

# THE LIFE OF SUM-PA MKHAN-PO (1704-1788), THE CELEBRATED AUTHOR OF DPAG-BSAM LJON-BZAN

(Translated from Deb-ther rgya-mtsho<sup>1</sup>)  
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Sum-pa mkhan-po ye-s'es dpal-'byor was the nephew of bsTan-'dzin chos-rgyal. In the account of Erti-ni tha'i-ji tshans-pa-skyabs (of Kokonor), Sum-pa was born in the Wood-Monkey year (A.D. 1704) of the 12th Rab-byuñ cycle.

Sum-pa read Erti-ni...s **Brag-dkar me-loñ** and learned the rules of the religious practice. When he was admitted into the monastery Thar-s'ul chos-skyoñ rgya-mtsho yoñs-dzin was appointed his teacher. Sum-pa acted accordig to his teacher's instruction and (later) became a very kind lama. He was ordained under an initiator lama (of the Thar-s'ul monastery) in the Iron-Tiger year (A.D. 1710). He was admitted into the school of philosophy of the dGon-luñ monastery in the Water-Serpent Year (A.D. 1713)<sup>2</sup> and studied well. At the age of 20 years in the Water-Hare year (A.D. 1723) he heard **rDor-'phren** under dPa'-rin Ñag-dbañ bkra-śis. He went to dbUs. Staying in the sGo-man school of philosophy he heard **brTsi-bśhag** from dPon-slob La-mo rnam-mkha', the first among the eight dGe-bses-s of Cun-gar. In the winter he began his study on Phar-phyin (Prajñāpāramitā) in the stream of religion. kLu-'bum-pa Mog-kyā 'jam-dbyañs rgya-mtsho became his teacher. At that time, rTa-tshag rje ndruiñ, Thor-god sgo-man sprul-sku, mÑa'-ris sprul-sku and bTsan-po No-monhan came to the school of philosophy (i.e. they joined the school as teachers). In the Fire-Horse year (A.D. 1726) he obtained the degree of gLin-bsre dka'-bcu.

In 'Bras-spuñs dge-'phel he heard the explanation of the doctrine from Bo-'u-kyā mñam-bshag-pa, mKhar-rdo bzod-pa rgya-mtsho, Shogs Don-yod mkhas-grub, Chu-mig-luñ-pā bla-ma 'Jam-dbyañs-pa, and others. Earlier and later he heard a vast number of things from Khri Nam-mkha'-bzā, Khri Ñag-dbañ mchog-ldan, Kon-po bKa'-'gyur-pa Chos-rin-chen, Shva-dmar s'es-rab rgya-mtsho, Sems-ñid dam-chos who was the teacher of sGo-man school, and others. He practised all those. He learned śabda-śāstra (grammar, composition of verse, etc.) under mDzo-mo mkhar-pa sMonlam lhun-grub, the disciple of Pra-ti dge-bses, *Sum-bcu-pa* (of Thon-mi) under bSam-blo mi-thuñ of sKu-'bum monastery and various arts of writing (dbu-can, dbu-med, etc.) and geometrical measurement under bTsan-po mi-tshañ-pa Tsa-grags-pa lhun-grub. He practised two varieties of astrological calculation, one for human benefit and the other for bringing harm

to the human beings, from Lha-dbañ-pa, who was the district officer of sKyor-mo-luñ and also the personal disciple of the regent (of Tibet), and Sog-ram-pa Ñag-dbañ rgya-mtsho who was the discipline of Lug-mgo bla-mkhyen Ñag-dbañ, and who used to teach Baidurya dkar-po (an astrological text of sDe-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho).

While out on a pilgrimage in the Fire-Horse year (A.D. 1726)<sup>3</sup> he visited Tsa-ri and 'Dab-'brel-ba'i rtsa-'mchog gron in Tsa-ri bab-skor. In the southern side, in rGyañ-rin-kho he visited a very high mountain which was called Sa-mi-svar by the ācāryas and rGya-gar señ-ge by the Tibetans.

In the Iron-Pig year (A.D. 1731) he came back to his own country. He got the initiation of Dus-'khor (Kālacakra deity) from the great scholar dGe-'dun don-grub. He received religious instructions from Khri-chen sprul-sku, dKa'-chen smon-lam-pa, Tshis-ka'i sñags-rim-pa, etc. in La-mo bde-chen monastery. He inquires about the religious advice on 3 **man-ñag**, etc. which successively came down to Gro-tshañ brag sprul-pa'i-sku from Kun-mkhyen goñ-ma ('Jam-dbyans bshad-pa Ñag-dban brtson-'grus). He gave rDor-'phreñ initiation in dGa'-ldan bsad-sgrub gliñ (a monastery) in the Dragon year (A.D. 1736).

