

## **THE LINEAGE OF THE NOBLE HOUSE OF GA-ZI IN EAST TIBET**

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Just as the history of the Central Tibetan noble house of 'Khon is at the same time the history of the Sa-skya school of Tibetan Buddhism, so the history of the Ga-zi family is at the same time that of the sTag-lung school. Ga-zi and sTag-lung-pa have developed a very strong Central Tibetan branch as well as a very strong East Tibetan one. In this short article I shall mainly focus on the history of the Ga-zi family in East Tibet.

The sTag-lung-pa belong to the great family of the bKa'-brgyud school. The genesis of a whole row of subschools is a characteristic phenomenon of the bKa'-brgyud-pa. Although they largely agree on their teachings these subschools were not only independent from each other but even clashed with each other at times. From the line of the Dvags-po bKa'-brgyud-pa, that is the tradition connected to sGam-po-pa (1079-1153), four main directions under his direct disciples originated: Karma bKa'-brgyud-pa, Phag-gru bKa'-brgyud-pa, Tshal-pa bKa'-brgyud-pa and 'Ba'-rom bKa'-brgyud-pa. In the next generation of disciples the Phag-gru bKa'-brgyud-pa increased the complexity of the lines by further splitting into eight subschools. Best known among them are the 'Bri-gung bKa'-brgyud-pa, today especially active in Ladakh, and the 'Brug-pa bKa'-brgyud-pa, who particularly dominate Buddhist life in Bhutan but who are also present in East Tibet and Ladakh. Less known among them are the sTag-lung-pa, who nevertheless left behind a distinct trace in Tibetan history.

For the history of the sTag-lung-pa in general as well as for their history in East Tibet we have quite a few sources. They all belong to the *rnam-thar* or *chos-'byung* class. Although the viewpoint of these sources is rather narrow because it is always bound to the same institution and reflects the opinion of the chronicler, their store of dates, names and hints at events and relationships present us with guidelines for further more detailed critical studies. For the early period we have the *sTag lung bka' brgyud kyī rnam thar rgyas par bshad pa* composed in 1609 by sTag-lung-pa Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal<sup>1</sup>, the biography of the founder of the sTag-lung tradition written by the same author in 1597<sup>2</sup> and further the passage on the sTag-lung-pa in the *Deb ther sngon po* which was written by Gos lo-tsa-ba gZhon-nu dpal in 1478.<sup>3</sup> In addition we have altogether four supplements and general surveys written in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Ngag-dbang bstan-pa'i ñi-ma which cover the history of the sTag-lung-pa until the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> A rough overview to the history of the

<sup>1</sup> Section Nya (vol. 1, pp. 263-768, vol. 2, pp. 761-980) of the *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, ed. by Khams sprul Don brgyud nyi ma, vols. 1-2, Tashijong 1972.

<sup>2</sup> *rGyal ba thams cad kyī sku gsung thugs mi zad pa rgyan 'khor lnga'i bdag nyid mtshungs bral tshes kyī rje rin po che stag lung thang pa chen po manga la shri'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar gyī phul zab rgyas las brtsams pa'i gdam mos gus kyī snye ma dge legs su mngon par dar ba'i dpyid* in: *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, ed. by Ngawang Sonam, Nyingmapa Monastery, Delhi 1979, pp. 1-228.

<sup>3</sup> See George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, Part I-II (Bound in One), Delhi 1976 (Reprint: Delhi 1979), pp. 610-652.

<sup>4</sup> *rGyud pa yid bzhin nor bu'i rtogs pa brjod pa ngo mtshar rgya mtsho'i sa dpyad brgyad pa stag lung bka' brgyud kyī rnam thar rgyas par bshad pa las stag lung ya thang rdo rje gdan gyī gdan rabs phyis byon pa dag gi rnam thar kha bskong ngo mtshar snyan grags lha yi rnga chen*, section Da (vo. 2, pp. 1057-1347) of *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* (see note 1); *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho'i sa bcad brgyad pa stag lung bka' brgyud kyī rnam thar rgyas pa bshad pa la dbyi shod ri bo che'i lo rgyus kha bskong ngo mtshar du ku la'i ba dan gsar pa*, section E (vol. 2, pp. 1381-1551) of *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*; *dPal stag lung pa'i chos srid kyī byung tshul zur tsam brjod pa ngo mtshar kun gsal me long*, in: *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po* (see note 2), pp. 229-94; *dPal stag lung ga zi'i gdung rabs zam ma chad par byon pa'i rnam thar ngo mtshar nor bu'i do shal skye dgu'i yid phrog*, manuscript kept in the Is.M.E.O. Library in Rome (see Elena de Rossi Filibeck, *A manuscript on the Stag lung pa genealogy*, in: *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the IATS, Fagernes 1992*, ed. by Per Kvaerne, Oslo 1994, Vol. 1, pp. 237-40). For the present outline I follow mainly those *chos-'byung* which are available in modern editions. Elena de Rossi Filibeck was kind enough to

sTag-lung-pa in East Tibet is contained in the *rGyal rabs chos 'byung shel dkar me long* better known as *Rag ra chos byung*. Rag-ra sprul-sku Ngag-dbang bstan-pa'i rgyal-mtshan composed it in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century or the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

There are no detailed studies focussing on the history of the sTag-lung-pa. Jeremy Russell composed a historical survey<sup>6</sup> and Elena de Rossi Filibeck presented a list of abbots and of their dates according to the Rome manuscript of Ngag-dbang bstan-pa'i ñi-ma.<sup>7</sup>

