

Notes on the history of Bon and the Ye shes monastery in Nyag rong, Sichuan

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Nyag rong stands out as an island of high peaks and craggy narrow valleys emerging from the rolling grassy knolls of Dkar mdzes. It is a natural fortress where its inhabitants have preferred to establish their villages on the top of those mountains and ridges which offered pasturage and arable fields for early settlers. The remoteness and difficulty of access made this an excellent place of refuge. It is not surprising to find Bonpos among the population, a once overwhelming majority in Tibet, now a religious minority found predominantly in remote areas or along Tibet's former frontiers where the authority of the then Central government was weak.

Nyag rong was not the first place where Bon was established in Khams. Some of the oldest sites, still operating, are to be found in Rgyal rong (Chinese: Jinchuan 金川) where the monastery of G.yung drung Lha steng (cf. Karmay & Nagano 2003: 556-559) claims 1,800 years of history (not without interruption). Zhou Xiyin mentions that Rtse drug in Steng chen (cf. Karmay & Nagano 2003: 181-189) has 1,300 years of history and Sgur skyang Monastery (*Guxiang shi* 苟象寺, cf. Karmay & Nagano 2003: 589-593) in Mdzod dge 1,700 years (Zhou 1995: 102). Although these dates are not confirmed, Bonpos seemed to have been present in these regions of Khams since at least the 11th century¹. Ye shes monastery's pundits claims 1,200 years of history (Rig 'dzin Nyi ma 2004: 65).

Local oral history associates the coming of the first Bonpo masters with the persecution of Bon by emperor Khri srong Lde btsan at the end of the 8th century (Rig 'dzin Nyi ma 2004: 60). One such character is credited with the founding of the first temple (*lha khang*) in the Gong shod valley where Ye shes monastery is located. Me Nyag stag gsas *alias* Nyag rong Rma lha rgod also known as Ma gsas lha rgod (Rig 'dzin Nyi ma 2004: 64), established a line of hereditary Bonpo priests which received the local

¹ The Sgur skyang as a temple if not as a monastery appears to have been founded just before the Rab byung period which started in 1027. See Karmay & Nagano (2003: 589).

ruler's support and formed exogamous disciples who later brought back G.yas ru dben sa kha's practices and ordination and much later those from Sman ri. The name of the monastery was given in honour of the son of Rma lha rgod, Nam mkha' Ye shes, who won the support of the Klu rgyal chiefs for three generations (Rig 'dzin Nyi ma 2004: 65-66).

The Xinlong Prefecture Gazeteer (*Xinlong xianzhi*) mentions that a certain Gsangs bdag Nam kha' ye shes taught Bon in the vicinity of Ye shes monastery before 983. He had secured the support of Klu rgyal (*Lejia* 勒加) in 958 (*Xinlong xianzhi* 321). If this latter Nam mkha' Ye shes is the same as the son of Rma lha rgod above and the date is correct, then the coming of his father is not linked to the persecution of Bon during the reign of Khri srong btsan but rather to the period of disunity following the collapse of the empire.

The first Bka' rgyud bla ma to come to Xinlong was Richa Guoba (日察过巴 Rin chen gon po?) in the year 1253. In 1268, Zhuogenqipa (卓根其帕 'Gro mgon khrid pa?) a disciple of 'Gro mgon chos rgyal Phags pa (1235–1280) was recorded as the first Sa skya master in the area (Wang Kaidui 179). No clear dates have been put forward regarding the first Rnying ma pa to visit the area. This omission is not surprising since Bonpos in the past either practiced also as Rnying ma masters or were recorded as Rnying ma masters by later followers. Up to recently, some Bonpo lamas were invited to Nyag rong Rnying ma monasteries to perform Buddhist rites. One contemporary master, A la Bon sgya (Bon brgya Dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho, b. 1935) in Reb gong, has a Rnying ma chapel on the grounds of his Bonpo monastery and confers empowerments and teachings of the Rnying ma lineage. History has shown that it is not abnormal to see a Bonpo master belonging to a Buddhist Rnying ma lineage and having a Buddhist name.²

By the early 13th century, Nyag rong was already busy with established religious masters who, together with their families, contributed to the development of the social, political, and cultural spheres of its society. Several names recur prominently in the local Bonpo folklore. The Su la, Khyung po and the Khod spungs families are credited with the establishment of several local Bonpo monasteries throughout history. Members of these lineages are still very much present and have been instrumental in the rebuilding of monasteries and the education of the next generation of practitioners and masters. There are quite a few families that today claim

² Such was the case of Bde chen Gling pa (see Achard 2004) as well as Tshul khriims mchog rgyal alias G.yung drung mchog rgyal (Rin 'dzin Nyi ma 2003: see illustration p. 21) Cf. Cantwell & Mayer in this issue.

to be relatives or descendants of members from these early Bonpo families. Many Bonpo spiritual teachings were (and are still) traceable to local Nyag rong families where teachings and spiritual lineages were handed down through the generations within and between these families.

Khod spungs Blo gros Thogs med (1280-1337) is one of the most famous Bonpo masters of the late 13th - early 14th centuries. His biography credits him with the transmission of practices from the Gshen family through his connection with a member of that lineage, Gshen Rgyal ba 'od zer, with whom he conducted long retreats at Brag dben hermitage in the mountains (Karmay & Nagano 2003: 439). He is also important as a treasure-text discoverer, a trend that gained importance in Nyag rong in the 18th century with the coming of Sangs rgyas gling pa (b. 1705) to the region and the 'discoveries' of Gsangs sngags gling pa (b. 1864) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Blo gros Thogs med is credited with writing two volumes of 'revelatory texts' (*snyan rgyud*) included in the Bon Canon (*bka' gyur*). These have been compiled under the title of Khod po Bskal bzang and are divided in twenty-six chapters.³ He spread his lineage and teachings throughout Khams. For instance, he is credited with the founding a monastery in Rta'u, the 'Ong gong dgon in Lcang log sna. He also performed rituals to 'open' spiritual doors on sacred mountain in the region (Karmay & Nagano 2003: 464-5). A son of Blo gros Thogs med, Rnam dag tshug phud is credited with bringing to Nyag rong the Bon vinaya from G.yas ru dben sa kha monastery in Central Tibet.⁴ His descendants studied at Sman ri and brought further practices and teachings to Nyag rong.

