

Queen of the World and her Twenty-seven Daughters

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In 1983 when I arrived at the Menri Monastery in Dolanji, Himachal Pradesh, India to carry out field research I found that the monastery was full of activity rehearsing religious dances (*'cham*). I soon learned that the monastery had received an invitation from the Festival de Lille in France to put on a show of traditional Tibetan religious dance as part of the Festival's cultural programme. The date of departure for Europe was less than two weeks away. Three types of dance were chosen and about ten young monks were selected to travel. However, there were no papers printed in either Tibetan or English explaining what *'cham* was all about. I was therefore asked to write a short article in English giving a historical account of the dances. In view of the short notice I was given I was rather reluctant to do it, but it was absolutely necessary to have some written explanations (Karmay 1998: 190-99).

In France, apart from Lille, the dances were also performed at the Musée Guimet in Paris in the presence of both Professors David L. Snellgrove and R. A. Stein.¹

One of the three *'cham* chosen to go to Lille was about the goddess Srid pa'i rgyal mo, Queen of the World, with her nine daughters, called Gze ma dgu. These were the first nine of the goddess' twenty-seven daughters.

In the Bon pantheon this goddess plays a multifarious role which suggests that she occupies a matriarchal position. Under different names, she is a partner of various tantric deities as well as manifesting herself as a religious protector. In her iconography she is described as having nine hundred heads and one thousand arms (*dbu brgya phyag stong*, Text A, folio 372).² Her complexion changes six times in twenty-four hours: at dusk she is black; at midnight, blue; before dawn, white; at sunrise, yellow; at midday, red; and in the afternoon, brown (Text A, folio 373). Half of the sky is her canopy (*gnam*

¹ In May 2011 a Czech non-governmental organization called Potala in Prague invited the monks from Menri Monastery to perform the same dances in Prague and other places in the Czech Republic.

² For the reference of Text A see below.

phyed bla yi khebs) and half of the earth is her mate (*sa phyed 'og gi gdan*, Text A, folio 374).

It is in her aspect of religious protector with her twenty-seven daughters that the 'cham based on her is performed. In this aspect she has a fierce look and rides on a mule. Before 1950, in most monasteries the dance was limited to the first nine daughters, but in some monasteries the dance included the twenty-seven daughters together with the mother, hence twenty-eight figures in all. In the Buddhist tradition there is a parallel tradition of the twenty-eight goddesses called *Dbang phyug ma nyer brgyad* (Blezer 2000).

In the Bon tradition the myth of the goddess is connected with a group of tantras known as *Khro bo rgyud drug* (The Six Tantras of *Khro bo*, cf. Martin et al. 2003, No. 64). *Khro bo* here is the name of a deity whose female partner is no other than *Srid pa'i rgyal mo* herself, under her name *Mkha' la gdug mo*. The myth of the goddess and her twenty-seven daughters is fully presented in the collection of the *Zhi khro*³ ritual texts. The myth of the goddess is contained in three texts.

Two of the three texts are believed to have been 'treasure texts' (*gter ma*) of *Gshen chen Klu dga'* (995-1035) while the third is a treasure text of *Rma ston Srid 'dzin*. According to the Bon chronology, *Gshen chen Klu dga'* revealed his texts in 1017 C.E. If this date is credible, which needs to be independently verified, the texts in question would date back to the 11th century. The revelation of *Rma ston* (b. 1092) is said to have taken place in 1108 (Karmay 1972: 168).

The titles of the three texts:

- A. *Khro bo dbang chen gyi las kyi dbal mo nyer brgyad pho nyar 'gyed pa*, ff. 371-414
(the relevant passages: ff. 376-377, Karmay 1977, Text No. 29, 16,).
- B. *Khro bo dbang chen las kyi spar ma nyi shu rtsa brgyad rtags kyi sgrub pa*, ff. 353-550 (the relevant passages: ff. 540-550, Karmay 1977, Text No. 29, 19).

³ For the list of the *Zhi khro* ritual texts see Karmay 1977.

- C. *Gsang ba thugs kyi brnag pa khro bog gsang thus*, ff. 1485-1571 (the relevant passage: ff. 1527-1537, Karmay 1977, Text No. 29, 22). This text is mentioned in the *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod* (Karmay 1972: 168, 326, l.34)

The goddess is regarded as belonging to the class of goddesses known as *Dbal mo*, “female *dbal*”. Prof. Snellgrove describes the *Dbal mo* goddesses as “a class of powerful flesh-eating goddesses” (1967: 304).

