

SOJOURNING IN THE “VALLEY OF HAPPINESS”:  
SHEDDING NEW LIGHT ON THE *SBAS YUL* SKYID MO LUNG

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In this sanctuary monkeys frolicked in the boughs of ancient fir trees that strove upward as if to compete with the grandeur of the surrounding peaks. We hiked through a forest of rhododendrons in full bloom, becoming immersed in pink and red blossoms that fluttered gently to the ground to form a soft carpet beneath our feet. [...] As we approached a temple sequestered deep within the hidden valley, the trail wound through an open pasture where wild mountain goats grazed unperturbed by the presence of humans.<sup>1</sup>

The sun had yet to make its appearance above the peaks which were just turning into pure gold in its first rays. Nothing moved in the still, cold air of the morning except a slight breeze. The deep peace of this sanctuary, so well hidden from the outside world, could be felt as a tangible force all round [...].<sup>2</sup>

These quotations describe the impressions two scholars of Tibetan studies, i.e. Geoff Childs and Michael Aris, treasured during their respective visits to a small tributary valley of the Buri Gandhaki river in the mountainous Ku thang region in northern Nepal, i.e. the Serang valley (gSer thang; alternatively gSer brang). The romantic wording of both statements may very well be based on the knowledge of the other identity of this particular valley. That is to say, Aris and Childs thought themselves to be sojourning in one of the so-called famed “hidden valleys” (*sbas yul*), i.e. sKyid mo lung. However, this identification holds only partly good. This paper will examine the full geographical extent of the hidden valley. In order to do so, it will delve into the history of sKyid mo lung which is tightly connected with the bygone western Tibetan kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang and the activities of four prominent “treasure-discoverers” (*gter ston*), i.e. Rig ’dzin rGod ldem can (1337–1408), Rig ’dzin mChog ldan mgon po (1497–1531), Rig ’dzin bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1536), and lastly Rig ’dzin Gar dbang rdo rje (1640–1685). On the basis of this overview of the “treasure” tradition (*gter ma*) in this area, the political and social

<sup>1</sup> Childs (2004, p. 76f.).

<sup>2</sup> Aris (1975, p. 66).

implications of the opening of a hidden valley will be indicated. It will be shown how the designation of a sBas yul transcends the sphere of religious, sacred topography to the field of calculated, politically and scholastically motivated actions. Finally this paper will be rounded off with information I was able to gather during my own research trip to the areas which were visited by Michael Aris and Geoff Childs, shifting their identification of the hidden valley sKyid mo lung and introducing the hitherto unidentified centre of the sanctuary.<sup>3</sup>

The area in question is a part of the greater south-west Tibetan region Mang yul Gung thang. This region, comprising an area of roughly 30,000 square kilometres between Gu ge and sPu rang in the west and La stod lHo in the east, the gTsang po river in the north and the lower Himalayas in the south, was founded as a kingdom by the first monarch 'Bum lde mgon (1253–1280) under the patronage of the Sa skya pa school, headed by Chos rgyal 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235–1280) presumably in 1267. This was accompanied by furnishing the head of the ruling family with the royal title mNga' bdag rgyal po by the grace of Sa skya, which meant that the family became affiliated with former great Tibetan kings, such as Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde btsan. The continuous contact to and the patronage of Sa skya proved to have been beneficial for the sovereigns of the region throughout centuries, yet repeatedly it also had been contested. One of these ordeals occurred when Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can took action in the region from the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In 1973 a research expedition from the University of Berkeley led by Michael Aris ventured into the hitherto “unexplored” regions surrounding the Manaslu massif in northern Nepal, i.e. the valleys of Ku thang and Nub ris. Besides retrieving various unknown, rare Tibetan texts and documents it was also pointed out to them that the Serang valley corresponds to sKyid mo lung. For the remarkable expedition report, cf. Aris (1975). Geoff Childs spent time and again several months in the village of Samagoun/Nub ris in order to conduct anthropologically orientated fieldwork there. The results of this work were summarized in his highly readable account, in Childs (2004). Seemingly Childs simply followed Aris in his identification of the hidden valley sKyid mo lung.

<sup>4</sup> The abundantly informative work of the *Gung thang rgyal rabs* by Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755) covers the entire royal era of Mang yul Gung thang from the founding of the realm in the thirteenth century to the decline of the dynasty in the early seventeenth century; cf. Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu, *Bod rje lha btsad po'i gdung rabs mnga' ri smad mang yul gung thang du ji ltar byung ba'i tshul deb gter dvangs shel 'phrul gyi me long* and Everding (2000), i.e. an analysis of Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin's work supplemented with a plethora of relevant biographical material from the respective periods covered; also cf. *ibid.* for further, detailed bibliographical references on Mang yul Gung thang. Particularly with regard to the political implications of the treasure-cult in this area one may refer to Everding

From the very beginning when rGod ldem can entered the stage as a gTer ston in Mang yul Gung thang, he was trying to get into close contact with the respective kings of his time, i.e. bKra shis lde (1313–1345), Khri Phun tshogs lde (1338–1370), mChog grub lde (1367/8–1389?), and presumably also bSod nams lde (1371–1404).<sup>5</sup>

In particular he did so by means of his treasure-findings—foremost mention should be made of the famous *gSol 'debs bsam pa lhun grub ma*, an integral text of the Padmasambhava-cult—in which he addressed the kings directly as the allegedly legitimate descendants of the glorified ancient Tibetan kings.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore—also by making use

