

A HISTORY FROM THE HIDDEN LAND:
SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON A SEVENTEENTH
CENTURY SIKKIMESE CHRONICLE

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*Introduction*¹

The focus for this article is a rare seventeenth century document, which provides a student of early Sikkimese history with a number of interesting insights into events, chronology and religious influence in seventeenth century Sikkim, and one which differs greatly from orthodox historical interpretations. Using information gathered from this source, alongside other seventeenth century documents, this article sets forth a number of initial thoughts regarding the formation of the Sikkimese state. Included in this discussion of early Sikkim is a brief analysis of the most prominent origin history for the Tibeto-Sikkimese² people and their first king Phun tshogs rnam rgyal. This narrative of origin is important for a number of reasons, but most pertinent to the study of early Sikkim is the way in which this myth was used to legitimate the construction of early state apparatus and the expansion of territory. Alongside an account of this origin tale, the text refers to a number of hitherto unknown events and actors. Throughout the commentary, I locate these events and their actors within the chronology of early Sikkim, and provide a more probable, though far from conclusive, account of Sikkim in the seventeenth century.

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² For this period of study, we are faced with the problem of choosing suitable ethnonyms for the major ethnic groups of early Sikkim. This is especially the case for those groups of Tibetan origin who are now known by the various designations of *IHo po*, *Bras ljongs pa*, *Bhutia*, etc. Throughout this paper, I have referred to these people as 'Tibeto-Sikkimese', a term which reflects both the origins of the early 'Tibetan' settlers and their political status during the growth of the Sikkimese state. While not ideal, the term 'Tibeto-Sikkimese' is preferable to using other designations which are inextricably linked to later political and historical developments.

This article raises questions for further research concerning the social and religious systems introduced into Sikkim. These systems include the adoption of the Tibetan religio-political theory of state and political power, as represented by *lugs gnyis*, a system based on the unification of the secular/political sphere with that of the religious/spiritual. Tibetan influence is not limited to the religious world, however, but is also identifiable through the introduction of economic practices such as land ownership, structures of taxation and a form of stratification based on the principles of Tibetan land economy. In short, it is my hope that this article may clarify a number of issues relating to early Sikkimese history, and serve as an introduction to the events surrounding the formation of this former Himalayan kingdom.

The text and its author

Since I have been unable to view the original document, the translation presented here is taken from a *'khyug yig* copy found in the Barmiok collection in 1972 by Gung rdo rje.³ It appears that the entire document, which is forty-five folios in length, is actually a compilation of four separate documents written at different times⁴ copied and compiled by Gung rdo rje into a single volume entitled: *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig dang rgyal rabs mdor bsdus bzhugs so*.⁵ The first document of this compilation (folios 2.a to 7.b line 1) is of interest to the student of early Sikkimese history and is therefore reproduced and translated here in full: *sTeng phyogs lha nas babs te nang tshan [mtshan] rgya dkar [kar] shar phyogs brgyud nas 'ongs [ong] te khams phyogs mi nyag a'o ldong drug spun gsum gyi byung khungs lo rgyus bzhugs so* (hereafter referred to by the abbreviation *PSLG*).

This document, written by Karma tshang bsam bskal bzang blo ldan, gives a short overview of how Sikkim was settled by a Tibetan descendant of Khams Mi nyag in alliance with a *mon po* (Lepcha) chief

³ I offer my thanks to the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology for allowing me to view this text. Special thanks must be extended to Tenzin Thubten and Sonam Thinley for their assistance in deciphering many of the *bsdus yig* transliterations of the text and for many valuable comments and corrections on earlier translations. Further thanks also to Dansong Namgyal for assisting in proof-reading the Tibetan typescript.

⁴ For details on the other documents contained within this compilation see the bibliography of this paper.

⁵ 'A concise compilation of royal historical works and pilgrimage guide books to the hidden land of Sikkim'.

of *mon yul*.⁶ From folio 5.a to 7.a the text provides details of how Tibeto-Sikkimese ascendancy was established—the battles fought, territories conquered, taxes levied and the laws introduced to govern the ‘non-Tibetan’ Lepcha (*mon pa*)—information which is conspicuously absent from later historical works such as *‘Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* (hereafter *BGR*).

The colophon of the text provides us with important information about the possible connection of the author with the royal family. Accordingly, the location of the estate of bKra shis dpal ‘byor is identified as the place where *PSLG* was written and, according to *BGR* (2003: 25), this is acknowledged to be the Palace of La sogs—the first residency of Phun tshogs nam rgyal. Provided the information in *BGR* is correct, which is by no means certain, the author bsKal bzang blo ldan may be considered to have had royal connections. This royal connection may be a relation of blood or one of marriage, for it is noted in the colophon that *PSLG* was written in the house of the author’s daughter. It is therefore probable that this text was written at the request of the royal family. Even if this is discovered not to be the case, the text is still vulnerable to bias in favour of Phun tshogs nam rgyal and his early reign. Bearing this caveat in mind, *PSLG* enables a historian to gain at least a glimpse of the mechanisms and national ideology of the state at that time, if not a better understanding of the events that led to the establishment of the Sikkimese royal dynasty.

⁶ The term *mon* is generally used to define non-Tibetan populations south of the Himalaya and around the borders of Tibet. However, it also conveys the derogatory meaning of ‘barbarian’ (see Pommaret 1999: 52-53 for a more detailed discussion of this term). Whereas the term *mon yul* usually denotes Bhutan, in this text the name applies to the land of *mon* (i.e. the land of the *mon* people). However, the use of *mon yul* in connection with ‘Seng lding’ could also refer to the hidden land of Seng ge ri in Bhutan (see Ehrhard 2003: 659-667, for details of the discovery of this sacred site). In this context, *mon* and associated terms are more likely to refer to the people that resided (and continue to reside) in Sikkim prior to the migration of the Tibetans, namely the Lepcha. The origin of the Lepcha remains unclear, but they speak a Tibeto-Burman language.

*The Tibetan text with translation*⁷

(folio 2.a)

ལྷོ། །སྤོང་ཕྱོགས་ལྷ་ནས་བབས་ཏེ་ནང་མཚན་རྒྱ་ཀར་ཤར་ཕྱོགས་བརྒྱུད་ནས་འོང་ཏེ།
ཁམས་ཕྱོགས་མི་ཉག་ཨའོ་ལྷོང་དུག་སྤྱན་གསུམ་གྱི་བྱང་ཁྲུང་ས་ལོ་རྒྱུས་བཞུགས་སོ།

The chronicle of the three brothers of the *A'o* sub-division of the *ldong drug* clan¹¹ of Khams Mi nyag (whose ancestors) descended from the heavenly realm and came via the eastern area of India.¹²

(folio 2.b)

ལྷོ། །ཁ་མོ་བརྗོད་བྱ་རུ་རྒྱ་ཡེ། བསྐལ་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོར་ཚོགས་གཉིས་ཡོངས་ཁྲུང་བྱང་
རྒྱུ་རྒྱ། ཐུགས་གྱི་དགོངས་པ་ལེགས་བསྐྱེད་ནས། འཛམ་གླིང་སྤྱི་གུའི་¹³འགོ་རྣམས་
འདྲེན་ཕྱིར་དགའ་ལྷན་ལྷ་ཡི་ཕྱོང་གི་རབ་བཞེངས་ཏེ། བཞེགས་པས་འཁོར་ལོས་བསྐྱར་
རྒྱལ་ཟས་གཙང་སྤུང་འཁྲུངས་མི་ལོ་བཅུ་གཉིས་བསམ་གཏན་མཉམ་པར་བཞག།
རྫོགས་སངས་རྒྱས་ནས་ བདུད་དང་སྤྱི་གསུངས་རབ་བཞུལ་ནས། ཚོས་ཕུང་བརྒྱུད་གྱི་
བཞི་སྟོང་ལ་སོགས་པ། ག་གསུང་དབྱངས་ཡན་ལག་དུག་ཕུའི་ཚོས་འཁོར་བསྐྱོར།

⁷ The text contains many spelling errors which I have attempted to correct. Any remaining errors are an oversight on my part.

⁸ Recte. *tshan*.

⁹ Recte. *dkar*.

¹⁰ Recte. *'ongs*.