The ancient manuscripts from Dga' thang

In 2006 manuscripts were discovered in the ruins of an old Buddhist stūpa at Dga' thang in southern Tibet (Pa tshab Pa sangs dbang 'dus & Glang ru Nor bu tshe ring 2007). Among these manuscripts there is a passage that looked like what might have been a prototype of the mythical account of the goddess. However, the manuscript is so full of spelling errors, omissions, incoherence and inconsistencies that it might just be nothing but an old faulty copy. The fact that it was found in the stūpa shows that there is no doubt about its antiquity, which in turn proves that the texts discovered by Gshen chen are of ancient origin.

In a previous article (Karmay 2009) I discussed at length the dates of the manuscripts without reaching any definite conclusion since it is not known when the stūpa was built or by whom. However, judging by the style of writing, grammatical structure, the type of vocabulary and the notions that are expressed, there is no doubt that the Dga' thang manuscripts are very old, probably pre-11th century. Another element that I should emphasize particularly is the absence of Buddhist vocabulary. The Dga' thang manuscripts are therefore redolent of the Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts.

I have made a rough translation of the passage from the Dga' thang manuscripts in order to demonstrate how closely it relates to that revealed by Gshen chen in terms of subject, but how different they are textually. The contents of the Dga' thang manuscripts may have provided material for Gshen chen in the writing of his texts. As well, I have reproduced the transliterated Dga' thang passage as well as a photographic copy of the manuscript itself (Fig. 1-4). I have also reproduced part of the passage from

Gshen chen's texts below (Text A) so that it can be compared with the passage from the Dga' thang manuscripts.

Translation of the Dga' thang manuscript (p.97, l. 6- p.90, l.5).

[Fig.1]

A story of the *gnag*.⁴ It is called the nine siblings of the *byad*⁵ deities and also the nine eggs of the *dbal zi ma*.⁶

In Gung dang, the heaven

There were three brothers of the wild deities

They were in search of marriage

“O! Gnam phyi gung rgyal⁷ (if we could join you in marriage)?”

Gnam phyi replied:

There is no greater than me, more powerful than me.

Man and offspring of the gods cannot join together.

The offspring of the dragon and the *khyung* eagle cannot compete with each other

(They did join together in the space) between the thunder and lightning [Fig.2]

Nine white eggs as big as the head of a young yak were produced

(1) One of the eggs of *dbal zi ma*

Was sprung⁸ and hatched with the sound of the dragon crying

There appeared a being with a human's body and a dragon's head

⁴ The normal meaning of the term *gnag* is 'cattle', including yaks, but in the context here it is used in such a way that it covers the 'animal kingdom'.

⁵ The term *byad* designates, amongst other things, a kind of evil spirit. So the word *byad gas* seems to stand for "deities who are against evil spirits".

⁶ This is a spelling variation of the term *gze ma*. For a short discussion on this term see below.

⁷ Another name of the goddess (cf. Karmay 1998: 129, 145, *et seq.*).

⁸ The alternative spelling of this term, *brtol*, is *brdol ba*, 'to overflow', 'to spring up'. It occurs in Text A, folio 407.

Her [hands] were in the form of wings of knives
And feet in the form of swords
She has nineteen blazing iron canine teeth
She devours her foe's flesh, *ljibs se ljibs*
And slurps her foe's blood, *rubs se rubs*
She stirs up her foe's kingdom
She strikes her foe with her hand in the form of knives
And cuts off her foe's lineage until the 7th generation.
She stamps her sword feet
That root up her foe's heart and soul.⁹
Her spell is: *du yu nan nan sen mo sbrul/ ni ti nying/* So should be recited.
Imagine that she comes and reaches the 'four souls'¹⁰ of the human body [of the foe].