(2004). On the general rich “religious history and topography” of this area, in particular the sKyid grong valley, cf. the substantial work on the famous statue of Avalokiteśvara, Ārya Va ti bzang po, in Ehrhard (2004a). For a short, yet informative synopsis of the royal history of Mang yul Gung thang, cf. Everding (2004, p. 267). For detailed information on the foundation of the realm, cf. Everding (2000, pp. 391–440). Broadly speaking the name of the kingdom, Mang yul Gung thang, is made up of two toponyms, i.e. Mang yul, denoting the southern part of the region and particularly the sKyid grong valley, whereas Gung thang refers to the northern part surrounding the royal capital, rDzong dkar; an extensive outline of the geography of this area is provided in *ibid.*, pp. 279–308 and for cartographical material cf. *ibid.*, Tafel 4–6; also on the traditional etymology of the geographical name, Mang yul, cf. Ehrhard (2004a, p. 394 f., ns. 146 & 147). Further, on the early pre-royal history of Mang yul Gung thang and on the circumstances that led to the foundation of the kingdom, cf. Everding (2000, pp. 315–390). The title of a king (*rgyal po*) was conferred by the ruling Sa skya pa administration, legitimatizing the authority of the rulers’ family by affiliating their genealogy with the lineage of the ancient great kings of imperial Tibet; similar procedures were employed for the ruling houses of the other west Tibetan kingdoms of Gu ge, sPu rang and Ladakh; cf. Everding (2004, p. 267). Furthermore, the additional title mNga’ bdag was presented by the great Mongol Khan Öljeitü in 1307; cf. *ibid.*, p. 269, n. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Rig ’dzin rGod ldem can’s biography was compiled by his direct disciple Nyi ma bzang po (14th/15th Cent.); cf. *sPrul sku rig ’dzin rgod ldem ’phru can gyi rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma’i ’od zer*. A comprehensive outline of rGod ldem can’s life, based on a number of short biographies, can be found in Schwieger (1985, pp. xxx–xxxviii). Cf. *ibid.*, p. xxxi ff., for a telling analysis of the various literary topoi applied in the texts that should serve to legitimize the gTer ston’s authoritative identity, i.e. his royal descent, the religious orientation of his parents, being an emanation of Padmasambhava, etc. Also in *ibid.*, two of his most important treasure-teachings have been catalogued, i.e. the rDzogs chen cycles *Kun tu bzang po’i dgongs pa zang thal* and the *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*. Further, cf. Everding (2000, pp. 226–233 for an introduction to his life based on the forecited biographical work of Nyi ma bzang po.

<sup>6</sup> For the *gSol 'debs bsam pa lhun grub ma*, part of the famed *Le’u bdun ma*, cf. Tucci (1949, p. 179 f.), Tucci (1970, p. 186), Houston (1975), and Schwieger (1988). According to its colophon, the *gSol 'debs bsam pa lhun grub ma* was eventually compiled as a proper text in 1403 by Rig ’dzin rGod ldem can; cf. Everding (2000, pp. 244–247 & Appendix 5).

of his treasure-texts—he prophesied the fate of the kings, or more precisely the ill-fate of the kings as all of them met a rather untimely death amidst times of considerable political turmoil. Supposedly this was viewed quite critically by Sa skya, it was even suggested that Sa skya plotted the deaths of kings as a reaction to their contact to rGod ldem can.<sup>7</sup> However, it contributed considerably to the social status of the treasure-discoverer, who in his turn materialized as the legitimate heir to the great adept Padmasambhava. One indication for his elevated status is that he was furnished by an official royal decree (*bka' yig*) with his own monasterial estate in Mang yul Gung thang, i.e. Ri bo dpal 'bar, with all the accompanying benefits included, i.e. that the people living in the area of his estate had to pay tax to him. On the other hand it can be safely assumed that the contact to the treasure-discoverer also was beneficial for the prestige of the monarchs, who—once again after the conferment of the royal status by Sa skya in the first place—were able to “refresh” their affiliation with the great bygone imperial times, purporting to be the legitimate descendants of Srong btsan sgam po and such.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Everding (2000, pp. 481–496) for a revealing and detailed breakdown of rGod ldem can's connections with the court of Mang yul Gung thang and some assumptions on the role of Sa skya in the midst of various internal as well as external political struggles during the 14th and early 15th centuries.

<sup>8</sup> Around 1370 rGod ldem can was invited by Phun tshogs lde. It is further said that they henceforth established a patron-preceptor relationship (*yon mchod*) and that they set out to recover treasure-objects at Ri bo dpal 'bar. Cf. Nyi ma bzang po, *sPrul sku rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can gyi rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*, pp. 47,6–48,4 and Everding (2000: p. 487 ff. & n. 1215) q.v. Accordingly the patron-preceptor relationship was actually evidenced by a royal *bka' yig* document, yet the wording of the decree is not documented in rGod ldem can's biography. The holy mountain Ri bo dpal 'bar (6797 m) is situated in the south of the sKyid grong valley; cf. Aufschnaiter (1976, p. 178), Brauen (1983, p. 41), and Ehrhard (2004a, p. 285 & n. 188) q.v. Following their treasure-hunt, the king and rGod ldem can headed on to a monastery and according to Everding (2000, p. 488 f.) this location presumably could be identified as rGod ldem can's very own monastery of the same name as the holy mountain, Ri bo dpal 'bar. Though rGod ldem can tried to get into contact with king bKra shis lde, a meeting did never take place; thus it must have been his successor king Phun tshogs lde who presented the treasure-discoverer with the estate. Therefore the foundation of the monastery must have taken place sometime between 1366 (i.e. the year rGod ldem can first met with the king) and 1370; *ibid.*, n. 1216 q.v. An inventory of the holy site can be found in, [anonymous], *Mang yul gyi gnas chen ri bo dpal 'bar gyi dkar chag*.

Having been invited later by the successor of king Phun tshogs lde, mNga' bdag mChog grub lde (1367/8–1389?), the king proclaimed rGod ldem can his principal religious teacher and issued an official royal *bka' yig* decree, setting forth an extensive tax exemption for rGod ldem can's monasterial estates, including Ri bo dpal 'bar. For the relationship to the king and the wording of the *bka' yig*, cf. Nyi ma

Furthermore, apart from his direct contact with the members of the royal family of Mang yul Gung thang, another action of rGod ldem can proved to have a strong effect on the history of this dominion, i.e. his disclosure of the so-called “hidden valley” (*sbas yul*), sKyid mo lung, within their country. Traditionally it is said of these remote mountain areas that, in line with the dynamics that govern the gTer ma tradition, Padmasambhava himself had concealed them so that, once they were revealed by a gTer ston, followers of his teachings could take refuge in these sanctuaries. Thus, not only did rGod ldem can act upon the beliefs of the members of the royal house by means of his prophetic treasure-teachings, but moreover he designated the topography of their home region as the holy domain of Padmasambhava and his adherents, the rNying ma pas.<sup>9</sup>

However, it has been argued that “a primary purpose of the sBas-yul was not necessarily to provide a haven for spiritual practice; more importantly, they were destined to be sanctuaries where the descendants of Emperor Khri srong lde btsan and his patrilineal kin could seek refuge when there was a threat to the continuity of their biological lineage”.<sup>10</sup> Further, it was shown, that the greatest, if abstract

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bzang po, *sPrul sku rig 'dzin rgod ldem 'phru can gyi rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*, pp. 64,6–67,3. mChog grub lde's life and regency are described in Everding (2000, p. 477 f.), his relationship with rGod ldem can is delineated in *ibid.* pp. 489–496, wherein one also finds a critical edition and a translation of the *bka' yig* decree.

