

# Tombs and Treasures

## Tibetan Empire and Ancestor Cults in Present East Tibet

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### 1. Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the debate of the ‘social’ and ‘religious’ as finely intertwined domains in both cosmological understandings and actual practice, within which we can find certain resonances and actual similarities between imperial Tibet and present-day East Tibet. The work does not examine the concepts of the ‘social’ and the ‘religious’ theoretically but rather tries to point out to the multiple intrinsic ‘social’ dimensions inherently embedded in what is commonly etically conceptualised as ‘religion.’

The case I study is the burial practices of social elites. These practices clearly manifest high or the highest social status and supremacy of political power. Hence they reveal notions of social arrangements and stratification, and yet Western academic audiences usually view them primarily as religious ritual. In this paper, I suggest reconsider these notions and practices and thus revealed perceptions of kingship and rulership, social power and identity, ancestry and progeny, prosperity and territorial integrity as prevalently ‘social’ and ‘political’ elements. Within these elements arise traditions of ancestor cults that derive from and also govern local social order and organisation in terms of both kinship and social hierarchy, in contrast to the transcendentalism of the universal doctrine of Buddhism. They pertain to treasures (*gter*) and perceived forces of vitality and prosperity, above all *bla* and *g.yang*. The article draws attention to significant cultural continuities of divine noble ancestry and kingship, territorial divinities (*yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*, etc.), funerary treatments, and specific treasure practices.<sup>1</sup>

I juxtapose the context of the Tibetan Empire with recent ethnographic and textual material collected in East Tibet, accenting several re-occurring notions and shared practices. By ‘Tibet’, I mean the area of the Tibetan Plateau and its Tibetic languages’ speaking communities; by ‘East Tibet’ I refer to this cultural constellation in the east of the Plateau. East Tibet is currently roughly within the Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces, and eastern parts of the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The short case study presented here derives from the region of Mgo log on the contemporary boundary of Qinghai and Sichuan. The article builds on evidence from the imperial era (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), Dunhuang documents (up to the 11<sup>th</sup> century), and presentations of

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<sup>1</sup> The work has been evolving in discussions with Rob Mayer and is written in relation to Reinier Langelaar’s contribution to this volume, both of whom I express my thanks. I am very grateful to Cathy Cantwell and Rob for help on the *gter ma* material and with the identification and transliteration of mantras, to Jiří Holba with Sanskrit identifications, to Per Sørensen and Guntram Hazod for generous feedback, to Hannibal Taubes for English corrections, and to the wholehearted people of Mgo log. I present here the mentioned topics only briefly, in length see my forthcoming D.Phil. thesis (University of Oxford).

14<sup>th</sup>-century sources relating to this era, especially in Erik Haarh's analyses; and further on a currently used ritual text for the most part authored by Karma chags med (17<sup>th</sup> century, edited later); historiographical literature from East Tibet from the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and on recent publications circulating in East Tibet. The fieldwork was conducted between 2014 and 2018 over repeated visits lasting from weeks to several months, and concentrated on the vicinity of the sacred mountain of Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Interlocutors included locals from all walks of life and different age groups: lay people, monastics, intellectuals, illiterate, both men and women of varying occupations.

## 2. Tibetan Empire: divinity, kingship, and treasures

### 2.1 Divine kingship and the occurrence of tombs

In the most prominent narratives, the Yar lung Spu rgyal dynasty of the Tibetan Empire (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) derived its origin and patrilineal genealogy from their first appointed king Gnya' khri Btsan po. He supposedly descended either on the mountain Lha 'bab ri, literally "mountain of the descending god" (var. Lha ri Rol po, Lha ri Yol ba, *et al.*), in the lower Yar lung valley,<sup>2</sup> or the Lha ri Gyang to (var. Gyang to (Gyang tho/mtho) Bla 'bubs) mountain in the Kong po region, or alternatively hailed from the Spo bo area east of Kong po.<sup>3</sup> The Yar lha Sham po mountain in Central Tibet also features as the descending ground of the dynasty's apical ancestor, whose identity can differ from Gnya' khri Btsan po (Stein 1972: 42, 203). This mighty glacier-topped peak and its warrior deity of the same name are still worshipped as a very important territorial protector at the present.<sup>4</sup> The *Dbal bzhed* chronicle (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>5</sup> mentions the god Yar lha Sham po as the dynasty's worshipped *sku lha*.<sup>6</sup> The very early Tibetan kings initiating the dynasty therefore supposedly descended from the celestial realm of the gods into the realm of the humans, and were expressively titled "divine sons" or "divine princes" (*lha sras*).<sup>7</sup> They were to govern humans as the "ruler of men" (*mi yi rje*).<sup>8</sup> This story has been recorded in Tibetan historical and religious

<sup>2</sup> Hazod in this volume; Sørensen 1994: 139; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 223; Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 58-59, esp. fn. 71, as in sources from the 12/13<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

<sup>3</sup> Haarh 1969: 381; Stein 1972: 42; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 36-37; Karmay 1998: 220-225, 282-309, based on the Dunhuang PT 1287, *in situ* inscriptions from the early 9<sup>th</sup> century (Richardson 1985: 66-67), and the *Lde'u Chronicles* (for references see e.g. Sørensen 1994: 137, *et passim*).

<sup>4</sup> Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 61, fn. 79; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 203-04; Karmay 1998: 297, 342, fn. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Tentative dating of the extant versions (containing material likely from the 9<sup>th</sup> century), a supplemented version probably dates to mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. See Sørensen's dating in the preface (xiv-xv), and the introduction, Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 98-99. On *sku bla/lha* see most recently Dotson 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Tucci 1955: 201; Haarh 1969: 342. The genealogy of the dynasty as recorded in various Tibetan sources is presented in Haarh 1969: 33-44; on varying genealogies: Karmay 1998: 282-309; reign of historical kings' chart: McKay 2003: 615; re-evaluated dating in Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: xxix-xxx; Dotson 2009: 116-19.

<sup>8</sup> See Hill 2013; Bialek 2019.

writing over subsequent centuries with substantial Indo-Buddhist influence,<sup>9</sup> and still continues to be a widespread notion in Tibet today. For example, the popular 16<sup>th</sup>-century *A Scholar's Feast of Doctrinal History*<sup>10</sup> (*Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*) authored by Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba (1504-1564/66) renders these notions as follows – in the translation by Erik Haarh:<sup>11</sup>

“Like day they came to Earth; like night they went to Heaven.  
When the sons were able to master the bridle  
They seized the *rMu-thag* and went to Heaven, it is said.  
As there is no corpse of *lHa*, they vanished like a rainbow.  
The tombs of the deceased ones are said to be placed in Heaven.”

Similar lines feature already in the Dunhuang *Royal Genealogy* (PT 1286) of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> cent., PT 1286, PT 1287; Dotson 2011: 85), the earliest known Tibetan historical narrative, and in the *Dba' bzhed* chronicle describing events of the imperial period (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 98). Later writings recall them again, among the important ones are: *The Chronicles of the Kings* (*Rgyal po bka'i thang yig*), a part of the treasure collection of *The Five Chronicles* (*Bka' thang sde lnga*) ‘discovered’ by the treasure revealer (*gter ston*) O rgyan Gling pa (b. 1323);<sup>12</sup> and the *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies* (*Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*) attributed to the Sa skya scholar Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams Rgyal mtshan (1312-1375, Sørensen 1994: 140).

The very first mythical kings, to whom this passage relates, appear as the “seven heavenly kings” (*gnam gyi khri bdun*) in the Dunhuang material as well as in later sources. They were presumed to temporarily visit the humans by means of a celestial cord (*rmu thag*, *smu thag*, *dmu thag*) connecting the heavenly sphere of gods with the sphere of humans and other earthly beings. Upon passing, the rulers returned to heaven, or the sky, by ascending on the cord. Arising from the gods, their identity was divine (as the world *lha*, “god, deity, divinity”, in the above excerpt indicates), and remained divine after their corporeal death on the earth. Since they also possessed a “divine body” (*lha lus*, cf. Haarh 1969: 330), they did not leave corpses behind on earth after their ascent. They might have had an ascribed cosmological and civilising role of guaranteeing social continuity, order, fertility and prosperity on both celestial and terrestrial levels.<sup>13</sup>

Only by an ill-fated coincidence of king Gri gum Btsan po (var. Dri gum Btsan po), still a pre-historic and likely mythological figure, was the direct heavenly connection broken. Gri gum Btsan po is remembered for unintentionally physically cutting off the exquisite celestial cord during a fight. Since this rupture, deceased kings could not return back to the sky as before, but had to remain on the surface of the earth. As a consequence, tombs were built to enshrine their bodies, of which

<sup>9</sup> Doney 2013, 2015, 2019; Walter 2009; Kapstein 2000; Ramble 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The title translation follows Buswell and Lopez 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Haarh 1969: 119, based on *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, Delhi ed. 1962: 64.6v-7r; Beijing ed. 2017: 87.

<sup>12</sup> Haarh 1969: 199, following the Potala ed. 1889 (O rgyan Gling pa 1889); modern editions: Beijing ed. 1986 (O rgyan Gling pa 1986); Tshang po 2010.

<sup>13</sup> See Dotson 2011; Hazod 2018: 63, and provided references.

the first one sheltered Gri gum Btsan po himself.<sup>14</sup> He was supposedly buried by his sons at the foot or on the slope of mountain Lha ri gyang to (var. Gyang to Bla 'bubs) in Kong po, or alternatively in Upper 'Phyong po. In some accounts, his body was transported from the first location to the second (initially starting at a third, earlier, location in Myang ro Sham po, from which the Gtsang po river carried it to Kong po), and was thus buried twice; Hazod (2007) has tentatively located the actual tomb in Upper 'Phyong po where the dynasty in fact historically originated. Gri gum Btsan po's tomb set a model for his royal successors.<sup>15</sup> Even without physically returning to the sky and leaving corpses, the rulers continued to enjoy divine status both during their lives and afterwards posthumously rising to heaven.<sup>16</sup> Each received a necronym when becoming a royal ancestor (Dotson 2015: 14ff.).

The resulting grand royal earth burial mounds from the whole duration of the dynasty, constructed between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, still at the present embellish the 'Phyongs rgyas site in the 'Phyong po valley of southern Central Tibet. The broad flat valley is thus close to the actual historical place of origin of the imperial royal dynasty in Upper 'Phyong po, and also to one of its supposed mythological origin sites. Square, round, and trapezoid tombs on the river plain and surrounding hill slopes overlook the valley and the 'Phyong po river, some rise from natural hillocks (Tucci 1950: 32). The individual tombs have been identified as to which emperor was buried in which tomb.<sup>17</sup> The main necropolis is located opposite the 'Phying ba Stag rtse fortress of the dynasty, on the left bank of the river 'Phyong po. Trapezoid tombs point with their long frontal side to the river, as is typical for Central Tibet (Hazod 2016b: 128, fn. 41). Each of the royal tombs historically featured one or several specific four-syllabic names often containing the mono-syllabic word *ri* signifying "mountain".<sup>18</sup> From the same period, the imperial Chinese *Tangshu* chronicle mentions tombs distributed "on the mountain slopes located above rivers". Haarh locates the site far from the centre of the Plateau, on the then Sino-Tibetan frontier west of Chiling (Chì líng in Pinyin, Ch'ih-ling in the Wade-Giles romanisation, Haarh 1969: 382) near the Kokonor lake (map in Stein 1972: 87). The majority of Central Tibetan tumulus fields occupy similar locations: on mountain slopes and on alluvial fans above rivers.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Haarh 1969: 330, 342; Stein 1972: 48-49; list of studies on the myth in Dotson 2011: 88, fn. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Haarh 1969: 115; Karmay 1998: 221; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 38-41; Hazod 2007, 2018: 63, 2019: 19ff., Tibetan Tumulus Tradition (TTT) website, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/first-tomb/> (accessed 13.10.2020); Dotson 2011: 88-89, following the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*.

<sup>16</sup> Tucci 1950: 52; *Old Tibetan Annals*, administrative register of the court between 650-765: Dotson 2009: 82, 91, 103.

<sup>17</sup> Haarh 1969: 380; Hazod 2009, 2018, 2019: 97, TTT website, see URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/royal-tombs-1/> (accessed 13.10.2020).

<sup>18</sup> Haarh 1969: 391-93; Tucci 1950: 3-4; Stein 1972: 202; Hazod 2018: 65ff.

<sup>19</sup> TTT website, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/placement/> (accessed 01.12.2020).

Romain (2019, 2020) has recently proposed a theory of geomantic orientation of the emperors' tumuli. Following his measurements, most tumuli are by their axes aligned to the peaks of nearby sacred mountains of cosmological and mythological significance: (1) Yar lha Sham po to the south-east; (2) Mgon po ri (var. Gong po ri) to the north-north-east, the assumed place of the origin of the Tibetan people (Stein 1972: 37; Langelaar 2018: 334); (3) Shel brag range (incl. the Lha 'bab ri of Gnya' khri btsan po's descent; cf. Hazod in this volume). Yet, the direct sight lines from the tombs to the peaks are prevented by other ridges. All three peaks together 'embrace' the Yar lung valley, being located around its edges. Further, one tomb aligns to the 'Phying ba Stag rtse fortress and one precisely to the four cardinal directions. One of the tumuli not aligned to any of these markers seems to parallel the 'Phyongs po river. Guntram Hazod in this volume suggests that more evidence is needed to support this geomantic theory.

For ancient Central Tibet in general, Hazod (2016a: 3) does not suppose recognisable geomantic schemes in the tombs' placement but rather "topographical adjustment". He argues that "basically we see a pattern where the cemeteries were established in close proximity to the settlements, in whose position in the landscape we can recognise a largely high level of historical continuity." Mostly the tombs are close to villages, less frequently they are on mountains and ridges above, and rarely in cultivated land (Hazod 2018: 9). Hazod (2019: 37-38) also shares an example of a burial ground facing the local sacred mountain and progenitor to the there-buried community in Upper Nyang po in eastern Central Tibet. The Central Tibetan tumulus sites reflect the constellation of pre-imperial principalities led by hereditary lineages, and also later political entities; some were likely specific to a particular lineage, but that does not seem to be common.<sup>20</sup>

Haarh (1969: 381-382) assumed that the royal tombs were used as sites of ancestor worship. The one of Srong btsan Sgam po (d. 649), the celebrated emperor and founder of Tibet's first Buddhist temples, further received a Buddhist shrine on its top in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Hazod 2016b: 127, fn. 41) which is still functional today. Whether by a specific articulated preconception or (in some cases) rather due to situational practicality, other ritual sites can be situated close to or at ancient grave fields – for instance with a Buddhist monastery lying opposite (Hazod 2016a: 4), but more often local non-Buddhist cultic traditions are prominent. Some funerary mounds are now topped by a *yul lha* cairn or shrine (Hazod 2016a: 2), and can be worshipped as a *yul lha* deity, as the one in Khu in 'Phyong po neighbouring Yar lung from the west (Hazod 2019: 59), or similarly in Thang stod of the Dbus sde district (Hazod 2018: 25). In another case, the grave field is located next to a sky burial site and a presently functional *yul lha* shrine (Hazod 2016a: 2). Also the artificial mound of Gri gum Btsan po's assumed tomb in Upper 'Phyong po was worshipped as a sacred site and circumambulated, a practice which "is associated with the image of the Gri-gum burial, according to which the spirit of the dead is worshipped as the deity of the place" (Hazod 2007). These arrangements recall the imperial one in 'Phyongs rgyas, of individuals of local provenience

<sup>20</sup> Hazod 2019: 28ff., 52, TTT website, URL:  
<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetanumulustradition/thematic-introduction/tombs-and-clan/>  
<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetanumulustradition/thematic-introduction/placement/>  
 (accessed 13.10.2020).

receiving an earth burial not far from the mountain seat of their divine protector and also potentially the presumed site of their divine ancestor's origin. The examples attest the physical proximity of residence, burial sites, and worshipped local territorial deities of particular communities which in some cases represent genealogically related groups.

The continuation of the successive genealogical line of the living royals as deceased ancestors was expressed in the ritual practice of the dynasty. A Dunhuang manuscript translated by Marcelle Lalou (1939) states that some of the sacrifices at the royal funerals were performed “under invocation of the *yul-lha*, the *yul-bdag*, the *yab-mes*, the *yum-phyi*, and the *yogs-che*” (Haarh's rendering, 1969: 369). This suggests the rites included beseeching the local territorial deities (*yul lha*, *yul bdag*) along with the dynasty's paternal and maternal ancestors (*yab mes* and *yum phyi* respectively), and the, in Haarh's understanding, general “powerful beings of the world of the dead” (*yogs che*, Haarh 1969: 372).<sup>21</sup>

## 2.2 Emperors' tombs as depositories of treasures

Descriptions of the disposition of some of the emperors' tombs emerged several centuries after their construction in the milieu of the rising *gter ma* treasure cults. The tombs of prominent importance have received most attention, namely those of Srong btsan Sgam po and his great-grandfather 'Bro Gnyan Lde'u (also 'Brong Gnyan Lde ru and other spellings, early 6<sup>th</sup> cent.).<sup>22</sup> In *The Chronicles of the Kings* the latter is conveyed as follows, in Haarh's translation:

“When King 'Bron-gñan-lde-ru  
Fell ill with disease in his body,  
A tomb was built in *Žan-phu 'i-mda'*.  
In the middle one of its nine sections  
Was made a lDeñ-khri of sandalwood beams.  
An image (*sku-tshab*) of the king was made of gold.  
He (it) was placed in a *zans-chen-kha-sbyar* (a copper vessel with a closed mouth).<sup>23</sup>  
Nine *bre* of gold and eight *bre* of silver,  
Together with the king's treasures all this  
Was sealed up with earth, stones, and wood.  
The treasures were hidden (for) the future royal generations.  
There was nobody to put in charge as guardian of the *Gter*.  
Seasons, months, and days innumerable,  
So it is told.

<sup>21</sup> Haarh (1969: 368) following Lalou, based on a Dunhuang funeral text.

<sup>22</sup> Haarh (1969: 384) notes that in known literature only the supposed tomb of Lha Tho tho ri Gnyan btsan (among the later kings of the earlier pre-historic mythological period) received such attention.

<sup>23</sup> Bialek (2015: 51, 104, 363-65, esp. 363, fn. 3) proposes to read *kha sbyar* rather as “mouth/opening prepared/made ready [to put sth. inside]”, and understands *zangs chen* as an equivalent of *zangs brgya* ('), “a large copper vessel”.



The tomb in *Zai-phu'i-mda'* has nine sections. In the central one, there is placed a black slab of slate, *g'yam pa*, with a white head besmeared (with its head or top painted white?).

[...]

In the upmost part there is made a level of slabs of slate.”<sup>24</sup>

According to this source, the tomb of 'Bro Gnyan Lde'u was located in Zhang phu'i mda' (present-day Zhang mda' Village) outside the royal necropolis of 'Phyongs rgyas,<sup>25</sup> a throne of sandalwood was placed into its middle bearing a golden representation of the monarch, and the corpse was inserted into “a copper vessel”. Gold and silver, and king's treasures (*rgyal po'i dkor nor*) accompanied the arrangement. The tomb was sealed and “[t]he treasures were hidden (for) the future royal generations” (*phyi rabs rgyal brgyud nor du sbas*). No one, either a human or a numen, was entrusted as the “guardian of the treasure” (*gter srung gnyer du gtad pa med*).

