

The records of Tshul khrim mchog rgyal on the Black Phur pa cycle of the Tibetan Bon pos¹

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Abstract

The deity Phur pa is important not only in Tibetan Buddhist circles but also among practitioners of Bon. The Bon pos possess several different ritual cycles of Phur pa in various forms with unique liturgies. These traditions, their history and their particularities are still little known and have not yet been the object of scholarly research. This article focuses on one such ritual cycle, that of the Black Phur pa tradition, which is considered one of the most ancient in Bon. The goal of this essay is to contribute to the understanding of the tradition based on contemporary settings, lineage history, ritual artifacts and the personal chronicles of some of its important lineage transmitters.

Introduction

This article is part of a larger research project on the corpus of ritual practices of the Black Phur pa of the Tibetan Bon religion. Phur pa is a deified ritual dagger which is associated with rites of demarcation of sacred boundaries, exorcism, the pinning down and subjugation of enemies, killing, and commitments (*dam tshig*). It was probably imported to Tibet from India sometime during the Imperial Period or shortly later. The history of its spread can be understood from a number of sources, principally traditional religious lineage accounts, local historical records, monastic chronicles and sectarian historical archives.

Among both Buddhists and Bon pos Phur pa has come down through many different lineages of practice. The practices associated with each lineage are varied but generally resemble one another in strategies, goals and methods. However, they differ from one another principally in their iconography, doctrinal emphasis, individual history and their position within the general hierarchy of the classification of their sect's teachings. The long history of the various Phur pa lineages is a testimony to the endurance and the social and religious relevance of these ritual techniques in Tibet. This article intends to research the lineage transmission of one corpus of Phur pa practice that claims a history of continued practice since the eleventh century, if not from antiquity. It is still performed by Bon po ritual specialists.

No previous studies have been conducted on the Bon po Phur pa. This lacuna is no doubt due to the small number of Bon specialists and to the relative scarcity and availability of written Bon po sources.² Ritual manuals,

¹ The author wishes to thank Concordia University, Faculty Research Start-up Grant for partially enabling this research.

² The Canon of Bön Scriptures, the Kangyur (*bka' 'gyur*, here K.) became available for only a short period at the beginning of the 1990s. It has been out of print for a number of years; however, thanks to the efforts of the Bon po lama Smon rgyal lha sras from Dbal khyung

which make for the majority of written material on Phur pa, are also difficult to acquire due to the religious restrictions imposed on their circulation. The practices are esoteric and secret by nature and are transmitted through rituals of empowerment (*dbang*), explained through personal transmission (*lung*) and instructions (*khrid*), and learned through repeated communal or supervised rehearsals. Their lineage is acquired through an obligatory retreat, the length of which varies according to the peculiarities of the local tradition. Samten Karmay is the first to have discoursed about the Bon po Phur pa, though with great restraint, as his concise explanations comprise only four paragraphs.³ He briefly highlights the commonalities between the Buddhist and Bon po Phur pa and mentions the originator of the lineage, Stag la me 'bar, and the rationale for this practice, without additional detail.

The indigenous literature on Phur pa is quite large and is divided by functional categories and ritual cycles.⁴ These will be addressed in a subsequent article. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that there are currently at least nine traditions of Phur pa in contemporary Bon. There may have been other traditions of which we are unaware, which have not survived into contemporary times.⁵ Considered to be the most ancient Phur pa compendium of practice, the Ninefold Tantra of Phur pa and its commentary, the Tenth (*Phur pa rgyud dgu 'grel bcu*), are traditionally held to have been transmitted by Stag la me 'bar, a disciple of Ston pa gshen rab, the mythical originator of Bon in Zhangzhung. Another considered equally ancient by the tradition is the Black Phur pa (*Phur pa nag po*) rediscovered by Khu tsha zla 'od, the twenty-sixth lineage holder according to the tradition. Yet another tradition, propagated widely only starting in the nineteenth century, is the Revealed Phur pa (*Snyan rgyud phur pa*, T.025) associated with Dbal 'bar stag slag can (Bstan 'dzin dbang rgyal). This practice is part of the Great Perfection Transmission (*Rdzogs chen brgyud*) which is considered the

dgon in Nyag rong, it is currently available again in Chengdu. In this article, the volumes are referred to as K.n following the catalog published by Kværne, Per. Yasuhiko Nagano and Dan Martin (eds). *Bon Studies 8: A Catalogue of the Bon Kanjur*, Senri Ethnological Reports No.40. Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2003. The publication of the commentarial section of the Canon (*bka' brten*, here T.) began during the late 1990s and is still available in China. Its references to its volumes follow the catalog published by Karmay, Samten G. and Yasuhiko Nagano *Bon Studies 5: A Catalogue of the New Collection of Bon po Katen Texts – indices*. Senri Ethnological Reports No.25 (with CD-ROM). Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001. Very few copies of these two sets are currently held by North American libraries. It is also important to note that not all texts, commentaries and ritual compendium, on Phur pa are available in the *Bka' brten*.

³ Karmay, Samten G. *The Great Perfection: A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*. (Hanover: E.J. Brill, 1988), 135-36.

⁴ The Buddhist Phur pa has already been the object of several studies, including translations of commentaries and an English version of a shortened daily ritual (*sgrub thabs*). For the former, see principally Mayer, Robert. *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection: The Phur-pa bcu-gnyis*. Oxford & Gartmore: Kiscadale Publications, 1996; Boord, Martin J. *A Bolt of Lightning from the Blue*. Berlin: Edition Khordong, 2002; and Marcotti, Thomas. *Dagger Blessings: The Tibetan Phurba Cult*. Delhi: B R Publishing Corporation, 1987. For the latter see Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche. *The Practice of Vajrakilaya*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1999.

⁵ This information was given to me (May 2004) by one of the masters of Ye shes monastery in Nyag rong, the scholar monk (*dge bshes*) and reincarnated master (*sprul sku*) Seng ge sprul sku Rig 'dzin nyi ma (b. 1967). The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) has apparently claimed several Bon po lineage holders and he has indicated to me that there may have been other Phur pa ritual cycles which were not included in the present edition (1998) of the *Bka' brten*.

most elevated Vehicle of Bon.⁶ These three systems, which are independent from each other, are considered to be part of the Old Treasure transmission (*gter rnying*) and are considered, by some monasteries, as more orthodox.⁷

The following six other lineages are part of the New Treasure transmission (*gter gsar*) and incorporate Buddhist elements which are accepted as contributions from Padmasambhava (fl. 8th century). This Buddhist charismatic figure is considered by the followers of New Bon to be the younger brother of Tshe dbang rig 'dzin and son of Dran pa nam mkha', two important Bon po masters of the period. Kun grol grags pa (b. 1800) was considered as one of the founders of what became known as New Bon and is recognized for having started a new wave of discovery of Textual Treasures.⁸ These were purportedly hidden in the eighth century, by the three aforementioned masters, to prevent the Teachings from disappearing during the persecution of Bon which followed. Hiding texts and artefacts is an old practice of the Tibetans. In fact, in times of persecution, the Tibetans hid their possessions by burying them under recognizable features of the landscape in order to perpetuate their location in the family memory and to be able to retrieve the goods at a later, more peaceful time. Tibetans have resorted to this again in recent times following the occupation of their lands by the People's Liberation Army troops in the 1950s and during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). As an aside, this has also resulted in a new wave of rediscovery of spiritual treasures involving contemporary Tibetan masters within and outside the Tibetan territories.⁹

The nineteenth century was a period of great religious syncretism in Eastern Tibet. In order to counteract the religious hegemony and ardent proselytizing of the Gelug (*dge lugs*) sect, which controlled temporal power in Central Tibet until 1959, religious hierarchs of the other four competing Buddhist schools began to share teachings. This phenomenon was known as

⁶ On this system, see Rossi, Donatella. *The Philosophical View of the Great Perfection in the Tibetan Bon Religion*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2000. Snellgrove, David. *The Nine Ways of Bon: Excerpts from Gzi-brjid*. London Oriental Series, V. 18. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968. Reynolds, John Myrdhin. *The Oral Tradition from Zhang-Zhung: An Introduction to the Bon po Dzogchen Teachings of the Oral Tradition from Zhang-Zhung*. (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2005), Karmay, *The Great Perfection*.

⁷ I am uncertain why Seng ge sprul sku Rig 'dzin nyi ma considered this as part of an Old Gter ma transmission. Being from the Ye shes monastery in Nyag rong, which upholds both New and Old Transmissions, it is possible that the claims of this system relating to the antiquity and orthodoxy of the tradition are accepted at face value by him. However, having been schooled at Snang zhig Monastery, which is a bastion of orthodoxy, he must have been aware of what, according to the Sman ri tradition, were the Old and New in the Phur pa traditions. I have not been able to verify this point further and it is my hope that this aspect will be clarified later.

⁸ On his life, see: Karmay, Samten G. *Feast of the Morning Light: The Eighteenth Century Wood-engravings of Shenrab's Life-stories and the Bon Canon from Gyalrong*. Bon Studies 9. Senri Ethnological Reports No.57. (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 2005), 19-35; Kun grol grags pa. *Rig 'Dzin Kun-grol Grags-Pa rNam-mthar Gsungs Pod bZ'ugs (sic!)* [Biography of the Lineage Holder kun grol grags pa] (Kathmandu: Tritan Norbutse Bon Education Centre Ichangu Narayan, 1990.)

⁹ For examples, see: Germano, David. "Re-membering the Dismembered Body of Tibet: Contemporary Tibetan Visionary movements in the People's Republic of China." In *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*. Edited by Matthew T. Kapstein and Melvyn C. Goldstein, 53-94. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

the Rime (*ris med*, i.e. Non-Sectarian) movement. Accompanying this was a renaissance in Buddhist teachings with new ritual trends and a homogenization of ritual practices. Starting in the eleventh century, and slowly gaining increasing momentum, was another important movement involving the discovery of hidden teachings left by early sages, unearthed by predestined individuals. These Hidden Treasures, the Terma (*gter ma*), uncovered by charismatic Buddhist and Bon lamas, came on the religious scene in the form of documents, sacred objects -- crystals, ritual daggers (*phur bu*), etc., signs, sounds, written syllables and revelations (mental treasures: *dgongs gter*). This mechanism of renewal was based partly on the charismatic authority of the Treasure discoverers, the Tertön (*gter ston*), recognized as the reincarnation of a former master; and the institution of reincarnated lamas having the tacit support of the legitimizing religious authority, the monastic establishments.

Thus, the Tertön were living religious authorities who renewed their own lineage with ideas, practices and rituals which were not necessarily in existence previously within their own schools.

The Bon pos have been rediscovering their teachings from the time of the initial persecutions, which started in the seventh century under the Buddhist King Srong btsan sgam po, and lasted until the fall of the Ganden Podrang (*dga' ldan pho brang*) government of the Dalai Lamas in 1959. In the ninth century, under the reign of King Khri Song lde'u btsan, followers of Bon had either to convert to Buddhism or go into exile. Religious texts were hidden and it was not until the eleventh century that Bon po masters reorganized their religion in order to be able to compete with Buddhism, which had continued to be imported to Tibet until the end of the thirteenth century.

Thus, most written teachings of Bon are *gter ma*. They are generally classified in two main branches, as seen previously: the Old Treasure and the New Treasure Traditions. The canonical texts included within the Kangyur are categorized as Rediscovered Treasures (*gter*),¹⁰ Mental Treasures (*dgongs gter*), Southern and Northern Treasures (*lho byang gter*), Revelation (*snyan rgyud*), Rediscovered Treasures of/from a Protector (*srung gter*), and Scriptures (*rgyud*).¹¹ Phur pa texts are part of the Rediscovered Treasures category when it comes to canonical texts such as the Nine Chapter Tantras of Phur pa (*phur pa rgyud le'u so dgu pa*; K.35, K.113, K.114).

