

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, La stod Byang and the Historical Context of his Deeds

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The 14th century of rig 'dzin rGod ldem dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, one of several outstanding figures of renown in the ranks of the rNying ma school, was a thriving period marked by the work of great *gter ston*-s such as himself, Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396), O rgyan gling pa (1323–?) and several others, including the older contemporary kun mkhyen Klong chen pa (1308–1364).

They brought a radical change from the earlier centuries in the search of literary treasures. In the previous period, the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* and *Mani bka' 'bum gter ma*-s were meant to secure the paternity of *bstan pa snga dar* to the rNying ma tradition in a time when *phyi dar* had flourished and new schools besides the One of the Ancients were born. Freed from doctrinal assertions of that type, the 14th century *gter ston*-s concentrated on rediscoveries that contributed to the birth of a new rNying ma season of great significance.

Still the context in which they operated was remarkably complex. The case of rig 'dzin rGod ldem on which I focus in this piece was no exception. The scenario was characterised by major events that affected the life of the lands where he was active.¹

Before I focus on the context of that time, I must spend a word or two on rig 'dzin rGod ldem's ethnicity given its peculiarity and the confusion that has been propagated in the past, which do not take into consideration his ethnic affiliation both from the viewpoints of historicity and linguistics. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was of foreign origin. He was not purely Tibetan.

¹ The 14th century was a time of major turmoil and deep changes in Tibet, an eventful period in its history that involved personalities and lands throughout the plateau and beyond it. Nonetheless, focus on the context in which rig 'dzin rGod ldem operated restricts my treatment to the individuals, events and territories that had an impact upon the life of the great master. This approach leads to the consequence that many important facts of those years—signs left by other people and the developments they were responsible for in the world of 14th century Tibet—have to be omitted from my treatment.

1. *The great gter ston's kin*

An interpolation that found its way into Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's 15th century biography of the great *gter ston* states that rig 'dzin rGod ldem's people were the Gur Ser.² This proper name has been misread. It has been said to refer to the Mongols (*Blue Annals*, p. 63),³ but in Tibetan culture the Gur Ser are the Yellow Uighur.

To trace his origins, a step back of 700 years from his birth is an aspect that should be dealt with. As well-known, rig 'dzin rGod ldem's origin goes back to his ancestor De wa ra dza who proceeded to Tibet in the train of Gyim shang Ong co. The Uighur were not yet formed as a tribal group or a nation in the second quarter of the 7th century when rig 'dzin rGod ldem's ancestor came to Tibet. They began making inroads in the Kan chou territory in the first decade of the ninth century (Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, p. 163) or else in 840 (Haneda, "Introduction: Problems of Turkicization," p. 5) otherwise as late as 860 or 866 (R.A. Stein, "Mi nyag et Si hia," p. 250).⁴

Subsequently, peoples' realignment in the region followed the Tangut ruler Yuanhao's military expeditions after he took over the throne of Byang Mi nyag later than 1015 but before 1028. Various

² Gu ru bKra shis, too, talks about the *rig 'dzin's* origin allegedly stemming from the Gur ser. This is an indicator that the interpolation in Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's biography of the great *gter ston* predates the work of Gu ru bKra shis. This great rNying ma master also mentions the ancestor De wa ra dza and adds that he bore the title *de gyin* (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 483,6-7). His reference to the Turkic title moves the ethnic identification of the master's family in a direction that has to be considered as reliable.

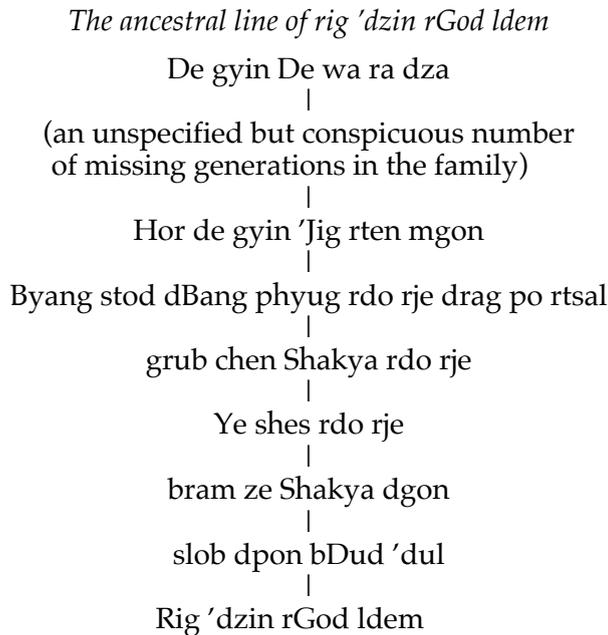
³ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was not a Mongol. What place did the Mongols hold in Tibetan history when, in 641, the Chinese princess reached Tibet according to the Introduction to the *Tun-huang Annals* (lines 12-14 in *Tun hong nas thon pa'i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha*, p. 12)? Definitely not a purported role in the Tibeto-Chinese relations.

⁴ The attribution to De wa ra dza of a Yu gur origin is explained from the viewpoint of the Ge sar *sgrung* by later Tibetan authors. The notional link with Gling Ge sar is anachronistic inasmuch as this association has a hiatus of some 400 years from De wa ra dza. This interpolation in the Sikkim and Bhutan biographies had the purpose to add further prestige to the lineage of rig 'dzin rGod ldem but the *gdung rgyud* of Gling Ge sar cannot be applied to de gyin De wa ra dza. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's own words about his origin in *sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, in a prophecy he attributed to Guru Padma, rule out a Gur ser affiliation.

The association of Gling Ge sar with the Yu gur, found in the saga of the hero, has been highlighted by Sum pa mkhan po (*Reply of Sum bha* (sic) *mkhan po's to dPal ldan ye shes in Damdinsuren, Istorickéskie korni Geseriadi*, Tibetan text, pp. 184,2-185,4). It is historically out of context to apply the interaction between Ge sar and the Yu gur, as done by Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, to a half millennium before the existence of protagonist of the saga, when De wa ra dza reached Tibet, disregarding any evaluation made of the great hero's life accepted as real by Tibetan authors but rejected by Western Tibetologists.

groups of Yu gur relocated on the western border of Byang Mi nyag, while the followers of the late Phan Blo gros, an influential A mdo dignitary of the beginning of the 11th century, settled to the south of it, in an area consonant with their A mdo ba ethnicity (*Sung rgyal rabs*, whose passages are translated into Tibetan by sTag lha Pun tshogs bkra shis in his *rGya'i yig tshang nang gsal ba'i Bod kyi rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, pp. 543,15-544,4).

De wa ra dza, the ancestor, bore the title *de gyin* which makes him a Turk.⁵ Since he became a minister favourite of Srong btsan sgam po, he could have been a Western Turk, the allies of this *btsan po* in campaigns to the west of the plateau (Beckwith 1987, p. 34; Chavannes reprint 1963, p. 288; *Ancient Tibet* 1986, pp. 231-232), rather than a Northern Turk.



Decisive evidence on the matter comes from the self-authored *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, where rig 'dzin rGod ldem has a prophecy he wrote about himself which he attributes to Guru Padma. In this prophecy, he talks about his origin. He does not say that he was of Uighur ethnic stock.

Around the mid 12th century, Hor 'Jig rten mgon, a member of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's family, still boasted the Turkic title *de gyin*, which is

⁵ For the same reading of the term *de gyin* (i.e. *tegyin*) as a Turkic title of distinction, see Dan Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures* (chapter 3, n. 25).

an indication that his *rus*—or patrilinear side—was Turkic while his *sha*—or matrilinear side—had become Tibetan. In the next generation—late 12th century—the Turkic family of rig 'dzin rGod ldem transferred itself to g.Yas ru Byang, not yet known as La stod Byang, thus bringing a cosmopolitan touch to the principality.

The prophecy rig 'dzin rGod ldem has written about himself in *sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig* is useful to approximate a date for the transfer of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's family to g.Yas ru Byang.

The *lung bstan* talks about thirty-six generations between De wa ra dza and rig 'dzin rGod ldem, including six of them between the predecessor Byang stod dBang phyug rdo rje drag po rtsal who settled in g.Yas ru Byang and the great *gter ston* (*sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, ff. 8b,6-9a,1).⁶ Besides De wa ra dza, no other member in rGod ldem's family is recorded in the period from 641 to the later part of the 12th century.⁷ This is a typical absence in the historiographical literature but, in the case of the great *gter ston*'s family, uncommonly extended farther than the canonical gap.

