass, and bronze,
[And] various precious jewels.
Draw an eight-spoked wheel on [a piece of] wood or slate,
[And] attach it to the lid [of the vase],

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[79] *Oṃ kṣitiṛāja svāhā*. Mantra of Kṣitigarbha, in Tibetan Sa'i snying po, the *bodhisattva* of the earth.

[80] *Oṃ pṛthivīdevī svāhā*. Mantra of Pṛthivī, the Indian Earth Goddess.

[81] See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 181-198.

[82] I.e. *dbu can* script (here as *mgo can*).

[83] *Oṃ amṛte adā svāhā.*

So that insects and worms cannot go inside.
At the bottom [of the vase] draw an eight-petalled lotus,
Insert the protection of the *g.yang* into its centre.
Having finished it, recite whatever [you wish to] accomplish,
Thus the *g.yang* of people will not decrease.

Ancestral bones of a happy, auspicious and long life,[84]
Are always put into a repository.
People who passed away over sixty [years old],
Are to be kept for about three years.
Those between forty and fifty [years of age],
Are not kept for a long time [and] a geomantic investigation is to be performed.
For those who died young,
There is no custom of handling ancestral bones,
As for adults and the elderly, [it] can [be done] for anyone.

Handle the hard bones as the ancestral bones.
As for all the soft bones,
Collect them and sprinkle them with "spell water."[85]
[If you are] not a relative [of the deceased], there will be no (ritual) pollution [caused by this].
A (ritually) pure [person should] (93) finely grind [the bones],
[And] cleanse [them] with water,
[So that they are] as white as a pigeon's face.[86]
Mix them with a portion of mud for the rite of Offering to the Earth (*sa sbyin*),
[And] reciting the root mantras, make earth *tsatsha*.
Having arranged all [the *tsatsha*] in front [of you],
Apply the whitewash over them.

In the centre of each *stūpa* [of the *tsatsha*, visualise],[87]
A *maṇḍala* of the Omniscient [Buddha].
Perform this accomplishment of the *tsatsha* as a practice of your own. Meditate thus for each one [of the *tsatsha*].
[Approach] the rites, offerings, and praises, and the root mantras,
[And then] the *stūpa*s will completely melt into light.

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[84] Literally "elderly", "old" (*rgan*), i.e. of an elderly person.

[85] *Gzungs chu*, water empowered by mantras for special properties.

[86] *Phug ron gyi/ dong rus mdog ltar dkar ba de/*, literally "pigeon's facial bone", probably refers to white operculum of the *Columbidae* family; might be hinting at *gdong ras*, "a cloth to cover the face of a dead body" (Tsering Thakchoe Drungtso and Tsering Dolma Drungtso 2005: 207; Vinding 1982: 296; Ramble 1982: 336; Gouin 2012: 55).

[87] The individual *tsatsha* cakes are to be visualised as *stūpa*s. The text has the spelling *tsatsha*, which I follow.

Having consecrated [the *tsatsha*] properly,[88]
In a hollow in the earth or in rocks,
So that it does not deteriorate and can resist water.
Offer a white *gtor ma* to the *gzhi bdag* [deities] and summon them,
[To ensure that] there are no hostilities in the earth,
And no malicious Lords of the place (*gnas bdag*).

As burnt ashes have a great impact on the earth,
Put them into a [place] close to [human] settlement.
Their immediate qualities are of great power.
Conceal the ancestral bones well into good earth,
Into a good back mountain, or the mountain behind, of abundant and smooth earth,
For the duration of thirteen generations,
This is a stable tomb of arising happiness and prosperity,
(94) The *bla* of the deceased will also reside there.

Examine [the *sa bdag*] Lto 'phye,[89] and the Lords of the place (*gnas gzhi'i bdag*),
Offer *gtor ma* cakes and the first portion libation,
Precisely perform the rite of Requesting the Earth (*sa bslang*)[90] and others.
Offer various grains and utter:
I pay homage to the Three Noble Jewels!
I pay homage to the One of Gentle Voice [Mañjughoṣa,][91] of supreme knowledge!
Led by the great *sa bdag* Lto 'phye,
And the Brtan ma goddesses,
All the *sa dbag*, I ask [you] to listen.
Especially all the *sa bdag*, *klu*, and *gnyan*,
Residing in this area, [please] listen:
Coming from the world of mundane existence,
Humans, the two-legged beings,
When they are born, they are born on earth,
When they die, they die on earth,
[Thus] also the burial of the body is in the earth.
Noble Mañjughoṣa of supreme knowledge,
[Please] state which land has good or bad qualities.
I and the sponsoring patron
Wish to ask for the attainment (Skt. *siddhi*) of good earth.

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[88] On funeral *tsatsha* (*tsatsa*) consecration see Brauen 1982: 326.

[89] See Eskenazi and Gyurme Dorje 2001.

[90] The translation of the name of the ritual follows Cantwell 2005.

[91] Skt. Mañjughoṣa ('Jam pa'i dbyangs, 'Jam dbyangs) is another name of Mañjuśrī ('Jam dpal). Snellgrove 1987: 59.

The word of Mañjughoṣa,
And the instructions of the four magical men,
(95) Stated that in this land the signs of the earth were good.
Therefore, you, the *sa bdag*,
Do not break this word of Mañjughoṣa,
Whatever is the attainment (*siddhi*) of the signs of the earth,
Today,[92] [please] be generous to us.
This great growth of fine green barley,
Appeared from the throat of the king [of birds] Khyung (Skt. Garuḍa),
Granted by the hand of the Great Compassionate One [Avalokiteśvara],[93]
It is the enjoyment of the black-headed men.
[I] offer this fine barley as a gift to the earth!
Giving [it] to land, [it will become] a treasury of auspiciousness (*bkra shis*).
Harmful earth demons and hostile spirits,
Are liberated by a fierce wooden ritual dagger (Skt. *kila*).

The precious container from the [syllable] *bhūṃ*,
Outside, it is a treasure vase,
Inside, it is an incomparable precious mansion.
In the inside, these white ancestral (*pha mtshun*) bones of the deceased,
By the blessings of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel [the Buddha],[94]
Conceal them as a precious treasure of the earth,
Open the realm of the Earth Goddess.[95]
The white bones [correspond to] the element of metal,
Today, earth and metal are set in the mother-son relation (*ma bu*).[96]
These thirteen[97] bones of the spine,
(96) Are established as a stake to support thirteen generations.
This round hipbone,
Is established as a general support of *g.yang* of people and cattle.
By this jawbone resembling a wide sickle,

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[92] The time indication (*de ring*) implies either "today" or "now," or both. Cf. similarly below.

[93] The word *'bru* can indicate both "barley" and "grain" more generally. The line alludes to the Tibetan myth on the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara as the begetter of barley to humans. See Kapstein 1992; Laurent 2015.

[94] The term Wish-Fulfilling Jewel (*yid bzhin nor bu*) is ambiguous – it may, and may not, refer to the Buddha.

[95] The Earth Goddess in earth rituals figures in Cantwell 2001: 117; iconographically in Eskenazi and Gyurme Dorje 2001: 110-111.

[96] The relation of production of the five astrological elements wood (*shing*), fire (*me*), earth (*sa*), metal (*lcags*) and water (*chu*); earth gives rise to metal as a mother. Cornu 2002: 59; Eskenazi and Gyurme Dorje 2001: 64.

[97] The numeral is emended from "sixteen", following Langelaar's critical edition (forthcoming-a).

Destroy all the *rgab* demons of disease and death (*na rgab shi rgab*).[98]

The black-headed people of aspiration of the mundane existence,
The best of men, king Mthing ger and others,[99]
All the powerful ancestors (*mes mtshun*),
Abide firmly in this support of *g.yang*.
Mdzangs ma 'phrul and Khri do che,[100]
All the paternal ancestors (*pha mtshun*) of the 'six clans' of Tibet,
Abide firmly in this support of *g.yang*.
Especially all the paternal ancestors (*pha mtshun*) of the paternal lineage (*pha mes brgyud*),
And all the maternal ancestors (*ma mtshun*) of the paternal lineage (*pha mes brgyud*),
Of these deceased,
Together with the *bla* of the deceased,
Settle in this earth of good signs,
And enjoy the abundance of the earth![101]

By the truth of the Three Jewels,
The completely pure Dharma,
And the truth of the conditional interdependence,
The *bla* of the [just] deceased and the paternal and maternal ancestors,
Joy, happiness, and wealth greatly increase.
(97) May [they have] the potency [to be] the protectors of the living!

By concealing this treasure vase of ancestral bones,
The *bla* of the dead, the deceased, is pleased,
The living will accumulate power and riches,
May long life without disease, of joy and happiness, come!

By the truth of the word of noble Mañjuśrī,
The unmistaken conditional interdependence,
And the force of the interdependence of arising,

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[98] See Das 1991 (*sgab 'dre*); in Zhang 1993 (*sgab*, *'gab*, *'gab 'dre*) defined as "demons pursuing people and cattle" (*mi nor rjes 'brangs kyi 'dre*). This accords with the above verse proposing the ritual for both people and cattle.

[99] King Mthing ger (var. Mthing ge, Thing ghe) is the progenitor of mankind and the last shared ancestor of the Tibetans and Chinese (and eventually other ethnic groups) in Tibetan myth and ritual traditions, personifying Tibetans before their split into the 'six clans'. The myth of his body's dismemberment engendering the clans recalls that of Phag thar above. See Stein 1972: 194, 224; Karmay 1998: 258, 267ff.; Langelaar 2018: 338, 347, 354.

[100] Mthing ger's patrilineal descendants, son and grandson, the latter begets the 'six Tibetan clans'. See Karmay 1998: 270ff., 249, as 'Dzom la phrom and Khri tho chen po; Langelaar 2018: 337, fn. 39, as Khri (g)tor.

[101] Alternatively, the final syllable in this verse (*sa yi dpal la longs spyod mdzod/*) could be translated nominally: "[And for] the abundance of the earth, [it will become] a treasury of enjoyment."

Earth and metal are set in the mother-son relation,
For the living, may long life without disease come!
By the truth of the planets, stars, and time,
May all auspiciousness arise!

Once reversed by the power of obscuration of ignorance,
Bad planets, stars, and time,
[And] noxious enemies in the earth may occur.
By the blessings of the truth of Mañjughoṣa,
May these turn into a peaceful ground of bliss and happiness!
Oṃ a ka ni ni ka ni a bhi la maṇḍala ma ye swā hā.[102]
Thus [utter], and scatter the flowers of auspicious wishes.

May the four directions, [and] the centre as the fifth, be auspicious,
May the auspiciousness of the Five Buddhas come!
May the eight points of the body be auspicious,
May the auspiciousness of the eight auspicious symbols come!
(98) May the interdependence of the eight objects[103] be auspicious,
May the auspiciousness of the eight auspicious objects come!
May abundance and wealth be auspicious,
May the auspiciousness of the Seven Royal treasures come![104]
May the earth of the four directions be auspicious,
May the auspiciousness of the tiger, the dragon, the bird, and the serpent, come![105]
Oṃ ye dharmā sogs.[106]
Oṃ su pra tiṣṭha badzra ya swā hā.[107]
Firmly establish this and then adorn the end by aspiration prayers.
Thus is pronounced.

The King of Barley of the sign of the *mani* (*ma ṇi*) syllable, [Avalokiteśvara,][108]
As he went to the sky,

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[102] The mantra pacifying obscuration in all directions, particularly to prevent harm from earth spirits: *Oṃ akani nikani abhila maṇḍalamaye svāhā*.

[103] The eight auspicious objects: mirror, curd, *dur ba* grass, *bil ba* fruit, white right-turning conch-shell, elephant bezoar, vermillion, white mustard seeds; Das 1991, Zhang 1993.

[104] The seven emblems of a universal monarch: wheel, jewel, queen, minister, elephant, horse, general; Das 1991, Zhang 1993.

[105] The four animals of the cardinal points again in the clockwise order (East–South–West–North). The serpent alternates with the tortoise featuring above.

[106] The mantra of dependent origination, *rten 'brel snying po* (*rten snying*): *Oṃ ye dharmā hetu prabhavā hetun teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃ vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ*.

[107] *Oṃ supratiṣṭha vajraye svāhā*.

[108] See fn. 93. The text implies the very popular mantra of Avalokiteśvara: *Oṃ ma ṇi padme hūm*.

From the foot of the great sacred mountain Mdzo,
In the midst of the Lho zla dga' ma riverbank,[109]
In places of universal kindness and nearby lands,
To the many mantra holders (i.e. tantrins) of the future generations,
For general benefit, [this was composed] by Rā ga a sya,
[Based on] the Purification Tantra, the principal text of Avalokiteśvara,[110]
[And] the abbreviated Chinese principal text on the earth.
It was written down in faith by the fully ordained monk Padma,
As it was pronounced following the oral transmission.
Henceforth, by all the connections,
May auspicious happiness and prosperity come to both the patron and priest!

Thus was composed by Grub dbang Rin po che according to the respective principle texts and note-commentaries, along with correcting perpetuating inaccuracies, and was arranged together by Blo gros rgyal mtshan. (99) Hereby let great benefit to all sentient beings arise!

Oṃ na mo bha ga wa te a pa ri mi ta a yur dznyā na su bi ni shtsi ta te dzwa rā dza ya ta thā ga tā ya arha te samyaksaṃ buddha ya, tadya thā, oṃ puṇye puṇye, ma hā puṇye a pa ri mi ta puṇye a pa ri mi ta puṇye dznyā na saṃ bha ro pa tsi te, oṃ sarba saṃ ska ra pa ri shuddha dharmā te ga ga na sa mudga te swa bhā wa bi shuddha ma hā na ya pa ri wa re swā hā.[111]
Oṃ dzaṃ bha la dza lendra ye swā hā.[112]
*Oṃ bai shra ma (*ba) ṇa ye swā hā.*[113]
Oṃ ba su dha ri nī swā hā.[114]

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[109] Langelaar (forthcoming-a) identifies the locations as the place of the work's composition: Gar mdzad mountain and its base (var. Lho rdza ngang ma) of Upper Rdza chu in northern Nang chen.

[110] The mentioned treatise 'Purification Tantra', *Sbyong rgyud*, or fully *Sbyong rgyud thugs rje chen po'i gzhung*, likely refers to the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* (*Ngan song sbyong ba'i rgyud*), *Tantra on the Complete Purification of All Negative Places of Rebirth* (the title translation follows Buswell and Lopez 2014), one of the early tantras translated into Tibetan, which expounds on rebirth and rituals for the dead. See its edition in Skorupski 1983, further Cuevas 2003: 21, 36ff., 106ff., Lindsay 2018. I am grateful to Mathias Fermer for this identification.

[111] The *dhāraṇī* from the *Āryāparimitāyurjñānanāmamahāyānasūtra* or *'Phags pa tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo* [Tōh. no. 483, 485]: *Oṃ namo bhagavate aparimitāyurjñānasuviniścitatejorājāya tathāgatāyārhate samyaksaṃbuddhāya | tadyathā | oṃ puṇye puṇye mahāpuṇye 'parimitapuṇye 'parimitapuṇyajñānasaṃbhāropacite | oṃ sarvasaṃskāraparišuddhe dharmate gaganasamudgate svabhāvaviśuddhe mahānayaparivāre svāhā |*

[112] Mantra of Jambhala: *Oṃ jaṃbhala jalenḍrāye svāhā.*

[113] Mantra of Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam thos sras), as a wealth deity: *Oṃ vaiśravaṇaye svāhā.*

[114] Mantra of the the wealth goddess Vasudhāra (Nor rgyun ma): *Oṃ vasudhārinī svāhā.*

> The spell of Mahābala: *Oṃ, Oṃ badzra kro dha ma hā bha la ha na da ha pa tsa ma tha bi dhwa na sa ya dza ṭilambo da ra u tsuṣma kro dha hūṃ phaṭ swā hā.*[115]
> The medicine spell: *Tadya thā, Oṃ bhai ṣadzye bhai ṣa dzye ma hā bhai ṣa dzye rā dzā sa mudga te swā hā.*[116]
> [The spell of] the Eight Appearances: *Oṃ a ka ni ni ka ni a bhi la maṇḍa la ma ye swā hā.*[117]
> [The mantra of dependent origination,] *rten snying*: *Ye dharmā he tu pra bha wa he tuṃ teṣāṃ ta thā ga to hya ba datte ṣāṃtsa yo ni ro dha e waṃ bā di ma hā shā ma ṇa.*[118]
> Thus [is uttered].

The rite treats bones of deceased elderly as a special substance enhanced with forces of prosperity that generates and ensures the well-being of the next generations of principally their lineage. Proper post-mortal storage of the bones, white-washed in a vessel hidden as a treasure at a certain location, secures that the essential forces of vitality and prosperity, *bla* and *g.yang*, carried by the ancestors during life (at least partially) remain with the living after their passing. Ethnographically, in current Mgo log people's perceptions, the title could fairly read: "The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness: The Practice of Establishing the White-washed [Burial Vase]". The term *dkar rtsi*, literally "white-wash/pigment" (alternatively "white sap/elixir"), according to Langelaar's (forthcoming-a) convincing textual analysis most probably denotes "ancestral bones". In Mgo log it is presently very difficult to find someone at least vaguely acquainted with the ritual, even though people, at least in the A skyong area, not rarely know about its existence. The term is more perceived to apply to the whole white-washed burial vessel rather than to the white bones in its inside.