The sTag-lung-pa were named after the sTag-lung valley which is located about 65 km north of lHa-sa. There, in the year 1180<sup>8</sup>, or 1181<sup>9</sup> sTag-lung thang-pa bKra-shis dpal founded the mother monastery of the school. sTag-lung thang-pa was a disciple of Phag-mo-gru-pa rDo-rje rgyal-po (1110-1170). He was born in Bong-ra-steng in 1142. Bong-ra-steng was a place<sup>10</sup> in g.Yang-shod, an area in mDo-khams. At that time members of the Ga-zi family settled in Bong-ra steng. They traced themselves back to the dBra, one of the six tribes

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send me a copy of chapter 31 and chapter 35 of the Is.M.E.O. manuscript. A comparison of chapter 31 with section E of the *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* revealed that both texts are very close together not only regarding their content but also regarding their words. Nevertheless for a critical study it is indispensable to take the whole manuscript into consideration.

- 5 In: *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga*, ed. by Chab-spel tshe-brtan phun-tshogs, Ma-grong mi-gyur rdo-rje, lDan-lhun sangs-rgyas chos-'phel and Bre-srang, Bod-ljongs bod-yig dpe-rnying dpe-skrun khang 1990, pp. 197ff (the chapter on the sTag-lung-pa: pp. 381-86).  
Filibeck 1994 further points out a text which continues the history of the sTag-lung-gdan-rabs until the modern times: Thub bstan go cha 1991, dPal stag lung bka' brgyud kyi gdan rabs lo rgyus, Bod ljongs nang bstan 1, 41-87.
- 6 Jeremy Russell, 'A brief history of the Taglung Kagyu,' in: *Chö-yang (Journal of the Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs of H.H. the Dalai Lama*, Spring 1986, Vol. 1, No. 1, ed. by Pedron Yeshe, co-ed. by Jeremy Russell, pp. 120-26.
- 7 See note 4.
- 8 Roerich 1976, p. 621; Giuseppe Tucci, *Deb T'er Dmar po Gsar ma, Tibetan Chronicles by bSod nams grags pa*, Vol. I, Roma 1971 (Serie Orientale Roma XXIV), p. 201.
- 9 *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, Preface.
- 10 In the source, *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 277, it is even called a great town.

the Tibetans regard as their roots.<sup>11</sup> The father seems to have been very rich and mighty. It is said that his house was like the palace of the *klu* and that he was in control (*kha-lo sgyur-ba*) of many monks, for instance those of Thang-skya monastery<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, he became known under the name *klu-dge ban-blon 'Bar-po*.<sup>13</sup> *bKra-shis dpal* was ordained in the Thang-skya'i gtsug-lag-khang in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his life. Some years later - *Rag-ra sprul-sku* tells us: in the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of his life<sup>14</sup> - he left for Central Tibet and became a disciple of *Phag-mo-gru-pa*. He staid in *Phag-mo-gru* for six years until the death of his teacher in 1170.<sup>15</sup> Afterwards he decided not to accept invitations from Khams but to stay in Central Tibet. He founded the monastery in *sTag-lung* and spent thirty years there until his death. At that time the monastery housed 3000 monks.<sup>16</sup>

He appointed his disciple *Rin-chen-mgon* as his successor in the abbacy. Like all successors of *bKra-shis dpal* he was a member of the *Ga-zi* family and like the first seven abbots of *sTag-lung* monastery he also came from *Bong-ra steng* in Khams. Therefore these first seven abbots are called the *Khams-byon bdun*.<sup>17</sup> There in *Bong-ra steng*, or rather in nearby *Rab-sgang*,<sup>18</sup> *Rin-chen-mgon* was born in 1191. When he succeeded his teacher on the throne he apparently had to make an effort to hold the monks together. At that time the monks obviously regarded themselves as being primarily obliged to a certain outstanding personality and less to a singular monastery or a specific school. Many monks left the monastery, Their accommodations went to ruins. Only 700 monks were left. But it is said when *Rin-chen-mgon* died in 1236 the monastery again housed the impressive number of 5000 monks. Just as the population increased so did the possession.<sup>19</sup>

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11 *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 277. Compare Filibeck 1994, p. 238.

12 This Thang-skya is not identical with the one close to *lHa-sa*.

13 The biography of *sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 235.

14 *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga*, p. 381. In Roerich 1976 and *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* the time is not so far clear.

15 Roerich 1976, p. 614.

16 Roerich 1976, p. 620.

17 *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 235; Filibeck 194, p. 238.

