

THE MNGA' BDAG FAMILY AND THE TRADITION OF
RIG 'DZIN ZHIG PO GLING PA (1524-1583) IN SIKKIM

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In Tibetan literature dealing with the introduction of the Buddhist doctrine into Sikkim and the definitive opening of dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs as a 'hidden land' (*sbas yul*), one becomes acquainted with a group of 'Four Yogins' (*rnal 'byor bzhi*) or 'Four Yogins [who are] brothers' (*rnal 'byor mched bzhi*). They are said to have entered the fertile region in the eastern Himalayas known for its cultivation of rice through entry points in the four cardinal directions and to have met at Yug bsam Nor bu sgang in 1642 in order to install the first Buddhist king of the realm (who is counted as one of the group of four):

Then [the hidden land] was opened—in an act universally known—by the Four Yogins [who are] brothers: from the north came lHa btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597-1653), the Master of the Teaching of the Great Treasure [Discoverer] bDud 'dul [rdo rje] (1615-1672); from the west came the teacher known as Kaḥ thog pa Kun tu bzang po; from the south came the Sovereign Lord, the [Great] Being Phun tshogs rig 'dzin (1592-1656); [and] from the east came Dharmarāja Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (1604-1670).¹

¹ Bya bral Rin po che Sangs rgyas rdo rje (b. 1913): *dPal rgyal rgyal ba kaḥ thog pa'i gdan rabs brgyud 'dzin dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa rin po che'i phreng ba lta bu'i gtam*, n.p., n.d., fol. 133b/6-134a/2 (*de nas rnal 'byor mched bzhis yongs grags su phyas pa yin te / de yang gter chen bdud 'dul chos bdag lha btsun nam mkha' 'jigs med byang nas byon / bla ma kaḥ thog pa kun tu bzang po zhes bya ba nub nas byon / mnga' bdag sems dpa' phun tshogs rig 'dzin lho nas byon / dharmarāja phun tshogs rnam rgyal shar nas byon te*). This section deals with the establishment of the Kaḥ thog tradition in Sikkim and is preceded by a reference to the opening of the hidden land by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can (1337-1406) and the peregrinations of Kaḥ thog pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1466-1540) in dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs; concerning the latter person and his activities in Sikkim and Bhutan see Ehrhard (2003: 15-24).

The concept of four brothers, topographically applied to Sikkim as to a maṇḍala with four entry points, is legitimised in the literature on the basis of quotations from the ‘treasure scriptures’ (*gter ma*) of Rig ’dzin Ratna gling pa (1403-1478). The latter is remembered as one of the ‘treasure discoverers’ (*gter ston*) to have propagated the cult of hidden sanctuaries in the Himalayan valleys in the fifteenth century. Such quaternaries form a quite frequently used model in Tibetan culture to structure an assemblage of localities and persons, and even icons. One other instance from the same period groups together four bKa’ gdams pa masters. The most conspicuous example, of course, is the ‘Four Brothers Ārya [Avalokiteśvara]’ (*’phags pa sku mched bzhi*), a set of statues of the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, which has enjoyed great fame in the world of Tibetan Buddhism.²

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If we consider the three Buddhist masters who acted as spiritual preceptors to Sikkim’s first Dharmarāja and the presence of their individual teaching lineages in the country, it seems that the Kaḥ thog tradition—also known under the name lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa or Mon lugs Kaḥ thog pa—was the earliest one to arrive there. These efforts by masters of the rNying ma pa school from Eastern Tibet can be dated to the closing years of the fifteenth century, but they obviously did not lead to the establishment of Buddhist monastic communities in the country. This was only achieved later, by the above-mentioned Kaḥ thog pa Kun tu bzang po, the ‘brother’ associated with the western gate.

lHa btsun Nam mkha’ ’jigs med, who is still regarded today as the great cultural hero who introduced the rDzogs chen doctrine and rituals of Buddhist worship to Sikkim, entered the country from the north. The teaching lineage represented by him exemplifies the phenomenon of treasure discoverers of the rNying ma pa school and their search for sacred lands in regions located to the south of the Tibetan plateau. It is stated in the quotation that he was a ‘master of the teaching’ (*chos*

² For the presentation of hidden lands by Rig ’dzin Ratna gling pa, see *Gu ru ratna’i gling pa’i gter byung chen mo gsal ba’i sgron me* in ‘Collected Works’, vol. 1, Bylakuppe: Pema Norbu Rinpoche, 1984, pp. 64.5-65.3. Concerning the four bKa’ gdams pa masters known, as Khams pa sku mched bzhi, see rTse thang Las chen Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (b. 1440): *bKa’ gdams kyi rnam par thar pa bka’ gdams chos ’byung gsal ba’i sgron me*, Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2003, p. 162.5-12; and for the tradition of the four Avalokiteśvara icons, Ehrhard (2004a: 58-59 & 66-67).

bdag) of Rig 'dzin bDud 'dul rdo rje, a native of Khams, who is generally known as one of those seventeenth century Buddhist teachers who undertook travels to gNas Padma bkod in the south-east of Tibet and raised treasure works in one of the old temples dating back to the glorious days of the Yarlung dynasty. He was a close associate of Rig 'dzin 'Ja' tshon snying po (1615-1672), another treasure discoverer who uncovered literary works and prophecies concerning gNas Padma bkod as a refuge for followers of the Precious Guru Padmasambhava. lHa btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med was not only a direct disciple of Rig 'dzin bDud 'dul rdo rje but of Rig 'dzin 'Ja' tshon snying po as well, whose treasure cycles he propagated in Sikkim.³