The six other lineages of Phur pa are:

4. The Phur pa lower-robe of Tagla (*stag la phur shams thabs?*), rediscovered by Kun grol grags pa.
5. The Phur pa of Dechen Lingpa (*bde gling phur pa*), rediscovered by Bde chen gling pa.¹²

¹⁰ In this paper, when both Tibetan and Chinese transliterations are supplied, the first will be the Tibetan transliteration.

¹¹ Zhou Xilang (ed.). *Zangzu yuanshi jiajiao* [Early Family-based religions of the Tibetan]. (Chengdu: Sichuan zangxue yanjiusuo, 1991), 476-497.

¹² For a brief biography and a catalogue of his writings, revelations and discoveries, see Jean-Luc Achard, *Bon po hidden Treasures: A Catalogue of gTer ston bDe chen gling pa's Collected revelations*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004. In this work, there are references to a number of texts on Phur nag, however it is not yet clear whether those are independent *gter ma*, instructions on the old Phur nag tradition or on a Black Phur pa version of Bde chen gling pa. Further research needs to be completed first.

6. The Fierce Phur pa of the Three Body (*sku gsum drag phur*), rediscovered at the cave of sbas yul g.yung drung spungs tshal in Nyag rong by Gsang sngags gling pa.¹³
7. The Canopy of Phur pa (*gdugs phur*), possibly the same as the Fierce Phur pa of Dranpa Namkha (*dran pa drag phur*) received by Gter chen bya btang Tshe dbang 'gyur med in a Pure Vision (*dag snang*) (T. 208).
8. The form of Phur pa propitiated within the Tantric cycle of Dge khod (*dge khod phur pa*).
9. The form of Phur pa propitiated within the Tantric system of Me ri (*me ri phur*).
10. The Canon of commentaries (*bka' brten*) also contains other forms of Phur pa, such as the Blo ldan phur (T. 077) written by G.yung drung tshul khriims dbang ldan; the Phur pa of Za from the cycle of Meri (*Zva phur me ri'i dkyil 'khor*, T. 099) discovered by Sangs sngags gling pa; the Phur pa of the Eight Life-sap (*brgyad bcud phur*) of Mkha' 'gro 'Od ldan 'bar ma, together with a host of other writings consisting of praises, concise rituals, supplication and prayers.

Source Material on Ritual, History and Lineages

The sources relevant to the history, lineages and practices of Bon po Phur pa include ritual texts, canonical literature, historical chronicles, root-Tantras (*rtsa rgyud*), initiation cards (*tsa ka li*), local monastic chronicles, paintings (*thang ka*) and local lineage history. The data derived from these documents follow an internal reasoning which supported earlier material as well as an 'insider's' interpretation of the scripture and practices. Conducting an external investigation, corroborating dates and identifying members of the lineages remain constant challenges.

Canonical materials contained in the Kangyur and the Katen on the Black Phur pa are numerous. The source of the practice is to be found in the root-Tantra of Phur pa (K.33, K.113 and K.114).¹⁴ This was rediscovered at a cave in Paro (*spa gro phug gcal*) in Bhutan, by Khu tsa zla 'od 'bar (b. 1024) in 1038.¹⁵ The Tantra is made of nine texts with a commentary, altogether comprising ten volumes. The root-tantra itself consists of thirty-nine chapters. In conformity with the general genre of the Bon Tantras, the bulk of this scripture consists of ritual instructions, commitments (*dam tshig*), descriptions of several circles of deities manifesting as Phur pa, methods to control water demons (*chu srin*), gods, the burning of corpses (*ro bsregs pa*), *homa* ritual (*sbyin sreg*), the making of offering cakes (*gtor ma*), and a host of other practices. Each of the nine Tantras contains individual instructions regarding these various rites. This corpus is thus fairly significant in size and

¹³ On the monastery of Gong rgyal and its surrounding caves, see Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 428-431.

¹⁴ K. 33, 113 and 114. Karmay *et al.*, *A Catalog*, 310.

¹⁵ This would then suggest that Khu tsa was 14 years old. Karmay has already pointed this problem out but has not yet suggested a way to resolve this chronology. However, he does mention that Yon tan rgya mtsho suggested that the discovery must have happened during the second Rab byung (1087-1146). Karmay *Treasury*, 145 n. 1.

contains groups of rites which are extensively covered by later Phur pa systems. Although the Root-text establishes the rationales and the antecedents which legitimize the practices of the corpus, exact directions as to how to apply them are found in the many ritual manuals (*sgrub thabs*) of the later Phur pa corpora. The latter are therefore invaluable for studying the methods of practice of this system. Among them are also found prayers to the masters of the lineages. It was not until recent times that Bon po lamas resorted to printing these and other manuals in significant numbers. Local productions record the names of the masters who handed down the teachings. It is in using these that a clearer history of the dissemination of the Black Phur pa can be reconstructed.

Conciseness is a characteristic of *gter ma* and rituals of the later New Bon movement.¹⁶ Because of this, New *gter ma* texts are very commonly used by monks when performing privately sponsored rites in households. The larger cycle of the Black Phur pa is rarely performed in these circumstances because of the complexities of its recitation and length. Therefore, at least in the Khams and A mdo areas, the Black Phur pa rites are predominantly performed within monastic compounds and on grand occasions.

The main commentary on the Black Phur pa is the *Great Commentary on the Concise Meaning of the Root-text* (*Don 'dus rtsa ba'i 'grel chen*) allegedly written by Khu tsa. These texts are not readily available in contemporary monasteries. Most practitioners of Phur pa rely on their master's instructions, which may or may not come from this last collection of instructions. The nature of these consists for the most part in drumming, ritual cake making, chanting, and directions on the proper order of recitation of the collection of texts, which can number well over thirty with excerpts inserted at strategic places during the larger unfolding of the ritual. These excerpts come from the daily liturgies of the mother monastery, which holds that particular branch of the tradition. Other parts, called "lore" (*gzhung*) are either from the root-verses which constitute the essential core or the "original" words of the purported first teacher, in this case either Stag la me 'bar, or Byams ma.

When one begins the enterprise of becoming a lineage holder, the essential part of the retreat consists of not only reciting the proper quantities of the various mantras but also of becoming proficient in the recitation of the core texts and various associated rituals. Thus, with the exception of the beginning and the concluding rites, most other miscellaneous texts and prayers to be recited are, in the task of daily recitations, not used with the exception of all the lore material. The *gzhung* constitutes the essential text, while all the remaining material was composed by different masters and added to the corpus. Although the lore is the essence of the practice, the other addenda are, for the scholars, the main objects of research.

The Phur nag corpus, being particularly bulky with added liturgy, makes it very complicated to recite. The ritual was expanded over time through the addition of prayers, entreaties and others miscellaneous rites unique to the

¹⁶ The gradual diminution of Bon po lamas over the centuries and the complexities of their ritual might have been a contributing factor to the emergence of New Bon. The later ones favored shorter, simpler rituals with abbreviated instructions. New Bon also came under intense criticism, not only from Buddhists but from Bon pos, for mixing heterogeneous elements from Buddhism. Many of the latter's symbols and concepts, had by then been absorbed in the greater Tibetan religious culture and were indistinguishable from indigenous culture.

tradition of each particular lineage. Not all monasteries use the same standards in their yearly or occasional recitations. These accord with received tradition and can be abbreviated or enhanced with sacred dances (*'chams*) and other grand public displays.

The canonical texts, found in private or monastic libraries – e.g., the *Nine Root Tantras* and the *Great Commentary* – are seldom if ever consulted by ritualists. Contemporary testimonials and the current situation indicate that the tradition has focused on individual training through regular communal ritual. The relative simplicity of later *gter ma* may be due, in part, to the ritual complexity of the Old Treasure Tradition which made learning difficult for novices and taxing to teach for Bon po masters. Monastic training in pre-PRC times started with rote memorization of the entire ritual corpus. This was followed by ritual drumming, chanting and learning to make the *gter ma*. The inner aspects of the practice, such as visualizations and the exegeses attached to these, would be imparted only to a minority of committed disciples who would enter a period of retreat to perfect or acquire the lineage. This would further entitle them to have disciples, and to transmit the lineage to those who followed in the footsteps of the master. The Phur pa specialist would also be asked regularly to perform the various rituals associated with the system of his tradition mentioned above. This could have involved the performance of exorcism, subjugation of evil spirits, healing, and ritual killing (*gsod pa*). My observations at Ye shes monastery indicate that the latter rite would be left to higher lamas of the monastery. Monks who are involved in private ritual performance for patrons seemed to believe the regular performance of the *gsod pa* rite may either shorten their lifespan and/or produce negative karma. In any case, the requirements for attaining mastery of this system are such that they necessitate a long period of apprenticeship, training, and ascetic discipline which would make the lama a “tradesperson” in the realm of the Bon priesthood; that is, a professional priestly member of an institution that supplies services of a religious and cultural nature to the local or greater population at large. In fact, religious organizations in Tibet may almost be compared to guilds that created specialists and guarded trade practices and secrets. The extensive use of esoteric and secret rituals to transmit teachings is very much in line with such ideology applied to the realm of the sacred.

Ritual demands a group of specialists trained in its intricacies. Despite the general trend towards secularization in China and the Tibetan areas, the demands for ritual performance seem to continue and even to be on the rise following the liberalization of the practice of religion starting in the mid-1980s. For decades there has been a vacuum in the local religious market in the Tibetan areas of Sichuan due to the political upheavals of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath. Monks who can fill the traditional offices have only recently been trained, thanks to the knowledge of religious elders and the concerted efforts of communities. This relatively recent renewal is in keeping with many Tibetan communities which have turned to traditional lore and organizations rather than to the national political ideology and organizations. One of the reasons for this may have to do with the relative isolation of the Tibetan regions in contrast to the Chinese (Han) populated areas. Economic development as well as the lack of infrastructure (roads,

electricity, hospital, etc.) have left the Tibetans to themselves in many regards. This may have provoked many to return to traditional systems which have proven reliable in the past, if not adaptable to the contemporary world.

Monasteries used to keep records of important visitors, of activities and of historical moments. Unfortunately, many of these chronicles were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). With their disappearance there vanished an important portion of the local cultural heritage. However, from the moment religious freedom manifested itself once again, elders, former heads of monasteries and some of the latter's disciples began to rewrite their history. Some have recently been published privately, such as the *History of the Yeshe Monastery*¹⁷ or the *History of the Nangzhi monastery* by the late Bya 'phur Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.¹⁸ Other historical information can be gleaned from recent government sponsored publications produced by Prefectures.¹⁹ They provide us with portraits of local geography, natural resources, recent history, culture, demography and society. Prefectures along the Sino-Tibetan frontiers have in the past produced local gazetteers in Chinese.²⁰ Although most do not distinguish between the different schools and sects of Tibetan religions, they nevertheless provide us with important historical information, sometimes reaching far into antiquity. Contemporary archaeological reports also provide glimpses of material culture. These are particularly important for the understanding of ancient Tibetan civilization which, according to historical records, supported a system of kingship closely tied to a religious aristocracy and from which contemporary Bon claims its ancestry.

The Black Phur pa Tradition

The Bon historical accounts of the Black Phur pa start with the story of a disciple of Ston pa gshen rab, the mythical founder of Bon. The sage Stag la me 'bar was one of two twin sons of the king Yang rgyal lha and the queen Stag za he ting of Stag gzig . One was pure-minded whereas his brother, Dha sha ghri ba, was evil. Before the birth of their twins both king and queen treated their servants very badly. One of their servants, before his death, told the couple that he would be reborn as both their sons. His good side reincarnated as Stag la and his resentful one as Dha sha. The latter soon

¹⁷ Seng ge sprul sku Rig 'dzin nyi ma. *Nyag rong ye shes dgon pa'i lo rgyus / Kang qu xinlong yisi si de lishi* [The history of Yeshe Monastery]. Bilingual edition. Chengdu, 2005.

¹⁸ Bya 'phur Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1969-1995). *Phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba'i sde chen po bkra shis g.yung drung gling ngam Snang zhig rgyal bstan phun tshogs gling gi gdan rabs bsdu par bshad pa rdzogs ldan ngag gi rgyal rnga zhes bya ba bzhuvs so* [History of the Abbatial seats and lineage holders of the Nangzhi monastery in Rnga ba] Solan: Mu khri bcan po zhang bod rig gzhung zhib 'jug khang, 1994.

