

The Khyung po, Dor ta and Rtse drug: War and Peace in Steng chen during the pre-Yuan years

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Trait in Dan Martin that has always impressed me is his free approach to life and studies. He has an independent mind, and this explains why Dan has a knack for finding unconventional, unusual topics in his research, which he takes to unexplored territories. I am also taken by his wide-ranging perspective. He is not someone who drills at a theme for ages. He likes to venture into the unknown and to find correlations that would be hardly imaginable otherwise. He knows how to untie the endless knots of many unsolved scholarly questions.

Creativity is not his only way. He is rigorous in work that needs complete dedication (translations, bibliographies, dictionaries). About Dan the rigorous scholar, I sympathize with his view that *gsan yig-s* are important material which open unknown vistas. Their perusal, despite their repetitiveness, leads to discoveries of hidden gems.

I also think that the composite history of Jerusalem where he lives—one of the great centers of world civilization—contributes to his depth of thought. I personally experienced how true this is. Jerusalem and his background studies at Bloomington have contributed to his capacity of crossing boundaries into the interdisciplinary dimension in which he works so well.

1. The transfer of the Khyung po and other Se Khyung dBra people to Steng chen

The Se Khyung dBra clan belong to the 'A zha *mi'u rigs* tribe that had originally settled in the area extending from mTsho sngon to the Chinese borderlands, contiguous with the plateau. The Khyung po are members of this clan and their presence in Khams goes back to a time that defies historical certainty. It is also uncertain when these people from areas in A mdo settled in Khams. It is also unknown whether they were part of a migration that involved other groups of the 'A zha tribe such as the Rlangs belonging to the dBra division, who established themselves in a wide area of Khams including its northwestern regions, west of the Ngom chu and towards Nag[s]

shod. Another migration—more recent but still ancient—saw splinters of the Khyung po clan move in the opposite direction, from west to east. They went from Zhang zhung, where the Khyung po resided for centuries and played an important dynastic role, to settle in an area in northwest Khams which the Bon po literature calls Sum pa Glang gi Gyim shod. It became known as Steng chen at a later time. This migration dates to the reign of Mang srong mang rtsan (late 7thc.). The Khyung po's return to Steng chen was not their own decision. The Spu rgyal Bod had imposed the transfer.

2. *The Khyung po involved in the incidents of the 1240s*

The Bon po literature not uncommonly connects antecedents to events that involved masters of the school to a remote past. The incidents I deal with here place Stong rgyung mthu chen on center stage at Gnam mtsho phyug mo. One of the great 'Dzam gling masters of the hoary past, he is used in the episode to introduce the future existence—a long time thereafter indeed—of the co-protagonists of the narrative I am concerned with in this essay. Stong rgyung mthu chen, at Gnam mtsho, was intent in subduing the *klu srin-s* of the lake, who were causing him much trouble.

Owing to their negative karma, these *klu srin-s* were reborn, many centuries later, as the people called Khyung po.¹ These developments of the narrative are typical of the Bon po literature's disregard for historical sequence. A big gap in time separates the rebirths of the *klu srin-s*, active in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, from the legendary Stong rgyung mthu chen, who lived in deep antiquity.

The thirteenth century members of the Khyung po clan, who had roles in the narrative, were the children of the six Khyung po Rgyal tsha brothers. They were distant descendants of the Khyung po people who migrated to Sum pa Glang gi Gyim shod owing to the deci-

¹ *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.4a,6-f.4b,5): "Earlier, while Zhang zhung sTong rgyung mthu (f.4b) chen was residing on one occasion at the *yang dben* of Nam mkha' mdzod in the area of Byang Gnam mtsho phyug mo do gling, the *klu srin-s*, residents of the lake, who moved in the lake to steal, blocked with water the rocky entrance to [his] meditation cave. At that time, Stong rgyung mthu chen threw his hand implement, a big bell, into the sky. At the rock, from the upper steps of the stairs [leading to] the sky he rode on his drum and soared into the intermediate space. It happened that the *klu srin-s* came out from the surface of the lake up to their chest, so he threw his *phur pa* [against them] in turn and slay them. Thrice he chased them, who were on the verge of death. He cast them away, who uttered abusive expressions. At that time, a rain of stones, Stong rgyung mthu chen's pebbles, fell at at sKor gling of Gnam mtsho. Stong rgyung mthu chen died in the land of Rgya gar (sic)". The way the *klu srin-s* came out of the lake waters up to their chest corresponds to their typical depiction in *thang ka-s*.

sion of their Spu rgyal Bod pa superiors. They are identified as Nang chen grags pa, the son of Ston 'bum, A bla, the child of Ston sras, and the Khyung po religious master Shes rab rgyal mtshan, the son of Ston thar (see n. 31). Two more Khyung po personalities played a major part in the incidents, but their origin is not disclosed. These were the brothers Dpon Dge, alias Bsges gshen Ye shes dpal and Dpon Dbus, alias Dad pa rgyal mtshan.

Paying the debt of their bad karma, the re-incarnations of the *klu srin*-s were reborn as Hor gyi mi chen Dor ldong and Ye stor.² Dor ldong is Dor ta, the headman of the well-known great Mongol invasion of Tibet in the year 1240, during the last years of the reign of O go ta [= Ögedei Khan] (r. 1229-1241). Ye stor's role in Dor ta's expedition is not explained in the Tibetan documents. His role may have been that of second in command in the campaign, but he would not have been the only one (see below for Li byi ta).

3. O go ta and Go dan [= Köten]:
the inception of the Hor pa policy in Tibet

In the last years of his reign, O go ta passed from a policy of relative neglect towards Tibet to military action, which he personally supervised. The Hor had little interest in Tibet before Dor ta's campaign of 1240 but, in line with the orders of the emperor, Dor ta established Mongol jurisdiction over Tibet for the first time.³ This explains why Tibetan historiography holds that Dor ta was the first to lead a Hor pa military action against the plateau inasmuch as the 1240 expedition was the most extensive and politically important despite traces in the literature about the Hor having launched various incursions into the plateau before 1240. I will discuss *in extenso* these attacks against A mdo on another occasion.

The change in O go ta's approach towards Tibet depended on

² *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.4b,5-6) reads: "Two incarnations were born in the land of Tibet. They were known as Khyung Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus, altogether two. As to the *klu srin*-s in their *rnams shes* (spelled so for *rnam shes*, "ordinary mental faculties"), they were born as Hor gyi mi chen Dor ldong and Ye stor. They were accompanied by an army [composed of] divisions of troops. Likewise, when they tackled their karmic debts of an earlier time, they realised that becoming Hor zi (?) did not [bring] liberation". Does Hor zi stand for Hor [Shi] zi[n] "Hor administering death (?)", as written elsewhere (see n. 26)?

³ The earliest contacts between the Tibetans and the Mongols, peaceful in nature on the occasion, occurred in 1219 between 'Bri gung gling pa Shes rab 'byung gnas and the generals of the army of Jing gir rgyal po {Chinggis Khan} in the Tarim Basin (see the 'Bri gung gling Shes rab 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar p.23,3-p.24,2 in Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang* n. 687). Earlier interaction between Jing gir rgyal po and the Tibetans has no historical foundation.

turning Byang ngos, the old frontier land contiguous with the plateau previously held by the Tangut kingdom, into the center of the newly formulated policy towards Tibet. Go dan the second son of the Mongol emperor—he was a younger brother of the next Hor Khan Go yug [Güyüg (r. 1246-1248)]—was entrusted the fiefdom of Byang ngos in the previous year (1239). He was thus posted near Tibet, whose affairs he supervised on behalf of O go ta.⁴ This meant that Tibet became a target of the Hor's Central Asian policy.

Official records of Tibetan historiography say that Dor ta, known as *nag po* to the Tibetans for his proverbial cruelty, burnt down Rwa sgreng and Rgyal lha khang, cut off the heads of 500 monks, and attacked 'Bri gung which was saved by a miraculous rain of stones. They also say that Dor ta ravaged the lands of Tibet all the way to the Himalayan range from Kong po to the border of Bal po, tearing down all castles he found in Lho brag, Gnyal, Lo ro, Byar po, Mon Dpal gro and lHo Mon (present-day Bhutan).⁵

In a previous work of mine ("The book of names of Nyang stod *bla ma-s*"), I pointed out that Dor ta's troops also advanced as far as

⁴ *Si tu bka' chems in Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru* (p.110 lines 2-3): "Rgyal bu Go dan was the Byang ngos pa ruler [handling matters] in the direction of Tibet". Wylie, "The Mongol Conquest of Tibet Revisited" (p.109-113) sees in Go dan the driving force behind the Dor ta expedition. That Go dan's headquarters were in Byang Mi nyag (i.e. at Byang ngos) indicates that the management of Tibetan affairs was run from the erstwhile Tangut kingdom. This is explicitly mentioned by dPa' bo Gtsug lag 'phreng ba (1504-1566) in his *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* p.1416 lines 14-17, when he traces back to Mi nyag Byang ngos the starting point of the 1240 Mongol invasion of Tibet. Do be ta's campaign against Tibet in 1252 was again launched from Byang ngos (ibid. p.1419,6-7).