¹¹ In Tibetan, this section reads *a'u ldong drug*, which makes reference to the six proto-clans of Tibet. According to legend, these are said to descend from the children of the union between a monkey and a rock demon. These six proto-clans of Tibet are listed in Ramble 1997 (republished in McKay 2003: 70) as: *dbra, ldong, 'bru, lga, dpa'* and *mda'*. I am unsure whether *a'u* is a later division of the *ldong* proto-clan or whether *ldong* in this case is used to represent all six clans as suggested by *drug* following *ldong* in the Tibetan. Riskey, quoted in Balikci-Denjongpa 2002a, states that Kham Minyak Andong was a principality of eastern Tibet 'situated to the west of Ta-t sien-loo, between Litang and Dirghe'. However, it seems more likely that Riskey has mistakenly combined two separate terms; that of the *a'u ldong* division of the *ldong* proto-clan and the political region of Khams Mi nyag.

¹² Following this sub-title there is a section dedicated to the praise of the Buddha.

¹³ Recte. *rgu'i*.

ཞིང་ཕར་ལ་བསྟན་འཛིན་ཀུན་གྱི་གཙུག་གི་ཚོར་བུ་མཚོ་ག། ལྷ་ཀྱའི་འབྲུང་གནས་ཐུབ་
དབང་ཚེན་པོ་ས་གསུམ་འགྲོ་བའི།

Na mo vajra guru ratna ye!

In the state of Enlightenment, which resulted from the accumulation of merit and wisdom during countless aeons, he generated the proper wish and intention; and in order to liberate all sentient beings of the world (he) ascended to the throne in the divine palace of dGa' ldan (Tushita) heaven and by his all seeing power was born as the son of Zas gtsang (who was like a) universal king (Cakravatin) and remained in the equanimity of contemplation for twelve human years. After (achieving) perfect Buddhahood he vanquished all evil and enemies of the Dharma (lit. heretics) and taught the eighty-four thousand approaches to the Dharma in sixty melodious speeches. Praise to the crown jewels of all the protectors of the victorious teachings. Salutations and praise to Shakyamuni who is the one of the promise to all sentient beings and is the most powerful throughout the three realms

(folio 3.a)

ཁོ་མིག་གཅིག་དམ་པ་དེར་འདུད། གང་གི་དགོངས་གསང་ཟེར་ལྷ་འབྲུག་པའི་སྲོང་།
དབྱིངས་རིག་དོན་རྗེའི་མཁའ་གསང་ལས་འཕྲོས་པའི། མཚོ་སྐྱེས་དོན་རྗེའི་རང་བྱུང་སྐུ་ལ་
པའི་སྐྱ། སྐུ་ལྷུ་ལ་བསྟན་འགྲོའི་སྲོག་ཤིང་དེ་ལ་འདུད། ཟ་དམར་སེར་ལི་གྲིའི་
མདངས་ལྷན་སྲིང་¹⁴ རལ་འཛིན། མཐོན་མཐིང་རལ་པའི་ཐོར་གཙུག་ཅི་བྲན་ཅན། ལྷ་
ཚོགས་བརྒྱན་མཛོས་གསུང་དབྱིངས་ཚོས་སྐྱ་ཡིས། འདྲིན་མཛད་འཇམ་མགོན་ལྷ་ཡིས་
ཤིས་པ་སྐྱོལ། ལ་བདེ་ལྷན་ཞིང་ན་ཚོས་སྐྱ་འོད་དཔག་མེད། རི་བོ་རྒྱ་ལར་འཕགས་
མཚོག་སྐྱན་རས་གཟིགས། ལྷུང་ལོ་ཅན་དུ་གསང་བདག་དོན་རྗེའི་འཛིན།

Hail to the one who is the life-tree of all living beings and the teachings of the hidden lands, the self emanated mTsho skyes rdo rje (Guru Rinpoche) who emanated from the five light rays (of the wisdom of the

¹⁴ Recte. *glegs*.

five Buddhas), which mixed together in space and which arose from emptiness and awareness as the unification of the *vajra* and *bhagha* (of the Dakini).¹⁵ Hail to the Auspicious Manjushri who is the holder of a sword and book, whose body is an orange red colour and is endowed with a crown (in which) his blue hair is tied in a top knot and who guides by means of the melodious voice of the dharma and various other qualities. I pay homage, without difference, to the three: Dharmakaya Amitabha in Sukhavati, Avalokiteshvara in Potala and in IChang lo can rdo rje 'dzin.

(folio 3.b)

ཀླུ་གསུམ་གཡེལ་¹⁶ མེད་ཆེན་པོར་བདག་འདུད་དོ། ལ་རྒྱལ་ཀུན་ངོ་བོ་སྐྱུ་གསུམ་དོ་རྗེ་
 འཆང། བཀྲིན་སུམ་ལྡན་ཅུ་བའི་སྐྱེ་མ་མཚོག་ གསང་ཆེན་བསྟན་པའི་སྦྱིང་པོ་འོད་པོ་
 ཆེ། བདག་གི་སྦྱི་བོར་པརྒྱའི་གདན་ལ་བཞུགས། ཅ་བསྟན་བསྐྱུང་¹⁷ དམ་ཅན་རྒྱ་
 མཚོའི་ཚོགས་སྦྱི་དང། བྱུང་པར་གངས་ཆེན་མཚོ་ད་ལྔ་ལ་སོགས་པ། ཡུ་བར་མདའ་
 ཡི་གནས་བསྐྱུངས་¹⁸ གཞི་བདག་སོགས། རོར་ལྷ་གཏོར་བདག་རྣམས་གྱི་ཤིས་པར་
 མཚོད། ཞེས་མཚོད་པར་བཟོད་པའམ་¹⁹ ཡངས་པར་བྱས་སོ། བྱུང་པར་མོན་གྱི་ཡུལ་
 འབྲས་ལྗོངས་མཐེལ་དུ་མི་ཉག་ཨ་བོ་སྦྱིང་གི་བརྒྱུད་ལས་ཐོན་པའི་རིགས་གྱི་བསྟན་པ་རིམ་
 ཆགས་རྩལ་འདི་ལྟར་རོ། །དེ་ཡང་སྐྱེས་ཡུལ་ཀུན་གྱི་གཙོ་བོ་འབྲས་མོ་ལྗོངས་འདི།
 མཁན་སྦྱོར་ཚོས་གསུམ་རྩུ་འཕུལ་²⁰ གཞུངས་བཅགས་ཏེ། བྲག་དཀར་བཀྲིས་སྦྱིང་གི་འི་

¹⁵ This refers to the practice of sexual union which appears as part of the method of uniting wisdom *bhagha* 'vagina' and means *vajra* 'penis'. In the secret consecrations of the tantric disciple, the Bodhicitta (thought of enlightenment) represented as the semen of the master is accepted by the disciple. The above example alludes to the endowment of the disciple or tantric practitioner with the wisdom of the five celestial Buddhas during the process of consecration which is completed by the unification of the disciple with the essence of wisdom, through tantric sexual practices.

¹⁶ Recte. *dbyer med*.

¹⁷ Recte. *srung*.

¹⁸ Recte. *srung*.

¹⁹ Recte. *brjod pa'i lam*.

²⁰ Recte. *rdzu 'phrul*.

དབུས་ཉིད་ནས། རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གནས་ལུགས་མ་ལུས་བསྟན་ལ་བབས།²¹ སྐུ་ལ་པའི་
རྣལ་བྱོར་ཚེད་བཞིའི་²² ལུང་རྒྱ་བསྟན།

Seated on a lotus throne on my own head (is the one who is) the great essence of the secret teachings, is the most sublime root teacher and is endowed with the three types of kindness, who is the essence of all three Buddha bodies: Vajradhara. Thus (I) request all auspicious deities such as the treasure holders, the gods of wealth, the four guardian deities of the upper, middle and lower areas, the universal oath bound dharma protectors and especially Gangs chen mdzod lnga.²³ Here ends the salutation to the deities. Thus have the extensive prayers been completed.

Herein follows an account of the way in which the Buddhist teachings of the people from the lineage of *a bo sdong*, developed in the centre of this barbarian Land of Sikkim. In a pure vision, Santarakshita Guru Rinpoche and Khri srong lde btsan set foot in this rice valley, the highest and most sacred of all hidden lands and from the same central throne of Brag dkar bkra shis lding established without exception the fundamental nature of auspicious omens. (They also) prophesised the coming of the four saints.²⁴

(folio 4.a)

། །ལུལ་འདིར་ཚོས་སྲིད་རྒྱལ་སྲིད་གཉིས་སྐྱོང་བའི། ལས་ལྷན་མི་རིགས་རྣ་
ཚོགས་འོང་²⁵ གསུང་བའི། སྟོང་ལྷ་རུ་དེ་ཞེས། སྟོང་ཕྱོགས་ལྷ་ནས་བབས་ཏེ། རང་
མཚན་²⁶ རྒྱ་དཀར་ཤར་ཕྱོགས་རྒྱལ་ཕྱན་གྱི། རྒྱུད་ལས་འོངས་ཏེ་ཁམས་ཕྱོགས་མི་ཉག་
རིགས་ཨའོ་སྟོང་གི་བརྒྱུད་དུ་འབྱོར་པ་ཡིན། སྐུ་ཚན་ནང་ནས་ལས་འབྲེལ་སྟོན་མཐུན།

²¹ Recte. *gtan la phab*.