(2) Another egg of *dbal zi ma*

It was hatched with the sound of the water spirit cry
[There appeared a being] with a human body that had a dragon's head with its lock of
hair
(Her hands) are in the form of wings of knives
She has eighteen blazing conch teeth
She devours her foe's flesh, *ljibs se ljibs*
And slurps her foe's blood, *rubs se rubs*
She devours also her foe's fresh heart
She looks at it and then puts it into her mouth

⁹ The manuscript has *brla*, which in standard Tibetan orthography means 'thigh', but the word intended is probably *bla* 'soul'. The spelling *brla* for *bla* 'soul' is found in the Dunhuang documents, e.g. *mye btsa dpyad 'di ni // tshes grangs te sbyar te / brla ga-la gnas pa / brtags nas / thog du ma bab bya'o //* 'one needs to calculate the time, determine where the soul is residing [at that time] and not apply [moxibution] there' (Pelliot tibétain 1044, ll. 53-54, cf. Yoeli-Tlalim 2008: 231).

¹⁰ Here the manuscript again has *brla* for *bla* 'soul'. Note, however, that for Tibetans each person has only one soul (cf. Karmay 1998: 311).

Her eyes open wide
 She stamps her feet.
 Her spell should be recited.

(3) Another egg of the *dbal zi ma*
 It was hatched with the sound of the winter queen
 (There appeared) a black *dbal* woman¹¹ [Fig.3]
 She has canine teeth in the form of knives
 She has copper hair that is well combed
 She wears a tiger skin cloak
 That is girdled with a snake belt around her waist
 She holds a heavenly wheel in her hands
 She stirs up her foe's ancestral spirits in their graves

(4) Another egg of *dbal zi ma*
 It was hatched at the heaven door of the *dbal* fort
 A red *dbal* woman¹² (appeared)
 Her iron lock of hair trails on the ground
 A full tiger pelt hangs down from her shoulders
 She leads the nine siblings of the *the'u rang* spirits as her retinue
 Seize [offspring] from under the arm of the foe!

(5) Another egg of *dbal zi ma*
 It was hatched in the centre of the Milky Way

¹¹ This is certainly an error. It should be a being with a human body and a head of an animal like the other members of the group, *cf.* No. 7.

¹² Here again this is an error. It should be a being with a human body and a head of an animal like the other members of the group, *cf.* No. 7.

A being with a human body and a wolf's head (appeared)
Her hands were in the form of knives
She has wings in the form of swords
Separate our foes from their gods!

(6) Another egg of *dbal zi ma*

It was hatched with the sound of the blazing fire
A being with a human body and a tiger's head (appeared)
She was called Byed gsas sha zan po
For her the foe's flesh is more delicious than the barley dough
She is a female messenger, wearing a brown dress
For her, the foe's blood is more delicious than ale
And the marrow of the foe is better than butter.

(7) Another egg of *dbal zi ma*

It was hatched with sound of the playing of a drum and the *gshang* bell
[Fig.4] A being with the body of a bear¹³ and the head of the *garuda* bird (appeared)
Her head horn is [as big as] the Milky Way in the heavens
Eat the flesh and bone of the foe as your food!
You steal the male
You look in the face of the female, Go!

(8) Another *dbal zi ma* egg

A being who has the wings of the awesome *khyung* eagle
That waves a snake in the wind
Her eight mouths are open and never satiated

¹³ Here again, it is evidently an error in the manuscript. It is meant to be a human body.

Her canine teeth can reach a thousand miles away
 When you are dispatched in the middle night
 You frighten the gods of the foe
 Seize the son of the foe from under his arm
 Eat his descendants till the seventh generation as your food.

(9) (The 9th is missing from the manuscript).

Comments on the passage from the Dga' thang manuscript

In the Bon tradition the term *dbal* designates a class of gods. It is also the name of a mythical land, *dBal yul*. The priests from there are called *dbal bon* and *dbal gshen*. The word *zi ma* has the sense of 'scum'. This is not what is meant here. Spelled '*gze ma*' it simply designates a 'plant', especially a 'thorny plant' in *gze ma ra mgo*. However, in Text A forty-three philosophical explanations separating the two syllables '*gze*' and '*ma*' are given, but none of these is plausible as a definition of the term *gze ma* (Text A, folios 399-403). The goddesses are also called *dbal gyi spar ma*, the '*Spar ma* of the *Dbal*' (Text A, folio 373), the word *spar ma* having the sense of 'claw'. Several members of the nine sisters bear claws as their attributes.