¹⁹ Renmin chubanshi is producing county gazetteers in Chinese as well as in Tibetan. Similar productions on Aba, Songpan, Jinchuan, Xinlong, Heishui and other Tibetan inhabited regions have also been published. There are also local reports on local institutions, their history and masters produced by the bureaus of Religious Affairs (*zongjiao bu*) in each Prefecture. These, however, are not readily available to foreign researchers since they are classified as Internal Documents (*neibu*).

²⁰ For instance, Songpan has a series of five volumes on its local history. Sichuan Province has also produced a series of eleven books covering the pre-republican (1911) period and going back to the Han dynasty.

began to persecute his parents. He beat his mother and eventually cut off the head of his father and left home. It was said that he left for the south of Stag gzig and became wild. It was rumoured that he ate humans and threatened the country with chaos and destruction. Stag la was forced to fight his own brother. But Dha sha apparently won, leaving Stag la at a loss as to how to subdue his brother.

After learning the rituals of Phur pa from his master, 'Chi med gtsug phud, Stag la retired to Brag phug rong can to practice. However, despite his best efforts, he was not able to contain his brother. Seeing his great distress, the goddess of compassion, Byams ma, appeared to him and explained that his compassion towards his brother was preventing him from achieving his goals. She instructed him further on the techniques of Phur pa and recommended him to cultivate a strong and arrogant frame of mind. After doing so, Stag la was able to kill his brother by magical means and "save the country and sentient beings."²¹

Stag la transmitted the teachings to Lha gshen Yongs su dag pa, Klu grub Ye shes snying po, and Rgyal btsan Mi lus bsam legs. They promulgated these teachings respectively in the realms of the Celestial deities, the subterranean world of the nāga, and the realm of the humans. The first disciple, Lha gshen, was born in the celestial realm and was a disciple of Gsang ba 'dus pa, a legendary master, who transmitted the teachings of one of the Bon po systems of the Great Perfection, the *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*. This important system of meditation, in Bon, permits adepts to accomplish the Rainbow Body (*'ja' lus*) and attain total Enlightenment, leaving no body behind.²²

The story of the second disciple, Klu grub, is an epic one. After first becoming a disciple to several masters, he transformed himself into a garuda and then later into a fish to seek out his destined master, Gshen lha 'od dkar. Failing to find him, he returned home to meditate. Only then did Gshen lha 'od dkar appear to him and begin to instruct him. He was told that his divine master had never been apart from him and that all the beings he encountered while travelling in the sky or in the ocean were none other than his master. He was eventually redirected to another master and later received the Black Phur pa lineage from Stag la me 'bar.²³

Mi lus bsam legs was born in Rgyal dkar ba chod. He was the son of a king who had just died. His country had been condemned by a soothsayer to be taken over by a neighbouring kingdom. The population fervently prayed to the goddess of compassion mentioned above and Mi lus bsam legs was born to the queen a year later. He studied under six masters of Bon, who included Stag la me 'bar, and eventually became the lineage holder of Phur pa and also of the important Tantric cycle of Magyud (*ma rgyud*).²⁴

²¹ Karmay, *Treasury*, xxii.

²² On the Rainbow Body in Bön, see Achard, "Le Corps d'Arc-en-Ciel", 503-532. The rainbow body phenomenon is shared with the Nyingma tradition. See: "The Strange Death of Pema the Demon Tamer" in Matthew T. Kapstein (ed.) *The Presence of Light: Divine Experience and Religious Experience*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 119-156. Thanks to Antonio Terrone for this information and reference.

²³ Karmay, *Treasury*, xxii-xxiii.

²⁴ Karmay, *Treasury*, xxiv.

The early history of the Black Phur pa cycle is linked to another larger corpus of practices known as the *Three Cycles [of the Propagation] of Chipung* (*spyi spungs skor gsum*). These are teachings related to the propitiation of Wrathful Male divinities, used to subdue and control chaotic forces. The Chipung is literally the “topmost heap” (*spyi spungs*), with *spyi* here a metaphor for “universal,” thus the “Universal heap of deities.” These are gatherings of divinities that are cosmic in character. They are believed to be able to affect “current events” in the three realms of the celestial divinities, humans and *nāgas*.²⁵ Some other divinities, still widely worshiped by the Bon pos today, are *Dbal gsas rngam pa*, *Khro bo Gtso mchog mkha' 'gying*, *Dbal chen ge khod* and *Lha rgod thog pa*. When all the various early teachings of male divinities (together with Phur pa) are classified together, they are also named the *Five Supreme Ones of the Citadel* (*gsas mkhar mchog lnga*). The whole collection comprises various rites involving all types of practices for controlling spirits, demons, gods, subterranean creatures and other beings of Tibet's extensive pantheon.

The three masters mentioned above who received the teachings of Phur pa are believed to have produced their own lineages of disciples. However, they are each better known as holders of other practices, such as *Ma rgyud*. This may account for other divergent lineage accounts of Phur pa, since what is today prevalent in the Kangyur (K.33, K.113, K.114) and the ritual compendium I have been able to consult omit the three latter masters (i.e. *Lha gshen Yongs su dag pa*, *Klu grub Ye shes snying po*, and *Rgyal btsan Mi lus bsam legs*) from the supplication list (*gsol bdebs*) and the lineage accounts (*brgyud rim*). The lists usually jump directly from *Stag la me 'bar* to *Dbal bon Kha yal me 'bar* in *Stag gzig*. The list below concerns the early propagation of Phur pa, from different regions of *Stag gzig* to Kashmir, India, Nepal, Tibet, and China. At this point, it is difficult to positively identify many regions mentioned below with contemporary locations, with the exception of the general areas of Kashmir, Nepal and India. Even the 'Grim thang area, purportedly located in China, is not yet identifiable. One can only notice the general involvement of the surrounding regions in the spread of the Phur pa tradition. Does the list imply that the teachings first spread abroad before being propagated in Tibet, or does it stress the contribution of these competing religious worlds, with the implicit understanding that the seminal teachings of all these different religious countries were extracted and put in a concise form into the Phur pa tradition, thus making it particularly potent? At this point, one can only conjecture. The various canonical lists found in ritual manuals and the histories, more mythical in nature than historical, have been compiled as follows by *Shar rdza bkra shis rgyal mtshan* (1859-1935) in his *Legs bshad mdzod*:²⁶

²⁵ Karmay, *Treasury*, 15 n.3.

²⁶ Translated in part by Samten Karmay, *Treasury*.

*Shar rdza's list of Masters who transmitted
the Black Phur pa practices to eighth century*

<i>Name of the Master of the lineage</i>	<i>Place of reception of the teachings</i>
1. Stag la me 'bar	Stag gzig
2. Gnod sbyin 'dul	Stag tshal rgod kha'i yul
3. 'Od spungs	Dbal 'bar lha'i yul
4. Khyung la can	Stag rtse lha'i mkhar
5. Stag la can	Dbal yul 'od ma'i tshal
6. Kha yal me 'bar from Gru	Grub yul grug stod
7. 'Ol bon mig gcig	'Ol yul 'ol mkhar
8. Ti ti me slag can	Mu stegs kha 'bar
9. Kha yal me lce can from dram ze	Dram ze 'thib gnon
10. A ga ru nag po from India	No location
11. Tsan tsan lce ring from Nepal	Thang shod, Nepal
12. Gyang ti gsas from Kashmir	Unspecified location in Kashmir
13. Spungs rgyung mthu chen from Khotan	Ljang ra smug po in Khotan
14. Ge ti gsas rnga chung can	Zhang chung
15. Ko long lha gsas from Smra	Unspecified location in Tibet
16. Kha 'byams lcags kyi bya ru can from 'Phan yul	'Phan yul
17. Dbal 'bar lha gsas from China	'Grim thang (?) in China
18. Gsas khar me 'bar	Yar yul lha'i thang
19. Dran pa nam mkha' (fl. eighth and ninth century)	Central Tibet

Depictions of the Spread of the teachings

Transmission means : Tsa ka li

As part of the process of the propagation of the teachings, the hierophant will use ritual cards (*tsa ka li*) to show the appearances of the divinities and the masters of the lineage populating the divine circle (*dkyil 'khor*). These cards measure roughly fifteen by twelve centimetres and are small paintings depicting the aforementioned beings and symbols. They are usually restricted to those who have been initiated into the Tantric cycle and who wish to study it. Until very recently (and it still often remains the case) these were local productions and history retold in picture form. One of the purposes of their use during the Empowerment ritual may be to suggest ways of imagining the masters of the lineage during prayers to the lamas. It also sets symbolic models for artists and painters who create *thangka* and other icons. For example, representations of Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, the founder of Sman ri monastery, follow iconographic prescriptions that have become standardized. It is thanks to these standardizations that the master's representation in paintings or statues is easily identifiable.²⁷

²⁷ See Ramble, Charles. "Tsewang Rigdzin: The Bon Tradition of Sacred Geography." In *Bon, The Magic Word: The Indigenous Religion of Tibet*. New York and London: Rubin Museum of Art and Philip Wilson Publishers, (2008), 125-129. Some Bon po artists have recently produced manuals which detail the guidelines for drawings and representing iconographic figures. One such book, written by Rig 'dzin nyi ma (different from Seng ge

I have been fortunate to be able to photograph two sets of those illustrating the Black Phur pa circle of divinities and masters and one of the *Fierce Phur pa of the Three Bodies* of Sangs sngags gling pa. The two sets of the Black Phur pa are from two different regions at some distance from each other. The first was photographed at the Ye shes monastery in Khams, Sichuan (in 2006), and the other at the Bon brgya monastery in A mdo, Qinghai (in 2004). Both sets illustrate similar divinities and differ only slightly with regards to the masters of the lineage. This can help us understand how this practice spread and who its principal disseminators were, and it may help to reconstruct local history, particularly when compared to written records.

The first set belongs to the younger brother of the late *sprul sku*, A g.yung bla ma²⁸ (G.yung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan) of Ye shes monastery, A rgyal bla ma (Skal bzang rgya mtsho, born *circa* 1940). It is divided into two sections: the first, named *Phur pa'i lha dbang* ("the empowerment of the deities of Phur pa"), is used during the initiation ritual on the Black Phur pa's divine circles (*dkyil 'khor*) of deities. It has thirty-three cards with depictions of deities and symbols. The second is numbered one to fifty-five, but the deck is missing one card and contains some unmarked ones. It portrays the lineage holders of this master. It is believed to have been made during the time of Tshul khrims mchog rgyal. The artist is unknown; however, I suspect that these *tsa ka li* were the products of the latter, who was an avid chronicler of the various lineages he received during his life. Behind most cards are handwritten texts to be recited while showing the cards.²⁹ These are excerpts from the ritual texts of the initiation in the cycle of the Black Phur pa. The textual passages that accompany the cards run as follow:

1. The Perfected King Mkha' 'gying (*rdzogs sku mkha'gying rgyal po*) resides in the fierce fortress of 'Og min. [He has a] dark-blue body and shines majestic light; his hair curls in an ornament of black expanse; [he] brandishes in his

sprul sku Rig 'dzin nyi ma), is: *G.yung drung bon lugs kyi bzo rig skya rengs gsar ba'i 'dzum mdangs*, Xinlong *circa* 2005.

²⁸ For his biography see Seng ge sprul sku Rig 'dzin nyi ma. *Bla ma a g.yung gi rnam thar / bla ma mchog rgyal gyi rnam thar* [Biography of Lama Ayung. Biography of Lama Chogyal]. Chengdu: Sichuan xinan minzhu xueyuan chubanshe (四川西南民族学院出版社) (2003), 1-19.

