

GLIMPSSES OF THE HISTORY OF THE rGYA CLAN WITH REFERENCE
TO NYANG STOD, LHO MON AND NEARBY LANDS¹ (7TH-13TH CENTURY)

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The little I am going to say here concerns a branch of the rGya clan that had some influence on the events unfolding in the Nyang stod area of southern Tibet and adjoining territories. These events are significant to the ancient history of lHo Mon, long before Bhutan was created. It is normally held that the rGya clan began to exercise its influence in areas later related with or comprised in the future kingdom of Bhutan when the great 'Brug pa master gTsang pa rGya ras Ye shes rdo rje (1161-1211) operated in these lands. I attempt to show that the rGya came to these lands at a remarkably earlier stage of their history. This phase should not be confused with the much later one characterised by the efforts of various bKa' brgyud pa sub schools masters, including the 'Brug pa of gTsang pa rGya ras, to settle in this region of the Tibetan plateau as part of the overall design of the bKa' brgyud pa to establish themselves in many territories also beyond the limits of their own world. Before trying to do so, I wish to look back at an earlier period and trace out a few brief notions on the origin and early history of the rGya clan. They are not necessarily related to the lands under consideration.

The rGya ancestrally belonged to the great proto-Tibetan tribe of the lDong. Among its divisions, they belonged to the clan of the sMug po lDong ("the dark lDong") from Mi nyag,² the region where the Tangut kingdom was subsequently formed, which lasted from 981 until 1227 when Jing gir Qan conquered it.³ The rGya are known to Tibetan history

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² There are several classifications of the ancestral lDong tribe mostly belonging to the *rus mdzod* and *mi'u rigs* literature. The *lDong rus mdzod* (vulgarly called the Hermanns manuscript) has an articulated version of the groups composing this tribe (see R.A. Stein, *Les tribus anciennes des marches sino-tibétaines* p.32-33). Mi nyag appears among the "six great" lDong which are, in *stod*, Pa tsa (sic) and 'Bring yag; in *bar*, Rag shi and Khrom bo (i.e. Khrom lo?); and, in *smad*, Me nyag (spelled as) and Khrom tshang.

rGya Bod yig tshang (p.13 lines 11-13) confirms: "There are six great ones (*mche drug* sic for *che drug*) with the elder brother lDong: in *stod*, both sPa tshab and 'Bring g.yas; in *bar*, both Ro 'dze and Rag shi; [and] in *smad*, both Mi nyag and Gyi than".

³ The *Sung Annals*, translated into Tibetan by sTag lha Pun tshogs bkra shis in *rGya'i yig tshang nang gsal ba'i Bod kyi rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (p.544 line 14-p.545 line 1), say: "246 years elapsed from the initial establishment of the [Mi nyag] kingdom (in 981) until its final surrender to the Hor (in 1227). Since [the appearance in 881 of] Zi kong, the chieftain of the various Tu 'o pa tsho belonging to the Tibetan race, 347 years (p.545) elapsed".

since the second quarter of the 7th century. They were one of the populations vanquished by Srong btsan sgam po soon after he was denied a Chinese princess in marriage in 634, and consequently decided to move against the Celestial Empire to avenge the offence. The *T'ang Annals* say that, on that occasion, he levied Zhang zhung pa troops and defeated the rGya and the 'A zha to open his way to the door of China.⁴ Eventually he was given Weng chen Kong jo in marriage, and did not invade China.

As is well known, lHa dga' and Klu dga' are among the earliest known members of the rGya whose trace has been preserved in the tradition. They were two brothers of great physical strength, responsible for bringing the statue of Jo bo Shakyamuni (later installed in the Jo khang) from China to lHa sa in the entourage of Weng chen Kong jo.⁵ On the other hand, some Tibetan sources, including texts belonging to the 'Brug pa literature, see the rGya as a clan of Chinese origin in that they single out members associated with the Celestial Empire. This is the case of rGya Sang shi, whose memory is preserved in the Tibetan tradition because he collected important books on astrology and other sciences in China on behalf of Mes Ag tshom, and was one of the protagonists of the Buddhist renaissance during the youth of Khri srong lde btsan (see *sBa bzhed* p.2 line 11-p.9 line 1 for the context of events in which he was involved). He is sometime recognised as a descendant of lHa dga' (*Myang chos 'byung* p.25 lines 20-21), but his association with the rGya clan is doubtful. Claims attributing a Chinese origin to the rGya are based in the main on the feeble assumption that the name of the clan, in the Tibetan language, is the same as that of China. In fact, the rGya's belonging to the proto-Tibetan tribes demonstrates that this suggestion is erroneous, and therefore I think that rGya Sang shi stands for Sang shi the Chinese.