The Su la lineage members have intermarried with descendants of Blo gros thogs med and its history as well as its teachings and practices are intertwined with those of the Khod spungs lineage. Su la Bskal bzang grags pa is the current head of the Su la lineage and travels throughout the Prefecture and abroad to transmit the heritage of his lineage.⁵ Former masters of Ye shes monastery were either members of the Khod spungs, Su la, Bya btang lineages or recognized as reincarnation of one of them. Such

³ Volumes Cha and Ja (6,7) of Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's Index and texts in the section 12 of the Mdo Section (121-122) in Martin et al. (88). These revelatory texts were allegedly transmitted orally, possibly in a vision, from Khod spung Dran pa Nam mkha' (fl. late 8th century).

⁴ On this monastery see Karmay & Nagano 2003: 29, 44, 330, 374, 399, 529.

⁵ See his *Dpra sras g.yung drung dbang rgyal gyi gsung rtsom thor bu bzhugs* which includes sections here and there on his family lineage and history.

was the case with the late G.yung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (*alias* A g.yung bla ma 1923-1997), the sprul sku of Bya btang Dri med 'od zer (fl. late 19th early 20th c.).⁶

Thus, from the 13th century, missionary activities and exchanges with other Bonpo institution in Central Tibet and other regions of Khams were already having their effects in Nyag rong despite its remoteness. The religious institutions of Nyag rong were not disconnected from the Greater Tibet scene. However, to this day, despite claims of unbroken transmission of teachings and practices, and besides Sman ri's syncretic and formulated G.yung drung Bon, it is difficult to find actual practices which have not been mixed with ones from the latter school. Despite uninterrupted practice of 'old' or orthodox gter ma cycles (Treasure Texts rites) such as Ma rgyud, Phur pa, Ge khod, Stag la me 'bar and others, with centuries of addendum, lost records and replacement of older practices and beliefs by trendier ones, it is next to impossible to identify 13th century practices in Nyag rong on the basis of later ones. However, many institutions as old as those in Nyag rong, claim to have kept ancient practices which are generally referred to as "tantric" or "magic" *gto rgyud*. There are a number of texts kept in Bonpo families' hereditary cache of manuscripts considered *gto rgyud* and some I have been able to see contained "magic" recipes for cures and spells to accomplish magical feats. The only study on such Tibetan grimoires so far remains that of Bryan Cuevas on Mi phams' *Be'u 'bum (Calf's Nipple)* in which the author describes the various spells, charms and amulets to use in order to attain as varied results as: growing flowers, protection against various animals and spirits, invisibility, suppressing plagues and other foes, attaining clear vision, clairvoyance, mirror divination, etc. The number of these smaller magical rites in the *Be'u 'bum* totals about 225 and the nature of the sources of the spells, their composition, the attributions of these rites as well as the iconographic details point to a collection of material from varying sources (Cuevas 2009: 165-186). The many rites considered as most 'ancient' and believed to predate Sman ri are rarely if ever practiced. It is actually difficult to meet anyone who has ever practiced them or knows how to. The lack of transmission from one generation to another due to political upheaval during the Sino-Tibetan War as well as during the Cultural Revolution may account for this. But the growing number of lamas educated according to the Sman ri norm over the last half-century might also be a factor which discouraged the practice of other forms of Bon. The situation might be a bit different in other parts of the Tibetan world such as in Dolpo and other areas where Bonpos have been thriving without much opposition. In general, these practices are difficult to find

⁶ A g.yung bla ma was also recognized as a reincarnation of the famous Bonpo siddha, Thung byung thugs chen. Oral communication from Rin 'dzin Nyi ma as well as from other monks of Ye shes dgon pa (2004-2007).

and to have a demonstration, simply because fieldwork as well as access to these areas have been enabled (with periodical breaks) only since the early 1990s. Research on these areas is, unfortunately, only in its incipient stage.

New Treasure phenomena

The 'spiritual treasure' (*gter ma*) phenomenon in Bon is not new. A major aspect of this tradition and its culture hinges on the discovery of sacred texts by either unsuspecting passers-by (even thieves!) or by early masters who reconnected with the intent of the practices and renewed their transmissions. The first two biographies of Ston pa Gshen rab, the *Mdo 'dus*⁷ and the *Gzer mig* are 10-11th centuries examples. The most notorious of the early Bon re-discoverers is no doubt Gshen chen Glu dga'.⁸ Khod spungs Blo gros thogs med was possibly the first treasure revealer in Nyag rong. The 18th century was a demarcating point for Bonpos in regards to this treasure tradition. With the discoveries of Rtse drug pa Sangs rgyas gling pa (b. 1705), Bon began to keep pace with other contemporary movements such as that of the Rnying ma pa. The most important change was probably in the nature of these rediscoveries; they began to show an increased syncretism with the Buddhism of the time. In addition, the character of treasure text discoverers and of the manners of discoveries also changed. *Gter ston* were no longer accidental discoverers but rather prophesized individuals much like in the Rnying ma pa's system. These Bonpo lamas rediscovered ancient teachings hidden in symbolic signs and mystical markings through remembering them or just discovering them in the recess of their karmic minds. The results were shorter liturgical manuals with more concise rites of a greater variety which included Buddhist names of masters, of deities and methods which had been exclusively Buddhist or were altogether new to both Bon and Buddhism.⁹

The greatest treasure text revealer of Nyag rong was Gsangs sngags gling pa (b. 1864) of Dbal khyung monastery. Elsewhere I have discussed how this charismatic individual, through the propagation of his teachings and rediscovered texts as well as through his unceasing travels and association with noted scholars was able, among other things, to transform his small and forgotten temple into a major pilgrimage site

⁷ See the new study of Kalsang Gurung on this text: "The Emergence of a Myth: In search of the origins of the life story of Shenrab Miwo, the founder of Bon." PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2011.