18 Here the translation of Roerich 1976, p. 621, is not correct.

19 Roerich 1976, p. 626.

Rin-chen-mgon was succeeded by Sangs-rgyas yar-byon, who was also called Chos-sku sangs-rgyas yar-byon. He was born in 1203. During his period of office there was an incursion of the Mongolian horsemen into Tibet, sent by Göden in 1240. Despite of the general devastation the Mongols left behind sTag-lung suffered no damage. According to dPa'-bo gTsug-lag phreng-ba's *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (composed from 1545 until 1564) this was due to the circumstance that the monastery was hidden from the soldiers through fog.<sup>20</sup> However that may have been, in the following time the head of the sTag-lung-pa belonged to outstanding personalities in Tibet. As is also well known the chronicle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai lama points to this fact. There it is told that Göden asked for the great spiritual leaders of Tibet to send the most important one among them to his court. According to the chronicle beside the heads of the bKa'-gdams-pa, the 'Bri-gung-pa, the Sa-skyapa and also the sTag-lung chos-rje were mentioned to him.<sup>21</sup> As we know the choice fell on the Sa-skyapa pandita. But Sa-skyapa pandita and his nephew 'Phags-pa obviously considered it to be important to consult among others Sangs-rgyas yar-byon in sTag-lung before they finally left for the court of Göden. After 'Phags-pa's return from China the relationship between Sa-skyapa and sTag-lung was for sure different from what it had been. In 1263 the Mongols clearly demonstrated their supremacy over Tibet through their military power. Sangs-rgyas yar-byon prevented an invasion by sending "presents".<sup>22</sup> In the following year 'Phags-pa returned to Tibet endowed - as Petech notes - with authority by the emperor.<sup>23</sup> He was invited to sTag-lung. He accepted the invitation under the express condition that Sangs-rgyas yar-byon who at that time was in seclusion would also take part in the gathering of the monks. Therefore Sangs-rgyas yar-byon left his seclusion.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Dieter Schuh, *Erlasse und Sendschreiben mongolischer Herrscher für tibetische Geistliche*, St. Augustin 1977 (Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abt. III, Bd. 1), p. 50.

<sup>21</sup> See Ngag-dBang Blo-bZang rGya-mTSHo, *Fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet. A History of Tibet*, transl. from Tibetan by Zahiruddin Ahmad, Bloomington, Indiana 1995, p. 91. Regarding the historical circumstances see Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols, The Yüan - Sa-skyapa Period of Tibetan History*, Roma 1990 (Serie Orientale Roma, Vol. LXV), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 386-88. See also Petech 1990, pp. 17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Petech 1990, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Roerich 1976, p. 628; *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 400-1.

The biography in the *chos-'byung* of Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal also claims a relation between Sangs-rgyas yar-byon and Karma Paksi's journey to China. But contrary to the mission of the Sa-skya hierarch there seems to be no other real foundation for this claim than the effort to prove the outstanding position of Sangs-rgyas yar-byon in his time. Without any detailed context a fairytale journey is described during which sTag-lung chos-rje hurried to China riding on a lion through the sky to prevent Karma Paksi from being burned by beer drinkers (*chang-pa*) of the Chinese emperor.<sup>25</sup> This description aims to attribute the story of Karma Paksi's fantastic salvation as told in his biography to the supernatural abilities of Sangs-rgyas yar-byon by adding to the original miracle report a second one.<sup>26</sup>

On the contrary the simple description of the relations with the Sa-skya hierarchs is inserted in a concrete context. While bringing into focus a clear influence of the Sa-skya hierarch on the further history of the sTag-lung-pa it expresses 'Phags-pa's authority in Tibet granted to him by Qubilai. But the facts are outlined as if 'Phags-pa only acts on request of Sangs-rgyas yar-byon. This seems to be doubtful.

It is handed down that when 'Phags-pa was on his way back from Göden he stopped over in sTag-lung, where Sangs-rgyas yar-byon explicitly asked him to protect the monastery which in future would be 'under the guidance of his nephew bKra-shis bla-ma. He especially entrusted his nephew to 'Phags-pa and 'Phags-pa promised to take care of sTag-lung.<sup>27</sup>

This clearly expresses that Sangs-rgyas yar-byon intended to make bKra-shis bla-ma, also known under his Sanskrit name Manggala-guru, his successor. But as it turned out at his death in 1272 Sangs-rgyas yar-byon had not made clear arrangements for his succession. Besides bKra-shis bla-ma he had also designed his younger nephew Sangs-rgyas-dbon as his successor. Shortly before he died he summoned bKra-shis bla-ma and told him: "Take care of all the sTag-lung-pa, the priests and the patrons, just as I cared for them before!"<sup>28</sup> But later also Sangs-rgyas-dbon claimed that his teacher had

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<sup>25</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 401.

<sup>26</sup> Regarding this episode in the biography of Karma Paksi see Petech 1990, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Roerich 1976, pp. 628, 631, 651; *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 430.

<sup>28</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 431.

designated him as his successor (*rgyal-tshab*). In particular he put all the objects of worship (*'brel-ba bsrung-ba'i rten*) of the monastery into his hands.<sup>29</sup> Besides the maintenance of the tradition these objects of worship constitute the main attraction of a monastery. Apart from special opportunities for receiving initiations, blessing and teachings they are the main reasons for pilgrims to visit the place. Therefore, they are a major source for the economic prosperity of the monastic community. To entrust these objects to a disciple means committing the heart of the monastery to his charge. Without them a monastery is nothing but an empty case.