The passage is extracted from *The Chronicles of the Kings'* chapter numbered eighteen in its modern editions (*Rgyal po bka'i thang*: 153-208; Tshang po 2010: 144-203). In the edition Haarh used (Potala ed. 1889), the chapter is titled *Ma 'ons rgyal brgyud nor skal dang: rgyal brgyud bla mchod man ngag rgyas btab ni*,<sup>26</sup> which Haarh renders as “The hiding of the inheritance for the future royal generations, and directions as to the royal family's offerings (*bla-mchod*), and the sealing (of the tomb)” (Haarh 1969: 352). The case of 'Bro Gnyan Lde'u is followed by a whole spectrum of treasures. The chapter systematically lists dozens (I counted over forty entries) of concealed “treasures”, or treasure caches, in 'Bro Gnyan Lde'u's tomb, in the individual parts of Srong btsan Sgam po's tomb which occupies a long and elaborate section, and further in other tombs and localities. This is presented in a fairly regular pattern: the separate sections describing the particular treasures usually open with the name and location of the treasure in question; then provide its detailed overview, a list of its items, which can be quite extensive and count several pages; and finally conclude with repeating the name and placement of the just concerned treasure, the name of the protector (*srung ma*) put in charge of guarding it (titled a “treasure lord”, *gter bdag, dkor bdag*) or a remark that no protector was appointed (as in the above passage). Sometimes at the very end occurs a brief statement that the contents presented constitutes a “guide list” (*kha byang, gter byang*) and “key” (*lde mig*) to the given treasure. Such catalogues are a typical feature of the Tibetan treasure literature developing from the 10-11<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Gyatso 1996: 148, 161, fn. 2) which *The Five Chronicles* represent. The titles or specifications of the different treasures enumerated in the lists often repeat across the various treasure repositories, for instance we repeatedly find the “divine treasure” (or the “treasure of the gods”, *lha nor*), the “*klu* treasure” (or the “treasure of the *klu*”, *klu nor*); rarer is the “(great) royal treasure of the *bla* force” (*rgyal po'i*

<sup>24</sup> Haarh 1969: 349-350, 362, 364 (*Bka' thang sde lnga*, Potala ed. 1896); cf. Beijing ed. 1986: 155; Tshang po 2010: 146.

<sup>25</sup> About five kilometres north, see the burial mound site 0037 on TTT website, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites-by-id/0037/> (accessed 16.10.2020), cf. also Hazod 2016b: 130, fn. 44, 2018: 40-42.

<sup>26</sup> The modern editions render the title in slight alternations.

*bla gter* [*chen po*]), etc. The treasures are explicitly stated to be “ancestral treasures” (*yab mes kyi dkor nor*), and often to be hidden for the prosperity and support of future generations (*phyi ma'i dus su las 'phro can zhig gis thon nas dar zhing rgyas par 'gyur, phyi rabs gtsugs lag rkyen du bzhaq, phyi rabs mams kyi rkyen du bzhaq, phyi rabs gtsugs lag gso ba'i rkyen du bzhaq*, etc.), for “great sustenance of Tibet” (*Bod khams kyi rten 'brel che ba'i gter*), or for “the future royal generations” (*phyi rabs rgyal brgyud nor bu sbas, ma 'ong rgyal brgyud nor skal sbas ba*) as in the above extract. The “treasures” are rendered by various terms: *nor*, *gter*, *nor gyi gter*, *dkor nor*, *dkor cha*, *rin chen*, *rin po che*, *nor bu rin po che*, *nor rdzas mams*, etc. The part on 'Bro Gnyan lde'u's tomb exemplifies this chapter of *The Five Chronicles*.

Another example is conveyed in the chapter's opening section on Yum bu Bla mkhar (or Yum bu Bla sgang), the early royal fortress in Lower Yar lung. Haarh (1969: 352) translates:

“In the life-time of King *Thi-ri-sñan-śal*,  
At the highest part of the mountain ridge of *Yum-bu-bla-mkhar*,  
In the middle of a large red rock,  
There was a treasure-tomb (*nor-gyi ban-so*) with five sections (*dra-mig lia-pa*).”<sup>27</sup>

Further the text mentions the upper coverage of the tomb as made of slab stone (*g.yam pa*), and also “[t]he thirteen treasures of the King” (*rgyal po'i dkor cha rin cen bcu gsum*) inserted into the tomb (Haarh 1969: 353). Various other jewels and royal insignia accompanied them, some, as gold dust, were concealed in pots (*rdza ma*). The mountain god Yar lha Sham po, in the source referred to as “the *btsan* of the Sham po glacier” (*sham po'i gangs btsan*), was entrusted as the guardian (*srung ma*) of the “treasure-tomb”. For this role, he received appropriate offerings of ritual cakes (“butter yaks”, *mar gyi g.yag*), food and a “golden libation” (*gser skyems*) of alcohol. The “guide list” (*kha byang*) to the tomb itself became a treasure and “was hidden as a *gter* in a rock looking like a finger” (*brag lag sor 'dra ba la gter du sbas so*, Haarh 1969: 354, 377). Haarh dates this tomb to “the very early part of the Yar-luñ Dynasty” epitomised by the Yum bu Bla sgang palace. He moreover assumes that “[i]n a later time this grave or tomb has been transformed into a kind of treasury of the Yar-luñ kings” (1969: 356), more specifically into “a treasury for the relics, the regalia and treasures of the kings of the Dynasty” (1969: 377).

These ‘treasures’ typically imply material objects of prestige and wealth composed of precious metals and other valuable materials, and are presented as intended to bring prosperity for future (royal) generations. This chapter constitutes the longest of the entire *Five Chronicles*, at least in the editions available to me (*Bka' thang sde lnga*, Beijing ed. 1986; Tshang po 2010). In these modern prints it counts over astonishing fifty and sixty pages respectively (in Western style book format), which makes it many times longer than any other of the chapters of *The Five Chronicles*, which are usually rather short. The length presumably indicates that its topic was perceived as important at least as reflected in the 14<sup>th</sup> century environment of *gter ma* treasure cults and revealers. Hazod (2016b: 127-128) has also noticed the similarity of these descriptions of the tombs with *gter ma*

<sup>27</sup> The passage in later editions of the *Bka' thang sde lnga*: Beijing ed. 1986: 153; Tshang po 2010: 144. In both the king's name appears as Tho re snyan shal.



treasure literature and revelations. He assumes that the burial mounds reported in this literature, such as the ‘treasure-tomb’ of Yum bu Bla sgang, were likely in this period re-established as *gter ma* sites for treasure excavation. So far, there is no actual evidence for Buddhist *gter ma* extraction from the tombs. Hirshberg’s (2016) detailed study locates the discoveries of Myang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (1124/1136-92/1204), the first of the great revealers (*gter ston*), at old temples, and miraculously opening cavities in mountains, never at tombs. Nor does the other key figure of early *gter ma*, the master revealer Gu ru Chos dbang (1212-70) in his work *The Great History of the Gter ma Tradition* (*Gter ’byung chen mo*) mention *gter ma* extraction from tombs (Gyatso 1994). Ronald Davidson likewise believes that early Buddhist *gter ma* were not extracted from old tombs, but from old temples.<sup>28</sup>

The descriptions of *The Five Chronicles* might have intentionally focused only on graves conceptualised as treasure repositories at this later period. Moreover, these graves might have been actually opened for the purpose of either illicit or socially approved non-Buddhist treasure removal around this time and earlier after the fall of the Spu rgyal dynasty. Some alleged items of personal possession of the royals have become such revealed treasures, including the *bla g.yu*, the “turquoise of vitality” stone, of the early kings.<sup>29</sup> As Mayer points out, in any discussion of the period when the *gter ma* tradition emerged, a time when rich burial tumuli were vulnerable to looting, it is crucial to make a clear distinction between (i) Buddhist and Bon *gter ma* discovery, (ii) illicit treasure hunting, and (iii) legitimate socially sanctioned recovery of grave goods (Mayer 2019: 150).

Another source from the same time but not from the *gter ma* literary tradition, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century chronicle *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*, also mentions a treasure in a tomb of a member of the royal genealogy (who, nevertheless, died young and was never enthroned). Again, I cite Haarh’s translation (1969: 384):

“The tomb of lJañ-tsha lHa-dbon is in front of his grandfather’s. It is built round. A treasure is hidden (in it). So it is said.”<sup>30</sup>

The line also stresses the physical proximity of the individual graves of the members of the royal patriline. The work further discloses that treasures (*nor*) were deposited into Srong btsan Sgam po’s tomb (Haarh 1969: 363; Sørensen 1994: 345).

Continuation of these perceptions tied to the royal tombs is attested in later literature as well. For instance, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *A Scholar’s Feast of Doctrinal History* details Srong btsan Sgam po’s tomb as having the shape of a mountain, moreover adding an insight into the ritual practices supposedly performed at it. In Haarh’s rendering:

<sup>28</sup> Davidson 2005, 2006; reconfirmed in personal communication with Rob Mayer, 19.08.2017.

<sup>29</sup> Karmay 1998: 326; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 22; Hazod 2016b: 127, fn. 38.

<sup>30</sup> Sørensen (1994: 356) offers a bit different translation conveying the same meaning. On the tomb further see Hazod 2018: 72.

“Outside it had the form of a mountain. One year (later [i.e. at the one-year anniversary of the funeral]) [the incumbent] king, ministers, and subjects made circumambulation, and later at the anniversary they made offerings and circumambulation.”<sup>31</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup>-century descriptions of the burial chambers of the monarchs 'Bro Gnyan lde'u, Srong btsan Sgam po, and also Khri Lde srong btsan (r. ca. 798-815)<sup>32</sup> propose the insertion of the body into a copper container (*zangs*) or box (*ga'u*) (Haarh 1969: 364). This might suggest a certain dismemberment of the body, after which bodily remains would be placed into the receptacle (Haarh 1969: 344, 346, 349, 361). Haarh speaks of a 'preliminary', i.e. primary, and 'final', i.e. secondary, burial.

Based on these sources, Haarh (1969: 381) concludes that one constituent of the royal burial mounds was “the depository or depositories, *nor-gyi ban-so*, of the personal treasures of the king or of the treasures offered at his funeral”. This idea resonates with the term used for royal tombs, *bang so* (*bang po*), related to *bang ba*, *bang mdzod*, “store-room”, “store-house”, “repository”, “treasury”,<sup>33</sup> both derived from the reconstructed \**bang* meaning “to have something/someone under/at one's feet”.<sup>34</sup> Hazod understands the various treasures mentioned in the tombs as “personal treasures and valuables of the deceased (*rgyal po'i dkon nor*)” (following *The Chronicles of the Kings*) based on patrilineal and matrilineal descent. He suggests that they might have comprised the “18 heirlooms of paternal and maternal ancestors” being “bequeathed from the father's and mother's side and by brothers and sisters”.<sup>35</sup>

In historical Chinese sources, Haarh noticed other types of funeral procedures of insertion into soil found to the east and north of the area of Central Tibet in the time of the Tibetan Empire or slightly later. For example, the nomadic group called Yangtong (Yang-t'ung in Wade-Giles used by Haarh), supposedly affiliated with the Tibetan royal dynasty, was reported to bury its chiefs into cliffs and caves, hidden from the eyes of others. Another group likely related to the Empire, the Sum pa, buried persons of high rank into vases filled with golden dust. For this purpose, the corpses were dissected into skin, bones, and flesh, to be mixed with gold (Haarh 1969: 347-48).

Haarh has also made an interesting observation about the *bla* force of vitality, usually translated as “soul”,<sup>36</sup> which he renders as “life-power”, in relation to the royal burials. He understands the *bla* as the main distinguishing quality between the living and the dead: the living are sustained by

<sup>31</sup> Haarh 1969: 363 (square brackets are mine); *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, Beijing ed. 2017: 155.

<sup>32</sup> Dates follow Dotson 2009: 143.

<sup>33</sup> Das 1991; Jäschke 2007; Zhang 1993.

<sup>34</sup> Bialek 2018 (vol. 2: 310ff., 332ff.) provides the old Tibetan etymology.

<sup>35</sup> Hazod 2016b: 126; Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 192-97.

<sup>36</sup> In the imperial context: Dotson 2019; Walter 2009, also “guiding power within an individual”, p. 107; later contexts and generally: Stein 1972: 226-229; Samuel 1995, also “life-force”, “life-essence”; Karmay 1998: 310-338; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 264 and elsewhere; Maurer 2012: 75: “vital principle”. As “soul” in ethnographies from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century: for ex. Karmay 1998: 326ff.; Mumford 1989; Oppitz 1982; Vinding 1982; Diemberger 1994; whereas Diemberger 1997: 311 has “spirit”; da Col 2012: 79 understands it as “life support”. My rendering of *bla* as a “force” rather than “soul” will become apparent below.

it, loosing it at the moment of death. At this instant, the dead leave their *bla* in the world of the living and with the living. Haarh comprehends the so called *bla mchod* offerings at the tombs mentioned in *The Chronicles of the Kings* as an “offering to the deceased”, an “offering for that which distinguishes dead and living” (1969: 315, 378, 451, fn. 68).

### 2.3 End of the tumulus tradition?

We do not know to what extent the sources coming from periods after the fall of the Tibetan Empire and the Spu rgyal dynasty in the 9<sup>th</sup> century actually reflect happenings and practices of the imperial period. The accounts might instead reveal later perceptions of the Empire and emperors (as recently stressed by Mayer 2019: 126-127). Nevertheless, certain described accessories in these later accounts have been confirmed by archaeological evidence, such as the content of precious objects inside tumuli. An outstanding example are the recently excavated eastern Tibetan massive and rich tombs of Dulan (Heller 2006) to the west of Kokonor lake (Mtsho sngon po). Central Tibet so far demonstrates 619 recognised grave fields.<sup>37</sup>

Along with most of the thousands of Central Tibetan tumuli, almost all the emperors' tombs were looted shortly after the end of the dynasty, thus their details will remain unknown. The first looting, related to the emperor tombs in 'Phyong rgyas, took place already in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century as an overt symbolic political act, rather than a mere pursuit for material enrichment. The treasures or precious objects concealed in the tombs triggered the plundering – their extraction stood for destroying the previous political power and order of the Spu rgyal rulers (Hazod 2016b). The ensuing political principalities emerging from the unrests of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century were based on territorial divisions governed by individual clans, partially existing already before the Empire. The re-establishment of these local powers was centred around their respective territorial deities (*yul lha*), the protectors of social and political order (Dotson 2012; Hazod 2016b: 117-121). At this occasion, the clans regaining power divided the royal tombs among themselves to execute the plundering (Hazod 2016b: 121). Of the emperors' graves, only that of Srong btsan Sgam po escaped this fate, for unclear reasons (*ibid.*: 137).

This end of the imperial era has been thought to signify the end of the Tibetan tumulus tradition: “This meant the end of the practice going far back into the pre-historic period of burying the dead in barrows – associated with a specific conception of the afterlife as part of the pre-Buddhist religious system, which likewise has ceased to exist” (Hazod 2016b: 113). The succeeding political entities did not embrace the custom, in which gesture the ongoing adoption of Buddhism was the decisive drive. Disputes on proper (royal) burials between *bon po* funeral specialists and incoming Buddhists took place already during the time of the Empire (Dotson 2016). The *Dbā' bzhed* chronicle (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 92-105) gives the story of the famed Buddhist scholar Vairocana (Bai ro tsa na, 8<sup>th</sup> century) during the preparations for Emperor Khri srong lde btsan's interment: In the episode, the *bon pos* propagate the continuation of non-Buddhist funerals arguing that the power of the mountain god Yar lha Sham po is strong enough to protect the dynasty, whereas Vairocana claims that it is the Buddhist Doctrine to be followed also for funerary practice

<sup>37</sup> TTT website, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetanumulustradition/sites/sites-by-id/> (accessed 16.10.2020).

and post-mortal benefits such as a good rebirth. Vairocana succeeds, and therefore:

“From that time onwards all the funerals have been celebrated according to the dharma tradition. It is said that the foolish followers of the Bon tradition hid great wealth as *gter*.”

This implies the substitution of animal sacrifices and wealth offerings by ceremonies to Buddhist deities, but not yet the abandonment of tumulus entombment. The translators further explain that “[t]he hiding of precious objects by the *bon po* could refer to the custom of burying precious items in the tombs” (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 101; Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 150-55). By its focus on treasures, this restriction evokes the edict issued by Lha bla ma Ye shes ’od (947-1019/1024)<sup>38</sup>, the ruler of Gu ge, to prohibit “the tradition of interring treasures in tombs for the deceased” (*gshin po’i don du nor dur sped pa’i lugs*, Hazod 2016b: 133, fn. 56).

According to these two narratives, the process of Buddhicisation of Tibet has discarded earth burials containing riches as incompatible with the new Doctrine. The rest of this article will try to show that these traditions still exist albeit in altered form.

#### 2.4 Later imaginations and interpretations

Do these accounts simply refer to the fact that various precious objects were inserted into the tombs as offerings for ensuring an enjoyable post-mortal existence of the deceased? Or, could one interpret the custom as rather aimed at the bereaved and the living even from the emic perspective of the deceased monarch’s contemporaries and future generations? Whereas imperial evidence indicates the former, later writings from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards discussed above, mainly the treasure text of *The Five Chronicles*, often suggest the latter.

Ronald Davidson, like Rob Mayer and Janet Gyatso, sees multiple causes for the *gter ma* revelatory traditions popular in both Buddhism and G.yung drung Bon, particularly the Rnying ma school, since the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Davidson has produced a social historical analysis of nostalgia for the lost Empire as a major cause for the appearance of the *gter ma* traditions, and he also emphasises the importance of Indian influences (2005: 212, 215, 216, 217, 219). One of his main contributions, of particular interest here, has been the exploration of the imperial royal funeral treasures and their looting as one of the contributory origins of the *gter ma* revelatory tradition. With the collapse of the Empire, the following second diffusion of Buddhism (*phyi dar*, 10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century) and the formation of G.yung drung Bon, their driving forces intentionally modelled upon the Empire. Davidson (2005: 213) argues that early treasure revelations focused on religious, political, and legal imperial legacy rather than on their later central figure, the Buddhist master Padmasambhava (Padma ’byung gnas, 8<sup>th</sup> century); and that among the early treasure excavations were material objects directly associated with the Empire rather than with general Buddhist themes as in later periods.