²² Recte. *rnal 'byor mched bzhi 'i*.

²³ For the importance of the Gangs chen mdzod lnga cult among the different ethnic and religious groups in Sikkim, see Balicki-Denjongpa (2002b).

²⁴ Namely, Phun tshogs rnam rgyal, lHa btsun chen po, mNga' bdag sems pa Phun tshogs, Ka: thog ku tu bzang po.

²⁵ Recte. *sna tshogs 'ongs*.

²⁶ Recte. *nang tshan*.

ཁམས་ནས་ཐོན་ཏེ་ལྷ་ལྡན་དབུས་སུ་འབྱོར། གནས་རྣམས་མངལ་ཞིང་རིམ་ལམ་བཤག
 ལོ་མ་ལུང་སླེབ་སྟེ་རི་ཞིག་ངལ་བསོ་བརྟེན། ཡར་འབྲོག་སྐང་བརྒྱད་འོང་ཏེ་རྒྱུང་ཚེར་
 འབྱོར། དེ་ནས་རིམ་བཞིན་དུས་ན་ལམ་བརྒྱད་ཕག་རིར་སླེབས། ཁམ་བུར་ཕཞག་
 ཟང་ལྷ་རིང་མཚོད་ཡོན་མངལ། གཡོན་དབང་ཤི་ཚོག་རིགས་རྣམས་²⁷ རིམ་གྱིས་
 རྒྱུངས།²⁸ གནས་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་སློ་ཕྱོ་ལ་ཁ་ཚུ་ནས། ཚུ་མོ་གཤང་དང་ཚུ་བི་རིམ་ཆགས་ཏེ།
 ཚུམ་འབིར་རེ་ཞིག་སྟོད་ཀྱང་སྟོད་མ་འཕེལ། །དེ་ནས་མོན་ཡུལ་སིང་ལྷིང་བུ་བ་ན།

It is said (in the prophecy) that a scion who has descended from Khams Mi nyag of the *a'u ldong* clan, whose ancestors originated from an eastern province of India and who in turn are descended from the heavenly realm known as sTong lha ru re, will come and, being endowed with fortuitous Karma, rule this sacred land in accordance with the dual laws of religion and politics.

From amongst the brothers (there was one) whose prayer and Karmic connections were in harmony,²⁹ left from Khams and arrived in Lha sa of the central province. Having contemplated a pilgrimage he gradually stepped out the path and once he arrived in Gro ma lung³⁰ he took rest for some time. He reached rGyal rtse via the province of Yar brog sgang and then gradually made his way to the road that leads to Phag ri. In Kham bu, he met with the benefactor Zhag zang lha ring. Gradually he ruled over these people of the *shi chog* clan.

From Phro la kha chu, which is the outer door of this place (i.e. Sikkim) the places of Chu mo gshang and Chu bi were gradually

²⁷ I am not entirely certain as to what *shi chog rigs* refers; the most likely rendering is 'the caste of those who perform death rituals'.

²⁸ Recte. *bskyangs*.

²⁹ It is generally recognised that among the three brothers, who were considered chiefs of Khams Mi nyag, only the middle one, Gyad, was prophesised to enter Sikkim (see *Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* 2003: 11). However, in the various oral traditions of Sikkim we find the hero figure migrating to dBus from Khams Mi nyag with his father and three brothers, from whom the four major Sikkimese clans are said to be descended.

³⁰ Gro ma lung is located near the present border of Sikkim and Tibet at a distance of about ten kilometres from the modern town of La chung.

established and despite residing in Chum 'bi for some time (they) were unable to increase their dominion.³¹

(folio 4.b)

མོན་པ་ཉེག་ངལ་བཟའ་ཚང་ཡོད་པ་ཡི། སྲིད་ཀྱི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་འགྲིག་པ་ཤེས་ཟེར་ཐོས།
 ཀུན་གྱི་སྲི་མིས་གྲུང་པ་འབྲུམ་བསགས་གྲིས། ཆས་འོངས་མོན་ཡུལ་སླེབས་སྤེལ་³² མོན་
 དང་འཕྲད། མོན་པས་དོན་བྱེད་ཅི་ཡིན་སྲི་³³ བ་བྱས། གྲུང་པས་མོན་པའི་གཏམ་ལན་
 བཏབ་པ་ནི། སིང་ལྗིང་ཡུལ་དུ་ཉེག་ངོག་བྱ་བ་ཡོད། དེའི་སར་འགྲོ་རྒྱུ་གར་ཡོད་ཤེས་
 སམ་བྲིས། མོན་པས་དེ་ནི་ཤེས་སོ་ཟེར་ནས་སོང། གྲུང་པས་མོན་པའི་རྫོས་
 སུ་གཉག་སོང་པས།³⁴ བྱིམ་སར་འགྲོར་སྐབས་ཉེག་ངང་ཡིན་པར་འདུག། ཉང་དུ་
 བོས་ནས་ཆང་བྱིན་གཏམ་དྲིས་བྱུང། གྲུང་གྲིས་ལན་བཏབ་པ་ན་ལ་སྲིད་མ་འཕེལ་སྲིད་
 ཐབས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཤེས་ཟེར་བས། འོངས་པའི་དོན་ནི་དེ་ཡིན་སྲིད་འཕེལ་གྲིས།
 བཅོས་ཐབས་གང་ཤེས་བྱེད་ཀྱི་བྱ་བར་དྲིས། གྲུང་པས་ལབ་པས་མོན་གྲིས་ལན་བཏབ་པ།
 ལུ་མེད་བཅོས་ཐབས་ཤེས་ཟེར་ཁས་ལེན་བྱུང།

It was then heard that in a place known as Mon yul seng lding there lived a Lepcha couple named Teg and Ngal who were capable of bringing forth good luck in worldly affairs. So Gyad pa 'bum bsags, who is the master of all, departed; and when he arrived (in that country) he met with a Lepcha person. The Lepcha asked him for what reason (he was there). Gyad pa responded to the Lepcha's question (in the following way): 'In the country of Seng lding there reside a couple called Theg and Ngal'. And he asked the way to their place. Upon hearing these words the Lepcha fled. However, Gyad pa pursued the Lepcha, and upon reaching the Lepcha's house (he realised) that he was none other than Teg himself. Once Teg had called him into the house he served him chang and made some enquiries to which Gyad responded: 'It is said that when one is unable to increase their dominion

³¹ Namely, they were experiencing problems conceiving.
³² Recte. 'phral.
³³ Recte. dri.
³⁴ Recte. rje su bsnyags song pas.

(the couple). Teg announced that the son would have many descendants and he held a large feast (in their honour).

Also (at that time) the son was given the name of Brag btsan dar.⁴² By the power of Teg and Gyad's karmic connections and by the power of auspicious karma both Teg and Gyad 'bum became friends. It was said that all the male descendents (of Teg and Gyad) would be considered as their own sons and whatever female descendents were arranged close to daughters.⁴³ With both their mutual consent, they resided in the country of Rong spogs⁴⁴ and the male line of their descendants increased without interruption.

(In order) to prepare for the taking of an oath of allegiance live wild animals were slaughtered. Many cattle, sheep and wild animals were butchered and their hides were spread out as seats. They then placed their feet in a tub of the animal's intestines.

