

Feats of an eclectic Bon po master: dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal's 'das log journey and gter ma rediscoveries


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"I do not doubt that one night a guest carved on the tombstone will come to knock at my door with his fist of marble and will grab the hand I will stretch out to him. He will draw me to the darkness from which no one returns."

Michel Tournier, *Le roi des aulnes*

For Elliot Sperling*

ourneys of Tibetans to the "Western Regions" form a classical piece of indigenous literature. Travel, either to pursue their karma or to undertake pilgrimage to holy places treasured by the school they belonged to, marked the lives of mystics and adepts of the religions of Tibet. Such an enterprise was one of several achievements that concurred to ensure the masters an eminent place in Tibetan history.

Among these journeys one stands out for its peculiarity. The extraordinary exertion of dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal was different from the others since he went to the west still bearing all symptoms of his status as 'das log.¹

* The few pages that follow are based on my presentation "Accounts of the journey to the "Western Regions" with particular reference to Khyung rgod rtsal and his 'das log experience. An historical view" given at the 8th Seminar of IATS, Bloomington July 1998, which I never took out for publication. The congress was organised by my dear old friend Elliot Sperling. The present revision of my Bloomington paper connects me ideally to those days spent together and is conceived with him in mind.

¹ Various aspects of dByil ston's personality have been dealt with in masterful treatments by Anne-Marie Blondeau who worked in particular on his rediscoveries (*Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratiques des Hautes Etudes*, 1984-1985, p. 107-114 and "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrags-pa Bon-lugs," p. 123-143) and Françoise Pommaret in her concern for those who were 'das log (*Les revenants de l'au-delà dans la tradition tibétaine*, p. 100-101).

1. dByil ston's 'das log experience

Khyung rgod rtsal was born at Gres khung of sPyi from dByil rDo rje seng ge, a master of Bon, and rGya gar gsal sgron from the Gu rub, a clan whose history goes back to Zhang zhung and Byang thang in antiquity. He studied Bon and medicine but was trained in Buddhism too.² sPyi, the locality in the area of 'Brong pa where he was born, had a leaning towards a wide-ranging exercise of religion. It was Bon po, as Khyung rgod rtsal and his family prove, but also Buddhist because, after staying in Gung thang, the Tshal pa master Tshang 'dur ba, active in the early 12th century, and thus before dByil ston's birth, founded a monastery there. The *dgon pa* was called Khyu ri and was founded after the Mang dkar ba invited Tshang 'dur ba there.³

Anne-Marie Blondeau has shown that dByil ston's belonging to the line of the eclectic rMa masters influenced his activity as literary treasure finder. In "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrags-pa Bon-lugs" (p. 38), she gives the transmission of the rMa lineage in the period by mentioning first rMa ston Srid 'dzin, then his son rMa ston lCam me, the latter's son rMa ston Shes rab seng ge and finally Khyung rgod rtsal.

Hence lineal transmission and the environment in which he was born and grew up made of dByil ston a master conversant with the two religions.

The biography of Khyung rgod rtsal (*dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*) was dictated by dByil ston to his disciple Dol po Shud kye drang srong rGyal mtshan tshul khirms,⁴ who introduces his 'das log experience

² *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 268,8-p. 269,1): "[dByil ston] was a master of Bon and *tsug lag* (spelled so). A few brothers and sisters were born to his mother Gu rub rGya gar gsal. He was the oldest. The name given to him by his father (p. 249) was rDo rje dpal. Since tender age he had faith and was perceptive, hence he learned Bon, Chos, medicine and astrology in a masterful manner." sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 245,21-p. 246,4): "The history of dByil gter ston. At the locality Gres khung of sPyi, he was born from father (p. 246) dByil Bon rDo rje seng ghe (sic) and mother dGu rib mo rGya kar gsal sgron. His was given the name He ru ka by his father and the name rDo rje dpal by the *slob dpon*. Since young age he had faith and wisdom. He learned Bon, Chos and medicine in a masterful way."

³ *Deb ther dmar po* (p. 144,18-19): "Yon bdag Blo gros invited [Tshang 'dur ba chen po] to gTsang and offered him the estate at sBo khung. There, Tshang 'dur ba introduced sessions of Ma ñi recitation. After the Mang dkar ba invited him to Phyi yul and became his main sponsors, he founded Khyu ri dgon pa. He introduced sessions of Ma ñi recitation."

⁴ The colophon of *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 274,7-p. 275,2) reads: "This *bla ma'i rnam thar* called *Rin chen phreng ba* was written in accordance with the words of sPrul sku dByil ston. Initially, it was composed by sTag lung drang srong lHa rje (a master of the medical science). It was then continued by lHo stod slob dpon

canonically. It says that, when Khyung rgod rtsal was twenty-three years old, as retribution for his previous acts, he was dragged to hell by a black man after experiencing a serious illness which initiated him into a 'das log ordeal.⁵ A judgement of his deeds was performed by the same black man and by a white man.⁶ The white man disap-

Gon ne. Finally, it was completed by sPa btsun. Given that no other account exists except the personal words of this famous *bla ma*, each of these three were accurate [in their work]. Moreover, given that there are texts well known to everyone but not directly referring to him (p. 275) and deviant oral accounts, for the sake of the future generations, I, Dol po'i Shud kye drang srong rGyal mtshan tshul khirms, bowed to the feet of the great benefactor, the *sprul sku* (i.e. dByil ston). I wrote this work according to his words, without exaggerating or omitting [anything].” After a sketchy history of the biography, Drang srong rGyal mtshan tshul khirms says that he based his biography on the master's words. Hence, as is canonical, this *rnam thar* is another case of an autobiography written down by a disciple. This may explain the recurring use of the first-person singular in the narratives referring to dByil ston. However, the author of the *rnam thar* adds that he also used oral accounts and consulted evidence deriving from other material, proving that he accomplished an expansion of the previous works. The *rnam thar* contains many colloquial expressions typical of the dialect of Upper West Tibet.

⁵ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 249,1-3): “In the earlier part of his life, owing to the crucial aspect that he triumphed many times over the Bon [po] and the *ban* [*de-s*], he was the master of the *ban de-s'* power, the protectors of the teachings and gShin rje [who causes] bleeding leprosy (*'dze nag*). This was the account of how these [past events] occurred. Now follows the account illustrating the experiences which were the results of his actions. When he was about twenty-three years old (1257; see below), he became severely ill. After thirty days, he was no more able to swallow normal food.”

⁶ I digress briefly from the main theme of this article to draw the attention of the reader to a few cases which bear similarity to the 'das log experience and the symbolism of black and white outside the typical context of the judgement of the soul, a matter which has been discussed at length in the past especially by Pomaret. I see in the narrative of the transformation of lHa lung dPal gyi rdo rje before and after he murdered Glang dar ma an episode reminiscent of the 'das log scheme. Even though his metamorphosis from a black man to a white man cannot be one of the earliest documented cases of 'das log, in its assonance to the presence of the white and black man in charge of the judgement of the souls, his transformation is an allegory of the forces of death and life. Death, when he is dressed as a black man to assassinate Glang dar ma. Life, when he turns his clothes white to represent the rebirth of the Buddhist teachings. His black to white transformation is found in the literature as early as *Nyang ral chos 'byung* (p. 439,8-11; p. 440,13-15 and p. 441,1-5). A vaguely analogous episode, anchored to a 'das log context, is found in *Srid pa'i rgyud kyi kha byang chen mo* (p. 116,1-p. 120,6) with reference to the well-known competition of magic between Bon po and Buddhists during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan. It ended with the defeat of the Bon po in the Buddhist literature, but with their victory according to Bon po sources. In the episode I wish to introduce, which has been masterly treated by Samten Karmay (“The Soul and the Turquoise: A Ritual for Recalling the *bla*” p. 317-318), the *btsan po* asks the Bon po to impart death to a minister so that Guru Padma can prove his powers by bringing him back to life. The minister, incidentally brought back to life by the Bon po rather than Guru Padma, when asked about his experience, talks like a 'das log. He says he met a black man who

peared and the black man led him to the netherworld via a series of gorges.⁷

A lengthy description of the hells follows. These vicissitudes fall into the typology of the 'das log narratives according to schemes found in the *Abhidharma* literature. It is common knowledge that the 'das log experience of the hell realms is based upon *Abhidharma* cosmogony, which provides its conceptual foundations, and thus it is not by chance that the most detailed descriptions of the hells are found in *Abhidharma*-related works.⁸ The way *Abhidharma* is treated in the biography of dByil ston is no exception to its conceptual paradigm.

One of the primary peculiarities of dByil ston's experience rests upon the fact that, after returning from the hells, he set out on a unique journey that brought him to visit major holy places in Tibet

took him away to the realm of death and a white man who led him back to life. In the case of Khyung rgod rtsal, the reappearance of the white man in the lands of *Abhidharma* cosmology shows that a reversal in the destiny of dByil ston had taken place. dByil ston was no longer bound by the negative consequences of his earlier deeds, symbolised by the black man who dragged him to the hells, but was rather poised to receive important initiations and become a prominent *gter ston*, after the white man led him to higher realms of *Abhidharma*.

⁷ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 249,5-6): "Having opened [the door], there appeared two persons, a handsome looking white man with a short figure and a black man with a tall figure and a dark face. [Khyung rgod rtsal] was taken out of bed and dragged away by the black man." Ibid. (p. 249,7-p. 250,2): "A white (p. 250) felt-like cloth having been spread between the two men who had brought him away, these [two] were counting the white and black pebbles on something like a drawing of a multicoloured diagram, which [was used to] calculate virtue and sin to find out to the smallest detail whether he had earlier committed sins or practised virtue. Upon realising that the sins and virtuous acts that he had performed were being counted, he was stricken with panic. Then, after a while, the white man with a noble complexion disappeared."