Among the further lineages obtained by the most famous rNying ma pa teacher of the country, one should mention that of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa and the latter's disciple Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624). This was the lineage in whose succession stood the third 'brother', said to have entered the country from the south. His name was mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin, and up to now he has not received much attention in studies on Sikkim's Buddhist culture, a fact already reflected in the problem of interpreting the title 'Sovereign Lord' (*mnga' bdag*). One might think that this title links him to the lineage of the first 'treasure discoverer king' mNga' bdag Nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer (1124-1192), but it could also imply that his family claimed direct descent from the rulers of the Yarlung dynasty. This latter claim would make sense in the context of the phenomenon of hidden lands, which are known to have been especially eagerly searched for at times of social disintegration and political turmoil in Tibet proper, and in places where it was possible to preserve the authentic line of the early Tibetan kings.

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A closer examination of this specific tradition of rNying ma pa teachings is possible with the help of a family chronicle written by

³ Concerning Rig 'dzin bDud 'dul rdo rje and Rig 'dzin 'Ja' tshon snying po as representatives of the rNying ma pa school who were active in sPo bo and Kong po in the seventeenth century, and their role in initiating the cult of the hidden land gNas Padma bkod, see Ehrhard (1999: 231-232) and Lazcano (2005: 46-47). A detailed account of the life of lHa btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med, his activities in Sikkim and data on the three incarnations following him can be found in mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (b. 1960): *mKha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gtsug nor sprul pa'i rnal 'byor mched bzhi brgyud 'dzin dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa blo gsar gzhon nu'i dga' tshal*, Gangtok: Khenpo L. Tsering, 2002, pp. 65.1-195.2.

mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin (b. 1625), the son of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin. Based on this genealogical account, I shall present in what follows an overview of this particular lineage (as represented by three generations of the mNga' bdag family) and their activities in Tibet and Sikkim. This will be supplemented by further materials from the writings of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa, since it was this treasure discoverer's findings which were introduced into Sikkim when the country was being transformed into a Buddhist kingdom.⁴

According to the work of mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin and a modern rendering of it by a contemporary Sikkimese scholar, the mNga' bdag family can be traced back to the Yarlung dynasty through the latter's western branch, and in particular to that line which produced the kings of Ladakh, that is, Mar yul. It is thus through mNga' bdag dPal gyi lde, mNga' bdag 'Gro mgon and mNga' bdag Chos mgon—the latter said to be a contemporary of Lo chen Rin chen bzang po (958-1055)—that they claim the name and status of 'Sovereign Lord'.⁵

Details on the further descendants of mNga' bdag Chos mgon are rather sparse. We are only told their names and that some of these local rulers from Western Tibet were known as great warriors famed for having fought back the armies of Hor yul or sTod hor that had spread down to gTsang in Central Tibet. Only in the twentieth generation after

⁴ The family chronicle has survived as a concluding chapter of a manuscript of the famous *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* of the Sa skya pa scholar Bla ma dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312-1375), which was published by Sherab Gyaltzen Lama et al., Mandi 1985; see pp. 548.2-594.5. I want to thank Anna Balikci-Denjongpa and mKhan po Lha Tse ring for making a copy of this manuscript available. The work was composed in 1656, in the same year mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin passed away, and supplants the chapter on the lineage of the Yar [k]lung[s] lords in the work of Bla ma dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan. It thus follows immediately after the genealogical account of the royal house of Ya rtse; see Sørensen (1994: 459-465). Refer to Ehrhard (2004a: 131-133) for details surrounding the fact that the fourteenth century work of the Sa skya pa scholar was used by other authors as a literary source and starting point for local Buddhist historiography.

⁵ In the following, I refer to the chronicle of mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin according to the rendering of it by mKhan po Lha Tshe ring. On the three mentioned rulers, see his text (as in note 3), p. 29.11-13. The author notes that the chronicle refers to mNga' bdag Chos mgon as the son of mNga' bdag 'Gro mgon, while the so-called 'Royal Genealogy of Ladakh' identifies them as brothers; see *La dvags rgyal rabs*, Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1986, p. 43.3 (... *dpal gyi mgon gyi sras 'gro mgon dang chos mgon gnyis*). The line of Ladakh rulers is then presented as descending from [mNga' bdag] 'Gro mgon, while the line from [mNga' bdag] Chos mgon remains blank. This latter line can be reconstructed with the help of the chronicle of the mNga' bdag family.

mNga' bdag Chos mgon does a name turn up of someone remembered not only for his secular powers but also for his spiritual achievements: mNga' bdag sTag sham can (d. 1623). As we shall see, this name links him to the teaching tradition of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa. But before encountering the treasure discoverer, he followed in the steps of his ancestors and ruled their domain from the capital, Shel dkar pho brang. He also fathered a son who later became known as mNga' bdag bKra shis khri btsan (d. 1635).