Two major events created the conditions for the rGya to become active in Nyang stod and neighbouring lands. The first occurred during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan and did not directly involve the rGya clan. As a reward for his activity in favour of the Buddhist diffusion, Khri srong lde btsan awarded his minister 'Gos Khri bzang yab lhag lands

⁴ On the events of 634, when Srong btsan sgam po sent a mission to the Chinese court asking for a princess in marriage, and those after 634, when Srong btsan sgam po levied Zhang zhung pa troops and subjugated the rGya and 'A zha, see the *Old T'ang Annals* (f.2a) (in Pelliot (transl.), *Histoire ancienne du Tibet* p.4; the *New T'ang Annals* (f.2b) (in Pelliot (transl.), *Histoire ancienne du Tibet* p.82), and Bushell (transl.), "The Early History of Tibet" p.444).

⁵ *Myang chos 'byung* (p.25 lines 17-20): "The greatness of the family of gTsang pa rGya ras is as follows. During the time of Srong btsan sgam po, the names of the two excellent athletes who brought the Jo bo from China were lHa dga' and Klu dga'".

which came to constitute his principality. The dominions of minister 'Gos comprised parts of Nyang stod, 'Bring mtshams, the present-day north-west Bhutan including Mon sKyer chu lha khang of Srong btsan sgam po's fame, up to the western portion of lHo brag.⁶ As a result of its territorial composition and its possession by minister 'Gos, the principality became known as 'Gos yul stod gsum ("the three upper lands of the 'Gos").

At that time, the rGya had not yet surfaced at the forefront of these lands. They did so when Ral pa can awarded rights over some lands within 'Gos yul stod gsum to rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba, his Tantric teacher from bSam yas, and the combined effort of the rGya and 'Gos was conducive to the foundation of gNas rnying, the main monastery of the area.⁷ The 'Gos were in charge of secular matters, the rGya were responsible for the religious activity. The grant by Ral pa can in favour of the rGya probably occurred after 821-822 when he signed the peace treaty with China, thus diverting his attention to religious matters rather than those secular, and before 836, the most plausible date of his assassination (*New T'ang Annals* in Pelliot, *Histoire ancienne du Tibet* p.133).

The lands assigned to the rGya comprised a fraction of the lands previously given to the 'Gos clan by Khri srong lde btsan in that they did not include the territory around sKar la mtsho and towards Bhutan as well as 'Bring mtshams and areas located to the west of the plain (where rGyal rtse was built subsequently) towards Pa snam rdzong. Their lands were centred around gNas rnying and rGyal rtse, and included mGo bzhi, the territory between Rwa lung and rGyal rtse (Ru lag kha gsum), and rGyang ro, the area to the south-east of gNas rnying towards sKar la

⁶ *gNas rnying skyes bu rnams kyi rnam thar* (f.3a line 6-f.3b line 1): "Then, during the life of chos rgyal Khri srong lde btsan, 108 *gtsug lag khang* and 108 *mchod.rten* were built. During their construction, the king ordered to the main ministers: "Each of you should build one *lha khang* and one *mchod rten* to remove your defilements". Due to the fact that he spoke so, (f.3b) they were built in compliance to his order. Among them, blon po chen po mGos (spelled as) Khri bzang ba yab lhag made the most wondrous *lha khang* and *mchod rten*".

Ibid. (f.3b lines 3-4): "Blon po mGos [was awarded] the lands in gTsang stod as far as Mon sKyer chu lha khang, until the extremity of sKar la mtsho [and] as far as 'Bri 'tshams rDza smug po. Hence, blon po mGos went to the lands granted to him by the king, the protector of the religion. Given that these territories were under the control of blon po mGos, the lands granted to mGos became known as mGos yul stod gsum".

⁷ *gNas rnying skyes bu rnams kyi rnam thar* (f.4a lines 5-6): "The *lha khang* and the *tshogs khang* of Ba ga rGyags grong were founded in the lower part of Ba ga lung. Here many settlements were established. As for his residence, the *bla ma's gzim khang* and *lha khang* were founded together with the gNas rnying central boundary wall surrounding them. As for the hermitage, a *gzim khang* was built at dBus lung thang khung".

mtsho and Phag ri rdzong.⁸ In neighbouring lHo brag, the Shud pu clan regained control of this territory by restoring it to independent status at the time of the disintegration of the power of the *lha sras btsan po* and the breaking of Tibetan unity into principalities.⁹

The means by which the rGya in Nyang stod and the Shud pu in lHo brag got hold of the local power could have not been more different. The rGya were empowered over stretches of Nyang stod by imperial decree, for Ral pa can granted them the lands within 'Gos yul stod gsum, whereas the Shud pu established their power by themselves in coincidence with the downfall of the rule of the *lha sras btsan po*.

