

PART II

THE ARCHAIC CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL TRADITIONS OF TIBET AND ZHANG-ZHUNG

Our understanding of the ancient historians is complicated by added subjects, such as archaeology, which loom large in the interests of the man of today, and the added techniques which provide information unknown to the Greeks... The whole study of archaeology with the great light it can throw on certain phases of Greek life was practically unknown to them. Much of the material for the study of pre-history in Greece and Asia Minor was more accessible than now, yet the Greeks were content to rely on folk-tales and poetic accounts of their own earlier history. For the majority of the Greeks, indeed, the myth was history.

Godolphin, *The Greek Historians*

1 The Application of Bon Literature to the Study of the Upper Tibetan Archaic Cultural Horizon

Part II of this study explores a variety of cultural, religious and political traditions associated with the Central Tibetan (Bod) and Upper Tibetan (Zhang-zhung and Sum-pa) territories of the archaic cultural horizon. This heritage is primarily enshrined in Bon literature and covers a wide range of vital human activities that were purported to have been an integral part of Plateau life during the prehistoric epoch and early historic period. The objective of this study is to submit for inspection the Tibetan literary sources that hold the most promise for serving as interpretive tools applicable to the field of archaeology. The various sections of the study describe the personalities, abstract traditions and landmarks that place Upper Tibetan archaeological data within a cultural historical framework. Particular attention is paid to those sources that elucidate the functions of archaeological sites and the material culture associated with them.

Tibetan (particularly Bon) texts contain a large corpus of information regarding the cultural, religious and political traditions of prehistoric and early historic times. This study samples but a small amount of this literary wealth, for its aim is not to act as a review or cross-section of Bon literature pertinent to ancient times but rather to expound upon specific areas of it. The texts and passages studied have been selected to clarify those activities and beliefs that are or may prove to be amenable to archaeological corroboration. Accounts that highlight objects, geography, and aspects of abstract culture that is likely to have left behind physical remnants are given precedence

over an analysis of religious and intellectual matters in isolation. This material manifestation is potentially expressed in the nature and extent of the Tibetan archaic artifact and monument assemblages, and in their distribution and relationships to one another. In the sphere of religion, therefore, this study does not focus upon philosophical tenets, mystic practices or lines of spiritual transmission as subjects of inquiry in themselves, but on the collateral activities, costumes, implements, and places associated with the Tibetan spiritual tradition. Even in sections of this work featuring deities, myths and rituals, the objective remains an understanding of their cultural and material basis and how this might be discernable in the archaeological record.

Many of the texts used in this study were written centuries after the events recorded are supposed to have transpired, lending a legendary coloring to them. These written sources were composed or codified after the end of the tenth century CE, as part and parcel of a different cultural and political order from that which they describe. The significant temporal and experiential distance from events of the earlier era, combined with the incorporation of much mythic and hagiographic material, has strongly affected the historical orientation of the documents. Rather than historical chronicles per se, this literature is more frequently a legendary index of ancient times, one in which idealized religious conceptions predominate over the discursive exposition of datable milestones.

The exaltation of the non-material past in Tibetan literary works makes it prudent to speak in terms of historical lore rather than historical fact: people, events and objects that existed conditionally but not necessarily in literal terms. We must bear in mind that the religious underpinnings of this literature tend to deviate from rationalist conceptions of reality. Ordinary historical structures are often ingrained in narrative matrices of unverifiable doings (viz. flying in the sky like birds, playing with the sun and moon, the control of the weather and seasons, etc.). Rather than explain the allegorical or symbolic significance of these mythic elements, this work is more concerned with an assessment of the beliefs, customs and traditions that stand behind them. By studying these sources, we prepare ourselves for the day when their contents can be compared to the physical objects and processes revealed by systematic archaeological excavation and the abstractions implicit in these.

The characteristic mixing of intangible and substantive elements in Tibetan accounts has given rise to a genre of literature best described as quasi-historical. As noted, these works frequently contain traces of palpable events and processes interpenetrated or embellished with non-corroboratory phenomena.¹ The majority of these sources are preoccupied with illustrating past religious glories, exemplifying an approach to the chronicling of the past where the prosaic is minimized and the phenomenal accentuated. We are all too often left with a picture where the mythological and religious overshadow the ordinary dictates of time and space. For instance, while place names are commonly mentioned in conjunction with mystic and miraculous happenings, few details about their geographic, architectural and demographic character are given. These mundane elements

¹ It is self-evident that these textual sources tell us at least as much, if not more, about the times in which they were written than they do about the times in which the narratives are set. Blezer (2003) argues for a limited degree of continuity of Bon traditions from the imperial period to the post-tenth century CE cultural milieu. His paper is concerned with the dynamics of textual continuity and transformation. Blezer has identified major historiographic strategies that the Bon-po have used in texts to bolster their claim to Tibetan prehistoric religious traditions. These include archaisation (important lineages and doctrines artificially projected into the past), the appropriation of Buddhist narratives into their doctrinal framework, and the cloning of personalities so as to span widely separated time periods. See *op. cit.* Blezer 2003.

of human existence are clearly secondary to the amazing occurrences and spiritual realizations thought to have taken place at these locations. Similarly, descriptions of battles, weaponry, uniforms, and insignia abound, but military and technological details are conspicuously absent. Their primary role in the historical discourse is to illustrate the prowess of past religious personages and the efficacy of the Bon doctrine (bsTan-pa). As pedestrian objects and events are not usually scrutinized by Tibetan authors, the minutiae of form and function are sidestepped.

Tibetan texts furnish an idealized view of history, one linked to a past born out of religious and sectarian compulsions. In the Bon (and Buddhist) historiographic tradition, the authentication and triumph of the doctrinal system takes precedence over descriptions of commonplace legacies. Emphasis is placed on doctrinal continuity between the prehistoric and historic epochs and the justification for religious tradition, not on a datable sequencing of past events and processes. As a result, the systematized Bon religion never developed a tenable chronology for its version of the distant past. This consigns a good deal of it to the nebulous realm of being unverifiable. Buddhism did much the same thing vis-à-vis India, creating literary tales of past greatness, in which the Vajrayāna of the medieval period is lent the mantle of authority of the Buddha and his times. It is not my intention here to enter into an involved critique of Tibetan historiographic methods, a specialized study in itself, but to stress that the need for religious legitimization was more important than a temporal ordering of the past. This maxim must remain central in any attempt to tie Tibetan quasi-historical literature to the empiricism of archaeology.

This is the state of affairs with which the chronicler of Tibet's prehistoric past must contend when using Bon and Buddhist literary sources. The degree to which literary materials concerned with this remote era are mythic, legendary or documentary in character remains very difficult to discern. While some accounts set in the early historic context can be compared with analogous narratives in the contemporaneous documents of Dunhuang, there are no such chronological benchmarks for the prehistoric epoch. One cannot with any assurance state what happened in terms of an exhaustive analysis of a historicized process or event. Rather Tibetan literature presents us with possibilities regarding the nature of prehistory, useful in the formulation of hypotheses. These can be tested against other sources of data such as the archaeological record.

Bon texts are replete with examples of cultural, religious and political traditions that are construed as being native to Tibet or the semi-mythical lands of sTag-gzig and 'Ol-mo lung-ring, to the north and west. This sets Bon's geographic origins firmly apart from Buddhism and its Indian homeland. Bon claims of an indigenous fountainhead for many of its traditions have considerable historical credence, for they appear to be linguistically and culturally specific to Tibet. In assessing the prehistoric and early historic past as portrayed in Tibetan literature, this study relies on the positing of an indigenous character to determine what predated Buddhism or what developed independently from it. The term indigenous as it is applied to Tibetan religious and cultural phenomena has several facets of signification. It describes both abstract and material aspects of culture that originated in Tibet, or were redeveloped in Tibet, whatever their original source. Indigenous culture and religion are potentially of two basic types: 1) non-Buddhist (not attributable to popular, canonical or associative forms of Buddhism); and 2) Buddhist (vernacular forms and interpretations of Buddhism tailored to the cultural and physical environment of Tibet). In this study, we are exclusively concerned with non-Buddhist endemic culture. Consequently, I will not use the term 'indigenous' to describe inborn forms of Buddhism.

There is far more historical lore about Central Tibet (Bod/sPu-rgyal) in Bon and Buddhist literature than there is for Zhang-zhung. This indicates that these sources were mostly composed

by those engrossed in the cultural heritage and political realities of Central Tibet, Zhang-zhung occupying a peripheral role at best. This Central Tibet-centric view of history permeates most Bon religious histories (bsTan-'byung). A significant minority of these quasi-historical documents do, however, speak about events and personalities connected to Zhang-zhung. These sources generally portray Zhang-zhung as a powerful kingdom with its own language and culture. Tibet is cast as a separate but culturally complementary country with its own political traditions but largely beholden to Zhang-zhung for its spiritual bequest. Given this importance, it seems curious that there is relatively little quasi-historical material related to Zhang-zhung. This is likely because these sources were written centuries after the demise of Zhang-zhung as a puissant cultural and political entity. The fading of the collective memory over time and the geographic shift of the Bon base of power to the south and east may have conspired to relegate Zhang-zhung to a fairly small body of historical lore.

Places thought important to early Bon (a blanket characterization of archaic religion in Tibet as conceived by the later Bon-po and Buddhists) in Upper Tibet reveal large concentrations of archaeological sites. This indicates that the Bon textual tradition has indeed preserved knowledge of the archaic cultural centers of Upper Tibet. While it may be argued that much of what is supposed to have taken place at these sites is mythic accretion laid down over the centuries, the fact that important cultural activity occurred in these locations is significant in itself. As in any historical analysis, a distinction must be made between what really transpired on a physical level and what existed as incorporeal or spiritual phenomena. It is in the non-concrete sphere, however, that Bon quasi-historical literature is at its most fecund. These writings often claim to represent the mindset, motivations and spiritual activities of those who populated the ancient cultural milieu of Upper Tibet.

Bon literature specifies at great length what philosophical and ideological abstractions lie behind the physical demonstrations of religiosity in ancient times. Many of these have assumed a Buddhist aura, with sutra and tantric doctrines attaining special prominence in Bon writings. The unremarked merging of indigenous and Buddhist-style traditions in Bon doctrinal systems has led to both being seen as sharing the same historical genesis. In the Bon historical discourse, little allowance has been made for the inflow of social and theological contributions over the course of history, resulting in a largely static view of history. Instead of an inherently mutable social and cultural phenomenon continually affected by historical changes in the wider Tibetan world, Bon has come to view itself as virtually unchanged and complete since its inception (hence, the epithet 'g.Yung-drung' (Eternal) Bon). This unifocal historical perspective has permitted Buddhist style doctrines and practices to infiltrate archaic religious traditions with few critical reservations. In this way, Bon has maintained its position as the primary heir to Tibet's ancient culture-scape, while embracing religious innovations inspired by contact with the Indic cultural world. This doctrinal adaptation has served Bon well, allowing it to thrive and expand its artistic and intellectual scope over time.

In the face of momentous cultural, political and social changes in Tibet, the assuming of Buddhist garb gave rise to a mix of religious traditions under the ancient banner of Bon. The appropriation of Buddhist traditions in substance but not in name has helped Bon institutions to remain vibrant and appealing in a changing Tibetan world. Perhaps this also acted as a cultural survival mechanism useful in fending off the sectarian bigotry and political suppression that has riddled Tibetan ecclesiastical history over the centuries. The Buddhicization of archaic religious traditions is likely to have begun early in the imperial period and to have intensified with the abolition of Bon by King Khri-srong lde'u-btsan, in the late eighth century CE. It appears that as a consequence of

the conversion of much of the Tibetan world to Buddhism, systematic efforts were made by those still calling themselves Bon-po to harmonize their religious tenets with the beliefs of the dominant community. While the timeline is open to debate, the current writings of the systematized Bon religion do tend to marginalize older traditions and practices. In particular, those aspects of the archaic cultural heritage not in conformance with Buddhist morality and sensibilities have been cast aside or altered (i.e., animal sacrifice, localized theogonies, the ancestral afterlife, etc.). The supplanting of archaic ideologies and motifs with Buddhist-style variants, as manifested in Bon literature, will be scrutinized throughout the course of this work.

Leaving aside Buddhist-style tantric, metaphysical and ethical teachings, what kind of cultural and religious milieu was dominant in the prehistoric epoch? Viewed as a whole, Bon quasi-historical literature paints a picture of the early religious milieu in which magic and ritual were the paramount insurers of human well-being and cosmic harmony. These esoteric practices were conducted with the unambiguous goal of bettering the lives of those participating in them. While speculative forms of archaic religion are likely to have co-habitated with more utilitarian activities, they may have been mostly limited to eschatological, cosmogonic and cosmological beliefs, as well as some forms of personal spiritual cultivation.

The archaic cultural ethos appears to have revolved around the deeply rooted belief that human beings and the gods came from the same primal cosmic source. Furthermore, their interactions continue in this world and that of the hereafter. An interrelationship with the animal kingdom in which certain species of animals are closely identified with humans is also postulated.² We therefore meet with a situation in which deities, humans and animals share the same ontological continuum, their outer forms and consciousnesses continually undergoing a process of reconstitution. Divinities appear in both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms, and humans in turn assume the guise of gods and animals. This ontological mutuality is at odds with Buddhism, which maintains that gods, animals and humans exist as separate categories of sentient life. Buddhism avers that it is not desirable for humans to become gods or animals as these have less advantageous forms of sentience for the pursuit of enlightenment. Archaic religion as portrayed in Bon literature is replete with interspecies exchanges that extend from a primordial past to the eternized afterlife. These fixed cosmological points of reference stand in contrast to the Buddhist affirmation that all phenomena are impermanent. We shall return to these fundamental cultural differences throughout the course of this work.

² Stein (1970: 183 (n. 36)) points out that in the Dunhuang manuscripts, animals are distinguished according to their acquaintance with men, gods and demons: i.e. *lha-sha* (deer of the *lha*), *srin-sha* (deer of the *srin*), *myi-sha* (deer of humans). This is a good example of the intensive interactivity that characterized spirit, human and animal relations in early Tibetan cultural traditions.

2 The Bon Masters and Ritual Objects of Ancient Tibet and Zhang-zhung

2.1 Questions Concerning the Historical Validity of Ancient Bon Personalities and their Activities and Possessions

While the ancient personalities themselves and their dwellings and activities in Bon literature derive from an early stratum of native religious tradition, these themes have been painstakingly wedded to Buddhist-style philosophy and praxis by the authors. This makes deconstruction into neat categories of ‘Buddhist’ and ‘non-Buddhist’ or ‘archaic’ difficult at best. A deconstructionist approach to these narratives would prove a tendentious exercise in any case, for independent sources of historical verification are largely lacking. Nevertheless, it is essential to come to terms with the long-standing historical continuities suggested by Bon biographical sources. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on those textual themes that reveal a non-Buddhist character without addressing their historical origins and how and why these may have come to be associated with a Buddhist-type religious setting. I refrain from ascribing a prehistoric or early historic period date to these materials, for as likely as this periodization may be, corroboratory evidence is hard to come by. Rather than discrete categories of chronologic religious tradition, we are left with undated threads of the ancient Tibetan religious tapestry. These are valuable nonetheless for drafting a blueprint of prehistoric and early historic cultural structures.

According to Bon historical notions, the Bon religion began with its semi-mythic founder, sTon-pa gshen-rab, many thousands of years ago. Both the adherents of this religion in general and a special class of ancient priests are known as Bon-po/*bon-po*. In keeping with the traditional scheme, I use the proper name (Bon-po) in this work to simply refer to the followers of the religion, whatever their occupation and in whatever the period they might have lived. The term with a lower case ‘b’ (*bon-po*) is employed to specifically refer to members of a prehistoric and early historic sacerdotal class. According to prevailing Lamaist g.Yung-drung Bon convictions, these priests were adherents of their religion and should not be distinguished as a separate religious or cultural category.³ In my opinion, the use of *bon-po* for a type of archaic religious functionary is a more appropriate rendering, avoiding any intimation of a monolithic religion in prehistoric and early historic times. There are no definite historical indications that an organized religion with a unified ecclesiastic structure and doctrinal system existed until the end of the tenth century CE. To the contrary, it appears likely that there were a variety of popular cults based at least in part on localized clan and ritual traditions. These cults may have varied substantially from region to region. There were also elite or royal forms of religion with a wider purview. This ‘high’ religion seems to have been dominated by priests (*bon-po* and *gshen*) who protected the well-being of the kings and who carried out their funerary rites after death.

It is not my intention to systematically review the founding of the g.Yung-drung (Eternal) Bon religion or to examine in any detail the illustrious life of sTon-pa gshen-rab. Rather the objective of this section is to furnish hagiographic and biographical data about the saints of early Bon in order to elucidate the cultural structures surrounding them. In this explication of the Bon masters of yore, the emphasis is on political customs, religious activities, ritual systems, and material

³ As we shall see, there are numerous textual indications that g.Yung-drung Bon has direct historical connections to religious traditions of the early historic period, so the *bon-po* priests of this period could be referred to using the proper noun designation (Bon-po). I have however elected to employ the lower case (*bon-po*) for the early historic period sacerdotal class, primarily with the purpose of highlighting their occupational distinctions.

objects that are believed to have been in circulation before the collapse of the Tibetan imperium. The chronological settings in which these doings are thought to have occurred range from deep in prehistory to the protohistoric period of the first 32 kings of the Tibetan dynasty, and finally to events that transpired during the early historic period.

The annals of Bon (and Buddhist) literature are replete with references to religious personalities of the prehistoric epoch and early historic period. These figures are cast as the guardians and propagators of the Bon religion from the depths of prehistory to historical times. Bon literary tradition is fond of depicting these meditators, magicians and sages as members of an almost timeless religious tradition, which has been passed down from remote antiquity to the present day with some attenuation but with few lapses or modifications. The ultimate source of this g.Yung-drung (literally means 'Swastika') Bon religion is of course sTon-pa gshen-rab/gShen-rab mi-bo che, a Buddha-like figure who appeared in the semi-mythical land of 'Ol-mo lung-ring. The holy personality of gShen-rab is reckoned to have lived thousands of years ago. Some traditional chronological reckonings even make the claim that he was born some 18,000 years ago, which would place this personage in the Upper Paleolithic. There are, in fact, no written historical sources that pre-date the end of the tenth century CE that speak of a singular prehistoric Bon founder. Moreover, the routine appearance of iron implements and weapons in these accounts show that sTon-pa's role as the individual who established the g.Yung-drung Bon is a more recent phenomenon than the religious orthodoxy might be willing to entertain. As we shall see, gShen-rab myi-bo also appears in the origin tales of the archaic funerary traditions preserved in the Dunhuang manuscripts (these texts were composed in the early historic period). In the Dunhuang documents gShen-rab is presented as an archetypal funerary priest. An archaeological analysis of these sources strongly suggests a prehistoric epochization for the happenings they chronicle, but one that probably does not reach back before the early Iron Age.

Although Bon literature contains many accounts of the Bon masters of the primordial, prehistoric and early historic past, they are of a mythic or legendary character. These hagiographic sources were chiefly composed to be used as part of devotional religious exercises, not as historical documents per se.⁴ Hagiographic narratives, however, are upheld by g.Yung-drung Bon as valid historical records that accurately chronicle the events and legacies of the past. The Bon enunciations of spiritual greatness and superhuman powers are indeed not solely tales of religious faith. They yield up shards of historical fact that hark back to the Upper and Central Tibetan cultural, religious and geographic mosaic of antiquity. While Bon apologues and other visionary accounts of past glories hamper efforts at historicization, they do not neutralize the worth of more quantifiable elements as valid chronicling agents. There is no single solution to the thorny problem of determining historicity, only various discriminative methods that can be brought to bear upon it. Literary portrayals that cast early Bon saints as possessing supernatural capabilities lie outside the pale of the modern historiographic method. Yet these very same texts describe the nature of Tibetan dress, technologies and religious practices purported to have existed in the distant past. Unless one takes the indefensible position that Tibetans do not have a prehistory or that they have been incapable of articulating their collective memory in a written form, these more demonstrable aspects of the past are deserving of close scrutiny and analysis.

The Bon quasi-historical sources contain a wealth of historical lore regarding non-Buddhist religious and cultural practices that is largely of an indigenous composition (wedded to the Tibetan landscape and people). The ritual activities, costumes and geographic environment of the archaic

⁴ For translations of various Bon hagiographies see Karmay 1972; Bellezza 2001; 2005a; Reynolds 2005.

cultural horizon Bon masters frequently differ from the customary portrayals of Buddhist adepts. Taken as a whole, the distinctive non-Buddhist cultural and religious characteristics of the Bon prehistoric and early historic personalities can be summarized as follows:⁵

- 1) Intensive occupation of special Upper Tibetan environments such as the islands and headlands of the great lakes
- 2) Residency in temples known as *gsas-khang* and *gsas-mkhar*
- 3) The wearing of animal skin robes, turbans, horned headdresses, lobed crowns, and distinguishing ornaments
- 4) Overt martial personalities and vigorous ritual involvement in the military affairs of state
- 5) Magical transformation into or control of wild animals
- 6) Close associations with mountain, lake, meteorological, and celestial deities and forces
- 7) A religious emphasis on the performance of rituals with practical benefits
- 8) Participation in the construction of tombs and large-scale burial rites

In addition to these native religious motifs, Buddhist-style beliefs and customs have crept into the Bon sources to create syncretistic figures and cultural environments. Buddhist philosophical and tantric traditions that filtered into Tibet from the seventh and eighth centuries CE took root in Bon hagiographic and biographical literature. This has had the effect of obscuring archaic cultural materials. For example, the citation in Bon literature of tantric Buddhist implements (thighbone trumpets, skullcups, *rdo-rje*, etc.), sky-treading goddesses (*mkha'-gro*), and meditative practices related to the subtle energy channels evince the high degree of Indic religious assimilation it has undergone. These religious traditions are taken by the Bon-po to be of Tibetan origin and part and parcel of their prehistoric cultural heritage. Traditional Bon scholarship's reliance on unconfirmed chronologies for the remote past, however, makes the ascertainment of provenance exceedingly difficult.

2.2 The Ancient Masters of the Bon Mother Tantra

This subsection begins with hagiologies of Bon adepts taken from the Ma-rgyud tantric cycle. A particularly large group of early Bon masters were singled out for biographical and hagiographic treatment in the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor*, a collection of devotional and procedural texts for the Mother Tantra tradition.⁶ This lore about ancient saints was composed as a pietistic element of Bon tantric practice, and each account ends in prostrations to the concerned figure. The deification of these masters has shorn them of whatever normative human personalities they may have once had, a function of the passing of time and ardent religious faith. In total, there are 25 separate vignettes of the extraordinary men and women who are believed to have preserved the Ma-rgyud doctrine in the protohistoric and early historic periods.

A seminal theme of the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* hagiologies is the close association of the ancient Bon adepts with meteorological and celestial phenomena. They are recorded as using and controlling

⁵ Taken individually, the qualities I set out below can sometimes characterize Buddhist saints, but their religious activities and traditions overall indicates a different cultural orientation from that of the archaic cultural horizon.

⁶ See *Le'u bzhi ba (Fourth Chapter)* of *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* (manuscript copied by dPal-ldan tshul-khrims, Indian edition, nos. 45–94) by dMu-rgyal rnal-'byor nyi-ma (gShen nyi-ma rgyal-mtshan) (born in 1360 CE, the Iron Mouse Year). Translations are located in the following parts of this text: Paragraphs one to 13 – nos. 49, ln. 2 to 54, ln. 2; paragraph 14 – no. 59, lns. 2–4; paragraphs 15 to 23 – nos. 63, ln. 2 to 66, ln. 5; and paragraphs 24 and 25 – nos. 68, ln. 5 to 69, ln. 4. For the transliteration of these passages see Tibetan Texts, Text II-1, pp. 579–581.

heavenly bodies, the sky, lightning and other skybound forces as miraculous demonstrations of their spiritual powers. Such connection to the heavens and atmosphere is stressed more in this 14th century CE text than in many other Bon literary accounts of the archaic religious masters. The intimate relationship that the Bon adepts had with the elemental forces and sky is also a salient quality of the Bon deities believed to be of Zhang-zhung origin. As with the lore of taming and riding wild animals, another important activity of the early Bon masters, much of this tradition is of an indigenous origin.

The first 13 personalities belong to a succession of Bon practitioners called Bar gyi gdung rgyud bcu-gsum-mo (Thirteen of the Honored Middle Lineage). It is believed that they transmitted Bon teachings such as the Ma-rgyud to one another in an unbroken chain of teacher to disciple. The first ten of these figures roughly correspond with the ten *gshen* of special attainments noted in the Bon history *Legs bshad mdzod* by bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan (1859–1935).⁷ At least five or six of the 13 Bon sages are described as dwelling in locations in Upper Tibet, illustrating the importance of this region in Bon conceptions of ancient history. They are documented as having carried out their religious and magical activities on islands, reflecting the importance of this special geographic zone to the settlement patterns of archaic cultural horizon Upper Tibet.⁸ This literary material is

⁷ See Karmay 1972, p. 41, fol. 137a, 137b (lms. 16–20).

⁸ According to *Legs bshad mdzod*, the *gshen* Legs-mgon practiced for eight years on the isle of Ri-ti (Water Mountain) and then dissolved into light (Karmay 1972: 55, fol. 146b). As the islands of Da-roq mtsho and gNam-mtsho phyug-mo are accorded different names in Bon literature, Ri-ti must refer to another island. In *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar*, by sPa-ston bstan-rgyal bzang-po (circa early 15th century CE), Delhi edition, no. 19, the early historic period Bon rDzogs-chen master Khyung-po legs-mgon (same personage as above) is recorded as practicing at mTsho-ri'i do. Ri-ti (or mTsho-ri'i do) perhaps corresponds with the 11 km-long island at Nang-la ring-mtsho (in 'Brong-pa). This largest island of Upper Tibet, is now known as mTsho do (Lake Island), and is the site of an archaic center consisting of five all-stone corbelled residences (B-131) and a funerary site (D-129). In *'Dzam gling gangs rgyal ti se'i dkar chag tshangs dbyangs yid phrog*, by dKar-ru grub-dbang bstan-'dzin (born 1801 CE), (*mDzod phug rtsa ba dang spyi don dang gangs ti se'i dkar chag*, nos. 491–657), no. 511, it records that at dBal-'bar me-ri do and La-ngag mtsho there is the cave of gSang-phug g.yung-drung 'od-bar (Blazing Bright Swastika Secret Cave) and other secret caves and religious places. This reference most probably refers to the islands now known as Do smug and Do ser, which both have early domiciliary traces in the form of all-stone corbelled edifices (B-132, B-133). These islands appear to have been the ritual center of the cult of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo, western Tibet's most powerful goddess, according to Bon tradition (see pp. 325–329). These island settlements are spectacularly sandwiched between Mount Ti-se (the residence of Ge-khod, the mountain god consort of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo) and Mount sTag-ri khra-bo (the soul mountain of the goddess). *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* states that sNang-bzher lod-po (eighth century CE) is associated with the largest island of Da-roq mtsho, known in this source as mTsho-gling gi do (Island of the Lake Realm) and in the contemporary vernacular as mTsho do (Lake Island) or Do rta-sga (Horse Saddle Island) (Bellezza 1999b: 79–81 (n. 25). There are two settlements of all-stone corbelled edifices (B-128, B-129) on this island, which appear to have been abandoned by the time sNang-bzher lod-po arrived, because he is portrayed in the biography of the Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud as living an ascetic life in a desolate environment. This greatly contrasts with the comfortable living that must have been afforded by residence in a well-developed, high status sedentary community. Moreover, the neighboring island of Do dril-bu also hosted a substantial *rdo-khang* settlement (B-130). These insular habitations appear to have constituted the ritual and political hub of the region, as there is no other residential settlement in the Da-roq basin that can compare with their size and stature. Many tens of people are likely to have once resided on each of these islands. A later historic date for the island settlements is not likely because in the oral tradition of the region, mTsho do and Do dril-bu are ascribed to the Bon-po of the pre-Buddhist period. Moreover, the ruined Da-roq mtsho retreat of Lha-khang dmar-chag (B-101), which on epigraphic grounds dates to the post-tenth century CE period, is architecturally of an entirely different order than the all-stone edifices of the islands. Lha-khang dmar-chag is much smaller (only a small handful of individuals could have been accommodated here) and is built in a far more rudimentary fashion. Another Bon saint of the eighth century CE, sTong-gyung mthu-chen, is documented as residing at Ma-chags srin-mo do/Nang-do/Se-mo do in gNam-mtsho (Bellezza 2001: 61). Two archaic communities (B-126, B-127) and a funerary site (D-127), which were probably founded and perhaps abandoned before this ascetic arrived on Se-mo do, point to the central importance

of much value because relatively little is made of protohistoric and early historic Upper Tibet in g.Yung-drung Bon histories, the center of Bon religious influence having shifted east to gTsang and mDo-khams by the beginning of the 11th century CE.

The first personality in the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* lineage is sNang-ba mdog-can, the *gshen* master of Tibet's second king, Mu-khri btsan-po (para. i). He is said to have received the Bon tantric teachings of *spyi-spungs* from the great adepts Mi-lus bsam-legs and Klu-grub ye-shes snying-po (Karmay 1972: 44). sNang-ba mdog-can is recorded as having amused himself with dragons, *khyung* and lions at his abode of Ri-rab lhun-po, the world mountain.⁹ The association of the ancient Bon masters with fierce carnivores is a persuasive theme in Bon literature, which seems to have as its modern-day analogue the cult of remedial deities adhered to by the *lha-pa* (spirit-mediums) of Upper Tibet. In both cultural settings the control of wild creatures is a testament of great personal power and spiritual excellence. As for his mystic acquaintance with the fixtures of the firmament, sNang-ba mdog-can deploys star-like (*skar-ltar*) magic bombs (*tswa*), blazing missiles (*dbal*) and celestial iron thunderbolts (*gnam-lcags thog*).

The second biographical vignette of the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* concerns Mu-khri btsan-po, Tibet's second king and Bon Mother Tantra's second lineage holder (para. ii). He is offered gifts of a celestial origin by the multitude of *lha-smān* goddesses of the earth and sky. His insurmountable climatic credentials and great power are underscored when he is referred to as the 'controller of the four seasons' (*dus bzhi'i dbang-sgyur*).

In the third biographical sketch we read about Ha-ra ci-par, the great Bon saint who lived in Mon (para. iii). This non-specific Himalayan country or region was located somewhere south or west of Tibet. The ethnonym and toponym Mon is used in Tibetan folklore and literature to refer to almost any of the cis-Himalayan and Transhimalayan tribes from present-day Arunachal Pradesh across the great mountain arc to Baltistan. The incorporation of a protohistoric Mon adept in the Bon tradition enhances the oral tradition that speaks of the close religious and cultural affinity of this ethnonym with ancient Tibet. Ha-ra ci-par's cotton apparel (*ras-gos*) and grass hut (*rtswa...spyil-bu*) seem to indicate that he dwelt in a subtropical environment. His esoteric practices included living in a cemetery and the use of the thighbone trumpet (*rkang-gling*),

of this 4 km-long island to prehistoric settlement at gNam-mtsho. Although many archaic cultural cave habitations at bKra-shis do and Bya-dur nam-mkha' do have been effaced by subsequent Buddhist occupations, it would appear that Se-mo do was the nexus of settlement at gNam-mtsho in both size and geomancy. The Buddhist hermitages of 11th to 13th century CE personalities such as rGwa-lo rin-po-che (11th to 12th century CE), rGyal-ba lo-ras-pa (died 1251 CE), Do-pa dar-ma shes-rab (born 1228 CE), and Ras-chung-pa (1083–1161 CE) were founded on top of and along-side the much more substantial ruins of the archaic cultural horizon. The headland of Sha do at gNam-mtsho, which also supported an early community (Bellezza 1997a: 270, 271), has reverted to being an island due to the recent rise in the lake level (B-65). Other Upper Tibetan islands or erstwhile islands with archaic residential ruins include Ser-do khang-chen in mTsho sngon-mo (Shan-rtsa); the former islands of sPos-do gong-ma (B-11), sPos-do shar-ma East and sPos-do shar-ma West (B-12), and Do dril-bu/gNam-mtsho kha-ral (B-13) in bKra-ri gnam-mtsho; the former island of Zhabs-rjes (B-15) in Da-roq mtsho; dGon-pa'i do (B-37) in mTsho-mo ngang-la ring-mtsho; and rMigs-pa mkhar-ru (A-37), just offshore in Glog-phug mtsho. The largest of these insular sites is Do dril-bu, which like Se-mo do and the two islands of Da-roq mtsho appears to have been a regional headquarters. Do dril-bu, with its many all-stone corbelled residences, may have supported a population of well over 100 at the height of its development.

⁹ Ri-rab lhun-po (Excellent Mountain Miraculously Formed) is generally equated with Mount Meru of Indic cosmological tradition. A root source for this tradition is the Abhidharmakośa. Mount Meru is conceived of as the axis mundi whose summit is directly in line with the pole star. Throughout the classical world there existed a tradition of the sun, moon, planets, and stars revolving around the cosmic mountain. See Kloetzli 1983, p. 43; Law 1932, pp. xvi–xviii.

customs probably borrowed from Buddhist tantric masters. Another Buddhist adaptation found in the biography of Ha-ra ci-par is his mastery (*mnga'-dbang*) of the mystic wind (*rlung*) and mind or primary consciousness (*sems*). *Rlung* is the subtle air-like substance that is the basis of sensation and cerebration in tantric Buddhism. In Vajrayāna thought its mastery is a prerequisite for the achievement of enlightenment. The mention of a lake island (*mtsho-gling*), however, seems to point geographically to Upper Tibet and the dozen or more ancient islands (some have since become headlands due to the shrinkage of the lakes) located there.

The fourth personality in the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* lineage is the great yogini (*rnal-'byor chen-mo*) and consort of Ha-ra ci-par, sTag li-wer, one of Bon's best-known ancient female saints (para. iv). Her inclusion in collected biographies of what are thought to have been protohistoric period saints demonstrates that the ancient esoteric practices of Bon were open to both men and women. Like Ha-ra ci-par, she seems to have roamed about in both the down-country forests and the islands of the Tibetan upland. Her primary localization in temperate or subtropical biomes is suggested by her ability to protect disciples from the venom of snakes (*sbrul*) and wasps (*sbrang*).

The fifth member of the lineage of accomplished *gshen* is A-nu phrag, who is recorded as practicing at the great holy mountain Ti-se (para. v). As with other archaic cultural horizon masters who are thought to have practiced there, A-nu phrag's residence at Ti-se illustrates the length of tenure the Bon-po believe marked their presence at this holy mountain.¹⁰ Gangs rin-po-che is of course also claimed by the adherents of the Indic religions from no later than Puranic times. The proliferation of archaic residential sites (*rdo-khang* type) at Ti-se demonstrates that it was the focus of permanent settlements by the Upper Tibetans as long as two or three millennia ago. Chronometric evidence for the antiquity of *rdo-khang* (see pp. 35–37) can only be taken as supporting early Bon (archaic religious) occupation of Ti-se as represented in quasi-historical literature. A-nu phrag is also associated with celestial phenomena and is attributed with the extravagant power of having controlled the movement of the sun.

The sixth biographical sketch concerns Sad-ne ga'u, the master of Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho (para. vi). From his headquarters in the large cavern that forms the heart of the Dang-ra g.yu-bun Bon center,¹¹ Sad-ne ga'u is said to have exercised dominion over the vast lake of Dang-ra. The religious identification with large sacred bodies of water in the Byang-thang is one of the defining features of archaic Bon practitioners. This intimacy with water seems to reflect the prominence of the Byang-thang lake goddesses in early times, as well as the ancient patterns of sedentary settlement expounded in Part I of this work. The shorelines of lakes such as Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho hosted much denser aggregations of permanent habitation in prehistoric and early historic times than they did in subsequent periods. Interestingly, Sad-ne ga'u is depicted riding his drum, not unlike the legendary shamans of other regions of Inner Asia. The ancient setting in which the drum vehicle is found gives us some reason to consider that analogous shamanistic myths may have been in circulation for many centuries.¹²

¹⁰ *bsGrags byang* states that gShen-rab preached most of his doctrines in the Ti-se region (Karmay 1972: xxx).

¹¹ This cave is now known as g.Yu-bun sgrub-khang. It is the hub of a quincunx of carnivorous Ma-rgyud goddesses, the Dang-ra mkha'-'gro gcan-gdong lnga (Bellezza 1997a: 337).

¹² Hoffman (1961: 25) sees Bon accounts of priests flying on their drums as demonstrating close typological relationships between ancient Tibetan religion and that of the contemporary shamans of the Altai, Yukutia and Buryatia. While a genetic relationship between these various types of religious adepts seems likely, the ethnical and cultural vectors that gave rise to it are highly recondite. For a discussion of commonalities between Upper Tibetan spirit-mediums and Inner Asian shamans, see Bellezza 2005a, pp. 20–25.

The seventh lineage holder of the Ma-rgyud, Zing-pa mthu-chen, was also preoccupied with the heavens as his sphere of magical influence (para. vii). The text tells us that he grasped the rays of the sun (*nyi-ma'i zer*) and was mounted on the corona of the moon (*zla-ba'i gur*). His residence in far-off China accords with the belief that the Bon religion was widely distributed in ancient times.

The eighth member of the rMa-rgyud lineage, Shad-pu ra-khug, practiced on the west side of gNam-mtsho in the region of [Drum gyi] stag-tshal (known more recently as gYag-pa grumbu) (para. viii). He is recorded as having a magical drum (*rnga*), *gshang* (flat bell) and *gtor-ma* (sacrificial cake), the three basic constituents of Bon ritual practice. As the sign of his mastery over wild animals and meteorological phenomena, Shad-pu ra-khug is described rotating the beads of his rosary of lightning (*glog gi phreng*) and using wild yaks (*rgod-g.yag*) as pack animals.¹³

The ninth biography in the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* is for sPe-bon thog-rtse who, according to Bon tradition, lived in the same period as the seventh and eighth Tibetan kings, Srib-khri btsan-po and Gri-gum btsan-po (para. ix). This Bon adept of Yar-lha sham-po in Lho-kha was also immersed in religious practices with a skyward orientation. His recourse to a skullcup of nectar (*thod-zhal bdud-rtsi*) and the blowing of a thighbone trumpet to call the *mkha'-'gro* goddesses, are nevertheless closely in keeping with Buddhist tantric lore.

The tenth lineage holder of the Ma-rgyud, sPe-bon thog-'phrul, hailed from 'Phen-yul, located north of Lhasa (para. x). His exploitation of aquatic oxen (*chu-glang*) and aquatic sheep (*chu-lug*) and his subjugation of earth demons called *the* are indigenous religious themes. As with other masters of the Ma-rgyud biographies, his activities are portrayed as being tangible and within the confines of the physical universe, rather than of a psychodynamic nature.

The next biographical summary is for This-chen hring-ni mu-thing, who is cloaked in native Tibetan motifs with apparent minimal syncretistic amalgamation (para. xi). His abode was an island, one of the religious nerve centers of ancient Upper Tibet. He threw magic bombs (*rtswo*) and defeated the aquatic *klu-bdud* demons. His manifestation as a *khyung* (horned eagle) and his brandishing of a *pra-phud*¹⁴ are other prominent indigenous features.

The 12th member of the Ma-rgyud lineage was Sum-pa sbu-kha, who like sTong-rgyung mthu-chen took the guise of a brahman (*bram-ze*) (para. xii). *Bram-ze* can also denote a knowledge-holder or seer in the general sense. Both Sum-pa sbu-kha and sTong-rgyung mthu-chen hailed from Sum-pa, a proto-tribal territory comprising much of the eastern Byang-thang and lower regions extending as far east as Khams. Sum-pa sbu-kha's epiphany of Kun-tu bzang-po, the primordial Buddha, and the way in which his body disintegrated, indicate that he was versed in the mystic practices of rDzogs-chen (Great Perfection).

The last member of the Thirteen of the Honored Middle Lineage was Glang-chen mu-wer, a tantric practitioner in the mold of the Buddhist *grub-chen* (*mahāsiddha*) (para. xiii). Like the

¹³ In a Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud hagiography, the rDzogs-chen master dPon-chen lhun-grub had a white goat, an emanation of the god Nyi-pang sad, and a white female yak ('*bri*), an emanation of sMan ku-ma, who acted as his herders. It is said, therefore, that he did not require human servants. See Reynolds 2005, pp. 144, 490 (n. 53).

¹⁴ A powerful Bon ritual object sometimes equated with the *rdo-rje*. Like the Buddhist *rdo-rje*, the *pra-phud* appears to have been a pronged instrument. The *pra-phud* may be represented by a design seen in archaic *thog-lcags* class metallic artifacts that superficially resembles the *rdo-rje*. One of this type of objects graces the tang of a prehistoric ritual mirror (*me-long*) discovered in Upper Tibet. See Bellezza 2005a, fig. 43.



Fig. 368. What appear to be horned anthropomorphs are known in the rock art of Upper Tibet. This specimen was painted in the Bon sanctuary of *sGar-gsol brag-phug* (J-16). The powerfully built figure may be depicted dancing. Early historic period (?)

Indian Buddhist adepts (especially of the seventh to 12th century CE), he had a fondness for the ritual use of human body parts and sexualized religious practices.

The tantric Buddhist character of Glang-chen mu-wer stands in sharp contrast to another Ma-rgyud practitioner known as Nam-ra **rtse-sku** (para. xiv). His headdress of the 'bird horns of the Bon of existence' (Srid-bon bya-ru) and his special robe (*dbal-slag*) certainly allude to native Tibetan customs of dress (see fig. 368). His ritual implements, the *gshang* and *yas-stag* (offering articles, probably in the form of effigies), are particular to the Bon tradition and suggest considerable antiquity. Nam-ra rtse-sku's island abode reinforces his mantle as a practitioner of indigenous forms of Tibetan religion.

The eclectic religious nature of the hagiographies of the Ma-rgyud tradition unfolds as follows:

- i) On the mountain peak of Ri-rgyal (King of the Mountains), inside the good house of gold, the one known as *sNang-ba mdog-can* was rotating a dark blue and golden lasso overhead. He was sporting with dragons, *khyung* and lions. He was sending out a multitude of star-like *tswo* and *dbal*. He bounced savage celestial iron thunderbolts like a ball.¹⁵ We prostrate to you, miraculous and powerful one.

¹⁵ *sGong*. This is an abbreviation for either *sgong-rtse* or *sgong-bsgyur*, which according to Bon tradition was a ball used in ancient celebrations when Bon masters were invited to attend public functions. The son of the mountain god *gNyan-chen thang-lha*, *Thang-lha'i 'phyor-bo* (Handsome God of the Plain) is portrayed holding a white crystal egg (*dkar-po shel-sgong*) (of cosmogonic significance) in the *gsol-kha* text '*Dzam gling spyi bsang* (Bellezza 2005a: 191).

- ii) At the locale of Lha-ri gyang-ma¹⁶ the great lineage holder King [Mu-khri btsan-po], powerful man holder of the *dmu* (heavenly) cord, was offered rainbows, clouds and music from the sky by many tens of thousands of *lha-sman*. He actually displayed the eight miraculous signs (*rdzu-'phrul rtags-brgyad*). Sometimes he had the manner of a fierce hero. We prostrate to you, controller of the four seasons.
- iii) On the peak of Mon-ri ri-bo gsum,¹⁷ inside an excellent grass hut, Mon-bon dud-skya (Hara ci-par) wore cotton clothes. He held a water pitcher (*ril-ba spyi-blug*) and a bundle of scriptures (*po-ti*). He flew in the sky and lived beside a forest. He traveled over to the lake island (*mtsho-gling*) and lived in a cemetery. He blew a thighbone trumpet and made the sound 'ha ha'. We prostrate to you who mastered the mystic wind and mind.¹⁸
- iv) On the lakeshore of Mu-le khyud (Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho) the great yogini, sTag li-wer, the great fierce lady, drank the essence of water (*chu-bcud*). Mounted on a tiger and leopard, she raced amidst the forest. Sometimes she traveled to the small world (*'dzam-bu gling-chung*).¹⁹ She meditated above a lotus. She protected from the fear of ferocious wasps and snakes. We prostrate to you, great heroine.
- v) On the neck (upper flanks) of the secret white snow mountain Ti-se, in front of the mandala of the excellent holy place of religious practice, was the great esoteric adept A-nu phrag. He held a light yellow crystal vase. He flew in space with wings of white clouds. He suspended bright rainbows on water and rotated the wheel of the sun overhead. We prostrate to you, very powerful adept (*grub-dbang stobs-ldan*).
- vi) At the secret cave of Dang-ra g.yu-bun, Sad-ne ga'u had a resplendent white complexion. On his body he wore aquatic silk (*chu-dar*) with a golden finish (*gser-mdangs*). The *mtsho-sman* (lake goddesses) offered him the treasure vase of water. He cast the *thun* (magic missile) of stone to banish the *mtsho-bdud* (lake demons). He raced on the lake riding on his drum. He circumnavigated the underwater *mchod-rten* of crystal. We prostrate to you, versed in the central channel.²⁰
- vii) On the mountain of China, in the vermilion cave, Nyi-dbang mdangs-len (Imbued with the Hue of the Sun), Zing-pa mthu-chen with the resplendent red complexion was holding the rays of the sun. He rode on the corona of the moon like a horse. He pulled up and down bright rainbow [beads] of a rosary. He revealed written mantras in the sky. We prostrate to you, great skillful self-arising one.
- viii) At [Drum gyi] stag-tshal, on the west side of gNam-mtsho, the great yogi Shad [pu] ra-khug had a reddish-brown complexion and a very wrathful manner. Brandishing a golden dagger he actually slew the *gdon* (demons). His drum, *gshang* and *gtor-ma* blazed fiery white-hot

¹⁶ Either the Bon sacred mountain located in the mystic realm 'Ol-mo lung ring, or the one adjacent to rKong-po Bon-ri and better known as Lha-ri gyang-to.

¹⁷ Also known as Mon-ri zur-gsum; this is the mountain of the five leopard-faced *mkha'-'gro* of the Bon Ma-rgyud tradition. It is thought to be located somewhere in the Himalaya.

¹⁸ *Rlung* is a highly subtle wind-like substance that figures in tantric practice. It carries sensations and thought, and is the physiological basis of enlightenment.

¹⁹ This is probably an epithet for an island such as the ones in La-Inga mtsho (Do smug and Do ser).

²⁰ *dBu-ma'i rtsal*. In tantric practice, the column of subtle spiritual energy paralleling the spine in the core of the body.

(*dbal-me*). He rotated a string of beads of lightning overhead. He loaded burdens on wild yaks. We prostrate to you, great powerful wrathful one.

- ix) On the upper flanks of the snow mountain Yar-lha sham-po, in the secret cave g.Yung-drung 'bar (Blazing Swastika), sPe-bon thog-rtse had a color of light red. He consumed skullcap bowls full of nectar (*bdud-rtsi*) and gathered the *mkha'*-*'gro* with the sound of his thighbone trumpet and conch. He gazed at a miraculous astrological computation tablet (*rtsis-byang*) in the sky. By scattering beads he created 108 springs. We prostrate to you, miraculous and powerful one.
- x) At 'Phan-yul brag-dkar chu-gling²¹ the great adept [sPe-bon] thog-'phrul with a magnificent reddish-brown complexion used aquatic ox and aquatic sheep as his possessions. By scattering flowers in the sky the figures of the wisdom *lha* vividly appeared. With a vase of water he collapsed from the top a black rock formation, killed the earth *the* and placed his footprint [on the rock]. We prostrate to you, powerful and fully capable one.
- xi) At the great garden island (*do-gling*) of the poison lake, the purplish-brown This-chen [hring-ni mu-thing] threw the golden *rtswa*. Removing the *klu-bdud* from inside the lake, he consumed them. He manifested a *khyung* and soared in the sky. He drank the spring of nectar inside the lake. On the mountain peak he beheld [all] in meditation. He struck the *pra-phud* of gold on the rock formation. We prostrate to you who has mastery of the subtle energy channels (*dhu-ti'i rtsal*).
- xii) Amidst the verdant grove, Sum-pa sbu-kha with the aspect of a Brahmin beheld the figure of Kun [tu] bzang [po] in space. Sometimes his body disintegrated, changing into honeybees in the sky and then becoming millions and hundreds of thousands (innumerable) *mkha'*-*'gro*. [Sometimes] he was staying in a mass of fire. We prostrate to you, powerful one of the holy mystic wind.
- xiii) At the secret cemetery, upon a corpse throne, Glang-chen mu-wer with the reddish-brown complexion played his skull *dā-ru* naked. For his food he had *tshogs* (ritual offering cakes) of cemetery corpses. He coupled with the *mkha'*-*'gro* workers themselves. Sometimes he blew the great conch of the corpse (thighbone trumpet) and flew in the sky wearing a human skin (*g.yang-gzhi*). We prostrate to you, heroic secret master.
- xiv) On the island (*chu-gling*) of the verdant country, the one known as Nam-ra rtse-sku wore the bird horns of the Bon of existence and a *dbal-slag*. Playing the golden *gshang* in his hand, the offering articles (*yas-stag*) of existence automatically went [to the divine recipients]. The mastery of knowledge scholar clapped his hands [in debate]. He raced in space riding upon his drum. We prostrate to you, great powerful dominating one.

Paragraphs xv to xxiii of the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* translated materials each pertain to a member of the mThu-bo che mi-dgu (Nine Great Powerful Men) group of Ma-rgyud masters. Four of these holy figures are explicitly recorded as hailing from Upper Tibet. The first of these is Li-bon mu-phya, who resided at Ti-se (para. xv), perhaps the greatest single religious center of ancient Upper Tibet (the large concentration of archaic residential sites around this mountain endorse such a

²¹ Rather than a proper name, *brag-dkar chu-gling* could also be a description of a place (white rock formation water realm).

view). Called the *ri yi mchog-can* (holy one of the mountain), he bounced iron stones (*lcags-rdo*) in space, which is a portrayal of mystic power peculiar to Bon that is probably derived from Tibetan native cultural traditions. This ability suggests that Li-bon mu-phya was credited with influencing the path of meteors.

The next adept in the lineage of nine members was Jo-bon gyim-bu of southern Tibet, who is also depicted with significant non-Buddhist qualities (para. xvi). Among the most prominent of these are the divine tree (*lha-shing*) and his attire of blue clothes (*gos-sngon*). His drinking of the nectarous sap (*rtsi-bcud*) of the divine tree, a motif found in Bon origin myths of trees used in compounding incense, suggests that the tree of Jo-bon gyim-bu was a juniper, as are many *lha-shing* in Tibet.²² *Lha-shing* function as the tabernacles of localized deities and as sacred receptacles containing the vital essence (*bcud*) or life-force (*srog*) of a locale. These sacred trees are the object of propitiatory rituals. Ancient *lha-shing* junipers are found in many corners of the Tibetan Plateau, and they are often ornamented with tufts of white wool, colored woolen yarn and prayer flags (*rlung-rta*).

Although the third representative of the lineage of nine Ma-rgyud masters is styled a yogi (*rnal-'byor*), almost all his activities relate to the taming of elemental forces rather than mental operations (para. xvii). This seems to suggest that Mu-phyo 'bar of Sum-pa is a syncretistic personality, who came to be viewed through the lens of Indian Buddhism as part of his incorporation into the Bon Ma-rgyud tradition. Taken literally, his account would have us believe that he primarily lived an oceanic existence. It is however more likely that the word ocean (*rgya-mtsho*) is metaphorically employed to refer to a large lake such as gNam-mtsho (located in old Sum-pa) with its three main islands.

The fourth member of the lineage was Khu-bon mthong-grags of Has-po ri, the sacred mountain at bSam-yas (para. xviii). This master was also involved in great feats of strength carried out in the firmament and in the mountains. In particular, his casting of *thun* (magic missiles) on the head of a *srin* demon is an important feature of archaic religion in Tibet, as depicted in various Bon literary sources.

The fifth member of the Nine Great Powerful Men lineage was Mu-cho 'bar-ba who came from Zhang-zhung Kha-rag, a region west of the celebrated mountain gTsang-lha phu-dar (para. xix). This yogi was preoccupied with the subjugation of noxious beings of Tibetan and Indian origin. For instance, the *dri-za* (literally: smell-eaters) is a benign class of Indian spirits known as *gandharva* in Sanskrit literature. On the other hand, the tellurian *srin* and atmospherical *bdud* are potentially noxious entities traced to native Tibetan sources (their induction into Indic demonology notwithstanding).

The sixth biographical sketch is about the yogi Dod-de rgyal, who seems to have spent much of his time on water (para. xx). Patronized by the *klu*, bearers of wealth, this adept seems to have lived a marine existence on board boats.

His successor was lJang-tsha 'phan-snang, who lived in a grass hut (*spyil-bu rtswa*) (para. xxi). From his name, it would appear that lJang-tsha 'phan-snang hailed from lJang in the southeastern Tibetan borderlands. His form of meditation in the sphere of space (*dbyings kyi ngang*) caused a *lha* to manifest before him in a special vessel.

²² For origin myths about incense see Bellezza 2005a, pp. 446–450; Norbu 1995, pp. 109–112.

The eighth member of the lineage was rMa-bon thug-dkar who, like his counterparts, is recorded as engaging in various fantastic activities (para. xxii). As with his two predecessors, it is not at all evident which of his activities sprang up from the native milieu and which were actually derived from the Indian Buddhist tradition, so intertwined they have become.

The ninth and final member of the lineage of great men was sNang-bzher lod-po, the famous Bon saint who is generally believed to have lived in the eighth century CE (para. xxii). His biography makes passing reference to the golden *tswo* (magical bomb) weapon for which he is renowned. Various Bon accounts record that this *tswo* was used against King Khri-srong lde-btsan in the aftermath of the assassination of the king of Zhang-zhung, Lig-mi-rgya:²³

- xv) At the base of Gangs-dkar ti-se stayed the one known as Li-bon mu-phya. He held the snow mountain upright in his outstretched hand. With the flick of his fingers he cast small mountains into the sky. He was bouncing an iron stone in space. Drinking the snow melt water (*gangs-chu*), he made the sound 'ha ha'. From his fingertips he scattered hills.²⁴ We prostrate to you, holy one of the mountains.
- xvi) At Yar-lung gtsang gi sog-kha, the one known as Jo-bon gyim-bu [lan-tsha] by looking at the grove, automatically collected [firewood?]. Concentrating on the dried tree of the red rock formation, it fell down. Sometimes he drank the nectarous sap of the *lha-shing*. He took a sheaf of grain from the lower rice [growing] regions of the south. Attired in blue clothes he was engaged in antinomian activities.²⁵ We prostrate to you, great powerful sovereign.
- xvii) Mu-phyo 'bar, the yogi of Sum-pa, the one who stayed on the ocean island, held the ocean in the sky with his hands. He directed large rivers upwards. He consumed the essence of water nectar of the vase. He gathered clouds in the sky and made rain fall. Engaged in meditation he stayed amidst the clouds. We prostrate to you, master of holy places, ruler of water.
- xviii) On the peak of Has-po ri, the one known as Khu-bon mthong-grags was flying in the sky swinging a fiery lasso (*me-zhags*). He connected the peaks of the mountains with his fiery lasso. He shot the lasso of lightning upwards in the sky. He went around space riding a great dragon. He cast the stone *thun* on the head of the red *srin*. We prostrate to you who ministers the spells of blazing fire (*me-'bar sngags*).
- xix) In the Zhang-zhung Kha-rag country the yogi known as Mu-cho 'bar-ba reposed in various formidable attitudes. He actually slew the *bdud-srin* (a man-eating demon) with the dagger. He subdued the sky *bdud* and earth *srin* by the stone *thun*. By concentrating, he gathered

²³ For some of these sources refer to Karmay 1972, 97–99; Norbu 1995, pp. 214–216; Bellezza 1999b, pp. 79–81 (n. 25); Reynolds 2005, pp. 100–103, 448–450. *Legs bshad mdzod* records a magic contest between Bon-po and Buddhists, which was organized by King Khri-srong lde-btsan. It is written that the Bon adepts performed many supernatural feats. See Karmay 1972, pp. 88, 89, fols. 171b–172b; Reynolds 2005, pp. 98, 99. For a discussion about the grammatical transformation of the archaic Tibetan form Lig-myi-rhya/Lig-myi-rhya into the modern orthographic variant (Lig-mi-rgya/Lig-mi-skya), see Uray 1968. On the doctrinal placement of *tswo/dzo/btso*, see Dagkar 2003, p. 12 (n. 7).

²⁴ *Rom-po* (also spelled *hrom*). This word of Zhang-zhung origin appears to mean both hill and the middle flanks (*mgul*) of mountains. It is often found in conjunction with *rdza* (talus). Thomas (1931: 389) glosses *rom-po* as 'big', 'massive' or 'deep'. Thomas's definition may constitute a secondary sense of the word.

²⁵ *brTul-zhugs*. This word portrays behavior that is well outside social norms.

- the *dri-za* with his lasso. He lit a fiery mass [of] *sbyin-bsreg*²⁶ in the sky. We prostrate to you, the master who himself actually conquered.
- xx) Dod-de rgyal, the yogi of Ba-gor,²⁷ who stayed on the bank of a mighty river, directed large rivers upwards by pointing his finger. He was playing with otters in the water. He stayed upon the water on a boat with a white flag (*dar-dkar*). He wrote secret letters (*gsang-yig*) and revealed ciphers (*brda-yig*). He held the pleasure jewel of the *klu*. We prostrate to you, treasure master, supporter of welfare.
- xxi) At the base of Mount Brag-dkar rtse (White Rock Formation Peak), inside a grass hut abode, stayed the one known as lJang-tsha 'phan-snang. Engaged in meditation in the sphere of space, an excellent *lha* stayed on top of a crystal vase. Great radiance filled his mind. Sometimes he struck a *rdo-rje* on the rock formation. We prostrate to you, great practitioner of the *pra-phud*.
- xxii) rMa-bon [thug] dkar magnificently stayed on top of the lion-like white boulder (*pha-wang*), residing on the right bank of a large river. He strode across water. On the boulder (*pha-bong*) is his swastika and footprint. From the water he scattered flowers for the *lha*. On the perfected water (*'dzam-bu chu*) he rained down golden flowers. We prostrate to you, powerful one of ferocity.
- xxiii) At the holy place of the Zhang-zhung territory, the *gshen* of ferocity, sNang-bzher lod-po, ignited shifting *dbal* fire from his mouth. From his hand he threw the gold (*mu-mar gser*) *tswo* (magical bomb). He passed unhindered through every mountain, rock formation and snow mountain. Sometimes in a hermitage he was engaged in meditation. He sang the yogic song of happiness. We prostrate to you, master of the delightful song.

Two other biographies of Ma-rgyud adepts grace the folios of the fourth chapter of *Ma rgyud sgrub skor*. The first of these features the female practitioner Khri-sangs rgyal-sman, who practiced at the 'little world' (*gling-chung*), which may refer to an island abode (para. xxiv). She is said to have manifested as a *shang-shang* (a mythical creature half man and half bird) and vulture (*rgod*). The magical ability to manifest as birds is a recurrent theme in Bon biographies of the ancient sages.

The final Ma-rgyud adept is another woman, Dod-de rgya-lcam of China (para. xxv). Her mount was the *rgya-gram* (cross), an unusual object for such purposes. More commonly represented in Bon tradition is her usage of aquatic oxen (*chu-glang*) and aquatic horses (*chu-rta*). These magical creatures are commonly said to inhabit the lakes of Upper Tibet, and folk tales about them abound in this region. They are of considerable antiquity, for the aquatic horse can be traced to the Dunhuang manuscripts (see pp. 525–527):

- xxiv) Amidst the grove of flowers of the southern continent the great heroine Khri-sangs rgyal [sman] manifested as a *shang-shang* and roved around the little world. She manifested as a vulture and soared in the sky. She ate flowers of *sa-le ljon-pa* (a magical food plant). She used a lotus bead rosary and flew in the sky. We prostrate to you, doer of activities in the sky.

²⁶ Offering articles, both edible and inedible, which are immolated in a special fire.

²⁷ Ba-gor/sPa-gor is a clan name; its most famous member was the great eighth century CE master Bai-ro-tsa-na (Vairocana).

- xxv) Amidst the grove of the lake of the excellent mountain of the China country, [Ri-bo] rtse-linga, the one known as Dod-de rgya-lcam raised a *rdo-rje* of gold in space. She lived upon a rock formation riding a cross. She loaded jewels on aquatic oxen and aquatic horses. Sometimes she held a white lotus inside the lake. We prostrate to you, adamantine heroine (*rdo-rje dpa'-mo*).

2.3 The Royal Priests (*sku-gshen*) of Ancient Tibet

According to both the Bon and Buddhist historical traditions, Bon masters of protohistoric times served as royal priests (*sku-gshen*) for the kings of Tibet. The *sku-gshen* are frequently accredited with possessing incredible powers that saved the lives of the Tibetan kings in the face of peril. One of the earliest Bon accounts of the *sku-gshen* is found in *bsGrags pa gling grags*, an important Bon historical source attributed to Dran-pa nam-mkha' (eighth century CE).²⁸ This text features a more prosaic account of Bon activities in the protohistoric period than the hagiographies of the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* we examined above. Events purported to have taken place in the distant past are chronicled with a minimum of supernatural elaboration, as befits a historical document. Like other Tibetan religious accounts of ancient times, however, be they Bon or Buddhist, the Tibetan worldview of a cosmos ridden with good and evil spirits and the miraculous feats of saints is inescapable. These types of themes still form an integral but supplementary part of the *bsGrags pa gling grags* narrative.

In the annals of the Bon masters believed to have lived in prehistoric times, *bsGrags pa gling grags* furnishes accounts that had taken on the aura of myths and legends by the time they were written down. For instance, we read: “Li-bon phyo-sang could carry Gangs ti-rtse on his small finger.”²⁹ Another hyperbolic account in the same text states: “As his dress, the *bon-po* of the O-rgyan kha-che (Kashmir) rock formation wore a mass of fire, and riding a drum he could cross the ocean.”³⁰ Other saints are fantastically described in the same source much as they are in *Ma rgyud sgrub skor*.³¹

The *bon-po* Glong mu-wer phyo-sangs of Zhang-zhung could wrap mTsho ma-pang in his skirt (*sham*).³² By throwing a golden *btso* he could cleave the ocean. The

²⁸ The sNyan-rong manuscript. This is the most extensive of the four extant copies of the *bsGrags* (also: *Grags/sGrags*) *pa gling grags* (there are also the Dolanji edition, the Dol-po manuscript and the Oslo manuscript). It is attributed to Dran-pa nam-mkha' (eighth century CE) as stated in the Oslo manuscript. The sNyang-rong manuscript originally consisted of 68 fols. (fols. 1, 2, 3, 22, 23, and 28 are missing). This text surfaced several years ago in sNyan-rong/gNyan-rong, and was recently edited and published by Dondrup Lhagyal of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences. Dondrup Lhagyal kindly presented me a photocopy of the original text. According to Martin (1997: 28, 29), *Grags pa gling grags* (*Grags pa rin chen gling grags*) may date to the mid-12th century CE.

²⁹ sNyan-rong manuscript, fol. 26b, ln. 2: *li bon phyo sang gis gang (= gangs) ti rtse theb (= mtheb) chung kha la khyer nus /*.

³⁰ sNyan-rong manuscript, fol. 27a, lns. 2–3: *O rgyan gyis (= gyi) bon po kha che brag gis me dpung gos su gon pa dang / rnga la zhon nas rgya mtsho rgal nus /*.

³¹ sNyan-rong manuscript, fols. 26b, ln. 7 to 27a, ln. 2: *zhang zhung gis (= gi) bon po glong mu wer phyo sangs gyis (= kyis) / mtsho ma pang dar sham du gtum nus pa dang / gser gtso' (= btso) 'phong (= 'phangs) pas rgya mtsho skad pa gtod nus / sum pa'i bon po snya'i (= snyas) / rnga la zhon cing gshang phyag du (= tu) bzung nas 'phur nus / thun rdo 'phong (= phangs) pas gdon gang yin 'chi nus /*.

³² Compare with sTong-rgyung mthu-chen's wrapping up of gNam-mtsho in his coattails. See Bellezza 2001, pp. 60 (n. 31), 61. Glong mu-wer phyo-sangs appears to be the same personality as Glang-chen mu-wer of the *Ma rgyud* (see pp. 212, 213, 215, para. xiii).

bon-po of Sum-pa, Khri-snyas, could fly riding on a drum and holding a *gshang* in his hand. By throwing the magic stone missile (*thun*) he could slay every demon (*gdon*).

The next translation I present is set in the time after the second king of Tibet, Mu-khri btsan-po, was grievously harmed by the demigods for hoarding the Bon teachings and not sharing them with others.³³ This all hinged upon the breaking of his oath, the bedrock of religious and social responsibility. In order to heal the king, his four *gshen* carried out ritual procedures that still form the foundation of the Bon curative system to the present day (para. i). This regimen of ritual activities included ablutions (*khrus*), fumigation with aromatic substances (*bsang*), purificatory rites (*sel*), apologies to the Bon protective and lineage deities (*'gyod*), offerings for their fulfillment (*bksang*), atonement exercises (*bshags*), restorative rites (*gto*), and ransom offerings (*glud*). As a result of these elaborate ritual measures King Mu-khri's health and kingdom were restored.

Having saved King Mu-khri's life, the four royal *gshen* were singled out for special commendations or awards (*che-thabs*) (para. ii). These awards were called *rtsig* (modern equivalent: *gtsigs*), which denotes that these were given to the *gshen* to distinguish them from lesser individuals. I therefore translate *rtsig* as 'superior distinction'. Karmay (1972: 351) instead defines the term as 'honor' or 'privilege'. In any event, the *rtsig* were ostentatious physical symbols and social tokens that definitively set the royal *gshen* apart from other men. The text indicates that the *rtsig* for the body extended to coiffures, items of dress, matters of ceremonial protocol, ritual objects held in high repute, and special foodstuffs and drink. With their uncut locks, silk turbans, horned headdresses, and long robes made from highly-coveted wild animal skins, the *gshen* of the *bsGrags pa gling grags* must have cut very impressive figures. Their magnificent personal appearances were heightened by the ample honors accorded them in state-sponsored ceremonies. The royal *gshen*'s lavish appearance and the pomp and circumstance surrounding them are vivid examples of an ancient Tibetan social and political order strikingly different from that which developed in the Indic cultural setting. In part, these cultural contrasts are attributable to the great variations in climate and natural environment that exist between the Indian Subcontinent and Tibetan Plateau.

The *rtsig* of speech was especially noteworthy, and shows that the royal *gshen* opened the business of state with a formalized utterance (para. iii). Once they had made their address, the king followed by his ministers could express themselves at the official convocations. The *gshen* as masters of ceremony also initiated the proceedings with a song and dance (para. iii). After their solemn opening of the event, the king, ministers and subjects participated in the songs and dances. The phrase 'costume of many melodies' (*rol-mo mang-po chas*) seems to imply that the performances of the subjects were accompanied by much pageantry. We might speculate that the initiatory declamations and performances of the *gshen* functioned to call to witness the royal divinities, signal the divine protectors, and glorify the origins and exploits of the royal lineage.

The *rtsig* of the mind was designed to provide for the contentment of the *gshen*. It is not surprising that in the martial society of ancient Tibet this included 'blood money' (*stong-thang*), which had to be paid should one of the royal *gshen* be murdered.³⁴ The text tells us that this reflexive form

³³ The sNyan-rong manuscript, fol. 23a, ln. 6 to 23b, ln. 7. For the transliteration of this text see Tibetan Texts, Text II-2, p. 582.

³⁴ The *stong-thang* is closely related to other terms for blood price that appear in old Bon texts (*pha-stong* and *stong-phrag*) and the Dunhuang manuscripts (*myi-stong*). In the Bon cosmological text *Srid pa 'i mdzod phug* (Varanasi, 1993: 24) legal prescriptions set in the time of Gri-gum btsan-po state: "The superior distinction for the contented happy mind

of retribution (*la-yog*) was equivalent to that demanded in cases of regicide. The killer was then remanded (*'bul*) in the custody of the *gshen*'s relatives to possibly face the ultimate punishment. The traditional penal code touched upon in these passages of the *bsGrags pa gling grags* is one founded on the principle of retributive equivalence. It is reasonable to assume that every crime in the society of ancient Tibet came with a stipulated price tag and that justice was fulfilled by paying exactly what was owed to an aggrieved party:

- i) Then the two *sku-gshen* Yang-ngal and She-mi carried out ablutions, fumigation and the purification rites, and urgently made apologies, offerings for fulfillment and penance [to the deities]. Both Co-mi and Thar-bon grub-skyol³⁵ made the restorative rites and body ransom offering (*sku-glud*) for freeing. Therefore, the epidemic (*yams*) was halted and [the king's] broken oath reinstated (*nyams-pa 'phro-ru sob*). The dominion (*mnga'-thang*)³⁶ of the lord was equivalent to the heavens.³⁷
- ii) Then he conferred these awards³⁸ upon the *bon-gshen*: the superior distinction offered for the body was long unbound hair, which was untrimmed and never cut; a white *dar-sing* (a type of silk) regal turban (*'gying-thod*) on which the flexible feathers of the king of the birds, the vulture, were erected; and golden bird horns with turquoise *ldem-mdong*.³⁹ The clothes were a *thul-pa* (a kind of robe) of white lynx and white wolf [skin], to which was attached a collar and trim (*gong lag*) of tiger, leopard and clouded leopard, these three. They dismounted and mounted horses from a carpet.⁴⁰ Along the path of their travel were peacock parasols. In the area within the range of their vision were golden victory banners (*rgyal-mtshan*). In the area within the range of their smell was the scent of incense smoke and frankincense (*sil*). For their food they were offered dairy products (*dkar*), sweets (*mngar*) and grain beer (*'bras-chang*) in which the medicine of sugar was added. They were given the placement at the head of the right row.⁴¹ On their thrones of ivory, gold and silver, sumptuous seats of brocade with precious threads (*za-'og*) were laid down. In their hands they held *phyag-shing*⁴² of gold and a white cane *'gying-dkar* (a staff signifying great authority).
- iii) The superior distinction offered for the speech was that until three words were uttered by the *gshen*, the king would not enter into speech and the ministers would not enter into consultations. Until the *gshen* had sung three words of a song, the king and ministers would not dance and sing (*bro glu*), and the subjects would not sing and dance (*glu gar*) and their costume of many melodies was not permitted. The superior distinction for the contented happy mind was that the [*gshen*'s] blood money was equivalent to the king's 'ten thousand

was that the [*gshen*'s] blood money (*stong-phrag*) was equivalent to the king's." For reference to the *pha-stong*, see Bellezza 2005a, pp. 406, 407. The term *myi-stong* is discussed on p. 391 (fn. 114).

³⁵ These two were the original *gshen* of the Co-mi and Ya-ngal lineages and the brothers of King gNya'-khri btsan-po. They are described on pp. 275, 276.

³⁶ Tucci (1955: 200) stresses the internal dimension of *mnga'-thang* as the innate quality of rulership that defined the king's majesty and divine bearing, the *dbu-rmog* (helmet) being the visible symbol of this.

³⁷ *dGung dang mnyam*. This indicates that the king's power and kingdom were unrivalled but within the ambit of the triumphant Bon religion.

³⁸ *Che-thabs*. The more commonly encountered spelling is *che-rtags*. I have also glossed this term as 'badge of valor' (Bellezza 2001: 67, 68).

³⁹ This word probably conveys that the turquoises were set on feathery horns.

⁴⁰ This custom continues to the present day wherein lamas and dignitaries are offered carpets for the same purpose.

⁴¹ This means that they sat on the right hand of the king.

⁴² A scepter, probably with swastika designs.

unlimited'.⁴³ The actual murderers⁴⁴ [of the *gshen*] were given over to [their surviving relatives for punishment]. If minor *gshen* were clubbed (*ber-rga rgyab*), punishment was carried out in the kingdom.⁴⁵ If their possessions and wealth were taken they had to be compensated ninety-fold. [The *gshen*] were offered such [distinctions].

The impression received from the ancient forms of justice described in the above *bsGrags pa gling grags* excerpt is that they were tied to a stringent sense of honor, which must have formed the bedrock of social contracts and relations. In ancient Tibet, as in many other martial societies, when the dignity and rectitude of an individual were impeached, even the most violent means of redress were condoned. To be sure, such a state of affairs prevailed in pastoral Upper Tibet and Khams until the modern period, which probably reflects long historical precedents. To better appreciate the crucial position accorded honor and the sense of shame that came from its absence, let us peruse a passage from a Dunhuang manuscript, which condemns a decline in social values.⁴⁶ This passage has a cosmological dimension, contrasting the age in which it was written and that to come with the halcyon days of the golden age. In the first sentence it speaks of the time before the gods and humanity were separated, a time when humanity is supposed to have lived in a compact with the divinities.⁴⁷ The text then proceeds to decry a decline in moral standards, citing oath breaking and shamelessness (two qualities that must have been seen as especially abhorrent to the Tibetans of the imperial period). It also claims that people shall become so brazen and avaricious that they will not even appreciate the value of their own lives. Again, citing the foreswearing of oaths, the text states that this moral decadence will worsen in the succeeding generations. The text vividly depicts a world where trust, honor and the sacrosanct belief in the modes of social reciprocity have been cast aside:

It will come to pass that nobody (*su-yang*) will do good, as in the salutary age of the non-separation of men and *lha*.⁴⁸ It has become the evil age of life, so gradually (*pyi-pyir*) it will come to pass that all bipedal humans are shameless (*khrel-myed*) and untrustworthy (*ltas-myed*). It will come to pass that they do not know shame. It will come to pass that they do not keep (*gzungs-myed*) their oaths (*bnā*).⁴⁹ It will come to pass that for wealth (*nor*) they do not fear their own *bdud* (killer) of the life-force

⁴³ *Khri ru 'byam-pa*. This phrase quantifies the blood price for a murdered *gshen* but what it precisely denominates is unclear. It seems to connote the most draconian of punishments.

⁴⁴ *Lag-dmar* (literally: 'red hands').