⁵ *Si tu bka' chems in Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru* (p.109,2-19): "During the time of the *khu dbon*, two in all, the Hor law came [to Tibet]. Hor Dor ta nag po, the head of the troops, cut off the heads of 500 monks of Byang Rwa sgreng. The whole of Tibet turned into a place where earth and stones shook. Dpon po Dor ta then seized Ra Sog 'jam mo (in Sog yul adjoining Nag(s) shod). When Spyan snga rin po che went to Dun thang, Dpon po Dor ta captured dgon (sic for *sgom*) pa Shak rin. While he was preparing to murder him, [Spyan snga rin po che] prayed to sGrol ma and a rain of stones fell from the sky. Dpon po Dor ta said: "You are good at producing stones" and prostrated, bowing his head to his feet. He spared the life of the *dgon* (sic for *sgom*) pa. Having entered the door of Tibetan forests, [Spyan snga rin po che] offered him the nectar of all of them on that occasion, accepted what was happening and offered submission. [Dor ta] dismantled the impregnable castles of east and west Lho brag, Bsnyal, Lo ro, Byar po, Mon Dpal gro, Lho Mon—that is from the land of Rkong po in the east all the way to the border of Bal po. Having introduced the enforcement of the law, *chos khrims* and *rgyal khrims* rose in the sky and shone like the sun in the east. They appeared in this land where Tibetan is the only language. This was due to the kindness of Spyan snga rin po che [who benefited] the realm of Tibet. One estimates that Dor ta nag po's appearance in Tibet happened during the reign of O go ta, the son of Jing gir rgyal po".

Nyang stod in Gtsang, where they caused death and havoc at Gnas rnying.⁶ This led me to say that the military fronts of Dor ta nag po's campaign were three, each one directed towards one region of the plateau. One front of his campaign remained in Dbus to pursue local objectives in this land,⁷ another front was directed against the Himalayan territories, and the third targeted Gtsang.

Dor ta had two main objectives. He intended to control as many areas in Tibet as possible and to single out a Tibetan powerhouse to subdue in order to establish Hor pa power over the plateau. He planned to adopt the same treatment the Mongols reserved for other countries they invaded, where they put to death the local headmen. Therefore, Dor ta resolved to sentence to death the 'Bri gung sgom pa Shak rin, a towering personality of his day. The *T'ai si tu bKa' chems* says that Spyan snga Rin po che (1175-1255, abbot of Gdan sa mthil from 1208 to 1235) saved his life by means of a miraculous performance.

Legends aside, the Hor realised that there was no headman in

⁶ *Gnas rnying skyes bu rnams kyi rnam thar* (f.19a,4-f.19b,4) says: "When the Hor troops went on a rampage (*sdang pa*, lit. "became hostile") in Dbus Gtsang, Dor to (spelled so) seized Skyegs Gnas gsar mkhar [attacking it from] the side of Cor. Many people were killed. Everyone went to Dur khrod gling ("i.e. the cemetery of Gnas rnying). People who travelled on the Rgya road (i.e. the road from Nyang stod to lHo Mon), did not dare leave unless accompanied by a few others. At that time, everyone heard that even various kinds of animals were lamenting. After all [kinds of] *mi ma yin*-s of Hor Bod appeared, and when everyone was in terror, [Gnas rnying Chos kyi rin chen] subjugated these *mi ma yin*, and so he planted the seeds of liberation. He blessed all the places in order to restore peace. Having thought to protect all the people of the realm of Nyang po'i *rgyal khams* from fear, he spent three days at Dur khrod gling. He blessed some corpses with *mantra*-s and carried others on his body (*glo skyor*). By being there, [Chos kyi rin chen], taken by compassion for those who were spared, was responsible for three miracles, by which he made all the phenomenal gods appear [against] the *mi ma yin*-s of Hor Bod. He behaved like a rje btsun Mi la's *yogi* [throughout the territory] all the way to the 'Brin chu. Likewise, inconceivable miracles took place". See Vitali 2014: 552–555).

⁷ One episode absent in the official records may have a semblance of authenticity because it suits well the unfolding of Dor ta's campaign in dBus. It is mentioned in the entry of the *bstan rtsis* of Ldan ma 'Jam dbyangs tshul khriims' classic *Khams stod kyi lo rgyus smad cha* for the year iron rat 1240 (ibid. p.161,10-11). Ldan ma 'Jam dbyangs tshul khriims writes without mentioning his authority: "The Hor troops gutted the Po ta la'i lha khang". The identity of the Po ta la'i lha khang that would have been set on fire by Dor ta is an unsolved matter. Although the Po ta la'i lha khang might not necessarily refer to a temple on the hill of Lha sa, the itinerary of Dor ta's campaign strongly advocates the possibility that this temple was there, given the importance of the town and its proximity to his other military objectives. It would ensure that Dor ta would have carried out a sack of Lha sa. A bit more surprising is that the official historiography neglects the event altogether, unusual had it truly happened.

Dbus-Gtsang but a plurality of noble families—Shak rin belonged to one of them. This situation was reflected in the subsequent Mongol decision to choose a plurality of chieftains from the noble families of Tibet. The strategy of taking a headman in captivity to Hor yul to act as interlocutor with the people of the plateau was implemented soon thereafter by Go dan, who chose to deport Sa skya Pañdi ta (1182-1251) and his two young nephews.

The first move after the Mongol occupation of Central Tibet was to launch a census of the population for the Hor to know their subjects. The census, a well-known pillar of the Mongol system of dominance, was a task undertaken by Dor ta himself and Li byi ta, both said to be the expedition chiefs in a passage of the *Si tu bKa' chems* in the *Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru*.⁸ Nothing is said about whether Dor ta made a census in Khams and A mdo. This lets one presume that it was not held, although its importance in the Mongol system of governance would make one suppose the opposite, but once again no record of a census is kept for the regions of the highlands in the east.

Having identified who his new subjects in Central Tibet were, O go ta passed orders to them for the first time in the history of the relations between the Hor and the Tibetans. The practice whereby military campaigns in Tibet were followed by the imposition of a Mongol structure of governance was inaugurated at the time. As is well-known, O go ta decided, with an imperial decree, to delegate Tibetan officers in Tibet to run the affairs of the country. His policy was thus to leave local power in the hands of Tibetan dignitaries of well-known charisma but under Mongol control in the absence of a supreme leader of the country, whom Dor ta could not locate because he did not exist.⁹

⁸ The *bstan rtsis* appended to the *Si tu bka' chems* in *Rlangs Po ti bse ru* (p.447 line 21-p.448 line 2) says: "In iron male rat 1240, by Hor rgyal po O ko (spelled so) (p.448) ta's order, Hor dmag Li byi ta and Dor ta, these two, having been sent earlier and later, made a census of the [Tibetan] population's households (*dud*).

⁹ Perhaps for the same reason tht Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng ba, a Khams pa, records Dor ta's presence in his own land but only marginally, T'ai si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan, a child of Central Tibetan soil, records the organisation of Dbus-Gtsang. T'ai si tu mentions the decree granting the administration of Tibet to the 'Bri gung pa/Phag mo gru pa camp. They exercised power for a brief period of time—from 1241 up to Go yug's reform of a few years later. The *bstan rtsis* appended to the *Si tu bka' chems* in *Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru* (p.448,2-10) reads: "[In iron male rat 1240] the Hor law was enforced. [The Hor] supported gdan sa Phag gru and 'Bri khung thel. Local lords were chosen to establish *rgyal khrims* and *chos khrims* in Bod yul Dbus-Gtsang [and] Mnga' ris skor gsum. The emperor made 'Bri khung the main territory of Dbus-Gtsang, and sgom pa Shak rin was nominated *spyi dpon* ("supreme headman"). The emperor appointed Rdo rje dpal ba to be the Gtsang pa's *dpon*, Gzhon nu 'bum to be the G.yor po Yar 'brog lho pa's *dpon*, [and] a *rnam pa* (spelled so for *gnam sa*) *dpa' shi* to be the Mnga' ris skor

O go ta was the Hor pa emperor who expanded the role of the Tibetans, eminently religious in the period, as their interaction with the Tangut court shows, to more secular areas as an effect of his 1240 appointment of Tibetan officers to oversee the governance of various regions of the plateau.