A calculation by *mi rabs* brings approximately to the early 13th century the transfer of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's historical family to the principality in the west.

g.Yas ru Byang

La stod Byang had a long history that goes back to the pre-Srong btsan sgam po period. *Grags pa gling grags* includes Zang zang lha brag among the thirty-seven 'du gnas-s of the ancient Bon po tradition, eight of them in g.Yas ru (Kværne-Martin, *Drenpa Proclamation*, p. 193). dPal ldan tshul khriims, too, includes Zang zang among the ancient thirty-seven Bon po 'du gnas-s (*g.Yung drung Bon bstan 'byung*, p. 489,3-4). The

⁶ It is significant that Drag po rtsal, the first member of the *rig 'dzin*'s family to settle in g.Yas ru Byang since he bore the specification Byang stod in his name, was the one who prophesied the great *gter ston*'s birth in the land of La stod Byang, at the eastern flanks of Ri bo bkra bzang in Fire-Ox 1337 (*Guru bkra shis chos 'byung*, p. 483,18-20).

⁷ On the topic of the generational distance between De wa ra dza and rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the Bhutan edition (f. 9,3) writes "mi lo nyer cig" ("twenty-one years") whereas the Sikkim edition (p. 59,2) writes "mi rabs nyi shu rtsa gcig" ("twenty-one generations"), an obviously more correct way to ascertain the gap between the two members of the family, but still not without error. The Sikkim edition, too, is chronologically incorrect since it says that fifteen generations elapsed, rig 'dzin rGod ldem included, from his ancestor's transfer to g.Yas ru Byang all the way to the great *gter ston*, whereas only six occurred according to the *rig 'dzin*'s own view. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's own statement in *sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig* that assesses the number of generations between his ancestor in the principality and himself is to be given credit. By means of an overall calculation by *mi rabs*-s, thirty-six generations went by from De wa ra dza to him.

next holy place in his classification of the 'du gnas-s is Grom pa rGyang in the area of lHa rtse, where rig 'dzin rGod ldem had an important sojourn and made a *gter ma* rediscovery (see below).

The land underwent a change of status, and therefore of name, across the centuries. It was conquered by rNam ri slong rtsan and included in his kingdom. At that time, it was still called Tho yo, its original denomination or at least the earliest that is recorded in the literature. It was still known in the same way when Srong btsan sgam po organised his state. Consequently, Tho yo was included in one of his *ru*, i.e. *g.Yas ru*, with the creation of the *ru gsum* in the year of the rat 712 (*Tun-huang Annals*, line 136, see *Tun hong nas thon pa'i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha*, p. 22), so that the area became known as *g.Yas ru Byang*. The name kept being used until 1268 when *g.Yas ru Byang* became La stod Byang, one of the dBus gTsang *khri skor bcu gsum*.

g.Yas ru Byang and its Tangut rulers

A further influx of foreign people marked a formative social antecedent in La stod Byang before the birth of rig 'dzin rGod ldem. This is recorded in dPal ldan Chos kyi bzang po's 15th century *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs*.

Tibetan sources say that Seng ge dar, who lived around or soon after the sixth generation of the Tangut royal house, became the lord of *g.Yas ru Byang*.

g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs, which describes the approach of Byang Mi nyag migrants towards *g.Yas ru Byang*, says that a royal child of the Tangut soil first moved to gTsang stod.⁸ He passed from locality to locality—Ra sa rGad po lung to sTag ste seng ge lung—and became the headman of the Mi nyag pa who migrated with him. He was Mi nyag pa lHa btsun Legs pa.

One of his nine children was Seng ge dar who became the ruler of *g.Yas ru Byang* and thus gave birth to a genealogy of local headmen that went on for generations to come.⁹

⁸ *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* (f. 1b,2-3): "Mi nyag Si'u rgyal po. After him at the sixth generation the nephew of rGyal rGod, a successor [in the royal family], which was long lasting and powerful, went to gTsang stod. He took control of the land. He moved to a [new] locality from Ra sa rGad po lung. He controlled the locality sTag ste seng ge lung. Here he became the elder brother of the Mi nyag [expatriates] as follows. Me nyag dpon po lHa btsun legs pa married two wives and the nine Zhu shang spun children were born. Concomitantly, they founded fiefs nearby and each of them controlled a locality".

⁹ *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* (ff. 1b,5-2a,1): "As to the greatest of the nine siblings, he was Me nyag Seng ge dar whose son was Kun dga' grags. The latter's son was Yon chen rDo rje dpal. (f. 2a) This one bowed to the feet of rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan. He was his *yon bdag*. His son was Yon chen dKon mchog grags who had

It is unclear how the sixth generation of Tangut rulers is counted in the Tibetan literature. Their sequence is not outlined beyond doubts and, moreover, in Tibetan sources the inception of the Byang Mi nyag kingdom is not clearly defined, too.

In his treatment of La stod Byang, the Fifth Dalai Lama identifies the lord of the principality in a similar way with the substantial difference from his source *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* that, in his view, the Tangut royal member who went to Tibet belonged to the seventh generations of the Byang Mi nyag kings (*dPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs*, p. 113,5-8).

The statements of both authors lack historical precision. They do not clarify the identity of the Byang Mi nyag king of those days and do not appraise the time of the dynasty foundation so that it is difficult to assess whether it is its sixth or seventh generation.

The Tangut tradition has it that the sixth king was Chunyou who had a long reign in the second half of the 12th century (r. 1153–1206). He was the king during whose reign Seng ge dar could have come to control La stod Byang. Evidence from the religious side proves matters more convincingly.

Seng ge dar's grandson, rDo rje dpal—gNam phe yo in the Tangut language—bowed to the feet of rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, the great Sa skya pa master (see n. 9). This places rDo rje dpal's interaction with the Sa skya pa master at the end of the 12th century or the beginning of the 13th at the latest given the dates of rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216).

The Great Fifth confuses the matter further by making rDo rje dpal the son of Seng ge dar rather than his grandson, despite basing himself on *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* (see *dPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs*, p. 113,8-9).

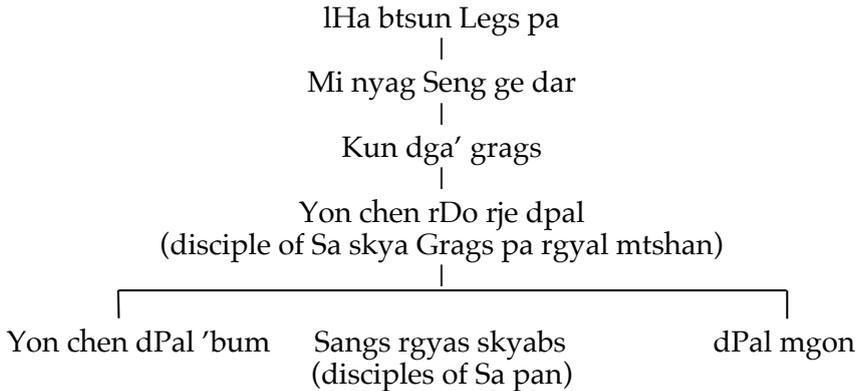
Given that the Tangut rule of *g.Yas ru Byang* began two *mi rabs* earlier than rDo rje dpal's interaction with rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Seng ge dar's ascension to the throne of the principality fell around the mid 12th century.

These spiritual ties position the influx of Tangut people into La stod Byang before the fall of their kingdom, whereas the migrations of its inhabitants to other destinations on the plateau—rGyal mo rong, Nang chen, Khams Mi nyag, 'Bras mo ljongs—was the consequence of Gengis Khan's later conquest of Byang Mi nyag that took place in 1227.

One generation after rDo rje dpal, his three sons Yon chen dPal 'bum, Sangs rgyas skyabs and dPal mgon were devotees of Sa skya pañdi ta (1182–1251). This fact validates chronologically the

three sons, Yon chen dPal 'bum, Sangs rgyas skyabs and dPal mgon. Father and the sons bowed to the feet of Sa skya pañdi ta chen po uncle and nephews (Sa pan, 'Phags pa and Phyang na rdo rje)".

association of rDo rje dpal with rje btsun Grags pa rgyal which confirms the Sa skya pa affiliation of the principality, a distinctive trait that persisted throughout rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life. These were relations that began quite a long time before the Sa skya pa were at the head of Tibet as agents of the Yuan dynasty. The g.Yas ru Byang lineage of the period included:



The enforcement of the Yuan system of governance by means of the *khri skor bcu gsum* strengthened the Sa skya pa authority over La stod Byang, known under this appellative after it had been g.Yas ru Byang for a long time. The closeness to the Sa skya pa took the shape of a confirmation with the formal implementation of the ruling bloc that headed Se chen rgyal po and his Tibetan agents in earth-dragon 1268. It was Sa skya pa earlier and remained under the influence of the same religious and political school after the promulgation of Yuan-controlled dBus gTsang.