(folio 5.b)

བྲག་བཙན་དར་གྱི་མ་ལས་རིགས་རྒྱུད་གྱིས། ཕོ་ལྷ་གྲ་⁴⁵ ལྷ་འགོ་བའི་ལྷ་ལྷ་དང།
 བཞུགས་བསྐྱེད་ཡུལ་ལྷ་གཞི་བདག་དཔང་དུ་བཅུག། ཉེག་གི་མོན་ལྷ་གང་ཡིན་དཔང་དུ་
 བཅུག། ཡང་མོན་པ་གཉིས་ཁ་འབྲེལ་བའི་མནའ་ཆེན་རྒྱུ་བ། བྲག་བཙན་དར་གྱི་རིམ་
 གྱི་ཡུལ་བཙན་ནས། ཉེག་གིས་རིགས་སུ་ཉི་བ་དགའ་ཞིག་བཏང། སྒྲ་⁴⁶ ཉོག་ཟེལ་
 རོན་ཅེ་ལ་ཡུལ་ཆགས་སོ། །སློབ་དཔོན་ཆེན་པོ་པདྨ་འཇམ་མཉམས་ལ། མི་ཉག་ཨ་བོ་
 བཏུང་གི་རིགས་བརྒྱུད་གྱིས། བཞུགས་ཡུལ་ས་འདི་སློང་བའི་ལུང་བསྐྱེད་བཞིན། སློན་
 ལམ་དུས་བབས་མངའ་ཐང་ཇེ་མཐོར་ཡོང། དེ་ནས་ཉེག་གི་ཉི་རིང་གང་ཡིན་དང།

⁴² Brag btsan dar is actually the collective term for the four main Sikkimese clans and hence makes up the first division of the *stong sde (sdus) ru(s) gshis 'babs mtshan brgyad*, i.e. the four clans and eight names (possibly sub-divisions of the four clans) of Sikkim.

⁴³ This passage probably means something on the lines of: 'whatever sons or daughters that were born to either lineage were considered by both the maternal and paternal line as being their own children/descendants'.

⁴⁴ Located at a distance of 3-4 kilometres from Kabi in north Sikkim.

⁴⁵ Recte. *sgra lha*.

⁴⁶ Recte. *sgang*.

གཞན་ཡང་ཐབས་གྱིས་མཐའ་དག་འཁོར་དུ་བསྐྱུས། ཐོག་མར་མོན་པའི་ནང་ནས་སློ་
 འཁོལ་བའི། ནང་ཟན་བྱ་དང་བྱུང་མིང་བསམ་འབར་བྱུང། དེ་ནས་རིམ་བཞིན་ཁ་
 གཏད་བྱུང་རིགས་རྣམས།

The local deities, protector deities, *pho lha*, *gra lha* [*sic*: usually *dgra lha* or *sgra bla*], the five primary deities of the clan of the mother of Brag btsan dar were taken as witness and Teg made whatever *mon* gods existed bear witness. Furthermore, both the *mon pas* took the great oath of connection.

Thereafter Brag btsan dar gradually took control of the land and some relatives from the clan of Teg were sent and on top of the peak of Zil gnon a town was established. Thus the way in which this sacred land was ruled, by the descendents of the clan of *mi nyag a bo*, was in accordance with the prophecy made by the great master Guru Rinpoche.

At the time of offering prayers the power of the kingdom increased. Furthermore by certain means those, whether related to Teg or not, along with others were all assembled as subjects (to the king). First of all those who were trustworthy amongst the Lepcha were considered as one's own sons. However, when conflict or opposition gradually arose

(folio 6.a)

ལྷོ་ཁོལ་གང་གཡོག་ལ་སོགས་གཡ་ཆེ་བའི། མགོ་ཆེངས་ལས་དཔོན་སོ་སོར་
 བཀོད་ནས་བཞག། དེ་རྗེས་བགྱིས་སྤོང་ཁའི་མོན་རིགས་བྱུང།⁴⁷ སང་ལྷིང་མོན་པ་

⁴⁷ This section has been reproduced almost verbatim in the *Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* (2003: 36): *de nas bkra shis sdeng kha'i mon rigs dang sing ldeng mon pa rnam rim bsdus kyis tshang mar las byed mon pa zhes ming btags/ thugs blos khel min gyi rigs la tshong skyel mon pa zhes phyi g.yog des skyel rkang 'gro dgos rigs dang / lag 'don/ bzo lum/ dbyar mjal dang / thog gsar sogs chad med sgrub rgyu'i tshong khral bkod bzhag mdzad pa'o//*. This has been translated in the English edition as: 'Gradually as the Lepchas of Tashi teng kha and Seng deng also came under the direct influence of the chief, they were called the ministerial Lepchas (Monpas). Those not so much in the chief's favour were employed as traders to carry goods and were called Tshong kyel Monpas, and employed in outdoor services. They were also expected to strike or kill anyone if necessary, in building and handicrafts. Besides they were to contribute the summer Nazar (tax) in the shape of newly gathered crops,

རྣམས་ཀྱི་རིམ་གྱིས་བསྐྱུས།⁴⁸ ཚང་མར་ལས་བྱེད་མོན་པ་མིང་བཏགས་སོ། དེ་ལྟར་
 བཀའ་སློན་ལ་ནི་སློམ་ཁེལ། གང་ཡིན་མཐའ་དག་ཚོང་སློལ་⁴⁹ མོན་པ་ཞེས། མྱི་
 གཡོལ་དོས་སློལ་⁵⁰ ཀྱང་འགྲོ་དགོས་རིགས་དང། ལག་དོན་བཟོ་ལུས་དབྱར་མཇལ་
 དགུན་གསུམ། ཆད་མེད་སྐྱབ་པའི་ཚོང་སྤལ་བཀོད་ནས་བཞག། དེ་ནས་གནས་ཀྱི་
 མཐེལ་དུ་ཆགས་ཚུལ་ནི། །སྤྱུལ་པའི་ནལ་འབྱེད་ཆེད་བཞི་⁵¹ ལུང་བསྟན་བཞིན། །རྩ་
 ཏྲ་ཉ་ལེ་འཚོས་རྒྱལ་ཕུན་ཚོགས་རྣམས་རྒྱལ་བྱེད། རྒྱལ་ཁྲིམས་མངའ་གསོལ་དགའ་སློན་
 རྒྱ་ཆེན་མཇུང། གནས་འདི་ལུགས་གཉིས་ཁྲིམས་ཀྱི་རྩ་ཆེན་སློབ། བསྟན་སྲིད་
 སྤེ་རྒྱལ་གུན་གྱི་རྩེ་བོར་བཀོད། དེ་ནས་བཀྱིན་ཆེ་བ་པ་མས་ནི།

only the dependable and trustworthy servants and others would be given important work and they were placed under a head man and work leader. Thereafter the *mon* of the caste of bKra shis steng kha and the Lepchas of Seng lding were gradually subdued.⁵² Thereafter they were given the title of the ‘Lepchas officials’ (*las byed mon pa*).

Likewise, as for the rule of the ministers, ministers that were untrustworthy, whoever they may have been, were known as the *mon pa* that conducted trade. These external servants carried out the introduction of a taxation system on the produce of the autumnal harvest and (wealth accumulated) through continual trade of the servants who were obliged to act as porters and messengers and those involved in the production of goods.⁵³

grains and fruits and they were also to carry grains etc to any markets for trade and barter’ (1908: 15). There are slight differences between the 1908 translation and the Tibetan republication.

⁴⁸ Should read *seng lding Mon pa rnam rim gyis bsdus*.
⁴⁹ Should read *skyel*.
⁵⁰ Recte. *des skyel*.
⁵¹ Recte. *rnal ‘byor mched bzhi*.
⁵² This either implies the growth and expansion of the areas of influence under the leadership of the Tibeto-Sikkimese or the subjugation of areas rebelling against Tibeto-Sikkimese dominance.
⁵³ Presumably goods such as handicrafts, utensils and equipment.