The *bla* is in contemporary Mgo log understood as a certain force of vitality, which supports the living but causes severe mental and physical disruption if it leaves. At death, it can be either brought into the soil, the aim of this rite, and/or join the ancestors in the sky[119] and the mountains, who are often simultaneously *gzhi bdag* deities of the land. The ancestors are represented and preceded by Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Both avenues overlap – effectively, the *bla* remains in the land of ancestral

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[115] Mantra of the deity Ucchuṣmakrodha Mahābala (Mnol ba med pa, literally "Without impurity"), who protects against impurity: *Oṃ vajrakrodha mahābala hana daha paca mathā vidhvaṃsaya jaṭilāmbhodaraṇa ucchuṣmakrodhāya hūṃ phaṭ svāhā.* Ucchuṣmakrodha deities first appear in Atharvavedic texts, and subsequently in many further Indian, especially tantric, traditions. The earliest appearances in Tibet of this tradition, and this very *dhāraṇī*, occur in the many separate copies of the *Āryamahābalanāmama-hāyānasūtra* found at Dunhuang (Bischoff 1956).

[116] Mantra of the Medicine Buddha (Sman bla; Bhaiṣajyaguru): *Tad yathā oṃ bhaiṣajye bhaiṣajye mahābhaiṣajyarājāsamudgate svāhā.*

[117] *Oṃ akani nikani abhila maṇḍalamaye svāhā.* See fn. 102.

[118] See fn. 106: *Ye dharmā hetu prabhavā hetun teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃ vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ.*

[119] Likewise described for the Thakali by Vinding (1982).

mountain deities.[120] The *g.yang* as a force of good fortune, prosperity and wealth[121] very closely ties to the *gzhi bdag* too. People call the *g.yang* from the *gzhi bdag* regularly, sometimes every day, as a part of fumigation offerings (*bsang*), and at special occasions, such as rites of passage (children's first hair cutting ceremonies, *ne'u ston*; weddings, *gnyen ston / gnyen sgrig*; reaching the age of eighty, *rgya ston*), and other times of need of mun-dane support, such as natural disasters, war, or illness. Another force at play in the text is auspiciousness (*bkra shis*) again very commonly summoned from the *gzhi bdag*.

Patrilineality is the main ordering factor of kinship reference and entitlement to the acquisition of these powers through the ritual. The bones (*rus pa*) epitomise the patriline (*rus*). It is patrilineal descendants, and their land, who gain the benefits of their concealment. Maternal ancestors emerge mainly in relation to the patriline as its ancestors, involving Gnyan po G.yu rtse's daughter. The envisioned descent in the rite relates back to the 'six clans' of Tibet and further to the supposed shared ancestor of all Tibetans. The ancestors collectively feature under the designation *mtshun* which Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 311) construes as "ancestral spirits" and Langelaar (forthcoming-b, also in this volume) as "ancestral metapersons". In Mgo log, qualified ancestors, typically rulers and heroes, indeed continue their existence after death in a spirit-like form as specific *gzhi bdag* divinities. Within their unity, they are distinguished as "paternal" (*pha mtshun*) and "maternal" (*ma mtshun*), and once appear jointly as "all the powerful ancestors" (*mes mtshun gnyan po thams cad*). They share this epithet "powerful" or "fierce" (*gnyan po*) with the Mgo log clan's paramount ancestor Gnyan po G.yu rtse. The same characteristic of the *mtshun* was observed by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 311), from which he deduces that "[m]any of them seem to be regarded as spirits of evil nature: *mes btsun gnyan po*". However, in Mgo log through this rite one seeks a good relationship with the *mtshun* for very favourable outcomes.

The ritual exposes the constitution of an individual of three forces: (1) the "life force" (*srog*) – which is bound by physicality, determining lifespan; (2) the *bla* 'vitality force' – which extends beyond one's life with considerable impacts upon posterity, and as articulated in Mgo log can comprise post-mortal existence in numinal form; and (3) "consciousness" (*rnam shes*), a Buddhist concept of the main constituent of continuation of an individual subjected to the cycle of rebirths (*'khor ba*, Skt. *saṃsāra*) until the aimed-at awakening (*byang chub*, Skt. *bodhi*) and attaining of *nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa*). The tripartite scheme might be a reminiscence of 'soul' pluralism (Langelaar, this volume), even though the concept of 'soul' is at least in some contexts questionable (see below) and we rather deal with certain forces, powers, and qualities constituting the individual. A compendium of geomantic, literally of "examination of the earth" (*sa dpyad*), texts used at the

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[120] Similarly noted in the Himalayas by Diemberger (1994, 1997); Brauen (1982) observed in La dwags retaining the family's *bla* by burying deceased children in the house.

[121] On *g.yang* see da Col 2012; Ramble 2013; in connection to death and locally preserved corpses of prominent and long-lived individuals as its carriers see Palmu (2018: 196-203), similarly Vinding (1982: 299) notes requests to the deceased to leave *g.yang* with the living, also Langelaar (this volume).

Dpal yul Dar thang monastery explains what happens to these forces at the death of their bearer as follows:

> "There are three [forces]: *srog*, *rnam shes*, and *bla*. The *srog* is killed, cut by the demons. The *rnam shes* follows its deeds (*las*, Skt. *karma*). The *bla* resides in the tomb."[122]

What concerns the geomantic manual and directly the descendants, is the *bla*. As the text further illuminates, the *bla* is joyful and pleased (*dga'*) if its established burial ground exercises good qualities, and as a consequence the bereaved and the related community prosper for generations. If not, the living will suffer too. The well-being of the ancestral force thus determines the affluence of the descendants. Concealing such a treasure of bones enhanced with the *bla* results in establishing firm "back mountains" (*rgyab ri*) of support for the community in the same manner as the patriarch Phag thar's bones gave origin to the three "vitality mountains" (*bla ri*) and "back mountains" of the three Mgo log subclans of his heirs. In the above-cited excerpt from *The Genealogy*, it was Buddhist monastics represented by Bla ma Chos 'bum pa who added to this notion the 'consciousness' principle, so that apart from continuing the *bla*'s post-mortal bound with the living, the deceased can also proceed through rebirths towards awakening. Apparently, according to the authors of the chronicle, they did not seem to see any contradiction with normative Buddhism in such a duality, as people do not see in contemporary Mgo log. *The Genealogy* does not mention the *srog* principle which ceases with death, and hence in effect is less relevant for funerary rites and the consequences of one's passing.

The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness ritual merges the local ancestor cosmology with Buddhism. Even though the act does not explicitly address Buddhist *post mortem* concerns of a good rebirth and awakening, it incorporates many Buddhist tokens. The cosmological contextualisation are the four cardinal points so popular in Buddhist ritual with their characteristic features. The practice is presented as centred around *bodhisattva* Manjuśrī, the Buddha, the Three Jewels; deities embodying awakening prominently figure at the beginning, the end, and crucial points throughout the rite. Jambhala (Dzaṃ lha, Dzam bha la) features notably due to his role as the deity of wealth and close connection to treasures (see below). A number of Buddhist symbols are involved, such as the eight-petalled lotus and *stūpa*s, as well as very common Buddhist tantric practices, such as consecration and visualisations, spiritual attainments (*siddhi*), usage of a *maṇḍala*, mantras, and of certain substances (medicines without poison, grains, metals). Likewise, other components, such as the pacification of local forces of the environment, the rites of Offering to the Earth and Requesting the Earth, offering to the Lords of the place and the *sa bdag* Lto 'phye, feature in Tibetan Buddhist (and G.yung drung Bon) ritual. The ritual, at least as currently understood and performed, presupposes cremation as the primary treatment of the body by which the bones are extracted. In the same way, the treatment of Phag thar's remains described in *The Genealogy* is currently read in Mgo log. In *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual, part

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[122] Bsod rnams Dbang ldan 1996, p. 318: *srog dang rnam shes bla dang gsum/ srog de gshed ma 'dre yis gcod/ rnam shes las kyi rjes su 'brang/ bla ni dur la gnas pa yin/*. Stein (1972: 227) observes equally: "At death, the soul (*bla*) survives in the tomb or elsewhere."

of the remnants are stored as whitewashed bones in a treasure vase and part are integrated into white-washed *tsatsha*, the latter is a common practice throughout Tibet. Both *The Genealogy* and the ritual therefore present primary and secondary funerals.

The colophon ascribes the text to Rā ga a sya aka Karma chags med (1613-1678), the prolific scholar of East Tibet in the 17th century associated with the Karma Bka' brgyud school and the Rnying ma Dpal yul lineage. Yet, the work is in fact a later composite of two Karma chags med's ritual manuals merged and edited by a certain Blo gros rgyal mtshan at an unspecified time. The titles of the components read, in Langelaar's rendering: *Instructions and Procedures* [*Concerning*] *Ancestral Bones* (*Dkar rtsi zhal gdams lag len*), and *Summary* [*Notes on*] *Bone Caskets: The Planting of Ancestral Bones* (*Dkar rtsi'i sa 'debs rus mkhar nyung bsdus gcig*, alternatively *The Bone Casket, a Vase-Treasure for Ancestral Bones*, *Dkar rtsi bum gter rus mkhar*). Blo gros rgyal mtshan supplied the new whole with its present title, a more coherent and formal Buddhist framework, some of the practical ritual instructions and fully spelled out mantras (further see Langelaar, forthcoming-a). Interestingly, both distant areas in which Karma chags med most likely composed the original two pieces, Nang chen and the area south of Sde dge (here specifically the vicinity of the Karma Bka' brgyud Dpal spungs monastery) respectively, feature on the remembered Mgo log clan's migratory path. This suggests that the clan might have become familiar with the local ideas and practises embedded in the rite already *in situ*, aside from afterwards adopting the ritual from the Sde dge Dpal yul monastery.

Interestingly, Karma chags med also authored a series of various funerary texts mainly of the Buddhist aim of guiding consciousness (Halkias 2013: 113-116; 2019). In contrast, in *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual, the master (and the later editor) undoubtedly aimed at incorporating vital cosmological notions wide-spread in East Tibet into a Buddhist framework, both conceptual and performatively ritualistic, and furthermore, included Chinese astrological knowledge, as the closing lines state. These elements have thus become part of Rnying ma practice, until today perpetuated at Dar thang monastery. Karma chags med's funerary rituals, along with many other of his compositions, count among the most common and widely used throughout Tibet (Skorupski 1982: 361).

3.3 Contemporary practice: treasures and burial grounds

The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness ritual is one of the several funerary rites that the Dpal yul Dar thang monastery presently conducts. It is colloquially called "earth burial" (*sa dur*) or "burial treasure" (*dur gter*), and is distinguished from the other performed funerals: sky burial (*bya gtor*, literally "scattering to birds", also *bya sbyin*, "giving/offering to birds"), cremation (*me dur*, *sbyin sreg*), and water burial (*chu dur*). Such an earth burial is taken as one type of a *gter* treasure hidden into the ground. The buried treasure can be, but is not necessarily, conceptualised as a treasure offering (*gter*) to the territorial deity into whose land it is hidden. The treasure either relates to this deity, such as in Mgo log to Gnyan po G.yu rtse, or to the generic *sa bdag* Lto 'phye pervading all land, or often to both depending on the interpretation of those in charge of the offering.

People also grant and hide other treasures to enhance the forces of *g.yang*, *bkra shis*, as well as the "earth essence" (*sa bcud*).[123] Thereby they boast their and the land's fecundity and affluence. These treasure offerings are very popular in present-day East Tibet during regular offerings to mountain *gzhi bdag* deities, such as grand yearly fumigations, and at special occasions, for instance pilgrimages, personal and family needs: house construction, illness, material loss and financial challenges, and environmental concerns mainly linked to the earth, such as draught, deterioration of soil, erosion, loss of productivity, etc. Both Buddhist and G.yung drung Bon authorities who produce the treasures and often lead their offerings, interpret them also in soteriological terms as a support for general merit (*bsod nams*) and awakening of all sentient beings. The treasures are both created and offered by monastics, tantrics (*sngags pa*), and lay people – usually men. They consist of "treasure vases" (*gter bum*) and "treasure sachets" (*gter khug*) filled with special ingredients, so-called "treasure substances" (*gter rdzas*), frequently based on precise recipes: jewels, precious and semiprecious stones, metals, grains, medicines, sheep wool representing *g.yang*, and the like, similarly to the funeral treasure presented above. The treasures should undergo ritual consecration to awakened Buddhist or G.yung drung Bon deities, among whom Jambhala (Dzam bha la), associated with treasures, wealth and material prosperity, features prominently. In Mgo log and Rnga ba regions, hundreds, and likely thousands, of such treasures are offered every year. Any auspicious and good site after a close examination of its geomantic conditions (*sa dpyad*) qualifies for the offering. The treasure is buried underground leaving no durable traces of the action on the earth surface. Places of high importance are the most popular, typically sacred sites, the "back mountains" (*rgyab ri*) of monasteries, natural features believed to contain the *bla* force: "*bla* mountains" (*bla ri*), such as A myes Rma chen, and "*bla* lakes" (*bla mtsho*) which for the Mgo log clan and its subjects is the Blue lake (Sngon mtsho), the repository of their communal *bla* where A 'bum once gained Gnyan po G.yu rtse's daughter for his son, situated in the western part of the range.

On the other hand, earth treasure burials are extremely rare, the rarest from all types of funerals performed and all types of treasures offered. The act is in contemporary practice of the Dpal yul Dar thang monastery *de facto* reserved for deceased Mgo log clan leaders. The institution serves the A skyong Khang rgan sub-subclan along the high and pastoral western foothills of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range. As the A skyong subclan spread to the north, north-west and north-east from the Mgo log heartland in Padma, they established their own bone repositories for the remnants of own patriarchs. The one of the A skyong Khang rgan lies on a hill slope. It is oriented to the south and lies about twenty kilometres westwards (as the crow flies) from Dar thang settlement, in the Blue valley (Sngo khog) roughly oriented east-west. The slope directly faces the Dge lugs Lung dkar monastery on the opposite side of the valley across its Blue river (Sngo chu), which further up to the east issues from the Blue lake. The hill is rounded. Locals explain its shape as giving the impression of slightly

[123] Da Col (2012: 79) explains *bcud*, "essence", as: "vitality, biopower, biodiversity and fertility (*sa bcud*); essence of life or quality of things, such as food." My Mgo log informants have explained the *bcud* principle as the essence of phenomena ensuring their characterising qualities, i.e. making them what they are: giving fertility to soil, healing to medicine, nutrition to food, etc. Treasure vases enhancing *sa bcud* are discussed in Cantwell 2001; Huber 1997: 115.

overhanging so as to create a hollow or shelter beneath its top, providing a very good geomantic spot to protect the tombs. The peak is called Dge bsnyen in a Buddhist manner[124] and is conceptualised as the supportive "front mountain" (*mdun ri*) of the monastery. As one climbs up, for about thirty minutes from the bottom of the valley, the dramatic glacier of Gnyan po G.yu rtse becomes visible in the east. The same counts for the monastery – from the three uppermost steps of its assembly hall and above, one receives the same view. Both the burial ground and the monastery on the opposite slopes are geomantically aligned to Gnyan po G.yu rtse's spires. One thus gets beautiful views of the Lung dkar monastery and Gnyan po G.yu rtse's majestic summit (see Figs. 5-6). The burial ground now contains probably three small tumuli composed of earth and stone. Only one is well evident – the latest, which in local understanding dates to the first half of the 20th century (Fig. 7).[125] Having an approximate rectangular shape of about one metre times two metres representing the proportions of a human body, it is elevated above the ground by about half a metre, and reveals its construction: the elevated earth basis is fully covered with thin slate stones carved with Buddhist mantras and symbols heaped one on another. The other two mounds are in a rather disintegrated state, resembling what might appear as random heaps of stones. The compact tomb is aligned by its longer sides to parallel the flow of the river and by its shorter sides to Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the other two, rather disintegrating, tombs seem to share this arrangement. The tombs locally referred to as (*dpon po'i*) *dur sa / bang so* are recognised to contain the remnants of sever-al last generations of A skyong Khang rgan chieftains.



Fig. 5: View of the Khang rgan graveyard with the most intact tomb on the left, and a disintegrated tomb on the right; overlooking the Dge lugs Lung dkar monastery and the Sngo chu river to the south; the intact tomb's longer sides parallel the flow of the river. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

[124] *Dge bsnyen* denotes *upāsaka* in Sanskrit, i.e. a lay Buddhist practitioner who observes the five elementary vows.

[125] In further research, I aim to establish a closer dating.

Another branch of the A skyong subclan, Khang gsar, has a similar burial site for their leaders on the hill Rma chen gi pha ri, the "Paternal Mountain of Rma chen", probably hinting at A myes Rma chen commonly called Rma chen. The site faces one of Khang gsar's central monasteries, the Rnying ma Smin thang dgon (est. 1865, 'Phrin las 2008: 302, now in northern Gcig sgril County), and should contain graves, orally rendered to me as *bang so* and *gdung khang*, of their leaders' last four generations.[126] Moreover, it seems that the third A skyong branch, Gong ma tshang, also used to have such a designated field, which has gradually fallen into oblivion. An important sacred hill within their territory is interestingly called Dmu ri (Rmu ri, Rma btsan Dmu ri), evoking the divine cord connection to the sky, and moreover, is located in a place called Gser gzhong gong ma, "Upper Gser gzhong", hence sharing name with Phag thar's bone trove of Dbang chen 'bum in the lower parts of the Mgo log territory.[127] Further, it is above the Rma chu, Rma river (Huanghe, Yellow river, in Chinese), and 'backs' the group's joint Rnying ma and Dge lugs Stong skyabs monastery (est. 1837, 'Phrin las 2008: 165, in Dga' bde County). According to literature, the hill holds bone repositories (*gdung khang*) besides *gter* treasures concealed by Padmasambhava.[128]



Fig. 6: View of the Khang rgan graveyard showing the second disintegrated tomb (to the left); overlooking the peaks of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range to the east. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

[126] I rely on information from the current holder of the A skyong Khang gsar rulership, I was not able to visit the site in person. The burial ground by its arrangement should resemble the one of Khang rgan.

[127] The spellings *gzhung* (more common) and *gzhong* alternate. The term denotes the main valley of an area, i.e. a (usually broad flat) valley of the core river, for instance here the Smar chu (for Dbang chen 'bum), and Rma chu (for A skyong Gong ma tshang).