²⁹ The text behind the *tsa ka li* can also be found, with minor variations, in an ancillary manuscript which is part of the initiation ritual (*dbang khrid*), entitled *The Minutiae of the lineage of Phur Pa, Rosary of Mu tig (phur pa'i brgyud tsag mu tig phreng ba bzhuqs so)*, RGPhGTh folios 1523-1540. This collection of material was acquired in the Spring 2004 at Rin spungs dgon. On this monastery see Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 608-611. It has been reprinted locally from collected hand-written material, which bears the lineage mark of the G.yung drung gling monastery in Central Tibet. This collection has more than a hundred different texts and totals one thousand five hundred and ninety four numbered folios. An elder lama of the monastery, Aku Yako, learned this cycle at an early age. He conducted several retreats locally and in Central Tibet. After completing his studies in Shar khog, he went to G.yung drung gling Monastery in Central Tibet. See Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 33-36. At the onset of the Cultural Revolution, disguised as a peasant, he and another Sharwapa returned home on foot to A mdo Shar khog (Songpan Prefecture). His knowledge of this corpus is remarkable. Besides having memorized the entire ritual, he has mastered all the traditional lore of the Black Phur pa. He has passed his learning to a young master in charge of the retreat center of the monastery, Joko lama.

- hand a dagger of meteorite iron whose fierce material subjugates the Five Poisons of affliction.³⁰
2. Great Mother Compassionate Byams ma (*yum chen thugs rje byams ma*) sits in the expanse of E of the Blanket of Delight. Her white body emanates green majestic light with her green hair gathering and swirling around turquoises; she carries a vase of ambrosia which holds compassion for all poisoned sentient beings.³¹
 3. The Emanated Teacher Gshen rab (*sprul sku ston pa gshen rab*) stands in the Canopy of Lapis of the fierce *gsas* palace. His blue-colored body radiates light and emanations; his hair is a topknot of lapis with a turquoise in the center.³²
 4. The *gshen* of power, the fierce Stag la me bar, resides in the fierce *gsas* palace in the cave of Rong chen. His body is red and blue, majestic in countenance; his hair is green and ornamented with thousands of small poisonous daggers; his body is covered with the mane of a tiger and ornamented with the hundred thousand small bells of existence; he holds high a curved iron dagger and liberates demons and devouring fiends.³³
 5. Kha yal me 'bar, hero of the *gshen*, resides at the fierce *gsas* palace in the Eight plains of Dbal yul.³⁴
 6. The Hero of Bon, the Shen subduer of the violent Yaksha, Dbal bon Gnod sbyin 'dul stands in the fierce *gsas* palace at Tiger grove (*stag tshal*).
 7. The Hero of Bon, 'Od dpung, the fierce and heroic *gshen* resides in the *gsas* palace in the country of the fierce gods at Dbal 'bar.³⁵
 8. The Hero of the *gshen*, Khyung slag, the heroic *gshen* stands in the fierce *gsas* palace at Stag rtse.
 9. The Hero of Bon, Stag slag, the fierce and heroic *gshen*, resides in the fierce *gsas* palace at 'Od ma in the country of Dbal.
 10. The Great Bon po of the kingdom, the Hero Kha yal me 'bar³⁶ resides at the fierce *gsas* palace of Drug yul.³⁷
 11. The Bon po of 'Ol, Spyang cig, hero of the *gshen*, dwells at the fierce *gsas* palace of 'Ol yul.
 12. Hero of the *gshen*, Ti ti me slag, is in the fierce *gsas* palace at the mouth of Mu steg.
 13. Hero of the *gshen*, Bram ze me 'bar is located at the fierce *gsas* palace of 'Thib gnon.
 14. Hero of the *gshen*, A ka ru nag, stays in the fierce *gsas* palace at a cemetery in India.³⁸
 15. The heroic Lord, Lce ring, hero of the *gshen*, resides ... at Thang shod in Dbal yul (Nepal?)
 16. ... Dbal 'bar ting gsal³⁹ ... in Kha che.

³⁰ RGPhGTh f. 1523.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ RGPhGTh f. 1524.

³⁴ From this point on, I will not translate the description of the person but will rather emphasize the place attributed to the master to highlight the two important points of these texts.

³⁵ RGPhGTh f. 1525.

³⁶ Identical name as card #5 but from a different place.

³⁷ RGPhGTh f. 1526.

³⁸ RGPhGTh f. 1527.

³⁹ There seemed to be some confusion as to the name of this master. RGPhGTh f. 1527 writes ti *gsas* while Tshul khrim mchog rgyal's records have been corrected with the name of Ga ta spyal or Ga ta rgyal. The handwriting is not very clear. YDChG f. 1b.

17. The Bon po of Khotan, Spyungs rgyung, ... at the Green Goat Gsas [palace] of Khotan.⁴⁰
18. Hero of the *gshen* of Ti gsas in Zhang zhung (*zhang zhung ti gsas dbal kyi gshen*)... at Khyung lung in Zhang zhung.
19. ... Smra bon lha gsas ... at Gser phugs in Central Tibet.
20. ... Kha 'byams drag pa ... in 'Phan yul in Central [Tibet].
21. ... Dbal 'bar lha gsas ... at 'Bram (i.e. 'Grim?) thang in Rgya yul (China or India?).⁴¹
22. Gsas mkhar me 'bar ... in Dmar⁴² yul at Thang shod.
23. Bla chen Dran pa nam mkha' ... at Yer pa in Central [Tibet].
24. Bla ma Khu tsha zla 'od 'bar at the retreat center of the cave of Spa gro.⁴³
25. Bla ma 'Gar⁴⁴ ston khro rgyal ... at the Mig dgu (nine sources?) of Dra ma in Rong.
26. Masters Bru chen, father and son ... at the retreat center of Mount Srin po.
27. Sprul sku Ston tshul khirms stag ... at the holy monastery of Brag dmar.
28. ⁴⁵ In the *gsas* palace of the heroes of Dbal chen, Me ston gshen rab bdud rtsi stands splendid with his body red-brown in color; his hair dark blue pointing upward; on his body is a great cloak and a shawl (*bza'*); he wields a dagger made of meteorite iron; he is a scholar with a purified heart, a vessel of all-encompassing knowledge.⁴⁶
29. ⁴⁷ In the *gsas* palace of Ring in Skyid mkhar, Sangs rgyas Me sgom khyung tum is dazzling with a shining white body with green hair swirling to the right, cloaked with a white cotton shawl (*bza'*), holding in the air a *dbal* dagger, he has a white meditation belt and sits in the state of emptiness and clarity.
30. Sprul sku Me ston rgyal mtshan ... at Ring in Skyid mkhar.
31. ⁴⁸ ... at Lha ring lho ngos grong stod is Sprul sku Me ston ra lcam. He has a body dark brown in color; his hair is green, bound in a topknot; he is wielding in the air a world dagger; he manifests himself as a knowledge-holder (*mkhyen*) of the gods' secret spells, equal to the gods; he has spontaneously realized the meaning of self and has reached the limits of the benefit for others.⁴⁹
32. ⁵⁰ In the monastery of Na ring dbal, Me ston Zhi ban ngang ldan dwells in a body of a brilliant pure white. His hair is like the black element streaming upward; on his body he wears a shawl adorned with precious jewels; he holds in the air a vase with ambrosia and medicine; he possesses the eight qualities and objects of enjoyment.
33. ... at Shel dkar monastery, Sprul sku Ye shes rgyal mtsan is depicted with a blazing body brown-black in color. He wears a magnificent shawl of cotton and fur; on his right he leads with sincerity a hundred black lives, on his left he rolls the dagger of the heroic soaring lion; from his body, speech and mind he emanates a hundred thousand rays of light; he protects the

⁴⁰ RGPhGTh f. 1528.

⁴¹ RGPhGTh f. 1529.

⁴² RGPhGTh f. 1529 writes yar yul instead. YDChG f. 3 clearly writes ya yul.

⁴³ RGPhGTh f. 1530.

⁴⁴ Shar rdza's *Legs bshad mdzod* has mgar. Karmay, *Treasury*, 147.

⁴⁵ No number or commentaries are written on this card. With the iconographical directions provided in the RGPhGTh f. 1530 and supplied here, this master has been identified provisionally. Some examples of the iconographical prescriptions as discussed above are translated here in order to illustrate this artistic tradition.

⁴⁶ RGPhGTh f. 1531.

⁴⁷ As above.

⁴⁸ Also not clearly labelled. As above.

⁴⁹ RGPhGTh f. 1532.

⁵⁰ No corresponding card can be found in this set but the details are provided from RGPhGTh f. 1532.

- teachings of Bon from destruction by the vow-breakers? (Abbreviated script [*bskungs yig*]: *dmms mus*) possibly *dam nyams*.⁵¹
34. ⁵² ... in Bde ldan drag po, ... 'Gro mgon blo gros who exhibits on his face all the marks of a Brahmin; his cloak shows the six-petal pattern; his realisation is the perfection of the Mighty Black Phur pa; his activities are the thundering of the scriptures and of reasoning.
 34. b⁵³ In ... Mkhar chu, ... Mtshan ldan 'dul ba is depicted with a dark red shining body; his cloak shows the six petal pattern; his realisation is the perfection of the Mighty Black Phur pa; his activities are the thousand requirements of this world.⁵⁴
 35. ... Mkha' btsun rgyal ba ... at Mount Phyug.
 36. ... Rtogs ldan nam 'od ... in Upper Dben.
 37. ... Mtha' bral bsod rgyal ... of [G.yas ru] Dben sa [kha].
 38. ... Mtshungs med bsod blo ... at Lhun grub.
 39. ... Mkhas grub nam bsod... at Bde gnas.⁵⁵
 40. ... Sprul sku tshe dbang ... in Phun tshogs.⁵⁶
 41. ... Mkhas btsun nam rin ... at Kun 'dul.
 42. ... Rgyal mtshan ka ra ... at Rtse brag⁵⁷ dkar po⁵⁸.
 43. ... Sprul sku Ye shes rgyal mtshan ... at Shel dkar dgon pa.
 44. ... Kun bzang rgyal mtshan ... in Gar bzhugs.
 44. b ... Mkhas grub rin bla ... at Zhigs gar bzhugs.⁵⁹
 45. ... Gshen rab rgyal mtshan⁶⁰ ... at Sman ri.⁶¹
 46. ... Rin chen rgyal mtshan ... at Sman ri.
 47. ... Nam mkha' ye shes ... at Phun tshogs sman ri.
 48. ... Kun bzang rgyal mtshan ... at Yang dben⁶² sman ri.
 49. ... Rin chen rgyal mtshan ... at Nad sel⁶³ sman ri.
 50. ... Rgyal thebs Tshul khriims rgyal mtshan ... at Sman ri.
 51. ... Bsod nams ye shes ... at Bkra shis sman ri.⁶⁴
 52. ... Bsod nams g.yung drung ... at Blissful (*bde ldan*) Sman ri.
 53. ... She tsu drung mu ... at Bkra shis sman ri.⁶⁵
 54. ... G.yung drung ye shes ... at Gto dgon yang dben.
 55. The heroic *gshen*, [one's] root-guru ... on the top of one's head (*spyi gtsug*).

⁵¹ RGPhGTh f. 1533. Thanks to Charles Ramble for this most probable interpretation.

⁵² No identifiable card. As above.

⁵³ This entry in RGPhGTh f. 1533 is not found among the cards from Ye shes dgon. However, the following is with the number 35. For the sake on completeness I have decided to include it here.

⁵⁴ RGPhGTh f. 1533.

⁵⁵ RGPhGTh f. 1533 has *bde* for *dben*.

⁵⁶ RGPhGTh f. 1534.

⁵⁷ Could this be Rtse drug monastery in Steng chen county? See Karmay & Nagano 2003: 181-189.

⁵⁸ RGPhGTh f. 1534 omits *dkar po*.

⁵⁹ RGPhGTh f. 1534.

⁶⁰ The previous entry (44) is not to be found in the RGPhGTh. Thus, it could either indicate a bifurcation of the lineage or an error on the part of the copyist at some point. It could also indicate another name for this master. The rest of the text is identical with that of the *tsa ka li* 44 and a few of the previous entries.

⁶¹ RGPhGTh f. 1535.