Later scholarship has revealed a different picture. Apart from Grwa pa Mngon shes’s (1012-1090)<sup>39</sup> *Four Medical Tantras* (*Rgyud bzhi*) there is only one extant *gter ma* that fits this description which might fully precede the *gter ma* of the two great architects of the Padmasambhava cult Myang

<sup>38</sup> The dates follow the BDRC, *The Treasury of Lives*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibd.*

ral Nyi ma 'od zer and Gu ru Chos dbang – *The Pillar Testament* (*Bka' chems Ka khol ma*), attributed to the 11<sup>th</sup>-century figure of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (972/982-?1055), but surely a later compilation. This text deals with the early emperors' establishment of Buddhist civilisation in Tibet, with special emphasis on Srong btsan Sgam po, and a chapter on Avalokiteśvara as tamer of the demons of Tibet (chapter 13). No more *gter ma* texts prior to Myang ral and Chos dbang are extant. Recent studies of the textual sources of Myang ral's *gter ma* (Hirshberg 2016) show that Myang ral was operating in a culture of revelation, sharing with or receiving revelations from others. His network of tantric contemporaries and predecessors, as his teacher Dngos grub, were already engaged in *gter ma* revelations. Hence these *gter ma* texts of Myang ral's predecessors were as early as *The Pillar Testament* or even earlier; yet unlike *The Pillar Testament* they focused on Rnying ma tantric traditions. In his most important *gter ma*, the massive *Eight Teachings of the Sugata Assembly* (*Bka' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*), Root Tantras which originated with Padmasambhava were transmitted to his student the Emperor Khri Srong lde btsan; thus they focused already on Padmasambhava as the original source (Cathy Cantwell, personal communication, 29.09.2020). Similarly, Myang ral's *Zangs gling ma* religious biography of Padmasambhava describes this work as originating with Padmasambhava (Doney 2014; Hirshberg 2016). Another early *gter ma* not centred on Padmasambhava, and drawing on the *Pillar Testament*, is the *Mani bka' bum*. Several authors contributed to this text, notably Myang ral and Chos dbang. Their central intention in the *Mani bka' bum* was to promote the cult of Avalokiteśvara as patron *bodhisattva* of Tibet, still a major concern of the Padmasambhava school. Another purpose was to emphasise the subordination of the emperors to the forces of Buddhism, and thus also by implication the grand imperial pedigrees of the various Rnying ma traditions in Tibet. The Rnying ma *gter ma* tradition has never just been Padmasambhava centred, numerous *gter ma* are said to be primarily concerned with persons of the imperial period other than Padmasambhava.<sup>40</sup>

In Davidson's evaluation, Myang ral engaged with two kinds of treasures: Dharma treasures and material wealth treasures, both of which open themselves in times of disasters – not only assumed religious collapse as the decline of the Buddhist Dharma, but also social upheavals and political disintegration (2005: 214). Likewise, Chos dbang was involved with both these treasure types, the latter in his case Davidson renders as *rdzas gter*, literally “material treasure” (2005: 213). Such a dichotomy might not be precise if compared with the Chos dbang's *Great History of the Gter ma Tradition* (Gyatso 1994). The work lists four main treasure categories with numerous sub-categories, several of which are material, but in all kinds of different and often magical ways. In addition, many of the Dharma treasures are material, and none of the material categories or sub-categories *per se* relate to the emperors or their tombs, even if a very small proportion of discrete items that fall within a subcategory can be associated with emperors. Some of material categories

<sup>40</sup> For a very old example, the highly influential Rdzogs chen *gter ma* of Zhang ston Bkra shis rdo rje (1097-1167) were focused on another contemporary of Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra. For a very recent example, the first major treasure of the late Dil mgo mkhyen brtse (1910-91), the '*Jam dpal snying thig*, was as its name suggests focused not on Padmasambhava, but on his contemporary Mañjuśrīmitra. There are a great many suchlike in between. Rob Mayer, personal communication, 29.09.2020.

and sub-categories do reference the kinds of natural resources that are often attributed into the control of territorial deities, but do not mention burials as *gter*. The twofold dichotomy into material and Dharma treasures might possibly be manifested in some instances in the discussed chapter of *The Chronicles of the Kings*, as implied by its dichotomous phrase “wealth and *dharma* treasure” (*chos dang nor gyi gter*) (*Rgyal po bka'i thang*: 201; Tshang po 2010: 194-95). In this way, the royal treasures of material riches would have gained Buddhist spiritual significance and the potential to support its central aim of awakening.

Davidson’s theory further points to a strong role of the imperial elite ancestor cult. In his view, mountain deities, like Yar lha Sham po, became associated with the treasures as their guardians based on the notions of being ancestors of the royal lineage and of particular communities in their areas, combined with the perception of the treasures as ancestral legacy (2005: 218). Furthermore, he links this to the *bla* principle to assume that “the sacred relics of their ancestors [...] constituted in some sense an extension of the king’s soul or person (*rgyal po'i bla*)” (2005: 220). He stresses that the “King’s Personal Treasure” (*rgyal po'i bla gter*), or the “royal treasure of the *bla* force” (my rendering), often features as the foremost one in the lists of such treasure objects, for instance in “the personal text of the royal ancestor (*yab mes kyi bla dpe*)” buried in Lho brag. Scriptures titled “the person/soul treasure (*bla gter*) of the emperor” might have represented his final statement of testament as his inheritance for future generations (2005: 221-22). Davidson (*ibid.*: 223) concludes that “[e]ventually, the entombment of the kings and emperors of Tibet was understood as establishing a place for the residence of their collective spirits and was identified with many of the properties of the Buddha’s relics in *stūpas*, so that the king’s residual presence in the tomb protects all of Tibet.”

Rob Mayer (2019: 136) has recently summarised Davidson’s thesis as follows: “The imperial *bla* had the power to enrich and bless, hence he proposes that there was a pre-Buddhist ritual tradition for blessing the realm, by distributing the emperor’s *bla* across the Empire via material treasures in which the imperial *bla* resided.” The treasures would later be excavated and processed across the country as a display of the rulers’ power and to distribute the prosperity imbued in the *bla*. Mayer warns that this hypothesis requires more evidence. Hazod’s (2016b: 126-127) understanding of the background of the royal tombs’ looting resonates with Davidson’s interpretation: some of the royal insignia as symbols of governance were with the fall of the Empire hidden by a faction aspiring for political power, to reappear only later, from the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, as insignia of rulers of principalities.

Such funeral royal objects perceived as powerful and available for excavation have inspired scholarly views on the origins of the *gter ma* tradition as derived from these imperial, likely indigenous, and non-Buddhist, antecedents. Below, I engage with these notions through contemporary literary and ethnographic material.

### 3. Contemporary Mgo log, East Tibet: divinity, rulership, bones, and treasures

#### 3.1 Divine rulership and ancestry

Many descent lines and communities in Tibet and the Himalayas have maintained similar



narratives of origin to that of the Spu rgyal emperors. Lineages of power, both monastic and lay, as well as those concentrating both temporal and spiritual authority, have propagated divine origin of own genealogies as an integral and essential feature of self-representation. Typically, the apical ancestor is perceived to be a numinal male figure, a *lha* being, descending from the upper celestial sphere. He can be identified as a representative of the class of territorial deities. The god can spring out of an egg, beget a son after encountering a human woman who he has chosen for her exceptional qualities, or give his own daughter in marriage to a human male again selected for certain assets. Buddhist records analogously propose ancestry from awakened Buddhist deities dwelling in the heavens of Buddhist cosmology.<sup>41</sup> Historical examples include prominent families such as the one of the master Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1002/1012-1097/1100),<sup>42</sup> the 'Khon of the Sa skya school,<sup>43</sup> the Rlangs dynasty ruling Central Tibet in the 14<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> century (Czaja 2013: 28, fn. 2, 31-38), the descent line of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (MacCormack 2020), etc. Likewise, ethnographic studies show the self-identification of ethnic and social groups and ruling patrilineages with divine progenitors, to provide a few examples: leaders of the Ldong 'Brong group in Rdza stod, Yul shul (Fitzgerald 2019), and of the Wa shul gser thar group (Gelek 1998: 54), in East Tibet; the Thakali (Vinding 1998: 169-71), Gurung nobility (Mumford 1989: 31), and certain lineages in Khenbalung in Nepal (Diemberger 1994, 1997); and likely also leaders' lineages in Bhutan.<sup>44</sup>

In contemporary East Tibet, such perceptions are still alive. One often hears stories of mountain gods, mainly of the chief one in the region, A myes Rma chen aka Rma chen spom ra, visiting beautiful women of his vast territory at night and thereby providing great leaders to individual communities. Those born from such encounters exhibit special signs and are thus best qualified to establish their own ruling patrilineages. Many communities regard their associated local deity of land, customarily a mountain god, as their ancestor.<sup>45</sup> In north-eastern Tibet, people often refer to such deities as '*a myes*', meaning "grandfather" or "ancestor", and simultaneously being an honorific address for elderly men. Hence the title itself does not necessarily determine assumed ancestry, yet often it overlaps with this notion. Whole social groups extending singular genealogies, such as villages or valley populations, claim descent from numinal beings. The claims are typically rather vague, lacking expressed descent lines or any details. By its more communal sense and identity, this model contrasts with the individualised elite descent lineages exemplified above.

<sup>41</sup> Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen 2000: 25, fn. 2; Roberto Vitali mentions this Buddhicisation of genealogical literature in his introduction to *The Genealogy*, Gyi lung Bkra shis rgya mtsho and Gyi lung Thugs mchog rdo rje 1991: xi.

<sup>42</sup> Per Sørensen, personal communication, 26.06.2020.

<sup>43</sup> Stein 1972: 193; Czaja 2013: 31.

<sup>44</sup> The last example is based on a Facebook post by Sangay Tenzin (21.06.2020) within the group Druk ge Ney: 'Brug lu byin rlabs can gyi gnas (Pilgrimage sites of Bhutan), thus requires further verification.

<sup>45</sup> For ex. Karmay and Sagant 1998; Karmay 1998: 423-462; generally, for Tibet see Stein 1972: 207, 228; Kornman 1997: 80.

One community known to me formulates an actual divine pedigree. Members of the Mgo log clan identify with their mountain deity, their “master of place” (*gzhi bdag* – the favoured term for territorial deities in East Tibet) and “deity of land” (*yul lha*), called Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the “Powerful one of the Turquoise peak”. The stunning mountain range of the same name that the deity supposedly inhabits (Fig. 1), expands over approximately eight hundred square kilometres, covering an area of about twenty kilometres in the east-west orientation and forty kilometres north-south. The massif lies on the border of the present Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces of the PRC, in the Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Mgo log bod rigs rang skyong khul, Ch. Guoluo Zangzu zizhizhou) and by a smaller part in the Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Rnga ba bod rigs dang chang rigs rang skyong khul, Ch. Aba Zangzu Qiangzu zizhizhou). Around the northern, western and southern foot of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range lives a group with shared identity referring to themselves as Mgo log. They mainly inhabit the area of the current Counties of Gcig sgril (Ch. Jiuzhi xian), Dga’ dbe (Ch. Gande xian), Dar lag (Ch. Dari xian), and Padma (Ch. Banma xian) in the Mgo log Prefecture (see map of Fig. 2).<sup>46</sup>



Fig. 1: The Gnyan po G.yu rtse mountain range. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

<sup>46</sup> The core Mgo log group has not inhabited the area around the A myes Rma chen range in the north-west of the Prefecture, albeit claimed the area and particularly its revenues collected in taxes from other groups settled there. See 'Ba' Don grub rgyal 2012; 'Ba' Don grub rgyal and Rgya mo thar 2012; Sulek 2010. Introductions to the region and its history: Cai Bei 2012: 55-58; Horlemann 2002: 245-246; Jacoby 2010; Don grub Dbang rgyal and Nor sde 1991; Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007; Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016.



Fig. 2: The current Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and its counties.  
(Map by G. Hazod)

The god Gnyan po G.yu rtse (Fig. 3) is believed to dwell in the highest peak of the range reaching 5369 metres<sup>47</sup> and covered by a glacier. Gnyan po G.yu rtse epitomises the *gzhi bdag* or *yul lha* divinities who reside and actively engage in both the upper celestial realm, touched by their summits, and the lower middle realm; as *lha* deities they, in the current vernacular, origin from the divine skies. In iconography and oral and written recitals,<sup>48</sup> Gnyan po G.yu rtse appears anthropomorphically as a mighty and fierce armoured warrior mounted on a horse. His depiction is quite variable: the colour of his body, armour, and horse range from warm tones of red and yellow to blue and turquoise (*g.yu*) reminiscent of his name. Usually, Gnyan po G.yu rtse features a red body, shielded by a golden helmet and armour, and rides a yellowish horse of a turquoise mane (as in Fig. 3).<sup>49</sup> The horse can also be of a blueish or turquoise body. In some depictions, Gnyan po G.yu rtse's whole body turns blue to turquoise. Then himself, his mount, as well as his palace on the mountain top shine with turquoise lustre.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Mapy.cz, URL: <https://en.mapy.cz/> (accessed 15.12.2020); Gcig sgril rdzong yul skor cu'u and Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skye khams khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa (n.d.: 2, 3) gives 5380 metres. The site and deity are mentioned in Rock 1956: 125f., maps in appendices.

<sup>48</sup> For ex. collections: Kar rig 2009; *Gangs ljongs gnas chen* 2015. Many more texts, including unpublished manuscripts, exist.

<sup>49</sup> Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007: 69, a popular depiction in monasteries (for ex. Lung dkar dgon, Gcig sgril rdzong), on posters, etc.

<sup>50</sup> Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007: 70; Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skye khams khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa 2019; mural in the monastery Rgyud sde dgon, Padma rdzong.



Fig. 3: Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the “Powerful one of the Turquoise peak”, as depicted in Lung dkar monastery. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2016)

The attributes Gnyan po G.yu rtse carries are of warfare and affluence, characterising the worldly concerns people approach him for: in his right hand he brandishes a spear (*mdung*), while his left hand holds a bowl of jewels (*nor bu, gter 'bum*). Alternatively, and less frequently, Gnyan po G.yu rtse appears in other colours displaying different attributes, usually with varying pieces of weaponry. His images in monasteries and (much less often) households in the vicinity of his mountain range indicate the main spread of his cult in both Mgo log and Rnga ba, and lay and monastic communities of all present denominations: mostly Rnying ma, then Dge lugs, Jo nang, Bka' rgyud, Sa skya, and G.yung drung Bon.

The ethnonym ‘Mgo log’ locally applies in two different meanings: (1) the patrilineal, ideally exogamous, leading group recognising their apical ancestor, which can thus be called a ‘clan’ (Godelier 2011: 558);<sup>51</sup> and (2) in a broader sense the members of the confederation which this clan became to govern, organised into settlements and clusters called *tsho ba* and *sde ba* encompassing many other patrilineal groups of various other groups.<sup>52</sup> Two main historical scholarly chronicles record their developments, mainly of the Mgo log clan’s ruling elite: *The Doctrinal History of Mdo smad* (*Mdo smad chos 'byung*) by Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1801-1866) and *The Mgo log Genealogy* (*Mgo log rus mdzod*), aka *The Garden of Flowers: Genealogy of the Six Tibetan Clans* (*Bod mi bu gdung drug gi rus mdzod me tog skyed tshal*) by Gyi lung Bkra shis

<sup>51</sup> ‘Clan’ concept in Tibet is summarised and discussed in Samuels 2016; Langelaar 2017.

<sup>52</sup> See Dhi nang Lha rgyal and Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2011: 141-43; Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skyed kham khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa 2019: 41-42. A similar arrangement is described by Gelek 1998, further Jacoby 2010.



rgya mtsho (b. 19<sup>th</sup> century) and Gyi lung Thugs mchog rdo rje (d. 1939).<sup>53</sup> Another document is the autobiography of Mdo Mkhyen brtse Ye shes rdo rje (1800-1866)<sup>54</sup> studied by Robin Kornman (1997). According to these sources and present oral history, the male progenitor was the hero (*dpa' bo*) chief (*dpon po*) 'Bri Lha rgyal 'bum (var. 'Bri Lha rgyal, 'Bru Lha rgyal). He allegedly hailed from the 'Bri clan of the primary 'six clans' of Tibet (Karmay 1998: 245-281; Vitali 2003). He led his people from the 'Bri lung ('Bri klung) valley in southern Nang chen (current Nang chen County, Ch. Nangqian xian, Qinghai) in northern Khams to the 'Gu kho (also 'Gu log, 'Go log) valley in the Dpal yul area south of Sde dge (in current Sde dge County, Ch. Dege xian, Sichuan). Some accounts propose a prior gradual migration of the lineage from Mnga' ris in West Tibet or La dwags in the Western Himalayas via 'Dam khog (or 'Dam zhung) north of Lha sa.<sup>55</sup> Bri Lha rgyal 'bum is said to have followed both Bon po and Buddhist Rnying ma masters, with the latter he established firm contacts at the Rnying ma Kaḥ thog and Dpal yul monasteries close to where they were settled south of Sde dge. His son and chieftain successor 'Bri A 'bum took the move to the north-east towards the Gnyan po G.yu rtse mountain range, leading his subjects. The group acquired their name after their home in Sde dge in the form of "Mgo log". This supposedly happened about six hundred years ago in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Jacoby 2010; Don grub Dbang rgyal and Nor sde 1991: 13ff.).<sup>56</sup> The migration entailed a partial switch from agriculture to pastoralism for higher located settlements. The historicity of these accounts has not been attested, here I present the content of the given sources and current understandings.

There, A 'bum encountered the Gnyan po G.yu rtse god in his celestial palace. After a trial, he won Gnyan po G.yu rtse's youngest daughter Gnyan bza' Me tog thod mdzes ("Beautiful(ly) flower-garlanded lady of the *gnyan*") as a bride for his youngest son 'Bum yag. Hereby Gnyan po G.yu rtse established his relation to the clan as a matrilineal ancestor and a maternal uncle, i.e. a bride-giver (*a zhang, zhang po*),<sup>57</sup> and the clan's protector. The written genealogy states that already Bri Lha rgyal 'bum married a daughter of Gnyan po G.yu rtse called "Queen of the *gnyan*" (Gnyan rgyal mo), and also another, further unnamed, "Lady of the *gnyan*" (Gnyan bza'). A 'bum was the

<sup>53</sup> Gyi lung Bkra shis rgya mtsho and Gyi lung Thugs mchog rdo rje 1991. All dates follow the BDRC. The year of composition of *The Genealogy* remains unclear (Langelaar 2018: 329, fn. 3). Its authors likely lived within the suggested time frame (The Treasury of Lives, current local oral history) but some local scholars argue for dating into the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros, interview August 2018).

<sup>54</sup> The dates follow BDRC, The Treasury of Lives.

<sup>55</sup> Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016: 43; Gnyan po g.yu rtse'i skye khams khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa 2019: 36; in mythology of origin in Kornman 1997: 84.

<sup>56</sup> The paragraph follows (if not stated otherwise) the *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 234-35 and *The Genealogy*: 26-27.

<sup>57</sup> On the social role of maternal uncles see Samuels 2013; in imperial times Dotson 2004: 90-96, 2012. In Bon po mythology, *gnyan* divinities are the maternal uncles (bride-givers) of three of the initial 'six clans' of Tibet, including the 'Gru aka 'Bru ('Bri), through the marriage of the progenitor Khri tho chen po (see below) with a female *gnyan* (Karmay 1998: 254, 270). On *gnyan* divinities inhabiting the land see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 288-90; Samuel 1995: 162-63; Karmay 1998: 253ff., 2010; Berounský 2014, 2016, 2017, and this volume.

latter's son. Yet, in contrast to Bum yag's wife, this account is neither developed in any detail, nor popularly known among the Mgo log today. Similarly, two other chieftains in the subsequent generations married divine female *gnyan* beings (*gnyan mo*) perceived as coming from Gnyan po G.yu rtse's retinue and kin.<sup>58</sup> Men born into the lineage can acquire personal names Gnyan sras, "son of the *gnyan*", or Gnyan phrug, "child of the *gnyan*", both in historical genealogies and in current practice, evocative of the imperial royal epithet *lha sras* featuring in later genealogies as well (for instance of the Rlangs, Czaja 2013: 33, 38).

Thanks to this bond with Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the Mgo log leaders, namely 'Bum yag and later his and Gnyan bza' Me tog thod mdzes's son Phag thar, conquered the area of the Three [valleys of] Rdo, 'Dzi and Smar (Rdo 'dzi smar *gsum*) west and south of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range as their main domain.<sup>59</sup> Gradually, they spread further north and north-west to their present distribution (Gcig sgril, Dga' dbe, Dar lag, Padma Counties of the Mgo log Prefecture), giving their name to the whole region. They have shared it with other groups keeping dominance and rulership over them, as well as the majority in population. Soon after Phag thar, the areas of Rdo and 'Dzi were lost to others, and Smar remained as the fertile agricultural heartland of the Mgo log clan and confederation – the present-day Smar valley of the Smar river, the backbone of Padma County. Phag thar divided the seized dominion among three of his descendants and political successors, in order of seniority: Padma 'bum, Dbang chen 'bum, and A skyong. This corresponded with a split of the clan into three subclans of the same names, collectively known as the "Three Divisions of Mgo log" (Mgo log *khag gsum*).<sup>60</sup>

A colloquial saying expresses the understood status of the Mgo log ruling nobles (*dpon po*) as follows: *mgo log gi dpon po ni/ myi gi rgyud pa ma red/ lha gi rgyud pa red/*: "The chieftains of Mgo log are not of a human lineage, they are of a divine lineage." They continue to be perceived as of the *lha* and *gnyan* divine status rather than of men. Their position thus blurs the distinction between the two and between mythological and historical ancestors. Their patrilineal genealogy derives from Bri Lha rgyal 'bum generation by generation. The Mgo log genealogy concludes with its contemporary generation and Mgo log settlements, i.e. Mgo log clan members in likely the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recent publications follow up by tracing the leaders' genealogies of the three sublineages, and their sub-sublineages, based on social memory and oral accounts of local elders, until the present.<sup>61</sup> People identifying themselves as Mgo log still nowadays either trace their origin to one of the "Three Divisions", or count themselves and own patriline as the Three Divisions' historical subjects.