[128] A skyong 'Jigs rnam 2010: front images; Pad ma rnam rgyal *et al*. (forthcoming): 703-05. The incumbent A skyong Gong ma tshang leader despite his great knowledge and rather advanced age did not know any such graveyard (interview, August 2018), neither other Gong ma tshang members I consulted. Likewise, Vinding (1982: 311) mentions "reliquary stone structures" for patrilineal descent groups of the Thakali, and Langelaar (this volume) in East Tibet.



Fig. 7: The most intact tomb of the Khang rgan graveyard, covered with thin slate stones carved with Buddhist mantras and symbols. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

Even though the current A skyong Khang rgan leader resides in the Lung dkar settlement below the monastery, and their cemeterial ground overlooks the monastery, Lung dkar monks do not perform the treasure burial itself, neither have access to its script. Monastics of the Rnying ma Dar thang establishment have to come to offer *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual. The ritual's text proposes that the white-washed burial vase "can be made for anyone" who has reached adulthood and especially old age. People have explained to me that the older the person the better for the rite and its efficacy; leaders, warriors, and also women with many sons are preferred. Likewise, *The Genealogy* states patriarch Phag thar's age of death as eighty-nine, which, at least from the current perspective, qualified his body and relics as especially powerful. However, in contemporary practice, the performance of the rite takes place only once in a generation when a hereditary ruler passes away. Then, first, the Dar thang and Lung dkar monasteries perform a cremation together (conceptualised as a "fire/burnt offering", *sbyin sreg*), accompanied by Jo nang Lcam mda' monastery (var. Lcam mdo, est. 1849, 'Phrin las 2008: 334, northern Gcig sgril County). Monks from each monastery recite their own texts. Secondly, bones are extracted from the ashes. Dar thang monks led by their highest authority titled the Dar thang Rin po che, compose the treasure vessel following the instructions in the ritual text. The treasure should be hidden into the ancestral ground. A new tomb for the deceased leader is than erected at the above described graveyard. Hereby he joins his forefathers, his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and potentially others, his genealogical and political predecessors already buried at the designed site. More importantly, he joins them through his *bla* force as a *gzhi bdag* deity in Gnyan po G.yu rtse's retinue. Coming from a lineage of divinity, the ruler continues his existence as a deity. His *bla* and *g.yang* will pervade the land and landscape and support the progeny and subsequent generations. The rulers thus receive a primary and secondary burial. Smaller bones can be powdered into *tsatsha*, as the text instructs, and placed into small *tsha khang* houses that occasionally dot the hill slopes of Gnyan po G.yu rtse's landscape.

Concealed treasures, both funeral and of general offerings, can never be dug out. They are to remain in the ground to enhance its properties, the welfare of those offering them and their descendants. Extraction equals an attack, a hostile act against the associated individuals and social group.[129] The land and the group would lose at least a portion of their *bla* and *g.yang* forces. For example, the Mgo log clan and confederation understand that removing or destroying the Phag thar's *bla ri* ossuaries at one or all three sites would potentially prompt great degradation of the land and annihilation of the clan and its whole confederation. The Smar Treasure mountain of Padma 'bum is particularly vulnerable because people perceive it as the primary trove and a joint point of identity of all Mgo log.

Historical sources present the same notions. The *Mdo smad chos 'byung* in its chapter on the region of Mgo log and the upper Rma chu records three cases of treasure concealment: a political leader requests a Buddhist monastic master to offer a "mountain treasure" (*ri gter*) in a silver vessel (*dngul bum*), which results into multiplication and flourishment of his progeny (p. 243). In a similar constellation, a treasure (*gter*) is offered for defence purposes against the Mongols, along with other forms of mountain deities' veneration, a cairn (*lab tse*) construction and fumigation (*bsang*) (p. 258). And thirdly, among other Buddhist practices, a master accomplishes (*sgrub*), i.e. probably composes and consecrates, and offers a Jambhala's treasure (Dzam lha'i *gter*) accompanied by the deity's "call for *g.yang*" recital (*g.yang 'bod*, p. 268). All three practices are performed today in East Tibet, including Mgo log, in equivalent circumstances.

Treasure offerings and burials in contemporary Mgo log manifest territorial claims, political dominance and ancestry projected into the landscape. Members of the clan, of specific subclans, and their subordinated and affiliated groups, often offer treasures into the land they occupy. Treasures offered at pilgrimage sites, nearer or further away, reveal religious and political networks of monastic, kin, and economic affiliations. The distribution of burial sites of the Mgo log ruling dynasty in the landscape reveals the supposed gradual migration of the clan, and, notably, the subsequent centres of power, seats of rule of the respective branches and their monasteries. Hence the social and political, and religious and ritual dimensions of their cosmology, and in practice, are intrinsically intertwined.

4. Discussion: cosmology and tombs in imperial Tibet and Mgo log, East Tibet

By juxtaposing material from the Tibetan Empire arising from Central Tibet with ethnography collected at the beginning of the 21st century at the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, we temptatively discover an astonishing continuity or sharing of certain notions across this wide time and space. Despite the Tibetan emperors and Mgo log clan leaders being about a thousand years and, as the crow flies, thousand kilometres apart, they seem to share similar elementary cosmological notions and even certain associated practices.

Both hereditary dynasties, the Tibetan emperors and the Mgo log rulers, claimed, and the Mgo log still do, origin from the upper divine celestial realm. Mountains often feature in the origin narratives

[129] Similarly finds Langelaar (in this volume), and Mayer (2019: 155, fn. 71).

of the emperors, such as that of the descending Gnya' khri Btsan po, whereas the Mgo log claim to have been initiated by 'Bri Lha rgyal and Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Rulers of both dynasties allegedly came from the sky as deities (*lha*) to rule upon humans, and return to the sky after passing, again as deities (*lha*). Prominent deified members of both dynasties acquire a necronym in their role as ancestors. A foremost mountain peak is the site of the emergence of their apical ancestor – in some narratives about the emperors (see above), and the Gnyan po G.yu rtse mountain for the Mgo log. The deity residing in the mountain can acquire the role of the dynasty's protector and guarantee their flourishing and authority over their dominion. The mountain is located in the core of the dominion geographically associated with the dynasty's origin, and serves as an identity marker not only for the ruling patriline but also for their subjects.

The cosmological bond with the ancestor and mountain deity is maintained through ritual and codified behaviour. A ruler's death represents an important moment for both the dynasty's continuation and post-mortal recognition of the ruler's deification, hence funerary ceremonies crucially express this bond – by both ritual performance and tomb construction. Earth burial tumuli, semi-subterranean structures covered by a mound (erected in the vicinity of the mountain), hold the rulers' remains, along with various offerings. They constitute burial fields at sites of the dynasty's acclaimed origin, of enormous dimensions for the Tibetan emperors and much more modest for the Mgo log leaders. Like the emperors, Mgo log rulers receive the most complicated and expensive funerals available.[130] For both, burial sites can become sacred centres: shrines top some of the royal tumuli, as well as other tumuli from the same era, whereas in Mgo log a cemetery can be a *bla ri* which at the same time can host a *gzhi bdag* mountain deity with a cairn on its top. Imperial royal tombs received offerings and calendrical celebrations (Haarh 1969: 356, 377), somehow reminiscent of the ongoing very popular yearly *gzhi bdag* venerations at their cairns. Further, both cases share similar geographical and geomantic features: in Mgo log, tombs and cemeteries can be aligned with the ancestral mountain's peak, which may be the case for some tombs of the imperial era too. The tombs can relate to mountains by their positioning, for Tibetan emperors also by name and appearance. In both cases, tombs can relate to the dynasty's fundamental fortresses and settlements, and are placed in valleys governed by a running watercourse, either at the valley's bottom or on its ascending slopes. In Mgo log, all leaders' burial grounds known to me are on slopes, whereas some *tsha khang* houses and sites for bodily dismemberment after sky burial are also on valley beds. Both the Spu rgyal and Mgo log tumuli can possibly be seen as creating a physical link between the origin of the dynasty, strongholds of its power, its divine apical ancestor and object of worship, and the passing and final resting place of its most noble members. In other words, the positioning of the tombs can manifest the mythologised ancestor cosmology and etiology.

In both imperial Tibet and contemporary, and likely historical, Mgo log, tombs of the upmost ruling social elites have been repositories of precious materials and objects manifesting power and supremacy of their holders. These concerned members of the ruling family and, according to present

[130] Funerals of monastic elites involving cremation and *stūpa* construction are also very demanding, yet the earth burial is taken as very complex and the most technically and ritually complicated.

oral accounts, socially acclaimed figures not necessarily of noble descent in Mgo log. In accordance with Haarh, Hazod understands the rich contents of the imperial royal tombs as royal insignia. He who holds them, holds the authority to rule. Ossuaries and tombs of treasures manifest political power and establish political entities. When newcomers aspire to seize power, they extract the insignia from the tombs to appropriate them. Raiding and parting of bones and funeral treasures stands for disintegration and decentralisation of power, subjects, and territory. In Mgo log, he who holds the *bla ri* and ancestral tombs, is on good terms with their divine guardian, a mountain deity, and ideally, establishes own *bla ri* of own ancestral bones, rules the land. Shares of bones predestine succession of rulership. The method to defeat own's enemy is to destroy their *bla ri* by soil extraction and ravaging the leaders' and group's ancestral graveyard.

Narratives of such a power transmission and takeover are again framed in relation to the deities of land – new territorial entities are centred around them. The story of the Mgo log patriarch Phag thar's bones being divided among his heirs to form the three *bla* mountains, each associated with a mountain deity, as the ritual and political centres of the three Mgo log subclans, consciously or unconsciously parallels the account of decentralisation of power of the unified Empire into regional principalities each governed by a mountain deity in the early 10th century (Dotson 2012; Hazod 2016b). "[T]he council of paternal relatives – gods and demons – agreed to the division of the dominion, and a principality was established at the foot of each of the sacred mountains involved" (Dotson 2012: 164). In this and the Mgo log example, mountain numina determine and reflect political constituencies as their governing principle.

Nathan Hill linking Dunhuang documents with an ethnographically documented practice in contemporary La dwags (Dollfus 1996), has shared similar observations on the connection between the worship of divinities and expressions of subjugation to ruling power: one becomes subject to him whose god one worships. He observes that "[a] *yul lha* ceremony in Ladakh shares several features with the *sku bla* ceremony" performed for the emperors in their vassal states as a marker of subjugation, and linked to their politically legitimising narrative of divine descent from Gnya' khri Btsan po (Hill 2015: 52, 55, fn. 12, 20). In East Tibet, including Mgo log, ceremonies to territorial deities express association with, and often subjugation to, the dominant social entity particularly connected with the deity (Karmay and Sagant 1998; Karmay 1998: 423-462).

4.1 Further variations

Objects concealed in tombs therefore seem to relate to deities of land and 'mundane' affairs they oversee, as power and governance. There are striking parallels in the wording of description of the imperial royal tombs in sources from the 14th and 15th century and the Karma chags med's *Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* text (17th century) of a later edition. The *gter ma* literature presents the tombs as treasure depots (mostly as '*nor*') for the sake of the royal dynasty's future generations and 'generations' in general, as does Karma chags med's writing both for the generations of the given descent line and their community. In his text as well as in other rituals of treasure concealment in Mgo log, the treasure is rendered by the word '*gter*'; the word '*nor*' still appears in the rites typically in relation to Jambhala (as in Nor lha, the "Deity of treasures/wealth", and other epithets of his).

To recapitulate a few instances from the extracts presented above, I highlight the closest parallels: *The Chronicles of the Kings* mention for king 'Bro Gnyan lde'u's tomb that inside "[t]he treasures were hidden (for) the future royal generations" (*phyi rabs rgyal brgyud nor du sbas*). Furthermore, elsewhere, the work speaks about the valuable royal treasures (*rgyal po'i dkon nor*), and "[t]he thirteen treasures of the king" (*rgyal po'i dkor cha rin cen bcu gsum*) in the treasure-tomb (*nor gyi bang so*) of Yum bu Bla sgang whose inventory itself "was hidden as a *gter*" (*gter du sbas so*). On a similar note, *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual recites:

> "Conceal the ancestral bones well into good earth,
> Into a good back mountain, or the mountain behind, of abundant
> and smooth earth (*'jam zhing sa dpal bzang sar sba*),
> For the duration of thirteen generations (*mi rabs bcu gsum bar dag tu*),
> This is a stable tomb of arising happiness and prosperity,
> The *bla* of the deceased will also reside there.
> [...]
> In the inside, these white ancestral bones of the deceased,
> By the blessings of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel [the Buddha],
> Conceal them as a precious treasure of the earth (*rin chen sa yi gter du sbas*),
> Open the realm of the Earth Goddess.
> [...]
> By concealing this treasure vase of ancestral bones,
> The *bla* of the dead one, the deceased, is pleased,
> The living will accumulate power and riches,
> May long life without disease, of joy and happiness, come!"

The symbolic numbers of thirteen and eighteen express fullness and complexity, and hence long duration. Further, in both cases, bodies, or the extracted bones, are kept in vessels inside the tombs. These are usually mentioned as vessels (*rdza ma*, explicitly copper vessels: *zangs*, *zangs chen*) or other containers (*ga'u*) for the imperial era, and feature as a "clay vessel" (*rdza yi bum pa*), "treasure vessel" (*gter gyi bum pa*), and "precious container" (*rin po che yi snod*) in the ritual text. Interesting is also the usage of slate rock (*g.yam pa*) in both examples, be it haphazard or not – slate is often described as covering the emperors' tombs, and remains the tomb cover in contemporary Mgo log. It is also listed as an attachment to the burial treasure vessel in Karma chags med's composition.

The *bla* vitality principle is another remarkable parallel. Haarh's understanding of the *bla* in the imperial context as a 'life-power' that separates from the corpse to stay with the bereaved and living fits very well with its comprehension in Mgo log. The presented Karma chags med's ritual aims at keeping it with the living in the soil of their land. In Mgo log, the crucial *bla* is maintained in the land and the hidden objects and substances it holds: treasures of ancestral bones, man-made treasures, and "natural treasures" (*rang 'byung gi gter*, such as repositories of rare metals and precious stones). Gnyan po G.yu rtse and other territorial deities owning such treasures in their estates are commonly titled "treasure lords" (*gter bdag*) hence by a term employed in *The Chronicles of the Kings* for divine guardians of royal treasures. In the *gter ma* tradition elaborating

on the imperial era, kingship, and authority, we also see the *bla* concept incorporated, as in the example of the revealed *bla g.yu* treasure of the early kings mentioned above. Davidson's take of the *bla* as "an extension of the king's soul or person (*rgyal po'i bla*)" and of "the person/soul treasure (*bla gter*) of the emperor" as inherently linked to the royal ancestral legacy for future generations and the Empire's mountain protector god, strongly resonates with Mgo log cosmology. The difference is that in Mgo log the prestigious rulers' graveyards are not seen as "a place for the residence of their collective spirits" by the accumulation of their individual *bla* entities, as Davidson assumes for the Empire. As I explicate above, in Mgo log the *bla* is a dividable and spreadable force rather than an individual 'soul' which would further divide into 'sub-souls'. Still, Mgo log shares Davidson's main proposition that the site of *bla* residence, tombs and *bla ri*, protects and blesses the dominion its former bearer governed. Davidson has also observed that the early treasure revealers engaged with treasures rectifying social and political disintegration, which accords with the political theory lying behind ancestral and other concealed treasures in Mgo log.

The aspect that does not accord between Davidson's view of the *bla* repositories as predecessors of the *gter ma* tradition and the Mgo log practice of *gter* treasures, including burials, is the moment of extraction. In Mgo log, there is a distinction between *gter ma* treasures for excavation and *gter* treasures for storing, strongly articulated in colloquial language and general understanding. Offered and natural *gter* treasures are never extracted in Mgo log, this could occur only as a malicious act. They keep the qualities of *bla*, *g.yang*, *sa bcud*, *bkra shis*, and also support "fortune" (*rlung rta*). As seen from Mgo log, the imperial royal tombs indeed contained the emperors' *bla* but would not be dug out unless someone wished to destroy the dynasty, the Empire, or Tibet as a whole (whatever vaguely defined territory would be imagined under the term) perceived as associated with the dynasty. However, there is one exception: certain types of treasures, standardly *not* including the funerary treasures but rather treasure vessels of precious substances, can be extracted by very advanced Buddhist or Bon po masters who overpower the territorial deities into whose land the given treasure has been confided. Hereby a *gter* treasure becomes a *gter ma* treasure, and a site of *gter* depository turns into a site of *gter ma* discovery. In this sense, Davidson's theory provides a possible link between the *gter* and *gter ma* treasure traditions, at least from the Mgo log and broader East Tibetan perspective.[131] The Mgo log cosmology thus seems to provide further clues for the accountability of the theory.

The imperial royal tombs, the Mgo log tombs, and contemporary treasure offerings in East Tibet represent mundane success and prosperity, and genealogical continuations. They serve as markers of territorial and genealogical shares and divisions of particular groups. Hence, all three instances relate to the capacities of territorial deities of ensuring prosperity, auspiciousness, power and riches, fecundity, protection from enemies, disease and death. Treasures in East Tibet enrich both the environment and people, and balance the environment's hostile forces. Importantly, all three cases exemplify materials representing power, prestige, abundance, and vitality. We find similar

[131] I elaborate on the mountain ancestor cosmology as the possible source for, or contribution to, the origin of the *gter ma* tradition in a paper presented at the 15th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (Paris, 2019) and in further work with Rob Mayer.

expressions at other rituals dedicated to territorial deities. For example, for a new *gzhi bdag* cairn construction in East Tibet one should offer and conceal treasures at its base, often accompanied by a statue of the deity who at the same time can be perceived as a local ancestor and a by-gone ruler. The arrangement recalls the imperial royal burials and present-day treasure burials – one thus recreates a subterranean tomb of one's own ancestor filled with treasures, in order to create a site for his veneration.