<sup>9</sup> The opening of sKyid mo lung is touched upon in, Nyi ma bzang po, *sPrul sku rig 'dzin rgod ldem 'phru can gyi rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*, p. 67,2 (*sbas yul skyid mo'i lung phyed*). Also the identification of 'Bras mo ljongs, i.e. present-day Sikkim, as a hidden valley is attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can. In total he is credited with the authorship of various guides to several hidden valleys, seven of which are most commonly highlighted, i.e., according to his *Gu ru'i ga'u bdun ma* (pp. 11,6–14,3): bDe ldan sKyid mo lung, sBas pa Padma tshal, Rol pa mKha' 'gro gling, rGyal kyi mKhan pa lung, lHa yi Pho brang sdings, sBas yul 'Bras mo shong, and Gro mo khud. In later sources, however, the number and names of the various hidden valleys differ considerably from this enumeration and a general conspectus of the several locations is still a desideratum in research, though various lists can be found in Childs (1993, p. 5 ff.); cf. Schwieger (1985, p. xxxvii). Still a large number of researchers have focused on or touched upon the sBas yul thematic, e.g. Bacot (1912), Bailey (1957), Aris (1975, 1979b), Reinhard (1978), Bernbaum (1980), Brauen-Dolma (1985), Orofino (1991), Diemberger (1991, 1993, 1994, 1997), Childs (1999, 2004), Ehrhard (1994, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2008b, 2010a), and Dalton (2011). Furthermore, several hidden valleys have been identified as proper locations on the southern fringes of the Himalayas, i.e. 'Bras mo shong in Sikkim, mKhan pa lung either in Bhutan (Aris, 1988) or in the Khumbu region near Everest (Diemberger, 1992), gNam sgo zla gam as the Langtang valley near Kathmandu (Childs, 1993; Ehrhard, 1997), and Yol mo/Padma tshal as Helambu next to Langtang (Ehrhard, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Childs (1999, p. 127).

yet still possible threat for the ruling family and their people was posed by an invasion by a foreign army, in particular by the Hor, i.e. most commonly the Mongols, which in turn necessitated a pacifying deed, i.e. the opening of the hidden land as the place of refuge.<sup>11</sup> However, as no invasion by the Hor into Mang yul Gung thang is attested at the turn of the century and the downfall of the Yüan-/Mongol-backed Sa skya administration had already taken place in 1354, it nevertheless could be assumed that the sBas yul ideology was based on the “traumatic” experiences Tibet had suffered during the invasion of the Mongols/Hor in the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, it seems probable, based on several indications, that the life-threatening forces afflicting the fate of the four kings of Gung thang originated from internal or “provincial conflicts,” i.e. politically and religiously motivated campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

As already mentioned above, the affiliation of the royal family of Gung thang with the ancient rulers of imperial Tibet was inaugurated by Sa skya at the foundation of the kingdom with the conferment of the title mNga' bdag rgyal po. Recourse to the intriguingly grand period of the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet occurred time and again in its later history, e.g. during the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign. The recurring theme of this cult of royalty suggests more than a particular notion for nostalgia among the Tibetan people. It indicates moreover a fine grasp of the respective leaders kindling this cult for its political implications when needed as a means to confer, gain and/or sustain authority. rGod ldem can, who, as a treasure-discoverer, closely aligned himself with the imperial period, seemed to have been well aware of these political, i.e. nationalistic, implications when he disclosed the hidden valley seeing the signs of times, addressing the rulers of Gung thang as heirs to the ancient emperors, and recalling the trauma of the Mongol invasion, during an unstable period of political turmoil. On the other hand, rGod ldem can's actions could not have remained unnoticed by Sa skya—e.g. the issuing of the official *bka' yig* document(s) for him—which had inaugurated the cult of royalty in Mang yul Gung thang in the first place. Moreover, the increasing influence of the treasure-discoverer in the dominion, utilizing the recourse to the grand times, i.e., in the light of its political implications, a real threat to Sa skya's authority, must have prompted a reaction. However, it remains a matter of speculation whether it was Sa skya plotting the death of the kings

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.* for the analysis based on a well-balanced number of sources, including various prophetic guides to hidden valleys attributed to rGod ldem can.

<sup>12</sup> Similar notions are expressed in Dalton (2011, pp. 144–157).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. n. 7.

who affiliated themselves with rGod ldem can. Anyway, the widespread presence of rGod ldem can's teachings in Mang yul Gung thang, and also in the other areas identified nowadays with the different hidden valleys, doubtlessly bespeak a successful gain of ground for his tradition.

Finally, the long-lasting implications of the stipulation of sKyid mo lung came to bear heavily on the actions of the treasure-discoverers who were to come after him.

Notably two further treasure-discoverers emerged in this regard, i.e. mChog ldan mgon po<sup>14</sup> (1497–1531) and bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1536).<sup>15</sup> At the court of Gung thang the favour for rNying ma proponents apparently continued after rGod ldem can, or more precisely recurred by the end of the fifteenth century, when the political sovereigns once more decided to rely on the religious expertise of treasure-discoverers. In the first place both mChog ldan mgon po and bsTan gnyis gling pa were committed to acting in their function as ritual specialists, i.e. they were to protect the royal dominion of Mang yul Gung thang from alleged foreign Hor assaults by means of specific liturgies.

<sup>14</sup> mChog ldan mgon po's autobiography can be found in, *sPrul sku rig 'dzin mchog ldan mgon po'i rnam thar mgur 'bum dad ldan spro ba bskyed byed*. The printing of the original xylograph of this text was carried out in Mang yul Gung thang by the Bo dong pa Chos dbang rgyal mtshan when mChog ldan mgon po was 30 years old (i.e. in 1527), while the consecration of the print was performed by the treasure-discoverer himself; cf. Ehrhard (2000, p. 32 f.) and Ehrhard (in press) for Chos dbang rgyal mtshan's prolonged contact with mChog ldan mgon po. Further, there is a supplementary part to the biographical text, referring to the events after 1527 up to his death, which was also compiled and printed by Chos dbang rgyal mtshan in the year 1531 immediately after mChog ldan mgon po's demise, cf. *Rigs 'dzin sprul sku mchog ldan mgon po'i rnam thar mgur 'bum gyi smad cha rnams* and Ehrhard (2000, p. 37) with Ehrhard (2008b, n. 21). His stay in Gung thang has been outlined in, Everding (2000, p. 560 ff.) and Ehrhard (2000, pp. 32–35), and a detailed analysis of his life with an emphasis on his activities in Bhutan has been worked out by Ehrhard (2008b).

