


A TENTATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF  
THE *BYA RU CAN* KINGS OF ZHANG ZHUNG

Roberto Vitali  
(Dharamsala-Kathmandu)

 dedicate this small study of a classic of the Bon po literature to mkhas dbang mKhar rme'u bSam gtan rgyal mtshan with deep devotion for his work and example. Hardly anyone in the studies has been able to combine Tibetan depth of thought with Western critical analysis as he has done so consistently. His learning is such that he can wade with ease into the ocean of Tibet's most disparate subjects (Bon, imperial Tibet, the Dalai Lamas, Ge sar, the *rus mdzod* texts and many others) and disciplines (history, philosophy, ritual, anthropology etc.), and author path-opening contributions, providing immaculate translations and state-of-the-art assessments. A true *thams cad mkhyen pa!*

There is little secular history of Zhang zhung in the Bon po sources, while religious historiographical material focusing on the school's masters and their activities is much more profuse. The few secular accounts available are overwhelmed by a consistent concern for cultural geography which is doubly meaningful when it can be used to corroborate historical investigation.

One piece of Zhang zhung pa secular historiography, not without controversial religious implications and notions impinging on cultural geography, is the outline of the *bya ru can* kings. The mystery surrounding these rulers makes dealing with them a tantalizing endeavour, especially due to the wide-ranging implications engendered by the headgear they seemingly wore. It is also a baffling subject to tackle because it is difficult to place these kings in a historical context that stands up in absolute terms if limited to an analysis of events on the Tibetan plateau. Beyond acceptance that these kings existed, doubts, problems and limitations mar any study of them, particularly concerning their relative chronology, hierarchy and division of power, and order of succession.

The material on the *bya ru can* kings does not allow one to establish firm grounds for dealing with these aspects. The task I propose to undertake in this paper is to highlight some of the concepts and notions that these accounts convey, such as whether they present segments of genealogies, a single one or no genealogy at all. The exercise I propose here is thus more an attempt to detect in these lists a thread that links them logically than an exercise in absolute historical validity. For those who do not attribute much historical credibility to the Bon po sources, my attempt will be no more than conceptual acrobatics on one of the several topics in Tibetan culture of doubtful veracity. For those who see in the Bon po sources a root

for decoding the ancient past of the plateau before sPu rgyal Bod took over Tibet and dispelling the clouds of proto-history, it would provide some basic ideas on the power system in Zhang zhung and the rulers who exercised it at an approximate time in antiquity. I am non committal on the validity of the effort and leave the judgement on its reliability entirely to the reader.

*Literary passages related to the bya ru can kings*

The sources that contain a treatment of the *bya ru can* kings are few, most of them written by modern authors who have drawn on dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen's *Ti se'i dkar chag*,<sup>1</sup> an important but late text which deals with a vast array of topics both historical and geographical, apparently based on ancient material.<sup>2</sup> Much older than *Ti se'i dkar chag* is the *'Dul ba gling grags*, one of the works associated with the members of the rMa clan. It refers only obliquely to the *bya ru can* kings, for it deals with the period during which they seemingly flourished. *'Dul ba gling grags* has been attributed to the 12<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> an early date for the extant Tibetan literature but in any case far too late to have recorded historical events in Zhang zhung near the time of their occurrence.

The two classifications of the *bya ru can* kings are found in the second part of dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen's *Ti se'i dkar chag*, which is dedicated to history—the preceding part concerns sacred geography. A

<sup>1</sup> See bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, *sNga rabs Bod kyi byung ba brjod pa'i 'bel gtam lung gi snying po*; Nam mkha'i nor bu, *The Necklace of gZi: A Cultural History of Tibet and Zhang Bod lo rgyus Ti se'i 'od*. Among the non-Tibetan authors, Dan Martin has dedicated a section entitled "Birdhorns" to the *bya ru*, the headgear they are said to have worn, in his Ph.D. dissertation *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*. I wish to thank him for his kindness in providing me with a copy.