⁸ For a study on Gshen chen, see Martin (2001).

⁹ See Achard (2004) for another example of Bonpo – Rnying ma syncretism.

(des Jardins 2012). Gsangs sgnags gling pa started a trend in Nyag rong; during and after him, this region saw many new local masters transmitting their treasure texts. Gsangs sgnags gling pa was also known for teaching the technique of treasure discovery (des Jardins 2012). In doing so, he propagated and legitimized the cycles generated by this New Treasure movement which other Bonpo monastic institutions linked with Sman ri and G.yung drung gling in Central Tibet had opposed. Gter yum Dbang gi sgrol ma (1868-1927?), the consort of Gsangs sgnags gling pa, discovered a number of teachings, first under the guidance of her master-consort and later after his passing (Rossi 2008: 371-378).

One of the most recent Bonpo gter ston of Ye shes monastery was Thugs rje gling pa *alias* Ri kho (d. 1980s), son of Khyung po Nyi ma rgyal mtshan (fl. 1909) who was a disciple of Shar dza pa Bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1858-1934)¹⁰. This latter master, friend and colleague of Gsang sngags gling pa, was probably one of the most important Bonpo masters of the last century. He was a Bonpo luminary and composed several important treatise on the Great Perfection systems of Bon, as well as on various topics relating to doctrine, history, philosophy, vinaya, ritual practices and the tantric systems.¹¹ His support of Gsangs sgnags gling pa with his validation of the latter's Treasure discoveries through his writings and practices at his hermitage further reinforced the trend.¹² Shar dza pa was a practitioner of both old treasure as well as the new wave of teachings spread by his friend.

Travel was the preferred method of spreading Bon beliefs as well as establishing one's credential and creating a network of support. Shar dza pa visited Nyag rong and particularly Ye shes monastery during the Dgon gsar monks' invasion and destruction of Bonpo monasteries of the region in 1902 (Achard 2008: 60). His visit of Dbal khyung, Ye shes and other centres in Nyag rong must have been an important moment for legitimating local masters and specially for the master's disciples at their respective monasteries.

Shar dza rinpoche's first two disciples were Nyag rong pa from Ye shes monastery. Tshul khrim mchog rgyal *alias* Tshul khrim mchog ldan *alias* G.yung drung

¹⁰ Dates for Bkra shis rgyal mtshan have varied. Karmay puts them as 1859-1935 (1972: xv n.2) and the editor of Shar dza pa's *Bka' lung rgya mtsho*, Sprul sku rig 'dzin Nyi ma (b. 1976), puts them at 1858-1933 (1). I follow Achard here for no other reasons than his extensive research on Shar dza's life while compiling the annotated bibliography of this Bonpo luminary. See Achard (2008).

¹¹ For a biography as well as an annotated catalogue of his Complete Works, see Achard 2008.

¹² Shar dza pa entered Gsang gling, Bde chen gling pa, Kun grold grags pa and other representative of the so-called New Bon movement as orthodox lineage holders of Bon in his *Legs bshad mdzod*. See Karmay 1972: 185-189.

tshul khrim (fl. early 1900s)¹³ and his friend, Padma Blo gros (d. 1894)¹⁴, became Shar dza's disciples in 1893. By a long association with the master, which included travel and retreat, Tshul khrim mchog rgyal was able to acquire a thorough training not only in the old treasure but also in the new treasure tradition, which he brought back to his monastery. Tshul khrim mchog rgyal in time returned to Ye shes dgon where he became one of the abbots and actively participated with Khyung po Nyi ma rgyal mtshan in the enlargement of the monastery's precinct in 1909 by adding a new assembly hall of 12 columns (Karmay & Nagano 2006: 421). In the course of his life, he also built several small retreat abodes in the vicinity of Ye shes dgon. In doing so, he disseminated his master's teachings and contributed to further establishing the eclectic tradition of his monastery. Seng gi sprul sku Rig 'dzin nyi ma (b. 1986), a present day (2013) abbot of Ye shes dgon maintains that the tradition at Ye shes was to always ask visiting masters to give transmission and teachings of their lineages. In doing so, the monastery collects lineages and practices that in turn contribute to the maintenance of the religion as well as to its dissemination. Today, Ye shes monastery maintains an active role in teachings and sending its monks to other important educational institutions.¹⁵ Hence, Ye shes monastery during the time of the late Ayung bla ma (*alias* G.yung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1923-1997) who suffered during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), contributed to the rebuilding of the monastery. We owe to him the first printing of the Bon Bka' 'gyur (Martin et al. 2003: 2). Ayung bla ma sent monks to many different institutions for studies such as the Snang zhig dgon pa in Rnga ba and to Bon brgya Dge legs lhun grub rgya mtsho (mentioned above) in Reb gong. Dge bshes seng gi sprul sku Rig 'dzin nyi ma, a noted writer and traditional scholar on Bon, is a graduate of Snang zhi monastery. The present Rgyal skyabs of Shar dza's hermitage, A 'jigs, is a monk from Ye shes monastery and a graduate from Bon brgya's school.

Ye shes dgon may have been predisposed to eclecticism and syncretism since its beginning. It seems that it was at first a collection of temples or shrine fulfilling different functions or groups since it was called the Valley of temples. It is not certain there was any assembly hall and the state of its original location, just one or two kilometres up river furnishes no traces of large buildings.