⁴⁵ This sentence indicates that lesser crimes were punished by the state apparatus.

⁴⁶ See IOL 734 (designated according to *Catalogue of the Tibetan Manuscripts from Dunhuang in the India Office Library*), lns. 21–26. For the copy of the text see Tibetan Texts, Text II-3, p. 582. For a translation and transliteration of this text (and the longer ritual text appended to it) see Thomas 1957, ch. 4, pp. 61–76, 77–95. The first text of IOL 734 runs 40 lines in length and is written in Classical Tibetan (cf. Stein 2003a: 558). The second text consists of an elaborate *glud* ritual, which is extremely difficult to comprehend in its entirety. The historical and cultural significance of the first text is difficult to assess. According to Stein (*ibid.*), it was written as an evocation of the old days and not necessarily as a manifesto of a prehistoric religion. I would concur with his appraisal because this text has a moralistic tone about it and does not mention specific religious practices.

⁴⁷ *Lha myi ma bye-ba*. The theme of the *lha* and men living together in the first era has been preserved in Bon historical documents. See Bellezza 2005a, pp. 428, 429. This theme is also known by the 'Brog-pa of Ladakh, who hold that before the beginning of the world humans and *lha* freely associated with one another. After a goddess was sexually assaulted by a young man, the 360 *lha* returned to their own country. This separation led to the establishment of heaven and earth. See Vohra 1989, pp. 37, 38, 40.

⁴⁸ This phrase pertaining to the period before the *lha* and men were separated occurs in the first rKong-po pillar inscription as part of the description of the royal ancestors (Stein 2003a: 559).

⁴⁹ The word *bnā* (mod. = *mna*) (pledge, oath) is used for both social and religious obligations.

(*srog*). It will come to pass that in the search for wealth they will wreak all kinds of evil (*ngan-dgu*) on other men (*myi-pha log-po*). Without a sense of shame and fidelity for the future (*'ung-gis*), they will eat (renounce) their oaths (*mna'*) and by this sin, the sons will become worse than the fathers and the grandsons will become worse than the sons. Gradually (*phyi-phyir*), the generations of humans (*myi-rabs*) will become worse.

The *bsGrags pa gling grags* also furnishes tales about the *sku-gshen* of later protohistoric times. One of these pertains to the 31st king of sPu-rgyal (dynastic Tibet), sTag-ri gnyen (= gnyan) gzigs btsan and his escape from prison.⁵⁰ On account of certain religious differences, King sTag-ri gnyan-gzigs fought with the king of Lho-brag (in southern Tibet), and came to be captured. His *sku-gshen* Khyung-po ra-sang rje-rgyal, on the pretext of bringing food, managed to obtain access to the king in prison.⁵¹ By using a magical golden bomb (*gtsa'o*), the *sku-gshen* rendered all the guards unconscious and cut the chains binding King sTag-ri gnyan-gzigs. Relying on the *sku-gshen*'s horse, the King was able to escape. Khyung-po ra-sang rje-rgyal returned home by manifesting as a conch-white vulture. Out of deep gratitude for his services, King sTag-ri gnyan-gzigs conferred various *rtsig* upon his personal *gshen*. In addition to those special distinctions with which we are already familiar (placement at the head of the row to the King's right and a luxurious throne), Khyung-po ra-sang obtained a *yig-tshang*, an insignia made of precious metals. The *yig-tshangs/yig-ge/yig* functioned as designations of the status of low-, middle- and high-ranking officials, whose use persisted throughout the imperial period. The ancient *yig-tshang* appear to have been in the form of badges or tablets, as well as many other kinds of valuable objects. The *bsGrags pa gling grags* tells us that these honors were awarded in a time (circa sixth century CE) when many Bon religious centers were being founded in Tibet:

Also, many temples (*gsas-mkhar*) of Bon were established.⁵² To repay the kindness [of Khyung-po ra-sang rje-rgyal] and as a badge of his greatness, the superior distinction (*rtsig*) conferred on the *sku-gshen* was for the *sku-gshen* to remain at the head of the right row. A throne of ivory and a brocade carpet of precious threads (*za'og*) were [also] given him. As the *yig-tshang* (insignia), a hair-tie (*phud-bu*) of gold and a vase of sapphire (*mthing*) were also given him.

⁵⁰ sNyan-rong manuscript, fol. 35a ln. 3 to ln. 5: *bon gyis (= gyi) gsas mkhar mang po yang bzhengs so / drin lan dang che thabs su / sku gshen la rtsig phul ba / g.yas gral gyi rtse la sku gshen 'jog / ba so'i gdan khri dang za 'og gis gdan gnang / yig tshang du gser gyis (= gyi) phud bu dang 'thing (= mthing) gis (= gi) bum pa yang mnang (= gnang) ngo /*

⁵¹ A variant of this account occurs in the Chronicle Fragments of Dunhuang (a remnant historical work of two folios) where the *btsan-po* Khri stag-bu imprisoned by the king of Lho-brag is freed by his *gshen*. See Uray 1972b, pp. 37–39. Referring to the text *rGyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* and the same historical incident, it has been commented that Bon histories often possess special knowledge of early traditions. The names of the protagonists in this version of the story are sTag-bu snyan-gzigs (the Tibetan king), Khri-ne khod (his *sku-gshen*) and Phan-ra rje (king of Lho-brag). See Richardson 1998, p. 129.

⁵² The founding of early *gsas-khang* and *gsas-mkhar* (temples) is recorded in a number of Bon histories. Those associated with the Bon 'Dul-ba lineage are listed in *Legs bshad mdzod* by Grub-dbang bkra-shis rgyal-mtshan (1859–1935). The Bon 'Dul-ba lineage is said to have begun with sTon-pa and to have been passed down through a succession of personalities (who lived in prehistoric times) to g.Yung-drung tshul-khrims, who built the *gsas-khang* of g.Yung-drung lha-rtse at Shel gyi brag-dkar rtse rdzong. His disciple gTseg-phud tshul-khrims built the *gsas-khang* of g.Yung-drung brtsegs-pa on Mount dGra-bcom-pa dpal. His disciple Ga-cu gtsug-phud rgyal-ba built the *lha-khang* of g.Yung-drung khri-'dus at 'Dam-shod snar-mo ('Dam-gzhung). His disciples Ya-gong ye-shes rgyal-ba and Pham-shi dpal gyi dbang-phyug built the *lha-khang* of bDud-'dul g.yung-drung khrims-gnas in the valley of Lha-sa yer-ba (located east of Lhasa). See Karmay 1972, pp. 35–38, fols. 133b–135a.

The *bsGrags pa gling grags* also speaks of two *sku-gshen* who wrested back the soul of the 35th Tibetan king, Mang-srong mang-btsan (655–676 CE), after he fell under the influence of Buddhism.⁵³ The *sku-gshen* were successful in recovering the king's soul, but the text tells us that because of the king's practice of Buddhism he would nonetheless die prematurely. In fact, other textual sources place King Mang-srong's death at an even younger age. This of course constitutes a strong sectarian argument for the superiority of Bon. For our purposes, the subject of central importance is the imputed ability of the royal priests to summon souls (*bla-khug*) back from the *lha* and *'dre*, the spirits of the dichotomous universe. Given the ubiquity and deeply infixed character of the belief in the vulnerability of the soul to demonic attack, it would indeed seem that the leitmotiv of worldly spirits absconding with peoples' souls (causing them sickness and even death) is a very old one in Tibet. The *sku-gshen* prove successful in their mission to retrieve King Mang-srong's soul by appealing to his *mgur-lha*, a group of 13 royal mountain divinities of Central Tibet.⁵⁴ The text also mentions another important Tibetan cultural theme of substantial antiquity, the shoring up of the *phywa* and *g.yang*, the generalized foundation for well-being and the various individualized capabilities for good fortune respectively. After his forthright recovery, King Mang-srong mang-btsan awarded his two *sku-gshen* various *yig-tshang*. The yaks and horses noted in the text may represent models of animals fashioned from treasured substances, rather than actual livestock.⁵⁵ The excerpt begins with indirect reference to the father of King Mang-srong, Gung-srong gung-btsan, the 34th king of Tibet:

- i) His son Mang-srong mang-btsan, [born in] the male earth dog year, took charge of the kingdom at age 15. Ghar-khri khra-'dzin mu⁵⁶ and Mang-po rje zhang-nam did [the job] of ministers. The *sku-gshen* were Khyung-po btsan-sgra don-'dzug and Sum-pa ye-khri bzang. The wife (queen) was 'Gro-za khri-tse khri lod-ma. During the time of this king he sent for the Buddhist texts *Kun mchog sprin* and *Thar lam dge bcu* from India, and he then practiced them, so the *mgur-lha* of the lord disappeared into the sky. The king fell sick. His soul was stolen and carried off by the worldly *lha* and *'dre*. Misgivings arose in the king's mind that this was caused by the Buddhist [texts]. The king pronounced, "If I die, it is because of the practice of these Buddhist [texts]. Now, let Buddhism decline, and by the great power of the various *sku-gshen*, let my soul be summoned from the grasp of the worldly *lha* and *'dre*." He thus spoke.
- ii) The various *sku-gshen* then invited back the *mgur-lha* of the Lord. They preserved his *phywa* and *g.yang*, so they said, "We summon his soul from the grasp of the *lha* and *'dre*." The Lord immediately recovered from his illness. The *yig-tshang* offered to the *sku-gshen* were golden horses, silver yaks with conch horns, *gleg-sbam*⁵⁷ of turquoise, and gowns (*'jong-ber*) of silk. That King, by the fault of practicing Buddhism, passed away at age 27.

The Bon quasi-historical text *g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum* refers to a variety of cultural activities involving the *bon-po* allies of two Tibetan kings.⁵⁸ These royal priests hailed from

⁵³ sNyan-rong manuscript, fol. 38a ln. 7 to 38b, ln. 6. Tibetan Text II-4, pp. 582, 583.

⁵⁴ References to the 13 *mgur-lha* are found in Bellezza 1997a, pp. 47, 48, 77 (n. 56–58).

⁵⁵ Ancient figurines of animals in stone, bronze and precious metals are indeed known in Tibet and surface from time to time in the international art and antiquities market.

⁵⁶ This figure belonged to the famous ministerial clan of mGar.

⁵⁷ A talisman worn in the hair that, in more recent times, contained a tiny text.

⁵⁸ See *g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum* (*Sources for a History of Bon: A collection of rare manuscripts from Bsam-gling Monastery in Dolpo (Northwestern Tibet)*), nos. 1–46. Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre: Dolanji, 1972), nos. 30, ln. 1 to 31, ln. 5 (paras. i–v); and no. 32, lns. 2–5 (paras. vi, vii). Tibetan Text II-5, pp. 583, 584. For a prior translation of these materials as well as the intervening account about the conflict between King sTong-nam and King sPros mang-po,

the proto-tribal territories of Zhang-zhung, Sum-pa and Mon. As in other accounts describing the incredible activities of the *gshen*, great magical powers are attributed to the *bon-po* of the protohistoric and early historic periods. These mythic attestations indicate the kind of close alliance that existed between the religious and political authorities of early times.

According to the *g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum* excerpt presented here, King Phri-thob nam-brtsan (also known as Khri-btsan nam) united (*gcig tu bsdebs*) Zhang-zhung and Tibet. This appears to refer to a cultural and/or ecclesiastic liaison, as the political annexation of Zhang-zhung by sPu-rgyal did not occur until the imperial period. As with Tibet's 31st king, sTag-ri gnyan gzigs btsan, Khri-btsan nam (the 25th king) is credited with founding many temples (*gsas-mkhar*) (para. i). This construction binge is supposed to have led to the well-being of all concerned. Projecting backwards in time from the historic reign of King Srong-btsan sgam-po (the 33rd king), this legendary event may possibly be attributable to the fourth or fifth century CE. In any event, the text makes it known that the practice of archaic rituals was unabashedly seen as a means of projecting political and military power. This textual theme of exploiting Bon religious traditions as instruments of temporal domination must be based on a historical fund of sorts. The sense of propriety evinced here contrasts with Buddhist political orders where bold actions are liable to be masked by pious pretension and other worldly immersion. The proliferation of *rdo-khang* in major economic centers across much of Upper Tibet seems to suggest that the religious hierarchy of ancient society was integrated into the ruling circles (see p. 32). Differing patterns of residency for the clerical and political elites of ancient society in any given locale of Upper Tibet do not appear to be the norm. Although an archaeological study of the early residential centers of Central Tibet has hardly begun, I would conjecture that many of them also accommodated intertwined religious and political elements of the paleoculture.

The text avers that an unnamed *bla-bon* promoted [Khri-btsan nam] from the four compass points (*phyogs-bzhi nas bteg*) (para. ii). I take this to allude to the standard ritual practice known as *g.yang-'gugs* (designed to shore up the vitality and ability of individuals), which may have depended on the *sgra-bla* of the four directions. The term *bla-bon* spurs us on to consider that this type of priest was both of a superior rank and a specialist in rites in which the soul played a central role. Also as a prelude to the King's military campaign, the *sku-gshen* Gyer zla-med conducted apotropaic procedures to neutralize the enemy's potential to kill (*sri*) and then consecrated the Tibetan army. Unfortunately, details of these rituals are not given in the text, but surely various tutelary, personal and territorial deities had a place in them. Ritually protected and strengthened, the Tibetans prevailed over 'Jang/lJang (a Bodic kingdom in the southeastern Tibetan borderlands). So pleased was the king that the *bon-po* were endowed with *yig-tshang* consisting of vulture robes with tiger-skin borders and horned headgear. According to *g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, the historical precedent for these categories of ceremonial dress began in that period. This claim, however, should not be taken literally but rather as an attempt to historicize ancient Tibetan religious customs within the most noble of political contexts. These re-engineered historical underpinnings appeared after the *bstan-pa phyi-dar* as part of a pervasive process of Tibetanization, which occurred with the definitive transfer of Bon religious influence from Upper Tibet to Central Tibet and the dominance of secular power in this latter region. We know from numerous Bon sources that the wearing of bird horns and vulture robes is also attributed to Zhang-zhung masters and autochthonous deities in a more ancient chronological placement than that of the 25th king of Tibet (for some examples see pp. 236, 237, 312 (fn. 322), 442–447).

see Bellezza 2001, pp. 64–68. I have decided to revisit this text in order to provide a somewhat more lucid translation and to discuss its contents at greater length.

In what would also appear to be the reign of Khri-btsan nam, the bon-po of Sum-pa, sPe-ne gu, thwarted the killing power of the Hor by the ritual invocation of the dgra-lha/sgra-bla (para. iii). Other Bon sources, as well as the archaeological record of Upper Tibet, indicate that contacts between Turco-Mongolian and Indo-Iranian groups and the Tibetans are likely to have occurred in prehistoric times.⁵⁹ This mythicized chronicle of a conflict with the Hor could therefore be based on a general historical situation, rather than a particular incident. There appears to be a historical epoch parallel in that areas once part of Sum-pa were subjected to numerous invasions by the Turco-Mongolian Hor, and eventually came to be known as Hor, a toponym still in use. g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum claims that as a result of the Tibetan victory over the Hor, the bon-po were given yig-tshang and bka'-rtags (symbols of accomplishment, trophies) in the form of sundry holy objects. The objects noted (arrow, spindle, sculptures) still form the mainstay of deity support practices in Bon ritual, and are supposed to have originated in the period of the story.⁶⁰ As with the bird horns and robes, this chronological attribution is largely apocryphal, representing a revised interpretation of Bon historical origins.

g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum now moves to a conflict with the Chinese, in which the Tibetans win by relying on the magic bombs of the Zhang-zhung bon-po Gyer-chen btso-'phen (para. iv). This account is of doubtful analytic value, as it does not seem plausible that the pre-empire sPu-rgyal Tibetans could have sallied forth from the Plateau to meet a powerful Sui dynasty military force or any other army of ancient China. The assertion that the use of turquoise and turbans by the Tibetans began with their presentation as yig-tshang in this period holds little water. For instance, we read in one of the major biographies of sTon-pa gshen-rab about a ceremony carried out at his birth, in which a turban and other ritual conferments were made.⁶¹ The most enigmatic aspect of this passage is the reference to a horse wagon (shing-rta) used to transport sTon-pa. Those who are inclined to see him as of foreign (Iranic) origin might see this reference as ammunition for their arguments. I reserve comment on this very complicated historical matter until further research can be conducted.

The loving adornment of the founder of the Bon religion is described as follows:

They tied a turban of bo-ti (a type of cloth) on the prince. They dressed him in a white silk ral-ga (robe). They made a gtsug-phud (a style of wearing the hair up with special ornaments) of power, and they made micro plaits (lan-phran) of long life

⁵⁹ The Bon quasi-historical text g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud bum describes the defeat of the Hor (a Turco-Mongolian or Indo-European group) by Phri-thob nam-brtsan, the 25th king of Tibet, presupposing intensive interactions between Central Asians and the protohistoric Tibetans. The Bon ritual text Dra ba nag po lda zor bsgrub thabs ma bu tshang ba chronicles the origins of the protective deity Mi-bdud and his struggle against the Hor, which is also set in the prehistoric epoch. Likewise, gNam lcags srog gi se bdar za 'gram che ba purports to document a prehistoric invasion of Tibetan territory by the Hor-pa Gyim-shang sta-re. The Bon text Drang don sgron ma mun sel records the invasion of ancient Pu-rang by a people styled the Gar-log sog-po (a Turco-Mongolian or Indo-European group). Although there are no definite clues as to when this tale of religious prowess is supposed to have taken place, the protagonist, sTon-pa dga'-ldan, is thought to have lived sometime before the imperial period. See Bellezza 2005a, pp. 282–284; 2002a, pp. 23–25; 2001, pp. 65, 66; pp. 235–237.

⁶⁰ For numerous examples of the ritual usage of these species of tabernacular support, see Bellezza 2005a, passim; Karmay 1998, pp. 423–431.

⁶¹ See mDo gzer mig, a bka' text rediscovered at bSam-yas lho-phyogs khri-dang dur-khrod by Drang-rje btsun-po gser-mig (mTsho-sngon: Krung-go'i bod kyi shes-rig dpe-skrun-khang, 1998), p. 52: der rgyal bu la ba ti'i thod ni bcings / dar dkar gyi ral ga ni gsol / dbang gi gtsug phud ni bcas / che'i lan phran ni blas / gser gyi chags shing ni bsnams / 'khor rnam kyis kyang / g.yung drung ris kyi gdan btings / nyi zla ris kyi gur phub / rin po che'i shing rta "khor pa mang pos bskor nas / spyang drangs so / ming dang mtshan ni ston pa gshen rab mi bor btags so /.

[with his hair]. They placed a golden *chags-shing* (scepter) in his hand. His circle [of disciples] also put down a carpet with swastika designs [for him]. They erected a tent with sun and moon designs. They led him in a precious horse wagon surrounded by many circles [of his followers]. The name and appellation sTon-pa gshen-rab mi-bo was bestowed upon him.

The imperial period antiquity of the turban as the customary headgear of the *gshen* is documented in IOL 734.⁶² It is mentioned in a passage in which a large group of practitioners assemble to decide on the best course of ritual action for an individual on the verge of death. This Old Tibetan text and its mention of turbans and other types of ceremonial equipment may allude to a prehistoric setting, as do other Dunhuang funerary texts we shall examine in Part III:

At the white sunny side of the mountain gathered the 100 white-turbaned male *gshen*, who conducted the divination (*mo-bthab*) and performed the prognosis (*pya-blhags*). At the black shady place gathered 100 hat-wearing female⁶³ *gshen* who conducted the divination and performed the prognosis.⁶⁴

The ritual magic practices used to destroy foreign armies continue in *g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum* with bTso-chen thog-'bebs and his hurling of a magic bomb (*btso*) at the Mon (a non-specific Himalayan people) (para. v). For his pains he was awarded *thul-pa* (robes) of tiger, leopard and clouded leopard as the *che-rtags* (award, badge of valor). Bon texts tell us that these three great cats were customary sources of pelts for the attire of the ancient *bon-po*. These types of animals often appear in the retinues of indigenous deities such as the *yul-lha* and *sgra-bla*, and the gods themselves manifest in such zoomorphic forms. The great cats and other large carnivores that figured in Bon ritual observances and as the source of costumes had a divine overtone, one that signified spiritual prowess and power. The robes made from these animal skins may also have had genealogical symbolism; the wearers being endowed with the ability to propitiate the ancestral clan deities that possessed the very same zoomorphic qualities.

g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum now skips to the time of the 27th king, Lha-tho tho-ri snyan-gzhal (Tho tho-ri gnyan-btsan), and another Zhang-zhung *bon-po*, Shel-le mig-dmar (para. vi). The *che-rtags* given to this *bon-po*, for recovering the vital soul turquoise (*bla-g.yu*) of the king from a demonic yak, consisted of skin robes (*thul* and *slag*) and helmets (*rmog-zhu*) made from the hides of fierce carnivores as well as the marmot. Although the text ascribes the origin of these customs to the time of Tibet's 27th king, such manner of dress can be found in much earlier settings in Bon literature. It should be noted that the difference between the *thul-pa* and *slag-pa* animal-hide robes is now unclear. Whereas the *slag-pa* has survived as the sheepskin *slog-pa* of the '*brog-pa*, the *thul-pa* has been largely consigned to history. In the final paragraph describing the conferring

⁶² *Op. cit.* Ins 47–49: *bdags (= gdags) ra (= ri) dkar po la / po gshen thod kar* (mod. = *dkar*) *brgya bsogs te / mo bthab* (mod. = *btab*) *pya* (mod. = *phywa*) *blhags* (mod. = *bklags*) / *srib sa nag po la ma mo gshen zhu brab (= bub) brgya sogs te / mo bthab pya blhags te /*. I have checked my facsimile of the text against the transliteration provided in Thomas 1957.

⁶³ *Ma-mo*. This appears to be an Old Tibetan honorific form of 'female' or 'woman'. Both syllables of this term are used individually in Classical Tibetan to denote a female/woman/mother.

⁶⁴ It may be that the theme of photic opposition presented in this text is predicated on the binary cosmogonic principles of light and dark as represented in the Bon tradition (see p. 436). It is also worth mentioning the sacred geographic division of space relying upon the categories of sunlight and shade. At gNam-mtsho there is the tradition of the 13 or 18 sunlit (*nyin la*) great *do* (islands and headlands) and the 13 or 18 shady (*srib la*) great *gdong* (mountain faces) that circumscribe the lake (Bellezza 1997a: 120–124).

of honors on the ancient *bon-po*, Shel-le mig-dmar wins the highly coveted horns of the *khyung* and *dbal* (para. vii). The precise identity of these *che-rtags* is no longer evident. They appear to have been types of raptor feathers and/or horn-like protuberances worn on the head. These horned headdresses are best known for their capacity to wipe out demons and other inimical forces:

- i) Then, Phri-thob nam-brtsan invited many *gshen* of Zhang-zhung, established 'bum⁶⁵ and *gsas-mkhar* in the four cardinal directions, united Tibet and Zhang-zhung, and spread the Bon doctrine, so the life of the lord was lengthened and the subjects ('*bangs*) under his rule contented. Thereafter, the Tibetan lord practiced Bon, hence his dominion (*mnga'-thang*) increased. He thought to subdue foreign countries.
- ii) The *bla-bon* (high ranking priests) promoted him from the four cardinal directions. Then the *sku-gshen* Gyer zla-med suppressed the *sri* (power to kill) of the enemy in the four cardinal directions. He empowered (*dbang-bskur*) the [king's] army. The army was led to 'Jang and entered into combat so the king of 'Jang was brought under the sway (*mnga'-'og*) [of the king of Tibet]. As a result [the king of Tibet] was pleased, so at that time, the 'three vultures'⁶⁶ on which turquoise horns were erected and the white female vulture robe (*thul-pa*) on which a tiger [skin] collar and trim were attached were conferred on the *bon-po* as the *yig-rtsang* (insignia). From that time on the Bon-po began wearing the bird hat and bird robe.
- iii) Also, the *bon-po* of Sum-pa, sPe-ne gu, invoked the *dgra-lha* and suppressed the *sri* of the enemy, hence the Hor were attacked and the Hor kingdom thus brought under the jurisdiction [of the king of Tibet]. For that great accomplishment (*che-dge*) [sPe-ne gu] was awarded the golden *gsas-zan* and *smān-bshos* of turquoise as the *yig-rtsang*.⁶⁷ The gold arrow and turquoise spindle were presented as the *bka'-rtags* (symbols of accomplishment, trophies). Therefore, the erection of *gsas-gsang* and *smān-bshos* as [supports of] the *lha* [by] the Bon-po, and the erection of the arrow and spindle also began from that time.
- iv) Also, the king of the Chinese attacked the Tibetan royal personage (*rje yi sku*), so the *bon-po* of Zhang-zhung, Gyer-chen btso-'phen, [placed] spells on gold and throwing the *btso* (magic bombs) defeated the Chinese kingdom. For that great accomplishment, the [Tibetan] king conferred pieces of turquoise⁶⁸ on him as the *yig-rtsang*, as well binding a white silk turban on his head. This is the reason why the Bon-po presently tie turbans on their heads and also hang turquoise and gold on their necks.
- v) Thereafter, the [Tibetan] army was led to Mon, so bTso-chen thog-'bebs of Zhang-zhung threw a *btso* and conquered the Mon. As a result, he was conferred *thul-pa* of tiger, leopard and clouded leopard, these three, as the *che-rtags* (badge of valor), and he was served the

⁶⁵ This word probably refers to sacred inscriptions carved on rocks and *tsha-tsha* (molded clay figurines of *mchod-rtēn*, etc.), rather than to printed scriptures.

⁶⁶ *rGod-gsum*. A type of headgear or helmet. Alternatively, rather than denoting 'vulture', *rgod* in this context could connote those who are brave, strong or fierce warriors.

⁶⁷ Nowadays, *gsas-zan* is a large *gtor-ma* (edible sacrificial sculpture) offered to the Bon deities, which is similar or identical to the Bon *gtor-ma* known as *gsas-sang/gsas-gsang*. In ancient times the meaning probably also included non-edible accessories or embellishments. The *smān-bshos* is now a type of medicinal cake, but in the distant past it seems to have denoted an alternative class of vital objects.

⁶⁸ *g. Yu-phrugs*. It is also possible that rather than denoting individual pieces of turquoise, this actually denotes a high-grade stone, such as the turquoise known as *g.yu drug-dkar*.

- three sweets (*mngar-gsum*).⁶⁹ As a result, the wearing of the tiger *slag* (robe) on the bodies of the Bon-po also [began] like that. In that way, the enemies of the [Tibetan] king were conquered by the *bon* [*po*]. The Twelve Principalities (rGyal-phran) were brought under the jurisdiction [of Tibet]. In that way, the dominion of the lord was increased by the *bon* [*po*].
- vi) Also, the soul turquoise (*bla-g.yu*) of Lha-tho tho-ri snyan-gzhal was stolen by the bay-colored *srin* yak. The Zhang-zhung *bon-po* Shel-le mig-dmar generated [powerful visualizations] at the *srin* yak and removing the soul turquoise from the mouth of the *srin* yak, offered it to the lord. As a consequence [the lord] was delighted. He presented [Shel-le mig-dmar] a marmot *thul*, a lynx *thul* and a wolf *thul*, these three, and a tiger *slag*, a leopard *slag* and a clouded leopard *slag*. As the *che-rtags*, he conferred a tiger helmet on him. The present-day wearing of the tiger *slag*, tiger headgear, and the lynx and snow leopard *thul-pa* by the Bon-po began from that time on.
- vii) At that time, [the Tibetan king] led his army to India, so many principalities of India were defeated. As a result, the evil *'dre* and *dam-'gong* closely followed [the Tibetans].⁷⁰ Having conquered them, they disappeared into space as light. As the *che-rtags*, [the Tibetan king] erected the *khyung* horns and *dbal* horns on [Shel-le mig-dmar's] head.

A quasi-historical account of the *sku-gshen* and the Tibetan kings they served is found in the *bsGrags pa gling grags*.⁷¹ The text states that each of the first seven kings of Tibet (Khri-bdun) had a *sku-gshen* who was a superior (*bla*), emphasizing the preeminence of the religious aspect of temporal power in the old Tibetan kingdom (para. i). The Khri-bdun also had bodyguards (*sku-brsungs*), priests responsible for the kings' physical and psychological welfare. Beginning with King Mu-khri btsan-po, the text names his *sku-gshen* and those of his son and grandson (para. ii). These royal priests belong to the bCo/Co clan, the original member of which accompanied King gNya'-khri btsan-po on his descent to earth (see pp. 274, 276). The text also furnishes the names of the chief temples (*gsas-mkhar*) of King Mu-khri and his grandson King Dri-rum. This and many other religious edifices attributed to the early stage of the Tibetan dynastic line suggests that the tradition of monumental residential construction in Central Tibet (as in Upper Tibet) was in place by the early protohistoric period (roughly 2000 years ago). King Dri-rum is also recorded as having a *dpon-gsas*, a type of priest probably differentiated from the *sku-gshen* by their role as the prime holders of Bon esoteric doctrines and practices.⁷²

The eighth and ninth kings, Dri-gum btsan-po and sPu-lde gung-rgyal, are said to have had lamas (*bla-ma*: religious teachers) and *lha-bon*. This is not intended to show that they did not also have *sku-gshen* but simply implies that there was an extensive contingent of religious functionaries in

⁶⁹ Rock sugar, jaggery and honey.

⁷⁰ These *'dre* and *dam-'gong* are classes of demons that likely represent the ghosts of the vanquished.

⁷¹ *Sources for a History of Bon* (compiled and edited by Tenzin Namdak, TBMC: Dolanji, 1972, nos. 48–71), nos. 62. ln. 5 to 63, ln. 4. Tibetan Text II-6, p. 584.

⁷² A tabulation of the names of the *sku-gshen* and the religious centers of the Tibetan kings from various historical sources was made by Namkhai Norbu (1996: 209–220). The names of various *mkhar* are given up to the time of King Zan-nam zin (16th king). A number of these *sku-gshen* have Zhang-zhung appended to the front of their names, indicating that they hailed from this country or that their lineages originated there. Among the texts used in Namkhai Norbu's study listing such *sku-gshen* are *Nyang gi chos 'byung* by Nyang-ral nyi-ma'i 'od-zer (1124–1192 CE?), *Dar rgyas gsal sgron* by sPa-ston btsan-rgyal bzang-po (circa early 15th century CE), *lDe'u chos 'byung chen mo* by lDe'u jo-sras (13th century CE), *Gleng gzhi bstan pa'i 'byung khungs* by Khyung-po blo-gros rgyal-mtshan (14th century CE?), and *Legs bshad rin gter* by Sa-skya paṇḍita kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan (1181–1251 CE).

protohistoric times (para. iii). The *sku-gshen* would have discharged the duties of lamas and *lha-bon* (performers of various kinds of rituals) as well. *bsGrags pa gling grags* proceeds to list the *dpon-gsas* and *lha-bon* of the Sa-la legs-drug, the group of Tibetan kings from the tenth to 15th members of the lineage:

- i) During the time of the [Khri-bdun] kings (*rje btsan-po*), each one had a *sku-gshen* who was a superior and a bodyguard *gshen*. They fostered the royal dominion (*rgyal-srid*). During the time of sPu-lde gung-rgyal there was a lama and *sku-gshen* above him.
- ii) The *dpon-gsas* of Mu-khri btsan-po was Gru-bon kha-'bar. His *sku-gshen* was bCo gyim-bu phyag-dkar. His *gsas-mkhar* was Khong-ma ne-chung. His son Ding-khri brtsan-po had as his *dpon-gsas* 'Ol-bon spyang-gcig. His *sku-gshen* was bCo'u smin-sngo. His *gsas-mkhar* was Khong-ma yang-rtse. His son Dri-rum btsan-po had as his *dpon-gsas* Li-bon spungs-rgyung. His *sku-gshen* was Co'u zhal-dkar. His *gsas-mkhar* was Khong-ba ru-rings. Each of the Khri-bdun had a *sku-gshen* and *dpon-gsas*. Each and every [king] had a *gsas-mkhar* of the legacy (*phyag-rjes*). They created many lasting testaments (*rjes-bzhag*) of the doctrine.
- iii) During the early life of Dri-gum btsan-po he had the lama 'Od-zer kun-gsal and the *lha-bon* bCo'u smin-dkar. During his later life Bon declined (*snubs*). The retribution (*dbu-yogs*) of Bon was that his Tibetan subjects were degraded.⁷³ The lamas of sPu-lde gung-rgyal were Dran-pa nam-mkha' and Khyung-po stag-sgra dun-rtsug. His *lha-bon* was gTso-mo gung-rgyal. This finishes the account (*bstan-pa*) of the Khri-bdun and the lTengs-pa gnyis (Dri-gum and sPu-lde).
- iv) Now, how the Bon of the Sa-la legs-drug was propagated: The lama of De-sho legs btsan-po was Li-shu stag-rings. His *lha-bon* were bTso-nyag and gZher thod-dkar. The *dpon-gsas* of E-sho legs was Mun-spangs. His *lha [bon]* was sTag klu-gsas. The *dpon-gsas* of 'Od-ru legs was sPe shod-khram. His *lha-bon* was bCo phan-grags. The *dpon-gsas* of 'Brong-bzhi legs was Gu-rum tsan-de mi-ser. His *lha-bon* was Co snyan-rings.

bsGrags pa gling grags continues to name the royal priests of the Tibetan kings, but this section of the text (no. 63, lns. 4–7) is somewhat fragmentary. Whether they are referred to as *dpon-gsas* or *lha-bon*, the dependency of the sPu-rgyal kings on these Bon religious figures is depicted as a central feature of the political and cultural life of ancient Tibet. The kings and priests noted include:

- De-sho legs (11th king): The *dpon-gsas* was Khu-lung gru-'dzin and the *lha-bon* was Seg-gshen bdud-'dul.
- Za-nam zan (16th king): The *dpon-gsas* was Gyim-thang rma'o and the *lha-bon* was sTong-dra zhing-sha.
- gNam khro'o bzhung-btsan (17th king): The *dpon-gsas* was gSum-la mu-phya and the *lha-bon* were gShen thang-mi chung⁷⁴ and bSe-bon la gnam-rings.
- (King's name?): The *dpon-gsas* was Drag-po kun-'dul and the *lha-bon* was Ches-pa gnam-'dul.

⁷³ *Rlag par btang*. This expression more commonly means 'were destroyed' but this is not very fitting in this textual context.

⁷⁴ It is worth noting that in the Dolakhā and Sindhupālchok districts of Nepal there is an ethnic group called Thani or Thangmi (possibly etymologized as Thang-mi or mTha'-mi), which may have migrated to their present homeland from the Plateau in ancient times (Turin 2002). It is not at all clear, however, if there is any ethnohistorical connection between this group and the *lha-bon* gShen thang-mi chung.

- King Srin-btsan: The *dpon-gsas* was sTag-sgra dge-bshes and the *lha-bon* were Za khong-grags and rGya wer-li lod.
- (King's name?): The *dpon-gsas* was {sTong-sgra} kun-'dul and the *lha-bon* was Co'u 'od-dkar.
- Khri-thog rje [btsan] (27th king): The *dpon-gsas* was lJang-tsha 'phan-snang and the *lha-bon* was Tha-tsha khob-'phar.

2.4 The *Bon-po* of Foreign Countries

According to the Bon tradition, the ancient *bon-po* priests were not just of Central Tibetan, Sum-pa, Zhang-zhung, and Mon extraction, but were also active in virtually all adjoining territories. These foreign *bon-po* dressed in a similar fashion and practiced magic and religious rituals comparable to their Tibetan Plateau and Himalayan counterparts. They are said to have operated in places such as China, India, the Indo-Iranic borderlands, and Turco-Mongolian Central Asia.

Much of this augmented geographic purview can be explained as stemming from a desire to reclaim legendary glories and majestic religious lineages that stretched far beyond the Plateau. I am not at all convinced, however, that this is the only factor explaining the literary references to *bon-po* in foreign countries. The imperial period conquests of adjacent lands may have conspired to create foreign practitioners of *bon* traditions. Moreover, in the maelstrom of cultural interactions that erupted during this period, *bon-po* from the Plateau must have traveled abroad, not least of all to minister to the needs of the fighting forces and administrative personnel. These conquests would have fostered various religious contacts between the Tibetans and their allies and vassal states. It is quite possible, therefore, that imperial period religious traditions were adopted by other peoples as part of their association with the Tibetans. As for the accounts of foreign *bon-po* in the prehistoric epoch, I put forward the hypothesis that these may in part have stemmed from deeply buried ethnohistorical and religious linkages that existed between the proto-tribal cultures of Tibet and their outlying neighbors. This is supported by the cross-cultural archaeological evidences we examined in Part I of this work. Although the correlation of Bon textual sources with paleocultural diffusive processes remains to be confirmed, this hypothesis warrants closer scrutiny as and when new founts of data are presented.

As we saw in *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* (p. 214, para. vii), the ancient *bon-po* are supposed to have been active even in China. This is taken as a sign of the erstwhile greatness of Bon and its geographic spread from the Iranic borderlands in the west to China in the east. A more detailed account of the greatest of the prehistoric Chinese Bon (rGya-bon) masters (*dpon-gsas*), Zing-pa mthu-chen, has been included in a recent work on the history of the Bon religion by Kun-bzang blo-gros.⁷⁵ His description of Zing-pa mthu-chen is quite heavily Buddhicized; the master is depicted wearing a type of shawl (*gzan*) like those used by Indian tantric practitioners. On the other hand, he is dressed in a wolf-skin robe trimmed with the pelts of great cats, a typical form of dress for the early *bon* masters. Zing-pa mthu-chen is documented as revealing the three causes of misfortune through his lyrical or rhythmical speech (*tshigs su bcad de gsung-ba*). This cadenced speech refers to formalized divulgements probably in the form of chants (*gyer*), the telling of riddles (*lde'u*) or mediumistic utterances (*lha-bka'*). Zing-pa mthu-chen's practice of an ancient

⁷⁵ See *Zhang bod kyi bstan 'byung lo rgyus lha rgyud rin chen phreng ba ma bcos gser gyi yang zhun* by Kun-bzang blo-gros, Lhasa: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun khang, 2003, p. 125. Tibetan Text II-7, p. 584. I am not certain what textual source the late Kun-bzang blo-gros (a noted scholar of Ru-lag g.yung-drung gling) relied on for this biographical account.

class of restorative rites (*gto*) is particular to the Bon tradition as well. The text records various objects employed in the *gto* rites. These included a colorful arrow (sign of males and receptacle of deities), a colorful spindle (sign of females and receptacle of deities), *pho-tong*, *mo-tong*,⁷⁶ *ngar-mi glud*,⁷⁷ and *gtor-ma* (sacrificial cakes). These objects were used to appease the ire (*'khrug*) of the various classes of elemental spirits, which was brought about by personal contamination and the disruption of the earth. Three types of contamination are recorded in the text: *dme* (caused by murder of relatives, incest, etc.), *thab* (caused by the sullyng of the hearth and springs), and *mnol* (caused by a variety of very negative actions). The text also informs us that the execution of the *gto* rites led to good harvests (*lo-legs*) and the contentment of the kingdom (*rgyal-khams*). Herein lies the most important purpose of the ancient *bon* priests: their perceived ability to increase the dominion of the nobility and the prosperity of the masses alike. These utilitarian activities, from which tangible benefits ensue to all those who are worthy of merit, shows that the functions of the *gshen* and *bon-po* closely correspond to those of the lamas, *sngags-pa* and *lha-pa* of more recent times. Finally, as a consequence of Zing-pa mthu-chen's exemplary service, the *bon-po* were granted special prerogatives and privileges (*che-ba'i thob-khongs*) by the king:

The great *dpon-gsas* rGya-bon Zing-ba mthu-chen wore the Bon costume of tantra, a peaked white Bon hat⁷⁸ on which there was a swastika sign in relief, a lynx and wolf *slog-pa* (skin robe) with tiger and leopard [skin] borders, a *gzan* of white silk with black silk edges ornamented with shriveled heads along the margins, and boots with swastikas and rainbow designs, etc. He revealed the cause and sources of perils (*nyer-'tshé*), diseases (*nad*) and demonic predations (*gdon*) by his lyrical speech. Through the *gto* of the eight divisions of the *spar-kha*⁷⁹ of existence, he rehabilitated 160,000,000⁸⁰ male and female *spar-kha* of the eight parts, sending them off to their respective cardinal, intermediate and up-and-down directions. In these [*gto*] he also assembled [all] the perfected offerings [such as] a colorful arrow, a colorful spindle, *pho-tong*, *mo-tong*, *ngar-mi glud*, *gtor* [*ma*], and offering *gtor-ma* to redress the anger of the *sa* [*bdag*], *klu* and *sde-brgyad* (eight orders of common spirits), caused by *dme*, *thob* and *mnol*, these three, and the digging of the earth and the extraction of stones. In the kingdom, therefore, good harvests and the prosperity of contentment accompanied [the people], and the Bon [po] were given major prerogatives [by the king] as in the ancient period.

The same types of grand capabilities ascribed to the early *bon-po* priests in Bon sources also figure in a Buddhist religious history that is roughly contemporaneous with the *bsGrags pa gling grags*. In *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud* by Nyang-ral nyi-ma'i 'od-zer (1124–1192?), we read about familiar practices through the lens of Buddhism, which paints a somewhat pejorative but fairly accurate picture of ancient *bon* traditions as depicted by the latter day Bon-po themselves.⁸¹ According to Nyang-ral, Bon began in the country of sTag-gzig, situated this side

⁷⁶ *Pho-tong* and *mo-tong* are male and female figures, respectively, which are used in enticement rituals (*mdos*). These usually entail the erection of palaces, representing a microcosm of the universe.

⁷⁷ *Ngar-mi* are effigies in human form that are used in various types of ransom rites (*glud*).

⁷⁸ Called *Bon-zhwa dkar-mo rtse-rgyal*.

⁷⁹ Trigrams symbolizing good and bad aspects of existence, used in astrology and divination. Derived from Chinese tradition, they consist of fire, earth, iron, space, water, mountain, wood, and wind modalities.

⁸⁰ The actual numerical quantity is ambiguous due to the juxtaposition of *bye-ba* (million) and *sa-ya* (ten million) in the sentence.

⁸¹ See text published by Bod-ljongs mi-rigs dpe-skrun khang: Lhasa, 1988, p.160. Tibetan Text II-8, pp. 584, 585.

(east) of O-rgyan and beyond (west of) Ka-che (para. i). This description indicates that sTag-gzig was located somewhere in present-day northern Pakistan.⁸²

This localization for sTag-gzig is also supported by *mKhas pa lde'u*.⁸³ In this seminal Buddhist history (Chos-'byung), the sTag-gzig of prehistoric times, purported to exist before the rise of the Twelve Principalities (rGyal-phran bcu-gnyis), is described. The Twelve Principalities of ancient Tibet are supposed to have served as the political precursor of the sPu-rgyal kingdom (see pp. 278–281). The country of sTag-gzig is described as one of four powers (along with India, China and Phrom) situated in the cardinal directions that harried the fledgling political development of Tibet. In this passage excellent geographic clues as to the location of sTag-gzig are given. The royal matriline was from Kashmir and the minister was a Sing (Singh), an ancient caste appellation for the Indo-Aryan ruling classes. Moreover, the language of sTag-gzig was Shintrat; this can be no other than one of the Shina languages of Ladakh, Gilgit or Indus Kohistan:

The mother of the king (sTag-gzig nor gyi rgyal-po) was nicknamed Kha-che ma (Kashmir Woman).⁸⁴ His minister's name was Sing-dang. sTag-gzig is the country in the west. [The king's] subjects are the sons of the *gnod-sbyin*, the four divisions of his people. The language of sTag-gzig was Shintrat, the speech spoken by the *gnod-sbyin*.

gTag-gzig is believed to have occupied a fundamental place in the propagation of Bon culture to Tibet. For example, according to Bon historical conceptions, even their literary tradition is traced to the northwest. sTag-gzig spungs-yig is the name of a system of writing that is supposed to have originated in 'Ol-mo lung-ring (another semi-mythic land, probably north and west of Tibet). sTag-gzig spungs-yig is commonly said to have been introduced to Zhang-zhung and its systems of writing, *smar-chung* and *smar-chen*, derived from it.

The first Bon of Nyang-ral nyi-ma'i 'od-zer's text is called *rdor*. This is usually rendered *rdol* (outbreak), the original Bon religion according to Buddhist historical notions. No such word is used in the Bon tradition to refer to its religious origins, thus it would appear that *rdol* is a Buddhist classificatory term with limited historical and/or sectarian scope. The *bon-po* protagonist in the account, despite adhering to a philosophical view of emptiness (*stong-pa*), is branded by Nyang-ral a teacher (*ston-pa*) of ephemeral heterodoxy (*mu-stegs nyi-tshe*). This suggests that

⁸² In the 1980s I spent a year in Chitral, Gilgit, Hunza, and Astor on foot researching pre-Islamic customs and traditions. While there are many superficial correspondences with Bon culture, the origins and extent of these parallels demand more intensive study. For one thing, there are ancient Bon-like *mchod-rten* inscribed on rocks in Indus Kohistan and Gilgit (discussed in Bellezza 2002a: 127). Some salient features of northern Pakistan cultures that resemble those found in Tibet are the cults of divine yaks and mountains, deities mounted on wild ungulates, chthonic serpent spirits (*nag*), white gods with white turbans and robes mounted on white horses, the mediumship of mountain fairies (*pare*), and traditional lunar-based calendrical systems.

⁸³ See *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*, by mKhas-pa lde'u (late 13th century), *Gangs can rig mdzod*, vol. 3 (ed. Chab-spel tshe-brtan phun-tshogs), Lhasa: Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrun khang, 1987, p. 222. I have extracted selected lines from the text.

⁸⁴ According to *bKa' chems ka khol ma*, attributed to Srong-btsan sgam-po and rediscovered by Jo-bo A-ti-sha (11th century CE), Gri-gum btsan-po and his minister with their army of *ma-sangs* (an ancestral tribe) and subjects went to the country of Kashmir to wage war. The king of Kashmir and the Tibetans entered into battle, which appears to have led to a Tibetan victory and the annexation of Kashmir. For this text, see Norbu 1996, p. 277. This reference suggests that the advance of Tibetan influence into the northwestern corner of the Subcontinent occurred deep in the protohistoric period. This in turn seems to strengthen the case for cultural ties between these regions in early times, and helps to account for longstanding Tibetan interest in the ancient Indo-Iranic borderland kingdoms such as sTag-gzig.

rather than the Buddhist dialectic concept of reality predicated on all phenomena lacking inherent existence (*stong-pa nyid*), the emptiness Nyang-ral refers to is the Bon cosmogonic abstraction of a primordium devoid of qualities (*dang-po ye-med stong-pa*).

Like the *sku-gshen* of King Mang-srong we have already read about (p. 224), the *bon-po* of Sa-zha (A-zha?) is recorded as having been able to harmonize relations between humans and the dichotomous spirits that reside above and below them. The text also states that this *bon-po*'s cosmogonic understanding was based on generative eggs, and that he had the power to divine the past, present and future. Moreover, Nyang-ral tells us the *bon-po* of Sa-zha could fly like a bird, and confirms the archaic cultural horizon usage of thread-crosses (*nam-mkha'*), crowning ornaments (*rgyang-bu*) and parched grain (*shel-tshig*) to win the favor of the elemental spirits (para. ii). These objects are major elements of the *mdos* (enticement ritual), which Bon texts also trace back to the first kings of Tibet.⁸⁵ Nyang-ral's Buddhist history correctly makes note of the offering of libations (*gser-skyems*) and the sacrifice of livestock found in the archaic funerary rites. As we shall see, these traditions are corroborated by Dunhuang and Bon sources germane to the ancient death rituals. Nyang-ral's characterization of the head of the dead person (*mi shi-ba*) as somehow being pressed down (*gnon*) is, however, not in conformance with the archaic funerary traditions. This passage signals that Buddhists of the 12th century CE held patently erroneous and/or prejudicial views of earlier Tibetan eschatological beliefs. Both the Dunhuang and Bon funerary manuscripts indicate that the deceased was figuratively raised up towards the celestial afterlife while the demonic cause of death (*gshed*) was suppressed.⁸⁶ Nyang-ral closes the passage by stating that the first Bon religion (known as Gyer-bon in this text), with its animal sacrifices, was not in line with the teachings of sTon-pa [gshen-rab] (para. iii). This reference is one of many historical indications that by the 12th century CE, Bon had re-emerged as the religion we know today by repudiating the slaughter of animals that was commonplace in religious rites of the imperial period:

- i) Then, during the reign of Srib-skhri's son, gNam phru-bo gzhung btsan-lha (seventh Tibetan king), the celestial *rdor* Bon began this side of O-rgyan and beyond Ka-che. In the middle of sTag-gzig, in the country called 'Gyur-snang bar-snang, there appeared one who was inclined towards and in accordance with the view of [those who accepted] emptiness as the nature of reality (*don-dam*), the *bon-po* of Sa-zha, the teacher of ephemeral heterodoxy. He had the ability to summon all the worldly *lha* and *'dre* by their life-force (*srog*) and heart (*snying*). He knew how to reconcile (*dmangs-sdum*) the humans and *lha* and *srin*. In the framework of conditional truth (*kun-rdzob*) he accepted that all [living beings] were born from eggs. He could easily (*thol thol*) divine (*smra shes-pa*) past signs, future signs and present conditions.⁸⁷
- ii) He was able to fly in the sky [like a bird] with flapping wings. His hand-tool (*lag-cha*) was a *skya-mo* (?) placed in a bag.⁸⁸ He set up an arched skin with the four limbs called by the name 'five halves'.⁸⁹ His offering objects were wood and bone on which blue and red designs were

⁸⁵ For a Bon origin myth concerning the *mdos*, see Bellezza 2005a, p. 244.

⁸⁶ I am of the opinion that this misinformed view about the archaic funerary traditions may possibly be historically connected to the phenomenon of corpse reanimation (*ro-lang*), a belief that has plagued Tibet for centuries (probably since the *bstan-pa phyi-dar* and the breakdown of the system of archaic death rituals).

⁸⁷ This is followed by a sentence that is not fully comprehensible, thus it has been omitted from the translation.

⁸⁸ *Khug*. Alternatively this could denote a corner but I think this is less likely.

⁸⁹ *Phyed-lnga*. The signification of this term is not clear. It may have to do with the four limbs and head of a quartered animal.

drawn.⁹⁰ [Human and animal] figures (*gzugs-brnyan*) were made with earth. He erected *nam-mkha'* and *rgyang-bu*. Saying, "I do the *lha-bon* of the living",⁹¹ he offered *zhugs-shang*⁹² and *srab-shang* (?) to the *lha* and *'dre* of the slate mountains and snow mountains. He offered with libations (*gser-skyems*). Saying, "I do the funeral ritual (*gshin-dur*)", he pushed down the head of the dead person and slaughtered the divine sheep of happiness⁹³ and a mare (*rta rgod-ma*).

- iii) Saying, "the *glud* (ransom offering) of the patient is not standard", he called for the offering constituents, a goat, sheep, bird and pig, and then slaughtered these animals.⁹⁴ There appeared the one called A-ya chab-nag. Upon being invited by the king that called the Bon of the Black Waters of the Lineage of Existence appeared.⁹⁵ That was the first Gyer-bon in Tibet. It is said that it was not the speech of sTon-pa.

A Buddhist version of the exploits of early Bon masters is also found in the late 13th century CE Chos-'byung by mKhas-pa lde'u.⁹⁶ In this passage, placed in the time of Gri-gum btsan-po (Tibet's eighth king), the geographic scope of the protohistoric Bon religion extends into Central Asia. It concerns a *bon-po* called Wa-zha from Yu-'gur, a territorial entity probably tantamount to the Uighur cultural entity of Eastern Turkestan (it did not arise until the seventh century CE). This localization seems to reflect cultural correspondences or contacts between Eastern Turkestan and Tibet. The oral tradition of Ru-thog speaks of an invasion from Eastern Turkestan in ancient times.⁹⁷ These military adventures, if they actually existed, may have been accompanied by cultural assimilations, as has often occurred in world history. Yet, even if ancient inter-territorial religious contacts are indeed chronicled in this Buddhist account of a *bon-po*, it appears to contain a serious historical discrepancy. The Turks as a coherent ethnicity appeared in Central Asia no earlier than the fifth century CE. Such a timeframe does not seem in accordance with the traditional genealogy of the Tibetan kings, which would have us believe that King Gri-gum btsan-po lived prior to the Turk period. Could the ethnonym Yu-'gur/Yu-gur, then, have been used to denote earlier Mongolic groups as well?

As with the name Sa-zha in the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po*, the linguistic significance of Wa-zha is not clear. It may represent a Tibetanized version of a Central Asian name. As in Bon sources, the adept Wa-zha had the power to transform himself into a bird and fly, as well as the ability to perform other miraculous feats. The transformation of anthropomorphous figures into ornithomorphous forms is also represented in the rock art of Upper Tibet (see p. 175). Wa-zha propitiated the elemental spirits, in this case the martial *btsan* spirits. Although the text does not

⁹⁰ This seems to refer to the *byang-bu* (ritual tablets of variable function), and *mo-tong* and *pho-tong* (plates with male and female figures used in the construction of cosmological models as part of *mdos* rituals).

⁹¹ *gSon gyi lha-bon byed*. This phrase conveys the formal use of rituals for the benefit of the living.

⁹² Often considered another name for *shel-tshig*, an important Bon offering material. It consists of variously colored parched grain (usually barley), the shapes of which are thought to resemble various animals.

⁹³ *sKyid kyi lha-lug*. Actually, *skyibs-lug* must be intended here, the archaic funerary sheep that conveyed the dead to the hereafter.

⁹⁴ The next sentence in the text is incomprehensible, thus it is omitted from the translation.

⁹⁵ Chab-nag srid-pa rgyud kyi bon, the Black Waters (Chab-nag) tradition of Bon (consisting of propitiatory and apotropaic rituals) of the *A-ya* (an old-style priest still found in southwestern Tibet).

⁹⁶ *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa* (late 13th century CE), p. 244: *de'i dus su yu 'gur sna sa sna bya ba na mu stegs breg pa'i bon po wa zha bya ba gcig la bon byung ste / rdzu 'phrul che nas gnam la lhab lhab 'phur zhing kha nas thol thol smra / shing la 'bren du 'dra zhing rdo la lhu gzugs byed pa des / zhugs bcad kyis btsan la las su mchod do / de la mnga' thang bstod pa ni / g.yu'i g.yung drung / dpa' bo stag slag 'ging (= 'gying) pa'i ral gas bstod /*

⁹⁷ For these oral traditions, see Bellezza 2002a, pp. 23, 24; 2005a, p. 282.

refer to them as such, this *bon-po* was offered three different types of *yig-tshang* by Gri-gum btsan-po:

In that period, in the country called Yu-'gur-sna of various types of earth, there was a heretic *bon-po* with cut [hair] called Wa-zha, who received the Bon [transmissions]. He had great magical [power]; so he flew in the sky with flapping wings and uttered prophecies (*thol thol smra*). He split wood to make leather thongs and molded stones into [different] forms. Through contemplation he offered to the *btsan* for their activities. For the elevation of his dominion (*mnga'-thang*) he was exalted by a swastika of turquoise, a hero's tiger-skin robe (*slag*), and a regal cloth robe (*ral-ga*).

Not only were foreign Bon-po living in regions contiguous to the Plateau, they are also recorded as having convened in Tibet. In one such story, Bon-po from China, India and other countries are said to have assembled at Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho, one of the most important early permanent cultural centers in Upper Tibet.⁹⁸ According to this hagiography, Dang-ra was a human entrepôt region that attracted a cosmopolitan selection of Bon adepts, who along with their local counterparts were immersed in various tantric practices. As a result of their religious attainments, these masters enjoyed various epiphanies, great powers, and the ability to magically alter the landscape. It is hard to extract even grains of verifiable history from this mythic rendering of the saints of Dang-ra save that it accents the centrality of this agricultural enclave in early religious history. With its many ruined all-stone temples and hermitages that likely date to the prehistoric epoch and early historic period, Dang-ra must have indeed been a magnet for visitors and pilgrims from across Upper Tibet and perhaps even Central Tibet. From how much farther afield people in antiquity may have come remains to be ascertained:

In long past ancient times, many knowledge-holders and *mkha'-'gro* (female adepts) of Zhang-zhung, India, China, O-rgyan, Kashmir, Tibet, Thod-dkar, Brusha, Me-nyag,⁹⁹ and other countries gathered [at Dang-ra]. They opened (practiced) many mandalas of pacific and wrathful deities. They obtained some worldly and extraordinary attainments. In particular, the Four Masters (*mKhas-pa mi-bzhi*)¹⁰⁰ were the masters of all languages and logic. To grasp the four activities (*las-bzhi*) of the Doctrine, they fully mastered the four activities (*'phrin-las rnam-bzhi*). This is why they were known as the Four Masters. They were also known as the Four Great Teachers (*Slob-dpon che-bzhi*). Irrespective of location, they performed all religious practices. In particular, Hris-pa gyer-med, Sad-ne ga'u and others, the many knowledge-holder masters, practiced the secret tantra of Me-ri. They saw the visages of the mGon-po rnam-gsum (Ge-khod, Ku-byi mang-ske and A-ti mu-wer) gods. Ye-shes dbal-mo (the great Bon goddess of wisdom) befriended them. They invoked the oath-holding mothers and sisters (the female deities). Their footprints are on the hard stable rock formations [at Dang-ra]. There is a gap where they cleaved the

⁹⁸ See *Dang ra'i dkar chags* (= *chag*) *mthong ba kun dga' bzhus so* in *Dwang ra khyung rdzongs* (= *rdzong*) *gnyis kyis* (= *kyi*) *dkar chags* (= *chag*) *gsal ba'i me long o*, by sNang-zhig 'dul-ba rgyal-mtshan), fols. 2b, ln. 2 to 3a, ln.2. Tibetan Text II-9, p. 585. This manuscript written in *dbu-med* contains two texts: the *dkar-chag* (registry) of Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho (8 folios) and a *dkar-chag* of Khyung-rdzong (7 folios).

⁹⁹ Also spelled Mi-nyag. The Tanguts refer to themselves as Mi/Mi ñiah (Mi-nyag), and in Tibetan literature, this term came to mean the entire Tangut realm of Hsia (Dunnell 1994: 156).

¹⁰⁰ Zhang-zhung sTong-rgyung mthu-chen, Se-bon Sha-ri dbu-chen, lDe-bon Gyim-tsha rma-chung, and Me-nyag lCe-tsha mkhar-bu. These personalities are attributed to the eighth century CE.

rock formation with their *gshang*. They flew in space like birds and so forth. They obtained every magical (*mthu*) power and ability.

A cultural relationship between Tibet and the regions of Central Asia loosely known as Hor is thought to have endured over a long period of time. Interactions of a religious, military and even consanguineous nature are regularly mentioned in Tibetan literary sources. As I have discussed, I think these may allude to actual interchanges between the Plateau and steppes beginning no later than the early Iron Age. During a persecution of Bon, adepts from Upper Tibet (Sum-pa and Zhang-zhung) are said to have traveled to Hor in order to conceal texts until it would be safe to bring them out of hiding.¹⁰¹ The passage is phrased as such: “When Li-bya ha-ra of Sum-pa, rGyal-chen mu-thur of Zhang-zhung and Se-bon¹⁰² sKar-ma mu-cho went to Hor, the Bon texts they hid as treasures will be discovered by him (Brag-sgom gting-gsal).” The temporal orientation of this account is ambiguous. Nevertheless, given the onomastic qualities of the protagonists’ names, it likely describes events purported to have taken place during the supposed persecution of Bon in the reign of Gri-gum btsan-po. Less plausibly, it relates to the prohibition of Bon put in force during the reign of King Khri-srong lde-btsan in the last quarter of the eighth century CE.

So close was the protohistoric period relationship between the Sog-po (Mongolians) and the Tibetans thought to be, *Hor gyi chos ’byung* claims that the ancestry of Genghis Khan can be traced to a scion of Gri-gum btsan-po.¹⁰³ While we can take this account to be a product of the 13th century CE adoption of Tibetan Buddhism by the Mongols, it does postulate an ancient cultural linkage between two great nations that could be grounded in protohistoric ethnical realities. In this tale, the youngest son of King Gri-gum, Nya-khri, traveled with his wife to Mongolia and was met there by a tribe called Pe-ta. As he was from the universal monarch lineage of India, the Mongols invited Nya-khri to be their chief:

The youngest son of King Gri-gum btsan-po, called Nya-khri, or Por-ta ze-ba in the Mongolian language, took the one known as Gwō-ma-ral from the country of rKong-po as his queen. With her he went to Sog-yul (Mongolia) and they arrived at the mountain known as Por han gal two na, on the bank of the river known as Pā’i gal. Here lived a people known as Pe-ta who inquired about the reasons why [they came], so [Por-ta ze-ba] clearly explained the source of his clan and lineage beginning from the lineage of the ‘King Honored by Many’ of ancient times,¹⁰⁴ the country from which he came, the reasons for coming, and so forth. So [the Pe-ta] people, having consulted among themselves, thus said, “This person is from a good clan and lineage so it is better that we make him our leader.” They respected (*bsti-bstang*) and honored (*bkur*) him as their leader, so he was widely known as Por-ta chi-no. His sons were the two, Pā-thō sa-han and Pa-thwo chā-gan.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ See *rGyung yar khod spungs kyi lo rgyus bzhugs sho*, attributed to Dran-pa nam-mkha’ (eighth century CE), rediscovered by Brag-sgom gting-gsal (*Sources for a History of Bon: A collection of rare manuscripts from Bsam-gling Monastery in Dolpo (Northwestern Tibet)*, nos. 142–164. Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre: Dolanji, 1972), nos. 157, ln. 10 to 158, ln. 2.

¹⁰² This term denotes either the funerary priestly occupation or the Se clan.

¹⁰³ *Hor gyi chos ’byung* by ’Jigs-med rig-pa’i rdo-rje, Zi-ling, mTsho-sngon mi-rigs dpe-skrun khang, 1993, p. 7. The author states that this work was compiled from Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian historical sources. Tibetan Text II-10, p. 585.

¹⁰⁴ Mang-bkur rgyal-po. This was the universal king of India according to Buddhist mythology. Bon accounts of how his lineage gave rise to the Tibetan kings are found in Namkhai Norbu 1995, pp. 206–209.

¹⁰⁵ The text continues to detail the succession through many generations of Mongolian leaders until the time of Jing-

2.5 The Costumes, Insignia and Weapons of the Ancient *Bon-po*

In the texts presented in this subsection, the focus is on the depictions of the dress, military accoutrements and ornaments awarded the ancient Bon priests by the Tibetan kings. As I have discussed, this emphasis on the physical aspects of ancient traditions may find some scientific corroboration once archaeological research in Tibet has sufficiently progressed. The most remarkable listing of ancient ritual apparel I have yet come across is found in a funerary text detailing the receptacles of the *gsas* divinities and associated ritual objects.¹⁰⁶ Although the material objects enumerated in this work were used in the archaic funerary traditions of Bon, they are also applicable to a much wider range of ritual usages. As in other texts we have perused, *gSas 'khor rgyan bkod rim pa* states that the Bon funerary priests wore robes and helmets fabricated from the hides of wild carnivores. In the Upper Tibet environmental context, brown bears, lynxes, wolves, snow leopards, vultures, and eagles could have provided the raw materials for this kind of ritual attire, while trade with adjoining regions may have made other types of animal hides available.

As with many other aspects of Bon traditions, the apparel mentioned is said to have originated with the *gshen* and *lha* at the beginning of time (para. i). They are recorded as having twin functions, symbolic and operational, as objects of power (*dbang-cha*) and for the fulfillment (*thugs-dam*) and the signaling/commissioning (*bskul-ba*) of the funerary divinities.¹⁰⁷ We learn that the bird and *dbal* horns are decorated with tiger-skin ribbons (para. ii). Headgear is said to have included helmets, hats and crowns of different types. As with the *sgrung-zhwa* of the Ge-sar bards and *btsan-zhwa* of the spirit-mediums, the hats of the Bon-po are ornamented with metallic mirrors. Generally speaking, these mirrors symbolize the mystic vision of the wearer; his or her special ability to know the fate or prognosis of individuals. These mirrors, like other elements of dress, are also used as supports for the deities during ritual evocations and spirit mediumship. The hats of the ancient Bon adepts are stated to have also been fashioned from the hides of a variety of large carnivores, a symbol of the personal power of the wearers and the greatness of the doctrines they upheld. The appearances of the crown (*pra-phud*) and coronet (*prog-zhu*) noted in the text is now somewhat obscure. A Bon pictograph (perhaps early historic period) painted on a cave wall in Shan-rtsa gives us cause to consider that these may have been similar in style to those of western Asia and Europe. This Shan-rtsa pictograph depicts a crown-like object with three prominent points.¹⁰⁸ A number of leather (*thul-pa* and *slag*) and textile (*'jol-ber*) robes are also specified in the text (para. iii). Like other aspects of the Bon costumes, these function to call and direct the deities during ritual performances:

- i) Mobilize that which in ancient times manifested from the mind of the excellent *gshen*,
The objects of the *lha* and the objects of power that descended in the primordial time,
And also all the items of offering for fulfillment and commissioning to mobilize the assemblies
of *lha*, the assemblies of *gsas*, the assemblies of *dbal*, and the *dur-'gsas* (funerary divinities)
with their attendants and workers.
Moreover, each of them was bestowed a name.

gir (Genghis Khan) and his son, and their assumption of rule over Tibet. See *Hor gyi chos 'byung*, pp. 8–14.

¹⁰⁶ *sNgags kyi mdo 'dur rin chen phreng ba mu cho 'i khrom 'dur chen po (= mo) las gsas 'khor rgyan bkod rim pa bzhugs so* (*Sequential Arrangement of the Ornaments of the gSas Circles from the Great Funeral Ritual Multitude of Mu-cho Jewel Rosary Tantric Funeral Ritual Texts*), anonymous (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 6, nos. 179–193), nos. 186, ln. 5 to 188, ln. 2. Tibetan Text II-11, p. 586.

¹⁰⁷ Similar themes are touched upon in a Nakhi funerary text: “Put eagle feathers in your hat, then you will not be afraid of the thunder; dress in a tiger’s skin, and when you meet a tiger on your way do not be afraid...” (Rock 1955: 189).

¹⁰⁸ For a photograph of this crown, see Suolang Wangdui, p. 133 (fig. 160).

- ii) The *bya-ru* (bird horns) and *dbal-ru*, conquerors of living beings, with miraculous tiger [skin] hangings (*go-pan*).
 The *pra-phud*, the helmet of the *gar* (a class of divinity) and the *prog-zhu* with ornaments of precious turquoise and gold.
 The lion hat, the dragon hat, and the *khyung* hat; the head [gear] of the fierce tiger, leopard, black bear, and brown bear; the vulture hat, the wild yak hat, and the oxen/elephant (*glang*) hat; the lynx hat, the snow leopard hat, and the tiger hat; [all] with a *me-long* (metal mirror), *rgya-long* (a type of mirror) and *mthong-bzhed*.¹⁰⁹
 Earrings of gold and turquoise with *ha-lo* (a species of flower) designs and small silver bells hanging freely from them.
 The ornaments of the head of the not-declining *dbal-bon* are the holy signs (*bka'-rtags*) of the head of the funerary *gshen*.
 Mobilize (*bzhengs*) them as the accoutrements of commissioning (*bskul-ba*) the *lha* and *gsas*.
- iii) There is the 'gying-slag (a regal leather coat) of the miraculous alphabet (*ka-kha*),
 The dragon *slag* of the dragon of total victory,
 The power *slag* of the fierce tiger and lion,
 The hawk *slag* of the cutting conquerors,
 The red and black 'jol-ber (textile robe) of power,
 And the tiger, leopard, lynx and wolf *thul-pa* with various kinds of designs of great light rays and small light rays.
 The flayed skin (*g.yang-gzhi*) and scarf (*dpyang-bu*) *kas-ma-hral* (a garment that wraps around the torso leaving the right shoulder uncovered).
 Sumptuous clothing and heroic ornaments are worn on the body.
 These are the signs of power of the body of the funerary priests ('dur-gshen).
 Mobilize them as the decorations of commissioning the *lha* and *gsas*.

The Bon tradition of the manufacture of metallic religious objects, armor and weapons is detailed in the *gZi brjid*, the most extensive biography of sTon-pa gshen-rab.¹¹⁰ This description of religious and military equipment is reckoned to be in the words of the founder of Bon himself, and to have been spoken in the very distant past. The inclusion of what is understood to be steel (*zhun-dkar lcags*) as an important material for the fabrication of armor and weaponry indicates that the *gZi brjid* describes highly sophisticated manufacturing traditions. Cross-cultural comparisons with India and Persia suggest that the production of steel in Tibet could have originated as early as the second half of the first millennium BCE. The metal crafts and armaments noted in the text, however, are likely to represent a reworking (through grammatical and thematic modifications) of imperial period technological and military tradition. Nevertheless, the presence of Zhang-zhung vocabulary in this *gZi brjid* account may also indicate that it preserves, in a vestigial or reformulated form, prehistoric technological and military lore.

According to the text, there are three types of beating and working metal (*brdung zhing 'thar la rnam-pa gsum*) that produce beautiful (*mdzes*), magnificent (*brjid*) and desirable ('dod-yon) articles (p. 247). The types of metals mentioned include gold (*gser*), silver (*dnkul*), copper (*zangs*), iron (*lcags*), brass (*ra-gan*), bronze (*li*), bell metal (*mkhar* = 'khar), and white metal (*tong-tse*). Steel (*zhun-dkar lcags*) is said to have a silvery cast (*dnkul mdangs thon*) and to be of two main

¹⁰⁹ Literally: 'opened vision'; a type of mirror.

¹¹⁰ *mDo dri med gzi brjid*, attributed to sTang-chen dmu-tsha gyer-med, rediscovered by sPrul-sku blo-Idan snying-po (born 1360 CE), vol. 2 (Bod-ljongs bod-yig dpe-rnying dpe-skrun khang, Lhasa: 2000).

types: that used to manufacture armor (*go*) and that used for weapons (*mtshon*). This list of metals reflects those predominating in the Tibet of historic times. The origins of these metallurgical traditions are still obscure, but desultory finds of artifacts in the Tibetan antiquities market, as well as that limited amount of art historical and archaeological data available, suggest that most if not all of these elemental metals and alloys were known by the early historic period.

gZi brjid states that the objects made by working metals include parasols (*gdugs*), victory banners (*rgyal-mtshan*), stupas (*mchod-rten*), mandalas (*ma-'dal*), ritual daggers (*phur-pa*), swastikas (*g.yung-drung*), wheels (*'khor-lo*), lotuses (*padma*), jewels (*nor-bu*), ritual thunderbolts (*rdo-rje*),¹¹¹ flat bells (*gshang*), *kho-ma dril-chen* (a type of bell), transverse flutes (*cing*), *cong-chen* (a type of percussion instrument), cymbals (*cag-par*), ritual mirrors (*me-long*), finials (*tog*), roof panels with *khyung* wing decorations (*khyung-gur*), *khyung* heads to decorate the tops of temples (*khyung-mgo*), eaves with bird feather designs (*bya-'dab chu-gzar*), water monster heads for temple roofs (*chu-srin zhal*), endless knots (*pa-tra*), rings (*A-long*), giant clam decorations (*tsi-par = tsi-pir*), butter lamps (*rkong-bu*), and food containers (*bshos-snod*). This enumeration of Bon decorative and ritual objects is unremarkable and recapitulates things produced over the millennium of the systematized Bon religion. Which of these items, if any, were actually produced in the prehistoric epoch (save for ritual mirrors) is debatable. Art historical evidence (particularly that derived from a study of *thog-lcags*, a heterogeneous class of copper alloy artifacts used as talismans and fetishes) suggests that many of the decorative features mentioned were in use in the early historic period. Although this list of Bon objects is supposed to be of those made by beating and forging sheets of metal, the mention of bells and cymbals shows that it includes cast objects as well. The implication of this technological confusion seems to be that the author was not well versed in the traditional Tibetan metal industry.

The *gZi brjid* goes on to describe the three major types of armor: helmets (*zhog-zhun rmog*),¹¹² body armor (*dbub-dbyel khrab*) and magical iron boots (*lcags kyi 'phrul-lham*). The war-like and strongly hierarchical nature of early Tibetan society is touched upon in this treatment of the subject. The text begins with the eight types of helmets (pp. 247, 248):

- 1) *Zhun-dkar ke-ru* (used by kings):¹¹³ It has a wish-fulfilling jewel (*vid-bzhin nor-bu*) finial (*thor-gtsug*) and has no seams (it is made all in one piece). It has a flexible lower section (*sham*).¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ The *rdo-rje*, the symbol par excellence of Vajrayāna Buddhism, seems an unusual inclusion in this list of Bon decorative and ritual objects. It reflects the 14th century CE compiler's predilections and the dominance of Buddhism in Tibet. The author may have intended the *pra-phud*, a Bon ritual object that is sometimes equated with the *rdo-rje*.

¹¹² *Zhog-zhun* appears to be the Zhang-zhung language equivalent of *rmog* (helmet), specifically one made of metal (steel or iron). In the interest of stimulating debate among linguists, I propose that the Zhang-zhung word *zhog* is etymologically related to the word for helmet in one or more Iranian languages: Avestan *xao'a*, Old Persian *xaudā*, Osset *xud*, *xodoe*, Tajik *xoī*, *xod*, and Middle Persian *xōd*. For these Iranian etymologies, see Litvinsky 1998.

¹¹³ The *mNga'ris rgyal rabs* records that the second king of western Tibet, bKra-shis mgon, possessed a royal helmet called *dbu-rmog khrom-thog dkar-ru* (Vitali 1996: 161–163). Vitali translates *dkar-ru* as 'white horns', which is certainly a faulty rendering. *dKar-ru* merely denotes the color white or is a conjunction (*bsdus-yig*) of *zhun-dkar ke-ru/zhog-dkar ke-ru*.