The rGya and the 'Gos continued to rule in those lands for some time to come. A crucial event that shaped the religious and secular situation in the lands under study was the division of the territories controlled by the rGya among rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba's successors at the time of his death. Each of his four sons received his share of lands and the successors in the 'Gos clan were their secular supporters. This division concerned those lands under the spiritual authority of the rGya rather than the territories comprised in 'Gos yul stod gsum, which were still controlled by the members of the 'Gos clan. rGya dPal chen skyabs, sponsored by 'Gos g.Yung dpal, received the lands of Gam and rGyang ro (i.e. the stretch of land to the south-east of gNas rnying). The land of Nying ro was assigned to rGya Rig 'dzin, sponsored by 'Gos Shes rab 'phel. The share of lands of Yang dag skyabs, sponsored by 'Gos Rig sprin, included gNas rnying; the area to the immediate south-east of the latter, mGo bzhi, and rGya grong. 'Jam dpal gsang ba allocated She'u

⁸ *gNas rnying skyes bu rnam kyī rnam thar* (f.4b lines 4-5): "The territories [given to the rGya clan], according to the 'ja' sa of the king, are Ru lag kha gsum in sTod, She'u lung gsum in sMad, sKyege ru gsum in Bar. Concerning the rje and the subjects of the 'Bre Khyung, the subjects assigned to the 'Bre are Lung pa dkar po sGo (spelled as) bzhi. The subjects assigned to the Khyung are Glang pa, Chos gzu, Gung sa and Pho ma".

⁹ *lHo brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar* (p.4 lines 1-4): "When bSam yas was consecrated, each men raced a horse, each hair was tied with a turquoise, and each man sang a song. Given that melted butter filled [people's] bellies (*dbo* equal to *sbo*), this [feast] was superior than [that offered] by a king. As [Shud phu dPal gyi seng ge] attained the spiritual power of rDo rje phur ba and Ma mo, many extraordinary signs occurred such as that he threw the *phur pa* in the Ngam shod river and blocked the waters from above and, having pegged [the *phur pa*] into a rock, the rock was torn down. From then until the present time, in the land of Shud phu, there is an uninterrupted [lineage of] Ma mo *grub thob-s*. In the fourth generation after Shud phu dPal gyi seng ge, the 'kheng (sic) log (i.e. the revolt of the subjects) against the rje erupted in the land of Grwa. After coming back [to the ancestral Shud pu lands], since [an unspecified member of the Shud phu clan] was at Yugs nags, he looked from Zangs dkar phu and said: "Let's settle down here from where we can see the sky". The [Shud pu] established themselves in gNam thang and settled [there]. In stages, they built their settlements".

lung, to the extreme north-west of the rGya territory, to bKra shis 'phel, sponsored by 'Gos Don rin.¹⁰

These succinct notions preserved in the sources are significant because they reveal that the rGya clan cruised through the dark period when “the fire of religion was asleep under its ashes” and resurfaced from this period of historical obscurity in a responsive way when the conditions were ripe to introduce *bstan pa phyi dar*. At the beginning of *bstan pa phyi dar*, the situation of the lands under study changed remarkably with the advent of the *tsho* system. The *tsho* were the divisions into which dBus and gTsang were fragmented into a network of small monastic communities centred on their own temple. They had been created by the men of dBus gTsang when, from Amdo, they reintroduced the Buddhist teachings in central and southern Tibet beginning from the late 10th century.¹¹ Among them was Blo gros shes rab, a member of the rGya (*sNgon gyi me tog gi phreng ba* p.38 line 3), which shows that the clan should be credited for contributing on a personal level to the reintroduction of Buddhism in Tibet.

Before *bstan pa phyi dar* or, less probably, during its initial phase, the rGya had come to exercise their authority over the temples and lands in lHo Kha bzhi, an area in lHo Mon. This area, identified by John Ardussi (see *From Lho Mon to Lha Kha Bzhi: Bhutan Emerges as a Political Entity*, a sub-section in Chapter Two (entitled “The Growth and Spread of Religious Institutions from Tibet: 10th-16th Century”) of his forthcoming monograph on the history of Bhutan) as corresponding during that

¹⁰ *gNas rnying skyes bu rnam kyī rnam thar* (f.5a line 3-f.5b line 1): “At that time, since the *bla ma* (i.e. rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba) was old, he assigned the properties and the several *yon bdag* to his sons in the following way. He assigned lHa khung grong leb and its sponsors to rGya Jo sras; and both Gam rGyang and their sponsors to dPal chen skyabs. The latter built the *tshogs khang* and *mgron khang* at Brag mo. His sponsor was 'Gos (spelled as) g.Yung dpal. [dPal chen skyabs] followed his father in protecting and supporting Gam rGyang. His lineage is established in sTod. [rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba] assigned She'u lung gsum in mDa' and their sponsors to Jo sras bKra shis 'phel. His *yon bdag* was bGos (sic for 'Gos) Don rin. [Jo sras bKra shis 'phel] followed his father in protecting and supporting the *gzhung gsum* (“three main areas”) such as She'u lung gsum. [rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba] assigned Nying ro and its sponsors to rGya Rigs 'dzin. His *yon bdag* was 'Gos Shes rab 'phel. [rGya Rigs 'dzin] followed his father in protecting and supporting Nying ro. [rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba] gave gNas rnying and Ba ga rGyags grong, as the main ones, and assigned sKyegs ru gsum and 'Bre Khyung rje 'bangs to Jo sras Yang dag skyabs. [Jo sras Yang dag skyabs] followed his father in protecting and supporting [these localities]. (f.5b) His sponsor was 'Gos Ri sprin”.