<sup>15</sup> In his collected writings we find three biographical texts, two of which are attributed to bsTan gnyis gling pa himself, while the third was compiled by his direct disciple, Blo gros rab yangs (15th/16thCent.); cf. bsTan gnyis gling pa, *Rigs 'dzin bstan gnyis gling pa rnam thar las: rnal lam lung bstan gyi skor sogs* and *Rig 'dzin chen po bstan gnyis going pa'i rnam thar las mnal lam lung bstan gyi skor*, with Blo gros rab yangs, *Rigs 'dzin bstan gnyis gling pa'i rnam thar kha bskong gsal ba'i nyin byed*, and further Everding (2000, pp. 233–237) for a detailed discussion of the different versions and other biographical sources relating to him, as well as a summary of his life based on these. His stay in Gung thang has already been thoroughly described in *ibid.*, pp. 563–575, and Everding (2004). Further on the life of bsTan gnyis gling pa and his rDzogs chen treasure-cycle *Yang tig ye shes mthong grol* (*Yang tig ye shes mthong grol gyi chos skor*), cf. Achard (2004).

After he had been invited to come,<sup>16</sup> mChog ldan mgon po arrived at the court of Mang yul Gung thang in 1527, and was reportedly very well received by the king Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa (1514–1560), his ministers, and a great number of religious dignitaries in rDzong dkar. It is further stated that he conducted several rituals, consecrated a newly established royal fortress, i.e. Khams gsum rnam rgyal in sKyid grong, and issued personal prayers for the princes of Gung thang. As to the real purpose of this visit—he was to deploy countermeasures in order to prevent the invasion of marauding Hor troops—there is a reference in Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan's (1552–1624) general account of the various invasions of Hor troops into Tibet, stating that several raids took place among the Byang 'brog nomads in the year 1522, while further assaults happened in 1526 and 1527, upon which the invitation to mChog ldan mgon po was issued. Concerning the first date, we find another reference in the biography of mNga' ris paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542) that around the year 1523 several attacks by the Hor took place in the north-western parts of Mang yul Gung thang. Further, it is documented that before 1529 the famous Byams sprin lha khang of sKyid grong had been damaged severely by the Hor. mChog ldan mgon po had visited this important temple during his stay in the region as well, while he admonished the rulers of Gung thang to take measures in order to renovate the damaged temple. We thus can assume a *terminus ante quem* for the damages to this temple of 1527, the year of mChog ldan mgon po's visit. Moreover, it should be noted that he urged local religious dignitaries to open the hidden valley of sKyid mo lung, as attacks by foreign armies were feared. Yet other than that, we find no substantial evidence about the concrete identity of the assailants, or about actual military clashes. His stay, however, did not last more than a few months and shortly before his departure in spring 1527 he gave his blessing for the printing of his autobiography, which was produced in Mang yul Gung thang.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> mChog ldan mgon po had been invited by the rulers of Mang yul Gung thang a couple of times. However, only when he was travelling in the hidden valley of bDe skyid gling in Bhutan, after he had received another letter from Gung thang, he answered their request to protect the dominion with three missive letters in 1526. Shortly later he received yet another letter upon which he responded with a short message that he would set off for Gung thang from his residence mChog grub gling in lHo brag; cf. Ehrhard (2008b, p. 81 ff. & Appendix).

<sup>17</sup> For the account of mChog ldan mgon po's stay in Mang yul Gung thang and the dating of the Hor assaults, cf. Everding (2000, pp. 560–563). The king Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa is introduced in *ibid.*, p. 558 f. For the royal fortress Khams gsum rnam rgyal in sKyid grong, cf. *ibid.*, p. 552. Sog bzlog pa's report is related in, *Sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus*, pp. 221,6–222,1; it was shown in Ehrhard (2008b, Appendix)



To conclude, though we do not have real evidence of any actual military clashes between Hor troops and the armed forces of Mang yul Gung thang and of mChog ldan mgon po's involvement, on the basis of his activities, we nevertheless can observe a continuation of the similar dynamics that had governed rGod ldem can's actions in Mang yul. In memory of the latter's tradition and facing the threat of a foreign invasion, the court of Gung thang opted again to rely on the expertise of a rNying ma proponent, who would ensure the safety of the country by means of his rituals and activities like the call for the opening of the hidden valley. Further, as the threat of invading Hor armies persisted, mChog ldan mgon po's stay had set the stage for the visit of another treasure-discoverer only some years later, i.e. bsTan gnyis gling pa.

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that his account was mainly based on mChog ldan mgon po's biography and the different missive letters he had issued concerning the advent of Hor troops; cf. preceding note. For mNga' ris pañ chen's account of the Hor attacks, cf. Schuh (1981, p. 354). The legal document, *Dharamsala 163*, referring to the damage to the Byams sprin lha khang is found in *ibid.*, and for the clarification of its dating, Everding (2000, p. 192 f.) q.v. The famous Byams sprin lha khang, located near sPang zhing in sKyid grong, is known as one of the so-called "border-taming temples" (*mtha' 'dul lha khang*); for the concept of the land of Tibet being identified with a supine demoness, which had to be tamed—i.e. pinned down—by the erection of various temples throughout the country in order to facilitate the introduction of the Buddhist doctrine, dating back to Srong btsan sgam po (605?–649), cf. Aris (1978, p. 17), Aris (1979b, pp. 3–33), Uebach (1987, p. 32 f.), and Sørensen (1994, pp. 253–297 & 551–583), for Byams sprin cf. Ehrhard (2004a, p. 283 & n. 174) and Sørensen & Hazod (2005, p. 52 & n. 53). mChog ldan mgon po's pilgrimage to sKyid grong has been outlined in Ehrhard (2000, pp. 32–35). His call for the opening of sKyid mo lung reads as follows: *gzhan yang snyigs ma'i dus su / stod phyogs mthar dmag gi 'jigs pa la skyob pa'i phyir / sbas pa'i yul skyid mo lung gi sgo 'byed pa la / chos de (r. rje) drang so ba dang / chos rje che mchog pa sogs mngags nas (sPrul sku rig 'dzin mchog ldan mgon po'i rnam thar mgur 'bum dad ldan spro ba bskyed byed*, p. 496,4–5). The two persons mentioned in this paragraph, Chos rje Drang so ba, also known as the first Yol mo sprul sku, sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po (15th/16th Cent.), and Chos rje Che mchog pa (d. 1535), were respectively known as the head of the sGrub sde of Ri bo dpal 'bar and the caretaker of the Byams sprin lha khang; cf. Everding (2000, p. 564). For the activities of Shākya bzang po in Mang yul Gung thang, cf. Ehrhard (2007), and for his provenance, Drang so in La stod lHo, *ibid.*, n. 8 q.v. For the important exponent of the mDo chen bKa' brgyud tradition of the Gur family, sNgags 'chang Che mchog rdo rje, i.e. Chos rje Che mchog pa, cf. Ehrhard (2008a, pp. 68–72), and for his assignment as the caretaker of Byams sprin by mChog ldan mgon po, Ehrhard (2000, p. 34).