Upon receiving a prophecy from a *ḍākīṇi*, he abandoned his rulership and left for Central Tibet. The first master he met there, in a place called dGon pa rNam gling, was Byams pa phun tshogs (1503-1581), from whom he received transmissions of the bKa' brgyud pa school, including the Mahāmudrā doctrine and the *Ras chung snyan brgyud* teachings. His initial teacher of the rNying ma pa school was a certain mKhan chen Byams pa bzang po from Gra skor in the gCung valley, who conferred upon his disciple the complete teaching cycles of the treasure discoverer Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can, the so-called 'Northern Treasures' (*byang gter*). By that time he must have been conducting his spiritual practices in the region of La stod Byang, since we find among his supporters the 'Lord of [La stod] Byang' (*byang bdag po*) Nam mkha' tsho dbang rdo rje. This local ruler was the father of Chos rgyal dBang po sde or Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550-1607), the representative of the tradition of the Northern Treasures who would ensure the continuity of the teachings in his family line.⁶

In the company of a few servants, the member of the royal line from Western Tibet reached lHa sa and soon afterwards met Gar dbang Zhig po gling pa, also known as the 'treasure discoverer of Khyung tshang brag' in sNang rtse—in the sTod lung valley to the north-east of the Tibetan capital. He obtained the transmission of the complete treasure cycles of this teacher, who was regarded as a reincarnation of

⁶ For the succession of the mNga' bdag family from mNga' bdag Chos mgon down to mNga' bdag sTag sham can, see the text by mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), pp. 29.14-31.15. See also *ibid.*, pp. 32.7-33.6, for the early years of mNga' bdag sTag sham can (an alternative name of whom may have been Chos rgyal Yon tan phun tshogs) and his first two teachers. Some biographical information on Byams pa phun tshogs can be found in Ehrhard (2004b: 584-586); he was a disciple of both lHa btsun Rin chen rnam rgyal (1473-1557) and rGod tshang ras pa sNa tshogs rang rol (1494-1559), and thus stood in the teaching lineage of the Ras chung bKa' brgyud pa inaugurated by gTsang smyong Heruka (1452-1507). For Chos rgyal dBang po sde, his political affiliations, and his role in the transmission of the Northern Treasures, see Karmay (2002: 31-33).

the prince Mu rub btsan po, and was especially identified by him as a master of the teachings of a specific cycle titled *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgröl gyi chos skor*. This latter work contained a prophecy legitimating his status and alluding to his name mNga' bdag sTag sham can:

To the king of mNga' ris with the marks of a tiger,
 To the one with the name 'Tshe' who has faith in the Great
 Vehicle—
 If to him the teaching is entrusted, benefit [for all] will arise.⁷

This detail refers to a mark on the lower body of the sovereign, a phenomenon quite well known in the Tibetan cultural sphere to testify to the special status of a 'reincarnation' (*sprul sku*). Among the further accomplishments of mNga' bdag sTag sham can, the genealogical account mentions that he was entrusted with an additional cycle of the master, one devoted to the wrathful form of Vajrapāṇi, and that he composed a ritual manual in this regard. Later, during his spiritual practice, he stayed mainly in the region of La stod Byang, where he continued to cultivate the tradition of the Northern Treasures. He also received many teachings from the Ninth Karmapa dBang phyug rdo rje (1556-1603).

⁷ Concerning the meeting of mNga' bdag sTag sham can with Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa, the wording of the prophecy and further statements relating to his spiritual status, see the text of mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), p. 33.6-17. The quotation can be found in "Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgröl gyi chos skor: A Collection of Lamaist Practices Focussing upon Mahākāruṇika Avalokiteśvara. Recovered from their place of Concealment at the 'Phrul snang Temple at Lhasa", vol. 2, Gangtok: Sherab Gyaltzen Lama, 1976, p. 378.3-4 (*mnga' rigs (=ris) rgyal po rtags kyi (=stag gi) mtshan ma can / theg chen la mos tshe'i ming can la / chos 'di gtad rgya bgyis na phan par byung*). The different works of the treasure cycle are introduced together with a historical account, which includes a list of the previous incarnations of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa; see *ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 8.4-20.1. This list is one of the literary sources for the treatment of the treasure discoverer's previous lives in his biography; see Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan: *rDzogs chen pa sprul sku zhig po gling pa gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal gyi skyes rabs rags bsdus dang rnam thar* in "Collected Writings of Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan", vol. 1, New Delhi: Sanji Dorje, 1975, pp. 21.2-34.5. For the family of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa, the powerful sNang rtse sde pa, the location of Khyung tshang brag, where he raised his first treasure, and the rhetoric directed by the Fifth Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682) against this particular rNying ma pa tradition, see Akester (2001b: 27-30).