¹¹ On the phases of *bstan pa me ro blangs* in A mdo and, successively, of *bstan pa phyi dar* in dBus gTsang one can read virtually every *lo rgyus* and *chos 'byung*, the earlier works of this literary genre being recommended. The exact chronology of the events that led to the passage in dBus gTsang from the former phase to the latter remains one of the major problems of Tibetan history which cannot be easily solved on the basis of the available sources.

period to the area of present-day north-western Bhutan centred on sPa gro, was part of the territories of 'Gos yul stod gsum originally controlled by the 'Gos. The only record proving the control of the rGya over this tract of land is found in *gNyos kyi gdung rabs* (f.3b lines 4-6) which says:

“Then, gNyos lo tsa ba and his disciples were invited to rGyang ro Sa lu sPe sar by rGya ston A rya de ba, the father and son. They received from gNyos instructions on *rGyud gsum* including his *chos skyong*. They offered him the extremity of the route of the rGya (rGya'i lam btsas) with Sa lu sPe sar at its beginning, and the estates, communities, monasteries, and territories of lHo Kha bzhi, belonging to the rGya people”.

The most significant aspect of A rya de ba's donation to gNyos lo tsa ba is the evidence that, during the previous period, the jurisdiction of the rGya branch of A rya de ba, a descendant of dPal chen skyabs, the son of 'Jam dpal gsang ba to whom the southernmost region known as Gam and rGyang ro were assigned, had been previously extended to lHo Kha bzhi because the rGya originally did not have control over the eastern dominions of 'Gos yul stod gsum (including Mon sKyer chu lha khang). This indicates that the 'Gos clan had lost grounds and had relinquished control of some of their lands in favour of the rGya. The place where gNyos lo tsa ba (973-1113 (sic)) gave empowerments to rGya ston A rya de ba and his son, namely rDo rje bla ma, was rGya gNas lha khang (*gNyos kyi gdung rabs* f.3b line 7-f.4a line 1):

“At rGya gNas lha khang (f.4a) one can still see the support (*sa stegs*) of the *mandala* with which gNyos lo tsa ba gave the empowerments”.

This temple is in the same area of Nyang stod (near Glang pa 'Pang thang) belonging to the rGya (*Myang chos 'byung* p.66 line 18). rGya gNas lha khang was also known as rGya gNas Tshe dpag med lha khang from its main statue which shed tears during the invasion of the 'Dzun gar and more tears in 1959 following the lHa sa revolt (*rGyang ru Sa ma mda' khul gyi dgon pa lha khang khag gi lo rgyus* p.36 lines 9-p.37 line 4). However, I believe that the rGya clan and then gNyos lo tsa ba did not exercise control over all the temples of Sa lu sPe sar, because rKyang bu lha khang, one of them, did not pass under gNyos lo tsa ba's authority (see my forthcoming “Biography without *rnam thar*: piecing together the life of Zangs dkar lo tsa ba 'Phags pa shes rab”).

The notion of the rGya'i lam btsas (or “the extremity of the route of the rGya”) is especially intriguing because not only it indicates that the area of rGyang ro was the terminal point of the trade route with India, but also that the rGya controlled this point and conceivably had a share

in this lucrative traffic. Although there is no date of the meeting between rGya ston A rya de ba and gNyo lo tsa ba Yon tan grags, the assessment of the approximate year in which it happened does not create too many difficulties. gNyo lo tsa ba left for India in 1028, together with lHo brag Mar pa who was seventeen years old at the time (b.1012).¹² gNyo lo tsa ba returned to Tibet seven years later in 1034.¹³ Soon after this year, he was in Nyang stod and received lands and religious institutions in lHo Kha bzhi and Nyang stod. Hence, this grant dates to some years before 1045 when the gNas rnying branch of the rGya descending from Yang dag skyabs, which was on the verge of extinction, also released jurisdiction over gNas rnying to the three Yol brothers, disciples of A ti sha, who could capitalize on the charisma of their teacher.¹⁴

rGya ston A rya de ba was probably the ultimate expression of the religious and secular complexity of the period. He belonged to the rGya clan locally empowered by the *lha sras btsan po*. However, he himself was the founder of a *tsho*, for he had established the rGya *tsho* at sPo ru sna (spelled as in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* p.479 lines 2-3, while *Bu ston chos 'byung* p.197 lines 10-11 has sGo ru ru sna), which shows that he adopted the religious system brought from A mdo by the men of dBus gTsang, including his kinsman, rGya Blo gros shes rab. The organization of the *tsho* system was based on the hierarchy between master and disciples. rGya ston A rya de ba was a disciple of A me who, in turn, was a disciple of Kyi ston Ye shes dbang po from whom the division known as Khyi tsho originated. rGya ston A rya de ba's rGya tsho was thus one of the subdivisions under the so called Kyi tsho stod pa.¹⁵

¹² *Kha rag gNyo kyi gdung rabs* (f.2b line 2-3): "gNyo [lo tsa ba], who was fifty-six years old [at that time], was the oldest; rje Mar pa, who was aged seventeen, was the youngest. Twenty children of Tibet (*Bod phrug*) left for India. They stayed for many days at the place called La stod Cung pa sa. Then they went to Gu lang gser kha to search for gold".

