Inner Asian Clans in Early Tibet and their Place in the Nyingmapa and Bon traditions[1]

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It is well known that both secular and religious history in the days of the Tibetan Empire and the period immediately following were shaped by the competition between not only religious ideologies and approaches but also the social and political conflicts between important Imperial clans. While there has been some scholarly inquiry into the histories and interests of certain prominent clans, there is still much to be understood on the subject. The present contribution introduces the importance to early Tibetan history of clans that had ancestral roots in an area of Inner Asia that extended from Bactria and Sogdiana across the Tarim Basin to the Dunhuang area.

Looking at the question of the historical and cultural relationship between early Tibet and Inner Asia, it is easy to form the impression that this was a topic of more interest to previous generations of Tibetologists than to the present one.[2] Certainly, one reason for this is the current emphasis put on the Dunhuang materials, owing to their incomparable value in re-examining what were previously considered settled questions. Another reason, however, is that the study of Tibetan religious history still tends to be dominated, at least in the Anglosphere, by the notion of an "Indo-Tibetan Buddhism", which sees religion in Tibet as essentially a matter of Indian Buddhism superimposed on earlier local Tibetan beliefs and practices, and does not concern itself with things outside that framework.

During the Imperial period of Tibetan history, however, Tibet was far more involved with its northern and eastern neighbors than with

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1 This article is extracted and condensed from chapters of the forthcoming book *Inner Asia and the Nyingmapa Tradition of Tibet*: *The Case of Shri Singha*, by the present writer. Many of the themes touched on in this article are dealt with at greater length in the book.

2 See, for example Tucci (1974, 1980, pp. 172, 195, 214, etc.), Hoffmann (1970, pp. 25-28). Also to be noted are the numerous articles of Siebert Hummell, who explored possible cultural connections between Tibet and not only Iran, but also the Near East and Inner Asian steppe culture. Kvaerne (1998) composed a bibliography of his works, and while some can no longer stand up to scrutiny, others are still pertinent.

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India. Tibetan emperors at various times controlled areas as far west as northern Afghanistan, as far north as modern Kucha, Karashahr and Turfan (Gaochang), and as far east as northern China, and all these areas left imprints on the nascent Tibetan culture. A remarkable example of this is a Tibetan document found at Dunhuang, the so-called *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (P.T. 1287), which has been demonstrated to preserve not only elements of the *Rāmayana*, but also the ancient Chinese *Shi ji* (Takeuchi, 1985), and the myth of Osiris (Hummell 1974, 1975);[3] recently, Bialek (2019) has pointed out themes and phraseology in the same document that closely resemble Avestan literature on Mithra. There is even some evidence of Inner Asian civilization within the Tibetan sphere in terms of material culture, perhaps the most striking example being a beautiful golden ewer designed specifically for the Tibetan imperial court that has been artistically categorized as a creation of "post-Sasanian Western Central Asia".[4] Nevertheless, an examination of historical sources shows that Inner Asian peoples left more than literary and artistic traces on Tibet; some peoples and clans of Inner Asian origin can be seen to have played major roles in early Tibetan history and religion.[5]

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3 Images of Serapis, the Greek interpretation of the Egyptian Osiris, have been found on Kushan coinage (Rhie, 2007, p. 66) and near Khotan (Rhie, op. cit., pp. 265-66).

4 See the illustration in Pritzker, 2017. On page 108, the author opines that the ewer in question is "emblematic of the unique period in Tibet's history before the dominance of Buddhism, when the rise of the imperial royal court coincided with the twilight and artistic brilliance of Late Antiquity."