Dalton (2011, pp. 144–157) relates in general the repeated opening of a hidden valley to the necessity of taming the wild and uncultivated border regions of Tibet time and again as a nationalistic effort. Yet in this instance it seems clear from a micro-perspective that the real threat of an invasion by foreign armies and the prophetic guidelines expounded by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can necessitated the opening of a hidden valley as a place for refuge in Mang yul Gung thang.

Although we do not have the precise date, bsTan gnyis gling pa is said to have been involved in a ritual to prevent an invasion by the Hor, which was performed in bSam yas under the patronage of the lHa btsun of bSam yas and the Gung thang king. We can assume that this event took place prior to his visit to Mang yul Gung thang, as the court must have learned of bsTan gnyis gling pa's proficiency in the *hor bzlog* rituals as a result of the episode in bSam yas, after which an official invitation to rDzong dkar was issued. Not only did he receive a letter of invitation from the king Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa, but also an additional one from his minister, Zhang blon bSam 'grub rdo rje (15th/16th Cent.) and the latter's rNying ma pa teachers.<sup>18</sup>

bsTan gnyis gling pa set off for Mang yul Gung thang in 1533 where he arrived most probably in early 1534. Without any specification of the political circumstances, it is further stated that bsTan gnyis gling pa then carried out the ritual to prevent more Hor attacks in rDzong dkar, after which he proclaimed to the king Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa that he would soon discover a gTer ma.<sup>19</sup> As with mChog ldan mgon po's efforts to repel the Hor in Gung thang, here we also have no detailed information about who the aggressor was this time. The different probable Hor attacks in the years preceding bsTan gnyis gling pa's stay in Gung thang have already been outlined. A Muslim invasion heading for lHa sa led by the Kashgar prince Mirzar Haidar Dughlāt is attested for July 1533, though this attempt only lasted until the end of the same year. Thus we can assume that it is highly probable that the various Hor assaults happened in the wake of the military actions of the Muslim prince.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The ritual in bSam yas and the subsequent invitation to Mang yul Gung thang are related in Everding (2004, p. 272 f.). For information on the "minister [from the dPon] Zhang [family]," bSam 'grub rdo rje, cf. Ehrhard (2004a, pp. 135, 255, 260 & n. 94) and for the title *dpon zhang*, *ibid.*, n. 87 q.v. According to Everding (2000, p. 559) he probably also was the father of Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa's wife, Tshe ring rgyal mo from Yar 'brog sNa dkar rtse. The invitation he had issued was signed by him, and the aforementioned Chos rje Che mchog pa and Chos rje Drang so ba, i.e. Shākya bzang po (cf. preceding note). Further, cf. Ehrhard (2000, pp. 16 & 34–35) for the printing of the *bKa' thang gser phreng*, i.e. a Padmasambhava hagiography attributed to the treasure-discoverer Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396), carried out in 1535 in Gung thang and for which bSam 'grub rdo rje acted as a donor, and further for the latter's connections with mChog ldan mgon po, bsTan gnyis gling pa, and Shākya bzang po.

<sup>19</sup> On his way to Gung thang, towards the end of 1533, bsTan gnyis gling pa stopped in La stod Byang, where he conducted a ritual to banish the Hor on behalf of the prince of the region. Cf. Everding (2004, p. 273 ff.) for bsTan gnyis gling pa's approach to Gung thang, his reception, the audience with the royal court, and the *hor bzlog* ritual.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Petech (1997, p. 245) for the Muslim invasion of 1533; Ehrhard (2008b, p. 87, n. 24) q.v.

The prospects of an imminent treasure-discovery must have been enthralling for the king. Since he was regarded as the ancestor of the great imperial kings by bsTan gnyis gling pa who idolised the ruler as the legitimate descendent of the early Tibetan kings and bsTan gnyis gling pa, as a treasure-discoverer, the heir of Padmasambhava's legacy, we again shall observe the same reciprocal dynamics of legitimation that governed the relationship of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can and the kings of his time.

Hence, bsTan gnyis gling pa set out for sKyid grong, visiting the Ārya Va ti bzang po statue in its temple, i.e. the 'Phags pa lha khang, and the royal fortress, Khams gsum rnam rgyal. He also travelled to the nearby region La ldebs, where he met with Chos rje Che mchog pa (d. 1535), i.e. one of bSam 'grub rdo rje's most important teachers who had also signed the invitation to bsTan gnyis gling pa and the caretaker of the Byams sprin temple. Further, he proceeded to this important site and conducted various rituals there in favour of the king. Eventually, attended by Chos rje Che mchog pa, bSam 'grub rdo rje and three more companions, he travelled to Ri bo dpal 'bar, i.e. the holy mountain and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's former monasterial estate, where he intended to raise a treasure.<sup>21</sup>

The party then reached the former abode (*gzims khang*) of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, of which it is said that it was found in a deteriorated state. Having spent a night there, the following morning Padmasambhava appeared, admonishing them not to take out a treasure of rGod ldem can which had been left there by the treasure-discoverer as a so-called *yang gter* ("re-concealed treasure"), since the time for the rediscovery of the treasure had not yet come. Still the company proceeded to excavate the treasure, as Chos rje Che mchog pa was urging bsTan gnyis gling pa to carry on. Thus the female protective deity of the treasure and of Ri bo dpal 'bar, rGya gar ma, appeared, stating that she had been installed as such by rGod ldem can. Recalling the need for this treasure-discovery on behalf of the king of Gung thang, bsTan gnyis gling pa and his attendants were eventually allowed to excavate one single scripture of the gTer ma. However, the party did not comply with this requirement and took the treasure in its entirety, upon which the protective deity threatened them with revenge. And indeed, soon after, on their way back, Che mchog pa was struck by illness: in fact he was befallen by leprosy. bsTan gnyis gling pa hurried back to rDzong dkar, where he immediately learnt of Che mchog pa's