<sup>2</sup> While the kings of Zhang zhung are not associated with the Garuda paraphernalia in the Buddhist literature, some of its earliest extant *chos 'byung* use the metaphor of a bird of prey for the sTag gzig rgyal po in the classification of the kings of the four quarters, chosen by appointment. *lDe'u Jo sras chos 'byung* (p. 98 lines 14-15) and *mkhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung* (p. 226 line 6) read: "sTag gzig rgyal po bya khyur khra zhugs 'dra"; "The king of sTag gzig is like a hawk intruding into a flock of birds"; elsewhere *mkhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung* (p. 222 lines 18-19) says: "sPyod pa ni Bod la bya khyur ltar myul"; "The behaviour [of the king of sTag gzig] is to make reconnaissance in Bod like [a hawk] into a flock of birds"; finally *mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 156 line 8) writes: "sTag gzig rgyal po bya khyur khra ltar rgyug"; "The king of sTag gzig speeds like a hawk into a flock of birds". My thanks go to Dan Martin for the reading proposed here.

<sup>3</sup> In "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrag-s-pa Bon-lugs" (n. 24) Blondeau cites the attribution of *'Dul ba gling grags* which she proposed in *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des hautes Études* XCIII either to rMa Srid 'dzin (b.1092; see *ibid.* p. 52) or to his son rMa lCam me, which places this text sometime during the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

first classification (p. 574 line 1-p. 578 line 5) associates the *bya ru can* kings with alleged religious activity (numbers are mine):

“Dzam gling gi phyogs bcu kun tu bstan pa spel ba’i dus su yang/  
sTag gzig gi yul nas drang srong Khri lde ’od po zhes bya ba bya rgod du  
sprul de/ Zhang zhung gi yul Gangs Ti se shel gyi mchod rten lta bu’i  
mgul/ gnas brtan rin chen pho brang du/ gnas brtan chen po ’od khri  
spungs kyi drung du bab ste/ zhe sa dang bsnyung ’dri ba la sogs mdzad  
do/ Gangs ri chen po’i g.yon phyogs A ti gsang ba g.yung drung phug tu  
[note: A ti phug zer] dgra bcom sems dpa’i ’dus sde khri drug stong du  
bstan pa spel lo/ de’i dus su yang zhabs nas ’deg pa’i rgyal po/ Gangs ri  
chen po ’de’i mdun du Gar ljang g.Yu lo rdzong mkhar zhes bya ba [note:  
rGyang grags zer] dang ru yang/ 1) Zhang zhung srid pa’i rgyal po Khri  
wer La rje gser gyi bya ru can nyid do//

de ltar du yang Khri lde ’od po’i slob ma/ drang srong Dang ba yid  
ring zhes bya ba des/ Zhang zhung Pu mar hring (p. 575) gi yul du Mu le  
mtsho yi gling du [note: La ngag mtsho zer]/ dgra bcom g.yung drung  
sems dpa’i ’dus sde sum stong sum brgya ru bstan pa spel lo/ de’i dus su  
yang zhabs nas ’deg pa’i rgyal po/ Pu mar hring yul du sTag chen rngam  
pa’i yongs rdzogs mkhar zhes bya ba de rtsa/ 2) sPung rgyung gyer gyi  
rgyal po ’od kyi bya ru can nyid do//

de ltar yang du Dang ba yid ring gi slob ma drang srong Gung rum  
gtsug phud ces bya ba des/ Zhang zhung Tsi na’i yul [note: Gro shod zer]  
Bye ma g.yung drung tshal du/ dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa’i ’dus  
sde chen po chig khri bdun stong du bstan pa spel lo/ de’i dus su’ang  
zhabs nad ’deg pa’i rgyal po/ Zhang zhung Tsi na’i shod Dum pa tshal  
gser gyi mkhar zhes bya ba de ru/ 3) Gu wer nor gyi rgyal po ga ljang ’od  
kyi bya ru can nyid do//