5 The question of clans in early Tibet is one that has been insufficiently studied, as Davidson (2005) has noted. Several early studies (e.g. Haarh, 1969) dealt with the mythical and historical roots of Tibet's putatively ancient clans, but few systematic treatments of the institution during Imperial times have been attempted since Richardson's pioneering contribution (1977), although discussions of eminent clans connected with Bon are perhaps the exceptions (cf. Blezer, 2016, and Karmay, 2014, pp. 47-56; Davidson, 2005, p. 389 n. 73, also cites Lhagyal in this respect). The problems are many: clan histories themselves cannot be taken at face value, often being composed in order to exalt the origins or reinforce the territorial or other claims of a given family. Further, clans may not necessarily be limited to descent groups, since adoption into a clan appears to have been common, as in the Tibetan institution of *makpa* marriage, in which a male becomes a part of his wife's family. Even entire outlying descent groups may come to be included in a clan, as among the Scottish Highlanders and the Pashtuns of Afghanistan. Nor is association with a certain locale straightforward, as Davidson notes; clans may have been moved by imperial decree, have shifted of their own accord, or, due to the vicissitudes of history, be located in more than one place simultaneously. Most importantly, it cannot be assumed that all Tibetans were concerned with clan; as in much of Europe, family names seem to have been the exception rather than the rule among common people until fairly recently (although biographies of eminent religious teachers very often include information on their ancestral clans). Still, Davidson's table (*op.cit*. p. 81) of noted clans and their seats in Tibet, based on the 16th-century

The earliest recorded example of an Inner Asian clan that had profound effects on Tibetan history comes with the Gars (*mgar*). The name Gar itself derives from the Tokharians, evidently referring in this case to that branch of the people that fled south (towards what is now the area of Gansu) rather than west after their downfall at the hands of the Xiongnu on the Mongolian steppe six centuries earlier.[6] The Gars supplied several famous generals and ministers to the early Tibetan court, and the clan grew in power until they were quashed as potential usurpers to the throne by the emperor Tri Düsong (r. 677-704). The Lang (*rlangs*) were another prominent clan in early Tibetan history, whose importance continued well after the fall of the empire. According to Yamaguchi (1992, p. 64), they were an offshoot of the Sumpa, called Xianbi by the Chinese, a proto-Mongolian people who succeeded the Xiongnu on the steppes.[7] At the other end of the Tibetan plateau, the Dru (*'bru*) clan had roots in the lands of Gilgit and Hunza (Tibetan *'bru sha*) in the Western Himalayas (Martin 1994, p. 5 n. 13), presently part of far northern Pakistan. Tibetan military and political involvement there began in 663 (Beckwith, 1987a, p. 30). The Dru clan were for many centuries one of the most prominent upholders of Bon traditions, but the entire clan was forcibly converted to the Gelukpa school in the nineteenth century (Karmay, 2014, pp. 48-52).

The farthest western marches of the Tibetan Empire also contributed to the aristocracy of early Tibet. In his autobiography, the 18th-century Nyingmapa Buddhist teacher Jigme Lingpa claimed to be part of the Tibetan clan of Nup (*gnubs* or *snubs*),[8] which according to him was in turn descended from the "ancient Dotribteng house of

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Kepe Gatön is very useful, as is Vitali's (2004a) attempt to analyze the history of one clan, the Gya. Now see also Martin (2022, pp. 509-518) for the scholar Deyu's description of clan territories.

6 Richardson, 1977; see also Bailey (1982, pp. 94-95). The Tokharians, known to the Chinese as Yuezhi (although there has been some controversy about the overlap of the two names) fragmented after their defeat by the Xiongnu; the westernmost branch of the people gave their name to Tokharistan, the area of Bactria to which they migrated, and that area and its people were known to the Tibetans by the name Togar (usually spelled *tho gar*). The present writer has occasionally seen the clan name Togar among modern Tibetans, but I have not been able to investigate whether the people who bear the name regard it as coming from outside Tibet or not.

7 In addition, according to Roerich. (1979. p. 110) Tibetan religious histories also often refer to the Li clan, probably indicating an ancestry in Khotan (*li yul*). Khotan's considerable contributions to early Tibet are discussed in my forthcoming book.

8 The clan name here may be based on its geographical seat, Nup being the location where Tri Detsugtsen's royal council met in the winter of 715 (Ryavec, 2015, map 14, pp. 56-57). See also Davidson (2005, p. 80).