4.2 Contexts of Buddhicisation

The discrepancy in the treatment of treasures – their concealment versus extraction – might entail a possible development of Buddhicisation. It mirrors the switch of burial practices tied to ancestor worship and cosmology and potential treasure hiding, to contrasting and even reversing Buddhist forms.

Several sources and personae, namely Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od in his edict (11th century), the *Dba' bzhed* chronicle (11th-12th century), Karma chags med's ritual work (17th century, of a later edition), and Bla ma Chos 'bum pa in the account on Phag thar's passing in *The Genealogy* (19-20th century), present (elite) funerals as an arena heavily contested by different ritual and religious groups, and hence by different cosmologies. Dotson (2016) points to several similar cases from Dunhuang documents, although these do not concern treasures. Each time, Buddhism stands against an antagonist actor that is non-Buddhist, and likely pre-Buddhist, representing indigenous cults: the *bon po*s of the imperial times, and the ancestor and mountain cults. Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od and the *Dba' bzhed* deny non-Buddhist practice, whereas Bla ma Chos 'bum pa and Karma chags med injects it into a Buddhist framework. Haarh also noted this objection of Buddhism to the imperial funerary practices which he understood as belonging to ancestor cults: "Though apparently very tolerant in most respects, orthodox Buddhism seems from the very beginning to have fought very radically and consistently the old concepts of the dead and the ancestors, because these concepts presented a particular offense to, and incompatibility with, fundamental features of the Buddhist doctrine." (Haarh 1969: 327; cf. Cuevas 2003: 34-38).[132]

On the same note, Bla ma Chos 'bum pa identifies the *gzhi bdag* and ancestor worship of the Mgo log people prior to his proselytising intervention as the "customs (*tshul*) of our ancestors" bearing no distinction between social practice and religious or ritual undertaking. He incorporates them into Buddhism by assigning them a marginal position. In Mgo log, the issue is very sensitive since these 'customs' govern social organisation and integrity, deriving from the ancestral and ancestor cosmology, hence, would be too challenging to deny. Correspondingly, Karma chags med in his composition still performed by Bla ma Chos 'bum pa's successors and community, creates a masterly compromise between the two systems. He overlays the locally-based rite connected to a certain lineage and social group with universal significance of Buddhist spiritual aims, still dedicating the majority of the recital to the ancestors. The Buddhist dimension feels as a mere

[132] Haarh provides the "most illustrative example of this iconoclasm" by the work of Heissig (1953) on the Buddhist suppression of ancestor cults in Mongolia.

framing, nonetheless it transforms the whole practice into a monastic and soteriological activity (see Langelaar in this volume).

According to my Mgo log interlocutors, the significant performative, as well as cosmological and philosophical, dimension Buddhism has added to local funerals, is cremation. Cremation is in Mgo log reserved for advanced religious masters, yet as the most prestigious Buddhist funeral it has made its way to social and political elites. Their deceased are first cremated and then hidden as treasures with Karma chags med's manual. Mgo log people assume that before the strong impact of Buddhism in their region, many of their ancestors were entombed, similarly to the emperors.[133]

5. Conclusions

The presented material suggests a great continuation of certain notions, practices, and linguistic terms across extensive time and space of the Tibetan Plateau, particularly in geographical niches of what appears as residua of (local) indigenous cosmologies. Secondly, the studied Mgo log case shows that certain practices in Western academic writing on Tibetan societies principally taken as 'religious' are inherently 'social' and 'political' derived from kingship, conquest, geography, migration, land seizure and distribution, genealogical and kinship ties, etc. The Mgo log cosmology maintains power and dominion, and designated social institutions, similarly to what the editors of this volume call "social conventions that ideally served the maintenance of the kingship as a divine order",[134] and Maurice Bloch (2008) has analysed as 'transcendental social'. The Mgo log missionary Bla ma Chos 'bum pa himself refers to them as "the customs (*tshul*) of our ancestors" without making any distinction between social, political, and religious dimensions.

The Mgo log case reveals a complex cosmology of ancestor and ancestral mountain cults, independent and functional on its own, in which individuals and social groups aim to participate in the flows of the various forces of well-being and prosperity and accumulate them to their fullest possible extent. The sources of these forces are ancestor deities residing in the sky, ancestral land imbued by them through these deities and then natural and ancestral bodily substances, epitomised by the *bla* force in cached ancestral bones. Such hidden precious materials are conceptualised as a *gter* treasure. Divine kingship determines the most powerful ancestors-to-be and the holders of the prestigious graveyards. Rulers' relics functioning as royal regalia manifest political power, related territorial divisions, their ritual centres, and supports of their stability and prosperity, and even existence itself. Are the rulers who are born divine and pass away divine religious, secular, or merely ritualistic? In this cult of Mgo log, 'religion' or 'ritual' expresses primarily mundane aims: social and political authority, genealogy, social integrity and splitting, cohesion and identity of social groups, and economic relations.

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[133] The same distinction is noted in Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 465 in the writings of the regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705) on mortuary practices based on class and occupation: "while secular leaders should be entombed, religious specialists should be cremated". Cf. Gouin 2012: 47.

[134] *The Social and the Religious in the Making of Tibetan Societies: New Perspectives on Imperial Tibet*, 21-23 November 2018, Vienna, workshop programme.

Imperial Tibet offers a similar layout of ancestor cosmology and political theory of divine kingship. The king of numinal celestial origin establishes, guarantees, and represents social order, like the Mgo log leaders. These notions have existed from very early periods of recorded Tibetan history, and maybe earlier. It might be the case that they have largely disappeared from Central Tibet under the pressure of Buddhicisation but have somewhat survived in various forms in 'peripheral' regions such as East Tibet and the Himalayas where they still form a part of widespread practices, narratives, popular knowledge, and inform actual social arrangements. Moreover, they have often been successfully built into Buddhist practice. Yet, in the Mgo log case and elsewhere, one has to be careful in distinguishing Buddhist versus non- or pre-Buddhist, until further research demonstrates it so. These notions and practices, or some of them, might have arrived into the region already as a part of practiced Rnying ma Buddhism, albeit they have likely originated outside of Buddhism and most likely represent indigenous ideas.

If we take the *gter ma* concept and practice in Mgo log seen as Buddhist and of G.yung drung Bon, versus the *gter* emically not primarily understood as connected to Indian-influenced cultural strata, an alluring and tentative, albeit not at all proven, hypothesis comes forward in Ronald Davidson's lines. The *gter ma* treasure tradition might be an outcome, or a certain inverted reflection, of Buddhicisation of the *gter* treasure tradition in an effort to overpower the indigenous cults. This I add as complementary to the discussion on the origins and the various possible historical influences on and aspects of the *gter ma* tradition advanced by Rob Mayer's (2019) recent argumentation. It is intriguing that the medieval *gter ma* literature in a way, not necessarily by intention, links the imperial times with present practice – its reflections of imperial royal funerary treasures as if continued to somewhat find actual instantiations in extant earth burial customs. In other words, its conceived descriptions of the early royal tombs almost seem like an inspiration for burials centuries later and ongoing rituals such as that by Karma chags med.

Since certain current notions and practices are so reminiscent of imperial Tibet, there is the question whether some recent historical and currently occurring developments could parallel developments in the imperial situation, as the gradual Buddhicisation of the Tibetan Plateau. Even though it is dangerous to post-project cultural happenings without solid proof, this article raises the issue of using current ethnography to better understand historical happenings within Tibetan societies, including their social – religious (in)distinctions.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Excerpt from *The Genealogy*, p. 48:

> nga mi rgan na tshod ni thal lo de ring 'gro/ pha myes yang myes dang bcas te bsu bar byon/ zhang bo yang zhang rnams drung du nga 'gro yi/ bu dang tsha bo 'bangs thams cad bde bar bzhugs/

Appendix 2

Excerpt from *The Genealogy*, pp. 48-49 (asterisk* marks emendations):

> 'bru lha rgyal nas bzung/ rang cag gi pha rgan 'di'i bar gyi pha myes rnams ni tshul shin tu bzang bo 'di lta bu rnams ltar snang la bzang bzang 'dra yang don la bzang bo min/ kho tshos gzhi bdag gi gtso bo rnams yi dam gyi snying bor bzung bas/ shi tshe bla dang rnam shes gzhi bdag gis khrid 'gro ba red kyang/ nam zhig na sngon las kyi rjes su 'brang dgos pas chos chen po byed dgos pa yod/ [...] bzhi (*gzhi) bdag chen po rnams kyis (*kyi) gtsos yul lha rnams kyi bsang mchod dang gsol mchod la btson na bzang gsungs te/

Appendix 3

Excerpt from *The Genealogy*, p. 49:

> rus pa rnams kyang bla ma chos 'bum pa nas bu dang tsha bo thams cad la bgos nas sbyin dgos pa byung/ rus pa de rang rang gi mkhar chen mo dkar mdzod a skyong gi rgyab ri dang/ chen mo'i gser gzhung dbang chen 'bum gyi rgyab ri rnams su yod pa'i yul lha rnams kyi ri la gtor/ de nas bzung rang rang gi bla rir gyur/ pad ma 'bum gyis gter 'dabs nas bzung ri 'bur le rtse'i bar du gtor bas/ de nas bzung ste smar gter 'di pad ma 'bum gyi mi rigs kyi bla rir gyur/

Appendix 4

The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness: The Practice of Establishing Ancestral Bones (*Dkar rtsi 'debs pa'i lag len dge legs gter chen*), ritual text of the dPal yul Dar thang monastery:

Each folio is numbered in the traditional system by fully spelled-out Tibetan numerals (from one to six), and furthermore each page is numbered by Arabic numerals as a part of the whole funeral series (from 89 to 99), which I follow in the Wylie transliteration. I do not correct deviations from the most common, or standard, Tibetan spelling (such as the -s post-suffix missing in some verbal forms), as I believe they reflect local notions of spelling. The emendations in the text I propose are bracketed and marked by an asterisk (*).

> (89) dkar rtsi 'debs pa'i lag len dge legs gter chen zhes bya ba bzhugs so//
> (90) oṃ swa sti/ rgyal kun mkhyen pa'i ye shes ni/ rgyal sras gzhon nu'i rol pa can/ smra ba'i nyi ma la btud nas/ dkar rtsi bzhag pa'i lag len bri/

de yang mthong brgyud phyag len ni/ rdza yi bum pa yod na rab/ med na gang lon snod gsar te/ gas chag med pa 'o mas phab/ tshon rtsi dkar po byug pa'i phyi/ shar du stag dang lho ru 'brug/ nub tu bya dmar byang ru sbal/ mtshams su gdugs sogs bkra shis brgyad/ bris la nang du gu gul bdug/ de nas dbus su srog shing ni/ pho la shug pa mo glang ma/ mgo mjug ma log 'dzer med pa/ gru bzhi gzhog pa'i rtse mo ni/ gru bzhi nyid du bcad pa la/ gur gum byugs te ser bo bya/ rtse stod oṃ āḥ hūṃ swā hā/ tho brtsegs phyogs bzhir thur du 'bri/ 'byor bstun gser dngul mtshal snag gis/ rten 'brel snying po dbyangs gsal dang/ oṃ kṣi ti rā dza swā hā/ oṃ pṛ thi wī de wī (91) swā hā/ zhes pa sa snying brtan ma'i sngags/ de tsam med du mi rung zhing/

gzhan yang tshe ni ring 'dod na/ tshe dpag gzungs dang phyug por 'dod/ dzaṃ lha nor rgyun gzungs sngags dang/ stobs che 'dod na stobs po che/ nad sogs zhi 'dod sman bla'i gzungs/ rtsub 'khrug zhi phyir snang brgyad gzungs/ de dag so sor shog dril bris/ mjug nas srog shing la dkris te/ pho la yig ngo phyir la bstan/ g.yas skor dag tu dkri bar bya/ mo la yig ngo nang du bstan/ g.yon skor dag ru dkri bar bya/ kun kyang yi ge mgo can no/ de rgyab tshe 'das de nyid kyi/ lus kyi 'byung ba'i mdog mthun pa'i/ dar gyis btums la tshon skud ni/ sna lngas dam du bcing bar bya/ bum pa'i dbus su srog shing 'dzugs/ de tshe sngags 'di phreng skor bzla/ oṃ a mṛ te a dā swā hā/

de nas lus kyi chags rim ltar/ rkang pa dpyi rgal rtsibs ma dang/ lag ske dang ni mgo rus bzhag/ (92) dug rigs min pa'i sman sna dang/ 'bru nag min pa'i 'bru sna dang/ lcags dang ra gan khro nag gsum/ ma gtog rin chen sna tshogs blugs/ shing ngam g.yam par 'khor rtsibs brgyad/ bris pa kha bcad la chas sbyar/ nang du 'bu srin mi 'gro bya/ zhabs su padma 'dab brgyad bri/ g.yang skyabs dbus su de nyid bzhag/ g.yang skyabs tshar grangs ci 'grub 'don/ de yi mi g.yang mi nyams gnad/
bkra rgan mi tshe skyid pa yi/ dkar rtsi rgyun du mdzod phug bzhag/ drug cu yar la 'das pa'i mi/ lo gsum tsam zhig bzhag par bya/ bzhi bcu yan chad lnga bcu'i bar/ yun ring mi bzhag sa mig bya/ gzhon nu'i nyid du shi ba la/ dkar rtsi byed pa'i bab thob med/ dar ma rgan po gang yang rung/

rus pa sra sra dkar rtsi bya/ snyi snyi'i rus pa thams cad ni/ bstus nas gzungs chus bran byas te/ nye du min cing sdig med pa/ gtsang ma zhig gis (93) zhib par btul/ chu la sbyangs te phug ron gyi/ dong rus mdog ltar dkar ba de/ sa sbyin 'jim pa tshod dang bsres/ rtsa rigs bzlas shing sātsatsha btab/ thams cad mdun du bsgrigs byas nas/ tshon rtsi dkar po byugs par bya/

mchod rten so so'i dbus nyid du/ kun rig dkyil 'khor re/ tsha sgrub 'di rang rang gi phyag len ltar bya/ rer bsgom/ cho ga mchod bstod rtsa rig bsnyen/ 'od zhu mchod rten rnam par gyur/

rab tu gnas pa legs byas pa/ de yang sa phug brag phug dang/ bskor ba mi 'gro chu thub par/ dkar gtor phul la gzhi bdag la bzhugs su gsol/ de yang sa dgra med pa dang/ gnas bdag ngan pa med par bces/ thal sol sa non chod che ba/ grong thag nye bar zhig tu blug/ 'phral gyi bzang ngan de dbang che/ dkar rtsi rgyab ri yang ri bzang/ 'jam zhing sa dpal bzang sar sba/ mi rabs bcu gsum bar dag tu/ phan bde 'byung ba'i gtan dur yin/ tshe (94) 'das bla yang de la gnas/

lto 'phye brtags dang gnas gzhi'i bdag/ gtor ma dang ni skyems phud phul/ sa bslang la sogs zhib par bya/ 'bru sna mchod cing 'di skad brjod/ 'phags pa dkon mchog gsum la phyag 'tshal lo/ mkhyen rab 'jam pa'i dbyangs la phyag 'tshal lo/ sa bdag lto 'phye chen po dang/ lha mo brtan mas gtsor byas pa'i/ sa bdag thams cad gsan du gsol/ khyad par yul phyogs 'dir gnas pa'i/ sa bdag klu gnyan thams cad gson/ srid pa'i 'jig rten chags nas ni/ rkang gnyis 'gro ba mi rnams ni/ skyes kyang sa yi steng du skyes/ 'chi yang sa yi steng du 'chi/ phung po dur yang sa la 'debs/ mkhyen rab 'phags pa 'jam dbyangs kyis/ sa la bzang ngan yod par gsungs/ bdag dang rgyu sbyor yon bdag gis/ sa bzang dngos grub zhu 'dod pas/ 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyis bka' dang ni/ 'phrul gyi mi bzhi'i lung gis ni/ sa (95) 'dir sa bkra bzang zhes gsungs/ de phyir sa bdag khyed rnams kyis/ 'jam dbyangs bka' de ma bcags pa/ sa bkra'i dngos grub ci yod pa/ de ring bdag cag rnams la byin/ 'bru mchog sngon mo 'phel chen 'di/ bya khyung rgyal po'i mgul nas byung/ thugs rje chen po'i phyag gis gnang/ dbu nag mi yi longs spyod yin/ sa yon 'bru mchog 'di 'bul lo/ sa 'dir gnang la bkra shis mdzod/ gnod byed sa 'dre sa sri rnams/ drag po'i shing gi phur bus bsgral/

bhūṃ las rin po che yi snod/ phyi ni gter gyi bum pa la/ nang ni rin chen gzhal yas khang/ de nang tshe las 'das pa yi/ pha mtshun rus bu dkar po 'di/ yid bzhin nor bu byin brlabs nas/ rin chen sa yi gter du sbas/ sa yi lha mo'i mkha' phyes shig/ rus bu dkar po lcags kyi khams/ de ring sa lcags ma bu sprad/ sgal tshig rus pa bcu drug (*gsum)[135] 'di/ mi rab (*rabs) bcu (96) drug (*gsum)[136] brtan phur btsugs/ dpyi yi rus pa sgor mo 'di/ mi nor spyi yi g.yang rten btsugs/ ma mkhal rgya zor 'dra ba 'dis/ na rgab shi rgab thams cad chod/ srid pa'i smon mi dbu nag dang/ mi mchog rgyal po mthing ger sogs/ mes mtshun gnyan po thams cad kyang/ g.yang rten 'di la brtan par bzhugs/ mdzangs ma 'phrul dang khri do che/ mi'u gdong drug pha mtshun kun/ g.yang rten 'di la brtan par bzhugs/ khyad par tshe 'das 'di dag gi/ pha mes brgyud kyi pha mtshun dang/ pha mes brgyud kyi ma mtshun kun/ tshe 'das 'di yi bla dang bcas/ sa bkra bzang po 'dir bzhugs la/ sa yi dpal la longs spyod mdzod/ dkon mchog gsum gyi bden pa dang/ chos nyid rnam par dag pa dang/ kun rdzob rten 'brel bden stobs kyis/ pha mtshun ma mtshun tshe 'das bla/ bde skyid dpal 'byor rab rgyas nas/ gson la mgon skyabs nus (97) par shog/ dkar rtsi bum gter 'di sbas pas/ gshin po tshe 'das bla dga' zhing/ gson po btsan phyug 'dzom pa dang/ tshe ring nad med bde skyid shog/ 'phags pa 'jam dpal bka' bden cing/ kun rdzob rten 'brel bslu med dang/ 'byung ba'i rten 'brel mthu btsan pas/ sa lcags ma bu 'di sprad pas/ gson po tshe ring nad med shog/ gza' skar dus tshes bden pa yis/ bkra shis thams cad 'byung bar shog/ mi shes rmongs pa'i dbang gyur pas/ gza' skar dus tshod ngan pa dang/ sa dgra gdug pa yod srid na/ 'jam dbyangs bden pa'i byin brlabs kyis/ zhi zhing bde legs 'byung gyur cig/ oṃ a ka ni ni ka ni a bhi la mandala ma ye swā hā/ zhes dang/ shis brjod me tog gtor zhing/

phyogs bzhi dbus lnga'i bkra shis pa/ rgyal ba rigs lnga'i bkra shis shog/ lus gyi gnas brgyad bkra shis pa/ bkra shis rtags brgyad bkra shis shog/ rdzas brgyad (98) rten 'brel bkra shis pa/