⁶² Upper hermitage? RGPhGTh f. 1535 keeps *phun tshogs*.

⁶³ Literally: removing illness, Sman ri medical college?

⁶⁴ RGPhGTh f. 1536.

⁶⁵ RGPhGTh f. 1536 has '*du gnas sman ri*.

Here ends the collection of *tsa ka li* from Ye shes monastery. It does not illustrate or inform one about the later part of the lineage. For this there are fortunately other documents that supply us with the relevant information to attempt a reconstruction of the purported religious history of this branch of the Black Phur pa teachings. We will address these shortly.

Records from the Rin spungs monastery in A mdo Shar khogs

As for the RGPhGTh (f. 1537-1539), this provides a list that is helpful for the history of the Sman ri Black Phur pa. Thus, the manuscript continues with the following list of masters:

She tsu drun mu, the ninth abbot of Sman ri
 Shes rab 'od zer (tenth abbot)
 G.yung drung rgyal mtshan (eleventh abbot)
 Shes rab blo gros (twelfth abbot)
 Shes rab 'od zer (thirteenth abbot)
 Gtsug phud 'od zer (fourteenth abbot)
 G.yung drung tshul khrim (fifteenth abbot)
 Rin chen 'od zer (sixteenth abbot)
 Rin chen lhun grub (seventeenth abbot)
 Shes rab bstan 'dzin (eighteenth abbot)
 Shes rab dbang rgyal (nineteenth abbot)
 G.yung drung dbang rgyal (twentieth abbot)
 Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (twenty first abbot)
 Bsod nams blo gros (twenty second abbot)

The lineage then moves to the snowy abodes (*gangs can zhing*), to the hands of the religious regent (*rgyal tshab*), Zla ba rgyal mtshan, who passed it on to Bskal bzang nyi ma (b. 1841), the second abbot of Dpal ldan g.yung drung gling monastery (founded 1834).⁶⁶ He passed it on to his successor, the third abbot Phun tshogs dbang rgyal. The manuscript jumps to the fifth abbot of G.yung drung gling, Shes rab blo ldan, who is the last individual named in this manuscript.⁶⁷ This short text does not possess a colophon with the name of the author. We might conclude that this particular set was brought to A mdo Shar khog by a local monk, such as Aku Yako, directly from G.yung drung gling. It might have been written by Phun tshogs rnam rgyal himself or one of his immediate disciples. The ninth and last abbot of the monastery was Shes rab bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1911-1979). Although we do have the dates of ordination of the nine abbots, from the third abbot to the present one, we can estimate roughly one hundred and fifty years with six to ten generations of masters at the most. The lineage has continued through the successive abbots of Sman ri⁶⁸ and to the last one of G.yung drung gling. It

⁶⁶ RGPhGTh f.1539.

⁶⁷ RGPhGTh f.1540.

⁶⁸ The present Throne holder of Sman ri, Lung rtogs Bstan pa'i nyi ma (b. 1929), a native of A mdo Shar khog, is a practitioner of this lineage, which runs in his family and is attached to the Skyang tshang monastery. He therefore not only brings his own lineage back to the Sman ri tradition, thus creating a loop, but is also a member of the direct transmission of the Black Phur pa from Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan through the abbatial seat of Sman ri. On Skyang tshang monastery see Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 614-617.

spread to A mdo Shar khog and to Ye shes monastery in Nyag rong. From Sman ri it spread to Rnga ba and Snang zhig monastery, which in turn transmitted it further to the north and southwest of A mdo.

What seems obvious from the information detailed above is that Sman ri may have played a central role in the formation and propagation of the practices of the Black Phur pa cycle. As we will see below, a vast collection of miscellaneous rites were created and added to the practice of the Black Phur pa by the Pandits of Sman ri. Thus, we could almost suggest that besides the basic textual lore (*gzhung*) which is attributed to Khu tsha zla 'od's discovery of the treasure texts in Bhutan, the rest of the elements used during the performance of the full series of rites may have been mostly Sman ri productions. This brings up the question of the role of Sman ri in the overall formation of what is known as Bon today and the introduction of a number of elements which may not have existed before. In this manner, Sman ri, which portrays itself as the bastion of Bon orthodoxy, may have played a more dynamic role, in that it may not have merely passed on the teachings and traditions of the past to the next generations in the form that it had received them, but rather may have contributed significantly to their elaboration and renewal through the process of reinterpretation and editing. Sman ri might be the central institution that restructured the overall tradition of Bon.

In order to reconstruct the lineage transmission process from Sman ri to G.yung drung gling to Ye shes monastery, one of the lineage holders of the latter institution has left us his own terse account of the succession of masters and the process of transmission. This is the object of our investigation in the next section.

The Records of Tshul khrims mchog rgyal

In the Spring of 2006, I was fortunate to discover a handwritten account of the Black Phur pa lineage of masters as it was transmitted to Tshul khrims mchog rgyal (alias G.yung drung mchog rgyal), a master of Ye shes dgon pa in Khams and an important disciple of Shar rdza Bkra shis rgyal mtshan. The original manuscripts (YDTshGPhPNPGRm⁶⁹) were most likely written by his own hand or that of his associate, Pad ma blo gros.⁷⁰ It is part of a larger corpus of memoirs that recorded all the empowerments (*dbang*), scriptural transmissions (*lung*) and instructions (*khrid*) that the former received. His lists of transmission lineages are extensive. They provide details organized along the Tantric cycles (*rgyud skor*) he received, such as Phur pa nag po, Rta mgrin, Dbal gas, and a host of others. It details the various texts within the corpus that are transmitted separately along the

⁶⁹ YDTshGPhPNPGRm, my own provisional title for *g.yung drung mchog rgyal phur pa nag po'i brgyud rim*.

⁷⁰ I received this information from a monk at Ye shes dgon, G.yung drung bstan 'dzin (alias Stag bon, pronounced Tabei in the local dialect), Spring 2006. Tabei has written a short biography of Padma blo gros, which has not been published yet, entitled: *Be ro'i thugs sprul rje btsun padma blo gros kyi mdzad rnam mdor bsdu sal ba'i me long bzhugs* (2007). See also Achard, *Enlightened Rainbows*: 41, 43, 62, and *passim*.

traditional lines of empowerment, scriptural transmission, and instruction. Those for the Phur pa cycle are texts such as the *Great Pledge* (*mta' chen*), the *Tiger's Cloak* (*stag gon*), which are preliminary rituals, and other sections of the corpus. These accounts were written on handmade paper measuring roughly six centimeters by twenty-nine centimeters. There are different sections to the manuscript, which comprises nine folios along with another folio detailing the lineage of the empowerment and the long life rituals (*tshe sgrub*) of Phur pa. Both sets of documents are concluded with the author's name. The narration is rather concise, just enough to record names, sometimes the location, texts and ritual cycles. It does not elaborate on the life of the master or give dates. Nevertheless it provides us with valuable information on lineage transmission and also offers a short glimpse of its history.

Tshul khrim mchog rgyal begins this Dbal phur pa nag po section by detailing the various components of this *yi dam's* corpus of key texts. The author begins by identifying the principal written sources (*dpe rtso*) of the corpus. Those are the *Great Pledge* (*gta' chen*)⁷¹, the "Celestial Line" (*gnam thig*), the *Short Verbal Transmission* (*shog chung*), the *Four Notes* (*tho bzhi*), and the *Tiger's Cloak* (*stag gon*).

The following texts are part of the corpus as received by the author and appear to constitute the traditional elements for ritual purposes. These are to be found in the corpus of *phur nag sgrub thabs* (*Ye shes dgon pa'i phur nag sgrub thabs*, YG PhNGTh) as used at Ye shes dgon in Nyag rong.

Core texts of the Black Phur pa transmission are:

- *The Great Pledge, the unravelling of the extensive array and the steering Four Notes* (*gta' chen bkod pa rgyas ba bkrol ba tho bzhi bskyod*) (f. 5-15).
- *The general points in regards to the Profound Perfection of the 25 lore* (*gting rdzogs kyis spyi don nyi shu rtsa lnga'i gzhung*) (76-162).
- *The purification of the Peaceful deities and mothers, the accomplishment of the root of the Great Sphere* (*zhi ba ma sang dbyings chen rtsa ba'i bsgrub pa*) (65-75)

Our author proceeds to list other parts of the ritual texts under general headings, some of which correspond to the titles of booklets titles and others to sections within a great volume. The following headings which, for most of them, speak to their functions, include: Refuge (*skyabs 'gro*, 88-89); Prayers (*gsol 'debs*, 90-93); Prostrations to the masters of the lineage (*brgyud phyag*); Miscellanea for the feast offering (*tshogs kyi cha lag*); The sprinkling of the Feast offerings; Correcting the essential points (*gnad bskang*, 142-162); Humans and demons (*mi bdud*); Offerings of the remaining *gtor ma* (*lhag ma*); The thousand recitations that are emanating magic (*bsnyen pa'i stong 'dzab 'phro*); The thousand recitations that are the praises of magic (*bsnyen pa'i stong 'dzab kyi bstod pa*); The mirror of purification (*gsal byed me long*); Exhortations of the hundred and eight underlings (*las mkhan brgya rtsa brgyad kyi bskul pa*, 214-278); Dissolution of the hundred and [eight] underlings (*las mkhan brgya rtsa bsdu ma*).

Exhortations of the six guardians of treasures (*gter bdag drug gi bskul pa*); The practice of raising the oppressive [power] of the nails (*gzer gnong bro yi las*)

⁷¹ YG PhNGTh f. 1-15.

byang); The everlasting circle of long life (*tshe grub g.yung drung 'khyil pa*, 287-304); Collecting prognosis (*phya tshe bsdu ma*, 305-316); Countering the various weapons (*bzlog pa las kyi mdel rnams*); The purification of the group of countering weapons (*bzlog mdel 'gres byang shog pa*); The exorcism of the point of the thousand daggers (*phur bu stong gi rtse bzlog*); The exorcism of the falcon-wolves (? , *khra spyang gi bzlog pa*, 317-351); Purification of the demons of the falcon-wolves (*khra spyang gi 'gres byang shog gcig*); The exorcism of the calamities among humans and animals [inflicted] by the army of curses of the [demonic] underlings (*las mkhan byad kha dmag ltas mi phyugs yams bzlog*, 352-363); Instructions on the actions of enduring (*mnaq pa las bya gi man ngag*, 381-389); and The lamp on the practice manual of memory (*brnag pa las kyi byang bu'i sgron ma*, 390-487).

The author further cites a certain Pad sprul⁷² who, in his collected injunctions, added that following the end of the exorcism (*bzlog*) and the erecting of the *mdos* (YG PhNGTh 299-316), the expelled infected substances (*ram sgo dbyed*) should be burned in a burnt offering (*sbyin sreg*).⁷³

These texts correspond to a certain degree to the various components that comprise the lore of Phur nag. The central text of this cycle is the *Great Ritual of the Black Phur pa* (*Phur nag bsgrub chen*). It is considered the original text excavated by Khu tsa and is generally referred to as the lore (*gzhung*). When a practitioner of Black Phur pa wants to conduct daily recitations of this cycle, it is generally the lore sections that are deemed essential to recite. The Phur nag has twenty-five lore or twenty-five methods or sequences. These are made of ritual sections such as requesting blessings from the masters of the lineages, the construction of the circle of deities, the recitation of mantras, etc. For lack of space, this will be treated in future articles on the Bon Phur pa. However, this also points to the very composite nature of the Phur nag tradition. It demonstrates how what is now considered a complete corpus of texts was also understood as a collation of diverse material all relating to the central deity, Phur pa.

Tshul khrim mchog rgyal, in the record of his Phur nag lineage, does not elaborate further either on the content of these manuals or on the rationale of the practices involved. He pursues his terse narration directly, without any introduction, with the names and places of the masters of the lineage. Although very similar in most cases, his records include a few more masters than the initiation text. Also, he clearly states that the following list is for the transmission of the aforementioned titles and rites.