In the Fire-Serpent year (A.D. 1737) he went to China and praised the Emperor. In the Earth-Horse year (A.D. 1738), while staying near the river called San-li behind tTsho-bdun temple, he saw that rJe-btsun tham-pa'i sprul-sku who was the son of Hal-ha don-grub lvañ was driven away by the army of Cun-gar.

In the Earth-Sheep year (A.D. 1739) he came back (to Tibet). In the Iron-Monkey year (A.D. 1740) he got dGon-luñ ri-khrod (a cave monastery), congregation halls of two bDe-skyid sgrub-sde-s of Zva-khog and dGon-luñ dga'-ldan lha-rtse built. He got Sri-gnon 'bum-pa chen-po and Sum-pa'i zin-yon temple along with dMar-gtsañ temple repaired. He got the huge statue of the Maitreya Buddha, built in the big temple of dGon-luñ. He got small temples and 3 other statues, built at the left and right sides of that temple of Maitreya. He got the great shrines built on the low land just in front of the monastery. In the Water-Dog year (A.D. 1742) he went to Pe-ciñ (the capital of China) and came back in Pig year (A.D. 1743). After five years he got a temple with images etc. built in Bo-śog-thu monastery of Po-khog. He became abbot of this monastery in the Fire-Tiger year (A.D. 1746). With this term and two more terms before and later it he became abbot for three times in total. In the Iron-Horse year (A.D. 1750) he went to Ri-bo rtse-lna. He also became abbot of the following monasteries : bKra-śis chos-gliñ, Ser-luñ, 'Brug-lun, 'Dul-ba dgon, dGa'-ldan rin-chen gliñ, Pho-rod pra-sde'i dgon, etc.

He composed many works, including a history of the doctrine called **dPag-bsam ljon-bzañ**<sup>4</sup> among the rTsis literature his **dGe-ldan rtsiś gsar**<sup>5</sup> is very famous.

It is the previous story that when Pan-chen thams-cad mkhyen-pa<sup>6</sup> stayed in sKu-'bum monastery, Sum-pa approached him in an auspicious moment and heard many things on medicine, tantra, the properties and various natures of the king, minister and army of the barbarians. At times he heard the nature of birds and animals like tiger etc.

He assembled many disciples as Thu'u-bkvanrin-po-che did. When Sum-pa was paying homage to the tomb of rJe 'Nag-dbañ chos-kyi rgya-mtsho, a small piece of thread like thumb in size fell inside the tomb. It is said that Sum-pa took that piece of thread into his mouth and as a result of this he got a long life and also became a very rich man. He died at the age of 85 years in the Earth-Monkey year (A.D. 1788). Kun-mhyen Bar-ma worshipped the shrine of his tomb.

Sum-pa had his autobiography. There Sum-pa is generally found to be famous among the names of the eighteen great castes of Tibet. This very Sum-pa also prepared 100 sets of 100-volume **Kanjur** written in gold by the order of the mother of the King of Lvan-li of China. At his request to the King the temples were built in a large number in the Amdo country and the zones with their fixed worship places were settled.

#### Notes :

1. I have used the printed edition of this work entitled **Histoire Du Bouddhisme Dans L'Amdo** Published by Imprimé Pour L'école Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris.
2. In the text the year is clearly mentioned as Water-Monkey i.e. A.D. 1752 but it is absurd. It will be Water-Serpent i.e. A.D. 1713. Sum-pa in his autobiography mentions the 9th year of his age as the year of his admission into dGon-lun.
3. Though in the text the year is clearly mentioned as Earth-Serpent i.e. A.D. 1749 but from the fact that he returned in the Iron-Pig year i.e. A.D. 1731 can by no means justify the former year of his pilgrimage. It should be the Fire-Horse Year i.e. A.D. 1726 and also it is justified by the statement in Sum-pa's autobiography, "at the age of 22nd year".
4. Full title of this oft-quoted work is '**Phags-yul rgya-nag chen-po bod dan sog-yul du dam-pa'i chos-byun-tshul dpag-bsam ljon-bzan**. It is written in 1748 and contains 317 folios of large format. It comprises the first volume of the Complete Works of the author.

From the Indian historical point of view it is an extremely important work yet to be fully deciphered. It recounts the history of Buddhism in India (fols. 41a4-95a6). It records a detailed history of Tibet (fols.

- 95a6-287b7). It contains a brief history of China (fols. 288a1-292b6) and of Buddhism in China (fols. 292b7-300b2). It also gives a short account of the history of the Mongols (fols. 300b2-312b2) and of the history of the spread of Buddhism among them (fols. 312b2-316a1).
5. Full title of this work is **rTsis-kyi bstan-bcos kun-gsal me-loñ-gi gshuñ : zla bsil rtsi-sbyor dge-ldan rtsis gsar**. It is included in the seventh volume of the Complete Works of the author and consists of 96 folios. The work contains numerous mathematical charts and diagrams.
  6. This is the second Panchen Lama Pan-chen bLo-bzañ ye-śes (1663-1737).