<sup>58</sup> *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 235; *The Genealogy*: 27-29. Here I provide selected details from the genealogies in both works, their slight differences will be analysed in my D.Phil. thesis. See Dhi nang Lha rgyal and Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2011: 119-127; Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016: 43-54.

<sup>59</sup> *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 236-237; *The Genealogy*: 39-44.

<sup>60</sup> *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 236-237; *The Genealogy*: 45-46, 49-51.

<sup>61</sup> For ex. A skyong 'Jigs nam 2010; Dhi nang Lha rgyal and Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2011; Bstan pa Dbang drag and Karma 'Gro phan 2016.



Gnyan po G.yu rtse, colloquially Gnyan rtse, G.yu rtse, and Gnyan po, is their prime venerated *gzhi bdag*. He brings success in mundane affairs, political and social issues, grants protection, abundance, prosperity and fertility to people, animals, and fields, helps in banditry and warfare. He governs the surroundings of his mountain range and the Mgo log territory. Within it, his divine retinue (*'khor*) is dispersed – its members occupy peaks, hills, boulders, lakes, springs, trees, and so forth. *The Genealogy* (pp. 84-85) lists other ancestor deities of the clan, collectively called *mtshun lha*, presented as certain individuals once born into the 'Bri lineage. Their 'Bri descendants, including the Mgo log clan, should worship them along with several named warrior *dgra bla* divinities, one of whom features as the deity of the “vitality of the lineage” (*rus bla'i lha*). Origin myths and proposed genealogical descent thus correspond with ritual practice. In the articulated ancestor cosmology, landscape deities (*gzhi bdag*, *yul lha*, *yul sa*, *gnyan*, *a myes*) and ancestor deities (*myes po*, *a myes*, *yang myes*, *mes mtshun*, *pha mtshun*, *ma mtshun*) overlap and merge.

### 3.2 Ancestral and rulers' tombs as treasures

#### 3.2.1. Ritual distribution of ruler's relics

The emergence of the Three Divisions of Mgo log was a social and political, as well as ritual, act. According to *The Genealogy*, it accompanied the passing of the heroic ruler Phag thar. Satisfied with territorial advances and consolidation of his dynasty's power, at the age of eighty-nine Phag thar gathered his subjects on the roof of his palace and delivered a sung message:

“I have become old, my time is exhausted, I will depart today! My forefathers and ancestors (*pha myes yang myes*), come to welcome me! I will go to maternal uncles (*zhang bo yang zhang*), [and you,] sons and grandsons, and all subjects, remain in peace!”<sup>62</sup>

Phag thar mainly appeals to his male patrilineal offspring. He calls his ancestors and maternal uncles to “receive”, or welcome, him (*bsu ba*). Coming from Gnyan po G.yu rtse's lineage, he anticipates rejoicing with the god and numinal ancestors after death in the celestial realm. He invokes generations of paternal ancestors (*pha myes yang myes*) along with a succession of maternal uncles (*zhang bo yang zhang*), epitomised by no one else than Gnyan po G.yu rtse.<sup>63</sup> In current popular and scholarly understandings among the Mgo log people, Phag thar has indeed returned to the sky to join Gnyan po G.yu rtse's retinue becoming a *gzhi bdag* himself. Many other celebrated past Mgo log rulers are believed to have turned into *gzhi bdag* divinities, during which transition they usually acquired a new name in their new role, i.e. a kind of a necronym, and often also a physical seat in the form of a natural landscape feature and a cairn (*lab tse*, *la btse*, *lha rtse*, *lha btsas*).<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *The Genealogy*: 48, see Appendix 1. All English translations provided are my own. For an alternative translation of *The Genealogy* see Gyilung Tashi Gyatso and Gyilung Thugchok Dorji 2009, the accompanying Tibetan edition slightly differs from the one I use mainly due to typing errors.

<sup>63</sup> Maternal uncles called at death are also mentioned by Vinding (1982: 297) for the Thakali, and Oppitz (1982: 378, 399) for the Sherpa.

<sup>64</sup> Rje dkar O rgyan brtson 'grus 2007: 104-106. For comparison, Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 233ff.) provides many examples from Tibet and the Himalayas of heroes and outstanding personalities deified

The process continues with the current members of the power lineages and other “heroes” (*dpa’ bo*). A remark of a Mgo log pastoralist captures the bottom line: *dpon po rtsa ya zig / dpon po zhe gi yag po zig / ’di mo zig gzhi bdag la ’gyur rgyu red /*: “an amazing leader, a really great leader, such becomes a *gzhi bdag*”. Unlike the Tibetan emperors, the Mgo log rulers do not need a *dmu* cord to ascend to the sky, but apart from pro-per descent they usually need good social and political reputation during life among humans.

In *The Genealogy*, Phag thar’s son Chos ’bum pa, a newly trained monastic at Kaḥ thog, led the funerary arrangements for his father. In a proselytising message, he warned the congregation:

“From the time of [our ancestor] ’Bru Lha rgyal until our father [Phag thar], although the customs (*tshul*) of our ancestors seemed very good, and appeared as the best, in reality they were not good. For them, the *gzhi bdag* were the main [deities] they embraced as their tutelary deities (*yi dam*). At death, both their *bla* force and consciousness (*rnam shes*) were led away by the *gzhi bdag*. Yet, as at a certain point former actions have to bear consequences, it is necessary to “practice the Great Dharma” (*chos chen po byed*). [...] It will be also beneficial to diligently perform fumigations and other offerings to the great *gzhi bdag*, and especially the *yul lha*.”<sup>65</sup>

Bla ma Chos ’bum pa urges the people to complement the local cult of Gnyan po G.yu rtse with Buddhism, stating that until now, both the *bla* force and consciousness (which is a Buddhist concept) of the Mgo log rulers, and presumably others, have after death joined the *gzhi bdag* deities of land. This should now change with Buddhism helping the consciousness to gain a better rebirth.

After a supposed cremation of Phag thar’s body,<sup>66</sup> Bla ma Chos ’bum pa handled the bones of his father:<sup>67</sup>

“Bla ma Chos ’bum pa divided the bones (*rus pa rnams*) [of the deceased Phag thar] among all sons and grandsons. The bones were dispersed to their respective great strongholds: Dkar mdzod (“White treasury”), the “back mountain” (*rgyab ri*) of the A skyong [subclan], and the “back mountain” of the Dbang chen ’bum [subclan] in Chen mo’i gser gzhung, into [these] mountains of the *yul lha* territorial deities. Since then, [these mountains] became their respective “*bla* mountains” (*bla ri*). Pad ma ’bum held the bones and from the foot of [the mountain called] Gter threw them towards [its peak] Ri ’bur le rtse. Since then, [this mountain called] Smar gter (i.e. the “Treasure [mountain] of the Smar [valley]”) has become the “*bla* mountain” of the people of Pad ma ’bum.”<sup>68</sup>

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after death to become local protectors. Such single cases are common, yet to constitute a genealogy and a part of an independent cosmology as in Mgo log seems uncommon.

<sup>65</sup> *The Genealogy*: 48-49, see below Appendix 2.

<sup>66</sup> Here as in the lines below I present the current local reading of the chronicle. The text does not explicitly mention the immediate post-mortal treatment of the body.

<sup>67</sup> Parallels of sons taking care of father’s funeral in Vinding (1982: 301) and Oppitz (1982: 386-387).

<sup>68</sup> *The Genealogy*: 49, below Appendix 3. The final name appears spelled as both Pad ma ’bum and Padma ’bum. I use the latter unless directly quoting a source which applies the former as in this excerpt.

The three hereditary political successors of Phag thar representing the “Three Divisions of Mgo log”, Padma ’bum, Dbang chen ’bum, and A skyong, received a portion of the patriarch’s relics. They placed it into the ritual and political centre of the respective territory ascribed to each of them by Phag thar himself (for the following locations see map in Fig. 4).

The most senior of the three, Padma ’bum, Phag thar’s own (and third-born) son, and his subclan gained the core area of the Lower Smar valley (roughly present Padma County, named after them). Padma ’bum deposited his father’s bones into the “Treasure mountain of the Smar valley”, today colloquially also known as the “Treasure peak” (Gter mgo) or the “Treasure *bla* mountain” (Gter bla ri).<sup>69</sup> Phag thar’s grandson, his eldest son’s son, Dbang chen ’bum seized the Upper Smar valley and buried the bones there into a hill slope of the wide valley of Chen mo’i gser gzhung.<sup>70</sup> The Dbang chen ’bum subclan has settled there, in the northern Padma County and the adjacent Dar lag County further to the north. The youngest, Phag thar’s great-grandson, A skyong also occupied a site in the Upper Smar valley where he hid his share of bones into the “White treasury” rock, now also called the “Divine rock of the White treasury” (Lha brag dkar mdzod), on a hill. The hill has been the supportive “back mountain” (*rgyab ri*) of their central A skyong monastery recorded to have been established by Bla ma Chos ’bum pa himself (A skyong dgon pa, founded in 1433, ’Phrin las 2008: 414). Most members of the A skyong sub-clan migrated further to the north, north-west and north-east along the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range into the current Dga’ bde and Gcig sgril, and to a lower extent also Dar lag, Counties. Later, they created new repositories of ancestral bones there (see below). Besides this main A skyong’s geographical diffusion, there are small enclaves of the subclan in areas surrounding Mgo log.

All the three sites mentioned are generally known in contemporary Mgo log and reflect the gradual advance of the Mgo log clan in the region. Locals precisely recognise the three burial locations. All are on hill slopes, in the upper part of each hill. All slopes overlook the Smar river, either from the west or the east. For each subclan, their hill is sacred and hosts a resident territorial deity in Gnyan po G.yu rtse’s retinue. Each god guards the entrusted relics as well as his subclan and their domain. People observe certain codes of behaviour at these sites and venerate each deity through different rituals elaborated to varying degrees, some also in monastic settings. Moreover, each subclan see their hill as their *bla ri*, “*bla* mountain”, the repository of their communal *bla* force of vitality and prosperity, upon which the survival of the given group and its leaders, and the abundance of their land, depends. The *bla* is retained in the hills and the ancestral patriarch’s bones. The *bla* force pervades the landscape, can spread or be divided into several repositories, and can simultaneously also depart for the upper sphere of the sky to constitute a *gzhi bdag* deity, thus it implies a certain force and quality rather than an individual person’s ‘soul’. The peaks holding it represent “back mountains” (*rgyab ri*) supporting the distinct clan branches. The heartland of the Mgo log in Lower Smar and its treasure mountain have remained important to all branches as a point of shared ancestral identity.

<sup>69</sup> Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2017: 178-79, 384; Pad ma nram rgyal *et al.* (forthcoming): 219, 425-426.

<sup>70</sup> Stag thog Dpal rgyas Blo gros 2017: 343; Pad ma nram rgyal *et al.* (forthcoming): 385.





Fig. 4: The Gnyan po G.yu rtse area. (Map by G. Hazod, based on satellite photograph 12/2016; Map data: Google, Landsat Copernicus; modifications and additional data: A. Sehnalova)

*The Genealogy* (p. 57) further mentions a nother ruler's tomb, this time referred to as *bang so*. Phag thar's son Padma 'bum fathered a son named Thar ba. Whereas Padma 'bum buried Phag thar's relics into the treasure mountain of Smar backing the important Klu mkhar fortress, Thar ba's tomb, *bang so*, was established behind another of the dynasty's fortresses used by his own progeny (Dbang rol gdong mkhar, said to have been located in the Lower Smar valley). Again, Thar ba passed away at the respectable age of eighty-six and his final resting place as disclosed in the text might have been the supportive "back mountain" (*rgyab ri*) of this fortress. The two stories of a ruler's final depository thus parallel each other.

Within Buddhicisation efforts, Bla ma Chos 'bum pa did not agree with the *bla* force merely joining the *gzhi bdag* in the sky and retaining in the soil of their land, according to current understandings in Mgo log. The upper and lower, as well as the middle, sphere are in Mgo log governed by Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Even though the account recalls the apportioning of Buddha's remains into eight shrines across the land and later dispensations of relics of Tibetan Buddhist saints (Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 463), *The Genealogy* does not describe any Buddhist funeral rites for Phag thar to guide his consciousness. Some Buddhist masters aimed at merging such local burial practices and notions with Buddhism, as the below section shows.

### 3.2.2. Rite of the burial vase of ancestral bones

A majority of the A skyong subclan continued further migration in the direction of the Mgo log, northwards to the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range and beyond. They split into three patrilineal sub-subclans called the "Three Divisions of A skyong" (A skyong khag gsum): Khang rgan tshang ("Household (division) of the Old House"), Khang gsar tshang ("Household (division) of the New House"), and Gong ma tshang ("Highest household", i.e. division).<sup>71</sup> Each division has been ruled by a patriline derived from Phag thar's descendant A skyong, and each has settled in different areas of Dga' bde, Gcig sgril, and Dar lag Counties.

Khang rgan tshang has occupied the western foot of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range with its centres of power in the settlements of Dpal yul ("Glorious land") and Lung dkar ("White valley") in south-western Gcig sgril County. Their contemporary leader is based in Lung dkar and enjoys some social power and prestige. Grand monasteries of the same names dominate both settlements:

1. Dpal yul Dar thang monastery (est. 1838, 'Phrin las 2008: 277) of the Rnying ma school, a branch of the Dpal yul monastery near Sde dge from which the Mgo log allegedly migrated. This monastery also maintains links with Kaḥ thog monastery.
2. Lung dkar monastery (est. 1769, 'Phrin las 2008: 285) of the Dge lugs, presently affiliated with the Rwa brgya monastery (var. Rwa rgya) in northern Mgo log Prefecture.<sup>72</sup>

Both monasteries have been closely associated with Khang rgan tshang leaders. They have existed thanks to their support and have acted as their main providers of ritual services, often performing side by side despite of the different denominations. Both institutions are also responsible for funeral rites for the ruling elite when needed (apart from conducting standard funerals for the public). At such rare sorrowful occasions, the Jo nang school joins them to represent all the main monastic forces in the Khang rgan chief's territory and assure a more powerful ritual action. The Dpal yul Dar thang monastery holds one of the key ritual texts used. It reveals a repeated pattern of burials: bones are conceptualised as a treasure. First, I provide its translation, then a short analysis below.

<sup>71</sup> *Mdo smad chos 'byung*: 236; *The Genealogy*: 53-55; Don grub Dbang rgyal and Nor sde 1991.

<sup>72</sup> On both monasteries further see Yang 'phags pa *et al.* 1991: 1-123.

**The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness:**

**The Practice of Establishing Ancestral Bones<sup>73</sup>**

(90) *Oṃ swa sti*,<sup>74</sup>

Having bowed down to the primordial wisdom **of the Victorious Omniscient One,**  
**[the Buddha],**

The Royal Prince of youthful emanation,  
[the Bodhisattva] Sun of Speech [Mañjuśrī],  
I shall compose the practice of establishing ancestral bones.

Namely, as for the practice transmitted by observation (*mtshong brgyud*),  
Best is to have a clay vase (*rdza yi bum pa*),  
If [you] don't have such, [use] any new container (*snod*) [you] obtain,  
Without a crack [or flaw], pour milk down [on it].  
On the outside [of the vase with] white paint applied,  
In the East [draw] a tiger, in the South a dragon,  
In the West a red bird, in the North a tortoise,  
[And] in the intermediate directions [draw] the eight auspicious symbols:  
The baldachin and the others.<sup>75</sup>

Having drawn [these], burn incense inside [the vase],  
Then, into the centre [of the vase insert] the Life-tree (*srog shing*),<sup>76</sup>  
A juniper for a male, and a willow for a female,  
Not upside down, and without knots.  
As for the square carved on the top [of the Life-tree],  
Cut this square itself,  
Moisten it with saffron to make it yellow,  
[And] on the very top [of the Life-tree], write: *Oṃ āḥ hūṃ swā hā*.<sup>77</sup>  
Into the upper part [of the Life-tree] and the four cardinal directions write downwards,  
In gold, silver, vermillion, and black ink in accord with good fortune,<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Dkar rtsi 'debs pa'i lag len dge legs gter chen*. I obtained the text in *dpe cha* form and *dbu med* script in a recent printed edition. I keep the distinction of recited parts by a larger letter font, and performance instructions by a smaller font. The red highlighting follows the original, as does the pagination in Arabic numerals. Wylie transliteration is in Appendix 4. For a critical edition of the text, its dating and history, see Langelaar (forthcoming-a).

<sup>74</sup> In Sanskrit: *Oṃ svasti*.

<sup>75</sup> The Buddhist eight auspicious symbols: endless knot, lotus, baldachin, right-turning conch shell, wheel of the Doctrine, royal emblem, treasure vase, golden fish.

<sup>76</sup> Similarly noted for East Tibet by Langelaar in this volume, for the Himalayas by Oppitz 1982: 384.

<sup>77</sup> *Oṃ āḥ hūṃ svāhā*.

<sup>78</sup> The colours reflect the four cardinal points: gold stands for yellow (East), silver for white (South), vermillion for red (West), and black for the North. The sequence follows the Buddhist clockwise direction, likewise the four animals of the points enumerated above.



The clear sound of the essence mantra of interdependence:

*Oṃ kṣi ti rā dza swā hā.*<sup>79</sup>

*Oṃ pr thi wī de wī (91) swā hā.*<sup>80</sup>

**Thus is the mantra of the earth essence mantra of the Brtan ma female spirits.**<sup>81</sup>

This has to be observed.

Also, if one wishes for a long life,

[Add] the spell of Buddha Amitābha, and if one wishes [to become] rich,

[Add] the mantra spell of Jambhala, the stream of wealth,

If one wishes for great power, [add] the [spell of] Mahābala,

If one wishes to pacify various diseases, [add] the spell of the Medicine Buddha,

In order to pacify fierce fights, [add] the spell of the Eight Appearances,

Write these [spells] on separate scrolls of paper,

Insert them [into the vase] and wrap them around the Life-tree.

For a male, put the letters facing outwards,

And wrap [the scrolls] around solely to the right.

For a female, put the letters facing inwards,

And wrap [the scrolls] around solely to the left.

All letters [have to be] “head letters”.<sup>82</sup>

Then, in accordance with the colour,

Of the element of the body of the deceased,

Cover [the Life-tree] with fabric in a corresponding colour,

[And] tie it with a colourful thread of the five colours.

Fastening the Life-tree in the centre of the vase,

At the same time, recite this mantra along with a rosary:

*Oṃ a mṛ te a dā swā hā.*<sup>83</sup>

Then, according to the structure of the body,

Insert feet and legs, hipbones, back bones, and ribs,

Hands and arms, neck bones, and the skull.

(92) Add various kinds of medicines without poison,

Various kinds of grains without bad grains,

The three [metals of] iron, brass, and bronze,

[And] various precious jewels.

Draw an eight-spoked wheel on [a piece of] wood or slate,

[And] attach it to the lid [of the vase],

<sup>79</sup> *Oṃ kṣitiṛāja svāhā.* Mantra of Kṣitigarbha, in Tibetan Sa'i snying po, the *bodhisattva* of the earth.