The outline of the royal lineage of local rulers in *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* proves that the lords of the principality, despite the change of overall governance in Tibet, did not stop being of Tangut origin.

Hence the land was characterised by the settling down of major groups of people who did not belong to the Tibetan layer of the land. The presence of Tangut and Turks in the principality under Sa skya pa guidance confirms that g.Yas ru Byang, not yet known as La stod Byang, experienced a moderate cosmopolitanism. It reproduced on a limited scale 7th century lHa sa, which benefitted from seminal contributions by Licchavi, Khotanese, Sogdians and Chinese under Srong btsan sgam po, witnessed by De wa ra dza.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's early years

In this scenario of minor cosmopolitanism, the great rig 'dzin rGod

ldem was born in fire-snake 1337 at sNa mo lung, the valley at the foot of the Ri bo bKra bzang mountain.¹⁰ Given that he was the rebirth of sNa nam bDud 'joms, his destiny to belong to the rNying ma tradition was evident from the outset. But Gu ru bKra shis says that rig 'dzin rGod ldem was a *skyes rabs* ("line of rebirths") member—this is how I interpret the term *skye ba* used by Gu ru bKra shis—of the bKa' brgyud master Khro phu lo tsa ba Byams pa'i dpal (1172–1236) (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 483,5-6).

He was raised to be a rNying ma by his father Srid bDud 'dul dpal and then received a formal education to the doctrines of this school from Legs pa ba and Se ston dPal chen, to whose *rus* the *rig 'dzin's* biographer Nyi ma bzang po belonged—thus showing that its clan members had a prolonged association with the *gter ston*.¹¹

Gung thang's steady support of Sa skya's policy

Being a turning point previous to the existence of rig 'dzin rGod ldem that impinged on the secular conditions of the principality, a further insertion into the reform of the social milieu brought by Tangut and Turks was that the Gung thang Khab pa took over direct control of La stod Byang in the days that followed the death of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa in 1280. The move marked the introduction of Gung thang's historical influence on La stod Byang.

The Gung thang feudatories of Sa skya launched a campaign that

¹⁰ The body features of rig 'dzin rGod ldem are most famous and therefore a prominent aspect of himself. The long description of his body traits, which covers much space in Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's biography, echoes the *purusha's* cosmic body which the *rnam thar* transfers to human form.

It is common dominion that three feathers grew on the crown of his head at age twelve. They represented his previous karmic accumulation. Five more grew at age twenty-four. They marked his spiritual realisations. The growth of feathers occurred during two consecutive duodenary cycles in the *rig 'dzin's* life, whose symbolic value is in need of research.

Rig 'zin rGod ldem's feathers on his head was not his exclusive trait. In the literature, the anonymous teacher of the bKa' brgyud pa bla ma rGod 'phur pa (wood-monkey 1167-earth-dog 1238), a disciple of sKyob pa 'Jig rten mgon po, had vulture feathers on his head (Klu dkyil *dgon* in *Khams dKar mdzes dgon sde'i lo rgyus*, vol. 2, p. 272,14-18). He thus was a predecessor to the great *gter ston* in the matter of feathers on the crown of the head. The appellative rGod 'phur ba (the "flying vulture") was an inheritance he received from his teacher who had such a distinctive feature.

¹¹ *Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung* talks about a line of rNying ma masters from the land that had an impact upon rig 'dzin rGod ldem in his young age and kept interacting with him until the end of the *gter ston's* life. The text deals with the Se lineage settled in these territories with brief references to Se ston dPal chen 'bum, teacher of rig 'dzin rGod ldem and a relative of Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, the disciple and biographer of the great master.

reinforced the overall strategy of the Yuan agents in Tibet. Thirteen forts were built to exercise Gung thang pa control on behalf of Sa skya over the lands of the plateau to the west in a thorough territorial coverage. The name that the forts received collectively echoes a not uncommon expression (*las thabs*, “acts of duty”) in Tibetan language, while its full name reflects a historical peculiarity associated with the creation of the forts.¹² *Glang gi las thabs bcu gsum* was dubbed so because the young 'Bum lde mgon, who became the lord of Gung thang, saw the parade of his uncle 'gro mgon 'Phags pa's horses in Sa skya while sitting on an ox. Subsequently, his association with the ox persisted in the name that identified collectively the lands over which he established control by means of a network of forts.¹³

Among the “the thirteen acts of duty of the mule”, the fort that 'Bum lde mgon built in La stod Byang was La ru'i Gad rdzong dkar po.¹⁴ Its construction and the active sway of Gung thang over La stod Byang occurred at an imprecise date but around the three-year delta 1277-1280.

La stod Byang's governance during the Yuan dynasty's sovereignty

Byang *khri skor* was created subsequently as one of the thirteen dBus gTsang divisions of ten thousand and its control was assigned to the sTag sna rdzong pa with headquarters at mThong smon in Shangs. Rin

¹² *Gung thang gdung rabs* (IHa sa ed., pp. 108,8-109,2). The forts are collectively called *glang gi las stabs bcu gsum* (“thirteen districts established by the campaigns of the ox”) in *Mar lung pa'i rnam thar*, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (p. 537,2-3) and *Chos legs kyi rnam thar*.

Mar lung pa'i rnam thar (f. 350b,1-3) says: “[Various] subjects were attending the [the parade of] the group of horses of 'gro mgon chos rgyal 'Phags pa in the military encampment at Sa skya. At that time, some people offered to help [Phags pa's] maternal nephew ('Bum lde mgon), who was seated on an old ox. They told him: “Do not scare the horses [with the ox]!”. Since [the nephew's dominions] were established, which became known as the *glang gi las bstabs bcu gsum*, their name became spread over the surface of the land”.

Chos legs kyi rnam thar (f. 9a,5-6) is briefer: “This great nephew (i.e. 'Bum lde mgon, the nephew of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa) also founded rDzong dkar and, furthermore, established the *glang gi las stabs bcu gsum*.”

¹³ A similar denomination of duties is found in the bKa' brgyud pa milieu around the same period. The 'Bri gung abbot Cung rin po che rDo rje grags pa (1210-1278) designated rdor 'dzin 'gro mgon Phyang chen to perform the *Yul smad las tshan bco brgyad* (the “eighteen officiating duties of Yul smad”) in the area of southeastern dBus and nearby lands (see my “Bang rim *chos sde* in Dwags po (11th-13th century): mKhar nag lo tsa ba's treatment and the *Bai ser* follow-up” for Franz-Karl Ehrhard's Festschrift).

¹⁴ *Gung thang gdung rabs* (p. 108,14-15): “To control/subdue La stod Byang ['Bum lde mgon] built La ru'i Gad rdzong dkar po”.

chen brtson 'grus,¹⁵ a Sa skya pa loyalist like his close friend Hor chen sTon Tshul, was the originator of the sTag sna rdzong pa family.¹⁶ He has a place of preeminence in *rGya Bod yig tshang*, whose author dPal 'byor bzang po was a member of the clan. The author dedicates a long chapter to these people (ibid., pp. 400,10-419,3). They exercised an important role as staunch supporters of Sa skya in the history of 13th and 14th century Tibet from the days of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa onwards. The relations in La stod Byang between the Gung thang pa and sTag sna rdzong pa is a subject of further investigation by means of documents not available at present.

The sTag sna rdzong pa originally were from the mtsho Ngon area. They descended from the bKa' ma/mi log.¹⁷ They became the *khri dpon-s* of Shangs aka Byang *khri skor*, whose empowerment derived from their association with the Sa skya pa established by Rin chen brtson 'grus when he left A mdo for Central Tibet to study religion. His first contact with this school occurred while traveling to dBus gTsang in 1265, when he met 'gro mgon 'Phags pa on the way.¹⁸

Rin chen brtson 'grus, a minister who ruled lands on behalf of Sa skya, was the first in the line of headmen of the Shangs princes. Later

¹⁵ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (p. 402 (f. 71a,10-16)): "dBon po Rin chen rgyal mtshan, this being his name as a layman, was the lord of the three great territories (dBus gTsang, Khams and A mdo?). He was intelligent and with broad views. Having faith in a pure attitude since his youth, he trained people in the various territories to treat everyone as a brother. Having heard the fame of the gTsang Sa skya *bla ma-s*, he grew faith [in them]. Wishing to bow to their feet, he went upwards".