¹¹⁴ This lower section is liable to be a mail neck guard. The one piece *zhun-dkar ke-ru* helmet is envisioned by native Bon scholars as having been egg-shaped, a shape used by Scythian warriors as well. Egg-shaped, cast bronze helmets of the Kuban type were in use among the Scythians of Central Asia and the northern Black Sea region, and they had holes along the base in order that mail could be fastened to them (their origins are disputed, with the Middle East and China variously cited). See Litvinsky 1998, text and figs. 22–31. It has been noted by Tucci (1973: 55, 202 (n. 54)) that *ke-ru*, a term that appears in the Dunhuang Chronicles, refers to the badge of a particular rank of military office. Tucci,

- 2) *Zhog-zhun ke-ru* (used by kings): It is composed of 42 plates that are of two types: *pho-byang* and *mo-byang* (21 of each type). The difference between these male and female plates is not clear in the text. The *pho-byang* appear to have a medial rib.¹¹⁵ This helmet also has a well-anchored golden *khyung* finial, and is used by kings when traveling.
- 3) *Dung-rmog dkar-po* (used by queens): It has 16 *pho-byang* and 16 *mo-byang*. It is whitish in color and resembles a *khyung* egg. It has a bird horn (*bya-ru*) and *khyung* horn (*khyung-ru*) finial, and the outer (lower) part is turquoise in color. It was made in ancient times by female demigods. It was needed by queens so that they could safely watch great battles.
- 4) *rGyal-la yang-mda'* (needed by ministers to monitor battles): It has 12 *pho-byang* and 12 *mo-byang*, and a *bya-ru* and *khyung-ru* finial. It also has a *khyung-dor ke-ru* (type of ornament) and pennants (*dar-'phru*).
- 5) *'Khor-ma skyabs-chen* (used by generals): It has ten *pho-byang* and ten *mo-byang*, and the *bya-ru* and *khyung-ru* finial. It is needed by generals when the regimental banner is held (*dar-so 'dzin*) (in other words; when in battle).
- 6) *Zhog-dkar ke-ru* (used by warriors): It has eight *pho-byang* and eight *mo-byang*, and flexible pennants of the heroic warriors (*dpa'-bo stag gi ldem-'phru*). It is needed when two warriors are engaged in combat.
- 7) *g.Yu-lo theb-rtse* (used by contestants): It has 12 *pho-byang* and 12 *mo-byang*. It is needed when men sport with their military equipment (*stag-shar go rtsed rtse*).
- 8) *Tha-ma lo-'phrom yang-sham can* (used by traders when in foreign countries): It is also needed by commoners (*phal-pa*) when engaged in work.

Next, the *gZi brjid* covers the eight main types of armor thought to have been worn in the time of sTon-pa gshen-rab (pp. 249–253). They are enumerated in the text as follows:

- 1) King (*rgyal-po*): There are five subtypes, the first of which is connected to Indra, the Vedic chief of the gods. The other four subtypes are each associated with a class of elemental spirits as well as one of the divine kings of the cardinal directions. These identifications highlight the great power and divine qualities that are believed to have been encapsulated in Tibetan royal armor:
 - i) *gSer gyi na-na tshem-tshem*: Its laminae are made of gold and have eyes (circular decorations) of turquoise. It was worn by Lha-dbang rgya (= brgya) byin (Indra) and could be used only by a king.

(*ibid.*) repeating the Tibetological opinions of others, states that *ke ke-ru* denotes a type of gemstone such as turquoise, a jade-like stone, or chrysoberyl, and he is of the view that this term is of Sanskrit origin. In the context of ancient Bon helmets, I question whether *ke-ru* can be equated with specific badges and materials. While the two terms are clearly etymologically interrelated, it may possibly be that the primary meaning of *ke-ru* has something to do with the power and majesty of the king's headgear.

¹¹⁵ One of the Khalchayan sculptures of the Central Asian Kushans depicts an egg-shaped helmet made of narrow iron plates. In the sixth and seventh century CE, sphero-conical helmets fabricated from metal plates were in use in Central Asia as well. See Litvinsky 1998.

- ii) *Dung gi so-ba bang mig-ris*: It has conch eyes with turquoise studs. It was discovered in the country of the *dri-za* (class of smell-eating spirits), and belongs to Yul 'khor srung (guardian king of the east).
- iii) *ICags kyi ne-tso khyung-gshog spungs*: The laminae appear to resemble the feathers of parrots and the wings of *khyung*. It was discovered in the country of the *gshin-rje* (postmortem spirits), and belongs to Bon gyi 'phags (guardian king of the south).
- iv) *Zangs kyi shol-mo rma-bya mdog*: This appears to be multi-colored armor with grooved laminae. It has lotus designs with turquoise coronas. It was discovered in the country of the *klu* (water spirits), and belongs to sPyan mi-bzang (guardian king of the west).
- v) *gSer gyi khra-mo 'od kyis mdzes* (beautiful effluent golden stripes): When worn its sun designs fill the world with light. It was discovered in the country of the *gnod-sbyin* (a class of dæmons), and belongs to rNam-thos sras (guardian king of the north).

The other seven main types of armor are:

- 2) Minister (*blon-po*): There are three subtypes mentioned in the text.
- 3) Queen (*btsun-mo*): Two subtypes. This type of armor was created after a *lha* girl and a *lhamin* girl were injured watching a battle between their respective forces.
- 4) Leader of traders (*ded-dbon*): Two subtypes.
- 5) Nobleman (*btsun-po*): Four subtypes.
- 6) Handsome person (*'phyor*): Four subtypes.
- 7) Hero (*dpa'-bo*): Ten subtypes. This type of armor was created by the primordial god Ye-rje smon-pa when the *ye* (virtuous existence) and *ngam* (unvirtuous existence) were in conflict with one another.
- 8) Coward (*sdar-ma*): Two subtypes. Used by commoners.

gZi brjid also describes armored boots, which are said to have had wings (*gar-gshog*) on each side (p. 253). The text observes that through the tempering process (*zhun mthar* (= 'thar)) five classes of steel are made (p. 254). In descending order of quality they are used for: 1) armor, 2) helmets, 3) weapons, 4) implements, and 5) foundations of pillars (*ka-gdan*). According to the text, there are two main classes of swords: *ye* and *ngam* (pp. 254, 255). The *ye* class is divided into three subtypes with Zhang-zhung language names: *ya-tsa* (jewel-shaped point), *skya-gam* (*prig-sha* leaf point) and *shang-lang* (point angled like a stylus). There are three subtypes of swords in the *ngam* class is divided into three subtypes with Tibetan names: *ral-gri* (point shaped like the top of a frog's head, i.e. spatulate), *chu-gri* (pointed on one edge only?)¹¹⁶ and *spu-gri* (light as a bird feather, or light and shaped like a bird feather).¹¹⁷

A description of the various kinds of *yig-tshangs* (insignia) in the time of King Srong-btsan sgampo is found in the well-known Buddhist history (Chos-'byung) *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga'ston*.¹¹⁸ They are graded according to the materials from which they were made: gold, silver, bronze, copper, iron, and turquoise. These same precious substances are part of sundry other

¹¹⁶ *rTse-mo snyung-ma bcad-pa 'dra* /.

¹¹⁷ *sPu-gri yang la bya-sgro 'dra* /.

¹¹⁸ Authored by dPa'-bo gtsug-lag phreng-ba (1504–1566). Beijing: Mi-rigs dpe-skrun khang, 1985, pp. 190, 191. Tibetan Text II-12, p. 586.

ancient traditions including: 1) attributes of deities and adepts, 2) substances used in costumes and ornaments, 3) descriptions of complexions and landscapes, and 4) materials from which ritual objects, armor and weapons were fabricated. In this *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* reference, instead of being conferred on Bon priests, objects of these substances are given to political appointees according to their rank and standing. The relative status of the occupations mentioned in the text has a rigid hierarchical character about it, in keeping with the sharply delineated social categories of a class-bound society.¹¹⁹

The *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* passage begins by announcing the value accorded each of six stones and metals used as *yig-tshangs* (*yig-ge/yig*) (para. i).¹²⁰ These in turn were divided into smaller and larger forms for a total of 12 types of insignia. The *yig-tshangs* of gold and turquoise were reserved for the highest orders of royal councilors. The larger silver *yig-tshangs* were presented to the Buddhist tantric priests, indicating that their social position was inferior to the top ministers (para. ii). Lesser insignia were given to the domestic retinue of King Srong-btsan sgam-po, including one for his hunting guides. Army generals merited smaller insignia than those conferred on the king's personal circle of protectors, but higher than those accorded the King's personal kitchen staff.

In addition to the *yig-tshangs*, King Srong-btsan sgam-po is supposed to have had six emblems (*phyag-rgya*), representing the six vital structures of his all-embracing rule (para. iii). These six emblems (the treasury (?), the ensign, the royal castle, the temple, the tiger-skin robe, and the *yig-tshangs*), pertained to the organs of sovereign power, and each of them symbolized one aspect of the royal dominion (the proclamations, the public, the country, the religion, the warriors, and the noblemen), respectively. Although it is not explicitly stated in the text, the authority vested in the *phyag-rgya* appears to have been assigned to various individuals as recognition of their administrative and fighting capacities. These emblems of King Srong-btsan seem to have been modeled on Tibetan royal traditions with long historical precedents. In any case, Bon ritual and historical texts are unambiguous in attributing symbols of majesty such as ensigns, castles, temples, tiger-skin robes, and special insignia to the prehistoric epoch. A case in point is the tiger-skin robe (*stag-slog*) for heroes and fighters, an unmistakable symbol of bravery and the special warlike proclivities of men. Likewise, the use of tiger-skin clothing by the prehistoric *bon-po* and *gshen-po* priests had martial overtones and reflected a religious culture in which worldly triumph was seen as paramount.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ This type of occupationally crystallized society is typified in a hunting code preserved in the Dunhuang collections. See Richardson 1998, pp. 149–166. According to Róna Tas (1955: 269), the clan community system of ancient Tibet as denoted by the terms *phu-nu* and *pha-spun* (patrilineal systems of community organization) was disintegrating by the early imperial period and being replaced by a 'feudal' system of serfs (*bran*), commoners (*dmangs*) and the aristocracy (*zang-blon*, *blon-po* and *dku-rgyal*). Róna Tas maintains that by the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth century CE, this feudal structure was firmly established (*ibid.*: 270).

¹²⁰ A similar tradition of *yig-tshang* (not mentioned by name) is recorded in the T'ang Annals. The materials of the ornaments used by officers on their ceremonial dress in descending order of importance are given as: *se-se* (a precious stone?), gold, gilded silver, silver, and copper. They are said to hang on strings of various lengths from the shoulders in order to distinguish the rank of the wearer. See Bushell 1880, p. 527 (n. 5).

¹²¹ Conversely, the mark of the coward (*sdar-ma*) is a fox [skin] hat, which was forced upon those of opprobrious conduct. The T'ang Annals state that a Tibetan who proved to be coward in battle was paraded around in public with a fox tail hung on his head, a symbol of great dishonor to which death was preferable (Bushell 1880: 443).

- i) The best *yig-tshangs* were both gold and turquoise. The middling ones were silver and *phra-men*.¹²² The lesser ones were the copper *yig* and iron *yig*. Each of the six had both larger and smaller [versions]; therefore, there were 12. And so the large turquoise *yig* was conferred on the *gung-blon chen-po* (chief minister).¹²³ The small turquoise *yig* [was conferred] on the middle *gung* minister and chief home minister.¹²⁴ The large gold *yig* [was conferred] on the smallest *gung* minister, the middle home minister and the great one who rectifies the bending of the law (chief legislator), these three. The small gold *yig* was [conferred on] the smallest home minister and middle *bka'-blon* (legislator). The *yig-ge* of *phra-men* was conferred on the smallest *bka'-blon*.
- ii) Moreover, the large silver *yig-ge* was given to the teachers of Buddhism, the tantracists of the royal personage (*sku*) and the *dbang-blon* of the upper and lower regions. The small silver *yig* was [conferred on] the *bon-po* caregivers of the royal personage, the chamberlains (*gzims-mal brtsigs-khab*), the [royal hunting] guides (*sa-mkhan*) of the Byang-thang, the sharp-edged [weapon] border guard sentries (*mtha'i so-kha srung-ba*), those protectors who guard the peak of the King's castle (*sku-mkhar gyi rtse-srung*), etc. The *yig-ge* of bell metal [was conferred] on the subjects of the patriarchs of the six clans, and so forth.¹²⁵ The copper *yig* [was conferred] on the *stong-dpon* (commanders of 1000 troops) and *ru-dpon* (regiment commanders), and so forth. The iron *yig* [was conferred] on the battle heroes (*g.yul du dpa'-bo*). It is said that the lowest, the *yig-ge* of firewood collectors (*shing-skya*) and water bearers (*chu-ris*), was conferred on the commoners (*'bangs-phal*) of the country.
- iii) The six emblems (*phyag-rgya*) thus specified were the emblem of the chest (*sgrom-bu*, the treasury?), the sign (*rtags*) of the proclamation (*bka'*); the emblem of the ensign (*ru-mtshon*), the sign of the public (*khrom*); the emblem of the royal castle (*sku-mkhar*), the sign of the country (*yul*); the emblem of the temple (*lha-khang*), the sign of Buddhism; the emblem of the tiger [skin] robe, the sign of the hero; and the emblem of the *yig-tshangs*, the sign of the noble people (*mdzangs*).¹²⁶

¹²² Apparently gilded silver, but perhaps also variegated onyx or agate (Richardson 1998: 15). The Bon-po usually identify *phra-men* as a semi-precious stone that is variegated in color.

¹²³ The *gung-blon* were involved with foreign affairs. According to *mKhas pa'i dga'ston* (p. 191): "The manner of the activities of the *gung* ministers is like that of a husband who deliberates over external affairs" (...*gung blon gyi las thabs khyo dang 'dra bar phyi rgya rlabs kyis gcod*...).

¹²⁴ *Nang-blon*. The *mKhas pa'i dga'ston* states (p. 191): "The home minister does like the noble wife who takes care of the home" (...*nang blon gyis bud med mdzangs ma ltar nang gi chis (= chus) byed l*).

¹²⁵ *Yab-'bangs rus-drug*. This is a reference to the Rus-chen drug/Bod mi'u gdung-drug, the six main clans of the imperial period. They are generally given as Se, rMu, lDong, sTong, dBra, and 'Bru. Also see pp. 350–352.

¹²⁶ In order to highlight the relationship between the royal emblems and signs, I have taken the liberty to translate this paragraph of the text without presenting its syntax in the genitive case.

3 The Elite Cultural Traditions of Zhang-zhung

3.1 Questions Concerning the Existence of the Kingdom and Culture of Zhang-zhung

In this **Section**, I present data derived from Bon texts and the oral tradition of Upper Tibet related to the religious luminaries, royal traditions and clans of Zhang-zhung. These mythic and quasi-historical sources furnish an intriguing albeit sketchy picture of the character of Zhang-zhung. In traditional Tibetan accounts, Zhang-zhung appears in three major guises: as a language, a culture and a political entity. Perhaps most commonly, Zhang-zhung is depicted as a distinctive language and polity that flourished as part of a powerful kingdom on the pre-Buddhist Tibetan Plateau. Many questions surrounding the chronology of the Upper Tibetan archaeological sites and the degree of historicity exhibited by Bon textual sources must be answered before archaic cultural studies can progress further. Yet Zhang-zhung as tantamount to the prehistoric Upper Tibet cultural world has surfaced as an important foundation of Tibetan civilization.

Zhang-zhung, the traditional Upper Tibetan cultural and linguistic province of ancient times, is closely identified with the Bon religion. In Bon literature, Zhang-zhung also appears as a kingdom in which Bon doctrines first spread after their revelation in the semi-mythical lands of 'Ol-mo lung-ring and sTag-gzig.¹²⁷ From Zhang-zhung the Bon doctrines are held to have been transmitted to adjoining countries such as Tibet and India. According to the Bon tradition, it was in Zhang-zhung that the system of monastic discipline ('dul-ba), tantra (spyi-spungs, dbal) and rDzogs-chen (a system of mind training) among other pillars of the religion were propagated.¹²⁸ The identity of Zhang-zhung is therefore primarily cast in religious terms, to be preserved in both mythic and quasi-historical idioms. Most Bon references to Zhang-zhung are devotional in nature and difficult to corroborate in a historical sense. Accounts of its language, kings and sites are also known but these are not particularly fecund and are mostly secondary to a particular religious discourse. There are no Zhang-zhung chronicles that provide details about the lives of the kings and ministers, nor is there any nucleated information regarding its polity, culture, environment, and historical developments in Bon literature. What has survived in written form is widely dispersed and has been shorn of specific chronological contexts.¹²⁹

The extensive archaeological record of Upper Tibet that has come to light in recent years, however, has allowed for a re-evaluation of Bon lore concerning Zhang-zhung, as there are remarkable correspondences that cannot be ignored. Chief among these is the sheer richness of Upper Tibetan archaeological assets, which verify that this region was indeed at the pinnacle of its power in the prehistoric epoch. The many residential centers that must have been partially or entirely dedicated

¹²⁷ According to the biography of Gyer-mi nyi-'od (12th century CE), lDe-bon gyim-tsha, s'ya-bon li-shu stag-ring and sTang dmu-tsha loaded 122 birds, including vultures and cranes, with Bon tantric texts and came to Zhang-zhung from sTag-gzig. These teachings were widely diffused and meditation centers were likewise established in many places by these three Bon-po. See Karmay 1972, pp. 21, 22, fol. 126a.

¹²⁸ The propagation of the various religious traditions of Bon in Zhang-zhung and Tibet are studied in Karmay 1972.

¹²⁹ As the literary documentation of Zhang-zhung has been reduced to a rather small body of myths and legends (linguistic evidence notwithstanding), the study of Zhang-zhung through Bon literature has been largely ignored by western scholars. While citations of Zhang-zhung in the Dunhuang manuscripts have stimulated much interest, references to Bon texts have often been tangential to the study of religious affairs and the political doings of imperial Tibet.

to religious practice and the elaborate necropoli found throughout Upper Tibet reflect spiritual traditions of considerable complexity. This sophisticated monumental infrastructure must have been commensurate with substantial refinement in the ideational and cognitive spheres. Moreover, it has been confirmed that the main centers of Zhang-zhung, as described in Bon literature, were indeed geographic hubs of sedentary cultural activity in ancient times (Bellezza: in press). The rock art tableaux with their therianthrope motifs, depictions of figures with horned or feathered headdresses, and many types of Bon style *mchod-rten* and other shrines, seem to corroborate various Bon literary accounts as well.

3.2 The Zhang-zhung Religious Masters

In this subsection, I shall furnish the names of a few Bon saints who are said to have practiced in the territory of Zhang-zhung. A number of other Zhang-zhung masters are cited in other sections of Part II and Part III of this work. Other figures reputedly from Zhang-zhung are found throughout Bon literature as the practitioners and transmitters of sundry utilitarian ritual, tantric and rDzogs-chen traditions. The names of these Zhang-zhung personalities are connected to Bon religious traditions with little or no recourse to a regimen of historical justification (save for lists of personal names supposed to have appeared as successive lineage holders). Biographical details are often sketchy and geographic documentation is limited. While a compilation of these names would be useful for specialized onomastic studies, they are in themselves of little utility in establishing the nature of prehistoric and imperial religious and cultural traditions in Upper Tibet. For this reason, I limit my coverage of the reputed adepts of Zhang-zhung to just a few examples that occur in conjunction with specific place names and lineages.

I begin with a translation of a passage from the 19th century CE Bon pilgrimage registry entitled *Ti se'i dkar chag*, which reveals how Buddhism came to requisition sites in western Tibet.¹³⁰ These locations are all in the Ti-se region and are believed to have been under the jurisdiction of the Bon religion in pre-Buddhist Zhang-zhung. The text encourages critical study of Buddhist sacred geographic assertions, purporting that they systematically overlay legitimate Bon territorial claims. This illustrates a fundamental matter: the Bon contention that their tradition pre-existed Buddhism as the indigenous or autochthonous religion of Upper Tibet. Whatever the precise composition of the archaic religion in the region, the archaeological evidence is unequivocal in that the environs of Ti-se were indeed an extremely important cultural center before the rise of the modern Lamaist religions. As symbolic recognition of this basic fact, *Ti se'i dkar chag* asserts that those places blessed by the Buddha actually belong to gShen-rab. In the same way, it is alleged that the Buddhists have used the well-known figure from Tibetan opera (*lha-mo*), Nor-bzang, to subvert the identity of the royal sites of Zhang-zhung. This purported deceit extends to the residences of Dran-pa nam-mkha' (the final eponymous figure of the eighth century CE) and dByil-ston khyung-rgod (11th century CE), which were annexed by the famous Buddhist saints Gu-ru padma and rGod-tshang-pa, respectively. Finally, we are told that the sites associated with Na-ro bon-chung, an apocryphal figure as far as the Bon-po are concerned, are nothing more than those occupied by a celebrated Buddhist ascetic:

¹³⁰ See 'Dzam gling gangas rgyal ti se'i dkar chag tshangs dbyangs yid phrog, by dKar-ru grub-dbang bstan-'dzin rin-chen (born 1801 CE) (*Zhang zhung rig gnas*, pp. 1–39, mNga'-ris: Bod-ljongs mnga'-ris sa-khul sman-rtsis khang), p. 35. Tibetan Text II-13, pp. 586, 587.

Moreover, according to the explanation of the [religious] transformers, in which it is said that all the holy places (*gnas*) are dGra-bcom shākya thub's (Buddha's), these were actually sanctified with the blessings of rGyal-ba gshen-rab, so by your knowledge thoroughly investigate and examine such [places] as [is written] above. All said to be the palaces of Prince Nor-bzang are the royal heritage (*rgyal-rabs*) of Zhang-zhung,¹³¹ so investigate such [places] as above.¹³² All said to be the holy places of Gu-ru pad-'byung are the holy places of Dran-pa nam-mkha' and his 80 knowledge-holders. All said to be the holy places of rGod-tshang-pa are dByil-ston khyung-rgod's. All said to be Na-ro bon-chung's are [the places] of Mi-la ras-pa's disciple Ras-chung rdor-grags. By your knowledge thoroughly investigate and examine such [places] as above.

The same edition of the *Ti se'i dkar chag* details the occupation of specific sites at Mount Ti-se by Bon masters thought to have lived after the tenth century CE.¹³³ It, however, makes no mention of the older residential centers found all around the mountain. Surely if the author dKar-ru grub-dbang, a keen advocate of Zhang-zhung, had been aware of their significance, he would have noted them in his pilgrimage registry. His ignorance of many of these archaeological sites is underscored by the author's referral to a place called Bya-skyibs (Bird Shelter), a term that appears to be used in the Buddhist *Ti se'i gnas bshad* to downplay the sophisticated ancient architectural tradition of all-stone corbelled edifices that sprang up at Ti-se (Bellezza 2002a: 68). This can only indicate that by the 19th century CE most traditions related to early patterns of residency had already been forgotten. Neither the Bon nor the Buddhist pilgrimage guides for Gangs rin-po-che give the archaic temples and fortresses I have documented at Ti-se even a passing mention. *Ti se'i dkar chag* lists some of the Bon religious sites at Ti-se as follows:

On the lower reaches of the front (south side) of Gangs-ri chen-po (Great Snow Mountain), at that which is called mChod-rten khong-seng can,¹³⁴ there are the reliquary *mchod-rten* and carved rocks (*rdo-'bum*) of Gu-ge blo-ldan, Pu-rang kun-dga' bDe-ba ring-mo,¹³⁵ Gu-ru rnon-rtse, and others. On the west side of dGra-bcom bzhugs-khri (Throne of Repose of the Buddha) is the cave of religious practice (*sgrub-phug*) of Dam-pa 'bum-rje. On Bya-skyibs brag (Bird Shelter Rock Formation) is the *sgrub-phug* of Gu-ru rnon-rtse, Dam-pa 'bum-rje and sPa-ston bstan-rgyal bzang-po, these three.

The early historic period Bon tenure at Ti-se is recognized in another Bon pilgrimage registry, which furnishes the names of a few masters believed to have been active in this period.¹³⁶ Rather

¹³¹ There is a ruined citadel of considerable antiquity located in Pu-rang on the left bank of the rMa-bya gtsang-po, which in the oral tradition is attributed to Prince Nor-bzang. It is situated in a Chinese military area and could not be surveyed to date.

¹³² This exhortation to investigate the facts concludes each of the historical assertions that follows in the paragraph. For the sake of brevity, I have left out two subsequent occurrences in the translation.

¹³³ See *'Dzam gling gangts rgyal ti se'i dkar chag*, by dKar-ru grub-dbang bstan-'dzin rin-chen (born 1801 CE) (*Zhang zhung rig gnas*, pp. 1–39), p. 35.

¹³⁴ This is the site now known by local Buddhists as mChod-rten gong-bzang, a roughly homophonous place name. For a description of this ancient settlement, see Bellezza 2002a, p. 78.

¹³⁵ Gu-ge shes-rab blo-ldan, Pu-hrang kun-dga' ring-mo and rTsi bde-ba ring-mo were members of the sTod-lugs kyi bla-ma drug lineage of the Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud. For their hagiographies, see Reynolds 2005, pp. 158–160.

¹³⁶ *Gangs ri mtsho gsum gyi kar* (= *dkar*) *chags*, by Ka-dam ye-shes rgyal-mtshan (14th century CE) (in *mDzod phug rtsa ba dang spyi don dang gangts ti se'i dkar chag*, nos. 445–489, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre: Dolanji, 1973), no. 479.

than the creation of buildings and administrative facilities, these saints are merely credited with leaving magical footprints behind in the rock. As is often the case in Bon quasi-historical sources, the mythic takes precedence over the mundane activities of life in this text. While this may quicken the religious sentiments of devotees, it does little to establish a verifiable historical record:

On the southwest side of Ti-se gangs, at Rig-'dzin gsang phug (Secret Cave of the Knowledge-Holders), Li-shu stags-rings, Bla-chen dran-pa nam-mkha' and mKha'-'gro co-za bon-mo did the main performance of Ma-rgyud. As a sign of their practice there was a stable footprint (*zhabs-rjes*) at this place.

Litanies of the names of saints said to have propagated prehistoric religious traditions in Zhang-zhung and Bod are not uncommon in Bon literature. To illustrate this point, I provide one such account of those believed to have spread Bon teachings throughout Upper Tibet.¹³⁷ Certainly the names of the personalities and places mentioned in this text are part of an ancient onomasticon but any attempt at historical validation is well outside our current bounds:

Then both Srid-pa'i bon-po and sTag-wer lig-wer did the performance of the sign of the unchanging swastika¹³⁸ at the secret cave of sTag-rgod shel (Crystal Wild Tiger). Then the 23 scholars of Zhang-zhung practiced at the grove of Bye-ma mi-'gyur g.yung-drung (Swastika Unchanging Sands).¹³⁹ Then gSang-ba rab-'byams, Mangag kun-'dus kyi rgyal-po, mKhas-pa thig-chen, and Kun-rig gi rgyal-po, these four, practiced on the face of Brag-rtse mthong. Then both Zhang-zhung kun-rig rgyal-po and g.Yung-drung snying-po practiced on the neck (upper flanks) of the majority of grassy meadows. Then Khu-mang chos-rje, Lha-lod mar-bzhed zlamtshan, Mang-sgra legs-po, and Shu-ge dpal gyi g.yung-drung, these four, practiced at Sram gyi bye'u gling and Shel,¹⁴⁰ and at the Zang-zang-mo rock formation of Mur-brag mkhan-kha.¹⁴¹ Then mKhun-btsun srid-pa'i rgyal-po mastered [the teachings] and practiced them at the rock formation of g.Yung-drung yang-yang rtse.

¹³⁷ *bDud rtsi A ma ra ya las / pham bum dgu pa'i gzhung** in the *bDud rtsi A ma ra ya*, the main volume for *smān-sgrub* rituals (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 237), nos. 97, ln. 3 to 98, ln. 2. Tibetan Text II-14, p. 587. According to the colophon, this secret nectar practice was successively transmitted from the Yum-sras gshen-gsum (*gshen*: 'Phrul-gshen snang-ldan; mother: bZang-za ring-btsun; son: 'Chi-med gtsug-phud) until the decline (*dar-nub*) of Bon (during the reign of King Khri-srong lde-btsan). It was hidden in the rock formation with the celestial staircase. It was later discovered by Khu-'dzu srid-pa'i rgyal-po. It was then bestowed on Shakya dpal, and then mastered by gShen dam-pa rgyal-tshab chen-po. From him it has been successively transmitted [to the present day].

* Contains a *smān-sgrub* ritual whereby medicinal ingredients are compounded and consecrated in a tantric rite to make a nectar, which is useful in the prevention and treatment of disease, and as a general blessing.

¹³⁸ *g.Yung-drung mi-'gyur rtags*. The various observances and practices of the Bon religion.

¹³⁹ A famous location on the headwaters of the rTa-mchog gtsang-po (Brahmaputra). There are the ruins of an archaic residential site at this location (B-18) said by local residents to have been an ancient Bon monastery (Bellezza 1993).

¹⁴⁰ These are two locations in Dol-po.

¹⁴¹ This is the celebrated location where both Bon and gNying-ma scriptural treasures have been discovered. It is situated approximately 25 km west of the town of Zang-zang (now commonly spelled bZang-bzang). According to *Legs mdzod bshad*, 29 'du-gnas (early Bon religious centers) were developed, including one at Zang-zang lha-rtse (Karmay 1972: 38, fol. 134b), the formation referred to here. My survey of this site did not turn up any ruins that predate the rNying-ma facilities located there, but surely the caves found at Zang-zang lha-brag have a long history of human occupation.

In Bon literature, it is quite commonplace to find descriptions of the lineages of saints, which are believed to be the conduits transmitting a ritual practice or textual cycle over the generations to its rediscovery by treasure finders (*gter-ston*). One excellent example is the history of the main Ge-khod lineage, which is tucked away in one of the many texts of the Ge-khod cycle.¹⁴² As with the litanies of Zhang-zhung masters, these religious lineages were written down many centuries after the period in which they are believed to have begun; consequently it is nigh impossible to assess their historical validity. While some of them may have been modified to give religious and historical legitimacy to certain textual traditions, others may well have begun as oral traditions that survived the great cultural leap from the imperial period to the post-tenth century CE codification of the Bon doctrines.

The deities and practices of the Ge-khod cycle are considered to be a Zhang-zhung religious tradition par excellence. The Ge-khod gods, which are peculiar to Bon, are all localized in western Tibet, particularly at Ti-se and Ru-thog Ge-khod gnyan-lung. In Section 6 of this part of the work, we will examine the Ge-khod gods more closely in order to ascertain the verity of allegations regarding their prehistoric origins. At the moment, it will suffice to state that despite the heavy tantricization of this unique Bon ritual cycle, archaic cultural elements are clearly discernable as well. The Ge-khod lineage presented in the text under review (redacted in the 15th century CE), extends back to the prehistoric epoch, reflecting the antiquity of the basal elements of the Ge-khod cycle.

The history of Ge-khod begins with Khri-ldem of Zhang-zhung (para. i), who appears as a royal figure in other Bon sources.¹⁴³ In this account he is limned as an archetypal priest, congruent with his divine status. Khri-ldem is a manifestation of the mGon-po rnam-gsum, the three main gods of the Ge-khod cycle: dBal-chen ge-khod, A-ti mu-wer and Ku-byi mang-ke. From him the lineage passed through seven individuals before it reached Dran-pa nam-mkha'. By the succession reckoned in this text, the Ge-khod tradition could not much predate the fifth or sixth century CE (the Bon-po generally believe it to be much older than this). During the persecution of Bon by King Khri-srong lde-btsan in the late eighth century CE, Dran-pa nam-kha' and several of his associates are supposed to have hidden the Ge-khod texts at Mount Yar-lha sham-po in Lho-kha and at another locale (para. ii). About three centuries later, these textual treasures are said to have been revealed by the well-known Bon *gter-ston* rMa-ston shel-seng (11th century CE) and dByil-ston khyung-rgod rtsal (born 1175 CE). From the time of their rediscovery until the present, the Ge-khod cycle has formed an integral part of the Bon religion, and has been augmented by the writings of more recent religious luminaries:

¹⁴² *dBal chen ge khod kyi dbang khrid byin rlabs sprin dpung zhes bya bzhugs sō*, compiled by mNga'-ris bsod-nams rgyal-mtshan (15th century CE)* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 1441–1494), nos. 1442, ln. 5 to 1444, ln. 2. Tibetan Text II-15, p. 587. A shorter version of the Ge-khod lineage is found in *Legs bshad mdzod*. bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan must have derived his account from the same Ge-khod text. See Karmay 1972, p. 50, fol. 144a, 144b. Also, see *gSang drag tshogs bskangs (= bskang) yod* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 287–292), nos. 288, ln. 6 to 289, ln. 2.

* One of the two chief disciples of Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan, who founded bKra-shis sman-ri monastery, in 1405 CE (Karmay 1972: 140–145).

¹⁴³ The *Ti se'i dkar chag* mentions King sTag-sna gzi-brjid, holder of the *khri-ldem* iron horns of the bird, and a great patron of the Zhang-zhung Bon religious community. This king was based at the castle known as sTag-sna dbal-rdzong, in the middle of the city of sTag-sna gling, which is now known as the valley of sTag-sna rong (in the erstwhile Groshod district of 'Brong-pa county). According to the *Ti se'i dkar chag*, in Zhang-zhung times, this locale was part of the Tsi-ṅa region. See Bellezza 2002a, pp. 57 (n. 3), 59. According to Lopön Tenzin Namdak's bsTan-'byung (Bon religious history), Khri-ldem lcags kyi bya-ru can and King Mu-wer stag-sna (from the same period as the Tibetan king gNya'-khri) were part of the latter royal lineage of Zhang-zhung (Bellezza: in press).

- i) Zhang-zhung Khri-ldem, holder of the iron bird horns, the manifestation of the Three Protectors, practiced it. He protected the Zhang-zhung kings. He bestowed this [Ge-khod] doctrine on Khri 'od-gsal. He transmitted it to Zhang-zhung gsang-ba gting-rum. He transmitted it to Sad-ne ga'u. He transmitted it to rGyung-ne khod-spungs. He transmitted it to Hris-pa gyer-med. He transmitted it to Tso-men gyer-chen. He transmitted it to This-dmar spungs-rgyung. He transmitted it to Khod-spungs dran-pa nam-mkha'.
- ii) At that time due to the power of poor karma of sentient beings and the jealousy of the Buddhist monks around dBus-gtsang (Central Tibet), the doctrine of Bon declined. sTong-chen dmu-tsha gyer-med, Blon-chen ra-sangs khod-ram, Khye'u dran-pa nam-mkha', and Bla-chen khe-nan yo-phya hid as treasures these [Bon] texts and others at Yar-lha sham-po and Zhal-bzang. Thereafter, through the good karma of sentient beings and the effect of prayers of good aspirations made earlier, the great reincarnation (*sprul-sku*) rMa-ston shel-seng and dByil-ston khyung-rgod rtsal, these two, rediscovered the Bon doctrines in the upper and lower countries.

3.3 The Zhang-zhung Royal Traditions

According to Bon historical conceptions, the kingdom of Zhang-zhung flourished long before the rise of the Central Tibetan kingdom (sPu-rgyal bod). Zhang-zhung is generally said to have had its own language and culture as part of a separate country.¹⁴⁴ As we have seen in Part I, the archaic monumental assemblage of Upper Tibet is, in fact, highly distinctive, demonstrating the existence of a unique paleocultural region (and probably political entity) in the prehistoric epoch. It has also been established that the geographic distribution of the sui generis ceremonial monuments and all-stone residential centers closely corresponds with the territorial demarcation of Zhang-zhung as provided in Bon sources (Bellezza: in press). Moreover, the kinds of physical environments favored by Zhang-zhung religious masters in the texts are confirmed by the ancient patterns of residential distribution in the Tibetan uplands. As for the erstwhile greatness of Zhang-zhung, the network of citadels and necropoli in Upper Tibet suggests a land of proud inhabitants whose sedentary culture had reached its zenith before the Buddhist era. Bon literature has preserved legendary and quasi-historical sketches of these seminal qualities of civilization in Upper Tibet but affords us little detail on the nature of its polity and people. Hence, our quest to know about the world in which the protagonists of the texts lived is only imperfectly realized.

Probably the two best-known sources for the royal traditions of Zhang-zhung are *Ti se'i dkar chag*, by dKar-ru grub-dbang bstan-'dzin rin-chen, and Lopön Tenzin Namdak's *g. Yung drung bon gyi bstan pa'i byung khungs nyung bsdus* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 270, nos. 553–670). These sources provide the names of the chief Zhang-zhung kings and those of their fortified headquarters. Unlike the historical annals devoted to the Tibetan sPu-rgyal kings of Central Tibet, detailed lore about the lineages, activities and cultural environment of the Zhang-zhung potentates has not survived. Clearly, the great paleoculture of Upper Tibet must have once had extensive political and historical traditions but only a few remnants endure in the works of individuals like dKar-ru grub-dbang and Lopön Tenzin Namdak, and their parent sources. The defeat of Zhang-zhung as a sovereign power in the early imperial period is liable to have initiated a process of the diminution of its royal traditions. Perhaps, then, the history of Zhang-zhung (preserved as an oral

¹⁴⁴ An excellent introduction to the Zhang-zhung culture and language derived primarily from ritual and philosophical sources is found in Dagkar 2003, pp. 10–41.

tradition) was so eroded by the time the Bon historiographic tradition arose in the 11th and 12th centuries CE that there was little left to record. In the 11th century CE, with the establishment of a number of important Bon centers in central Tibet (particularly gTsang), this region emerged as the chief religious hub of the Bon-po. The eclipse of Upper Tibet by regions to the south and east may also have had a profound effect on the scope of the Bon historiographic tradition. Be that as it may, the extant Bon political histories were composed with a central Tibetan geographic and cultural bias. As we shall further see in subsection 4.4, these chronicles largely draw their inspiration from the Yar-lung dynastic lineage and the political intrigues of its members.

The ancient kings of Zhang-zhung and their royal priests are thought to have conducted their religious practices in the temples known as *gsas-mkhar/gsas-khang*. The worship of the tutelary god *Ge-khod* (also a class of deities) in one such temple is described in a text from the *Ge-khod* cycle.¹⁴⁵ This circa 16th-century CE account is mythic in nature but it does succinctly depict a type of religious ritual that is thought to have persisted since ancient times. The site of this ritual is an unspecified *gsas-khang* in the heart of the Zhang-zhung *khri-sde* (literally: 'division of ten thousand'; administrative units) (para. i). This phrasing of the location, as does the king (*Khri-wer*)¹⁴⁶ who participates with *gShen-rab* in the propitiation of *Ge-khod* (literally: 'Demon Destroyer', in the language of Zhang-zhung), alludes to Mount *Ti-se*, the site of a number of ruined *gsas-khang*. In the ritual performed for the satisfaction of *Ge-khod*, we find the essentials of the Bon offering regimen. The ritual includes edible sculptures (*gtor-ma*), cakes (*tshogs*), the three white foods (*dkar-gsum*: milk, yogurt and butter), the three sweets (*mngar-gsum*: honey, rock sugar and jaggery), meats (*mang-thun sha*), libations (*skyem*), blood offerings (*ting-mur*), a golden tree (*gser lo-l on*; juniper), nectar (*bdud-rtsi*), medicines (*sman*), and incense (*spos*).

The text now moves to the making of the ritual in the present time and offers *Ge-khod* all the offerings specified above, just as was done in ancient times (para. ii). *Ge-khod* is then beseeched to carry out every wish of the ritualists in accordance with his oath. Once the offerings are made and the requests given, the text returns to an affirmation concerning ancient times, and the *Ge-khod* lineage held by *gShen-rab* and King *Khri-wer* (para. iii). Two other Zhang-zhung royal personages are also noted: King *Khri-men/Khri-man* and King *sTag-sna*. They are said to have practiced at a *gsas-khang* known as *gTing-brag bdud-'dul*, located at *Ge-khod gnyan-lung*, the holy mountain of *u-thog* (see p. 354, fn. 443):

- i) bS'o! In the first epoch, in early times, at the secret cave palace *gsas-khang* in the very middle of the Zhang-zhung *khri-sde*, *sTon-pa gshen-rab mi-bo* and the Zhang-zhung King of existence *Khri-wer* conducted the following ritual: In a jeweled blazing *gtor-ma* tray a snow mountain (i.e., a very large amount) of excellent food and beverage offerings, grains, *gtor ma*, *tshogs*, *dkar-gsum*, *mngar-gsum* are amassed. Having a mountain of meats heaped on top of one another, libations and *ting-mur*¹⁴⁷ like an impounded eddying lake, a golden

¹⁴⁵ See *gSang drag tshogs bskangs* (bskang) yod by *gShen gyi drang-srong* (dge-slong) *tshul-khrims rgyal-mtshan* (the sixth abbot of *sMan-ri*) in *Ge khod sgrub skor* (new collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 287–292), nos. 287, ln. 1 to 288, ln. 2. *Tibetan Text II-16*, pp. 587, 588.

¹⁴⁶ This is *Khri-wer la-rje gu-lang*, holder of the golden horns of the bird headdress, one of three kings recorded in the *Ti-se'i dkar chag* as residing at the citadel of *rGyang-ri g.yu-lo ljon-pa'i rdzong-dkar*. This location is now known as *rGyang-grags*, the site of a famous 'Bri-gung *bka'-brgyud* monastery, which is situated in the inner circuit (*nang-skor*) of *Ti-se*. *rGyang-ri g.yu-lo ljon* is supposed to have been the first capital of Zhang-zhung. Many ruined *rdo-khang* are found in the vicinity. See Bellezza 2002a, pp. 62, 63; in press.

¹⁴⁷ In systematized Bon, red liquid offerings are of two general types: 1) reconstituted dried animal blood compounded with various medicinal ingredients (*rakta*), and 2) medicinal ingredients mixed in tea or an infusion of 'bri-mog (an

tree, transformed nectar, medicines, and incense smoke swirling like clouds, we fulfill the fully perfected Root (Ge-khod) and his assembly of *lha*, the circle of pure Zhang-zhung *lha*, protectors of sGo, Phug and Bar (the three geographic divisions of Zhang-zhung), whose minds are rigidly bound by an oath, according [to this ritual].

- ii) Now, at this excellent place we fulfill you, so carry out the activities with which you are entrusted without distraction. Bestow the capability of the attainment of great empowerments and blessings.
- iii) These *gshen* (gShen-rab and King Khri-wer) were the *gshen* lineage holders of the mind tutelary deity [Ge-khod]. Khri-men, holder of the iron horns of the bird, and the Zhang-zhung King sTag-sna at gTing-brag bdud-'dul *gsas-khang* [were also lineage holders of Ge-khod].¹⁴⁸

An extensive (but certainly not exhaustive) search of Bon literature by my colleagues and I over several years, has turned up little material on the statecraft of Zhang-zhung. The most extensive quasi-historical narrative found to date has been discovered in a text describing the construction of a tabernacle (*lha-rten*) for the Ge-khod deities. This text relates that the main element (*rta*) of the *lha-rten* is an axis and its casing (a tiered platform), upon which many extensions and embellishments are made. Each tier along with the top part of the structure represents a different element, beginning with space at the base and proceeding upwards to the air, fire, water, and earth levels. The general form of the *lha-rten* is reminiscent of the tiered ceremonial structures widely depicted in the rock art of Upper Tibet. A brief description of the *lha-rten* for the native divinities is given as follows:¹⁴⁹

On behalf of the worship of the armies of the *lha*, the upper section is a three-sided *zang-yag* (very pointed) *dbal* castle. The middle section is square and one span (*'dom*) in length. On it are put the figures of the four continents of existence. The elements are drawn in the manner of graduated tiers on the square and circular base.

herb that imparts a red color; also used in the decoration of *gtor-ma*).

¹⁴⁸ This is followed by the same type of ritual as that in paras. i and ii. Other lineage holders noted in the text are described as follows (nos. 288, ln. 6 to 289, ln. 2): “The [other] accomplished *gshen* wisdom-holder members of this lineage at the secret *gsas-khang* of bDud-'dul were Khri 'od-gsas, gSang-ba gting-rum, Sad-ne ga'u, rGyung-ne khod-spungs, Hri-pa gyer-med, Dzo-men gyer-chen, This-dmar spungs-rgyung, and Dran-pa nam-mkha'.”

¹⁴⁹ *Ge khod lha la rten mkhar gzugs pa zhes bya ba bzhugs pa legs swō* attributed to sTon-pa gshen-rab in *Ge khod sgrub skor* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-bri*, vol. 242, nos. 357–461), no. 392, lns. 2–4. The text contains a passage summarizing the worth of the *lha-rten* to the Zhang-zhung kingdom of prehistoric times (nos. 385, ln. 4 to 386, ln. 1): “The many numbers and great power of the Zhang-zhung *lha* first originated then. The erected support (*rten*) that protects humans also originated then. In Zhang-zhung sGo, Phug and Bar, these three, the protection of the doctrine of Zhang-zhung Bon also began then. The very great value (*gnyan*) of the fundamental teachings (*bka'-gzhung*) of the excellent *gshen* also began then. In Zhang-zhung sGo, Phug and Bar, the very great value of the fundamental teachings and the erection of the *rten-mkhar* also began then. This primary explication is the chapter of [King] Khri-man, holder of the iron horns, who erected the support for the Zhang-zhung *lha* and their circles, and as a result, Khri-bzhur 'od-ldem, who had been abducted by sTag-gzigs khri-to rgyal-ba, was freed by the army of *lha*” (*zhang zhung lha mang la mthu che ba yang / dang po de nas srid pa la sogs (= lags so) / lha la rten btsug pas mi mgon byed pa yang / de nas srid pa lags so / zhang zhung sgo phug bar du / zhang zhung bon gyi bstan pa skyongs ba yang de nas srid pa lags so / gshen rab bka' gzhung gnyan pa yang de nas srid pa lags so / zhang zhung sgo phug bar du / bka' gzhung gnyan pa dang / lha rten mkhar btsug pa yang de nas srid pa lags so / khri man lcags kyis (= kyī) bya ru can gyis / zhang zhung lha 'khor la rten brtsug (= btsug) ste / stag gzigs khri to rgyal bas / khri bzhur 'od ldem khyer ba / lha dmag gis ston (= bton) pa 'i le'u ste / dbu 'chad dang po'o l).*

This is for the *lha-srin* of visible existence to dwell around the four kinds of levels. Its name is *lha-rten srid-pa'i mkhar* (castle of existence *lha* receptacle).¹⁵⁰

The grand history of the tabernacle or shrine for the Ge-khod gods is provided at the beginning of the *lha-rten* text.¹⁵¹ This shrine is also known as a *rten-mkhar*, and its account is divided into five parts (para. i). The text is attributed to the Bon founder gShen-rab, thus it belongs to the corpus of canonical literature (*bka'*) (para. ii). The auspices of the text are said to extend to the main classes of *lha* of Zhang-zhung, Central Tibet and Eastern Tibet, a geographic inclusion that supports the composition of the text in its present form after the tenth century CE. The *lha* of these three main countries of the Tibetan Plateau come in groups of 360, which may be related to the days of the solar year. The text is said to have been written at Ting-brag chen-po on the mountain of Ru-thog. This is a reference to Ge-khod gnyan-lung, the chief holy mountain of Ru-thog, located within sight of the great citadel of rDzong-ri (A-17), in Ru-thog proper. The authoring of the *lha-rten* text on the peak of Ru-thog may well be a reference to the once-important agricultural center of Ge-khod mkhar-lung (A-89). The mighty all-stone citadel there, which appears to be no less than 2000 years old (see pp. 36, 37), is in close proximity to Ge-khod gnyan-lung (the subterranean chambers of its temple face north towards the holy mountain). It is from such a nucleus of early cultural and political life that archaic traditions associated with Ge-khod may have originated and been propagated. The text then assigns its own doctrinal placement and function. It is classified as a sNang-gshen teaching, the second of the nine vehicles or systems (*theg-pa*) of Bon teachings. This is another indication that in its present configuration the *lha-rten* tradition was devised in a post-tenth century CE religious environment. While this does not necessarily distract from the antiquity of tabernacles or the Ge-khod divinities, it does suggest that they underwent a not insubstantial process of doctrinal transformation with their incorporation into the systematized Bon religious superstructure.

The *lha-rten* text does not mince its words: the Ge-khod shrines were erected for the express purpose of increasing the political and military power of Zhang-zhung (para. iii). The text was also composed so that the inhabitants of Zhang-zhung would know how to properly propitiate the gods, thereby avoiding their wrath. In short, the deities and religious practices of Zhang-zhung were designed for practical ends. In the course of erecting shrines for the Ge-khod gods, King Khri-men of Zhang-zhung was able to defeat his rival the king of sTag-gzig. This appears to be reference to a military conflict involving western Tibet and territories to the north and/or west. In addition to the *bon-po* having been active in sTag-gzig, according to Tibetan sources, the

¹⁵⁰ For a detailed description of the *lha-rten*, see *Ge khod lha la rten mkhar gzugs pa*, pp. nos. 361, ln. 2 to 367, ln. 6. Like the well-known Bon ritual device *mkha'-klong gsang-mdos* (also a four-tiered structure), the *lha-rten* is conceived of as a model of the entire universe: The very heart of this tabernacle is a wooden axis preferably made of birch (juniper and other substitutes are also permissible) called *rta/gta'*. It is four cubits in length. The round base (*rtsa-ba zlum-po*) is decorated with the colors of the five elements. The four-sided middle section (*rked-pa gru-bzhi*) is decorated with images of Ri-rab lhun-po, wild ungulates, people, and yaks. The three-sided top section (*rtse-mo zur-gsum*) has likenesses of the world tree (*dpag-bsam shing*), a *khyung*, and the firmament with the planets, stars, the sun and moon, rainbows, clouds, metallic thunderbolts (*thog*), and hail. Inside the four tiers of the *lha-rten*, beside the axis, are various receptacles (*rten*) for the Ge-khod deities and elemental spirits, among which are a spindle, draped arrow, grain sculptures of various kinds (some in the shape of humans and animals), jewels, the model of a castle, stones of the *lha* and *gsas* (another class of deities), and a number of thread-crosses (*nam-mkha'*). Each of the four tiers of the tabernacle is the residence of different gods. From top to bottom the tiers are inhabited by: 1) the Ge-khod *lha* of the body, speech and mind; 2) the outer and inner circles of the Ge-khod *lha*; 3) the *lha* of Tibet, the protectors (*srung-ma*) of Zhang-zhung, and the *lha* of mDo-gam smad (lower Tibet); and 4) the *g.yen-dgu* and *sde-brgyad* (two major classes of elemental spirits). On the exterior of the *lha-rten* numerous thread-crosses and types of wood are placed.

¹⁵¹ See nos. 358, ln. 1 to 361, ln. 1. The first three lines of the text are written in an esoteric alphabet likened to a Zhang-zhung script. Tibetan Text II-17, p. 588. They are not included in the translation or transliteration.

folklore of Ru-thog maintains that in ancient times this region was invaded by the Hor of Eastern Turkestan. The Ru-thog of the prehistoric epoch, with its ample agricultural resources and many temples and fortresses, is indeed likely to have elicited the interest of any number of Inner Asian invaders. The highly developed nature of archaic civilization in western Tibet may have given rise to the legendary account of conflict we have before us in the *lha-rten* text. While it may not be based on an actual historical episode, the military conflict it describes could be predicated on political realities that once weighed heavily on western Tibet, especially Ru-thog, the district most accessible to adjoining Indo-Iranic and Turkic territories. As we have seen in Part I, the rock art and pillar monuments of Ru-thog in particular reverberate with ethnohistorical and acculturative processes emanating from north Inner Asia.

As with the main Ge-khod lineage, the *lha-rten* practice passed through a line of eminent ritualists including Khri 'od-gsas and Dran-pa nam-mkha'. Thereafter, Dran-pa nam-mkha' and other masters made provision for the concealment of the Bon teachings during the persecution perpetrated by King Khri-srong lde-btsan (para. iv). The text lists the five places in which the scriptures were deposited, only two of which have any geographic correspondence to Zhang-zhung. These are Gyung-srung shel-dkar gyi brag (Mount Shel-rgyung) and Zang-zang lha-brag, both of which are located near the traditional and archaeological border of Zhang-zhung and Central Tibet. The other textual stores are in Central and Southern Tibet. These concealment patterns may signal that the importance of Zhang-zhung to the Bon tradition was already waning by the late eighth century CE. This conclusion is supported by the appointing of the 'Gur-lha and Yar-lha sham-po, deities of Central Tibet, as the divine guardians of the Bon textual treasures. Had Zhang-zhung not become somewhat marginal, the vast hinterland areas of Upper Tibet would have been well suited to the safekeeping of texts (Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho, as an important textual repository in the Bon treasure tradition, is an exception). The Ge-khod tradition hails from western Tibet and the powerful autochthonous deities of this region could just as well have acted as the defenders of written works stored for posterity. Questions related to the political decline of Zhang-zhung aside, the Tibetanization of Bon history is evident in this common theme of the distribution of texts in five diverse locations:

- i) In the language of sPu-rgyal Tibet: constructing the *rten-mkhar* of the *lha* Ge-khod. Prostrations¹⁵² to the figure of bDud-'dul ge-khod. This is composed to propound an explanation in five parts. Firstly, which *dpon-gsas* authored it and in what country was it written? From what source texts (*rgyud*) was it extracted and to what ritual system can it be assigned? What beneficial properties does it exhibit? These are the five parts.
- ii) It was written by *dpon-gsas* sTon-pa gshen-rab as a happy support castle¹⁵³ for the 360 orders (*rigs*) of Zhang-zhung *lha*, the 360 orders of Bod (Central Tibet) *lha*, the 360 orders of *lha* of low mDo-khams (Eastern Tibet), and the outer and inner Ge-khod *lha*. The country it was written in is the country of Zhang-zhung, in the grove of Ting-brag chen-po on the peak of the Ru-thog mountain. It was extracted from the text *Three Hundred and Sixty Lha* and the large text *This*.¹⁵⁴ It is assigned to both the common and special ritual systems. The outer

¹⁵² *Gu-dun hrun*. The Zhang-zhung equivalent of *phyag 'tshal lo*.

¹⁵³ *mNyes-pa'i rten-mkhar*. This refers to the text itself.

¹⁵⁴ At present, these prototypical texts (*rgyud*) exist in name only. *Lha gsum brgya drug cu* is the scripture describing the history, activities and mantras of the *lha*. *This* is a Zhang-zhung tantric cycle containing many types of *this* rites such as those for long life, wealth empowerment, and the development of magical instruments such as *dzo* (bombs). For a brief description of the three classes of *this* rites, see Bellezza 2005a, p. 399 (n. 197).

system is the support castle for all the orders of Ge-khod and pertains to the *lha-rten gsas-mkhar* (*lha* receptacle *gsas* castle). In the special system it is among the Nine Vehicles (Thegpa dgu) as well as [among the tradition of] the erection of the support for the *lha* and *glud* offerings for the obstructors (*bgegs*). It belongs to the sNang-gshen [vehicle] of chanting and proclamations pertaining to rituals of *dbal-bon* [against] foes for obviating injury brought on by the heretical enemies (*ge-shan gran*). It is for the pleasurable assembly of bDud-'dul (Ge-khod) *lha*. It belongs to the secret mantras of Gyer-ting.¹⁵⁵ It belongs to the Bon portals (teachings), the pure divine portals of Gyer.

- iii) [This textual tradition of building the *lha-rten*] was practiced with the purpose of spreading the dominion of the *khri-sde* (administrative divisions) of Zhang-zhung in ancient times, and it was written so that the Bon-po would not become the object of divine retribution (*lha'i bka'-chad*). Accordingly, it was practiced by Zhang-zhung khri-man, the holder of the iron horns of the bird. He practiced this castle (text) of paying homage in that the circle of Zhang-zhung *lha* would be his armies and defeat the sTag-gzigs king. [Consequently,] the stature of the Zhang-zhung king was exalted. Later, the Zhang-zhung king of sTag-sna'i lha obtained [this text] from [King] Khri-men (*sic*), and he erected the *lha-rten*. The people of Zhang-zhung became powerful and wealthy. They were victorious in nine types of battles, and the circle of Ge-khod *lha* became fulfilled and happy. Subsequently, this doctrine was held by Khri 'od-gsas. When he dispatched the circle of Ge-khod *lha* they would go, and when he paid homage to them they would come around [and engage] in various activities. Then it was successively transmitted to Khye'u dran [pa nam-mkha'] to hold, and he propagated the teachings.
- iv) Then when the barbaric King (Khri-srong lde-btsan) through ignorance sowed discord and became uncommitted [to his religious observances], the Bon [traditions] declined. Both Khenan yo-phya and [Khye'u dran-pa] organized the pure Bon texts of Zhang-zhung into five groups. One part was entrusted to Yar-lha sham-po. One part was entrusted to rGyung-srung shel-dkar gyi brag. One part was entrusted to Zang-zang lha-brag rdzong. One part was entrusted to Lho-mon gyi brag. One part was placed in the king's hand. A prayer was said aspiring that all [the Bon texts] would again be propagated in the future. The 'Gur-lha of the lords and Yar-lha sham-po were appointed as witnesses. Khye'u dran-pa said in these words, "In the future, when conditions are conducive, the four Gyer (Bon-po) of good fortune will in succession propagate the [Bon] doctrine. One such as this (the text) is the very best of the crystal formations." Thus saying, it was sealed.

The details of the struggle between the Zhang-zhung king and the king of sTag-gzig(s) are found in another portion of the *lha-rten* text.¹⁵⁶ Whatever historical truth may be contained in this tale, it is couched in the language of ritual magic and the helping hand of the gods. This legend is set in the period when Zhang-zhung is at the height of its power (para. i). The demons, jealous at the success of the Zhang-zhung king and his kingdom, began to injure and kill the *gshen* and the subjects. gShen-rab, witness to the harm the various orders of demons were causing, erected the *lha-rten* for the Ge-khod gods and performed various esoteric rites (para. ii). Through the efforts of gShen-rab, the *lha* of Zhang-zhung defeated the demons. According to the text, this

¹⁵⁵ A virtually extinct Zhang-zhung tantric system.

¹⁵⁶ See nos. 380, ln. 5 to 385, ln. 4. Tibetan Text II-18, pp. 588, 589. *Ge khod bsad pa'i mdel kha'o*, no colophon (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 1311–1314), no. 1312, contains a synopsis of Khri-ldem lcags kyi bya-ru can's defeat of sTag-gzig khri-to rgyal-po.

led to a strengthening of the Zhang-zhung king's dominion, the augmentation of his army, and the revitalization of the Bon religion (para. iii). From the strife Ge-khod came forth as the chief tutelary deity of Zhang-zhung and the *lha-rten* became the main instrument used in his and his circle's worship. The text tells us that Khri-men was the chief priest as well as the King of Zhang-zhung, and Ting-brag of Ru-thog the main religious center. As with dMu-khri btsan-po, who was both a king and a *sku-gshen*, Khri-men fulfilled the joint role of a political and religious leader. This exemplifies the inextricable link existing between spiritual and material power that prevailed in ancient Tibet. This seems to capture the ethos of the times, one in which religious truths were palpable in the physical world, not verities that were of a different order from the universe around us. The text also observes that the Zhang-zhung King ensured the viability of Bon, clearly his most vital function. In addition to his subjects King Khri-men had Khri-bzhur 'od-ldem, a woman who was either his wife or daughter. Her relationship to the king is not spelled out in the text.

The story then jumps to the King of sTag-gzig, sTag-gzigs khrod-to rgyal-ba, who resided in the castle of sTag-gzigs kho-ti (para. iv). The text paints a picture of a haughty king and a people at the pinnacle of their power, eager for military adventure. To make matters worse, the sTag-gzigs king was not a contented individual despite his external endowments. It was inevitable therefore that this king mustered his formidable fighting forces and attacked Zhang-zhung (para. v). Bereft of a wife, the king of gTag-gzigs made sure to kidnap Khri-bzhur 'od-ldem while he plundered the wealth of the Zhang-zhung *gshen*. Needless to say, the king of Zhang-zhung became very upset, and the *lha* of Zhang-zhung were angered by the war cries of the sTag-gzigs army (para. vi). The people of Zhang-zhung were also incensed, and along with the *lha* allies, rallied to the side of their king. To meet the sTag-gzigs onslaught, the Zhang-zhung king readied his forces of loyal *gsas* and *lha* divinities and humans. King Khri-men addressed his great army and explained that they had no alternative but to fight (para. vii). He then ordered his army of *lha* to slay sTag-gzigs khri-thog rgyal-ba (*sic*). In the meantime a *lha-rten* and other ritual offerings such as gold and turquoise were prepared for Ge-khod. His body receptacle was the golden horns of the blue sheep (*gser gyi rna-ru*), his speech receptacle a bright mirror (*gsal-ba 'i me-long*), and his mind support an arrow with vulture feathers (*mda'-mo bya-rgod*). King Khri-men proceeded to invoke all the gods of Ge-khod through the offerings he had assembled for them, and ordered that they kill their enemies (para. viii).

The Zhang-zhung king then commenced the destructive tantric rite of the red *this* at the cave (temple) of Ting brag (para. ix). With the execution of the *lha-rten* ritual, the soul stone (*bla-rdo*) of sTag-gzigs khri-to rgyal-ba (*sic*) appeared in the receptacle of the *lha*, a clear sign that the Ge-khod gods had carried out his commands. According to traditional Tibetan belief, the theft or destruction of an individual's soul vessel (*bla-gnas*) spells his illness or death. By the deployment of molten metal thunderbolts (*thog*), hail and explosive *dzo*, the sTag-gzigs king and his kingdom were annihilated. The Zhang-zhung deities and king were victorious, an unmistakable sign that the receptacles of the Ge-khod *lha* and *gsas* were unsurpassed in their ability to aid human beings:

- i) In that time and period, the country was the pure land Zhang-zhung, the castle was the castle of blazing jewels. The king of the Zhang-zhung *khri-sde*, and his subjects and ministers, and retinue carried out the virtuous activities of g.Yung-drung Bon. His dominion spread and [Zhang-zhung] reached its zenith (*rgung*). This created enmity among the *'dre*, *bgegs* and *srin-po*, and they came to obstruct its welfare. The *srin-po* Dza-la rag-sha inflicted harm on the *gshen*. Also the *'dre*, *srin* and *bgegs* appeared to make obstacles and steal lives.

- ii) This was seen by the compassionate gShen-rab, who thought that the *bdud* and *srin* were in deep error and must be subdued, and that the *'dre* and *bgegs* must be defeated. He also thought that the Bon doctrine must be re-established. He thought that the Zhang-zhung king's person must be protected. He raised a *lha-rten* with the offerings of fulfillment at which all types of Zhang-zhung *lha* and the assembly of Ge-khod *lha* manifested. He performed to absolute completion the secret red *this*.¹⁵⁷ He cast *dzo dbal* (fulminating magical bombs) and fierce *this-thun* (magical missiles).¹⁵⁸ Many armies of *lha*, like swirling clouds, defeated the *bdud* and *srin* enemies and the *bgegs*.
- iii) The g.Yung-drung Bon doctrine was re-established. The dominion of the Zhang-zhung king spread; it was thus spread. He had a very great *lha* army; it was thus enlarged. His *this* and *thun* were extremely wrathful and potent, and the virtuous activities of Bon spread as a result. The Zhang-zhung king's person was protected by the divine *rten-mkhar*. Moreover, the country was the Zhang-zhung country. The [main] *lha* was dBal-chen ge-khod. The [main] *gshen* was Khri-men, holder of the iron horns of the bird. The holy place was the gTing-brag *bdud-'dul* cave. The activities were the virtuous activities of Bon conducted [in this cave]. Around [the King] were Khri-bzhur 'od-ldem and his people. [The King] defended the national life¹⁵⁹ of Zhang-zhung Bon.
- iv) In that time and period, the country was the country of the sTag-gzigs king. The castle was the castle of sTag-gzigs kho-ti. This was the country and castle of that ruler (*mnga'bdag-po*), the man known as sTag-gzigs khrod-to rgyal-ba. His subjects were the ten divisions (*sde*) of sTag-gzigs. His ministers and retinue oversaw (*skyongs-ba*) his wealth and possessions. His dominion spread, reaching its zenith. His people were dominant yet they overrated (*ma-mkhas*) themselves. Their robust horses could not be kept in stables (*bres*).¹⁶⁰ Although high up¹⁶¹ their lord was wealthy, low down¹⁶² he did not have a wife. Also, his mind harbored ill-will.
- v) The [sTag-gzig] lord [summoned] all his subjects (*'bangs*), retinue (*'khor*), servants (*g.yog*), and ministers (*blon*), and they were all with armor and weapons. This large army with its armor and displaying its weaponry was ready to fight. This very large, powerful and redoubtable force attacked the Zhang-zhung Bon-po holder of the iron horns of the bird. Khri-bzhur 'od-ldem was abducted by sTag-gzigs khro-to rgyal-ba. The wealth of the Bon *gshen* lineage was stolen. The [Zhang-zhung] population was shown the point of swords and the tips of arrows.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Rites for the production of *dzo* and other types of magical weapons. The deities of the red *this* are said to reside at Ru-thog gnyan-dmar rdzong.

¹⁵⁸ The various destructive rites of Bon, including the *dzo dbal this*, are surveyed in Namkhai Norbu 1995, pp. 199–218. Citations regarding these magic rites are found in Bellezza 2005a, *passim*.

¹⁵⁹ *mNga'-thang*. This term can sometimes just mean 'dominion' or 'innate royal power' as in the kingly control of a country. Here, however, this word has a wider scope, encompassing not only the idea of sovereignty but all aspects of the life of a nation, including its religion, culture and society.

¹⁶⁰ This sentence describes a very aggressive and powerful race thirsting for conquest.

¹⁶¹ *Bla na*. This trope refers to the king's prestige and wealth, etc.; in other words, the excellent state of his external circumstances.

¹⁶² *'Og na*. This figure of speech refers to the unfulfilled nature of the King's personal needs.

¹⁶³ *Gri-rtse mda'-rtse bstan*. This saying signifies that the people of Zhang-zhung were harassed and driven to submission.

- vi) The mind of the Zhang-zhung *gshen* (king) became very upset (*bkrugs*). The Ge-khod *lha* figures were very adverse to [the sTag-gzig battle cries] *ku-sgra* and *ya-sgra*. The *g.yang gi lha* (god of good fortune) of the treasury also very strongly disapproved of the plundering of wealth and livestock, and was enraged (*sdong*). At the same time, the Zhang-zhung *khri-sde* were extremely antagonistic (*thugs su bsnyung*). The Zhang-zhung people and the *lha* gathered [in front of their king]. He issued a g.Yung-drung Bon decree (*bka'-khrims*). His *lha* horde (*ru*) and the assembly of the Ge-khod *lha* were invoked. The army of *lha* were assembled and the army of *gsas* were assembled, and in consultation [with the king] they solemnly agreed to uphold (*dgongs-srungs*) their oath.
- vii) With these many armies mobilizing, Khri-men, holder of the iron horns of the bird, announced that due to [the presence] of the sTag-gzigs people, materials and furious hordes, war must be waged in response. He said that the very powerful army of the *lha* must slay sTag-gzigs khri-thog rgyal-ba. A *lha-rten* and offerings of fulfillment were sought by Khri-men, holder of the iron horns of the bird. Unrefined gold, new turquoises and other ritual constituents were collected. The body receptacle (*sku-rten*) [of Ge-khod] was the golden horns of the blue sheep. The speech receptacle (*gsung-rten*) was a bright mirror, and the mind support (*thugs-rten*) was an arrow with vulture feathers. Select turquoises, grains and other offering ingredients were collected.
- viii) [The Zhang-zhung King] spoke, “The fierce assembly of bDud-'dul *lha* must be called for assistance and allied with the *gshen* practitioners.” He said, “The [other] orders of Zhang-zhung *lha* and their retainues, allies of the *gshen*, must be called for assistance. These protectors of sGo, Phug and Bar, the army of powerful helpers, must also be called for assistance.” He said, “They are allied with the *gshen* and directed against [our enemies]. With savage *this* (magic bombs) and *thun* (magic missiles), we must slay our enemies.
- ix) In a very angry frame of mind, with these words, Khri-men, holder of the iron horns of the bird, secretly practiced the red *this* to the assembly of the Ge-khod *lha* of activity, at the cave of Ting-brag gsang-ba in the holy place of the Zhang-zhung country. The *lha-rten* and all manner of offerings as supports were erected. The soul stone (*bla-rdo*) of sTag-gzigs khri-to rgyal-ba was captured in the receptacle of the *lha*. Wrathful molten metal thunderbolts (*thog*), hail and fulminating *dzo* rained down. sTag-gzigs khri-tho and his population and property were destroyed. In the last instance, the stature of Zhang-zhung sGo, Phug and Bar, these three, were also highly elevated by the *lha*.

3.4 The Clan Structures of Zhang-zhung

The kings and subjects of Zhang-zhung are believed to have belonged to a number of clans organized along tribal lines. The tribe of sMra Zhang-zhung is traditionally regarded as the original source of the clan groupings of Zhang-zhung.¹⁶⁴ In the overlapping and sometimes contradictory ethnogenetic records of Tibet, this same honor is also accorded the Se-khyung-dbra/bSe-khyung-sbra proto-clan. The Se-khyung-dbra is also confusingly associated with 'A-zha, an ancient

¹⁶⁴ A discussion of sMra Zhang-zhung and the theogony of the other great proto-clans of Tibet is found in Bellezza 2005a, pp. 203–212; Vitali 2003b. To date, no detailed study on Tibetan clan origins and history has been undertaken. As there are many disparate and complex accounts, this would prove a highly challenging project but one that would certainly bear good fruit. Important preliminary studies on this topic include Stein 1959; Vitali 2003b.

country in the northeastern portion of the Tibetan Plateau. According to Namkhai Norbu (1996: 40, 41, 171), the lineage of Zhang-zhung mainly came from the bSe-khyung-sbra clan, bSe and Khyung being the two main parts of the sBra proto-clan. This is supported by *A mdo chos 'byung*, which mentions that the king of the sBra, who was linked with the rGyal-rong kingdom, came from Zhang-zhung (Ramble 2003: 73, 74). The 19th century CE Bon history *Legs bshad mdzod* avers that the original localization of the Khyung clan was in Zhang-zhung as well.¹⁶⁵ In this source it relates that Rig-snang 'od gyi rgyal-po, a manifestation of Kun-tu bzang-po, decided to help sentient beings, so he manifested as three *khyung* from his body, speech and mind. They landed in a grove of beautiful flowers in Zhang-zhung Kha-yug and deposited three eggs, which hatched to produce individuals that went on to found the great Bon temples of Upper Tibet. I too am inclined to see the Khyung, perhaps in a non-aggregated form (separate from the Se and dBra), as an aboriginal tribe of Zhang-zhung. To the weight of the evidence given above it must be added that the *khyung* bird is emblematic of Zhang-zhung, and the Upper Tibetan oral tradition maintains that certain Khyung clans are native to the region.¹⁶⁶

On the basis of the customary Bon claim in the *Legs bshad mdzod* that the dMu-gshen tribe emigrated from sTag-gzig to Zhang-zhung, and the Bru from O-rgyan, Tho-gar, and Bru-sha to Zhang-zhung, Vitali (2003: 40, 41) argues that Indo-Iranic clans must have enriched the autochthonous ethnic substrate of Zhang-zhung with the effect of creating a multiethnic country. This is certainly the implication that must be drawn from Bon quasi-historical sources such as *Legs bshad mdzod*. Central Asian migrations from Tho-gar and sTag-gzig may possibly furnish literary evidence for the foreign cultural influences detected in the archaeological record of Upper Tibet. Certainly, given the unique nature of Upper Tibetan archaic monuments and rock art claims made that the entire nation of Zhang-zhung originated in the opposite direction (in the Sino-Tibetan marches) are simply untenable. For example, Hoffman (1990: 374, 375) alleges that the people of Zhang-zhung were solely the product of Ch'iang migrations moving west across the Byang-thang.¹⁶⁷ This type of speculation, needless to say, does not take into account the Bon historiographic tradition, nor the significant differences in the ancient monumental assemblages of northeastern Tibet and Upper Tibet. Hummel (2000), using linguistic evidence, comes to the conclusion that the Zhang-zhung language, along with its elite social components, derived from the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. While Hummel's theory of infusions of people, ideas and linguistic elements from the east seeping across the northern tier of Tibet seems to have significant archaeological and linguistic merit, I see no compelling reason to postulate a uni-focal ethnogenesis for Zhang-zhung. I think it more likely that fundamental ethnical and cultural inputs came from various geographic sources (beginning no later than the early Iron Age). These

¹⁶⁵ See Karmay 1972, pp. 11, 12, fols. 120b, 121a; pp.

¹⁶⁶ Tsering Thar (forthcoming) maintains that the Khyung clan began migrating east from Zhang-zhung kha-yug in early times as part of the dissemination of the Bon religion. Vitali (2003b: 40), however, observes that while certain clan lore literary materials (*rus-mdzod*) connect the Khyung-po with Zhang-zhung, these materials do not regard them as an original clan of the region. Namkhai Norbu (1996: 74; after Richardson 1977) argues that Khyung-po may have denoted several nomadic groups in Zhang-zhung who had moved across northern Tibet from east to west. Clearly, further textual study is needed in order to establish the traditional clan origins of Zhang-zhung with more precision.

¹⁶⁷ Hoffman's position does not hold up in the light of more modern studies (Driem 2001; Nishi and Nagano 2001; and Takeuchi *et al.* 2001), presenting linguistic evidence that connects the Zhang-zhung language to the pronominalized languages of the central and western Himalaya. These studies reveal that Zhang-zhung has an ethnolinguistic relationship with languages such as Manchad and Bunan (Lahoul), Kinnauri, Kanasha (Malana), and Darmiya, Chaudans and Byans (Uttaranchal). Also noted in these linguistic studies are five Dunhuang manuscripts (PT. 1247, 1251, 1252, and two IOL texts) written in an unknown language, which their authors believe may be Zhang-zhung. All five of these works appear to be medical texts.

augmented and transformed an autochthonous or very long-settled element of the Zhang-zhung ethnos. A more refined analysis of the ethnohistorical template of Zhang-zhung must await further linguistic and archaeological breakthroughs.