¹³ See Rig 'dzin Nyi ma's biography : *Bla ma Mchog rgyal gyi rnam thar*. Chengdu 2003.

¹⁴ See Stag bon bla ma. *Pad ma Blo gros kyi rnam thar*. Manuscript. Nyag rong (Xinlong) 2007.

¹⁵ On the new roles of Bonpo monastic institutions such as Ye shes dgon and Snang zhig dgon in the preservation, revitalization and dissemination of Bon in the contemporary world, within and outside the borders of China, see des Jardins 2009.

The monastery was transferred to its present site in 1848 during the reign of Mgon po Rnam rgyal (r. 1836-1865) who conquered much of the territories around Nyag rong for a brief period.¹⁶ Three smaller monasteries or temples were merged and the master Nyag stod Stong ldan mgon po renamed Ye shes as Ye shes bshad sgrub gling that year (Karmay & Nagano 2003: 420-421).

Ye shes dgon's relocation eventually included the construction of two dedicated temples, one to Ma rgyud and the other to Phur pa.¹⁷ Each temple had its own dedicated practices. One Sprul sku was assigned the charge of one temple. Both sat on the two Golden Thrones (*ser khri pa*) in the Assembly Hall and were made the Head abbots of Ye shes monastery. The last two Golden Throne holders of the monastery were G.yung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1922-1996) *alias* Ayung Lama (Ma rgyud lineage) and G.yung drung bdud 'dul (?-1995) (Phur pa lineage). Besides these temples and other minor shrines the rebuilding included the consolidation of three different smaller monasteries (which I was not able to identify).

With the destructions of the Cultural Revolution, all temples were destroyed. The present Assembly Hall (*bsdud khang*) was rebuilt using the remaining walls of the 1909 hall (Karmay & Nagano 2003: 421).

With the rebuilding efforts of the 1980s to the present, as mentioned, the immediate concerns of the heads of Ye shes dgon was to rebuild not only the physical monastery but also to perpetuate the tradition. Efforts included the reprinting and recuperation of written material and the training of younger generation in the face of the rapidly dwindling number of old masters and monks who remembered the practices. Together with remaining Bonpos throughout the Tibetan and Chinese regions, concerted efforts brought back enough of the old material and support to reinitiate the practice of Bon.

At Ye shes monastery, monks were sent to specialize in certain traditions such as that of Sman ri (for Rig 'dzin nyi ma for example), of Bon brgya and others. Certain members of the Ye shes community, however, inherited Nyag rong's past transmissions in both Old treasure texts and New treasure. The younger brother of Ayung bla ma, Skal bzang rgya mtsho *alias* A rgyal bla ma (b. 1939) was the disciple of Dbra ston Bskal bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1897-1959), another disciple of Shar dza Bkra shis rgyal mtshan and the author of his biography. Since A rgyal bla ma was younger than A g.yung bla

¹⁶ On Mgon po Rnam rgyal, see Tsomu.

¹⁷ This information was given to me in 2007 by one of the four abbots of the monastery, G.yung drung bstan 'phel (b. 1931), who lived in the monastery prior to its destruction during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1076).

ma, Dbra ston rinpoche decided to confer on him the transmission of the New Treasure he was holder of. A rgyal became a custodian, so to speak, of these traditions while his elder brother, whose *yi dam* was Ma rgyud, specialized in the Old treasure traditions. Thus, Ye she monastery continues to transmit both, the ‘older treasure’ traditions as well as the ‘new gter ma’.

Historical lineages and practices

As mentioned above, when one tries to identify the ritual practices that might have been initiated by Ma gsas lha rgyod and the early masters, one is confronted with the same discontinuity of evidence as those encountered when researching the greater history of Bon. That is, among others, a short list of initial masters stretches over a long period of time. This followed by a ‘renewal’ starting in the 10-11th centuries. Then the flourishing of many different traditions from time to time till a seemingly critical mass is attained in the early 18th century which brings forth extensive additions to ‘older treasures’ as well as ‘new treasures’ and further syncretism.

Hence, Gshen chen glu dga’ (996-1035) seemed to have initiated a wave of renewal among the Bonpos with his discoveries.¹⁸ After him, the important canonical texts (i.e. those in the Kangyur catalogues of either Nyi ma bstan ‘dzin (1813-1875) or the ones published by Martin et al or by Keutzer and O’Neill) were added till the end of the 14th century. Some Collected Sayings (*bka’ ‘bum*) have been handed down as writings of early 11th – late 14th century Bonpo masters. Unfortunately, none have yet been the object of study.¹⁹ Later productions appear to consist of commentaries and addenda to rituals but little was added to the Bka’ ‘gyur compilation. Hence, a chronological table of the main identifiable (and datable) compilers, discoverers or recipients of revelatory material (*snyan rgyud*) based on the concise list of the Sman ri Abbot Nyi ma bstan ‘dzin shows eighteen of its twenty-seven individuals belonging to the 10th (four), eight to the 11th, two to the 12th, and five to the 13th centuries. The remaining eight cannot yet be given dates. However, circumstantial evidences from

¹⁸ See Martin (2001).

¹⁹ The *List of the Bonpo Kanjur skar chag* (10) drawn by Khedup Gyatso of Nyi ma Bstan ‘dzin’s catalog lists seven Collected Sayings. These are: g.Yor po Me dpal (b. 1134); ‘Mkhas mchog dpal chen (b. 1052); Gnyon Tshul khrim rgyal mtshan (b. 1145); Gro mgon Blo gros rgyal mtshan (b. 1198); Dru Rgyal ba g.yung drung (b. 1242); mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan (b. 1356); and ‘Gro mgon Bdud rtsi rgyal mtshan (?).