Transliteration of the passage from the Dga' thang manuscript (p.97, l. 6-p.90, l.5)

[Fig.1]

/gnag pa rabs gcig la/ byed gsas

/spun dgu zhes yang [kyang] bya/

/dbal zi ma sgong du zhes yang [kyang] bya/

/lha yul gung [thang] na/

/lha rgod mched gsum po/
/khab dang byal [dbyal] btsal ba/
/gnam phyi gung rgyal lags/
/gnam phyi'i zhal na re/
/nga las che myed btsan myed par/
/myi dang lha'i bu gdan du myi bshos so/
/'brug dang khyung ghyi [gi] bu dran kyi ['gran gyi] do ma lags/
/thog dang glog gyi [gi] bar du bshos pa'i bu/

[Fig.2]

sgong nga dkar po g.yag rus [grus] 'go [mgo] tsam brgu [dgu] bsrid [srid] do/

(Egg No. 1)

/dbal zi ma sgong cig [gcig] ni/
'brug ngur ba'i sgra las brtol [brdol]/
/myi 'i [myi'i] lus po la/
'brug kyi [gi] 'go [mgo] bo can/
/chu dri'i [gri'i] gshog pa can/
/ral gyi'i rgang [gri'i rkang] pa can/
/lcags kyi mche ba rgu gnyis bcvo brgyad 'bar bas/
/gra [dgra] bo'i sha za ljibs se ljibs/
/gra [dgra] bo'i khrag 'thung rubs se rubs/
/gra [dgra] bo'i rgyal khams krug [dkrugs] par byed/
/chu dri'i [gri'i] lag brdabs pas/
/gra [dgra] bo'i bdun rgyud [brgyud] gcod par byed/
/ral gyi'i [gri'i] brdabs pas/
/gra' [dgra] bo'i don rnying brla dang rtsa [rtsad] nas gcod/
/de 'i [de'i] sngags la/

/du yu nan sen mo sbrul/
 /ni di nying/ zhes brjod do/
 /brla bzhi dang myi 'i [myi'i] lus po 'ongs br bsam mo/

(Egg No. 2)

/yang dbal gyi zi ma sgong gcig ni/
 /klu ngur ba'i sgra las brtol [brdol is possible]/
 /myi 'i [myi'i] lus po la 'brug kyi [gi] ral ba can/
 /chu dri'i [gri] gshog pa can/
 /dung gyi [gi] mche ba rgu gnyis bcvo brgyad 'bar bas/
 /gra [dgra] bo'i sha za'a ljibs se ljibs/
 /gra [dgra] bo'i khrag 'thung rubs se rubs/
 /gra'a [dgra] bo'i snying khrag rlon pa la/
 /tsho tsho byed cing zhal du bstobs [bstabs]/
 /mig grad do/
 /rkang pa brdabs so/
 /sngags bzlas so/

(Egg No. 3)

/yang dbal gyi zi ma sgong cig [gcig] ni/
 rgun gyi rgyal mo'i sgra las brtol/
 /dbal gyi myi [Fig. 3] myi nag po la/
 /chu dri'i [gri'i] mche ba can/
 zings pra [skra] dmar mo shed de shad/
 /stag kyi [gi] slag pa gsol/
 /sbrul gyi ska rag rked la bcings/
 /gnam gyi 'khor lo phyag na bsnam/

gra'a [dgra] bo'i dur gyi mtshun khrugs cig [dkrugs shig]/
/chu dri'i [gri] mche ba bdar ba la/
/gra [dga] bo'i sha za ljibs se ljibs/
/gra'a [dgra] bo'i khrag 'thung rngubs se rngubs/

(Egg No. 4)

/yang dbal [gyi missing] zi ma sgong gcig ni/
/dbal mkhar gnam sgo can nas brtol/
/de'i nang na/
/dbal gyi myi po [mo] dmar po la/
/lcags kyi ral pa sa la bshal/
/stag kyi [gi] g.yang bzhi phrag la gzad [gzar]/
/the'u brang [rang] spun rgu 'bangs su khrid/
/gra'a [dgra] bo'i mchan lan nas [mchan nas] byung [bu] phrogs cig [shig]/

(Egg No. 5)

/yang dbal (gyi missing) zi ma sgong gcig ni/
/rgu tshigs gzhang las brtol/
/myi 'i [myi'i] lus po la spyang khu'i 'go [mgo] bo can/
/chu dri'i [gri'i] lag pa can/
/ral gyi'i [gri'i] gshog pa can/
/gra [dgra] bo'i myi dng lhar phrol cig/

(Egg No. 6)