de ltar du yang Gung rum gtsug phud kyi slob ma/ drang srong rDzu  
’phrul ye shes zhes bya ba des/ Zhang zhung sPos ri ngad ldan pa’i shar  
phyogs/ La (p. 576) mor sdo yi khang bu’i gling du/ dgra bcom g.yung  
drung sems dpa’i ’dus chen stong phrag du ma ru bstan pa spel lo/ de’i  
dus su’ang zhabs nas ’deg pa’i rgyal po/ Zhang zhung Tsi na’i yul sPos ri  
ngad ldan gyi rtsa ba/ grong khyer sTag sna gling [note: Bon ri sTag sna  
rong zer] gyis dbus/ sTag sna dBal gyi rdzong mkhar zhes bya ba de ru/  
4) sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru can nyid do//

de ltar du’ang rDzu ’phrul ye shes kyi slob ma/ drang srong Ye shes  
tshul khirms zhes bya ba des/ Zhang zhung Kha yug gi yul bDud rtsi  
sman gyi nags tshal du/ dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa’i ’dus sde  
stong dang drug bcu’i bstan pa spel lo/ de’i su’ang zhabs nas ’deg pa’i  
rgyal po/ Zhang zhung Kha yug gi yul Mu rdzong chen po khro chu’i  
mkhar zhes bya ba de ru/ 5) Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po utpala ’od kyi bya  
ru can nyid do//

de ltar du'ang Ye shes tshul khriims kyi slob ma/ drang srong g.Yung drung tshul khriims zhes bya ba des/ Zhang zhung Khyung lung gi grong khyer rgyal ba mnyes yul gyi khab Khyung chen spung pa'i ri [note: mKhar gdong zer] la yang/ dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'i (p. 577) 'dus sde grangs med du bstan pa spel lo/ de'i dus su'ang zhabs nas 'deg pa'i rgyal po/ grong khyer rgyal ba mnyes yul gyi dNgul mkhar dkar po khro chu'i rmengs rdo can de ru yang/ 6) Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po rin chen 'od kyi bya ru can nyid do//

de ltar du'ang g.Yung drung tshul khriims kyi slob ma/ drang srong gTsug phud rgyal ba zhes bya ba des/ Zhang zhung Ru thog gi yul gSang brag g.yung drung gtis pa'i tshal du'ang/ dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'i 'dus sde stong phrag du ma ru bstan pa spel lo/ de'i dus su'ang zhabs nas 'deg pa'i rgyal po/ Zhang zhung Ru thog gNam rdzong mkhar zhes bya ba de ru/ 7) Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po enda 'od kyi bya ru can nyid do//

de ltar du yang gTsug phud rgyal ba'i slob ma/ drang srong Ye shes rgyal ba zhes bya ba/ Zhang zhung sPos ri ngad ldan gyi rtsa ba grong khyer sTag sna gling gi khab/ mchod rten Ghan dha chen po'i drung du yang/ dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'i 'dus sde khri drug stong du bstan pa spel lo/ de'i (p. 578) dus su'ang zhabs nas 'deg pa'i rgyal po/ Zhang zhung Tsi na'i yul sPos ri ngad ldan gyi rtsa ba/ grong khyer sTag gling gi dbus/ sTag sna dBal gyi rdzong mkhar zhes bya ba de ru/ 8) sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru can nyid do//

de ltar du Ye shes rgyal ba'i slob ma/ drang srong dPal gyi dbang phyug zhes bya ba des/ Bod kyi yul du 'Dul ba'i bstan pa rgya chen por spel ba'o zhes so//

de ltar Zhang zhung gi yul du mi lo nyis stong lnga brgya ru/ 'phags pa'i sems dpa' rnam kyi sku tshe mtha' ru phyin zhing/ zhabs nas 'deg pa'i rgyal po rnam mnga' thang 'byor pa rgyas pa'i/ 'Dul ba'i bstan pa'ang phyogs bcu kun tu dar ro//".