Then as for the way in which the centre of this place was established it was in accordance with the prophecy of the four reincarnated saints. In the year of the water horse, 1642, Chos rgyal Phun tshogs nam rgyal ascended the throne, instituted great festivities throughout the kingdom and in this kingdom the laws of the dual systems of religion and politics were proclaimed. The religious and political order was established and he was inaugurated as the ruler over the whole territory. As for the great and kind ancestors,

(folio 6.b)

།ལྷ་དབང་བསྟན་འཛིན་ལྷ་དབང་བཀྲིས་ཚོགས། སྒང་ཉོག་ཟེལ་ཚོན་ཅེ་ལ་ཡུལ་སླེབ་ཏེ།⁵⁴
 གནས་གྱི་མཐིལ་དུ་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་མ་སློག་ཞིང། ཐོག་མར་མོན་ཕུ་བཀྲིས་འཛོམས་དུ་ཆགས།
 ཡུལ་བབྱང་གཞི་བཅའ་མོན་རིགས་དབང་དུ་བསྐྱུས། ལོ་འགའ་སྟོད་ནས་སྐས་ཡུལ་
 མཐིལ་དུ་སླེབས། ལ་སོགས་འབྱོར་ནས་ཚོས་རྒྱལ་ཉིད་དང་མཇལ། མཇལ་ཀ་ཞུས་
 དས་དགུས་པའི་སྐྱང་བ་སྐྱུལ། བྱི་ལོ་ནང་དུ་ལ་སོགས་རྫོང་རྒྱབ་པས། ཚོས་ཕ་རྒྱལ་
 བསྟན་བསྐྱུང་⁵⁵ རྣམ་རྒྱལ་འདི་ན་འབྱུངས། སྒང་གི་ལོ་ལ་རབ་གདན་ཅེ་བཞེངས་སོ།
 ཡུག་མཐིང་ལྷ་དབང་བཀྲིས་བཞེངས་པ་ཡིན། ས་གཞི་བབྱང་ནས་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་⁵⁶ གཉིས་ལ་
 བསློག། རིམ་གྱིས་ཡུག་བསམ་མོན་པ་འགའ་ཞིག་དང། ཚོང་བསྐྱུལ་གཡོག་བཅས་
 རྫོན་ལམ་འབྲུགས་གྱིས་འཛོམས། དེ་ལྟར་གནས་གྱི་ཕོ་ཉར་མངའ་བ་ཡི། ཕུ་མའད་
 བར་གྱི་མོན་པ་གང་ཡིན་རྣམས།

the two groups of lHa dbang bstan 'dzin and lHa dbang bkra shis arrived at the settlement on the peak of Zil (g)non and since in the centre of this place auspicious circumstances could not be arranged, they first settled the *mon pa* in bKra shis 'dzom. The region was occupied and the *mon* were conquered. After residing there for some years they arrived in the centre of the hidden land. Upon reaching La

⁵⁴ Recte. *slebs te*.

⁵⁵ Recte. *bsTan srung*.

⁵⁶ Recte. *rten 'brel*.

sogs they met with the king and on account of being granted an audience (with the king) they were filled with happiness.⁵⁷

In the year of the dog (1646) the castle of La sogs was built and in this castle the crowned prince bsTan srung nam rgyal was born. In (1649) the year of the Ox (the palace) of Rab gdan rtse was established. Yug mthing was established by lHa dbang bkra shis and from the four directions of the occupied land the two forms of auspicious qualities were arranged. Eventually by the strength of prayer some of the Lepchas of Yug bsam united with the servants that conducted trade. So messengers of the kingdom (were sent) to all the Lepcha communities of the upper lower and middle territories (folio 7.a)

།དཔོན་གཡོག་ཇི་སྲིད་བསྐྱེད་བརྒྱུད་བྲལ་གྱི། འདུན་མར་འཇོམས་ནས་མནའ་དང་དག་
 པས་བཅིངས། རང་འགོས་དག་ཐོས་པོ་བྱིར་མོ་བྱིར་སྟོན། རང་གི་མོན་པ་པོ་ཡིན་ན།
 བུ་རྒྱམས་གང་ཡོད་རང་གིས་ཐོབ། བུ་གཅིག་ཡིན་ན་པ་ཚབ་བཞག། རང་གི་ནག་མོ་
 ཡིན་པ་ལ། བུ་མོ་གང་ཡིན་མ་ཡི་⁵⁸ ཐོབ། བུ་མོ་གཅིག་རང་ཡིན་ན་མ་ཡི་ཚབ།
 མོན་པོར་བུ་མེད་གཅིག་ཡིན་ན། དེ་དག་གཞན་གྱི་ཐོབ་རིང་ཡིན། དེ་ལྟར་མངོན་
 གནས་ཐག་ཚོད་དོ། དཔོན་གཡོག་རིགས་བརྒྱད་ཅུ་མེད་གཞུང་ལྟར་གནས། ལར་
 རྒྱུར་པམ་སྲིར་མ་དེབ་འདིར་གསལ་བ། དེ་ཡང་སྟོད་འབྲེལ་ལས་བོད་སྐད་དུ་སེར་འཕུར་
⁵⁹ ཞེས་པ། མི་བུ་ལོ་དུས་འཁོར་བའི་སྟོན་འབྲིང་བྲུམ་སྟོད་ཉ་བ་བུ་མེད་བྲིམ་ལ་སྟོད་པ།
 རྣལ་འབྱོར་བརྒྱུད་པ་གཟའ་དཀར་ཚེས་⁶⁰ བྲངས་འཕྲོད་སྟོར་བཀྲིས་

⁵⁷ The two groups mentioned here, i.e. the ancestors of lHa dbang bkra shis and lHa dbang bstan 'dzin, were probably other Tibetan migrants or, as this text suggest, distant relatives of Phun tshogs nam rgyal that had settled in the area around bKra shis 'dzom in the past and had established a centre of local power in the region. The audience mentioned here may in fact describe a union between the areas controlled by Lha dbang bstan 'dzin and bKra shis and Phun tshogs nam rgyal, who, on account of an expanding state, was becoming too powerful to ignore.

⁵⁸ Recte. *vis*.

⁵⁹ Recte. *'phyang*.

⁶⁰ Recte. *skar tshes*.

to assemble a council and (to designate) the relationship between servants and masters for as long as a hundred Kalpas and (after this council) they were bound by truth and oath..... If the Lepcha, who is under your service, is male you (will) obtain whatever sons he has. However, if your servant has only one male descendent that son must remain in the household of his father and act as the guardian of the family. Your wife will obtain as servants whatever daughters the Lepcha has. If there is only one daughter she will act in a similar way to the mother. If the Lepcha is without male issue he will be entitled to receive one from another person. This is what was actually decided. This relationship between lords and servants will remain forever like a great flowing river. In order to highlight the benefits of this system it has thus been mentioned here in this source. Thus in the estate of bKra shis dPal 'byor, in my own daughter's house, this document has been accurately prepared and compiled (based on what has been) seen by me Karma tshang bsam skal bzang blo ldan

(folio 7.b.1)

པའི་ཉི་མ་ལ་སོགས་བགྲིས་དཔལ་འབྱོར་གཞིས་ཁར་བདག་མིང་ཀམ་ཚང་བསམ་སྐལ་
བཟང་སློབ་ལྷན་དུ་གྲགས་པས་མཐོང་བསྐྱིགས་ཡང་དག་ཏུ་བྱས་པས་དགོ་ལེགས་སུ་གྱུར་ཅིག།

on this exact date which is the auspicious day of *rnal 'byor brgyad pa* in the autumnal month of September / October of the Fire Bird Year (1657), which is known in Tibetan from the *Collected Praise* as *gser 'phyang*.⁶¹ And so may virtue prevail!

Myth and history: some remarks on the origins of the Tibeto-Sikkimese

Following the eulogy to the Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, Bodhisattvas and local deities, the history begins in earnest from folio 3.b. onwards. The account opens with the semi-legendary story of the migration of Tibetans to Sikkim, focusing on two major actors—Gyad and Teg—and their wives Jo mo Guru and Ngal respectively, and the son of Jo mo Guru and Gyad, Brag btsan dar. Brag btsan dar was conceived only after the intervention of Teg who used his healing and spiritual powers to aid the couple. The story then continues with the oath of allegiance being sworn by Teg and Gyad. This myth of origin is well known in

⁶¹ The term given to the thirty-first year of the Tibetan cycle (*rab byung*).

contemporary Sikkim and has been celebrated with the construction of the *Unity Statue*, depicting the first meeting of Gyad and Teg, in the old children's park in the centre of Gangtok.

Like many oral histories and folk stories, this particular narrative has merged semi or possible historical material with mythical and legendary elements; so much so, in fact, that it is difficult to determine what is historically viable and what is mythical.

Bearing this caveat in mind, oral and folk history may still prove valuable to the study of Sikkimese history and to the story of Gyad 'bum sags. First, it appears that Gyad 'bum sags leaves his home in Khams Mi nyag for Lhasa, from where he begins a 'pilgrimage' to the central provinces of Tibet. When his pilgrimage comes to a halt he settles around the Phag ri / Kham bu area in the north of the Chumbi Valley, and perhaps with the help of Zhang zang lha ring, he begins to carve out a territory which he begins to rule. This territory gradually expands to include the southern part of the Chumbi valley and borders on the outer ranges of Sikkim. Perhaps it was the expansion of the territory under his control that brought him into contact with the Lepcha chief of the area named in *PSLG* as Mon yul seng lding. *PSLG*, however, gives another reason for this first contact with the Lepchas of Sikkim; it states that Gyad 'bum sags was having problems increasing his 'dominion', i.e. *srid*. Gyad then hears that there is a Lepcha couple who can help him with his problem so he heads for Sikkim, supposedly in search of the couple.