¹³ *Kha rag gNyo kyi gdung rabs* (f.3b lines 1-2): "Since [gNyo lo tsa ba] studied with this *bla ma* (i.e. Ba lim a tsa rya) for seven years, seven months and seven days, he cleared his doubts. The *bla ma* said: "You should leave now in order to benefit many sentient beings in Tibet".

¹⁴ *gNas rnying skyes bu rnam ky'i rnam thar* (f.10a lines 5-7): "When [rGya Jo sras Phur pa 'phel] was thinking what would be the best in order to complete the tasks of the rGya (*rGya'i las thabs*), Yol Chos ky'i dbang phyug requested Jo sras Phur pa 'phel: "Do you have or not any objection if I introduce a monastic community at your *dgon pa*?", and Jo sras was very pleased. He said: "My wish is fulfilled. The son (i.e. Yol Chos dbang) has arrived in time when the father (i.e. Jo sras Phur pa 'phel) has become old. This is excellent".

Ibid. (f.10b lines 6-7): "Having said this, the entire land of sKyeags with the *yon bdag* (i.e. the properties and sponsors for the upkeep of the temple) were given by rGya Jo sras Phur pa 'phel to mkhan po Yol chen po. Yol Chos dbang established a noble bKa' gdams pa monastery at both gNas rnying and Yol".

¹⁵ *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p.479 lines 1-4): "At that time, of the four [A me's] disciples of sTod, Khri ston brTson 'bar held Shong sna; Sa rbad bTsun chung held Brang chung; rGya ston Arya de wa held sPo ru sna; and 'Dar Shakya bzhon nu held Sar phug. These are known as Khri tsho, Bra

The empowerments that gNyos lo tsa ba, a proponent of the new teachings that he introduced directly from India, gave to rGya ston A rya de ba and his son rDo rje bla ma were the embryo from which the secular and religious influence of the gNyos clan over that stretch of land developed and became established for centuries to come. Hence, it was the rGya clan which opened the way for the steadfast presence of the gNyos in the southernmost stretch of the plateau, including parts of present-day Bhutan. Around the same time when gNyos lo tsa ba Yon tan grags received donations from A rya de ba, he was separately given places and temples in 'Gos yul stod gsum and 'Bring mtshams.¹⁶ This indicates that other areas of the ancient 'Gos yul stod gsum were not under the spiritual influence of the rGya branch to which A rya de ba belonged. The 'Gos clan's loss of jurisdiction over tracts of 'Gos yul stod gsum during *bstan pa phyi dar* is underscored by the absence of traces in the sources of a pre-eminent role exercised by the 'Gos in their own territories, while the other clans were remarkably active.

The early *bstan pa phyi dar* expansion of the rGya clan members to other areas neighbouring those originally assigned to them by Ral pa can and inherited by the sons of rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba is documented by a few hints scattered throughout the available sources. The rGya established a stronghold in sTag tshal of Nyang smad, a major religious centre during the 11th century.¹⁷ This locality is where rGya brTson seng, one of the pre-eminent members of the rGya, was born (*Myang chos 'byung* p.115 lines 12-13), which indicates that the presence of the rGya at sTag tshal was not occasional, and may date back to a time before the beginning of *bstan pa phyi dar*. rGya brTson seng led the delegation sent by lha bla ma Byang chub 'od of mNga' ris skor gsum to India in order to invite Jo bo rje A ti sha.¹⁸ After contributing to convince him to come to

tsho, rGya tsho and Sar tsho. They are known as the Kyi tsho stod pa and became four tax-paying communities".

¹⁶ *Kha rag gNyos kyi gdung rabs* (f.4a lines 2-3): "Given that iHa rje Chos byang had built E ma ra'i bDud 'dul lha khang [note: this is called Kyang po], he requested the *lo tsa ba* to consecrate it. Moreover, he offered the *lo tsa ba* all the monastic quarters and places of mGos (spelled as) yul stod gsum and 'Bri (spelled as) mtshams". On g.Ye dmar lha khang see Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet* (Chapter Two). Identifying Ema ra'i bDud 'dul lha khang as rKyang pu is an oversight on the part of the anonymous author of *Kha rag gNyos kyi gdung rabs* because E ma ra is g.Ye dmar in which a temple, like at rKyang pu, was dedicated to the subjugation of Mara's demons.

¹⁷ *Myang chos 'byung* (p.26 lines 7-8): "Then, due to the power of the times (i.e. implying a change in the situation), his (i.e. rGya 'Jam dpal gsang ba's, the founder of gNas rnying) descendants were transferred to sTag tshal".