⁸ 'Gar Dam pa Chos sdings pa (1180–1240), the beloved spiritual son of sKyob pa 'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217), is credited in the biography of him penned by his nephew U rgyan pa aka Nub gling ston pa, with the feat of taking back his *nye gnas* gZhon nu 'od from death since he was a victim of a smallpox epidemic in Byang Mi nyag. 'Gar Dam pa thus acted as a veritable Bodhisattva, in the best tradition of this deity visiting the hells owing to his compassion. The most salient aspect of the episode is that gZhon nu 'od, after the ordeal, speaks as the 'das log that he was. *Chos sdings pa'i rnam thar* (p. 503,1-4) reads: "gZhon nu 'od said: "I have seen you, [my] *bla ma*. This was a great benefit. I visualised many Buddhist paradises, too. A white man appeared. One Buddhist realm up there is bDe' ba can. Down here, you, the *bla ma*, were rejoicing. There was radiance down here. A red woman appeared. Down there in the west was U rgyan. Down here, you, the *bla ma*, were rejoicing. There was radiance down here. I did not know where to go. [You my] *bla ma* came straight to me." So he reported. The *bla ma* said: "This is extraordinarily good. The route to this very U rgyan is near. Since you had no studies on *sNgags*, the white man who came to assist [you] was Thugs rje chen po. The infection is dealt with. So, your healed winds have removed it."

while moving progressively towards the west.

After fainting in the hells, dByil ston recovered his senses at Sol nag Thang po che. He went to lHa sa 'Phrul snang and then proceeded to g.Yas ru and sPyi rTsang. On the way, he passed through sPyi, his native place in southern Byang thang (Byang), had a detour in 'Bring mtshams, and proceeded to sTag sde, lDong ra and other localities in La stod Byang,⁹ including Bar 'brog rDo rje gling, where he

⁹ To present the travelogue of dByil ston in this note and the next ones I focus on the parts of the biography that tell more about his ordeal. I omit sentences and brief paragraphs so that the narrative flow runs better. *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 256,7-p. 259,7): "Not knowing where he was heading to, [dByil ston] found himself at Sol nang thang po che of dBus. Having heard that bSam yas was [nearby], he thought of going to bSam yas, but was stopped by a huge black bird. He then came upwards (p. 257) and went to lHa sa 'Phrul snang. He first proceeded to 'Phrul [snang]. He was struck by fear that this [area], resplendent with vegetation, could be g.Yas ru or sPyi rTsang (i.e. the ancient spelling of gTsang). He visited both temples (i.e. Ra mo che and Jo khang) [...] Subsequently, having gone upwards (i.e. westwards) to rTsang, he was hungry and thirsty. He went to drink water in g.Yas ru, but there was no water in Dram pa sha re." *Ibid.* (p. 257,3-4): "Then, he came to sPyi, [where] the sPyi river flows with blue water. Having gone to drink its water, he did not like it because it was salty [...] He did not avoid knocking at any door of entire sPyi yul [for food and water] [...] At Bar 'brog, he crossed the peak of the pass and, continuing a while, he came to a cave where there was an old *rnal 'byor pa* wearing a dress made of different pieces of fabric. In front of him was a table with three small *brtor [ma]* (sic for *gtor ma*). Having seen the offering of the three small *brtor ma*, he thought: "I must have been born as a *yi dags*" [...] [dByil ston] spared some food that lasted later until 'Bring 'tshams Gad kha. He went to the right-hand border. Having gone to a red *lha khang*, there was a group of red horsemen [...] This was in Ble 'gong [...] He returned upwards (i.e. westwards). After having reached a big settlement known as Drang so, he proceeded from there. When he arrived in front of Drang se gNyan rtse, he remembered that he was born here as a mule [...] He reached 'Bring 'thams Gad ka (sic), a large territory with many inhabitants. In the great land Gad kha many Bon po (p. 259) were hunting deers with long horns.... After crossing a small pass in the northwest, he arrived at Khro bu. He went to Gab Bya ru, and here he remembered that he was born [here] as an ox. "I (Khyung rgod rtsal) was not happy." Then, he crossed g.Yas ru, and reached La stod Byang. He was without a companion, exhausted, very hungry and thirsty. Here was a rocky mountain known as mDog dbugs which had very scarce vegetation. He remembered that he was born here as a cow and did not feel happy. On the way back, he left sTag sde smad and went to see Jo bo Thugs rje chen po at Rong Byang chub kling (sic)." sTag sde was the locality of the lord, namely Grags pa rgyal mtshan, who received from Guru Hūm 'bar gZa' *Mon pa Ke ta'i gdams skor shin tu zab cing rmo myur tshan che'i drag sngags*, the *gter ma* extracted by the latter at Tho ling. This dignitary from sTag sde passed it to Ye shes 'od (*Guru bKra shis chos 'byung* p. 504,24-p. 505,3 and *gTer ston brgya rtsa'i rnam thar* p. 481,3-5). Judging from their descriptions in *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*, sTag sde and sTag sde smad are to be located in La stod Byang. *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 259,8-p. 260,8): "He subsequently arrived at the castle of Rong. He continued upwards (i.e. westwards) and arrived at Brog ra (sic) [...] He then proceeded to the sTag sde valley via some smaller valleys at a higher elevation [...] Following that, he

met rGod tshang pa.¹⁰

Via the southern route that traverses Byang thang, dByil ston entered into other *Abhidharma* experiences upon reaching Upper West Tibet, the quintessential land of Bon.¹¹ Here he came across lakes and

also went to sDong ra Khrim 'khar (sic). He then toured Cung pa lung pa."

¹⁰ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 262,3-5): "[dByil ston] subsequently went downwards (i.e. eastwards) to dGyer chung. He was given something similar to *chang* which was requested by [some] horsemen. He then went to Bar 'brog rDo rje gling, the residence of rGod tshang pa. At the bottom of the valley was a line of huts. Upon a shelter on a rock was a building [like] a black nest. He (rGod tshang pa) resided in a hut higher than any other above this shelter on the rock. He wore on his head a red scarf tied as a turban. He had white hair over his forehead. He wore a red shawl. His face was white and round. [Khyung rgod rtsal] was happy to see him and offered his prostrations. He then went to sPyi."

¹¹ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 263,2-p. 267,1): "He then arrived at a very clean land, where the confluence of a big river was located. In the centre of a shallow lake formed by this river was a tall tree, and a *lha khang* was in its branches. At that time, the same white man of before appeared nearby it. He said: "Down there [in the *lha khang*] stays gNyan rje Gong sngon. [dByil ston said]: "I am familiar with the experiences [related to] the *gnyan-s*, so I wish [to see him]." He (i.e. the white man) replied: "If you get inside [the lake], you will not come back. Even if you try [hard], you will not succeed" and added: "I will lift the door curtain [for you]." Once he had lifted the door curtain, [Khyung rgod rtsal was able to see] gNyan rje Gong sngon with three heads and six arms, a shining light [emitting] from the upper part of his body and a pair of turquoise horns the size of one 'dom protruding from his head. All kinds of birds were chirping "*ldong ldong*" [around him]. "After a while, a wolf appeared near the river [and] took my (i.e. Khyung rgod rtsal's) intestines out, pulling them away." Here, at the bank of the river, he [tried] to take his intestines back. He was in pains and [his intestines] were torn. The white man said: "Meditate on gNyan rje Khyung rum." Having thus meditated on this *gnyan* to heal [his intestines], he recovered. He then arrived at a large country with elevated settlements, [where] all the mountains touched the sky, with many lakes and cattle, [and where there] was a blue lake. On the nape of this lake was a large settlement. Upon reaching there, [he saw that] all the door decorations were made of gold and turquoise. In this lake, various species of [aquatic] birds were swimming and singing. It was attractive and pleasant. Having asked which land this was, the white man (p. 264) said: "This is the land of the Klu." [Khyung rgod rtsal] said: "If so, I must have been born at some instance in the land of the Klu." The [white] man said: "Which merit did you accumulate to be born in the land of the Klu?" Having concentrated his thoughts [on this question], he was uncertain what [merit] he had accumulated, but he had made many water *rtor [ma]*, *klu rtor [ma]* and *bong ra* (?). [The white man] added: "You were not born like that (i.e. in the land of the Klu)." [Khyung rgod rtsal] asked: "If not, why then did we come here?," [the white man] told him: "We are here to cleanse your defilements." [Khyung rgod rtsal] insisted: "Which negative deeds did I do?" [The white man] replied: "Do you not remember your previous miserable deeds?" He replied: "I do remember." [The white man] concluded: "This is it. This is the effect [descending] from the cause. However, you have meditated on the *yi dam* and *bla ma*, and so all are cleansed." After leaving that place, he came across another land which was almost square. In its centre was a big lake with blue water, where many people were swimming. From here looking [into the distance], he could clearly see many countries. A feeling of happiness and