The proto-clan of Se and/or dBra is found among the Tibetan historical genealogical groupings known as the Four Great Clans (Rus-chen bzhi) and the Six Great Clans (Rus-chen drug)/Six Clans of the Little People of Tibet (Bod mi'u gdung-drug).¹⁶⁸ In Bon sources, the Se¹⁶⁹ cum dBra proto-clan is commonly linked to the clan of Khyung-po to form a kind of super clan that spread to all corners of Tibet. *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags* describes the genealogical structures of the Se-khyung-dbra proto-clan as firmly entrenched throughout the upper, middle and lower regions of Tibet.¹⁷⁰ This text appears to preserve clan lore that was prevalent in the imperial period, as its attribution to King Khri-srong lde-btsan would have us believe. In this period the great proto-clans had already split into numerous branches, combining and dividing into an amorphous mass of subsidiary clans, which makes the assignment of geographic sources a difficult and risky proposition. Vitali (2003b: 58, 59) theorizes that the geographic divisions of the *mi'u rigs* began to blur during the semi-mythical period of the Twelve Principalities (rGyal-phran bcu-gnyis), the political precursors of the Central Tibetan state, to be eventually subsumed under the Tibetan *btsan-po*. The *mi'u-rigs*, the proto-Tibetan pastoral tribes, originally inhabited the northern tier of the Tibetan Plateau from rMa-chu in the east to Dardistan in the west, and were potentially open to both Central Asian steppe and Indo-Iranic cultural influences (cf. *ibid.*: 42, 43).

dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags depicts a complicated clan structure for the Se-khyung-dbra that could only have been the product of centuries of genealogical ramification. Tsering Thar (Forthcoming) observes that today there are over 100 branches of the Khyung clan in mDo-khams alone. Rather than elucidating the temporal progression of the clan over the centuries as in a conventional genealogy, the prime aim of this *rus-mdzod* is to exalt the stature of the Se-khyung-dbra. Its members and their activities are portrayed as unrivalled and worthy of great respect and emulation. The text, however, ignores the origins and theogony of the proto-clan.¹⁷¹ The various clan divisions are classified both geographically (*tsho*) and biologically (*bu, mi*), and their numbers are already said to have reached nearly one million by the time of the creation of the text

¹⁶⁸ The (northern) Tibetan ancestral lineages (*mi'u rigs*) and their territories are generally given as dMu/rMu/sMu (Zhang-zhung), Se-khyung-dbra ('A-zha), sTong (Sum-pa), and lDong (Mi-nyag). However, many name variations, combinations and localizations appear in the clan literature. Vitali (2003b: 40) notes that the sMra clan of Zhang-zhung is usually thought to correspond with the dMu. The clan lineage text *gDung rabs pad ma dkar po 'i 'phreng ba* holds that sMra Zhang-zhung was the first ancestral tribe to appear in Tibet (*ibid.*: 39 (n. 4)). In the important clan lore texts known as *Khungs chen po bzhi*, sPu-rgyal bod is found outside the *mi'u rigs* as a distinctive territorial and ethnic entity (*ibid.*: 38), as it is in the *pha-rabs* and *sel* texts I have studied (Bellezza 2005a). As Vitali (*ibid.*: 43, 44, 58, 59) points out, this indicates that the Central Tibet ethnos and its predominantly agrarian way of life developed independently from the [precursor of the] *mi'u-rigs*, even though these became amalgamated into a singular clan tradition with the political rise of sPu-rgyal Tibet in the imperial period.

¹⁶⁹ Interestingly, in ritual chants the Gurungs refer to themselves as Se (Ramble 2003: 76), illustrating the way in which the Se-khyung-dbra proto-clan traditions have widely diffused.

¹⁷⁰ See the manuscript *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags* (*Appearance of the Little Black-Headed People*) in *The Call of the Blue Cuckoo. An Anthology of Nine Bonpo Texts on Myths and Rituals* (eds. S. G. Karmay and Y. Nagano, Senri Ethnological Reports 32, Osaka National Museum of Ethnology, 2002, 35 fols.). Attributed (in an earlier form) to King Khri-srong lde-btsan (742–797), folios 28a, ln. 1 to 30a, ln. 1. Tibetan Text II-19, p. 590. This manuscript belongs to the *rus-mdzod* genre (literature pertaining to clan lore).

¹⁷¹ In the ritual text *bSang mchod yid bzhin nor bu*, the dBra clan's symbol and *sgra-bla* protector is Dung-sha dkar-mo (Conch White Hind). According to the origin myth of the *sgra-bla* of the clans found in *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags*, the *sgra-bla* of the dBra is a *khyung* with an iron beak and claws. See Bellezza 2005a, pp. 404–408.

(para. i). *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags*, using a traditional tripartite color scheme (white, variegated, black), explains that there were 36 dBra communities distributed in far-removed eastern, western and northern Tibet. Each color grouping possessed a like-colored clan ensign (*ru-dar*). Those clan communities associated with Upper Tibet include Mar-yul (Ladakh), Zhang-zhung, Mu-thur, Pra-phud, Yo-phyu, and Pu-rang (para. ii).¹⁷² The names of these various lineages of the Se-khyung-dbra are also Zhang-zhung geographic regions and territorial deities. This implies that the proto-clan constituted an autochthonous element in Upper Tibet. But how wide was the original geographic purview of the Se-khyung-dbra? There are no ready answers. Among the white dBra is Khyung-po, which probably refers to the sTeng-chen region.¹⁷³ None of the groups mentioned as part of the variegated and black dBra seem to have any connection to Upper Tibet but instead are associated with other regions of the Plateau. In another reiteration of the Se-khyung-dbra clan structure called the Six Great Ones (Che-drug), mention of Mar-pa and Pu-rang in the upper zone and Zhang-zhung and Khyung-po in the middle zone is made (para. iii). The next system of classification of the Se-khyung-dbra appears to be that of great patriarchs known as the Four Men of Graciousness (bKa'-drin can gyi mi). Among them are two *bon-po* of Zhang-zhung: Mar-me, the conqueror of demons; and Dzo-men gyer-chen, who defeated the *srin* with a magical bomb.

In the next part of the narrative, the main sources of paternal wealth held by the Se-khyung-dbra are articulated (para. iv). They include the riches of human numbers, livestock, religion, and turquoise. Here six patriarchs are depicted as lending their names to six branches of the Se-khyung-dbra. The *rus-mdzod* now moves to a list of the strongholds of the clan, which appear to be scattered all around Tibet, demonstrating that members of the clan are not only rich but

¹⁷² The localization of the dBra clan in Upper Tibet seems to be confirmed in the oral tradition of *ma-sangs* (ancestral spirits) in the region. The most famous dBra ancestor (locally spelled: dGra and Bra, and in texts pertaining to the Buddhist history of gNam-mtsho as Bra, Gra and Dwa'u) was dGra-dgu ngo-gnon (Face Pressed Downwards), who is said to have originally resided in the vicinity of rTa-rgo ngo-dmar lha-btsan. dGra-dgu ngo-gnon is believed to be so named because he used to sit with his face pointing downwards. dGra-dgu ngo-gnon's wife was gNam-mtsho phyug-mo, and his father's name was sBa-la sbe-ba (said to signify a stupid hunched-over individual). One day the *btsan* Ngo-dmar lha-btsan met dGra-dgu ngo-gnon and they announced their identity to one another. It is said that Ngo-dmar lha-btsan was originally a white *yul-lha* but due to a rivalry between the two, dGra-dgu ngo-gnon threw the lungs of a blue sheep at the god, causing him to become red in color. At some time in the past, the dGra-dgu clan migrated from Ngo-dmar lha-btsan to Glag-tshang in Sa-dga' where they lived for a long time (perhaps 18 or 20 generations), before fleeing to India with the Chinese Communist invasion (most of them are now in Mysore). The dGra-dgu worship rTa-rgo as their *skye-lha* (birth god) as do other clans that emigrated to gZhung-ru from Nag-tshang. This migration explains the popularity of rTa-rgo in gZhung-ru (in Sa-dga' county). According to Thub-btsan phun-tshogs (born circa 1929 CE) and Thub-bstan phyogs-glang (born circa 1944 CE) (in personal communication), both senior monks at Phur-brag monastery (in gZhung-ru), the above lore represents the remnants of the dGra-dgu clan history, which has now all but been lost. The unflattering characterizations of dGra-dgu ngo-gnon and his father indicate that they are non-Buddhist personalities. dGra-dgu ngo-gnon is none other than the A-po/A-pha hor ancestral hero of gNam mtsho, Bra-gu ngom-ngan/Bra-bu'i ngo-ngan (Ugly Visage Son of the Bra). At least two ancient ruins at gNam mtsho are identified with Bra-bu'i ngo-ngan (A-25, B-127). Folklore about this figure is found in Bellezza 1997a, pp. 40, 119, 161, 212, 220 (n. 11), 264, 265; Bellezza 2001, pp. 79–81. In the *gnas-bshad* texts *gNyan chen thang lha dang gnam mtsho phyug mo'i gnas bshad mdzub mo ri ston* (eds. rKang-btsugs and bsTan-'dzin rman-rgyal, published by Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrun-khang, Lhasa, 2003), p. 21; and *Grub dbang gong mi'i byin gyis brlabs ba'i gnas* (by sKal-bzang chos-grags, published by dPal-mgon county, 1991), p. 12, it states that the three-story rDzong-dmar of Se-mo do (B-127), the residence of dGra-gu, was taken over by the Buddhist practitioner gNam-mtsho do-pa dar-shes. This is probably the clearest extant textual evidence for the Buddhist reoccupation of the archaic residential sites of Se-mo do.

¹⁷³ The history of this branch of the dBra is detailed in *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay 1972: 11–13, 120b–122a). Its four progenitors were born from *khyung* eggs. Each of them possessed a typical *bla-gnas* (an object enshrining the soul of an individual acquired through one's lineage), which consisted of a precious soul stone boulder, a self-constructed castle and a self-created lake of turquoise (fol. 121a, lns. 16–18). See pp. 288, 289.

powerful as well (para. v). Only four of the six sovereign fortresses of the dBra are singled out by name. The Se-khyung-dbra *rus-mdzod* concludes with a paean about the clan (para. vi). They are compared with the magnificent world mountain and the stalking tigress. The text does admit that, alas, the clan is not in possession of fertile land, which appears to be an allusion to their mostly pastoral homelands. For good measure, the text ends with a boast about four special heirlooms held by the Se-khyung-dbra, magical objects for Bon ritual performances:

- i) Now, the many kinds of dBra are like this: In the upper zone (*stod*) there are nine white dBra *tsho*.¹⁷⁴ There are not just nine *tsho* but 12. There are nine sons of variegated color in the middle zone (*bar*). There are not just nine sons but 12. There are nine black dBra *tsho* in the lower zone (*smad*). There are not just nine *tsho* but 12. The Se-khyung-dbra has six great [ones]. There are four men of the graciousness dBra. For the 900,000 dBra there are six riches (main family lineages). There are six fortresses that support the pillars of the dominion of the dBra. In the upper zone the dBra are higher than the middle of the sky. In the middle zone the dBra lake (population mass) is thicker than clouds. In the lower zone the frontier of the dBra is longer than a river.
- ii) Now, the nine white dBra communities of the upper zone: rKong-po, Dag-po (Dwags-po) and Nyang-po, these three; Mar-yul, Zhang-zhung and Bal-po,¹⁷⁵ these six; Mu-thur, Pra-phud and Yo-phya, these nine; as well as Khyung-po, bTsan-po and Pu-rang, these three. These are the 12. They are the divine lineage of the holders of the white flag. The nine variegated sons of the middle are dBu, 'Go and Ga-zi,¹⁷⁶ these three; rGya, rKyang and Glang, these six; Re-khe, De-khe and Shung-khe, these nine; as well as Bra-po, rGyun-ne and Khyung-ril, these three. These are the 12. They are the heroic lineage of the holders of the striped flag. The nine black dBra communities of the lower zone are gDa'-thu, Nyag-rgyu and 'Gu-zi, these three; Ma-thang, Bal-thang and Cog-thang, these six; Kho-yo, Kho-'dra and Kho-dbra, these nine; and sTag, sTeg-gu and rGyal, these 12. These are the powerful lineage of the holders of the black flag.
- iii) Now, the six great [ones] of the Se-khyung-dbra: Mar-pa and Pu-rang in the upper zone, these two; Zhang-zhung and Khyung-po in the middle zone, these two; and Nyag-rgyu and 'Gu-zi in the lower zone, these two. These are the six great [ones] of the Se-khyung-dbra. Now, the four men of the graciousness dBra: the *bon-po* of Zhang-zhung Mar-me bound the 'dre, *srin* and *byur*, these three, to an oath. Otherwise, by their bad fortune, they would have destroyed Tibet (Bod-khams). That is why he showed great kindness to Tibet. By casting a *dzo* (magical bomb), Dzo-men gyer-chen of Zhang-zhung conquered the city (realm) of the *srin*. Otherwise, Tibet would have been eaten by the *srin-po*. That is why he was greatly kind to Tibet. Mar-pa chos kyi blo-gros translated the Buddhism of India (Dam-chos) into Tibetan.¹⁷⁷ Otherwise, Tibet would have gone to hell. That is why he was greatly kind to Tibet. Lha-rgod ngo-khro of Kom (a localized clan name) killed by strangulation the man-

¹⁷⁴ *Tsho* are communities, sub-districts, or regional encampments. Traditionally, they were components of the administrative, military and geographic units known as *sde* (divisions, districts).

¹⁷⁵ Nepal. In particular, this must be a reference to Transhimalayan regions of the country such as Glo and Dol-po.

¹⁷⁶ The Ga-zi as one of the clans originating from the dBra is noted in a history of the chief sTag-lung bka'-brgyud protectors. See Bellezza 2005a, p. 60, para. i.

¹⁷⁷ The great bKa'-brgyud-pa translator was born in Lho-brag (1012–1097 CE). As is well known, he was the disciple of the Indian guru Nā-ro-pa and the teacher of the yogin Mi-la ras-pa. For a biographical sketch see Dung-dkar 2002, pp. 1597, 1598. This patently Buddhist attestation appears to represent a later modification to the lore contained in this *rus-mdzod*, and demonstrates that the text in its present form was not written before the 11th century CE.

eating serpent. Otherwise the serpent would have destroyed Tibet. That is why he was greatly kind to Tibet. These are the four dBra men of graciousness.

- iv) There are the father riches of the 900,000 dBra: the son of 'Jang nyi-ma 'phrul, Byed-pa dkon-mchog, the riches of religion; sKyi-dkar yon-tan, the riches of armor; Dol-pa dbang-phyug, the riches of sheep; Indian A-yag, the riches of horses; and Nepalese A-mgon, the riches of turquoise. Now, these are the father riches of the 900,000 dBra.
- v) Now, the six fortresses supporting the pillars of the dominion of the dBra: The uppermost of the six fortresses is sTag rdzong khra-mo (Striped Tiger Fortress) of crystal and lapis lazuli, which glistens colorfully. Its upper part is the supporter that prevents snow avalanches. In the vicinity there is a fortress; it is the fortress of Sham-sham ra-rtse mdo-mkhar. It is Se-khyung dbra's; they have it. It is held by Dar-rgyas skyabs;¹⁷⁸ they hold it. In the vicinity there is a fortress, the blue fortress Sog gi g.yu (Turquoise of the Sog). It is Se-khyung dbra's; they have it. It is held by Ber-mog;¹⁷⁹ they hold it. In the vicinity there is a fortress; it is the fortress of Za-ma ring-rgyud of the southern upper zone. It is Se-khyung-dbra's; they have it. It is held by Sum-pa glang;¹⁸⁰ they hold it.
- vi) Upward from Gag-pa gar-sgong of the lowest zone, the noble dBra are like Ri-rgyal lhun-po. They are like the bright-striped tigress lying [in wait]. The many [dBra] are like the herbs and trees of the forest. As the good father holds the land, the little dBra are noble.¹⁸¹ As they are noble, they do not hold good land. The place is not favorable to people. People are kind to the place. Do not compare the many types of dBra [to others]. Bone Rock,¹⁸² the white elder maternal uncle, has 1500 sons and grandsons. Do not compare the riches of the dBra [to others]. dBra-khyung nyi-ma rgyal-mtshan has four jewels that no other Tibetan has. He has a broken piece of the blue sky (a type of precious jewel). He has barley of the good epoch.¹⁸³ He has a *slag-pa* (a skin robe) of the female lynx.¹⁸⁴ He has the mighty beak and claws of the *khyung*. That is the wonderful account of the Se-khyung-dbra.

My field research shows that the present-day genealogical structures of Upper Tibet are a welter of disparate patrines, some many generations old and others of a more recent pedigree. Migration in virtually all directions has been the norm for the last 150 years and probably for a great deal longer. Clans of all types and origins are therefore juxtaposed with one another in almost any given region. Sometimes single families will refer to themselves as a clan (*rus-pa*) and it is not uncommon for an affinal group of just three families to assume a clan status. This has led to the generation of many hundreds of so-called clans. This is not to deny that there are indigenous clans in the region, but these are prone to distortion by more modern genealogical structures and the

¹⁷⁸ This is a Buddhist name of a country or clan.

¹⁷⁹ This is probably a country or clan name.

¹⁸⁰ The locale known as Sum-pa glang gi gyim-shod (the old name for the sTeng-chen region). For localization data see Bellezza: in press. Yamaguchi 1970 assumes that Sum-ru may not be the same territory as Sum-pa. Wading through the geographic lore he presents in his paper, however, I can only conclude that Sum-ru is indeed the homeland of the Sum-pa proto-clan. The correspondences between Sum-pa and Sum-ru furnish ample circumstantial evidence to believe so.

¹⁸¹ This appears to be the correct reading of this line, but it is not very legible and is one syllable in excess of the septasyllabic meter of the text.

¹⁸² Brag-rus. Alternatively, this hard-to-read word could be Brag-rgyus (Ligament Rock Formation).

¹⁸³ This refers to ritual constituents that insure good fortune (*g.yang-rdzas*).

¹⁸⁴ This line contains the word *them-phrom*, which is of unknown meaning.

erosion of the old kinship traditions. The loss of ancient clan lore in Upper Tibet appears to be the result of a long process of attenuation (with huge implications for the cultural complexion of the region). The relative historical placement of clans in any particular region is not of prime concern to the *'brog-pa* and, after two or three generations, the specifics of clan and family emigration into a new area tend to fade from the community memory. At least in the present day, members of older and newer clans freely marry, and little additional social status is accorded to those who belong to the 'original' clans of a region.

The historical picture of clan settlement painted in the oral tradition is one of great complexity. Some regions (such as Lake Dang-ra, Seng-'khor, gZhung-pa ma-mtshan, and Ru-'thor) are said to contain autochthonous clan groupings, that is, those that have 'always' existed in their present-day homelands. There are still no independent means to verify the aboriginal status of these groupings, as they do not always significantly differ in language and customs from more recent arrivals to the same regions. Moreover, those clans that form the oldest or native layer of settlement are not always discernable from others, for the inhabitants of some places have not retained this kind of information. While it is commonly stated by the *'brog-pa* that the original clans are often related to the *yul-lha*, or the *lha* and *klu* of the region in which they reside, little specific lore about these myths of origination has endured in either written or oral form. What clan mythology does exist is often ambiguous and of questionable accuracy. Older and newer clans are sometimes differentiated by the terms *rus-rnying* and *rus-gsar*.¹⁸⁵ In mNga'-ris, old and new clans and the regions in which they are concentrated are popularly distinguished by the terms Khams-sde (Division of Khams) and 'Brog-sde (Division of the Highland Pastures).¹⁸⁶ Throughout Upper Tibet non-indigenous clans are often designated by the region from which they are thought to have immigrated. Thus we have the labels: Hor-pa, Bod-pa, gTsang-pa, Rong-pa, Khams-pa, and A-mdo-ba. These designations distinguish clans that are believed to have appeared subsequent to those of autochthonous origins.

Genealogical relationships among the *'brog-pa* are reckoned mainly for the purpose of marriage through the so-called clan, with an exogamy seven generations in length being mostly observed. The seven generations are typically counted on the joints, a kind of symbolic and mnemonic device. This method of counting starts with the tip of the fingers or toes and ends with the shoulder blades or pelvis, with each articulation representing the next generation of removal.

The gZhung-pa ma-mtshan cultural luminary Tshe-ring chos-'phel has collected oral sources of information about the clan history of his region, which he has kindly shared with me. Here I record some of his data in order to demonstrate how the old clans of gZhung-pa are thought to owe their origins to the prehistoric epoch and the ancient countries of Zhang-zhung and sTag-gzig. These lineages are distinguished from those generally designated the Hor-pa, which appear to have arrived in the region over the last 300 years or so. The earliest settlers tend to live south of the township headquarters near the border with Yag-ra. It is thought that each of nine camps (*tsho-pa/ 'go-pa*) of the original gZhung-pa ma-mtshan *spyi-khyab* (much larger in size than present-

¹⁸⁵ In adjacent Dol-po, there is a clan hierarchy known as *rus-che*, *rus-bar* and *rus-chung*. The *rus-che* are the first settlers to a locale, and have special ritual access to the *yul-lha*. The *pho-lha* of colonizing clans also become identified with the *yul-lha*. See Hazod 1996, p. 94.

¹⁸⁶ In sGer-rtse, the 'Brog-sde consists of the people and land of bSe-'khor while the Khams-sde is made up of the people and territory of rNgo-ro skor-mched. Rivalries and prejudices still exist between these groups of herders despite living in proximity to one another for around 250 years. Stereotypically, the inhabitants of bSe-'khor still see those of rNgo-ro skor-mched as newcomers who came to the region as homeless beggars, rather coarse in customs and manner. In turn, the Khams-sde of rNgo-ro skor-mched view their bSe-'khor neighbors as clannish and inbred.

day gZhung-pa township) was associated with a prominent clan such as Khyung-lho, Khyung-byang,¹⁸⁷ bZang-rgyud, Grang-shong, 'A-ba, Nab-ra, Ra-ba, Men-yang and sBra-tsho.¹⁸⁸

Tshe-ring chos-'phel's paternal clan is rGyal-rgyud lha-mo dar (*phugs-lha*: rTa-rgo btsan), which he believes originated in sTag-gzig. Its clan god (*rus-lha*) is the La-dkar range, namely the peaks of Gangs-chen, Gangs-chung and Som-thang. In Tshe-ring chos-'phel's father's time, the worship of their *rus-lha* was already diminished, with few trips being made to give offerings at La-dkar. The means of worship included those popularly used for indigenous deities including *lha-bsangs*, *gser-skyems*, and the erection of flag masts, spears and draped arrows. According to Tshe-ring chos-'phel, there are four ancient and prominent clans (*mi-rgyud*) in gZhung-pa called Dar-khyab che-pa'i dar-po bzhi, which are said to have originated with a lineage called sMug-po gdung gyi rgyud (related to the dMu proto-clan, probably as one of its branches). These four clans are also associated with divine figures called Pho-rus dkar-po dung (Paternal Clan White Conch) and Ma-rus sngon-mo g.yu (Maternal Clan Blue Turquoise), which appear to be their *lha* and *klu* progenitors respectively. The Dar-khyab che-pa'i dar-po bzhi are dPon bla-ma dar of the bZang-rgyud *tsho-pa*,¹⁸⁹ Nam-mkha' dar of the Grang-shong *tsho-pa*, Gwa-ba dar of the sBra-tsho *tsho-pa*, and rGyal-rgyud lha-mo dar of the Khyung-lho *tsho-pa*. Each of these four clans has an ancestral god, which are collectively termed Pha-mes bstan-pa'i rus-rgyud gyi lha (Lha of the Clan Lineages of the Paternal Ancestral bTsan). The four individual deities (also called *skye-lha*) are: dPon lha-ma dar – Beg-tse lcam-sring (residence: Shangs klu-khang),¹⁹⁰ Nam-mkha' dar – Brag-skya lha-btsan (residence: near sGom-'khor); Gwa-ba dar – sMan-lcam dkar-mo dang smug-po (residence: mountain north of gZhung-pa town); and rGyal-rgyud lha-mo dar – usually given as Chos-dben g.ya'-nag rtse-dgu (residence: near Tshwa-kha).

Let us now concentrate on the clans of other regions of Upper Tibet that are locally reported to be the oldest, or seemingly so. The following listing of indigenous Upper Tibetan clans is the product of hundreds of interviews that I have carried out in the field over a number of years. The Byang-thang areas I include in the present study are all those which are locally reputed to have significant populations of 'autochthonous' clans. I shall not focus on more recently settled pastoral regions such as sGer-rtse/dGer-rtse proper, dGe-rgyas and Yag-ra. Also excluded from this study are the agricultural valleys of far western Tibet (in Ru-thog, sGar, Pu-rang, and rTsa-mda'), which have poorly developed clan traditions, as do most other agrarian regions of Tibet. I will also omit a discussion of the hundreds of other clan and family names I have encountered that are traced to more recent migrations, or to those groups that came about through the fissuring of older clans.

¹⁸⁷ Western Tibet as a source of the Khyung clans is also noted in *dPag bsam ljon bzang* by Sum-pa mkhan-pa. It records that on the left side of mTsho ma-dros-pa (Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho) there is a small *shal-ma-la* tree, which is the abode of the four Khyung races. See Vitali 1999, p. 9. Khyung-po is considered one of the six main clans of Brang mkhar in sPi-ti (Francke 1914: 48). Furthermore, Khyung-po spirit-mediums of 'Om-lo, northwestern Nepal, trace their lineage back to Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar (cf. Bellezza 2005: 34).

¹⁸⁸ This belief that each of the nine districts of gZhung-pa was once associated with a dominant clan, which claimed the local *yul-lha* as its clan god (*rus-lha*), is also supported by the native luminaries Rig-gsum mgon-po (born circa 1937 CE) and Karma bde-chen (born circa 1931 CE) (in personal communication). They give the original borders of gZhung-pa as: east – Ma-mig rong-gser, south – sDig-pa nag-khyer (located not far north of Ma-yum la), north – Sha-sha dpal-khang, and west – Seng-ge g.yu-ral (located near Seng-ge kha-'babs). In the southeast, gZhung-pa is said to have once shared a border with Ru-'thor.

¹⁸⁹ According to Tshe-ring chos-'phel, the most famous member of the bZang-rgyud clan was sGrub-chen dbang-grags (lived roughly 800 years ago), a monk at mTho-lding monastery in Gu-ge. He is credited with founding the Shangs klu-khang retreat center in gZhung-pa.

¹⁹⁰ Beg-tse lcam-sring may have originally been an archaic Mongolian deity (Nebesky-Wojokowitz 1956: 88). The iconography of the god is detailed in *ibid.*, pp. 88–93.

Even those clans presented in the oral tradition as ‘old clans’ (*rus-rnying*) may or may not have ancient tenure in the region to which they are now connected. The pastoral way of life in Upper Tibet has always been conducive to the movements of families, clans and tribes. In the absence of written records, it is therefore not possible to fix the original homeland of a clan or its relative antiquity in any given locale with any degree of accuracy. Even when specific clans are connected to local sacred mountains, this is no guarantee that they ‘originally’ resided there. In some cases, powerful migrant groups are likely to have taken over the ritual control of territorial deities as they consolidated their political and military strength.

Even a study of clan names is problematic because so many variant spellings and misspellings exist among the largely illiterate herding communities. For this reason, the renderings of the clan names provided here should not necessarily be seen as authoritative. Literacy alone is of little help in this area of inquiry, for few Upper Tibetan clan traditions were ever committed to writing. It is therefore not my intention to try to establish which clans may have arisen in the prehistoric epoch, but rather to present locally obtained data that suggest a long historical association with specific places in Upper Tibet. It is my position that while migration into and away from the region has been the norm for many centuries, there are still bound to be genealogical vestiges of early populations, as the oral tradition maintains.¹⁹¹ Many of these putative ancient clans tend to be distributed in more than one region of Upper Tibet, which probably reflects manifold patterns of migration over a great length of time. Finally, it must be cautioned that the listings I furnish below should not be construed as a complete inventory of all the ancient clans of Upper Tibet. Undoubtedly there are many that I have overlooked in the vast sea of kinship traditions in the region.

In sNyan-rong, there are four main Khyung clans: Khyung-dkar, Khyung-nag, Khyung-rgyud, and Ar-khyung. Of these only the Khyung-dkar clan is actually regarded as ancient. According to Lama 'Bum-thar (born circa 1921 CE) of sNang-gsal monastery, the Khyung-dkar clan originated with the Bon deity gShen-lha 'od-dkar who appeared as a white *khyung*, and is identical with the famous White Khyung clan of dKar-ru in sTeng-chen. As with other important clans of Khams, the Khyung-po of sTeng-chen have spread to many areas of Upper Tibet in recent centuries. Migrations from Khams to pastoral Upper Tibet continued unabated until 1959 and are not unheard of even today. The Ges clan is said to have produced the headmen of the Ar-smad region of sNyan-rong, the last being Khams-gsum dbang-'dus. This clan is said to have originated with a *klu* who built a red earthen throne on which a youth, the progenitor of the clan, appeared. According to a local sNyan-rong historian, Tshe-ring of the 'Byong clan (born circa 1940 CE), much of the clan lore of the region must have disappeared no later than four or five generations ago. He reports that there were once clan histories preserved by bards called *bka'-sgrung*, but that they died out long ago, otherwise contemporary elders would have some knowledge of them through their parents and grandparents. Clan symbols such as the *ru-dar* (clan banner) and *mdung-dar* (spear with attached flag) also began to disappear in sNyan-rong generations ago. Tshe-ring adds that there were two main sources for the clans of the region: Zhang-zhung and Hor. He states that the Khyung clans and probably the one known as Lha-gdong belong to the former

¹⁹¹ Even ancient migrations out of Upper Tibet are indicated. In the oral tradition of the dMu-dge region of Songpan (which had four large Bon monasteries and a number of smaller ones), it is said that the original population came from Zhang-zhung during King Khri-srong lde-btsan's persecution of Bon. This group was led by two personages, sTag-la rje and dBal-gsas skyabs. They found refuge in dMu-dge and permanently settled there. Many families are reported to have preserved ritual objects and customs from Zhang-zhung. See Tsering Thar 2003, pp. 620, 621.

while many others belong to the latter. He also believes that the Sum-pa and Me-nyag tribes were probably the sources of certain sNyan-rong clans.

In Bar-tha (traditionally known as Bar-tha sger-gzhung dgu) there is a clan called Mu-thur, but informants could not say if it takes its name from the eponymous Zhang-zhung deity. If so, this clan may have emigrated from western Tibet. Another ancient clan of Bar-tha is Kye, which is said to be derived from the famous *bdud* of the Ge-sar epic, King bDud klu-btsan, and his minister bDud sTobs-rgyal. There appears to be some historical connection between these *bdud* and those of the bDud-bon tradition (see Bellezza 2005a: 406 (fn. 222)).

In sPo-che (in gNam-ru), two clans that are said to have originated in the prehistoric epoch are 'Om-po and Gyer-pa (this clan is also found in Shan-rtsa).¹⁹² These two are among a large contingent of clans of diverse origins in the region. The name Gyer-pa suggests that ancient Bon practitioners may have given rise to this clan. Another old clan in sPo-che is called Tshwa-po (Salt People). Mount sPo-che is called A-myes by the inhabitants, implying a genealogical relationship, but no specific traditions seem to have survived. The *smān* goddess of Gyer-ru mtsho is also referred to as the protectress of sPo-che's clans.¹⁹³

The prominent clan dPon-skyā is said to have been in the Ring-pa region of gNam-ru since the imperial period, but to originally have come from India (Bellezza 2005: 110, 111). The old clans of gShen-sger (in gNam-ru) include Gu-rub, gShen and Khrom-rta. Ancient clans of sMad-pa (in Shan-rtsa county) are thought to include sMyus, Bi-ri, rMa-ba, and Gu-rub. In nearby Zha-sgo, the oldest clans by local reckoning are said to include sBre-ba (probably of Nag-tshang or mNga'-ris origin), 'Brong and dGu-ba. In g.Yag-pa thar-ma (now in Shan-rtsa county), the oldest clans are given as sBal-pa (some local residents believe the name sBal-pa is associated with frogs), mGar-pa (said to be connected to the mGar clan of imperial times), g.Yag-pa, Bra-tsha, Gu-rub, sTong-pa (perhaps derived from the sTong proto-clan?), Nang-pa, and rKyang (named after the onager). In Zha-sgo (also in Shan-rtsa), the clan brTar-dkar is thought to be related to the local mountain of the same name.

In Ri-khrod (in Nyi-ma county), there are the Zhang-zhung-pa and Mus-pa clans, which reputedly have occupied the region for a long time. I suspect that the Mus-pa may either be a branch of the dMu proto-clan or originally from the Mus-lung valley of gTsang, but corroboratory data is lacking. There is also a clan called Zhang-zhung in La-stod, on the opposite (west) side of Lake Dang-ra, and in Dang-chung. I believe it likely that this clan appellation is a cognominal attribution related to a former adherence to the Bon religion, rather than a direct reference to the ancient Zhang-zhung kingdom.

The most ancient clans of the Bon-po at Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho are reported as: Phyug-tshang, O-bo, gNam-rus, Phyag-pa, Pha-cho, and Ra-ba. These clans are found in adjoining regions as well. In fact, there is an oral tradition in Nag-tshang that speaks of the three great clans of Byang-thang: upper, O-bo; central, rTsang-pa; and lower, Ra-ba. This assertion seems best viewed as the glorification of a kinship grouping that vied with rival clans for social and political dominance in the Upper Tibet of yore. As is well attested, an old headman of 'Om-bu, Dang-ra Ang-ma

¹⁹² The Yar-lung region has been a stronghold of the Gyer/dGyer clan from no later than the imperial period. dGyer appears to be affiliated with the bSe proto-clan. For background information on the dGyer, see Sørensen and Hazod 2005, pp. 22, 25–27, 57 (n. 65), 254 (n. 59), 259 (n. 64), 319 (n. 29).

¹⁹³ Information on the sPo-che enclave is found in Bellezza 1997a, pp. 247, 248.

(who died at least five generations ago) has no surviving relatives or clan members. It is said that his father was the local *yul-lha* Brag-btsan and his mother an ordinary woman. The *pho-lha* or *rus-lha* of O-bo and Phyag-pa is Pho-lha zhes-rgyung, a celebrated Zhang-zhung mountain god (see pp. 334–338). There is also a confederation of related clans called Phyag la rus-chen bco-brgyad (although it is unclear if there are indeed exactly 18 branches), of which Phyag gnam-gdong dkar-po is one.

According to local elders, in Phyogs-bcu (in mTsho-chen) the oldest clans are those such as 'Om-po, Gu-rub, Gro-bo, Khri-tshang, Gyi-rus, Ra-ba, and Chag-pa/Chags-pa/Phyag-pa. The far-reaching nature of immigration to this region is reflected in the names of two other clans: Sum-pa and Bod-pa, as it is in the traditional name of the district itself, which translates as Ten Directions. Nya-shu is the name of a clan that is said to have had a piscatorial function in early times. Byarigs (perhaps related to the mountain Bya-pho in g.Yag-pa) is an ancient clan in Phyogs-bcu, as indicated by the great number of genealogical branches it has spawned. This clan is thought to have been centered in gNam-ru and Nag-tshang. While Khri-po and Gong-pa are cited as the oldest clans of sBub-stod, in 'Brong-pa, other native clans of this region seem to include 'U-rus, Chag-pa, Ar-kha and A-shag. Farther north in 'Brong-pa byang-ma, indigenous clans are affirmed to include Khri-po, Tsab-rus, dPon-rus (same as dPon-pa), and Chag-pa.¹⁹⁴

The oldest clans of bSe-'khor/gSer-'khor/Seng-'khor (in sGer-rtse) are reported as bSe-'khor,¹⁹⁵ dPon-pa, Khri-po, Shong-tsha, Phyug-tshang, Cos-tog, Gyong-tshang, Ba-rong, Dus-ngen/Dus-ngas, Ra-ba, 'A-ba, and sPred-pa/Kre-ba.¹⁹⁶ Several of these clan groupings have *rus-lha*, protective deities common to all their members. These gods are of the *dgra-lha* class and are believed to provide vital support and protection to those of their kinship affiliation. The Dus-ngen clan is reported to have Lha rgyal-po rwa-nag (King of the Lha Black Horns) as its *rus-lha*. The *rus-lha* of dPon-pa and bSe-'khor are bTsan kham-nag and A-bse gro rwa-dkar, respectively (Bellezza 2005a: 468). The inclusion of horns (*rwa*) in the names of two of these *rus-lha* and the color adjective *kham-nag* (a medium brown) used to describe the third one indicate that they were originally zoomorphous divinities.¹⁹⁷ Although the iconography of these *rus-lha* is no longer clear to clan members, Bon and Buddhist literature demonstrate that many types of *dgra-lha* appear in animal form. On the basis of lore found in *rus-mdzod* and *pha-rabs* (clan origination and development literature), it seems likely that the *rus-lha* of bSe-'khor were once seen as the divine originators of the native clans. This form of religious belief, however, did not survive the thorough Buddhicization of the region and its emphasis on Indic etiological orientations.

¹⁹⁴ For the 13th and 14th century CE activities of the Chag/Phyag clan of the Byang region, see Vitali 1996, pp. 427, 428, 482 (n. 813).

¹⁹⁵ There is an oral tradition in bSe-'khor that subdivides the bSe-'khor clan into three hierarchical groups. From top to bottom: bSe-'khor 'go-po'i dang ring-ma (sp?), bSe-'khor smug-po gdong gi mi-rgyud and bSe-'khor tshe'o ze-khra (sp?) (*ze-khra* refers to a yak of mixed color with a white back). According to local tradition, the bSe/Se clan is one and the same as Se-khyung, one of the six proto-clans of the Bod mi'u gdung-drug.

¹⁹⁶ This is the same clan known as sBre-ba in sMad-pa. By yet another spelling (Gre-ba), sPred-pa/Kre-ba is known as far afield as Mon-'tsher/Mon-mtsher in far western Tibet. Gu-ge tshe-ring rgyal-po (2005: 278) provides alternative spellings for some of these clan names: 'A-pa ('A-ba), Cu-bzang (Phyug-tshang) and sPom-pa (dPon-pa). One name for the district, gSer-'khor (Circle of Gold), is said to have originated on account of much gold being found there in ancient times (*ibid.*: 279). An alternative name, Seng-'khor, is derived from the epic hero Gling seng-chen, who is supposed to have been active in the region.

¹⁹⁷ This is also borne out by an alternative name recorded for A-bse gro rwa-dkar: bSe-'khor gro-bo ra-dkar (Gu-ge tshe-ring rgyal-po 2005: 291), confirming the zoomorphous forms to be goats.

In Ru-'thor (in 'Brong-pa county), it is reported that the original clans are Gu-rub, Kya-kya, Phyug-rtsang (same as Phyug-tshang), 'A-ba, bDod, and sTag-rtse.¹⁹⁸ They have the local *lha-ri* bKa' lha-btsan as their clan protective deity (*pho-lha*) and his mate Rin-chen shor-'ur mtsho as their *mo-lha*. The Gu-rub/Gu-rib clan is well represented in Ru-'thor, as it is in the eastern Byang-thang regions of g.Yag-pa and gShen-sger. Its most famous member is the eighth century CE Bon saint sNang-bzher lod-po.¹⁹⁹ According to senior members of the Gu-rub clan in Ru-'thor (such as the Ge-sar bard Gu-rub rig-'dzin, born circa 1934 CE), their clan originally migrated to Ru-'thor from eastern areas. This seems to indicate that the clan originated in gShen-sger or g.Yag-pa. This bit of lore also helps to explain why the Gu-rub clan is now concentrated in two widely separated areas of the Byang-thang.

The original clan of gZhung-pa (also gZhung-sa), the region encompassing much of the plains below Mount Ti-se, is reported to be Brag-rtsa. The Brag-rtsa clan is said to have owned the two main islands at La-lnga mtsho, Do smug and Do ser (site of ancient residential structures). This clan still has preferential winter grazing rights on these islands. The headmen of gZhung-pa were traditionally derived from the Brag-rtsa clan. According to the late Brag-rtsa luminary gZhung-pa yon-tan (born circa 1926 CE), his clan appears to have originated with the prehistoric Bon-po inhabitants of the region. Another old clan of gZhung-pa, which is reported to have arrived in the area from 'Bri-byi'u (in gZhung-pa ma-mtshan) is Zhang-rung rta-pa dkar-po. Local elders opine that this clan may have appeared in gZhung-pa in the *snga-dar* (first diffusion of Buddhism) period.²⁰⁰ gNam-rus, Thog-rus²⁰¹ and Kyis-rus, the top rung of a popular group of nine clans in sTod, are also found in gZhung-pa. According to some elderly residents, the ancient clans (pre-dating those of Hor, Khams and Central Tibet origins) in Mon-'tsher and Khyung-lung of far western Tibet include Ya-rong and sNyel-ba.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ On these six clans, see Bellezza 2005a, p. 151 (n. 141).

¹⁹⁹ This clan is also called Gu-rib. Among other Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud masters who belonged to it are dMu tsog-ge, dMu tso-stangs, dMu shod-tram, and dMu rgyal-ba blo-gros. For their hagiographies, see Reynolds 2005, pp. 133–137.

²⁰⁰ Vitali (1996: 330, 331) identifies Zhang-rung as a clan that played an important role in the political and religious life of western Tibet from the time of the early mNga'-ris skor-gsum dynasty.

²⁰¹ This is probably the same as Thog-lha, the paternal clan of the Bon lama dPon-chen btsan-po (circa tenth century CE), who hailed from Da-roq mtsho. He went to Zang-zang lha-brag to receive Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud teachings from dMu rgyal-ba blo-gros. See *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar*, by sPa-ston bstan-rgyal bzang-po (circa early 15th century CE), Delhi edition, no. 36. Detailed biographical lore about this Zhang-zhung master is found in Reynolds 2005, pp. 137–139.

²⁰² A clan lore (*rus-mdzod*) text for sNyel has recently come to light: *Bla ma snyel gyi gdung rabs snying bsdus zhwa dkar btsan pa'i mdzes rgyan*, written by the contemporary Bon-po lama of Dol-po, sNyel-ston g.yung-drung dar-rgyas (manuscript of 20 folios). I thank the venerable Nyi-ma 'od-zer of bSam-gtan gling for presenting me with a copy of this work. The sources for the *sNyel gyi gdung rabs* are stated to include *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar*, *rDzogs chen yangs rtse klong chen*, *Rig 'dzin rgyud 'bum*, and *Lhas stegs ser dgon zhes pa'i dkar chag*, as well as the oral tradition of sNyel elders (fol. 20a). The community organization, Dol-po'i gsung-rab nyams-gso khang, is planning to publish this text as part of the collected works of sNyel-ston g.yung-drung dar-rgyas in the near future. According to the *sNyel gyi gdung rabs*, in the time of the Zhang-zhung [kingdom], the sNyel lineage was found in Glo and Dol-po (fol. 4a). The text claims that the goat herder Gu-ge shes-rab blo-lidan of the sNyel clan received Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud teachings from Thog-lha dpon-rgyal btsan-po around 1400 years ago (fol. 4b). This periodization, however, is somewhat exaggerated; this religious transmission is likely to have occurred circa the tenth century CE. *sNyel gyi gdung rabs* states that Gu-ge shes-rab blo-lidan obtained ordinary spiritual attainments (*thun-mong*) at the Gu-ge locale of Rin-chen lha-lung, in the secret cave of bKra-shis 'od-bar (fol. 4b). For Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud biographical information about Gu-ge shes-rab blo-lidan, one of the sTod-lugs kyi bla-ma drug, see Reynolds 2005, p. 158.

4 The Elite Cultural Traditions of Tibet

4.1 Tibet as a Repository of Bon Cultural Traditions

In Section 4, I examine cultural traditions associated with the protohistoric rulers of Tibet from various quasi-historical sources. This part of the work focuses on quantifiable political and religious facets of early Tibetan life. It is by no means intended to comprehensively review royal origin myths and kingly religious activities, but rather to contribute to a better understanding of the ancient Tibetan polity. As in every area where monuments, costumes and other aspects of material culture are documented in Tibetan literature, we can hope that archaeological research may one day prove their existence as demonstrable facts. Until that time, the deeds of the ancient Tibetan kings and royal priests will abide in the legendary sphere, poised somewhere between actual artifacts and the notional reality of folk memory.

In subsection 4.2, there are references that serve to geographically demarcate the Tibetan and Zhang-zhung territories. Both Bon and Buddhist texts saw fit to document the frontier between Tibet and Zhang-zhung, as well as the borders of other contiguous nations. As in the study of the monumental assemblage of Upper Tibet, these literary sources present Zhang-zhung or the Upper Tibetan paleocultural entity as a sizable country distinct from its neighbors. This geographic lore is followed in subsection 4.3 by the etiologic myths of royal descent from the heavens to the actual land of Tibet, as derived from a Bon text and a Dunhuang manuscript. A comparative study of these myths recapitulates Bon traditions relating to cosmogonic deities, the vital functions of the Bon priests and the cosmological significance of the heavens. In subsection 4.4, the religious activities of the Tibetan kings, portrayed as a successive legacy in which the sovereigns and their priests dispensed the prerogatives of power, are investigated. Once more, focus is on the manner in which these spiritual and temporal potentates wielded control over the social and numinous environments. This basic theme, articulated in religious terms, is invariably portrayed in a positive light as safeguarding the prominence of the rulers and priests while ensuring the well-being of the masses. There is nothing extraordinary about this, for many political regimes throughout history and across the globe have rationalized their grip on power as being of mutual benefit to the rulers and those they ruled.

4.2 The Territorial Delineation of Zhang-zhung and Tibet

Bon and Buddhist literature both commonly treat Zhang-zhung and Central Tibet (Bod) as separate countries in possession of distinctive languages, cultures and political traditions. According to the literary sources, it is only with the annexation of Zhang-zhung by imperial period Tibet that a unified polity came into being. The claim that these two entities once had different cultures is substantiated by the archaeological records of Upper Tibet and Central Tibet. In this subsection, I will examine a few textual accounts that fix the ancient borders of Zhang-zhung and Tibet. Unfortunately, detailed geographic information on the entire extent of the frontier does not seem to have survived in Tibetan literature. Only general indications on where the border was set between the two nations are given in the texts.

According to the Bon text *Khro bo dbang chen*, the frontier between Tibet and Zhang-zhung in prehistoric times was as follows: “Generally, at first, the territorial division of Zhang-zhung and

Tibet was around gTsang Kha-rag.”²⁰³ This boundary, corresponding to a well-known mountain in the upper Yar-lung gtsang-po valley, gTsang-lha phu-dar, is set between the 86th and 87th meridians.²⁰⁴ This corresponds with the ecological transition between pastoral western Tibet and primarily agrarian Central Tibet. As already discussed, this territorial demarcation also coincides with the eastern edge of the geographic range of the sui generis pillar monuments, which define the Upper Tibetan paleocultural zone. Both pillars erected in quadrangle enclosures and arrays of pillars appended to mortuary temples south of the Transhimalaya extend as far east as the border of Tibet, as described in the *Khro bo dbang chen*. This is an unmistakable indication that the text has preserved historical information relating to the spatial arrangement of the Zhang-zhung and Bod proto-tribal entities. This fact negates the claim made in the quasi-historical text *bsGrags pa gling grags*, which states “The juncture of upper [region] Zhang-zhung and Tibet is that [place] divided by the valley of Ge-khod gnyan-lung”.²⁰⁵ This placement of the frontier between these two countries at the mountain residence of the god Ge-khod, in Ru-thog, is neither geographically nor culturally sound. The passage may therefore have been crafted as an allegorical allusion to the spiritual dominion of Ge-khod in the Zhang-zhung and Central Tibetan context of later historical times. *bsGrags pa gling grags* was written in a Central Tibetan perspective, furnishing the authors with ample scope to view Zhang-zhung through the lens of Central Tibetan history and the region’s imperial period political domination of the Plateau.

The Buddhist history *mKhas pa’i dga’ston* provides valuable information on the relative location of Zhang-zhung in the imperial period.²⁰⁶ It records that the administrative divisions (*stong-sde*) of upper (western) Zhang-zhung lie between the Central Asian country of Gru-gu and Tibet. This seems to be a reference to the vast Byang-thang region, which is sharply divided from Central Tibet by the Transhimalaya (gNyan-chen thang-lha range) and from Eastern Turkestan by the Kunlun range. The same *mKhas pa’i dga’ston* reference avers that the five administrative divisions of lower Zhang-zhung are situated between Sum-pa and Tibet. This designates the region encompassing most of the eastern portion of present day Nag-chu prefecture as one would expect, but confusingly includes Gu-ge and Cog-la in far western Tibet. The text delineates the Zhang-zhung territory and its ten *stong-sde* as follows:

At the border of Tibet and Gru-gu are ’O-co and Mang-ma, these two; gNye-ma and Tsa-mo, these two; and Bag-ga stong-bu chung; the five *stong-sde* of upper Zhang-zhung. At the border of Tibet and Sum-pa are Gu-ge and Cog-la, these two; sPyi-gtsang and Yar-tshang, these two; and Ci-de stong-bu chung; the five *stong-sde* of lower Zhang-zhung. [These are] the ten *stong-sde* of Zhang-zhung.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ See *Khro bo dbang chen ngo mtshar rgyas pa’i rnam bshad gsal ba’i sgron ma* by sKyabs kyi ston-pa rin-chen ’od-zer (born 1353 CE), in *Spyi Spungs Dang Dbal Phur Gyi ’Grel Pa* (New Thobgyal, TBMC, 1973, nos. 31–392), no. 91, ln. 4: *spyir zhang zhung dang bod gnyis dang po sa bgos la gtsang kha rag yan man ...* This text is a commentary on the *spyi-spungs* tantric cycle, and is specifically dedicated to the tutelary deity of the mind, Khro-bo gtso-mchog mkha’-’gying. According to Hazod and Sørensen (in personal communication), gTsang Kha-rag formed the western border of g.Yon-ru, one of the four horns of the imperial period. This is corroborated by Lopön Tenzin Namdak (in personal communication), who places the western border of g.Yon-ru at gTsang-lha phu-dar.

²⁰⁴ The location and identity of gTsang-lha phu-dar is discussed in Bellezza: in press.

²⁰⁵ The sNyan-rong manuscript, fol. 5a, ln. 1: *stod zhang zhung dang bod kyis (= kyi) bar ni / ge khod gnyen (= gnyan) lung rang (= rong) gis bcad /*.

²⁰⁶ *Chos ’byung mkhas pa’i dga’ston* by dPa’-bo gtsug-lag phreng-ba (1504–1566). Beijing: Mi-rigs dpe-skrunkhang, 1985, pp. 187, 188.

²⁰⁷ This same geographic description of the *stong-sde* of upper and lower Zhang-zhung is found in the *mKhas pa lde’u*, with only some minor spelling variations. See Bellezza: in press.

bsGrags pa gling grags also describes the frontiers of Tibet vis-à-vis Central Asian countries, as well as its border with Sum-pa.²⁰⁸ The mountain range demarcating Ge-sar (Eastern Turkestan or possibly a region in the extreme northwest of the Subcontinent) from Tibet has not been identified (perhaps the Kunlun, Karakorum or Pamirs). The toponyms separating sTag-gzig and Tibet are also unidentified. The lake known as Khri-shog mtsho situated on the frontier between Hor and Tibet is none other than mTsho sngon-po, the large body of water on the northeastern fringe of the Plateau:

The juncture of Ge-sar of the north and Middle (Tibet) is that [place] divided by Bye-ma dgong-ring (= sgang-ring) (Long Sandy Ridge), which is like the back of a fish. The juncture of Hor and Tibet is that [place] divided by Khri-shog mtsho and the valley of Khri-chu sman-'phang. The juncture of sTag-gzig and Tibet is that [place] divided by rDo-rgod and Brag-rgod. The juncture of low Tibet and Sum-pa is that [place] divided by the valley of Ga'u shel-rtse (Ga'u Crystal Peak).²⁰⁹

4.3 The Bon Mythic Origins of the Tibetan Dynasty

The vast Central Tibetan territory was ruled over by a long line of kings known as sPu-rgyal bod. This subsection focuses on the mythic origins of the Tibetan royal dynasty from just two sources, *bsGrags pa gling grags* and the Dunhuang manuscript PT. 1038. In addition to other Bon accounts, the Buddhist historiographic tradition contains many mythic accounts of the rise of the Tibetan kings as well. The most detailed studies of the royal etiologic myths to date have been made by Haarh (1969), Macdonald (1971) and Karmay (1998), required reading for those interested in this aspect of Tibetan history and culture.

My aim in examining *bsGrags pa gling grags*, one of the earliest extant Bon texts describing the descent of the first Tibetan king from the realm of the gods, is to demonstrate that divine royal originators were in the guise of *bon-po*. This furnishes more evidence of the nexus of religious and political power that characterized the ancient Tibetan polity. Also of special interest in this work are the apotropaic and fortune-bestowing rites mentioned in connection to King gNya'-khri-btsan-po, seminal themes that permeate all facets of Bon ritual tradition. The motif of the heavenly cord (*dmu-thag*) and heavenly steps (*dmu-skas*) that King gNya'-khri used to travel from the heavens to earth are well-known mythical themes, symbolizing the celestial origins of the Tibetan kings and their genealogical descent from the *dmu* deities. As we shall see, the heavenly cord appears in the Tibetan archaic funerary tradition as leading to the divine envoys who show the deceased the way to the celestial afterlife (see pp. 392, 405). The *dmu* conveyances therefore appear to have had a fundamental soteriological role for Tibetans of all social rungs. As they were used by the first Tibetan king to access his terrestrial kingdom, at the time of his death they also acted as guidance in the opposite direction towards the uranic fountainhead of divine existence.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ sNyan-rong manuscript. In the translation I have juxtaposed three non-contiguous sentences. They are located in the text as follows: fol. 4b, ln. 3; fols. 4b, ln. 7 to 5a, ln. 1, folio 5a, ln. 2.

²⁰⁹ Essentially, *ga'u* can refer to any enclosed secure and/or sacred space. This word is now most commonly used to designate portable shrines and reliquary boxes. In the imperial period, *ga'u* also designated a type of casket (see p. 293.)

²¹⁰ The continuing importance of the *dmu-thag* is demonstrated by its appearance as a seminal theme in contemporary Tibetan literature and poetry. The *dmu-thag* motif also appears in folk songs. For instance, a traditional song entitled *sNyan-mo glu yi mchod-pa* (*Offerings of Song Harmonies*) (Tshe-'bar and dGongs-pa mtsho 1997: 36), is a probable remnant or adaptation of an ancient hymn that recapitulated the propitiation of the divinities of the human life-cycle. It goes as follows: "The essential (*gnyan-po*) *lha* is your own *skyes-lha* (birth god). We proffer three times offerings

The origin of the Tibetan royal lineage in the *bsGrags pa gling grags* is preceded by a theogonic sequence.²¹¹ It begins with the great creator god Sang (= Sangs) po [³bum-khri]. Next in the line of descent is Srid-rje, who had 18 sons. His eldest son Lha-rab gnyen (= gnyan) rum rje coupled with Sri-lcam li dur-ma and begot the god gNam-lha dkar-po. He was succeeded by nine generations of sons, the last of which was Mong-than rje. He coupled with dMu-dung ral-mo che and produced three sons: 'Phrul-cha 'al-'ol, Khri-cha 'al-'ol and sTag-cha 'al-'ol. From 'Phrul-cha 'al-'ol descended the 100,000 of the *lha* lineage, most of whom became the planets and stars. From Khri-cha 'al-'ol descended the one million of the miraculous *lha* lineage, which became the demigods (*lha-ma-yin*) of the savage *g.yen-khams* (the three realms of elemental spirits).

The *bsGrags pa gling grags* theogony then moves to sTag-cha 'al-'ol and 'Tsham-za khyad-khyud, who begot the divine ancestor of the Tibetan kings, Yab-lha bdal-drug (para. i).²¹² In the text, Yab-lha bdal-drug is equated with the chief of the Vedic gods Lha'i dbang-po brgya-byin (Indra), the wielder of the thunderbolt. As there is no hint of Buddhist deities and doctrines in this origin myth of the Tibetan kings, the correspondence between a native god and one of Indian origin may represent a Tibetan tradition that surfaced in the imperial period or perhaps even in an earlier time. The text tells us that Yab-lha bdal-drug had his own *sku-gshen*, a celestial counterpoint to the existence of the royal priests here on earth. With one of his 33 consorts, Yab-lha bdal-drug begot seven sons. The three eldest sons went to reside in a heaven above Ri-rab lhun-po, while the three youngest sons gave rise to the important elemental spirits known as *ma-sangs*, *gnyan* and *yul-lha*.

It was from the middle son of Yab-lha bdal-drug that the Tibetan kings descended (para. ii). Around this time Nam-mkha' snang-ba mdog-can, a resident of Tibet who was to become the *sku-gshen* of the first king, gNya'-khri btsan-po, explained to the god Ye-lha sems kyi sgron-ma (Primordial Lha Lamp of the Mind) that his country still lacked a protector of humans (*mi-mgon*) and a keeper of livestock (*dud-'gro phyug skyob*). Nam-mkha' snang-ba mdog-can thus appealed to the deity to send a divine representative to Tibet. This was to be Lha-rab gnyan-rum rje (Lord Excellent Lha Womb of the gNyan).²¹³ Evidently, from what the text says, this god was not at all keen to come down to the earth and required much encouragement. Finally, Lha-rab was sent by Yab-lha bdal-drug to be the king of the world (*'dzam-gling gi rgyal-po*).

Lha-rab gnyan-rum rje is acknowledged as the universal sovereign by the Tibetans, and he ushered in a period of peace and stability (para. iii). Lha-rab then returned to the heavens to take a goddess as his wife. Lha-rab's wife, dMu-lcam bra-ma, was the daughter of his maternal uncle, dMu-rje btsan-po. This cross-cousin marital alliance indicates a strong matrilineal component in the royal lineage of the Tibetan kings, which is possibly the product of archaic gynarchic structures (also see pp. 343–349). This link is reinforced by the forms of their offspring, manifesting as a

of nectarous beer. The essential wood is red *kyl-ta*. We set out three times the *dmu-thag* of white wool. The essential venue is this congregation gathered here. We proffer three times offerings of melodious songs" (*lha gnyan po rang gi skyes lha red / chang bdud rtsi'i mchod pa lan gsum 'phen / shing gnyan po kyal ta dmar po red / bal dkar po'i dmu thag lan gsum 'then / gral gnyan po 'dir tshogs khrom pa red / glu snyan mo'i mchod pa lan gsum 'phen /*).

²¹¹ See the sNyan-rong manuscript, fols. 19b, ln. 6 to 20a, ln. 5. Bon theogonic literature from several sources is studied in Haahr 1969; Karmay 1998, pp. 245–309; Bellezza 2005a, pp. 393–401; pp. Karmay's (*ibid.*) detailed analysis of *mKhas pa lde'u* and its myth of descent regarding Tibet's first king is especially relevant to this *bsGrags pa gling grags* passage and provides many points of comparison.

²¹² The translation I provide beginning at this juncture of the text is found in the sNyan-rong manuscript, fols. 20a, ln. 5 to 22a, ln. 3. Tibetan Text II-20, pp. 591, 592.

²¹³ Lha-rab may also be read Lha-rabs (Lha Lineage).

scorpion, frog, fish, and tadpole, animals typically associated with the *klu*. The chthonic *klu* in their female form (*klu-mo*) are customarily connected to maternal clan origins. dMu-lcam bra-ma performed a ritual to attract good fortune (pertaining to the *phywa* and *g.yang*) with the four tellurians, who as a result were transformed into four amazing human manifestations (*ya-mtshan sprul-pa'i mi*) (para. iv). The crystal scorpion, golden frog, turquoise fish and conch tadpole gave rise to four men armed with powerful Bon ritual implements, their royal emblems (para. v). These four animals of precious substances were divine *klu* protectors and/or the totemic (clan origination) deities from the mother's side of the Tibetan royal lineage. Among the royal emblems of males were those we are already familiar with, such as turquoise horns, a turban, a *gshang* and drum, and a skin robe (*slag-pa*). The golden man who appeared from the miraculous frog held a grain measurement container (*bre-ba*) and a mattock (*g.yag-pa*), tools that appear to symbolize the founding of agriculture.

Yab-lha bdal-drug and dMu-lcam bra-ma, struck by the exquisite appearance of their four sons, asked them why they had assumed such remarkable forms (para. vi). The man of crystal, gNya'-khri btsan-po, affirmed that they descended from the divine lineages of the *lha* and *gnyan*. He also explained the meaning of his name, which is at variance with Tibetan sources that claim gNya'-khri (Neck Enthroned) came from him being carried on the necks of human bearers. gNya'-khri then introduces his three brothers to their parents. The man of gold was Ya-ngal, the great *sku-gshen* who could dispel the various forms of retribution originating with the daemons. The unnamed man of turquoise was the keeper of life (*tshe-rdzi*) of the *lha* and *gnyan* lineages, in other words, another prototypical *gshen* who protected the well-being of the kings and their subjects. We know from para. vii of the text and other Bon sources that this prototypical *gshen* belonged to the Tshe/mTshe lineage. The man of conch was the celebrated *gshen* known as Co-mi (Co Man). Yab-lha bdal-drug issued instructions for Ya-ngal, Tshe and Co to support and protect their brother gNya'-khri btsan-po in order to prevent harm from befalling him on earth (para. vii). This was accomplished using the defensive mainstays of ritual tradition: fumigation (*bsang*), ablutions (*khru*s), purificatory rites (*sel*), and ransom offerings (*glud*), as well as the proactive methods of ritual empowerment (*dbang*) and benediction (*byin-rlabs*). Additionally, Yab-lha bdal-drug ordered four *sman* (goddesses) to support all sides of gNya'-khri btsan-po's body. These *sman* goddesses are the female counterparts to the four male aspects of divinity represented by gNya'-khri and his three brothers. The dyad of *lha* and *sman* as a full divine complement is a common theme in Bon ritual tradition. With all protective measures in place, the four *sman* of space (*nam-mkha'*) arrange for four celestial horses to carry gNya'-khri btsan-po and his brothers down to earth (para. viii). In the last instance, King gNya'-khri descends to southern Tibet:

- i) The son of the union of sTag-cha and 'Tsham-za khyad-khyud was known as the lord Yab-lha bdal-drug, and also known as Lha'i dbang-po brgya-byin (Indra). He was protected by his *sku-gshen* dMu-bon thugs-dkar. The lord had 32 consorts and along with Mu-za mdzes-ldan ma,²¹⁴ he had 33. mDzes-ldan ma (Beautiful Woman) begot seven sons. The elder three brothers went to bSam-gtan gong-ma.²¹⁵ The lineage of the *thugs-kar* gods, the lineage of the *thugs-dmar kha-sprin*, the lineage of the *gnyan* gods and *ma-sangs*, and the *yul-lha* of existence descended from the three youngest brothers. They acted as the masters of the slate mountains, snow [mountains], rock formations, water, trees, sunny places, and shady places.

²¹⁴ The word *za* refers to female members of the Mu clan.

²¹⁵ This is reference to the bSam-gtan bcu-gnyis, which is part of the world of forms (*gzugs-khams*). It includes 17 layers of deities above Ri-rab lhun-po.

- ii) The middle [brother] was known as Khri-sad ber bdun-tshig and also known as Lha-rab gnyan-rum rje. That time was the period in which the *gshen* Nam-mkha' snang-ba mdog-can stayed in Tibet. It was said to Ye-lha sems kyi sgron-ma (Primordial Lha Lamp of the Mind) (the middle brother) that the world's Tibet was still without a protector for humans and without a keeper for livestock, so he must manifest a son on behalf of living beings. Lha-rab was encouraged (*skul-ma*) again and again and this middle one of the seven of the *lha* lineage of existence was sent by the father as the king of the world.
- iii) All the humans bore him above their heads,²¹⁶ so he was also called gTsan-btsug spyi-rgyal btsad-po.²¹⁷ The world was made peaceful by him. Many respected him, so he was also called the rJe mang-pos bkur-pa'i rgyal-po (King Respected by Many Lord). He was appointed the leader of all, so he was also called rGyal-po spyi-bor skyes (King Born Above the Head). He went up to the thirty-three.²¹⁸ He took as his wife dMu-lcam bra-ma, the daughter of his maternal uncle, dMu-rje btsan-po. On the back of his wife's neck appeared a growth (*sba-ba*) as large as a stomach. It opened after nine months and ten days and from inside appeared these four: a scorpion of crystal with turquoise spots, a frog of gold with silver bumps on its back,²¹⁹ a fish of turquoise with golden fins, and a tadpole of conch with a pearl crest (*thor-tsug*).
- iv) The mother was surprised. She perceived [the births] as a defect and set up a white curtain. She spread out the mattress of good fortune (*dmu-yad*). She put them inside a golden *kur-ma*,²²⁰ keeping them as the support of the *phywa* and *g.yang*. She did the performance of *phywa* preservation and *g.yang* preservation. When she looked after three nights and four days they were the four men of wonderful manifestation.
- v) The scorpion of crystal was the man of crystal with turquoise hair. He had white silk clothes and a turban. He radiated white light as large as a mandala. He held in his hand a '*gying-dkar*'²²¹ of crystal. The frog of gold was the man of gold with turquoise horns erected [on his head]. He wore clothes of gold. In his hand he held a grain measurement container of silver and a mattock.²²² The fish of turquoise was the man of turquoise with a golden turban tied [on his head]. He wore clothes of five cloths of different colors. In his hand he held a turquoise drum (*rnga ding-ba*). The tadpole of conch was the man of conch with a pearl head ornament (*thor-tsug*). On his body he wore a robe (*slag-pa*) of '*phra-men* (a type of gemstone). In his hands he held a golden wheel and a *gshang*.

²¹⁶ *sPyi bor gtsug tu khur*. This means that they deeply respected him.

²¹⁷ This name shows that he was the *btsan-po/btsad-po* (literally: the indomitable one, the mighty one, etc.) and universal king (*spyi-rgyal*), but its precise signification is uncertain.

²¹⁸ *Sum-bcu rtsa-gsum*. This is a synonym for the realm of the *g.yen-khams*, the 33 classes of spirits. From this juncture in the narrative onwards, this same royal origin myth is also found in *rGyal gshen ya ngal gyi gdung rabs / Un chen tshangs pa'i sgra dbyangs*, by Yang-sgom mi-'gyur rgyal-mtshan (Dol-po'i gsung-rab nyams-gso khang, Dolanji, 2005), pp. 28–32. This text was written at bSam-gtan gling monastery in Dol-po (pp. 79, 80). *Ya ngal gyi gdung rabs* has some minor grammatical and generally inferior thematic variations. These probably indicate that it was written at a later date than the sNyan-rong manuscript.

²¹⁹ *gSer gyi sbal pa la /dngul gyi grang 'brum can .../*. It is also possible, but less likely, that this describes a tortoise of gold with a silver carapace.

²²⁰ This is a scribal error. It should read: "She put them inside a gold and silver *ga'u* and paid them homage," (*gser dngul ga'u'i bkur ma'i nang du bcug...*). See *rGyal gshen ya ngal gyi gdung rabs*, p. 28.

²²¹ More commonly '*Gying-khar*. A kind of staff that serves as a symbol of royal authority.

²²² In *Ya ngal gyi gdung rabs* these attributes have been altered to a crystal rosary and a hammer.

- vi) The mother and father said, “You are the four wonderful sons.” They said, “For what purpose do you have a beautiful appearance and ornaments?” The holy man (*mi-po*) of crystal said, “Dear father and mother, we four are the sons of the *lha* lineage and lords of the *gnyan*. I am gNya’-khri btsan-po. For what reason am I called gNya’-khri btsan-po? For nine months and ten days I stayed on the nape of the neck of the mother, and that is why I am called gNya’-khri. My commands over the *lha* and *’dre* of tangible existence are irresistible; for this reason I am called bTsan-po. This golden man is the *bon* of existence, Ya-ngal shag. He can defeat the *thab*,²²³ *gzhob*²²⁴ and rancor (*’khon*), these three [of the demigods]. This man of turquoise is the holy man, keeper of life of the *lha* and *gnyan* lineages. This holy man of conch is the one called Co-mi gyer-mkhan khu-byug gsung-snyan (Co Man Chanter Melodious Song of the Cuckoo).²²⁵ These manifestations emanated like this from celestial *lha* [because] we are going to be the king and the *gshen* of the earth. Father, please advise us.” Thus he said.
- vii) The father said, “Celestial *lha*, to go to the earth [is to go to] the human country of great contamination and defilement, so Ya-ngal shag, guide [gNya’-khri] from the front and do fumigation (*bsang*), ablutions (*khros*) and the purificatory rites (*sel*). There are very many obstructions (*bar-chod*) and sudden calamities (*hur-pa*), so Tshe Man, support his body from the right, and empower and bless him. The *lha* and *’dre* of tangible existence are wildly hostile, so Co Man, support his body from the left and make the body *glud* (ransom offering)²²⁶ that liberates [from demons]. [gNya’-khri], grasp the white *dmu* cord as the hand support. Keep on the consecutive *dmu* steps as the foot support. Four *smān*, support his body from all around.” Thus he spoke and commanded.²²⁷
- viii) Then, the four miraculous *smān* from within the realm of space caught four cloud horses with the power of the wind. Placing a miraculous throne on the back of the neck [of one] of the horses, they made it [gNya’-khri’s] conveyance.²²⁸ He held the *dmu* cord in his waving hand. Placing his left foot on the *dmu* stairs, he went amidst the southern clouds and mists. He beheld the pure land Yar-lung sog-ka. He descended to the pure holy place of rTse-mo byung-rgyal.²²⁹

²²³ Divine retribution for the contamination of springs.

²²⁴ Divine retribution for the contamination of the hearth and for despoilment by fire.

²²⁵ *rGyal gshen ya ngal gyi gdung rabs* notes that Ya-ngal is related to Gyim-gong srid-pa (a lineage?) but that this needs more inquiry (*zhib dgos*) (p. 30). This association is confirmed in the text *Lha bon gshen gsum gyer bzhengs* (see p. 386, para. vi), which mentions Ya-ngal gyim-gong (the same personality as the *sku-gshen* of gNya’-khri btsan-po?) as receiving aspects of the archaic funerary tradition from the *’dur-gshen* rMa-da. *Ya ngal gyi gdung rabs* adds that mTshe belongs to the dMu-bon ye-then lineage and bCo-mi to the Phywa-bon the-legs lineage (p. 30).

²²⁶ *sKu-glud*. This is a kind of effigy (also called *ngar-glud*) offered in exchange for the body of one held in thrall by demons. The historical significance and ritual value of the *glud* is examined in Karmay 1998, pp. 339–379. Of particular interest is a Bon *glud-rabs* (Text I), a work pertaining to the origins of the *glud* (*ibid.*: 343–346, 372–374).

²²⁷ The contents of this paragraph are described in Tenzin Namdak 1997, pp. 52, 53. An account similar to this paragraph is found in the *bsGrags byang*, which is translated in Karmay 1998, p. 385.

²²⁸ Literally: foot support (*zhabs-rten*).

²²⁹ *Ya ngal gyi gdung rabs* (pp. 32, 33) goes on to state that the first castle in Yar-lung sog-kha (*sic*) was established at rTse-mo byung-rgyal and called Byi-ba stag-rtse. bCo, mTshe and Ya-ngal received the Bon teachings of *spyi-spungs* from Nam-mkha’ mdog-chen. Their *gsas-mkhar* legacy (*phyag-rjes*) was g.Yung-drung lha-rtse, which was also established at rTse-mo byung-rgyal. We can see from this reference that right from the inception of the Tibetan dynasty the twin organs of political and religious power became fixed institutions.

I shall now present a translation of PT. 1038, a text that has already come under much scholarly scrutiny.²³⁰ In the present study, particular attention is drawn to the indigenous or Bon motifs in the myth of royal origins. Like the etiologic myth in *bsGrags pa gling grags*, there is no infiltration of patently Buddhist concepts in this Dunhuang manuscript. The first king of Tibet is referred to as ITi'u rgyal-po thod-rgyal, a term of uncertain significance (para. i).²³¹ He appears as the *btsan-po* (king/emperor) of sPu-rgyal bon, Bon here being synonymous with Bod (Tibet). The text casts doubts on whether the first king should be included among the antecedent Twelve Principalities (rGyal-phran), but gives no further explanation.

PT. 1038 commences to provide three different versions of the royal origins (para. ii). Karmay (1998: 285) and Macdonald (1971: 216, 217) note that all three of these mythic themes are also present in later works such as *mKhas pa lde 'u*. This is a fine example of the temporal continuity between the imperial period (or its aftermath) and the Buddhist-dominated phase of later Tibetan history. In the first summary of kingly origins, the royal lineage is traced to Lha ku-spyi ser, the leader of all the *ma-sangs* (ancestral spirits of the *gnyan* class), who is also a *phywa* god. The *phywa*, along with the *dmu*, is the most important class of divinities in the old Tibetan cosmogonies. In the second royal origin myth, the lineage or tribe (*rigs*) of the kings is that of the 'fierce meat eaters' (*gdol par sha za*) and the 'red-faced ones' (*gdong-dmar*), which appear to be characteristic epithets for the ancient Tibetans. These labels must have been used with pride and relish during the imperial period when Tibet's military expansion led to its political status as a major Asian power. It is also professed that the Tibetan kings belonged to the lineage of *gnod-sbyin*, spirits tantamount to the *yakṣa*. I see no allusion to Buddhist tradition in this passage but rather the equating of the royal origins with a type of deity prevalent in ancient India. The *gnod-sbyin* may have been introduced in the imperial period, but we cannot discount out of hand the possibility that Tibetan knowledge of the *yakṣa* (as with certain Vedic deities such as Indra) predates the imperial period.²³² The great antiquity of the *gnod-sbyin* is supported by their rule over the first proto-state of Tibet (see p. 279, 280). It is the third version of the royal origins that brings PT. 1038 into close correspondence to *bsGrags pa gling grags*. Mention is made of the first King descending from Khri-bar la bdun-tshig, who can be no other than Khri-sad ber bdun-tshig of the *bsGrags-pa glings grags*, the divine precursor to the Tibetan kings and the middle son of Yab-lha bdal-drug. I am more inclined, however, to read this as describing the placement of the middle brother of Yab-bla bdal-drug's seven sons rather than as a proper name per se.²³³

²³⁰ I examine the entire text, lns. 1–18 (the text is cut here after four additional words of no integral meaning). Tibetan Text II-21, p. 592. PT. 1038 was translated and studied by Karmay (1998: 285–288), who refers to earlier studies of the same text by Lalou and Macdonald. This part of Karmay's masterful study of the royal myths is focused mainly on a comparison of PT. 1038 with *mKhas pa lde 'u*. Our respective translations differ sharply in a number of important areas, heavily coloring our individual interpretations of its historical significance. I make note of these discrepancies in the translation at the appropriate places.