¹⁸ mChims Nam mkha' grags, *Jo bo A ti sha'i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.121 lines 1-2): "Then in the thought of the king (i.e. Byang chub 'od), he thought: "I must invite this Jo bo by all means". Having given much gold, the main one being a piece of gold equal to sixteen *srang*, to lo tsa ba

Tibet, rGya brTson seng died of black magic in Bal po on the way to Tibet, and it was Nag tsho lo tsa ba who escorted A ti sha to his destination.¹⁹ The area of sTag tshal was the ancestral seat of the Yol family of the three brothers who inherited gNas rnying from the rGya,²⁰ but they controlled it only temporarily. In this process of expansion, the rGya thus intersected the Yol, their ancient subordinates in the territory of Nyang stod when the rGya came to settle in gNas rnying and surrounding areas.

Turning my attention to 'Bring mtshams, little is known about this territory during this early phase, yet there is enough to prove that, in line with developments happening elsewhere, the rGya were involved. They undertook the foundation of a temple belonging to the *tsho* network. This was the remarkably obscure Bul tog lha khang of 'Bring mtshams, a branch temple built after the foundation of La stod Mar la thang by another member of the clan, rGya Shakya gzhon nu, about whom little is known (*mKhas pa'i dga' ston* p.477 lines 19-21).

Hence, with *bstan pa phyi dar*, the previous order evolved to a new reality within the frame of the old power structure. This evolution pertained to the rGya and the Yol. The Yol clan had their part in this closely knit arrangement of temples and masters presiding over them. Yol Thog 'bebs, the youngest of the three Yol brothers who, because they were disciples of A ti sha, had received gNas rnying from the rGya, was especially active in Khu le, the 'brog pa territory towards the Kha ro la and lHo brag, where Rwa lung was later built, and founded temples there.²¹ It is not clear from the sources whether, in order to do so, Yol

rGya brTson 'grus seng ge who hailed from the locality gTsang sTag tshal, and having formed a group of one hundred retinue, he sent him to invite the Jo bo from rGya gar".

¹⁹ mChims Nam mkha' grags, *Jo bo A ti sha'i rnam thar rgyas pa* (p.137 lines 1-4): "When he went to Bal yul, lo tsa ba rGya brTson seng was extremely sick. The Jo bo asked him: "What did you do?". He said: "I did not do anything else than receiving a harmful *mantra* from a *mu stegs pa*. I gave some gold powder from the gold that was left [with me] but he was not satisfied. He told me: "Melt it [into one piece]!". Not being able to do so (*ma phod par*), I had a fight ('*dras*) with him. From then on, I was slightly sick". The Jo bo said: "Although, in general, it is not possible to melt it, had you thereafter disclosed [the matter] to me, [I] would have used a method [leading to a solution]", and added: "Depite [my] blessings, [rGya brTson seng] has gone beyond [the possibility of being saved]". Given that lo tsa ba rGya was thus going to be murdered [by the *mu stegs pa's* spell] in Bal po, the local law [sanctioned that], if one died in a house, the householder would take for himself [the deceased person's] belongings, that night they camped at the bank of a river on the plain ground. He died that night and most of his belongings were brought forth [to Tibet]".

²⁰ *Myang chos 'byung* (p.114 lines 12-15): "The birth place of Yol Chos dbang, Drang srong and Thog 'bebs, altogether three, was sTag tshal Yol lcags. The great Yol ston Chos dbang died on the religious throne while expounding the great commentary to *brGyad stong pa*".

²¹ *gNas rnying skyes bu rnam ky'i rnam thar* (f.11a lines 1-4): "Yol Thog 'bebs founded rMog pa on the mountain of Khu le. Given his foundation of rGya Dam po, he established the Khu le 'brog pa.

Thog 'bebs used the authority that derived to him as a disciple of A ti sha, or from the relations established earlier by his clan with its neighbours. It is probable that it was a combination of both factors. His main disciple was Zla ba rgyal mtshan, a member of the Shud pu clan of lHo brag.²² During *bstan pa phyi dar*, the Shud pu retained their control of lHo brag, but also faced a peculiar situation. One of the four sons of Yum brtan's descendant Tsha la na Ye shes rgyal mtshan, a contemporary of lha bla ma Ye shes 'od and famous for having promoted the men of dBu gTsang's later diffusion of Buddhism, went to settle in lHo brag.²³ So it should be noted that a redistribution of the progeny of the old order as late as *bstan pa phyi dar* took place in lHo brag. When one considers the situation that took shape during the 11th century from the perspective of *bstan pa phyi dar*, one can see that both the rGya and the Shud pu belonged to the old order. The rGya were relics of the imperial system, the Shud pu the expression of post imperial Tibet, a time of remarkable obscurity. In the long run, the only actual new player on the scene were the gNyos who did not belong to the local power structure of the ancient times.

Then, since he reformed all the ancient settlements, he established the householders of the Khu le land. He established *yon mchod* with the Bod 'brog pa-s. When he was traveling between Bye mda' and rMog pa, he came to Gram. Having had lunch at this place a few times, he said: "A place to eat is needed", and founded Bra thang. This is bTshad nams sDe chen. Having said: "A place to stop at night is needed", he founded both 'Chad mangs and Ze thang. He renovated dGe rgyas lha khang at Bye mda'. Since he founded Nyams lha khang at Bye mda', he gave it as offering. He made the *lcags ri*. Having said: "This is a good place for me to stay", he founded Shod mgur. The three Yol brothers stayed here. Moreover, he founded many [temples] such as Wa lung".