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Everding (2004, p. 275) for bsTan gnyis gling pa's travel to sKyid grong. For Che mchog pa, cf. ns. 17 & 18. Two of his other three companions are mentioned by name, i.e. lHa chos bSod nams skyid and bDe chen Kun tu bzang po.

death due to the infection. He was deeply moved by the tragedy and wanted to return to his home region. Yet before he left, he met again with the king, and Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa invited the treasure-discoverer to stay one more year in Gung thang, as he apparently had been deeply impressed by the dramatic story of the treasure-hunt.<sup>22</sup>

Henceforth a trusting relationship ensued between the young king and the treasure-discoverer. This development was accompanied by two texts the king had issued in favour of bsTan gnyis gling pa in the summer months of 1534. First, he composed a prayer for the gTer ston. Full of devotion for him, he prayed that the treasure-discoverer live a long and prosperous life, and that his teachings and adherents flourish and spread throughout the world. Second he endorsed an official *lam yig* document, which endowed bsTan gnyis gling pa with far-reaching and lifelong privileges. Not only did all the king's subjects, every religious and secular authority and any other individual have to pay the highest respect to the gTer ston, they also were ordered to provide him with accommodation, horses, fodder and anything else he required on his travels on the pain of physical penalties. The two texts illustrate that at that time the treasure-discoverer had become an utterly important "place of worship" (*mchod gnas*) for the king.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, in the course of the actions of the two treasure-discoverers it became clear that they not only protected the political sphere from harm, through their rituals, but they also reinstated the very same reciprocal dynamics of legitimation that governed the relationship of rGod ldem can with the region and its rulers. That is to say, by excavating treasure-works in the region, establishing close contact to the rulers and the local religious teachers, and calling for the re-opening of Mang yul Gung thang's very own hidden valley, i.e. sKyid mo lung,

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<sup>22</sup> For the episode relating the treasure-hunt, cf. Everding (2004, p. 275 f.). Accordingly the revealed treasure bears the title *Phag mo zab brgya'i skor*; cf. its entry in the *Rin chen gter mdzod as rDo rje phag mo'i zab khrid*, (Schwieger & Everding, 1990–2009, vol. 12, pp. 56–67). Further, compare the events with the report of Che mchog pa's life, in Ehrhard (2008a, pp. 68–72), wherein one also finds a prayer by bsTan gnyis gling pa commemorating Che mchog pa. Further, it is stated in *ibid.* that the reincarnation of Che mchog pa was born as the son of bsTan gnyis gling pa, called Tshe dbang bSod nams rgyal po. The family lineage of bsTan gnyis gling pa, whose members were also invested as the caretaker of Byams sprin, starting from Tshe dbang bSod nams rgyal po up to Rig 'dzin 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789), is found in, Chos kyi dbang phyug, *gTer dbon rig 'dzin brgyud pa'i gdung rabs lo rgyus tshangs pa'i do shal*, fo. 7a2 ff., and it has been outlined in Ehrhard (2007a, p. 40 ff.).

<sup>23</sup> The prayer and the travel-document were included in bsTan gnyis gling pa's biography, critical editions and translations of the two texts can be found in, Everding (2000, p. 267 f.) and *ibid.*, pp. 268–273 & Everding (2004, pp. 277–280) respectively.

they so to speak “plowed” and “fertilized” the field of actions for the rNying ma pas that had been set before by rGod ldem can. Their success in doing so can be evidenced in the case of mChog ldan mgon po as when he arrived in Gung thang he was welcomed by the royal members and a host of religious dignitaries with great pomp and splendour. Whereas bsTan gnyis gling pa in the course of his actions was granted an extensive official *lam yig* by the king, Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa, which provided him with far-reaching benefits.

However, not long afterwards, i.e. some 80 years later, the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang should come to its end, first as a result of the war with the gTsang rulers at the beginning of the seventeenth century and soon later by the instalment of the central Tibetan dGa' ldan pho 'brang government under the great Fifth Dalai Lama.<sup>24</sup> In this regard it might have been expected that the continuity of the gTer ma tradition in Mang yul Gung thang would have ceased as well, which—as I have tried to indicate—was largely based on the relationship between the members of the royal family and the treasure-discoverers and the ensuing reciprocal dynamics of legitimation.

The life of Rig 'dzin Gar dbang rdo rje proves that quite the opposite was the case. He was born two years before the Great Fifth Dalai Lama would be installed as the new sovereign of greater Tibet, i.e. in 1640 in a valley called mNyam in the south-west of Mang yul Gung thang.<sup>25</sup> He grew up under rather poor circumstances; from an early age he had to work as a shepherd. Nevertheless he was also thoroughly educated mainly in the fields of the rNying ma and the bKa' brgyud traditions, receiving teachings of great local importance like

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Everding (2000, p. 581 ff.).

<sup>25</sup> For Gar dbang rdo rje's “mundane” life, cf. his “outer biography”, *sPrul sku rigs 'dzin chen po gar dbang rdo rje snying po'i phyi'i rnam par thar pa nges don rgya mtsho*, which was compiled by one of his most important disciples, rGyal dbang seng ge (b. 1616). Short biographies of him can be found in *Gu bkra chos 'byung*, p. 580 f., and in Ngag dbang bsTan 'dzin nor bu, *gCod yul nyon mongs zhi byed kyi bka' gter bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar byin rlabs gter mtsho*, fos. 53a3–60b4 (although both sources clearly relied on the outer biography of Gar dbang rdo rje); also, cf. Bradburn (1995, p. 250 f.) for another short account of his life. According to the former source he was born in a place called g.Yam in Nub ri[s], i.e. an area in the south-western part of Mang yul Gung thang; cf. Everding (2000, Tafel 5), Childs (2001) for pertinent historical information on Nub ris and Childs (2004) for a highly readable ethnographic account of the Nub ris valley, lying in the shadows of the Manaslu peak in present-day Nepal. A location named g.Yam could not be identified and I take it as erroneous for the approximately homophonic mNyam (cf. the concordant interpretation in, Childs (2001, n. 16)), i.e. the region where Gar dbang rdo rje's first education took place (cf. rGyal dbang seng ge, *sPrul sku rigs 'dzin chen po gar dbang rdo rje snying po'i phyi'i rnam par thar pa nges don rgya mtsho*, fo. 35a6).