With two candidates for the seat of sTag-lung after the death of Sangs-rgyas yar-byon the resulting quarrel was nearly unavoidable. The quarrel finally led to a temporary splitting of the sTag-lung-pa. It is not surprising that the biographer of Sangs-rgyas yar-byon has only one explanation for the *bla-ma*'s omission of a clear regulation of his succession: he explains it as a sign for the clairvoyant knowledge of the *bla-ma* that due to this splitting the sTag-lung-pa would be forced to spread to East Tibet.<sup>30</sup>

Both nephews tried at first to get along with each other somehow. But after one year of Sangs-rgyas-dbon's abbacy the conflict broke out openly. 'Phags-pa intervened. Apparently in accordance with the promise he had once given Sangs-rgyas yar-byon he decided the case in favour of bKra-shis bla-ma.<sup>31</sup> Sangs-rgyas-dbon left the monastery but took all the objects of worship which his teacher had explicitly entrusted to him. He took even the dried faeces along from the toilet of his teacher. bKra-shis bla-ma didn't stand for this. When Sangs-rgyas-dbon was in camp a messenger of the Sa-skya arrived to urge him to return at least part of the objects to the monastery. But Sangs-rgyas-dbon refused. It is said that he even had been asked to return false objects of worship instead of the real ones. Sangs-rgyas-dbon refused again because in such a case both kinds of objects in future would lose their credibility. He added that his teacher had entrusted the residence to him. Therefore, wheresoever he should stay would also be the residence.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 878, 431.

<sup>30</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 431; Roerich 1976, p. 652.

<sup>31</sup> Roerich 1976, p. 651.

<sup>32</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 883; Roerich 1976, p. 651.

Sangs-rgyas-dbon went back to his native country mDo-khams. First he traveled to sMar-khams (this is sMar-khams sgang and not the later place sMar-khams previously called sGar-thog). After roaming around for some time he founded the monastery Ri-bo che in dByi-shod (close to Chab-mdo). The dates vary a little. According to the *Deb ther sngon po* it was in the year 1276, the 26<sup>th</sup> year of his life.<sup>33</sup> According to the *chos-'byung* of Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal he arrived only during the first month of the following year in dByi-shod where he started just two months later with the construction of the monastery.<sup>34</sup> We may suspect that either his family owned land there or that he had good relations to local patrons. In the year 1288 Ri-bo che was consecrated.<sup>35</sup> In the sources Ri-bo che is also called Yang-dgon or sTag-lung mar-thang while the mother monastery was from now on known as sTag-lung yar-thang. In addition to the monks who had followed the founder from sTag-lung many monks from different parts of mDo-khams also entered the monastery.<sup>36</sup> We read nothing about an attested law to recruit monk disciples from the local population. But apparently the monastery had the support of generous patrons from the beginning. In general it is said that after the consecration all subjects of the monasteries and the nobles (lha-sde mi-sde) in mDo-khams showed their reverence. Cham-bu dbon-chen (probably correctly written as Cham-bu dpon-chen) is mentioned<sup>37</sup> as an especially generous patron. It may be that he granted the place for founding the monastery. Right from the beginning of its history the monastery became a major attraction in mDo-khams. Immediately after Sangs-rgyas dbon was enthroned as abbot about three thousand monks and laymen listened to his sermon.<sup>38</sup>

When Sangs-rgyas-dbon died in 1296 there was apparently a great interest to improve the relationship with the mother monastery in Central Tibet as well as to ensure the connection to the Ga-zi family. Regarding the former trouble between Sans-rgyas-dbon and bKra-shis bla-ma it is said that

<sup>33</sup> Roerich 1976, p. 652.

<sup>34</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 887-888; *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 264.

<sup>35</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 889.

<sup>36</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 888.

<sup>37</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 889.

<sup>38</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 889, *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 265.



although Sangs-rgyas-dbon had been designated as abbot his behaviour would nevertheless represent a violation of his teacher's instruction. Because of this offense the tutelary deities had revolted. Therefore after the death of Sangs-rgyas-dbon a delegation was sent to dBus to invite Chos-sku u-rgyan mgon-po to Ri-bo che as his successor. As it is handed down to us this was according to the explicit instruction of Sangs-rgyas dbon himself. Before his death he - by what supernatural means however - is said to have searched in all of 'Dzam-gling for a successor. Finally he told on behalf of his monks the name of the next abbot's father. Under the guidance of this monk the delegation later left for Central Tibet to fetch Chos-sku u-rgyan mgon-po.<sup>39</sup>

Chos-sku u-rgyan mgon-po was born in the year 1293 south of sTag-lung in the valley 'Phan-yul which would later become the seat of the Ga-zi family in Central Tibet.<sup>40</sup> He was the son of Sangs-rgyas-dbon's elder brother who had temporarily served as 'Phags-pa's assistant. The son was named Chos-sku u-rgyan mgon-po because he was identified as an emanation of O-rgyan Padma 'byung-gnas.<sup>41</sup> When he came to Ri-bo che he was four years old.<sup>42</sup> During his minority sku-zhang lHa, the most outstanding among Sangs-rgyas-dbon's disciples, was apparently abbot in Ri-bo che. He transmitted the religious teachings he had received from Sangs-rgyas-dbon to Chos-sku u-rgyan mgon-po.<sup>43</sup> Under Chos-sku u-rgyan mgon-po the monastery was enlarged. From 1320 until 1327 the great temple of bKra-shis lhun-po 'dzam-gling rgyan was built.<sup>44</sup> During his time the widow of Qubilai Khan visited the monastery on her pilgrimage to the Jo-bo. We are told that when she died on her way back from Lha-sa she bequeathed all her jewels, clothing and other belongings - altogether more than hundred big and small boxes - to Ri-bo che.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, pp. 893-894, 991, 905.

<sup>40</sup> See Filibeck 1994, p. 238.

<sup>41</sup> Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, p. 904.

<sup>42</sup> Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, p. 906.

<sup>43</sup> Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, pp. 901-902.

<sup>44</sup> Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, pp. 910-911.