Several local rulers are mentioned who bestowed their services upon mNga' bdag sTag sham can. While undertaking a journey to sacred sites in Southern Tibet, including the old temple of lHo brag mKhar chu, he met Zhabs drung Mi pham chos rgyal (1543-1606), the head of the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa school. This hierarch of the rGya family of Ra lung is accorded special mention among his disciples, together with Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan, the author of the hagiography of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa. The instructions of the rNying ma pa and bKa' brgyud pa schools received by him were transmitted to his son, who was begotten upon a noble lady from the Zangs dkar valley in Ladakh. This son, mNga' bdag bKra shis khri btsan, is said to have followed his father in spending his time in remote mountain hermitages in Central Tibet.⁸

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Before setting out to lead the life of a Buddhist yogin, mNga' bdag bKra shis khri btsan founded a residence in Western Tibet named Pho brang Sag khri mkhar. It was there that his son Phun tshogs rig 'dzin was born. The young boy received this name from his grandfather mNga' bdag sTag sham can, who was at the time staying in the region of La stod Byang. At the age of nineteen (in 1611), he studied the Mahāmudrā doctrine of the bKa' brgyud pa school under his father and, leaving the administration of his royal domain in the hands of his ministers, started to practise austerities in cemeteries. In the year 1616, he met for the first time mNga' bdag sTag sham can in person at bSam grub rtse, the fortress of the kings of gTsang in gZhis ka rtse, and the treasure cycles of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa were passed on to him in their entirety. mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin spent the next years in

⁸ See the text of mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), pp. 33.17-35.11, for the second part of the life of mNga' bdag sTag sham can, and *ibid.*, pp. 35.12-36.18, for an overview of the life of mNga' bdag bKra shis khri btsan. Concerning Zhabs drung Mi pham chos rgyal, the hierarch of the rGya family of Ra lung, it should be mentioned that he, too, was a personal disciple of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa and married the treasure discoverer's daughter. From this union sprang Mi pham bsTan pa'i nyi ma (1567-1619), the father of Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal (1594-1651), the founder of the Buddhist state of Bhutan. See Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775-1837): *dPal ldan gzhung 'brug bka' brgyud gser phreng gi bla ma brgyud pa'i mam thar dang phyag rgya chen po'i spyi don ngo mtshar snyan pa'i sgra dbyangs*, manuscript, NGMPP reel-no. L 380/5-L 381/1, fol. 43a/4-b/1. For the role of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos rgyal in the composition of some of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa's writings, see the Appendix below.

hermitages, completely abandoning worldly concerns, and was therefore praised by his grandfather as a second Mi la ras pa. After being installed by mNga' bdag sTag sham can as his spiritual successor, he is said to have founded 'sites for spiritual practice' (*sgrub sde*) and established a temple in the precincts of the monastery Byams pa gling in the lHo kha area.⁹

With the overall situation deteriorating in Central Tibet and the kings of gTsang leading military campaigns against the Mongol invaders, the 'political rule' (*chab srid*) of Karma bsTan skyong dbang po (1604-1642) began to decline. This was interpreted by the followers of Padmasambhava and the rNying ma pa school that the time had come to move to the hidden lands in the south, as prophesied in the treasure scriptures. In the case of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin, he is said to have been foretold in the writings of Rig 'dzin rDo rje gling pa (1346-1405), and even more clearly in those of Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, as one of the Four Great Yogins to open dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs. These prophecies also contained details about the erection of Buddhist edifices in order to secure the prosperity of Tibet:

Among the Four Yogin Brothers, who are my incarnations,
 One will arrive in the form of a yogin with matted hair.
 On the way he should undertake agriculture, and the doctrine
 will increase!
 If at this sacred place vihāras, stūpas and sites for spiritual
 practice are erected,
 The realm of Tibet will enjoy happiness for a hundred years!
 If one is not able to penetrate inside [the hidden land],
 One hundred vihāras should be erected in the [mountain] chain
 of the 'Five Glaciers', and then some,

⁹ See the text of mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), pp. 37.1-41.3, for the early years of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin. The author takes note of a visit at the age of twenty-one years to Lha sa, where mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin is said to have conducted rites for 'repulsing the Mongols' (*sog bzlog*). The literary source for this event is the biography of Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580-1639), the son of the above-mentioned Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal; see *ibid.*, p. 39.3-8. If one consults this biography, written by the Fifth Dalai Bla ma, the year mentioned in the text is seen to correspond to 1638, when mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin had reached his forty-sixth year; see Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho: *Byang bdag rig 'dzin chen po ngag gi dbang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho* in "The Collected Works of the Vth Dalai Lama", vol. 8, Gangtok: Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, 1992, p. 806.5.

[And then] the armies at the borders will be repulsed and Tibet will enjoy happiness every year!¹⁰

The place of departure for the journey to the south is given in the genealogical record as the ‘domain’ (*rgyal khab*) of the kings of gTsang in gZhis ka rtse. mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin had already sent three persons in advance to dPal gyi ’bras mo gshongs in order to survey the terrain. It was the third Tibetan month of the year 1642 and the fifty-year-old rNying ma pa master was in the company of his family and servants, including his son Byams pa bstan ’dzin. The journey took around five months. After pacifying and propitiating the local gods and protectors of the territory, he went on to the ‘central spot’ (*sa’i thig le*) of the hidden land, which he reached in the eighth Tibetan month of the year 1642. The point of arrival was called Yug bsam Nor bu sgang.