Bonpo chronicles (such as the *Legs bshad mdzod* of Shar dza Bkra shis rgyal mtshan) may indicate that they were contemporaries of masters of the 11th to late 14th century period.

Chronological list of contributors to the Bonpo Bka' gyur

	Name, aliases and approximate dating	Section, volume in the index of Nyi ma Bstan 'dzin and type of scripture
1.	A tsa ra mi gsum (the Three Acarya ?) <i>alias</i> Ban de mi gsum (fl. 913)	Mdo Section Vol. Ku (61) gter ma; 'Bum Section vols Tsa-Ya (79-86) gter ma, Pi-Nu (105-134) gter ma.
2.	Khro tshang 'brug lha (b. 956)	Mdo Section Vol Dzi (48) gter ma
3.	A tsa ra mi gnyis (fl. 961)	Mdo Section vols Sa, Ci (28, 35) gter ma
4.	Gshen glu dga' (b. 996)	Mdo Section Vols Kha (2) gter ma, Tsi (47) gter ma, Ku-Khu (61-62) gter ma; 'Bum Section vols Ka-Ma (63-78) gter ma, Sems Section Vol Kha (173) gter ma.
5.	Bu 'tsho Srid pa'i rgyal po (early 11th c. Karmay 1972: 170)	Mdo Section vol. I (60) gter ma.
6.	Khu tsha zla 'od (b. 1024)	Mdo Section vols Thi (40) gter ma, Tsi (47) gter ma; Rgyud Section vols Tsa (156) gter ma, Na (165) gter ma, Pa (166) gter ma.
7.	Drang rje btsun pa <i>alias</i> Drang nga ma (fl. late 11th c. ? See Karmay 1972: 165 and 165 n.2)	Mdo Section vols La, Sha (26, 27) gter ma.
8.	Gnyen 'thing Shes rab rdo rje <i>alias</i> Gnyen ma thing (fl. 1067)	Mdo Section vols Ji, Nyi, Ti, Di, Shi, Hi: (36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 57, 59) all gter ma; 'Bum Section Ti, Thi, Ni, U (101, 102, 104, 152) all gter ma.
9.	Gzhod ston Dngos grub grags pa (fl. 1088)	Sems Section vol Ga (174) gter ma.
10.	Rma ston (b. 1092)	Rgyud Section vols Ca, Tsha (158, 171) gter ma.
11.	Gyer mi byi 'od (b. 1096)	Mdo Section Ka (1) Snyan rgyud; Rgyud Section vol Ka (154) Snyan rgyud.

12.	Khyung rgod rtsal <i>alias</i> Dbyil ston He ru ka (b. 1175)	K. 59, Rgyud Section vols Cha (159) part gter ma (for the <i>Dbal gsas ting mur g.yu rtse'i rgyud</i>) and two texts as dbus gter (for the <i>Dbal gsas drag zlog gi rgyud</i> and the <i>Stong ri tho chen rgyas 'brings sdus gsum</i>), Pha (167) gter ma, Ma (169) three titles as gter ma (<i>Stag la'i rgyud</i> , <i>Spu gri dkar po lta ba rdzong phug bstan pa'i rgyud</i> , <i>Mi 'jigs srung ba'i rgyud</i>) and another three titles as gshen gter gter ma (<i>Srid rgyal gyi rgyud ba ga glong chen</i> , <i>Ma mo gsang ba yang this kyi rgyud</i> , <i>Ma mo stag ri rong gi rgyud</i>).
13.	Gu ru Rno rtse (b. 1136)	Rgyud Section vol. Tha (163) (main texts for the Ma rgyud cycle) gter ma
14.	Khod po Blo gros thogs med (1280-1337)	Mdo Section vols Cha, Ja (6, 7) snyan rgyud.
15.	Go sde 'phags pa G.yung drung ye shes <i>alias</i> Dbang ldan Gshen sras lha rje <i>alias</i> Go lde 'Phags pa (fl. before 1310 Karmay 1972 175 n. 1)	Mdo Section Na, Pa, Dzi (12, 13, 49) gter ma.
16.	Skyang 'phags Mu la drung mu (fl. before 1310. Karmay 1972: 172 n. 2)	Mdo Section vol Mi (46) gter me.
17.	Sprul sku blo ldan <i>alias</i> Blo ldan Snying po <i>alias</i> Pad 'byung nam mkha' rin chen (b. 1360)	Mdo Section vols Pha-Ra (14 – 25) snyan rgyud, Ha – Gi (29-34) snyan rgyud, Wi (50) snyan ryud, Shi (57) snyan rgyud for the title: <i>Dge spyod yan lag gsum pa</i> ; Rgyud Section vols Ka (154) snyan rgyud for the title: <i>Dbal gsang ba 'dus pa don gyi rgyud</i> , Da (164) snyan rgyud for two titles: <i>Rig 'dzin 'dus pa thabs chen mkha' yi rgyud</i> and <i>Rig pa khu byug tsa ba'i rgyud</i> , Ba (168) snyan rgyud and only one title on six is ascribed to Blo ldan. It is the <i>Gshen dmar spyi 'dul ba der gshegs 'dus pa'i rgyud rdzu 'phrul dra ba</i> .

18.	Sprul sku khro gnyer (fl. 1386)	Mdo Section vols Nya, Ta (8, 9) as dgongs gter.
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The chronological list which follows was reconstructed from the *List of the Bonpo Kanjur skar chag* drawn by Khedup Gyatso²⁰ of Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's catalog. The corpus of their contributions follow their names according to the index of Nyi ma bstan 'dzin.