¹⁶ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (pp. 400,10-401,3): "This is the account of the appearance of the sTag sna rdzong pa, the emanations of the Ma sang (spelled so). Swasti. When the dPal ldan Sa skya pa, the ornaments of the crown of mankind, controlled the *chol kha gsum*, the *dpon chen-s* and the *slob dpon-s*, *dge bshes-s* and *blon chen-s* who, in succession, brought to fruition the [school's] activities. Innumerable were those endowed with outstanding learning and provided with power. Among them there were, first of all, the *yus* (f. 70a) *po che'i mi gsum* (the "three men who achieved a great deal"). They were Grom pa Sa skya'i dpon chen Shaka (spelled so) bzang po, (p. 401) Shar smad Tsong kha'i dge bshes Rin brtson and Hor chen sTon Tshul, this one from mDo stod Gyon (i.e. Go 'gyo). Among them, descendants (i.e. the sTag sna rdzong pa) from the *dge bshes chen po*, who belonged to a high-standing family and [was endowed with] a brilliant intellect, exist up to the present day".

¹⁷ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (pp. 401,7-402,6) says about the bKa' ma/mi log that in the time of Khri srong lde btsan, nine brave soldiers were left as a garrison at the border between Bod and Hor, after the sPu rgyal army had destroyed the meditation place of the Bha rta (spelled so) Hor. They were instructed not to return without an order (*bka' ma log*). They settled in the territory and took bKa' ma log as their clan name. The ancestor of the A mdo ba family of sTag sna rdzong descended from them.

¹⁸ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (p. 403, 4-8): "When 'gro ba'i mgon po chos rgyal 'Phags pa went upwards (to Tibet) from the imperial court, he was invited by dGon pa ba to 'Brong. He was well attended. Those two (Rin chen brtson 'grus and Hor che ston Tshul, the latter's companion) met him also. The former asked to be ordained [and] the name Rin chen brtson 'grus was given to him".

in 14th century Shangs, the region became the land of the sTag sna rdzong pa from the homonymous name of their castle.¹⁹ Rin chen brtson 'grus was subsequently appointed *khri dpon* authorized to collect taxes from Byang by rgyal bu Chos dpal, one of the Mongol princes in charge of Tibet (*rGya Bod yig tshang*, p. 405,9-18).

In fire-sheep 1307, Zhwa lu sku zhang Grags pa rgyal mtshan and the Gung thang king Khri lde 'bum travelled to China (see, e.g., *Myang chos 'byung*, p. 168,4-9). sTag sna rdzong pa Ban rgan pa went with the same delegation to receive various appointments from the emperor. At court, he was given a patent by 'Ol ja du, which confirmed his power over the Shangs territory encompassing the lands as far as Dwang ra g.yu mtsho in central Byang thang and, therefore, his authority over La stod Byang.

The set political standards introduced before his life led rig 'dzin rGod ldem to inherit the traditional affiliation of La stod Byang to Gung thang, established at the time of the late 13th century *glang gi las thabs bcu gsum*, with a huge difference that he pursued this alignment on a personal basis, marked by the spirit of *yon mchod*.

The rig'dzin's secular inclination

Unlike other rNying ma masters such as the 14th century O rgyan gling pa who was a fierce opponent of the Yuan combine and also had a disastrous dissent from the positions of ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan that cost him exile, the *rig 'dzin*, despite being a rNying ma, did not take a stance against the Sa skya pa. Young rig 'dzin rGod ldem was unaffected by the transition of power. He obviously focused on the religion but was influenced, too, by the secular context in which his life unfolded.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem established a lifelong relation with the throne holders of the Gung thang royal house, who were Sa skya pa loyalists since they were their feudatories with an active part in reducing, several decades earlier than the *gter ston's* life, a vast territory under their control on behalf of their headmen.

No details are provided in the historical literature about the establishment of *yon mchod* with the Gung thang royal house but their *bla ma* / ruler interaction occurred not before bKra shis lde ascended the

¹⁹ The name sTag sna rdzong pa is retroactively applied by *rGya Bod yig tshang* to the line of the Shangs rulers, because it was only in fire-tiger 1386 that rGod po rin chen took control of sTag sna rdzong, called sTag sna dzong grub rtse in the source (*ibid.*, p. 413,17-18): “[rGod po rin chen], having gone upwards (i.e. from the imperial court to Tibet), in this place Shangs mThong smon, since there was water and he found it excellent from every point of view including the name, said: “I wish to include this [place] among [my possessions]”.”.

throne in water-dragon 1252 (*Gung thang gdung rabs*, p. 114,12-14), left vacant by the death of his father Chos skyong lde (*ibid.*, p. 114,12).²⁰ bKra shis lde's demise occurred in 1365 and no better approximation can be attempted to fix the inception of their *yon mchod* than during that delta of years.

To introduce an important event in the early career of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life, the foundation of Byang Ngam ring, the major institution of La stod Byang together with the holy place Ri bo bkra bzang, *Bai ser* follows the same outline of the migration of members of Byang Mi nyag to gTsang stod. As found in *g.Yas ru Bang pa'i rgyal rabs*, the migration was headed by a scion of the Tangut royal family, whom the *sde srid* calls Legs pa simply. In sTag ste, Seng ge lung had nine sons, the most distinguished being Seng ge dar. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho then goes on to outline the circumstances that led to the establishment of Byang Ngam ring. Belonging to the Seng ge dar's lineage, ti shri Kun dga' blo gros was appointed in the Yuan period to be the *dpon chen*. Next to Gad pa Ngam nag pa, at the extremity of Ngam ring Ngam mtho chen mo resounding with the uttering of swans, in the locality Ngam rings, here he invited Shākya seng ge from the back of sTag rtse, who laid the foundations of the *chos sde* in wood-bird 1345 of the fourth *rab byung* (*Bai ser*, p. 263,16-21). In open deviance from his *sde srid* Sangs rgyas mtsho, the Fifth Dalai Lama opts to antedate its foundation sensibly since he puts it during the reign of Se chen rgyal po (r. 1260-1294) and attributes its foundation to Grags pa dar, a Tangut *dpon chen* of the La stod Byang ruling family (*dPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs*, p. 113,11-13).

Sa skya's loss of hegemony and Phag mo gru pa control of Tibet

Still in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's teens, the status quo was disrupted in the worst possible way. Soon after bKra shis lde's ascension to the throne of Gung thang the direct Sa skya hegemony over Tibet saw its last

²⁰ *Gung thang gdung rabs* (p. 114, 8-13): "Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was the religious head of the [*Byang gter*] as its founder. [The existence of] the master was contemporaneous with the prophecy about the birth of bKra shis sde, which said: "In particular, to the northeast of the *sku lha* of Mang yul there will be a castle with bricks (*so mang* spelled so for *so phag*) resembling turquoise. At this locality, given the royal genealogy, short in stature [and] enlightened of chos rgyal bKra shis lde, and the rediscovery of this *gter*, the teachings will be able to exist in Tibet for fifty-three human years". It said so. Much warfare broke out. Khri Chos skyong lde died in water-dragon 1352 and bKra shis lde was granted the crown". The birth date of bKra shis lde is not given in *Gung thang gdung rabs*. All that one can presume is that he and rig 'dzin rGod ldem were roughly of the same age in view of the fact that Kra shis lde's ascension to the throne could have happened in this heir apparent's teenage years, as customary.

days. Sa skya fell into the hands of ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan in 1354, so that it lost hegemony.²¹

Sa skya's fall meant that the Phag mo gru pa were able to extend their sovereignty over Shangs, contiguous in the east to La stod Byang, held by the pro-Saskya sTag sna rdzong pa. Parts of the lands to the north of the Brahmaputra were lost to Sa skya.

The absence of a date for the inception of the *yon mchod* that rig 'dzin rGod ldem entertained with bKra shis lde hinders an assessment whether the *gter ston* established it with the Gung thang lord before or after the 1354 divide that changed the equilibrium on the plateau.