[sharper] knowledge was produced [in him]. Near the lake, at the foot of a multi-coloured country, people with magnificent costumes were circumambulating a tall tree with many leaves. When he asked them why they were making circumambulations, they said that on the tree was a *bya khyung* and they were prostrating and making circumambulations in order to proceed to a higher realm. After reaching the thickly vegetated tree, [he saw] a *bya khyung* as big as a sheep and wearing something like a turquoise [coat] emitting light. [This bird] had straight horns with sharp tips. "Since I myself (i.e. Khyung rгод rtsal), too, performed prostrations and circumambulations, a stable feeling of happiness was produced [in me]." Then looking [around], there was a similar tree a little farther away, with many people and [several] markets. He asked: "What is over there?" They told him: "This is the wish fulfilling tree" and added: "If one climbs up this tree, one reaches the realm of the *lha-s*." He went to its foot, but [the tree] was too tall for his eyes to see the top. Many people were trying to climb it and some fell down. "As I (i.e. Khyung rгод rtsal) also [began to] climb it, I almost fell down, (p. 265) but I did not." Grabbing its leaves, this impious [man] reached [the tree] top, and [there] was a multicoloured [land] known as the realm of the *lha-s*. In the centre of a lake in front of [the realm of the *lha-s*] was another [tree], taller than the previous tree. On that tree, many birds with bright blue feathers similar to crows were crying *ltong ltong*. When again he experienced a happy realisation [which made him wonder] into which [realm of the] gods he had been born. At that moment something sounding like a loud voice spoke. "Listening to it, I had the impression that it was calling my name." Stricken by panic, he felt uneasy in his heart. Soon after, he climbed down from the tree. He said he descended without stopping and, coming farther and farther down without falling, arrived at the top of a big mountain known as Ri bo Gha dha la (i.e. Ghan dho la, spelled Gha dha la in *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar rgyas pa* p. 51, aka Dril bu ri). From there, he saw a big blue river known as River 'Ghang ga (sic). He descended from the west side of this mountain, and after crossing a big river, arrived at a big blue country. He met a very tall woman who had a blue complexion, with beautiful hair and long eyebrows. She said: "You have missed your way. This succession of desert plains is the land of the *srin po-s*. Escape to the mountain up there!" In sheer terror, he ran away in fear and exhaustion. Long grass grew on this mountain. He ascended from the foot of this mountain and inside a grass hut was a man with hair in tangles (a *sadhu*). [Khyung rгод rtsal] asked him: "Which river is that one?" Pointing a finger, [the *sadhu*] replied: "That is the Ghang ga (sic)." Along its banks (*de'i rtsa na*) were sandy hills, and there was a territory full of rivers. The habitations were made of bent bamboo covered with grass on the outside. This area was densely populated. There were relatives and acquaintances [he recognized]. He said he had the feeling that he had spent thirteen years there. Owing to a famine, everyone lived [at the time] on the boiled juice of wild grass (?) (*rtsa rlong dol ba*). Near this mountain he became intoxicated (*nyod pa* for *myos pa*) with *snyan sa le* berries. At the time, he remembered his births. Later [in his reincarnations as dByil ston], when he went to see Ghu ru Chos dbang, the latter told [dByil ston's father]: "Your son (i.e. Khyung rгод rtsal), who is fourteen years old and is provided with (p. 266) prophetic knowledge, has come on my lap. The two of us were born as *brahmin* brothers on the bank of the river Gha gha (sic)." Then proceeding farther (*phyar* for *phyir*), he arrived at a desertic plain which was easy to cross. After crossing it, he found many white grass huts similar to those [he had seen] before. Inside a small hut covered by grass was a man with a white complexion wearing a long robe and sporting a moustache. The people [there] are said to be inhabiting the barren lands of India. Having crossed them, he arrived at rDo rje gdan, where the temple is built with bricks, with *gan 'dzira* and golden streamers.

trees which mark higher realms of *Abhidharma* cosmogony. It is significant that the white man reappeared at this stage of his journey and accompanied him to these realms, all of them on top of mythical trees and populated by deities and fabulous animals:

- The abode of the *gnyan-s*, with a lake and a tree in its centre, and the *lha khang* of gNyan rje Gong sngon—a wrathful Bon po deity with three heads, six arms and turquoise horns—located in the tree.
- A blue lake, above which is the abode of the *klu-s*, its access doors being adorned with gold and turquoise.
- A square land with a big blue lake and a tree with a *khyung* in it, leading to a realm above it.
- Another lake and another tree, which is the wish-fulfilling tree (dPag bsam shing). Climbing this tree brought Khyung rgod rtсал to the abode of the *lha-s*, with another mythical tree.

Descending from the dPag bsam shing, dByil ston returned from the *Abhidharma* realms to the physical world, specifically at Ri bo Ghan

At its foot, in front of a tree (the Bodhi tree?) is a statue of sGrol ma. While he was offering prostrations and circumambulations, the previous white man appeared from nowhere. He said: "What are you doing here? Let's go." After they left, they arrived at a dark mountain covered in fog. While he was led there, he was in a happy mood and clearly elated. He climbed to the top of that mountain and looked around. To the west was a mountain, half of which was covered in fog, known as the country of dBu rgyan (sic). To the northwest (i.e. looking from the direction of rDo rje gdan) was a flat land where the mountains were snow-capped and whose peaks emerged from the clouds. Having asked which were the snow mountains up there, [the white man] said: "These are the snow mountains of sTag gzic and Zhang zhung." He said: "If so, I would be glad to go there since I am a Bon po." He said: "Let's set off and go to these [places]." Hence, they descended from the latter mountain, and he had the feeling that he had travelled for a few days. He did not feel tired nor hungry. He reached a big country, where many deceitful people lived. Looking from the lower part of this land, a white snow mountain with three peaks appeared. Having asked: "Which mountain is that?", [the white man] said: "This is Gangs Ti se, the meditation place of the Bon po." He said: "I would be happy to go there because I am a Bon po." Then [the white man] said: "Let's go, we will reach there tonight." While approaching the mountain, they heard the sound of drums and the tambourine. Hearing this made him feel glad." Unless the statements of the last passage should be treated as a visionary experience, which is improbable given dByil ston's frequentation of the mountain, it is somewhat peculiar to see Ti se as a three-peak mountain like rMa chen sPom ra. It is hardly tenable to consider Phyag na rdo rje and 'Jam pa'i dbyangs as its two minor peaks or to look for Bon po sacred mountains, such as sPos ri ngad ldan, in the vicinities in order to find some coherence in this dialogue with the white man.

dho la in Gar sha. From Ri bo Ghan dho la he saw the Gang ga,¹² and moved to an area of India equated with the land of the *srin po*-s from where he escaped in great hurry.

His biography says that, in the final stage of his journey, he went to rDo rje gdan, U rgyan, sTag gzigs and Zhang zhung by swift walking and then proceeded to Gangs Ti se, where he had extraordinary encounters and the initiation to a major religious system. dByil ston's 'das log experience ends here.

Historical notations on dByil ston

The biography of dByil ston states that Khyung rgod rtsal met rGod tshang pa (1189–1258) at the age of twenty-three and *gter ston 'og* Guru Chos dbang (1212–1271 or 1273)—*gter ston gong* was Nyang ral—when he was a fourteen-year-old boy.

dByil ston being a younger contemporary of rGod tshang pa and Guru Chos dbang is sufficient proof that the wood sheep year—dByil ston's date of birth—given in the *bsTan rtsis* by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin as 1175 and consequently by Kvaerne in his article that provides a translation of the same work,¹³ should be post-dated by a full *rab byung* ("sexagenary cycle") to the wood sheep 1235.¹⁴ Otherwise dByil ston would be too old to meet rGod tshang pa and Guru Chos dbang, given that he met the 'Brug pa master in 1257, who is described in dByil ston's *rnam thar* as an old man with white hair, wearing a red turban and shawl, in a hut at Bar 'brog rDo rje gling (see above n.10). rGod tshang pa died the following year.

When he was fourteen years old, in 1248, dByil ston met a mature Guru Chos dbang who affirmed that Khyung rgod rtsal had prophetic powers (*mngon shes can*). The rNying ma master added that he and

¹² dByil ston's itinerary after crossing Byang thang and leaving the *Abhidharma* realms becomes imprecise. Summarized descriptions of the lands he transited are found in his biography without identification of these territories. Khyung rgod rtsal would have reached Gomukh, described as the mountain where the Gang ga has its sources. The region was dotted with bamboo huts with leaf roofs, which could be present-day Uttarkand. It is thus almost sure that he crossed Gu ge lHo smad to reach the sources of the Gang ga.

¹³ Kvaerne, *Bon po bstan rtsis* (p. 231) reads as follows: "In the wood sheep year, dByil ston dPon sras khyung rgod, called Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru, was born (1175)." This translates the entry concerning him in the *Sangs rgyas kyi bstan rtsis ngo mtshar nor bu phreng ba*, which reads verbatim (p. 32,17-18): *shing lug lor/ rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru zhes/ dbyil ston dpon gsas khyung rgod 'khrungs*. Kvaerne makes the sentence more comprehensible by changing the insignificant 'phru into a sensical 'phrul but not everything is sorted out (see below).

¹⁴ His death date is not recorded in the sources. His demise occurred after the earth monkey 1308, the year in which he had his last *gter ma* rediscovery (see below), the last life event mentioned in the literature.

Khyung rgod rtsal were linked by karmic bonds, because in a previous life they were born as brothers into a *brahmin* family on the bank of the Gang ga (see above n.11).¹⁵ Had dByil ston's birth taken place in 1175, Guru Chos dbang would have not been born at that time.

Evidence to postpone dByil ston's life by sixty years from the date given in Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *bsTan rtsis* is ascertained not just through the lives of Buddhist masters but also through the biography of his disciple Gru chen Tshul khrim rgyal mtshan (b. 1251), a Bon po *gter ston* who belonged to the tradition of the rMa masters like dByil ston.

Gru chen was a reincarnation of Tshe dbang rig 'dzin (*Gru chen rnam thar* p. 451,2), the son of Dran pa nam mkha', and a native of sPyi, the same locality where Khyung rgod rtsal was born.¹⁶ Gru chen returned to sTod from studies in its east sometime in 1284 or soon thereafter,¹⁷ and, a few years later, proceeded on pilgrimage to Gangs Ti se, like his teacher dByil ston. He was at the sacred mountain, aged forty, in iron tiger 1290.¹⁸

¹⁵ Anne-Marie Blondeau and Françoise Pommaret have depicted dByil ston as an eclectic master especially close to the rNying ma pa. Guru Chos dbang was a major proponent of the cult of sPyan ras gzigs, the deity who, in works as early as *Za ma tog bkod pa*, went to the higher realms of *Abhidharma* after descending to its hells. A younger associate of Guru Chos dbang, Khyung rgod rtsal transferred the literary theme to human experience. From the perspective of those who returned from the hells rather than Khyung rgod rtsal exclusively, Pommaret speaks about the diffusion of the 'das log among the rNying ma pa and the bKa' brgyud pa ("Les revenants de l'Au-delà ('das-log)" p. 676-677 and *Les revenants de l'Au-delà dans la tradition tibétaine* p. 100-102), i.e. the religious traditions to which Guru Chos dbang and rGod tshang pa, the Buddhist acquaintances of dByil ston, belonged.

¹⁶ An event in his life proves the eclectic character (Bon po and Buddhist) of Gru chen's activity. He was able to bring under control a white-turbaned being who had appeared to him in a dream. This being made him the protector of the *rang gzhan sde* (*Gru chen gyi rnam thar* p. 445,8-p. 446,2), an expression that implies spiritual authority over both the Bon po (*rang*: "one's own") and Buddhist (*gzhan*: "the other") communities (*sde*). This reading of the term *rang gzhan sde* is confirmed in *rGyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas* among a deluge of other sources. In the chronological tables placed at its end, one finds a set of dates according to the Bon po reckoning and a cross-check based on Buddhist chronology. In several instances the author, Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan, makes use of the expression *gzhan sde* (see, e.g., *ibid.* p. 187,1, p. 188,1 and p. 190, 4). The reference to the Buddhist community ("the other community") is indisputable because the dates and events with which the expression is connected are Buddhist, the calculations being based on Buddha's *nirvāṇa*.