Undated transmitters presumed to be prior to the beginning of the 15th century

1.	Mtshan ldan Drung mu ha ra (?)	Mdo Section vols Ngam Ca (4,5) snyan rgyud, Shi (57) snyan rgyud, two titles on five as ascribed to Drung mu: <i>Gna' sdig bshags pa'i sbrul mdo rin chen phreng ba</i> and the <i>Gsang gzungs dga' ba bdo mchog</i> .
2.	Gling gshen Mu la Thogs med (?)	Mdo Section vols Tha, Da, Si (10, 11, 58) all snyan rgyud.
3.	Sham po (?)	Mdo Section vol Thi (40) gter ma, one title on two: <i>Mo sbyong pad ma mun sel gyi mdo</i> .
4.	Gu ru ban chung (?)	Mdo Section vol. Ni (42) gter ma.
5.	Se snyen zhig po (not certain if he is the same as Rgya rong Se gnyen Mu 'od bsnyong pa. See Kvaerne et al 48-49)	Mdo Section vols Zhi-Li (51-56) gter ma.
6.	Lhun grub thogs med (?)	Mdo Section vol. Shi (57) gter ma, one title on five: <i>Skye sgro bcod pa'i mdo</i> .
7.	Gnyan ston Gzhun nu 'bum <i>alias</i> Gnyan ston <i>alias</i> Gnyal ston (?)	'Bum Section vols Ki-Nyi, U (93-100, 151) gter ma, Rgyud Section vol Tsa (170) no entry as to which method of provenance the text fall into.

²⁰ This list was given to me by the late Ayung bla ma in Chengdu in December 1992. Khedup Gyatso. *List of the Bonpo Kanjur dkar chag*. Bonpo monastic Centre. Dolanji, P.O. Ochgat via Solan (H.P.) India. 20.9.1985. 10 pages hand drawn manuscript (30cm X 42cm).

8.	Yum sras gshen gsum (?)	Rgyud Section vols Ja (160) no entry, Nya (161) no entry under one title on five. Only the first, <i>Bdud rtsi ga'u brtsegs pa'i rgyud</i> , is ascribed seemingly to Yum sras. One title, <i>Thabs kyi rgyud</i> , is classified as Dbus gter. Unclear as to which texts are ascribed to Yum sras and which ones are not. Need further research.
9.	Kyu ra rnal 'byor <i>alias</i> Sprul sku Kyu ra Blo gros Rgyal mtshan (?)	Rgyud Section vol. Ba (168) gter ma. Four titles on six: <i>Spyi 'dus rdzas lnga rin chen sgron ma'i rgyud</i> ; <i>mDzad pa skor gsum gyi rgyud</i> ; the <i>Mu la sgron bu rin po che'i phreng ba'i rgyud</i> ; and the <i>Bder gshegs 'dus pa'i khro bo yongs kyi glad don tsa ba'i rgyud</i> .

These tables illustrate how, the seemingly closed Bonpo Canon of today is a collection of 10th century to pre-1500s material. The list above was written by a Sman ri Abbot, Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, whose focus was orthodoxy during a period where the rise of New Bon was widespread in the Khams regions. It has been presumed elsewhere that he edited his index in order to reflect a conservative form of the Bon religion (Martin et al. 2003: 4-5), which was actively propagated by the Sman ri establishment. One could speculate that throughout its existence, Sman ri has sought to dominate this religion doctrinally at least (if not politically).

Ritual texts such as those produced in part and disseminated by Sman ri and its branch institutions are 15th century and later. I would propose that most ritual texts from either Sman ri or the neighbouring Gshen village, which transmitted Gshen chen's legacy as well as important tantric systems such as the Ma rgyud cycles, have received ritual sequences, prayers and miscellaneous ancillary texts which have obscured the 'original' sections. Those, sometimes indicated as 'lore' (*gzhung*), are found throughout the enormous corpus here and there. Tradition considers these lore sections as the original 'received' texts, such as the Phur pa texts discovered by Khu tsha zla 'od in Spa gro or ascribed to the 'original' teachings of famous Bonpo siddha of antiquity such as Stag la Me 'bar, Mi lugs sems legs and others. These later additions to ancient texts appear to indicate a later form of Bon, which was not only influenced by Buddhism but

also, possibly, as a response to the well organized and literate Buddhist traditions which started to dominate Tibet from as early as the 10th century onward. At present, it is uncertain if the purported original lines that constitute the lore (*gzhung*) should be considered as directly stemming, in unbroken lineages, from the Bon of the Imperial (7th-9th century) or Pre-Imperial times. However, the traditions that link present practices and lineages to one of the six original family lineages of Bon (Karmay 1972: 3-14), which date from either the time of Gshen chen glu dga' (996-1035) or shortly after, seem to be historically reliable, but further study is required.

A new conciliatory form of Bon which focused on Dran pa Nam mkha' (8th c.) and his two sons, Tshe dbang rig 'dzin and Pad ma 'Byung gnas (*alias* Padmasambhava) would be as old as the 14th c. if we rely on Bon zhiG G.yung drung gling pa *alias* Dor je gling pa (1346-1405) and his Treasure texts of the Tshe dbang bod yul ma cycle (Rambles 2007: 127). Since then, many other texts involving Dran pa Nam mkha' and his two sons have been produced, such as G.yung drung Bstan pa'i rgyal mtsham's (b. 1516) revelation of the Tam 'grin cycle which was bestowed to him from a wisdom Sky-goer (*mkha' gro ma*) during the fifth month of a Fire Dragon year (1556) (des Jardins 2010: 193). The bulk of texts and practices focusing on the Father (Dran pa Nam mkha') and his two sons, however, are the products of the movement started in the 18th century by the Bonpo master from Rtse drug monastery, Sang gyas gling pa (b.1700).