²³¹ Karmay (1998: 285, 286) interprets this name as King of ITi Thod-rgyal (= rgal), signifying a king who appeared suddenly. I contend that Thod-rgyal ('Royal Turban') was probably a kingly epithet, while ITi'u (= ITe'u) is liable to be closely related or identical to IDe, the well-known Tibetan dynastic house and region due east of Yar-lung.

²³² On the other hand, Karmay (1998: 287) believes that mention of the *yakṣa* could only have occurred after Buddhism was well established in Tibet. He also argues that the various tribes the Tibetan kings belonged to are cited in the text in a disparaging fashion. His argument that the Tibetan kings are depicted as equal in status to Indian outcasts is unconvincing. The wording of the text does not warrant such an interpretation.

²³³ PT. 1286, lns. 42, 43, also notes that IDe-nyag khri bstan-po (King gNya'-khri) descended to earth as the Khri 'i bdun-tshigs, he who had three older brothers and three younger brothers.

The first king descended to Tibet to be the lord of humans and livestock, presupposing the establishment of a new political order and civilization. As the nucleus of his state, sPu-rgyal gathered around him the Lho, rNgīgs, mTshe, gCo, Sha, and sPug clans, which eventually came to be known as Yab-'bangs rus-drug (Patriarchs of the Six Clans):

- i) ITī'u rgyal-po thod-rgyal appeared²³⁴ from the four territorial divisions (*yul-sde*),²³⁵ each with a country and castle, as the *btsan-po* of sPu-rgyal bon.²³⁶ According to the accounts of some, it is so stated that [this king] was included in the Twelve Principalities. Also some state that [this king] was not included.²³⁷
- ii) To utter the origins of the lineage of the *btsan-po*: above the apex of the sky is the one known as Lha ku-spyi ser, the master of all the *ma-sangs*, who dominates all existence. It is also stated that he was Phywa, the Phywa [god]. In a second way, he was of the tribe of the fierce²³⁸ meat-eaters. He was of the tribe of red-faced kings. He was the master of the wealth of snow mountains (Tibet).²³⁹ It is also said that he was of the tribe known as gNod-sbyin dza.²⁴⁰ In a third way, it is said that above the 13 layers of the sky he was the middle [brother] of the seven Khrī [brothers]. From the *lha* of the sky [he came to] earth²⁴¹ as the lord of the black-headed humans who had no lord, and as the superior of livestock²⁴² that had no superior. His ministers were Lho and rNgīgs. His *bon-po* were mTshe and gCo. His *phyag-tshang*²⁴³ were Sha and sPug. This lord of humans did as the *lha* and *bdud*.²⁴⁴ It is thus spoken that he came to the country of Bod-ka g.yag-drug. Irrespective of whatever has been mentioned, his clan was sPu-bod and he was named sPu-rgyal.

In order to complete this abridged study of the mythic origins of the Tibetan kings, I turn to the Twelve Principalities (rGyal-phran bcu-nyis), which are often cited in Tibetan historical literature as having composed the political structure of Tibet before the time of the sPu-rgyal kings. As we saw, PT. 1038 is non-committal regarding whether there is a direct political link between the first king of Tibet and these principalities. Even before the rise of the Twelve Principalities the nascent Tibetan polity was supposed to have had a series of semi-divine rulers. I will provide an account of these proto-states from just two Buddhist histories in order to illustrate the mythic nature of

²³⁴ *Byung ste* (appeared). This is my interpolation, as the end of the line is not legible.

²³⁵ Karmay (1988: 285) treats *sde bzhi* as a proper name, but this is not likely in my opinion. The four *yul-sde* are probably four territorial or political divisions or quarters of the sPu-rgyal kingdom and may, therefore, correspond with the Ru-chen bzhi (g.Yas-ru, dBus-ru, g.Yon-ru, and Ru-lag) or the gNa' gnyen mtha'-bzhi'i rabs (the four dynasties of lDe, sKyī, Dags, and mChims).

²³⁶ As Karmay (1998: 286) aptly points out, the final consonants 'd' and 'n' are often interchanged in early texts.

²³⁷ *La gtog-pa* (included). This is my interpolation for what is illegible in my copy of the text.

²³⁸ *gDol*. Karmay (1998: 286, 287) translates this word as 'inferior', one of its lexical senses. This gloss is inappropriate here, however, as the text is speaking of royal origins and the custom of meat eating in a proud tone. Furthermore, there is no indication anywhere else in the text that a pejorative portrayal of the royal origin myths was intended by the authors.

²³⁹ This sentence includes the word *byud*, which is of unknown contextual meaning.

²⁴⁰ Alternatively, this last syllable may read: *jo*. Karmay (1998: 287, 288) identifies Dza as a proper name, which probably denotes a mythic figure in an origin tale of tantric teachings. I take his identification as provisional and not particularly fitting the textual themes, as Buddhist ideas do not crop up in PT. 1038.

²⁴¹ *Sa-ga dog-drug*. The precise semantic import of this expression is not clear.

²⁴² *Dud rngog-chag*. Literally *dud* means 'stooped over' and *rngog-chag* (= *chags*) 'with mane'.

²⁴³ A messenger, attendant or ritual assistant.

²⁴⁴ This sentence is somewhat grammatically ambiguous. It appears to indicate that the king dispensed goodness or harm depending on whether his subjects behaved virtuously or not.

Tibetan statehood before the dawn of its historical era. It is not my intention to enter into an examination of all variations existing in these traditions, but rather to explicate a traditional view of Tibetan prehistory.

rGyal po bka' thang describes the political structure of early Tibet as follows: “This is how the Buddhist kings of Tibet appeared: between the lineage [of the Tibetan kings] and the pro tempore [kings] there appeared four kingdoms oriented in the cardinal directions, each with a king.”²⁴⁵ Although the setting is the distant past, these four kings appear in a form congruent with political geographic traditions attributed in later historical sources to the imperial period. They include the ritual sciences (*gtsug-lag*) king of China in the east, the Dharma king of India in the south, the wealth king of Ta-zig in the west, and the king of the army of Ge-sar in the north. At the time these four kings were spreading in the four directions, the Tibetans had no lord, so they built small castles and fortresses on all the small mountains and rock formations (*ri-phran brag mkhar kun la rdzong yang bcas*). They put their clothing, foodstuffs and jewels in impregnable castles. At that time, the Tibetan army was very small and could not challenge others. They had no autonomy and only thin support. In this land of nine snow mountain peaks, the country of Tibet, there appeared six sovereigns (*mnga'-mdzad*) before the sPur-rgyal (*sic*) (Tibetan kings). This reference to the construction of mountain strongholds is significant in that it furnishes a literary basis for an archaeological fact in many parts of the Plateau.

From this incipient stage of political development in which Tibet is portrayed as vulnerable to the designs of its immediate neighbors, the country takes its first steps towards unity. This transpires under the dominion of elemental spirits in five successive states. Each state is associated with an ‘ancient symbol’ (*snga-rtags*), a reference to the political and cultural instruments of governance, bravery and prosperity. The use of the term ‘ancient symbol’ illustrates that these five successive periods became precedents. The *snga-rtags* of the *gnod-sbyin* (a class of environment-bound spirits) is sheer strength, while the *snga-rtags* of the *bdud* and *srin* is a carnivorous lifestyle. The *snga-rtags* of the third proto-state of the *klu* and *btsan* has to do with the standard beverages of Tibet, water and milk (known as *dkar-chu* when mixed together). The *snga-rtags* of the *ma-sangs* of the fourth proto-state are the backbone of old Tibet’s weaponry. It was in the fifth proto-state of the Za-ram skyes-drug²⁴⁶ that the equestrian arts and jewelry were supposed to have developed. Only thereafter the Twelve rGyal-phran rose up, to be followed by sPu-rgyal bod. The proto-states, rulers and ancient symbols of these various political entities in *rGyal po bka' thang* are listed as follows:

- 1) Firstly, the *gnod-sbyin* governed. The name bestowed upon the country was bDud-yul kharag mgo-dgu. The ancient symbol of the mighty and puissant originated then.
- 2) Then, the *bdud* and *srin* governed. The name bestowed upon the country was Lha-srin gnyis kyi yul. The ancient symbol of red-faced meat-eaters originated then.

²⁴⁵ See *rGyal po bka' thang* (*bKa' thang sde lnga, Dgah-ldan-phun-tshogs-glin* (= *gling*) edition. Śata-Piṭaka Series, Indo-Asian Literatures, vol. 307, nos. 105–287. Lokesh Chandra: Delhi, 1982), nos. 138, ln. 2 to 140, ln. 1.

²⁴⁶ An obscure group of deities. The six Za-ram skye-bu are found in the circle of the mountain god gNyan-chen thang-lha, where they appear as the protectors of youth. They are depicted with the typical weaponry and armor of Tibet. See Bellezza 2005a, p. 190, (inc. n. 5). Given this association with gNyan-chen thang-lha and the name of the country they ruled (sTong is closely identified with Sum-pa), it may be that the Za-ram deities originally belonged to the Sum-pa proto-state.

- 3) Then, the *klu* and *btsan* governed. The name bestowed upon the country was Bod-khams gling-dgu. The ancient symbol of using milk with water originated then.
- 4) Then, the nine *ma-sangs* governed. The name bestowed upon the country was Bod-khams g.ya'-drug. The ancient symbol of arrow and spear weaponry originated then.
- 5) Then the *Za-ram skyes-drug* governed. The name bestowed upon the country was sTong-sde bco-brgyad. The ancient symbol of riding horses and hanging earrings originated then.
- 6) Thereafter the Twelve Minor Kings (rGyal-phran) governed. The name bestowed upon the country was sBa-kha brgyad. The ancient symbol of prostrations and showing respect originated then.
- 7) Lastly, the sPur-rgyal *btsan-po* governed. The name bestowed upon the country was Bod-khams ru-bzhi. The *btsan-po* of Tibet, 'O-de spur-rgyal²⁴⁷ came down from the divine sky as the lord of humans.

The *mKhas pa lde'u* mentions ten proto-states before the rise of the Twelve Principalities.²⁴⁸ The type of spirit, the name of the country and the characteristic implement (a symbol of political power and martial ability) of these political entities can be listed as follows:

Type of divinity	Ruler	Country	Hand-tool
<i>gnod-sbyin</i>	gNod-sbyin nag-po	bZangs-yul rgyan-med	bow and arrow for shooting
<i>bdud</i>	Re-sde mgo-g.yag	bDud-yul gling-dgu	<i>sta-re dgra-sta</i> (battleaxe)
<i>srin</i>	gNya'-ring phrag-med	Nag-po dgu-dul	foot of the <i>srin-mo</i> (spear) and <i>sgyogs</i> (catapult)
<i>lha</i>	dMar-'jam	Lha-yul gung-thang	trident
<i>klu</i>	?	Ngam-brang cang-brang	spear
'dre	?	Lang-tang ling-tang	'gyug-pa skyog (= <i>sgyogs</i>) (club)
nine <i>ma-sangs</i>	?	Bod-khams g.yang-drug	<i>dong</i> (bow case), <i>ral</i> (quiver) and <i>phub-chung</i> (small shield)
<i>klu</i> (= <i>btsan</i>)	?	Bod-khams gling-dgu	?
<i>mi-ma-yin</i>	?	Ngam-yul nag-po	?
Za-rid spun-drug	?	sTong-ste bco-brgyad	?

²⁴⁷ Alternatively spelled 'O-lde spu-rgyal. An ancestral king closely linked to gNya'-khri/khyi *btsan-po* in the rKong-po and Lhasa gTsug-lag khang pillar inscriptions (Richardson 1954: 163).

²⁴⁸ See *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*, by mKhas-pa lde'u (late 13th century CE), p. 224.

According to *mKhas pa lde'u*, after these ten prehistoric dominions, Tibet was governed by the rGyal-phran bcu-gnyis (Twelve Princes), and then by 40 vassal kings (*sil-ba*) (p. 225). The name of each of these principalities, its king and the clan of its ministers can be listed as follows:

Country	King	Ministerial clan
mChims-yul nag-po dgu-sul	mChims ne-gu	Dang and Ding
Zhang-zhung	Dar gyi rje li-ga shur	sMa-ra sangs-rje
Myang-ro mchad-dkar	rTsang-rje thod-dkar	Ban
sNubs-yul gling-dgu	sNubs-rje srid-pa	rMe'u and 'Gro
Nyang-ro sham-po	Lo-ngam	She'u and Yug
Ra-ljongs sngon	Kyi-rje rmangs-po	Ngas-mi and 'Gro
Ngas-po khra-sna	Gung-khri zings-po rje	'Gar and sNyan
'Ol-phu yang-mkhar	Zin-'brang rje	Go and sBas
sNa rol-mo gong	Drang-rje gong-nam	sBrad and Zhu
Nyang-yul rnam-gsum	Nyang-btsun glang-rgyab	two brothers
Dwags-yul se-mo gru-bzhi	Dwags-rje lce-mang	Bla and Kam-mo
'Brog-mo rnam-gsum	Ser-khri	rKang-re nag-po

4.4 The Bon Religious Activities of the Tibetan Kings

Instead of a Zhang-zhung royal setting, most references to the *gshen* of protohistoric and imperial times pertain to the kings of Tibet. This is a clear indication of the Central Tibet focus that developed in the systematized Bon historical discourse. This historical bias can probably be attributed to imperial-period oral and written sources that were largely preoccupied with the sPu-rgyal empire. There are numerous oblique references to the priests of Zhang-zhung in *bsGrags pa gling grags* and other Bon quasi-historical texts, but few descriptions of the political and historical doings in which these religious figures are thought to have participated. This is a cause for some consternation but not an insuperable problem for traditionalists. They view the activities of the kings and priests of Tibet as being largely applicable to the Zhang-zhung cultural setting as well. The widespread diffusion of Bon teachings from Zhang-zhung and sTag-gzig to Central Tibet is generally held up to explain the cultural and religious similarities between these countries.²⁴⁹ The literary neglect of Zhang-zhung history suggests that with the unification of the Plateau under King Srong-btsan sgam-po, the cultural distinctions between Central Tibet and Zhang-zhung began to blur under a barrage of assimilative forces. Bon quasi-historical sources

²⁴⁹ *Nyi sgron* states that Bon literature, *gsas-khang* and *mchod-rten* thrived in Zhang-zhung before they appeared in gTsang and dBus. *Legs bshad mdzod* avers that Bon mainly reached China, India and Tibet from Zhang-zhung. See Karmay 1972, p. 22, fol. 126a–126b.

also make us stop and consider that cultural interchange between the two countries could have actually begun much earlier, under sovereigns such as sPu-lde gung-rgyal, Tibet's ninth king. The vital need for grain among the inhabitants of the Byang-thang would certainly have spurred on economic contacts. The archaeological record, however, is unambiguous in showing that there were significant paleocultural differences between the Upper Tibetan and Central Tibetan proto-tribal entities. These cultural differences are not the subject of comparative analysis in Bon quasi-historical literature, which to a large extent is concerned with the extraterritorial scope of the Bon religion.

The exploits of the early kings of Tibet covered in the *bsGrags pa gling grags* deserve special attention, because they provide one of the most lucid accounts of early religion and the Tibetan kings found in Bon literature. First for inspection is the tale of the propagation of Bon during the time of the first seven kings of Tibet.²⁵⁰ These seven kings, known as the Khri-bdun, are enumerated in PT. 1286 (lns. 44–47). According to this text, they reigned only until their sons could ride a horse; that is, until their scions came of age. After death they each returned to the celestial realm, a mythic theme that continued to prevail in the later histories of these kings. A matrilineal component in this listing is unmistakably indicated by the third and fourth kings each assuming part of his mother's name. The matronymic component of these names appears before the patronymic element, which suggests the maternal lineage may have taken political and/or ritual precedence over that of the forefathers. This may possibly be an intimation of gynarchic traditions in the ancient cultures of the Plateau, which manifested in the maternal avuncular role in the succession of the kings. The existence of the Phyi-mo bcu-gsum (Thirteen Grandmothers) clan tradition in a *pha-rabs* text, and Yum-sras as the queen of the chief mountain gods surrounding gNam-mtsho, seem to support the existence of matriarchal cultural elements (Bellezza 2005: 99, 318). The Khri-bdun are listed as follows:

The son of the liaison of lDe-nyag ci btsan-po and gNam mug-mug was Mu-khri btsan-po. The son of the liaison of Mug-khri btsan-po and Sa dñg-dñg was Dñg-khri btsan-po. The son of the liaison of Ding-khri btsan-po and So tham-tham was So-khri btsan-po. The son of So-khri btsan-po was De-khri btsan-po. The son of De-khri btsan-po was Khri-sde²⁵¹ btsan-po. These [kings] who came before²⁵² were the same in that the fathers passed away to the heavens (*dgung*) when their sons were able to ride horses.

A record of the activities of the Tibetan kings in *bsGrags pa gling grags* begins with the dMu divinities, who gave rise to both the universal monarch (referred to as the 'honored lineage', the *gdung-rgyud*) and the vassal kings of the Tibetan proto-states (para. i). The text avers that these first kings were directly connected to the practice of Bon, a convention betokening the great antiquity of this religious tradition. How Tibet's first King gNya'-khri btsad-po (*sic*) is related to the prehistoric royal lineage is not specified in the text; it merely says that he appeared after the older overlords died off. As in the other royal chronicles we have examined, King gNya'-khri came down to earth to be the protector of humanity. It is affirmed that the king was a divine *lha-bon* practitioner who originated in the sky. The *lha-bon* are the priests who propitiated the *lha* divinities and who conducted all manner of beneficial rituals. These sacral origins of the king are

²⁵⁰ See *bsGrags pa gling grags*, Dolanji edition, nos. 50, ln. 6 to 52, ln. 7. Tibetan Text II-22, pp. 592, 593.

²⁵¹ *sDe* may actually be *spe*, but this syllable is not fully legible.

²⁵² *Yan-chad*. This refers to the seven kings who came before Dri-gum btsan-po. One of the seven kings is missing in this passage.

reported to be contained in two named texts that, to my knowledge, no longer exist. The baton of religious transmission is then passed onto King gNya'-khri's son, Mu-khri btsan-po. Having received the full complement of Bon teachings from his personal *gshen* Nam-mkha snang-ba'i mdog-can, King Mu-khri is said to have practiced them at Lha-ri gyang-tho, the holy mountain in Kong-po that many royal theogonies cite as the location upon which King gNya'-khri first descended.

As in the *Ma rgyud sgrub skor* we have already scrutinized, King Mu-khri is attributed with many miraculous powers (para. ii). His affiliation with the sky and meteorological phenomena is made evident by his control of thunderbolts. He is said to have had dealings with the *g.yung-drung sems-dpa'* (equivalent of *bodhisattva/byang-chub sems-dpa'* in Buddhism), gods (*lha*) and goddesses (*lha-sman*). Despite being given every facility for spiritual practice, King Mu-khri was averse to sharing his religious endowment with others (para. iii). This hoarding of the doctrinal gems constituted a breaking of his religious oath, which had serious consequences for the king. The text stresses that breaking the religious oath is akin to inflicting grievous bodily harm on oneself. Unlike the sNyan-rong manuscript, the Dolanji *bsGrags pa gling grags* does not give any details about the way in which King Mu-khri's health and oath were restored. Rather, the text goes on to observe that with the increase in disciples and the strengthening of the religious lineage in the period of the Khri-bdun, Bon increased its scope (para. iv). Attention is now turned to a listing of the well-known *gshen* of special attainments, who are thought to have lived some time after the Khri-bdun and before the eighth century CE in an unbroken chain of master-disciple transmission.

bsGrags pa gling grags relates that in the time of the Three Scholars (Se-bon Sha-ri dbu/U-chen, lDe-bon Gyim-tsha rma-chung, and Me-nyag lCe-tsha mkhar-bu), there were 37 major Bon religious centers (*'du-gnas*) in Zhang-zhung, Sum-pa and Tibet (para. v). Additionally, the Bon-po developed other sets of places for spiritual practice. In that period, the *gshen* of Zhang-zhung and sTag-gzig acted as the spiritual beacon for the people, while other Bon adepts practiced tantra and rDzogs-chen (para. vi). The text also says that special types of Bon-po were active in defeating foreign powers, and that 25 *gshen-po* carried out the funerary rites by fully separating the living and the dead from each other (*gson gshin gnyis kyi go-cha 'byed*) (see pp. 404, 411, para xxxi). By fulfilling its spiritual and temporal mission, Bon realized the happiness of all segments of Plateau society.²⁵³ The hierarchical structure of this imperial-period society is as follows: king (*rgyal-che*), priests (*gshen*), [warrior] men (*mi*), and commoners (*'bangs*). This quadripartite hierarchy stresses the lofty social positions of the king and priests, the intermediate ranking of the warriors, and the inferior status of the commoners, who included the pastoral, agricultural and artisan classes:

- i) Thereafter, the dMu kings of the lineage held the life-force (*srog*) of the [Bon] doctrine.²⁵⁴ They passed on the lineage to all the disparate vassal kings and the honored lineage (universal monarch). In that way, they unceasingly practiced Bon, the virtuous lineage. After the death of the king of the lineage, the lord gNya'-khri btsad-po came [down] to protect the bipedal humans (*'greng-mi*). The *lha-bon* of the sky appearing as the *gshen* king of the earth, propagated the Bon of the Swastika. The details are explained in [the texts] *'Dul ba'i*

²⁵³ The religious superiority of the Bon practitioners in the protohistoric period is documented in Nyang-ral's Chos-'byung. Regarding the Chu-la lde-brgyad (the 16th to 23rd Tibetan kings) (p. 163), this text states: "It is said that in the dynasty of those Kings, the Bon-po were made the ritualists (*mchod-gnas*) of the dominion" (*rgyal-rabs de rnams su chab-srid kyi mchod-gnas bon-pos byas skad do*).

²⁵⁴ The lineage of sTon-pa *gshen-rab* originating directly from 'Ol-mo lung-ring.

phyis 'byung and *Rig 'dzin dbu 'chad*. The son of gNya'-khri [btsan-po], Mu-khri btsan-po, received the teachings of the essence of the 360 *gsas-mkhar* (main texts) and secret sPyi-spungs (an old class of tantra) from Nam-mkha' snang-ba'i mdog-can. Then, practicing at Lha-ri gyang-tho, the many signs of consummation actually appeared.

- ii) [Mu-khri btsan-po made] thunderbolts fall down between winter and spring. He made water flow at the country of the arid mountain. He cultivated a garden of flowers in a desert plain. Instantaneously, he beheld hundreds of figures of teachers, presented hundreds of types of offerings to the *lha* of wisdom, and listened to the Bon teachings of the *g.yung-drung sems-dpa'*. From space the *lha-sman* served him food.
- iii) As well as possessing thousands of other signs of spiritual consummation, the king grudgingly thought in his mind that as the Bon such as this is the best of the king's lineage, it should not be practiced by the lowly. Strictly keeping it secret, he blocked the root [of the teachings]. Earlier he had practiced all the doctrinal views and [religious] activities. [He then] broke the root and branch of the oath of the lineage of the great secret vehicle; therefore, the signs of spiritual consummation of the *gshen* king disappeared. Why did they disappear? [Because] he disregarded the oath-holding activities. [Now] the king stepping,²⁵⁵ walked alone across the land. What was the cause of this shortcoming? It was caused by the breaking of the oath. Verily, one should not cut the succession of the lineage. One should not remove the needed eye. One should not wander around bad places. One should not banish the beloved heart.
- iv) [Good texts/masters] said, "Teach all the intact containers²⁵⁶ like jewels strung through a silk cord."²⁵⁷ [Good masters/texts] said, "Conceal all the bad containers." The doctrine of Bon spread during the Khri-dbun (first seven Tibetan kings). The Bon [teachings] fell from the sky and descended to Mon-bon Har-ra ci-par. He transmitted them to sTag-wer li-wer. She transmitted them to A-nu phrag-thag. He transmitted them to Sad-ne ga'u. He transmitted them to Da-mi thad-ke. He transmitted them to Shad-bu ra-khug. He transmitted them to sPe-bon thog-rtse. He transmitted them to sPe-bon thog-'phrul. He transmitted them to sTong-rgyung [mthu-chen]. He transmitted them to the Three Scholars.
- v) And during the time of the Three Scholars, downward from the border of high Zhang-zhung kha-yug and Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar and upward from low Sum-pa glang gi gyim-shod, there were the 37 '*du-gnas* (gathering places) of Bon,²⁵⁸ the nine caves of secret

²⁵⁵ *Leg leg*. This word describes the action of walking or striding.

²⁵⁶ *sNod-ldan*. This is a metaphor for pupils (*snod*). When the vessel is inverted (*kha-sbub*) it means that the student is unable to internalize the teachings. When the vessel has a hole in the bottom (*zhabs-rdol*) it signifies that the student easily forgets the meaning of the teachings. When the vessel is poisoned (*dug-can*) or odorous (*dri-ma can*) it shows that the mind of the student is corrupted.

²⁵⁷ *Rin-po-che* (jewel) is a metaphor for the student and *dar-thag* (silk cord) is a metaphor for the lineage. The sentence portrays that the Bon teachings should be transmitted without interruption.

²⁵⁸ These are recorded in the early 20th century CE Bon history *Legs bshad mdzod* by Grub-dbang bkra-shis rgyal-mtshan (1859–1935). The 37 '*du-gnas* enumerated in this work come from earlier sources, *sGra 'grel* and *bsGrags byang*. *sGra 'grel* has a central Tibetan geographical bias and only notes gNam-mtsho do-ring and 'Dam-shod snar-mo of g.Yon-ru and Zang-zang lha-brag of g.Yas-ru as '*du-gnas* found in pastoral Upper Tibet or regions bordering it. The list of '*du-gnas* in *bsGrags byang* includes many places in Upper Tibet: Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar, Gangs ti-se, sPos-ri ngad-ldan, mTsho ma-pang, Gangs kyi byi-ba mkhar,* Chu-mig brgyad-cu rtsa-gnyis, Gangs-gnyan rta-sgo, mTsho mu-le khyud, and Dang-ra'i mtsho. gNam-mtsho phyug-mo and Sum-pa glang gi gyim-shod are also mentioned. See Karmay 1972, pp. 40, 41, fols. 136b, 137a; pp.

* Lopön Tenzin Namdak opines (in personal communication), on the basis of its large size and location (in Byang),

tantric performance and the 20 divisions (religious centers) of *'dul-khrims*.²⁵⁹ The [*bon-po*] respectively held these places and engaged in various religious contemplations (*nyams*). The *dpon-gsas* and *g.yung-drung sems-dpa'* were the chief caretakers of the Pri-trang and Chebdun (Great Seven)²⁶⁰ of Bon.

- vi) The *gshen-po* of Zhang-zhung and sTag-gzig guided living beings upwards. The 40 great meditators practiced the signification of the Great Vehicle (rDzogs-chen) above which there is nothing. They meditated on the signification of the unborn [nature of the mind]. The 40 adepts practiced to fruition the secret tantra of the great vehicle. The nine great powerful men protected the doctrine of Bon. They subdued the foreign enemies. They fully completed the ten householder vows (*dge-bsnyen*) and the activities of the ten virtues. On behalf of living beings, the 25 *gshen-po* completely separated the living and the dead, these two. The 42 great *bon [po]* subdued the frontier of Tibet and China. They maintained the kings and ministers and rendered decisions through consultations. Above was the great king. High up were the mighty *gshen*. In the middle was the stringent law (*khrims-dam*) of [warrior] men. Down below the commoners were contented.

Although paras. v and vi of the above *bsGrags pa gling grags* passage, with their mention of sTong-rgyung mthu-chen and the three other 'Scholars', are set in an eighth century CE context, the next portion of the text explicates the historical character of the Bon religion framed in the time of the Khri-bdun. As a result of these manifold religious activities g.Yung-drung Bon was successfully spread. Then misfortune struck when provocateurs sowed discord between Tibet's eighth King Dri-gum btsan-po and his *bon-po*.²⁶¹ This was accomplished by convincing the King that his priests were trying to steal his sovereignty by appropriating emblems that should solely belong to royalty. The objects represented are the robes and turban with which we are already familiar as the *rtsigs* (superior distinction) and *yig-tshangs* (insignia), awarded the royal *gshen* for their exemplary duty to the kings of Tibet. As if this was not enough, those interested in eliminating the power of the *bon-po* told King Dri-gum that they had even taken his throne, carpet and scepter, the ultimate symbols of his monarchical authority. This is all related in the words of the provocateurs:

The evidence that the *bon-po* took political power (*bstan-pa*) is that they tied the turban of the lord [on their own heads]. The *bon-po* also took the silk *'jol-gos* and *'jol-ber* (types of royal robes) [to wear]. The *bon-po* also took the *slag* (skin robe) of the gorgeous fur of carnivores with the trim of tiger, leopard and clouded leopard [skins], these three, and whose central portion has a lioness [skin]. The [*bon-po*] even took under them the throne (*khri*), carpet (*gdan*) and the scepter (*'gying-dkar*) of crystal.²⁶²

that the ruined citadel now known as dBang-phyug mgon-po mkhar (A-51) may well be the celebrated Zhang-zhung stronghold of Gangs kyi byi-ba mkhar. In local folklore, this castle was built by the king of the *bdud*, who was defeated by Buddhist forces under the spiritual guidance of Gu-ru rin-po-che.

²⁵⁹ A system of rules and regulations governing the behavior and activities of monks. The origin of this tradition is recounted in *Legs bshad mdzod*. See Karmay 1972, pp. 35–39, fols. 133b–135b.

²⁶⁰ The identity of these traditions is obscure.

²⁶¹ See no. 53, lns. 2–4: *bon pos bstan pa khyer ba'i rtags su rje'i dbu thod bon pos bcings / dar gyi 'jol gos dang 'jol ber yang bon pos khyer / gcan zan spu sdug gi slag pa la stag zig (= gzig) gung gsum gyi gong lag / seng ge dkar mo'i gzhung 'bab tang (= btang) ba rnams kyang bon pos khyer / khri dang gdan dang gshan ma tha shel gyi 'gying dkar man chad khyer /*.

²⁶² This sentence contains the superfluous word *gshan*.

bsGrags pa gling grags now details the first persecution of Bon by King Dri-gum btsan-po/Dri-rum btsan-po.²⁶³ The provocateurs told King Dri-gum btsan-po that the *bon-po* had usurped his power and that they could even kill him and exile his scions. These troublemakers created much ill-will in Dri-gum btsan-po, causing him to become angry with the *bon-po*. This led to open hostilities between the king and the *bon-po*, and Dri-gum threatened to destroy all their religious centers. The *bon-po* appealed to the king to desist from destroying Bon and to resume his practice of the religion. King Dri-gum refused to budge, and all the Bon religious centers were harassed. In order to protect their spiritual heritage, the *bon-po* decided to hide their texts and loaded them on horses (*ku-hrang*),²⁶⁴ buffalos, hybrid yaks, mules, and camels with the intention of transporting them to foreign countries. This mention of camels (Bactrian) as a beast of burden is yet another bit of evidence that indicates close cultural associations between the Plateau and Central Asia in protohistoric times. The local deities that protected Bon, however, prevented the *bon-po* from leaving Tibet with their textual treasures, for it was feared that religion would disappear from Tibet. The *bon-po* were then constrained to divide their texts into various groups and hide them throughout Tibet. They also prayed to the local protector deities for Dri-gum btsan-po to desist from his persecution. The text states that one and a half years later, Dri-gum was assassinated by his minister Lo-ngam rta-rdzi. His corpse was sealed in a copper vessel with iron pins and disposed of in a river.²⁶⁵ King sPu-lde gung-rgyal regretted his father's persecution of Bon and made provision to bring the teachers and texts from Zhang-zhung and sTag-gzig back to Tibet. Emissaries were sent and precious things offered to the *bon-po*; thus Bon was reinstated in Tibet.

Subsequently, the Bon religion is thought to have again achieved a preeminent position in ancient Tibetan society. A good indication of this is found in the same *bsGrags pa gling grags* text in a passage describing an incident at the time of Tibet's 27th king, Khri-rje thog-btsan,²⁶⁶ a period in which Bon attained great honors. Bon is portrayed as the prime insurer of the political order and as something that is to be jealously guarded. The winds of change, however, were beginning to blow, and the Bon reintroduced into Tibet by sPu-lde gung-rgyal was under threat again. To stem the danger, King Khri-rje convened a grand assembly:

At that time Khri-rje thog-btsan said, "Pay close attention, lineages of the *gshen* and lamas. Also, all the *sku-gshen* pay close attention. Also, all the Tibetan subjects concentrate. At this time, the superior kingdom is fostered by Bon, and as Bon is absolutely imperative, it is superior and great. Up above the lord is noble. Down below the subjects are contented. All teachers, assemble." Thus he ordered. Thereafter, Bon, which had been introduced from Zhang-zhung, declined. The king ordered that the *bon*, *gshen*, [vassal] kings, and ministers assemble.

²⁶³ The description of the persecution of Bon and the subsequent demise of King Dri-gum is found from nos. 53, ln. 4 to 62, ln. 5. A detailed account of this first persecution of Bon is also found in the history *Legs bshad mdzod*. For an English translation, see Karmay 1972, pp. 58–71.

²⁶⁴ The horse or onager. This Zhang-zhung word is still in use in Upper Tibet, where a mare who gives birth to a male foal is known as a *hrang* (Tawa and Tashi Topgyal 1998: 40). There is a pastoral region known as rKyang-hrang (the name consisting of the customary bilingual juxtaposition of a Zhang-zhung and Tibetan word), one of the *tsho-pa* (camps) of 'Brong-pa tsho-pa dgu. In the Communist period it has been annexed to mTsho-chen county.

²⁶⁵ Karmay (1998: 224) tentatively identifies this river as the Nyang-chu in rKong-po.

²⁶⁶ See nos. 63, ln. 7 to 64, ln. 3: *de'i dus na khri rje thog tsan (= btsan) gyi zhal nas / gshen rabs bla ma rnams kyang dgongs cig / sku gshen rnams kyang dgong cig / bod 'bangs kun yang soms cig / bla'i rgyal srid bon gyis mtsho (= 'tsho) ba'i dur (= dus) 'dir bon gnyan pas bla ma che / rje gong na btsun / 'bangs 'og na skyid pas / ston pa kun yang 'dus cig gi bka' byung ngo / dus der zhang zhung nas bdan drangs pa'i bon yang nub / rgyal po'i bka' byung bas bon gshen rgyal blon rnams 'dus so /*.

Nevertheless, the Bon introduced from Zhang-zhung suffered setbacks, so Khri-rje thog-btsan sent Bla-chen Dran-pa nam-mkha' to obtain teachings such as rDzogs-chen, tantra and those revolving around Ge-khod, reinvigorating Bon (nos. 64, ln. 3 to 65, ln. 1). This stemmed the tide of decline only temporarily. The last part of *bsGrags pa gling grags* deals with King Srong-btsan, who introduced Buddhism to Tibet at the behest of his Nepalese wife (nos. 65–71). This led to many evil occurrences in the country. The king, having second thoughts about what he had visited upon Tibet, is recorded as patronizing the Bon-po and promising to build a Bon temple. It was to no avail, however, and both Bon and Buddhism subsequently declined.

According to another Bon quasi-historical source the decline of Bon was also due to foreign intrigue, created to weaken Tibet in general.²⁶⁷ In this story, India and China were complicit in releasing Buddhism in Tibet. The text tells us that they hatched their conspiracy because they were deeply worried about Tibet's growing political power. Although this account is polemical in nature, it does eloquently express the destructive effects of the introduction of a foreign religion into Tibet. Rather than the majority view of Buddhism as a great liberator of the Tibetan people, here it is cast as a baleful force that led to the systematic degradation of all of their national institutions.²⁶⁸ Whether one perceives it as positive or negative, Indian Buddhism did indisputably have a huge impact on the cultural and political life of Tibet, ushering in changes to its ethos that stood unchallenged until the mid-20th century CE:

At one time, the people of China dispatched a letter to India. In it was written,
As the lha are working on behalf of the lord of men, the dominion of the kingdom of Tibet is expanding. The gshen practitioners, very powerful personalities, are harming all the lower and upper countries. If you have some way to degrade this Bon doctrine, all of you Indians carefully do something. The letter was sent. Thereafter, the people of India also thought that these words were true. The savage king and ministers searched for a method. They knew there was no other way they could do something but to send Buddhism, sorcery and heretical religion in order that the national life (*mnga'-thang*) of Tibet would decline. They unanimously agreed to send these methods of education.

²⁶⁷ See *g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum*, no. 35, lns. 4–6: *dus de tsam na rgya nag po'i mis rgya dkar po la phrin yig brdzangs pas (pa) / skol le bod kyi rgyal khams na /mi r e lha yis mdzad pas mnga' thang rgyas / gshen rab sku mthu che bas stod smad kun la gnod / 'di la bstan pa bshig thabs yod na kun gyis rem bya ba yig than skur bskur ro / der rgya gar gyi mi rnams kyis kyang bsam pas / de bden par go / rgyal blon gdug pa can rnams kyis thabs brtsal ba / gzhan gyis mi thub pas chos dang ngan sngags log chos stes nas btang bas / bod kyi mnga' thang 'ig par go / de'i btang thabs byed pa la kun mthun no /*

²⁶⁸ *sNgon gyi gdam me tog phreng ba* by Ne'u pañdi-ta grags-pa smon-lam blo-gros, probably written in the Water Sheep Year, corresponding to 1283 CE (see p. 2 of its introduction), in *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga*. Gangs can rig mdzod (ed. *hab-spel tshé-brtan phun-tshogs*), Lhasa: Bod-ljongs bod-yig dpe-rnying dpe-skrun khang, p. 32, turns the tables on this religious perspective and describes the reversion to what are represented as Bon traditions, in the context of Glang dar-ma's apostate activities to suppress Buddhism. It states that some monks (*btsun-pa*) who wore robes were impelled to erect bird feathers on their heads and engage in playing the drum and gshang, leading dogs and shooting arrows at wild ungulates. These kinds of native cultural activities are attested in the literary and rock art records.

5 The Archaic Architectural Traditions of Tibet and Zhang-zhung

5.1 The Great Residential Centers of Ancient Tibet and Zhang-zhung

In the accounts of the Bon priests and kings presented above, reference is frequently made to temples (*gsas-mkhar/gsas-khang*) and castles (*mkhar/rdzong*), residential centers of variable size and complexity. As we have seen, even before the formation of the Tibetan proto-states, mountain strongholds are supposed to have dotted the landscape and to have accommodated people and their possessions. A more modest version of the beginnings of architecture is found in *bKa'chems ka khol ma*, where it states that when gNya'-khri btsan-po came down to Yar-lung btsan-thang, his 'palace' was made of tiger, leopard, wild yak and deer skins.²⁶⁹ It is also thought that in ancient times, rudimentary shelters were made of wild yak skins.²⁷⁰ These hides could be specially prepared and rolled lengthwise to be used as beams and pillars. This type of building material is believed to have been very hard and durable. In consonance with archaeological findings in general, the Tibetan historical tradition maintains that substantial ceremonial and residential structures were built all across Tibet in the prehistoric epoch.

gSas-khang/gsas-mkhar are generally thought to have been ceremonial and residential edifices where the ancient Bon priests lived and practiced. Textual and archaeological data indicate that they varied considerably in design and technical sophistication, ranging from simple cave shelters to elaborate freestanding temples. The Bon historical text *Legs bshad mdzod* confirms that the prehistoric Upper Tibetan religious elite constituted a sedentary cultural component with permanent residences. As we know from the archaeological record, they shared the custom of habitation in fixed structures with the political/military rulers, who established a chain of strongholds.²⁷¹ In *Legs bshad mdzod*, the tradition of building religious edifices (*gsas-khang*) in Zhang-zhung is attributed to the Khyung-po lineage.²⁷² The author bKra-shis rgyal-mtshan (1859–1935) must have taken his account from a Khyung rabs (history of the Khyung clan), but this is not made explicit in his writings.

The text tells us that four youths (*khye'u*) appeared from eggs laid by three *khyung* in the Zhang-zhung country of Kha-yug (para. i).²⁷³ These *khyung* had issued forth from a manifestation of the primordial Buddha, Kun-tu bzang-po. Each of these divine youths owned a precious soul stone boulder (*bla-rdo'i pha-bong*), a miraculously non-constructed (*ma-brtsigs*) castle, and a miraculously non-impounded (*ma-bskyil*) turquoise lake. These three objects appear to have been the soul receptacles (*bla-gnas*), symbols of sovereignty (*rgyal-rtags*) and ablutions pools (*khrus*

²⁶⁹ Text attributed to Srong-btsan sgam-po and rediscovered by Jo-bo A-ti-sha (11th century CE). See Namkhai Norbu 1996, p. 329. For an account of gNya'-khri btsan-po's arrival in bTsan-thang, see Sørensen and Hazod 2005, pp. 106 (n. 271), 221–223.

²⁷⁰ This oral tradition was obtained from Lopön Tenzin Namdak (in personal communication). According to his *'Bel gtam lung gi snying po*, Tibetans originally lived in stone huts, caves and cavities in the ground. See Bellezza 2005a, pp. 428.

²⁷¹ Bon textual accounts of Upper Tibetan castles taken from *Kun 'bum, Ti se'i dkar chag* and Lopön Tenzin Namdak's *bsTan-'byung* are found in Bellezza 2002a; in press.

²⁷² For translation, I have used the copy of the text reproduced in Karmay 1972, p. 206, fols. 120b–121a, lns. 3–28. Tibetan Text II-23, pp. 593, 594. For Karmay's translation of the same passage, see *ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

²⁷³ A triad of cosmogonic birds is a mythic motif also known in the Minaro culture of lower Ladakh. A Minaro song called 'Origin of the World' says that the earth appeared on a lake; then in succession came a meadow, three hills, three sandalwood trees, and three birds (Francke 1905: 93).

kyi mtsho-mo), respectively, of the four *khyung* divinities. By virtue of these empowering facilities, the brothers went on to establish a network of *gsas-khang*, some of which are given proper names in the text (para. ii). *Legs bshad mdzod* states that these four figures were venerated by the early kings of Zhang-zhung, and were highly esteemed by gNya'-khri btsan-po and his successors up to the time of Seng-khri btsan-po, the seventh Tibetan king:

- i) The actual lineage history of the holy *khyung*: the manifestation of Kun-tu bzang-po, the one known as Rig-snang 'od kyi rgyal-po (King of Luminous Phenomenal Awareness) decided to act on behalf of sentient beings, so he manifested the three *khyung* of body, speech and mind. They flew down from up high and landed in the beautiful flower garden of Kha-yug, in the country of Zhang-zhung. Accordingly, with a sense of wonder arising in the people of Zhang-zhung, they declared that these birds were unknown to them. Some old men remarked that they could be male *khyung* as they had horns. Those three *khyung* having flown away into the sky, [the people of Zhang-zhung] examined the place they had been. Where their claws had touched the ground moisture and warmth had formed²⁷⁴ four eggs: white, black, yellow, and variegated [in color]. From inside each of the hatched eggs appeared a youth with highly favorable qualities. Each was bestowed the name Khyung-po. They were renowned as Khyung-dkar thog-la 'bar, the eldest; Khyung-ser lha-khyung, the one junior to him; Khyung-'phags khra-mo, the one junior to him; and Mu khyung-rgyan, the youngest. Each of them had a precious soul stone boulder, a precious non-constructed castle, and a non-impounded turquoise lake, respectively. They exercised sovereignty over these and each one founded salutary castles of the Khyung-po.
- ii) The eldest, Khyung-thog 'bar, founded 108 *gsas-khang* of 'Od-zer rab-tu 'phro-ba (Intensely Radiating Light). The second oldest, Lha khyung-rgyan, founded the *gsas-khang* gZo-bo khyung-lag. The next to youngest, Khyung-'phags khra-mo, founded the *gsas-khang* Lha-rtse gung-nam. The youngest, Mu khyung-rgyan, founded eight *gsas-khang*. They lived as long as they deigned to, and also they did an immeasurable amount on behalf of living beings. During the early Zhang-zhung royal lineage they acted as the highly revered religious functionaries (*mchod-gnas*). The Tibetan kings from gNya'-khri btsan-po to Seng-khri btsan-po held [the four *khyung*] in very high esteem.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ *'Dril-ba*. This word is used in Bon ritual tradition to describe the creation of eggs in a manner not unlike the way snowballs are formed.

²⁷⁵ A closely related account of the origin of the Khyung clan is found in a Khyung rabs recorded in a collected work entitled *Khyung po steng chen* (ed. g.Yang-dge), Si-khron mi-rigs dpe-skrun khang, Chengdu, 2005. This *Khyung rabs* is entitled *dBra dkar khyung po'i gdung rabs kyi lo rgyus dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i glu dbyangs* (p. 106), which was compiled from texts known as *Khyung dkar gdung rabs* (written by Khyung-po blo-gros rgyal-mtshan, 14th century CE), *dBra dkar khyung po'i gdung rabs rnam dag shel phreng*, *dBra dkar khyung po'i gdung rabs 'khrungs tshul legs bshad phreng ba*, *Ma yig g.yu mgo ma*, and *Khyung rabs gong sngon ma* (pp. 142, 144, 145). According to the text (pp. 108, 109), there were only three Khyung progenitors: 1) Lha khyung-rgyal, the oldest brother, who established the 108 *gsas-khang* of Zo-bo khyung-lag, where 108 *lo-paṅ* (?) crystal *mchod-rtēn* were enshrined, in front of which were placed 108 sets of seven lapis lazuli (*mu-men*) butter lamps with camphor wicks that were filled with the milk of white lionesses; 2) Khyung thog-la 'bar, who established the 108 *gsas-khang* of 'Od-zer 'bar-ba, where a thousand images (*stong gi sku*) of the Enlightened One were enshrined, in front of which were arranged 108 sets of seven golden mandalas that were filled with turquoise; and 3) dMu-khyung rgyal, who established the 108 Divine Peak Silver Castles (dNgul-mkhar lha-rtse), where 108 *'Bum chen* with gold lettering on blue paper were enshrined, in front of which were arranged 108 sets of seven pearl bowls on crystal stands that were filled with jewels. As in the *Legs bshad mdzod*, dMu-khyung rgyal's son, sTag-skra dun-gtsug (sTag-sgra dun-gtsug) is said to have ruled Zhang-zhung after the assassination of its king (Lig-min rgyal) by Tibet's king, Khri-srong lde-btsan. Tsering Thar (forthcoming) furnishes a

A fine account of ancient building traditions associated with the Bon-po of Upper Tibet and Central Tibet is found in a commentary on the *spyi-spungs* tantric cycle by Rin-chen 'od-zer.²⁷⁶ It relates to the 37 'du-gnas (assembly centers), a network of residential sites in which the Bon masters taught and propagated their religion.²⁷⁷ According to the text, the 'highest' (most westerly) of these centers was the dNgul-mo'i mkhar (Castle of Silver), the capital of Zhang-zhung at Khyung-lung (para. i). This castle is said to have been located in Pu-rong (Pu-rang) in the Kha-yugs (Gu-ge) region of Zhang-zhung. As in *bsGrags pa gling grags*, the *Khro bo dbang chen* text asserts that the border between Zhang-zhung and Tibet was in far western Tibet, in this case at Kha-yugs. The localization of Zhang-zhung in Gu-ge and around Mount Ti-se is also common in Buddhist texts of the same general timeframe. This portrayal of Zhang-zhung as a relatively small region rather than much of Upper Tibet probably reflects the toponym's application in the post-tenth century CE period. In its original configuration, Rin-chen 'od-zer attributes a much larger area to Zhang-zhung (see pp. 270, 271). The author also mirrors later geographic conceptions pertaining to the relative positions of Tibet and Zhang-zhung when he characterizes Tibet as a comparatively low (*dma'*) region, negating the 1000-km transection of high valleys and basins interspersed between Gu-ge and Central Tibet.

The author then expends some effort to show that another of the 'du-gnas, rMa she-le, is located in gSum-pa glang gi gyim-shod (para. ii). In Tenzin Namdak's *g.Yung drung bon gyi bstan pa'i byung*, this location is said to mark the eastern border of outer Zhang-zhung (Bellezza: in press). Rin-chen 'od-zer cryptically describes gSum-pa glang gi gyim-shod as having the holy mark (*bka'-rtags*) of the star of the sky (*gnam-skar*). Citing the text *sGra 'grel*, he presents the 'du-gnas as a pan-Tibetan phenomenon existing between the Kunlun and Himalaya ranges, the northern and southern geographic divides of the Plateau (para. iii). The text does not give their relative placement, but it is clear that the country of Phrom lies north of the Kunlun and Mon is south of the Himalaya. The establishment of the 'du-gnas is assigned to gShen-rab who, according to the text, personally visited each of the sites (para. iv). Rin-chen 'od-zer then gives a *sGrag byang* (*sic*) reference for the 37 religious centers, which divides them between the Ru-bzhi (Four Divisions) of imperial period sPu-rgyal.²⁷⁸ The Tibet-centric view presented in this text is counterbalanced by *sPa dro*, which places no less than 25 of the 'du-gnas in sTod and sTod-byang gi gnas (Byang-thang) (para. v).

Rin-chen 'od-zer now attempts to rectify the obvious discrepancies in the localization of the 'du-gnas that crops up in the Bon sources. He states that the *sPa dro* reference is more pertinent to the purposes of his text, as it traces their establishment all the way back to Mu-khri btsan-po (para. vi). On the other hand, *bsGrags byang* provides a listing of the 'du-gnas from imperial times.

somewhat different listing of five Khyung rabs texts to which he had access. He notes that all of these texts contain a similar origin tale of three or four *khyung* progenitors.

²⁷⁶ *Khro bo dbang chen ngo mtshar shar rgyas pa'i rnam bshad gsal ba'i sgron ma* by sKyabs kyi ston-pa rin-chen 'od-zer (born 1353 CE) (in *Spyi Spungs Dang Dbal Phur Gyi 'Grel Pa*, New Thobgyal, TBMC, 1973, nos. 31–392.), nos. 56, ln. 1 to 57, ln. 1. This text is dedicated to the tutelary deity of the mind, Khro-bo gtso-mchog mkha'-'gying. Tibetan Text II-24, p. 594.

²⁷⁷ According to the *bsGrags byang* and *Nyi sgron*, the 'du-gnas were manned by various types of *gshen*, including *sgrub-pa po* (adepts), *bon-chen* (chief priests), *mthu-chen* (great magicians), *mkhas-pa* (scholars), and *g.yu-rnga can* (possessors of the turquoise drums, a class of ritualists). See Karmay 1972, pp. 40, 41, fol. 137a.

²⁷⁸ Uebach observes that the 'du-gnas listed in texts such as *sGra 'grel* and *g.Yung drung bon gyi rgyud 'bum* reflect the territorial division of late imperial Tibet, while preserving geographic place names associated with the old aristocratic clans and their local powerbases. She sees this as reflecting the patronage of the *bon-po* priests by these aristocratic clans in the pre-Buddhist period. See Uebach 1999, pp. 269–271.

Although he does not dwell on this point, the author's geographic analysis makes the historical process of Central Tibetan domination self-evident: in the time of the empire, the thrust of Bon religious activity and settlement had moved from Upper Tibet towards the center of the Plateau.

In conclusion, *Khro bo dbang chen* asserts that at each of the 'du-gnas there were *mchod-rten*, *bka'-steg*, *sgrub-phug*, *bang-so*, and *sa-rtags*. *mChod-rten* are of course shrines of many styles widely used by both Bon-po and Buddhists. It is possible that rather than just stupas of Indian persuasion, archaic stepped shrines of the *rten-mkhar* and *gsas-mkhar* classes are also intended here, which share many of the same basic functions (gifts to and receptacles of the deities, subjugation of harmful forces, enrichment of the environment, cosmological models, etc.). *bKa'-steg* is sometimes likened to a stand, throne or dais used for religious teachings. However, I am inclined to see *bka'-steg(s)* (literally: 'support of the holy pronouncements') as referring to the monumental basis for the propagation of the religious teachings: in other words, physical plants such as the *gsas-khang* and *gsas-mkhar* mentioned in so many other Bon and Buddhist sources. The passage under scrutiny forthrightly enunciates the monuments of the 'du-gnas, and mentions various ceremonial structures in the process. It does not seem at all likely that mention of the great temples of Bon would have been omitted from this discussion. The *sgrub-phug* are caves or any other isolated natural or manmade place used for religious practice. The term is now sometimes used in Upper Tibet to describe archaic residential ruins. *Bang-so* are the burial tumuli of Tibet, and as the 'du-gnas listings imply, they are found right across Upper Tibet and Central Tibet. *Sa-rtags* are border markers such as cairns and standing stones. Perhaps these *sa-rtags* are a 14th century CE allusion to the mortuary pillars of Upper Tibet, the function of which was already a distant memory by this time. The *Khro bo dbang chen* text furnishes us with an integrated picture of the ancient Tibetan architectural traditions, one in which the full complement of residential and ceremonial types appears to be enumerated.²⁷⁹

- i) In ancient times, the highest of these [37 'du-gnas] were the five great castles held by the Khyung-po, among which was dNgul-mo'i mkhar (Castle of Silver) of the center. Also known as mKha' 'om-po sgo-bzhi, it was in the country of Pu-rong. The general name is the country of Zhang-zhung kha-yugs and this is also the border of Tibet. In comparison with the highest [region] it could be said that this is a low region.
- ii) Although it has been explained that rMa she-le is in mDo-smad (eastern regions of Tibet), here it is explained as being among the 18 great Shod in Upper Southern (Lho-stod). The cave of religious practice gSum-pa glang gi gyim-shod has a holy mark of the star of the heavens. That is [rMa she-le].
- iii) The explanation of these ['du-gnas]: according to *sGra'grel*, in the north is the mountain range of Li-wi sgang-ring kha-ba dkar-po (Li-wi White Snowy Long Ridge)²⁸⁰ and in the

²⁷⁹ The archaic Bon building traditions are thought to have continued until the late eighth century CE and the persecution of the religion by King Kri-srong lde-btsan. *Legs bshad mdzod* reports that during this persecution some Bon *gsas-khang* and *mchod-rten* were destroyed or repainted and renamed in the fashion of Buddhist temples. In the same textual source and covering the same time period, it states that four great religious centers (*gnas-sde chen-po*), including g.Yung-drung rol-ba and 12 smaller ones, were destroyed on account of moral decline affecting the Bon priests and laypeople. See Karmay 1972, pp. 85, fol. 169a, 92, fols. 174b, 175a.

²⁸⁰ The Kunlun range.

south is Dom-sgro nag-po snyug-mas bu khur (Black Bear Sack Bamboo Carrying the Son).²⁸¹ These [mountain ranges] are the borders of Mon, the Phrom country²⁸² and Tibet.

- iv) The number of [*'du-gnas*], on account of Sangs-rgyas (sTon-pa) having walked upon and prayed [there] in ancient times, are 37, the foundational places where the Bon-po assembled and gathered. According to *sGrag byang*, it is explained that there are 13 Central Divisions (dBus-rus) at 'Dam-shod snar-ma and other places, seven Left Divisions (g.Yon-rus) at 'Ol-kha shug-gcig and other places, eight Right Divisions (g.Yas-ru) at 'O-yug sa-nag and other places, and nine Branch Divisions (Ru-lag) at Nyang-ro stag-'tshal and other places.
- v) According to *sPa dro*, it is mentioned that there are nine places of Upper mNga'-ris,²⁸³ [including] Khyung-lung dngul-mkhar, Gangs ti-se and other ones. The 16 places of Upper Northern (Byang-thang), [including] Gangs rta-rgo, mTsho mu-le (Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho) and other ones; and the 12 places of the southern and northern Middle (Central Tibet), [including] 'Phan-thang and Lha-thang of Yar-lung, and so forth.
- vi) According to the places of religious practice [in the root text] that follow, we can be in agreement with *sPa dro*. The first of these [37 *'du-gnas*] was established during the time of Mu-khri [btsan-po]. According to *bsGrag byang (sic)*, [the *'du-gnas* are set in a period] subsequent to the Four Scholars,²⁸⁴ but the *'du-gnas* [tradition] is the same. It is explained that each of them had a *mchod-rten*, *bka'-steg*, *sgrub-phug*, *bang-so*, and *sa-rtags*.²⁸⁵

Various Tibetan sources such as the *rGyal po bka' thang* give the names of castles and temples that the early kings of Tibet are supposed to have inhabited. As an example of this literary tradition, I provide here a listing of residential centers derived from the *bsGrags pa gling grags*.²⁸⁶ The association of the Tibetan kings with specific domiciliary monuments illustrates that at minimum, the elite stratum of prehistoric Tibetan society enjoyed a settled way of life. The sedentary cultural institutions alluded to in the text could have been based only on the practice of agriculture, presupposing the existence of a system of irrigation, granaries and transport facilities. Castles and temples do not spring up in isolation; they require well developed means of economic production. Unfortunately, Bon and Buddhist authors seldom thought it appropriate to record the traditions surrounding these more humble aspects of their ancient heritage. The use of the terms *gsas-mkhar*

²⁸¹ The Himalaya.

²⁸² The *mKhas pa lde'u* has the following to say about the origins of the people of Phrom (under the supreme commander, Ge-sar) (p. 223): "They were originally descended from the vulture, the king of birds" (*chad khungs dang po bya rgyal rgod las chad l*). This country is described as being north of Tibet under the constellation Ursus Major (sMin-bdun). The text also reports that they wore the woven down of trees (cotton?) as their clothing, and their language was known as Ka-ra-na.

²⁸³ mNga'-ris stod kyi gnas-dgu. There is still an oral tradition that speaks of mNga'-ris (western Tibet) being divided into nine divisions (sTod gling-dgu) in early times (Bellezza 2001: 44).

²⁸⁴ mKhas-bzhi: Zhang-zhung sTong-rgyung mthu-chen, Se-bon Sha-ri dbu/U-chen, lDe-bon Gyim-tsha rma-chung, and Me-nyag lCe-tsha mkhar-bu. These sages are believed to have lived in the eighth century CE.

²⁸⁵ An abbreviated listing of monuments in conjunction with the *'du-gnas* is found in *mDzod sgra 'grel*. It includes *sa-rtags* (border markers), *mchod-rten* (shrines) and *bang-so* (burial mounds) See Bellezza 2002a, p. 85. *bsGrags pa gling grags* (sNyan-rong manuscript, fol. 26a, lns. 3, 4) reads: "Accordingly, in the 37 *'du-gnas* there were 37 *mchod-rten*, 37 crystal *rdo-ring* and 37 *bang-so* tombs. There were 67 *gshen-po* who stayed at these [places]." This account seems to corroborate the existence of the mortuary pillars but implies that they were uniformly distributed in both Central Tibetan and Upper Tibetan *'du-gnas*, which is not the case.

²⁸⁶ sNyan-rong manuscript: first seven kings: fols. 22a, ln. 4 to 24a, ln. 6; next eight kings: fols. 25a, ln. 1 to 33a, ln. 3.

and *gsas-khang* to denote the royal abodes suggests that they had both military and religious functions. The close relationship between the Tibetan kings and their priests would seem to explain the apparent mix of ceremonial and habitational modalities of the early royal capitals.

The residences founded by the gNam gyi khri-bdun:

- 1) gNya'-khri btsan-po – the personal castle (*sku-mkhar*) 'Phying-pa stag-rtse and the *gsas-mkhar* g.Yung-drung lha-rtse (Swastika Peak of the Lha)
- 2) Mu-khri btsan-po – the *gsas-mkhar* Kho-ma ne'u chung
- 3) Srong-khri btsan-po – the *gsas-mkhar* Kho-ma yang-rtse
- 4) Ye-khri btsan-po – the *gsas-mkhar* dGu-ra dgu-rgyud
- 5) Khri-ding bkod btsan-po – the *gsas-khang* Za'o khyung-lag (same facility established by the *khyung* deity Lha khyung-rgan, see p. 289, para. ii)
- 6) So-khri btsan-po, also called Byang-khri – the *gsas-khang* g.Yung-drung lha-rtse (Swastika Divine Peak)
- 7) Khri-sde leg-po, also called Khri-spen btsan-po – the *gsas-mkhar* Kho-ma ru-ring (Long Horn Wild Yak?)

The residences founded by the Bar gyi lding gnyis:

- 1) Gri-gum btsan-po – the *gsas-mkhar* Sa-le bya'u-tshang
- 2) sPu-lde gung-rgyal – the *gsas-khang* Za'o khyung-lag

The residences founded by the Sa-la leg-drug:

- 1) A-sho lag (= leg) – the *gsas-mkhar* Khri-skos ldem-lag
- 2) De-sho leg-pa – the *gsas-khang* Sa-le ljon-phyug
- 3) The-sho leg-pa – the *gsas-mkhar* Khong-ma yang-rtse
- 4) Gong-ru leg (not listed).
- 5) Brong-'dzin leg-pa – the *gsas-mkhar* Rin-chen zur-mang
- 6) 'O-ru leg – the *gsas-mkar* Li-li pang-pang

5.2 The Burial Monuments of the Tibetan Kings

Given the occurrence of burial mounds in Upper Tibet, a brief look at the literary traditions connected to the burial grounds of the sPu-rgyal kings is in order. These kings are recorded as having been interred in large burial tumuli (*bang-so*), a form of burial known throughout Inner Asia, particularly in the first millennium BCE. For instance, the *rGyal po bka'thang* (no. 182, lns. 3–5) describes the tomb of Srong-btsan sgam-po.²⁸⁷ At Yar-klungs smug-ri (in 'Phyong-rgyas), members of the royal lineage constructed a *bang-so*. Gold was applied on the corpse of the father (king) and two mothers (his queens). His corpse was placed inside a silver casket (*ga'u*) and placed on a throne in the middle partition (*re'u-mig*) of the *bang-so*.²⁸⁸ Gold, silver and turquoise in quantities of *bre yi khal* (perhaps around ten kilograms) and the jewels of the king were amassed before him. A silk canopy (*bla-brer*), parasol (*gdugs*) and victory banner (*rgyal-mtshan*) were set

²⁸⁷ A more detailed analysis of Srong-btsan's burial monument is found in Tucci 1950, pp. 8–10. At around 60 m in length, this tomb is larger than any of the *bang-so* discovered in Upper Tibet.

²⁸⁸ Tucci (1950: 8–10) likens the *re'u-mig* to the *me-ba dgu*, an astrological representation of the universe, which is also divided into nine squares.

up (as part of the funerary rites). With these undecayed grave goods the *bang-so* was meticulously secured and seven unbreakable seals were fixed [around the entrance?].

The *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 165) lists the 'six acme strongholds' (*'ching-ba rtse-drug*) of the Legs-drug kings: 1) I-sho legs – sTag-rtse; 2) De-sho legs – rGod-rtse; 3) Thi-sho legs – Yang-rtse; 4) Gong-ru legs – Khri-rtse; 5) 'Brong-gzher legs – rTse-mo khyung-rgyal; and 6) [E] sho legs – Khri-brtsigs 'bum-gdugs. In the text, the *bang-so* of these and other Tibetan kings are described in a manner that would befit sacred monuments, which were probably viewed as having a salubrious effect on the landscape. *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* enumerates the locations and appearances of the royal tombs as follows:

The Legs-drug (the tenth through 15th Tibetan kings) (p. 165): “The *bang-so* of the six Legs were built at the margins of the slates and meadows.²⁸⁹ It is said these were like a rainbow spreading in the meadow.”

The Chu-la lde-brgyad (the 16th through 23rd Tibetan kings) (p. 165): “The *bang-so* of the lDe-brgyad were built on a plain near the river. It is said these were like snow falling on a lake.”

The Bar gyi btsan-lnga (the 24th through 28th Tibetan kings) (p. 169): “From the time of the bTsan-lnga the *bang-so* were built at 'Phying-yul [nga-ra thang].²⁹⁰ The five bTsan [po] tombs are mounds of earth like a tent.”

sTag-ri gnyan-gzigs (the 31st Tibetan king) (p. 171): “The *bang-so* of the relics (*gdung*) was constructed in the lower reaches of Don-mkhar. It is situated on the left side of the *bang-so* of Khri [gnyan] gzungs [btsan] (29th king). It too, is like a heaped mound of earth without plumb [walls]. Below it are the two *bang-so* earth mounds of both his queens, 'Bro-za smun-btsan and Mon-bu rgyal-mtshan.”²⁹¹

King gNam-ri srong-btsan (the 32nd Tibetan king) (p. 172): “The construction of the square *bang-so* began then. It is situated on the right side of the *bang-so* of Khri [gnyan] gzungs [btsan]. [The *bang-so*] design is square with large plumb [walls] in the shape of a shoulder blade.”

5.3 The Design Characteristics of the Bon *gSas-mkhar* Habitation

Bon literature has preserved an extremely important account of the design and function of the ancient *gshen* abode.²⁹² The *gsas-mkhar/gsas-khang* is referred to as a numinous palace (*pho-*

²⁸⁹ In *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud* by Nyang-ral nyi-ma'i 'od-zer (1124–1192?), p. 163, this is phrased: “Their tombs were established at the margins of the slates and meadows in Don-mkhar.” Don-mkhar is in 'Phyong-rgyas, in the vicinity of the Phying-ba stag-rtse/Phying-dbar stag-rtse castle. The Tibetan royal tombs are concentrated in this locale. See Tucci 1950, pp. 31–33; Richardson 1963, pp. 83, 84.

²⁹⁰ For lore on this location and the dynastic intrigues surrounding the death of King Gri-gum see Hazod, (forthcoming).

²⁹¹ This account of the bTsan-lnga royal tombs in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* refers to the mouth of the Don-mkhar valley in 'Phyong-po. For a satellite image of these burial grounds see Sørensen and Hazod 2005, p. 225.

²⁹² See *gShen gyi pho brang gzhai yas bkod pa* (*Design of the Palace of the gShen*), the 11th section (nos. 95–101) of *g.Yung drung las rnam par dag pa'i rgyud*, rediscovered by Gyer-med nyi-'od (born 1092 CE), *bka'*, vol. 1, nos. 1–253 (published by Kun-grol lha-sras mi-pham rnam-rgyal, Sichuan, 1996). This same source is studied in Karmay 1998, pp. 200–205. In his excellent study, Karmay includes the translation and transliteration of the portion of *g.Yung drung*

brang gzhal-yas), stressing its divine identity. It appears to have been a single conterminous complex, carefully aligned in the cardinal directions. According to Lopön Tenzin Namdak (in personal communication), each unit was usually conceived of as a separate building but the *gsas-mkhar* could also be a single structure with contiguous rooms.²⁹³ He adds that this design is thought to have been the main type of *gshen* residence before the demise of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion in the late eighth century CE. It consists of three rows of rooms oriented east to west. The text does not specify windows, which is reflected in standard Upper Tibetan *gsas-khang* design. Unfortunately, the building materials and roof design are not stipulated in the text. The main entrance appears to have been in the east, where there is a large vestibule (entranceways on the south side of the edifice are also described). The residential elements of the edifice are listed as follows:

- 1) West row, south unit – establishment of the swastika good form *mchod-rten* for closing the door of the man-eating ghouls (*raksha srin po'i sgo gcad phyir / g.yung-drung bkod-legs mchod-rten bzhangs /*)
- 2) West row, south central unit – storehouse of the precious treasures of the *gshen* (*gshen gyi rin-chen gter gyi mdzod*)
- 3) West row, north central unit – cooking larder of the orders of the *gshen* practitioners (*gshen-rabs khrims sde'i g.yo-spyod mdzod /*)
- 4) West row, north unit – granary for the provision of the *gshen* (*gshen gyi spyad-rkyen 'brub-cud mdzod /*)
- 5) Middle row, south unit – place of creating virtue of the pure *smad khyims* (a living area?) (*smad khyims tshangs-pa'i dge-spyod sa*) and palace residence of the *gshen* (*gshen gyi pho-brang*)
- 6) Middle row, central unit – stables of horses, excellent herds and livestock (*rta dang khyu mchog rkang 'gros mdzod*)
- 7) Middle row, north unit – storehouse of firewood and useful wood and iron items (*shing lcags ran dang zhugs-shing mdzod*)
- 8) East row, south unit – place without protector and support [of deities] (a guestroom) (*gnas-med skyabs dang rten-gnas*)
- 9) East row, central unit – vestibule palace of the *gshen* (*gshen gyi pho-brang phyi-khyams*)
- 10) East row, north unit – gathering place of lay practitioners (*khyim-pa'i sgrub-pa 'tshogs-sa*)

The text also details the construction of the *mchod-rten* that filled the south unit of the west row of the building. It was called *g.yung-drung bkod-legs mchod-rten* (good form swastika *mchod-rten*) or *g.yung-drung lha-rtse gsas-mkhar* (temple of the *lha* summit swastika). This unit occupied about one-twelfth of the total floor plan of the *gshen* residence. The base of the *mchod-rten* contained 16 outer pillars (*ka-ba*) and 16 inner pillars. These appear to have been integrated into the exterior and interior walls of the lowest tier of the *mchod-rten*. The outer pillars were two cubits (*khrus*) in length. The pillars rested on footings (*ka-gdan*) with a tortoise (*ru-sbal*) design and had giant clam (*kyog-pir*) capitals (*ka-zhu*). Additionally, there were nine central pillars in the base. These may have been arrayed as eight ancillary pillars surrounding a central trunk pillar but no indication is given in the text. The beams of the *mchod-rten* were one cubit in length and four fingers wide (*mtho-gang sor-bzhi*). No door on the ground level is specified but it can be inferred that one existed on the east side of the room. There is a further erection (*yang-phub*) or second

las rnam par dag pa'i rgyud that deals with the general layout of the *gshen* residence. He also includes diagrams which are very much worth consulting. Karmay observes that by virtue of being placed at the beginning of the canon, this work holds a prominent place in the Bon religion.

²⁹³ Karmay (1998) also treats the *gshen* residence as a contiguous domestic space.



Fig. 369. The all-stone corbelled religious center of Ri'u dgon-pa (B-25)



Fig. 370. The inner courtyard of Ri'u dgon-pa (B-25)



Fig. 371. *Phur-bu gyang-dmar (B-47)*, in *gNam-ru*

level to the *mchod-rten*. An east-facing door on this level is specified in the text. The pillars that supported it rested above the lower ones and were twice the size of the lower series pillars (...*ka-ba 'og-ma'i steng / bar-khyams dag las ldab tu 'gyur /*). The footings of the pillars were in the shape of elephants and the capitals had a dragon design. The beams and capitals were the same size as those on the lower level. No midsection (*bum-pa*) or spire (*'khor-lo*) is noted in the text, suggesting that this particular type of *mchod-rten* did not possess these structural features. The finial (*tog*) of the *mchod-rten* was in the form of a bright blazing jewel (*rin-chen 'bar-ba 'od*). The text tells us that inside the *g.yung-drung bkod-legs mchod-rten* resided the orders of *lha*. On top of it, in the entrances and in the ten directions resided the *lha* that remove suffering and defilements.

The dimensions of the pillars (approximately 1 m to 2 m in length) and beams (approximately 50 cm in length) demonstrate that the *g.yung-drung bkod-legs mchod-rten* was not a very large structure. Its total height may have been only in the vicinity of 4 m, and it may have occupied an area of well under 12 m². According to the text, the space it was enshrined in occupied about one-twelfth the of total area of the *gshen* residence, so we can infer that this was a single domicile and not a large complex of buildings. With the inclusion of the wall dimensions, further extrapolation indicates that the total size of the *gshen* residence may have been in the vicinity of 18 m x 15 m (270 m²).

There is, however, a complication in this assessment: the presence of what appears to have been a barnyard in the central portion of the structure, which occupies about one-sixth of the total



Fig. 372. The corbelled beehive arch of the southwest room, Phur-bu gyang-dmar (B-47)

floor plan (roughly 40 m²). The size of this space seems unusually small when we consider that not only horses but herds seem to have been kept there. It is curious in the first place that in the middle of a *gshen*'s residence there was an area for livestock, which opened directly onto rooms where sacred activities were conducted. This corralling function seems to have been a crucial factor in explaining why the Bon-po often envision the *pho-brang gzhai-yas* as being a large palace complex rather than a single building. The impression that this was a sprawling facility is strengthened by the use of a flying arrow text to determine the length of one side of the 'palace', as described in the text. In this spatial perspective the stable can be seen as part of a large area (perhaps a central courtyard), which provided ample distance from sensitive adjoining areas. The existence of an ostensible stockyard in the central portion of the residence may be one reason why in his treatment of the text, Karmay (1998) was persuaded to locate the main entrance to the edifice in the south wall of the building, despite there being no clear written indication.