4. *Steng chen and the Mongols*

The older Bon po texts do not hide their authors' disliking for the Hor pa domination of Tibet during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Although expressed in unequivocal terms—in their prophecies for instance: see the *lung bstan*-s in *Sources for a History of Bon*—hardly any episode of active defiance is recorded in their works. This applies to almost every other historiographical work of any school, which could mean that hardly any pro-active stance was taken by the Tibetans. Cases are few (see below for one of them) and I therefore make use in this example of a limited number of sources because there are

gsum *dpon*. They were appointed as headmen to administer the law in their own [territories]. In the same year, the lord (i.e. *Spyan snga rin po che*) appointed Ldan ma sgom Brtson to be the Phag gru's *khri dpon*". In the organisation of power delegated by the Mongols to Tibetans in Tibet, the 'Bri gung sgom pa Shak rin, who was granted supreme authority over Dbus-Gtsang, had, as subordinates, a governor (*dpon*) of Gtsang, the Phag mo gru pa *sgom pa* Rdo rje dpal—a Dbus pa by the way—and one governor (*dpon*), Gzhon nu 'bum, overseeing the Yar 'brog lho pa (presumably the people of Lho brag). The *bstan rtsis* appended to Ta'i si tu's *Si tu bka' chems* adds that, on the occasion of O go ta's iron rat 1240 appointments, a *khri dpon* (Ldan ma sgom Brtson) was chosen to lead the Phag mo gru pa but the traditional assessment of the inception of the *khri skor* system is, as well known, to have been the earth dragon year, 1268. Recognized as existing almost thirty years before the actual beginning of the system, a state of affairs noted by Sørensen-Hazod in *Rulers on the Celestial Plain* (p.556-557), the allusion to the existence of a Phag mo gru pa *khri dpon* in the iron rat year 1240 seems to be used anachronistically. In any event, the matter is confusing because, in another passage, Ta'i si tu defines the same Ldan ma sgom brTson not as a *khri dpon* but as a *spyi dpon*, the title held by the 'Bri gung sgom pa Shak rin. This problem notwithstanding, one has the impression that the Ta'i si tu's reference to O go ta's allocations of posts is intentionally incomplete. Ta'i si tu seems to mention only the situation among the Phag mo gru pa and their associates, such as the 'Bri gung pa, and that other positions of authority may have been granted to other aristocratic families of Central Tibet and elsewhere (Kham and A mdo?). On the *khri skor bcu gsum* system see the *Rgya Bod yig tshang* (p.298,7-9): "In the earth male dragon year (1268), the envoys A kon and Mi gling, these two, who had been directly sent by the imperial court, came. All the human communities and the lands [of Tibet] took the name of the great Hor". The *Ngor chos 'byung* (p.326,7) says: "When [gro mgon 'Phags pa (1235-1280)] was thirty-four, in the 1268, *dpon chen* Shakya bzang po established the *khri skor bcu gsum*". Also see Wylie, "The First Mongol Conquest of Tibet Reinterpreted" (p.125), where the establishment of the *khri skor* system relates to the Mongol census of Tibet in the same year.

few that deal with the topic I discuss.

What one deduces from the accounts found in the official historiographical literature such as the best-known *chos 'byung* and *lo rgyus* is that the Tibetans did not confront the Hor militarily. It would seem that a good dose of passivity spared them a complete annihilation of their socio-political system, unlike what happened in other countries where the Mongols beheaded the local power structure.

The little that is known about Dor ta's military activity in Khams while he was en route to invade Dbus-Gtsang and the lands of the Himalayan range in 1240 is enriched by the record of an extraordinary confrontation, an episode of Bon po heroism. My choice of this topic is in view of Dan Martin's passion for Bon. The events I discuss here pertain to the secular domain, a diversion Dan could appreciate from standard themes of its tradition, that is, the religious domain, which nonetheless impinge on activities undertaken in favor of the Bon po religion.

That the episodes I tackle have gone largely unnoticed rests on the isolation of the Bon po literary material, especially the few that concern its secular sphere, which is often neglected even by its historians who are more concerned with the religious unfolding of this tradition.

These incidents took place before Sa skya Paṇḍita wrote his famous letter to the Tibetans in which he urged them to surrender to the Hor (A mes zhabs, *Sa skya'i gdung rabs* p. 135,22-p.140,17). Points in the missive are indicative of his preoccupation that the Tibetans could underestimate Mongol might as other countries had done and for which there were dire consequences. I wonder whether Sa skya Paṇḍita also considered that, besides other Tibetan groups famed for their strength, people from Khams were among the few who went on a collision course to confront the powerful Mongols. The sequence of events that I will introduce occurred prior to the subsequent recommendations Sa skya Paṇḍita issued in his message.

The historical literature of Tibet treats the earliest official Mongol invasion recorded for Central Tibet and, in a more marginal manner, peripheral areas of Dbus-Gtsang towards the Himalayan range as if the Hor came to this wide expanse of lands from nowhere. It is obvious that, to reach Central Tibet, attack monasteries and kill people, Dor ta's army must have crossed A mdo and Khams. The itinerary that Dor ta followed in Khams and Dbus can be roughly traced. He took the *byang lam*, the northern route, given his presence in Steng chen which is confirmed by his advance to Sog yul according to Dpa'

bo Gtsug lag phreng ba,¹⁰ but there are no indications about the localities he touched while crossing A mdo and the rest of Khams. One more sign that Dor ta travelled on the *byang lam* is that he torched Dam dkar dgon, a Karma bKa' brgyud monastery on the bank of the Rdza chu in Nang chen.¹¹ The destination of Dor ta's campaign—Rwa sgreng, Rgyal lha khang and 'Bri gung—before heading south and west to the Himalayan range and Gtsang are one more indication in the same sense.

The history of the Hor in Tibet is made of invasions, victories, and a heavy-handed treatment of the Tibetans. The episode I deal with steps out of this steadfast sequence of negative facts for the inhabitants of the plateau, although it too did not take place without suffering and loss on the part of the Tibetans.

A combined reading of the *Khyung po gdung rabs* and the *Khyung*

¹⁰ Dpa' bo Gtsug lag phreng pa mentions a few regions crossed by Dor ta on the way to Central Tibet. He is not profuse in his description of the itinerary and even less so when the Hor chieftain traversed Khams. *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (p.1416,14-17) says: "Later, in iron rat 1240, the Hor troops, with Dor tog (spelled so) as commander, for the first time came to Tibet from the territory [of] Byang ngos under [the command of] Go dan. As prophesied by O rgyan rin po che that peace in Mdo stod, Mdo smad, Sog chu, Ra sgreng and other [localities] would be disrupted and that this would be a cause for sorrow, people in mDo stod, mDo smad, Sog chu kha etc. were killed". With these words Dpa' bo marks the crucial steps of Dor ta's advance in Tibetan territory, Mdo stod (A mdo), Mdo smad (Khams), Sog chu (Sog yul contiguous to Steng chen/Sum pa Glang gi Gyim shod), and Rwa sgreng being the theatre of important events in Dor ta's military offensive. Was Sog chu/Sog yul the scene of another key incident on the way? Or does Dpa' bo mean Steng chen, the territory of Dor ta's warfare against the Khyung po? The *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (p.1416,13-20) adds: "When Jing gi (spelled so) was fifty-nine (sic, he was dead by then), in iron rat (1240), he would be born in 1182 according to Dpa' 'bo), given that Dor tog (i.e. Dor ta) was made head of the troops at Go dan's place Byang ngos, he led Hor troops to Tibet for the first time. According to the prophecy by O rgyan rin po che: "Mdo stod, Mdo smad, Sog chu and Rwa sgreng etc. ..., but I do not want to go into it in detail, for it is a matter of sorrow, people in Mdo stod, Mdo smad, Sog chu ka etc. were killed as soon as [the Mongols] saw them. Rwa sgreng was greatly damaged. Stag lung was hidden by fog and they did not see it. Rgyal lha khang was burnt. 500 monks, such as btsun pa So ston, were killed. No harm was caused to 'Bri khung because 'Bri khung Sphyan snga Grags pa 'byung gnas made a rain of stones fall". It is the work by Dpa' bo Gtsug lag 'phreng ba which outspokenly makes Dor ta's campaign the earliest, while in several sources written before the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* this invasion is the first one included in their treatment of the Mongol relations with Tibet during the period.

¹¹ *Nang chen nyer lnga'i rgyal rabs ngo sprod lo rgyus* (p.20,8-12): "'Dam dkar dgon was a Karma Bka' brgyud monastery established at the edge of the hill behind the 'Dam dkar settlement on the northern bank of the Rdza chu, some five kilometers from Skye dgu [mdo]. Initially the monastery must have been on the Rdza chu's southern bank. In 1239 Sog po Dor ta nag po, when he came to Tibet, destroyed it viciously. Then its location was moved [where it is] now".

po'i lo rgyus rnam thar, belonging to the group of texts definable collectively as the *Khyung rabs*, provides a better sequence of the events. These are the texts that report the incidents I deal with here.

Dor ta nag po's Hor pa invasion was the factor that triggered the hostilities in Steng chen. The Khyung po of the territory revolted against the presence of Dor ta's warriors in their land. The account is a rarity because it records events in Khams that led to an armed resistance against the invaders. A wind of war blew, brought by the Hor pa troops,¹² headed by the incarnations of the *klu srin*-s of Gnam mtsho.

The Khyug po inflicted upon the Mongols the affront of stealing a *gser yig* ("golden letter") from Do rta.¹³ There is no information of the contents of the golden letter, a document normally issued by a high authority, including the Mongol emperor. It can be presumed that the *gser yig* touched on important political and military matters that concerned the Tibetans, or else it would have not been in the hands of Dor ta, charged by O go ta with the mission to bring the Tibetans under Hor pa governance. Otherwise, it would not have been snatched away by the two Khyung po headmen.