¹⁷ *Gru chen gyi rnam thar* (p. 444,3-5) says that after his return to g.Yas ru dBen sa kha when he was thirty-four years old (1284), Gru chen Tshul khrim rgyal mtshan returned to sTod again. On his way towards the higher lands in the west, Gru chen met his master dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal.

¹⁸ *Gru chen gyi rnam thar* (p. 445,6-7): "When [Gru chen] was forty years of age [in 1290], he made a circumambulation of Gang ri mtsho gsum. He went into mental

Gru chen met dByil ston when he was between eighteen and twenty-five (ibid. respectively p. 440,3 and p. 441,8), hence between 1268 and 1275. Were dByil ston born in 1175, he would have been too old (between 91 and 101) or dead by the time he gave teachings to Gru chen.¹⁹

Revising the period in which dByil ston lived is, thus, not a pedantic historical exercise but an important aspect useful to date the cultural season in which dByil ston operated.

The Treatment of Abhidharma in dByil ston's Travelogue

A feature of *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*, which makes the account charac-

quiescence. He stood in smooth peace. Slob dpon Bu chung from sTod received empowerments, blessings and spiritual liaison [from him]. Then he went to Dol po."

¹⁹ If the *lung bstan*-s of both the Buddhist and Bon po literature are considered works written after the events mentioned in them, further evidence supports the one *rab byung* postponement of dByil ston's birth date. In text number 4 of *Sources for the History of Bon*, several prophecies attributed to Dran pa nam mkha' whose rediscoveries are credited to dByil ston by Samten Karmay (see *A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications* p. 115) and Blondeau ("mKhyen-brce dbang-po: la biographie de Padmasambhava selon la tradition du bsGrags-pa Bon et ses sources" p. 138). The place of extraction—at the foot of Zhal bzang brag—is one basis for such an attribution (see below). *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* says that, in an earth horse year, dByil ston rediscovered a few *lung bstan*-s, including ones by Dran pa nam mkha', Guru Padma 'byung gnas and Pa kor (sic for Pa gor) Bai ro tsa na (ibid. p. 273,3). These Bon po and Buddhist prophecies should be added to those attributed to him by Karmay and Blondeau. If the birth date of Khyung rgod rtsal provided by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (1175) is accepted, these rediscoveries would date to earth horse 1198. For the revised date of this event based on a sounder chronology, see below in the section "Life after the 'das log phase: dByil ston's gter ma-s." One of the prophecies foretells that the fortunes of Tibet would depend on the Hor, showing that the Mongols had already established their sway over the country. Traditionally the first invasion of Tibet—or more precisely Central Tibet—was the one by Dor rta nag po in iron rat 1240. Even if other earlier but little-known intrusions of the Hor into some specific areas of Tibet are counted, none of them dates to before the earth horse year 1198. Another prophecy concerns the 'Bri gung sgom pa Śākya rin chen, who was involved in stopping the advance of Dor rta nag po in 1240 with meagre results (Che tshang bsTan 'dzin padma'i rgyal mtshan, *'Bri gung gdan rabs gser phreng* p. 112,6-8; also Sperling, "Some Notes on the Early 'Bri-gung-pa *Sgom-pa*" p. 35 and n.23). Another prophecy concerns Shakya bzang po, appointed to the post of Sa skya dpon chen in wood dragon 1244 after Sa skya pañdi ta and nephews left for the land of the Hor. Śākya bzang po founded Sa skya lHa khang chen mo in fire dragon 1256 and died some two decades thereafter in 1275 (*rGya Bod yig tshang* p. 357,2-p. 358,10; Ar. Macdonald "Préambule a la lecture d'un rGya-Bod yig-chang" p. 93 etc.). These historical facts show that Khyung rgod rtsal could not have rediscovered those prophecies aged twenty-three in earth horse 1198. He unearthed them in earth horse 1258. This is an indirect confirmation that he was born in wood sheep 1235 unless these premonitions were the outcome of a true prophetic power.

teristic, is that the typical 'das log theme of the hells has been expanded to incorporate a description of the higher realms of *Abhidharma* cosmogony.²⁰ Journeying to paradises after descending to hell for reasons of salvation is a theme encountered in the works dealing with the cult of sPyan ras gzigs as early as *Za ma tog bkod pa*. It is also found in the biographies of other 'das log-s. In dByil ston's account, there is nothing which echoes other descriptions of a descent to hell for the compassionate reason of rescuing souls from damnation and then a journey to higher realms. In his case, he was led to those experiences to cleanse his defilements.

During his journey, hence after returning from death, dByil ston shows the signs typical of a *yi dwags* (*preta*), such as unbearable hunger, thirst and exhaustion, which are recurring features of a 'das log. People did not recognise him or notice his ordeal. He could see people but some of them could not see him. A few of those he tried to approach suddenly fell sick and died.

dByil ston's journey might have been mystical or imaginary, induced by his 'das log state, but the detailed description of his travel—especially into the areas of g.Yas ru Byang and Byang thang—in which he accurately mentions one destination after the other, is far more indicative of a physical journey than the experiences of those religious masters who visited U rgyan, for instance, in dreams or trance flights. A meaningful example of a mystic journey to U rgyan is the one of bla ma Zhang g.Yu brag pa brTson 'grus seng ge (1123-1193 or 1194).²¹ In bla ma Zhang's case, emphasis is accorded to the

²⁰ There are analogies—and dissimilarities—between the almost contemporary Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the ordeal that led dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal to descend to the hells, return to the lands of Tibet, cross them, and ascend to the *Abhidharma* paradises. dByil ston's *Purgatorio* were the lands of Tibet he visited in the 'das log state after his hell experience and on the way to the heavens. The duration of dByil ston's journey is unknown, but it seems that it lasted for a much longer time than the week that was enough for Dante to descend to *Inferno*, cross *Purgatorio* and ascend to *Paradiso*. dByil ston's *Divine Comedy* took place some forty years before Dante's. Khyung rgod rtsal journeyed to the hells and paradises in fire snake 1257; Dante from April 8th to April 14th 1300. Dante was a gifted observer, dByil ston a hard-core adventurer, for he was personally involved in the journey while the one of Dante was an intellectual visitation. Dante left to us a masterpiece, Khyung rgod rtsal an interesting account between reality and fiction. Unlike the *Divine Comedy* in which disease leads to purgatory, the 'das log adventures in hells are presented as being caused by illness. Chants of the *Comedy* came out in bunches, so did the life of dByil ston described in various *rnam thar-s*, unavailable nowadays. The Ravenna mosaics were a source of inspiration to Dante, as is the *srid pa'i 'khor lo* summarising dByil ston's descent to the netherworld described in sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po's *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me*. Dante had a lay approach to theology and paradises; the handling of heavens in dByil ston's travelogue does not depart from an unrealistic religious treatment.

²¹ *Gung thang gi dkar chag* (f.11a,4-f.12a,1): "Performing a ritual to obtain omens, [bla

visions influenced by his yogic practice; they have a cosmic status and an actual journey is not even hinted at. On the contrary, the itinerary of dByil ston's journey towards the west is so rich of precise geographical particulars that one can follow the territories he traversed on a map.

After a journey across Byang thang, dByil ston was led to abandon the physical realm. The circumstances of those *Abhidharma* experiences are described as real events in his life. The mythical realms, lakes and trees of *Abhidharma* cosmology are tangible realms, lakes and trees which dByil ston reaches and climbs. Hence, the main feature of his travel to these *loci mentis* and various holy places is that *Abhidharma* cosmogonic concepts are superimposed on actual experiences.

ma Zhang] concentrated his mind on his *yi dam lha*. When he prayed after meditating, the *rje btsun ma* (i.e. sGrol ma) spoke to him: "Noble boy! If you go to U rgyan in the west, the adamantine holy place, you will attain the ten perfections with the help of your *yi dam*." Having spoken thus, she disappeared. On the night of the ninth, catching hold of a sunray, he proceeded to the *sum bcu rtsa gsum gyi gnas* and to the west. When, in his search for U rgyan, he was left helpless, he had a vision of mGon po Phyag bzhi pa. He made offerings to him and received instructions on how to eliminate suffering. [mGon po] instantly transformed into the three-eyed He ru ka. While wondering whether he had stably occupied the abode of Tshang pa (Brahma), the twenty-eight rGyu skar lha mo ("the goddesses of the constellations") (f.11b) descended upon earth. A little boy wearing a white-scarved turban offered him the *snying po yi ge* ("essential syllables"). On the night of the tenth, with his body decorated with the five bone-ornaments [and] with the cycle of sixteen Rigs ma in the sky, while the miracle occurred that the foundations of the earth shook, he went to U rgyan which he saw as if it was rDo rje gdan. At that time, coinciding with the offering of many *u dum wa ra* flowers by the four great kings, a great ceremony took place. "I too made various kinds of offerings with the eyes of my imagination." Then, seeing that there was something resembling a flaming red light at a distance of an arrow shot in the west of this holy place U rgyan, I went there without hesitation. [Seeing] there the *yi dam* rDo rje phag mo on a swirling *g.yung drung* as a couch, with a pig face [and] ornaments which were not cast, my body originated without effort a red Hum letter which rose from the rectum. As it reached the *dkyil 'khor* of the navel, I clearly saw all the six realms of existence as if [my] body was a mirror. For an instant, I felt as if I were dead. At that time, I had unlimited clairvoyance. I saw the 1,028 *bla ma* of the past, the thirty-one *bla ma* of the present, the *gtsug lag khang*, the various *lha khang-s* and *mchod rten-s* I would myself build later. I saw my own body burning above the third *bang rim* [of the latter], and many *lha, klu, dri za*, men and *mi ma yin* lamenting. The various *mkha' 'gro-s* and *chos skyong-s* did not stay still but moved frantically around (*brel g.yang*). Then, while [the Hum letter] proceeded to the heart, [I saw that] this was 'Dzam gling (f.12a) but, fearing that this would be difficult to put into written form, I do not write any more about it."