<sup>80</sup> *Oṃ prthivīdevī svāhā.* Mantra of Prthivī, the Indian Earth Goddess.

<sup>81</sup> See Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996: 181-198.

<sup>82</sup> I.e. *dbu can* script (here as *mgo can*).

<sup>83</sup> *Oṃ amṛte adā svāhā.*

So that insects and worms cannot go inside.  
 At the bottom [of the vase] draw an eight-petalled lotus,  
 Insert the protection of the *g.yang* into its centre.  
 Having finished it, recite whatever [you wish to] accomplish,  
 Thus the *g.yang* of people will not decrease.

Ancestral bones of a happy, auspicious and long life,<sup>84</sup>  
 Are always put into a repository.  
 People who passed away over sixty [years old],  
 Are to be kept for about three years.  
 Those between forty and fifty [years of age],  
 Are not kept for a long time [and] a geomantic investigation is to be performed.  
 For those who died young,  
 There is no custom of handling ancestral bones,  
 As for adults and the elderly, [it] can [be done] for anyone.

Handle the hard bones as the ancestral bones.  
 As for all the soft bones,  
 Collect them and sprinkle them with “spell water.”<sup>85</sup>  
 [If you are] not a relative [of the deceased], there will be no (ritual) pollution  
 [caused by this].  
 A (ritually) pure [person should] (93) finely grind [the bones],  
 [And] cleanse [them] with water,  
 [So that they are] as white as a pigeon’s face.<sup>86</sup>  
 Mix them with a portion of mud for the rite of Offering to the Earth (*sa sbyin*),  
 [And] reciting the root mantras, make earth *tsatsha*.  
 Having arranged all [the *tsatsha*] in front [of you],  
 Apply the whitewash over them.

In the centre of each *stūpa* [of the *tsatsha*, visualise],<sup>87</sup>  
 A *maṇḍala* of the Omniscient [Buddha].  
 Perform this accomplishment of the *tsatsha* as a practice of your own. Meditate thus for each  
 one [of the *tsatsha*].  
 [Approach] the rites, offerings, and praises, and the root mantras,  
 [And then] the *stūpas* will completely melt into light.

<sup>84</sup> Literally “elderly”, “old” (*rgan*), i.e. of an elderly person.

<sup>85</sup> *Gzungs chu*, water empowered by mantras for special properties.

<sup>86</sup> *Phug ron gyi/ dong rus mdog ltar dkar ba de/*, literally “pigeon’s facial bone”, probably refers to white operculum of the *Columbidae* family; might be hinting at *gdong ras*, “a cloth to cover the face of a dead body” (Tsering Thakchoe Drungtso and Tsering Dolma Drungtso 2005: 207; Vinding 1982: 296; Ramble 1982: 336; Gouin 2012: 55).

<sup>87</sup> The individual *tsatsha* cakes are to be visualised as *stūpas*. The text has the spelling *tsatsha*, which I follow.

Having consecrated [the *tsatsha*] properly,<sup>88</sup>  
 In a hollow in the earth or in rocks,  
 So that it does not deteriorate and can resist water.  
 Offer a white *gtor ma* to the *gzhi bdag* [deities] and summon them,  
 [To ensure that] there are no hostilities in the earth,  
 And no malicious Lords of the place (*gnas bdag*).  
 As burnt ashes have a great impact on the earth,  
 Put them into a [place] close to [human] settlement.  
 Their immediate qualities are of great power.  
 Conceal the ancestral bones well into good earth,  
 Into a good back mountain, or the mountain behind, of abundant and smooth earth,  
 For the duration of thirteen generations,  
 This is a stable tomb of arising happiness and prosperity,  
 (94) The *bla* of the deceased will also reside there.  
 Examine [the *sa bdag*] Lto 'phye,<sup>89</sup> and the Lords of the place (*gnas gzhi'i bdag*),  
 Offer *gtor ma* cakes and the first portion libation,  
 Precisely perform the rite of Requesting the Earth (*sa bslang*)<sup>90</sup> and others.  
 Offer various grains and utter:  
 I pay homage to the Three Noble Jewels!  
 I pay homage to the One of Gentle Voice [Mañjughoṣa,]<sup>91</sup> of supreme knowledge!  
 Led by the great *sa bdag* Lto 'phye,  
 And the Brtan ma goddesses,  
 All the *sa dbag*, I ask [you] to listen.  
 Especially all the *sa bdag*, *klu*, and *gnyan*,  
 Residing in this area, [please] listen:  
 Coming from the world of mundane existence,  
 Humans, the two-legged beings,  
 When they are born, they are born on earth,  
 When they die, they die on earth,  
 [Thus] also the burial of the body is in the earth.  
 Noble Mañjughoṣa of supreme knowledge,  
 [Please] state which land has good or bad qualities.  
 I and the sponsoring patron  
 Wish to ask for the attainment (Skt. *siddhi*) of good earth.

<sup>88</sup> On funeral *tsatsha* (*tsatsa*) consecration see Brauen 1982: 326.

<sup>89</sup> See Eskenazi and Gyurme Dorje 2001.

<sup>90</sup> The translation of the name of the ritual follows Cantwell 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Skt. Mañjughoṣa ('Jam pa'i dbyangs, 'Jam dbyangs) is another name of Mañjuśrī ('Jam dpal). Snellgrove 1987: 59.

The word of Mañjughoṣa,  
 And the instructions of the four magical men,  
 (95) Stated that in this land the signs of the earth were good.  
 Therefore, you, the *sa bdag*,  
 Do not break this word of Mañjughoṣa,  
 Whatever is the attainment (*siddhi*) of the signs of the earth,  
 Today,<sup>92</sup> [please] be generous to us.  
 This great growth of fine green barley,  
 Appeared from the throat of the king [of birds] Khyung (Skt. Garuḍa),  
 Granted by the hand of the Great Compassionate One [Avalokiteśvara],<sup>93</sup>  
 It is the enjoyment of the black-headed men.  
 [I] offer this fine barley as a gift to the earth!  
 Giving [it] to land, [it will become] a treasury of auspiciousness (*bkra shis*).  
 Harmful earth demons and hostile spirits,  
 Are liberated by a fierce wooden ritual dagger (Skt. *kila*).  
 The precious container from the [syllable] *bhūṃ*,  
 Outside, it is a treasure vase,  
 Inside, it is an incomparable precious mansion.  
 In the inside, these white ancestral (*pha mtshun*) bones of the deceased,  
 By the blessings of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel [the Buddha],<sup>94</sup>  
 Conceal them as a precious treasure of the earth,  
 Open the realm of the Earth Goddess.<sup>95</sup>  
 The white bones [correspond to] the element of metal,  
 Today, earth and metal are set in the mother-son relation (*ma bu*).<sup>96</sup>  
 These thirteen<sup>97</sup> bones of the spine,  
 (96) Are established as a stake to support thirteen generations.  
 This round hipbone,  
 Is established as a general support of *g.yang* of people and cattle.  
 By this jawbone resembling a wide sickle,

<sup>92</sup> The time indication (*de ring*) implies either “today” or “now,” or both. Cf. similarly below.

<sup>93</sup> The word *'bru* can indicate both “barley” and “grain” more generally. The line alludes to the Tibetan myth on the *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara as the begetter of barley to humans. See Kapstein 1992; Laurent 2015.

<sup>94</sup> The term Wish-Fulfilling Jewel (*yid bzhin nor bu*) is ambiguous – it may, and may not, refer to the Buddha.

<sup>95</sup> The Earth Goddess in earth rituals figures in Cantwell 2001: 117; iconographically in Eskenazi and Gyurme Dorje 2001: 110-111.

<sup>96</sup> The relation of production of the five astrological elements wood (*shing*), fire (*me*), earth (*sa*), metal (*lcags*) and water (*chu*); earth gives rise to metal as a mother. Cornu 2002: 59; Eskenazi and Gyurme Dorje 2001: 64.

<sup>97</sup> The numeral is emended from “sixteen”, following Langelaar’s critical edition (forthcoming-a).

Destroy all the *rgab* demons of disease and death (*na rgab shi rgab*).<sup>98</sup>  
 The black-headed people of aspiration of the mundane existence,  
 The best of men, king Mthing ger and others,<sup>99</sup>  
 All the powerful ancestors (*mes mtshun*),  
 Abide firmly in this support of *g.yang*.  
 Mdzangs ma 'phrul and Khri do che,<sup>100</sup>  
 All the paternal ancestors (*pha mtshun*) of the 'six clans' of Tibet,  
 Abide firmly in this support of *g.yang*.  
 Especially all the paternal ancestors (*pha mtshun*) of the paternal lineage (*pha mes brgyud*),  
 And all the maternal ancestors (*ma mtshun*) of the paternal lineage (*pha mes brgyud*),  
 Of these deceased,  
 Together with the *bla* of the deceased,  
 Settle in this earth of good signs,  
 And enjoy the abundance of the earth!<sup>101</sup>  
  
 By the truth of the Three Jewels,  
 The completely pure Dharma,  
 And the truth of the conditional interdependence,  
 The *bla* of the [just] deceased and the paternal and maternal ancestors,  
 Joy, happiness, and wealth greatly increase.  
 (97) May [they have] the potency [to be] the protectors of the living!  
  
 By concealing this treasure vase of ancestral bones,  
 The *bla* of the dead, the deceased, is pleased,  
 The living will accumulate power and riches,  
 May long life without disease, of joy and happiness, come!  
  
 By the truth of the word of noble Mañjuśrī,  
 The unmistakable conditional interdependence,  
 And the force of the interdependence of arising,

<sup>98</sup> See Das 1991 (*sgab 'dre*); in Zhang 1993 (*sgab, 'gab, 'gab 'dre*) defined as “demons pursuing people and cattle” (*mi nor rjes 'brangs kyi 'dre*). This accords with the above verse proposing the ritual for both people and cattle.

<sup>99</sup> King Mthing ger (var. Mthing ge, Thing ghe) is the progenitor of mankind and the last shared ancestor of the Tibetans and Chinese (and eventually other ethnic groups) in Tibetan myth and ritual traditions, personifying Tibetans before their split into the 'six clans'. The myth of his body's dismemberment engendering the clans recalls that of Phag thar above. See Stein 1972: 194, 224; Karmay 1998: 258, 267ff.; Langelaar 2018: 338, 347, 354.

<sup>100</sup> Mthing ger's patrilineal descendants, son and grandson, the latter begets the 'six Tibetan clans'. See Karmay 1998: 270ff., 249, as 'Dzom la phrom and Khri tho chen po; Langelaar 2018: 337, fn. 39, as Khri (g)tor.

<sup>101</sup> Alternatively, the final syllable in this verse (*sa yi dpal la longs spyod mdzod*) could be translated nominally: “[And for] the abundance of the earth, [it will become] a treasury of enjoyment.”

Earth and metal are set in the mother-son relation,  
For the living, may long life without disease come!  
By the truth of the planets, stars, and time,  
May all auspiciousness arise!

Once reversed by the power of obscuration of ignorance,  
Bad planets, stars, and time,  
[And] noxious enemies in the earth may occur.  
By the blessings of the truth of Mañjughoṣa,  
May these turn into a peaceful ground of bliss and happiness!

*Oṃ a ka ni ni ka ni a bhi la maṇḍala ma ye swā hā.*<sup>102</sup>

Thus [utter], and scatter the flowers of auspicious wishes.

*May the four directions, [and] the centre as the fifth, be auspicious,*

May the auspiciousness of the Five Buddhas come!

May the eight points of the body be auspicious,

May the auspiciousness of the eight auspicious symbols come!

(98) May the interdependence of the eight objects<sup>103</sup> be auspicious,

May the auspiciousness of the eight auspicious objects come!

May abundance and wealth be auspicious,

May the auspiciousness of the Seven Royal treasures come!<sup>104</sup>

May the earth of the four directions be auspicious,

May the auspiciousness of the tiger, the dragon, the bird, and the serpent, come!<sup>105</sup>

*Oṃ ye dharmā sog.*<sup>106</sup>

*Oṃ su pra tiṣṭha badzra ya swā hā.*<sup>107</sup>

Firmly establish this and then adorn the end by aspiration prayers.

Thus is pronounced.

The King of Barley of the sign of the *mani* (*ma ṇi*) syllable, [Avalokiteśvara,]<sup>108</sup>

As he went to the sky,

<sup>102</sup> The mantra pacifying obscuration in all directions, particularly to prevent harm from earth spirits: *Oṃ akani nikani abhila maṇḍalamaye svāhā*.

<sup>103</sup> The eight auspicious objects: mirror, curd, *dur ba* grass, *bil ba* fruit, white right-turning conch-shell, elephant bezoar, vermillion, white mustard seeds; Das 1991, Zhang 1993.

<sup>104</sup> The seven emblems of a universal monarch: wheel, jewel, queen, minister, elephant, horse, general; Das 1991, Zhang 1993.

<sup>105</sup> The four animals of the cardinal points again in the clockwise order (East–South–West–North). The serpent alternates with the tortoise featuring above.

<sup>106</sup> The mantra of dependent origination, *rten 'brel snying po* (*rten snying*): *Oṃ ye dharmā hetu prabhavā hetun teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃ vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ*.

<sup>107</sup> *Oṃ supratīṣṭha vajraye svāhā*.

<sup>108</sup> See fn. 93. The text implies the very popular mantra of Avalokiteśvara: *Oṃ ma ṇi padme hūm*.



From the foot of the great sacred mountain Mdzo,  
 In the midst of the Lho zla dga' ma riverbank,<sup>109</sup>  
 In places of universal kindness and nearby lands,  
 To the many mantra holders (i.e. tantrins) of the future generations,  
 For general benefit, [this was composed] by Rā ga a sya,  
 [Based on] the Purification Tantra, the principal text of Avalokiteśvara,<sup>110</sup>  
 [And] the abbreviated Chinese principal text on the earth.  
 It was written down in faith by the fully ordained monk Padma,  
 As it was pronounced following the oral transmission.  
 Henceforth, by all the connections,  
 May auspicious happiness and prosperity come to both the patron and priest!

Thus was composed by Grub dbang Rin po che according to the respective principle texts and note-commentaries, along with correcting perpetuating inaccuracies, and was arranged together by Blo gros rgyal mtshan. (99) Hereby let great benefit to all sentient beings arise!

*Oṃ na mo bha ga wa te a pa ri mi ta a yur dznyā na su bi ni shtsi ta te dzwa rā dza ya ta thā  
 ga tā ya arha te samyaksam buddha ya, tadya thā, oṃ puṇye puṇye, ma hā puṇye a pa ri mi  
 ta puṇye a pa ri mi ta puṇye dznyā na sam bha ro pa tsi te, oṃ sarba sam ska ra pa ri  
 shuddha dharmā te ga ga na sa mudga te swa bhā wa bi shuddha ma hā na ya pa ri wa re  
 swā hā.*<sup>111</sup>

*Oṃ dzaṃ bha la dza lendra ye swā hā.*<sup>112</sup>

*Oṃ bai shra ma (\*ba) ṇa ye swā hā.*<sup>113</sup>

*Oṃ ba su dha ri nī swā hā.*<sup>114</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Langelaar (forthcoming-a) identifies the locations as the place of the work's composition: Gar mdzad mountain and its base (var. Lho rdza ngang ma) of Upper Rdza chu in northern Nang chen.

<sup>110</sup> The mentioned treatise 'Purification Tantra', *Sbyong rgyud*, or fully *Sbyong rgyud thugs rje chen po'i gzhung*, likely refers to the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra* (*Ngan song sbyong ba'i rgyud*), *Tantra on the Complete Purification of All Negative Places of Rebirth* (the title translation follows Buswell and Lopez 2014), one of the early tantras translated into Tibetan, which expounds on rebirth and rituals for the dead. See its edition in Skorupski 1983, further Cuevas 2003: 21, 36ff., 106ff., Lindsay 2018. I am grateful to Mathias Fermer for this identification.

<sup>111</sup> The *dhāraṇī* from the *Āryāparimitāyurjñānanāmamahāyānasūtra* or 'Phags pa tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo [Tōh. no. 483, 485]: *Oṃ namo bhagavate aparimitāyurjñānasuviniścitatejorājāya tathāgatāyārhatē samyaksambuddhāya | tadyathā | oṃ puṇye puṇye mahāpuṇye 'parimitapuṇye 'parimitapuṇyājñānasambhāropacite | oṃ sarvasaṃskārapariśuddhe dharmate gaganasamudgate svabhāvaviśuddhe mahānayaparivāre svāhā |*

<sup>112</sup> Mantra of Jambhala: *Oṃ jambhala jalendrāye svāhā.*

<sup>113</sup> Mantra of Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam thos sras), as a wealth deity: *Oṃ vaiśravaṇaye svāhā.*

<sup>114</sup> Mantra of the the wealth goddess Vasudhāra (Nor rgyun ma): *Oṃ vasudhārīnī svāhā.*

The spell of Mahābala: *Oṃ, Oṃ badzra kro dha ma hā bha la ha na da ha pa tsa ma tha bi dhwa na sa ya dza ṭilambo da ra u tsuṣma kro dha hūṃ phaṭ swā hā*.<sup>115</sup>

The medicine spell: *Tadya thā, Oṃ bhai ṣadzye bhai ṣa dzye ma hā bhai ṣa dzye rā dzā sa mudga te swā hā*.<sup>116</sup>

[The spell of] the Eight Appearances: *Oṃ a ka ni ni ka ni a bhi la maṇḍa la ma ye swā hā*.<sup>117</sup>

[The mantra of dependent origination,] *rten snying: Ye dharmā he tu pra bha wa he tuṃ teṣāṃ ta thā ga to hya ba datte ṣāṃtsa yo ni ro dha e waṃ bā di ma hā shā ma ṇa*.<sup>118</sup>

Thus [is uttered].

The rite treats bones of deceased elderly as a special substance enhanced with forces of prosperity that generates and ensures the well-being of the next generations of principally their lineage. Proper post-mortual storage of the bones, white-washed in a vessel hidden as a treasure at a certain location, secures that the essential forces of vitality and prosperity, *bla* and *g.yang*, carried by the ancestors during life (at least partially) remain with the living after their passing. Ethnographically, in current Mgo log people's perceptions, the title could fairly read: "The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness: The Practice of Establishing the White-washed [Burial Vase]". The term *dkar rtsi*, literally "white-wash/pigment" (alternatively "white sap/elixir"), according to Langelaar's (forthcoming-a) convincing textual analysis most probably denotes "ancestral bones". In Mgo log it is presently very difficult to find someone at least vaguely acquainted with the ritual, even though people, at least in the A skyong area, not rarely know about its existence. The term is more perceived to apply to the whole white-washed burial vessel rather than to the white bones in its inside.

The *bla* is in contemporary Mgo log understood as a certain force of vitality, which supports the living but causes severe mental and physical disruption if it leaves. At death, it can be either brought into the soil, the aim of this rite, and/or join the ancestors in the sky<sup>119</sup> and the mountains, who are often simultaneously *gzhi bdag* deities of the land. The ancestors are represented and preceded by Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Both avenues overlap – effectively, the *bla* remains in the land of ancestral

<sup>115</sup> Mantra of the deity Ucchuṣmakrodha Mahābala (Mnol ba med pa, literally "Without impurity"), who protects against impurity: *Oṃ vajrakrodha mahābala hana daha paca mathā vidhvaṃsaya jaṭilāmbhodaraṇa ucchuṣmakrodhāya hūṃ phaṭ svāhā*. Ucchuṣmakrodha deities first appear in Atharvavedic texts, and subsequently in many further Indian, especially tantric, traditions. The earliest appearances in Tibet of this tradition, and this very *dhāraṇī*, occur in the many separate copies of the *Āryamahābalanāmama-hāyānasūtra* found at Dunhuang (Bischoff 1956).