In rig 'dzin rGod ldem's early years marred by an instable situation before Sa skya's fall, *Si tu bka' chems*—the locus classicus on those events—says that an attempt at subverting the status quo within the Sa skya pa alliance in 1345 involved the Gung thang Khab pa, delegated to exercise control over a vast expanse of lands in the west, was repealed by dpon chen Dar ma rgyal mtshan. The suppression of the revolt in Gung thang left the ruling conditions in the principality unaltered,²² so that, years later, the great *gter ston* was able to establish his *yon mchod* with the bKra shis lde.

Byang chub rgyal mtshan does not identify the rebels in Gung thang, who engineered the 1345 rebellion quelled by the Sa skya *dpon chen*. Was it an attempt to overthrow the Sa skya pa line on the throne?

The next sentence of *Si tu bka' chems* is enlightening since it shows that the relations between the Sa skya pa and people of mNga' ris, i.e. those of mNga' ris smad—the Gung thag Khab pa therefore—in the days immediately after the rebellion remained solid and amicable.²³ This is a sign that the 1345 rebels did not belong to the Gung thang establishment but must have been enemies of the principality headmen, Glo bo and the nomads of Byang thang being candidates.

²¹ The *khri dpon* of Byang in office up to around 1354 was dKon mchog 'od zer, the head of La stod Byang in the early part of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life before the Sa skya pa organisation of the lands was lost without a resistance, at a time marred by a succession of conflicting episodes.

²² *Si tu bka' chems in Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru* (pp. 165,19-166,21): "In wood-female-bird 1345, Dar ma rgyal mtshan, rDo rje lcam hu shri, A san bho kha tshe dhan undertook the exercise of the court of law. They established the Shag 'jam mo ("postal relay") and quelled the uprising of mNga' ris. (p. 166) They went to explain the division into the *chol kha gsum*. When they explained their investigation [to reinforce the division] that extended to 'Dam, the rTa ro dmar po of dBus dissented [and thus] did not accept. The people of gTsang said they accepted. The people of dBus did not submit. Thereafter, an investigation was run that extended to Tshong 'dus mgur mo. The dBus pa of gTsang were useless in their embarrassing [behaviour]. The people of mNga' ris said they accepted. Also, the people of dBus did not submit".

²³ *Si tu bka' chems in Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru* (p. 166,7-8): "Then the people of mNga' ris invited the *si tu* (Dar ma rgyal mtshan) to Yar lungs".

*The impact of the Phag mo gru pa takeover
on the life of the great gter ston*

The age-old leaning of La stod Byang towards Sa skya was put in serious difficulty after 1354 owing to the change of authority on the plateau. The loss of Sa skya's power led to the elimination of the *khri skor bcu gsum* system substituted by the network of Phag mo gru pa forts such as lCags rtse gri gu, 'Ol kha sTag rtse, Gong dkar, Ne'u rdzong, Brag dkar, Rin spungs, bSam grub rtse, sPa nam, lHung grub rtse (*Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*, Tucci transl., p. 210,14-19). The destiny of the Gung thang fort La ru'i Gad rdzong dkar po in La stod Byang is unknown.

For a short while after the fall of Sa skya, the authority in La stod Byang remained in its bloc but the Byang *dpon chen* could not do anything in succour of the school's main seat (*ibid.*, p. 297,17-18). The Phag mo gru pa takeover of La stod Byang—including Ri bo bkra bzang/Zang zang lha brag, the centre of La stod Byang during the Yuan/Sa skya pa control over Tibet—was fait accompli sometime after ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan's official investiture by the Yuan in 1357 (*Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru*, p. 289,1-14). The slow political transfer of La stod Byang into the Phag mo gru pa fold may have been a sign of a partial amount of resilience vis-à-vis the new rulers of Tibet in hectic years characterised by a realignment of power in Tibet, not without disputes and political games from every side.

However, *rGya Bod yig tshang*, which says little concerning the passage of Shangs and connected territories, such as La stod Byang, to the Phag mo gru pa, vaguely confirms that the Sa skya pa handed over Byang *khri skor* to ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan after the downfall of Sa skya in 1354. The end of the Sa skya pa sovereignty over the Byang *khri skor* of Shangs, Dwang ra and La stod Byang occurred with an act of formal capitulation without spilling blood.²⁴

Turbulence in Central Tibet

Earlier than the fall of Sa skya, another destabilising event hit the lands to the north of the Brahmaputra in the region of La stod Byang. This

²⁴ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (pp. 411,16-412,1): "Blo gros rgyal mtshan received both the name and the rank of *si tu*. The [Sa skya] *dpon chen* handed over both his nephew (i.e. Blo gros rgyal mtshan) and mThong smon to ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan".

Statements in *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* (Tucci transl., p. 192) convey that the military campaign did not lead to a takeover of La stod Byang: "Once rDzong spyi Grags pa rin chen led a great Phag mo gru pa army against La stod Byang, he could not cause great trouble".

was invasion by the Dung reng, a major event of those years. They were people composed of various groups from different areas of the plateau in the south, the Himalayan range and beyond. Their U ra group was settled in lHo Mon and they are known to the literature as the lHo Dung reng. The Shar Dung, who were settled in lHo brag, in the course of the invasion, marauded Myang.

The Dung reng invasion has been minimised in past western scholarship but they conquered a huge expanse of territory that included lands across the Brahmaputra. It is unclear whether La stod Byang suffered from the invasion, but it is probable.

An alliance of Tibetan principalities was needed to oust them from this major territorial occupation of the plateau. Two campaigns to defeat them testify to the resilience of these invaders from the south. The head of the alliance was Kun dga' 'phags pa, the Shar kha pa ruler of rGyal rtse, and his brother 'Phags pa rin chen. The lHo Dung reng were defeated in 1352 by an act of treachery and the Shar Dung reng in the successive years 1353-1354.²⁵

The Phag mo gru pa change of governance

With the political downgrading of Sa skya in favour of Phag mo gru pa rulership, the conditions on the plateau underwent a radical change. In "Besides the literary icon: historical hints on the life of bcom ldan Rig pa'i ral gri" (forthcoming in the *Festschrift* for Helmut Tauscher), I say that, in gTsang, the Sa skya pa had a lenient approach towards institutions not belonging to their school. Their attitude towards other monasteries was different. In their gTsang pa home grounds, they did not pursue an aggressive policy; on the contrary, they intruded heavily in the affairs of other schools in other regions of the plateau, all of them under their control.²⁶

The radical change that Phag mo gru pa governance allowed was that they let the principalities under its control to exercise limited

²⁵ While *rGya Bod yig tshang* is profuse in describing the campaigns against the Dung reng but without a precise chronology of events, *Rab brtan kun bzang 'phags kyi rnam thar* is concise but provides the dates of the military actions. The latter text (p. 8,12-17) reads: "In water-male-dragon 1352, ... the lHo Dung were exterminated at Phag ri Rin chen sgang; the next year (water-snake 1353), Shar Dung Don grub dar was decapitated".

Ibid. (p. 8,19-21): "In wood-male-horse 1354, the younger brother 'Phags pa rin chen went to lHo brag and subjugated the Shar Dung. People should be immensely grateful to the dBus gTsang [alliance]".

²⁶ Examples of Sa skya's duress during the Yuan hegemony over Tibet are several, e.g., Khams Ri bo che (see Vitali, *Upper Khams and its wider world* vol. One forthcoming) or gDan sa mthil (see my "The year the sky fell: remarks of the 1290 *gling log*," in Vitali, *Essays on the History of Tibet*).

autonomy, a secular condition not possible during the joined Yuan/Sa skya pa sway over the plateau.

Especially after the death of Byang chub rgyal mtshan in wood-dragon 1364, the internal controversies to choose a head of the Phag mo gru pa school—the dignitary who would handle the religious and secular affairs—led to a weakening not experienced in the days of the *ta'i si tu*.

These looser conditions facilitated rig 'dzin rGod ldem's activity in La stod Byang, who could continue to side with bKra shis lde, ruler of Gung thang and his steadfast sponsor.

Political realignments in the post Yuan/Sa skya period

The secular equilibrium in Central Tibet that followed the ascendancy of the Phag mo gru pa as rulers of Tibet and Sa skya's loss of power saw a realignment that was only partial since it followed, in the most, the alliances and loyalties of the previous period. The structure of the Sa skya pa alliance during the post-Yuan period was composed by their old-time loyalists in a way similar to when they were agents of their overlords from China. It comprised the Gung thang Khab pa, the Zhwa lu pa, the sTag sna rdzong pa of Shangs as well as La stod Byang for a short while before it was taken by the Phag mo gru pa.