<sup>45</sup> Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, pp. 913. There is also another hint that the monastery was high in the favour of the Yuan court. In the year 1324 emperor Togan Temür (1320-1370) issued an edict in favour of the monks of Ri-bo che. See: *A Collection of Historical Archives of Tibet*, compiled by the Archives of the Tibet

After his death in 1366 Chos-sku u-rgyan mgon-po was followed by rGyal-ba'i mtshan-can (1344-1401), one of the sons of his younger brother Chos-kyi mgon-po. For centuries the succession of abbots in Ri-bo che was arranged in this way. One of the sons - not always the eldest - functioned as the abbot. As long as they didn't also enter the monastery the others founded a family and took care that one descendant of the Ga-zi family always became the head of the monastery. It is possible that the brothers who didn't take vows married a common wife so that the possession was not parceled out. On the one hand the frequent practice of polyandry in Tibet is in one case clearly proved for the Ga-zi family.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, there are not the slightest hints of a branching of the descent lines in Ri-bo che. It could happen that the holder of the abbot's seat had also been identified as *sprul-sku* but the *sprul-sku* system did not determine the succession of abbots.

The landholding of the monastery and the worldly power of the Ga-zi family must have increased considerably in the course of time. For the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century we hear for the first time of a family member bearing the title *mi-dbang*, "ruler". From now on this title is used in the same sense as *sde-pa*. This first mentioned *mi-dbang* Seng-ge was the younger half-brother respectively brother of Rin-chen 'byung-ldan (Ratnakara, 1362-1418) and *sprul-sku* Grags-pa'i mtshan-can (1376-1421), who were successively (1384 and 1418) enthroned as abbots.<sup>47</sup> At that time in Ri-bo che in addition to the monastery there was also a castle (*mkhar*).<sup>48</sup> The number of monks is reported to have increased very much.<sup>49</sup> For the first time we read about the danger of warlike troubles when a large army from Khams Khyung-po threatened the monastery. Some of those who were holding responsibility (*las 'dzin-pa*) in Ri-bo che pleaded to draw up an army of monks and go into action against the enemy. Finally the war was avoided by sending presents and through

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Autonomous Region, chief editor: Sgrolkar, Xiao Huaiyuan and Vodzer, Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1955: document No. 2.

46 Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, p. 1412.

47 *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 261. In Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, p. 942, he is called dbon Seng-ge.

48 Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, p. 942.

49 Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho, pp. 939-940, *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 268.

negotiations with the Khyung-po dpon.<sup>50</sup> The danger of a war with Khyung-po is evidence for the increasing secular power of Ri-bo che. Naturally, their interests collided more and more with those of other power centers in the region. The nearest competitor was the Khyung-po dpon; Khyung-po is the name for the whole territory around Ri-bo che.<sup>51</sup>

The *chos-'byung* do not contain any hints regarding the supraregional power conditions. The first mention of a secular ruler of Ri-bo che coincides with the last stage of the Phag-mo-gru-pa predominance in Central Tibet when their power was not yet challenged by the rise of the Rin-spungs-pa. The supremacy of the Mongols over Khams slowly vanished during the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup> Unlike the Sa-skyapa who also took over administrative functions in East Tibet under Yüan sovereignty through holding the offices of the two *dpon-chen* of Gling-tshang and Gon-gyo the influence of the Phag-mo-gru-pa on East Tibet was unimportant. It counted more on the maintenance of good relationships with partisans in East Tibet.<sup>53</sup> The sovereignty of the Ming emperor didn't reach into East Tibet. As Elliot Sperling has shown he only took care of diplomatic relationships with the meanwhile independent principalities of Gling-tshang and Gon-gyo to ensure as far as possible his influence on the security of the road to Central Tibet, which was important for trade and envoys.<sup>54</sup> To that extent Gling-tshang and Gon-gyo, still had owned an outstanding position after the Yüan time. But there is no indication that this

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<sup>50</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 940-941.

<sup>51</sup> See for example the map in the appendix of Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa, *Tibet, A Political History*, New York 1984.

<sup>52</sup> See Luciano Petech, 'Yüan oranzation of the Tibetan border areas,' in: *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> Seminar of the IATS Schloss Hohenkammer - Munich 1985*, ed. by Helga Uebach and Jampa L. Panglung, München 1988, p. 378.

<sup>53</sup> L. Petech points out some hints at the influence of Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan over East Tibet in his paper 'sTon-tshul: the rise of Sa-skyapa paramountcy in Khams,' in: *Tibetan History and Language, Studies dedicated to Uray Géza on his seventieth birthday*, ed. by Ernst Steinkellner, Wien 1991 (Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, Heft 26), pp. 417-22. Regarding Gling-tshang and Gon-gyo see also Petech 1988, p. 376.

<sup>54</sup> Elliot Sperling, 'Ming Ch'eng-tsu and the monk officials of Gling-tshang and Gon-gyo,' in: *Reflections on Tibetan Culture, Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie*, ed. by Lawrence Epstein and Richard F. Sherburne, New York, Ontario 1990 (Studies in Asian thought and religion, vol. 12), pp. 75-90.

fact included a superiority of power over Ri-bo che in East Tibet. The limitation of the power of the Phag-mo-gru-pa to Central Tibet in general promoted the development and independence of the principalities in East Tibet.