²² *lHo brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar* (p.4 line4-p.5 line 2): "When he was twenty-one years old, Zla ba rgyal mtshan went to gTsang to study. He received many religious exposition from bla ma Yol thog 'bebs, Yol dge slong (i.e. Chos dbang), and Yol Drang srong, altogether three. In particular, he completely received the entire religious exposition and instructions on gShin rje from Yol Thog 'bebs. As the *bla ma* was old, since [Zla ba rgyal mtshan] had developed an extremely great power, the *bla ma* said: "I am old, and cannot do it anymore since my health is slightly weak. You should display signs [of your power] now". After handing him over the '*khor lo* and *ling ga*, he said: "I do not need these [anymore]". (p.5) While [Zla ba rgyal mtshan] kept on rolling his iron *rdo rje* above the *ling ga*, blood dripped from the mouth and the navel of the *ling ga*, and since it happened that blood stained the *rdo rje*, the *bla ma* said: "You fulfilled my wish, son! You have become a person who has the power of a *grub thob* of dpal gShin rje. You are bound to benefit the teachings of Sangs rgyas greatly, and to build many *gtsug lag khang* in the barbarian land". It is somewhat remarkable that followers of A ti sha, who had been called to Tibet to restore orthodoxy in the teachings, were practitioners of black magic.

²³ *lDe'u Jo sras chos 'byung* (p.153 line 5-8): "The lineage of [Yum brtan's] younger [son], Nyi 'od dpal mgon, is as follows. Nyi 'od dpal's son was mGon spyod. His son was Tsha la na Ye shes rgyal mtshan. The latter had four sons. The three younger ones (*og gsum*) separated. They scattered to dBu ru 'Phan yul, lHo brag and Shed Mal gro". Also see Vitali, "The Role of Clan Power in the Establishment of Religion (from the *kheng log* of the 9th-10th century to the instances of the dByil of La stod and gNyos of Kha rag)", paper read at the Seminar on *Chos srid zung 'brel* held at the Lumbini International Research Institute in March 2000, and to be published soon in its Proceedings.

The next period saw further changes with the rGya surging again as protagonists. The key land was Khu le and its vicinities, after the Yol played a role in this area which, however, like in the case of gNas rning, did not last long. The rGya resurfaced conspicuously in Khu le when the 'Brug pa established themselves there following the birth of gTsang pa rGya ras in this land in 1161 and the foundation of Rwa lung. The appearance of the rGya in Khu le was due to the migration of members of the rGya from sTag tshal to this territory in the meantime,²⁴ but it is not clear when this transfer exactly occurred. gTsang pa rGya ras was born in this family transplanted to Khu le.

The gNyos preserved their privileges and authority in that stretch of land, with a peak of flourishing in the late 12th and early 13th century, corresponding with the beginning of the endeavour made by the various bKa' brgyud pa schools to begin proselytising and establish relations in several lands of the plateau and beyond. It is well known that during this period gNyos lHa nang pa (1164-1224) was active in lHo Mon, and left a mark at holy places feasibly under the control of his clan, especially at bCal kha (see, e.g., *gNyos lHa nang pa'i rnam thar* p.98 line 8-p.99 line 15 which spells sPyal kha). It is too coincidental to be fortuitous that gNyos lHa nang pa and gTsang pa rGya ras came to operate in lHo Mon and neighbouring lands. Their presence in these lands was favoured, in my view, by conditions historically conducive to a positive outcome of their activity. This was due to the fact that the rGya and the gNyos clans, to which they respectively belonged, had historical ties to this area.

I believe that the concomitant but separate presence of gTsang pa rGya ras and gNyos lHa nang pa at Tsa ri to open the door of this holy place, especially significant to the bKa' brgyud pa because of Mi la ras pa, was part of the scenario created by the activity of the rGya and gNyos in lands at the borders of the plateau. The interaction of gTsang pa rGya ras and gNyos lHa nang pa has been described in competitive terms by the late 'Brug pa literature and has become the prevailing view of the issue (see the guide to Tsa ri by 'Brug pa kun mkhyen Padma dkar po (*Tsa ri tra legs bshad* p.48 line 6-p.57 line 6)). However, an earlier rare source that has recently resurfaced, and which appears to originate from the 'Bri gung pa, does not describe their interaction in antagonistic terms. Rather, it reflects a mutual understanding and cohabitation. Indeed, gTsang pa rGya ras is acknowledged in this 'Bri gung pa source as the actual opener

²⁴ *Myang chos 'byung* (p.26 lines 10-11): "[Among] his (i.e. rGya brTson seng's) successors, this *chos rje* (i.e. gTsang pa rGya ras) was born in the lineage which migrated to Khu le".

of the Tsa ri door,²⁵ whilst gNyos lHa nang pa is ascribed with opening specific localities.