That same year mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin installed in the very same place a local official named Zhal ngo A pa rdo rje as the first Buddhist king of Sikkim, having invited him from his residence in sGang tog to the Yug bsam area. He conferred upon the chosen secular head of the country the name Phun tshogs rnam rgyal, and they entered into a relationship of ‘ruler’ (*yon bdag*) and ‘preceptor’ (*mchod gnas*), as called for in the political theory of an ideal Buddhist society. It is interesting to note that the instalment of Zhal ngo A pa rdo rje as the new Buddhist ruler of the county is ascribed to mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin alone without mentioning Kaḥ thog pa Kun tu bzang po or lHa btsun Nam mkha’ ’jigs med.¹¹

In the eleventh month of the year 1643 a first temple, the lHa khang dmar po, was erected at Yug bsam sgang. After its completion mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin identified the site for Brag dkar bKra shis sdings, the monastery to be situated in the very centre of the hidden land. It is said that he perceived the external setting as a palace of the

¹⁰ For these two prophecies from the writings of Rig ’dzin Ratna gling pa, see the text of mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), p. 41.7-9 (*nga yi sprul pa rnal ’byor mched bzhi las / gcig ni rnal ’byor ral pa’i tshul gyis byon / lam bar so nam byed cig bstan pa spel*), and p. 43.2-6 (*gnas der lha khang mchod rten sgrub sde btsugs / bod yul lo brgya’i bar du bde bar ’gyur / gal te nang du tshud par ma ’gyur na / mdzod lnga’i rgyud la lha khang brgya rtsa brtsigs / mtha’ dmag bzlog cing lo re bod yul bde*). The latter prophecy is related to the establishment of the monastery of Brag dkar bKra shis sdings, located at the ‘navel of the sacred site’ (*gnas kyi lte ba*).

¹¹ Concerning the generally accepted view that all three Tibetan religious teachers conducted the enthronement ceremony, with lHa btun Nam mkha’ ’jigs med performing the actual coronation, see Ardussi (2004: 45).

Peaceful and Wrathful Jinas, the inside as if consisting of the nādis of the Vajrakāya, and its secret aspect as a maṇḍala of the spiritual dimension of the ‘Great Perfection’ (*rdzogs pa chen po*). The first foundation was a vihāra called bKra shis dge legs, which was furnished with sacred items. In the eleventh Tibetan month of the year 1649 his own residence, known as Zil gnon, was erected to the north of the new monastery.

mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin had an official meeting in that residence with the ruler Phun tshogs rnam rgyal in the first Tibetan month of the year 1651, at which time they discussed his being succeeded in the future by his own son mNga’ bdag Byams pa bstan ’dzin as preceptor in the relationship with the Buddhist king of Sikkim. After a second vihāra (the so-called Byams pa lha khang) had been erected in Brag dkar bKra shis sdings, the whole monastic complex was finally inaugurated under auspicious signs in the second Tibetan month of the year 1652.¹²

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One of the reasons why the fifty-nine year old head of the mNga’ bdag family persuaded the ruler Phun tshogs rnam rgyal to accept his own son as royal preceptor may have to do with an invitation which arrived about that time from another Buddhist kingdom in the Himalayas, known as Glo bo (present-day Mustang in northern Nepal). This domain had been ruled since the fifteenth century by the ‘regents of Mustang’ (*glo bo sde pa*), and the royal couple, which had issued the invitation, were A haṃ bSam grub rab brtan and his wife A yum Nyi zla rgyal mo. The rNying ma pa master who had recently opened the hidden land of dPal gyi ’bras mo gshongs spent one year in Glo bo and satisfied the court with his instructions; he left after the foundation ceremony for the Byams pa lha khang and returned just in time for the inauguration of the monastery of Brag dkar bKra shis sdings. A separate mention of mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin’s stay in Glo bo in the year 1651 is found in the biography of the ’Brug pa bKa’ brgyud pa yogin dPag bsam ye shes (1598-1667); it is mentioned there that the master (here called mNga’ bdag Rig ’dzin phun tshogs) was a witness

¹² See the text of mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), pp. 41.16-45.5, for the ten-year period between 1642 and 1652 in the life of mNga’ bdag Phun tshogs rig ’dzin, his journey to dPal gyi ’bras mo gshongs and the construction of the monastic complex and residence in the western part of Sikkim.

to dPag bsam ye shes's own activities of delivering teachings to the ruler of Glo bo and his wife.¹³

On his way back from Glo bo to dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin stayed in the Nepal Valley, where he was honoured by the local rulers, including the ruler of Ghor sa (present-day Gorkha). In the cave of Yang le shod on the south-eastern rim of the valley he performed the sādhana of dPal chen rDo rje phur ba and, like the Precious Guru Padmasambhava before him, had a vision at the sacred site of the deities of the maṇḍala. Another local ruler who performed services for the rNying ma pa master is called in the genealogical account Mang 'khor rgyal po. He provided mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin with a religious endowment said to have consisted of the revenue from the land of a hundred taxpayers. The custom developed from then onwards that members of the mNga' bdag family were allowed to collect taxes in this region located on the southern border of the Nepal Valley.¹⁴

That religious contacts between dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs and Glo bo were quite close at that time can be shown in the case of another traveller who hailed from the southern part of the latter kingdom and was, like lHa btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med, a master of the teachings of the treasure cycles of Rig 'dzin bDud 'dul rdo rje. His name was O rgyan dpal bzang (1617-1677), and he first met the treasure discoverer