By the beginning of the 18th century, Bonpo communities were isolated socially within the greater core of Buddhist Tibet. According to Rig 'dzin nyi ma of Ye shes monastery, prior to year 2005 Bonpo scholars (*dge bshes*) were relatively scarce on the ground and most Bonpo institutions relied on their own local received ritual and religious traditions. The history of Bonpo temples, monasteries and hermitage was intensely local in nature and the formal conferral of practices through empowerments and transmission had an important measure of oral teachings. These were composed of ritual directives as well as anecdotal history on local lineage holders, local practitioners' lives and religious figure, lay or ordained. Each temple had already well rehearsed liturgies and method of delivering Bon rites. It is difficult to say how much fossilization had taken place but renewal of the tradition must have been important in order to 'keep up' with the times and with the Buddhist competition. Wandering Treasure discoverers such as Nyag rong pa Sangs sngags gling pa became important contributors on the religious scene. For the Bonpos, they must have supplied communities and most importantly, monks and lamas whose bread and butter rely heavily on ritual performance, very relevant means of religious endeavour. The wide popularity of these treasure Texts practices in Khams and in A mdo at the turn of the

1900s supports this. But how much of the ‘old’ gter ma-s were present in the basic core of Bonpo religious practices at that time?

Tshul khrims mchog rgyal and his lamas’ lineages

Evidences, which might permit us to get a clearer picture of the formation and provenance of teachings and practices, are only surfacing in the course of further research. While I was conducting field research at Ye shes monastery in 2006, A rgyal bla ma was kind enough to bring to my attention a corpus of records from Tshul khrims mchog rgyal, the disciple of Shar dza Bskra shis rgyal mtshan and root-master of A g.yung bla ma. The material was composed of 488 folios of hand made papers totalling about 970 pages of hand written notes. It seems that Tshul khrims mchog rgyal kept meticulous records of all the transmissions he received during a large portion of his life. The beauty of many of these, particularly those pertaining to the older treasure tradition, is that he often made distinctions between the various components of the general rites and indicated the provenance of many. I have written on two such instances elsewhere. One focused on the Phur nag tradition (des Jardins, forthcoming) and the other on a New Treasure relating to a unique and dramatic Tam sgrin rite practiced, possibly only, at Ye she dgon now (des Jardins 2010).

These records show us the previously mentioned eclecticism of the Ye shes traditions. Tshul khrims mchog rgyal received the transmission of a vast array of New treasure and Old treasure transmissions from a variety of sources. The study of the lineage transmitters may help shed light on the interconnection between monasteries and regions as well as help understand the ways a given cycle, such as Phur pa for instance, grows through the addition of various rites, parts, prayers and so on. The material is, however, vast and many masters (if not most of them at present) are difficult to clearly identify in place and time. A quick glance at the content however appears to support the supposition that Ye shes monastery did have a corpus of “old” gter ma. Lineage holders in the line leading to Tshul khrims mchog rgyal appear to be former masters of Ye shes. Some of the lines of past masters are shorter. They bifurcate not long before Tshul khrims mchog rgyal to the Sman ri lamas. Does it mean that the provenance of some of these teachings came from Sman ri or that it was just a local lama who went to study or received teachings at Sman ri had his spiritual lineages “renewed” from his contemporary masters at Sman ri? This could be the results of Tshul khrims mchog rgyal’s own wanderings and receiving empowerments he already

received earlier for blessings purposes. We can clearly demarcate the old from the new Bon cycles and the latter appear to outnumber the former.

Below is a sample of the sort of Bonpo cycles of practices Tshul khrims mchog rgyal received during his career as Bonpo lama. The first column identifies the practices with conventional titles that are familiar in Bonpo circles. Hence for example, Zhi khro will refer to teachings relating to the Angry and Peaceful cohort of deities relating to the Intermediate state between rebirths. Some are title of texts and others are just names of deities (i.e. *Rtsa gsum bon skyong bzhi sbrag gi dpe rtsi* for a text on Bon protective deities; or Stag la me 'bar for a well known Bon deity which has received a number of ritual texts commentaries). The second column attempts to identify the movement the practices are ascribed to. In this case, I have chosen to associate these with the New Bon (new gter ma) when the lineage holders' list enters well-known Bonpo masters such as Kun grol drag pa or most importantly, Dran pa Nam mkha'. The Old gter ma category refers to the Old Treasure texts tradition associated with Sman ri. The last column indicates the image number (IMG) and the folio number which corresponds to a data bank of photographs of Tshul khrims mchog rgyal's original manuscript I took in 2006 at Ye shes dgon in Nyag rong. I hope to be able to produce a thorough study of this corpus in the future.

	Generic name of the cycle	Appurtenance	Reference
1	Zhi khro	New gter ma	IMG 1261 f.1
2	A khrid gzhung	Unclassifiable	IMG 1262 f.1
3	Phur nag po	Old gter ma	IMG 1264 f. 1
4	Me ri snying thig	Unclassifiable	IMG1266 f. 4
5	Rta Phyag Khyung gsum	New gter ma	IMG 1266 f. 6
6	Gtso mchog dgra brub	Unclassifiable	IMG 1269 f.1
7	Dbal gsas including A gsas (protector) and others	Unclassifiable	IMG 1268 f. 2
8	Dpal ldan Lha mo	New gter ma	IMG 1268 f. 3