<sup>116</sup> Mantra of the Medicine Buddha (Sman bla; Bhaiṣajyaguru): *Tad yathā oṃ bhaiṣajye bhaiṣajye mahābhaiṣajyarājāsamudgate svāhā*.

<sup>117</sup> *Oṃ akani nikani abhila maṇḍalamaye svāhā*. See fn. 102.

<sup>118</sup> See fn. 106: *Ye dharmā hetu prabhavā hetun teṣāṃ tathāgato hy avadat teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha evaṃ vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ*.

<sup>119</sup> Likewise described for the Thakali by Vinding (1982).

mountain deities.<sup>120</sup> The *g.yang* as a force of good fortune, prosperity and wealth<sup>121</sup> very closely ties to the *gzhi bdag* too. People call the *g.yang* from the *gzhi bdag* regularly, sometimes every day, as a part of fumigation offerings (*bsang*), and at special occasions, such as rites of passage (children's first hair cutting ceremonies, *ne'u ston*; weddings, *gnyen ston* / *gnyen sgrig*; reaching the age of eighty, *rgya ston*), and other times of need of mun-dane support, such as natural disasters, war, or illness. Another force at play in the text is auspiciousness (*bkra shis*) again very commonly summoned from the *gzhi bdag*.

Patrilineality is the main ordering factor of kinship reference and entitlement to the acquisition of these powers through the ritual. The bones (*rus pa*) epitomise the patriline (*rus*). It is patrilineal descendants, and their land, who gain the benefits of their concealment. Maternal ancestors emerge mainly in relation to the patriline as its ancestors, involving Gnyan po G.yu rtse's daughter. The envisioned descent in the rite relates back to the 'six clans' of Tibet and further to the supposed shared ancestor of all Tibetans. The ancestors collectively feature under the designation *mtshun* which Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 311) construes as "ancestral spirits" and Langelaar (forthcoming-b, also in this volume) as "ancestral metapersons". In Mgo log, qualified ancestors, typically rulers and heroes, indeed continue their existence after death in a spirit-like form as specific *gzhi bdag* divinities. Within their unity, they are distinguished as "paternal" (*pha mtshun*) and "maternal" (*ma mtshun*), and once appear jointly as "all the powerful ancestors" (*mes mtshun gnyan po thams cad*). They share this epithet "powerful" or "fierce" (*gnyan po*) with the Mgo log clan's paramount ancestor Gnyan po G.yu rtse. The same characteristic of the *mtshun* was observed by Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1996: 311), from which he deduces that "[m]any of them seem to be regarded as spirits of evil nature: *mes btsun gnyan po*". However, in Mgo log through this rite one seeks a good relationship with the *mtshun* for very favourable outcomes.

The ritual exposes the constitution of an individual of three forces: (1) the "life force" (*srog*) – which is bound by physicality, determining lifespan; (2) the *bla* 'vitality force' – which extends beyond one's life with considerable impacts upon posterity, and as articulated in Mgo log can comprise post-mortal existence in numinal form; and (3) "consciousness" (*rnam shes*), a Buddhist concept of the main constituent of continuation of an individual subjected to the cycle of rebirths ('*khor ba*, Skt. *saṃsāra*) until the aimed-at awakening (*byang chub*, Skt. *bodhi*) and attaining of *nirvāṇa* (*mya ngan las 'das pa*). The tripartite scheme might be a reminiscence of 'soul' pluralism (Langelaar, this volume), even though the concept of 'soul' is at least in some contexts questionable (see below) and we rather deal with certain forces, powers, and qualities constituting the individual. A compendium of geomantic, literally of "examination of the earth" (*sa dpyad*), texts used at the

<sup>120</sup> Similarly noted in the Himalayas by Diemberger (1994, 1997); Brauen (1982) observed in La dwags retaining the family's *bla* by burying deceased children in the house.

<sup>121</sup> On *g.yang* see da Col 2012; Ramble 2013; in connection to death and locally preserved corpses of prominent and long-lived individuals as its carriers see Palmu (2018: 196-203), similarly Vinding (1982: 299) notes requests to the deceased to leave *g.yang* with the living, also Langelaar (this volume).

Dpal yul Dar thang monastery explains what happens to these forces at the death of their bearer as follows:

“There are three [forces]: *srog*, *nam shes*, and *bla*. The *srog* is killed, cut by the demons.

The *nam shes* follows its deeds (*las*, Skt. *karma*). The *bla* resides in the tomb.”<sup>122</sup>

What concerns the geomantic manual and directly the descendants, is the *bla*. As the text further illuminates, the *bla* is joyful and pleased (*dga'*) if its established burial ground exercises good qualities, and as a consequence the bereaved and the related community prosper for generations. If not, the living will suffer too. The well-being of the ancestral force thus determines the affluence of the descendants. Concealing such a treasure of bones enhanced with the *bla* results in establishing firm “back mountains” (*rgyab ri*) of support for the community in the same manner as the patriarch Phag thar’s bones gave origin to the three “vitality mountains” (*bla ri*) and “back mountains” of the three Mgo log subclans of his heirs. In the above-cited excerpt from *The Genealogy*, it was Buddhist monastics represented by Bla ma Chos ’bum pa who added to this notion the ‘consciousness’ principle, so that apart from continuing the *bla*’s post-mortal bound with the living, the deceased can also proceed through rebirths towards awakening. Apparently, according to the authors of the chronicle, they did not seem to see any contradiction with normative Buddhism in such a duality, as people do not see in contemporary Mgo log. *The Genealogy* does not mention the *srog* principle which ceases with death, and hence in effect is less relevant for funerary rites and the consequences of one’s passing.

*The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual merges the local ancestor cosmology with Buddhism. Even though the act does not explicitly address Buddhist *post mortem* concerns of a good rebirth and awakening, it incorporates many Buddhist tokens. The cosmological contextualisation are the four cardinal points so popular in Buddhist ritual with their characteristic features. The practice is presented as centred around *bodhisattva* Manjuśrī, the Buddha, the Three Jewels; deities embodying awakening prominently figure at the beginning, the end, and crucial points throughout the rite. Jambhala (Dzam lha, Dzam bha la) features notably due to his role as the deity of wealth and close connection to treasures (see below). A number of Buddhist symbols are involved, such as the eight-petalled lotus and *stūpas*, as well as very common Buddhist tantric practices, such as consecration and visualisations, spiritual attainments (*siddhi*), usage of a *maṇḍala*, mantras, and of certain substances (medicines without poison, grains, metals). Likewise, other components, such as the pacification of local forces of the environment, the rites of Offering to the Earth and Requesting the Earth, offering to the Lords of the place and the *sa bdag* Lto ’phye, feature in Tibetan Buddhist (and G.yung drung Bon) ritual. The ritual, at least as currently understood and performed, presupposes cremation as the primary treatment of the body by which the bones are extracted. In the same way, the treatment of Phag thar’s remains described in *The Genealogy* is currently read in Mgo log. In *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual, part

<sup>122</sup> Bsod nams Dbang ldan 1996, p. 318: *srog dang nam shes bla dang gsum/ srog de gshed ma ’dre yis gcod/ nam shes las kyi rjes su ’brang/ bla ni dur la gnas pa yin/*. Stein (1972: 227) observes equally: “At death, the soul (*bla*) survives in the tomb or elsewhere.”

of the remnants are stored as whitewashed bones in a treasure vase and part are integrated into white-washed *tsatsha*, the latter is a common practice throughout Tibet. Both *The Genealogy* and the ritual therefore present primary and secondary funerals.

The colophon ascribes the text to Rā ga a sya aka Karma chags med (1613-1678), the prolific scholar of East Tibet in the 17<sup>th</sup> century associated with the Karma Bka' brgyud school and the Rnying ma Dpal yul lineage. Yet, the work is in fact a later composite of two Karma chags med's ritual manuals merged and edited by a certain Blo gros rgyal mtshan at an unspecified time. The titles of the components read, in Langelaar's rendering: *Instructions and Procedures [Concerning] Ancestral Bones* (*Dkar rtsi zhal gdams lag len*), and *Summary [Notes on] Bone Caskets: The Planting of Ancestral Bones* (*Dkar rtsi'i sa 'debs rus mkhar nyung bsdus gcig*, alternatively *The Bone Casket, a Vase-Treasure for Ancestral Bones*, *Dkar rtsi bum gter rus mkhar*). Blo gros rgyal mtshan supplied the new whole with its present title, a more coherent and formal Buddhist framework, some of the practical ritual instructions and fully spelled out mantras (further see Langelaar, forthcoming-a). Interestingly, both distant areas in which Karma chags med most likely composed the original two pieces, Nang chen and the area south of Sde dge (here specifically the vicinity of the Karma Bka' brgyud Dpal spungs monastery) respectively, feature on the remembered Mgo log clan's migratory path. This suggests that the clan might have become familiar with the local ideas and practises embedded in the rite already *in situ*, aside from afterwards adopting the ritual from the Sde dge Dpal yul monastery.

Interestingly, Karma chags med also authored a series of various funerary texts mainly of the Buddhist aim of guiding consciousness (Halkias 2013: 113-116; 2019). In contrast, in *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual, the master (and the later editor) undoubtedly aimed at incorporating vital cosmological notions wide-spread in East Tibet into a Buddhist framework, both conceptual and performatively ritualistic, and furthermore, included Chinese astrological knowledge, as the closing lines state. These elements have thus become part of Rnying ma practice, until today perpetuated at Dar thang monastery. Karma chags med's funerary rituals, along with many other of his compositions, count among the most common and widely used throughout Tibet (Skorupski 1982: 361).

### 3.3 Contemporary practice: treasures and burial grounds

*The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual is one of the several funerary rites that the Dpal yul Dar thang monastery presently conducts. It is colloquially called "earth burial" (*sa dur*) or "burial treasure" (*dur gter*), and is distinguished from the other performed funerals: sky burial (*bya gtor*, literally "scattering to birds", also *bya sbyin*, "giving/offering to birds"), cremation (*me dur*, *sbyin sreg*), and water burial (*chu dur*). Such an earth burial is taken as one type of a *gter* treasure hidden into the ground. The buried treasure can be, but is not necessarily, conceptualised as a treasure offering (*gter*) to the territorial deity into whose land it is hidden. The treasure either relates to this deity, such as in Mgo log to Gnyan po G.yu rtse, or to the generic *sa bdag* Lto 'phye pervading all land, or often to both depending on the interpretation of those in charge of the offering.



People also grant and hide other treasures to enhance the forces of *g.yang*, *bkra shis*, as well as the “earth essence” (*sa bcud*).<sup>123</sup> Thereby they boast their and the land’s fecundity and affluence. These treasure offerings are very popular in present-day East Tibet during regular offerings to mountain *gzhi bdag* deities, such as grand yearly fumigations, and at special occasions, for instance pilgrimages, personal and family needs: house construction, illness, material loss and financial challenges, and environmental concerns mainly linked to the earth, such as draught, deterioration of soil, erosion, loss of productivity, etc. Both Buddhist and G.yung drung Bon authorities who produce the treasures and often lead their offerings, interpret them also in soteriological terms as a support for general merit (*bsod nams*) and awakening of all sentient beings. The treasures are both created and offered by monastics, tantrics (*sngags pa*), and lay people – usually men. They consist of “treasure vases” (*gter bum*) and “treasure sachets” (*gter khug*) filled with special ingredients, so-called “treasure substances” (*gter rdzas*), frequently based on precise recipes: jewels, precious and semiprecious stones, metals, grains, medicines, sheep wool representing *g.yang*, and the like, similarly to the funeral treasure presented above. The treasures should undergo ritual consecration to awakened Buddhist or G.yung drung Bon deities, among whom Jambhala (Dzam bha la), associated with treasures, wealth and material prosperity, features prominently. In Mgo log and Rnga ba regions, hundreds, and likely thousands, of such treasures are offered every year. Any auspicious and good site after a close examination of its geomantic conditions (*sa dpyad*) qualifies for the offering. The treasure is buried underground leaving no durable traces of the action on the earth surface. Places of high importance are the most popular, typically sacred sites, the “back mountains” (*rgyab ri*) of monasteries, natural features believed to contain the *bla* force: “*bla* mountains” (*bla ri*), such as A myes Rma chen, and “*bla* lakes” (*bla mtsho*) which for the Mgo log clan and its subjects is the Blue lake (Sngon mtsho), the repository of their communal *bla* where A ’bum once gained Gnyan po G.yu rtse’s daughter for his son, situated in the western part of the range.

On the other hand, earth treasure burials are extremely rare, the rarest from all types of funerals performed and all types of treasures offered. The act is in contemporary practice of the Dpal yul Dar thang monastery *de facto* reserved for deceased Mgo log clan leaders. The institution serves the A skyong Khang rgan sub-subclan along the high and pastoral western foothills of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range. As the A skyong subclan spread to the north, north-west and north-east from the Mgo log heartland in Padma, they established their own bone repositories for the remnants of own patriarchs. The one of the A skyong Khang rgan lies on a hill slope. It is oriented to the south and lies about twenty kilometres westwards (as the crow flies) from Dar thang settlement, in the Blue valley (Sngo khog) roughly oriented east-west. The slope directly faces the Dge lugs Lung dkar monastery on the opposite side of the valley across its Blue river (Sngo chu), which further up to the east issues from the Blue lake. The hill is rounded. Locals explain its shape as giving the impression of slightly

<sup>123</sup> Da Col (2012: 79) explains *bcud*, “essence”, as: “vitality, biopower, biodiversity and fertility (*sa bcud*); essence of life or quality of things, such as food.” My Mgo log informants have explained the *bcud* principle as the essence of phenomena ensuring their characterising qualities, i.e. making them what they are: giving fertility to soil, healing to medicine, nutrition to food, etc. Treasure vases enhancing *sa bcud* are discussed in Cantwell 2001; Huber 1997: 115.

overhanging so as to create a hollow or shelter beneath its top, providing a very good geomantic spot to protect the tombs. The peak is called Dge bsnyen in a Buddhist manner<sup>124</sup> and is conceptualised as the supportive “front mountain” (*mdun ri*) of the monastery. As one climbs up, for about thirty minutes from the bottom of the valley, the dramatic glacier of Gnyan po G.yu rtse becomes visible in the east. The same counts for the monastery – from the three uppermost steps of its assembly hall and above, one receives the same view. Both the burial ground and the monastery on the opposite slopes are geomantically aligned to Gnyan po G.yu rtse’s spires. One thus gets beautiful views of the Lung dkar monastery and Gnyan po G.yu rtse’s majestic summit (see Figs. 5-6). The burial ground now contains probably three small tumuli composed of earth and stone. Only one is well evident – the latest, which in local understanding dates to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 7).<sup>125</sup> Having an approximate rectangular shape of about one metre times two metres representing the proportions of a human body, it is elevated above the ground by about half a metre, and reveals its construction: the elevated earth basis is fully covered with thin slate stones carved with Buddhist mantras and symbols heaped one on another. The other two mounds are in a rather disintegrated state, resembling what might appear as random heaps of stones. The compact tomb is aligned by its longer sides to parallel the flow of the river and by its shorter sides to Gnyan po G.yu rtse, the other two, rather disintegrating, tombs seem to share this arrangement. The tombs locally referred to as (*dpon po’i*) *dur sa / bang so* are recognised to contain the remnants of several last generations of A skyong Khang rgan chieftains.



Fig. 5: View of the Khang rgan graveyard with the most intact tomb on the left, and a disintegrated tomb on the right; overlooking the Dge lugs Lung dkar monastery and the Sngo chu river to the south; the intact tomb’s longer sides parallel the flow of the river. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

<sup>124</sup> *Dge bsnyen* denotes *upāsaka* in Sanskrit, i.e. a lay Buddhist practitioner who observes the five elementary vows.

<sup>125</sup> In further research, I aim to establish a closer dating.

Another branch of the A skyong subclan, Khang gсар, has a similar burial site for their leaders on the hill Rma chen gi pha ri, the “Paternal Mountain of Rma chen”, probably hinting at A myes Rma chen commonly called Rma chen. The site faces one of Khang gсар’s central monasteries, the Rnying ma Smin thang dgon (est. 1865, ’Phrin las 2008: 302, now in northern Gcig sgril County), and should contain graves, orally rendered to me as *bang so* and *gdung khang*, of their leaders’ last four generations.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, it seems that the third A skyong branch, Gong ma tshang, also used to have such a designated field, which has gradually fallen into oblivion. An important sacred hill within their territory is interestingly called Dmu ri (Rmu ri, Rma btsan Dmu ri), evoking the divine cord connection to the sky, and moreover, is located in a place called Gser gzhong gong ma, “Upper Gser gzhong”, hence sharing name with Phag thar’s bone trove of Dbang chen ’bum in the lower parts of the Mgo log territory.<sup>127</sup> Further, it is above the Rma chu, Rma river (Huanghe, Yellow river, in Chinese), and ‘backs’ the group’s joint Rnying ma and Dge lugs Stong skyabs monastery (est. 1837, ’Phrin las 2008: 165, in Dga’ bde County). According to literature, the hill holds bone repositories (*gdung khang*) besides *gter* treasures concealed by Padmasambhava.<sup>128</sup>



Fig. 6: View of the Khang rgan graveyard showing the second disintegrated tomb (to the left); overlooking the peaks of the Gnyan po G.yu rtse range to the east. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

<sup>126</sup> I rely on information from the current holder of the A skyong Khang gсар rulership, I was not able to visit the site in person. The burial ground by its arrangement should resemble the one of Khang rgan.

<sup>127</sup> The spellings *gzhung* (more common) and *gzhong* alternate. The term denotes the main valley of an area, i.e. a (usually broad flat) valley of the core river, for instance here the Smar chu (for Dbang chen ’bum), and Rma chu (for A skyong Gong ma tshang).

<sup>128</sup> A skyong ’Jigs nram 2010: front images; Pad ma nram rgyal *et al.* (forthcoming): 703-05. The incumbent A skyong Gong ma tshang leader despite his great knowledge and rather advanced age did not know any such graveyard (interview, August 2018), neither other Gong ma tshang members I consulted. Likewise, Vinding (1982: 311) mentions “reliquary stone structures” for patrilineal descent groups of the Thakali, and Langelaar (this volume) in East Tibet.



Fig. 7: The most intact tomb of the Khang rgan graveyard, covered with thin slate stones carved with Buddhist mantras and symbols. (Photo: A. Sehnalova 2018)

Even though the current A skyong Khang rgan leader resides in the Lung dkar settlement below the monastery, and their cemeterial ground overlooks the monastery, Lung dkar monks do not perform the treasure burial itself, neither have access to its script. Monastics of the Rnying ma Dar thang establishment have to come to offer *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual. The ritual's text proposes that the white-washed burial vase "can be made for anyone" who has reached adulthood and especially old age. People have explained to me that the older the person the better for the rite and its efficacy; leaders, warriors, and also women with many sons are preferred. Likewise, *The Genealogy* states patriarch Phag thar's age of death as eighty-nine, which, at least from the current perspective, qualified his body and relics as especially powerful. However, in contemporary practice, the performance of the rite takes place only once in a generation when a hereditary ruler passes away. Then, first, the Dar thang and Lung dkar monasteries perform a cremation together (conceptualised as a "fire/burnt offering", *sbyin sreg*), accompanied by Jo nang Lcam mda' monastery (var. Lcam mdo, est. 1849, 'Phrin las 2008: 334, northern Gcig sgril County). Monks from each monastery recite their own texts. Secondly, bones are extracted from the ashes. Dar thang monks led by their highest authority titled the Dar thang Rin po che, compose the treasure vessel following the instructions in the ritual text. The treasure should be hidden into the ancestral ground. A new tomb for the deceased leader is then erected at the above described graveyard. Hereby he joins his forefathers, his father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and potentially others, his genealogical and political predecessors already buried at the designed site. More importantly, he joins them through his *bla* force as a *gzhi bdag* deity in Gnyan po G.yu rtse's retinue. Coming from a lineage of divinity, the ruler continues his existence as a deity. His *bla* and *g.yang* will pervade the land and landscape and support the progeny and subsequent generations. The rulers thus receive a primary and secondary burial. Smaller bones can be powdered into *tsatsha*, as the text instructs, and placed into small *tsha khang* houses that occasionally dot the hill slopes of Gnyan po G.yu rtse's landscape.