In turn, the Phag mo gru pa alliance before its people's ascendancy to supreme authority was composed by most bKa' brgyud pa schools, the 'Bri gung pa in particular whose monastery had been severely damaged by the Yuan/Sa skya pa military intervention. The rNying ma and the Bon po, too, were fierce antagonists of foreign domination in Tibet. Hence, a wide spectrum of schools—the rNying ma, bKa' brgyud and Bon po for instance—manifested an open disliking for the Mongol sway over Tibet but could not sort out any result beyond criticism.

The evolution of these relations during the third quarter of the 14th century within the anti-Yuan bloc changed in the years just before the fall of Sa skya. Heavy reorganisations modified the earlier political alliances/enmities among the Tibetan principalities. Several members of the bKa' brgyud pa faction did not side with the *ta'i si tu*. After a long phase of close relations, the 'Bri gung pa antagonised Byang chub rgyal mtshan in the next ten years before Sa skya's fall in 1354,²⁷ and

²⁷ O rgyan glin pa had a dissent with his own bloc of anti-Sa skya sympathisers. A grudge with *ta'i si tu* Byang chub rgyal mtshan about the control of gNyal, subtracted to his people was bitter enough for the great *gter ston* to be exiled by the Phag mo gru pa supremo.

Guru bKra shis chos 'byung (p. 409,21-25): "On the occasion of his rediscovery of twenty-eight *Grub pa'i dbang po*, including *bKa' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho'i dkyil 'khor*,

continued to show hostility following his death. So did the g.Ya bzang pa occasionally.

That of the Tshal pa was a case apart. They remained firm in their friendship with the Yuan and the Sa skya pa. They were aligned directly to Yuan policy since the transition from Genghis Khan to Ögodei that occurred from the first to the second quarter of the 13th century.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's 1366 rediscovery

The next step in the *rig 'dzin's* life were the 1360s, years of fair contextual tranquillity. No major subverting events took place in his sphere of competence during that span of time. Those circumstances meant for the *gter ston* a renewed interaction with his *yon bdag*, the new Gung thang ruler Phun tshogs lde (b. 1338). However, outside his world, complex matters affected the Phag mo gru pa rulers of Tibet owing to the demise of ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan in 1364.²⁸

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem concentrated on Zang zang lHa brag before he undertook the long preparation that culminated in his important 1366 rediscovery. On Ri bo bKra bzang he built a hermitage monastery on the mountain slope and a temple on the peak before the 1365 *terminus ante quem* that marked the death of the Gung thang lord bKra shis lde who sponsored the work (*Rig 'dzin rGod ldem gyi rnam thar*, 1983 ed., pp. 100-101).

In wood-snake 1365, after the death of bKra shis lde, the preparations of a complete Canon to be printed at sKyid grong were

from the upper courtyard of Khra 'brug gtsug lag khang, the *gter ston* said: "Sometime an occasion will come [that is favourable to obtaining] power and [spreading] the teachings". Gong ma Si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan [indeed] got the land of Tibet under his control. O rgyan gling pa repeated time and again: "The rope of gNyal should be cut".

Ibid., (pp. 409,25-410,3): "[O rgyan gling pa's words in favour of gNyal] were heard by the *ta si* (spelled so, i.e. Byang chub rgyal mtshan) who [then] sent a messenger to him. [O rgyan gling pa] received strict summons, (p. 410) and [was subjected] to various harassments, such as a slap on his face ('gram bcag spelled so for 'gram lcag). The *gter ston* was upset. The [*si tu*] told him: "Your area has come to have extensive [virtuous] qualities, but you cannot stay there". The stone bridge of Shel brag padma brtsegs pa was obstructed".

²⁸ The succession to ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan was an affair difficult to solve, since the Phag mo gru pa headman himself was torn by controverted choices. Still during his life, he chose 'Jam dbyangs gu shri Shakya rgyal mtshan as his successor (r. 1364-1373). Then it was the turn of Byang rdor aka Grags pa byang chub (r. 1373-1381), bSod nams grags pa (r. 1381-1384/1385; sku zhang Grags pa rin chem (r. 1384/1385) and Grags pa rgyal mtshan (r. 1385-1432) that covered the life of rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

concluded.²⁹ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem activated himself to set in motion *gter ma* rediscoveries. He was at Grom pa rGyang for a preliminary finding in the local *lha khang* and to meet Phun tshogs lde. Grom pa rGyang was a locality not too far from the border of La stod Byang, which was, together with lHa rtse, historically Sa skya pa since the days of the get-together of 'Brog mi lo tsa ba with Ga ya dha ra (*gTsang stod rgyl po'i rnam thar dang rgyal rabs*, p. 122,6-8), He received from Mang lam Ri khrod pa bZang po grags pa the *kha byang* of the literary treasure to be unearthed at Ri bo Kra bzang while a *gter tshab* for the rediscovery should have been given to him by Phun tshogs lde.³⁰

Having paid a visit to Sa skya, he went to recover the scrolls and keys hidden on the peak of Ri bo bKra bzang and was then ready to unearth the main treasure at Zang zang lHa brag.

He then undertook the perilous adventure of the 1366 unearthing at Ri bo bkra bzang.

This rediscovery is given pre-eminence in his biography. A long *lung bstan* on Tibet's history, styled as a prophecy of Guru Padma requested by Mu khri btsan po, emphasises its importance. His conception is unusual. It rather is a *bstan rtsis* that works as the preliminary to introduce the unearthing. The chronological sequence of the historical phases of Tibet is imprecise if judged from the historiographical standards commonly adopted.

However, its peculiarity is that it periodises events in Tibet in a way different from the set tradition, a mix of well-known categorisations and uncommon readings of phases in the history of the land.

The *bstan rtsis* is conceived from the viewpoint of the rNying ma tradition. To be in line with the prophetic approach of the genre, the first statements of the *lung bstan* concern a period distant from the 8th century of Guru Padma and Mu khri btsan po. It begins with the post Glang dar ma period and, therefore, does not deal with *bstan pa snga dar*, the domain of the School of the Ancients. Is it that the rNying ma milieu did not need to reaffirm its unicity during the early diffusion? The entries say:

²⁹ *Gung thang gdung rabs* (p. 117,1-6): "Concerning him (bKra shis lde), his death year being wood-snake 1365, *gter ston rig 'dzin chen po rGod ldem 'phru can* activated himself to work at the *gter [kha]* [note: in fire-horse 1366, the year next to wood-snake 1365, *gter ston rig 'dzin chen po rGod ldem can* from Zang zang lHa brag, the land connected to Byang, extracted *Gung thang rgyal rgyud skyong pa mdzod lnga* ("the five treasures for the protection of the Gung thang royal line"). He established ties with Phun tshogs lde but it was not somewhat possible to arrange [them]".

³⁰ On the way back to La stod Byang, at Ngam ring he was given stripes of silk and assorted grains as *gter tshab* for his forthcoming treasure rediscovery of 1366 (*Guru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 484,19).

Glang dar ma's destruction of Buddhism will lead to sixty years of darkness. They should be dated from 842, the *btsan po's* assassination at the latest, to the end of the 9th century (901);

The good times will come to an end. The nobility will scatter to form many principalities and mNga' ris skor gsum will exist. Communities (*sde*) will practise *chos khrims* and there will also be powerful *sngags pa-s*.

From the secular perspective, this is the period that followed the implosion of the sPu rgyal state with the emergence of principalities and, thus, is a reference to the *kheng log-s* while in the west sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon formed the mNga' ris skor gsum kingdom.

From the religious perspective, this corresponds to the situation of the Noble Religion in dBus gTsang that confirms the assessment of its debased unfolding, found in *Nyang ral chos 'byung*.

Due to lHa Mu tur—i.e. dGongs pa rab gsal—there will be a restoration of the teachings. They will last for sixty-four years, hence until the mid 10th century (901-964). dGongs pa Rab gsal, dPal 'khor btsan and dPyang A po will exist during those sixty-four years.

The *lung bstan*, like several other works, assigns a late positioning of dGongs pa Rab gsal, whose existence fluctuates widely in the sources. In the case of the *lung bstan / bstan rtsis* he is somewhat closer than in other cases to the introduction of *bstan pa phyi dar*. Hence his placement falls several decades away from the possibility that he was the rebirth of 'Bro Khri gsum rje sTag snang, as held in dBon Bi ci's treatment of him (*Deb ther sngon po*, p. 89,9-13). The consequence is that dGongs pa rab gsal is considered as an older contemporary to dPal 'khor btsan and thus he would have lived in the late 9th century according to the *bstan rtsis* since dPal 'khor btsan died in 910.