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[135] Emended following the critical edition by Langelaar (forthcoming-a).
[136] *Ibd*.

bkra shis rdzas brgyad bkra shis shog/ dpal dang 'byor ba'i bkra shis pa/ rgyal srid sna bdun bkra shis shog/ phyogs bzhi sa yi bkra shis pa/ stag 'brug bya sbrul bkra shis shog/ oṃ ye dharmā sogs/ oṃ su pra tiṣṭha badzra ya swā hā/ brtan bzhugs dang smon lam gyis mtha' brgyan par bya'o/ smras pa/

'bru rje rgyal po ma ṇi'i mtshan/ dgung du gshegs pa'i rkyen byas te/ gnas chen ri bo mdzo zhol nas/ lho zla dga' ma 'grim (*'gram)[137] rol dbus/ spyi byams gnas dang nye ba'i sar/ phyi rabs sngags 'chang mang po la/ phan phyir rā ga a sya yis/ sbyong rgyud thugs rje chen po'i gzhung/ rgya nag sa gzhung don bstus te/ ngag nas ji ltar smras pa bzhin/ dge slong padmas dad pas bris/ phyin chad 'di dang 'brel tshad kyis/ mchod yon bkra shis phun tshogs shog/

ces grub dbang rin po ches mdzad pa 'di gzhung dang zin bris so sor snang zhing yi ge'ang ma dag pa rgyun 'byams pas zhus dag dang bcas dkyus gcig tu blo gros rgyal mtshan gyis bkod pa (99) 'dis kyang sems can thams cad la phan pa rgya chen po 'byung pa'i rgyur gyur cig

oṃ na mo bha ga wa te a pa ri mi ta a yur dznyā na su bi ni shtsi ta te dzwa rā dza ya ta thā ga tā ya arha te samyaksaṃ buddha ya/ tadya thā/ oṃ puṇye puṇye/ ma hā puṇye a pa ri mi ta puṇye a pa ri mi ta puṇye dznyā na saṃ bha ro pa tsi te/ oṃ sarba saṃ ska ra pa ri shuddha dharmā te ga ga na sa mudga te swa bhā wa bi shuddha ma hā na ya pa ri wa re swā hā/ oṃ dzaṃ bha la dza lendra ye swā hā/ oṃ bai shra ma (*ba) ṇa ye swā hā/ oṃ ba su dha ri nī swā hā/

stobs po che'i gzungs/ oṃ/ oṃ badzra kro dha ma hā bha la ha na da ha pa tsa ma tha bi dhwa na sa ya dza ṭilambo da ra u tsuṣma kro dha hūṃ phaṭ swā hā/ sman gzungs/ tadya thā/ oṃ bhai ṣadzye bhai ṣa dzye ma hā bhai ṣa dzye rā dzā sa mudga te swā hā/ snang brgyad/ oṃ a ka ni ni ka ni a bhi la maṇḍa la ma ye swā hā/ rten snying/ ye dharmā he tu pra bha wa he tuṃ teṣāṃ ta thā ga to hya ba datte ṣāṃtsa yo ni ro dha e waṃ bā di ma hā shā ma ṇa/ zhes pa 'o//

[137] *Ibd*.

References

Abbreviations

Bka' thang sde lnga = O rgyan Gling pa, A) *Bka' thang sde lnga.* 5 Vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1986. B) Tshang po (ed.). *Bka' thang sde lnga*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang 2010.

Gangs ljongs gnas chen 2015 = Anonymous. 2015. *Gangs ljongs gnas chen gnyan po g.yu rtse'i gnas yig dang bsang gsol phyogs bsgrigs*. Mgo log khang sar smin thang khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa.

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Mapy.cz. URL: https://en.mapy.cz/

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TTT = *The Tibetan Tumulus Tradition* (*TTT*), project website: *The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet: A Historical-anthropological Study and Documentation of the Tumulus Tradition of Early Central Tibet (4th-10th century CE)*. URL: https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/

The Treasury of Lives. URL: https://treasuryoflives.org/

Buried Bones and Buddhas Beyond
Ancestor Cults in 17th-century Khams and the Transcendentalisation of Tibetan Religion[1]

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Tread lightly, she is near
Under the snow,
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.
...
Peace, Peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet,
All my life's buried here,
Heap earth upon it.

O. Wilde*, Requiescat*

1. Ancestor cults and Tibetan Buddhism

The form and prevalence of generalised ancestor cults in Tibetan societies has long remained enigmatic.[2] As far back as 1969, Erik Haarh bemoaned the lack of extant Tibetan primary sources on ancestor propitiation. He attributed this lacuna to the historical dominance of Buddhist authors, who seemed to have purged the ancient "ancestral deities" – known as *mtshun* – from the literary record (Haarh 1969: 226, 316). Over the half century since, precious little has changed to revise Haarh's impression of Buddhist animus towards such ritual traditions. A monograph that surveyed the

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[2] "Generalised ancestor cult" refers to ritual traditions in which most men and/or women can expect to retain a role in their community after death. This sets the cults discussed in this paper apart from Tibetan mountain and most (if not all) *pho lha* cults, where select individuals may over time come to function in a protective ancestral role, but pose a rare exception in doing so.

Such generalised ancestor cults are ethnographically attested among neighbouring populations in the PRC, such as the Naxi (McKhann 1992: 289-297), Premi (Wellens 2010: 120-122) and of course Han Chinese (e.g., Watson 1982 and contributions in Watson and Rawski 1988). The ethnography of Ladakh, too, has produced some evidence of such cults (e.g., Aggarwal 2001, Brauen 1982). (Note that Dargyay 1988, reporting on Zanskar, seems to conflate *pha lha* "ancestral gods," i.e., gods of the ancestors, with the ancestors themselves; cf. Balikci 2008: 96 on this ambiguity of the term *pho lha* in Sikkim. The *srid pa'i lha* cults of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, discussed in Huber 2020, are focused on high-level ancestors and not generalised.)

literature on Tibetan death ritual, for one, could not cite any proof of their existence,[3] and ethnographic work on kinship and clan structures similarly could marshal no evidence for their practice in Central Tibet or the eastern regions of Khams and A mdo.[4] Yet some authors have demonstrated that this silence does not in fact reflect a blanket absence of evidence.[5]

In Khams, as it turns out, *mtshun* cults have been practiced for centuries on end, and found favour among non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike. They have, moreover, left substantial literary evidence after all, particularly in the form of ritual manuals. In this paper, I will introduce the cosmology of these heretofore undocumented cults, and assay their interactions with Buddhism. The mutual impact of such different ritual and cosmological systems is of particular interest in the context of this volume, as it provides a theoretical template for how Buddhism adapted on the Tibetan Plateau, and how, vice versa, preceding forms of religiosity changed in their encounter with Buddhism – a foreign tradition that came packed with alien notions of universalism, soteriology, orthodoxy and canonicity. The associated developments, I will suggest, may have also had a sizable impact on Tibetan forms of unilineal kinship organisation.

The interplay between Buddhism and ancestor cults presumably dates back well over a millennium, since *mtshun*-centered ritual, despite its marginal literary status, enjoys a long-standing pedigree on the Himalayan Plateau. The attested history of the term *mtshun* goes back at least to the turn of the ninth century, when it was included in a Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary to render the beneficiaries of Indian *kavyam* ritual, the offering of food to departed ancestors.[6] Due to the latter's role in Brahmanical *śrāddha* ritual, *mtshun* also reared their head in Buddhist scriptures translated from Indic languages, and would thus even find their way into Tibetan Buddhist canonical collections, albeit in peripheral roles.[7] *Mtshun* also appeared in Tibetan-language Dunhuang documents such as a dice divination text[8] translated from Chinese,[9] as well as in perhaps eleventh-century Dga' thang 'bum pa che materials (Huber 2020, vol. 2: 46-8; Bellezza 2013: 131, etc.). In the second millennium, they kept occasionally popping up in histories, dictionaries (Stein 2010: 62-63), and origin myths (e.g., Karmay 1998a), and even appeared in works authored by the third

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[3] Gouin 2010, especially pp. 132-133.

[4] E.g., Aziz 1974: 25; Salomon 2015: 863; Samuels 2016; Thargyal 2007: 171; Langelaar 2017.

[5] Bellezza 2008: 393, fn. 120 gives a brief ethnographic note on a contemporary ancestor cult being practiced in pockets of the Byang thang. Huber (2020, vol. 1: 541) notes that a *mtshun mchod* ritual was still practiced in Khams in 2000, even though this clearly was no longer part of any generalized ancestor cult. (These two reports stem from western Nag chu and Sde dge, respectively, personal communication with John Bellezza and Toni Huber, 23.10.2020 and 02.06.2019). Also see Sehnalova's contribution to this volume on the select usage of an ancestor cult manual in Mgo log, which was written by the same author also focused on in this paper.

[6] Stein 2010: 62, which provides other interesting references, too.

[7] The *Lalitavistara*, for instance, lists reverence for the *mtshun* as one of the many qualities that mark those families into which a bodhisattva may be born in his last life: *rigs de ni mtshun rjed pa yin/* (*Rgya cher rol pa*: f. 15b.5).

[8] ITJ 0739: f. 4a.4 (*mgon btsun* [= *mgon mtshun*]).

[9] South Coblin 1991: 306, 310 (*mgon mtshun*, *lha mtshun*).

Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339), a respected Buddhist figure.[10] All in all, then, *mtshun* were a long-standing cultural presence, whose genealogy alone need not have posed a problem to the Buddhist authors that Haarh credited with "radical efforts at [their] suppression".[11]

Rather, Buddhists' historical tendency to avoid such ancestor cults was surely rooted in the cosmological rift between their distinctive conceptions of death. To wit, all ancestor cults incorporate the fundamental notion that *death does not part*: deceased forebears retain a presence within their community or its surroundings, and may still be interacted with and make their agency felt among the living.[12] In contrast, the Buddhist concept of reincarnation frames death as a chasm that is not so easily bridged. It typically catapults one's consciousness into completely new surroundings, effacing any former social roles, relationships, and attendant responsibilities in the process.[13] As a rule of thumb, then, social identity in Buddhism is just as fleeting as life itself. Huber's recent trailblazing work on ancestral fertility cults in the eastern Himalayas points out a similar conceptual discrepancy, and stresses those particular cults' virtual lack of historical exchange with the Buddhism surrounding them.[14] He even suggests that the Buddhist religion, with its focus on impermanence and universalist – rather than kin-based – underpinnings, simply "cannot accommodate the cult's central ideas." (Huber 2020, vol. 1: 16).

Yet despite obvious conceptual and historical tensions, there were regions in the Tibetan highlands where such distinct cosmological strains met and managed to strike common ground.[15] In this paper, I will chiefly focus on the writings of a figure who represents exactly such a confluence, the 17th-century *Bka' brgyud pa* Buddhist Karma chags med (1613-1678), a prolific author from Khams who composed a substantial number of ritual manuals that directly detailed or otherwise touched on these cults. His engagement with these traditions, a rarity for Buddhist authors, reflects the relatively high currency that such ritual enjoyed in his home region, which was centred around the Upper Ngom chu in Khams,[16] a river that flows south-east-bound towards Chab

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[10] Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975: 208. Also see the reference below.

[11] Haarh 1969: 316. Cuevas 2003 takes a more nuanced stance (e.g., pp. 28-38).

[12] There is a wide variety of beliefs associated with ancestor cults. See Tatje and Hsu 1969 for one classification of the various conceptions of the roles played by ancestors.

[13] Both Buddhist theory and practice certainly did develop ways for the bereaved to advance the soteriological aims of the departed and to thus bend or even circumvent karmic law. Yet the presumption that the dead can be persuaded to "not wander off" and support their descendants, as the rites detailed in this paper hold, parts with this Buddhist law altogether. (e.g. ... *ma bros ma 'khyams par/ /bdag gi gnas 'dir bzhugs la kha 'dzin mdzod/,* Mtshun-g: f. 151.3).

[14] Huber 2020, vol. 1: 15-16. Vinding 1982: 312-315 reports a similar situation among the Thakali of Mustang, Nepal, who, though identifying as Buddhists, are largely unaffected by notions of *saṃsāra* and rebirth.

[15] Also consider the sometimes mutually affirmative co-existence of Buddhism and ancestor cults in, for instance, China (e.g., Ebrey 1986: 23; Clarke 2000: 277-278). Śaiva traditions, too, managed to incorporate brahmanical ancestor cult rites, however conceptually awkward this was (Mirnig 2018).

[16] KCBio: ff. 19.5-20.1. The Ngom chu is the river formed after the Lci chu merges with another stream just south of the Qinghai-TAR border, which subsequently merges with the Rdza chu at Chab mdo.

mdo Town (Ch. *Qamdo*) in what is today the north-eastern Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). In a bid to cover the wider regional usage of such ritual and to illustrate the representative nature of Karma chags med's writings for broader regional practices, I will occasionally alternate references to his writings with confirmatory notes drawn from other eastern Tibetan works, of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist signature.[17] (For heuristic purposes, overt Buddhist influences are stripped from this section and taken up separately later in the chapter).

Next, I will detail some key influences that accompanied the meeting of such traditions with Buddhism as reflected in Karma chags med's works. This discussion will be theoretically framed around Alan Strathern's recently forwarded notion of immanentist and transcendentalist religiosity (2019), a framework that helps illuminate the dynamics behind Buddhism's ability to simultaneously embrace, challenge and gradually alter the ritual-cosmological landscapes it encountered. Conversely, it will also help cast light on how highly particularist religious traditions such as these ancestor cults – intimately wedded to local patrilines and pre-dominantly concerned with securing mundane benefits – could penetrate, influence, and enlist for their own purposes a universalist religion such as Buddhism. Such dynamics are sure to have reoccurred time and again across the Himalayan Plateau, and indeed across the wider Buddhist world.

2. Dead ancestors as embodied social actors

In Khams, *mtshun*[18] were believed to furnish support in wide-ranging aspects of daily life, such as the procurement of luck (*g.yang*, *phywa*, *rlung rta*), health, the welfare of live-stock, successful harvests, and support during war and travel. They held particular clout for their ability to boost their offspring's fertility, an association that was enshrined in origin myths[19] and was explicitly adduced in the 1740s as a local community's main motivation to engage with the ancestors, as another Buddhist from Khams reports.[20] This broad assistance provided by the forebears is neatly

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[17] All in all, the following discussion is based on some 50-60 relevant works. I have identified and studied over 30 works by Karma chags med himself that explicitly address or mention the *mtshun* or their cult, ranging in size from a single to over 50 folio sides. Further works of his, moreover, have proved relevant even if they do not touch on these cults directly, such as genealogies or *bla bslu*, *g.yang* and *dgra lha* rituals.

[18] The terms actually in use for the ancestors are mostly compounds, of which I have counted close to twenty. Most common among these are *pha mtshun*, *ma mtshun, lha mtshun* and *mtshun lha*. Occasionally, the compound member *mtshun* is spelled *btsun* instead, as in *cho btsun* or *mgon btsun* (for *cho mtshun* and *mgon mtshun*). They are often additionally referred to as *dgra lha/bla.* Conversely, of course, not all *dgra lha* are *mtshun*, and the former tend to have a more strictly militaristic role.

[19] Karmay 1998a discusses a relevant myth in the *Dbu nag mi'u 'dra chags*. See Langelaar 2018 for a more recent discussion of this myth and related origin narratives, some of which also incorporate the relation between *mtshun* (or ancestors in general) and fecundity. The manuals under study occasionally include permutations of the same myth as well.