The memory of gTsang pa rGya ras is more vivid in the tradition than that of gNyos lHa nang pa. A telling sign of the devotion nurtured for gTsang pa rGya ras is the account of the monasteries far and wide in the Tibetan lands under the influence of the 'Brug pa which housed the vertebrae of gTsang pa rGya ras' spine as most treasured relics. On each vertebra a self originated image of sPyan ras gzigs appeared after cremation. The locations where they were placed not later than the 16th century were as follows (*Myang chos 'byung* p.18 line 9-p.19 line 1 and 'Brug pa Padma dkar po, *Rwa lung gi dkar chag* p.185 line 1-p.186 line 1).

- Three of gTsang pa rGya ras' vertebrae were kept at Rwa lung in the way they had been found;

- other three were kept inside receptacle holders at the same monastery;

- two at 'Brug in dBus, not far from lHa sa, the monastery from which the sect derives its name;

- one each at mDo mkhar and Chos rdzong;

- one at Byang U ri and another at mKho 'thing in lHo brag, subsequently moved to gSal rje in Bya yul near Yar lung;

- one at sPu tra in La stod lHo;

- one at sNe'u rings in lHo brag;

- one at dKar dum in Pu hrang, then moved to Gu ge;

- one each at gNas rnying and Chos lung tshogs pa, both in Nyang;

- one placed inside a *mchod rten* in Sikkim;

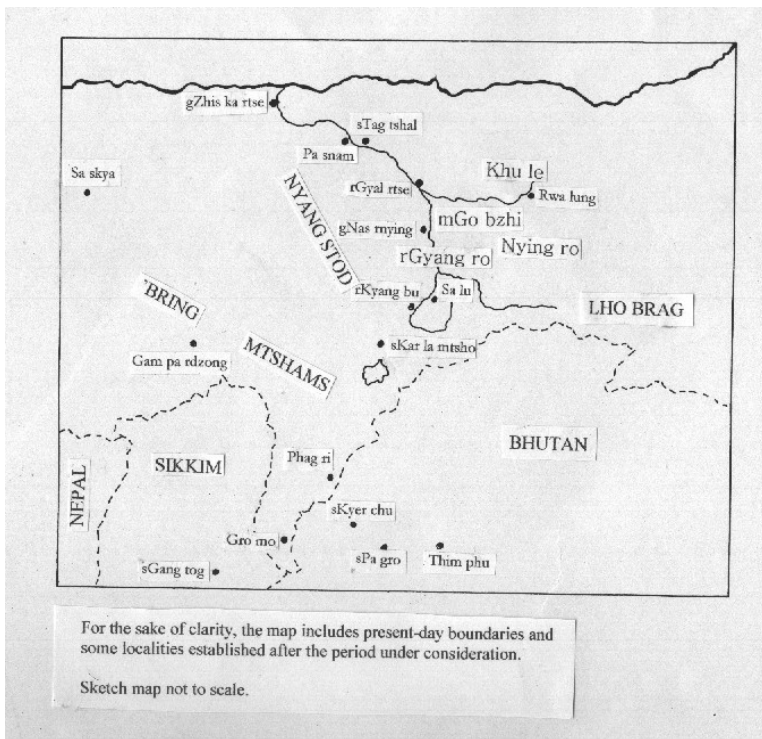
- one at Yon rdzong of lHo Mon, eventually sent to Khams Rong.

This testifies to the widespread territorial diffusion of the 'Brug pa school to which gTsang pa rGya ras contributed. He was instrumental in

²⁵ sMyos lHa gnang ba, *Tsa ri'i dkar chag* (p.22 lines 11-14): “[The three lion-faced *mkha' 'gro ma* said]: “Son! You (i.e. gTsang pa rGya ras) are zealous and moved by a superior aim (*gtul shug* sic for *brtul shugs*), but by acting in this way you will not be able to open the door of the holy place Tsa ri. [You] will not have the vision of the cycle of deities manifesting within [the holy place], and will not obtain extraordinary and ordinary siddhic powers. Go back now”.

Ibid. (p.22 line 22-p.23 line 1): “At that time, [gTsang pa rGya ras] went back without opening the door of the holy place. The next year, around that time, since he was equipped with the implements, the hat and dress as had been advised by the *mkha' 'gro ma*, he arrived at the stone female organ and performed a *tshogs 'khor*. Then he went down. The road was blocked by mGon po brandishing the *gri sgug* (spelled as for *gri gug*). He held [mGon po] by the neck and shook him as if he were a bell. He threw him in the sky as if he were a *rdo rje*, and [mGon po] fell on the ground. At that time, he opened the door [of Tsa ri]. Then he went to gCig (p.23) char, and wondered how was it that sMyos (spelled as) [lHa nang pa], mGar [Chos sdings pa] and [dPal] Chos [ye], altogether three, had come there, although he had opened the door of the holy place”.

transforming the local power of the rGya into the power of the 'Brug pa. And with this transition, a period of the history of these lands came to an end.



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