“When the teachings spread in all the ten directions of 'Dzam gling, drang srong Khri lde 'od po from the land of sTag gzig transformed into a vulture/eagle and landed upon the piled throne of the great *gnas brtan*-s in the precious palace of the *gnas brtan*-s (sic) at the neck of the crystal *mchod rten*-like Gangs Ti se in the land of Zhang zhung. He performed [deeds] such as paying homage and asking respectful questions. To the left of Gangs ri chen po at A ti gsang ba g.yung drung phug [note: known as A ti phug] he diffused the teachings at the 16,000 gathering places of the *dgra bcom sems dpa'*-s. At that time the king who supported him was Zhang zhung srid pa'i rgyal po Khri wer La rje gser gyi bya ru can [residing] at Gar ljang g.Yu lo rdzong mkhar [note: known as rGyang grags] in front of Gangs ri chen po.

Likewise Khri lde 'od po's disciple, drang srong Dang ba yid ring, diffused the teachings at the 3,300 gathering places of the *dgra*

*bcom sems dpa'-s* at Mu le mtsho yi gling [note: known as La ngag mtsho] in the land of Zhang chung Pu mar hring (p. 575). At that time the king who supported him was sPung rgyung gyer gyi rgyal po 'od kyi bya ru can [residing] at the foot (sic) of sTag chen ngam pa'i yongs rdzogs mkhar in the land of Pu mar hring.

Likewise Dang ba yid ring's disciple, drang srong Gung rum gtsug phud, diffused the teachings at Bye ma g.yung drung tshal in the land of Zhang chung Tsi na [note: known as Gro shod] at the 17,000 great gathering places of the *dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'-s*. At that time the king who supported him was Gu wer nor gyi rgyal po ga ljang 'od kyi bya ru can [residing] at Dum pa tshal gser gyi mkhar of Zhang chung Tsi na'i shod.

Likewise Gung rum gtsug phud's disciple, drang srong rDzu 'phrul ye shes, diffused the teachings at the many thousand great gathering places of the *dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'-s* at La (p. 576) mor sdo yi khang bu'i gling in the east of Zhang chung sPos ri ngad ldan pa. At that time the king who supported him was sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru can [residing] at sTag sna dBal gyi rdzong mkhar in the centre of the town sTag sna gling [note: known as Bon ri sTag sna rong] at the foot of sPos ri ngad ldan in the land of Zhang chung Tsi na.

Likewise rDzu 'phrul ye shes's disciple, drang srong Ye shes tshul khirms, diffused the teachings at the 1,060 gathering places of the *dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'-s* at bDud rtsi sman gyi nags tshal in the land of Zhang chung Kha yug. At that time the king who supported him was Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po utpala 'od kyi bya ru can [residing] at Mu rdzong chen po khro chu'i mkhar in the land of Zhang chung Kha yug.

Likewise Ye shes tshul khirms's disciple, drang srong g.Yung drung tshul khirms, diffused the teachings at innumerable gathering places of the *dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'-s* at Khyung chen spung pa'i ri [note: known as mKhar gdong] at Zhang chung Khyung lung, the castle of the town cherished by the Victorious Ones (p. 577). At that time the king who supported him was Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po rin chen 'od kyi bya ru can [residing] at dNgul mkhar dkar po khro chu'i rmengs rdo can ("with foundation stones in molten metal"), the town cherished by the Victorious Ones.

Likewise g.Yung drung tshul khirms's disciple, drang srong gTsong phud rgyal ba, diffused the teachings at the many thousands gathering places of *dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'-s* at gSang brag g.yung drung gtis pa'i tshal in the land of Zhang chung Ru thog. At that time the king who supported him was Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po enda 'od kyi bya ru can [residing] at Zhang chung Ru thog gNam rdzong mkhar.

Likewise gTsong phud rgyal ba's disciple, drang srong Ye shes rgyal ba, diffused the teachings at 16,000 gathering places of the *dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'-s* in front of mchod rten Ghan dha chen po of the castle in the town sTag sna gling at the foot of

Zhang chung sPos ri ngad ldan. At that (p. 578) time the king who supported him was sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru can [residing] at sTag sna dBal gyi rdzong mkhar in the centre of the town sTag gling at the foot of sPos ri ngad ldan in the land of Zhang chung Tsi na.