The list of Tshul khrim mchog rgyal begins⁷⁴ with the vast expanse of the Sphere of Suchness (*bon nyid dbyings kyi klong*). Then in the fortress of the pure land where 'Og min is displayed and where the king of the gods (*lha*), Mkha' 'gying, dwells as the Teacher of the Sphere (*dbyings*) in his perfected body of enjoyment (*long spyod rdzogs pa'i sku*). The lineage is moved to the fortress of Brum E in the Sphere of the Great Bending Backward (*dgyed pa chen po'i dbyings*), where the Great Mother Byams ma showers blessings (*byin rlabs*) of compassion from her citadel (*gsas*) of turquoise flooring in her Tent

⁷² I cannot identify which reincarnation of the Smon rgyal lineage it is. Maybe Bstan 'dzin nyi ma bzang po. See Achard, *Enlightened Rainbows*, 59.

⁷³ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f.2.

⁷⁴ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 2.

of Harmony (*mthun gur*), and teaches. Then she transmits the teachings (*bshad*) to the Teacher Gshen rab mi bo, in his emanation body (*sprul sku*) shining like a peacock feather (*rma lo mdangs ldan du*).

After writing all the names of the first mythical lineage holders and after mentioning how the lineage went to China with Bon po Dbal bon 'bar lha⁷⁵ gsas in Mthing 'brang in China, he went to teach the *bon po* of Bod (i.e. Tibet), Gsas mkhar me 'bar, at Lha'i thang in Ya[r] yul.

At this point Tshul khrim mchog rgyal writes: "These quintessential learned ones were concerned about the disappearance of scholars and knowledge [of Bon] in Central Tibet." He further points out that these very texts mentioned above were transmitted through the lineage to the great soul (*bla chen*), Dran pa nam mkha'. He continues by mentioning that in those days, the reigning monarch and other great souls had poisoned minds and this is why G.yung drung bon fell. Dran pa nam mkha' was concerned for the survival of the tradition. He divided the collection of texts into three groups, those concerning the transmissions [of the tantras] (*brgyud*), the commentaries ('*grel*) and the root-texts in accordance with scriptural transmission (*lung*), meaning (*don*) and increasing activities (*rgyas pa*). The first divisions of the Tantra comprise: the Nine Tantras, the commentary making the Tenth, the three methods (*thabs*), the four injuries (*gnod*), and the five keepings ('*chang*).

The second division was made of: the six topics (*don*), the twenty-one small meditations (*sgrubs*), together with sharp instruction (*man ngag rno*), and the nine bitternesses (*kha tsha dgu*), together mixed with counterfeit (*ma grub*) material.

The third division was made of: the cycle of miscellaneous rites ('*phrin las*), essentials derived from experience (*nyams su blang ba thig*) and small commentaries ('*grel chung*). Also included were the three purifying actions of the miscellaneous rites (*phrin las las byang gsum*), the two root commentaries (*rtsa 'grel pa gnyis*), and the three circles ('*khor lo gsum*). Added to that were the three exorcisms (*zlogs pa gsum*) together with the three applications (*las sbyor gsum*).

Furthermore the essential instruction for *mdos* were also concealed together with four small rituals from the cycle of the meaning, the five ornaments of light, the four scriptures (*lung*), the four instructions (*man ngag*), four rituals (*thabs*), the nine conditions (*cha rkyen dgu*), and six texts from the hidden precepts class.⁷⁶

This list of texts purports to represent what was believed, during the time of the author, to be the complete transmission of Black Phur pa received by Dran pa nam mkha' during the time of Khri Srong lde btsan. A son of the king, Mu thig (Mu thug according to Shar rdza pa)⁷⁷, together with the *bon po* from Khyung po, Gyer zla med, concealed the texts at Spa gro phug gcal.⁷⁸

Many of the names and titles do not refer to actual separate pieces of writings as explained above. They may refer to a wide variety of sources, methods, commentaries and techniques. Although their titles appear to hint at the arsenal of war magic, that is exorcism, the hurling of magical weapons

⁷⁵ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 3.

⁷⁶ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 3b.

⁷⁷ Karmay, *Treasury*, 102-103.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

and the use of other similar implements, some allude to hosts of deities, pith instructions, and so forth. The exact nature of all this remains to be investigated and will be taken up in a later study.

The text continues⁷⁹ with the transmission of the more readily identifiable names and places. This would then constitute the later propagation in our historical age.

Khu tsha zla 'od (alias Lha rje) rediscovered a number of texts at Spa gro phug gcal in Bhutan, such as the *Sha dbal nag po klong gsas rgyud*, five root tantras, the *Rgya mdud 'khyil pa mkhyi' (?) rgyud* and others. These texts of the Black Phur pa cycle in three sections were eventually appropriated by Mgar 'Bum chung and his son Mgar ston Khro rgyal. These were passed to the Me family members, Me ston Tshul khirms stag; then to Me ston Shes rab bdud rtsi;⁸⁰ to Me sgom Khyung tum; Me ston Rgyal mtshan 'od zer; Me ston Ra lcam; Me ston Zhi ba ngang ldan; 'Grom chen Blo gros rgyal mtshan and Me ston Ye shes rgyal mtshan, then to Mkhas grub Kun bzang rgyal mtshan.

The latter transmitted the lineage to the founder of Sman ri, Mnyam med chen po Shes rab rgyal mtshan. The transmission lineage of Tshul khirms mchog rgyal follows the same as those previously seen from the *tsa ka li*: that is, from the founder of Sman ri, it passes to the second abbot, Ston pa Rin chen rgyal mtshan. From him, it was transmitted to his successor Nam mkha' ye shes, then to Mkhas grub Kun bzang rgyal mtshan, to Rang shar Rin chen rgyal mtshan, and then to Mtshan ldan Tshul khirms rgyal mtshan (sixth abbot). The text here is marked with the sign of the Three Jewels or three small circles arranged in a triangle. It also denotes a change in the transmission which does not continue along the lineage of either Sman ri or G.yung drung gling.

Thus, from Sman ri Tshul khirms rgyal mtshan, it passes to Shes rab blo gros, then to Bru Nam mkha'i g.yung drung, to Rin chen rnam rgyal, and to Kun mdun rin chen lhun grub. The latter passed it to 'Gar bla ma G.yung drung rgyal mtshan who then passed it to Skam bla ma Lha bu, to Sga ring G.yung drung gtsug phud, to Skam bla ma G.yung drung nyi ma rgyal mtshan, to Mkha' chen Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, to U ti bla ma Rnam dag tshul khirms, to Rgyal rong Bsod nams rgyal mtshan,⁸¹ to another Rgya rong pa, Ha ra wer zhi, to Rtogs ldan Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, to Rtogs ldan Lha rgyal bkra shis, to Drongs Tshul khirms rnam dag, to the second Drongs Bkra shis rgyal mtshan, better known as Shar rdza rin po che⁸², then to the author, Tshul khirms mchog rgyal.

The author further adds another lineage transmission of the same above which he received and derived from Sme ston Zhi ba ngang ldan (mentioned above), who passed the teachings to 'Gron ston Blo gros rgyal

⁷⁹ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 4-4b.

⁸⁰ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 5.

⁸¹ This abbot is mentioned on the stele of the Bon po monastery of G.yung drung lha steng (f. 1046) which was reconstructed between 1766 and 1768 before being destroyed by the Chinese army in 1778 and converted into a Dge lugs monastery. Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 556. He was a contemporary of Kun grol grags pa (b. 1700) and was the monk who ordained the forty-fourth king of Chu chen in Rgyal rong, Nam mkha' rgyal po. Karmay, *Feast*, 52, 130.

⁸² YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 5b.

mtshan. He in turn taught Bru ston 'Dul ba rgyal mtshan, and the lineage passed to Bru btsun Rgyal ba g.yung drung, to Rtogs ldan Nam mkha' 'od zer, to Mtha' bral Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, to Mtshungs med Bsod nams blo gros, to Nam mkha' bsod nams, to Tshe dbang rgyal mtshan, to Rnal ma ka ra, to Mkhas grub Rin chen blo gros, to Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, to Rgyal tshabs Rin chen rgyal mtshan, to Kun bzang rgyal mtshan, to She tsu drung mu, to Bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan, to G.yung drung rgyal mtshan, to Shes rab blo gros, to Sku mdun Shes rab 'od zer, to Drom 'od zer rgyal mtshan. This is one transmission.

This 'Od zer rgyal mtshan transmitted the teachings to Bru Nam mkha g.yung drung, then it passed to Bru ston Rin chen rnam dag,⁸³ to Mkhan chen Rin chen rnam rgyal, to 'Gar bla ma G.yung drung rgyal mtshan, to Skam bla ma Mkhyen rab nyi ma'i snying po, to Bla ma G.yung drung gtsug phud, to Skam bla ma G.yung drung nyi rgyal, to U ri bla ma Rnam dag tshul khirms, to Rgyal rong Bsod nams mchog rgyal, to Bla ma Ye shes rgyal mtshan, to Rtogs ldan Lha rgyal bkra shis, to Tshul krims rnam dag, who passed it to Drong Bkra shis and to Tshul krims mchog rgyal.

A third alternative transmission noted is that of the *Yang gzhung rkyang rgyud rim*, an unidentified text or set of teachings that may have been part of oral lore and put down into writing by Mkhan chen Rin chen lhun grub (the seventeenth abbot of Sman ri as above), who began to transmit it to She rab bstan 'dzin (eighteenth abbot), and it was passed to She rab dbang rgyal (nineteenth abbot), to Grub rgyal ba 'od zer, to Rab byams Bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan, to Rme'u Tshul khirms dbang rgyal, to Skam bla ma G.yung drung nyi rgyal, to Mkhan chen Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, to Drongs Rnam dag tshul khirms, to Rtog ldan Lha rgyal bkra shis,⁸⁴ to Drongs Tshul khrim rnam dag, to Drongs Bkra shis rgyal and finally to our author.

Alternative lineages are not uncommon in these transmission lineages and when the characters are identifiable, they help us to understand better the movements of these sets of religious practices.

Other separate transmissions are those of the Peaceful deity (*zhi ba*) rite for protection, exorcism, killing (*bsrung*, *bzlog*, *bsad pa*) also part of the Phur nag corpus. The transmission started through Sku mdun Shes rab 'od zer (the tenth abbot of Sman ri), who passed it to Bru Nam mkha' g.yung drung, to Bru G.yung drung phun tshog, to Sprul sku Shes rab phun tshog, to Rtogs ldan Blo gros grags pa, to G.yung drung rgyal mtshan, to Shes rab dbang rgyal, to Rgyal ba 'od zer, to Bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan, Mkhan Bsod nams blo gros, to Drongs Bzod pa rgyal mtshan, to Mkhan Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, to Drongs Rnam dag tshul khirms, to Rgyal rong Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, to Rgyal rong Ye shes rgyal mtshan, to Lha rgyal bkra shis and Tshul khirms rnam dag. The latter transmitted it to Rong Bkra shis rgyal mtshan, then to the author.

The methods of the *Tantra of the Lamp which Illuminates the Tradition of Dbal phur* (*Dbal phur phyag bzhes snang gsal sgron ma'i rgyud*) are those concerning the arrangement of the offerings and of the ritual implements "in the manner of Rgyal ba Mnyam med rin po che" (i.e. Shes rab rgyal mtshan). These were transmitted from Mkhan chen Shes rab dgongs rgyal (twenty-second abbot of Sman ri) to Sum ldan bzod pa rgyal mtshan, then to Mkhan chen Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, to Drongs Rnam dag tshul khirms, to Rgyal rong

⁸³ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 6.

⁸⁴ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 6b.