Tazig" (Gyatso, 1998, p. 128). According to Smith (2018, p. 4, n. 13), the eminent Tibetan Che (*lce*) clan also claimed ancestry in Tazig. Quibbling over the exact referent of the geographical term "Tazig" during different eras continues among Tibetan specialists, but all recognize that it refers to a cultural area to the west of Tibet, and it has sometimes been taken to refer in a general sense to the Iranic-speaking realms east of the Iranian plateau, although it may also may also pertain more specifically to the lands of the upper Oxus and Indus rivers.[9] Whatever the case, the area in general had been a cultural crossroads for many centuries before the Arab incursions, since at least the time of the Kushans, and its biggest city, Balkh, was one of the largest and most prosperous centers of civilization in the entire world of antiquity. More will be said of the Nup and Che clans below, but it is nonetheless significant that the former seems to have preserved a memory of an eastern Iranian heritage for a thousand years.

There is another Inner Asian people, however, whose contributions to early Tibetan culture have been even less noticed than those of the Bactrians: the Sogdians. These people, who spoke an Iranian language now extinct, and whose home territory was between the Oxus and Jaxartes (now Amu Darya and Syr Darya) rivers in west Central Asia, built up, starting in the fourth or fifth century, trade networks that reached from the Iranian plateau to Manchuria and Siberia. Faxian even speaks of seeing Sogdian merchant chiefs in Sri Lanka (Hansen, 2012, p. 160).[10] Sogdian colonies were founded all along these routes, and many Sogdians became permanent resident aliens in the Chinese Empire. The Sogdians were the primary bearers of not only trade goods but also Iranian, Turkic, Greco-Roman, Indic and Chinese cultures back and forth across Inner Asia throughout the seventh to ninth centuries. For a time during the Tang dynasty, upper-class Chinese admired and imitated many facets of Sogdian civilization, and popular culture in China still retains elements of this interaction.[11]

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[9] The name itself, however, refers to the Arabs, via the Middle Persian *t'cyk*, pronounced Tāzīk, Tāčīk, or Tāžīg (Beckwith, 2006, p. 170). That it was adopted in reference to areas that were Iranic in language and culture is undoubtedly because Tibet first became aware of these areas at the time of the Arab incursions, when the Tibetan, Turkic, Arab, and Chinese empires were in fierce competition there. Beckwith (1987a) is still the most detailed treatment of these maneuverings based on primary sources.

[10] The Chinese word that Faxian uses is *sabao*, which Beal translated as "Sabeans", but is actually derived from the Sogdian *sarvapao*, a title also given to Sogdian community leaders in China. That word in turn is based on the Indic *sārthavāha* "caravan leader" (d. l. Vassière, 2005, p. 151).

[11] Astrology was one major area of influence; according to d. l. Vassière (p. 140 n.89), "The Sogdian names of the days of the week have been preserved into modern

Most of the other cultures that the Sogdians were in contact with have similarly shown at least some trace of their shared history.

It is certain that that the Tibetans and Sogdians were familiar with each other; the latter were known to the former as *sog po* or *sog dag* in early sources.[12] Tibetan historical and geographical works written both during and after the imperial period long ago proved that the Tibetans were well aware of the Sogdians geographically and militarily (Beckwith, 1987a; Martin, 1994).[13]

It is true that a few cultural connections were already remarked on long ago. Kvaerne (1987, p. 164, citing Stein and Demiéville) says that the lore of the lion came to both Tibet and China from Iran through the Sogdians. The snow lion is a national symbol of Tibet, although lions as we know them probably never existed there,[14] just as the first attested performance of the Lion Dance, now thought of as quintessentially Chinese, was probably by Sogdians in the border regions of China. In a groundbreaking article Beckwith (1979; but now see also Martin 2016) pointed out the connection between Iranians (probably Sogdians) and the introduction of the Greek school of medicine into Tibet, via China, and there is evidence that "Sogdian medicine" continued to be practiced in Tibet into at least the eleventh century (Roerich, 1979, pp. 874-875). Sogdian specialists for their part have noted people who are most likely Tibetan appearing together with Turks, Chinese, and Koreans in the Hall of the Ambassadors mural in Afrosiab, near Samarkand (Ashurov, 2013, p. 51); and attested the presence of temples dedicated to the traditional Sogdian religion in Chengdu (de la Vassière, 2005, p. 145) and Dunhuang (Grenet and Zhang, 1996, p. 175), both of which locales fell under the cultural penumbra of the Tibetan Empire.[15]

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times on Chinese almanacs." Rong (2001, p. 148) says of the Sogdians that "Their commercial expertise, fighting skills, devotion to Zoroastrianism, and dancing and musical talents were to make a deep impression on China's political process, religious complexion, and musical diversity." Aoki (2015, p. 149) says that in the tenth century, "the gods of Sogdian Zoroastrianism were assimilated into the pantheon of Chinese folk beliefs."