Likewise Ye shes rgyal ba's disciple, drang srong ['Pham shi] dPal gyi dbang phyug, diffused the teachings of 'Dul ba in the land of Bod extensively.

Likewise in the land of Zhang chung for 2,500 human years, owing to the accomplished life of those 'phags pa sems dpa'-s, and the extensive power and prosperity of the kings who supported them, the teachings of 'Dul ba were diffused in all the ten directions".

The list of eight *bya ru can* kings is neatly organised conceptually; the *bla ma* and patron are mentioned side by side together with their religious and secular seats respectively. The secular side of the lists of *bya ru can* kings in dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag* goes hand in hand with a purported diffusion phase of 'Dul ba Bon in Zhang chung at a time fully historical in terms of the Buddhism of North-West India but extremely ancient in terms of Tibetan historiography.

In this section of *Ti se'i dkar chag* dedicated to the alleged diffusion of 'Dul ba in Zhang chung, brought there from sTag gzig there are eight *bya ru can* kings and seven territories (Gangs Ti se, Pu mar hring, Tsi na'i shod, Tsi na'i yul sPos ri ngad ldan, Kha yug, Khyung lung and Ru thog):

1. Gangs ri chen po: Khri wer La rje gser gyi bya ru can;
2. Pu mar hring: sPung rgyung gyer gyi rgyal po 'od kyi bya ru can;
3. Tsi na'i shod Dum pa tshal: Gu wer nor gyi rgyal po ga ljang 'od kyi bya ru can;
4. Tsi na'i yul sPos ri ngad ldan: sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru can;
5. Kha yug: Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po utpala 'od kyi bya ru can;
6. Khyung lung dNgul mkhar dkar po: Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po rin chen 'od kyi bya ru can;
7. Ru thog: Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po enda 'od kyi bya ru can;
8. Tsi na'i yul sPos ri ngad ldan: sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru can.

The castles from which the kings ruled are as follows:

1. Khri wer La rje ruled from Gar ljang g.Yu lo rdzong mkhar in front of Gangs Ti se;
2. sPung rgyung gyer gyi rgyal po ruled from sTag chen rnam pa'i yongs rdzogs mkhar in Pu mar hring;

3. Gu wer nor gyi rgyal po ruled from Dum pa tshal gser gyi mkhar in Tsi na'i shod;
4. sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po ruled from sTag sna dBal gyi rdzong mkhar at sPos ri ngad ldan;
5. Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po ruled from Mu rdzong chen po khro chu'i mkhar in Kha yug;
6. Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po ruled from dNgul mkhar dkar po khro chu'i rmengs rdo can in Khyung lung;
7. Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po ruled from gNam rdzong mkhar in Ru thog; and
8. sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem ruled from sTag sna dBal gyi rdzong mkhar at sPos ri ngad ldan.

A second list in dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen's *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 599 line 2-p. 601 line 4) classifies the *bya ru can* kings on the basis of the territory they ruled and reckons a larger amount of them (numbers are mine):

"Khyad par Zhang zhung khri lde bco brgyad gtsos pa'i yul chen bco brgyad la mnga' dbang che ba'i rgyal po / 1) srid pa gnam nas skos pa'i Zhang zhung srid pa'i rgyal po / Khri wer La rje gu lang gser gyi bya ru can dang / 2) Zhang zhung Zil gnon rgyal po rlabs chen khyung gi bya ru can dang / 3) Hri do gyer spungs rgyal po kang ka shel gyi bya ru can dang gsum ni / Gangs ri chen po'i mdun rGyang ri g.Yu lo ljong pa'i rdzong mkhar du chags so /

De ltar du'ang Khyung lung rgyal ba mnyes yul du / 4) Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po rin chen 'od kyi bya ru can dang / 5) rGyung<sup>4</sup> yar mu khod rgyal po gzha' tshon 'od kyi bya ru can dang / 6) Gyi le Gu ge'i rgyal po un chen dung gis bya ru can dang gsum mo /