*Paradises left behind:
Further Destinations in dByil ston's 'das log Travelogue*

The account of dByil ston's experiences as a 'das log is divided into four parts. They are all different—the descent to hell and his return from death, the journey across lands of the plateau, his ecstatic ascent to paradises. The fourth segment of dByil ston's travelogue stands aside from the previous three. At a first glance, it is a further itinerary to physical lands—at least most of them—after his experiences of paradises. A historical down-to-earth consideration makes this journey fade away from realism, however. Despite this section of the travelogue being described in the *rnam thar* as a swift walking passage from land to land, all events in the four phases of dByil ston's life are crowded together in the single year—fire snake 1257—which leave little space for a journey across many lands that are not contiguous.

To travel through Gar sha, metropolitan India, the sources of the Ganges, an obscure land like that of the *srin po-s*, and then rDo rje gdan, all the way to U rgyan in the Northwest and finally Gangs Ti se covers a vast stretch of territories in northern 'Dzam bu gling. While there is a record of his activity at Gangs Ti se which makes his presence at the mountain a real event (see below), the nature of the reference to the other regions is less actual. It is quite unlikely that he travelled there. The ultimate proof of this implausibility is that he went to the land of the *srin po-s*—unless this stands as an allegorical allusion to a hostile territory.

The last section in his 'das log experience is a celebration of *loci mentis* popular in Tibetan culture, U rgyan and sTag gzigs, lands of deep religious significance to a Bon po, but also to rDo rje gdan, a locality sacred to an eclectic master like him who leaned towards Buddhism, too.

Like earlier in the biography, the final part of the journey transfers religious stereotypes to a human experience that is rather a literary treatment than the continuation of dByil ston's journey. Nonetheless, short ethnic details enrich the narrative of lively aspects typical of those lands that are not necessarily mystical.

Overall, the narrative of dByil ston's 'das log ordeal has several points that make of the account a beautiful piece of Tibetan literature:

- Gangs Ti se seen as a three-peak mountain,
- the clear water of the sPyi river turning salty,
- Uttarkand and the lands of metropolitan India,
- *Abhidharma* tenets also found in other cultures of the same period,

- Gang ga and Gomukh, the sources of the river,
- a description of sites on the plateau from La stod Byang to 'Bring mtshams,
- sPyi rTsang, called the same way as the dynastic period's *stong sde* of the same territory,
- the meeting with rGod tshang pa just before the 'Brug pa master died,
- the abodes of the *gnyan-s*, the *klu-s* and the *lha-s*,
- lHa sa 'Phrul snang and Ra mo che associated with g.Yas ru,
- rGod tshang pa living in a hut higher than any of his disciples,
- dByil ston's recollections of previous lives as *yi dags*, mule, ox, cow, and one in India,
- Bon po practitioners hunting deers,
- rGod tshang pa's face like a full moon,
- a famine in India,
- clean, pure lands upon approaching the west,
- a wolf taking dByil ston's intestines out but being healed by meditating on gNyan rje Khyung rum,
- people swimming in a blue lake,
- a *khyung* with a turquoise coat emitting light,
- the dPag bsam shing,
- Ri bo Gan dho la,
- the meeting with a *mkha' 'gro*,
- the land of the *srin po-s*,
- the desertic area of metropolitan India,
- a land with many rivers (Punjab?),
- the vernacular architecture of India: bamboo and leaf roofs,
- intoxicating berries,
- the Do rje gdan Gan dho la built with bricks.

All of them are contained in a few of the fifteen folios that compose dByil ston's *rnam thar*.

*The "opening" of the Gangs Ti se "door":
Bon po contributions to the post-Mi la ras pa phase*

Although peculiar, the life experiences of dByil ston fell during a season of shared cultural focus. Even if dByil ston's journey is considered fanciful due to his visionary '*das log* experience and despite it being a description of the physical places he traversed on the plateau, Khyung rgod rtsal's travelogue witnesses the 13th-century interest for journeys to the West by intrepid Tibetan masters.

If true, dByil ston would have proceeded to Bodhgaya about 1257, a time of great turmoil in the Gangetic plain under Muslim pressure. The appearance of the white man who urged him to move away from the holy place as soon as possible echoes the advice given by a transformation of mGon po phyag bzhi pa to U rgyan pa Seng ge dpal (1238–1309). The wrathful deity told U rgyan pa to visit rDo rje gdan in a hurry, owing to Muslim trouble.²² Another version of the same account concludes that U rgyan pa was instrumental in removing threat.²³

While U rgyan pa was in the “Western Regions” before dByil ston, Khyung rgod rtsal, an older contemporary, would have preceded him at rDo rje gdan if—as said above—his presence at this Gangetic holy site is reliable. U rgyan pa first returned to Mar yul in the same year 1257 in which dByil ston set out for his 'das log journey. He travelled to Bodhgaya only in 1261.²⁴ He returned to rDo rje gdan subsequently and contributed to the restoration of the holy place,²⁵ despite the unsafe conditions faced in Ma ga dha at the time.

Assonances between the two masters forsaken, some major differ-

²² *IHo rong chos 'byung* (p. 732,21-p. 733,3): “Then, when [U rgyan pa] was thirty-two years old in the bird year (1261), he went to rDo rje gdan. (p. 733) On the way, he sent back Nye gnas Sher rin and went on alone. He said he had a notion that a black Newar (Bal mo for Bal po) man smeared with white ashes and with four hands (i.e. mGon po Phyag bzhi pa) pulled him with two hands, saying: “Visit it quickly. The Du ru kha are causing hindrance to rDo rje gdan.”

²³ bSod nams 'od zer, *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar* (p. 133,11-p. 134,5): “Nye gnas Shes rin having gone up [towards Tibet], [U rgyan pa] continued alone. Subsequently, at the palace of Bal po called Tha bga' me there was a black man with four arms and red eyeballs, who said: “The Du ru ka troops will be coming to rDo rje gdan. Go there quickly to repulse them with your prayers. Four rnal 'byor pa-s like you will cooperate unitedly.” He scattered [seeds] from his hand, which appeared to be an auspicious omen. [U rgyan pa] commented: “He is *chos skyong* Ye shes mGon po.” At that time, the head *dkon gnyer* of rDo rje gdan (p. 134) was Dza ya po ga shen, the king of the land of Ma ga ta (sic). U rgyan pa said: “I recited and offered uncountable noble prayers such as those which can help to diffuse the teachings, hence the Du ru ka troops were repulsed from the [Ma ga dha] dominions ('khor).” [U rgyan pa] then went to Bal po thil (sic), one of the twenty-four *yul* (“localities”) [of the cosmic body].”

²⁴ bSod nams 'od zer, *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar* (p. 116,15): “You, [U rgyan pa,] should go to rDo rje gdan in the year of the bird (1261)”; also *ibid.* (p. 121,18): “I, [U rgyan pa,] will go to rDo rje gdan in the year of the bird (1261).”

²⁵ bSod nams 'od zer, *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar* (p. 166,17-p. 167,6): “At that time, the boundary wall having been dismantled by the Sog po troops, and much wealth having been allotted (*skur* for *bkur*) [to repair it], the Zangs ling gi rgyal po, the Ya rtse'i rgyal po and the *rje grub chen* (p. 167) *rin po che* (i.e. U rgyan pa) restored it, one side each. [Hence] rDo rje gdan's northern gate is known as the gate of Tibet. From then on until the end of the world, whatever wealth exists, such as gold and silver, this is used to restore the decay of rDo rje gdan *gtsug lag khang* and its images.”

ences exist as well, the foremost being that the experiences of U rgyan pa in the “Western Regions” and mNga’ ris were real adventures in those lands which his *rnam thar* shows to have been blessed by extraordinarily mystical encounters and troubled by political turmoil.

The historicity of Khyung rgod rtсал’s sojourn at Gangs Ti se is beyond doubt. It is justified by the fact that he was bestowed *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* at the mountain, of which his becoming a master is recorded in Bon po works.

Khyung rgod rtсал’s presence at Gangs Ti se—a must for a Bon po like him—led to empowerments he received from nine *rig ’dzin-s*, among them Dran pa nam mkha’ (*dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* p. 267,4-7), although the latter is assigned in the literature to half a millennium earlier, if ever he was a historical personality. dByil ston’s presence at the sacred mountain left a mark in the subsequent literature.

In his immensely valuable *Ti se’i dkar chag*, dKar ru Bru chen bsTan ’dzin rin chen has a polemical section on the views held by the Buddhists on the “opening”, frequentation and identification of holy places at Gangs Ti se. This section of the text is viewed with suspicion by Tibetologists as this crudely polemical treatment of the role of 12th-13th century Buddhists at the sacred mountain largely departs from a balanced view of facts.

dKar ru bsTan ’dzin rin chen emphatically dismisses the attribution of the “opening” of the “door” of this holy place to rGod tshang pa. He stresses that the sacredness of the mountain goes back to primordial times.²⁶ Earlier in the same section, he enumerates all the Bon

²⁶ dKar ru grub dbang bsTan ’dzin rin chen, *Ti se’i dkar chag* (p. 651,2-p. 652,3): “An assessment of the fact that the one known as rGyal ba rGod tshangs pa (sic) opened the door of the holy place [Ti se] is as follows. This is a statement [reflecting] a selfish and fanciful account by a thoughtless child. In whatever way it may be, this Gangs ri chen po is the self-originated mountain existing primordially. This is the holy place for the liberation of the six classes of sentient beings prophesied by all the Sangs rgyas-s from the earliest times. Concerning its blessing [power], this has been seen by all the *klu-s*, *lha-s* and *mi-s* existing in this illusionary realm but, despite many realising this, the belief that it was rGod tshangs pa (sic) who opened the door of the holy place still exists at present, which is completely false and laughably nonsensical. So it should be said. Moreover, although the holders of the Bon and Chos philosophical systems each hold that they are the ones who distinguished between the *phyi sgor* (sic for *phyi skor*, “external circumambulation”) and the *nang sgor* (sic for *nang skor*, “internal circumambulation”) [of Gangs Ti se], concerning [the difference between] the so called *phyi sgor* (sic) and *nang sgor* (sic), (p. 652) the words of those who [say] that our own *sDe snod* (“basket”) of philosophical system does not differentiate between them are ignorant. However, in whatever way this may be, in all the words of the Victorious Ones and the instructions of Exalted Ones, the *phyi sgor* (sic) circumambulates the boundaries of the area externally and the *nang sgor* (sic) circumambulates the boundaries of [one’s own] mind internally. At present, dissenting opinions are allowed to be voiced, which do not recognise the difference between the

po holy places at Gangs Ti se which the Buddhists and, according to him, rGod tshang pa in particular, assessed differently, substituting Buddhist names to the Bon po ones. At this point of his treatment, dKar ru Bru chen reminds his readers that dByil ston blessed many of them,²⁷ and adds subsequently that all the holy places “opened” by rGod tshang pa were in fact reconnoitered by Khyung rgod rtsal.²⁸

The revised birth year of Khyung rgod rtsal (1235) leaves little reason to accept dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen's assertion that it was dByil ston rather than rGod tshang pa who “opened” several holy places at the mountain. dByil ston was a younger contemporary of the 'Brug pa master and sojourned in the area of the Gangs ri mtsho gsum sensibly after him.²⁹ But whether it was rGod tshang pa who

outer and the inner [*skor lam* of Gangs Ti se].”