12 *Sogpo* later came to refer to the Mongols, but this is simply because the first place the Tibetans encountered the Mongols was in the lands previously settled by the Sogdians on Tibet's northeastern frontier.

13 According to Beckwith (1987a, p. 56) an important Tibetan general was taken prisoner by the Sogdians during the course of one of Tibet's campaigns on its western borders. Beckwith also notes (*op. cit*. pp. 108-110) the presence of Tibetan troops in Sogdiana itself at two junctures in the early eighth century, fighting in alliance with the Türgesh armies and Sogdian rebels against the Arabs.

14 But also see Martin (2023, p. 515, n.1876).

15 The native Sogdian religion has been considered as a variation of Zoroastrianism, but it also incorporated features quite alien to the form found on the Iranian

As far as Sogdian material culture in the Tibetan sphere, probably the most well-known example is a beautiful sculpted silver drinking vessel, now kept in Lhasa, illustrating a Sogdian dance.[16] However, in a very important article, Heller (2013) has analyzed the artwork on coffin panels from the Dulan area of the Tso Ngön (Kökönör) region of the modern Chinghai province.[17] She notes that these panels include motifs similar to those in the murals of Panjikent in Sogdiana as well as in Sogdian burials in China; they include feast scenes, hunting scenes, and a camel caravan. Religious themes depicted include sacrifice, both animal and human, and facial laceration in a funeral context, which was a Turkic custom also practiced by some Sogdians, but was at odds with the Zoroastrianism of Persia. At the other end of the Tibetan plateau, Sogdian graffiti have been found on cliffs near Trangtse, Ladakh; they seem to have been written by an embassy on its way to Central Tibet.[18]

This archaeological evidence of Sogdian culture comes from the Tibetan border areas, but there are indications that there were populations of Sogdian provenance that gained some political prominence at the center of Tibetan civilization, just as they did in China at the same time. One Sogdian clan of importance came to Tibet from Nanam (*sna nam*), a name that Richardson believed to be related to Samarkand.[19] This clan provided not only a queen and a minister named Trompa Kye to the Tibetan emperor Tri Detsugtsen (r. 712-755),[20] but another minister named Gyaltsen Lhanang to his successor Tri Songdetsen (r. 755- 797?). The competition found between the emissaries of Nanam and China found in some Tibetan historical sources (Sørenson, 1994, p. 360), as well as the fact that the Nanam

plateau. Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Christianity also had considerable support among the Sogdians, but evidently more in the Sogdian colonies rather than in Sogdiana itself. See Gibson (forthcoming).

16 On the famous Sogdian "whirling dances", one performed by males and the other by females, see Schafer (1963, pp. 55-56), Durkan-Meisterernst, (2004, p. 21), and Zhang (2009, p. 44, fig 22). There is an excellent illustration of this vessel in Heller (2013, pp. 167-68).

17 Dulan lay on an alternate, southern route from the Tarim Basin to China, which was probably resorted to when the usual route through the Gansu corridor became unstable. (Ryavec, 2015, Map 11, p. 45)

18 Uray, 1981; de la Vassière, 2005, pp. 309-310. These, however, are rather late (ninth century).

19 Richardson (1977) citing Das, whose dictionary in turn (2000, p. 765) cites the *Blue Annals* (*Debther sngonpo*) and the *Baidūrya Yasel*; see also Sørenson (1994, p. 365 n. 1183). However, Richardson's association of Nanam (and Samarkand) with people "of Yueh chih [i.e.Tokharian -- TG] stock" is clearly incorrect.