He finally reaches Sikkim, but the man he is looking for avoids contact by fleeing their first meeting (probably due to the armed guard that would be accompanying any local ruler through unknown, and therefore possibly hostile, territory). Gyad follows the man and realises that the person he was tracking was indeed the Lepcha chief he had wanted to meet. Teg then agrees to help Gyad and after some time Gyad's wife, Jo mo guru, becomes pregnant and Gyad returns to Sikkim to thank Teg for his help at which point they swear an oath and Gyad's son is allowed to settle in Sikkim. While the author of *PSLG* would like us to believe that this first contact between Tibetans and Lepchas was a peaceful one, we have little evidence of this first meeting and the historical existence of Teg and Gyad is still shrouded in mystery.

This account is interesting less for its historical validity and more for the way in which these two figures are said to have united. First, a pattern of dual or parallel inheritance appears to have been established. Goldstein has noted this practice in Tibetan political and economic

structures in which Tibetan *mi ser* were tied to their lord through the practice of parallel descent, i.e. sons were associated with their father's lord and daughters to their mother's lord (Goldstein 1971a: 1-27). In this particular passage it is not the relation between lords and tenants that is highlighted (although we do find this relationship in a latter passage of *PSLG* folio 7.a), but rather it is part of the oath of friendship. In short, we witness the unification of two separate families into a single relation or kinship network. This unification of two distinct families closely resembles the coming together which takes place during marriage.

In Lepcha marriage customs the marriage does not symbolise the union of two individuals but signifies a contract between two kin groups. It is common for this contract to be maintained even after the death of the husband. Gorer noted that it was common for the wife of the deceased man to be re-married to another man from the same kin group, but that she cannot be re-married to a brother of the deceased husband if that brother has married a sibling of the widow (1996: 156-163). The reason for this is that both women share the same mother, and thus the brother is already connected to the mother through marriage to the widow's sibling. It has been suggested by Sardar-Afkhami (2001: 142) that this event (as well as the fact that Gyad and his wife were having problems conceiving) marks the offering of a Lepcha wife to Gyad. This alliance, which would have been of crucial importance to the early Tibetan settlers, was further strengthened through a series of oaths and animal sacrifices, similar to those that took place in the period of the Tibetan empire. Stein (1972: 199-201) notes that during the swearing of treaties and oaths during that period, Buddhist and local deities such as *dgra lha* and *klu* were taken as witnesses and that the participants anointed themselves with the blood of sacrificed animals.

While this folk history is certainly interesting and requires a more detailed study than the overview that has been presented above, there still remain a number of historical uncertainties which need to be clarified. Despite the attempts that have been made to locate Gyad 'bum sags and Teg in history (see Yeshe Dolma and Balikci-Denjongpa 2002: 299-305), there is still no historical evidence at present to confirm their existence. Balikci-Denjongpa's work on the possibility of migrations (both to central Tibet and Khams Mi nyag) caused by the Mongol destruction of the Xi xia kingdom (Mi nyag) is interesting in that the *ldong* clan was also dominant in that area of the Tibetan plateau, and after the Mongol invasions descendants of Mi nyag are to

be found governing the region of Byang in gTsang (Ramble 2003: 7-75). Moreover, Balikci-Denjonpa argues that the events that surrounded the re-organisation of eastern Tibet by Kublai Khan (c. 1260s) may have caused further migrations from Khams Mi nyag to central Tibet and beyond. While this argument is certainly plausible, there is not enough evidence to come to a satisfactory conclusion and many areas of enquiry remain open which may help to bring us closer to understanding Tibetan migration patterns.

The similarities found in some of the origin myths of other 'Tibetan' groups of the southern Himalayas may provide some possible answers to the migration conundrum of the Tibeto-Sikkimese people. In the Sherpa history *Shar pa'i chos 'byung*, it is mentioned that the *ldong* clan migrated to Khams Mi nyag and after some time made their way to Khumbu in Nepal which is now the region most commonly associated with the Sherpa (Ramble 2003: 75). The *ldong* clan also figures largely in the origin myth of the Tamang people, as the ancestors of the Tamang are said to originate from the eighteen sons of one lDong chen po dpung grags. It appears highly unlikely that such similarities amongst 'Tibetanized' groups, which reside in relative proximity to each other, are merely coincidental. Indeed such similarities may indicate either a shared origin for these communities or a trans-Himalayan myth tradition originating through cultural and physical contact between these groups after their arrival in the southern Himalayan region.

PSLG brings together the possible historical figure of Gyad with Phun tshogs nam rgyal and the lineage of the *ldong* clan from Khams Mi nyag. This is done through the appropriation of the collective noun for the four main Sikkimese clans, Brag btsan dar, in order to conform with the religious prophecies prevalent in seventeenth century Sikkim. Thus the historical questions of whether Gyad 'bum sags existed, or whether he was part of the migration of eastern Tibetans to central Tibet after the Mongol invasions of 1227, are, for the study of seventeenth century Sikkim, irrelevant. The most pertinent historical question is why this lineage and story is so important for seventeenth century Sikkim.

This section of *PSLG* (folios 3.a. to 5.b.) follows an interesting pattern: in essence it can be broken down into three parts. First, it opens with a statement to the effect that the text describes an account of the way in which Buddhist teaching were brought into Sikkim in accordance with the prophecy of Guru Rinpoche, Khri srong lde btsan

and Santarakshita.⁶² The key point here is the reference to the prophecy of *rnal byor mched bzhi* which is further developed in the following folio (4.a.). Here the author gives a short overview of the main details of this prophecy:

1. There exists a prophecy which was pronounced by *mkhan slob chos gsum*, while they were in Sikkim.
2. In this prophecy it is stated that there will be a man who belongs to the *ldong* clan and who will be born into the kingdom of Khams Mi nyag.
3. This man's karma will lead him to Sikkim, whereby his descendents will settle and rule the country by the laws of *lugs gnyis*.

The reason for this focus on the 'historical lineage' of the royal family of Sikkim (which makes up the majority of *PSLG*) was most probably necessitated by the political events of seventeenth century western Sikkim. The tale of Gyad links three important points for legitimating the state of Sikkim under the control of Phun tshogs. First, the association of the new state with a lineage that descends from a royal dynasty (which was retrospectively associated with the Tibetan empire, despite the problems of clan association). Second, the formation of a relation of unity and sameness between the Tibeto-Sikkimese and the Lepcha populations. Third, the religious prophesies which act as the ultimate legitimation and justification for the establishment of a new and centralised Sikkimese state. The only thing that holds these three different levels of legitimacy together is the figure of Gyad 'bum sags, who has been aligned with the lineage of the Tibetan kings, through the association of his lineage with the *ldong* clan⁶³ of Khams Mi nyag. Similarly, Phun tshogs is associated with Gyad through the name of Gyad's son, which as has been noted earlier is the collective noun of the four major Sikkimese clans (from which Phun tshogs rnam rgyal

⁶² For an introductory survey of the prophesies credited to Guru Rinpoche, Khri srong lde btsan and Santarakshita see bKra Shis Tshe ring (2003: 8-11).

⁶³ In '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* and in some of the oral histories of Sikkim, it is mentioned that the Sikkimese kings, through the lineage of Gyad 'bum sags, can be traced to the middle son of Khri srong lde btsan, who (in the oral histories) is said to have migrated to eastern Tibet. This 'royal connection' is most probably fabricated to enhance the legitimacy of the kingdom and further attest to the Tibetan origins of the Tibeto-Sikkimese. It is unsure whether this view was commonly promoted during the seventeenth century.

descended) and through the religious prophesies of the seventeenth century.

State and politics: some previously unknown events

According to more orthodox historical accounts, as best represented by *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*, accredited to Chogyal Thuthob Namgyal and his wife Queen Yeshe Dolma, prior to the arrival of Lha btsun chen po, Sikkim was without major political states. Indeed they claim that Phun tshogs nam rgyal was little more than a lowly farmer from Gangtok in eastern Sikkim, who was found by lHa btsun and brought to west Sikkim to rule the state in accordance with the religious prophesies.