The Khyung po dignitaries from Steng chen, the brothers Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus, stole it together with a solid silver duck with a golden beak, which seems to have been part of Dor ta's booty. The duck reminds one of Tibet's past and its participation in the nomadic world of the Central Asian steppes; its production of images depicting extraordinary animals is also found as a badge of imperial Tibet's dignitaries. The *Tang Annals* record that the tent of Khri Ral pa housed wondrous objects of precious metal.¹⁴ Ink made of precious materials was popular among Bon po masters. As for Hor pa looting, a life size crystal *mchod rten* was taken away from Gnas rnying decades later to be placed on the roof of Se chen rgyal po's palace.¹⁵

¹² *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.5b,1-2) adds: "Thereafter Hor troops appeared. The shepherd of 'O brgyad noticed that the the lord of the secular realm (*srin rgyal*, i.e. the Hor Khan) with 100 heads and 1,000 arms manifested in the sky filling it".

¹³ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.10a,6-f.10b,1) says: "Later, since those (i.e. Dpon Dge and Dpon Dbus) stole the Hor's golden letter and a two silver *bre* bird with a golden beak, they tied them on Khyung po (f.10b) horses. They fled in rebellion".

¹⁴ *New Tang Annals* (f.6a, Pelliot transl., *Histoire ancienne du Tibet* p.128-p.129): "Au milieu [du campement], il y avait une haute terrasse, entourée d'une riche balustrade. Le *btsan-po* était assis dans sa tente. [Il y avait] des dragons avec et sans cornes, des tigres, des pantheres, le tout fait en (p.129) or".

¹⁵ *Gnas rnying skyes bu rnam ky'i rnam thar* (f.11a,5-6): "During *rta pa'i zla ba*, Yol Thog 'bebs destroyed with nine bolts of lightning the white rock mountain resembling the open mouth of a lion, which could become a hostile place for the A me (spelled so) Yol [brothers]. It split like pieces of bamboo. From inside, a man-size crystal *mchod rten* and [another] *mchod rten*, one *khru* in size, appeared. The

The accounts of the events in the *Khyung po gdung rabs* and the *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam* tell a different story about the Mongol reaction. One says that it was immediate. They went chasing Dpon Dge and Dpon Dbus, which indicates that they were the headmen of the Khyung po rebellion. Dor ta and Ye rtags trapped and killed them.¹⁶ Another account says that they died in battle, one that was waged by the Khyung po against the Hor after the pursuit of the stolen goods (see nos. 16 and 17). Both versions do not say whether the golden letter was recovered.

The way the strife is described shows that the Mongols, when the confrontation was in full swing, had the upper hand initially. The Hor arrested Khyung po A bla and he was taken captive to Hor yul, deportation being a typical Mongol system to deal with their hostages. This happened after Dpon dge and Dpon Dbus were assassinated. The *Khyung po gdung rabs* assigns A bla's deportation in Mongols' captivity to before the 'O brgyad battle,¹⁷ the next episode in the saga.

5. A Khams pa victory against the Hor

The *Khyung po gdung rabs* and the *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam* describe to a limited extent the events that led Khams pa people from 'O brgyad in Steng chen to obtain a rare victory in battle against the Hor. A single Tibetan victory over the Mongols during the period should not be discounted given the fame of Hor pa invincibility. One episode of a successful expulsion of Hor troops from his land was achieved by a dignitary linked by a patron-patronized relationship (*yon mchod*) to U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1230-1309).¹⁸ It occurred in

man-size one was taken away by the Hor and installed as a '*gan dzi ra* of the Ta'i tu palace". Khubilai's capital Ta'i tu was begun in 1267. The main palace was completed in 1274 (Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet* p.104 and p.120 n.178). Building activities continued for several decades to come. In absence of details concerning the crystal *mchod rten*, it is virtually impossible to ascertain the palace adorned by it. For a chronology of the construction of Ta'i tu see Shatzman Steinhart 1983.

¹⁶ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam* *thar* says to which locality the two Hor pa warriors went in pursuit of Khyung po Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus to recover the stolen items. The text (f.10b,1-2) reads: "Having gone to their pursuit, the Hor dignitaries Dor rto and Ye rtags, two of them, chased Khyung po Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus from Byi'u lung mda' up to the foot of Byang ri and killed them there".

¹⁷ *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.5b,2-3) reads: "Then Shes rab rgyal mtshan intervened. The Hor assassinated Khyung po Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus. The Hor deported Khyung po A bla and persecuted the teachings of G.yung drung Bon".

¹⁸ *Deb ther sngon po* (p.1267,3-10): "His (i.e. Bya mnga' bdag's) sons were Dge slong ba, Bya Rin chen and Chos rgyal dpal bzang, three in all, who were known as the Bya Rigs gsum mgon po. Dge slong ba's sons were Rin chen dpal. Dbang phyug ri chen, Rin chen bzang po and Dwags po ba. His (i.e. Bya Rin chen's) subjects (*mi*

Bya yul during a subsequent Mongol campaign, not Dor ta's. The *yon mchod* Bya Rin chen established with U rgyan pa, given the *grub chen's* birth date, is proof that he did not cast away from his lands either Dor ta or Do be ta who invaded Tibet in 1252 (*Mkhas pa'i dga'ston* p.1419 lines 6-7). Bya Rin chen repulsed the Mongol army that burned 'Bri gung down in iron tiger 1290 and continued its campaign south of the Brahmaputra and into the Himalayan range. This is proved by *Lho rong chos 'byung* (p.740,6-21) among other works, which talks about U rgyan pa's visit to Mdo mkhar (spelled so), Thang po che, Gnyal, Chag lo tsa ba's Te ra and Lo ro. At the last destination of this journey, he realised that the second Karma pa re-embodiment Karma Pakshi (b. 1204) had died at that time, that is, in the year 1283. U rgyan pa's *yon mchod* with Bya Rin chen should be placed in those years, followed by the Bya dignitary's successful expulsion of the Mongols which is confirmed for 1290.

The spiritual master Khyung po rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan is introduced in the *Khyung rabs* texts, engaged in moving hurriedly with destination Steng chen when the situation precipitated.¹⁹ He did not opt for a conciliatory attitude—a defensive move—like some *bla ma-s* who tried to come to terms with the Mongols,²⁰ or at best per-

se spelled so for *mi ser*) were the people of G.ye, Dwags [po], Dmyal, Byar and Lo ro. He held many estates in these [areas]. Bya Rin chen subdued all [territories] such as G.ye, Dmyal, Dwags [po], and Lo ro. He repulsed the troops of the Hor and was appointed everyone's headman. He entertained *yon mchod* with grub chen U rgyan pa".

¹⁹ On the way, Khyung po rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan is attributed the same miraculous performance as Stong rgyung ring mo, the Khyung po dignitary of the third/fourth quarter of the 7th century who moved to Sum pa Glang gi Gyim shod. The text says that, during the migration, he left behind a flower on every spot he stomped his feet, a manifest derivation from the legend of the previous Khyung po exponent. The *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.5a,6 -f.5b,1) adds that Khyung po rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan rode on a horse which was fast like a *garuda*: "Khyung po rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan rode on Mdo ba rta rje lding khyung (the "flying *khyung* lord of excellent horses"). (f.5b) He went to Mdo smad. On every spot on which he stomped his feet, a flower each appeared". A conciliatory way out from the two versions could be to proffer that horse hoofprints blossomed into flowers.

²⁰ Even Sphyan snga Rin po che, despite sparing the life of sgom pa Shak rin and preserving 'Bri gung from a Hor pa attack by means of a miraculous performance, came to terms with Dor ta to avoid further damage (see above n.5). One more case, for instance, is the effort of Sangs rgyas yar byon (1203-1272), the third abbot of Stag lung, to use his charisma and convince the Mongols not to create havoc by sending an emissary for pacification. Among various sources dealing with the event, *Sangs rgyas yar byon gyi rnam thar* (*Stag lung chos 'byung* p.276,8-13) reads: "On one occasion, a large army of Hor Du mur's troops came to Tibet. [Sangs rgyas yar byon] gave gifts to Zhang btsun and sent him to the headquarters of the Hor. Having rolled up only a few prayers [as gifts for them], [this was enough] to pacify their evil minds and they were subdued. Upon travelling to the

formed rituals in order to contain the Mongols (*Hor bzlog*) or rites of protection (*rim 'gro*). Khyung po rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan's contribution to the conflict between the Khyung po and the Hor was that he put his spiritual status coupled with his determination at the service the people of 'O brgyad in Steng chen and the members of the Khyung po clan. He supported the rebels and was adamant in his uncompromising encouragement to take the offensive. Khyung po rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan, a religious personality, exercised spiritual control over his people, whom he pushed into action against the Hor when the situation seemed to turn sour for the Khams pa.