For three and a half centuries after its foundation Ri-bo che seems to have enjoyed growing prosperity. Two hundred years after its foundation, more precisely in 1478 when 'Gos lo-tsa-ba wrote his *Deb ther sngon po*, Ri-bo che the largest monastery in Khams.<sup>55</sup> At that time the wealth of the monastery was so great that the then abbot 'Jig-rten dbang-phyug (1454-1531) had numerous iron and timber bridges built over the large rivers of the area for the welfare of the population and for travellers.<sup>56</sup> The clerical and the increasing secular power were already strongly connected through family ties. At times they even were united in a single person. After the death of 'Jig-rten dbang-phyug his nephew Padma rgyal-po, the eldest of three brothers, was enthroned. Already his father *mkhar-drung* bSod-nams bkra-shis had taken over ecclesiastical functions in addition to his secular duties. He is called *chos-rje mkhar-ba* and *rigs-sngags 'chang-ba'i dbang-po* and he had also been the spiritual teacher of his sons.<sup>57</sup> Actually it was his duty to arrange the succession of the clerical as well as the secular rule in Ri-bo che. Either due to his failure to give clear instructions before his death, or to the minority of his other two sons it finally happened that *rgyal-sras* Padma rgyal-po took over the responsibility for both secular and ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>58</sup> Because of his early death Padma rgyal-po couldn't carry out his offices for a long time.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless he helped the monastery and the population to greater prosperity. Among his secular activities also the waging of war (*dmag-khyer*) is mentioned. But no examples are given.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Roerich 1976, p. 652.

<sup>56</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 962.

<sup>57</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 965, *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khagb lnga*, p. 384.

<sup>58</sup> Also in sDe-dge it happened that a son was at the same time the spiritual and the secular head as well as the guarantor for the continuation of the ruler's family. In sDe-dge this happened when there was only one male descendant. Similar regulations also existed elsewhere. See R.A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, London 1972, p. 114.

<sup>59</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 1385. No exact dates are given.

<sup>60</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 965-966, 969; see also *The Biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, pp. 270-271.

After the death of Padma rgyal-po his younger brother mTsho-skyes rdo-rje (1530-1590)<sup>61</sup> was apparently the first to take over the clerical as well as the secular power.<sup>62</sup> But finally the youngest of the three brothers, *sde-pa* dBang-drag rdo-rje<sup>63</sup>, became responsible for the secular functions. He was then the head of the Ga-zi family (*gdung-srid skyong-pa*).<sup>64</sup> During the time of mTsho-skyes rdo-rje, still before the year 1585, he kept off - by whatever means he could - the roaming army of the Western Mongols (Sog-po) so that they didn't harm the monastery.<sup>65</sup>

mTsho-skyes rdo-rje died 1590. For fifteen years a provisional abbot was the head of the monastic community. His name was Karma grags-pa. He was born in Kong-po and was regarded as the reincarnation of Padma rgyal-po. Finally Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan, the youngest son of mGon-po rdo-rje, the then secular head of Ri-bo che, was enthroned as abbot in the age of fourteen. Karma grags-pa resigned.<sup>66</sup> Succession through reincarnation was only a temporary solution.

When Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan ascended the throne in Ri-bo che in 1605, the 15<sup>th</sup> year of his life, secular power was still in the hands of mGon-po rdo-rje. After his death it was probably Khro-bo rgyal-mtshan, the eldest brother of the abbot, who functioned as the head of the family for a while. But then the youngest of the three brothers, Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan, became the *mi-dbang* respectively *sde-pa* in Ri-bo che. Apparently Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan was already in office in 1618.<sup>67</sup> In any event it was Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan and Rin-

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61 *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 971, 976.

62 *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 271.

63 Also written as dBang-grags rdo-rje (see *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 970, 1386).

64 *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 1386.

65 *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 974.

66 *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 977, 1386-87, *The biography of sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, p. 272.

67 The year is concluded from the context of *dPal ldan bla ma dam pa karma bstan 'phel gyi rnam par thar pa grub pa'i rol rtsed*, *The Autobiography of the First Khams-sprul Karma-bstan-'phel*, published by the Sungrab Nyams-Gso Gyunphel Parkhang, Tashi Jons Paprola Distt. Kangra, H. P. 1985, p. 163). The death of Khro-bo rgyal-mtshan is only mentioned in passing and without any date (*Chos 'byung*

chen rgyal-mtshan who were confronted with the rise and the fall of the Be-ri king by which the existence of the monastery and the principality of Ri-bo che was seriously threatened for the first time in its history.

When open hostilities between Ri-bo che and Be-ri started in the year 1633 a long decline began after three and a half centuries of more or less continuously growing prosperity in Ri-bo che. The situation was so threatening that the wife of *sde-pa* Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan, who had also been the wife of the late elder brother Khro-bo rgyal-mtshan, left her husband and escaped to her native country.<sup>68</sup>

On September 9th, 1633, the army of Be-ri Don-yod rdo-rje conquered the castle of Ri-bo che. *rJe-drung* Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan was allowed to travel to sTag-lung in Central Tibet.<sup>69</sup>

After Gushri Khan had defeated Be-ri Don-yod and later also the gTsang sde-srid the political situation in sMar-khams sgang changed totally. The dGe-lugs-pa were now the dominant power.