rGod ldem can's treasure-teachings and the *Ras chung snyan brgyud*<sup>26</sup> of the bKa' brgyud school, thus finally being well versed in the local religious traditions. This background is also reflected in his actions as a treasure-discoverer, as which he figured from his 25th year onwards. Alike his predecessors he made use of the prevailing regio-cultural dynamics. One example being that he also heavily drew upon the continuous importance of the hidden valley sKyid mo lung by repeatedly revealing treasures there. Most notable is the hunt for a treasure focused on Vajrasattva, i.e. the *rDor sems thugs kyi me long*.<sup>27</sup> He initially received hints pointing to the emergence of a treasure on practices of Vajrasattva. No precise information is given as to what these indications were. Yet this aroused his strong conviction that it was necessary for him to go and practice at the middle opening to the hidden valley of sKyid mo lung. At the opening, called Mu rtse khrod, he then settled in a cavern which forms a part of a turtle-shaped boulder rock, where, after some time had elapsed, he was approached by a man all dressed in white riding on a horse. The man introduced himself as the guardian of the adjoining Mu le glacier mountain (*mu le gangs*, i.e. the Dhaulagiri Himal). He explained that Gar dbang rdo rje would receive a treasure which once was entrusted to him by the Rig 'dzin chen po dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, i.e. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can.<sup>28</sup> Hence the treasure to be found is identified as one that has already been revealed earlier, but then concealed again, another so-called *yang gter* of rGod ldem can. Further, Gar dbang rdo rje met with three demons, who introduced themselves as the "ya bdud [demons] of Ra zam" (*ra zam gyi ya bdud*), known as rDzong lha dkar po, sKos rje dkar po, and Klu sman dkar mo. They thanked him for taming and purifying them by means of his compassion and thus encouraged the treasure-discoverer to continue with his search. He then proceeded following a red deer which led him to a mountain named bKra shis dpal bzang. At the foot of this mountain he eventually discovered the treasure, consisting of the typical scroll of yellow paper (*shog ser*). It bears the title *rDor sems thugs kyi me long*, i.e. a text focusing on Vajrasattva.

<sup>26</sup> For the transmission of the *Ras chung snyan brgyud*, cf. Ehrhard (2004b, p. 587 ff.) and Sernesi (2004, 2011) q.v.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. rGyal dbang seng ge, *sPrul sku rigs 'dzin chen po gar dbang rdo rje snying po'i phyi'i rnam par thar pa nges don rgya mtsho*, fos. 30a–32a and Gar dbang rdo rje, *rDo rje sems dpa'thugs kyi me long*.

<sup>28</sup> It has been mentioned in Ehrhard (1993), in a description of the sacred geography of the Mukthināth area, that the Mu le glacier mountain corresponds to the Dhaulagiri Himal. However, the reason why the guardian deity of this mountain is cited as the protector of the *yang gter* of rGod ldem can in sKyid mo lung remains unclear.

It seems clear that in this case by revealing a treasure of the famous gTer ston rGod ldem can, Gar dbang rdo rje himself sought to elevate his own status as a mystic treasure-discoverer—it should be noted that in the end he actually was quite successful in doing so as he became considered as the reincarnation of rGod ldem can.<sup>29</sup> So what we can observe is again the calculated recourse to the bygone grand times and figures for the benefits in the present—only this time not from the present to Padmasambhava but to earlier famous and successful gTer stons. Yet not only did Gar dbang rdo rje try to reinstate these same dynamics. After the overpowering of Gung thang, the central Tibetan government eventually installed representatives in the capital rDzong dkar and in sKyid grong, so-called rDzong dpon. It seems clear that these figures had no interest in reinstating any cult of royalty in the region. Still they repeatedly sought the close contact to the treasure-discoverer. They were asking for the conferment of his treasure-teachings and just like their predecessors they also employed Gar dbang rdo rje as a ritual specialist in order to counter foreign attacks. As, just like before, no noteworthy military conflicts for the region are attested for the respective time, I take these actions again as a symbolic and calculated effort to retain “old customs” in order to preserve the continuity of the regio-cultural dynamics thus again ensuring the social status of the political class. In this regard the life of Gar dbang rdo rje also serves as a good example of the *Zeitgeist* of the late seventeenth century that was set by the ubiquitous great Fifth Dalai Lama. By means of interests fuelled by political power, the Fifth Dalai Lama emerged to become the universal leader of a unified Tibet. One aspect that helped him to succeed in this endeavour was the calculated recourse to the grand bygone times of imperial Tibet. This undertaking was helped by his open support of the heirs of the ancient time, i.e. the rNying ma pas in general and the treasure-discoverers in particular. Eventually in this way the great Fifth was able to solidify his status as the new universal sovereign of Tibet, just as the proponents of the rNying ma school were, to a great extent, able to pursue the continuation of their tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Generally speaking, Gar dbang rdo rje is considered to be a reincarnation of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms—as is Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can—i.e. one of the close disciples of Padmasambhava, who was sent as a messenger from king Khri srong lde btsan to accompany the adept to Tibet. This, for instance, can be observed in the *le'u lha* illustrations featured in the first folios of Gar dbang rdo rje's “inner biography” (cf. *sPrul sku rigs 'dzin chen po gar dbang rdo rje snying po'i nang gi rnam thar nyams mgur gyi rim pa*, fos. 1b–2a), as well as in the entry on his life in the *Gu bkra chos 'byung*, p. 580; also cf. the concordant interpretation of the Brag dkar rta so sprul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug in Ehrhard (2004a, p. 379 f., n. 115).