I have no ready answers for these discrepancies in the physical dimensions of the *gshen* residence, and the placement of a livestock holding area in the middle of it. While there are many general correspondences between the carcasses of *gsas-khang* in Upper Tibet and the *gshen* domicile described in this Bon text, it must be pointed out that there is no structural evidence of stables within the central areas of any of the dozens of archaic temples and strongholds surveyed to date. Nor are there open-air courtyards or other spaces within the central portions of these buildings (with the exception of Ri'u dgon-pa, a structure influenced by Buddhist temple design, see p. 31, fn. 12) (figs. 369, 370). I think, therefore, that this 'treasury' (*mdzod*) of horses and other livestock is a later interpretation of the domestic ecology of the ancient *gshen* quarters. Buddhist

monasteries often have central courtyards (as do some houses in eastern Tibet) surrounded by buildings and covered galleries, where horses can be hitched and livestock temporarily stabled.

The spatial dimensions of the structure and the location of the doorways in question may indicate that the tradition of prehistoric religious construction was partially conjectural when *g. Yung drung las rnam par dag pa'i rgyud* was written down in its present form. The description of its design, however, preserves much of the general floor plan of the all-stone corbelled *gsas-mkhar/gsas-khang* of Upper Tibet. Unlike many Buddhist monasteries, these are often of just one story. Two or three rows of small rooms oriented east to west, and usually without axial corridors, is indeed the chief ground plan of the Upper Tibetan remains as well. Like the *gshen* residence of the text, the various rooms must have had multifarious ritual and utilitarian purposes. These structures have few, if any, windows and often just one or two main entranceways to the outside, internal openings between chambers, and rooms with entranceways that are independent from the rest of the building. All of these architectural traits are reflected in the ground plan of the *gshen* residence as described in the text.

Typically, individual all-stone structures of Upper Tibet are quite diminutive and only the largest specimens fall within the range of 18 m x 15 m, dimensions I estimate the textual example to occupy on the basis of the dimensions of its *mchod-rten*.²⁹⁴ Larger *gsas-khang* often have three rows of rooms, with three to four rooms in each row, just like the *gshen* residence of the text. The most stunning architectonic correlation is found in the all-stone edifice known as Phur-bu gyang-dmar in gNam-ru (B-47) (figs. 371, 372). According to local lore, it was once the residence of a *sngags-pa* named Phur-bu. This red sandstone structure was established on a steep rocky slope and faces east. Phur-bu gyang-dmar is generally aligned in the cardinal directions and measures 10.5 m (north-south) by 9.5 m (east-west). There were a total of approximately 12 rooms in the three rows of the building. The south room (interior dimensions: 2 m x 1.7 m) of the west/upper tier of the structure appears to have fulfilled a ritual function, just as described in *g. Yung drung las rnam par dag pa'i rgyud*. The corbelled roof that arches over this room forms a domed structure that is elevated 70 cm above the rest of the roof level. This structure is reminiscent of the central portion of a *mchod-rten*. A ceremonial function for this southwest room as a temple or shrine is indicated. While the area covered is smaller, the relative position and pseudo-arch of the southwest room match the description given in the text. The structural evidence derived from *rdo-khang* permits us to conclude that the *g. Yung drung las rnam par dag pa'i rgyud* was composed with some knowledge of the prehistoric or early historic architectural traditions that prevailed in Upper Tibet, the cynosure of the ancient *gshen*.

²⁹⁴ Among the largest *rdo-khang* discovered in Upper Tibet is the main structure of the east complex of sMan-lha pho-brang (B-21) (it is tucked away in a side valley off the Ti-se pilgrim circuit). This structure measures 16.5 m (north-south) by 21 m (east-west), and appears to have consisted of three lateral rows of rooms.

6 The Pantheon of Zhang-zhung

6.1 The Circle of Ge-khod Gods

The largest grouping of Bon gods identified with ancient Zhang-zhung is that of the Ge-khod cycle (and those of the closely related Me-ri cycle).²⁹⁵ This large circle of divinities is native to western Tibet, particularly to the areas around Mount Ti-se and Ru-thog Ge-khod gnyan-lung. Despite the presence of significant tantric elements, which can be attributed to the Buddhist religious environment, Ge-khod and his eponymous assembly of deities also embody archaic cosmogonic and ritual structures. These older aspects of the Ge-khod gods relate to the *lha*, *dbal*, *gar* and *sman* classes of divinities, and appear to have risen out of the archaic cultural domain of western Tibet. These environment-bound deities were transformed into a bevy of powerful tantric tutelary gods of Indic inspiration, with their peculiar doctrinal and iconographic characteristics.²⁹⁶ This ideological and literary recreation appears to have been made complete by the emergence of the assimilated Bon religion at the turn of the second millennium CE. Beginning in this period, the various texts of the Ge-khod cycle were created and ‘rediscovered’. It is the great tantric god Ge-khod himself who dominates Bon tenets, and serves as the doctrinal superstructure that overarches more ancient ideas and practices. This earlier cultural groundwork is primarily comprised of cosmogonic conceptions, and apotropaic and fortune-bestowing rituals, stanchions of the native Tibetan religious milieu. The ancient ritual performances especially associated with the Ge-khod circle of deities include *bsangs* (fumigation rituals), *tshan dkar-dmar* (rites of lustration employing a wide range of pacific and wrathful liquid substances), *tso* (rites in which magical bombs are used to slaughter demons and doctrinal enemies), *dbal-chu* (rites in which specially prepared boiling liquids are used to purify deities, humans and the environment), and *rdza-’dzab* (rites involving special fire offerings).²⁹⁷

The Ge-khod deities, like others presented in this section of the work, are vital in understanding the religious makeup of early Upper Tibet. A quantification of their antiquity in terms of a specific phase of Tibetan cultural evolution, however, will be possible only when new sources of documentation come to light, independent from Tibetan literary works. In Bon texts, the Ge-khod gods appear in religious and mythic contexts, which include only a minimum of quasi-historical material from which to make a chronological assessment. As we have seen, the origin of the Ge-khod tantric cycle and ritual practices is assigned to legendary royal and priestly figures of the Zhang-zhung kingdom (see pp. 249, 250), hardly sufficient in itself to serve as a historical foundation. Nevertheless the non-Buddhist etiologic myths, iconography and ritualism associated with the Ge-khod cycle are best explained within an indigenous cultural setting. While far-

²⁹⁵ In *rGya bod kyī chos ’byung rgyas pa*, the theogony of King gNya-khri btsan-po includes a listing of the deities of Zhang-zhung (p. 231). Rong-rong rtsal-po mated with rMu-bza’ mthing-khug sman and their nine children (only eight are listed) were the gods of Zhang-zhung: Ge-god (Ge-khod), Me-dur (Mu-thur), Tshangs-lha, Pha-’brum, rMa-tshes, Pho-’brang, rMa ge-god, and Yo-phyal (Yo-phyā). While this theogony clearly integrates the Zhang-zhung deities into a Central Tibetan lineage, it does include figures of genuine western Tibetan origin.

²⁹⁶ According to Karmay (and as the Bon-po maintain), Ge-khod was the chief god of Zhang-zhung, a region which was open to influences from various Central Asian countries. Karmay was the first Tibetologist to perceive Ge-khod’s transformation from a mountain deity to a Bon tantric tutelary god, which he ascribes to a gradual historical and theological process. See Karmay 1998, pp. 116, 134, 395, 396.

²⁹⁷ Translations of certain segments of these Ge-khod ritual traditions and the origin myths associated with them are found in Karmay 1998, pp. 143–146, 389–412; Norbu 1996, pp. 109–120, 167–170; Bellezza 2005a, pp. 443, 444, 446–456.

reaching ethnohistorical influences may possibly be indicated in the formation of the Zhang-zhung pantheon, it exhibits a significant array of cultural traits that can be assigned to the Tibetan ethnos. There is little historical scope for the development of the multiplex Ge-khod traditions with the coming of the second diffusion of Buddhism and the virtual disappearance of the *bon-po* from western Tibet.²⁹⁸ This indicates that the Ge-khod gods arose in an anterior cultural milieu, in a period when native Tibetan traditions were still flourishing. As such, a prehistoric (Iron Age or protohistoric period) or imperial period origin is likely indicated. An early periodization for the source of the Zhang-zhung divinities is supported by the following factors:

- 1) A prehistoric origin is postulated in the Ge-khod cycle and in other texts pertaining to the Zhang-zhung pantheon.
- 2) The functions, iconography and rituals associated with this pantheon appear to have stemmed from a formative period in the evolution of Tibetan culture. The basic qualities, appearances and onomastic attributions of these deities sharply contrast with those of the Buddhist pantheon. Historical processes of considerable duration seem to best account for the development of these integral religious traditions.
- 3) The complexity of these traditions and their endemic qualities. The unequivocal geographic connection of the Zhang-zhung deities to Upper Tibet appears to represent an authentic in situ Tibetan tradition.

From a cultural historical perspective, it is the Zhang-zhang pantheon that is most likely to have participated in the spiritual life of the inhabitants of the ruined archaic strongholds and temples that dot western Upper Tibet. An understanding of the pantheon's role in the Bon tradition is therefore essential in marshalling a valuable interpretive archaeological tool that can be applied to the monumental record. The Zhang-zhung pantheon furnishes an important departure point for the formation of hypotheses regarding the geographic placement, domestic ecology and functions of the early residential centers of Upper Tibet. The manner in which these Zhang-zhung gods and goddesses may have accounted for the patterns of residency and types of abodes found in ancient times will be examined in the appropriate places below.

All surviving traditions (indigenous and Indic) associated with the Ge-khod gods are envisioned as part of an integral tantric system in Bon, one possessing a singular history and ethos. This tradition is now codified in two main volumes, *stod-cha* and *smad-cha*, which contain scores of individual texts. The Ge-khod tantra of systematized Bon is considered part of the seventh vehicle (*theg-pa*) of Bon teachings, A-dkar theg-pa. The tantric Ge-khod, like other 'high' Bon deities, exists as a manifestation of the *bon-nyid* (reality itself) and does not have a geographic abode. This class of gods abides in a highly rarefied ontological sphere, one that is not amenable to measurement or localization. Ge-khod is classed as an inner tantra (*sngags nang-pa*) in which wrathful offerings such as blood, flesh and beer are offered to the deities. These mystic offerings are viewed as powerful symbols of psycho-physical metamorphosis, not merely as physical gifts that are proffered to the deities. Outer tantra (*sngags phyi-ba*), on the other hand, does not employ these types of esoteric offerings. Interestingly, there is a proscription in place disallowing practitioners of Ge-khod and Me-ri tantras from eating the flesh of equids (horses, *rkyang*, donkeys, etc.).²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ With the establishment of the Gu-ge/Pu-hrang dynasty at the end of the tenth century CE, Buddhism spread in an all-encompassing fashion in western Tibet. The rise of Buddhism and the Gu-ge/Pu-hrang polities is comprehensively documented in Vitali 1996.

²⁹⁹ A list of activities that must be eschewed by practitioners of Ge-khod tantra is found in Karmay 1998, p. 391. Karmay notes that the proscription on horse flesh must be due to the sacral status of the horse in Tibetan culture. Among

The Ge-khod deities in general, like the great *lha-ri* (mountain deities), are viewed as *gtsang-rigs lha* (gods of the pure order), limpid beings who must not be sullied by human activities. Strictly speaking, high tantric deities are beyond the pale of mundane human activities, but here we find an amalgamation of indigenous and Indic beliefs. This kind of syncretism (in the form of layering and interpenetration) characterizes the various texts of the Ge-khod cycle to a greater or lesser extent. In their higher tantric form, the Ge-khod deities are also known as *ye-shes lha* (wisdom gods), those who have passed beyond the sphere of worldly existence (*'jig-rten las 'das pa*). They are envisioned as residing in the *bon-dbyings* (sphere of reality), which is characterized as empty of any inherent existence/emptiness (*stong-pa nyid*). The practitioners of Ge-khod tantra aspire to become one with its mandala (in the *bon-dbyings*) and to dissolve into the *bon-nyid* (reality itself), the highest ontological state. Those who attain this ultimate objective acquire a pure *sgyu-lus* (a miraculous or numinous body), which is one with the form of Ge-khod himself. This transformative process is achieved through the union of compassion with the wisdom of having comprehended the true nature of reality (*stong-nyid snying-rje zung-'brel*).

The protean Ge-khod deities belong to three main phenomenological categories, each with different iconographical and personality traits. This tripartite delineation is expounded upon in *Ge khod dbang rgyal*.³⁰⁰ This text describes the three forms of dBal-chen ge-khod, the tutelary god proper (para. i). In order of theological precedence, there are: the Ge-khod who appeared from the space of reality itself (*bon-nyid dbyings*), the Ge-khod of the magnificent manifestation (*sprul-pa gzi-brjid*) and the Ge-khod of the world (*'jig-rten*). These three forms of Ge-khod are based upon the *sku-gsum* doctrine of the three ontological bodies (states) of the Buddha: *bon-sku* (intrinsic Buddha body), *longs-sku* (Buddha body with definite characteristics) and *sprul-sku* (Buddha body with physical form). According to this classification, the ontological descent is derived from an inapprehensible state of being to one that is apprehensible to ordinary perception. The tripartite system, however, upholds the essential unity of Ge-khod as taught in Bon, welding the three figures together into one composite godhead. To my mind, the triad of Ge-khod gods constitutes a stratagem designed to effect a doctrinal reformulation in consonance with Buddhist thought and practices. It would appear that this doctrine developed in order to integrate the Ge-khod gods of the culturally disparate indigenous and Indic religious pedigrees into a unified tradition. By enmeshing the diverse Ge-khod deities in a holistic model of origins, Vajrayāna philosophical conformity was achieved. It must be pointed out, however, that those who take an orthodox stance see all forms of Ge-khod as having a singular prehistoric Zhang-zhung origin. This hardly seems likely, however, for the characteristic mandalas and iconographic features of Buddhist higher tantra were not developed before the seventh century CE, as demonstrated by the archaeological, literary and art historical records of the Indian Subcontinent.³⁰¹

the evidence he cites is the myth of the riding horse found in IOL 731 verso. For this myth and its historical significance see pp. 529–553. The eating of the flesh of equids is considered a reprehensible act by the herders of Upper Tibet and is resorted to only by the poorest and most downtrodden.

³⁰⁰ See *Ge khod dbang rgyal zhes bya ba ri rong nag mo'i gong non 'phrin las rno ngar spu gri zhes bya ba bzhugs sō*, rediscovered by dByil-ston khyung-rgod (born 1175 CE) (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242 (*Ge-khod stod-cha*), nos. 557–578), nos. 558, ln. 2 to 561, ln. 4. Tibetan Text II-25, p. 595.

³⁰¹ While the complex of beliefs and practices associated with tantra can be traced to the fifth century CE, the earliest evidence for a fully formed tantric religion are four Sanskrit texts of the seventh century CE (Lorenzen 2002: 26). For a discussion on the scholarly controversies surrounding the origins of tantric literature, see Vashist 2002, pp. 5–10. An analysis of the fictive historical qualities associated with placing Tibetan tantric tradition in the epoch predating the seventh or eighth century CE (using the Guhyasamāja as an example) is found in Davidson 2002, pp. 204, 205.

Ge khod dbang rgyal goes on to give a fuller explanation of the three aspects of dBal-chen ge-khod (para. ii). The first or *bon-nyid*-derived Ge-khod is the ultimate spiritual guide of human beings and his existence can be imputed only in a nominal form. From an ordinary or conditional perspective (*kun-rdzob bden-pa*), this god is non-existent (*grub-pa med*). The *sprul-pa gzi-brjid* Ge-khod is the god who is visible in a mystic sense as a multi-armed deity. This text refers to the six-armed Ge-khod but the same is true of the 18-armed version, another common Bon tantric form. Like the Bon *srid-pa'i sgra-bla*, this grade of deity exists at the margin of the world and the realm of other-worldliness (*'das-ma 'das mtshams*). Conversely, the *'jig-rten* Ge-khod has a definite genesis in the world, and appeared from Mount Ti-se and/or Ge-khod gnyan-lung in Ru-thog. It was from this worldly Ge-khod and his mate that the circle of 360 Ge-khod gods appeared.³⁰² These represent a superior class of environment-bound deities, for they belong to the *g.yen-dgu* (nine orders of elemental spirits) without parentage – i.e., without the prosaic origins that birth entails. These worldly Ge-khod, the protectors of Bon, are affirmed to be mountain gods. As this text is devoted to the six-armed tantric form of the god, the passage ends with him:

- i) There are three [types of] Ge-khod: the dBal-chen ge-khod who appeared from the space of the *bon-nyid*, the dBal-chen ge-khod who appeared from the magnificent manifestation, and the dBal-chen ge-khod who appeared from the world, these three. In the language of Zhang-zhung they are Ge-khod. In the language of Tibet they are called bDud-'dul.
- ii) That which appeared from the space of the *bon-nyid*, the one who guides and charms sentient beings, appears to exist. In the true sense of reality (*don-dam*) he is not existent as he transcends worldly existence. The Ge-khod who appeared from the magnificent manifestation is the one explicated in this text with three heads and six arms. He resides as the suppressor of the *lha-srin* [*sde-brgyad*] at the demarcation of the world and that beyond. The dBal-chen ge-khod who appeared from the world at Zhang-zhung rdzong dbang gi ri-mda' (Lower Place Mountain of the Power Castle of Zhang-zhung) is the one known as Lha-chen kun-thog ring-nam, who is among the *g.yen-dgu* who have no actual father. He is also known as sTag-ri rma.³⁰³ He and the mother Zo-za 'phrul-mo che coupled and, as a result, the 360 Ge-khod of the world were born, who made the snow mountains and slate mountains of the world their abodes. Hence, they protect the doctrine of Bon. The Ge-khod who appeared from magnificence explicated in this text is the suppressor of the *ma-mo* (problematic female spirits); that is why it is extremely important to endeavor [to practice him].

A text from the Me ri cycle expands upon the iconographic and spatial differences that mark the two latter categories of Ge-khod deities (*sprul-pa* and *'jig-rten* forms).³⁰⁴ The text contains a medley of indigenous and tantric religious forms, which stand side by side with one another in the composition. This reflects an attempt at reconciling the archaic Ge-khod gods with their tantric counterparts, revealing the syncretism that characterizes the Ge-khod cycle. In this *bskang-ba* text, the various Ge-khod gods include those types that figure in Bon rituals to bring palpable

³⁰² Tucci suggests that these 360 gods represent the 360 days of the year, which are associated with the Tibetan astrological deity The-se, the god of the solar year. The-se, he hypothesizes, may have been an aboriginal god who subsequently came to be identified with Mount Ti-se, as the world pole around which the stars rotate. See Tucci 1947, p. 724.

³⁰³ The syllable *rma* is not very legible in the text.

³⁰⁴ See *Me ri dpa' bo gyad phur gyi bskang ba* in *Zhang zhung me ri bka' mi'i sgrub skor gyi gsung pod* (published by rMa-rtsa rin-chen rgyal-mtshan, Delhi, 2000), nos. 543–564. No author or finder recorded, but this appears to be an ancient *bskang-ba* ritual text for the activity (*las*) Ge-khod gods. Passage locations: paras. i–iii: nos. 552, ln. 3 to 553, ln. 6; para. iv: nos. 554, ln. 6 to 555, ln. 4. Tibetan Text II-26, p. 595.

benefits to the officiants and their sponsors. These are the so-called activities (*las*) Ge-khod of the mountains. As with other gods that carry out operations for the service of humanity in *bskang-ba* (appeasement offering) rituals, these deities are recorded as having geographical homes. This is so because they must be available to the ritualists' beckoning and the provision of worldly gain. Those gods who belong to higher ontological orders cannot so easily be called on for such pedestrian concerns.

The first Ge-khod mentioned in this *bskang-ba* text is a ten-armed, five-headed form, endowed with an abode at Ru-thog's Ge-khod gnyan-lung, this district's most important *yul-lha* (para. i). His earthly credentials are strengthened by his parentage, which includes a *sku-bla* class father (often protective mountain deities such as gNyan-chen thang-lha and Yar-lha sham-po) and a lake goddess mother. This is a quaint matching of a tantric deity with the Upper Tibetan mytheme of origination based on a male mountain and a female lake. Dyads of this kind are ordinarily credited with giving rise to the many species of environment-bound deities.³⁰⁵ The ten-armed Ge-khod's residence is also equated with Ri-rab, which is divulged by his gazing at the 30 *lha*, the gods who reside above the lofty summit of the cosmological mountain. He therefore has both a terrestrial home and one associated with the axis mundi of the universe. Paralleling the iconography and function of the mountain gods, the ten-armed Ge-khod dominates the *bdud*, *sgra-bla* and *lha-srin* spirits, and holds a drum and sword. His stature as a tantric god nonetheless is undisputed, as the text states that he debates (*rtsod*) with the Enlightened Conqueror (Buddha). This illustrates that they are of the same ontological essence.

The text then moves to a description of Ku-byi mang-ske, an important Lilliputian deity and one of the main figures in the Ge-khod cycle (para. ii).³⁰⁶ The position of the six-armed Ge-khod above the world mountain (Ri-bo mchog-rab) is mentioned. He is called the *lha* of the four perfected activities (*las-rnams bzhi rdzogs-pa*), a reference to the '*phrin-las bzhi*, the four standard modes of accomplishing religious activities (pacific, expanding, power-generating, and wrathful). We are informed that rather than actually residing on the Ru-thog mountain, the radiance of the mind (*thugs-rje'i 'od-zer*) of this general of the *lha* is concentrated upon it. The text now moves to the 18-armed Ge-khod who rules over all the worlds of the universe (para. iii). This great enlightened tantric god is depicted as the savior who stops the cycle of rebirth for all sentient beings. This is quite a contrast in function to the demon-destroying activities of the Ge-khod gods of the mountains. According to Bon conceptions, these are functions lying on opposite ends of the godhead's spectrum of activities. The text then returns to the 360 Ge-khod of worldly activities (*'jig-rten las*), whose parents are Lha-chen kun-thog ring-nam and Shel-za 'phrul-chen (para. iv). They are described as the mountain gods who destroy pernicious demons. With no set demarcation between the montane and tantric Ge-khod forms, the text goes on to state that the six-armed Ge-khod is the one who resides at the great soul lakes and soul mountains of Zhang-zhung. It is more likely, however, that it was the environment-bound Ge-khod *lha* that originally inhabited Ti-se and rTa-sgo (rTa-rgo), and the Ge-khod *sman* that first resided in Ma-pang and Dang-ra:

³⁰⁵ See Bellezza 1997a; 2005a for numerous examples.

³⁰⁶ Descriptions of this tiny but powerful god are found in Karmay 1998, pp. 178 (n. 31), 320, 395, 398, 399; Bellezza 2005a, pp. 399 (n. 197), 415, 416; pp. According to Dagkar (2003: 98, 99), the name Ku-byi mang-ke (alternative spelling) denotes that he is the god of the summer solstice. In the text *gSo rig nyi ma'i 'khor lo* by 'Jigs-med nam-mkha' rdo-rje (1897–1956), it states: *Ku-byi mang-ke ku-hrang 'tsho-ba'i dus...* Dagkar (*ibid.*) interprets this as meaning that the summer solstice is the suitable time for the mating of onagers.

- i) On the west side of the country of Zhang-zhung, on the peak of the Ru-thog mountain, the son of the union of sKu-bla rin-chen sgron-ma and mTsho-sman rgyal-mo dwells in the slate mountains and snow mountains. You (Ge-khod) have five heads, ten hands and a complexion of unalloyed gold (*gser-btso*). One of your heads looks at the abode of the 30 *lha*. One of your heads acts as the oppressor of the *bdud*. One of your heads is the leader of the 10,000 *sgra-bla*. One of your heads debates with the Enlightened Conqueror (bCom-ldan 'das). One of your heads judges the *lha-srin*. You hold a small crystal drum and sword.
- ii) We fulfill the wishes of sKu-byi mang-ske, formed from worldly activities. We fulfill the wishes of dBal-chen ge-khod; you are the sovereign of very powerful tantra, the effulgent one of revelatory miracles. Above Ri-bo mchog-rab in the center, you move around the top of Yongs-su sa-brdol shing.³⁰⁷ You are the *lha* of the perfected four activities. You have three heads, six arms and a blazing [body]. You expel the battle-hardened titans (*lha-ma-yin*). We fulfill the great general of the *lha*. On the setting-sun side of the world, the radiance of your mind is focused on the peak of the Ru-thog mountain.
- iii) The son of the union of Lha-chen kun-thog ring-nam and Shel-za 'phrul-chen is Dregs-pa dbal-chen ge-khod with nine heads and 18 arms in six [groups]. Your great body has a golden complexion and massive limbs. With your smiling and ferocious nine faces you govern the nine levels of the three worlds.³⁰⁸ You also control the 18 great worlds with your outstretched 18 arms. You close the door of rebirth for the six orders of living beings with your straight and flexed six legs.
- iv) At lJong-dbang Mountain, in the country of Zhang-zhung, the sons of the union of Lha-chen kun-thog ring-nam and Shel-za 'phrul-chen were the Ge-khod of worldly activities. Three hundred and sixty were born. Abiding, they live at the snow and slate mountains. Their activities are as killers (*gshed*) of the *rgyal-'gong* and *dam-sri* (classes of demons). They are the *lha* and *gsas* of the Father³⁰⁹ and of Bon. Among them is the chief manifestation. On the soul mountain, king of the snow mountains Ti-se with a blazing yellow golden mass of fire; in the soul lakes Dang-ra and Ma-pang with spreading blue turquoise smoke; and on the soul rock rTa-sgo, the great rock formation, with golden sparks densely radiating in all directions; is the son who manifested in the mountains, rock formations and lakes. He is the Ge-khod with three heads, six arms and a blazing golden fire on his body. Turquoise smoke billows from below him.

The complete mandala of the tantric Ge-khod gods is found in a text by the great abbot of sMan-ri monastery, mNyam-med shes-rab rgyal-mtshan.³¹⁰ In order to gain a fuller appreciation of the way

³⁰⁷ A mythical tree on the northeast side of the world mountain Ri-rab. Its roots are occupied by the *lha-min* (titans) and its canopy by the *lha* (gods).

³⁰⁸ *Khams-gsum* (three worlds/realms): '*dod-khams* (the realm of desire and sensuality inhabited by humans and other living beings), *gzugs-khams* (the realm of forms without sensuality or needs, primarily inhabited by the *lha*), and *gzugs-med-khams* (the formless realm, where only mind exists).

³⁰⁹ Pha. This refers to either the Bon religion, the lineage of Bon masters, or possibly to sTon-pa gshen-rab himself.

³¹⁰ See *Ge khod gsang ba drag chen ldog med gser gyi spu gri'i gzhung*, compiled (*bsgrigs-pa*) by Drangs (= Drang) srong [mNyam-med] shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (also known as rJe rin-po-che) (1356–1415), at bKra-shis sman-ri'i khrod, (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, 187–281), nos. 251, ln. 3 to 274, ln. 3 (lines of mantras found between the descriptions of various deities are not included in the transliteration or translation). Tibetan Text II-27, pp. 596–598. It is evident that Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan compiled his *gzhung* (foundation of the tradition) from earlier written sources of the root tradition. According to Karmay (1972: 46), Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan's text was compiled from the five *gyud*

in which indigenous aspects of religious tradition have been assimilated into Buddhist tantra, we will examine this mandala in its entirety. Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan's work, which is based on earlier textual prototypes, represents a codification of the Ge-khod tantric cycle that remains viable to the present day. Although this tantra is viewed as a complete religious practice, parts of its mandala of deities are not completely developed, leaving one with the impression that at least some of it was an improvisation. Several of the deities of the intermediate points appear to have been created to suit the scheme of the mandala as their sets of iconographic traits are repeated several times over. In addition to borrowing from tantric mandala compositions, Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan incorporated native lore into his descriptions of the various Ge-khod, most notably as pertains to onomastics, and to celestial and meteorological phenomena. This indigenous grounding serves to set Bon tantra apart from its Buddhist counterparts and, as discussed, appears to have been derived from pre-existing western Tibetan religious traditions.

The Ge-khod mandala is envisioned in a typical Indic fashion as two interlaced equilateral triangles set inside a circle, which is surrounded by an outer ring of eight lotus petals or points. The central space of the six-pointed star is occupied by the main deity, dBal-chen ge-khod, with his consort sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo in ecstatic embrace. This sexualized iconography is one of the hallmarks of Indic tantra. Such graphic sexual depictions do not seem to be represented in the archaic iconographic traditions of Tibet. Autochthonous mountain gods often take more than one consort from surrounding sacred topographs, but their unions are described in cosmogonic and fertility-enhancing terms, not in the psycho-sexual vocabulary of tantra. Except for wild ungulates, there are few if any explicit sex scenes in the ancient rock art of Upper Tibet. A dignified confidentiality as pertains to the actual act appears to have been the norm in the ancient sacred traditions. The dBal-chen ge-khod depicted in the text with his 18 arms and nine heads is likewise not found in the archaic iconographic traditions of the texts or rock art tableaux. The native anthropomorphous divinities are usually portrayed in a conventional anatomical fashion with one head, two arms and two legs.

The six deities of the points of the star and their consorts (where given) in the Ge-khod mandala, listed in their order of occurrence in the text, are:

- 1) East – Ku-byi mang-ske and his consort Ting-nam rgyal-mo (paras. x–xii)
- 2) Southeast – A-ti mu-wer and his consort Nam-mkha' dbyings kyi 'phrul-mo che (paras. xiii–xv)
- 3) Southwest – Nam-mkha'i khye'u-chung (para. xvi)
- 4) Northwest – sPrul-pa'i khye'u chung (para. xvii)
- 5) West – Tsha-drag las kyi lcam-mo (para. xviii)
- 6) Northeast – Tshe yi lcam cig las kyi yum (para. xx)

There is also a goddess called Klu-srin nag-mo las byed-ma who, occupies an intermediate position on the points of the star (para. xix).

(formative texts) belonging to Ge-khod. Earlier sources of cognate iconographic lore include the text *dBal chen ge khod gsang drag gi yang snying bsgrub pa'i gzhung* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 491–512), attributed to Khri-min lcas kyi bya-ru can (a famous Zhang-zhung king), hidden by Dran-pa nam-mkha' and rediscovered by dPon-gsas khyung-rgod rtsal (born 1175 CE) at Zang-zang lha-brag. It features a similar description of the main Ge-khod god, Ku-byi mang-ske and A-ti mu-wer (mGon-po nam-gsum) and their consorts as Shes-rab rgyal-mtshan's text. The descriptions of the rest of the deities of the Ge-khod mandala, however, appear in a shortened form. This account of dBal-chen ge-khod and his consort Glog-'bar tsa-med is translated in Kværne 1995, pp. 81–84. Another text attributed to early times that contains an analogous mandala of Ge-khod and his retinue is *Ge khod lha la rten mkhar gzugs pa*.

mNyam-med shes-rab rgyal-mtshan's description of the Ge-khod mandala begins with the multi-armed dBal-chen ge-khod, who is called bDud-'dul drag-po (Angry Demon Conqueror) (para. i). His basic iconographic qualities (colors, body form and fierceness) as given in the text are much in line with wrathful figures of Buddhist tantra such as rDo-rje 'jigs-byed. This conventional tantric plan continues to dominate throughout the text but with a special emphasis on violent meteorological events (para. ii). As we shall see, this focus on grand phenomena associated with the firmament and weather permeates the entire family of Ge-khod deities. The preoccupation with awe-inspiring happenings originating in the sky is qualitatively different from the role of the sky in the Buddhist tantric traditions. While the sun and moon as philosophical symbols and thunder and lightning as weapons permeate Buddhist tantric iconography, they have a much more limited place in the overall personality of the deities. These motifs exist as constituent components amid the rich repertoire of attributes of the tantric divinities. On the other hand, in Ge-khod tantra these sky-bound forces are central to the makeup of the deities. They appear as physical emanations of the Ge-khod circle, which suggests that in the ancient indigenous tradition, the Ge-khod gods were the personifications of empyrean and meteorological phenomena.³¹¹ We might see the retention of uranic mythic elements as attributable to the fundamental place they once occupied in the Ge-khod tradition. Other mountain gods such as gNyan-chen thang-lha also act as embodiments of atmospheric conditions (Bellezza 2005a: 195, 197). The identification of the mountain deities (including the old Ge-khod gods) with the heavens can probably be attributed to an early period in the development of Upper Tibetan religion.³¹² This mimetic tradition may even help to explain

³¹¹ Tucci was the first Tibetologist to call attention to Bon divinities as personifications of celestial and meteorological phenomena. He cites Thog-lha (god of thunderbolts); the celestial grandmother gNam-phyi gung-rgyal and her thunderbolt attribute, symbol of the stormy sky; and Nam-mkha' g.yu-mdog snang srid-mdzod with her lightning, thunder, hail, and cloud ornaments. See Tucci 1947, pp. 718–720. For an examination of doctrinal aspects of the Bon sky-cult see Dagkar 2003, pp. 30–33.

³¹² This principal sky-orientation theme may reflect prehistoric or protohistoric affinities with the Mongolic peoples of the steppes. There are certainly close functional parallels, but the ethnohistorical factors that may have given rise to these are extremely obscure. Both ancient Mongolian religions and the Ge-khod tradition have gods connected to the sun, moon, other heavenly bodies, and celestial dragons. Moreover they exhibit a prominent dyadic element of a sky father and earth mother. The mythographer Hummel (1998, pp. 2, 16, 17 (n. 14, 18)) sees a paleo-Mongol solar myth at the heart of the epic tale about Ge-sar capturing the sun and moon with his golden sling in order to illuminate his prison cell. Baldick (2000: 22, 23) notes that the Hsiung-nu had a nine-layered heaven and a great god known as Tengri, a name preserved by both the Turks and Mongols. The Hsiung-nu (Huns), a major element of Mongolian ethnos (as were the Hsien-pi), worshipped the sun and moon and other heavenly bodies, and made sacrificial offerings to them and to the earth spirits and ancestors. The Hsiung-nu also worshipped the dragon. See Ishjmat 1994, p. 164. In general, the ancient Siberian and Central Asian religious systems divided the universe into three vertical parts: upper – heaven, middle – earth, lower – underworld. The supreme deity of the ancient Turks was Tengri, a sky god who determined the destiny of men and the world order. Eastern Turk kaghans offered prayers to this god on mountains. Tengri's consort was Umai, goddess of fertility and the newborn. The ancient Mongols had two main cosmological principles: Heaven and Earth. Mongol Tengri, the creator of all that exists, as the male principle determined the fates of men and the affairs of state. His counterpart was Ütügen, the goddess of the earth, who was associated with fertility and the renewal of nature. Mongols also worshipped the sun, which was considered the mother of the moon. The Wu-huan (another early Mongolic tribe) (like the Hsiung-nu) worshipped the heaven, earth, sun, moon, and the stars. See Litvinsky and Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya 1994, p. 430. For the Jurchens, the two main deities were Heaven and Earth as well (*ibid.*: 447). In the uppermost heaven of the Turco-Mongolian Evenks lived the supreme deity Amaka (Grandfather), and in lesser heavens the deities of the sun, moon, thunder, stars, clouds, sunrise, and sunset (Anisimov 1963: 108). Anisimov views these gods as part of a polytheism that revolved around a patriarchal clan structure, which replaced ancient matriclan zoomorphous deities (*ibid.*: 108, 109).

Later cross-fertilizations of Mongolian and Tibetan religions are also indicated, making the assignment of historical origins for any parallel Inner Asian mythic motif difficult at best. In a masterful study, Kværne (1980) demonstrates that 13th and 14th century CE Mongolian religious influences, as found in the edicts of that period, crept into two prayers

the siting of prehistoric and imperial period Upper Tibetan strongholds and religious edifices in high-altitude locations. Conceivably, in such lofty places the inhabitants could appease the sky-bound deities through ritual and partake of their largesse. In the text, the personification of powerful storm events is realized by lightning, thunderbolts and hail that issue from parts of Ge-khod's head. In Tibetan popular tradition, thunderbolts (*thog*) are molten metal bombs hurled down to earth, where they are transformed into metallic talismans (*thog-lcags*). As for Ge-khod's association with an auditory phenomenon (thunder), this is depicted by the sound of the dragon (*'brug gi sgra*) coming from his ears.

The next part of the description of dBal-chen ge-khod is concerned with his *khyung* (horned Tibetan eagle deity) attributes (para. iii). A *khyung*'s head crowns the god's other heads, revealing another main facet of his character. Mountain gods often manifest in the form of a *khyung* and have *khyung* in their retinues, and the Ge-khod gods are no different. The chief function of this *khyung* is stated to be the subjugation of the *klu*, its archetypal role in Tibetan religion.³¹³ Ge-khod also possesses qualities of the chthonic and aquatic *klu*; he wears a turban of serpents and his prayer beads are made of water monsters and giant clams. Great mountain gods (*lha-ri*) such as gNyan-chen thang-lha are also a composite of *khyung* (celestial) and *klu* (underworld) personality facets. This is conventionally explained by the metaphors 'sky pillar' (*gnam gyi ka-ba*) and 'earth stake' (*sa yi phur-pa*) as representations of the *lha-ri*. In other words, they rise up from the depths of the earth and reach down from the top of the sky, penetrating the various planes of existence. Like other powerful mountain and tantric deities, Ge-khod is recorded as controlling the eight orders of elemental spirits (*sde-brgyad*) and demons. This ability to conquer those spirit forces

recorded in *gZi brjid*. He shows that while the Tibetan concept of heaven (*gnam*), the main object of worship in these prayers, has native antecedents, it was infused by Mongol influences of the Yuan period. Interestingly, Kværne also notes that the royal epithet of the ancient Turks, *tängri tag* (heaven-like), is matched by an expression found in the *gZi brjid*: *gnam dang 'dra-ba*. The 'blue heaven' (*dgung sngo*) and 'heaven knows' (*gnam shes-so/dgung mkhyen-no*) of the Dunhuang Chronicles are part of ancient Turk and Mongol declarations as well. See Kværne 1980, pp. 93, 96, 97.

There are also functional parallels between the Tibetan cult of Ge-khod and the *Rgveda* of India (composed circa 1200 to 800 BCE), which may possibly be attributable either to the formative spread of Indo-Iranian mythology in the second millennium BCE or the later importation of Indic culture to Upper Tibet. Ge-khod is most comparable to the celestial and aerial gods Indra, Varuṇa and Mitra. Indra in particular shares many traits with Ge-khod. He is the father of heaven and wielder of the metallic thunderbolt, who rules over the atmosphere and does battle with the demons of drought and darkness. Indra is recorded as slaying his father, while Ge-khod committed matricide. Indra was a war god, slayer of serpent demons and the bringer of rain, characteristics he shares with Ge-khod. A remarkable iconographic similarity is that both the Indian and Tibetan gods have a reddish beard and hair. Moreover, Indra assumed the form of an eagle while Ge-khod has a *khyung* persona. In the *Rgveda*, Varuṇa and Mitra were solar deities who regulated the movement of the moon and the light of the stars. They were also rain gods and regulators of the seasons who were sometimes associated with the ocean. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the *Rgveda* speaks of a year of 360 days and the sky-earth division of the universe, cosmological concepts contained in the Ge-khod cycle as well. One of the most fundamental differences between the Ge-khod deities and the three gods of the *Rgveda* noted is that anatomical representations of atmospherical and celestial phenomena dominate in the Ge-khod tradition. This type of mimesis is hardly met with in the *Rgveda*. Theriomorphism is also more prevalent in the Ge-khod tradition than in the *Rgveda*. For this analysis of the gods of the *Rgveda*, I have relied on the translation of Griffith 1973, and the keen analysis of the text provided by Keith 1925a. Similarly, Reynolds (2005: 421 (n. 41)) argues that the Bon celestial deity gShen-lha 'od-dkar may be derived from Indo-European mythology, citing parallels to Varuṇa and the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda, a divine figure who is also known by the appellation 'God of Wisdom'. Walter and Beckwith (1997: 1038 (n. 4)), equate (functionally and linguistically) the Bon primal deity Ye-smon rgyal-po with the Indo-Iranian Yima/Yama.

³¹³ The celestial *khyung* defeating and controlling the chthonic *klu* is a ubiquitous theme in both Bon and Buddhism. In the archetypal myths (*dpe*) of the Gurungs, the vulture is the lord of the sky and is opposed to the snake, the lord of the earth (Pignède 1966: 365). The fundamental opposition of birds (mostly raptors) and snakes in world mythology is discussed in Mundkur 1983, pp. 95–109.

that potentially bring harm and misfortune to humans and livestock may have constituted the rationale for his propitiation throughout history, encompassing both non-Buddhist and Buddhist aspects of the Ge-khod tradition.

The *khyung* persona of Ge-khod is strengthened by his possession of the wings of this avian god (para. iv). These wings are of earth-shaking power: they have the *dbal* (the sharpest, most wrathful of forces), an endowment peculiar to Bon deities. They emit the fiercest of storms, which consume the demonic mountain *bdud*. Ge-khod's body hairs are also weapons, a secret armament of tantric tradition. The god is said to separate heretics from their *lha* (*lha dang phrol*), a reference to the Tibetan belief that each individual is born with protective deities, which must remain with them if they are to be healthy and happy. The text now enumerates the various attributes that Ge-khod holds in his 18 hands. Many of these demon-destroying weapons are also common to Buddhist tantric deities. Of his 18 magical tools, the ones not usually wielded by Buddhist tantric deities include the thunderbolt arrow (*thog-mdal*), battle hammer (*tho-bo*), horn of the blue sheep (*rna-ru*), and boiling *dbal* water (*dbal-chu khol-ma*).

Ge-khod is attired in an elephant hide, a classic Buddhist tantric costume, which symbolizes the invincible power of the deities and their victory over demonic forces (para. v). His lower body is girt in a tiger-skin loincloth (*stag-sham*), another typical Buddhist tantric garment. It has a leopard and clouded leopard border, reminiscent of the robes worn by the ancient *gshen* and *bon-po* priests. In keeping with his fundamental meteorological qualities, Ge-khod's sash is of zigzagging red lightning (*glog-dmar 'khyug-pa*). He also wears armllets (*dpung-rgyan*), an Indian style of ornamentation. Since traditional Tibetan dress often includes long sleeves, the wearing of armllets on the upper arms was not customary. Ge-khod's throne is of the lion and water monster (*chu-srin*), a type of seat used by both Bon and Buddhist divinities. These animals betoken his great power. With the completion of his awesome appearance the text moves to the offering of nectar to Ge-khod and a request that he act as the protector of the Bon religion (para. vi).

mNyam-med shes-rab rgyal-mtshan's mandala now proceeds to describe dBal-chen ge-khod's consort, sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo, a goddess who in her most fundamental form inhabits either Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho or La-Inga mtsho, lakes within eyeshot of Ti-se (para. vii). She also has a mountain residence, sTag-ri khra-bo. sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo is depicted as one with the sky, light, the sun, and moon, which must be a legacy of her earliest cultural configuration. In the text, however, she is presented as a full blown tantric figure with three heads and six arms. Like her mate, she is cast as a ferocious figure, which is probably a function of both tantric tenets and the terrifying qualities of tempests, comets and meteorites striking the earth. sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo, the queen of all the *sgra-bla*, is portrayed as the great storm-bringer, attired in the fire of the firmament and adorned in the stars and planets (para. viii). She is also the great celestial mother, the controller of fire and the keeper of the world mountain (para. ix). Although the text states that sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo is spiritually equal to Ge-khod, she conforms to the stereotypical paternalism of Indic tradition. She is depicted as serving the needs of her consort and presenting herself as the object of his desire. This submissive role was probably not integral to the primitive version of the goddess, who appears in origination myths as the undisputed superior of her male counterparts, the *sgra-bla* (see pp. 325–329).

The rendering of the Ge-khod mandala now skips to the minute Ku-byi mang-ske, a god with a Zhang-zhung language name (para. x). This deity is also connected to thunderbolts and the sacred substances of gold and turquoise. Unlike the *yab-yum* pair at the center of the mandala,

Ku-byi mang-ske has only two arms. Despite his small size, his mind permeates every direction. The text makes one of its few philosophical forays when it identifies this deity with ‘mind itself’ (*thugs-nyid*), but the language as it now stands is clumsy and incongruent. Ku-byi mang-ske is also put forward as the one who butchers the demons that murder children, probably on account of his small size (para. xi). His golden sword spreads meteorites, thunderbolts and hail, those heavenly objects that have the potential to do great harm on earth. Like his serpent lasso, this sword is the destroyer of evil forces. Ku-byi mang-ske’s consort is Ting-nam rgyal-mo (Queen of the Ocean), another embodiment of titanic natural phenomena (para. xii). She is associated with a combination of Indian (victory banner and skullcap of blood) and native (*la’u*) attributes. Her mount is a giant clam (*spir*), a conveyance found only in the Bon tradition.

The next god of the Ge-khod mandala is A-ti mu-wer (in the Zhang-zhung language, Grandfather King of the Sky) whose empyrean aura is equated with the compassionate qualities pivotal to both Buddhist and assimilated Bon doctrines (para. xiii). This great protector of Bon wields a bow and arrow made of meteoric iron, and he releases iron *khyung* and magic bombs (*tso*) against the enemies of Bon (para. xiv). A-ti mu-wer’s consort is Nam-mkha’ dbyings kyi ’phrul-mo che (Great Miraculous Woman of Space), who has a body the color of the sky, clouds as hair, meteorites for ornaments, and the fiery atmosphere as her garments (para. xv). She also possesses a blazing celestial serpent (*gnam-sbrul ’bar-ba*) necklace, which I take to be a metaphor for either a stellar phenomenon or the aurora borealis. When describing her union with A-ti mu-wer, the text relies on tantric explications, and speaks of skillful means (*thabs*) and the nature of reality as neither union nor separation (*’du ’bral med-pa*).

The next god of the mandala is Nam-mkha’i khye’u-chung (Youth of Space), one of several *khye’u* (small boy) deities and ancient practitioners found in old Bon traditions (para. xvi).³¹⁴ The term *khye’u* carries the connotation of ritual purity, a prerequisite in the propitiation of the orders of pure gods (*gtsang-rigs lha*). In his hands Nam-mkha’i khye’u-chung holds a *pra-phud* (a type of crown or magical tool with points) and a *dbyug-to* (maul), implements closely associated with the Bon tradition. This god also sets loose a wolf with seven heads. Multi-headed wolves, scorpions and falcons are common members of the retinues of important mountain gods as well. The next Ge-khod god is sPrul-pa’i khye’u-chung, who is armed with a thunderbolt arrow (para. xvii). He is said to resemble a *srin-po* and a strongman (*gyad*). In the mandala description, he is followed by a wrathful female deity, Tsha-drag las kyi lcam-mo, who has the power to send sickness upon the enemies of Bon (para. xviii).

The final two deities of the points of the triangle are the goddesses Klu-srin nag-mo las byed-ma and Tshe yi lcam-cig las kyi yum, wrathful and pacific figures respectively (paras. xix, xx). As her name indicates, Tshe yi lcam-cig las kyi yum (Mother of Destiny the Only Woman of Life) is a long-life deity who holds a golden fruit. This type of benevolent goddess is well represented in the indigenous pantheon of Tibet (she is comparable with the well-known Tshe-ring mched-lnga and bsTan-ma/brTan-ma bcu-gnyis goddesses). These life-protecting goddesses are typified by the weather prevailing on fair days: sunny (white) and placid conditions. They are the pacific

³¹⁴ For other examples of divine children in Bon literature, see p. 436; Bellezza 2005a, pp. 48 (n. 51), 210, 212, 214, 346, 351, 451, 453. Ta-pi hri-tsa (seventh to eighth century CE), the 25th member of the Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud rDzogs-chen lineage of Bon, appeared in the guise of a miraculous child to his disciple sNang-bzher lod-po. For accounts of their encounter, see Reynolds 2005, pp. 80–82, 107–118. Reynolds (*ibid.*: 81, 462 (n. 3)) perceives the *khye’u* religious motif as a Tibetan (Bon) expression of the wise child archetype, which is found in Buddhism and Christianity as well.

meteorological counterpoint to the wrathful divinities of the tempestuous skies:

- i) *E!*³¹⁵ From the dark blue center of the manifested mandala, from the middle of the blazing expanse, from the *gsas-mkhar* of the fixed, unchanging swastika rises the blazing figure of bDud-'dul drag-po, the dark-blue, angry, fear-inspiring, blazing one with nine haughty, fear-inspiring heads, who subdues the black (evil) *bdud*. With your short stout limbs you render the *srin-po* (man-eating demons) unconscious. Your right [heads] are white. Your left [heads] are red. Your middle [heads] are dark blue with a fierce visage.
- ii) Your mouth is agape, your fangs bared, and your three eyes stare upwards. Your ginger beard has the appearance of spreading sparks. The three wrathful furrows of your nose are contorted upwards. From your eyebrows spread a thousand zigzagging lightning strikes, thunder and hail. From the *E*³¹⁶ of your mouth thunderbolts and hail fall down like the raining of blood. From your teeth spread thunderbolts, which slay the enemies and obstructors. From your nose bursts forth a black wind tornado. From your tongue great lightning blankets the world. From your ears emanates the great sound of the dragon.
- iii) Your eight [subsidiary] heads are wrathful in the manner of a *srin-po*. Your crown (*spyi-gtsug*) is the head of the great blazing *khyung*. Your mane of hair is the clouds that cover all the innumerable worlds (*stong-gsum*). From your hair spread golden sparks. The voice of the *khyung* is the tremulous pitch that agitates the ocean depths. Your head wrap (turban) is of the five types of great serpents, and you have a rosary of water monster (*chu-srin*) and giant clam (*pir*) skulls. With your mouth of the great blazing *khyung* you consume the five types of *klu*.³¹⁷ Your eight faces subjugate the savage *sde-brgyad*. Your turquoise blue dragon earrings are spiraling. You have a necklace (*do-shal*) of masses of fire and thunderbolts that emit molten metal missiles (*thog*) and hail, which incinerate demons (*rgyal-'gong*).
- iv) Your torso has the spreading wings of the *khyung*. At the base of the wings is the blazing conflagration of the *dbal*, which rapidly incinerates the upper (male) demons. By the flapping of your *khyung* wings three times, a tornado of thunderbolts swirls around the tips of your wings, which rapidly incinerates the black demon (*bdud*) mountain. Your body hairs are turbulent masses of fire and the rain of weapons. They separate the apostates (*dun-tse*) and oath-breakers (*nyams-pa*) from their *lha*. You depute the great kings of the four divisions to action.³¹⁸ The first pair, right and left, of your 18 hands feeds the father demons and mother demons into your mouths. They collapse the black *bdud* mountain from its base. The hand tools (*phyag-mtshan*) of the eight right [hands] are the sword, battleaxe, wheel, thunderbolt arrow, mass of fire, scimitar, maul, and a rotating wheel overhead. They cut, chop, continuously assault, puncture, burn, hack to pieces, bludgeon, and make insane and insensate³¹⁹ the *gri-gran* (enemies of religion) and demons (*'byung-po*). The hand tools of the eight left [hands] are the bow and arrow, lasso, battle hammer, iron chain, iron hook, spear,³²⁰ horn of the blue sheep, and boiling *dbal* water which generates the erupting wave of boiling *dbal* water.

³¹⁵ An exclamatory word used to call the attention of the deities that is particularly used in the Ge-khod and Me-ri cycles. It is the equivalent of the more common *kye/kyē* and *kye kye/kyē kyē*.

³¹⁶ This probably indicates that the open mouth of the deity has the shape of the Tibetan letter *E*.

³¹⁷ *Klu-rigs*: 1) *rgyal-rigs* (kingly type), 2) *rje-rigs* (lordly type), 3) *bram-ze rigs* (brahmin type), 4) *dmangs-rigs* (commoner type), and 5) *gdol-rigs* (inferior type).

³¹⁸ The divine sovereigns of the cardinal directions. See p. 494, fn. 470.

³¹⁹ These actions are respectively associated with the corresponding weapon.

³²⁰ The Zhang-zhung word *sni-rtse* is used for spear here.

- They shoot, strangle, beat, bind, rip the heart out, stab, and deluge and reduce to dust those of inimical activities, the evil-doing oath-breaker enemies.³²¹
- v) Your torso is wrapped in an elephant hide with the skin of a male demon on its borders.³²² Hundreds of thousands of masses of *dbal* fire emanate from you. You quickly incinerate the adversarial *bdud* and *srin*. On your lower body is the great tiger skirt with the wild clouded leopard and leopard [skin] borders. You tie a sash of zigzagging red lightning. Your body hairs naturally shake out the rain of weapons. The *sde-brgyad lha-srin* are your servants. On your body spread the sparks of the *dbal*. You have the necklace of the great blue serpent. You have encircling snake bracelets and anklets. Your armband is decorated with a flaming great *khyung*. Your four feet press down the black *klu-bdud*. You repose on a lion and *chu-srin* throne. Your head is ornamented with five types of great *khyung*. Your magnificence suppresses the black (evil) *klu-bdud*.
- vi) You are the great dBal-chen ge-khod Demon Conqueror lord. Please receive this offering of medicinal nectar. Slay the evil-doing enemies and obstructors in space. Protect the doctrine of g.Yung-drung Bon in the ten directions (everywhere).
- vii) *E!* Your counterpart is the wrathful female sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo mu-tsa med. You are the wrathful female of the sky with the radiance of the sun. You are the blazing lightning fiery red resplendence. You have a red-colored body and a complexion of coral. Your orange hair is the blazing light of fire. On your head there is an ornament (*thor-tshugs*) of fiery crystal. Your head is ornamented with the bright sun and moon.
- viii) You have golden earrings *si li li*,³²³ eyebrows of thunderbolts *khyugs se khyugs*,³²⁴ the resplendent face of the sun *ta la la*,³²⁵ and a necklace of white copper (*bse rgyangs se rgyang*).³²⁶ You have three heads, six arms and the manner of a wrathful female. Your right [head] has a face of lunar water crystal. Your [left] head has a face of solar fire crystal. Your middle head has the appearance of blazing pure gold (*gser-btso*). From inside your quivering hair there is a swirling tornado of golden light and thunderbolts. On your body is the dress of fiery silk and you have a rosary of the skulls of the eight great planets.³²⁷ You have armlets of the bright sun and moon with the lacework of the 20 constellations (*sgyu-skar*).
- ix) On the lower part of your body is a skirt of lightning with the tracery of spreading sparks.

³²¹ I have taken the liberty of rearranging this list of activities in the translation to correspond with the associated weapons in sequential order. This is surely what the author intended; the present textual arrangement must have been the handiwork of inattentive copyists.

³²² The text *Ge khod tso dmar 'khyil ba'i rgyud las dbal chu skol ba'i 'phrin las bzhugs pa legs so* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 905–920, no colophon), no. 908, ln. 5, provides an alternative description of the nine-headed Ge-khod costume that is more in keeping with the dress of indigenous Tibetan deities. It reads: “You wear a vulture [skin/feather] *thul-pa* on your torso. You use a brown bear [skin] skirt (*sham-thab*) on your lower body” (*sku stod la bya rgod kyi thul pa brnab (= mnab) pa / sku smad la dred kyi sham thab byas pa /*).

³²³ *Si li li* is the onomatopoeia for the jingling sound of the goddess' ornaments.

³²⁴ *Khyugs se khyugs* is the trisyllabic indicator that describes the zigzagging movement of lightning.

³²⁵ *Ta la la* conveys the luminosity of the sun and moon.

³²⁶ *rGyangs se rgyang* may possibly be a trisyllabic indicator of brightness.

³²⁷ *Nyi-ma* (Sun), *zla-ba* (Moon), *Mig-dmar* (Mars), *Lhag-pa* (Mercury), *Phur-pa* (Jupiter), *Pa-sangs* (Venus), *sPen-pa* (Saturn), and *ra-hu-la* (eclipses).

You tie a sash of the blazing black serpent. Your first pair of right and left [hands] of your six arms holds a mass of fire and the golden Ri-rab (World Mountain). From the middle pair of your right and left [hands] of your six arms your serpent lasso and thunderbolt arrows descend like rain. With the lower pair of your right and left [hands] of your six arms you present a pure golden libation (*gser-gling phud-rgod*) to your consort. You fulfill the wishes of your consort of resplendent space. You embrace your consort as an equal without dualistic division. You reveal the beautiful complexion of your face to your consort. You exhibit the wrathful lines [of your face] to the enemy.

- x) *E!* At the interlacing of the triangles³²⁸ in the eastern direction is the excellent *gsas* of the Mother and Father. From the *gsas-mkhar* of bright fiery thunderbolts is the body manifestation, the wild *lha* with a wrathful manner, the Ku-byi mang-ske manifestation. You send inconceivable (in terms of numbers) manifestations everywhere. Your maximum and minimum dimensions are uncertain. When you initiate activities and manifest a form, your small body is as large as a golden spindle. Your tiny heart is as large as a mustard seed. Your body meditates on the nature of mind as it is (*thugs-nyid*).³²⁹ Your body color has the complexion of pure gold. You have turquoise hair and eyebrows. Your manifested figure has one head and two hands. Your tiny eyes are as large as the eye of a needle. Your mouth is as large as the peppercorn of the Mon. Your thoughts (*thugs-dgongs*) and manifestations spread in the ten directions.
- xi) On your body is the *slag* of the striped weasel with a border of the blue turquoise serpent. You reduce to dust the blighter *chung-sri* (demon killer of children). From your body spread golden sparks that rapidly incinerate enemies, obstructors and those who guide in the wrong direction. In your right hand you hold a sword of gold that spreads celestial iron, thunderbolts and hail. With your left hand you fling the snake lasso with nine braids. Seize by the lasso and cut by the sword these heretical oath-breaker apostates (*dun-tse*). Please receive these pure turquoise first offerings. Cut the root (lineage) of the oath-breaker apostates.
- xii) *E!* Your counterpart is the wrathful female Ting-nam rgyal-mo, the lady of the rainfall of nectar. You have a beautiful blue-colored body and ornaments of turquoise. On your face you make the wrathful ripples of the ocean. On your body you wear an aquatic silk mantle (*la'u*) and the flayed skin of a *chu-srin*. The hand-tools of manifestation in your right and left [hands] are the raised victory banner and the skullcup of blood that you guzzle. You slay the oath-breakers and protect the extremely worthy (*gnyan*) doctrine of Bon. Riding on the water *bdud* giant clam, you race in all ten directions. Please receive this offering of golden nectar, the first straining of beer. Carry out the activity of slaying the doctrinal enemy (*ge-shan*) and the apostates.
- xiii) *E!* On the right side of the figure of dBal-chen, from the mandala of fiery golden light, rises the figure of the wisdom *lha*, the *sku-lha* A-ti mu-wer.³³⁰ Your body is like the essence of gold.

³²⁸ This superimposition of triangles (*gru-gsum bsnol-ma*) describes a six-pointed star.

³²⁹ This line does not make very good sense. Nevertheless, I let it stand because it does not lend itself to simple emendation.

³³⁰ A description of A-ti mu-wer, drawing more heavily from Indian iconographic tradition is found in the text *bdud 'dul ge khod gsang ba drag chen gyi zhi ba A ti mu wer gyi sgrub thabs bzhugs swō* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 165–180, anonymous), nos. 170, ln. 5 to 171, ln. 4. A-ti mu-wer is depicted with one head, two arms, a white body, and with a smiling countenance. He wears a *ze'u-prog* (a kind of crown), a necklace (*mgul-chu*), a long necklace (*se-mo do*), anklets, armbands, bracelets, and earrings. He gestures with his right hand held at the chest. In his

The beneficent qualities of your mind are like the essence of the sun. Your compassion is like that of a mother to her only son. Your blessings are like the cloud masses of summer.³³¹ You act for sentient beings like the rain falling from the sky.³³² Your power is like the thunderbolt of the sky. When you go in a wrathful manner you wear armor of gold³³³ on your body. Savage weapons cannot injure you. Your ten heads see in all ten directions.

- xiv) You think about the oath-holders with the beneficent qualities of your mind. You consume the heart blood of the oath-breakers. In your right hand you hold a bow and arrow of celestial iron. You shoot them into the hearts of the apostates and oath-breakers. With your left hand you dispatch 900,000 iron *khyung*. You apprehend the oath-breakers and consume them. On your body you wear the flayed skin of the *srin-po*. By your magnificence you suppress the inimical *bdud* and *srin*. As attendants, you dispatch the golden *tso* from your mouth. Collapse the palace of the apostates.
- xv) *E!* Your counterpart is the wrathful female Nam-mkha' dbyings kyi 'phrul-mo che (Great Miraculous Woman of Space). You have a body color of pure blue. Your mane of iron is a covering mass of clouds. You spread celestial iron, thunderbolts and hail in the ten directions. Your head is ornamented by celestial iron thunderbolts. You are ornamented with the blazing celestial serpent necklace (*mgul-chus*). You wear the clothes of fire and air jumbled together. With your right hand you throw the *tso* and arrow of blood. Render to dust the apostates and oath-breakers. With the light rays in your left hand, you place the essence of the sky in the mouth of your consort. You ecstatically embrace your consort with skillful means. Your effort has the signification of neither union nor separation. Please carry out the activities of the beneficent qualities of your mind.
- xvi) *E!* From the manifestation of the Father and Mother dBal-chen, on the right side of the interlacing triangles, the *dbal* male manifested from your body is Nam-mkha'i khye'u-chung with the brilliant complexion. You are a furious figure with one head and two hands. Your head has wrathful lines in the manner of a *srin-po*. Also, your feet are placed apart [in the manner of] a strongman (*gyad*). Also, your mouth proclaims the great sound of *ha he*. In your right hand you hold a *pra-phud* and maul. Without remittance you beat the oath-breakers. In your left hand are the pincers (*gze-ma*) of curses (*byad*). You dispatch a seven-headed turquoise wolf of manifestation. Go for the activity of catching hold [of demons] with the pincers.
- xvii) On the left side of the interlaced triangles is sPrul-pa'i khye'u-chung in the horrific pose (*'dor-thabs*) of the *gshin-rje* (lords of death). You have one head and two hands in the manner of a *srin-po*. You cry out in a cacophonous voice. Also, your face has unpleasant wrathful lines in the manner of a *srin-po*. You have a magnificent regal costume on your torso. Your two feet are spread in the manner of a fear-inspiring, ferocious strongman. Beat the wrongdoing enemies with your hand tool thunderbolt arrow.

left hand he holds a *chags-shing* (a type of Bon scepter).

³³¹ *dByar gyi sprin dpung 'dra*. This simile demonstrates that the god's blessings are everywhere and provide protection like the thick cloud masses of summertime sheltering one from the intense heat.

³³² *mKha' las char 'bebs 'dra*. This simile shows that the deity bountifully acts to help without hesitancy or partiality.

³³³ *Gu-lang gser*. Here a Zhang-zhung term for gold is used in conjunction with the Tibetan word.

- xviii) On the west side of the interlacing triangles is the sister of the *klu* and cousin of the *bdud*, Tsha-drag las kyi lcam-mo. You have a blazing dark red-colored body. Your face is that of the blazing water monster (*chu-srin*). Poisonous vapor spreads from your mouth. A rain of blood falls from your eyes. In your hand you hold a bag of diseases. Send epidemics and diseases to the country of the enemies of religion.
- xix) In front, on the right side of the interlacing triangles, is Klu-srin nag-mo las byed-ma. You have a bright blue-green-colored body. You have the head of a poisonous black serpent. The blue and red vapor from your mouth is a mass of clouds. From your eyes falls a great hail of molten pig iron. In your hands you hold aloft the victory banner of the *chu-srin*. You conquer the black *klu-bdud*.
- xx) In front, on the left side of the interlacing triangles, is Tshe yi lcam-cig las kyi yum. Your body is naturally golden. Turquoise mist billows from your mouth. In your hand you hold a tree with golden fruit. You are the lady preserver of long life, the goddess of the swastika. You guard the long life and life-force of the *gshen*.

Beyond the six points of the star, the Ge-khod mandala includes an outer ring of eight subsidiary deities. Those of the cardinal directions are depicted with consorts. Each pair or individual deity is envisioned as occupying one petal of the lotus that surrounds the inner circle.³³⁴ They are described as follows:

- 1) East: sKu-bla ge-khod 'od-dpung. His body spreads golden light and he is clad in a golden (*gu-lang gser*) cuirass and helmet. He wears a brown bear-skin skirt. He rotates a golden sword overhead with his right hand and throws the lasso of the black serpent with his left hand. He is mounted on a golden elephant. His consort is Sra-brten rgyal-mo (Hard and Steady Queen). She has a golden-colored body and hair of stormy turquoise clouds. She has a sparkling necklace of gold and holds a golden vase (*bum-pa*) in her hands. She is requested to be the goddess of the swastika (stable) long life (*g.yung-drung tshe yi lha-mo mdzod /*).
- 2) North: Ge-khod tso-men this kyi bdag. He has a bright blue-green-colored body. He wears an iron crown (*pra-phud*) on his head and a cuirass of blazing white copper (*bse*) on his body. His skirt is a blazing mass of fire. In his right hand is a secret *dbal* spear with a white ensign billowing like clouds and blazing *dbal* fire on its tip. With his left hand he draws a bow and arrow. He rides a seven-headed turquoise wolf. His consort is Len (= Lan) brgyan rlung gi khro-mo. She has a bright blue-green body. She wears a turquoise *ze-prog* (a kind of crown) on her head. Her fine face has eyes of banded agate (*gzi*). She wears the *go-zu* (a kind of magic coat) of the wind and a sparkling necklace of lapis lazuli (*mu-men*). In her hands she holds the *bse* needle, arrow of long life. She is called upon to summon the *phywa* (basis of all good fortune) and long life and to expand the honored long life (*phywa* (= *phywa*) *tshe khug la sku tshe bsring /*).
- 3) West: Ge-khod ring-nam 'phrul mo che (= chen). He has a smoky dark red-colored body. On his head is a scarf (*cod-pan*) of fire. He wears a bright flaming cuirass and a sparking tasse. With his right hand he shoots a thunderbolt arrow with a great mass of fire, and with his left hand he agitates sparks as if they were stars. He is mounted on a tiger. From within

³³⁴ See nos. 267, ln. 5 to 274, ln. 3 of mNyam-med shes-rab rgyal-mtshan's text.

his hair comes a swirling tornado of fire. He also has a celestial iron claws iron hook. His consort is Tshangs-stang me yi rgyal-mo (Queen of Fire). She has a bright red-colored body, an effulgent fire crystal *thor-tshug* (a type of head ornament), and a sparkling coral necklace. She also has a fine rippling (*pu ru ru*) fire flag. She holds a swastika juniper tree in her right hand, which is erected as the life-force pillar (*srog-shing*) of stable long life. In her left hand she holds a *ga'u* that collects the declined swastika (stable) long life and *phywa* (= *phywa*).

- 4) South: Ge-khod srid-gsum kun-'dul rje (Demon-Subduing Lord Conqueror of All in the Three Realms of Existence). He has a bright-blazing blue body. He wears an iron cuirass and helmet. He has the bound mane of an angry black bear. Inside his hair there is a swirling tornado of wind and fire. In his right hand he holds a celestial iron sword spreading the radiance of the *dbal* and in his left hand an iron chain. He rides a swift turquoise horse. From within his hair comes a swirling tornado of wind and water. His consort is g.Yu-za khri-btsun las kyi yum. She has a turquoise-colored body.³³⁵ She has hair of 100,000 serpents on her head. She wears a mantle (*la'u*) of aquatic silk (*chu-dar*) on her body and has a sparkling turquoise necklace. In her right hand she holds a miraculous mirror that is the guardian of stable long life. In her left hand she possesses a miraculous arrow and spindle that collects the long life, life-force and *dmu-yad* (a good fortune quality akin to the *phywa* and *g.yang*). She is requested to be the goddess of the swastika long life.
- 5) Northeast: sPrul-pa'i khye'u-chung zhi-ba'i sku (Small Child of Manifestation Peaceful Figure). He has one head and two arms. He draws a bow with no bowstring (the '*ur-do*/sling) with his right hand. With his left hand he throws an arrow without a nock (a stone) *sha ra ra* (one after another directed at the target) with the thunderous ('*u ru ru*) sound of the miraculous stone.
- 6) Northwest: sPrul-pa'i khye'u-chung las kyi sku (Small Child of Manifestation Figure of Activities). He has the same attributes as the northeast member of the mandala. His torso possesses the manner of a lion.
- 7) Southwest: sPrul-pa'i khye'u-chung dbang gi sku (Small Child of Manifestation Figure of Power). He has the same attributes as sPrul-pa'i khye'u-chung las kyi sku.
- 8) Southeast: sPrul-pa'i khye'u-chung drag-po'i rdul-shugs (Small Child of Manifestation Indomitable Wrath). He possesses the same attributes as sPrul-pa'i khye'u-chung las kyi sku.

The Ge-khod cycle of texts has also preserved rituals featuring deities that were hardly influenced by Indic tantra. One of the most extensive treatments of these sets of non-tantric gods is found in an invocation to a brotherhood of nine Ge-khod protectors that resemble *lha-ri* or *sgra-bla*.³³⁶ These figures are referred to using the old Tibetan appellation 'hero' (*dpa'-bo*), as are other fierce indigenous divinities. This ennead of Ge-khod gods has many ancient (and often untranslatable) onomastic qualities. The litany of the names and attributes of these Ge-khod gods is part of a ritual for deploying magic bombs (*tso*) against enemies. This characteristic Ge-khod cycle ritual

³³⁵ The text specifies that this is *ma-tang g.yu*, a type of high-grade turquoise, the precise qualities of which are no longer clear.

³³⁶ See *Ge khod tso dmar 'khyil pa'i rgyud las dpa' bo mched dgu'o* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 829–840, no colophon), nos. 832, ln. 6 to 835, ln. 4. Tibetan Text II-28, pp. 598, 599.

practice is ascribed to the prehistoric Zhang-zhung cultural environment. While this cannot yet be independently established, it is clear that the tradition of *tso* is of indigenous and not Buddhist origin. The brotherhood of nine Ge-khod gods differs from the tantricized accounts in a number of distinctive ways. Traditionally these contrasts are explained according to the tripartite system already expounded and the worldly status ascribed to the brotherhood. It does appear, however, that the Ge-khod brotherhood is an older and/or largely indigenous tradition hardly affected by the dictates of Indic tantra, which is best illustrated by their apotropaic function of repulsing the cause of death in the form of anthropomorphous demons. As we shall see in Part III, these demons of death must be defeated if the deceased is to find a place in paradise and the concerned family spared from further misfortune. In fact, the Ge-khod gods are one of the prime classes of protective deities in the Bon archaic funerary tradition known as the Mu-cho'i khrom-'dur (see pp. 370–372).

The gods of the Ge-khod brotherhood are two-armed deities, the progeny of a father *lha* and mother *sman* (para. i). These two appear to have been the prototypical male and female deities of Zhang-zhung. The union of the earth mother and sky father is articulated as the product of skillful means (*thabs*), a Buddhist mode of expression. The Ge-khod brothers, however, are referred to as heroes (*dpa'-bo*) that arose from castles (*mkhar*), placing their origins in congruity with the theogony of the *srid-pa'i sgra-bla* and *yul-lha*. Mention is also made of a man who came from the *ma-sang(s)*, ancestral spirits of the *gnyan* class. The significance of this second line in the passage is somewhat puzzling, with its reference to an ostensible human figure interspersed in a theogonic sequence. This could be the vestige of an ancient genealogical tradition whereby the ritualists affirmed their kinship with the gods they invoked.

After the origins of the gods are announced, the text moves to a description of the eldest brother, Ge-khod *dpa'-bo thog-mda' 'phen*, a wielder of thunderbolts (para. ii). He defeats killer demons known as the *rtsang-sri*. The second brother is Ge-khod *dbang-rgyal mthu-bo che*, who is attired in an animal-skin robe (*slag*) (para. iii). He brandishes a golden *thu-lum* (a kind of mallet) and a red *tso* of gold. The third brother is Tho-tho *yam-pa mthu-bo che*³³⁷ mounted on a crystal blue sheep, a stock conveyance of the Bon tradition (para. iv). This god also holds a golden blue sheep horn (a magical implement) and a red *tso* of gold, used to crush the nine *chung-sri* (demon killers of children) brothers. The fourth Ge-khod brother is *rNgam-pa bdud-'dul mthu-bo che*, the rider of a crystal wild yak (para. v). He demolishes *'dre*, another type of spirit credited with blighting the life-force of humans. The fifth member of the brotherhood is Ge-khod *tsa-skyed mthu-bo che*, a god who brandishes a *tso* and executes the *'dre* (para. vi).