²⁷ dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 634,7-p. 635,5): “Likewise, dByil ston chen po Khyung rgod rtsal (p. 635), after taking birth in front and at the foot of 'du gnas Zang zang lHa brag of Byang, mastered (*mnga' brnyes*) the *Byang gter* of the *gshen-s*. In particular, he personally visited Gangs ri chen po and all the holy places in Zhang chung and, as signs of his blessings, there are many traces of his instructions, handprints and footprints. At the gatherings of various classes of indestructible (*zag med*) *rig 'dzin-s* and *mkha' 'gro ma-s* he revealed his method of practising the propitiation, meditation and actualisation of *sPyi spungs bsGrags pa skor gsum*. The very extensive accounts of the Tantric precepts and empowerments he obtained are clearly mentioned in *dByil ston chen po'i rnam thar*.” dKar ru does not clarify to which dByil ston's biography he refers in this passage and transfers his birthplace from sPyi to Zang zang.

²⁸ dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 637,3-4): “All of rGod tshangs pa's (sic) holy places were those of dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal, as shown above.” *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 267,3-4) says that Khyung rgod rtsal discovered a path which brought him to Shel gyi phug. Is this a reason that led dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen to attribute the mystical reconnaissance of Gangs Ti se to dByil ston rather than to rGod tshang pa, who is considered, due to a stereotype contradicted by historical evidence (see Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang* p. 371-381), to have been the “opener” of the *skor lam*? dByil ston found many tombs of the *bDe bar gshegs pa-s* in the interior of the cave. Is this a point of contact with the 'Bri gung pa tombs at rGyang grags?

²⁹ Other Bon po masters should be considered as possible actors in the “opening” of the Gangs Ti se “door” during the modern phase that roughly predates the period of dByil ston and rGod tshang pa. Their dates in the Bon po literature and, therefore, the period of their lives are not beyond doubt. One of them was 'Bum rje 'od who had a long life (dPal ldan tshul khriims, *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 390,17). He may have been born in the first quarter of the 12th century. His sojourn at Gangs Ti se, documented by dKar ru Bru chen, most likely predated the one of rGod tshang pa, otherwise 'Bum rje 'od would have approached one hundred years of age when the 'Brug pa master was at the mountain. dKar ru Bru chen credits 'Bum rje 'od with meditation at Gangs Ti se, at the caves near Gra bcom bzhugs khri and dGu sul phug; and more retreat on the shore of Ma pang g.yu mtsho, at gSer gyi bya skyibs. Gu ru rNon rtse was at Gangs Ti se but his placement into a cultural context provided by *Ma rgyud* is not sufficiently accurate to propose a period for his presence at sacred mountain. Another—equally unlikely—candidate is Klu brag pa bKra shis rgyal mtshan, the younger brother

was responsible for these achievements is still moot and an idea not supported by the history of the mountain since other bKa' brgyud pa were at Gangs Ti se before him and around the same time.

No one can dispute that cultural and religious devotion for the sacredness of Gangs Ti se goes back long before the times of rGod tshang pa and Khyung rgod rtsal. Both the 'Brug pa and the Bon po masters must be associated with the "modern" phase that "opened" the "door" of the holy place and the cultural descendance which still exists at present—e.g. the reconnaissance of the holy geography around the mountain, consequent practices to be performed etc. Moreover, dKar ru Bru chen's own argumentation is contradictory. On the one hand, he bypasses the rGod tshang pa/dByil ston phase in stressing the antiquity of religious practice at Gangs Ti se. On the other, he validates the same phase since dByil ston, rather than rGod tshang pa, should be credited with the "opening" of many holy places at the mountain and the lakes.

A viable assumption is that the presence of Buddhists and Bon po at Gangs Ti se during the prolonged phase that encompassed the residency first of rGod tshang pa and then of dByil ston was more or less contemporaneous. However, one cannot fail to associate the embryonic inception of the modern phase with rje btsun Mid la—a fact acknowledged by his rNying ma detractors too—and afterwards. Several bKa' brgyud pa masters were inspired by his activity and not motivated by proselytism to introduce a devotional circuit. This does not detract an *iota* from Bon po assiduity at the mountain in their practice and reconnaissance.

It is thus disputable that the Buddhist "opening" of the "door" of the Gangs Ti se pilgrimage is to be ascribed to rGod tshang pa alone. It was the result of a collective effort, also characterized by the Bon po activity but with divergences. Although they shared with the Buddhists a similar need for seclusion, the Bon po treated Gangs Ti se and Ma pang/Ma pham g.yu mtsho less as pilgrimage destinations than as localities where to pursue practice permanently, in particular the adepts of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*,³⁰ given that most of

'Bum rje 'od. He was in Pu hrang before his thirty-one years of age (ibid. p. 391,1-3) and thus before 1171 (on him see below more profusely).

³⁰ Meditation at the mountain by masters of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* covered various centuries. One long-term sojourn at the mountain and the region of the lakes—including La ngag mtsho—occurred in the life of Khyung po Legs mgon (*Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* p. 19,3-p. 20,1). A disciple of Ma hor sTag gzig, he spent twelve years in meditation at Gangs Ti se (ibid. p. 19,3-p20,1). Ma hor sTag gzig had sGyer spungs sNang bzher lod po for teacher (ibid. p. 20,1), famous in the Bon po literature for his *mthu* against Khri srong lde btsan (*Bon ma nub pa'i gtan tshigs*). The reliability of this threat forsaken, Khyung po Legs mgon, who belonged to the generation after Khri srong lde btsan's, was ac-

them hailed from Upper West Tibet and nearby territories.

The predilection for Gangs Ti se by various *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* masters during Buddhist *bstan pa snga dar* elicited no equivalent activity among the Tibetan practitioners of the Noble Religion.³¹ The *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma*-s consistently gravitated around the mountain and the lakes for centuries before rje btsun Mid la.³²

In the long run, the journeys to the "Western Regions" should be seen from a comprehensive perspective. The quest for teachings and pilgrimage led Tibetans, especially after the years of rje btsun Mid la's life, to face the perils of travelling to the bounds of the Tibetan world. Given these antecedents in the "Western Regions," the greatness of the exertions of masters should be appraised in terms of the conditions they faced. These daring endeavours were even more forbidding during the period considered here. In addition to the roughness of the journey, these mystics had to contend with war and racial hostility. In the same way as going to rDo rje gdan, a pilgrimage difficult by any standard, had become an even greater challenge owing to the Muslim presence, so too the journey to the "Western Regions" became increasingly daunting, to the point that the mystical experiences to be attained were all the more extraordinary for the concrete possibility of loss of life, such as the risks run by U rgyan pa.

Life after the 'das log phase: dByil ston's gter ma-s

A new beginning in the life of dByil ston occurred after the 'das log journey to the Western Regions which ends in *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* with dByil ston's stay at Gangs Ti se, his final destination.

The sojourn of Khyung rgod rtsal at the sacred mountain lasted only seven days but was of the utmost intensity owing to the em-

tive around the early 9th century. Two generations before Khyung po Legs mgon fell the twenty-one years spent by Khyung po A ba lDong at the sacred mountain (ibid. p. 18,4-6). He belonged to the *Grub thob snyan khungs gyi* (sic) *rgyud* of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*. The succession in this segment of the lineage is Khyung po A ba lDong followed by Khyung po bKra shis rgyal mtshan and Khyung po Legs mgo after the latter.

³¹ *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* (p. 56,6-p. 57,2) says that Gu ge Kun dga' ring mo, a lineage holder of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud stod lugs*, was active at Gangs ri mtsho gsum presumably during Buddhist *bstan pa phyi dar* (ibid. p. 57,2).

³² One case of a journey to the "Western Regions" by a Buddhist earlier than *bstan pa phyi dar* is sNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes's to Bru zha. *mKhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung* (p. 321,17-20) says: "Then, having heard that rGya gar Chos skyong ba'i rgyal po had gone to Bru sha, after going to Bru sha, he (Sangs rgyas ye shes) met the *chos srid byed pa* (the "one active in religion and secularism") at this locality. It is said that he saw Che rtsan skyes [and] listened to his preaching. He translated *dGongs 'dus* from the Bru sha [language and] brought it back to Tibet."

powerments he received from Dran pa nam mkha' and other *gshen-s*. sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po states in *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* that dByil ston received those crucial empowerments from Dran pa nam mkha' and the other eight masters he calls *rig 'dzin-s* at Ti se Shel phug. They initiated him to *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*, an experience which the biography succinctly describes again at the edge between a mythical and a factual induction into this most important Bon po system (*dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* p. 267,3-7).³³ It was also at Gangs Ti se that he received the name Khyung rgod rtsal.³⁴

The involvement of Dran pa nam mkha' defies any sense of space and time but is the nodal point that marked Khyung rgod rtsal's passage from being a *'das log* to live as a *gter ston*. These empowerments into secret teachings granted him the status of a perfected master able to accomplish important deeds.