Concealed treasures, both funeral and of general offerings, can never be dug out. They are to remain in the ground to enhance its properties, the welfare of those offering them and their descendants. Extraction equals an attack, a hostile act against the associated individuals and social group.<sup>129</sup> The land and the group would lose at least a portion of their *bla* and *g.yang* forces. For example, the Mgo log clan and confederation understand that removing or destroying the Phag thar's *bla ri* ossuaries at one or all three sites would potentially prompt great degradation of the land and annihilation of the clan and its whole confederation. The Smar Treasure mountain of Padma 'bum is particularly vulnerable because people perceive it as the primary trove and a joint point of identity of all Mgo log.

Historical sources present the same notions. The *Mdo smad chos 'byung* in its chapter on the region of Mgo log and the upper Rma chu records three cases of treasure concealment: a political leader requests a Buddhist monastic master to offer a "mountain treasure" (*ri gter*) in a silver vessel (*dngrul bum*), which results into multiplication and flourishment of his progeny (p. 243). In a similar constellation, a treasure (*gter*) is offered for defence purposes against the Mongols, along with other forms of mountain deities' veneration, a cairn (*lab tse*) construction and fumigation (*bsang*) (p. 258). And thirdly, among other Buddhist practices, a master accomplishes (*sgrub*), i.e. probably composes and consecrates, and offers a Jambhala's treasure (Dzam lha'i *gter*) accompanied by the deity's "call for *g.yang*" recital (*g.yang 'bod*, p. 268). All three practices are performed today in East Tibet, including Mgo log, in equivalent circumstances.

Treasure offerings and burials in contemporary Mgo log manifest territorial claims, political dominance and ancestry projected into the landscape. Members of the clan, of specific subclans, and their subordinated and affiliated groups, often offer treasures into the land they occupy. Treasures offered at pilgrimage sites, nearer or further away, reveal religious and political networks of monastic, kin, and economic affiliations. The distribution of burial sites of the Mgo log ruling dynasty in the landscape reveals the supposed gradual migration of the clan, and, notably, the subsequent centres of power, seats of rule of the respective branches and their monasteries. Hence the social and political, and religious and ritual dimensions of their cosmology, and in practice, are intrinsically intertwined.

#### 4. Discussion: cosmology and tombs in imperial Tibet and Mgo log, East Tibet

By juxtaposing material from the Tibetan Empire arising from Central Tibet with ethnography collected at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century at the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, we temptatively discover an astonishing continuity or sharing of certain notions across this wide time and space. Despite the Tibetan emperors and Mgo log clan leaders being about a thousand years and, as the crow flies, thousand kilometres apart, they seem to share similar elementary cosmological notions and even certain associated practices.

Both hereditary dynasties, the Tibetan emperors and the Mgo log rulers, claimed, and the Mgo log still do, origin from the upper divine celestial realm. Mountains often feature in the origin narratives

<sup>129</sup> Similarly finds Langelaar (in this volume), and Mayer (2019: 155, fn. 71).



of the emperors, such as that of the descending Gnya' khri Btsan po, whereas the Mgo log claim to have been initiated by 'Bri Lha rgyal and Gnyan po G.yu rtse. Rulers of both dynasties allegedly came from the sky as deities (*lha*) to rule upon humans, and return to the sky after passing, again as deities (*lha*). Prominent deified members of both dynasties acquire a necronym in their role as ancestors. A foremost mountain peak is the site of the emergence of their apical ancestor – in some narratives about the emperors (see above), and the Gnyan po G.yu rtse mountain for the Mgo log. The deity residing in the mountain can acquire the role of the dynasty's protector and guarantee their flourishing and authority over their dominion. The mountain is located in the core of the dominion geographically associated with the dynasty's origin, and serves as an identity marker not only for the ruling patriline but also for their subjects.

The cosmological bond with the ancestor and mountain deity is maintained through ritual and codified behaviour. A ruler's death represents an important moment for both the dynasty's continuation and post-mortal recognition of the ruler's deification, hence funerary ceremonies crucially express this bond – by both ritual performance and tomb construction. Earth burial tumuli, semi-subterranean structures covered by a mound (erected in the vicinity of the mountain), hold the rulers' remains, along with various offerings. They constitute burial fields at sites of the dynasty's acclaimed origin, of enormous dimensions for the Tibetan emperors and much more modest for the Mgo log leaders. Like the emperors, Mgo log rulers receive the most complicated and expensive funerals available.<sup>130</sup> For both, burial sites can become sacred centres: shrines top some of the royal tumuli, as well as other tumuli from the same era, whereas in Mgo log a cemetery can be a *bla ri* which at the same time can host a *gzhi bdag* mountain deity with a cairn on its top. Imperial royal tombs received offerings and calendrical celebrations (Haarh 1969: 356, 377), somehow reminiscent of the ongoing very popular yearly *gzhi bdag* venerations at their cairns. Further, both cases share similar geographical and geomantic features: in Mgo log, tombs and cemeteries can be aligned with the ancestral mountain's peak, which may be the case for some tombs of the imperial era too. The tombs can relate to mountains by their positioning, for Tibetan emperors also by name and appearance. In both cases, tombs can relate to the dynasty's fundamental fortresses and settlements, and are placed in valleys governed by a running watercourse, either at the valley's bottom or on its ascending slopes. In Mgo log, all leaders' burial grounds known to me are on slopes, whereas some *tsha khang* houses and sites for bodily dismemberment after sky burial are also on valley beds. Both the Spu rgyal and Mgo log tumuli can possibly be seen as creating a physical link between the origin of the dynasty, strongholds of its power, its divine apical ancestor and object of worship, and the passing and final resting place of its most noble members. In other words, the positioning of the tombs can manifest the mythologised ancestor cosmology and etiology.

In both imperial Tibet and contemporary, and likely historical, Mgo log, tombs of the upmost ruling social elites have been repositories of precious materials and objects manifesting power and supremacy of their holders. These concerned members of the ruling family and, according to present

<sup>130</sup> Funerals of monastic elites involving cremation and *stūpa* construction are also very demanding, yet the earth burial is taken as very complex and the most technically and ritually complicated.

oral accounts, socially acclaimed figures not necessarily of noble descent in Mgo log. In accordance with Haarh, Hazod understands the rich contents of the imperial royal tombs as royal insignia. He who holds them, holds the authority to rule. Ossuaries and tombs of treasures manifest political power and establish political entities. When newcomers aspire to seize power, they extract the insignia from the tombs to appropriate them. Raiding and parting of bones and funeral treasures stands for disintegration and decentralisation of power, subjects, and territory. In Mgo log, he who holds the *bla ri* and ancestral tombs, is on good terms with their divine guardian, a mountain deity, and ideally, establishes own *bla ri* of own ancestral bones, rules the land. Shares of bones predestine succession of rulership. The method to defeat own's enemy is to destroy their *bla ri* by soil extraction and ravaging the leaders' and group's ancestral graveyard.

Narratives of such a power transmission and takeover are again framed in relation to the deities of land – new territorial entities are centred around them. The story of the Mgo log patriarch Phag thar's bones being divided among his heirs to form the three *bla* mountains, each associated with a mountain deity, as the ritual and political centres of the three Mgo log subclans, consciously or unconsciously parallels the account of decentralisation of power of the unified Empire into regional principalities each governed by a mountain deity in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century (Dotson 2012; Hazod 2016b). “[T]he council of paternal relatives – gods and demons – agreed to the division of the dominion, and a principality was established at the foot of each of the sacred mountains involved” (Dotson 2012: 164). In this and the Mgo log example, mountain numina determine and reflect political constituencies as their governing principle.

Nathan Hill linking Dunhuang documents with an ethnographically documented practice in contemporary La dwags (Dollfus 1996), has shared similar observations on the connection between the worship of divinities and expressions of subjugation to ruling power: one becomes subject to him whose god one worships. He observes that “[a] *yul lha* ceremony in Ladakh shares several features with the *sku bla* ceremony” performed for the emperors in their vassal states as a marker of subjugation, and linked to their politically legitimising narrative of divine descent from Gnya' khri Btsan po (Hill 2015: 52, 55, fn. 12, 20). In East Tibet, including Mgo log, ceremonies to territorial deities express association with, and often subjugation to, the dominant social entity particularly connected with the deity (Karmay and Sagant 1998; Karmay 1998: 423-462).

#### 4.1 Further variations

Objects concealed in tombs therefore seem to relate to deities of land and ‘mundane’ affairs they oversee, as power and governance. There are striking parallels in the wording of description of the imperial royal tombs in sources from the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century and the Karma chags med's *Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* text (17<sup>th</sup> century) of a later edition. The *gter ma* literature presents the tombs as treasure depots (mostly as ‘*nor*’) for the sake of the royal dynasty's future generations and ‘generations’ in general, as does Karma chags med's writing both for the generations of the given descent line and their community. In his text as well as in other rituals of treasure concealment in Mgo log, the treasure is rendered by the word ‘*gter*’; the word ‘*nor*’ still appears in the rites typically in relation to Jambhala (as in Nor lha, the “Deity of treasures/wealth”, and other epithets of his).

To recapitulate a few instances from the extracts presented above, I highlight the closest parallels: *The Chronicles of the Kings* mention for king 'Bro Gnyan Ide'u's tomb that inside "[t]he treasures were hidden (for) the future royal generations" (*phyi rabs rgyal brgyud nor du sbas*). Furthermore, elsewhere, the work speaks about the valuable royal treasures (*rgyal po 'i dkon nor*), and "[t]he thirteen treasures of the king" (*rgyal po 'i dkor cha rin cen bcu gsum*) in the treasure-tomb (*nor gyi bang so*) of Yum bu Bla sgang whose inventory itself "was hidden as a gter" (*gter du sbas so*). On a similar note, *The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness* ritual recites:

"Conceal the ancestral bones well into good earth,  
 Into a good back mountain, or the mountain behind, of abundant  
 and smooth earth (*'jam zhing sa dpal bzang sar sha*),  
 For the duration of thirteen generations (*mi rabs bcu gsum bar dag tu*),  
 This is a stable tomb of arising happiness and prosperity,  
 The *bla* of the deceased will also reside there.  
 [...]  
 In the inside, these white ancestral bones of the deceased,  
 By the blessings of the Wish-Fulfilling Jewel [the Buddha],  
Conceal them as a precious treasure of the earth (*rin chen sa yi gter du sbas*),  
 Open the realm of the Earth Goddess.  
 [...]  
 By concealing this treasure vase of ancestral bones,  
 The *bla* of the dead one, the deceased, is pleased,  
 The living will accumulate power and riches,  
 May long life without disease, of joy and happiness, come!"

The symbolic numbers of thirteen and eighteen express fullness and complexity, and hence long duration. Further, in both cases, bodies, or the extracted bones, are kept in vessels inside the tombs. These are usually mentioned as vessels (*rdza ma*, explicitly copper vessels: *zangs, zangs chen*) or other containers (*ga 'u*) for the imperial era, and feature as a "clay vessel" (*rdza yi bum pa*), "treasure vessel" (*gter gyi bum pa*), and "precious container" (*rin po che yi snod*) in the ritual text. Interesting is also the usage of slate rock (*g.yam pa*) in both examples, be it haphazard or not – slate is often described as covering the emperors' tombs, and remains the tomb cover in contemporary Mgo log. It is also listed as an attachment to the burial treasure vessel in Karma chags med's composition.

The *bla* vitality principle is another remarkable parallel. Haarh's understanding of the *bla* in the imperial context as a 'life-power' that separates from the corpse to stay with the bereaved and living fits very well with its comprehension in Mgo log. The presented Karma chags med's ritual aims at keeping it with the living in the soil of their land. In Mgo log, the crucial *bla* is maintained in the land and the hidden objects and substances it holds: treasures of ancestral bones, man-made treasures, and "natural treasures" (*rang 'byung gi gter*, such as repositories of rare metals and precious stones). Gnyan po G.yu rtse and other territorial deities owning such treasures in their estates are commonly titled "treasure lords" (*gter bdag*) hence by a term employed in *The Chronicles of the Kings* for divine guardians of royal treasures. In the *gter ma* tradition elaborating

on the imperial era, kingship, and authority, we also see the *bla* concept incorporated, as in the example of the revealed *bla g.yu* treasure of the early kings mentioned above. Davidson's take of the *bla* as "an extension of the king's soul or person (*rgyal po'i bla*)" and of "the person/soul treasure (*bla gter*) of the emperor" as inherently linked to the royal ancestral legacy for future generations and the Empire's mountain protector god, strongly resonates with Mgo log cosmology. The difference is that in Mgo log the prestigious rulers' graveyards are not seen as "a place for the residence of their collective spirits" by the accumulation of their individual *bla* entities, as Davidson assumes for the Empire. As I explicate above, in Mgo log the *bla* is a dividable and spreadable force rather than an individual 'soul' which would further divide into 'sub-souls'. Still, Mgo log shares Davidson's main proposition that the site of *bla* residence, tombs and *bla ri*, protects and blesses the dominion its former bearer governed. Davidson has also observed that the early treasure revealers engaged with treasures rectifying social and political disintegration, which accords with the political theory lying behind ancestral and other concealed treasures in Mgo log.

The aspect that does not accord between Davidson's view of the *bla* repositories as predecessors of the *gter ma* tradition and the Mgo log practice of *gter* treasures, including burials, is the moment of extraction. In Mgo log, there is a distinction between *gter ma* treasures for excavation and *gter* treasures for storing, strongly articulated in colloquial language and general understanding. Offered and natural *gter* treasures are never extracted in Mgo log, this could occur only as a malicious act. They keep the qualities of *bla*, *g.yang*, *sa bcud*, *bkra shis*, and also support "fortune" (*rlung rta*). As seen from Mgo log, the imperial royal tombs indeed contained the emperors' *bla* but would not be dug out unless someone wished to destroy the dynasty, the Empire, or Tibet as a whole (whatever vaguely defined territory would be imagined under the term) perceived as associated with the dynasty. However, there is one exception: certain types of treasures, standardly *not* including the funerary treasures but rather treasure vessels of precious substances, can be extracted by very advanced Buddhist or Bon po masters who overpower the territorial deities into whose land the given treasure has been confided. Hereby a *gter* treasure becomes a *gter ma* treasure, and a site of *gter* depository turns into a site of *gter ma* discovery. In this sense, Davidson's theory provides a possible link between the *gter* and *gter ma* treasure traditions, at least from the Mgo log and broader East Tibetan perspective.<sup>131</sup> The Mgo log cosmology thus seems to provide further clues for the accountability of the theory.

The imperial royal tombs, the Mgo log tombs, and contemporary treasure offerings in East Tibet represent mundane success and prosperity, and genealogical continuations. They serve as markers of territorial and genealogical shares and divisions of particular groups. Hence, all three instances relate to the capacities of territorial deities of ensuring prosperity, auspiciousness, power and riches, fecundity, protection from enemies, disease and death. Treasures in East Tibet enrich both the environment and people, and balance the environment's hostile forces. Importantly, all three cases exemplify materials representing power, prestige, abundance, and vitality. We find similar

<sup>131</sup> I elaborate on the mountain ancestor cosmology as the possible source for, or contribution to, the origin of the *gter ma* tradition in a paper presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (Paris, 2019) and in further work with Rob Mayer.

expressions at other rituals dedicated to territorial deities. For example, for a new *gzhi bdag* cairn construction in East Tibet one should offer and conceal treasures at its base, often accompanied by a statue of the deity who at the same time can be perceived as a local ancestor and a by-gone ruler. The arrangement recalls the imperial royal burials and present-day treasure burials – one thus recreates a subterranean tomb of one's own ancestor filled with treasures, in order to create a site for his veneration.

#### 4.2 Contexts of Buddhicisation

The discrepancy in the treatment of treasures – their concealment versus extraction – might entail a possible development of Buddhicisation. It mirrors the switch of burial practices tied to ancestor worship and cosmology and potential treasure hiding, to contrasting and even reversing Buddhist forms.

Several sources and personae, namely Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od in his edict (11<sup>th</sup> century), the *Dbal bzhe* chronicle (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century), Karma chags med's ritual work (17<sup>th</sup> century, of a later edition), and Bla ma Chos 'bum pa in the account on Phag thar's passing in *The Genealogy* (19-20<sup>th</sup> century), present (elite) funerals as an arena heavily contested by different ritual and religious groups, and hence by different cosmologies. Dotson (2016) points to several similar cases from Dunhuang documents, although these do not concern treasures. Each time, Buddhism stands against an antagonist actor that is non-Buddhist, and likely pre-Buddhist, representing indigenous cults: the *bon pos* of the imperial times, and the ancestor and mountain cults. Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od and the *Dbal bzhe* deny non-Buddhist practice, whereas Bla ma Chos 'bum pa and Karma chags med injects it into a Buddhist framework. Haarh also noted this objection of Buddhism to the imperial funerary practices which he understood as belonging to ancestor cults: "Though apparently very tolerant in most respects, orthodox Buddhism seems from the very beginning to have fought very radically and consistently the old concepts of the dead and the ancestors, because these concepts presented a particular offense to, and incompatibility with, fundamental features of the Buddhist doctrine." (Haarh 1969: 327; cf. Cuevas 2003: 34-38).<sup>132</sup>

On the same note, Bla ma Chos 'bum pa identifies the *gzhi bdag* and ancestor worship of the Mgo log people prior to his proselytising intervention as the "customs (*tshul*) of our ancestors" bearing no distinction between social practice and religious or ritual undertaking. He incorporates them into Buddhism by assigning them a marginal position. In Mgo log, the issue is very sensitive since these 'customs' govern social organisation and integrity, deriving from the ancestral and ancestor cosmology, hence, would be too challenging to deny. Correspondingly, Karma chags med in his composition still performed by Bla ma Chos 'bum pa's successors and community, creates a masterly compromise between the two systems. He overlays the locally-based rite connected to a certain lineage and social group with universal significance of Buddhist spiritual aims, still dedicating the majority of the recital to the ancestors. The Buddhist dimension feels as a mere

<sup>132</sup> Haarh provides the "most illustrative example of this iconoclasm" by the work of Heissig (1953) on the Buddhist suppression of ancestor cults in Mongolia.



framing, nonetheless it transforms the whole practice into a monastic and soteriological activity (see Langelaar in this volume).

According to my Mgo log interlocutors, the significant performative, as well as cosmological and philosophical, dimension Buddhism has added to local funerals, is cremation. Cremation is in Mgo log reserved for advanced religious masters, yet as the most prestigious Buddhist funeral it has made its way to social and political elites. Their deceased are first cremated and then hidden as treasures with Karma chags med's manual. Mgo log people assume that before the strong impact of Buddhism in their region, many of their ancestors were entombed, similarly to the emperors.<sup>133</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

The presented material suggests a great continuation of certain notions, practices, and linguistic terms across extensive time and space of the Tibetan Plateau, particularly in geographical niches of what appears as residua of (local) indigenous cosmologies. Secondly, the studied Mgo log case shows that certain practices in Western academic writing on Tibetan societies principally taken as 'religious' are inherently 'social' and 'political' derived from kingship, conquest, geography, migration, land seizure and distribution, genealogical and kinship ties, etc. The Mgo log cosmology maintains power and dominion, and designated social institutions, similarly to what the editors of this volume call "social conventions that ideally served the maintenance of the kingship as a divine order",<sup>134</sup> and Maurice Bloch (2008) has analysed as 'transcendental social'. The Mgo log missionary Bla ma Chos 'bum pa himself refers to them as "the customs (*tshul*) of our ancestors" without making any distinction between social, political, and religious dimensions.