The Hor put up a show of strength deploying a striking number of warriors, but the Khams pa managed to eliminate them.²¹ With the intervention of the sky the Mongol troops were annihilated. The victory is attributed to a miraculous stone hail and a rain of lightnings. These themes are a classic of the Tibetan vision of Mongol culture. The rain of stones echoes the treatment Dor ta received when he tried to destroy 'Bri gung. The supernatural tones that led to victory in battle have been transferred from 'Bri gung to Khams (or vice versa). Differently from the miraculous hail that prevented the *dgon pa* from being torn down by the Hor, the case of the stones falling on the heads of the Mongols in Steng chen was an offensive designed to wipe out their troops. The other literary classic, typical of the culture of the animistic Mongols, is that the episode proves their dependency on the sky.²²

headquarters of the Hor, they had a one-night halt on the way, so the men had to carry his residential tent (*gzims gur*) on their head. They had the vision that Thugs rje chen po was sitting [on their heads]. They made prostrations". Du mur's campaign took place during an unidentified year before 1253.

²¹ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.10b,2-4) says: "Then, from the Tshug mar gsum border, the queen of secular existence with 100 heads and 1,000 arms appeared in the three worlds. A stone hail like eggs fell continuously, [making the sound] *khri li li*. Those stones can still be seen at present. A saying was that those stone served the purpose as rotten curd and rotten chang. People stated that, under the rain of stones, not a single man of the Hor troops was spared". The *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.5b,3-5): "Thereafter, Shes rab rgyal mtshan said that the retinue of the lord of the secular realm (*srid pa rgyal po*, i.e. the Hor supreme) had to be repulsed. The shepherds, too, joined and proclaimed likewise [that the Hor should be eliminated]. A hail of stones, each one like an egg, rain and lightnings fell. The Hor troops—men and horses altogether—died without exception and [therefore the army] was destroyed. The communities of the land of 'O brgyad absorbed the lineages of the two Khyung po brothers (i.e. Dpon Dge and Dpon Dbus) into their pastoral class".

²² The notion that the Khyung po were able to induce the deity of the intermediate space, Mongol Tengri (Tibetan: *gnam*), to defeat the Hor is a metaphor of the supernatural power of the sky, acknowledged as superior by the mighty Mongol

Hor pa retaliation was quick. The Mongols sent other troops to the area, which shows that those defeated and killed at 'O brygad were a detachment of their army. The rebellion was quelled.²³ Shes rab rgyal mtshan, named Khyung Dbus rin po che in the passage (*Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* f.7b,4 and f.9b,5-6), was compelled to flee owing to the presence of this other Hor military contingent sent to the area to curb the gallant assertiveness of the Khams pa rebels.²⁴ The convoluted itinerary Khyung Dbus rin po che followed in his flight from the Hor brought him towards the region of the Dngul chu and then, from Nag[s] shod in the upper side of the river, he went to the locality that *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* names Khyung Dbus rdzong. The land along the river, which becomes known as Rgyal mo Rngul chu in its southern side, was a safe haven,²⁵ for the Hor did not pursue him

conquerors who had to bow to it. See the case of the Tshal pa master Dung khur pa, whose status was enhanced by the Mongol perception that he had the skill to control the sky. The *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (p.1414,17-p.1415,1) reads: "It seems that the earliest to come [to Hor yul and nearby lands] were the teachings of the Tshal pa, ahead of the Sa [skya pa and] Kar [ma pa]. Zhang rin po che's disciple, Gtsang pa Dung khur pa, seven in all, including [this] teacher and [his] disciples, went to Hor yul and stayed at a hermitage. The [local] Mongol nomadic encampments were engaged in grazing sheep. [Dung khur pa and disciples] practised meditation, while [the Mongol nomads] mainly [attended upon] the sheep. One day there was heavy hail and a flood, and all sheep [in other areas] died. He (i.e. Dung khur pa) focused his concentration on the hail, which stopped falling instantly, so that their sheep did not suffer at all. This being extraordinary, [the Mongols] asked for an explanation and, not being able to speak the language, [Dung khur pa] pointed his index finger towards the sky, which they understood as meaning that he had received empowerment [from there]. Great fame and merit (p.1415) ensued [to him]".

²³ The aftermath of the battle was a time for compassionate attention. The inhabitants of 'O brygad performed funerary rites for their victims and erected a *mchod rten bkra shis sgo mang* with no indication of its purpose but the one—I assume—of *gdung rten* for the dead. *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.6a,1-3): "A *sku 'bum* was built on top of the mountain. It is well known that [this *mchod rten*] built by the [people] of 'O brygad bestowed great blessings. At present, it has ended up inside the *sa rta*. Blood was [found] scattered in the ashes. Sha ri ram relics and numerous images appeared in the ashes".

²⁴ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.10b,4-6): "Owing to [the presence of] another major Hor army detachment, Khyung Dbus rin po che, carried by the *rta rje lding khyung* ("khyung, flying lord of horses"), left for the region of the Lho Rngul chu. From Nag stod of Sha rong he set out to Brag dkar choosing [to travel in] the sky. He extracted a *chu gter* ("water repository") which was embedded in a rock. Having stayed there, the Hor troops could not [do anything]. At present [the locality] is known as Khyung Dbus rdzong".

²⁵ A shorter and a longer description of Rngul chu and why it is associated to the south—of Steng chen in particular—are respectively found in an old text and a contemporary source. The *IHo rong chos 'byung* (p.745,14-15) says: "The rivers in the east flow to Nag shod. After mixing with the Sog chu [the river] becomes known as rNgu (spelled so) Rgyal nag mo". IHo bsTan 'dzin nyi ma writes in the

there, which would have been a detour from their objective in Central Tibet.

While the *Khyung po gdung rabs* focuses on Khyung po A bla being taken prisoner at the time of the conflict that ensued when the Hor assassinated Khyung Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus, and mentions no more than he was deported to Hor yul (see n. 16), the *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar*, on the other hand, tells about his life in captivity in the land of the Mongols. Six years after his detention, he was the object of an assassination attempt that was foiled by U zi ma, a Mongol woman who took care of him.²⁶ Hence, it not being anywhere indicated whether Dor ta was in Khams in 1239 or after his attack of Dbus in 1240, A bla would have been taken hostage around 1240 and would have continued to be a captive in Hor yul after the assassination attempt of around 1245, since he had a child from the same Mongol woman. This shows that, in the Hor pa view, matters were not settled with the Khyung po after Dor ta's campaign. The multiple battles between the Khyung po and the Hor were more than an incident on the way to Dbus, but instead local resistance that took the Mongols time to defuse. Old scores were still influencing the Mongol relations with A bla given the attempted murder, quite different from the treatment Sa skya Paṇḍita received at Byang ngos.

To wrap up the historical sense of the contention between the Khyung po and the Hor and its multifarious facets that go from the enforcement of the Hor pa law to a rare case of armed resistance by the Tibetans, the facts suggest that the dispute between the Khyung po and the Hor was a war, not a single battle. It was a sequence of battles.

6. A time of Bon po self-assertion

After the situation cooled down so that his life was no more threatened, Khyung po Shes rab rgyal mtshan returned to Steng chen, for

, *mDo Khams Dge 'Brong lo rgyus* (p.155,9-15): "After several minor water courses cross Nag shod, 'Bri ru smad and Khams Sring mo rdzong in succession, [they converge]. The place of the confluence of the two rivers Nag [chu] and Sog chu is known as Nag Sog sum mdo. After the Nag chu and Sog chu merge, [the river] is universally known as Rgyal mo Rngul chu. It receives the minor water courses of Dkar shod, Rgyal shod, Re shod and gently flows to the north of Dpal 'bar, to the south of Steng chen, the middle of Lho rong and Dpa' shod, the west of Mdzo sgang and Rdza yul and from the right side of Kha ba dkar po into Yun nan".

²⁶ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.10b,6-f.11a,2): "Six years having elapsed from when A bla (f.11a) was captured by the Hor troops, Hor Shi zin (i.e. Dor ta's successors) came to kill him. The daughter of the Hor dignitary A ta 'gu ti, namely U zi ma, saved his life so that this noble brother, child of Tibet, was spared from being killed".

he was granted a holy place most sacred to the Bon po tradition, named Shel le rdzong drug in as related in the *Khyung po gdung rabs*.²⁷ This extraordinary holy place with a stunning landscape is commonly known nowadays as Khyung po Rtse drug. Shel le rdzong drug was the focal point of the Khyung po in Sum pa Glang gyi Gyim shod (spelled Sum gling Gyim shod in the text), the quintessential hermitage of the Bon po tradition. The grant had been prophesied to Shes rab rgyal mtshan before his migration to Khams by his *bka' srung* whose identity is not revealed in the *Khyung po gdung rabs*.²⁸

In those days, the territory of Steng chen was in the hands of the Rgya who belonged to the ancestral lDong *mi'u rigs*.²⁹ Steng chen was ruled by the dignitary Rgya gtsug gtor Nyi ma 'brug grags. This means that the Rgya were the lords of the land inhabited by a Khyung po population. The Rgya had not been involved in the contention with the Hor but there are no clues to ascertain whether they suffered from the conflict.