In 1642 Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan, the abbot of Ri-bo che, started to return to his monastery. But first he had to ask the Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan for permission. On his way he fell ill. He died before he had reached his home.<sup>70</sup>

For the time being there was no successor of the abbot. After the destruction carried out by the soldiers from Be-ri the monastery further decayed. The monks were scattered. In 1646 Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan's only son, Grags-pa legs-grub (died 1711), was born. During the time when the abbot's seat was vacant Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan first tried in vain for three years to receive the permission from the Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan to invite bKra-shis dpal-grub, the abbot of sTag-lung (1600-1671), to direct the reconstruction

*ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 1410). In *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* we find the first hints at Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan as *sde-pa* for the year 1626 or 1627 (see *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 1150, 1410).

<sup>68</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 1412.

<sup>69</sup> I have described the events in detail according to the sources in my paper 'first steps towards a history of Don-yod, King of Be-ri' presented at the 1997 Beijing Seminar on Tibetan Studies.

<sup>70</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 1428-1429.

of the monastery. Before he finally received that permission Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan had fetched Ngag-gi dbang-phyug (born 1625) from sTag lung monastery.<sup>71</sup> This also was only possible with the official consent of the Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan. It was part of the effort to secure the survival of the monastery. Ngag-gi dbang-phyug embodied the close connection to sTag-lung. He was born in the palace of the Ga-zi family near sTag-lung as the son of *sde-pa* dGe-legs rgya-mtsho. His mother was descended from the family from which the hierarchs of the 'Bri-gung bka'-brgyud-pa came. After he had taken the vows of a *dge-bsñen* in the eleventh year of his life he had studied for the most part together with Grags-pa rgyal-mtshan. After the initial failure of efforts to invite bKra-shis dpal-grub, the abbot of sTag-lung, to revive the monastery of Ri-bo che all the hope was placed on Ngag-gi dbang-phyug. When he finally arrived the sde-pa Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan was still without a male descendant. Ngag-gi dbang-phyug was not enthroned as abbot, but functioned first only as the abbot's substitute (*chos-rje'i khri-tshab*). At that time the reconstruction of the monastery started. But because there was a lot of restoration work left to do Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan still wished to invite *zhabs-drung* bKra-shis dpal-grub so that he could support both Ngag-gi dbang-phyug and himself. After three years he received the necessary permission. bKra-shis dpal-grub had three longer stays in Ri-bo che, when he supervised the reconstruction of the monastery. Altogether he spent more than ten years in Ri-bo che.<sup>72</sup> During that time the temple and the monastery were reconstructed and in addition a new *mgon-khang* was built. After this progress in the reconstruction Ngag-gi dbang-phyug travel to Central Tibet to see the Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan where he offered the gifts Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan had given to him. Apparently the purpose of the visit was to receive official permission for Ngag-gi dbang-phyug to marry although he had taken vows. But the Dalai Lama was not pleased.<sup>73</sup> Therefore Ngag-gi dbang-phyug had to return to East Tibet without the permission. The fear of Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan and the Ga-zi family that their secular and spiritual power in Ri-bo che could be extinguished is evident. It is also clear that the power of the Dalai Lama and his patron was far reaching and that the Ga-zi family in Ri-bo che had lost its sovereignty.

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<sup>71</sup> Filibeck 1994, p. 238.

<sup>72</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, pp. 1431-1453; *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga*, p. 385.

<sup>73</sup> Is.M.E.O. manuscript (see note 4), p. 770.

In 1646 Grag-pa legs-grub, Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan's only son, was born. Later he took the vows of a novice from bKra-shis dpal-grub. And in 1666 it was again bKra-shis dpal-grub who enthroned Grag-pa legs-grub as abbot of Ri-bo che. It is said the property was divided at that time and that a second abbot's seat, called Ri-bo che rtse, was established. Ngag-gi dbang-phyug was enthroned here as *khri rin-po che rtse-pa* or *zhabs-drung rtse*.<sup>74</sup> About dividing the rights and the property a written agreement was made. Later also the authority of the sde-pa Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan as the secular head of Ri-bo che was divided after the Ri-bo che-pa had turned to the Dalai Lama. Apparently disputes between Ngag-gi dbang-phyug and Rin-chen rgyal-mtshan were the reason. Such disputes are mentioned by Rag-ra sprul-sku Ngag-dbang bstan-pa'i rgyal-mtshan in his *chos-'byung*. After the the division of authority it was permitted that the *rtse zhabs-drung* establish his own residence, his own *bla-brang*, by constructing the palace bKra-shis rab-brtan. Afterwards, however, Ngag-gi dbang-phyug was allowed to marry. His successor Ngag-dbang bkra-shis chos-skyong was later born to him. He also held secular and spiritual power. The lineage of Rin-chen rgyal-mtsan became extinct. As abbot his son Grag-pa legs-grub was succeeded in 1711 by bKra-shis dbang-rgyal. He was born in 1688 as the oldest son of *zhabs-drung* Ngag-dbang bkra-shis chos-skyong and later became a disciple of Grag-pa legs-grub.<sup>75</sup> The youngest son, bKra-shis rnam-rgyal, succeeded his father as *zhabs-drung rtse*. Grag-pa legs-grub, the last male descendant of the Ga-zi lineage in Ri-bo che, lived on as it were in a newly founded chain of incarnations.<sup>76</sup> When the grandson of Ngag-gi dbang-phyug had no male descendant the succession of abbots in Ri-bo che rtse was arranged by incarnation. After a further vain attempt to establish a hereditary succession of abbots in Ri-bo che rtse within the Ga-zi family the incarnation line was sustained.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*, p. 1451. See Filibeck 1994, p. 237.

<sup>75</sup> Is.M.E.O. manuscript, p. 774.