The Mgo log case reveals a complex cosmology of ancestor and ancestral mountain cults, independent and functional on its own, in which individuals and social groups aim to participate in the flows of the various forces of well-being and prosperity and accumulate them to their fullest possible extent. The sources of these forces are ancestor deities residing in the sky, ancestral land imbued by them through these deities and then natural and ancestral bodily substances, epitomised by the *bla* force in cached ancestral bones. Such hidden precious materials are conceptualised as a *gter* treasure. Divine kingship determines the most powerful ancestors-to-be and the holders of the prestigious graveyards. Rulers' relics functioning as royal regalia manifest political power, related territorial divisions, their ritual centres, and supports of their stability and prosperity, and even existence itself. Are the rulers who are born divine and pass away divine religious, secular, or merely ritualistic? In this cult of Mgo log, 'religion' or 'ritual' expresses primarily mundane aims: social and political authority, genealogy, social integrity and splitting, cohesion and identity of social groups, and economic relations.

<sup>133</sup> The same distinction is noted in Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle 2013: 465 in the writings of the regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705) on mortuary practices based on class and occupation: "while secular leaders should be entombed, religious specialists should be cremated". Cf. Gouin 2012: 47.

<sup>134</sup> *The Social and the Religious in the Making of Tibetan Societies: New Perspectives on Imperial Tibet*, 21-23 November 2018, Vienna, workshop programme.

Imperial Tibet offers a similar layout of ancestor cosmology and political theory of divine kingship. The king of numinal celestial origin establishes, guarantees, and represents social order, like the Mgo log leaders. These notions have existed from very early periods of recorded Tibetan history, and maybe earlier. It might be the case that they have largely disappeared from Central Tibet under the pressure of Buddhicisation but have somewhat survived in various forms in ‘peripheral’ regions such as East Tibet and the Himalayas where they still form a part of widespread practices, narratives, popular knowledge, and inform actual social arrangements. Moreover, they have often been successfully built into Buddhist practice. Yet, in the Mgo log case and elsewhere, one has to be careful in distinguishing Buddhist versus non- or pre-Buddhist, until further research demonstrates it so. These notions and practices, or some of them, might have arrived into the region already as a part of practiced Rnying ma Buddhism, albeit they have likely originated outside of Buddhism and most likely represent indigenous ideas.

If we take the *gter ma* concept and practice in Mgo log seen as Buddhist and of G.yung drung Bon, versus the *gter* emically not primarily understood as connected to Indian-influenced cultural strata, an alluring and tentative, albeit not at all proven, hypothesis comes forward in Ronald Davidson’s lines. The *gter ma* treasure tradition might be an outcome, or a certain inverted reflection, of Buddhicisation of the *gter* treasure tradition in an effort to overpower the indigenous cults. This I add as complementary to the discussion on the origins and the various possible historical influences on and aspects of the *gter ma* tradition advanced by Rob Mayer’s (2019) recent argumentation. It is intriguing that the medieval *gter ma* literature in a way, not necessarily by intention, links the imperial times with present practice – its reflections of imperial royal funerary treasures as if continued to somewhat find actual instantiations in extant earth burial customs. In other words, its conceived descriptions of the early royal tombs almost seem like an inspiration for burials centuries later and ongoing rituals such as that by Karma chags med.

Since certain current notions and practices are so reminiscent of imperial Tibet, there is the question whether some recent historical and currently occurring developments could parallel developments in the imperial situation, as the gradual Buddhicisation of the Tibetan Plateau. Even though it is dangerous to post-project cultural happenings without solid proof, this article raises the issue of using current ethnography to better understand historical happenings within Tibetan societies, including their social – religious (in)distinctions.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1

Excerpt from *The Genealogy*, p. 48:

nga mi rgan na tshod ni thal lo de ring 'gro/ pha myes yang myes dang bcas te bsu bar byon/  
zhang bo yang zhang rnams drung du nga 'gro yi/ bu dang tsha bo 'bangs thams cad bde bar  
bzhugs/

### Appendix 2

Excerpt from *The Genealogy*, pp. 48-49 (asterisk\* marks emendations):

'bru lha rgyal nas bzung/ rang cag gi pha rgan 'di'i bar gyi pha myes rnams ni tshul shin tu  
bzang bo 'di lta bu rnams ltar snang la bzang bzang 'dra yang don la bzang bo min/ kho tshos  
gzhi bdag gi gtso bo rnams yi dam gyi snying bor bzung bas/ shi tshe bla dang rnam shes  
gzhi bdag gis khrid 'gro ba red kyang/ nam zhig na sngon las kyi rjes su 'brang dgos pas  
chos chen po byed dgos pa yod/ [...] bzhi (\*gzhi) bdag chen po rnams kyis (\*kyi) gtsos yul  
lha rnams kyi bsang mchod dang gsol mchod la btson na bzang gsungs te/

### Appendix 3

Excerpt from *The Genealogy*, p. 49:

rus pa rnams kyang bla ma chos 'bum pa nas bu dang tsha bo thams cad la bgos nas sbyin  
dgos pa byung/ rus pa de rang rang gi mkhar chen mo dkar mdzod a skyong gi rgyab ri dang/  
chen mo'i gser gzhung dbang chen 'bum gyi rgyab ri rnams su yod pa'i yul lha rnams kyi ri  
la gtor/ de nas bzung rang rang gi bla rir gyur/ pad ma 'bum gyis gter 'dabs nas bzung ri 'bur  
le rtse'i bar du gtor bas/ de nas bzung ste smar gter 'di pad ma 'bum gyi mi rigs kyi bla rir  
gyur/

### Appendix 4

*The Great Treasure of Virtue and Goodness: The Practice of Establishing Ancestral Bones (Dkar rtsi 'debs pa'i lag len dge legs gter chen)*, ritual text of the dPal yul Dar thang monastery:

Each folio is numbered in the traditional system by fully spelled-out Tibetan numerals (from one to six), and furthermore each page is numbered by Arabic numerals as a part of the whole funeral series (from 89 to 99), which I follow in the Wylie transliteration. I do not correct deviations from the most common, or standard, Tibetan spelling (such as the -s post-suffix missing in some verbal forms), as I believe they reflect local notions of spelling. The emendations in the text I propose are bracketed and marked by an asterisk (\*).

(89) dkar rtsi 'debs pa'i lag len dge legs gter chen zhes bya ba bzhugs so//

(90) om swa sti/ rgyal kun mkhyen pa'i ye shes ni/ rgyal sras gzhon nu'i rol pa can/ smra  
ba'i nyi ma la btud nas/ dkar rtsi bzhag pa'i lag len bri/

de yang mthong brgyud phyag len ni/ rdza yi bum pa yod na rab/ med na gang lon snod gsar te/ gas chag med pa 'o mas phab/ tshon rtsi dkar po byug pa'i phyi/ shar du stag dang lho ru 'brug/ nub tu bya dmar byang ru sbal/ mtshams su gdugs sogs bkra shis brgyad/ bris la nang du gu gul bdug/ de nas dbus su srog shing ni/ pho la shug pa mo glang ma/ mgo mjug ma log 'dzer med pa/ gru bzhi gzhog pa'i rtse mo ni/ gru bzhi nyid du bcad pa la/ gur gum byugs te ser bo bya/ rtse stod om āḥ hūṃ swā hā/ tho brtsegs phyogs bzhir thur du 'bri/ 'byor bstun gser dngul mtshal snag gis/ rten 'brel snying po dbyangs gsal dang/ **om kṣi ti rā dza swā hā/ om pṛ thi wī de wī (91) swā hā/ zhes pa sa snying brtan ma'i sngags/** de tsam med du mi rung zhing/

gzhan yang tshe ni ring 'dod na/ tshe dpag gzungs dang phyug por 'dod/ dzam lha nor rgyun gzungs sngags dang/ stobs che 'dod na stobs po che/ nad sogs zhi 'dod sman bla'i gzungs/ rtsub 'khrug zhi phyir snang brgyad gzungs/ de dag so sor shog dril bris/ mjug nas srog shing la dkris te/ pho la yig ngo phyir la bstan/ g.yas skor dag tu dkri bar bya/ mo la yig ngo nang du bstan/ g.yon skor dag ru dkri bar bya/ kun kyang yi ge mgo can no/ de rgyab tshe 'das de nyid kyi/ lus kyi 'byung ba'i mdog mthun pa'i/ dar gyis btums la tshon skud ni/ sna lngas dam du bcing bar bya/ bum pa'i dbus su srog shing 'dzugs/ de tshe sngags 'di phreng skor bzla/ **om a mṛ te a dā swā hā/**

de nas lus kyi chags rim ltar/ rkang pa dpyi rgal rtsibs ma dang/ lag ske dang ni mgo rus bzhag/ (92) dug rigs min pa'i sman sna dang/ 'bru nag min pa'i 'bru sna dang/ lcags dang ra gan khro nag gsum/ ma gtog rin chen sna tshogs blugs/ shing ngam g.yam par 'khor rtsibs brgyad/ bris pa kha bcad la chas sbyar/ nang du 'bu srin mi 'gro bya/ zhabs su padma 'dab brgyad bri/ g.yang skyabs dbus su de nyid bzhag/ g.yang skyabs tshar grangs ci 'grub 'don/ de yi mi g.yang mi nyams gnad/

bkra rgan mi tshe skyid pa yi/ dkar rtsi rgyun du mdzod phug bzhag/ drug cu yar la 'das pa'i mi/ lo gsum tsam zhig bzhag par bya/ bzhi bcu yan chad lnga bcu'i bar/ yun ring mi bzhag sa mig bya/ gzhon nu'i nyid du shi ba la/ dkar rtsi byed pa'i bab thob med/ dar ma rgan po gang yang rung/

rus pa sra sra dkar rtsi bya/ snyi snyi'i rus pa thams cad ni/ bstus nas gzungs chus bran byas te/ nye du min cing sdig med pa/ gtsang ma zhig gis (93) zhib par btul/ chu la sbyangs te phug ron gyi/ dong rus mdog ltar dkar ba de/ sa sbyin 'jim pa tshod dang bsres/ rtsa rigs bzlas shing sātsatsha btab/ thams cad mdun du bsgrigs byas nas/ tshon rtsi dkar po byugs par bya/ mchod rten so so'i dbus nyid du/ kun rig dkyil 'khor re/ tsha sgrub 'di rang rang gi phyag len ltar bya/ rer bsgom/ cho ga mchod bstod rtsa rig bsnyen/ 'od zhu mchod rten rnam par gyur/ rab tu gnas pa legs byas pa/ de yang sa phug brag phug dang/ bskor ba mi 'gro chu thub par/ dkar gtor phul la gzhi bdag la bzhugs su gsol/ de yang sa dgra med pa dang/ gnas bdag ngan pa med par bces/ thal sol sa non chod che ba/ grong thag nye bar zhig tu blug/ 'phral gyi bzang ngan de dbang che/ dkar rtsi rgyab ri yang ri bzang/ 'jam zhing sa dpal bzang sar sba/ mi rabs bcu gsum bar dag tu/ phan bde 'byung ba'i gtan dur yin/ tshe (94) 'das bla yang de la gnas/

lto 'phye brtags dang gnas gzhi'i bdag/ gtor ma dang ni skyems phud phul/ sa bslang la sogs zhib par bya/ 'bru sna mchod cing 'di skad brjod/ **'phags pa dkon mchog gsum la** phyag 'tshal lo/ mkhyen rab 'jam pa'i dbyangs la phyag 'tshal lo/ sa bdag lto 'phye chen po dang/ lha mo brtan mas gtsor byas pa'i/ sa bdag thams cad gsan du gsol/ khyad par yul phyogs 'dir gnas pa'i/ sa bdag klu gnyan thams cad gson/ srid pa'i 'jig rten chags nas ni/ rkang gnyis 'gro ba mi rnams ni/ skyes kyang sa yi steng du skyes/ 'chi yang sa yi steng du 'chi/ phung po dur yang sa la 'debs/ mkhyen rab 'phags pa 'jam dbyangs kyis/ sa la bzang ngan yod par gsungs/ bdag dang rgyu sbyor yon bdag gis/ sa bzang dngos grub zhu 'dod pas/ 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyis bka' dang ni/ 'phrul gyi mi bzhi'i lung gis ni/ sa (95) 'dir sa bkra bzang zhes gsungs/ de phyir sa bdag khyed rnams kyis/ 'jam dbyangs bka' de ma bcags pa/ sa bkra'i dngos grub ci yod pa/ de ring bdag cag rnams la byin/ 'bru mchog sngon mo 'phel chen 'di/ bya khyung rgyal po'i mgul nas byung/ thugs rje chen po'i phyag gis gnang/ dbu nag mi yi longs spyod yin/ sa yon 'bru mchog 'di 'bul lo/ sa 'dir gnang la bkra shis mdzod/ gnod byed sa 'dre sa sri rnams/ drag po'i shing gi phur bus bsgral/

**bhūṃ las rin po che yi snod/** phyi ni gter gyi bum pa la/ nang ni rin chen gzhal yas khang/ de nang tshe las 'das pa yi/ pha mtshun rus bu dkar po 'di/ yid bzhi nor bu byin brlabs nas/ rin chen sa yi gter du sbas/ sa yi lha mo'i mkha' phyas shig/ rus bu dkar po lcags kyis kham/ de ring sa lcags ma bu sprad/ sgol tshig rus pa bcu drug (\*gsum)<sup>135</sup> 'di/ mi rab (\*rabs) bcu (96) drug (\*gsum)<sup>136</sup> brtan phur btsugs/ dpyi yi rus pa sgor mo 'di/ mi nor spyi yi g.yang rten btsugs/ ma mkhal rgya zor 'dra ba 'dis/ na rgab shi rgab thams cad chod/ srid pa'i smon mi dbu nag dang/ mi mchog rgyal po mthing ger sogs/ mes mtshun gnyan po thams cad kyang/ g.yang rten 'di la brtan par bzhugs/ mdzangs ma 'phrul dang khri do che/ mi'u gdong drug pha mtshun kun/ g.yang rten 'di la brtan par bzhugs/ khyad par tshe 'das 'di dag gi/ pha mes brgyud kyis pha mtshun dang/ pha mes brgyud kyis ma mtshun kun/ tshe 'das 'di yi bla dang bcas/ sa bkra bzang po 'dir bzhugs la/ sa yi dpal la longs spyod mdzod/ dkon mchog gsum gyi bden pa dang/ chos nyid nam par dag pa dang/ kun rdzob rten 'brel bden stobs kyis/ pha mtshun ma mtshun tshe 'das bla/ bde skyid dpal 'byor rab rgyas nas/ gson la mgon skyabs nus (97) par shog/ dkar rtsi bum gter 'di sbas pas/ gshin po tshe 'das bla dga' zhing/ gson po btsan phyug 'dzom pa dang/ tshe ring nad med bde skyid shog/ 'phags pa 'jam dpal bka' bden cing/ kun rdzob rten 'brel bslu med dang/ 'byung ba'i rten 'brel mthu btsan pas/ sa lcags ma bu 'di sprad pas/ gson po tshe ring nad med shog/ gza' skar dus tshes bden pa yis/ bkra shis thams cad 'byung bar shog/ mi shes rmongs pa'i dbang gyur pas/ gza' skar dus tshod ngan pa dang/ sa dgra gdug pa yod srid na/ 'jam dbyangs bden pa'i byin brlabs kyis/ zhi zhing bde legs 'byung gyur cig/ om a ka ni ni ka ni a bhi la mandala ma ye swā hā/ zhes dang/ shis brjod me tog gtor zhing/

**phyogs bzhi dbus lnga'i bkra shis pa/** rgyal ba rigs lnga'i bkra shis shog/ lus gyi gnas brgyad bkra shis pa/ bkra shis rtags brgyad bkra shis shog/ rdzas brgyad (98) rten 'brel bkra shis pa/

<sup>135</sup> Emended following the critical edition by Langelaar (forthcoming-a).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibd.*



bkra shis rdzas brgyad bkra shis shog/ dpal dang 'byor ba'i bkra shis pa/ rgyal srid sna bdun  
bkra shis shog/ phyogs bzhi sa yi bkra shis pa/ stag 'brug bya sbrul bkra shis shog/ **om ye**  
**dharmā** sogs/ om su pra tiṣṭha badzra ya swā hā/ brtan bzhugs dang smon lam gyis mtha' brgyan  
par bya'o/ smras pa/

'bru rje rgyal po ma ṇi'i mtshan/ dgung du gshegs pa'i rkyen byas te/ gnas chen ri bo mdzo  
zhol nas/ lho zla dga' ma 'grim (\*'gram)<sup>137</sup> rol dbus/ spyi byams gnas dang nye ba'i sar/ phyi  
rabs sngags 'chang mang po la/ phan phyir rā ga a sya yis/ sbyong rgyud thugs rje chen po'i  
gzhung/ rgya nag sa gzhung don bstus te/ ngag nas ji ltar smras pa bzhin/ dge slong padmas  
dad pas bris/ phyin chad 'di dang 'brel tshad kyis/ mchod yon bkra shis phun tshogs shog/  
ces grub dbang rin po ches mdzad pa 'di gzhung dang zin bris so sor snang zhing yi ge'ang ma dag pa  
rgyun 'byams pas zhus dag dang bcas dkyus gcig tu blo gros rgyal mtshan gyis bkod pa (99) 'dis kyang  
sems can thams cad la phan pa rgya chen po 'byung pa'i rgyur gyur cig

**om na mo bha ga wa** te a pa ri mi ta a yur dznyā na su bi ni shtsi ta te dzwa rā dza ya ta thā  
ga tā ya arha te samyaksam buddha ya/ tadya thā/ om punye punye/ ma hā punye a pa ri mi  
ta punye a pa ri mi ta punye dznyā na sam bha ro pa tsi te/ om sarba sam ska ra pa ri shuddha  
dharmā te ga ga na sa mudga te swa bhā wa bi shuddha ma hā na ya pa ri wa re swā hā/ om  
dzaṃ bha la dza lendra ye swā hā/ om bai shra ma (\*ba) ṇa ye swā hā/ om ba su dha ri nī  
swā hā/

stobs po che'i gzungs/ **om/ om badzra** kro dha ma hā bha la ha na da ha pa tsa ma tha bi dhwa  
na sa ya dza ṭilambo da ra u tsuṣma kro dha hūṃ phaṭ swā hā/ sman gzungs/ tadya thā/ om  
bhai ṣadzye bhai ṣa dzye ma hā bhai ṣa dzye rā dzā sa mudga te swā hā/ snang brgyad/ **om a**  
**ka ni** ni ka ni a bhi la maṇḍa la ma ye swā hā/ rten snying/ ye dharmā he tu pra bha wa he  
tuṃ teṣāṃ ta thā ga to hya ba datte ṣāṃtsa yo ni ro dha e waṃ bā di ma hā shā ma ṇa/ zhes  
pa 'o//

<sup>137</sup> *Ibd.*

## References

*Abbreviations*

*Bka' thang sde lnga* = O rgyan Gling pa, A) *Bka' thang sde lnga*. 5 Vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang 1986. B) Tshang po (ed.). *Bka' thang sde lnga*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang 2010.

*Gangs ljongs gnas chen* 2015 = Anonymous. 2015. *Gangs ljongs gnas chen gnyan po g.yu rtse'i gnas yig dang bsang gsol phyogs bsgrigs*. Mgo log khang sar smin thang khor yug srung skyob tshogs pa.

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*The Treasury of Lives*. URL: <https://treasuryoflives.org/>