The *Ldong rus mdzod* says that the Rgya were settled at Rma chen Spom ra and also held lands in Zal mo sgang,³⁰ the *sgang* out of the

²⁷ *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.6a,5-f.6b,2): "Then, when Rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan went to the locality, the headman of the land Steng chen, Rgya gtsug gtor Nyi ma 'brug grags, great in might (f.6b) and political power, this master of the *rig pa'i gnas lnga*, said: "Although the advice of Sangs rgyas gong ma and any lineage in whatever case could be destroyed even now, I offer the *bstan pa* and the royal seat of the Rgya to the Khyung po. This likewise is a time of happy acquisition occurring". In the tripartite division of the lands of Zhang zhung, the Bon po tradition has it that Shel le Rgya gar and Sum pa Glang gyi Gyim shod belonged to Zhang zhung Sgo. *Zhang zhung rig gnas* (p.32,5) mentions its constituent areas as She le Rgya skar and Khyung po Gting rdzong, called so rather than Khyung po rdzong drug.

²⁸ *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.6a,3-5): "At that time, the *bka' srung* on a red mule gave Khyung po Shes rab rgyal mtshan an order [containing] instructions likewise: "The holder of the Dbra dkar Khyung po lineage must go to Mdo Khams smad. He should make arrangements to make the teachings shine like the sun and moon. Even clouds in the sky will shine in the future. At the holy *rdzong* site of Sum [pa] gling Gyim shod in front of the extremely noble Shel le rdzong drug is the seat of the Steng chen pa Khyung po at Gser nya mtsho. You should go to this locality'. So said he". *Khyung po gdung rabs* defines as Mdo Khams smad the territory of Sum pa Glang gi Gyim shod—known as Khyung po or Steng chen in more modern times—which indicates how territorially volatile are the geographic definitions of Khams. Mdo Khams smad normally addresses a more easterly and also southerly sector of the region.

²⁹ Shar yul Phuntsok Tsering (*A Survey of Bonpo Monasteries and Temples in Tibet and the Himalaya* p.165-166) takes Rgya gtsug tor Nyi ma 'brug grags for a Chinese. He equivocates his affiliation to the Rgya clan which, on the contrary, is of immaculate lDong origin. The Rgya belonging to the lDong tribe were fully-fledged Tibetans in the 13th century and also since ancestral time.

³⁰ *lDong ru mdzod* (Hermanns ed. f.13b,1-2 = p.197,36-37) "Rgya tse dkar po is one lDong. Rma chen Pom (spelled so) ra in the east is [his] unchangeable holy

six situated in the western/central part of Khams. The diffusion of the Rgya clan members, therefore, encompassed a huge tract of lands from Zal mo sgang to Rma chen Spom ra and, in the east, they inhabited various areas of A mdo.

In its outline of the Khyung po genealogies, the *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* looks closely at the events that established a direct relation between the Khyung po and the Rgya in the territory of Steng chen. The generation that instituted this rapprochement was that of the four 'Dan children, known as the 'Dan Khyung. One of them, Khyung Dbus, who had settled at sPom ra ancestrally inhabited by a group of Rgya, gave two *bre* of silver to the local Khyung po exponent sTon thar. One *bre* was gifted to support the younger members of the clan. He gave the other in prevision of the future intermarriage with a wondrous Rgya woman who would bring glory to the Khyung po by giving birth to her children.³¹ One of them was

place". Ibid. (f.17a,2-3 = p.200,6-7): "The Bi ri [division of the Rgya] had cattle as many as Zal mo sgang".

³¹ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.8b,2-4): "Those [living in Khams, long] after the ancestral lineage (i.e. the one descending from Khyung sder sngon mo), were Rgyal ba dpal, Shes rabs (spelled so) dpal and Dpal bzang po. They were those who held ranks such as *rta dben bru* and the seal with a tiger-head jewel. Given that Rgyal rin held the rank of the Chinese emperor's *rta dben bru sha*, there is an account that he placed a gold-written 'Bum over the emperor's head". Ibid. (f.9a,5-f.10a,6): "Gtsug gsum Stag [was born] at sunshine of the daybreak (sic) when Khu byug died. Khyung po Myes tshab was one son born to Stag pa. He was also known as Stong 'bar. Dam pa Khyung sgom was the one [born] after the latter. As for his name, he was also known as Shes rab sgom. Dben pa A lug was the one [born] after the latter. He was also known as Ston (f.9b) lug. The youngest was known as Khyung Dbus. His name was Dad pa rgyal mtshan. These four were the four 'Dan tsha children, also known as the 'Dan Khyung. Stong 'bar's son was Stong thar. Ston lug's son was dpon Slob 'gres po. As for his name, he was also known as Bkra shis 'bar. He had no descendants. His brothers died. Mkhas pa Khyung Dbus settled at Rma Pom (spelled so) ra. Having gone to see sTon thar, he gave him two *bre* of silver. He said: "One is for your sons' living expenses (*rgyag rten* spelled so for *rgyags rten*), and as for the other being a support to Rgya Re bza's legendary aura (*gtam*), boys and girls of wealth and merit will come to exist". He did likewise. When Rgya bza' came to the family, that night she laid the foundation of the group of the six Rgya stag (the "six Rgya tigers"). Later, six sons were born to her. The eldest was Stong sras, [born] after him was Khyung Dbus rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan; [born] after the latter was Ston pa Bon sgra; [born] after the latter was Bsges gshen Ye shes dpal who was also known as Dpon dgGe; [born] after the latter was Dpon Dbus (f.10a) who, as for his name, was known as Dad pa rgyal mtshan; the youngest was Stong 'bum also known as Ston A 'bum and later Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as a monk. They were known as the Rgyal tshang spun drug of father Ston thar. Based on *lha chos sa gsum nag tshong* ("smuggling in the three lands [where] *lha chos* [is practised]"), the people of the camp took it yonder and settled down permanently in the lower area of Byi'u lung of Dbus. There was an offer of a hill-ock by the Ja ro phos pa. Ston sras's son from Stag bza' was the *slob dpon bla ma*

Khyung Dbus rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan to whom Rgya gtsug gtor Nyi ma 'brug grags granted Rtse drug and control over Steng chen.

The Rgya dignitary was led by the presence in the land of a *bla ma* of the calibre of Khyung po rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan to realise that Steng chen had to go back to its ancient owners.³² This may be a sign that until Khyung po Shes rab rgyal mtshan came to Steng chen the Khyung po did not have leadership in the territory. The grant marked the Khyung po's re-appropriation of land in the 1240s that had been their own since at least the late seventh century but could have been theirs long before, given the reverence they had for their ancient and most sacred Shel le rdzong drug. It is difficult to establish when Khyung po Rtse drug was selected as a great hermitage site. The Bon po tradition holds it that it was theirs from time immemorial.

The change of control from the Rgya to the Khyung po brought a reformed leadership in Steng chen. The grant of Khyung po Rtse drug led the Khyung po clan to take over secular control of Steng chen, too. In the first instance both religious and secular power were assigned to Shes rab rgyal mtshan. Hence, they both were in the hands of a religious exponent, which amounted to a theocratic choice.

whose name was A bla. Later, he was a monk by the name of Nam kha' rgyal mtshan. sTon gnyan had many sons and daughters. A karmic debt [was paid] with their lives from an early time. Communities, such as the Khrom tshang, convened upwards from Mdo smad. They were named Sa Hor. The derogatory name Khrom tshang A stis stayed with those who pitched camps (*sgar 'dab ru*, spelled so for '*debs ru*') of the Khyung po kin".

³² *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.6b,2-f.7a,1) further elaborates: "Rgya rje Nyi ma 'brug grags went on riding on a Khyung po horse. Khyung po Shes rab rgyal mtshan proceeded well inside Rma la bzhi. He came across the religious throne of the Rma on the plain. Clad in silk, he rode to the tiered throne of the Rgya but with damage in its structure. Then, having been invited to Rgya rdzong under [Nyi ma 'brug grags]'s power in Khams, Rgya gtsug gtor Nyi ma 'brug grags asked Khyung po Shes rab rgyal mtshan for teachings. He likewise gave them. "Now, as [said] in the *kha byang* of the Sangs rgyas gong ma, I [offer to you] the teachings of the Rgya that exist in the land of Rgya, the whole of Rgya and the sentient beings who live in the present circumstances. [In exchange of] yourself and the teachings of the Khyung po, given that I, Rgya rje Nyi ma 'brug grags, occupy this *gdan sa*, may the holy place [be allotted] to yourself, Khyung Rgyal, and the castle of the Rgya under [my] jurisdiction in Khams. (f.7a) May it pass under [your] control, Khyung Rgyal!". He gave him a golden vessel [note: one should consult the other account]. As requested, [Khyung po Shes rab rgyal mtshan] gave him a combination of appropriate teachings". The Rgya rdzong reached by Shes rab rgyal mtshan was composed by a twin locality, for the *Khyung po gdun rabs* elsewhere says that Rgya Nyi ma 'brug grags had a dual seat at Gser ri and G.yu ri (ibid. f.9a,5, but it seems that the Khyung po secular rulers from A bla onwards chose Brag dmar me ri rdzong chen to be their secular hub in Steng chen (ibid. f.9a,6).