From folios 5.b to 7.a we learn that a basic system of social, political and economic organisation was introduced prior to Phun tshogs nam rgyal ascending the throne in 1642.⁶⁴ First, according to *PSLG* (folio 6.a), there was the division of the population into two groups: *g.yog* (servants) and *blon* (ministers). The servants were organised into various groups under higher ranking officials known as *mgo chings* and *las dpon* (headman and work leader) and the Lepchas of bKra shis steng kha and Seng lding were given the title of Lepcha officials (*las byed mon pa*) after their incorporation into the territory that Phun tshogs would rule and inherit. The ministerial group was organised according to their reliability and trustworthiness. Those who were not trusted became involved with trade or were responsible for tax collection. The fact that *PSLG* indicates that the early formation of centralised authority existed prior to 1642 leads us to believe that Phun tshogs was not necessarily the first ruler in Sikkim, but in fact inherited this position from an earlier figure (about whom we know almost nothing). Furthermore, the fact that all the events mentioned in *PSLG* take place within a twenty kilometre radius from Tashiding casts further doubt on the Gangtok origins of Phun tshogs nam rgyal.

It appears that prior to 1642, the region that would be known as Sikkim grew and expanded with areas such as bKra shis ldeng kha and Seng lding (folio 6.a) gradually coming under the control of the territory that Phun tshogs nam rgyal would inherit, rule, and in alliance with minor rulers, expand. In folio 6.b we are told of an interesting event relating to a united group of Tibetan migrants, the ancestors of lHa dbang bstan 'dzin and lHa dbang bkra shis, who attempted to settle in Zil gnon only to find that this area was not suitable, probably

⁶⁴ This date is still problematic.

because it had already been occupied or there was a high level of local resistance (described in *PSLG* as an inability to establish ‘auspicious circumstances’)⁶⁵ and then carved out a micro-state around bKra shis ‘dzom.⁶⁶ They ruled this territory ‘for some years’ until Phun tshogs rnam rgyal co-opted bKra shis ‘dzom into his realm probably through an alliance, described in *PSLG* as a royal audience. Later on in the same text we learn that the same lHa dbang bKra shis⁶⁷ expanded the territory under the administration of Phun tshogs by seizing Yug mthing.

Perhaps, then, the early reign of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal was defined by the expansion of the borders of his territory (which he had inherited) through the subjugation of other smaller Tibetan and Lepcha territories using, in some instances, military strength and in others subservient alliances.

It is useful at this juncture to clarify an issue of chronology which has until recently escaped the attention of Sikkimese and western historians. According to *PSLG* it is stated that Phun tshogs rnam rgyal ascended the throne in 1642. However, this date should be considered as problematic for a number of reasons. In an earlier article (Mullard: 2003a), I highlighted a number of problems relating to this date, the most important of which is that the so-called architect of modern Sikkim, lHa btsun Chen po, had not yet arrived in Sikkim. Until now only two possibilities had been considered: first, Phun tshogs rnam rgyal was already King by the time lHa btsun arrived in Sikkim; second, the date of 1642 was fixed retrospectively to associate the formation of Sikkim with the establishment of the dGa’ ldan pho brang in Lhasa. Until now the latter argument has been favoured. However, new information provided in *PSLG* seems to suggest that a third possibility is in fact more plausible: Phun tshogs did indeed obtain political power over an area of west Sikkim in 1642, but only in 1646

⁶⁵ *PSLG* (folio 6.b).

⁶⁶ The term ‘micro-state’ has been used here to illustrate the pattern of seventeenth century political geography in the region to the west of the Tista river. It is highly probable that in this region there existed a pattern of small independent territories under the administration of both Lepcha and Tibetan clan leaders. Gradually, these territories or ‘micro-states’ fell under the control of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal.

⁶⁷ lHa dbang bKra shis appears to have been a highly influential person in the politics of early Sikkim. He is frequently mentioned in *LTLY* by the title *jo bo* (folios 607 to 608), which is generally associated with lay people of considerable importance and can be roughly translated as ‘lord’ or ‘master’. The image of Shakyamuni housed in the Jo khang in Lhasa is known as Jo bo rin po che in which the Buddha is depicted as a prince.

or 1647⁶⁸ was he involved in an event (possibly politically motivated to display his position and regional dominance) which inaugurated him as the Chos rgyal of Sikkim. Unfortunately, the problems surrounding this chronological issue are still ignored in the works of a number of western scholars.⁶⁹

Religion and politics


Towards the end of folio 6.a we are told that the rule of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal involved the establishment of the dual system of religion and politics (*lugs gnyis*). The system of *lugs gnyis* and its associated concepts of *chos srid zung 'brel*, *tshul gnyis*, *khriims gnyis*, *mchod yon* etc. have been noted elsewhere (Cueppers (ed) 2004, Ruegg 1991 and 1997). *Lugs gnyis* is probably best understood to be a religio-political theory of state and society, in which the united territories of the political and religious worlds play a complementary, although not always equal, role in the formation and direction of policy. Thus certain guarantees and concessions are set in place, theoretically at least, to maintain the balance and stability of both social orders.

In Sikkim, the 'establishment' of this religio-political system is definitely associated with the arrival and influence of Tibetan bla ma in Sikkim and the creation of a religious historical royal lineage for Phun tshogs rnam rgyal. As such, the extent to which the system of *lugs gnyis* was established is an issue of considerable importance. Indeed, the somewhat cryptic Lung bstan shel gyi me long bzhugs so, a text within *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* ('discovered' by IHa btsun chen po), warns that chaos and conflict will result if the dual laws of religion and

⁶⁸ 'Bras ljongs lam yig. The collected works of IHa-btsun Nam-mkha' 'Jigs-med, Vol. III: folio 556 to 557, 1974, New Delhi. *Then on the first day of dkar-phyog of the tenth month, (end of 1646 beginning of 1647) having arrived at Nor bu sgang, the centre of the treasure of the great holy land of 'bras mo gshong.... Then again, Phun tshogs rnam rgyal was enthroned as the greatest patron of the Buddhist teachings and was endowed with the seven ritual objects of the Chakravatin (symbols of royalty), as well as the eight auspicious objects and signs* (my translation).

⁶⁹ Most notably, in an article by John Ardussi on the religio-political structures of early Bhutan (2004: 45). It appears that Ardussi has relied primarily on *BGR* without realising the inherent problems of that text for the study of early Sikkimese history. A cursory glance at IHa btsun chen po's rnam thar, which he himself mentions in that article, would have revealed that IHa btsun had yet to arrive in Sikkim, making it impossible for him to have been involved in an installation in 1642.

secular affairs are not introduced.⁷⁰ Whether the *Rig 'dzin srog sgrub* had an influence on the state policies of early Sikkim is still unclear.


IHa btsun chen po (who is credited with the formation of the Sikkimese state in traditional histories) arrived in Sikkim in the ninth month of 1646 and began 'discovering' prophecies, ritual treatises and *gnas yig* which reinforced the definition of Sikkim, first articulated by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can, as a *sbas yul* and a geo-physical .⁷¹ Both religious ideas regarding sacred geography (as found in the numerous *gnas yig* of Sikkim) and 'discovered' prophetic texts were probably employed politically, like the tale of Gyad 'bum sags, to define not only the national character of the expanding state, but as we have seen earlier, to add legitimacy and status to its ruler. This probably allowed IHa btsun chen po, his followers, and other religious practitioners, the freedom to propagate their teachings.

Perhaps this, then, is what is meant when the author of *PSLG* (folio 6.a.) states that the reign of Phun tshogs nam rgyal was characterised by the introduction of the Tibetan religio-political philosophy of *chos srid lugs gnyis*.

Rebellion and reorganisation: ethnic stratification in early Sikkim

Despite establishing himself as the dominant power in Sikkim at some point after the establishment of Rab gdan rtse Palace in 1649, there was a rebellion against the rule of Phun tshogs nam rgyal instigated by the Lepchas of Yug bsam and what *PSLG* describes as 'local traders', perhaps an early reference to the Limbu. This rebellion seems to have been subdued by 'royal messengers' who were dispatched to the

⁷⁰ *mi mthun log pa'i khrims: bsdam rgyal khrims dang: chos khrims zung du myur bar ma bsdams na: bar ched dbang byas gzhi bdag lha srin 'khrugs: (Lung bstan shel gyi me long bzhugs so: folio 3.b).* This is a particularly interesting prophecy, as the opening folios begin by describing the time of the degeneration of Buddhism in Tibet and the importance, at that time, of *sbas yul* and other areas blessed by Guru Rinpoche. From folio 3 onwards, methods and practices aimed at preserving the sacred character and blessing of the *sbas yul* are explained as well as the way in which evil and inauspicious circumstances will be prevented from entering such sacred places.