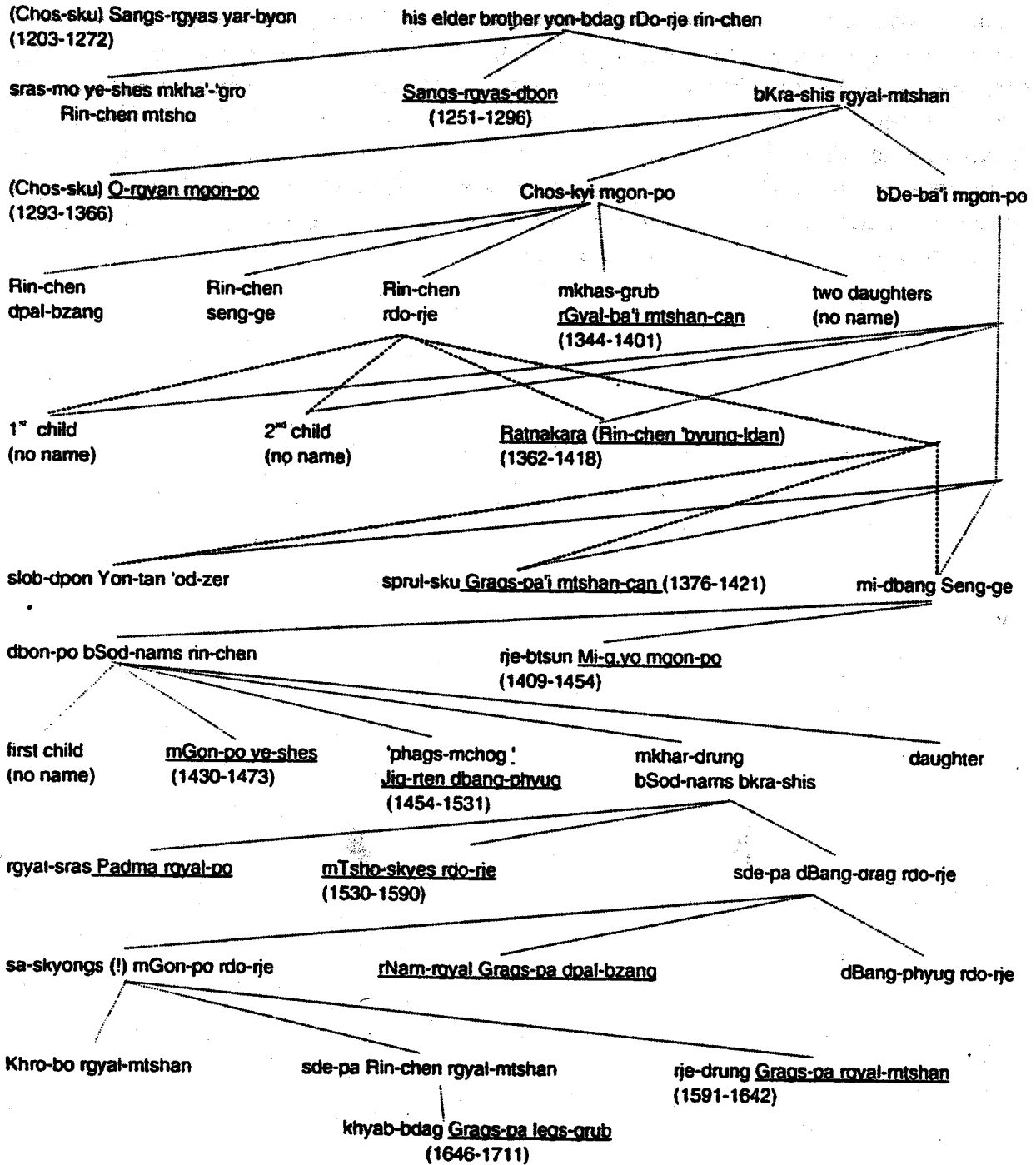
<sup>76</sup> See Filibeck 1994, p. 238.

<sup>77</sup> Is.M.E.O. manuscript, pp. 761-711; *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga*, pp. 386-87. There was the hope that bKra-shis dpal-grags, the then *zhabs-drung rtse* and brother of bka'-blon Tshe-ring dbang-rgyal (1697-1763), would get a son and heir. See also Luciano Petech, *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet 1728-1959*, Roma 1973 (Serie Orientale Roma XLV), pp. 70-73.



*The Lineage of the Noble House of Ga-zi in East Tibet / 131*

The lineage of the Ga-zi family in Ri-bo che according to the *dPal stag lung pa'i chos srid kyī byung tshul zur tsam brjod pa ngo mtshar kun gsal me long* (The biography of *sTag-lung-thang-pa chen-po*, pp. 261-262):



In the above outline of the Ga-zi lineage in Ri-bo che the names of the abbots are underlined.

In the second row bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan is the son of rDo-rje rin-chen's second wife. bDe-ba'i mgon-po in the third row had two successive wives: dKon-mchog rgyal-mtshan and Sangs-rgyas 'bum. The three people mentioned in the fifth row are the children of his first wife, while the three of the sixth row are from his second wife. However, in *Chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* those wives are not mentioned as the wives of bDe-ba'i mgon-po but as those of Rin-chen rdo-rje. Rin-chen rdo-rje is accordingly described as the father of the six children. It may be that bDe-ba'i mgon-po and Rin-chen rdo-rje, the son of his elder brother Chos-kyi mgon-po, had the same wives.