But the system was changed almost immediately. Shes rab rgyal mtshan renounced both roles.³³ Religion and secularism went into the hands of two different Khyung po clan members. Shes rab rgyal mtshan pass-ed the chieftainship of Steng chen to Nang chen grags pa and A bla, who broke free from his captivity in Hor yul and managed to return to Khams.³⁴

Whatever treatment was reserved to Khyung po A bla—including the policy of taking a Tibetan dignitary as hostage to be the Hor pa interlocutor with the people of the plateau in a way similar to Sa skya Pandita—this proved to be unsuccessful. A bla managed to survive in captivity but did not have a role in Mongol policy towards Tibet. He returned to his land with a son from the Hor mo noblewoman who saved his life.³⁵

Was A bla taken to Byang ngos, by then the center of the Mongol policy concerning Tibet? He was deported to Hor yul before Sa skya Paṇḍita began his journey to Hor yul in 1244 to meet Go dan in Byang ngos. Did they meet at this seat of Mongol power?

The *Khyung po gdung rabs* tells us that, after Shes rab rgyal mtshan's refusal to accept responsibilities in Steng chen and delegation of control over both spheres to his stepbrothers, he did not stay in the region. It is somewhat confused concerning his whereabouts. The text says that he settled at Khyung lung dngul mkhar not to be taken for the capital of Zhang zhung (see n.32). The *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.7a,5-6) clarifies that this was the castle founded by the Khyung po in the late 7th century at Rma chu Bkra ri, named so by the Khyung po. This indicates that the Bon po idea was that the place

³³ *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.7a,1-4): "Khyung rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan said: "I myself am a peculiar personality in the ten directions. I have no means to rule the land and its community. However, I wish to lend your Rgya land, castle, and community that I have received to the Khyung po. I [will give them] to my two half-brothers A bla and Nang chen grags pa. I will keep on staying at Zhang zhung Khyung lung dngul mkhar. I grant them this one gift. You should send two messengers to summon him (i.e. A bla)"."

³⁴ *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.7a,6-f.7b,2): "When Khyung A bla returned from the land of the Hor, the two men sent to invite him witnessed [his return]. The message of the grant was communicated with the request [to accept it]. (f.7b) A bla having been invited, the headman (i.e. A bla) and the assistants, three in all, [travelled] via the *lho lam*. From the area in Shing rong dbyangs chen la kha, offers of flowers like rain being bestowed [upon him], he went upwards with great happiness to return to his own land".

³⁵ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.11a,2-4): "[Hor mo U zi ma] became familiar with him, and a son was born who was unaffected by fire, water, and wild animals. He happened to subsist on light and lightnings and he was given the name Hor btsun Byang chub rgyal mtshan. He gathered many people and looked after them. One aristocratic relative (*lha gnyen*) gave him protection so that he was called Lha gnyen Mgon 'bum".

still was Zhang zhung, no more a kingdom but a *locus mentis*.

An internal rearrangement took place between Nang chen Grags pa and A bla. The former, who received honors from the emperor of China, once again not identified in the text, stressed his predisposition to follow the religious path.³⁶ He did not want to have the burden of secular responsibilities which Rgya gtsug gtor Nyi ma 'brug grags granted A bla.³⁷ Nang chen Grags pa was the spiritual head of the Khyung po community, A bla its secular head, so that religion and politics, that is, *Chos* and *srid* were separated.

After being released by the Hor, Khyung po A bla traveled on the *lho lam*, southern route, from China to Khams.³⁸ It is not clear whether the reference to the *lho lam* concerns the road he took in China or the tract in Khams that would have brought him to Steng chen. If *lho lam* refers to Khams, he must not have entered the Tibetan plateau from the area of Rab sgang/Khams Mi nyag where, in those years, refugees from the erstwhile Tangut kingdom converged to escape Jing gir rgyal po's destruction of their state, an area too far south from the destination of sTeng chen. He may have travelled along the more southern route from Dkar mdzes to Sde dge and Chab mdo rather than farther north across Rma chen, 'Bri klung and Nang chen.

As with what happened with A bla who was able to return to Khams to assume the responsibility of his post, so Nang chen Grags pa, the person designated to hold Khyung po Rtse drug, was not in Steng chen. He himself was staying at eastern Khyung lung dngul mkhar from where he was summoned.

This *lo rgyus* historical part of the *Khyung po gdung rabs* ends with the aftermath of the contention between the Hor and the Khyung po, and begins with a section that relates the names of the Khyung po genealogy of Steng chen. Most of these people are unknown to me,

³⁶ *Khyung po'i lo rgyus rnam thar* (f.11a,6-f.11b,4): "After Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus, altogether two, were killed (*bsgrung*), from the servant A mtsho bza' a son of Ston'bum was (f.11b) born. He was Nang chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan. At the age of thirteen, he was asked to take a wife from his entourage. He said: 'I do not choose household life. I will practice *lha chos*'. The senior ministers invited an important wife to protect the lineage. Due to that, Nang chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan was extremely disturbed. Thus, he said: 'I must only practice *lha chos*. As for the lineage of the Khyung po family, to protect it a little, [you] should go to Hor yul to look for A bla. The Hor did not kill him yet. It is possible [to take him back]'".

³⁷ *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.9b,3-4): "Rgya rje Nyi ma 'brug grags, who had got the land and the community, all of them, arranged that Khyung A bla should have them".

³⁸ The document published by Sharyul Phuntso Tsering, which he does not identify, also mentions that A bla travelled the *lho lam* (*A Survey of Bonpo Monasteries and Temples in Tibet and the Himalaya* p.166).

but among those who did not have a part in the events (secular and religious) of those years, they too should have had a significant place in the history of the Tibeto-Mongol relations.

The child whom A bla had with the Hor mo who had given support during his captivity went eventually to live in Tibet (see above n.35). He is one of the few Tibetans of Mongol origin whose existence is documented for the period. He is called Hor btsun Byang chub rgyal mtshan in the *Khyung po gdung rabs*. Hence, he is identified by his matrilinear side. His Hor pa blood was *sha* while, for instance, the Mongol blood of Hor khang Ma bsam bu ("unintended son") (*Hor chos rje sku phreng gong rim gyi rnam thar* p.35,4-5), the progenitor of the Tre Hor lineage, was *rus*.

The time frame of all these activities extends to a good number of years after the initial contention between the Khyung po and Dor ta. It must allow for the captivity of A bla in Hor yul, his having a child with a Mongol woman, and his return with the son they bore. A safe *terminus ante quem* is the inception of the Yuan domination of Tibet in 1268 during the thirty years that elapsed from the strife that broke out around 1240 and the passage of Tibet under the authority of Se chen rgyal po [= Qubilai Khaghan (r. 1260-1294)].

Eventually the scions of A bla split into three encampments, the Rang lo, Gser pa and Tshab shwe pa, defined as *sgar-s* (*Khyung po gdung rabs* f.9a,2-f.9b,2; is *sgar* in this sense different from *ru* but still implying a 'brog pa condition?). They were the chieftains of the Khyung po. Initially they formed a three-fold unity, but they split afterwards. The Rang lo gave birth to the Khyung dkar and Khyung nag divisions. The Tshab produced the Khyung tshab, hence they did not substantially proliferate but expanded their territorial influence to A mdo. Like the Khyung tshab, the Gser pa carried on without substantial modifications to the clan.

7. A subsequent Khyung po religious episode in Steng chen

The passage from a hermit/individualistic pattern of Bon po practice to a monastic organisation in Steng chen was the outcome of religious charisma and courage on the political scene. It took place either rather early or late in comparison with other regional strongholds of Bon. For instance, in Mustang the Bon po monastic phase began earlier, i.e., in the second half of the twelfth century (Klu brag dgon).³⁹ In

³⁹ For the studies by Klu brag pa Bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1131-1215) on monastic discipline at G.yas ru Dben sa kha see the *Zhang zhung snyan rgyiud bla ma'i rnam thar* (p.86,4-6). For his foundation of Klu brag, thus establishing a monastic community in Glo smad see Vitali, *A short history of Mustang* (p.36).

Dol po it happened during the 14th century (Bsam gling dgon, see the *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* p.93,2-3), around the time of the similar phase in Steng chen. Bon po monasticism was far ahead in its features and time frame from the patterns of Buddhist monasticism on the plateau, if one thinks of the post-1054 (the death date of A ti sha) creation of the Bka' gdams pa school, the establishment of Sa skya pa school in 1073 or the birth of the networks of Bka' brgyud pa subschools in Central Tibet and Khams.