⁷¹ See Mullard (2003a), *rDo rje nyi ma'i gnas yig* (Rig 'dzin rgod ldem can - reprinted in Boord 2003) and *Brag dkar bkra shis sdings kyi sku 'bum mthong ba rang grol gyi dkar chag mdor bsdus don gsal me long zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, (IHa btsun chen po Nam mkha' 'jigs med). Other examples of the representation of the  concept can be found religio-physical geography of other *sbas yul*, such as mkhan pa lung (Diemberger 1997b, Diemberger and Hazod 1999: 41).

Lepcha strongholds throughout the kingdom and who, after the rebellion was pacified, established a royal council to ‘mediate’ and enact some form of agreement. The result of the council was the introduction of a law rather unfavourable for the Lepchas which defined the relationship between the populations of Tibetan descent and the local Lepcha groups. This law reads as follows: ‘*If your Lepcha (i.e. a Lepcha under your administrative authority) is male, his sons will belong to you (i.e. they will belong to you as servants).⁷² If the male Lepcha has only one son he will be retained by his family. Your wife will obtain whatever female Lepcha descendants that may exist, but if there is only one, she will be retained by the Lepcha family. If the male Lepcha is without male issue, he can receive a son (mag pa) from someone else.*’⁷³

The law uses the language of generalised Tibetan kinship and social customs regarding inheritance and property ownership. As noted in an earlier passage of this document, in which the female descendants of Gyad ‘bum gsags are associated with the lineage of Teg perhaps on account of a marriage alliance, the possession of ‘servants’ is aligned with gender. It should be noted that the dual ownership of both male and female ‘servants’, which implies the total ownership of all the descendants of a family grouping and this family’s responsibilities to their overlord, may be a mechanism of controlling marriage external to the (e)state or region of domicile. Whether or not this was the case will only be ascertained through further research of relevant seventeenth century material. It is also interesting to note the application of Tibetan concepts of gender division to the ‘ownership’ of Lepcha and perhaps other tenants. Whether the use of a kinship or inheritance metaphor represents an attempt to introduce a law of servitude on the basis of ethnicity without causing alarm, or whether it reflects a common

⁷² While this section of the text makes repeated reference to *mon* (Lepcha) and *g.yog* (servant or one who provides services), it may be more accurate to designate this economic group as landed tenants. Such an economic system has been widely noted in other regions of the Tibetan area, in which tenants provide domestic and other services, along with a portion of their harvest, as a form of tax to the ‘Lord’ or ‘true’ owner of the estate on which they are engaged in exchange for rights over land (see Goldstein 1971a and 1971b).

⁷³ At first I was puzzled by this passage so I asked for advice from a number of local scholars who were divided on its precise meaning. Dr. Rigzin Ngodub, Sonam Thinley, Acharya Tsultrim Lama and Acharya Dubgyal agreed with my translation, whereas Khenpo Chowang disagreed. Khenpo Chowang argued that there were many mistakes in *PSLG*. In order to clarify the issue I have included a grammatical breakdown of this passage below.

ideology of racial arrogance and discrimination which was characterised by a view of the Lepchas as a subservient racial group, is still open to speculation.

The fact that this passage begins with the statement that the council was established ‘to designate the relationship between servants and masters’ (*dpon g.yog*)⁷⁴ and the grammatical use of the genitive particle suggest a level of ownership or possession. Note the difference in meaning between *rang gi mon pa pho yin na* and *rang mon pa pho yin na*. The former, which is found in *PSLG*, reads as: ‘if the Lepcha which belongs to / associated with you is male’ or more literarily ‘if your Lepcha is male’, whereas the latter would read something like: ‘If you are a male Lepcha’. The use of the genitive particle in this case thus radically changes the meaning of the whole passage. Furthermore, if the passage had merely stated the Tibetan system of kinship practices, the whole passage would need to be ‘corrected’. If this was a rule only relating to Lepchas, there would be no need to state ‘*in the case of there being only one son he should be retained as pha tshab*’ as this is implied by the earlier statement, providing that the genitive particle in the opening phrase is removed: ‘*if you are a male Lepcha you will receive whatever sons exist*’. If the phrase is read as simply representing general Tibetan kinship practices, we are left with a rather confusing passage requiring the omission of a number of key grammatical particles. While far from conclusive, this passage may prove to be important for understanding the introduction of Tibetan land economy marked by the social distinction between land owners (*dpon*) and Lepcha tenants/ servants (*g.yog*).

This section of *PSLG* seems to suggest that during the reign of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal, a system of ethnic stratification was introduced into Sikkim based on the application of Tibetan land economy. While this document does point to such a conclusion, it should not be taken as a final point of analysis for early Sikkimese ethnic and economic relations. Indeed, the lack of consistent information regarding this period of Sikkimese history, coupled with the inherent bias of *PSLG* and some doubt caused by the errors inherent in the text call for caution in analysing such a provocative account of economic, social and ethnic relations.

⁷⁴ While the term *dpon g.yog* literally designates the relationship between servants and lords, such terminology can also be applied to the relationship between a disciple and his guru or even between two males of the same family group, e.g. father and son, or paternal uncle and nephew. For a more detailed analysis of this see Stein (1972: 94-109).

Some concluding remarks

A robust presentation of the early history of Sikkim would require detailed historical analysis, something which this paper has not attempted. However, from the Sikkimese chronicle presented here a number of important questions are raised regarding not only the formation of political structures and religious authority, but also the importance of historical legitimacy (the lineage history of the Sikkimese *chos rgyal*) and the chronology of events in the young state. Such questions, which appear to contradict more orthodox historical accounts of Sikkim (such as *BGR*), would suggest a more complicated historical process of state and religious formation, involving events, locales and figures which have yet to find their place within the orthodox historiography of Sikkim. As such, one is reminded of the necessity of adopting a more critical approach to the traditional histories of Sikkim, an approach which is already well established in wider Tibetological studies. The history of Sikkimese statehood requires detailed study, and this paper serves to draw attention to that need by introducing one such text that can deepen our knowledge of seventeenth century events.

Such studies will likely run parallel to the study of the expansion of Buddhism, its royal patronage and its position in early Sikkimese politics; an endeavour which may lead to a contrary historical view to that of the religious position of Sikkimese history. This is not to say that the position of Tibetan Lamas in Sikkim was inconsequential, since much of the Sikkimese state was inevitably influenced by wider religious ideas and the Tibetan notion of *lugs gnyis* introduced to Sikkim by seventeenth century religious figures, as illustrated by the religious references in *PSLG*. However, some of the content of *PSLG* brings into question the precise role Buddhist Lamas played during the ascent of Phun tshogs nam rgyal in western Sikkim, if the date of 1642 is accepted. While *PSLG* is of course grounded in the religious concepts of the time, it also highlights a number of political actions and events, such as the introduction of a rudimentary social order and internal alliances conducted between Phun tshogs nam rgyal and other minor political figures like lHa dbang bstan 'dzin and bKra shis. These have not been discussed in even the more recent works on Sikkimese

history (mKhan po lHa Tshe ring, 2002 and mKhan po Chos dbang, 2003).⁷⁵

The introduction of a legal code demarcating the role and position of *dpon* (lords) and *g.yog* (servants), based on wider Tibetan concepts of parallel descent, may indicate a substantial shift in the organisation of Sikkimese society from minor chiefdoms to a proto-national state based on a Tibetan model of political hierarchy. It remains unclear whether the system of stratification applied only to the non-Tibeto-Sikkimese communities such as the Lepcha (and possibly the Limbu), or whether the system was applied more generally to all ethnic populations in Sikkim. Resolving this question is crucial for an understanding of whether the immediate subordinates of Phun tshogs rnam rgyal⁷⁶ were drawn from various ethnic communities, or whether the early Sikkimese state was characterised by the rule of a Tibeto-Sikkimese hierarchy over the Lepcha and Limbu populations, and Tibeto-Sikkimese commoners.

In summary, this text highlights a number of questions relating to the various mechanisms employed by the early state to establish a wider national political formation. The primary reason for presenting *PSLG* in this paper is to initiate a discussion on these historical questions which are of crucial importance to understanding the evolution of state and society in early Sikkim and its relationship to wider Tibetan models.

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⁷⁵ Such emissions in contemporary research may be grounded more in a religio-historical world view rather than a desire to comprehend wider historical questions which may challenge pre-existing religious conceptions of the past.

⁷⁶ By this I mean those figures who held posts of high rank, as *PSLG* mentions that some minor officials were drawn from the ranks of the Lepcha, and possibly the Limbu, populations (*las byed mon pa*, etc).

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