¹³ Concerning the rule of A ham bSam grub rab brtan according to the 'Tsarang Molla', see Jackson (1984: 150 & 155, note 33). It is stated there that mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin (together with his son?) had acted as spiritual preceptor to the king of Glo bo on the same level with the illustrious Sa skya pa teacher [A mes zhabs] Ngag dbang Kun dga' bsod nams (1597-1659) and Chos rnam rgyal, abbot of [rTa nag] Thub bstan monastery in Central Tibet. For the testimony of dPag bsam ye shes, see Bod mkhas pa Mi pham dge legs rnam par rgyal ba (1618-1685): *rJe btsun grub pa'i dbang phyug dam pa dpag bsam ye shes zhabs kyi rnam par thar pa mchog gi spyod tshul rgya mtsho'i snying po* (xylograph), NGMPP, reel.-no. L 13/5, fol. 48b/5-6 (*mnga' bdag rig 'dzin phun tshogs kyi kyang / glo bo sde par / rgyal po rgyal mo'i khengs pa ma byed par khong la chos zhus / nga las khong lhag yin gsung bsngags pa mdzad da lta'ang glo'i bla ma gnyis bar (=par) gyur*).

¹⁴ See the text of mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), pp. 45.6-46.5, for the journey to Glo bo, the stay in the Nepal Valley and the religious endowment offered by the ruler Mang 'khor rgyal po. This ethnonym stands for the people known as Mang kar or Mang gar, who in the twelfth century had served the kings of Nepal as mercenaries, and are called 'Southern Magars' in modern ethnographic literature. A description of their origins and their respect for Tibetan religious teachers can be found in the travel account of the Sixth Zhva dmar pa Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584-1630), who passed through their territories a few years before mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin; see Ehrhard (1997: 134, note 17). The hierarch of the Karma bKa' brgyud pa school takes special note of the generosity of this ethnic group.

after a long and difficult journey to Dar rtse mdo in Khams. On his way back to the Himalayas, he was drawn by the fame of the mNga' bdag family to dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, in whose newly established monastery of Brag dkar bKra shis sdings he stayed in the year 1646. It was there that he met Phun tshogs tshe ring rnam rgyal (another name of mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin) and obtained from him the transmission of treasure cycles of the rNying ma pa school, including those of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa. In the latter part of his life he spread these teachings in Glo bo and neighbouring areas, after founding a monastery in the region from which he came.¹⁵

[6]

The presence of the teaching lineage of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa in dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, and in particular that of the spiritual practices and rituals of the cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgrol gyi chos skor*, can be regarded as the religious legacy of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin. The story goes that during a visit to Lhasa and its sacred shrines (which may be dated to the above-mentioned year 1638) he said his prayers in the Jo khang in front of the statue of the Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara and was blessed on that occasion with a special sign from the icon, regarded as the personal meditation deity of Srong btsan sgam po, the archetype of a Tibetan Buddhist king. This event led to public ceremonies for reciting *oṃ maṇi padma hūṃ*, the mantra of the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, 'one hundred million' (*dung phyur*) times, thereby introducing his cult into the newly opened hidden land. These public rituals—the first one said to have taken place either in Brag dkar bKra shis sdings in the year 1646 or prior to the founding

¹⁵ The life and travels of O rgyan dpal bzang, who was born into the family of the local rulers of dGa' rab rdzong in southern Glo bo, have been sketched in Ehrhard (2001: 236-238). The spiritual contact with mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin and the list of transmissions received by O rgyan dpal bzang from him can be found in the autobiography-cum-*gsan yig* of the teacher from Glo bo; see his *Dad pa'i spu long g.yo byed mthong bas yid 'phrog ngo mtshar 'phreng ba'i gtam rmad du byung ba* (manuscript), NGMPP reel-no. L 83/1, fols. 219/a5-256a/1. The representative of the mNga' bdag family is called in this work "Phun tshogs tshe ring rnam rgyal, who upholds the teaching of the two systems [of secular and spiritual authority] of the immaculate family line of the great Dharmarāja [of Tibet]" (*chos rgyal chen po'i gdung rgyud dri ma med pa lugs gnyis bstan pa'i srol 'dzin phun tshogs tshe ring rnam rgyal*); see *ibid.*, fol. 222a/1-2. At a later point in time (in the year 1668) O rgyan dpal bzang had another meeting with mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin in Glo bo; see *ibid.*, fol. 317b/4-318a/4.

of the monastery at the lHa khang dMar po at Yug bsam sgang—were accompanied by ‘meditation and offering rituals’ (*sgrub mchod*) based on the cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgrol gyi chos skor*.¹⁶

This treasure had been discovered by Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa in the year 1563 in the Jo khang temple of Lha sa. The introductory text of the cycle provides detailed information on how the sacred scriptures were promulgated there earlier by Padmasambhava, set down in writing by his consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and then entrusted to the protective deities. After the ‘treasure discoverer of Khyung tshang brag’ recovered them from their place of concealment, he transmitted them for the first time at 'Bri gung, to the north of Lhasa, in the year 1567; the recipient was 'Bri gung Zhabs drung Yon tan bkra shis (1547-1602), a connection pointing to the role of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa in the 'Bri gung pas' spiritual claim to the Jo khang area in Lhasa. In the year 1575 the cycle was taught one more time in bSam yas, Tibet's first monastic complex, and there Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa manufactured sacred substances which ‘liberate by taste’ (*myong grol*). In dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs these rituals from the *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgrol gyi chos skor* were reenacted by mNga' bdag Rig 'dzin phun tshogs, and a sacred vase said to have been passed down to him from the treasure discoverer through his grandfather mNga' bdag sTag sham can still occupy a central place in one of the most important events in the religious life of Sikkim.¹⁷