The adoption of monasticism in Steng chen coincided with the foundation of the eponymous monastery, Steng chen *dgon*, by the charismatic master Khyung rin po che Shes rab rgyal mtshan. In his treatment of Steng chen dgon pa, Sharyul Phuntso Tsering in his *A Survey of Bonpo Monasteries and Temples in Tibet and the Himalaya* p.164 places the life of Khyung Dbus Shes rab rgyal mtshan first in the tenth century and then writes that he founded Steng chen dgon pa in 1061. In the *Bon dgon khag gi lo rgyus* (p.288,6), Sharyul Phuntso Tsering gives, instead, the birth date of Khyung po Shes rab rgyal mtshan as iron ox 1061, the same year he attributed the foundation of Steng chen dgon pa to the Bon po master in his *A Survey of Bonpo Monasteries and Temples in the Tibet and the Himalaya* (p.164). I presume that the unidentified document he has used to discuss Steng chen gives the monastery's foundation date to an iron ox year which he assigns to the first *rab byung* and, therefore, he takes it for 1061, but it makes sense to postdate it to fourth *rab byung*, hence to 1241. The correction in favor of 1241 is justified by Shes rab rgyal mtshan's deeds in Steng chen around that year and Dor ta's concomitant campaign.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In the *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan*, Dpal ldan tshul khriims has an overview of holy institutions in Sum pa Glang gi Gyim shod after the ancient period which, nonetheless, may go back to a time earlier than the great *bstan pa me ro/phyi dar* divide. He is non-committal on the issue but the way he deals with his material acknowledges that some of the holy places existed beforehand. Dpal ldan tshul khriims (*Bstan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p.503,8-15) writes: "The *gdan sa-s* of the noble Khyung po in Stod, Smad and Bar are so numerous that I indeed do not know all of them. Nonetheless, a great monastery founded during *bstan pa phyi dar* in Bar Khams was Sog Lcags zam g.yung drung gling, which was cited above. Extremely many erudites and meditators born in the Khyung po clan came [to work] at this institution, but their names are not recorded. Likewise, it is a fact that there were a few monastic communities at Gyim shod stod smad at an early time but at present their locations and the *lha khang-s* [themselves] are not known for sure. For the sake [of this analysis], to elucidate likewise the existence of the seats of the Khyung dkar nag gser, three in all, associated [among themselves] in the name of nobility, the *gdan sa* of the Khyung dkar was Brag dmar ri bdun; the *gdan sa* of the Khyung nag was Rtse drug ri khrod; the *gdan sa* of the Khyung gser was Bya ze yang rdzong, which, in earlier time, were splendid and bestowed blessings".

All in all, the Khyung po in Steng chen occupy a historical niche that has few counterparts in the centuries of post-imperial Tibet. They passed from putting up a gallant rebellion against the Hor with victories and defeats—rare if not unique events during the Mongol dominance of Tibet before Yuan rule—to bring their land in a span of a few years to a time of religious glory that made it the epitome of a Bon po enclave that it continues to be today.

The importance of the Khyung po's achievement goes beyond the individual sphere. An example of single-handed refusal to bow to the Hor and their subordinates is that of U rgyan pa Rin chen dpal. It cost the Bka' brgyud pa master dearly but left him unimpressed and defiant (see Vitali, "Grub chen U rgyan pa and the Mongols of China"). The achievements of the Khyung po were collective and, despite highs and lows, they were able to renovate the glory of Rtse drug, a place that, despite the adulterations of modernity, still breathes a spirituality and a sense of a world with values different from the predominant standards of the present.

8. *Unsolved matters*

A few pending matters for which there is no easy solution are:

~ the precise years of the events in Steng chen, hence how they relate to Go dan's time of appointment in Byang ngos and Dor ta's campaign, although evidently around 1240.

~ consequently, the temporal slot of Dpon dGe and Dpon Dbus's assassination.

~ whether the conflict between the Khyung po and Hor happened on Dor ta's way-in or way-out of Central Tibet (to paraphrase Xenophon's account of the campaigns of Cyrus in Asia Minor; was it during Dor ta's *anabasis* or *katabasis*?). This incertitude leads to a minimum *delta* of years, either before or after the year 1240.

~ the absence of any indication of the year in which Dor ta returned to Hor yul.

Addendum

A micro-gnas yig of Khyung po Rtse drug

An important piece of history of the subsequent period is the major monastic foundation at Khyung po Rtse drug in 1383 by Blo ldan snying po (b. 1360), a member of the Khyung po clan and a child of the Steng chen soil. The holy place was transformed from a her-

mitage to a center for a Bon po congregation.⁴¹ The *Khyung po gdung rabs* has a short *dkar chag* of the holy building that Khyung po Blo ldan snying po constructed.⁴² The model he used for his *gtsug lag khang* is treated in mythical terms, for it was Gsas khang Bkra shis legs thang from the realm of Rtag gzigs (spelled so) 'Ol mo lung ring, but it cannot be ruled out that, in cosmopolitan fourteenth century Khams, the *dgon pa* echoed the style of a monastery of the Indian Northwest. This would signify that he adopted a structure whose unconventional conception was extraneous to the architecture of Tibet of the period. The *Khyung po gdung rabs* talks about a few important endowments to the temple. On its outside, the roof must have been wondrous, endowed with a chain in heavy iron (a material linked with Bon) attached to it. Lavish use was made of gold. Inside, gold was used for the main receptacle holders—a statue of Khri smon rgyal bshed and the seven *mchod rten*—and other images. Blo ldan snying po equipped a chapel in the monastic complex with a library of books written both in gold and silver.

Blo ldan snying po's reform went beyond the function of Khyung

⁴¹ Upon dealing with Khyung po Rtse drug, Dpal ldan tshul khriims divides its existence into two grand historical phases, the ancient one when it was a hermitage and meditation place, the later one when it was a monastic centre. Dpal ldan tshul khriims (*Bstan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p.504,2-3) remarks: "The meditation caves and the objects of the three bodies of Rtse drug ri khrod existed in continuity since early times under the control of *bla [ma-s]* committed to meditation. Subsequently, in the days of Sangs rgyas gling pa, a meditation centre was established and incarnation *bla [ma-s]* came [there] in succession, so that the teachings were greatly expanded". The allusion to *gter ston* Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396) in Dpal ldan tshul khriims's treatment refers to the evolution of Khyung po Rtse drug into a *dgon pa* accomplished by Khyung Blo ldan snying po in 1383, for the two were contemporaries. Dpal ldan tshul khriims's statement should be decoded in the sense that the function of Rtse drug kept being devoted to meditation but monastic life was perpetrated along a lineage of monastery holders.

⁴² *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.9b -f.10a,3): "The excellent incarnation body Blo ldan snying po was invited. In accordance to the prophecy issued to this incarnation by the *rig 'dzin mkha' 'gro-s*, he built Phreng gtsug lag khang chen using Gsas khang Bkra shis legs thang from the realm of Rtag gzigs (spelled so) 'Ol mo lung ring as model. On its top was a gilt finial made of seventy-seven *khal* of copper with a chain attached to it, made of sixty *khal* of iron. Inside it three Byang chen and, outside it, gilt finials were made of twenty-one *srang* of gold. Inside, the quintessential [images] were Khri smon rgyal bshed, seven excellently made *mchod rten* and three *ston pa* not going back to the past but of that day. Golden statues were the main ones that were made. [Blo ldan snying po] produced 108 golden images; (f.10a) 108 religious books [written in] gold and 108 religious books [written in] silver. Moreover, canopies, banners (*'phen* spelled so for *'phan*), parasols and silk emitting pleasant sounds and implements for worship transformed [the *gtsug lag khang*] into a *gzhal yas khang* with innumerable precious objects made of gold, silver and iron, so that a necklace of deities from Li yul paid their homage [to it]".

po Rtse drug as a site where a congregation was gathered. He brought about a radical transformation of the doctrinal principles. He professed the *ris med pa* concept (I do not intend here any reference to the later Ris med movement) that a syncretic view of Bon and Chos both from the philosophical viewpoint and its practical application should be adopted.⁴³ He was an exponent of this religious solution.

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⁴³ Blo ldan snying po is attributed a statement that explicates his religious position. *Khyung po gdung rabs* (f.10a,5-f10b,2) mentions it: "He said: "It is a fact that Dam pa'i Bon and Chos each have lineages and seats that merge. Hence, I accept this [attitude] without doubt, I myself Blo ldan from a family of fortunate beings practice such a syncretic method. The successive lineages of the Dbra Khyung Gser tsha, their *bla* [*ma-s* and] chieftains, each performing golden bits of meditative practice, the communities without a voice, (f.10b) and the subjugated communities should make each and every receptacle of body and speech. I request that the chieftains should make in succession sets of *'Bum* and each one of the large and middle-sized communities sets of *mDo*. May [all this] be pursued without indolence".

gling pa'i rnam thar stan pa'i 'brug sgra bzhug go, in 'Bri gung Ratna'i ming can gyi skyes rabs mos gus dran pa'i lcags skyu and rje btsun Rin chen phun tshogs kyi rnam thar smad cha dad pa'i gdung ba sel byed, *The Autobiography of 'Bri-gung-pa Rin-chen-phun-tshogs (1509-1557) and its continuation by Rin-chen-dpal, with Rin-chen-phun-tshogs' Biographies of 'Bri-gung-gling-pa Shes-rab-'byung-gnas (1187-1241) and 'Bri-gung-pa Kun-dga'-rin-chen*, Bir, Bir Tibetan Society, 1985.

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