/yang dbal [gyi, missing] zi ma sgong gcig ni/
/mye 'bar ba'i sgra las brtol/
/myi' 'i [myi'i] lus po la/

/stag kyi [gi] 'go mgo] bo can/
 /mying dang mtshan btags pa/
 /byad gsas sha zan po/
 /gra'a [dgra] bo'i sha ni zan bas zhim/
 /kham kham mnabs cig [zhing] pho nya ma/
 //gra'a [dgra] bo'i khrag ni chang bas zhim/
 /gra'a [dgra] bo'i lhe rkang mar bas zhim/

(Egg No. 7)

/yang dabl [gyi missing] zi ma sgong gcig ni/
 /rnga gshang krol [dkrol] ba'i sgra las brtol/
 [Fig. 4] /dom gyi [myi'i] lus po la/
 /khyung gyi [gi] 'go [mgo] bo can/
 /klad kyi bya ru gnam gyi rgu tshigs tsam/
 /gra'a [dgra] bo'i sha rus zan du zo/
 /pho rku bed la/
 /mo bad byed la bso/

(Egg No. 8)

/dbal [gyi missing] zi ma sgong gcig la/
 /rngam chen khyung gyi [gi] gshog pa la/
 /sbrul rlung khu gyi [yi] g.yab mos [mo] 'debs/
 /chog myi shes kyi zhal zhal brgyad gdengs/
 /mche ba dpag tshad stong slebs ma/
 /nam gyi gung la mngags pa'i tshe/
 /gra'a [dgra] bo'i lha sngangs par byed/
 /gra'a [dgra] bo'i mchan nas bu phrogs cig [shig]/

/gra'a [dgra] bo'i bdun rgyud [brgyud] tshun chad zas su gsol/

(Egg No. 9 is missing)

Text A from Gshen chen

[f. 375]

*mi bzad gnam [376] gyi lha rgod thog pa dang/
bar snang sgra yi nang du gnyis med thabs kyis rol/...
thabs kyis rol bar mdzad pa'i byin rlabs kyis/
dbal gyi spar ma nyi shu rtsa bdun byung/
dbal gsas rngam pa thugs kyi pho nya mo/
srid pa'i sgong nga dang po dgu brtol ba/
mi bzad dbal gyi gze ma mgo dgu ste/
sngon mo 'brug gi mgo can ni/
'brug gi sgra las [377] brtol ba yin/
ljang nag sbrul gyi mgo can ni/
rlung gi sgra las brtol ba yin/
nag mo skyung gi ka'i mgo can ni/
bdud kyi sgra las brtol ba yin/
dkar mo seng ge'i mgo can ni/
seng ge'i sgra las brtol ba yin/
dmar mo dred kyi mgo can ni/
dbal khang gnam sgo can gi sgra las brtol ba yin/
dmar nag spyang ki'i mgo can ni/
dgu tshig [tshigs] gzhung gi sgra las brtol ba yin/
smug nag stag gi mgo can ni/*

me dpung 'bar ba'i sgra las brtol ba yin/
 ser ljang khyung gi mgo can ni/
 rnga dang bshang gi sgra las brtol ba yin/
 sngo ljang chu srin mgo can ni/
 rgya mtsho klong gi sgra las brtol ba yin/

Comparative Table of the Nine Daughters

Dga' thang MS	Text A
1. Dragon	1. Dragon
2. Dragon [sic]	2. Snake
3. Head not mentioned	3. Chough
4. Head not mentioned	4. Lion
5. Wolf	5. Red bear (<i>dred</i>)
6. Tiger	6. Wolf
7. Khyung eagle	7. Tiger
8. Head not mentioned	8. Khyung eagle
9. [missing]	9. Crocodile

For the transliteration of the text of these manuscript folios see above.