The influence of dPyang A po will be equal to a ruler and dPal 'khor btsan will be a legitimate *chos rgyal*.

While the importance of dPyang A po in the affairs of dPal 'khor btsan's reign is recognised, dPal 'khor btsan is considered an authentic *btsan po* and, therefore, the sPu rgyal royal lineage would have lasted until him.

Prosperity will last for 215 years.

Those 215 years refer to the dynasty of the sPu rgyal *btsan po*-s who would have secured a happy life to the land, a typical view of the rNying ma school. I reckon them from Srong btsan sgam po's enthronement in 629 to Glang dar ma's assassination in 842, the end of the *btsan po*-s' legitimate rule. It makes 215 years precisely. This long span of time covers the dynastic period which was the exclusive appanage of the School of the Ancients.

Decay will befall lHa sa and bSam yas as well as the *mtha' 'dul* and *yang 'dul gtsug lag khang*-s.

lHa sa was troubled by turmoil from around the last quarter of the 10th century until 1160 (see Vitali, "lHa sa hectic years ca. 975-1160"), bSam yas was damaged by a fire caused by the internecine disagreements between the lHa sa *sde bzhi*.³¹

Then the Hor troops will come. Owing to repeated invasions, Tibet will be under the Mongols for sixty years.

This is too short a time since the inception of the Yuan/Sa skya pa sway over Tibet in 1268 and ended in 1354, which continued for over eighty years.

Tibet will be without rulers for 215 years.

The *lung bstan* introduces a reckoning difficult to place chronologically since the inception and end of this period are prone to several variable approximations. The correspondence with the other set of 215 years is suspicious.

Tibet will be under Hor *khirms* (the "Mongol law") for 150 years.

This is an assessment way too long for the influence of the Hor pa ruling system. Its duration is hardly comprehensible. Were it so, it would mean the principles of governance of the Yuan would have continued well after the loss of its grip over the plateau, a fact denied by secular administration of the Phag mo gru pa who introduced their own system of rulership.

A hypothesis is to reckon that 1354, the fall of Sa skya, minus 150 years comes to ca. 1206, which would warrant Gengis Khan's alleged

³¹ *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 451,8–10) summarises this decay as follows: "Then, eventually, lHa sa will be threatened by water and bSam yas will be threatened by fire".

expedition to Tibet, as proposed by late authors such as Sum pa mkhan po and mentioned by early western scholarship such as by Hambis (“L’histoire des Mongols à l’époque de Genghis-Khan et le dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang de Sumpa-Qutuqtu”). I am not in favour of accepting the existence of the 1206 invasion.

Tibet will be without peace. The only good aspect will be the existence profound *gter*-s but an impediment will make Ri bo bkra bzang unavailable. Catastrophes will precede the rediscovery at Ribo bkra bzang.

In the typical apocalyptic style of rNying ma treatments, rediscoveries are associated with calamities, most often preceding them.

At this inauspicious time, the *gter* will be rediscovered in the horse year 1366 from Ri bo bkra bzang, the mountain resembling a black snake.

This period in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life culminated in 1367 at sKyid grong, with 'Phags pa Wa ti talking to him about his future rediscoveries. The Jo bo spoke, as he did with the all-time great personalities of Tibet.

The Gung thang lord Phun tshogs lde attended to reconfirm *yon mchod* with him. The *gter ston* gave him documents on the Gung thang royal house, useful to safeguard its members.

Unfavourable conditions in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's sphere of activity

Novel dynamics after this period caused dark clouds to hang over the lands of the rig 'dzin. The life of the people in the territories related to him was perturbed, so that the work of rig 'dzin rGod ldem was affected too. A factor was the usurpation of the Gung thang throne by the Men Zhang 'brog pa-s from Byang thang, a branch of the local royal family. The Men Zhang 'brog pa-s inhabited lands in lower Byang thang, east of Gro shod, where Pra dum is sited, and west of Gung thang including Dol po and Glo bo (ibid., p. 142,8-10 and *Chos legs kyi rnam thar*, f. 10a,4-10b,3). These 'brog pa had installed themselves in southern Byang thang as early as the 12th century after their ancestors migrated from Gu ge to gTsang around the end of the 11th century, but returned westwards in Byang thang (ibid., ff. 7b,3-8a,2).

The Men Zhang had deposed the Gung thang main line related by kinship to the Sa skya pa since the days of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa, a state of affairs that lasted for five years (*Gung thang gdung rabs*, pp. 117,21-118,6). The change of governance caused rig 'dzin rGod ldem to lose

his Sa skya pa royal house of Gung thang patrons for a while.

Before the throne of Gung thang was usurped, Men Zhang 'brog pa bSod nams lde led a campaign that resulted in his takeover of La stod Byang, thus subverting the old conditions of the principality, and took over La stod lHo, too, thus expanding the authority of the Men Zhang from Gung thang over a vast area of gTsang (*Gung thang gdung rabs*, p. 119,3-5).

These events led the *Byang gter* master to conceive in 1370 the idea to seek a safer land where to live. He gave course to his thought the next year 1371, given another factor that unsettled the world in which he operated and, therefore, made him opt for exile without further hesitation. One more destabilising event was the war brought by a huge Phag mo gru pa army which moved from dBus to La stod Byang (*rGod ldem can gyi rnam thar* Sikkim ed., p.109,4-5), a distant ripple of the Sa skya pa hegemony's end over Tibet.

He took his time to reach Sikkim, which he did in 1374. Among several motivations for personalities to move to a *sbas yul* such as 'Bras mo ljongs, was to seek solitude. His choice of Sikkim as his new land was to take distance from the unfavourable events in Central Tibet. His move to 'Bras mo ljongs underpins one of the institutional roles of a hidden land besides religious ones. Among them, they served the function of refuge from a dire secular situation in the place where one used to be active. Exemplary was, in the 9th century, the decision of Khri Ral pa can's brother lHa sras gTsang ma who saved his life by migrating to lHo Kha bzhi, when the strife between the Buddhists and the representative of the old tribal order led to the assassination of his *btsan po* brother. The case of rig 'dzin rGod ldem was not as dramatic but the usurpation of the Gung thang throne that broke his life time *yon mchod* with its pro-Sa skya rulers played a role in his eventual resolution, besides obvious religious reasons that prompted him to leave Central Tibet. In 'Bras mo ljongs he found conditions not too dissimilar from those in La stod Byang. The presence of a Tangut immigration echoed the social status of La stod Byang with people of the same origin. They exercised an important role locally.

He returned to gTsang in 1384. While he was in Sikkim, the Sa skya pa line was restored on the Gung thang throne.

Return to Central Tibet

The next historical phase that took shape in those years was characterised at large by a softer influence of the Ming dynasty over Tibet in comparison with the Yuan who made their presence felt in Tibet by means of an overwhelming domination of the plateau.

Soon after his return to bKra bzang, the first signs broke out of the

conflict between the Phag mo gru pa of dBus and their subordinates, the Shar kha pa of gTsang, who had challenged the authority of sNe gdong. The ruler of rGyal rtse, Kun dga' 'phags pa, took away, in 1385, sTag rtse rdzong, a strategical locality in the wider lands frequented by the *gter ston*, from the control of the Phag mo gru pa who lost this important outpost in gTsang. The relations between rGyal rtse and sNe gdong only got worse in the next years. They fought more than a single campaign across the decades but, in the long run, the Shar kha pa were unable to take gTsang for themselves.

The war for unsuccessful supremacy waged by rGyal rtse against rTse thang/sNe gdong shows that the Phag mo gru pa political takeover was not strongly rooted, especially in gTsang.

Although the political scenario kept evolving in those years, a firm point in the *rig 'dzin*'s life kept being the steadfast bonds he entertained with Gung thang still after the passage of the throne from Phun tshogs lde to mChog grub lde, the ruler of the principality in those years (r. 1375-1390).

In 1389, *rig 'dzin* rGod ldem was given full honours by the ruler mChog grub lde.

A *bka' shog* issued by the king in favour of *rig 'dzin* rGod ldem highlights the esteem he had for the *gter ston*.

By requesting all the principality people to abide by the *gter ston*'s spiritual guidance, its conception canonically records the secular structure of Gung thang during the time of the *Byang gter* master.