[20] *rang re'i rigs rus bskyed byed cho mtshun gyi ngo bo yin zhes kyang thos pa la brten nas ...* Mtshun9: 368. ("[I also composed this ritual] because [I] heard [people say]: "The quintessence of the *cho mtshun* [patrilineal ancestors] is to engender our progeny.") The author in question is Kaḥ thog Tshe dbang nor bu (1698-1755) and the dating of the work is based on its colophon.

summarised in allusions to their potential functioning as "a wish-fulfilling jewel" (*yid bzhin nor bu*).[21] All in all, these cults served as a cultural means through which death and the crises it entails could be positively re-appropriated as a source of regeneration, vitality, as well as communal stability.[22]

Despite the ancestors' obvious skill in manipulating worldly circumstances on behalf of their descendants, they did not themselves enjoy an ethereal life detached from material trouble. They could still suffer from hunger, thirst, temperature extremes and other physical disturbances, and thus were subject to the same happenstances as living man. Accordingly, they did not dwell in some paradisaical world, but were rather believed to "settle in the ground,"[23] where their bones would generally be buried. In multiple passages, moreover, they are attributed with bodies that were subject to natural wear and tear. One ritual composed by Karma chags med presents them with a *"mtshun* sheep" to revitalise their physical frame[24] and another presents foodstuffs, including meat, "in order to mend [the ancestors'] bodily essence."[25] A longer ritual text, part of a larger cycle attributed to Confucius, offers libations, clothing and so on to prevent the ancestors from growing thirsty or cold.[26] In recognition of this embodied vulnerability, ritual works may expressly state that their goal is to ensure that the ancestors are not merely willing, but indeed "physically capable" (*nus*) of providing support.[27]

Although ideally a well-spring of boons, the ancestors were not invariably congenial in nature. Karma chags med warned that their descendants would offend or neglect them at their own peril, with disease and losses of livestock looming over those who shirked their ritual responsibilities.[28] Fear of these more irascible traits underlies recurring pleas such as "do not grow spiteful, even if the offerings are small,"[29] or "like predators [never attack their offspring], do not fight [your own] children."[30] A similar sentiment is encountered in a G.yung drung bon text preserved in the Bon canon (*Bon gyi bka' brten*), which makes offerings in an attempt to stave off their jealousy (*phrag*

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[21] E.g., Mtshun-i: f. 1449.2.

[22] For enlightening anthropological reflections on the cultural links between death and new life see Bloch and Parry 1982. In a Himalayan context see Huber 2018 and 2020.

[23] See, for instance, the passage translated below (p. 316) or Dur3 B: f. 4.2 (*dang po sa la dur ni btab pa'i dus/ bla yid sa la chags pa yin/*). This settling of the ancestor was contingent on the correct performance of appropriate ritual. Bellezza, too, reports that people of the Byang thang believe the ancestors "live in cemeteries" (2008: 393, fn. 120). But cf. the old ritual documents discussed in Huber 2020, where the location of the *mtshun*, though somewhat unclear, appears to be above that of living man (vol. 2: 47-8, 68).

[24] Mtshun5 A: f. 39.5-6.

[25] *lus kyi bcud rnams gso ba'i phyir/* (Dur3 A: f. 289.2-3).

[26] Mtshun-p: f. 285.1-2.

[27] E.g., *gson la mgon skyabs nus par shog* (Dkar A: f. 260.1-2), *rigs rgyud rnams la mgon skyobs byed nus nges so/* (Mtshun-i: f. 1449.4).

[28] E.g., Dur-f: f. 182.2-3, Dur3 A: f. 285.2-3, and the passage translated below, Chap. 4.

[29] *... mchod pa chung yang ma 'khon la/* (Mtshun2: f. 201.3).

[30] *gcan gzan bzhin du bu la ma rgol zhig* (Mtshun5 A: f. 45.3-4).

dog) and fury (*khro gtum*).[31] Such passages, which could easily be multiplied, reflect a broadly shared concern that the relations between the living and the dead could derail and erupt into an injurious affair.[32]

Yet fortunately, the ancestors had a rich emotional life that extended far beyond feelings of spite, anger and acrimony (*khro*, *'khon*, *'thur, ldang*, *'khang*, etc.). They could also be happy (*skyid*), pleased (*dga'*, *mnyes*), comfortable (*bde*), at ease (*thugs dal*), envious and frustrated (*phrag dog*, *ko long*), and even, it seems, be embarrassed into toeing the line. One text addresses the famous eastern Tibetan numen Mount Rma chen spom ra in his capacity as an ancestor of the 'Brong pa clan,[33] and pre-emptively seeks to shame him into compliance: "Ancestor, would the disgrace that should befall you in front of all *lha* and men not be great if you – the guardian of [your] offspring – should fail to defend us?"[34] As such passages illustrate, ancestors were not impersonal forces, but were believed to retain human features and a broad emotional pallet that needed appropriate engagement, much like a living ancestor would.

Indeed, the ancestors are repeatedly imputed with what comes close to full human mentality. Sometimes, they are referred to simply as *bla*,[35] the mobile vitality principle that is key to man's physiological and mental functioning. This vitality principle, which may leave the body in cases of "soul loss,"[36] is often believed, across and beyond the Himalayan Plateau, to linger after death, and is a stable feature of the *mtshun* in these writings.[37] Quite commonly, moreover, it is joined with *yid*,[38] thus yoking "thought" or "intellect" to the otherwise unpredictable momentum of the *bla*. On several occasions, furthermore, Karma chags med and other authors, too, even complement this duo

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[31] Mtshun-i: f. 1447.3-5.

[32] In a nutshell, the *mtshun* were of a "rewarding-punishing" type (Tatje and Hsu 1969: 157). Sheils dubs this type of ancestor cult "supportive", which he sees as "the strongest form of ancestor worship" (1975: 428).

[33] This clan is still in existence today, scattered largely across Nang chen and Rdza stod prefectures. More information on this descent group can be found in Myang Blo gros rab gsal, n.d. and 'Brong pa Rgyal po 2013.

[34] *tsha bo nged rnams mgon skyabs ni/ /mes po khyod kyis ma skyobs na/ /lha mi kun gyi spyan lam du/ /khyod la sma phab mi che'am/* (Mtshun1: ff. 579.6-580.1).

[35] See fns. 42, 47 and 79 below. On the *bla*, occasionally also spelled *brla* see Gerke 2007, 2012: esp. 137ff.; Karmay 1998b; Mumford 1989: 167-194, and Ramble 2009.

[36] The translation of *bla* as "soul" is misleading and hence generally avoided here, although an exception is made in the case of compounds ("soul loss," "soul tablet," etc.), where stylistic considerations make "(mobile) vitality principle" too burdensome.

[37] Cf. Haarh 1969: 17, which states that the *mtshun* can be distinguished from the living by the *absence* of a *bla*.

[38] E.g., Mtshun2: f. 201.1-2 invokes the *mtshun mgon* alongside the *yang myes bzang po'i bla yid rnams*. We also repeatedly find phrases such as "you, the *bla yid* of the deceased" (*tshe 'das bla yid khyod nyid*, Dur2 A: f. 308.5, see also f. 308.4), or "the *bla* and *yid* settle in the earth," *bla yid sa la chags* (see fn. 26).

with *sems*, or "mind,"[39] completing a trio of constituents sometimes noted to make up a being's full mental apparatus.[40]

Such theoretical frameworks anchor the belief that an ancestor could persist in his or her established social role after death. This notion lucidly emerges, for instance, from a text that addresses an esteemed deceased man and promises him a good burial site. Reminding the departed that "when you were alive and had not yet died / [you] were a strident and mighty leader," it pleads with him to continue his tasks after death, too.[41] Another ancestor, 'Brong pa Ban thung, explicitly retains his clan name and affiliation after death,[42] and a myth contained in a G.yung drung bon collection has a ritual specialist address an early Tibetan ancestor in exactly this kin role: "Do you not think of [your] sons and grandsons!?"[43] Such continuation of trusted identities, whose carriers can still be appealed to for help, is a far cry from the description forwarded by Cuevas, who, relying on Haarh's older work, describes the *mtshun* as an "aggressive menace" that exerted nothing but "a hostile power over the living" and were therefore to be contained, but not put to beneficial use.[44]

These passages should suffice to illustrate that there was a significant intuitive overlap bet-ween departed ancestors and live human beings: The deceased could act decidedly human-like and had minds of their own, a panoply of emotions, memories, agency, kinsmen among the living, social roles to uphold, and health to preserve. They were "dead" only in the most nominal of senses.[45] The cult treats ancestors as full-fledged persons who remain socially invested in, and pivotal contributors to, their community. Although dead, they are not departed.

To accurately reflect this emic understanding of *mtshun*, I follow Marshall Sahlins in steering clear of the immaterial and supernatural implications that accompany the term ancestral "spirit" (and, for that matter, "deity"). Easily misconstrued as an otherworldly apparition that is only tangentially connected to mundane reality, the term's dualistic overtones can easily obscure the social and material lives of the *mtshun*. Above, I have consequently referred to these beings simply as ancestors – an ambiguous term in its own right – and will also employ the terms "metaperson"

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[39] E.g. Dur3 A: ff. 284.5-6 and 285.2; Dur-h: ff. 723.5 and 724.4; Mtshun-p: f. 269.2.

[40] See Karmay 1998b: 311 and the references cited there. Somewhat different ontologies are given in other texts, e.g. *bla*, *srog* and *rnam shes* (Dur-f: ff. 181.6-182.1), or *bla*, *yid* and *rnam shes* (in the passage translated in Chap. 4).

[41] *khyod ma shi gson po'i dus kyang / kha drag dbang chen gyi dpon po yin pas/ da lta shi ba'i tshe na yang / brla drag gzhung bzang gi gshin po khyod kyis/ ...* etc. (G.yang2: 149.1-2).

[42] See, e.g., the passages translated below.

[43] *bu dang tsha la mi dgongs sam/* (Mtshun-p: f. 266.2-3).

[44] Cuevas 2003: 31-2, following Haarh 1969. Salomon 2015: 811-13, 817-18 reports a similar situation for Nang chen, where the *bla* of the departed, with the exception of that of high Buddhist dignitaries, was considered a possible threat to the living, not a source of well-being. Similar fear of the dead *bla* is reported elsewhere, too, including in an article on funerary traditions in Dkar mdzes, Sichuan (Rinchen Losel 1991: 177-180).

[45] Ancestors were "dead" in a literal sense (*gshin po*, *shi* etc.), but this only relates to their destroyed body and lack of life-force (*srog*).

and "metahuman" to help reflect the *mtshun*'s human-like motivated agency and continued presence within society or its direct surroundings (Sahlins 2017: 35-42).

In keeping with the social relevance of the deceased, these ancestor cults hold that a community's welfare comprises the weal of both the living and the dead. Their fates are believed to be intimately intertwined, as Karma chags med himself noted: "If you, *bla* of the dead, are not at ease / The living, too, will not enjoy good fortune."[46] Accordingly, a rich array of ritual tactics and techniques was available to address the needs of the departed, including soul-calling, the erection of shrines (*gsas mkhar*), the expulsion of beings that harangue the departed (*bse rag*, *dur sri*, etc.), petitions to enlist the support of numina, offerings of song and dance to the dead, and other rites.

Most crucial among all ritual was secondary burial, which served to settle down the wandering *bla* of the dead and to thus re-incorporate it into the community. This practice revolved around the interment of the bones left behind after cremation, bird exposure, or another type of primary funeral. Bone, let it be noted, is the endonym for patrilineal descent, and hence also the term in use for the patriclans of Khams (*rus* or *rus pa*, *gdung* in the honorific).[47] According to Karma chags med's manuals, this shared substance was ideally interred in a white-washed earthenware vase along with a "soul tablet" into which the *bla* of the dead was invited. Grave gifts were inserted as well, and could include grains, medicine, precious stones, pieces of cloth, weapons, and gender-specific items such as arrows and spindles.[48] Secondary burial was therefore a carefully orchestrated attempt to provide the ancestor with a well-equipped dwelling, "a residence, a house for the *mtshun*,"[49] as Karma chags med put it. This dedicated post-mortuary preservation of the shared substance of bone reflects the wish to sustain agnatic kinship, and indeed the lineage-centred community, across the threshold of death.[50]

3. The ancestor cult as "immanentist" religion

Such mutual engagement with the dead is radically different from what one may expect of Tibetan Buddhists, especially educated authors well-versed in religious doctrine. Buddhism, after all, tends to focus on rebirth and liberation, rather than on the continuation of worldly community. Notably, this is only one of multiple differences between these two traditions. Much ink has already been

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[46] *gshin bla khyod nyid ma bde na/ /gson po dag kyang mi shis pas/* (Dur2 A: f. 306.1).

[47] Salomon 2015: 413, 212-15. I could confirm the continued existence of large, geographically spread-out exogamous patriclans in southern Nang chen during fieldwork in 2018.

[48] E.g., Rten dur: ff. 242-244.3; Dur-b: ff. 122.4-123.2, and Dkar A: ff. 254.1-256.3 (for further references on the latter source see fn. 64). These ossuaries, in keeping with their potentially rich grave gifts, are often referred to as "treasures" (e.g., *gter bum*, *rin chen sa yi gter*, *dkar rtsi bum gter*, *mkho dgu'i longs spyod zad med rin chen gter*, etc.).

[49] *mtshun khyim bzhugs yul* (Mtshun5 A: f. 42.2).

[50] Also see Wellens 2010: 108. On the meaning of preserving bones, specifically, also see Bloch and Parry 1982: 20-21.

spilled in attempts to analytically distinguish between religions[51] that display markedly different socio-cultural dynamics. Whereas some religious traditions, such as Buddhism, may preach universal ethics, actively missionize, have codified historical traditions, and champion salvation, others lack all such characteristics and instead enshrine the pursuit of mundane well-being as the operational creed of their ritual repertoire. A proper understanding of such differences helps explain the dynamics at play between Buddhism and *mtshun* cults, and why Buddhas eventually managed to eclipse the ancestors.

Among the numerous terms that have been forwarded to capture such religious diversity are, on the one hand, universal(ist), salvific, doctrinal, scriptural, literary, organised and world religion, as well as great traditions, which are juxtaposed with terms such as local, folk, ethnic, communal, pagan, traditional, nameless, domestic, indigenous or tribal religion, or little traditions, on the other hand. Although such terms do helpfully highlight the dangers of taking the likes of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam as the archetype of religion,[52] all come with either undesirable implications, limited explanatory power, or both. I myself found none to be particularly productive in analysing the relations, frictions, and interactions between Buddhism and *mtshun* cults.[53]

The historian Alan Strathern, in a helpful bid to provide a more satisfactory theoretical template, has recently proposed the usage of "immanentist" and "transcendentalist" religion instead. Crystallising notions previously forwarded by anthropologists,[54] he formulates this framework through a wide-ranging comparative survey of literature on both Buddhist and prospective (largely pre-contact) Christian societies, before deploying it to an analysis of the relations between religion and politics. At once more nuanced and encompassing than the analytic terms listed above, Strathern's scheme is better-suited to an analysis of the material under consideration.

All transcendentalist traditions, Strathern argues, are fundamentally marked by their embrace of "an ontological breach," which divides reality into a mundane realm on the one hand, and one that is in essence beyond and obscured on the other hand. Such traditions are therefore invariably accompanied by conceptions of "the sacred" as radically distinct and separate from everyday life, such as Islamic paradise or Mahāyāna Buddhist conceptions of enlightenment. In such traditions,

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[51] The term "religion" itself has been infamously difficult to define. In the present context, a note on theoretical abolitionism and deconstructionism of the term must suffice. In my opinion, scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Timothy Fitzgerald and Talal Asad sacrifice too much communicability and comparative potential by seeking to eliminate "religion" from our vocabulary, and place an unrealistic burden on language, which of necessity distorts and simplifies. Useful points are made in Saler 2008, Strathern 2019: 3-8, 11-16, and Strenski 2010, who all stress the strategic and heuristic nature of definitions. (Also see Bloch 2008 for a more wide-ranging understanding of what "religion" is all about).

[52] Cf. Huber 2020, vol. 1: 13-16, which distinguishes between "religions" (salvific, transcendentalist traditions) and "cults" (immanentist religions).

[53] I found salvific and universalist religion to be most helpful in this context, although the framework presented next incorporates their advantages, while opening up additional lines of analysis, too.

[54] See, for instance, Sahlins 2017: 35-42 as well as the references cited there to the work of Descola, Viveiros de Castro and others. Strathern (2019: 6) himself notes that anthropology has forwarded relevant ideas as far back as Durkheim, and cites copious relevant work throughout his book.

the sacred can be inscrutable, unspeakable, and ineffable, simultaneously beyond man's conceptual and physical grasp. Ordinary mortals, for instance, can neither comprehend nor travel to nirvana, nor inflict damage upon Amitābha or God; these beings inhabit a different plane altogether. This alternate sphere exudes a compelling allure and swiftly becomes a central concern of religious activity (Strathern 2019: 47-50, 24, etc.).

Such a dualistic perspective entails a slew of consequential developments.[55] Oft-recurring features of transcendentalist religiosity include the fact that salvation – the escape from rather than the embrace of mundane life – becomes the paramount goal of religious practice. Worldly values may therefore be inverted, with, for instance, kinship and sex being stripped of value. A "process of ethicisation" commences, accompanied by a turn towards inner mental cultivation. Concurrently, pragmatic ritual loses relative standing to hegemonic claims to ultimate truth. Founding teachers are framed as a "historical singularity" and consequently their doc-trines are codified, and canons created and gradually closed. This puts a conceptual brake, however sluggish it may operate in practice, on innovation and adaptation (Strathern, *op. cit*., 63-64; also see 81-92). Great clerical organisations arise to function as erudite guardians of the tradition's heritage, and are often marked by a longevity that far exceeds that of the states that historically surround them. Along with claims to universally valid truth, strong self-conscious collective identities can appear, and rivalling metapersons are subordinated or abolished outright, as Buddhism and Christianity have respectively tended to do.[56]

In contrast, immanentist traditions are marked by a rather monistic understanding of the cosmos, in which metapersons and everything hallowed alike inhere in the realm that man occupies. "The sacred," although perhaps on occasion inaccessible to the human senses or too difficult to reach, nevertheless constitutes part of one and the same cosmos as man does. It is immanent to the physical environment and does not transcend it in any ontologically meaningful sense (Strathern, *op. cit*. 31-35). This applies neatly, for instance, to the old ritual cosmologies recently studied by Huber, which are "purely mundane" and firmly set in "the atmospheric and the terrestrial domains of the actual, cognisable natural world we live in" (Huber 2020, vol. 2: 69). Strathern cites examples in which the seats of wayward meta-persons were burned, drowned and even flogged (Strathern 2019: 34, 42), demonstrating the emic equation of these beings with specific physical objects. In such traditions, indeed, the distinction between "natural" and "supernatural" has little to no purchase (*ibid*.: 32-34, 6, etc.).