¹⁶ See the text of mKhan po lHa Tshe ring (as in note 3), pp. 46.6-49.15, for the role of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin in introducing the *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgrol gyi chos skor* to Sikkim, the history of the cycle, and the public ritual associated with it which is celebrated every year from the eighth up to the fifteenth day of the fourth Tibetan month at Brag dkar bKra shis sdings. In that monastery is also kept the so-called ‘Precious Vase [with Water] Which Liberates by Taste’ (*myong grol bum pa rin po che*). Compare also the accounts of this sacred vessel and the Buddhist festival by Rigzin Ngodub Dokhampa (2003: 25-30) and mKhan po Chos dbang: *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi chos srid dang 'brel ba'i rgyal rabs lo rgyus bden don kun gsal me long*, Gangtok: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 2003, pp. 115.9-116.9.

¹⁷ The details of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa's discovery of the Mahākaruṇika cycle in the Jo khang and its propagation at 'Bri gung and bSam yas are described in the treasure discoverer's biography, written by Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan; see his work (as in note 6), pp. 78.1-2, 81.1-82.2 & 91.3-5. Concerning the erection of a temple by Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa—the so-called rDo rje'i lha khang—from 1557 to 1558, with the aim of protecting the sanctuary of the Jo khang in Lhasa against floods, see Akester (2001a: 3-16). The overall political context of this temple-building activity in the mid 1550s, when the 'Bri gung pas challenged the spiritual claims of the dGe lugs pas to the site, and the role of Zhig po gling pa in this regard are analysed by Sørensen (2003: 119-125).

[7]

The last years of mNga' bdag phun tshogs rig 'dzin's life were spent in the monastery of Brag dkar bKra shis sdings, and this was where he passed away in his sixty-fourth year. The last advice to his followers was the request to set the memorial of his own parinirvāṇa on the same date as the 'commemoration ceremony' (*dgongs rdzogs*) of his grandfather mNga' bdag sTag sham can. This can be seen as an act meant to establish his family line firmly in the ritual calendar of his followers in dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs.

His own son, mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin, supervised the cremation. A reliquary with the physical remains of mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin can still be found today in Brag dkar bKra shis sdings. In fulfillment of the final wishes of the deceased teacher, a third vihāra was erected, known as the Thub chen lha khang. These activities started immediately after his passing in the year 1656 and lasted up to the year 1658. Among the five special wishes, it is noted that this one was made "in order to establish all the border people of Mon in the teaching, once the doctrine of the Buddha has been spread in the hidden land of 'Bras mo gshongs." The new vihāra was furnished with a so-called 'Enlightenment Stūpa' (*byang chub mchod rten*), reminding the inhabitants of Sikkim of the central event in the life of Buddha Śākyamuni, and this religious edifice was finally inaugurated in the year 1665.¹⁸

The tradition of the mNga' bdag family was thus firmly established in dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, and smaller monasteries sprang up out of bKra shis sdings soon afterwards. One might wonder, finally, why mNga' bdag Phun tshogs rig 'dzin, the 'brother' who entered the country from the south, was identified in the Buddhist sources with that particular cardinal direction. One of the possible reasons worth considering are his travels, which brought him (and other family members) into contact with the regent of Mustang and the local rulers of Gorkha and Magar origin. As noted by the genealogical account, the road taken by the religious master from Tibet passed through Ilām; this route could be interpreted as a southern approach to the hidden land in

¹⁸ See the text of mKhan po Lha Tshe ring (as in note 3), pp. 49.16-51.11. The details of the erection of the Thub chen lha khang can be found in the chapter of the life of mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin; see *ibid.*, pp. 56.1-62.6; it is made clear that funds for building the stūpa came from the so-called Mang 'khor rgyal po. For the quotation see *ibid.*, p.57.3-5 (... *sbas yul 'bras mo gshongs su sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa dar nas kla klo mon pa thams cad kyang chos la bkod pa'i phyr...*).

the period when the ideal of dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs being a maṇḍala was made reality by the Four Yogin Brothers who opened it.



A portrait of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa in 'Collected Writings', section Kha, fol. 1b (right side). The caption reads *nam mkha' tshe bstan (=brtan) bsod nams rgyal po la na mo*. This is the first ordination name of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa, received at an early age from sMan chu ba Nam mkha' rin chen; see Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (as in note 6), p. 36.4-5.

APPENDIX

The Writings of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa

A good overview of the various treasure cycles of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa, which were transmitted in Sikkim, can be found in the autobiography-cum-*gsan yig* of O rgyan dpal bzang from southern Glo bo. He received these teachings from mNga' bdag Byams pa bstan 'dzin four years after the enthronement of the first Buddhist ruler of the country. The *gsan yig* section opens with the *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba las sgröl ba'i chos skor* and includes such further cycles as the *Zab chos rgyal ba 'dus*, *rDzogs pa chen po gsang ba snying thig*, *Phyag na rdo rje stobs po che'i skor* and *dPal bde mchog 'khor lo*; it closes with the titles of the 'biography' (*rnam thar*) and the 'Collected Writings' (*bka' 'bum*) of the treasure discoverer.