After talking about the events at Gangs Ti se, in the section dedicated to dByil ston's new life as a *gter ston*, Dol po Shud kye drang srong combines the vivid simplicity of his writing style that makes his prose a pleasure to read with an epic characterisation, as required by the genre. Nonetheless, his treatment lacks the completeness of sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po. sPa ston's work is more succinct since it is conceived as an outline of dByil ston's treasure findings, but it is also more rigorous. It describes several rediscoveries that Khyung rgod rtsal undertook at various *gter kha-s*. sPa ston has chosen to focus on Khyung rgod rtsal the *gter ston*, hence to approach a somewhat complete notion of the textual treasures he unearthed, this narrative is the main source that describes Khyung rgod rtsal's work as a *gter ston*.

dByil ston's first steps in his new life was the prediction he received in fire snake 1257, which prophesied that he would find works on Bon and Buddhism along with precious items (*ibid.* p. 267,8-p.

³³ Khyung rgod rtsal was linked to *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* before his journey and its transmission at Gangs Ti se. His biography records that he received teachings from 'Phrul med zhig po, a master from Glo bo of the *byang rgyud*—one of its transmission branches—before descending to the hells. *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 252,3-4) says that, during his experience of the hells, "He was again and again very frightened and shivering. He remembered the advice earlier [given to him] by slob dpon 'Phrul med [zhig po] of Nyi ma La stod Blo bo'i Sha ri. This *slob dpon* said that in the event that one descends to the hell realms, one must remember the teachings of Bon [and] keep in mind [only] a single thought [which says] that the hells do not exist." These teachings beautifully stress that the hells are just an illusion.

³⁴ See, e.g., *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* (p. 267,4) and *sPa ston sgron ma* (p. 763,4-5). The latter reads: "Subsequently, at Ti se Shel phug he received the empowerments of the nine *rigs 'dzin-s* (sic), such as the one by Dran pa, and was given the secret name Khyung rgod rtsal" (see a similar statement in sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me*).

268,3). It also made him aware that he would make his first rediscovery in the next year, earth horse 1258,³⁵ age twenty-four, after the performance of an obscure ritual,³⁶ which would enable him to gain the skill to open *gter kha*-s ("treasure repositories").

The next step was to receive the authorisation to open his first repository from g.Yung drung bkra shis and Me nyag Jo sras. The latter must have been an exile from the Tangut kingdom of Byang Mi nyag that was overtaken by Ginghis Khan in 1227, given the inevitable postponement of dByil ston's life to one *rab byung* later than the date proposed by bsTan 'dzin nyi ma in his *bstan rtsis*.

The biography of dByil ston then relates his meeting at 'Khar lung with a *gter bdag*, a black, fearful giant sent by the *srid pa'i rgyal mo*. The obscure ritual that the *gter bdag* advised him to perform in preparation of his initial *gter ma* "invitation" required to get a whip, make an effigy of a black sheep and offer black cakes. It is at this point in the narrative that Dol po Shud kye *drang srong* rGyal mtshan tshul khrim stresses the involvement of g.Yung drung bkra shis and Me nyag Jo sras, who are defined as *grogs po* ("friends" or "companions") in the approach to open the *gter kha*.

As a consequence, in the years after his sojourn at the mountain, Khyung rgod rtsal accomplished a number of *gter ma* "invitations," an activity that went on for a number of findings, concentrated in the span of little more than a decade in a tight sequence of rediscoveries.

sPa ston's account of Khyung rgod rtsal's *gter ma* rediscoveries is conceived in *bstan rtsis* style, the range and completeness of this literary material being a sign that dByil ston was a rMa master of great religious significance. The text deals with them systematically by introducing:

- the year of the *gter ma* "invitation";
- the location of the *gter kha*;
- the documents rediscovered.

The first unearthing that happened at the foot of the rock of Zhal bzang is described by bsTan rgyal bzang po in the typical manner of the *gter ma* literature as a wondrous event,³⁷ which reads as a resumé

³⁵ Elsewhere, his *rnam thar* confirms that he became a *gter ston* in earth horse 1258 (ibid. p. 270,1).

³⁶ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 763,5-6-p. 764,2): "The prophecy by the *gter bdag* ("guardian of the *gter ma*") bDud btsan in fire female snake 1257 [said]: "Afterwards, in earth male horse 1258 bury an image of a black sheep at the household. Worship with black morsels."

³⁷ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 763,6-p. 764,2): "Following the authorisation of g.Yung drung bkra shis and Me nyag Jo sras, two in all, he went to the foot of Zhal bzangs kyi brag. Located up at one third of the

of *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*. The bunch of works he found when, one year later (earth sheep 1259), he opened the vase in which the documents were kept, seems Bon po.³⁸

After this point, sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po's treatment of treasure findings becomes typical of the *bstan rtsis* genre. The *gter ma* work led Khyung rgod rtsal to engage in remarkable mobility that brought him to several localities of the Tibetan plateau, but not to Upper West Tibet near Gangs Ti se, the destination of his 'das log travelogue. He was not active in his native sPyi but in other areas of southern Byang thang (Byang). The opening of *gter kha*-s happened in:

- Iron male monkey 1260, age twenty-six, at rGyang lha khang, he found texts both pertaining to Bon and Buddhism.³⁹
- Wood male rat 1264, age thirty, at rGya Yon po lung, the *gter kha* was full of wrathful Tantric works.⁴⁰
- Earth male monkey 1268, age thirty-four, at Zang zang lHa brag phug, he recovered a group of Bon po texts.⁴¹

rock and down at its two thirds, on a square there was a shining crystal *svastika* resembling a female organ. He went there using a rope. He excavated with a chisel and arrived at the door. Inside it, over a square black stone (p. 764) *maṇḍala* with the four sides and the centre, which makes five, appeared a terracotta vase the colour of bluish green zinc. On the fifth (i.e. in the centre) there was a protruding scratched copper mouth. Symbols of his own family were written on it. He opened the *bum pa*'s mouth and scrolls came out. Inside the cavity it was filled with medicines in grains. He stayed on at the external door to arrange [the finding]."

³⁸ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,2-5): "For one year he kept [the finding] secret and [then] opened [the vase]. *rDzogs chen g.yung drung long yang*, *sGron ma dgu skor*, 'Khrid dri med shel gyi snying po, Thig le 'dus pa, Thig le sgron me, g.Yung drung lung bcu, Drang don mdo dgu, Nges don mdo dgu, Phur pa sha 'bal gyi skor, Kun bzang rgyal 'dus kyi skor, Dran pa phyi nang gsang gsum, Tshe dbang phyi nang gsang gsum, bsKal bzang phyi nang gsang gsum; mKha' 'gro rigs lnga'i sgrub pa, Ge khod gsang ba drag chen gyi skor, bsTan srung yum sras lnga'i rkyang sgrub; Dil sgrub and sMan rtsis came out."

³⁹ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,5-7): "On the thirteenth of the middle summer month of iron male monkey 1260, from the heart of the statue of rTa mgrin at rGyang lha khang, concerning Bon, *Phur pa drag sngags skor*, *Grub chung nyi shu rtsa lnga*, *Dran pa'i lung bstan che 'bring chung gsum* [came out]; concerning Buddhism, *rDo rje sems dpa'i mngon rtogs*, *Phyag rdor gyi sgrub skor*, *Dro nad gso thabs* and *Gu ru drag sgrub skor* came out."

⁴⁰ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,7): "On the tenth of the summer month of wood male rat 1264, from rGya Yon po lung many wrathful *sngags*-s came out such as *Thog ser ma bu skor*."

⁴¹ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,7-p. 765,2): "On the eighth of the winter month of earth male dragon 1268, (p. 765) from Zang zang lHa brag phug with a vermilion opening, *Yang gsang rtsod bzlog*, *sNyan*

- Iron male horse 1270, age thirty-six, at Bo dong Bya rgod gshongs, he found seemingly Buddhist texts.⁴²
- Water male monkey 1272, age thirty-eight, at Mang mkhar lCags 'phrang, he unearthed Bon po and Buddhist texts.⁴³
- Earth male monkey 1308 (?), age seventy-four (?), at Pra dum he rediscovered Buddhist works.⁴⁴

They all took place during male years in the course of fifteen of them. Then a long gap of thirty-seven years would have intervened before the last treasure finding.

A final stage of rediscoveries, not only textual, took place at Yum bu bla sgang and mKhar mkhar (?) in unspecified years.⁴⁵

In his panegyric of dByil ston and the relegation of rGod tshang pa to an insignificant role at Gangs Ti se, which downgrades the importance of the Buddhists, especially the bKa' brgyud pa, at the sacred mountain, dKar ru grub chen introduces an important religious notion about Khyung rgod rtсал. In a lapidary statement, he says that dByil ston mastered (*mnga' brnyes*) the *Byang gter* of the *gshen-s* (*Ti se'i dkar chag* p. 635,1).

dKar ru grub chen's one line sentence is enough to highlight the part dByil ston played in this branch of the Bon po doctrines. It summarises well his life achievements—*gter ma* rediscoveries and

brgyud mchog drug, Tshe gzungs Dran pa brdzus skyes, Tshe dbang Zhang chung ma and E dbag chen mo, came out by means of deception and by means of worshiping *gter bdag* lHa btsan."

⁴² sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,2-3): "On the eighth of the last month of summer of iron male horse 1270, from the heart of the rNam sras of Bo dong Bya rgod gshongs came out rNam sras *phyi nang gsang gsum, rGying chen skyes bu'i sgrub skor* and *Gu ru phyag Phur pa*.

⁴³ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,3-5): "On the eighth day of the last summer month of water male monkey 1272, from Mang mkhar lCags 'phrang came out *Kun rig rgyas bsdus 'de thung, Khro bo sGron ma zhi ba, sDe brgyad gzungs ring cha lag, rGyud ting mur g.yu rtse, dPal gsas srung zlog gzir gsum, sTong rgyud gi sgrub skor, Mi bdud khrag mgo'i mdos, lHa rgod snying phrom gto de dgu* by means of the worship of the seven *gter bdag-s*, the bDud btsan brothers."

⁴⁴ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,5-7): "On the fourteenth of the autumn month of earth male monkey 1308 (?), from the belly of Pra dum rTa mgrin, came out *rTa mgrin sgrub skor, rGyal po dbyug them che chung, gSo dpyad bdud rtsi bum pa che chung, Padmas mdzad pa'i gza' bcos, Chung dpyad Padma gces phreng*. People say that four *bande-s* took *dByug them che chung men lhag shog ser* which ended up with Gu ru Chos dbang."