As a corollary,[57] immanentist religions tend to have undifferentiated notions of the afterlife, which are either modelled on everyday existence or considered unimportant and hence remain undeveloped. These traditions instead have an overriding ritual focus on mundane expediency, and are marked by a "communal, local and unsystematised" morality that is fundamentally focused on

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[55] The following discussion is summarised from the fourteen additional characteristics of transcendentalism discussed in *ibid*.: 50-81.

[56] On the latter point see *ibid*.: 71, 75-78, 92-97 (on Buddhism specifically) and 97-100 (on Christianity).

[57] The following paragraph is summarised from the nine additional characteristics of immanentism dis-cussed in Strathern 2019: 27-47.

"the maintenance of successful communal living" (Strathern, *op. cit.*, 36-38). They tend to concentrate on metapersons' powers rather than their inspiring ethics, and have a pragmatic and empirical approach to religious practice, accompanied by a dynamic mutability. There is limited emic resonance with notions such as "belief" and "religion," and they have a "rather borderless and elastic" religious field (*ibid.*: 46) in which metapersons and their cults may spread without particular regard for their pedigree or provenance.

Despite these marked differences between immanentist and transcendentalist traditions, no religion can live off the intangible alone. Accordingly, transcendentalist traditions invariably include immanentist features, too, without which they could neither get started nor function, appeal nor spread. The transcendent sacred must at some point reach out and touch the world. Transcendentalism therefore remains dependent on and susceptible to the lure of immanentist religiosity, with whom it exists in a dynamic relationship.[58] This dependency is illustrated by the Tibetan Buddhist belief in spontaneously arisen statues, the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the heavenly origins attributed by Muslims to the Kaʿbah in Mecca, the practice of glossolalia among Evangelical Christians, or the wide-spread belief in miracles. Combined with the fact that Buddhist doctrine conceptually allows for the absorption of "rival" metapersons (Strathern, *op. cit.*, 71, 75-78, 92-97), this helps explain why Buddhism could so often engage in constructive exchanges with the religious traditions it encountered.

The ancestor cult as outlined above, heuristically stripped of the incursions of Buddhism and G.yung drung bon, fit Strathern's immanentist model to a tee. Firstly, the cult's underlying cosmology is conspicuously monistic. The dead, as well as the metapersons they may encounter (*dur sri*, *sa sri*, *bse rag*, *sa 'dre*, *dur 'dre*, *sa bdag*, *yul lha*, etc.), remain squarely within living man's environment; they are not "supernatural." The cult's vision of life after death, moreover, does not meaningfully differ from the regular human condition, but is directly modelled on it. Associated concerns continue to revolve around kinship, food, clothing, shelter and physical safety. In one non-Buddhist source, an ancestor even bargains for a consort.[59] The notion of salvation, on the other hand, is wholly absent.

In a further fit with the immanentist model, these ancestor cults explicitly strive for the harmonious functioning of community by boosting vitality, fertility and security, but are not rooted in the clarion call of universally applicable ethics. Indeed, solidarity among humans, both living and dead, is primarily deployed along lines of kinship, ensuring that the cult's morality is communal at heart. The *mtshun*, moreover, must be "capable" of offering assistance, but there is no indication that they are any more ethical than their living brethren. Indeed, they were quick to lash out if ignored or offended. The empirical approach to ritual, too, we see confirmed – albeit tempered somewhat by Karma chags med's transcendentalist penchant for orthodox justification.[60] Although

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[58] *Ibid.*: 7, 81-106. Note, however, that the opposite does not hold. Immanentist traditions can function well without a shred of transcendentalist influence.

[59] Mtshun-p: f. 261.3-4.

[60] One colophon, for instance, notes how Karma chags med, faced with the repercussions of a burial that had taken a wrong turn, took ritual counter-measures, inspired by a visionary dream. As a result, a horse that

the remaining features are too complex to satisfactorily address in brief, all indications confirm these points, too, including the high mutability of these practices across space, time and religious boundaries. The cult of the *mtshun*, all in all, was wholly practical and mundane in orientation, and seems to have lacked any notion of transcendence.

4. Transcendentalising the ancestor cult

Having come of age in 17th-century Upper Khams, Karma chags med was socialised to cherish the immanent ancestors. His autobiography, for one, records how his biological father, a Buddhist practitioner of some repute, instructed his son to carry out the appropriate post-mortuary ritual after his death. This request was coupled with a promise that the ancestor cult rite would benefit Karma chags med himself as well.[61] At the same time, Karma chags med received extensive training as a Buddhist specialist, especially in the bKa' brgyud and rNying ma traditions. First ordained at the age of eight, he studied and mingled with numerous teachers throughout his life, composing dozens of volumes of Buddhist works along the way. Therefore, even when engaging with *mtshun* cults, a larger Buddhist worldview always hovered in the backdrop, forever ready to bend down and absorb any mundane frame of reference by allotting it a subordinate spot under an over-arching Buddhist canopy.

Indeed, Karma chags med's most elaborate extant work on *mtshun* ritual explicitly sets out stating that by tweaking minor details he sought to compose a proper Buddhist framework for these otherwise perfectly acceptable rituals.[62] Such bids at harmonisation entailed several theoretical and practical mergers of Buddhism and ancestor cults, offering insight into a process of religious transculturation. Although the extent to which regional ancestor cults had already been subject to transcendentalist influence before his time remains unclear, Karma chags med's works clearly indicate that, at least among Buddhist literati, his was a lonely voice. For instance, in composing instructions on how to construct and inter an ossuary, he relied on observation of popular ritual practice (*mthong ba brgyud pa*), not on written sources.[63] In another work, he implies that he had not encountered a proper written Buddhist rendering of such ritual, and explicitly associates the

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had fallen sick due to the error stopped shivering and quickly improved in health. Karma chags med "marvelled" at the results of his experiment and "wondered whether I had found a [suitable] ritual for moving [burial sites]," before adding, "but I figured that I had not, [and that I instead] should assemble [such a rite] from all transmitted literature." (*... ngo mtshar skyes nas ni/ /de phyir spo chog e rnyed bsam pa la/ /ma rnyed dpe rgyud kun nas bsgrig dgos bsam/*) (edited reading, based on Dur3 A: f. 296.4-5, Dur3 B: f. 20.4-5, Dur3 C: f. 107.3).

[61] *nga yi rus pa dkar rtsi sa yag sar/ /rgyobs dang khyod rang la yang phan no gsungs/* (KCBio: f. 25.2-3). (On the term *dkar rtsi*, used in these materials to refer to ancestral bones see Langelaar 2021).

[62] Mtshun5 A: f. 8.2-4, stating his doubts concerning the usage of *bon lugs* rituals by Buddhist mantrins, because invocations of non-Buddhist deities would clash with their vows.

[63] Dkar F: f. 806.6. This fragment reflects the beginning of a work otherwise only extant in edited and compiled form (e.g., Dkar A). For a translation and discussion of the compiled manual based on a witness closely related to A see Sehnalova's contribution in this volume. For critical editions and a discussion of the two original works see Langelaar 2021.

rites with "*bon* [or Bon] traditions" (*bon lugs*).[64] Below, I will outline five of the more conspicuous ways in which Karma chags med's rituals introduced a transcendentalist Buddhist layer to these ancestor cults.

First, to illustrate that ancestor cults had a proper Buddhist pedigree, Karma chags med presented his audience with fitting citations from a series of authoritative sources. In the preface to his longest ancestor cult manual, already adduced above, he cites a *dhāraṇī* that notes simply: "Oblations to the *mtshun*!"[65] A quoted *sūtra* confirms the possibility of providing deceased parents with food, and a treasure text notes that halting post-funerary offerings to the dead will precipitate a fall into poverty. The third Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje, is cited as having prescribed the fumigation of "all formidable *pha mtshun*."[66] These neatly arrayed precedents serve to keep any suspicion at bay that Karma chags med was peddling "fabricated, [self-]composed *dharma*" – as he himself styles deviations from scriptural truth elsewhere.[67] Immediately at this work's outset, therefore, an appeal to the truth as enshrined in orthodox Buddhist works filters into the cult, drawing it into a broader religious realm.

Secondly, and more substantially, the author sought to logically integrate the cosmology of the ritually accessible ancestors with that of Buddhist reincarnation. To do so, he provided a theoretical discussion of the *mtshun*'s ontology in which he relies on a threefold taxonomy of mentality. By assigning the two different post-mortem paths of man to separate mental constituents, he can simultaneously accommodate both views:

> "[...] concerning the [beings] known as *pha mtshun*: [there are] three [mental components], namely the *bla* [mobile vitality principle], *yid* [thought], and *rnam shes* [karmic consciousness]. [The following ritual] is beneficial to the *rnam shes* [of] the deceased, which, as explained in Hīnayāna *sūtras*, must remain in the intermediate state between death and rebirth as long as [their] lifespan has not lapsed. [The ritual outlined below] is also beneficial to certain [other *rnam shes*], similarly described [in the *sūtras*], that do not [re-]take bodily form for many human generations and remain in the intermediate state [for that period]. In the general system of the *sūtras* and *tantras*, it is held that after 49 days, the *rnam shes* is [re]born into whichever of the six classes [of beings] is appropriate [to its karma] [...].

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[64] *... bon lugs ma gtogs ban lugs la mi 'dug pas ...* (Mtshun5 A: ff. 51.6-52.1, see also f. 8.2-4). (This *bon lugs* may well be a catch-all category for any and all non-Buddhist traditions rather than a specific reference to the G.yung drung bon religion, although the latter certainly interacted with these ancestor cults, too – Mtshun-i offering one example [e.g., f. 1448.2-3]).

[65] *mtshun rnams la swā hā/* (Mtshun5 A: f. 9.2-3). The line is (correctly) attributed to the *'Phags pa rdo rje ri rab chen po'i rtse mo'i khang pa brtsegs pa'i gzungs* (see Tōh. 946: f. 293).

[66] Mtshun5 A: ff. 8.4-10.2, with the translated passage reading: *rje rang byung rdo rjes kyang / rgyal bu mthing ge la sogs pa'i/ /pha mtshun gnyen po thams cad bsang / /zhes ...* (f. 10.1-2).

[67] *rang bzo(s) brtsams chos* (Dur3 A: f. 297.1-2 and 297.3).

> [As concerns] the *bla* of the deceased: after the [*bla* of the] departed has assumed form (*gzugs bzung*),[68] it takes up residence at the funerary grounds. If he is happy and has resources, [his] sons and grandsons will flourish. Yet if he grows frail, hungry and thirsty, and his pleas for protection to his sons and grandsons do not manage to lift [his hardship], then his sons and grandsons will incur diseases and losses. This is explained in Chinese astrological treatises."[69]

Here, in effect, Karma chags med embraces a type of soul pluralism in order to uphold both cosmological views of the afterlife current in these areas of Khams.[70] (In referring to Chinese materials, he must equate the Tibetan *bla* with either the *hun* or *po* soul of Chinese cultures).[71] By thus integrating reincarnation with ancestor cults, the ritual cosmology of the latter is again folded into a more expansive picture, in which Buddhism provides the grand scheme. The ancestor cult itself hardly moves beyond the local community and its immediate concerns ("the funerary grounds," "sons and grandsons," "diseases"), whereas the inclusion of the karma-bound consciousness elicits mention of Buddhist scripture, reincarnation, the intermediate state between death and rebirth (*bar do*), the existence of other realms within *saṃsāra*, and, implicitly, of course, the lure of enlightenment to escape from it all.

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[68] See Dur2 B: f. 866.5 on the "form" of the *bla*, namely *yid* (*bla ni yid kyi gzugs can khyod /*; Dur2 A, f. 305.4 erroneously reads: *bla yid yid kyi gzugs can khyod/*).

[69] *de yang pha mtshun zhes pa ni/ bla* (B: *brla*) *yid rnam shes gsum ste/ tshe 'das rnam shes ni/ tshe tshad ma rdzogs bar du bar dor 'dug dgos pa theg pa chung ngu'i mdo rnams nas gsungs pa* (B, C, D: *pas*) *de la yang phan/ la la ni mi rabs mang por lus mi len par bar dor 'dug* (C: *dgug*; A: inserts *dgos*) *pa yang yod par gsungs pa* (B, C: *pas*; D: omits *pa*) *de la yang phan/ mdo rgyud spyi'i lugs la zhag zhe dgu* (C: *zhi bcu*) *nas rnam shes rigs drug gang rung du skye bar bshad kyang /* [...]

tshe 'das kyi bla (B: *brla*) *de ni tshe 'das kyis* (B, C: *kyi*) *gzugs bzung nas dur sa* (B: *dur de*) *de la gnas pas/ de skyid cing longs spyod dang ldan na/ bu tsha bor dar rgyas 'ong / de rgud cing bkres skom byung na bu tsha bo la skyabs zhu bas / de mi khyags nas bu tsha bo la na tsha dang god kha 'ong bar rgya nag gi rtsis gzhung nas bshad/* (edited reading with selected variants from Mtshun5 A: f. 10.2-6, Mtshun5 B: ff. 1277.5-1278.4, Mtshun5 C: ff. 102.3-103.4, Mtshun5 D: ff. 959.6-960.5).

[70] Rolf Stein already noted the co-existence of notions of a *bla* that "survives in the tomb or elsewhere" and the reincarnating consciousness of Buddhism (1972: 227). A similar presence of multiple "souls" is evident in various regions, including in Nang chen, where reincarnation and the lingering *bla* also operate independently (Salomon 2015: 813).

[71] Stein (1972: 226-227) suggests that Tibetan authors equated the *bla* with the *hun* 魂, the soul that is called upon after death and takes up residence in ancestral tablets. In Karma chags med's manuals, too, the *bla* is called upon to settle in a tablet, and hence the *hun* may indeed offer the most appropriate equivalent. However, note that the *po* 魄 soul, like the *bla*, is strongly connected with the body, sinks into the earth (on the *bla* see Salomon 2015: 812), is ritually associated with jade, and carries lunar associations, being etymologically tied to the moon's phases (Yü 1987: 370-371). (The *bla* is believed to move through the body in sync with the stages of the moon [e.g., Gerke 2012: 137-154] and an etymological connection between *bla* "soul" and *zla* "moon" has also been suggested [Schuessler 2007: 417, citing P.K. Benedict], although the latter claim may prove untenable). In any case, the theoretical fit with the Chinese model appears to be forced, and it remains to be seen to what degree Chinese materials constituted a genuine source of inspiration rather than a mere literary justification of a pre-established frame of local understanding.

A third Buddhist twist in these manuals is the deployment of tantric methodology, where the author enlists high-ranking Buddhist deities to command the entire ritual sphere. In a burial site moving ritual, for instance, Karma chags med stipulates that the practitioner must visualise himself as a transcendental bodhisattva and even verbally announce himself as "the body of Mañjuśrī"[72] to the *dur sri*, fearsome beings that habitually prey on the dead. The commands that follow are accordingly backed up by transcendentally ordained sanctions, as the ghouls are duly reminded: "Do not break the command of Mañjuśrī! / If you disobey his word / Yamāntaka will be furious / and crush you [into] dust!"[73] This same cloud of comeuppance also hangs over the head of bothersome ancestors themselves, who are told to stop causing trouble and to no longer mingle with the living, lest they "be destroyed for breaking [their] vows."[74]

Through such means, then, the metapersons that populate the cosmology of the ancestor cult (*pha mtshun*, *ma mtshun, dur sri*, etc.) are stripped of all power relative to those beings who manifest the Buddhist ideal of sentient perfection. The instalment of such an ultimate arbiter, lifted far above the rest of the playing field, has the effect of "dignifying [non-Buddhist metapersons] through conversion while diminishing them in the new hegemonic scheme" (Ramble 2009: 206) and perfectly illustrates what Strathern dubs the "inferiorization of metapersons" that is so typical of Buddhist confluences with other traditions.[75] Indeed, many of Karma chags med's manuals already display this dynamic simply by commencing with an invocation of Buddhist deities before addressing the ancestor cult itself.

Fourth, fascinatingly, we find conceptual expansions of who may qualify as a "patrilineal ancestor" (*pha mtshun*). Despite the *mtshun*'s intimate linkage to patrilines and their abundantly clear role as biological forebears, Karma chags med sometimes inflates the category to include Buddhist luminaries, too. In doing so, figures such as the widely revered eighth-century missionary Padmasambhava, who has no known descent lines, could also be styled *mtshun*.[76] Another manual, despite invoking bio-genetic forebears as well, reserves pride of place for "compassionate *pha mtshun* such as Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī, Padmasambhava, and the Three Dharma Emperors," with whom the invocations starts off.[77] The immanent ancestors are thus neither elided nor attacked, but rather gently pushed aside, allowing bigger Buddhist names to shine instead.

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[72] *rang nyid 'jam dpal dbyangs su bsgom/* and *nga ni 'jam dpal gzhon nu'i sku/* (Dur2 A: ff. 304.3 and 306.5).

[73] *'phags pa 'jam dpal bka' ma bcag_/gal te bka' las 'das gyur na/ /gshin rje gshed po khros nas su/ /rdul phran bzhin du brlag par 'gyur/* (Dur2 A: f. 307.1-2). (Yamāntaka is a wrathful manifestation of Mañjuśrī).