The sixth sibling in the text is Ge-khod *'od-rum mthu-bo che*, a god with power over the clouds (para. vii). He too eradicates various classes of evil spirits. The seventh member of the brotherhood is *Nag-po thog-'beb 'jig-pa'i sku*, attired in the skin of a brown bear (para. viii). This god has traits of both the upper realm *khyung* and the lower realm *klu*. It appears that he has *khyung* horns on his head, like the special gods of the archaic funerary tradition, but this line of the text is particularly abstruse. This may suggest that the individual who committed the present text to writing was not very familiar with the ancient Tibetan funerary traditions. The eighth brother is Ge-khod *ya-can dbu-dgu*, who has dragon heads and a thunderbolt body (para. ix). His servant is the crow, the

³³⁷ *Sems lung gsal sgron* (rediscovered by rMa-ston srol-'dzin in 1108 CE) establishes the term *tho-tho* as belonging to the Zhang-zhung language. *Tho-tho* is a keynote term of the Bon religion, and forms part of one name for gShen-rab (Tho-tho spungs-gyer) as well as that of 28th sPu-rgyal king (Lha tho-tho ri gnyan-btsan). See Dagkar 2003, pp. 201, 481. On etymological grounds, I am inclined to see this word as a teleological expression having the connotations of the 'highest' and 'very first'.

bird of the *bdud*. The ninth and final member of the Ge-khod brotherhood enumerated is Lha-rab ku-byi mang-ske (para. x). His description illustrates that this text deals with a tradition different from that of the tantric mandala (para. x). As compared with his place in mNyam-med shes-rab rgyal-mtshan's mandala, this description of Ku-byi mang-ske has a more ancient and/or native quality about it. He is said to be as large as a thumb and attired in the skin of a tigress. The text states that Ku-byi mang-ske has a celestial iron sword and uses wild sheep, wild yaks and (wild) carnivores as his retainers. As we have seen, this ability to ride wild animals and use them as servants is also ascribed to the Bon masters of prehistoric times:

- i) *bSwo!*³³⁸ The *lha* was the foremost *lha* of Zhang-zhung. The man was the man in his prime of the Zhang-zhung *ma-sang*. The father was the king of the *wa-rtsa*³³⁹ *lha*. The mother was the miraculous only *smān* female. In the nine fortresses of the heroes, the nine castles of the heroes, the unsurpassed castles, through miraculous skillful means they united and the nine Ge-khod hero brothers appeared.
- ii) The biggest hero brother is Ge-khod dpa'-bo thog-mda' 'phen (Ge-khod Hero Thunderbolt Arrow Shooter). You repose on a white lotus carpet. You wear a wild tiger skin on your body. You throw thunderbolts and dry the oceans. For your activities you subdue the *rtsang-sri* of violent death.³⁴⁰ Today, without swerving, defeat the *rtsang-sri* of violent death.
- iii) The Ge-khod younger than you is Ge-khod dbang-rgyal mthu-bo che (Ge-khod Great Magical Power King). On your body you wear a golden *slag-pa*. In your right hand you hold a golden *thu-lum*. With your left hand you throw a red *tso* of gold. You are greatly disposed to anger towards the enemies and obstructors.
- iv) The Ge-khod younger than you is Tho-tho yam-pa mthu-bo che. You ride a male crystal blue sheep mount. In your right hand you hold a golden blue sheep horn. With your left hand you hurl a red *tso* of gold. For your activities you subdue the nine *chung-sri* brothers.
- v) The Ge-khod younger than you is rNgam-pa bdud-'dul mthu-bo che (Fierce Demon Conqueror Great Powerful One). You ride a crystal wild yak as your mount. You wear the flayed skin of a *bdud* on your body. In your hands you hold various kinds of weapons. As your activities you subdue the nine blighter brothers. Without distraction you subdue the nine blighter brothers. Without distraction slay the nine types of blighters.
- vi) The Ge khod younger than you is Ge-khod tsa-skyed mthu-bo che. You send forth yellow *tso* of gold from your mouth. Without distraction, remove the heart essence of the '*dre*.
- vii) The Ge-khod younger than you is Ge-khod 'od-rum mthu-bo che. Raise the banner of billowing masses of clouds. With your right hand you send forth the red *tso* of gold. Defeat the *gnam-thel* (a class of sky-dwelling demons) and slay them as *tshogs* (edible offerings).

³³⁸ *Bso/bswo* is a general word of invocation for deities, a speech offering, and a seed syllable of various *yi-dam* that represents the enlightened form of the body, speech and mind.

³³⁹ The signification of this Zhang-zhung language term is unknown to me. Perhaps it is equivalent in meaning to *dbang-po* (power?).

³⁴⁰ This is probably a class of demonic killers (*sri*) from rTsang/gTsang province. For example, the funerary text *Sa-bdag Reparation Conquest with the Flayed Skin of the Life-Cutter gShed* details the origin of a murderous *mo-sri* who escaped to a location in rTsang while being pursued by the gods. See p. 471, para. ii.

You subdue the angry *bdud* and *sri* that increase rage. Without distraction, conquer the *gnam-thel* and the blighters (*gnod-byed*).

- viii) The Ge-khod younger than you is Nag-po thog-'beb 'jig-pa'i sku (Falling Fear-Inspiring Figure Black Thunderbolt). On your body you wear the flayed skin of a brown bear. You tie a sash of a thousand black serpents. You sport with a *khyung* horn from your eyes.³⁴¹ You consume the liver blood of the female *bdud*. Without distraction, reduce to dust the female *bdud*.
- ix) The Ge-khod younger than you is Ge-khod ya-can dbu-dgu, who possesses [nine] dragon heads and a thunderbolt body. You employ black crow *bdud* as your servants. You shoot thunderbolts, hail and poisonous arrows. The time has come to subdue the enemies and obstructors without distraction.
- x) The Ge-khod younger than you is Lha-rab ku-byi mang-ske, a magical man (*mi-po*) as large as a thumb. You wear the flayed skin of a young tigress on your body. You rotate a celestial iron sword overhead. You are the magical holy man as large as a thumb. You employ wild sheep and carnivores as your servants. You ride wild yaks and place loads on wild sheep. You make manifestations and shoot ferocious thunderbolts.

We have examined references to Ge-khod's abode being on the Ru-thog mountain, but other texts directly connect him with Ti-se and Ma-pang. The concentration of archaic residential sites in these widely separated regions suggests that they were two of the most important (Zhang-zhung) centers in far western Tibet. These ancient residential patterns and the presence of prominent mountain peaks and ample fresh water may well explain why Ru-thog and Ti-se were selected as hubs of the Ge-khod cult. Such nuclei of settlement where local elites dwelt were well suited to religious and other non-subsistence activities.

One Ge-khod cycle text concerned with the fabrication of magical bombs and other ritual procedures starts out by calling the Ge-khod gods from Ti-se and Ma-pang:³⁴²

bSwo! Without distraction, without distraction, *lha* of Zhang-zhung smar! From Gangs-dkar ti-se, the soul mountain, we call you mighty *sku-lha* of the *lha* lineage. From the ornamented wild rock formation, the soul rock, [we call you mighty *sku-lha* of the *lha* lineage]. From Ma-spang g.yu-mtsho, the soul lake, we call you mighty *sku-lha* of the *lha* lineage. We call you, master of spells of the fulminating *tso*. We call you, mighty *lha* lineage of Zhang-zhung.

In a long-life ritual text that relies on the three-headed Ge-khod and his consort, a visualization is carried out to invite the deities (specifically, sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo).³⁴³ Again, the Ge-khod

³⁴¹ The verb at the end of the line *btse* (= *rtse*) (to play; to sport) does not seem correct here. Also, the *khyung* is described by the unknown word/phrase: *kud-rje*. The reading I provide in this sentence, therefore, is questionable.

³⁴² See *Ge khod tso dmar 'khyil pa'i rgyud las dbal gyi tso 'gyed bzhugs sho* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 857–881), no. 857, lns. 1–2: *bswo ma g.yel ma g.yel zhang zhung smar gyi lha / bla ri gang (= gangs) dkar ti tsi (= tse) nas / sku lha lha rgyud gnyan po bdar / bla brag brag rgod brgyan ldan nas / bla mtsho ma spang g.yu mtsho nas / sku lha lha rgyud gnyan po bdar / tso dbal sngags kyi bdag po bdar / zhang zhung lha rgyud gnyan po bdar /*

³⁴³ See *Ge khod gsang ba drag chen gyi tshes sgrub g.yung drung 'khyil pa zhes bya ba bzhugs* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 122, nos. 235–264), no. 238, lns. 3–5: *bdag gi mdun gyi nam mkha' la / gang (= gangs) ti tse shel gyi ri bor gnam du zang se ba / mtsho ma pang g.yu yi ma 'dal 'dra ba thang 'khyil ba / rtse la g.yu'i na bun 'thib pa / gzha' tshon sna lnga'i gzhal yas khang / shel la grub pa de'i dbus su / seng ge'i khri stengs su nyi zla pad ma'i gdan la tshes yi lha mo sgom /*

deities are invoked from their residences at western Tibet's most celebrated mountain and lake dyad:

In space in front of myself is Gang-dkar ti-se, the sharp-pointed crystal mountain in the sky and mTsho ma-pang swirling in the plain like a turquoise mandala. On the summit [of Ti-se] mists of turquoise whirl. It is the numinous palace (*gzhal-yas khang*) of the rainbows of five colors. In the middle of that formed by crystal, upon the throne of the lion, on the sun and moon carpet of the lotus, visualize the goddess of long life.

The mythic origins of the Ge-khod mountain gods have fortuitously survived in the Ge-khod cycle. One of these narratives, which contains nothing of Indic tantra, is composed in the traditional style of Bon etiologic myths.³⁴⁴ It relates the primal beginnings of the gods, and is written employing the caesura *ni* to add extra weight to each statement, in the manner of certain Dunhuang manuscripts and old hymns to the mountain gods. Ge-khod and his circle of deities are depicted like other members of the environment-bound pantheon with a definite home territory. Moreover, they act exclusively as protective deities, not as symbols of tantric teachings.

The origination myth begins with the famous Bon word of invocation *bswo*, as do many ritual texts for the native Tibetan pantheon (para. i). The use of this word has crossed over into the Buddhist tradition as well. Ge-khod, the god of Zhang-zhung, is also called by his Tibetan name bDud-'dul. Like the *srid-pa'i sgra-bla*, Ge-khod's source is traced to the very beginning of time and space. From this primordium, the Ge-khod deities appeared as light rays before making their descent to the snow mountain (either Ti-se or Ge-khod gnyan-lung) and lake (either mTsho ma-pang or La-Ing mtsho) of Zhang-zhung. These deities appeared from eggs and assumed the form of a wild yak. The wild yak (*'brong*) is a popular zoomorphic divinity in Tibetan culture, with mountain gods and *sgra-bla* appearing as male yaks, and lake goddesses as female yaks.³⁴⁵

The indigenous warrior aspect of Ge-khod is asserted when he is called the *sgra-bla* (protective and ancestral god) of the *shel-gyer* (para. ii). *Shel-gyer* is the Zhang-zhung language term for the *bon-po* priests or Bon community in its entirety. These ancient practitioners are recorded as having established the tabernacles (*rten*) needed as supports for the deities during their ritual evocations. These receptacles are set up to contain the deities whose presence is essential if one is to benefit from their manifold capabilities. The yak is the outer support for Ge-khod and his retinue. Live animals are still commonly used in this ritual fashion in Upper Tibet.³⁴⁶ The inner support for Ge-khod and his entourage is gold. By erecting these supports and maintaining their oath with the Ge-khod gods, the ancient *shel-gyer* were able to harness the power of these deities and conquer antagonistic forces. The names of three figures that are said to have controlled the

³⁴⁴ See *dBal chen ge khod kyis (= kyi) dug phyung tshan dkar dmar spos bsang bcas* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 81–101, no colophon), nos. 89, ln. 3 to 90, ln. 5. Tibetan Text II-29, pp. 599, 600. This theogony is sandwiched between the well-known Ge-khod matricide myth and the actual *tshan* ritual liturgy. The same theogony, up to the invocations of the deities (paras. i, ii), is also found in the text *Lha lcam dral rnams spyan 'dren bzugs so* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 1327–1330), no. 1327, lns. 1–6. A longer but somewhat more Buddhicized theogony for Ge-khod taken from the *Ti se'i dkar chag* and a more abbreviated version in the Ge-khod cycle have been translated in Bellezza 2005a, pp. 414–417.

³⁴⁵ The association of female yak hybrids with spirits such as the *klu* can be traced to PT. 1289 (this text contains a rather incoherent account about a *mdzo-mo*). It relates (fol 1, pl. 596, ln. 7) that the red or butter-producing (*mar-mo*) female hybrid yak of the *klu* has a variegated back (...*klu mdzo mar mo la rgyab ni khra bo...*).

³⁴⁶ See p. 454, fn. 314. Numerous examples of the ritual uses of yaks and other livestock are found in Bellezza 2005a.

Ge-khod deities before the time in which this text was written are given. They appear to be listed in chronological order, with Mu-tsa dza-yer, the oldest among them.

The text now turns to the invitation extended to the Ge-khod gods, beginning with the chief Ge-khod figure (para. iii). It then lists his consort followed by the deity Phu-wer. Phu-wer is best known in the Bon tradition as a divination and tantric god.³⁴⁷ Next in the list are the goddess personifications of fire (Tshangs-stang rgyal-mo), water (Ting-nam rgyal-mo) and air (Li-mun rgyal-mo). Ku-byi mang-ske, the four Youth (Khye'u) and the 360 lesser Ge-khod gods, all primary figures in the pantheon of Zhang-zhung, are also invoked as the protectors of the Bon-po:

- i) *bSwo!* Without distraction, without distraction, the *lha* of Zhang-zhung smar, Demon Conqueror Ge-khod with your entire circle! In the beginning existing, yes, you appeared in the primordium (*ye*) and positive universe (*vod*). Descending, yes, you descended from radiance and light. Manifesting, yes, you manifested on a snow mountain and lake. Emerging, yes, you emerged from a precious egg. Emanating, yes, you emanated in the *kho-mo* wild yak. Landing, yes, you landed in the country of Zhang-zhung.
- ii) You came as the *sgra-bla* of the *shel-gyer* in their prime. They made the yak of the *dbal* the outer support (*phyi-rten*). They made precious gold the inner support (*nang-rten*). Offering, yes, they offered yaks and sheep to you. Holding, yes, they held the immaculate oath. Performing, yes, they performed the *tso* and *this*. Defeating, yes, they defeated the *srin-po* and *bdud*. In the beginning you were the *lha* of Mu-tsa dza-yer. Then you were the *lha* of Dzo-men gyer-chen. Then you were the *lha* of Lha-btsan yag-pa. Today you are the *lha* of us, the *shel-gyer*.
- iii) *bSwo!* Father god (*yab-lha*)³⁴⁸ dBal-chen ge-khod,
Your consort (*lcam-mo*) Mu-ting tsa-med (Turquoise Lake Woman),
The father god (*yab-lha*) dKyil (= dKyel) chen phu-wer,
The only mother Tshangs-stangs rgyal-mo,³⁴⁹
The only sister Ting-nam rgyal-mo,
The miraculous Ku-byi mang-ske,
The only woman Li-mun rgyal-mo,
The father god holy man (*skyes-mchog*) Ge-khod,
The four savage Youth (*Khye'u*) of the cardinal directions,
And all the 360 types of Zhang-zhung *lha*,
We invite you for the activities of the *dzo* and *this*,
Please come for the activities of protecting the *shel-gyer*.

Let us now turn to a more detailed account of the tabernacles (*rten*) of the Ge-khod gods.³⁵⁰ This practice of enshrining deities in physical objects is one of the foundations of indigenous Tibetan religious traditions. Many of the *rten* objects of Bon have been adopted by the Buddhists, who

³⁴⁷ Bon rituals featuring Phu-wer are the object of study in Bellezza 2005a, part 4, section ii.

³⁴⁸ *Yab-lha/yab-bla* is an ancient title for those worthy of homage, such as deities and the Tibetan kings. See Bellezza 2005a, pp. 203, 203 (n. 104), 452, 452 (n. 101).

³⁴⁹ Queen of Fire. *Tshangs-stang/tshang-stang* is the Zhang-zhung word for the element fire. See Bellezza 2005a, p. 337 (n. 486); Dagkar 2003, p. 321; Karmay 1998, p. 404 (n. 92).

³⁵⁰ See *Ge khod gsang ba drag chen gyis* (= *gyi*) *brnal bsang dang bskang ba* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 293–321), no. 298, lns. 1–4. The colophon states that this original text (*ma-dpe*) was on light yellow paper folded in three parts, and consisted of four folios with 153 lines in total.

also use statues and paintings in much the same way (as does systematized Bon). The outer support of Ge-khod is said to be a white yak, while the inner support is rock crystal, and gold in its naturally occurring state is the secret support (*gsang-rten*). The wishes of the Ge-khod gods are fulfilled much in the same way as they are for other deities, with beautiful objects to behold and delicious things to eat. A description of another triad of supports is also given: an arrow with vulture feathers, a mirror, and a blue sheep horn, popular containers for the mystic incorporation of deities to the present day in Tibet. Metal arrowheads and circular mirrors have been produced in Tibet since the prehistoric epoch, lending credence to their ritual antiquity. Wild ungulate horns still commonly grace *gsas-mkhar*, *la-btsas* and *dar-lcog* erected on behalf of the environment-bound deities:

The outer support is the divine white yak, the inner support is bright white crystal, and the secret support is unworked gold. May we fulfill your wishes by beautiful-looking things (*spyang-gzigs*), first offerings (*phud*) and victuals (*zhal-zas*). *bSwo!* Demon Conqueror and your circle of *lha* assembly, please make these the supports of your body, speech and mind:

The mind support – vulture feather arrow,

The speech support – clear mirror,

And the body support – golden blue sheep horn.

Please make these the supports of your body, speech and mind.

Please befriend and accompany us, the excellent *gshen*.

There are other important Zhang-zhung gods who belong to the circle of Ge-khod. These male figures also may have been mountain spirits but their places of residence have been lost to time. They include Yo-phya, Pra-phud, Mu-thur, and Gyer-gyung, all of whom are endowed with Zhang-zhung language names. Their descriptions are found in another text of the Ge-khod cycle.³⁵¹ According to Lopön Tenzin Namdak's history of Bon, these gods appear to have ruled over eponymous territorial entities in prehistoric Zhang-zhung as territorial protectors (and perhaps ancestral figures),³⁵² much like the *yul-lha* of the historical period.

Yo-phya is depicted with a blazing orange body. From his mouth he manifests a *khyung*. His hand tool is the claws of the *khyung*, which he uses to remove the hearts of the four types of *klu*. When angered, his *khyung* horns quiver and he has the cry of a *khyung*. From this description we might infer that Yo-phya was envisioned as an anthropomorphic figure with horns (like the archaic funerary deities and ancient *bon-po* and *gshen* priests) as well as in a zoomorphic form as a horned eagle.

The god Pra-phud has one head and two arms. He has bared fangs, a wide-eyed stare and a coiled tongue with a fierce clicking sound that is heard in the ten directions. He consumes enemies, obstructors and *'byung-po* (a class of demons). He wears a flayed human skin on his torso. On his lower body is a tiger-skin skirt. In his right hand is a blazing sword of copper. In his left hand he has a *thu-lum* (a type of mallet) that he uses to beat the hearts of the *byad-ma* (noxious spirits

³⁵¹ See *Ge khod gsang ba drag chen gyis (= gyi) bzlog mdos bzhugs pa'o* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 703–717). According to the colophon, this text was hidden by sTong-rgyung mthu-chen (eighth century CE). The descriptions are found in the following locations: Yo-phya (no. 712, lns. 3–5), Pra-phud (nos. 712, ln. 6 to 713, ln. 4), Mu-thur (nos. 713, ln. 4 to 714, ln. 1), Gyer-rgyung (no. 714, lns. 1–6), and Lha-dbang spyi-phud (nos. 714, ln. 6 to 715, ln. 4).

³⁵² For a translation and analysis of this reference, as well as a less tantricized description of these gods taken from the text *Lha rgod drag bdar*, see Bellezza: in press; see also pp. 371, 372.

that interfere with religious practice). His consort is said to be Mu-la tsa-med (Woman of the Heavens). She is possibly the lake goddess of Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho or La-lnga mtsho, and is often identified with sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo.

Mu-thur has a blazing dark-red fiery body, one head and two arms.³⁵³ He has a wrathful manner and a blazing mane of dark brown hair. He holds miraculous weapons. The text calls him the *sgra-bla* that conquered the many *srin-po*.

Gyer-rgyung has a bright blazing white-colored body, two heads and four arms, a tantric guise for this Zhang-zhung deity. In the manner of the ancient Bon priests, he wears a striped tiger skin on his body and a striped tiger-skin hat on his head (see pp. 228, 229, 388). In his hand, he holds a miraculous drum and *gshang*, the favorite musical instruments of the Bon-po. He recites incantations (*sngags*) and throws daggers (*phur-pa*) of mustard seeds (*nyungs*). Another Zhang-zhung deity, Lha-dbang spyi-phud, is said to shoot a celestial iron thunderbolt arrow.

A description of Phu-wer, another major Zhang-zhung deity, is tucked away in yet another text of the Ge-khod cycle.³⁵⁴ Unlike his pacific persona in divination rituals, in this account he is a ferocious martial figure ready to take on the cannibalistic *srin-po*:

bSwo! The manifestation of the body is the ferocious figure of the *lha*, the *sgra-bla* dKyel-chen phu-wer. Your body is clad in yellow golden armor. You draw a savage bow and arrow with your hands. Repulse the battleground of the angry *srin-po*.

The appearances and activities of Yo-phya, Pra-phud and Mu-thur, along with those of two other eminent Zhang-zhung gods, Mu-wer and Wer-spungs, are also the focus of a Me-ri cycle text.³⁵⁵ This Me-ri account reveals no hints of tantricism, suggesting that it was composed in recognition of an earlier tradition as compared to the *Ge khod gsang ba drag chen* passages examined above. As in the Ge-khod cycle texts, these descriptions of the deities are rather cursory (the last remnants of a moribund religious tradition?). The Me-ri text does provide some geographic points of reference regarding the residences of the Zhang-zhung deities. The five gods of the text are all associated with sacred mountains, meteorological conditions and celestial phenomena, hallmarks of the Ge-khod iconographic tradition.

Yo-phya is stated to be the son of Srid-pa'i rgyal-mo (Queen of Existence), the most famous of the Bon female protectors, as well as the commander of the *sgra-bla* (para. i). This is further confirmation that in their primary indigenous form, the Ge-khod deities are tantamount to the *sgra-bla*. Yo-phya is depicted with his head towering above the world mountain and his feet reaching

³⁵³ During the persecution of Bon in the reign of Gri-gum btsan-po, various *gshen* meeting at Zhang-zhung Byi-ba mkhar in Kha-yug were deputed by the deity sKye-chen mu-thur to hide texts in many far-flung places. Among these locations were lake islands (*mtsho-do*). See Karmay 1972, pp. 63, 64, fols. 153a, 153b.

³⁵⁴ See *dBal chen ge khod 'khros pa nag po 'i bzlog pa** (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 719–726), no. 724, lns. 5, 6: *bswo yang cig sku yi sprul pa ni / sgra bla dkyil (= dkyel) chen phu wer ni / lha yi sku la drag tshad can / sku la gser khrab ser po mnab / phyag na gdug pa 'i mda' gzhu 'ging / drag byed srin po 'i g.yul sa zlog /*.

* The colophon merely says, “It is the well-done teachings of sTong-rgyung” (*stong rgyung gi gdams pa legs so /*).

³⁵⁵ See *Me ri dpa'bo gyad phur gyi bskang ba* in *Zhang zhung me ri bka' mi 'i sgrub skor gyi gsung pod*, anonymous, nos. 543–564 (published by rMa-rtsa rin-chen rgyal-mtshan, Delhi, 2000), nos. 559, ln. 1 to 560, ln. 1. Tibetan Text II-30, p. 600. In an offering liturgy this text also mentions dKyel (= dKyel) chen phu-wer and his consort Gyer-ting tsa-med (no. 556, ln. 5).

the depths of the ocean, a graphic sign of the Ge-khod god's dual identity as a *khyung* (*lha*) and *klu*. This dichotomous cosmological imagery is strengthened when Yo-phya is referred to as the controller of the *lha* and *srin*, a binary entity inhabiting the two spheres of the universe (*yar* and *yog* respectively). The second deity (Wer-spungs) is expressly connected to mountain abodes (para. ii). He is the god who controls the wind.³⁵⁶ Like Yo-phya, his divine residence Gung-thang (Vault of the Heavens) is probably a metaphorical land. On the other hand, the god Mu-thur is connected to real places: Ti-tse (*sic*), Ma-pang, Dang-ra, and rTa-sgo (para. iii). His identification with two pairs of Zhang-zhung mountains and lakes should not be taken too literally. It seems to suggest that much of the lore surrounding this god had disappeared before it could be recorded in the Bon scriptures of the post-tenth century CE. This could have led to Mu-thur's residence being conceived of in a generalized sense. Like many other native mountain deities of Upper Tibet, Mu-thur is mounted on a crystal (white) yak.

The fourth deity mentioned in the Me-ri cycle text is Mu-wer (Sky King), who is said to have originated from the root of the world tree (para. iv). He is a planetary god mounted on the red light reflected by Mars. The final god noted is Pra-phud, a figure affiliated with birds and the light of the sun and moon. Interestingly, his residence is declared to be Gru-gu, probably Turkic Central Asian lands bordering Upper Tibet. According to Bon sources, ancient Bon priests were active in other northwestern lands such as Yu-'gur and Tag-gzig (see pp. 232–237), and a Dunhuang manuscript states that the tradition of funerary horse vehicles extended into Gru-gu (Drugu) (see p. 524). This evidence seems to suggest that the practice of certain early Bon traditions extended beyond the Plateau into Central Asia. These findings are correlative with the affinities exhibited by the funerary monument assemblages of Upper Tibet, Mongolia and southern Siberia. The country of Pra-phud and the other snippets of textual evidence seem to indicate broad-ranging cultural ties between these territories:

- i) The son of the union of the father Kun-thog ring-nam and the mother Srid-pa'i rgyal-mo is the general of the *sgra-bla*, Yo-phya. His head looms above the summit of Ri-rab and his feet reach to the bottom of the ocean. We fulfill the wishes of Yo-phya of activities, who rides a five-jewel *khyung* and controls all the *lha-srin*.
- ii) There is the one manifested from the divine country Gung-thang who stays on the slate and snow mountains, racing astride a conch-white doe. He raises up a banner and holds the great wind. We fulfill the wind *lha* of activities.
- iii) There is the one who resides at Ti-tse and Ma-phang, who has the eyes of the lake³⁵⁷ Dang-ra and the *cod-pan*³⁵⁸ of the mighty snow mountain rTa-sgo. He rides a crystal yak mount. We fulfill the wishes of Mu-thur of activities, who controls all the *lha-srin*.
- iv) There is the one manifested from the root of the Mu-le grum tree in the northern world of cacophonous sound, who rides the rays of the Great Red Star (Mars). We fulfill the wishes of Mu-wer of existence of activities, who intently looks at all the worlds.

³⁵⁶ A Phu-wer healing ritual text mentions five kings of the wind (*rlung gi rgyal-po*) who, like Wer-spungs, are mounted on deer (Bellezza 2005a: 370).

³⁵⁷ *Ting-mtsho*. This bilingual term is probably the equivalent of *g.yu-mtsho*, indicating a lake with a blue or turquoise color.

³⁵⁸ A long strip of cloth used for clothing and turbans; his snowy mantle.

- v) There is the one who bodily manifested in the country of Gru-gu in the crystal castle surrounded by birds, amidst the rays of the moon and rays of the sun. We fulfill the wishes of Pra-phud of activities, the eyes of the manifestation of all the miraculous *lha*.³⁵⁹

6.2 The Zhang-zhung Goddesses

This subsection continues to focus on sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo as well as a few other goddesses that are believed to be of Zhang-zhung origin.³⁶⁰ Other lake and mountain goddesses (*sman*, *lha-mo*, *klu-mo*) of Upper Tibet are extensively treated in my earlier works and I will not revisit this material. The aim of this examination is to better clarify the place of the goddesses attributed to Zhang-zhung in Bon myth and ritual. One aspect of this religious tradition that stands out in the passages selected for translation is the martial personality of the goddesses. While there are many wrathful Buddhist female figures, the special women-at-arms status accorded the Zhang-zhung goddesses in Bon literature appears to be part of an indigenous legacy. Many of these deities are clad in armor and helmets just as their male counterparts, a reflection perhaps of ancient cultural realities where women participated in defense and other warrior traditions.³⁶¹

If it proves to be the case, as I think it likely, that some lore surrounding the Zhang-zhung gods and goddesses is of sufficient antiquity, this is liable to have implications for the development of prehistoric and early historic architectural traditions in Upper Tibet. Territorial affiliations between monuments and these deities, monuments as venues for their ritual observance, and the establishment of sites based on cosmogonic and cosmological principles associated with the Zhang-zhung pantheon all emerge as potential cultural historical scenarios.

A pithy description of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo is featured in an untitled text of the Ge-khod cycle.³⁶² She is referred to as the sister, or possibly wife (*lcam*), of Mu-thur. She is called from

³⁵⁹ There is one other chief god of Zhang-zhung who should be noted. This is Nyi-pang sad, the special protector of Zhang-zhung Bon doctrines, especially Ge-khod, Me-ri and the Zhang-zhung snyan-rgyud (a rDzogs-chen tradition reputed to be of Upper Tibetan origin). Nyi-pang sad is white-colored and has attributes such as a white turban or helmet, a wish-fulfilling jewel (*yid-bzhin nor-bu*), and a 'gying-dkar (a kind of scepter). According to *bsTan bsrungs* (= *srung*) *rgyal-po'i mchod bskangs bzhugs sho*,* a text devoted to this deity (no. 694, lns. 2, 3), the name Nyi-pang sad was bestowed upon him by the great Bon tutelary gods dBal-bon stag-la me-'bar and dBal-chen ge-khod. This text also states that he was given the name dKyil (= dKyel) chen phu-wer by gSang-ba 'dus-pa, and the name rGyal-po li-byin har by gShen-rab. This demonstrates that at least in certain cases, Nyi-pang sad and Phu-wer are one and the same deity. A discussion about Nyi-pang sad and his female counterpart sMan-mo ku-ma ra-dza, as well as ritual texts used in their propitiation, is found in Reynolds 2005, pp. 345–365.

* This text is found in an untitled volume (nos. 669–703), containing scriptures for a wide assortment of Bon protector deities. The individual texts of this collection all come from Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho, and were brought together and reproduced under the behest of Gu-ru 'od-zer, the chief lama of 'Om-bu.

³⁶⁰ My research shows that in the remote village of sTang, in the Za-rang district of Gu-ge, sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo is still the chief female protective deity of the *yul-lha* class. She plays a prominent role in the *shun* ballads of the village.

³⁶¹ There may be broader Inner Asian ethnohistorical and mythological factors involved in this female combatant role. Weaponry is sometimes discovered in the tombs of Scythian women. Sauromatian women appear to have functioned as both priests and warriors, and the Massagetae in the time of King Cyrus were led by Queen Tomyris (Jacobson 1987: 17). It is believed that Hsiung-nu women were adept horse riders and good with the bow and arrow, assisting their husbands in defense (Ishjmat 1994: 164).

³⁶² See Untitled, composed by gShen gyi drang-srong shes-rab rgyal-mtshan (1356–1415) at sMan-ri monastery (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 337–340), no. 337, lns. 1–4: *bswo ma g.yel ma g.yel bya ra ma / ma 'da' ma 'da' sgrub sde mo / mu wer lha yi sring dam can sgra bla mo / 'byung ba lnga yi bcud bsud ma / dbal chen ge*

her residence at the poison (awesome) lake of Mu-le, a reference to La-Inga mtsho. The waters of La-Inga mtsho still have a reputation for being poisonous and are generally shunned by Buddhist pilgrims. sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo is said to reside on a poison mountain in the middle of the lake, which refers to either the island of Do ser or Do smug. The text also mentions her other main residence: sTag-ri rong (Tiger Mountain Valley). This is the 7728 m massif sTag-ri khra-bo (Buddhist name: gNas-mo sna-gnyis), located south of Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho.³⁶³ By extension, sTag-ri rong also denotes the wider region of extreme southwestern Tibet as far east as the eponymous sTag rong valley (in Gro-shod). It is popularly said by Bon-po that La-Inga mtsho is the soul lake (*bla-mtsho*) of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo and sTag-ri khra-bo is her soul mountain (*bla-ri*). One thing for certain is that her mountain abode is much higher and larger than either Ti-se or the Ru-thog mountain. Furthermore, she is incumbent in both lake and mountain, embracing the prime symbols of the dichotomous universe, whereas the male deities usually reside just on mountains of the upper sphere. This can be taken as allegorical evidence (along with other evidence we have examined) that matriarchal traditions may have played an important role in the paleoculture of Upper Tibet. This is also supported by the myth in which sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo devours her parents, husband and *sgra-bla* brothers.³⁶⁴ In this passage, however, the goddess appears as an ordinary Bon protectress:

khod pho nya mo / g.ya'dang gang (= gangs) gi pha rol na / sprin dang na bun tshul (= tshur) rol na / dug ri nag po'i rtse rgyal mo / dug mtsho mu le'i dkyil shad na / g.yu dang mun pa'i gur khang nas / sgra bla'i rgyal mo mthu mo che / srid pa'i rgyal mo stag ri rong /.

³⁶³ The conjugal relationship between gNas-mo sna-gnyis and Ti-se is recognized in the oral tradition of the region. According to one folktale, the two mountains are man and wife but were separated after Ma-pham g.yu-mtsho was created by an ancient Buddhist king named Kun-spang. The lake is said to have come into existence from water in which huge quantities of rice were cooked for distribution to Kun-spang's poor subjects. It is thought that from that time, Ti-se and gNas-mo sna-gnyis are able to meet each other only on Buddhist holidays such as Lo-gsar.

³⁶⁴ The implacable savagery (in the service of religious ideals) of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo forms a theme in an origin tale in a Bon ritual text written for the discharge of wrathful activities. See *dBal chen ge khod gsang ba drag chen gyi bka'nyan nag mo thugs kyi gsang bsgrub bzhugs so*, attributed to Srid-pa dre-ma khod (the younger brother of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo) in *Ge khod smad cha* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 122, nos. 101–116), nos. 101, ln. 1 to 106, ln. 1. This tale portrays the terrific personality of the goddess as reflected in the oral tradition of Jo-mo ri-rang (Mistress Mountain), a mountain deity in rGya nyi-ma (Nyi-'od g.yen-dmar rgyal-khams of the Bon literary tradition), another location associated with sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo. A summary of the origin myth: In ancient times, in the country of Zhang-zhung, on the middle reaches of Mount Ha-ri nag-po, lived the king of the *gnod-sbyin*, sTong phu-wer, in a small blazing house of celestial iron (*gnam-lcags*). Srin-mo 'dod-chags kyi gtso-mo khrag gi ral-pa can (Srin-mo Chief of Lust with the Mane of Blood) lived at the base of Ha-ri nag-po beside a lake of the savage *klu*. These two coupled, producing eight brothers, and a black egg of iron from which appeared a savage woman. For her food she ate the flesh of enemies and for her beverage she drank blood. She consumed the flesh of her father and the blood of her mother. She had nine husbands, all of whom died.* She became mad with rage and horrific in appearance and wandered about. Meanwhile, sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo's seven older brothers lived happy and prosperous lives in Dung-lung (Conch Valley). She went to them to beg but her seven older brothers hurled abuse and set their dogs loose on her.

Her youngest brother, Dred-ma khod, lived in a small valley in a goat-hair tent (*re'u-sbe'u*). His wealth consisted of five dark-colored female goats with brown markings on their faces and their kids (*brgya (= rgya) mo smad lnga 'jo*). sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo visited her youngest brother and he showed pity on her. Dred-ma khod invited her inside his tent and slaughtered his biggest goat for her. He let her eat and drink whatever she wanted. She ate raw flesh and blood. She complained bitterly about their seven older brothers. When sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo left she took some meat and the five main organs (*don-snying smad-linga*) with her, and told her youngest brother to meet her where the snows and talus converge on the mountain in four days. She instructed him to bring a *ga-zi* (a type of flesh-eating cuckoo?) and a *ga-nu* (a type of pigeon) with him. She warned Dred-ma khod that a huge avalanche would come to Dung-lung and sweep away all the people and dogs, sparing only the livestock. After four days a deluge came causing a landslide in which sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo's seven older brothers were killed. Her youngest brother met her on the mountain at the appointed time, and found his sister beside a small fire with bird feathers on her body. She told him that she had realized the *ma-mo* (a type of fierce goddess) of wisdom and would no longer be a savage *ma-mo*. She offered to help Dred-ma khod

bSwo! Don't be distracted, don't be distracted, female guardian. Don't deviate, don't deviate [from your oath], female performer of religious activities. You are the only sister of the *lha* Mu-wer, sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo, the only sister and mother with an oath. You are the female collector of the essence of the five elements. You are the female attendant of dBal-chen [ge-khod]. Beyond the slate and snow mountains, this side of the clouds and fog, on the victory peak of the black poison mountain, in the middle of the poison lake Mu-le (La-lnga mtsho), from the tent of darkness and turquoise, comes sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo, the great powerful one. You are the queen of existence of sTag-ri rong.

In a text that contains various ritual performances for sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo, she is connected to the home of her consort, Ti-se, and Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho, an alternative view of her dwelling-place.³⁶⁵ In this passage Ti-se is simply called Snow Mountain (rTa-sgo) in the language of Zhang-zhung:

Kye kye! Beyond the slate and snow [mountains], this side of the clouds and mists, in the divine country of Zhang-zhung, is the holy place (*gnas*) of the mighty good fortune turquoise lake. From the country of residence of the *sku-lha* Ge-khod, Mount rTa-sgo and Lake Ma-pang, we invite the woman of ferocity, great mother.

In another untitled text from the Ge-khod cycle, a more detailed picture of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo is given.³⁶⁶ Along with Ti-se and Ma-pang, the goddess is also associated with sPos-ri ngan-lan/sPos-ri ngad-lan (para. i). These three prime Bon pilgrimage centers in southwestern Tibet (Gangs-ri-mtsho gsum) are said to be the habitations of the *gshen*. The archaeological record indicates that this was especially true in ancient times before the period of Buddhist hegemony. Like the *'brog-pa* women of Upper Tibet and mDo-khams, sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo keeps her hair tied in many fine braids (para. ii). She wears a goat skin and is clad in metal armor. In line with her terrific personality, she releases an owl, bird of the *btsan* spirits and death. This symbolizes that no living beings can resist her. This wrathful goddess also has homicidal female *srin* in her retinue. Her lake credentials are stressed when she is depicted reposing in the midst of a great circle of *mtsho-sman*:

- i) *Bhyo!* In that direction, the direction over yonder, in the direction of the setting sun over there, are the lofty heights of the good snow mountain Ti-tse (*sic*), the very deep Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho, and the good hill³⁶⁷ abundant in majestic talus, the fragrant smelling sPos-ri

make the religious performance dedicated to her. She then became a big fire and was absorbed (*thim*) into mTsho mu-le-had (La-lnga mtsho).

* She ate them. In *Ma mo'i gnad bskul bzhugs sohō* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 122, nos. 647–660, no colophon), no. 651, ln. 3, we read: “She ate her nine husbands (*stang*) and nine children” (*stong* (= *stang*) *dgu khri dang bu dgu zos* /). The signification of *khri* in this context is not clear; it could possibly refer to the number 10,000 but this does not seem a particularly appropriate usage here.

³⁶⁵ See *Nag mo rol sgrol gsang bsgrubs kyi yig sna bzhugs so*, no colophon (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 122, nos. 577–603), nos. 587, ln. 6 to 588, ln. 2: *kye kye g.ya'dang gang* (= *gangs*) *kyi pha rol na / sprin dang na bun tshul* (= *tshur*) *rol na / zhang zhung lha yi yul shed na / g.yu'mtsho'g.yang gnyan po yi* (# *kyis*) *gnas / sta rgo gang* (= *gangs*) *dang ma pang mtsho' / sku lha ge khod bzhugs yul nas / ma gtum rngam can gyis* (= *gyi*) *yum chen spyen'dren.../*.

³⁶⁶ See untitled text (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 122, nos. 779–812, no colophon), nos. 788, ln. 3 to 789, ln. 2. Tibetan Text II-31, p. 600.

³⁶⁷ *Rom-po*. This Zhang-zhung language word could denote a special type of mountain or hill but this is no longer ascertainable.

ngan-ldan. Ti-tse is the good snow mountain, palace residence of the excellent *gshen*. Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho is the ablutions lake of the excellent *gshen*. sPos-ri ngad-ldan is the good mountain abundant in majestic talus, the holy place of practice.

- ii) At the palace of this mighty and pure country resides the figure of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo. You have turquoise micro-braids (*lan-phran*) *sha ra ra*.³⁶⁸ On your body you wear the flayed skin of a goat. You have a red coral *gdong-ral* (a type of head ornament). You have white copper (*bse*) armor of power *si li li*.³⁶⁹ You ride a golden female goose.³⁷⁰ You dispatch a *bse* owl as your hawk (bird of the dead). You lead a copper female fox. Nine *srin-mo* of the cemetery follow you. You regally repose in the middle of 100,000 lake *sman*.

There is also a less common, pacific form of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo. A rendering of her is found in a text for peaceful ritual performances such as divination and summoning good fortune, as part of a *bskul-pa* (signaling and deputation of the goddess) ritual.³⁷¹ sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo has four different irenic appearances but whatever her manifestation, she commands 100,000 *sman* and is the protector of the lives of the Bon priests.

As a mountain deity (Ti-se), sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo is white in color, wears a white *la'u* (mantle), and rides a white lioness (para. i). This long-life ally of the *gshen* holds the draped arrow of longevity (*tshe yi mda'-dar*). When she resides at Tag-ri rong/sTag-ri rang she assumes a different appearance and cradles the vase of good fortune (*g.yang-bum*) (para. ii). As the goddess of the *phywa* (basis of good fortune), sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo (sTag-ri rong) is yellow in color (para. iii). She grasps a mongoose sack (*ne'u-le'i rkyal-pa*), which must be a symbol of good fortune (the famous wealth god Dzam-bha-lha is often depicted with a mongoose vomiting jewels). In her fourth manifestation, she is a red deity that dwells on a white rock formation (para. iv). The final part of the *bskul-pa* reveals that it was in all likelihood composed by the goddess' brother Dred-ma khod, a legendary figure of prehistoric Zhang-zhung antiquity (para. v). We know from her origin myth that he was the only one of her eight *sgra-bla* brothers she spared from destruction (see p. 326, fn. 364). Dred-ma khod reminds sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo that she must help him when called upon. The ritualists who read this liturgy play the part of her brother:

- i) *bSwo!* The only mother of existence of sTag-ri rang, the white *lha-sman* holder of life, when you reside on the face of the snow mountain, you are the woman Gangs-dkar lha-mo sman-cig (Snow Mountain Only Goddess Sman) with an effulgent white body complexion. Your head is decorated with small pieces of turquoise ornaments. On your body you wear a white silk *la'u*. You ride a white lioness as your mount. In your hand you hold the draped arrow of long life. You are surrounded by 100,000 *sman-mo* [with an appearance] as above. If the lives of the excellent swastika *gshen* decline, summon their lives with those as above.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ This trisyllabic indicator conveys that these many braids hang down freely like the falling of snow or hail.

³⁶⁹ This is the onomatopoeia for jingling and clanking sounds.

³⁷⁰ *gSer gyi ngang-mo*. Alternatively, this could denote an orange-colored mare.

³⁷¹ See *dBal chen ge khod nor sgrub dang g.yang sman bzhi'i sgrub pa gsal byed me long pra yi bsgrub pa'o*, probably attributed to Dred-ma khod (the youngest brother of sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo), transmitted from Khyung byi (= byid) mu-thul (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, nos. 589–596, vol. 242), nos. 591, ln. 4 to 593, ln. 4. Tibetan Text II-32, p. 601.

³⁷² The circle of *sman-mo*. This final clause is of clumsy composition. The phrase: *steng nas* does not fit well here but this appears to be the intended meaning.

- ii) When the only mother of good fortune, sTag-ri rong, resides on the slopes of the white slate mountains, you have a naturally-colored blue body. On your head you wear a turquoise *gocog*.³⁷³ On your body you wear an aquatic silk *la'u*. You ride a magnificent great wild yak mount. You hold a vase of good fortune in your hand. You are surrounded by 100,000 *sman* women of the slates. If the good fortune of the excellent swastika *gshen* declines, please protect them with your 100,000 *sman* of the slates.
- iii) When the only mother of the *phywa*, sTag-ri rong, resides on the grassy slopes, you are the great radiance *lha-mo* of the meadow *sman*. You have a yellow body and ornaments. On your head you have turquoise micro-braids (*lan-phran*). On your body you wear a fiery *ral-ga* (textile robe). You ride a doe of the *sman* as your mount. In your hands you grasp a mongoose [skin] sack. You are surrounded by 100,000 *sman* women of the meadows. If the *phywa* of the excellent swastika *gshen* declines, please protect them with your 100,000 *sman* women of the meadows.
- iv) When the only mother, sTag-ri rong, resides on the slopes of the white formation, you are the only mother of existence of the rock formation *sman*. Your red-colored body radiates light. On your head you have a silk *cod-pan* (a turban headdress or ribbons). On your body you wear a red silk *la'u*. You ride a lammergeyer mount. In your hands you hold a vessel of long life and the vessel of good fortune.³⁷⁴ You are surrounded by 100,000 *sman* of the rock formations. If the welfare of the excellent swastika *gshen* declines, please protect them with your 100,000 *sman* women of the rock formations.
- v) You are the only great powerful mother of existence. I myself am your brother Dred-ma khod. When I, your brother, depute you, do not be negligent in the activities of long life. Do not be irresolute in the activities of the *g.yang* (good fortune capability).

There is a Bon tradition of four holy lakes in southwestern Tibet that appears to be of substantial antiquity. The Bon-po believe that this tradition originated in prehistoric Zhang-zhung, but this cannot be verified from textual sources alone. The goddesses do, however, have Zhang-zhung language names. Each of their names ends in *tsa-med*, the Zhang-zhung word for ‘woman’, which has cognates in languages such as the Se-skad of Glo (*dza-med*).³⁷⁵ What appears to be the oldest literary description of these four lake goddesses is located in a Me-ri cycle text.³⁷⁶ It describes them in terms of powerful warriors no less armed than the male gods. Each of them has a helmet and armor (cuirass), iconographic traits not usually possessed by so-called worldly Buddhist goddesses.³⁷⁷ There are few signs of tantricism in the text, suggesting it may well be a written

³⁷³ A helmet-like headdress that magically protects a wearer against attack.

³⁷⁴ *Tshe-bskur* and *g.yang-bskur*. This is the contextual signification of the word *bskur*, used here as a noun (vessel, vase).

³⁷⁵ There are also cognates in Kinnauri and the Lahoul languages of Tinan and Bunan (Martin 2001b).

³⁷⁶ See *Me ri bka' ma gyad phur gyi sgrub gzhung* in *Zhang zhung me ri bka' mi'i sgrub skor gyi gsung pod*, nos. 391–525 (published by rMa-rtsa rin-chen rgyal-mtshan, Delhi, 2000), nos. 488, ln. 4 to 491, ln. 3. Tibetan Text II-33, pp. 601, 602. The description of the four lake goddesses is preceded by: “Over yonder, in the western direction, is the Ti-se crystal *mchod-rten*, the mountain of Bon, unconstructed but very lofty. The Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho mandala is the lake of ablutions, unexcavated but very deep. The castle of sPos-ri ngad-ldan is the blissful attractive residence talus hill (*rom-po rdza*). Magnificent is the fortress residence of the mighty elder sister [sGra-bla'i rgyal-mo]. In the four directions of the mountain [Ti-se] there are swirling lakes.”

³⁷⁷ Likewise, the female *klu* Klu-mo dung-khrab dkar-mo and Klu-mo gser-khrab ser-mo, two of the goddesses occupying the cardinal directions around gNam mtsho, wear conch and golden armor, according to the *bsang* ritual of

version of an authentic Zhang-zhung tradition. In any case, it does conform to the *'phrin-las bzhi* structure, the quadripartite tantric modes of activity, one for each of the lake goddesses. The four deities are:

- 1) Gung-chu dngul-mtsho/Gong-khyung dngul-mtsho (Gung-rgyud mtsho, Hor township)
- 2) Ma-pang g.yu-mo-mtsho/Ma-pham g.yu-mtsho (Bar-kha and Hor townships, Pu-rang county)
- 3) La-ngag bsil-mo mtsho/La-lnga mtsho/La-ngags mtsho/La-sngar mtsho/La-ngag ser-mtsho (Bar-kha township)
- 4) Gur-rgyal lha-mo mtsho/Zom-shangs lcags-mtsho (Seng-stod township, dGe-rgyas county)

The text begins with Gong-khyung dngul-mtsho, the pacific goddess of the oft dark-colored 20-km-long lake of the same name (para. i). This body of water does not have a special status in Buddhist sacred geography and is frequently said to be poisonous. Rather than a black inky mass of water, in the Me-ri cycle tradition Gong-khyung dngul-mtsho is a silvery lake with a silver goddess. She is said to ride a mule, an animal found in the nearby agricultural valleys of Pu-rang smad. She, like others in the quartet, is depicted as the owner of the life-force and an ally of the Bon adepts.

The second goddess, Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho, is the power-generating aspect of the *'phrin-las* scheme (para. ii). She is a turquoise figure armed with a spear and clad in armor, who rides a hawk. The third figure is La-ngag ser-mtsho, the lady of gold (para. iii). This expanding-activities personality has the *zor* and *tso* (kinds of magic missiles) as her weapons of choice. The fourth or wrathful figure is Zom-shangs lcags-mtsho, who is characterized by the element iron (para. iv). She sends iron hawks and wolves as her servants. Like many other Ge-khod and Me-ri cycle deities who possess ferrous attributes and implements, we can be confident that these iconographic traditions did not crystallize until the full development of the Iron Age in Tibet, at the very earliest (meteoric iron notwithstanding).³⁷⁸ The southwestern Tibetan lake goddesses of Bon are described in the text as follows:

- i) The sovereign females of the mighty four lakes: You are the white lady of silver inside the white silver lake, who wears a silver helmet on your head. You wear white crystal armor on your body. You ride a black mule mount with a silver head. With your right hand you hurl a golden *tso* (magical bomb). With your left hand you throw a red *bse* (a metal similar to copper) lasso. You dispatch the male and female life-force master (*srog-bdag*) attendants. You are named Phya tsa-med (Gong-khyung dngul-mtsho). You are the maker of pacific activities.³⁷⁹ You are the obedient worker of dBal-chen ge-khod. You are the ritual performance helper of gSang-ba 'dus-pa. You are the companion of all the Gyer-spungs (Bon teachers). The time has come for your activities. Annihilate the enemies who hate us, blighters and obstructors. Protect the doctrine of g.Yung-drung Bon.
- ii) You are the blue lady of turquoise inside the blue turquoise lake, who wears a helmet of turquoise on your head. You wear blue *mthing* (a type of gem?) armor on your body. You ride a turquoise hawk mount. In your right hand you hold a turquoise spear. With your left hand you hurl the *tso* of turquoise like an arrow. You dispatch the *sman* of the lake depths as your

the *lha-pa* of sMad-pa, Karma rig-'dzin. See Bellezza: forthcoming.

³⁷⁸ For a discussion of the historical significance of iron in Bon liturgical traditions, see Bellezza 2005a, pp. 45, 46.

³⁷⁹ The remaining portion of this paragraph accompanies the descriptions of the three goddesses in the following paragraphs of the text as well. For the sake of brevity, I have not included the repeated lines in the translation.

attendants. You are named Ting tsa-med (Ma-pang g.yu-mtsho). You are the maker of power-generating activities.

- iii) You are the yellow golden lady inside the yellow golden lake, who wears a helmet of crystal on your head. You wear yellow golden armor on your body. You ride a yellow golden tiger mount. With your right hand you ignite the red *tso* of the great fire. With your left hand you hurl a red blood *zor* (a type of magical missile). You dispatch Khu-le lag-dgu as your attendant.³⁸⁰ You are named Tsa tsa-med (La-ngag bsil-mo mtsho). You are the maker of expanding activities.
- iv) You are the dark blue lady of molten pig iron (*khro-chu*) inside the molten iron lake, who wears a molten pig iron helmet on your head. You wear armor of blue iron on your body. You ride the celestial iron (*gnam-lcags*) great *khyung* mount. With your right hand you dispatch a fiery hawk. With your left hand you thrust the celestial iron dagger. You dispatch iron wolves with fiery tongues as your attendants. You are named rBa tsa-med (Zom-shangs lcags-mtsho). You are the maker of wrathful activities.

Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho in the central Byang-thang (Nag-tshang) is another goddess closely associated with Zhang-zhung. The lore surrounding her is supposed to have sprung up from the pre-Buddhist religious traditions of Zhang-zhung, though I have not yet located a text dedicated to her that is assigned to this era. It is possible, however, that texts attributed to *gter-ston* such as rMa-ston srol-'dzin (12th century CE) are actually *gter-ma*, works that are frequently reputed to date to early times. What is indisputable is that Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho was an important cultural center by the imperial period and most probably was in the prehistoric epoch as well. This is indicated by its agrarian resource base, an extremely precious natural endowment in the Byang-thang. The many sites featuring all-stone corbelled residential facilities, and the oral and textual traditions associated with them, also point to a pre-Buddhist antiquity. Along with these ancient habitations, religious and mythic traditions pertaining to Lake Dang-ra are likely to have developed as well.

The mythic origins of the lake goddess of Dang-ra, Dang-ra las kyi dbang-mo che, are contained in a 19th century CE ritual text for the goddess.³⁸¹ This text traces her birth (and all that of the Bon deities) to primordial times and the great Bon cosmogonic couple Sangs-po 'bum-khri and Chulcam rgyal-mo (para. i). In this late text, the union of this original pair of gods is framed in the language of Vajrayāna Buddhism, as the joining of the archetypal companion elements of wisdom (*ye-shes*) and skillful means (*thabs*). The actual creation of Ti-se is ascribed to the wisdom gods, while rTa-sgo came into being through the agency of Lha-rgod thog-pa, the Bon tutelary deity of speech (para. ii). The soul lakes of Dang-ra and Ma-pang are said to owe their existence to gNam-phyi gung-rgyal, the famous sky-dwelling cosmogonic goddess.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ A dangerous demigod personality.

³⁸¹ See *Srid pa'i lha chen ri mtsho gnas bdag lcam dral mchod bstod gzer bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung* by sMan-ri'i mkhan-po Nyi-ri shel-zhin (born 1813 CE, the 22nd abbot of sMan-ri) (the volume entitled *rTa dang tshogs bskang*, nos. 81–146), nos. 120, ln. 3 to 121, ln. 5. Tibetan Text II-34, p. 602.

³⁸² An archaic-style iconographic depiction of this important Bon goddess is given in *Ma chig srid pa'i rgyal mo'i gsang bskang bzhuks pa dge*, rediscovered by sPrul-sku rMa-ston shes-rab seng-ge at [Yar-lha] sham-po (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 88, entitled *Bru lugs skong pod*, nos. 895–919), nos. 901, ln. 6 to 902, ln. 5: "Sometimes when you create a manifestation, you are upon a throne of the wish-fulfilling jewel, on the top of the head of the universal (*spyi*) *khyung* lord, on the tip of the beautiful tree of turquoise foliage, on the world [mountain] (*spyi-bo*) Ri-rab lhun-po. You are the purplish-brown *ma-mo* suppressor. On your body you wear a nectarous *thul-pa* (an animal skin or feather robe). In your hands you hold a vase of nectar. Nectar rains down from your mouth. From your nose a mist of

- i) *bSwo!* In ancient times, in the rise of the first epoch, from the miraculous great method of the excellent wisdom *lha*, the king of existence Sangs-po 'bum-khri came into existence. From the wisdom emanation of the great mother of space, Chu-lcam rgyal-mo, the great mother of wisdom, came into being. From the concentration and emission of the wisdom and method of these two, the 10,000 males and 100,000 females of existence came into being. Also, among all those who uphold the virtuous side [of existence], from the radiance of the protecting mother manifestation, Lha-rgod thog-pa, the mind manifestation of Sangs-po and gNam-phyi gung-rgyal, the mind manifestation of the mother came into being. They are for the conquest of those who are difficult to subdue in the world.
- ii) From the radiance of the beneficent qualities of the mind of the excellent wisdom *lha*, the soul mountain (*bla-ri*) of Bon, Gangs-dkar ti-se, came into being. From the miraculous radiance of the speech of Lha-rgod, the soul rock formation (*bla-brag*) of Bon, Gangs-gnyan rta-sgo, came into being. From one drop of the spittle of gNam-phyi gung-rgyal, the soul lakes (*bla-mtsho*) of Bon, Dang-ra and Ma-pang, came into being.

6.3 The *Khyung*, *rGyung* and *Wer-ma* Gods

This subsection peruses ritual texts dedicated to the *khyung*, *rgyung* and *wer-ma*, three classes of gods closely identified with Zhang-zhung. Of these three, the *khyung* is now the most celebrated. It is the ancestral and protective deity of Zhang-zhung, and the vehicle (figuratively and literally) of adepts and gods in both Bon and Buddhist traditions. Let us begin the translations with a text featuring the *khyung* in its more gentle aspect.³⁸³ This text constitutes one of the recitations found in the *dbal-chu* performances of Ge-khod, a series of rites carried out for the purification of deities, humans, animals, and the environment, thought to be of Zhang-zhung pedigree. This reading corresponds to the ritual activities of preparing *khyung* nests and *khyung* eggs of butter for these rites. It is commonly thought by the Bon-po that these ritual objects do not melt, even when plunged into boiling water, a reflection of their great magical power! I have chosen this text for its unembellished language and thematic elegance. To my mind, such a liturgy has an excellent claim of having been composed in ancient Zhang-zhung. It is nevertheless written in classical Tibetan, indicating that even if created in prehistoric or imperial times, in terms of language, it has undergone some degree of modification.

The recitation is pentamerous in structure; the first four parts being oriented in the four cardinal directions (beginning in the east and going counterclockwise) and the last taking the center. It concerns five sets of *khyung* mothers and their young who nest in the five sectors of the world mountain and world tree. Each of these *khyung* families of the compass points and center are identified with a specific color and substance: east – conch, north – copper, west – iron, south – turquoise, and center – gold. Perhaps such a configuration represents a native conception of space as perceived through ritual and cosmology (rather than being derived from the 'phrin-las cruciform configuration of the Indic tradition). Its fundamental geometric characteristics encourage such a

nectar spreads. On your head you wear a nectarous *go-cog* (magical helmet or head ornament). By your magnificence you suppress the sky *bdud* and powerful *klu*. You are surrounded by a circle of 100,000 *ma-mo* suppressors. Your name is gNam-phyi gung-rgyal.”

³⁸³ See Untitled text (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 1131–1136, no colophon), nos. 1133, ln. 5 to 1135, ln. 6). Tibetan Text II-35, pp. 602, 603.

view.³⁸⁴ Many ancient peoples divided their ritual and cosmic spaces into four quarters and the center, and this seems especially true of those who inhabited wide open spaces.

This *khyung* liturgy is above all an apotropaic inurement in which the motif of growth and fertility is paramount. The five mother eagle deities make nests in the cosmological trees so that their young may grow. Each of the five descriptions ends with the imagery of the mothers and their young flying around space, inspirited by the usage of trisyllabic indicators of sound (*'u ru ru*) and form (*kyi li li*). The passage ends with requests for all concerned to be free of distress and misfortune. The *khyung* mothers and their offspring are, moreover, asked to insure the happiness of the ritualists and their sponsors:

- i) *Hum!* On the peak of the white conch mountain in the east there grew a tree of precious conch. There grew but three trees of conch. On the tips of the trees of conch, nests of the white conch *khyung* were made. From inside the nests of the white conch *khyung*, the wings of the precious conch *khyung* grew. The *khyung* mother flew and her young flew. They flew in space. The mother flying from space *'u ru ru*.³⁸⁵ The children flying in space *kyi li li*.³⁸⁶
- ii) *Hum!* On the peak of the red copper mountain in the north there grew, there grew but three trees of precious copper. On the tips of the trees of copper, nests of the red copper *khyung* were also made. From inside the nests of the red copper *khyung*, the wings of the precious copper *khyung* grew. The *khyung* mother flew and her young flew. They flew in space. The mother flying from space *'u ru ru*. The children flying in space *kyi li li*.
- iii) *Hum!* On the peak of the black iron mountain in the west there grew, there grew but three trees of precious iron. On the tips of the trees of iron, nests of the precious black [iron] *khyung* were also made. From inside the nests of the black [iron] *khyung*, the wings of the precious black [iron] *khyung* grew. The *khyung* mother flew and her young flew. They flew in space. The mother flying from space *'u ru ru*. The children flying in space *kyi li li*.
- iv) *Hum!* On the peak of the blue turquoise mountain in the south there grew, there grew but three trees of precious turquoise. On the tips of the trees of turquoise, nests of the precious turquoise *khyung* were made. From inside the nests of the precious turquoise *khyung*, the wings of the precious turquoise *khyung* grew. The *khyung* mother flew and her young flew. They flew in space. The mother flying from space *'u ru ru*. The children flying in space *kyi li li*.
- v) *Hum!* On the peak of the yellow golden mountain in the center there grew, there grew but three trees of precious gold. On the tips of the trees of precious gold, nests of the yellow golden *khyung* were made. From inside the nests of the yellow golden *khyung*, the wings of the precious golden *khyung* grew. The *khyung* mother flew and her young flew. They flew in space. The mother flying from space *'u ru ru*. The children flying in space *kyi li li*.

³⁸⁴ In this regard, it is also worth looking at the Bon myths of the five primal drums, which share the same set of directional qualities. They are attributed to the prototypic *gshen* gSang-ba 'dus-pa and sTag-la me-'bar. See Bellezza 2005a, pp. 424–428.

³⁸⁵ *'U ru ru* replicates the thunderous sound of the mother *khyung* in flight.

³⁸⁶ *Kyi li li* portrays the circular flight pattern of the young *khyung*.

- vi) Pacify the diseases and troubles of the benefactors, their circles and ourselves. Repulse obstacles and the cause of misfortune (*rkyen*). Perfect our bliss and well-being. May our prayers [for] auspiciousness be steadfastly [realized].

There is an important Bon sacred geographic tradition known as rGyung-dgu, a band of nine mountain gods of Zhang-zhung. I have identified eight or nine mountains the names of which contain *rgyung* as a second syllable in Sa-dga', Dol-po, Shan-rtsa, and Khu-nu. It is not known, however, which ones comprised this prominent group of Zhang-zhung deities, as there does not appear to be a list of their individual names in Bon literature. The most famous *rgyung* mountain is Shel-rgyung/Zhes-rgyung, a lofty peak situated in the Transhimalayan range northwest of Sa-dga'. In popular tradition, it is often distinguished by reference to the highest peak in a beautiful cluster of glaciated mountains, this tallest mountain being known as Blon-po gangs-ri (elevation 7095 m). Shel-rgyung is identified as the smaller jagged peak to the west of Blon-po gangs-ri. Shel-rgyung's son is also located west of Blon-po gangs-ri. Shel-rgyung's wife (known in the oral tradition as bTsun-mo zur-ra g.yang-chen) is said to be a sharp peak next to Blon-po gangs-ri. Some or all of Shel-rgyung's guard of four commanders are situated south of Blon-po gangs-ri, in the same glaciated group of peaks. As Blon-po gangs-ri is not singled out for special treatment in the relevant *gsol-kha* texts, his existence may be a more recent religious innovation. Shel-rgyung could have once been the tallest mountain in the range only to be relegated to a subsidiary position at a later date (with the imperial period conquest of Zhang-zhung). The pre-eminence of this holy massif is underscored by its frequent occurrence as a *phugs-lha* (household god), *pho-lha* (patriline god) and *rus-lha* (clan god) in Upper Tibet. This genealogical tradition is not a late cultural innovation, for the clan or personal name of one of the legendary 18 great Zhang-zhung kings of prehistoric times was Shel-rgyung [hri-do] (Bellezza 2001a: 43 (n. 10)).

While I have not discovered a text dedicated to Shel-rgyung in the Bon corpus, I have managed to locate two manuscripts for this *yul-lha* within the compass of its territorial reach. The longer of these belongs to the Buddhist Dar-rgyas gling monastery in Sa-dga'.³⁸⁷ This combination of *bskang-so* (offerings for appeasement and expiation) and *gser-skyems* (libation offerings) is primarily composed in the ancient bardic style with few Buddhist interpolations. This suggests that it may have circulated as an oral tradition before being written down by the founder of Dar-rgyas gling. The descriptions of the deities and their abode are in keeping with the indigenous or 'secular' tradition with no addition from Buddhist sutra and tantra. The text was authored in classic *gsol-kha* fashion with septi-syllabic lines, investing it with a distinctive cadence that facilitates memorization and recitation. As is customary, one section of the text details the mountain god's Buddhist oaths, but its adventitious position and contrasting cultural orientation suggest it was a later emendation. The most flagrant Buddhist modification of the text is its title, which clearly reflects the god's induction into the Buddhist pantheon of Dar-rgyas gling. In the title, Shel-rgyung is called by the roughly homophonous name Shel-skyongs (Crystal Defender), *skyongs* being a common Buddhist appellation attached to protective spirits.

³⁸⁷ Entitled *Shel skyongs gsol mchod*, it is attributed to Shri 'gro-mgon. Tibetan Text II-36, pp. 603, 604. Spelling corrections to the manuscript are made in the transliteration without notation. This manuscript consists of four folios in *dbu-can* script, and was obtained at Dar-rgyas gling monastery. Shel-skyongs is considered one of this monastery's *bstan-srung* (religious protectors). According to the current head Blo-bzang sbyin-pa (born circa 1931 CE) (in personal communication), Dar-rgyas gling (now a dGe-lugs-pa institution) was originally founded as a bKa'-brgyud-pa retreat center by the saint Shri 'gro-mgon. It is believed that when Shri 'gro-mgon first came to the site, he meditated in the cave known as Brag-phug. It is said that after some time, he ran out of food and became ill. Shel-skyongs appeared before him in the guise of a wolf and brought things to eat, such as blue sheep meat. Shel-skyongs thus became a benefactor of Shri 'gro-mgon and his monastery.

Shel skyongs gsol mchod commences with a vibrant account of the deity's abode, a white silk tent pitched atop his mountain (para. i). There is the productive usage of trisyllabic indicators of sound, form and movement, non-lexical poetical ornaments that enliven the verses about the tent. In recognition of Shel-rgyung's ancient genealogical function, he is declared to be the *zhang-lha* (maternal uncle god) and *pho-lha* (father god) of all of sTod. This assertion immediately follows the description of the god's abode, indicating it is of central importance. Next in the textual sequence is a depiction of Shel-rgyung's attire and horse (para. ii). Like other chief *lha-ri*, this mountain god has a *lha*, *btsan* and *klu* persona and armies of spirits, illustrating his dominion over the trichotomous, vertically aligned universe (*srid-pa gsum*). The *gsol-kha* now moves to Shel-rgyung's consort Lha-sman zur-ra g.yang-skyong ma, who is enrobed in a *la'u*, one of Tibet's ancient styles of dress (para. iii). Its cloud designs (*sprin-ris*) seem to symbolize this mountain goddess' position in the sky. The son of this archetypal divine mother and father is the Albion mountain deity Lha-sras rtse-rgyal, who holds a jewel (*nor-bu*) and regimental banner (*ru-dar*).³⁸⁸

The daughter of the mountain pair is Lha-lcam dpal-mdzes, whose dress of blue silk with water designs bespeaks her rule over the watery realm (para. iv). Her silver mirror attribute and divine white yak mount show that she is of a pacific nature and active in life augmentation and divination. This is also revealed by the gift of sweets made to her. The four generals of Shel-rgyung are now named, invincible figures of war. They can be envisioned as occupying the four cardinal directions, with their leader in the middle. With the completion of the descriptive praises (*bstod-pa*), incense offerings are made to Shel-rgyung (and his circle) in lieu of him being the divine protector of males and their patriline (*pho-lha*) (para. v). A draped arrow (*mda'-dar*) is also offered to the circle of deities in compensation for their granting of long-life. Other standard offerings of native persuasion (including dance and song) are presented to Shel-rgyung and his entourage in compensation for their vital aid and the fulfillment of desires (para. vi).

With the conclusion of the main battery of praises, offerings and requests, the deities' religious commitments are articulated (para. vii). The first oath (householder type) administered to Shel-rgyung was by Gu-ru rin-po-che. According to the text, in subsequent periods, the mountain god was made a part of the ritual regimens of gShin-rje dmar-po (the god of death) and Phyag-na rdo-rje (*bodhisattva* of skillful means) in order that he fulfil his Buddhist duties. In this sequence of *Shel skyongs gsol mchod*, cultural time starts with Gu-ru rin-po-che. It was not seen necessary to mention the native historical precedents concerning the god's existence.

³⁸⁸ According to Tucci (1950: 77 (n. 37)), the term *lha-sras* (son of the *lha*) was adopted by the imperial period Tibetan kings under foreign influence. He cites China and Khotan as likely sources. I cannot, however, fully support his assertion. More credible is Kværne's (1980: 94, 95) position connecting the usage of *lha-sras* with Turco-Mongolian concepts of the 'son of heaven' by the ancient Mongols, Turks and Uighurs, without postulating an ultimate historical origin. While the specific use of this term for the Tibetan *btsan-po* emperors may have been inspired from abroad, the concept of kings (and other prominent members of early Tibetan societies) being the offspring of deities has every indication of being of great antiquity. The traditions of clan origins promulgated in *rus-mdzod* and *pha-rabs* literature are predicated on genealogical links between the gods and humans. This is beautifully summed up in a *rus-mdzod* text for the lDong clan: "There is no man who did not originate from a *lha* and no river that does not descend from a snow mountain" (Vitali 2003a: 3). Moreover, in the *Shel skyongs gsol mchod* we find the deity Lha-sras rtse-rgyal, and in the Bon funerary tradition, the god Lha-bo lha-sras (see p. 451), as divine forms that carry the epithet *lha-sras*. In my opinion, the ontological and mythic interplay between deities and humans, being of seminal importance in ancient Tibetan culture, is probably the impetus behind the usage of *lha-sras* as a royal appellation.

Firm in his oath, Shel-rgyung and his circle are called forth from their mountain abode (para. viii). The archaic nature of the ritual is affirmed in the series of offerings used to entice the gods to the ritual venue. These include *zhol-chen* (prized yaks with long hairy fringes and massive withers), grape wine (*rgun-chang*)³⁸⁹ and rice beer (*'bras-chang*). This type of yak and beverages are normally found in Bon texts attributed to the prehistoric epoch and imperial period. Grape wine and rice beer, libations of the north and west (Central Asia) and south (moist tropical and temperate environments of the Subcontinent) respectively, speak of the cosmopolitan nature of early Bon rituals.³⁹⁰ While we cannot judge the age of the text on this criterion alone, when considered in tandem with the quality of the prose, iconographic lore and the entire offerings ensemble, it becomes clear that we are dealing here with a work of considerable antiquity. *Shel skyongs gsol mchod* returns to Shel-rgyung's circle, mentioning three groups of six divine attendants (para. ix). The most enigmatic of these groups is that of the Mon-pa ax-holders (*sta-thogs*). Mon-pa is ordinarily an ethnonym applied to a wide variety of Himalayan peoples as well as to the aboriginal inhabitants of Upper Tibet. The *bdud*, another group thought of as being extremely ancient inhabitants of Upper Tibet, also customarily wield axes.³⁹¹ I am disposed to seeing this mention of Mon-pa in *Shel skyongs gsol mchod* as a cryptic and ritualized expression of ancestral elements in the Upper Tibetan ethnos. In the last measure, the text reminds Shel-rgyung of what he must do for the ritualists and about the great panoply of gifts that have been assembled on his behalf:

- i) *Hum!* At the rock formation cave of the vulture of the pyramidal white snow mountain, at the rock formation cave of the white snow mountain, an erected white silk tent *ldi ri ri*,³⁹² golden pillars (*rtsugs-shing*) *rongs se rong*,³⁹³ guy lines of turquoise *brengs se breng*,³⁹⁴ jewel stakes *thibs se thib*.³⁹⁵ Inside such a tent there is a white silk curtain *khyugs se khyug*.³⁹⁶ Inside that curtain, on a blue turquoise throne,³⁹⁷ is the *zhang-lha* of all the people of sTod, the *pho-lha* of all the regions of sTod.³⁹⁸

³⁸⁹ The connection of wine with Eastern Turkestan is made explicit in the ritual text *sKyung mo mda' khyer gyi lo rgyus* in which there is a tale about the king of Li (Khotan) being offered sweet grape wine by the personification of air, a beautiful woman. A preliminary study of this text was made by Karmay (2003: 8–10). On grape wine, also see p. 406, fn. 153; Bellezza 2005a, p. 356. Viticulture is still practiced by the Minaro of lower Ladakh (Peissel 1984: 79, 80).

³⁹⁰ For examples of the invoking of various countries in early Bon ritual settings, see the texts *Mi'u rigs bzhi lha sel lha mchod* and *g.Yang 'gug bkra shis 'khyil ba* in Bellezza 2005a, pp. 208, 209, 460.

³⁹¹ For reference to these ax-wielding *bdud*, see Bellezza 2005a, pp. 283–285.

³⁹² *ldi ri ri* seems to convey the loud sound that the tent is making on account of the strong wind.

³⁹³ *Rongs se rong* portrays that these pillars are sharp and pointed like upright arrows or spears arrayed in rows.

³⁹⁴ *Brengs se breng* shows that these lines are straight and taut like bowstrings.

³⁹⁵ *Thibs se thib* indicates that there are many stakes in all directions.

³⁹⁶ *Khyugs se khyug* depicts that the curtain is moving with a regular sinuous motion.

³⁹⁷ I have moved this line (*sngon po 'i khri steng na*) to its current position. It appears prematurely in my copy of the text.

³⁹⁸ In the other *gsol-kha* text for Shel-rgyung (untitled and anonymous) his residence is described as such: “Your outer appearance is that of a lofty, beautiful white crystal snow mountain. Please come here, Shel-khyung, the haughty excellent *khyung*, from the beautiful palace of the crystal tent with poles of agate, guy lines of turquoise and stakes of lapis lazuli.” I obtained photographs of this manuscript in 1999 from Phur-brag bsam-gtan gling, a dGe-lugs-pa monastery in gZhung-ru (reportedly, it was founded by 'Jam-dbyangs of Khams ri-bo-che, a disciple of the first Dalai Lama). The text is part of the Phur-brag bsam-gtan gling protector collection, much of which was destroyed in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. According to the head lama Thub-bstan phun-tshogs (born circa 1929 CE) (in personal communication), one of his female relatives managed to preserve a copy of the text. The current manuscript was derived from it. Lama Thub-bstan explained to me that although the text refers to the deity as Shel-khyung, it should actually be spelled Shel-(r)gyung. We might see this onomastic modification as one of several Buddhicizing elements that crept into the worship of the local *yul-lha*. These Buddhist features are more conspicuous in the Phur-brag bsam-gtan gling text than they are in the Dar-rgyas gling manuscript.