Bsod nams rgyal mtshan, to bla ma Ye shes rgyal mtshan, to Rtogs ldan Lha rgyal bkra shis and Tshul khriims rnam dag. The latter transmitted it to Shar rdza pa Bkra shis rgyal mtshan, the master of our author.⁸⁵

The root sadhana (*rtsa sgrub thabs*) of Dbal phur is described as having been transmitted from Mkhan chen Tshul khriims rgyal mtshan (the sixth abbot of sman ri) to Bsod nams ye shes (seventh abbot), to Bsod nams g.yung drung (eighth abbot), to Phun tshogs drung mu, to Bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan, to G.yung drung rgyal mtshan, to Shes rab 'od zer, to Bru Nam mkha' g.yung drung, to Rin chen 'od zer, to Bstan ma(?) rgyal mtshan, to Kun dga' phun tshogs, to Tshe dbang lhun grub phun tshogs, to Bstan pa dbang rgyal, to Rtogs ldan G.yung drung phun tshogs, to Dbon sprul Ye shes bstan 'dzin⁸⁶, to Rab bla G.yung drung bon bstan, to Dge sbyang Pad ma blo gros, and to the author. Hence, the root-text tradition must have implied that the lineage comes from Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, and only mentions its start, like the other aforementioned sources, from a later Sman ri associated figure to highlight where it separated from that institution. In the case of the root-text, it must be so understood. However, for miscellaneous sources, it might or might not imply similar antiquity. It may suggest that the first person in the lineage is either the creator for that particular section or that he was the first known link to an otherwise oral tradition of uncertain antiquity.

The lineage of masters for the *Dbal phur zhi ba gser mig g.yu spras sam gser gyis yong zhun* and the *Dbal phur 'phrin las srog len gnyis rim gyis brgyud* begins with Kun grol Nam mkha' grags pa⁸⁷ and continues with Rtogs ldan Shes rab g.yung drung (most likely the same abbot from Rgyal rong mentioned above), and with Sum ldan Bkra shis rgyal mtshan (Shar rdza rin po che) who transmitted it to Tshul khriims mchog rgyal. This definitely points to a New Bon influence introduced into the Phur nag tradition of Nyag rong. However, this needs to be further researched and assessed.

The corpus of the *Dbal phur 'bar gnog rin chen gter mdzad (mdzod?) rtsi rgya dang rgyud rim* and its associated texts on petitions to the masters, the sequences of the apparitions of members of the divine circle (*dkyil 'khor*), miscellaneous ritual practices associated with the protector Me ri,⁸⁸ refuge and request,⁸⁹ directives on initiation ritual, on conciliation (*rgyud skang*) with the spiritual guests, secret rites (*gsang sgrub*) and a host of other related practices such as exorcisms (*bzlog*), belonging to both the Black Phur pa cycle and other Phur pa traditions, among others, were transmitted to our author from Drongs Bkra shis rgyal mtshan (Shar rdza rin po che) as above. It does not stipulate how far back these come from or whether they were initiated by his master or not.

⁸⁵ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 7.

⁸⁶ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 7b.

⁸⁷ "Nam mkha' grags pa is the 5th Kun grol incarnation. His *gter ston* name was bDud 'dul gling pa and he was a direct master of Shardza Rinpoche. Nam mkha' grags pa is his incarnation name in the Kun grol line of *sprul sku*." Thanks to Jean-Luc Achard for these precisions and corrections.

⁸⁸ Me ri is a distinctively Sman ri protector associated with Zhang zhung lineages. See Kvaerne, Per. "Bon po Tantric deities." In *Bon, The Magic*, 169-174.

⁸⁹ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 8.

The last section concludes with the transmission records of another cycle of practice, the *Me ri snying thig*.⁹⁰

Another very short document, handwritten by Tshul khriims mchog rgyal, records the transmission lineage of the empowerment rite (*dbang*) and long life (*tshe sgrub*) rituals. It begins with Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, and passes to Rin chen rgyal mtshan, then to Nam mkha' ye shes, to Kun bzang rgyal mtshan, to Mnyam med bkra shis rgyal mtshan, to Shes rab rin chen, to Blo gros 'od zer, to Lhun grub dbang gi rgyal mtshan, to Zhu Yas rgyal grags pa, to Drang srong Bstan pa' od zer, to Phun tshogs grags pa, to Shes rab blo gros, to Rgyal mtshan tshul khriims, to Grags pa rgyal mtshan, to Bsod nams tshe dbang, to Kun bzang lhun grub, to Mchog sprul G.yung drung phun tshogs, to Zhu Bstan 'dzin lha rgyal, to Zhu btsun (f. 1b) rgyal grags pa, to Sku mdun Bsod nams blo gros, to G.yung drung bstan dbang, to Smon btsun Bstan 'dzin tshul khriims⁹¹ and Rgyal ba lhun grub, to Smon sprul Ye shes bstan 'dzin, Rab bla Rin chen rnam rgyal, to Dbal khyung bon gter (ston)⁹² Tshul khriims mchog rgyal. Its line is orthodox in that it originates with the founder of Sman ri Shes rab rgyal mtshan; however, some masters of the Smon rgyal monastery were also well known proponents of New Bon teachings. This also shows that, as explained previously in the case of Ye shes monastery, the institution of transmitting both systems, the Old *gter ma* and the New *gter ma* teachings, was already established early on in the Khams region.

The Tsa ka li of Dbal phur from Bon brgya Monastery

In the Spring of 2004, I was able to accompany a friend, a lay tantric lama, to visit his master, A lag bon brgya, at his monastery in Reb gong (Tongren Xian) in Amdo (Qinghai). While visiting this Bon po scholar, he generously offered me his assistance for my research on Phur pa. I was able to photograph not only paintings and statues in his monastery, but also a deck of tsa ka li. The first part is the set of the masters of the lineage (*bla ma brgyud rim*) comprises seventy one cards. From the successor to Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan to the last card, there are twenty four masters depicted in this set. Since the first forty seven masters' identity, from Stag la me 'bar to Mnyam med bla ma, are the same, I will not restate them. However, the

⁹⁰ YDTshGPhPNPGRm f. 8. *Me ri gyad phur gyi sgrub pa nyams len snying thig* is in the *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, 2nd ed., vol. 22, pp. 731-735. It has been translated into English by Kurt Keutzer with Ponlop Trinley Nyima as: *An Essential Heart Practice for Accomplishing Me Ri Gyad Phur*. Privately published, non dated (text not seen by myself). Thanks again to Jean-Luc Achard for these informations.

⁹¹ Smon btsun bsTan 'dzin tshul khriims was a disciple of Tshe dbang 'gyur med, the son of bDe chen gling pa (1833-1893). He was himself a *gter ston* and was then named *gTer gsas rin po che* bsTan 'dzin tshul khriims. He came to meet Shardza one year before the latter's 'ja' lus and received from him teachings on the *bKa' lung rgya mtsho* (and most certainly other instructions). He was an important lineage holder of bDe chen gling pa's treasures in sDe dge and he also worked with Khyung-sprul g.Yung drung mchog dbang. Both were indeed important New Bon lineage holders. Thanks to Jean-Luc Achard for these informations.

⁹² Tshul khriims mchog rgyal was definitely a monk of Ye shes monastery. It is interesting to find here this self-ascribed designation of a Treasure-text discoverer associated with the Dbal khyung monastery of Gsang sngags gling pa. Both the latter and Shar rdza rin po che were close friends and visited each other. Since the former was very active in Nyag rong it is not surprising that our author received many transmissions from him.

followers in the footsteps of the founder of Sman ri provides us with the history of how the Black Phur pa tradition may have made its way to Reb gong. The list of these miniature paintings goes as follow:

47. Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, founder of Sman ri in 1405
48. Rin chen rgyal mtshan (second abbot)
49. Nam mkha' ye shes (third abbot)
50. Kun bzang rgyal mtshan (fourth abbot)
51. Rin chen rgyal mtshan (fifth abbot)
52. Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan (sixth abbot)
53. Bsod nams ye shes (seventh abbot)
54. Bsod nams g.yung drung (eighth abbot)
55. She tsu drung mu (ninth abbot)
56. Bsam bstan rgyal mtshan (tenth abbot)
57. G.yung drung rgyal mtshan (eleventh abbot)
58. Shes rab blo gros (twelfth abbot)
59. Shes rab 'od zer (thirteenth abbot)
60. Gtsug phud 'od zer (fourteenth abbot)
61. G.yung drung tshul khrims (fifteenth abbot)
62. Rin chen 'od zer (sixteenth abbot)
63. Rin chen lhun grub (seventeenth abbot)
64. Shes rab bsTan 'dzin (eighteenth abbot)
65. Shes rab dbang rgyal (nineteenth abbot)
66. G.yung drung dbang rgyal (twentieth abbot)
67. Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (twenty-first abbot)
68. Bsod nams blo gros (twenty-second abbot)
69. Zla ba rgyal mtshan (first abbot of G.yung drung gling)
70. Bstan pa'i nyi ma (sixth abbot of G.yung drung gling)
71. The latter taught [Bon brgya] Phun tshogs dbang rgyal, who brought a period of prosperity to the Bon brgya temple.⁹³ His home institution was called Rgyal mtshan kun gling. It is not certain whether this refers to the temple in Reb gong.

The seventy-second card is reserved for one's root-master (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*).

As these records show, this tradition stems directly from Sman ri via G.yung drung gling. It involves ritual procedures, recitation, drumming, chanting, and dances (which are not regularly performed in Reb gong), as well as meditative directions, which should be in conformity with the Sman ri tradition. If we were to rely only on this information, we might easily conclude that this Black Phur pa tradition is either quite recent in Reb gong, or that its lineage has been renewed every generation through Reb gong's students who in turn re-established the transmission every generation, or that this set, which consists of photographs and is not an original local production, is only partly representative. In fact, after speaking with Bon brgya rin po che at the eleventh conference of the IATS, the last probability was confirmed. In fact, Bon brgya rin po che has two lineages of Phur nag, both stemming from Sman ri by different routes.

⁹³ Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 285.

The first starts with Shes rab dgong rgyal (alias Bsod nams blo gros), the abbot of Sman ri, who transmitted the lineage to an A mdo ba by the name of G.yung drung shes rab. He in turn taught Rtsi zhig chos rje, who in turn passed it to Rgyal ba tshul khriims, then to Bon brgya Rang shar rig bgrol (grol?), to Bon brgya G.yung drung phun tshogs, to Bon brgya Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, then to the contemporary master Bon brgya Dge legs lhun grub rgyal mtshan.⁹⁴

The other transmission begins again with Shes rab dgong rgyal (alias Bsod nams blo gros), and continues with Skyang sprul Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, who was invited to be the head of the Skyang tshang monastery in Zung chu (Songpan) in 1828.⁹⁵ His lineage was passed on to Snang ston Zla ba rgyal mtshan (a teacher of Snang zhig monastery in Rnga ba) and then to Bstan 'dzin g.yung drung dbang rgyal, Lung rtogs skal bzang rgyal mtshan, and Bon brgya Lhun grub rgyal mtshan, concluding with the present master Bon brgya Dge legs lhun grub rgyal mtshan.

The Snang zhig dgon chen's Transmission

Snang zhig monastery⁹⁶ is the largest Bonpo institution in the world. It is located in the northern part of Sichuan and has over eight hundred monks. It is the major academic institution within the borders of the PRC for Bon pos and possesses two schools for ritual practice (*sgrub gwra*) and Bon teachings (*bshad gwra*). Since its reopening in the late 1980s, it has taken on the role of training monks and educating them through a curriculum culminating with the *dge bshes* degree. In this function, it has replaced the traditional roles Sman ri and G.yung drung gling in Central Tibet used to play in the past. Its lineage is therefore central to the dissemination of Bon teachings in all the regions of China and abroad.⁹⁷ It was established in 1108 in the Rnga ba valley, and its first master was Do 'phags chen po or Snang zhig Yon tan rgyal mtshan.⁹⁸ The masters of the monastery follow the tradition of the Old *gter ma* practices and do not indulge in or teach the Bon gсар systems. Its lineage relies heavily on the Sman ri traditions, from which it claims its pedigree. In the past, its masters established satellite institutions in the region of A mdo Shar khog, which is presently the only prefecture in Tibetan territories with a Bon po population outnumbering the Tibetan Buddhists. Distant monasteries in Khams, Amdo and Central Tibet send their monks to Snang zhig to study. As previously mentioned, the transmission of lineage is

⁹⁴ Bon brgya Dge legs lhun grub rgyal mtshan is the *sprul sku* of G.yung drung phun tshogs gling while Bon brgya Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was the *sprul sku* of Rang shar rig grol (grol?). Personal communication August 27, 2006.