20 The Western Turks and Tibetans were sometime allies during Tri Detsugtsen's reign.

queen was referred to in Old Tibetan sources by the Turkic title *qatun* (the Turks were the suzerains of Samarkand at the time, and there came to be a considerable Turco-Sogdian community) establish beyond doubt that Nanam was a place outside of Tibet, and it would be difficult to assert that the Nanam clan in Tibet was not connected to it.[21] There were also at least two luminaries of early Tibetan Buddhism from the Nanam clan, as well as a few associated with Bon; these figures will be discussed below.

The link between the Nanam clan and Samarkand could provide a valuable clue to the hitherto-unsolved mystery of the succession crisis in Tibet that took place in 755. As Beckwith (2009, pp.144, 412 n. 73) has noted, the revolt was surely connected to the murder of Tri Detsugtsen and the accession of his successor. That there was some concern over his son Tri Songdetsen's maternal ancestry is clear. In spite of the fact that the oldest and most reliable records clearly identify him as the son of the Nanam queen (who, however, died within a year of his birth), sources such as the *Testament of Wä* have him asserting (at the age of five years) that his actual lineage was through his father's Chinese consort (actually also deceased before the events in the traditional story) rather than through the Qatun (see Beckwith, 1983, p. 8; Kapstein, 2000, pp. 28-30; Wangdu and Diemberger. 2000, p. 34). It is quite likely that, whoever committed the murder, the Chinese sympathizers at court attempted to claim the heir to the throne as rightfully theirs in order to further Chinese interests in Tibet. The "revolt" may have begun as an attempt to ensure recognition that the heir was actually the son of the Qatun, and it is possible that the struggle was part of the larger conflict between Sogdians and Chinese happening at the time, and an attempt by the former (since their own homeland had just been finally and definitively lost to the Arabs) to establish themselves in a place that was free of Chinese domination -- a struggle which manifested in China itself with the sanguinary Rokshan (Ch. An Lu Shan) rebellion that began in the same year.[22]

It has been suggested (Richardson, 1977, pp. 20 ff.) that the Tibetan clan name Ngan (*ngan*) is no other than the Sogdian name that is usually rendered An in Chinese, which indicated ancestry in Bukhara,

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[21] Although the clan later was associated with the Tolung valley area, according to Deyu (Martin, 2022, p. 517) they belonged to the left horn of the early empire.

[22] Alternatively, the violent reaction against the Sogdians in China after the Rokshan Rebellion was quelled may be a reason that the *Testament of Wä* and many sources relying on it were at such pains to establish the Chinese consort as Tri Songdetsen's mother. The *Wä* were a Chinese-oriented clan (Kapstein, 2000, pp. 34-35), and it has even been proposed that they were ethnically Chinese themselves.

and was made famous (or notorious) by Rokshan.[23] While this suggestion has not been conclusively demonstrated,[24] information on the clan and in particular its most famous member in imperial Tibet, Tagdra Lugong, is worth including here. It is noteworthy that two of the ministers mentioned above, Ngan (sometimes Nganlam) Tagdra Lugong and Nanam Trompa Kye, were remembered in many (much later) sources of the Buddhist tradition as enemies of Buddhism, yet Tagdra, at least, is also recorded in early sources as a loyal supporter of Tri Songdetsen during the succession conflict, and a contributor to the construction of Samye, the most important Buddhist temple in early Tibet.[25]

The present writer has elsewhere explored the significant influence that the Sogdian Buddhist master Amoghavajra seems to have had on the Buddhism that reached Imperial and post-Imperial Tibet from the north.[26] While he is not among those early Buddhists that the Nyingmapa school honors as its ancestors, other prominent figures with Inner Asian connections can be detected. If we accept that the Nanam clan of that time did have roots in Sogdiana, and that the Nub clan was indeed of Irano-Bactrian ancestry, then the list expands rapidly. Among the 25 disciples traditionally reckoned as the foremost students of Padmasambhava of Urgyan,[27] we find Nanam Dorje

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[23] Hoffmann (1971, pp. 446-447) objected to this conclusion on the grounds that there was a Nganlam region in Tibet, and Wangdu and Diemberger (2000, p. 61 n. 194) also note the clan's association with the Phenyul region northeast of Lhasa. They describe the Nganlam as being one of the oldest clans, one of the original *ma sang* clans of ancient Tibet, but whether this is a historical or legendary attribution is not clear; according to Richardson, they do not appear in the historical record before the eighth century. In any case, the examples of the Nub and Nanam clans show that groups of foreign extraction could also have hereditary seats in Tibet.