Fig. 1

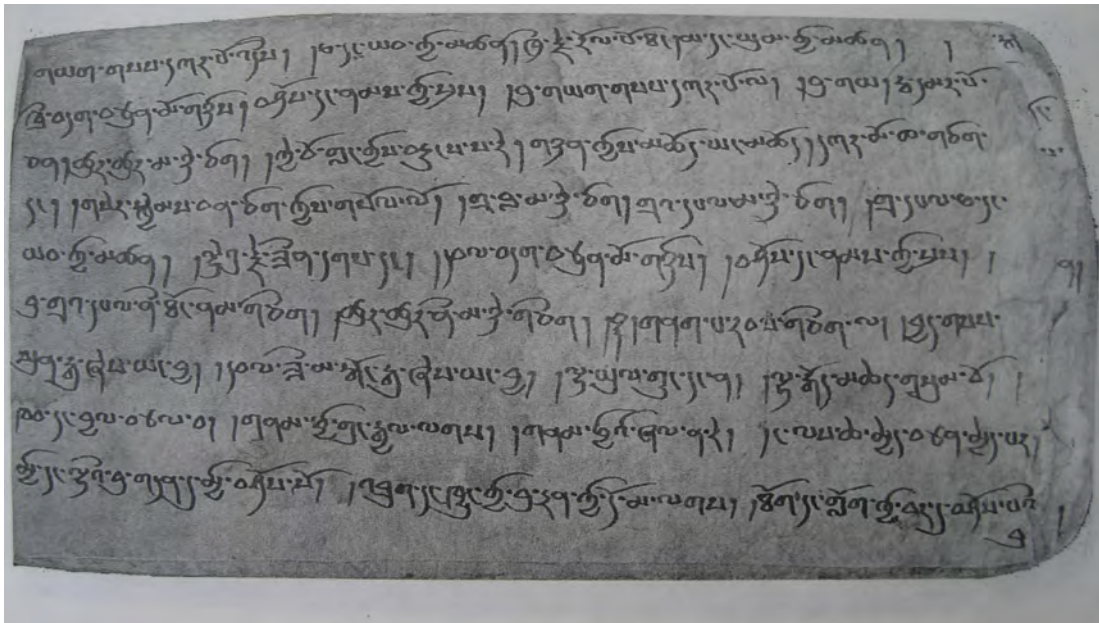


Fig.2

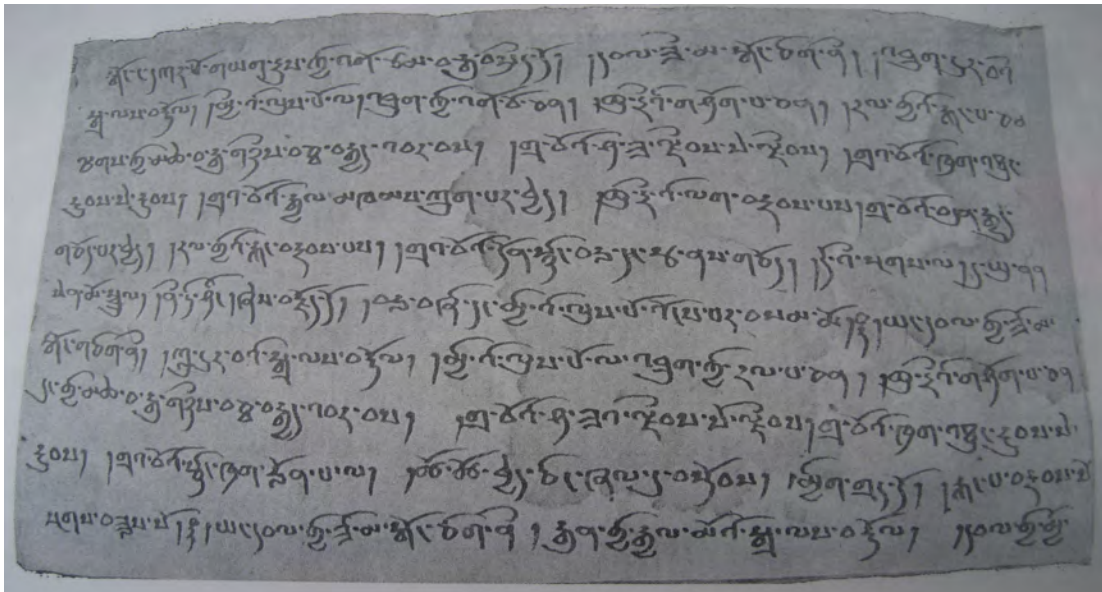


Fig.3

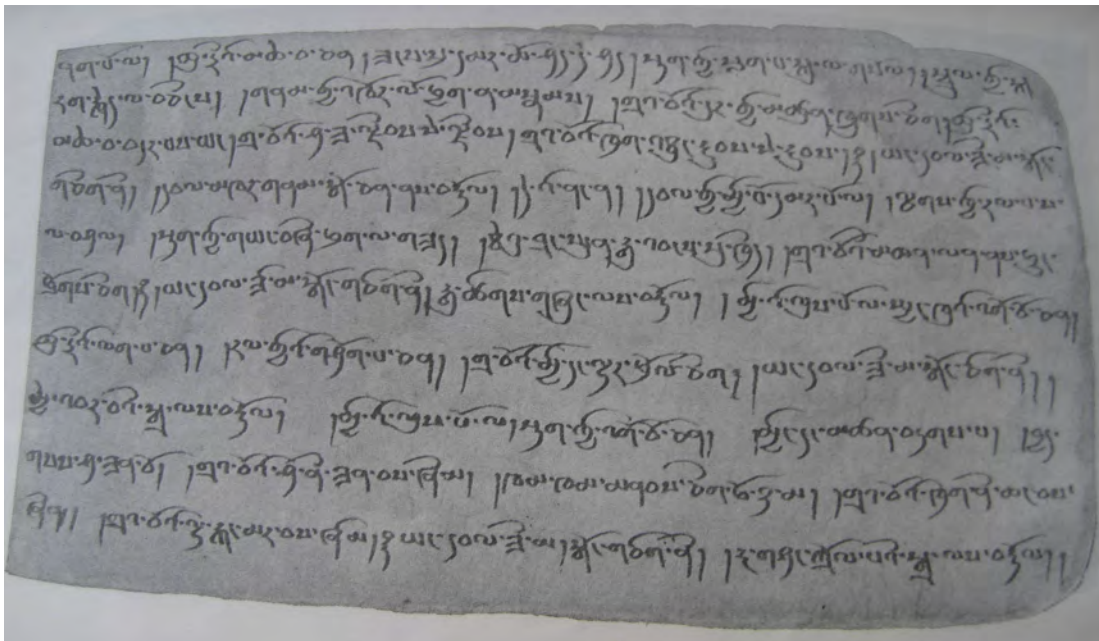
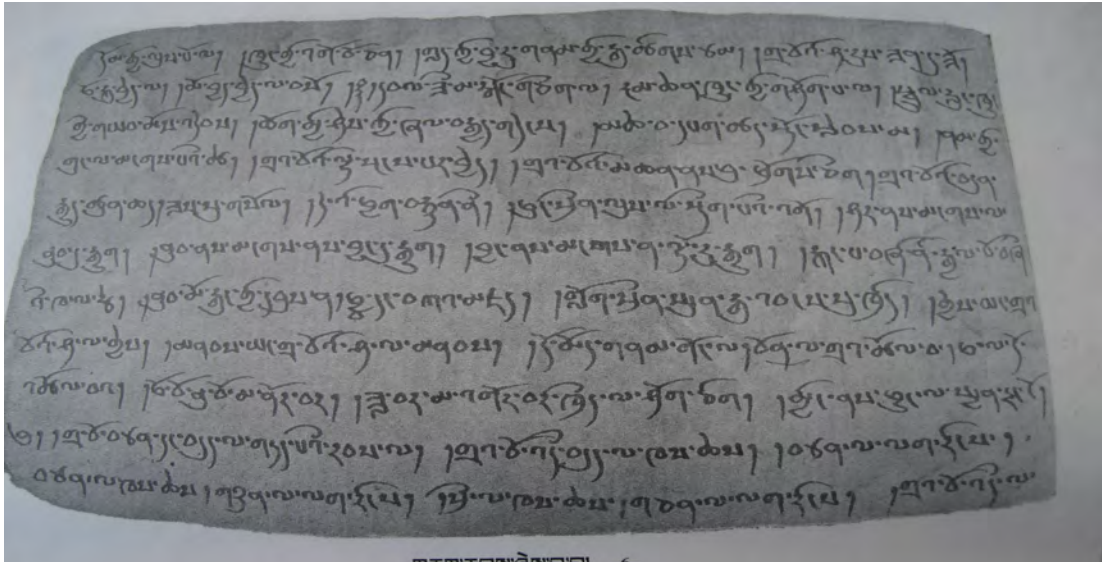


Fig.4



Courtesy of P.W. Patshab

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Shar rdza Bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1859-1934), (1985). *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod*. Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

Zhi khro sgrub skor, published in India in the *poti* format, no indication of the date and place of the publication. All the texts in this volume are listed in Karmay (1977, No. 29.)

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