[74] *'phags pa 'jam dpal gzhon nu dang / /rnal 'byor bdag gi bka' ma bcag_/gal te bka' las 'das gyur na/ /dam tshig chad pas brlag par 'gyur/* (Dur2 A: f. 309.3-4).

[75] Strathern 2019: 75-78. Also see Mumford 1989: 178, where a soul-calling ritual's reliance on a high Buddhist deity ensures that "the outcome is certain" to be positive, turning the ritual's final confir-mation of success, in Mumford's view, into "a parody" of sorts.

[76] *slob dpon padma la sogs pa'i / rgya gar grub chen mtshun rnams dang / bod yul mar pā* [*sic*] *lo tsā dang / srong btsan sgam po la sogs pa / bod yul rig 'dzin mtshun rigs ...* (Mtshun7: f. 170.1).

[77] *kun bzang 'jam dbyangs padma 'byung / /mes dbon rnam gsum la sogs kyi/ /pha mtshun thugs rje mnga' ba rnams/ ...* (Mtshun4: ff. 65.4-66.1).

Fifth, and perhaps most substantially, *mtshun* could be recast altogether in a Mahāyāna Buddhist mold. This happened in the case of an ancestor of the 'Brong pa clan on whom Karma chags med composed several works. Readers of his *Quick Supplication to 'Brong pa Ban thung*, for one, are presented with two different ontological frameworks, quite along the lines of the theoretical passage translated above. Here, then, we still tread familiar conceptual terrain:

> "Ban thung of the 'Brong pa, lord among yogins,
> [your] mind has departed to a pure Buddhafield.
> [But your] *bla* has stayed behind as a *pha mtshun* and martial protector,
> as such, offer support to [your] lineage, the members of the 'Brong clan!"[78]

In this passage, the immanentist cosmology of the ancestor cults remains firmly intact, even if expanded upon by the Buddhist insertion of a more-or-less transcendental world – a pure realm established by a Buddha in his quest to aid all sentient beings.[79] Yet it is clearly still the *bla* of the ancestor that stays behind in the world of men, and it is this embodied mental constituent that explains Ban thung's continued engagement with his offspring (see Fig. 1). The same framework is repeated in another work.[80]

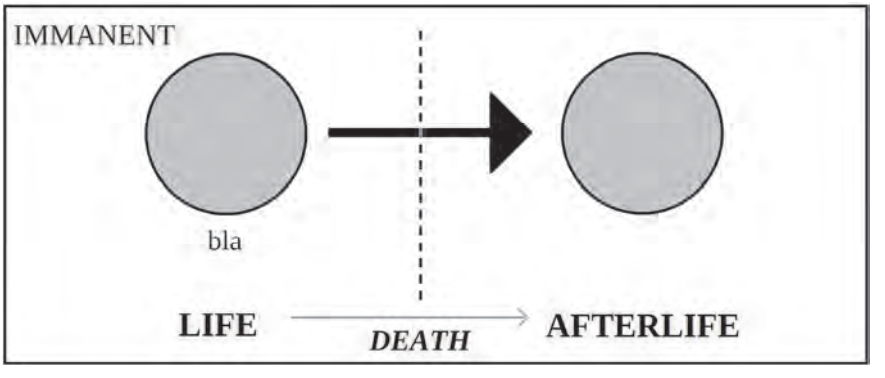


Fig. 1: A simplified immanentist framing of an ancestor's post-mortem activity. The mundane *bla*, or vitality principle, survives death and provides the base for the ancestor's continued presence and support.

Elsewhere, however, the picture changes. In yet another manual penned by Karma chags med, the cosmology of the ancestor cult comes crumbling down under the overbearing weight of a full-blown Mahāyāna Buddhist worldview, which not just overlays but wholly substitutes the original cosmology. This fumigation rite (*bsang mchod*) for the 'Brong pa clan's ancestors moves to reframe

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[78] *rnal 'byor dbang phyug 'brong pa ban thung ni/ /thugs ni dag pa rgyal ba'i zhing du gshegs/ /bla ni pha mtshun dgra bla'i tshul bzhugs nas/ /rigs rgyud 'brong rigs rnams la kha 'dzin mdzod/* (Mtshun-e: f. 425.1-2).

[79] In another post-mortuary ritual, Karma chags med describes a different pure realm as marked by the presence of innumerable Buddhas and the enjoyment of "incomprehensibly marvelous well-being and happiness." (*bde skyid ngo mtshar bsam gyis mi khyab yod:*, Tshe: f. 12a.1-4). For all intents and purposes, then, this is a paradise.

[80] Mtshun-g: f. 150.2-3.

Ban thung as a transcendental Buddhist being, capable of manipulating the mundane realm at will by sending an emanation:

> "Ban thung ma, born into the clan of the 'Brong pa,
> became accomplished in [the tantric practice of] Tiger-Riding Mahākāla.
> The Black Protector revealed himself,
> [and] bestowed [upon Ban thung] the mastery to increase his clan's strength.
> As a sign of his attainments, he would travel and dwell in the sky.
> In reality, [he] dwells in [the Buddhafield] Khecara,
> [but] an emanation took the form of a martial protector (*dgra bla*),
> and acts as the *dgra bla* of the entire 'Brong [pa] clan."[81]

Here, then, the forefather's continued operation in this world becomes dependent on a complete Buddhist cosmology of attainment, enlightenment, powerful Buddhist deities, transcendental realms, and emanating bodies. Within this framework, the supra-mundane realm, reflective of a "reality" (*dngos nyid*) inaccessible to regular folk, has now become the critical quality of the ancestor's efficaciousness (Fig. 2). This framework, as I will show below, would gain increasing traction over time.

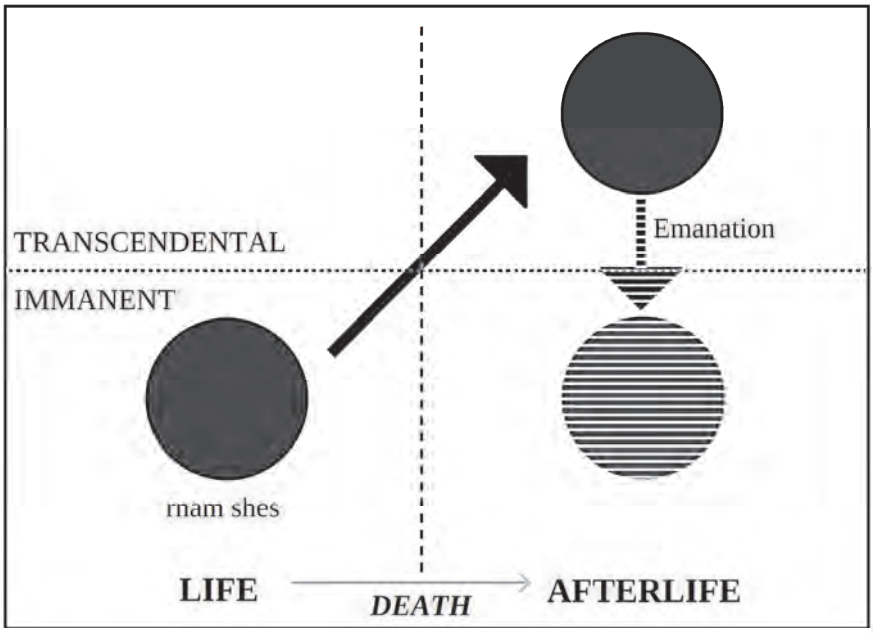


Fig. 2: A simplified transcendentalist framing of the ancestor Ban thung's post-mortem activity. The karma-guided consciousness, or *rnam shes*, attains a higher state and emanates as a *dgra bla* to provide mundane aid to his offspring.

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[81] *'brong pa'i rigs 'khrungs ban thung ma/ /stag zhon ma hā kā la bsgrub/ /mgon po nag pos zhal bstan nas/ /rigs rgyud btsan dar dngos grub gnang / /grub rtags nam mkhar gshegs bzhugs mdzad/ /dngos nyid mkha' spyod gnas na bzhugs/ /sprul pa dgra bla'i tshul bzung nas/ /'brong rigs kun gyi dgra bla mdzad/* (Mtshun1: f. 577.3-4).

5. From buried bones to Buddhas beyond

Although Karma chags med upheld the ancestor cults of his homeland, Buddhist notions of transcendence had a greater and more compelling story to tell. The descendants of the respected clan ancestor Ban thung therefore may well have welcomed their ancestor's metamorphosis into a Buddhist emanation, rather than seeing it, with a suspicious eye, as a subversion of the ancestor cult's cosmology. It is surely noteworthy that the ritual manual cited above, in which this forebear was recast as a transcendent being, was in fact composed for a 'Brong pa clan leader[82] and left the descent group's collective identity and communal goals firmly intact. Ban thung's emanation, after all, still concerned himself solely with the weal of "the entire 'Brong pa clan" – not with that of all sentient beings. The petitions addressed to him remained mundane in orientation, too, and included requests for luck (*g.yang*), success in battle, for Ban thung to take care of his descendants and their horses, and to steadfastly dwell on his offspring's weapons.[83] As such, the ritual clout of Buddhism was incorporated in a way that upheld the social objectives of the clan-based ancestor cult itself.

In the long run, however, the transcendentalist layer that was introduced as a fresh fount of ritual efficacy could not but relativise the immanent realm in which it was deployed. If ancestors and ghouls alike should tremble in front of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the *mtshun* grow only ever less likely to be relied upon for support. Strong concern for clan identities, too, would be more likely to wane than benefit if, as Karma chags med cites the Buddha, "class and clan are not central to my teachings."[84] The belief in the *bla*, too, only stood to lose ground to the reincarnating consciousness, which in contrast to the vitality principle was an integral part of Buddhist cosmology.[85] Once clan members open the door to Buddhist ritual and its attendant worldview, therefore, it is but a matter of time until a future generation produces a voice that understandably wonders why one should bother invoking one's great-grandfather at all.

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[82] The man is identified as a leader of the Rdor shul section of the 'Brong pa (*'brong pa rdor shul dpon*, Mtshun1: f. 582.2).

[83] Mtshun1: f. 578.2-6.

[84] *... nga yi bstan pa la/ /rigs dang rus ni gtso bo ma yin te/ /'bras bu sa thob de nyid gtso bo yin/* (KCBio: f. 28.3). Note, however, that such notions are often the subject of substantial flip-flopping across contexts, Buddhist genealogies offering plentiful examples where the connection between lineage affiliation and Buddhist clout are emphasised. Indeed, the translated passage in fact appears in a section where Karma chags med goes to considerable lengths to settle his own affiliation with a respectable patriline. The *Lalitavistara sūtra* passage cited earlier also includes "eminent lineage" (*rgyud phun sum tshogs pa*, *Rgya cher rol pa*: f. 15a.6) among the criteria that mark a soon-to-be Buddha's family.

[85] A post-mortuary ritual not altogether dissimilar from that surrounding the ossuary in Khams is described for Klu brag in Mustang, Nepal, where a whitewashed vase, filled with jewels and offerings, also serves to attract the wandering soul of the departed. This ritual is soteriologically oriented, however: it centres on the *rnam shes*, not the *bla*, does not involve the insertion of bones, and the vase is discarded, not preserved (Ramble 1982). Alternatively, the *bla* could also be drawn into the very dynamics that typify the karmic consciousness. Salomon cites a *bla ma* from Nang chen who argues that the *bla* too must follow its karma (2015: 812, fn. 1082).

Such a gradual process of increasing Buddhist hegemony over *mtshun* cults seems to have largely come to completion in contemporary Khams. During a 2018 research trip to Nang chen, a region where Karma chags med composed some of his ancestor cult manuals in the 17th century, just upstream from his place of birth, I was invariably met with blank stares when I broached the topic of *pha mtshun*. Salomon's encyclopaedic work on Nang chen, based on 797 interviews with exiled people from the region, found no evidence of ancestor cults either. Despite his attention to funerary rites, religion, and the post-mortem *bla*, the term *mtshun* never appears in his 1000-page dissertation.[86]

In the wake of the historically surely haphazard shifts away from the ancestors, the ritual preparation and preservation of their bones, too, stood to lose both subjective appeal as well as objective logic. Once Buddhist cosmology reigned in the ritual realm, the social need and cosmological justification for the immanent ancestors would weaken. Nowadays, to be sure, not the retention of bone, but its abandonment or *destruction* through pulverisation are standard post-mortuary practice across the larger Plateau.[87] In 20th-century Nang chen, too, where many of Ban thung's descendants live to this day, bones were crushed and discarded, exceptions being made only for high *bla ma*'s and leaders.[88] The post-mortem presence of the common man's *bla*, moreover, had grown to be the object of fear alone (Salomon, *op. cit.*, 811-813, 817-818). Whereas the historical interment of bone, accompanied by a soul tablet and grave gifts, expressed the desire (and possibility) to preserve the integrity of the patriline beyond death, the bones' destruction now lends voice to the Buddhist belief in the social dissolution of the departed, in perfect keeping with the Buddhist tenet of reincarnation. The dead no longer partake in the community. This monumental social change affirms Strathern's suggestion that wherever "the archaeological record of gravesites [with grave gifts] suddenly plunges into mute emptiness it may be taken as an indication of the arrival of transcendentalism" (Strathern 2019: 35). Over the course of centuries, it seems, Buddhism has robbed Tibetan clans of their graves.

Dovetailing with such changes, undoubtedly, came a shift of attention away from a web of collective kin-based identities – which granted ritual rights and duties in ancestor cults – towards a focus on individual beings, who are all equally under the sway of karmic law and under the compassionate eyes of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Ritual power moved from lineage forebears to Buddhist deities, whose cults were perfected in sometimes distant monasteries. On the level of ritual practice, therefore, the gradual unravelling of *mtshun* cults was accompanied by a transfer of ritual

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[86] Salomon does suggest that practices of calling the *bla* still "display features of an ancestor cult overlaid by Tibetan Buddhism." (2015: 863, my translation).

[87] Gouin 2010. Some exceptions can however be found in 20th-century Dkar mdzes (see Rinchen Losel 1991: 163, 171, 172) and may well still be encountered on the Byang thang and in other pockets of Khams (see the references to Bellezza and Huber in fns. 6 and 24).

[88] The bones of high-ranking *bla ma*s and leaders are still crushed, but are subsequently fashioned into *tsha tsha*, little clay figures stamped with pious imagery (Salomon 2015: 810-11). In Karma chags med's manuals, *tsha tsha* also appear, but major bones were destined for ossuaries and were not to be crushed (see Sehnalova's contribution in this volume).

clout from local lineage heads, ritual specialists and other lay community members, such as sons and in-married brides and grooms,[89] to trained and even ordained Buddhist specialists. Even the life of Ban thung, whose cult did persist and whose purvey was still a specific clan, would have inspired faith in a universalist Buddhism, since the ultimate source of his might was located in his tantric mastery.

In Nang chen, it was only when I approached a young and educated pastoralist nomad of the 'Brong pa clan that I found confirmation of the historical presence of *mtshun* cults. The man had come across *mtshun* in his personal readings on local history, and, revelling in the fact that a distant foreigner was familiar with his clan's illustrious ancestor, volunteered to lead us to a nearby "soul tree" (*bla shing*) of Ban thung.[90] Although, as the man informed my guide and me, Ban thung is still respected and revered among 'Brong pa members, the tree now sits abandoned; he himself only knew of it from local literature.[91] In contrast, a statue of Ban thung still stands proudly in a ritually active setting, which, tellingly, is a Buddhist monastery. The once immanent ancestor has over time morphed into a Buddhist deity. This development is also evident in a recent Tibetan monograph on Ban thung's clan, which fails to mention his immanentist framing and solely presents him as a Buddhist emanation. The term *mtshun* is absent; instead, Ban thung is presented as a *dgra lha*,[92] a protective martial metaperson commonly found in Buddhism and G.yung drung bon alike.

Such Buddhist transformations undercut the upkeep of any generalised ancestor cult. The forebear of focus, after all, is no longer simply a dead man's vitality principle (*bla*), but a transcendentally sprung Buddhist avatar. This framework razes the hope of offspring to ever become such an ancestor, too, for only the most immaculate of Buddhist practitioners could ever expect to attain similar mastery. Once such conceptual developments have convincingly taken hold, and the social need for ritual efficacy is increasingly covered by what is now quite thoroughly Buddhist ritual, the ancestor cult's original cosmology can simply be left to wither. Soteriology becomes central to funerary ritual, the *mtshun* gradually fade from the pantheon, bones start being pulverised, soul trees are abandoned, ancestors forgotten, burial sites consigned to oblivion. As such, Ban thung's developmental trajectory perfectly embodies the move from an immanentist Tibetan religiosity, centred on buried bones, to a transcendentalist framework, in which he effectively became a Buddha beyond. Unlike Haarh may have presumed, Buddhists hardly needed to suppress the immanent ancestors for them to eventually disappear into the long shadow cast by Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

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[89] Such kin roles all have parts to play in *mtshun* manuals, whether of Buddhist or Bon affiliation (e.g., Mtshun2: f. 201.3 and Mtshun-o: f. 243.4-5).

[90] This tree is a juniper (*shug pa*), the same tree or shrub from which, according to Karma chags med, men's ancestral tablets should be made. (For women, *glang ma* "willow" is prescribed instead, e.g., Dkar A: f. 254.3-4).

[91] The *ma ṇi* stones that surround the *bla shing* still testify to the tree's ceremonially active past.

[92] Myang Blo gros rab gsal, n.d.: 17.

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Abbreviations

acc. nr. = accessions number

BDRC = Buddhist Digital Resource Center (www.tbrc.org, formerly the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center).

Gnas mdo dpe rnying nyams gso khang = Khams stod nang chen 'bang sgang bzo rig gnas mdo gsang sngags chos 'phel gling gnas mdo dpe rnying nyams gso khang.

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