[24] A recent source translated from the Chinese, and cited in de la Vassière (2005, p. 338) is titled *Ngan Louchan che tsi* (*Histoire de Ngan Louchan*), so it appears that an old or local Chinese pronunciation matched the Tibetan, providing some further support for the hypothesis.

[25] It is worth remembering that until the reign of Tri Songdetsen, there was evidently no attempt to distinguish between Buddhism and the other religious traditions of the Tibetan plateau on an official level, and it is likely that the emperor's doing so was a contributing factor to Bon later becoming a catch-all term among Buddhists for any ritual or other practice not found in Indian or Chinese Buddhism. Tagdra Lugong may well have been a Sogdian who supported the Qatun's son during his youth, but continued on with the practices of his earlier religion until it was banned. On the diversity of traditions that later came to be subsumed under "Bon", see Blezer (2016, esp. p. 246). On the black stupa built at Samye, see Karmay (2001, pp. 101, 267).

[26] Gibson (forthcoming).

[27] This list is a post-Imperial creation, and shows minor inconsistencies throughout the various traditional accounts within the Nyingmapa, and some of the

Dudjom, Nanam Yeshe De, Nup Namkhai Nyingpo, and Nupchen (the "great Nup") Sangye Yeshe; in addition there was a Sogpo Lhapel, who, as a blacksmith, may not have belonged to an illustrious clan, but whose name nevertheless indicates his Sogdian ethnicity. Another disciple, Lang Pelgi Senge, would have been of Xienbi descent. If Richardson's proposal is correct, Nganlam Gyalwa Chokyang could be added to the list of Sogdian descendants, and even, centuries later, the great Nyingmapa luminary Longchen Rabjam, usually known as Longchenpa (1308-1363).[28]

Some small support for this conjecture can be found in an unexpected place. The present writer has in his possession a scroll painting (*thangka*) which includes Padmasambhava's 25 disciples. Of those for whom Inner Asian roots are proposed, all but one of those who are portrayed as lay disciples are depicted as having facial hair, which might be expected in people of ethnic Iranian ancestry; the sole exception is Nanam Dorje Dudjom.[29] That these portraits are not arbitrary is shown by the fact that certain conventions of posture and accoutrements are observable in most such renderings. This further might be taken to imply that the pictorial tradition of the 25 disciples goes back to a time when memory of their individual characteristics had not yet faded.

Two of these disciples were particularly prominent: Nanam Yeshe De and Nub Sangye Yeshe. The former is regarded as one of the foremost translators of the early period,[30] and his name appears in the colophons of a great number of texts specific to the Nyingmapa school as well as more general Mahayana works; perhaps most importantly for Tibet, he was a co-translator of the *Avataṃsaka* sutra.[31] Given their

individuals listed appear to be historically unlikely. Nevertheless, the lists represent a cultural memory if not strict historical fact. English-language sources on this matter that may be referred to are Thondup (1996, pp. 96-108; and 1986, pp. 231-234); Thondup also provides numerous Tibetan references for future research on the subject.

28 The Eighth Sungtrul Rinpoche of Padma Lingpa, cited in Harding (2003, p. 33), claims that Longchenpa was from the Nganlam clan, and was a descendent of Gyalwa Chokyang. Thondup, on the other hand (1996, p. 109) claims he was from the Rok clan. Thondup cites (1996, p. 369 n. 129) several authors as contributing to his biography.

29 Those disciples who are depicted as monks, of course, have no hair at all, either on head or face.

30 See Karmay (2007, p. 30); the others were Kawa Paltsek, Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen, and Berotsana. The first two of these may have been from pre-Imperial Tibetan clans; on the possible Inner Asian connections of the latter, see Gibson (forthcoming).

31 See Hamar, 2007b, pp. 165-168. He is also said to have helped translate the *Lotus Sutra* into Tibetan, and, according to Overby (2016, p. 262) the mantra text *Mahāmāyūrī* as well. All these texts were evidently far more popular in Inner Asia

history in this regard in other countries, it is hardly surprising to find a Sogdian acting as a major translator in Tibet.