Its text shows that the organisation of Gung thang followed the hierarchy and the social configuration of the sPu rgyal state. Those called to follow the *rig 'dzin* enlightened advice were:

the *dmag dpon*;
 the *dmag mi-s*;
 the *khrims gcod yul bsrungs-s* ("local guardians of the law");
 the *bsdud 'gro 'ong-s* ("tax collectors");
 the *zhang blon-s*;
 the *sa 'khor nang so 'dzin-s* ("interior holders of local areas");
 the *las tshan so so* (the "various departments");
 the *ru dpon-s* (the "head of the district");
 the *bcu dpon-s* (the "heads of ten [men]");
 the *sgos g.yog-s* (the "skilled servants");
 the *rta mdzo 'dzin-s* (the "horse and *mdzo* caretakers");
 the *Hor dgra-s* (the "select warriors/policemen").

The organisation of Gung thang reflected in the main a solution deemed as workable despite the drastic change of the state of affairs in the course of the centuries after the implosion of the sPu rgyal state.

Based on a consolidated system of issuing ordinances to the population at large from the higher religious or secular authority of the land, the *bka' shog* brought about an expansion of *yon mchod* in the sense that not only the Gung thang royalty but also the subjects from all walks of life became involved in the care of the *gter ston*.

One year later, the *rig 'dzin* met mChog grub lde for the first time after the issuing of the *bka' shog*, which reinforced his life-long interaction with the Gung thang rulers. On the occasion, Gung thang mChog grub lde appointed him *ti shri* ("royal preceptor") (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 488,2).

After he received honours by mChog grub lde sanctioned in the *bka' shog*, he dedicated himself to open or frequent various *sbas yul*-s. Gu ru bKra shis has a summary of the hidden lands he was active at. The doors of the the *sbas yul*-s he opened were bDe ldan sKyid mo lung, sBas yul Padma'i tshal, Rol pa mKha' 'gro'i gling, rGyal gyi mKhan pa lung, lHa'i pho brang stengs, included in a group of seven hidden lands, plus Yol mo gangs, Bu le gangs of 'Bri gung Seng ge ye shes memory, 'Bras mo khyad, sKyid mo lung, sTag so gangs ra according to Gu ru bKra shis (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 487,20-23).

He also hid treasures at localities such as *sbas yul sKyid mo lung* and at Ri bo dPal 'bar too, in lands given to him by his sponsor and part of the circuit under the control of the Gung thang throne.

The last years

More secular changes occurred during the last long years in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life until his death.

Owing to the looser control over the lands of Tibet—a feature of Phag mo gru pa policy I mentioned before—various principalities were able to gain independent rulership. This was the case, in the west, of Glo bo, Gu ge and La dwags. In Glo bo, the dynasty of A ma dpal ruled by establishing its superiority over the neighbours (Vitali, *A short history of Mustang (10th-15th century)*). In Gu ge, rNam rgyal lde introduced a new, independent dynasty (Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang*). In La dwags, it was the end of foreign rulership and the resurgence of local kings, as mentioned in a few sources such as *gDung rabs zam phreng* and the gNam rtse edition of *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (also see Vitali, *Early bKa' brgyud pa masters in the lands of the "upper side" (1191-1344)*).

In the later part of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life—at the end of the 14th century—Ngam ring *chos sde*, established by Shākya Seng ge in 1345, surged to a pre-eminent position with the patronage of the La stod Byang ruler and the Sa skya *dpon chen*, rta dben Blo gros rgyal btsan. gNam ring *chos sde* marked the transfer of the centre of La stod Byang

from west to east still with the support of the Sa skya headmen. With the grown importance of Ngam ring *chos sde*, a consolidation of the secular status in La stod Byang took place, so that its chieftains did not run any risk to lose their land. They opted for an open attitude towards various schools of Tibet such as the Jo nang pa, Bo dong pa and the early dGe lugs pa besides continuing to be followers of the Sa skya pa tradition (*Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*, Tucci transl., p. 192). During the tenures of four Ngam ring *mkhan po*-s, the sPe'u dkar po bla brang (the "bla brang with a turret") and the 'du khang, a small assembly hall, were built (*Bai ser*, p. 263,22-23).

In this panorama of renewed independentism, rig 'dzin rGod ldem undertook quite a long phase of rNying ma *bka' ma* for a great *gter ston* like him.

He indeed chose *bka' ma* to explain rDzogs *chen* to his disciples but was reluctant to let them have the texts of his rediscoveries. It is improbable that all twenty-five disciples who received his preaching were trained masterly enough to use them properly. He conceded to share them with one dpon mo sGrub pa mo from Ri bo bkra bzang, manifestly a local female meditator, upon her insistence (*rig 'dzin rGod ldem gyi rnam thar*, Sikkim ed., p. 132,2-3).

Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's statement that his bad fall from a horse was the consequence of the concession of the texts is just an interpretation of the events (*ibid.*, Sikkim ed., pp. 132,4-133,2). It was *las*, as every incident in one's life, but it is not entirely convincing to consider it consequent to giving out *gter ma*-s at the insistence of bKra bzang Grub pa mo. It is equally improbable to read the incident in the way *gSang ba phyag rgya can gyi skor*, one of the *Can lnga* in *mkhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung* (pp. 375,8-376,14), treats the sPu rgyal *btsan po*-s' falls from a horse in allegorical terms, as a premonition of death. I see in Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's a Buddhist-style interpretation of the incident.

His *bka' ma* preaching had the priority to preserve the purity of his *gter ma*-s. He was, therefore, a major *gter ma* adept until the last days of his life.

The Sikkim and Bhutan editions of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biography do not state a date for the passing of the great *gter ston*. His demise is stereotypically assigned in the literature to 1408. Gu ru bKra shis, for one, opts for this earth-rat year as the date of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's passing (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 488,12-13). Nonetheless, Tenpa Tsering Batsang at the Paris seminar on *Byang gter* (October 2024) has proposed, adducing circumstantial evidence, that he died either in 1401 or 1402. What remains to be ascertained is why the date 1408 has found its way in collective reckoning.

In any case, the conundrum, which is important per se, changes the context in which the rig 'dzin operated marginally. An episode in the

historical context that would have fallen before or after the demise of rig 'dzin rGod ldem depending on the different order of dating his death is that the sTag sna rdzong pa, who continued to exercise some authority over La stod Byang, were able to remove dependency from the Phag mo gru pa whose control of Shangs lasted until fire-dog 1406, when Phag gru Grags pa rgyal mtshan was defeated at the siege he laid to sTag sna rdzong.³² If dead in 1401/1402, the event would have fallen after his demise.

All in all, the difference of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's death year does not alter sensibly my treatment of the historical background during the last period of his life, except for the sTag sna rdzong pa episode, in the event of an extension or reduction of his life span.

The work of rig 'dzin rGod ldem is consistently associated with the well being of Tibet in general; in particular with the Gung thang royal house and with special attention to life conditions characterised by peace on the southern border of the plateau. But this was not the case during a century, the 14th, with composite and subverting events which had an impact over the highlands. His *gter ma* work is also celebrated (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 488,5-10) in terms of stereotypes such as that:

no invasions from the borders occurred,
 no diffusion of infectious diseases affected the lands,
 no internal fights took place,
 no impact by demons created nuisances,
 the restoration of communities' power was an effect of his treasure findings, and
 acts to tame the lands were undertaken.

Still, these stereotypes let space to acts of great impact that created the conditions peculiar to those one hundred years. The 14th century of rig 'dzin rGod ldem was a time of sudden, continuous changes:

swift of power,
 hegemonic changes,
 usurpation of the throne,

³² *rGya Bod yig tshang* (p. 415,3-9): "In particular, the dBus pa lord Grags pa rgyal mtshan, who wielded the political power of the Phag mo gru pa, having gathered a mighty army of dBus gTsang, in the fire-male-d year 1406 laid siege to sTag sna rdzong for a long time. This also happened to many [other places such as] Nang yan, Tshag skyel and Brod sdigs. The father and son (sTag sna rdzong pa Glang po rin chen and rGod po rin chen, actually the uncle and nephew), leaders and servants all stubbornly resisted [to repulse him]".

unexpected demises,
 war between members of the same alliance,
 changes of land control,
 celebrations of his greatness, and
 events that made him move to exile.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem cruised through this turmoil in pursuit of his life mission, the *gter ma* rediscoveries that were the genesis of the *Byang gter* tradition.

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