9	Srid rgyal dri'u dmar	Old gter ma	IMG 1268 f.4
10	Byams ma	Old gter ma	IMG 1270 f.1
11	Mkhan chen Nyi ma bstan 'dzin corpus	Unclassifiable	IMG 1271 f.6
12	Ma mo rbod gtong snang srid zil gnon gyi rgyud	New gter ma	IMG 1272 f.1
13	Zhi khro bon spyod sku gsum rang grol	New gter ma	IMG 1272 f. 4
14	Rnam 'joms	New gter ma	IMG 1277 f. 6
15	Dbal gsas	Old gter ma	IMG 1278 f. 5
16	A (bse) rgyal (ba)	New gter ma	IMG 1278 f.6
17	Dbal gsas rngam pa	Old gter ma	IMG 1280 f.1
18	Dri med lhan skyes snyan rgyud dkar po sum	Snyan brgyud	IMG 1280 f.4
19	Drag pa yab sras kyid gzhung	New gter ma	IMG 1280 f.5
20	Dbal gsas drag po Ham chung gi rgyud	New gter ma	IMG 1282 f.2
21	Gsang drag	Old gter ma	IMG 1282 f. 3
22	Stag la me 'bar	Old gter ma	IMG 1282 f. 5
23	Bde gshegs 'dus pa	New gter ma	IMG 1284 f.2
24	Gshin rje gshed nag	New gter ma	IMG 1284 f. 4
25	Gdug dkar mo	New gter ma	IMG 1286 f.5
26	Shi khro ma gsum	New gter ma	IMG 1288 f.1
27	Gsang bsgrub rta dbu dmar chung	New gter ma	IMG 1289 f. 1

28	Tshe dpag med	New gter ma	IMG 1288 f.4
29	Rta Spyag Khyung gsum	New gter ma	IMG 1289 f.4
30	Zhi khro bde gshegs 'dus pa	New gter ma	IMG 1288 f. 5
31	Gsang gcod	New gter ma	IMG 1290 f.1
32	Dri'u dmar mo	New gter ma	IMG 1290 f. 2
33	Rgyud gsang ba gseb thub	New gter ma	IMG 1290 f.4
34	Ye shes dbal mo	New gter ma	IMG 1290 f.5
35	Gsang mchog dkyil 'kor bcu drug	New gter ma	IMG 1290 f.6
36	Rta mgrin	New gter ma	IMG 1292 f.4
37	Rtsa gsum bon skyong bzhi sbrag gi dpe rtsi	New gter ma	IMG 1292 f.5
38	Bai ro thugs thigs gong khug ma dpa' bo drag gshed lha cig ma'i gzhung	New gter ma from Kun grol grag pa's <i>Bon</i> <i>bskor</i>	IMG 1292 f. 6
39	Dre'u nag mo	New gter ma	IMG 1301 f.2

A first glance at this table brings to mind the overwhelming number of New Treasure texts transmissions. Although, the table only reflects a fraction of the content of this 488 folios collection, I have found it representative of the rest. There are a number of factors to keep in mind while researching this corpus. Many of the deities that belong to the Old gter ma tradition also have New gter ma texts. These are different from the more orthodox traditional writings in that, proponents of the New Treasure tradition added rites, mantras, new iconographical descriptions and also new methods of propitiation. These new texts were either received in dreams and visions or were “rediscovered” through a text, the fragment of a text, an object, or a marking and then their carried teachings were put down in writing.

There are also other writings that were added to the main ritual texts of the old Bonpo Sman ri rites. These are prayers and entreaties as well as commentaries and oral traditions put into writing. The authors are orthodox lamas from Sman ri, satellite institutions or others. Tshul khrims mchog rgyal has noted the provenance of various components of some cycles (such as Phur pa, item 3) and his writings have benefitted our understanding of the ways a given tradition was formed and its methods of transmission.

Besides Bonpo deity practices receiving a transfusion of new revelatory teachings from the proponents of New Bon, a number of Buddhist deities (such as Tshe dpag med, i.e. Amitayus, item 28) and border line characters (such as Bai ro or Vairocana fl. 8th c. item 38 who is recognized by Bonpos as one of them)²¹ have found their ways in Bon. As mentioned before, this seems to be a characteristic of the New Bon movement, which not only reinterprets Bon but also the Buddhist traditions.

Because of many not well-known texts and deities of Bon, there were many religious lineages I was not able to clearly identify from Tshul Khrims mchog rgyal's records. Bon research is still in its infancy if we compare it to Tibetan Buddhism, as it is the hope of this researcher that further research will enable us to know more of this ancient tradition.

Conclusion

The Bon religion is associated, in Tibetan minds, with the first forms of religious practices and beliefs in Tibet. Although historical chronicles mention Bon as being part of the apparatus of State rituals prior to and during the empire period, contemporary records and canonical texts of the Bon Canon indicates a much later time frame. Most of its scriptures appear to be 10th to late 14th century productions. Although contemporary Bonpos consider their spiritual lineages to have come down in an unbroken chain from the Imperial and Pre-Imperial times, there is little concrete evidence to support this. It does not mean that the current Bonpo canon's beliefs and practices are not much older than their written counterparts. In the past, Bonpo Canons were collections of canonical material, mostly in manuscript forms, and held by different institutions, which were spread across the Tibetan world. Their various compositions probably showed a wide range of variations (Martin et al. 2003: 12-17).

²¹ For a translation of his hagiography, see Palmo, Ani Jinba (trans.) *The Great Image: The life and story of Vairochana the translator*. Boston and London : Shambhala. 2004.

Due to the destruction of most of them, the present Canon and other indexes of other Bonpo canons are all we have to work with to understand the development of Bon spiritual lineages, ritual texts and practices. Our current state of knowledge of Bon does not supply us with concrete evidence to support the Bonpos' historical claims.

Many individuals and characters mentioned in spiritual lineage lists (*brgyud rim*) such as those from the records of Tshul khrims mchog rgyal have not been correctly identified and placed in spatial and chronological frameworks. This, I believe, would be an important step in reassessing our current knowledge of Bon with more accuracy. Ye shes monastery is one example among many other institutions which are important links to the social and historical understanding of Bon. The monastery's history, past and present, tell us about the dynamics of cultural adaptation, religious syncretism and the functions this institution plays in Tibetan society, locally and at large. The story we can gather from this brief preliminary report is that Bon has never been a monolithic tradition and that although there were important institutions which worked to consolidate and articulate an orthodox point of view of the tradition as a whole, in reality, many tendencies and currents challenged this and continue to change Bon according to the tides of trends and ideas of modern society and culture.

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