Nupchen Sangye Yeshe is best known to Western scholarship as the author of the *Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation* (*Bsam gtan mig sgron*) a work that compares various approaches to the Mahayana path, ranking Atiyoga (another name by which the teachings of the Great Perfection (Dzogchen, *rdzogs chen*) are sometimes known) as the most profound, followed in descending order by the Vajrayana, the teachings of the Chinese Chan school, and the sūtric teachings.[32] It is now commonly believed, however, that Nupchen wrote in the 10th century, which means that he either would have been improbably long-lived, or that he was not actually Padmasambhava's direct disciple. Nevertheless, his influence was strongly felt, as evidenced by the tales of magical power attributed to him, and the numerous Nyingmapa figures who claimed descent from him either lineally or through rebirth. It also might be mentioned that one of Nupchen's own teachers, Pelgi Yeshe, was a Sogdian, and supposedly a grand-disciple of Padmasambhava. (Karmay, 2007, p. 125 n. 23; Roerich, 1979, pp. 108, 170); he also sometimes appears on lists of the 25.

The Che clan was mentioned above as having roots in Tokharistan.[33] One member of the clan, named Tsenkye, is said to have brought the premier Nyingmapa tantra of the Anuyoga class, the *Gathered Intent* (*Dgongs pa 'dus pa*) from the far western Himalayas, and (possibly with the aid of Nupchen) translated it from the Brusha language (Germano, 2002, p. 254). Another of the clan, Chetsun Senge Wangchuk, is closely associated with a group of texts that are the root of the Instruction Division (*man ngag sde*) of the scriptures of the Nyingmapa's Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) school, the so called Seventeen Tantras. These were supposedly brought to Tibet during the reign of Tri Songdetsen, and hidden away by Nyang Tingdzin Zangpo, to be rediscovered in the eleventh century by one Dangma Lhungyal, and then propagated by Chetsun.[34] It should be remarked in passing that one of the most important of the tantras in this collection, the *Tantra of Self-arising Awareness* (*Rig pa rang shar*) was supposedly translated from several languages (Smith 2018, p. 520), and it contains

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and China than in India, and would have been well known among Sogdian Buddhists.

32 Since Guenther (1983) and Karmay (1988) brought this work to the attention of foreign scholarship, there has been considerable comment on it. See especially Meinart (2002) and van Schaik, (2012).

33 On the political and religious role of the Che clan in post-Imperial Tibet, see Davidson (2005, pp. 228- 230).

34 Gyatso (1998, p. 301 n. 69) believes that Senge Wangchuk "had an important role in the codification if not composition" of the Seventeen Tantras.

much terminology that is not congruous with a Sanskrit back-translation (Davidson, 2005, pp. 240-241). It also shows an unquestionable familiarity with Manichaean mythology.[35]

It should not be thought, however, that Inner Asian ancestry can only be detected in these brilliant early exemplars of early Tibetan Buddhism. According to the *Blue Annals* (Roerich, 1979, p. 110), the Nyingmapa master Zur Sherab Jungne (1002-1062) studied a commentary on the *Secret Matrix* (*Guhyagarbha*) tantra with a Tokharian teacher, Namkha De, who also taught him the important Dzogchen text the *All-Creating Sovereign* (*Kun byed rgyal po*). Another member of the Nup clan, descended from Nupchen, was one of the celebrated Milarepa's early teachers.[36] In addition, the mother of the treasure discoverer Aro Yeshe Jungne was also identified as Sogdian in his biography.[37]

One crucial role that a Sogdian played in the reestablishment of Buddhism after the Empire fragmented has been scarcely noted: this was during the reintroduction of the Lower Tradition of the Vinaya (*smad 'dul*) into Central Tibet from the Amdo region. The event was spearheaded by the famous Lachen Gongpa Rabsel, but, according to the Bon tradition (Karmay, 2001, pp. 105-108), one of the three who ordained him, named Tribar Tsultrim, was before his own ordination a Sogdian refugee from China who had taken a job as a horse herder in Amdo, where he had earlier been known as "the Sogdian with a monkey-skin robe".[38] Whatever the facts behind this tradition, it is known that among Lachen's spiritual descendants, there was a group known as the "Six Sogmo" (male in spite of the epithet). That these were not all strictly Sogdian descendants, however, seems to be indicated by the fact that both the Nup and the Che clans are represented among the names given in the traditional lists (Stoddard,

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35 Manichaeism was widespread in Tokharistan before the Arab invasion; on this matter, see my forthcoming book. Since Manichaeism was probably extinct as an independent religion in the lands of Islam by the eleventh century, however, this raises interesting questions about how the mythology came to be preserved in the *Rigpa Rangshar*.