An incomplete set of the latter collection was microfilmed by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) in the National Archives, Ramshah Path, Kathmandu under reel-nos. AT 99/2-AT 100/16. It is a xylographic print, and the colophons of some of the texts mention Zhabs drung Mi pham chos rgyal from Ra lung as the person who requested that the individual works be written out. The biography of Rig 'dzin Zhig po gling pa actually refers to a sojourn of the master at the residence of the hierarch of the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa school and the penning of texts; see Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (as in note 6), p. 90.3-6. With the help of one of the colophons, this visit to Ra lung can be dated to the year 1577.

Ka -----

Kha *rDzogs chen pa sprul sku zhib po (=zhig po) gling pa sku gzhon nu'i dus mdzad pa'i gsung 'bum*, 15 fols.

Ga -----

Nga *rDzogs chen pa sprul sku zhig po gling pa gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal gyi zhal gzigs skor*, 30 fols. Includes the '*Phags pa rang byon mched lnga'i bsgrub thabs bskyed rdzogs zung 'brel du gdams pa*', fols. 24a/5-25b/3. Edited in Ehrhard (2004a: 523-524), translated in Decler (2004: 55-57)

Ca -----

Cha *dPal chen rakṣa'i bshad pa dang bzlas pa'i phan yon dang las sbyor*, 34 fols. Written in the year *chu mo bya* [1573] upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po

Ja *dPal bsam yas mi 'gyur lhun gyi grub pa'i dkar chag dang bkur sti byas pa'i phan yon dad ldan dga' ba bskyed byed*, 33 fols.

- Nya *rDzogs pa chen po gsang ba snying thig yang zab bsdus pa'i snying po'i mdun bskyed dkyil 'khor sgrub pa'i chog (=phyogs) sgrig rdzogs chen pa 'od gsal sgyu mas mdzad pa*, 8 fols.
- Ta *Ra sa 'khrul (=sprul) snang gi 'jig skyobs lung bstan rdo rje'i lha khang zhes bya ba'i dkar chag dad ldan dga' ba bskyed byed*. 16 fols. Translated in Akester (2001a: 15-24)
- Tha -----
- Da -----
- Na -----
- Pa *A rgam bsgrub pa'i gsol 'debs*, 6 fols.
- Pha -----
- Ba *Gu ru drag po gtum drag me'i 'khor lo can gyi nyams len brgyun khyer*, 24 fols.
Written upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po
- Ma *Tshe bsgrub 'od zer 'phreng ba'i sgrub thabs*, 8 fols. Written upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po
- Tsa *'Jam dpal 'char ka nag po'i zor 'phen pa'i dmigs rim*, 3 fols. Written upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po
- Tsha -----
- Dza *Tshe dpag med rgyal ba 'dus pa'i lag 'khrid gter ston gyi mdazd pa*, 4 fols.
- Va *rTsa gsum gyi las byang dgos 'dod kun 'byung*, 11 fols. Written in Ra lung upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal-po
- Zha *bKa' srung kun 'dus pa'i las byang 'dod don kun grub*, 11 fols. Written in Ra lung in the year *me mo glang* [1577] upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po
- Za -----
- 'A -----
- Ya *Bla ma'i rnal 'byor mchod sbyin rdzogs rim a ti rgyun khyer nyams su blang bde ba*, 28 fols.
- Ra -----
- La *dGra gnan gshin rje rlung bsgrub kyi las gzhung lag len zhal shes dang bcas pa'i khrigs chags su sgrigs pa bstan dgra 'joms byed*, 11 fols. Written in Ra lung upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po
- Sha -----
- Sa -----
- Ha *Tshe bcu'i mam bshad gtor dbang rig 'dzin zhig po gling pas mdzad pa*, 9 fols.
Written in Ra-lung upon the request of Zhabs drung Mi pham chos kyi rgyal po
- A *Bla ma zhi ba'i gtor dbang bskor ba*, 15 fols.
- Ki -----
- Khi -----
- Gi -----
- Ngī *sKu gsum khrid gyi gdams pa'i kha byang rin chen gter mdzod*, 23 fols. Written in the year *chu pho stag* [1542]
- Ci -----
- Chi -----
- Nyi -----
- Ti -----
- Thi -----
- Di -----

Ni -----

Pi -----

Phi -----

Bi -----

Mi -----

Tsi -----

Tshi *rDzogs pa chen po brgyud (=rgyud) bcu bdun gyi dbang mchog rdzogs pa rang byung gi rgyud kyi dgongs pa ji lta ba bzhin chos (=phyogs) sgrigs zin bris su bkod pa*, 31 fols.

Dzi *bsNyen gnas gyi sdom pa len chog*, 8 fols.

Vi *Phyag na rdo rje 'byung po 'dul byed kyi mngon rtogs rjes gnang*, 36 fols.

--- *mNga bdag yab sras la / o rgyan rin po ches gdams pa'i / o rgyan thugs bcud kyi sgrub skor / zung mkhar rdo'i mchod rten padma can nas spyang drangs pa'i bsgrubs bskor la rten pa'i (=brten pa'i) las byang*, 8 fols.

--- *rGyal po chen po pe ha ra'i srog dbang mnga' bdag nyang gi phyag len bzhin bkod pa*, 26 fols.

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