⁴⁵ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,7-p. 766,2): "From the turquoise and gold door at Yang bu le'i gangs (p. 766) he extracted one Bon *gter*, a turquoise and eggs in gold. A heavy hail shower fell. He took with him silk and a few excellent horses. He suspected [the gift] was due to the local community. It is said that he extracted [a treasure] from mKhar mkhar. These were dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtсал's thirteen *gter kha-s* which he controlled.

fluency in *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*. The assertion, a pronouncement expressed several centuries after dByil ston's life and thus subject to scrutiny, is somewhat reductive of the extent of dByil ston's *gter ma* rediscoveries but dKar ru grub chen has manifestly linked Khyung rgod rtsal's intense sojourn at Gangs Ti se with his long and strenuous search of textual treasures.

Khyung rgod rtsal's eminent role as a Bon po *Byang gter* literary treasure rediscoverer leads to the association with the rNying ma *Byang gter* master, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337-1408), propounded in Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *Sangs rgyas kyi bstan rtsis ngo mtshar nor bu'i phreng ba*. The entry in the *bstan rtsis* can be forced to mean that rGod ldem can was dByil ston's reincarnation,⁴⁶ but its literal formulation reads in the opposite way, that Khyung rgod rtsal was the rebirth of rGod ldem can (see above n.13). One can hypothesise an inclusion of them both in the same *skyes rabs*, a lineage which defies biology and time-related bonds in favour of affinity based on common existential and religious traits, since rGod ldem can is considered to be the rebirth of dByil ston who lived about one century earlier. Even the postponement of the Bon po master's existence by a full *rab byung* (b.1225) does not get him close enough to the *Byang gter* master. The peculiarity of the *skyes rabs* genre can go to the extent of inverting the sequence of births.

Buddhist texts rediscovered by dByil ston are reputed to have reached Guru Chos dbang (see n.44). The new dates of dByil ston's life show that the *gter ma-s* which ended in the hands of Guru Chos dbang could not have been those unearthed by him as late as earth monkey 1308 in view of the great rNying ma master's death, given in the literature in a few different but consecutive years—1269, 1270, 1271, 1272 and also 1273. Hence the date of dByil ston's bestowal of his *gter ma-s* to Guru Chos dbang remains perforce insubstantial given the wavering of the chronology of the rNying ma master's demise. Since he unearthed Buddhist texts, a prudential term for the transfer of literary treasures from dByil ston to Guru Chos dbang is that the hand-over occurred on one of two more realistic occasions.

The *terminus post quem* for this textual transfer is the 1260 rediscovery at rGyang lha khang otherwise upon the 1270 unearthing at Bo dong Bya rgod gshongs. The 1272 "invitation" at Mang mkhar lCags 'phrang is improbable since most sources consider that Gu ru

⁴⁶ The sentence in Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *bstan rtsis* could be improperly read as: "dByil ston dpon gsas Khyung rgod, whose incarnation was known as rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem, was born in the wood sheep year." For the Tibetan text of this passage see above n.13). I do not go for this interpretation which does not respect the formulation of the entry in the chronological table.

Chos dbang died in iron horse in iron horse 1270.

The outcome of dByil ston's achievements is a polyhedric contribution to Tibetan teachings and literature. The biography of Khyung rgod rtsal (p. 272,5-p. 273,4) classifies dByil ston's *gter ma* rediscoveries on the basis of the contributions that those works gave to a wide spectrum of people, followers of different religions and experts of various disciplines, styled as the outcome of his personal graciousness:⁴⁷

- He benefitted the Bon po meditators, since he unearthed cycles such as *rDzogs chen snying gi skor*, *INga sgom gyi skor* and many *gdams pa*-s. He brought to light *dBang bkur byin rlabs* and its *lung* by Tshe dbang rig 'dzin. He had the vision of [his] *yi dam lha* and of his lineage that went back to Kun tu bzang po and it continued without interruption since he had many disciples. The main ones were rDod kyi Yang ngal drang srong, lHo stod slob dpon mGon ne, sTag lung sGom lHa rje and gNyag bseb ston pa Kun dga' phan (ibid. p. 272,1).
- He was useful to Buddhists, for he rediscovered *Thugs rje chen po phyi nang gsang gsum*, slob dpon Pad ma 'byung gnas's *Phyi nang gsang ba'i sgrub pa'i sde*, *Pad 'byung gyi* (i.e. Pad ma 'byung gnas) *zhal gdams gyi sde* and many other works.⁴⁸
- He gave support to the physicians of Tibet since he "invited" *Drang srong bcos* and *Rims nad 'joms pa'i sgron ma*.
- He unearthed great scriptures such as *lTa ba g.yung drung klong yangs* and *Dri med shel skor*, thus being kind to those who focused on *bShad rGyud* (the second part of *rGyud bzhi*);
- He cared for humans (lit. "bipeds") since he found *Thod*

⁴⁷ *Ti se'i dkar chag* adds another text dByil ston mastered: "At the gatherings of various classes of indestructible (*zag med*) *rig 'dzin*-s and *mkha' 'gro ma*-s he revealed his method of practising the propitiation, meditation and actualisation of *sPyi spungs bsGrags pa skor gsum*."

⁴⁸ In her "mKhyen brtce'i dbang po: La biographie de Padmasambhava selon la tradition bsGrags pa Bon, et ses sources," Anne-Marie Blondeau has a summary of the Buddhist texts rediscovered by dByil ston on *dPon gas kyi rnam thar*. They are *rTa mgrin sgrub skor*, *rGyal po g.yug them che chung*; *gSo spyad bdud rtsi bum pa che chung*; *gZa' bcos* and *Chung spyang* written by Padma 'byung gnas along with *dByug them che chung* and *Men lhag gi shog ser* associated with the tradition of Guru Chos dbang since he received several of those *gter ma*-s, and *Bai ro tsa na'i lung bstan*. She mentions major Bon po works dByil ston rediscovered that sum up to *Tshe dbang Zhang chung ma* and *lDe mig 'bring po*, and *Tshe dbang rGya gar ma* (on all this see ibid. p. 123-124 and p. 132 and, in general, please consult her "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrags-pa Bon-lugs" p. 123-143).

srungs and *Klu gdon srung ba*.

- He gave insight on the future to sentient beings in general owing to his discovery of the *lung bstan-s* prophesied by bla chen Dran pa nam mkha', slob dpon Padma 'byung gnas and Pa kor (sic) Be ro tsa na.

Khyung rgod rtsal had his initiation to *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* in Glo bo (see below), which he brought to completion at Gangs Ti se. The power that Khyung rgod rtsal obtained was by means a sort of *rjes gnang* that made him able of pursuing *gter ma* rediscoveries. The event forged dByil ston's *karma* from an interlocutory phase in his existence to a life-long capacity to open *gter kha-s*. Hence, his life was a continuum which led him to go from episodes in uncommon human conditions, told in the lively prose of his *rnam thar*—a rare biographical specimen of Tibetan literature—to a status of extraordinary mastery that went on for the following decades. From individual experiences in 'das log style to everlasting contributions to the Bon po treasure finding school—the tradition deservedly recognises him as a master of *Byang gter*—along with Buddhist and secular material, the text he rediscovered were in the footsteps of the work of his rMa master predecessors.

In terms of where he stands in the traditions of the highlands, the various *gTer ston brgya rtsa* texts documenting the Noble Religion *gter ma-s* neglect his Buddhist rediscoveries. Whether his finding of literary treasures in the realm of secularism was the outcome of textual archaeology or personal authorship forsaken—a sterile question in absence of validating evidence—the *lung bstan-s* he unearthed are significant *per se*, especially for the Yuan-Sa skya pa period. Nonetheless, dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal has received little space in the literature of any kind.

An additional note on dByil ston

Although not an official transmission holder of the Oral Transmission of Zhang zhung despite the teachings he received at the sacred mountain, *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i ram thar* documents dByil ston's connexion with an exponent of the *lho rgyud* ("southern transmission") of this class of teachings.

This master was Klu brag pa bKra shis rgyal mtshan, the younger son of the great Yang ston Shes rab rgyal mtshan, the establisher of the Oral Transmission's *lho rgyud* lineage. Klu brag pa's most famous feat was his well-known foundation of the homonymous cave monastery at the southern edge of Glo smad. Ahead of its establishment, he decided to abandon the status of householder after his wife died.

Klu brag pa went to sTag gzig where he spent three years. He then proceeded to g.Yas ru dBen sa kha, age thirty-one. Here he received a monastic education which he combined with *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*.

The modern author dPal ldan Tshul khirms says that he died when he was eighty-five old (*bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 391,12). D. Jackson has reckoned his dates to be 1131-1215.⁴⁹

Klu brag pa's historical placement in the Bon po literature is not unanimous. In the section dedicated to the *lho rgyud*, *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* (p. 88,2-3) says that the existence of Klu brag pa was prophesied by Khyung rgod rtsal. Centuries afterwards, dPal ldan tshul khirms states that Klu brag pa had Khyung rgod rtsal among his disciples (*bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 391,11-12).

I do not favour the assessment in *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* that Klu brag pa's life was preceded by that of dByil ston even if the wrong notion of Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's birth date of dByil ston is unnecessarily considered, given the dealings that Klu brag pa's father, Yang ston Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1077-1140), entertained with Ba ri lo tsa ba Rin chen grags (1040-1112).⁵⁰ This disproves that Khyung rgod rtsal lived before Klu brag pa. Klu brag pa's life cannot be postdated one sexagenary cycle to match my placement of dByil ston, or else he would have lived much longer than eighty-five years. Khyung rgod rtsal thus was a later exponent of a tradition to which Klu brag pa belonged. Even dPal ldan tshul khirms's notion of a direct teacher-disciple relation between the two is a statement without historical foundations.

dByil ston's life has remained misinterpreted since his *rnam thar* has not been given due consideration in *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar*, Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *bstan rtsis* and dPal ldan tshul khirms's *bstan 'byung*.

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⁴⁹ Jackson David, "Notes on the History of *Se-rib*, and nearby Places in the Upper Kali Gandaki Valley," p. 204-206.

⁵⁰ For Ba ri Lo tsā ba's date of death being 1112 and not 1111 see Vitali, "The transmission of *bsnyung gnas* in India, the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet (10th-12th centuries)."

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