⁹⁵ Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 615.

⁹⁶ See also Kvaerne "The monastery of sNang zhig of the Bon religion in the rNga pa District of Amdo." *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 3, (1990), 531. Bya 'phur nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, *phyogs las*; Donatella Rossi, "The Monastic Lineage of Snang-zhig Dgon-pa in Amdo." *The Tibet Journal* 23: 4 (1998): 58-71; Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 531.

⁹⁷ Snang zhig monastery now has scholars living outside the frontiers of the PRC, for example in Canada (Dge bshes G.yung drung in the Comox Valley in the Vancouver area) and is consequently spreading its lineages and teachings around the world. See Des Jardins, J.F. Marc. "Tibetan religions in British Columbia." *Asian Religions in British Columbia*. Edited by Daniel Overmyer and Larry de Vries. Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 2009.

⁹⁸ Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 527-532.

part of the curriculum of all monasteries, and in participating in these activities, the monk-students bring back this institution's lineages and ritual methods. Its importance, therefore, cannot be underestimated.

The Black Phur pa lineage remains to be investigated in more detail. There are at least three distinct and related lines of succession of the teachings in this establishment. These are the Bya 'phur, the Rgya 'obs and the Snang zhig sprul sku lineages. In addition, the lineages of recognized *sprul sku* are further complicated by the *bla brgyud* system which automatically makes every male member of the extended family an incarnation. The Snang zhig family, which produces the leaders of the monastery (*dgon bdag*), no doubt possesses a number of convergent and alternative lineages of Phur nag. The current Snang zhig *sprul sku*, Bskal bzang blo gros rgya mtsho, is the thirty-ninth generation to occupy the throne of the institution, and practices Phur nag as his personal tutelary deity (*yi dam*). Personal experience in the study of Bon lineages makes me believe that most Bon po families carry a family *yi dam* and that this practice, when not abandoned, has continued through the generations to the present.⁹⁹ The personal *yi dam* of most monks is often that which has been worshipped in their home. The continuity of the practices entails the blessings of past generations and lends a spiritual boost believed to help in miscellaneous rites associated with the deity and progress along the path to Enlightenment.

The representative masters (*rgyal tshab*) of Snang zhig for the Black Phur pa are currently held by the Snang zhig and Rgya 'obs *sprul sku*, or represented by the *mkhan po* of their meditation school (*sgrub grwa*). The short lineage of the Rgyal 'obs starts with Sman ri as its source and was established quite late under the thirty-fourth abbot of Snang zhig.

1. Nam mkha' blo gros (b. 1891, a *rgyal tshab* of Sman ri)
2. Snang ston Blo gros thogs med (thirty-fourth abbot of Snang zhig)
3. Snang zhig Bstan pa'i nyi ma (thirty-fifth abbot)
4. Rgya 'obs Bstan pa'i rgyal (*rgyal tshab*)
5. Snang ston Nam mkha' blo gros (thirty-seventh abbot)
6. Rgya 'obs Sangs gyas bstan 'dzin (*rgyal tshab*)
7. Rgya 'obs Bstan 'dzin dbang rgyal (b. 1928)
8. Mkhan po Bstan 'dzin phun tshogs (b. 1965), a former abbot of the *sgrub grwa* of Snang zhig, schooled at the New Menri monastery in Dolanji (India) and installed (in the early 2000s).

Phur pa in A mdo Shar khog

In the spring of 1992, I was very fortunate to acquire inadvertently a handwritten manuscript of the *sādhana* of Phur nag. This local production, beautifully written, possesses a short list of the masters of this area. It has not been possible to identify which monastery they were attached to. There

⁹⁹ Snang zhig monastery counts 717 families that have been attached to it for many generations. Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 530-531.

are twelve monastic institutions in the Shar khog area and a number of attached retreat centers (*sgrub gwra*) and village temples (*lha khang*).¹⁰⁰

This unique local production contains a host of smaller ritual texts, common to other *phur nag sgrub skor* (PhNGrThKh). There are lists of lineage masters in two sections. The first, the *brgyud phyag* or “Prostrations to [masters of] the lineage,” lists the names without specifying the location of their tenure. The second, *brgyud 'debs* or “lineage entreaties”, specifies the location of the masters which are all the same as mentioned in previous works. The text of the PhNGrThKh begins with:

1. Rdzogs sku Mkha' 'gying,
2. The Great Mother Byams ma,
3. Sprul sku Ston pa gshen rab,
4. Kha yal me 'bar,
5. Drag po gnod sbyin 'dul,
6. Dbal chen 'od,
7. 'Od dpung,
8. Khyung slag can,
9. Stag la,
10. Dru gu me 'bar,
11. 'Ol ldan mig jig,
12. Ti ti me slag,
13. Bram ze me 'bar,
14. A ka ru nag,
15. Tsen tsen lce ring,
16. Dbal 'bar Ti gsas,
17. Li bon sprungs rgyugs,
18. Zhang zhung ting gsas,
19. Smra bon lha sras,
20. Kha 'byams drag po,
21. Dbal 'bar lha gsas,
22. Gsas mkhar me 'bar,
23. Gyer spungs dran pa,
24. Dbal bon gshen rnam (the Heroic bon gshen),
25. Khu tsa zla 'od,
26. Mgar ston khro rgyal,
27. bla ma Bru sha Khyung gi rgyal mtshan,
28. Tshul khrims stag,
29. Shes rab bdud rtsi,
30. Me sgom khyung tum,
31. Me ston rgyal mtshan,
32. Me ston ra lcam,
33. Zhi ba ngang sldan,
34. 'Gro mgon blo gros,
35. 'Dul ba rgyal mtshan,
36. Mkhas btsun rgyal ba,
37. Rtogs ldan nam 'od,
38. Mtha' bral bsod rgyal (Dben sa monastery),
39. Mtshungs med bsod blo,
40. Mkhas grub nam bsod,
41. Sprul sku tshe ldan,
42. Mkhas btsun nam rin,
43. Rnam rgyal ka ra,

¹⁰⁰ Karmay et al, *A Survey*, 605-635.

44. Mkhas grub chen po,
45. Rin chen blo gros,
46. Ye shes rgyal mtshan,
47. Kun bzang rgyal mtshan,
48. Shes rab rgyal mtshan (first abbot of Sman ri),
49. Rin chen rgyal mtshan (second abbot),
50. Nam mkha' ye shes (third abbot),
51. Kun bzang rgyal mtshan (fourth abbot),
52. Rin chen rgyal mtshan (fifth abbot),
53. Tshul khriims rgyal mtshan (sixth abbot),
54. Bsod nams ye shes (seventh abbot),
55. Bsod nams g.yung drung (eighth abbot),
56. She tsun drung mu (ninth abbot),
57. Bsam ldan rgyal mtshan (either and alternative name for an abbot or a teacher-lineage holder)
58. G.yung drung rgyal mtshan (eleventh abbot of Sman ri)
59. Shes rab blo gros (twelfth abbot)
60. Shes rab 'od zer (thirteenth abbot)
61. Gtsug phud 'od zer (fourteenth abbot)
62. G.yung drung tshul khriims (fifteenth abbot)
63. Rin chen 'od zer (sixteenth abbot)
64. Rin chen lhun grub (seventeenth abbot)
65. Shes rab bstan 'dzin (eighteenth abbot)
66. Shes rab dbang rgyal (nineteenth abbot)
67. G.yung drung dbang rgyal (twentieth abbot),
68. Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (twenty-first abbot),
69. Bsod nams blo gros (twenty-second abbot),
70. Zla ba rgyal mtshan (founder of G.yung drung gling),
71. Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (twenty-third abbot of Sman ri),
72. Bskal bzang nyi ma (second abbot of G.yung gling),
73. Phun tshogs dbang rgyal (third abbot of Smin grol gling¹⁰¹),
74. Shes rab blo ldan (fifth abbot of the Bslab gsum dbang phyug at G.yung gling),
75. Bstan pa'i nyi ma (sixth abbot of G.yung gling),
76. Shes rab bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (ninth abbot of G.yung gling),
77. Bka' drin gsum ldan rtsa ba'i bla ma.

There are a few old monks in the Songpan area who studied at G.yung-drung gling in their youth. One such master is Aku Yakho of Rin spungs monastery. His *yi dam* is Phur nag and he has practiced it since he was a very young monk. He knows the main text of the ritual (*sgrub chen*) by heart and also performed a long retreat of Phur nag at Brag g.yung drung kha hermitage before it became a nunnery.¹⁰² From the time of G.yung drung bstan rgyal to today, the Rin spungs monastery has represented itself as a branch of Sman ri and G.yung-drung gling. It used to send its monks to Sman ri for study. The situation apparently still persists and some younger monks have made their way to the New Menri, rebuilt in the Dolanji area of Northern India.

¹⁰¹ This monastery is Rin spungs bkra shis smin grol gling, in the A mdo Shar Khog (Songpan) region where this manuscript comes from. The monastery was renamed this way after G.yung drung bstan rgyal (b.1768) became its head. Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 608.

¹⁰² On this hermitage and nunnery, see Karmay *et al.*, *A Survey*, 626-628.

From this we can assert that the owner of the *Phur nag sgrub skor* (PhNGrThKh) above was a patron or a monk of the Rin spungs Monastery in A mdo Shar khog. It also points out how Sman ri and G.yung drung gling's contributions to the Black Phur pa have been central to this particular system of practice, which thrived in regions as far away as A mdo Shar khog and A mdo Reb gong.

Conclusion

Comparative examination of the lineages of the Black Phur pa tradition confirms the importance of Sman ri as the source of this tradition in contemporary Bon. In this, we can understand the role of this institution not merely as a link in the chain of spiritual transmission but also as having a formative role in the creation of the Black Phur pa practices. As the manuscripts of Tshul khrim mchog rgyal from Nyag rong have shown, many of the ancillary texts and rituals of Phur nag originated in Sman ri. All the ritual source texts of Phur pa that are not *gter ma*, and those encountered in this article, stem from the tradition of Mnyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan. Therefore, a preliminary conclusion would be to consider all non-*gter ma* Phur pa material (i.e. ritual manuals, praises, commentaries, etc...) as either products of or as having been either edited by or channelled through Sman ri. This helps us to establish a compelling argument in favour of ascribing the sole historical provenance of this tradition to Sman ri. Despite traditional claims and lineage accounts which regard Zhang zhung and Bhutan as the source of Phur nag, it is reasonable to consider Sman ri as the creator of the contemporary G.yung drung Bon practices of Phur nag. Other practices that were rediscovered later exhibit a substantially different pedigree, but the analysis of these would require another series of articles. This does not mean, however, that Sman ri was the sole creator of G.yung drung Bon: other important ritual practices and traditions, for example the Ma rgyud, come from other centers such that of the Gshen family in Dar lding.

Contemporary lineages help us take the pulse of Bon and analyze its present situation. Among the institutions that are most closely aligned with Sman ri, such as Rin spungs and Snang shig, we find the Black Phur pa practiced, but not as the object of sacred dances and public display. Although A la bon brgya's institution did receive the Sman ri tradition from Snang zhig, it is seldom practiced there today.¹⁰³ Bon brgya rin po che heads a lay-based organisation, the Bon po sngags mang or the Congregation of Lay Tantric Practitioners. The main tutelary deity of this group, which is rather large and influential in this region, is Dbal gsas, the head of the *gsas mkhar mchog lnga* or the Five Supreme Ones of the Citadel. Phur pa is one of these. Dbal gsas is believed to be the commander of this group and lay tantric lama usually focus on him in order to practice their skills, which involve weather control by magic, exorcism, fertility and a host of other practices aimed at mundane results.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Personal information from the present head of the lineage, A la Bon brgya, July 2005.

¹⁰⁴ On this deity and its iconography, see Per Kvarne. *The Bon Religion of Tibet: The Iconography of a Living Tradition*. (London: Serindia Publications, 1995), 92-97.

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