36 His name is uncertain, as the various traditions seem to contradict one another. On this, see Martin (1982, pp 52-57).

37 Her name was Sogmo Paldrön (Østensen, 2018, p.11).

38 There are varied and contradictory versions of the story; see Stoddard (2004, pp. 63-71) and Davidson (2005, pp. 88-89). Stoddard (together with most scholars since) does not mention the Bonpo connections to this story, but Davidson does allude to them. Stoddard showed that the location of these ordinations was in a hermitage near Dentig, which is west of Lanzhou on the Yellow River (Ryavec, 2015, Map 15, p. 61), and not in present-day Khams, as many Tibetan histories suggest.

2004, pp. 68-73). Perhaps by this time, *sog* had become a more generic term for Inner Asians, as the word *hu* was in China.

One final personage deserves mention: Zhang Yudrakpa Sonam Drakpa, who was a politically powerful and ruthless (but evidently spiritually accomplished) lama during the start of the so-called "Second Spread" of Buddhism.[39] He was also a member of the Nanam clan, although according to Martin (2001, p. 45) he did not use his clan name until the end of his working life. Although better known for his works in the New Translation context, he came from a Nyingmapa background.

In sum, then, many of the important clans of Imperial Tibet had their origins in the area reaching from the Iranian borderlands (Tazig), through Bactria, Sogdiana, and Khotan, to the eastern Tokharians and the Xianbe. This in itself should not be a surprise; Stoddard (2004, p. 53) has already noted the "multicultural, multilingual ethos" which developed in Tibet during the late Empire, and continued for some time after. Still, awareness of the cultural antecedents of some clans might be useful not only in contextualizing some aspects of Tibetan history (such as the revolt of 755 mentioned above), but also in tracing religious currents in early Tibet.

Including considerations of clan might aid in reconstructions of Tibetan religious history in another way: by exploring the relationships of clans to particular bodies of literature. Guenther has suggested (though without going into the matter in much depth), that using the translator information in colophons might be useful in discovering whether certain translators or teams of translators specialized in working from different types of texts with different origins.[40] It seems, for example, that there may have been more than a random connection between the most important esoteric scriptures that are particular to the modern Nyingmapa school and the Inner Asian clans. To take one example, the primary tantra of the Nyingmapa Mahāyoga class, the *Secret Matrix*, was rejected by scholars of the New Translation schools on the grounds that it was not to be found in India;[41] the fact that Zur Sherab Jungne chose to study

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[39] His life and thought have been treated by Martin (2001); see also Davidson (2005, pp. 328-29).

[40] Guenther (1996, p. 6 n. 13) suggests that Kawa Paltsek was an expert in the Chinese language, while Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen was skilled in the language of Urgyan. Unfortunately, he does not say how he came to this conclusion.

[41] Contrary to the stance widely accepted in later Tibet, this in no way implies that the tantra was "inauthentic". There were many Buddhists outside India who knew Sanskrit, and, more importantly, there are no valid criteria for labeling scriptures composed inside India as "authentic", while rejecting all others. On this issue, see Gibson (forthcoming).

the tantra with a Tokharian teacher indicates that at least some of those who kept this teaching alive in the face of the new material being brought from India were Inner Asian by ancestry. This circumstance might be related to the interest shown by these clans in keeping alive the forms of Buddhism which came to Tibet during the imperial period, when the clans' prominence was at its peak. That Zhang Yudrakpa Sonam Drakpa did not choose to use his clan name when he was writing might indicate not only that the Nanam clan was losing its prestige by his time, as Martin suspects, but also that the clan was still associated with scriptures that did not have an Indian pedigree and hence were suspicious.

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