- ii) *Kye kye!* Diminutive white crystal man, on your head is tied a regal white silk turban. In your hand you hold a white silk regimental banner. On your body you wear a white silk *'jol-ber*. You ride a goose (an orange horse) with a white muzzle as your mount. In the morning you assume the appearance of a *lha*. You ride a chestnut [horse] with a face of crystal as your mount. You assemble the army of *lha* and *dri-za*. In the midday you assume the appearance of a *klu*. You ride a blue [horse] with a turquoise mane as your mount. You command the 100,000 great *klu*. In the evening you assume the appearance of a *btsan*. You ride a straw-colored horse with a white mouth as your mount. You command a 100,000-strong *btsan* army.
- iii) Lha-sman zur-ra g.yang-skyong ma, you ride a light-brown divine horse. You have a white body complexion and precious ornaments. You wear a *la'u* of white silk with cloud designs. You hold a *mda'-dar* and vase in your hands. Confer upon us the capability of the attainment of long life, good fortune and wealth. We fulfill your wishes by the pure three white foods (*dkar-gsum*). Lha-sras rtse-rgyal (Son of the Lha Victory Peak), you have a white body complexion. You ride a tan wind horse as your mount. As your hand tools, you hold a jewel and regimental banner. We fulfill your wishes with *bshos* (ritual cakes), incense and grains.
- iv) Daughter Lha-lcam dpal-mdzes (Lady Lha Beautiful Eminence), on your body you wear blue silk with water designs. In your hand you hold a white silver mirror. You ride a white divine female yak³⁹⁹ as your mount. We fulfill your wishes by the pure three sweets (*mngar-gsum*). The four commanders (*ru-'dren*) – bTsan-rgod 'bar-ba of the manifestation,⁴⁰⁰ Thod rgyal-ba-ra thod-dkar, Gang-ra tho-dang khri-nag-ral, and gSer-ri blon and so forth – all possess great magical power, bravery and tremendous force. You have inconceivably large circles of *'byung-po*.⁴⁰¹ We fulfill your wishes with tea, beer and libations.
- v) Shel-skyong with your circle, we give you these sacred incense offerings. Please be the *pho-lha* who protects us. Please realize excellent pacific activities in accordance with our wishes. We fulfill your wishes with the *mda'-dar* of five colors. Increase our long life, merit, good luck and magnificence. Give us your protection without being side-tracked. Carry out the activities entrusted to you.
- vi) *Kye kye!* We give to you offerings and gifts. Great *lha*, we give to you offerings of a white four-sided *bshos* and this white *gtor-ma* decorated with butter. *Lha* protector, we give to you offerings of yaks, sheep and goats [made] of grain, these three. *Lha* protector, we give to you offerings of these brightly illuminating butter lamps. *Lha* protector, we give to you offerings of the fumigation of fragrant incense. *Lha* protector, we give to you offerings of dancing and rhythmic (*chems chems*) music. Carry out the activities entrusted to you. By the boon of offering and proffering to you, realize the wishes of us masters and disciples and our circles in our travels. Realize all the objects of our desire. Carry out the activities entrusted to you. Realize our wishes and fulfill our hopes. Augment our possessions and the objects of all our desires. Eliminate the obstacles on our way.
- vii) *Kye kye!* In the first epoch of ancient times, at the crystal rock formation cave of Ma-g.yang, in the mandala [performance] of Pad-ma khrag-'thung, Slob-dpon padma 'byung-gnas bound you to the great *dge-bsnyen* oath. Thereafter, in the middle epoch, at the rock formation

³⁹⁹ As is customary, both the common and ancient words for a female yak are used in conjunction: *'bri zhal*.

⁴⁰⁰ *sPrul-pa*. This probably refers to this god being a manifestation of Shel-rgyung.

⁴⁰¹ A noxious class of spirits.

cave bSam-yas mchims-phu, in the mandala [performance] of gShin-rje dmar-po, you were appointed the protector of the secret tantra doctrine. Now, in these later times, you protect the Doctrine of the lama guardians of living beings. In the mandala [performance] of Phyag-na rdo-rje, praises to you, real protector of the speech of the Buddha (*bka'*).

- viii) *Kye kye!* Diminutive white man personage, please come forth from upon [the throne] on which there is a blue striped brocade carpet, inside the tent of white felt, on the summit of the beautiful white crystal snow mountain. Please come here with your personal circle. Come here to the beautiful offerings for the realization of activities of the hosts, the officiants and benefactors. They are the all-good cloud (many) offerings that fill space: great *zhol-chen* black yaks gathered in a multitude that fills the earth, birds soaring in the sky *ldings se lding*,⁴⁰² black wolves and black bears *khyugs se khyug*,⁴⁰³ beautiful ornaments *lhungs se lhung*,⁴⁰⁴ silver and golden ladles *khriks se khrig*,⁴⁰⁵ and rice beer and grape wine *khyil li li*.⁴⁰⁶
- ix) Six unencumbered men of conch race on your right. Six young women of coral race on your left. You dispatch six Mon-pa ax-holder attendants.⁴⁰⁷ Cut from the root the life-force of the oath-breaker enemies. Great *lha*, if you do not act for the Doctrine, there is no sense for us tantric practitioners to even call you. The not-incomplete outer physical offerings, the inner components of the oath gathered like clouds, and the secret offering ingredients filling the sky; may they fulfill the wishes of you and your circle. We entrust you. We praise you. Carry out our activities.

Another species of deity that is related to Zhang-zhung cultural and geographic entities is the *wer-ma*, martial figures that closely resemble *sgra-bla*. The *wer-ma* are warrior gods, many of which have theanthropic and zoomorphic appearances. *Wer*, a word of Zhang-zhung origin, appears to mean 'sovereign', as typified by the *wer-ma*, a class of deity superior to all others.⁴⁰⁸ In particular, the *wer-ma* are war and travel gods (*lam-lha*). This latter function predominates in an invocatory text for the *wer-ma* reputedly written by Tshe-dbang rig-'dzin, the son of Dran-pa nam-mkha'

⁴⁰² *lDings se lding* invokes the soaring flight of the birds.

⁴⁰³ *Khyugs se khyug* shows that these fierce animals are bounding.

⁴⁰⁴ *Lhungs se lhung* conveys that the ornaments are sparkling.

⁴⁰⁵ *Khriks se khrig* conveys that the ladles are nicely arranged in neat rows.

⁴⁰⁶ *Khyil li li* depicts these beverages swirling around in their containers.

⁴⁰⁷ In the Phur-brag bsam-gtan gling manuscript, these attendants and the description of the main deity appear together: "Kye kye! You are upon the excellent horse ornamented with a saddle and bridle; very beautiful. You are the lord of the *lha* with a great smiling magnificent appearance. You are known as the diminutive crystal man of mighty speech; very melodious. We praise you, who holds the white silk regimental banner aloft, rippling vigorously. You are the *zhang-lha* of all the people of sTod. You are the miraculous *pho-lha* of the lDong clan of wealth. You hold a tray of wish-fulfilling jewels in your hand. We praise you, holy man who fulfils every one of our aspirations. At your right side there are six small angry men of conch. At your left side there are six noble women of coral. We praise you, haughty Mon-pa ax-holders and others, your queen, ministers, and the assembly of *sde-brgyad*" (*kye kye mdzes mdzes sga sral rgyan spras rta mchog steng / 'dzum 'dzum brjid pa'i nyams ldan lha yi rje / snyan snyan shel gyi mi thung bka' gnyan zhes / lhab lhab dar dkar ru mtshon phyar la bstod / khyod ni spyi med stod kyi zhang lha srid / ldong rigs phyug gi pho lha rdzu 'phrul can / yid bzhin nor bu'i gzhong pa phyag na bsnams / ci 'dod re ba skong ba'i skyes bu bstod / g.yas na dung gi mi chung mi bzad drug / g.yon na byi ru'i na chung sman btsun drug / mon pa star thogs la sogs dregs pa'i 'khor / btsun mo blon po sde brgyad tshogs la bstod /*).

⁴⁰⁸ This paramount position is vividly conveyed in an origin myth for the *wer-ma*. For this myth and rituals describing the *wer-ma* of the cardinal directions, see Norbu 1995, pp. 55–58; Snellgrove 1967, pp. 57–63. Martin (2001b) defines *wer* as 'king', 'conqueror', 'victor', 'ruler', or 'queen'.

(eighth century CE).⁴⁰⁹ This text features different types of *wer-ma*, all of which are asked to ally themselves with the ritualists. They serve as fighters, sentries, guardians, and travel companions. These divine military figures are supposed to permit their votaries the ability to prevail in all spheres of life, explaining their continued popularity among Bon-po (and Buddhists). In this work they assume both anthropomorphic (horsemen) and ornithic (vulture, owl, hawk, and crow) forms.

The text begins by invoking Wer-ma kun-thub 'jigs-med, who appears to be the king of all the *lam-lha* (para. i). Next the carnivorous avian *wer-ma* are named (para. ii). Wrathful Bon divinities often manifest in the form of these birds. These creatures also figure in archaic funerary rituals, suggesting perhaps that the *wer-ma*, like the *sgra-bla*, were once the protectors and escorts of the dead. As we shall see in Part III, combat and the force of arms are prominent motifs in ancient Tibetan eschatological beliefs. The text proceeds to the *wer-ma* of the four cardinal directions, who possess the characteristic color of the quarter they rule over (paras. iii–vi). The invocations now return to Wer-ma kun-thub 'jigs-med, guardian of the intermediate directions (para. vii). All the *wer-ma* are then called upon to protect the health of the ritualists and the safety of their horses (para. viii). It should be noted that the disease of vomiting blood associated with the *btsan* may refer to pulmonary tuberculosis or cholera. The *wer-ma* must also guard against the disease of the *gnyan*, anthrax, which can devastate flocks of livestock (para. ix). The disease of the *srin* is also cited but no symptoms are given. Parent-like to those who propitiate them, the *wer-ma* are the unappeasable foes of those who would harm their human keep, much in the way of fierce wild animals tending their young:

- i) *bSwo!* The mighty *sgra-bla wer-ma* Wer-ma kun-thub 'jigs-med (Wer-ma All-Enabling Fearless One) is the *lam-lha* (god of the road) of the leader of the armies. Today, we remunerate you with fragrant burnt offerings (*gsur*). Please be the *lam-lha* of us *gshen* practitioners. Sally forth, sally forth, go to the enemy!⁴¹⁰
- ii) The white vulture of conch is the *lam-lha* of traveling in the day. (Refrain.) The owl of gold with the sharp eyes is the *lam-lha* of traveling at night. (Refrain.) The blue hawk of iron is the *lam-lha* of cutting the life-force of the enemy. (Refrain.) The adeptly moving crow of turquoise is the *lam-lha* of the sentries. (Refrain.)
- iii) We offer this white *mda'-dar* to the white men with white horses *wer-ma*, who are at the door of guests in the eastern direction. Be our protector, great force and companion when we go in the eastern direction.
- iv) We offer this yellow *mda'-dar* to the yellow men with yellow horses *wer-ma*, who are at the door of guests in the northern direction. Be our *sgra-bla* protector of the life-force and long life when we go in the northern direction.

⁴⁰⁹ *Wer ma lam lha'i bsang bzhugs so*, attributed to Tshe-dbang rig-'dzin (son of the last Dran-pa nam-mkha'). Tibetan Text II-37, pp. 604, 605. This text is found in an untitled volume (nos. 551–554) containing texts for a wide assortment of Bon protective deities. The individual texts of this collection all came from Dang-ra g.yu-mtsho, and were brought together and reproduced by Gu-ru 'od-zer, the hereditary chief lama of 'Om-bu.

⁴¹⁰ These preceding three lines act as the *bskul-pa* refrain for each of the *wer-ma* in para. ii of the text. I simply designate subsequent occurrences of these three lines: (Refrain.).

- v) We offer this red *mda'-dar* to the red men with red horses *wer-ma*, who are at the door of guests in the western direction. Be our *lam-lha* of the subjugation of enemies and obstructors when we go in the western direction.
- vi) We offer this blue *mda'-dar* to the blue men with blue horses *wer-ma*, who are at the door of guests in the southern direction. Be our *lam-lha* of guests when we go in the southern direction.
- vii) We offer this *mda'-dar* and *mdung-dar* (spear with flag) to Wer-ma kun-thub 'jigs-med, who is at the door of guests in the four intermediate directions. Be our *lam-lha* of the great reputation when we travel in the four intermediate directions.
- viii) *bSwo!* You mighty *wer-ma*, do not degrade your protection and companionship. Do not send the *btsan* disease of vomiting blood. Do not let the *btsan* take our riding horses (*'og-rta*).⁴¹¹ Do not give our horse leads to other people.
- ix) *bSwo!* You mighty *wer-ma*, do not send the *gnyan* disease of anthrax (*lhog-rgod*). Do not send the *srin* disease and poisoning. Do not lessen your miracles and great power. Put a *dmu-gab*⁴¹² on the hateful enemy. Be the escort when we *gshen* practitioners depart. Protect us like your children when we remain stationary. Be the companion [of those of] good virtue. Raise the banner of the Doctrine in space. Realize all our wishes. Carry out the activities entrusted to you.

In order to better appreciate the utilitarian aspects of ancient Tibetan ritual traditions, we now turn to a passage in a Buddhist history that talks about the exploits of the Rlangs, a prominent Tibetan clan.⁴¹³ The chronological setting of this passage is uncertain (perhaps the post-imperial period?). In any case, the tone of the language and the activities described belong to the Tibetan native ethos. No attempt was made to temper the bellicose doings of the Rlangs clan with a Buddhist historical pedigree or rationale. The accomplishments of the Rlangs were realized through the propitiation of various *yul-lha*. This recapitulates the function of all the Zhang-zhung deities we have been examining, their ability to provide tangible benefits to those who supplicate them. These deities were the figureheads of a warlike and active society, one in which honor, physical prowess and unrelenting material betterment were the watchwords. It might be inferred that at the behest of such territorial deities, the archaic cultural horizon citadel and temple complexes of Upper Tibet were established and maintained.

I have selected passages from the exploits of the Rlangs clan, choosing to ignore certain hard-to-understand intervening lines. The emphasis in this study is on the gods and the boons they were responsible for. The first deity noted is the mountain god sKyogs-chen ldeng-dbra/sKyogs-chen ldong-ra, propitiated as the personal deity of members of the Rlangs clan. This god may have been the totemic (clan origination) deity of the dBra or lDong, important proto-tribal groupings of Tibet (see pp. 350–352). While no details of this worship are given in the text, it would appear that this god functioned as a *sku-lha* (personal and ancestral deity). The relationship with their

⁴¹¹ This is an old designation for a horse mount, found in a Dunhuang manuscript, a kind of compensation for legal infractions related to hunting accidents (Richardson 1998: 157–160). The term *'og-rta* is still used in the Ge-sar epic.

⁴¹² This is a metaphorical hood that restricts the ability to see, think and breathe.

⁴¹³ *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru rgyas pa* (in current form, composed in 14th century CE) (*Gangs can rig mdzod*, vol. 1, Lhasa: Bod-ljongs mi-dmangs dpe-skrun khang, 1986), p. 34.

deity allowed the Rlangs to slay enemies and obtain their (soul) turquoises, symbolizing absolute domination over those they conquered:

- i) Before leading his army to the country of Chibs to conquer the Dar, sPrangs and Chibs, the figure(s) known as Rlangs-rje rtsa-gsum is recorded as worshipping (*mchod-nas*) sKyogs-chen ldeng-dbra as his *lha*. His 'heroic signs and legacy' (*dpa'-rtags*) were: 1) he slew Chibs-pa btsan-grags, 2) he conquered the two divisions of Dar and sBrang and made them his subjects, and 3) he obtained the turquoise *phud-bkab* of the Chibs and the red turquoise *chang-rje*. Accordingly, the divine lineage of the Rlangs was the conqueror of Dar, sBrang and Chibs, these three.

In the next account of a Rlang (*sic*) personage, he is said to have visualized a lama (*bla-ma*) on the top of his head (this may not refer to a human religious practitioner). The unashamed usage of this lama in mountain deity worship aimed at military conquest is not at all in keeping with traditional Buddhist piety. The protagonist, Rlang-mchog dpal gyi seng, or his ancestors, must have come from Central or Southern Tibet because he has Yar-lha sham-po as his personal god. His heroic sign and legacy (*dpa'-rtags*) was the conquest of La-stod in mNga'-ris. La-stod consists of two large pastoral areas (Lho-ma and sTod-ma) in western Nag-tshang (Nyi-ma county). This region shares the same language (sTod-skad) and culture as adjoining districts of what now constitutes mNga'-ris:

- ii) Rlang-mchog dpal gyi seng visualized an excellent lama on the crown of his head, and worshipping Yar-lha sham-bu as his *lha*, led his army to northern mNga'-ris and conquered the northern areas of mNga'-ris. His heroic sign and legacy were that he captured the great man of the north, Ang-zu, and made the kingdom of mNga'-ris a subordinate state. Accordingly, the conqueror of La-stod in northern mNga'-ris was of the divine Rlangs lineage.

Another Rlangs figure, Rlangs-rje rtse-mthon, conducted his military adventures by propitiating 'O-de gung-rgyal, the ancestral mountain deity of 'Ol-kha and a divine forebear of the Tibetan kings. The procurement in war of three iron hawks (*lcags kyi bya-khra*) as his heroic symbol and legacy probably refers to the clan god receptacles of the subjugated lDong and lDing clans:

- iii) Worshipping the *lha* 'O-de gung-rgyal, Rlangs-rje rtse-mthon led his army to dBus and conquered lDong-lDing yul-mkhar. He made both the lDong and lDing lineages his vassals. As his heroic sign and legacy he obtained the three brother iron hawks, and the lTeng-lteng of dBus were subdued and made the vassals of the divine Rlangs lineage.

Through the worship of what appears to have been another mountain god for war aims, Rlangs-sras rgod-lDing secured the special sword (a symbol of sovereignty) of the valleys of Gilgit ('Bru-sha):

- iv) Worshipping Lha-rgod mdung-rtse as his *lha*, Rlangs-sras rgod-lDing led his army to 'Bru-rgyal rong-po. As his heroic sign and legacy he slew Rong-po dbang-lDan, obtained the soul turquoise (*bla-g.yu*) of Rong and the sword *zi-chen*. The 'Bru-rgyal rong-po were also subdued by the Rlangs lineage.

The same type of worldly religious activity is recorded for Rlangs dpal-stag lha-gzigs bse'u and his domination of Khams:

- v) Worshipping Mo-nam mched-brgyad as their *lha*, the three lineages of Rlangs dpal-stag lha-gzigs bse'u made three divisions (*ru*) of Rlangs in Khams. He was made the supreme leader of Khams and his lineage became the leading one of Khams.

Rlangs bsam-skyes supplicated the celebrated god of wealth rNam-thos sras as his personal deity, and procured a number of implements and other objects. At least some of them were archetypal weapons and symbols of political authority, which devolved to the Rlangs clan. The tradition of special empowering armaments and ornaments appears to have been widespread in Tibet well into the historic epoch, underscoring the martial nature of society with its war-like religious cults:⁴¹⁴

- vi) Worshipping rNam-thos sras as his *lha*, Rlangs bsam-skyes obtained the armor *spu-rtse rgyal*, a golden *gong-gong* (?), an iron *pu-mi 'dren* (?), the helmet *zhal-le dor-zhun*, the sword *dkar-chen dkar-chung*, the pearl canopy (?) (*mu-tig bla-ris*), a silver *yol-sgong* (?), a silver *bya-phog* (?), a golden mandala, a talking bird (parrot), and a small and large throne of crystal.

6.4 An Overview of the Bon Cosmogonies

The study of Bon origin myths is vital to the development of an ethnoarchaeological model of the prehistoric epoch and early historic period. The cosmogonic myths, to the extent that they accurately reflect speculative aspects of Tibetan paleocultures, provide building blocks for theorizing about the cognitive and motivational bases of various archaeological phenomena. The Upper Tibetan inhabitants of early times must have asked the perennial questions: 'who am I?', 'where did I come from?' and 'why am I here?'. The quest to understand or cope with the human condition is likely to have permeated many areas of the ancient Upper Tibetan social discourse and the way in which the physical environment was exploited. There are two fundamental themes in Bon cosmogonic lore that may be applicable to the Upper Tibetan archaeological record: 1) the belief in the primordial origin of the divine precursors of human beings, and 2) a celestial or skyward source for most biological and physical phenomena. Given the pervasive nature of these seminal themes in the old origin myths, they could have had a considerable bearing on the development of the archaic monumental assemblage of the region. The placement of ancient residential sites in high-altitude locations or the configuration of complex architectural elements at funerary sites are best explained as being suffused with the cosmogonic and cosmological conceptions of the builders.

The subject of the origin and development of the universe and the beings that inhabit it is a very broad one in Bon. Its literature boasts hundreds of different etiologic myths derived from various doctrinal, historical and cultural sources.⁴¹⁵ Many of these are found in an abbreviated form as the mythic precedents to various rituals. They frequently appear as part of the proclamation of the historical source and succession of ritual practices that preface their actual performance. These formalized enunciations are known as *smrang* (see pp. 369, 373). Additionally, there are longer cosmogonic myths that trace the beginnings of the universe and the Tibetan nation. Many of these elaborate

⁴¹⁴ *mNga'ris rgyal rabs* records a number of coveted weapons and ornaments that rTse-lde, an 11th-century CE king of Gu-ge, obtained from the rGya ge-sar (Dards?). See Vitali 1996, pp. 72, 124. These objects of great magical power noted in *mNga'ris rgyal rabs* had the effect of exalting the king's reign.

⁴¹⁵ In addition to Bon literary sources, ancient origin myths are found in the oral tradition as well. Here, I would like to note the old Ladakhi wedding songs, which contain various cosmogonic and cosmological motifs. These were recorded and studied in Francke 1901.

myths include royal theogonies, which elucidate the origins of the Tibetan kings. In this subsection I will focus on Bon etiologic sources to assess their significance to Tibetan cultural history.⁴¹⁶ Cosmogony plays a particularly important role in the Bon religion, in which the establishment of origins is considered essential in the legitimization and practice of sundry traditions. It is through knowledge of these antecedents that the age, authority and transmission of Bon religious traditions are established, opening the way for their continued propagation. Moreover, the cosmogonies articulate a cornerstone of Bon cosmological and ontological doctrines, the principle that all things are traced to a primal state of pre-existence in which there were no forms of materiality. This state of emptiness is expressed in various ways such as: *ci yang mi-srid* (absolute non-existence) and *srid-pas ma-srid* (existence did not exist). This is not the *stong-pa nyid* of Buddhism per se, the doctrine that negates the inherent existence of all material and psychological phenomena. This Bon understanding of the primitive appears to stem from archaic cultural beliefs.

A Bon origin myth of considerable antiquity features a female serpent deity (*klu-mo*) from which all deistic, physical and biological constructs of the universe emanate.⁴¹⁷ Cosmic serpents giving birth to the universe are of course found in the mythology of indigenous peoples throughout the world.⁴¹⁸ In Tibet, the goddess known as Queen of the Klu (Klu'i rgyal-mo) embodies a pantheism in which all elements of the universe are born from the various parts of her body. This *Klu 'bum khra bo* myth is likely to date to the imperial period or to be derived from a parent myth of that period. I take this view because of the myth's references to the languages and peoples of Zhang-zhung, Sum-pa and Tibet, a Plateau-wide unifying tradition. This is best explained within the imperial period polity, and the contemporaneous political and cultural processes that welded the various proto-tribal cultures into a single nation/territory. The specific mention of these three cultures suggests that this myth originated either in Upper Tibet or Central Tibet. As for the cosmic serpent herself, the historical origins of this genetrix may date to a very early phase in Tibetan civilization, because the *Klu 'bum khra bo* cosmogony ascribes the origins of the universe to a Gaeian mother and not to male gods. The rich celestial and meteorological imagery in this myth (comparable to the Ge-khod tradition) also seems to indicate that its divine protagonist possibly dates to the prehistoric epoch. I hasten to add that the 'original' form of the myth featuring a queen of the *klu* may have been substantially different from the text under consideration, exhibiting more archaic language, different phrasing, etc.

⁴¹⁶ Productive sources of Bon cosmogonic myths are found in the works of Haahr 1969; Norbu 1995; Karmay 1998; Karmay 2003; Bellezza 2005a.

⁴¹⁷ See *Klu 'bum khra bo*, vol. 2 (*kha*), nos. B41, ln. 3 to 46, ln. 1. Delhi edition (same text as that published in *Gtsang Ma klu 'Bum Chen Mo: A reproduction of a manuscript copy based upon the Tāranātha tradition of the famed Bonpo recitational classic* (Dolanji text) (Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre: Dolanji, 1977). Tibetan Text II-38, pp. 605–607. According to Dagkar (2003: 464), it was discovered by the A-tsa-ra mi-gsum in 913 CE. *Klu 'bum khra bo*, nos. 269, ln. 4 to 270, ln. 3, also provides a much more abbreviated cosmogony of the female *klu*. In this account the goddess is referred to as the Klu of All Existence (*Srid-pa thams-cad kyi klu*) and the Mistress of All Disease (*Nad thams-cad kyi bdag-mo*). She also appeared from a state of absolute non-existence (*ci yang mi-srid*). From this non-existent telos her genesis is described as follows: Firstly, there was a wheel of emptiness. Thereafter, [miniscule particles] the size of dust (*rdul tsam*) appeared in an iota of emptiness. From these [miniscule particles] the size of dust a wheel of emptiness wind (*stong-pa rlung gi 'khor-lo*) came into being (*srid*). From that called the wheel of emptiness wind, one digit (*gang-pa cig*) of radiance came into being of its own accord. In that radiance the queen of manifestation (the *klu-mo*) came into being. By the miracle of the queen of manifestation, mind and space without distinction between them came into being. A synopsis of another cosmic serpent myth (also featuring a golden tortoise) from the *Klu 'bum* is found in Stein 1972, pp. 246, 247.

⁴¹⁸ Serpents as ancestors of humans and fertility symbols are met with in divers places such as India and Mesopotamia. Of special comparative interest is the serpent ancestress of the Siberian Evenki tribe. It is reported that ophidian traditions were well entrenched in Siberia until recent times. See Mundkur 1983, pp. 26, 77, 165, 172–208.

The serpent goddess myth begins with cosmogonic language undergirt by a sophisticated grammatical structure (para. i). This seems to suggest that the myth sprang up from a highly developed speculative tradition concerning the origins of the universe and the ontological development of sentient creatures. This exordium is predicated on the absolute immateriality of the origins of existence. From a state of nothingness, moisture, the generative agent of the universe, is said to have arisen (para. ii). The tenor of the language remains highly technical, as befits a historically well-grounded tradition. One might even be persuaded to use this cosmogonic tradition to assert that fundamental ideas concerning the unitary base of reality (*kun-gzhi*) associated with Bon rDzogs-chen philosophy have a native and/or prehistoric cultural orientation (see p. 424, fn. 224).

After the foundations of existence have been intricately expounded, the text turns to the ingenerative serpent woman who appeared from something no larger than a sesame seed. On the other hand, her potentiality is on the biggest of epic scales. Although the Queen of the Klu is diminutive in size, her mind covers the worlds (*thugs kyis stong-khams khyab*), illustrating her universal ambit (para. iii). Like many other serpent spirits the world over, she appears with limbs; in other words, in anthropomorphous form. The text furnishes the name of the progenitor in three of the main languages of ancient Tibet, all of which highlight her cosmogonic role (para. iv). Now commences the sequence of creation, beginning with the intangible sky. This sky and its corollary light are described as covering everything in the universe (para. v). The effort expended on depicting the qualities of the sky and the precision of the concepts associated with it underlines the importance of the firmament in early Tibetan beliefs, as do the iconographic depictions of the Ge-khod cycle we have already explored.

Having described the mind-sky nexus of the Queen of the Klu, the text turns to the corporeal elements of existence. From the gleam in the Queen of the Klu's right eye came the moon (para. vi) and from the glint of her left eye issued the sun (para. vii).⁴¹⁹ Traditionally in Tibetan culture, the sun is considered female and, as later stated in the text, the moon is male. The sun is also equated with the swastika, as in many other ancient Eurasian cultures. The swastika as a solar symbol was widespread from Celtic Europe to Central Asia and the Subcontinent. After the birth of the heavenly ornaments of the sun and moon, the four male planets came from the Queen of the Klu's upper fangs (para. viii) and the four female planets from her lower fangs (para. ix). Minus the personification of comets and eclipses, these are the seven planets of the classical world, widely known to Eurasian and North African cultures. From the Magna Mater's 12 upper teeth and 12 lower teeth appeared the 24 stars (constellations), divided into male and female groups. This would appear to be a zodiacal tradition the details of which are no longer extant. *Klu 'bum khra bo* also makes clear that the authors were aware of the correlation between planetary and sidereal movements, as well as correspondences between the seasons (*nam-zla*) and time cycles (*dus-tshod*).

With the firmament in place, the mythic account moves to the unfolding of earthly physical conditions. This sequence begins with thunder, lightning, clouds, fog, rain, and hail, which in that order appeared from the goddess's mouth and eyes (para. x). From the nostrils of Queen of the Klu spread various types of wind, which generated the power of growth (para. xi). From the cosmic serpent's blood came the five oceans, and from her nerve channels all the watercourses (para. xii). From this water came vegetation and the plants that supported the growth of animals.

⁴¹⁹ In the *R̥gveda*, the sun and moon are called the two eyes of heaven (Griffith 1973: 48). Such ocular imagery appears to have been widespread in early Eurasian mythological traditions.

The text tells us that ‘there was absolutely nothing that was not produced by animals’ (*blun de las mi-skye-ba gang yang med-pa*), mirroring the importance of the hunting and pastoral way of life in Tibet. Subsequently, from the light of the great goddess’s flesh came the golden earth, the sustainer of all life. The text momentarily reverts back to primal times, explaining that the light of the Queen of the Klu generated the warmth that sustains (*gsos-pa*) all beings (para. xiii). From her bones came the world mountain Ri-rab and all other topographical features, and from her hair came all the species of flora.

The animal world is held to have manifested from the Queen of the Klu’s limbs (para. xiv). The front and back sides of the goddess’s gigantic bulk are responsible for the day and night, illustrating her pantheistic nature.⁴²⁰ The spirit world of the *klu*, *lha* and *’dre* was primarily actualized from the light of her organs. The text goes on to concentrate on the begetting of human cultural foundations by the cosmic serpent lady. The attribution of the ground of common human experience with a goddess is extremely noteworthy, constituting one of the most persuasive pieces of evidence available to show that ancient Tibet may have had matriarchal social structures. First to be created in the realm of humanity, presupposing the existence of human beings, were the religions (para. xv). Then came the musical traditions (*rol-mo*) of the *lha* muses and the various lesser bodies of water, followed by the thoroughfares (*lam-rgyu*), outer (physical) countries (*phyir yul*) and castles (*mkhar*). This reference to thoroughfares indicates the autochthonous nature of major routes of communication such as mountain passes, valley bottoms and passages traversing cliffs. The cultural fabric of societies and their loci of residence are also assigned to the goddess, providing what could possibly be a mythic footing for the tradition of the early kings of Tibet assuming the clan/personal names of their mothers (see pp. 273, 274, 282). In the same vein, ascribing the origins of culture and civilization to a queen of the *klu* may have influenced the development of other native religious and political traditions in which gynarchic elements were present.

Klu ’bum khra bo avers that from the Queen of the Klu’s womb appeared the ‘continuous path of birth’ (*skye-ba’i rgyun-lam*), establishing that she is the ultimate source of all living beings. This fecundating principle still remains part of the Tibetan cult of the *klu*, accounting for the propitiation of this class of deity (particularly female *klu*) in matters related to fertility. This tradition stands in contrast to that group of Bon cosmogonies that ascribe all beings to the primeval couple Sangs-po ’bum-khri and Chu-lcam rgyal-mo. Perhaps these cosmogonies were the etiologic traditions of different Tibetan proto-tribes that later came to be homogenized and incorporated into Bon literature. Alternatively, we might consider that the Queen of the Klu cosmogony may have the same geographic source as the cosmogonic couple but is representative of an older ophiolatrous tradition. At this point in time, we have no way of ascertaining the historical relationship between these respective cosmogonic traditions. I suspect, however, that the pantheism and dominant gynaecomorphism of the cosmic serpent predate the myth founded on the archetypal divine couple of Bon. The *Klu ’bum* proceeds to claim that it is the most authoritative source for the origin myth of the *klu-mo*, which indicates that it was in cultural circulation before it was codified in its present form (para. xvi). The text tells us that with the physical and institutional structures in place, languages such as Zhang-zhung, Sum-pa, Tibetan, and sTag-gzig came into being (para. xvii). The great polarities of life and death, good and evil also appeared in the universe (*bon*), which are reflected in the divine forms of the upper (*var*) and lower (*yog*) planes of existence. The text seems to say that the celestial *lha* and terrestrial *’dre* entered into competition with one

⁴²⁰ In the *Rgveda*, there is a pantheistic myth known as Puruṣasūkta (book X, hymn CXC), an elaborate sacerdotal cosmological reckoning of comparatively recent origin. Puruṣa, a primeval giant, produced the sun, moon, gods, humans, animals, and four castes from various parts of his body.

another, similar to that of a predator-prey ecological cycle. The *Klu 'bum khra bo* cosmogony ends with mention of three types of divinities: the god of the life-force (*srog-lha*), the god accepted for worship (*bsten-pa'i lhar 'ches-pa*), and the god of propitiation (*sgrub-pa'i lha*). These are the fundamental divine aspects of the Bon ritual tradition.⁴²¹

- i) From here downwards the tradition of the Queen of the Klu is shown: In the beginning of existence there existed absolutely nothing, abiding in the nature of emptiness. Thereafter, in the sphere of emptiness there existed not even a particle of the vapor of existence; everything was not wrought and nothing was not wrought as well (*yod par mi byed med par yang mi byed*).
- ii) From the sphere of blissful moisture a rainbow-like [form] came into being. The very attractive and brightly colored rainbow-like [form], an inapprehensible [entity], came into being. It also formed a tangibility and likewise had bright colors. From its essence [an entity] as large as a sesame seed came into being. From the essence of the spontaneously self-opening⁴²² [entity] as large as a sesame seed, the figure of a woman one hand in height came into being.
- iii) A woman, a female with a one-hand [high] body and robust limbs was born. She was born as one with differing utterances from her mouth. Her mind covered the worlds of the innumerable world systems (*stong-gsum*). Her miraculous body and beneficent mind, which covered everything, was born.
- iv) She was given names. In the language of Zhang-zhung: Sang ka-ra ste kun-tu khyab. In the language of Sum-pa: Mol-gzhi kun-khyab. In the language of Tibet she was known as Klu'i rgyal-mo srid-pa gtan la phab-pa (Queen of the Klu Organizer of Existence). From the vapor of the crown of her head the turquoise-colored blue sky came into existence. Although it was visible, the existence that emerged from the vapor was not tangible.
- v) There was absolutely nothing that could not be covered by the sky. In the language of Zhang-zhung, that is known as the 'all-covering emptiness' (*stong-pa kun tu khebs*). In the language of Sum-pa it is known as 'uniformly covering' (*khebs brdal*). In the language of Tibet it is known as sky (*gnam*). In the language of g.Yung-drung Bon it is known as the sky or the 'inapprehensible and intangible space quiddity' (*don dbyings nyid mtshan ma gzung du med pa'o*). There was absolutely nothing not covered by the light. Therefore, it is called the highly resplendent all-covering. It unremittingly looked over [existence]; so there was absolutely nothing that was invisible.
- vi) From the light rays of the right eye of Queen of the Klu Organizer of Existence, the bright moonlight came into existence. Thereafter there was absolutely nothing that was not illuminated. In the language of Zhang-zhung that is [called] *da dung las*; in the language of

⁴²¹ After these 17 paragraphs, the narrative assumes a moralistic tone. The next sentence of the text reads: "Thereafter, the anger, pride, ignorance, lust, and envy of sentient beings, these five, completely came into being" (*de nas sems can la zhe sdang dang / nga rgyal dang / gti mug dang / 'dod chags dang / phrog dog dang / de lnga yongs su srid do l*). This is followed by a description of the five afflictive emotions.

⁴²² *rDol-ba*. This verb is used to describe the hatching of an egg or the breaking of fragile materials such as ceramics.

Sum-pa, *ma yel kun tu bdal*; and in Tibetan, the moon. In the language of Tibet it is also known as the *g.yung-drung sems-dpa'*.⁴²³

- vii) From the light rays of her left eye the sun, the maker of warmth, came into being. Its warmth came down upon the innumerable world systems, and there was absolutely nothing that it did not cover. It had no egocentricity (*nga dang bdag tu med-pa*); therefore, in the language of Zhang-zhung it is known as the 'great uniform covering' (*khyab gdal chen-po*). In the language of Sum-pa that is known as the 'impartially affectionate mother of all' (*ma kun snyoms*). It is also called 'pha-ma he all-loving'. In the language of Tibet it is known as the sun (*nyi-ma*). In the language of Tibet it is also known as the 'unsurpassable swastika' (*g.yung-drung gyi bla-na med-pa*).
- viii) The sun and moon were kept as the ornaments of all visible existence. Thereafter, from the *don-gzer*⁴²⁴ of the four upper fangs of Queen of the Klu Organizer of Existence there appeared the four male planets. They are: 1) the moon, 2) Jupiter, 3) Venus, and 4) that called *byi-ti-ba phras* (eclipses and comets). This is also called *gza 'sgra-can 'dzin* (comet).⁴²⁵ It is also known as *du-ba mjug-ring* (smoky long tail).⁴²⁶ It is also known as *gza 'bdud chen-po yongs-su che-ba* (great *bdud* planet all-encompassing greatness).
- ix) From her four lower fangs [came] the sun, Mars, Saturn, and Mercury. These are the four female [planets].⁴²⁷ When Queen of the Klu opened her right eye night [appeared]. When she opened her left eye it was daytime. Thereafter, from the 12 upper teeth of Queen of the Klu Organizer of Existence the male stars [appeared], and from her 12 lower teeth, the female stars [appeared]. By the planets, the seasons and time cycles were controlled (*gzung-ba*). Also, the stars likewise [controlled] the time cycles.
- x) From the speech of Queen of the Klu, thunder sounded in the innumerable world systems. There was absolutely no one who could not hear this. From the light rays of her tongue, the lightning strikes that illuminated the innumerable world systems came into being. From the vapor of her mouth clouds and fog appeared. From the tears of her eyes rain [appeared]. If her tears are copious the rain is great. If her tears are scant the rain is less. From the saliva of her tongue hail [appeared].
- xi) From the breath of her right and left nostrils the breezes and winds in the cycle of the seasons came erratically. If her breath is heavy, the wind is great. If her breath is light, the wind is

⁴²³ Literally this means eternal heroic/brave mind. This phrase encompasses all the virtuous qualities of the mind, most notably compassion. In Tibet, the moon is respected as a cultural hero, as it unfailingly illuminates. The term *g.yung-drung sems-dpa'* has also come to denote Bon *bodhisattvas* or those spiritual warriors who aid all other sentient beings.

⁴²⁴ The precise meaning of this word is not known. It may refer to a nail-like quality.

⁴²⁵ The equivalent of Ke-tu in Indian mythology.

⁴²⁶ The equivalent of Ra-hu-la in Indian mythology. Rāhu and Ketu are derived from Indo-Iranian mythology. Rāhu is a formless or serpent-like demon. Extensive descriptions of these astrological figures are found in *Brhat Samhitā*. For an English translation, see Subrahmanya Sastri and Ramakrishna Bhat 1947, pp. 44–75, 127–146. For the iconography and functions of the Tibetan Ra-hu-la, see Sørensen 2000, pp. 167–170.

⁴²⁷ The next three lines of the text contain a total of 17 syllables of unknown signification. They are not treated in the translation.

less.⁴²⁸ From the breath of the Queen of the Klu Organizer of Existence appeared the currents of wind. From the wheel of the wind the four great wheels of wind appeared:⁴²⁹ the wind blowing in the sky, the wind that brings down hail and warmth, the wind that cleanses the channels,⁴³⁰ and the wind that induces growth. Such are the four.

- xii) From her blood the four great oceans were produced. Along with the central ocean, these five appeared. Thereafter, from her 360 subtle channels (*rtsa*) each of her streams, thousands of rivers, came into being. From her thousands of streams the plants consumed by animals came into being, and there was absolutely nothing not produced by animals. Thereafter, from the light rays of her flesh the all-supporting golden earth⁴³¹ came into being. There was absolutely nothing not included in it. There was absolutely nothing not growing from it. There was absolutely nothing not sustained by it.
- xiii) From her light rays of warmth the epochal light came into being from primordial times, so there was absolutely nothing that was not sustained by this warmth. From the light rays of her bones Ri-rab lhun-po also came into being. The rock formations of existence and the stones came into being then. Thereafter, from each strand of body hair and each strand of

⁴²⁸ The signification of the next two lines in the text is not clear and they are not included in the translation. They have something to do with the goddess's mouth.

⁴²⁹ As Stein (1972: 246, 247) noted, wheels (*'khor-lo*) of the elements are also met with in Indic tradition. The *cakravāla* cosmology includes the circles of water, wind and earth (Kloetzli 1983: 34). A description of this cosmological tradition is given in *ibid.*, pp. 23–50.

⁴³⁰ *sBu-gu*. This refers to the vascular systems of plants, animals and humans.

⁴³¹ The golden earth is also a feature of the Indic *cakravāla* cosmology. It occurs as the foundation of the cosmological disk, which consists of seven concentric mountain ranges with Mount Meru in the center. See Kloetzli 1983, pp 24, 25, 34. The motif of the golden earth orb appears to have had wide currency in Indo-Iranian mythology. A Tibetan version of the *cakravāla* cosmology found in the Bon funerary text *sNgags kyi mdo rin chen phreng ba mu cho'i khrom 'dur chen mo las 'dur khung chen stong thun gyi smrang gi dbu slang le'u lnga pa'o bzhugs so.ha* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 6, nos. 931–948) begins as follows (nos. 936, ln. 4 to 937, ln. 2): “During the [first] epoch and age, from the miraculous good qualities of perfected reality,* arose the five light rays of resplendent wisdom. They were resplendent white, yellow, red, green, and blue. From the essence of the five colored lights formed the miniscule particles (*rdul*) of the formless mind (*gzugs-med yid*). From the seed of those five minuscule particles of light emerged the foundation (*gzhi-rmeng*) of the naturally occurring elements (*rang-'gyur 'byung-ba*). In space appeared wind, fire, water, and gold (earth). The unfolding of destiny (*las*) and the benevolent mind (*thugs-rje*) produced the four worlds, subsidiary worlds and Mount Ri-rab; the seven mountains encircling the ocean; the sun, moon, planets, stars, rainbows, and clouds; and the wish-fulfilling jewels, jewels, gems, and grain” (*dus dang bskal pa de tsam na / mngon rdzogs yon tan rdzu 'phrul las / ye shes gsal ba'i 'od zer shar / dkar ser dmar ljang sngon po gsal / kha dog 'od lnga'i skal snying po las / gzugs med yid kyi rul (= rdul) du grub / 'od rdul de lnga'i sa bon las / rang 'gyur 'byung ba'i gzhi rmeng chags / mkha' la rlung chags me chu gser / gling bzhi gling phran ri rab ri / ri bdun rol mtsho ba tsha can / nyi zla gza' skar gzha' tshon sprin / dpa' bsam nor bu rin chen 'bru / las dang thugs rje dbang gi (= gis) smin /*). At the time of this creation, from a chain of causal factors connected to the duality of samsara and nirvana, appeared the polar realms of light (virtue) and darkness (non-virtue). *sNang-ba 'od-ldan* (Illuminating Resplendence) came into being from light and *Med-khams rgyal-po* (King of the Realm of Darkness) came into being from darkness. These two primal personalities were the progenitors of all beings. The cosmogonic couple *Sang-po 'bum-khri* and *Chu-lcam rgyal-mo* appeared from the luminous side of existence. Among the beings who succeeded them were two important classes of Bon funerary deities, the *'thor-gsas* and *bdar-gsas*, and the three classes of numinous humans, the *mi smra* and *gshen*. See *'Dur khung chen stong thun gyi smrang*, nos. 937, ln. 2 to 940, ln. 4. In the multiple-world cosmologies of the Tibetan Buddhists, the cosmogonic progression entails the following chain of phenomena: wind, rain, a mass of water, the churning of this water by wind, a golden disc, the elements, and Mount Ri-rab. For an explication of this cosmogonic sequence, see Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Taye 2003, pp. 62–67.

* *mNgon-rdzogs*. A formless entity that functions not unlike a creator god.

hair on the head of Queen of the Klu Organizer of Existence, the trees, plants, forests, and so forth came into being.

- xiv) Thereafter, from the light rays of her four limbs the [animal] world came into being. From the light rays of her body Ri-rab lhun-po came into being. From her front and back the sunny and shady places came into being. From the light rays of her organs and from the light rays of her throat hundreds of thousands [of *klu*] came into being. From the light rays of her lungs the white *klu* came into being. From the light rays of her liver the black *klu* came into being. From the light rays of her heart the *lha* and *'dre* of visible existence bestowed with names came into being.
- xv) The inconceivable Bon and non-Bon religions (*chos*) that bring happiness to sentient beings came into existence. Also, all the musical traditions and so forth of the *lha* came into being. From the light rays of her brain all the great lakes and small lakes came into being. From the light rays of her abdomen all the marshes and ponds came into being. Her intestines created the thoroughfares. The outer (physical) countries and castles came into being. From her womb ([*mo*] *mtshan*) the continuous path of birth came into being. There is absolutely nothing that does not exist from her.
- xvi) In that way, Queen of the Klu Organizer of Existence created the outer structures (*phyi-yul*). So, if it is not specifically distinguished in such a way, even though it is stated that the mother [*klu*] is the source of existence, there is no awareness [of the intricacies] of existence. From the mind of Queen of the Klu all the universe (*bon*) of existence came into being of its own accord.
- xvii) In the universe (*bon*) Zhang-zhung, Sum-pa, Tibetan, sTag-gzig, and [other] dissimilar languages came into being.⁴³² The life and death of the universe, savagery, and the pure practices of the mind (*sems-phyogs*) also came into being then. The *lha*, the pure *lha* who reside in space, the *'dre* who tread on the earth, and the hungry *lha* who eat the *'dre* came into being then. The *lha* that is called the god of the life-force, the *lha* accepted for worship, and the *lha* of propitiation who subjugate the world also came into existence.

We shall now examine a Bon-inspired cosmogony featuring the divine primal couple Sangs-po'i 'bum-khri and Chu-lcags rgyal-mo.⁴³³ This syncretistic origin myth makes no mention of the state of pre-existence but has the five elements (*'byung-pa rnam-pa lnga*) as its cosmic priori (para. i). The elements give rise to generative eggs, a popular cosmogonic entity in the Bon tradition.⁴³⁴ As noted by Blezer (2000: 130), cosmogonic and theogonic egg myths are known the world over. Given this level of cultural universality and the ubiquity of eggs in the natural world, this mytheme

⁴³² This sentence also includes the word *skyogs dang*; its signification is unknown.

⁴³³ See *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru rgyas pa*, p. 4–6. Tibetan Text II-39, pp. 607, 608. This cosmogony is comparable with a longer version contained in *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags*. For a translation and discussion of this important root source, see Karmay 1998, pp. 245–281.

⁴³⁴ Stein (1972: 246, 247) observes that the cosmogonic sequence of non-being, being, generative eggs, and the universe occurs in the Brāhmanas and Upaniṣads. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna* (circa fourth century CE), a single huge egg appeared in the primal world of darkness, which opened to reveal the lotus-born fore-father Brahma, the creator of the worlds (Pargiter 1904: xiv, 552). Blezer (2000: 131–135) provides Bon generative egg myths from various textual sources. Blezer (*ibid.*: 139) also comments on the common theogonic theme of the birth of gods and demons found in the generative egg myths of the Tibetan, Nakhi and Yakuts. Karmay (1998: 248, 249) observes that the Tibetan primeval egg myth appeared in literature no later than the 11th century CE; its origins are still unknown.

is liable to have risen independently in various cultures. I concur with Blezer's assessment (*ibid.*: 135) that the Bon generative egg tales appear to be rather distinctive and not directly attributable to the mythology of adjoining peoples. In this *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru* cosmogony, the various parts of the generative egg differentiated into a rock formation and lake, the traditional dyadic instruments of creation in Tibetan culture. Between them appeared the six orders of sentient beings (*rigs-drug sems-can*), the Buddhist worlds of gods, titans, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings. These six orders of sentient beings appeared from 18 eggs, numbers that probably have some correspondence to the popular Tibetan tripartite color scheme (white, black, and variegated) of the clan and iconographic traditions.⁴³⁵ The god who appears from the centerpiece of these eggs is sMon-pa (Benediction/Wish). His inclusion among the six orders of sentient beings is an unmistakable Buddhist contrivance.⁴³⁶

After producing a body for himself, sMon-mi (alias Ye-smon rgyal-po/Sangs-po'i 'bum-khri) gave rise to all living beings and served as their ruler (para. ii). The textual allegation that he received his name 'Bum khri because he was the grandfather of hundreds of thousands is probably not sound, as these two words appear to have had meanings other than numerical designations in Old Tibetan. He is the paternal source of living beings, a gender specification at odds with the *Klu 'bum khra bo* cosmogony. Sangs-po'i 'bum-khri and his wife Chu-lcags rgyal-mo produced three sons from which the three lineages of divine humans (*smra*) and nine proto-human brothers appeared. Chu-lcags rgyal-mo is also commonly called Chu-lcam rgyal-mo, and her Zhang-zhung name is Sa-trig er-sangs. How the onomastic variations Chu-lcam (Lady of Water) and Chu-lcags (Water Iron) developed is obscure. It can be said that iron, like water, is conceived of as a powerful and sacred element.

The son of the cosmogonic couple was sPyi-gtsug rgyal-ba; he and his wife begot Phyar-rje stag-tsha 'al-'ol (para. iii). He in turn had four sons, divine precursors of human beings, including the great mountain god 'O-de gung-rgyal and the famous royal progenitor sKos mkhan-pa'i yab-lhag brda-drug (*sic*). Yab-lha brda-drug had various wives including *lha*, *gnyan* and *rmu* (*mu/dmu*) divinities (para. iv). The youngest of his 35 sons was sNe-khrom lag-khra. One of his grandsons was rGyal-bu mthing-ge, the progenitor of the great clans of Hor and Tibet. rGyal-bu mthing-ge is recorded as having three wives (para. v). One of his wives, Lha-lcam dkar-mo, gave him a son whose progeny included Khri-rje thang-snyan (the progenitor of the Tibetan lineages). rGyal-bu mthing-ge and his wife mThing-mo had a son who gave rise to the Hor, which split into three lineages known as O-bo'i hor. These must be those now known as the A-po hor/A-pha hor of the eastern Byang-thang, clans of mixed Tibetan and Mongolian stock (Bellezza 1997a: 288 (n. 47)). This reiterates the kinship between the Hor and the Tibetans,⁴³⁷ which seems to be a reflection of early ethnohistorical realities, just as the archaeological record of Upper Tibet indicates. These distant genealogical connections took on special significance in the aftermath of the 13th century CE Mongol conquest of Tibet, which occurred no more than a century before *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru* in its current form was written. With another wife, rGyal-bu mthing-ge fathered a son, the initiator of a royal lineage. The son of Khri-rje thang-snyan was A-nye (A-mye) mu-zi khri-to chen-po,

⁴³⁵ This is supported by the *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags* cosmogony and the appearance of three eggs of this color scheme from the black and white *khyung* progenitors of the universe. See Karmay 1998, p. 265.

⁴³⁶ In the Bon tradition, sMon-pa or Sangs-po 'bum-khri appears from space (*dbyings*) and the virtuous side of existence (*vod*), and is not part of the cyclical wheel of samsara. For this clarification, see Norbu 1995, p. 271 (n. 22); Karmay 1998, pp. 128–130, 133, 179 (n. 31), 196, 265; Bellezza 2005a, pp. 326, 394, 396.

⁴³⁷ This international genealogy is confirmed in the *dBu nag mi'u 'dra chags* where 'Thing-ge (alternative spelling) and his three wives produce the nations of Tibet, China and Mongolia (Karmay 1998: 267).

who with his three wives sired the six great clans of Tibet: lDong, Se-khyung-dbra, A-lcags 'gru, dMu-tsha dga', dBal, and Zla (para. vi).⁴³⁸ The former four clans were all originally localized in pastoral northern Tibet (from the Sino-Tibetan marches to mNga'-ris), while the latter two clans appear to be of Central Tibetan origin. The mother of the dBal and Zla was Brag-srin gdong dmar-mo (Red-Faced Rock Srin), the famous mother of the Tibetan race according to Buddhist sources such as *Ma ni bka' 'bum*. An Indic cultural element is tagged on to the end of the cosmogony when it states that from the dBal and Zla came the four lineages (*rgyud-bzhi*), which are comparable with the four castes (*rigs-bzhi*) of India:

- i) The genealogical history of the subjects: From the essence of the five elements there appeared a great egg. The outer shell of the egg became the divine rock formation. The inner liquid of the egg [became] the swirling white conch lake. The intervening integument became the six orders of sentient beings. It hatched into 18 eggs. The middle egg among the 18 erupted as a conch-white egg. From it [appeared] sMon-pa'i bi-mo lum-lum. He did not have five senses but he had a thinking mind, so he thought he needed eyes to see, thus a wisdom eye sprouted. A nose to smell fragrances sprouted. Ears to hear melodious sounds sprouted. Teeth for cutting the five poisons sprouted. A tongue to sample tastes sprouted. Hands to set upon the earth sprouted. Feet to miraculously rove around sprouted. Therefore, whatever he wished immediately appeared.
- ii) He bestowed a name upon himself. He assumed [the name] sMon-mi bsam-pa blum-blum lam-lam. He assumed [the name] Ye-smon rgyal-po (Primordial Aspiration King) because he had prayed in primordial times. He was the grandfather of hundreds of thousands, so he was also called sTon-pa 'bum-me. He was enlightened from primordial times and lived as the chief of hundreds of thousands, so he assumed the name Sangs-po'i 'bum-khri. He took mother Chu-lcags rgyal-mo as his wife, and their son, the prince of the *lha*, was known as sPyi-gtsug rgyal-ba. Also he was known as Srid-bu 'dod-tsam. Also he was known as 'Phrul-sras dbang-ldan (Powerful Miraculous Son). He took Dung-za dngul-mo as his wife, and their son was bKo-sras skyes-cig. His sons were the three brothers of the *smra* human lineage. These were humans endowed with the name of the *lha*. The nine brothers of the human lineage of existence appeared, resembling pearls on a string. These were the sons descended from the mind of the *lha*.
- iii) The youngest of the three brothers was Phyar-rje stag-tsha 'al-'ol. This youngest of the *lha* lineage of existence was the head of the human lineage of existence. He took 'Tshams-sa khyad-khyud as his wife, and their sons were known as the four brothers *lha* lineage of existence. They are also known as mGo-gsum tsha. From these four the human lineage descended. These were the four sons: 'O-de gung-rgyal, sKos mkhan-pa'i yab-lhag brda-drug, Khri-de gsum-po, and Tsha-grang shing dkar-po.
- iv) Yab-lha brda-drug took the princess of the *lha* as his wife, and the sons were begotten as nine brothers, cousins of the *lha*. [Yab-lha brda-drug] took gNyan-mo as his wife and nine brothers, the cousins of the *gnyan* appeared. [Yab-lha brda-drug] mated with rMu-thang and nine brothers, cousins of the *rmu* appeared. Basically, he had 35 sons. The youngest of these, sNe-khrom lag-khra, mated with Lha-lcam dkar-mo. Their son was Ni-pha rgyal-po. He took

⁴³⁸ The grandfather Khri-to chen-po and his six Tibetan clans are the subject of a myth that provides a precedent for the obtainment of the lineage protecting *sgra-bla* gods. See Karmay 1998, pp. 270–273, 279–281; Bellezza 2005a, pp. 405–411.

Lung-kha hris-mo as his wife and the sons rGyal-bu mthing-ge, 'Thing-po and mThing-gnyis appeared.

- v) rGyal-po mthing-ge took Lha-lcam dkar-mo as his wife, and their son was Bod 'byong la brangs. [rGyal-po mthing-ge] also took rMu-za mthing-sgril as his wife, and their son was rGyal-khri la-zham. His sons were the three big and small kings, from whom descended the eight lineages. [rGyal-po mthing-ge] also took mThing-mo as his wife. The son of mThing [ge] gave rise to the Hor. The Hor diverged into the O-bo'i hor lineage of the three brothers. The sons of Byong la bram were Bor-rje, Khri-rje, Khri-rje thang-po rje, Khri-rje thang-snyan, and Bor-rje khri-rje gtsos-'dus.
- vi) The son of Khri-rje thang-snyan was A-nye mu-zi khri-to chen-po. He took gNyan-za shamig as his wife and three sons were born to them: sPos-chu ldong the eldest, Se-khyung-dbra who was junior to him, and A-lcags 'gru the youngest. [Khri-to chen-po also] took dMu-za lha-mo as his wife and their son was dMu-tsha dga'. [Khri-to chen-po also] reluctantly took Brag-srin gdong dmar-mo as his wife and their sons were dBal and, Zla from which four lineages of great human *gol-po* (?) were born.

As noted, Bon cosmogonies featuring generative eggs are commonplace. They either stand alone, as in the case of *Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru*, or they are appended to various ritual performances. I will now furnish an example of a synoptic origin myth that prefaces a Bon funerary ritual.⁴³⁹ This text begins with the visualization of the funerary divinities and ancient Bon practitioners, as well as the subjugation of the demonic agents of death (*sri* and *gshed*). The cosmogony, our topic of study, comes next. It is followed by a Buddhist-inspired account of the demise and death of human beings. This tale serves as a doctrinal rationale for the Bon death rituals set out in the text. It begins by relating that in the *srid-pa ka-log* (negative existence or the alter-universe), a poisonous (non-virtuous) cow with the heads of a bird, snake and pig appeared. From the bird mouth of lust (*'dod-chags*) appeared the gods (*lha*), titans (*lha-min*) and humans (*mi*). From the pig mouth of ignorance (*gti-mug*) appeared the chthonic spirits, the *klu*, *byol-song* and *lto-phye*. From the snake mouth of anger (*zhe-sdang*) appeared the hell beings, famished ghosts (*yi-dwags*) and *gshin-rje* (spirits afflicting the dead). According to the text, these are the orders of living beings. The text goes on to state that the Tibetan cosmogonic entities sNang-ba 'od-ldan, chief of virtuous existence, and Mun-pa zer-ldan, chief of non-virtuous existence, manifested the beings of their respective spheres of existence, which are amalgamated in the six orders of living beings (*'gro-ba rigs-drug*). The Buddhist character of the account is reinforced by the citation of the chain of dependent origination (*rten-'brel*), the cause of the *bdud-bzhi* (birth, old age, sickness and death). As a result of this chain of suffering, the deceased, the object of the funeral ritual, wanders around the six realms of living beings.

Returning to the cosmogonic predecessor of this funerary ritual, we find that it begins with a description of space (*nam-mkha'*), the singular quality of primeval existence in the Bon tradition (para. i). This myth, however, does not so much delineate a temporal sequence of cosmogonic events as furnish a review of seminal cosmogonic motifs. A syncretism is distinguishable right from the start, with mention being made of an adamantine wind (*rlung gi rdo-rje*). This motif appears to be a loan from Buddhist etiologic myths where the origins of the universe are attributed

⁴³⁹ See *sNgags kyi mdo 'dur rin chen phreng ba mu cho'i khrom 'dur chen mo las rin chen phreng ba gzhung gi nyin bon le'u gnyis pa'o* (Second Chapter of Daytime Bon of the Primary Text Scripture from the Great Funeral Ritual Multitude of Mu-cho Jewel Rosary Tantric Funeral Ritual Texts) (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brien*, vol. 6, nos. 341–379), nos. 345, ln. 4 to 347, ln. 1. Tibetan Text II-40, p. 608.

to a cross-shaped adamantine structure (*rdo-rje rgya-gram*). The text also cites the primal mountain and ocean, a reference to the dyadic initiators primarily known from the oral tradition. It would seem, therefore, that three distinct cosmogonic traditions (primal space, the generative *rdo-rje* and the mountain-water dyad) were woven together in this synoptic origin myth. After this triad of inceptive factors, the golden earth, five elements and sentient beings, in that order, are listed. The physical universe is referred to as the outer container (*phyi-snod*) and its living inhabitants as the inner contents (*nang-bcud*), as they are in other Tibetan sources.

The myth proceeds to further qualify primordial existence in the languages of Zhang-zhung, Tibet and Bon (the liturgical language) (para. ii). The characterization of primal time and space in the language of Zhang-zhung is something to the effect of ‘the primordium of all-encompassing space’.⁴⁴⁰ In the language of Tibet, this primal existence (*srid-pa*) is the universe of intrinsic light (*rang ’od*), the light of the planets (*gza’-’od*) and the light rays of the *phyi* (cosmogonic) deities (*phyi-’od-zer*). The Bon language characterization articulates the beginning as the ‘womb of the space of emptiness’ (*stong-pa’i dbyings rum*), the primordium without qualities (*ye med*).

From the primal light came moisture and then a lake, which gave rise to three marvelous generative eggs (para. iii). Having the qualities of copper, iron and conch, these three eggs hatched to reveal the lineages of the gods of purity (*dwangs-ma lha*) and humans. This statement succinctly sums up an essential belief in Tibetan indigenous religious thought: gods and humans descended from the same primal source. This fundamental kinship permeates many facets of Tibetan culture, expressing itself in the ritualistic ordering of the world and the social and ecological interrelationships it generates:

- i) *He!* The secret space is extremely broad and extensive. The vertical extent of the *rdo-rje* epoch wind is very broad. The great bright effulgent fiery mountain is warm and even. The depth of the nectarous ocean is very deep. The golden disk (*gser gyi dong-tse*) of the earth is the residence of all. The five elements of the outer container world were formed from up to down. The inner contents of sentient beings appeared from the resplendent *lha* up to down.
- ii) In the language of Zhang-zhung this is: *nya zhi ye ye mu*. In the language of Tibet it obtained the name ‘existence, light itself, the light of the planets and the light rays of the *phyi*’. In the language of Bon: ‘the womb of the space of emptiness, the primordium without qualities’. In the language of Zhang-zhung: *ti ’od dmar ’od*. In the language of Tibet: ‘absolute emptiness’ (*cir yang med-pa*).
- iii) Thereafter *’ol*⁴⁴¹ and light came into being. After that light and rays appeared. After that moisture and dampness came into being. After that a precious lake came into being. A film (*shags*) appeared on the lake. Furthermore, the lake film rolled into eggs. Three wonderful eggs rolled, the eggs that are greatly wondrous. [One] had [the qualities of] a globule of the white light of conch, [one] had [the qualities of] a globule of the red light of copper, and [one] had [the qualities of] a globule of the black light of iron. From inside the opened eggs the lineages of the *lha* of purity and humans appeared, the lineages that appeared from light and miracles.

⁴⁴⁰ *Nya zhi ye ye mu*. In rendering this free translation, I found the bilingual dictionary of Martin 2001b very helpful.

⁴⁴¹ This word appears to have photic connotations.

According to Bon tradition, the *gshen* and *bon-po* priests of ancient times would recite the origins of the universe as a prelude to their ritual activities. The sponsors of the rituals had to demonstrate considerable hospitality and proffer gifts to these priests, if they were to carry out their vital religious duties. A fine account of this religious activity and the words uttered in the recitation has been preserved in a Ge-khod cycle text.⁴⁴² It occurs as the profession of precedents (*smrang*) that leads off in the *dbal-chu* ritual performance of total purification, a tradition believed to have originated in prehistoric Zhang-zhung.⁴⁴³ This text begins with the word *bsō*, beckoning all the gods and people in attendance to come and listen (para. i). The ritualists then commence to explain why he has been called upon to perform the *dbal-chu*. He announces that he was invited from the far side of a mountain and river and brought to the ritual venue by various conveyances. This is a conventional and not necessarily actual depiction of where the ritualist hails from. It is intended to demonstrate the great efforts taken by the benefactors to bring the officiant to their home.

The ritualist goes on to describe how he was made comfortable, a mark of his honorable status (para. ii). He is offered a carpet to sit on, a fancy tent to stay in, turquoise jewelry and a turban to wear, an unnamed gift, and a libation (probably beer) to drink. The text also notes that the priest has been given the objects needed to perform the *dbal-chu*, here epitomized by butter lamps (*mar-me*) and a tabernacular arrow (*mda'*) to be presented to the presiding deities of the Ge-khod cycle. With all arrangements in place, the ritualist goes ahead and pronounces the origin tale of the universe and *dbal-chu* (para. iii). From the absolute nothingness of the beginning (*dang-po ci yang med-pa*), there appeared the primal elements of wind, fire, water, and earth. From the generative forces of darkness, oscillations, moisture, and warmth, a mirror-like lake came into existence, which gave rise to an effulgent man (*'od kyi mi*). This was Ye-srid rgyal-po, the primeval deity, who manifested three wondrous eggs from his mind (para. iv). From the eggs appeared the cosmogonic couple Ye-smon dbu-nag and Chu-lcam rgyal-mo, procreators of the *lha*, humans and *gshen* (a type of divine human):

- i) Now say the origin tale of the *dbal-chu* like this: *bsō, bsō, bsō!* Tonight, on the best day of existence for the subduing of wrong-doing enemies and *'dre*, I the *dbal-bon* was invited by this sponsor and benefactor. From beyond a big pass, I was escorted (*bsus*) here on a horse and *rkyang*. From the other side of a big river, I was brought here on a boat and ship.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² See *dBal shel rgyung dkar po'i dbal chu bzhugs pa'i dbu phyogs legs swō* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 927–1016, no colophon), nos. 932, ln. 3 to 934, ln. 1. Tibetan Text II-41, pp. 608, 609.

⁴⁴³ The main ritual text for the *dbal-chu* performance is entitled *rTogs (= rTog) 'jom dbal chen wer spungs kyi gzhung bzhugs pa legs* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 242, nos. 1337–1360). While individual components of this elaborate ritual system may have separate sources, the account in the colophon of this text gives the historical origin of the *dbal-chu* as a whole. The colophon reads: “The tale is about the protection of Zhang-zhung sTag-sna rgyal-po in the first [age]. It was practiced by the Gyer-spungs (Bon master) [King] Khri-ldem, holder of the iron horns. [Sometime] thereafter, it was transmitted to sNang-bzher lod-po (eighth century CE), who kept it confidential for 13 years. It was [then] transmitted to the Bla-chen (a title meaning ‘greatly superior one’) Dran-pa nam-mkha’ (eighth century CE). The Bla-chen thought that should this [text] decline, all the transmissions of the Zhang-zhung *tso* (destructive magic rites) would decline. Therefore, he concealed it at Dang-ra mtsho, on a rock formation that resembled a tortoise. Later, Bon-zhig blo-gros rgyal-mtshan revealed this treasure on the 15th day of the middle month of winter, in the year of the rat. It was then transmitted to Ba-yo mtshams-pa” (*lo rgyus ni dang po zhang zhung stag sna rgyal po'i sku srung du / gyer spungs khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru can gyi (= gyis) mdzad / de nas snang zhing (= bzher) lod po la rgyud (= brgyud) nas mi lo beu gsum la bka' rgya byas nas / bla chen dran pa nam mkha' la brgyud / bla chen gyi (= gyis) 'di nub nas zhang zhung dzo rgyud kun nub par dgongs nas / dang ra'i mtsho la brag ru sba' dra ba'i logs su sbas / phyi dus bon zhig blo gros rgyal mtshan gyis yos lo'i rgun zla 'bring pa'i tsho bco lnga la gter zhal phyas nas / ba yo mtshams pa la brgyud /*).

⁴⁴⁴ There is a western Tibetan song that has been incorporated in Tibetan opera (*A-ce lha-mo*) called *Drang-srong*

- ii) Under me a *na-man*⁴⁴⁵ carpet was spread. Above me a brocade (*za-'og*) tent was set up. On my neck a turquoise⁴⁴⁶ was hung. I was offered a nectarous libation to drink. On my head a white turban was tied. A precious gift was offered to my hands. In front of me bright butter lamps were lit. An arrow was erected as the good body support [of Ge-khod]. I am the great *dbal-bon* for subduing enemies and obstructors.
- iii) I will explain the source (*skye-rgyud*), the great *dbal* that insulates from heinous defilements (*sme*). In the absolute nothingness of the beginning there appeared the element of wind. There arose the enveloping fire. There arose the enveloping water. There arose the circle of the earth. There existed darkness and oscillations (*smig*). There existed a little dampness and a little moisture. From the miraculous combination of warmth and moisture, a lake as large as a mirror came into being. In the lake a bubble as large as a tent whirled up. The essence of that bubble existed as an effulgent holy man.
- iv) He bestowed a name upon himself: he was known as Ye-srid rgyal-po (King of Primordial Existence). From the manifestation of his mind three miraculous eggs appeared. Inside the opened eggs a man from the primordium appeared, Ye-smon dbu-nag (Primordial Aspiration Black-Headed One) of existence came into being. He was the elder brother (senior-most man), primordial *gshen* of consummate power. There appeared a woman who was the epochal Chu-lcam rgyal-mo (Queen Lady of Water). *Lha*, humans and *gshen*, these three, appeared from them.

The *dbal-chu* origin myth continues with Srid-pa ye-smon dbu-nag, who prayed for the seed of existence (*ru-ma*) at the lake of existence.⁴⁴⁷ He also prayed that his wishes would be realized (thus the reason for his namesake, 'Aspiration'). Through him and Chu-lcam rgyal-mo, existence appeared from non-existence and increased in extent. Thereafter, the *srin*, *'dre* and *byur* demons challenged the humans, *smra* and *gshen*. They robbed the wealth of the father Ye-smon rgyal-po and Bon. They also challenged the *lha-gsas* divinities. The five *bdud* of the five mortal poisons (*dug-lnga*: anger, ignorance, lust, envy, and pride) and the 13 types of *'dre* also wrecked havoc on existence. This caused Yab-bla bdal-drug of the *phyra* lineage to cry out to the realm of the *lha*. His appeal was heard by sTon-pa gshen-rab, who advised him to invite the dBal hrom-po dbu-dkar. This god received the empowerments of fire and water from two other deities. He thus became a nemesis fit for the demons.

A similar account of ritual preparations is found in a Bon funerary volume except that it is composed in the first person interrogative.⁴⁴⁸ Here the funerary priest addresses the sponsors and benefactors, asking them whether they have made all the necessary provisions. Among the amenities to be presented to the priest is a *lda-ber*, a kind of greatcoat associated with the *bdud*. This

la (The Pass of the Sage) in which the protagonist ceremoniously makes his way over a pass and across a river. See Lobsang Samten 2001, p. 93.

⁴⁴⁵ A precious type of textile, the details of which are unknown.

⁴⁴⁶ The Tibetan and Zhang-zhung (?) words for turquoise are used in conjunction: *mtsho-ro g.yu*.

⁴⁴⁷ See *dBal shel rgyung dkar po 'i dbal chu*, nos. 934, ln. 1 to 940, ln. 40.

⁴⁴⁸ See *Drag po gting zlog gis (= gi) shog dril dmar nag gis (= gi) bsad pa bzhugs pa legs so in gSang phur nag po* (New Collection of Bon *bka'-brten*, vol. 176, nos. 495–580), no. 504, lns. 1–4. The passage begins: *Nga gshed 'dul gnyen (= gnyan) po 'di / la chen po gcig gis (= gi) phar kha nas / rta dang rkya (= rkyang) la blangs sam /*. The colophon states that the Yum-sras gshen-gsum (*gshen* – 'Phrul-gshen snang-ldan, *yum* – bZang-za ring-btsun, *sras* – 'Chi-med gtsug-phud) transmitted this text to gSang-ba 'dus-pa. Then through a line of succession it was transmitted to Khro-ryal rin-chen.

is a sign of the awesome powers of the ritualist, which are very much needed if he is to destroy the demons that cause death. We might expect that in the preliterate cultures of prehistoric Tibet the ceremonial utterances of the priests assumed the great weight accorded them in this passage:

Have you taken me, the mighty conqueror of the *gshed* (demonic agent of death), from the far side of a big pass on a horse and *rkyang*?⁴⁴⁹ Have you taken me by boat and ship from the far side of the big river? Do you have a carpet of *na-nam* underneath me? Do you have a brocade tent above me? Do you have a *lda-ber* for my body? Do you have a turban of white silk for my head? Do you have nectarous libations in my mouth? Do you have a precious gift for my hand?⁴⁵⁰

The statecraft, building projects, technological innovations, and religious pursuits we have been exploring reveal a civilization that could boast of great intellectual achievements. The ideas and activities described define the way in which the ancient Tibetans insured their security and happiness. The existential counterpoint to the affairs of the living is the fate of the dead. This final stage in the great lifecycle of archaic Upper Tibet is the object of study in Part III.

⁴⁴⁹ The text has *rkya* (horseman) but *rkyang* (onager) is likely intended here. On the word *rkya* see p. 528, fn. 609.

⁴⁵⁰ Also in the *gSang phur nag po* volume (*Mi rabs kyi yar zhus dbye ba gsal byed ces bya ba'i dbus phyogs bzhugs pa legs*, nos. 807–823) there is the same type of content but written as a statement in the voice of the sponsors. The colophon of the text reads: “For posterity (*phyi-rabs don-du*), *gTo-bu 'bum-sangs* (eldest son of *sTon-pa*) and *Yongs-su dag-pa* (disciple of *sTon-pa* and *gshen* of the *lha*) both requested [this ritual], so *sTon-pa* spoke/taught it at *gSas-mkhar sham-po lha-rtse* (located in 'Ol-mo lung-ring). The text begins with an overture of welcome for these primal *gshen*. The first lines (no. 807, lns. 1, 2) of this greeting and petition read: “*Kye kye!* You are the white-turbaned divine *bon* of existence. You are the *gshen-po* of the *lha*. You are the one who subdues the *lha* and '*dre* of visible existence. Please listen to me for a while” (*kye kye srid pa'i lha bon thod dkar khyed / khyed ni lha yi gshen po ste / snang srid lha 'dre khyed kyi* (= *kyis*) '*dul / khyed len* (= *lan*) *gcig nga la bsnyan* (= *snyan*) *gsong dang /*).