The imprint Gar dbang rdo rje had left in the region can be well observed even today. As mentioned above, the gTer ston Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can is commonly considered to be the person who once discovered and opened the hidden valley of sKyid mo lung in the first place. For western Tibetan studies this sBas yul was disclosed by Michael Aris during his expedition to Nub ris and Ku thang in 1973. It was pointed out to him the Serang valley corresponds to sKyid mo lung.<sup>30</sup> Yet on a visit to the main monastery of the valley, gSang chen

<sup>30</sup> For the opening of the sBas yul by rGod ldem can, cf. n. 9. Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin in his *Gung thang rgyal rabs* offers a notable elaboration in the description of the opening of sKyid mo lung: *rig 'dzin chen pos sbas yul skyid mo lung gi sgo phyes dpal 'bar dang skyid mo lung du yang gter mang du sbas (Bod rje lha btsad po'i gdung rabs mnga' ri smad mang yul gung thang du ji ltar byung ba'i tshul deb gter dvangs shel 'phrul gyi me long*, p. 649,8), “the Rig 'dzin chen po [i.e. rGod ldem can] opened the hidden valley sKyid mo lung, [and] in [Ri bo] dpal 'bar and sKyid mo lung he concealed many *yang gter*.” Apparently the discoveries of the *yang gter* by bsTan gnyis gling pa and Gar dbang rdo rje had not remained unnoticed by Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin. As to the guide to the hidden valley, cf. rGod kyi ldem 'phru can, *sBas yul skyid mo lung gi lam byang* and for an overview of the available literature focussing on sKyid mo lung which is attributed to rGod ldem can, cf. Childs (1999, n. 22). Notably a contemporary of Gar dbang rdo rje, i.e. the 'Brug pa bKa' bryud pa and founder of the Shel dgon pa in Dol po, bsTan 'dzin ras pa (1644/46–1723), after he had received a vision of Padmasambhava near the end of his life, credits himself with [re-]opening sKyid mo lung, beside emphasizing the treasure-discovery of Gar dbang rdo rje in the sanctuary; cf. Ehrhard (2001, p. 238 & n. 14). For a thorough description of Michael Aris' observations during his exploration of the hidden land, cf. Aris (1975, pp. 56–59 & 62–66), and further Childs (2004, pp. 74–77) q.v., for an anecdote about a journey to the Serang valley. The strong identification of this particular valley with sKyid mo lung seems to be based on the lives of three prominent masters of the Ku thang region, i.e. Padma don grub (1668–1744), Padma dbang 'dus (b. 1697), and Padma lhun grub (b. 1708), who were all active in the hidden valley, e.g. conducting retreats there. Travelling through the Ku thang region and in particular the Serang valley, one cannot help but recognize the great number of Maṇi stones flanking the way (especially a couple of hours into the Serang valley, one passes the hamlet of \*Sarang—in the sketch-map of Aris it is labeled as Sharang, cf. Aris (1975, p. 76)—which features a whole “maze” of hundreds of Maṇi stones on a ridge). In addition to numerous depictions of highly esteemed rNying ma and bKa' bryud dignitaries, such as 'Ja' tshon snying po, bsTan gnyis gling pa, Mi la ras pa and his lineage, one also finds frequently recurring illustrations of these three masters (notably I could not identify a single depiction of Gar dbang rdo rje; for an illustration of Padma dbang 'dus, cf. *ibid.*, plate p. 72). Further, at one of the most venerated places within the valley, i.e. a spring with legendary “realisation water” (*sgrub chu*) lying at the western foot of bKra shis dpal bzang, it was explained to me that in this very place Padma don grub also had revealed treasures by gazing at a particular rock-face in which he deciphered the gTer ma script (interview with local resident, Nyin lha, April 2011). Though we have the biographies of the three masters from Ku thang at hand, I could not validate this claim; for the biographies, cf. Aris (1979a), selected parts of these texts were translated in Childs (1997, p. 145 ff.) and Childs (2004), and



rab brtan nor bu gling, it was explained to me by the head of the monastery, Karma Mi 'gyur rdo rje rin po che, that the Serang valley is indeed sKyid mo lung, but it forms only a part of it. Thus it was further outlined by Slob dpon 'Gyur med in Samagaun, Nub ris, that the valleys of bTsum, Ku thang, and Nub ris in Nepal and the bordering Tibetan areas of Rud, sNyings, and mNyam, all constitute the hidden land of sKyid mo lung. Moreover, it was asserted that the centre of the sBas yul, i.e. the most venerated place, is the small Sarphu valley (\*gSar phug), just east of the Serang valley. It was reasoned that it was in this very place, at the upper end of the valley and at the eastern foot of the mountain commonly known within the local community as bKra shis dpal bzang, that Gar dbang rdo rje revealed the *rDor sems thugs kyi me long*. Further it was explained that it is gTer ston Gar dbang rdo rje whose name is most identified with the whole of sKyid mo lung today.<sup>31</sup>

Despite warnings about its inaccessibility, I eventually received permission from the local religious masters to travel to the centre of sKyid mo lung myself. However, unfortunately multiple attempts to enter the Sarphu valley failed due to unfavourable weather conditions and thus an exploration of the supposed centre of sKyid mo lung still awaits realization by future researchers.

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further it is mentioned in Ehrhard (2004b, p. 590 & n. 11) that all three of them travelled to rGod tshang gling in Yol mo in order to receive teachings from Gar dbang don grub, i.e. the reincarnation of rGyal dbang seng ge.

<sup>31</sup> The interviews with Karma Mi 'gyur rdo rje rin po che of the Serang monastery and Slob dpon 'Gyur med of Samagaun were both conducted during my fieldwork in the region in April, 2011. For a similar assessment of the full geographical extent of sKyid mo lung, also based on oral information, cf. Everding (2000, p. 298 f.). According to the information of Bla ma Ye shes, the Sarphu valley today is largely uninhabited except for some small buildings. At the entrance to the valley there lies the hamlet \*Ras zam, which most likely corresponds to the site connected to the aforementioned *ya bdud* demons, i.e. Ra zam. The way up to its end is steep and at various places rather inaccessible, leading to a small run-down hermitage at the eastern foot of mount bKra shis dpal bzang, which commemorates the place where Gar dbang rdo rje found the *rDor sems thugs kyi me long* (cf. Plate, for the awe-inspiring west flank of the bKra shis dpal bzang pictured in the background and seen from Serang valley). The colophon to most of the chapters of the treasure-cycle further specifies that Gar dbang rdo rje withdrew the gTer ma from a peculiar boulder shaped like a "lion's face" (*seng ge'i gdong*). This boulder still exist and at this place the local religious dignitaries, such as Bla ma Ye shes himself, even today withdraw for retreats; (interview in Nyi lod/bTsum, April 2011).

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The assembly hall of the gSer brang monastery in the morning light;  
background Ri bo bKra shis dpal bzang