Zhang zhung Pu mar hring gi yul (p. 600) 7) sPungs rgyung gyer gyi rgyal po bya ru 'od kyi bya ru can dang / 8) Nye lo wer ya rgyal po phra men 'od kyi bya ru can dang gnyis so /

Zhang zhung Tsi na'i yul du 9) sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po zom shang lcags kyi bya ru can dang / 10) Zo dmar this spungs rgyal po me dpung 'od kyi bya ru can dang gnyis so /

Zhang zhung Ta rog yul du 11) bDud 'dul dbal gyi rgyal po nyi shel lcags kyi bya ru can dang / 12) Li wer gyer gyi rgyal po zla shel 'od kyi bya ru can dang gnyis so /

<sup>4</sup> Rather than *g.yung*, as in Nam mkha'i nor bu (*Zhang Bod lo rgyus Ti se'i 'od* p. 81 line 8), unless the original text at his disposal has a different spelling.

Zhang zhung sTa (so spelled) sgo'i yul du 13) Shel rgyung hri do rgyal po zo dmar 'od kyi bya ru can dang/ 14) Lig mur nam mkha' rgyal po baidur<sup>5</sup> 'od kyi bya ru can dang gnyis so/

Zhang zhung Kha sgyor yul du 15) Mu wer nor gyi rgyal po ga ljang 'od kyi bya ru can dang/

Zhang zhung Kha yug yul du 16) Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po utpala 'od kyi bya ru can dang/

Zhang zhung La dag (so spelled) yul du 17) Nye lo wer ya rgyal po gnam lcags dbal gyi bya ru can dang/

Zhang zhung Ru (p. 601) thog yul du 18) Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po enda 'od kyi bya ru can soggs/ Zhang zhung rgyal po bya ru can bco brgyad 'di rnams kyi ring la/ Zhang zhung khri sde bco brgyad la soggs yul chen bco brgyad kyi mgo bo non pa dang/ g.Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa phyogs bcur rgyas shing/ sku tshe yang mi lo gnyis stong du bzhugs pa dang/ phung po stag med du Sangs rgyas pa dang yod pa'o / /".

I translate here only the last lines of these passages since my classification of the list of the eighteen *bya ru can* kings (see immediately below) is *de facto* a translation:

“During their time, these eighteen Zhang zhung *rgyal po bya ru can* controlled the *yul chen bco brgyad* (the “eighteen great lands”) such as the Zhang zhung khri sde bco brgyad. The teachings of g.Yung drung Bon were diffused in the ten directions. They existed for 2,000 human years, did not leave their remains behind and were fully enlightened”.

In the list of these rulers there are eighteen *bya ru can* kings but only ten lands or perhaps nine because—see above—Gangs Ti se was part of Kha sgyor according to bsTan 'dzin rnam dag (g.Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i *byung khung nyung bsdu* p. 622 line 1):

1. Gangs ri chen po; three *bya ru can* kings:

Zhang zhung srid pa'i rgyal po Khri wer La rje gu lang gser gyi bya ru can;

Zhang zhung Zil gnon rgyal po rlabs chen khyung gi bya ru can;

Hri do gyer spungs rgyal po kang ka shel gyi bya ru can;

2. Khyung lung; three:

Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po rin chen 'od kyi bya ru can;

rGyung yar mu khod rgyal po gzha' tshon 'od kyi bya ru can;

Gyi le Gu ge'i rgyal po un chen dung gis bya ru can;

3. Pu mar hring; two:

<sup>5</sup> Nam mkha'i nor bu's reading *bhe bhus* (ibid. p. 81 line 15) does not correspond with the spelling in the edition I have used.



- sPungs rgyung gyer gyi rgyal po bya ru 'od kyi bya ru can; and  
Nye lo wer ya rgyal po phra men 'od kyi bya ru can;
4. Tsi na; two:  
sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po zom shang lcags kyi bya ru can; and  
Zo dmar this spungs rgyal po me dpung 'od kyi bya ru can;
5. Ta rog yul; two:  
bDud 'dul dbal gyi rgyal po nyi shel lcags kyi bya ru can; and  
Li wer gyer gyi rgyal po zla shel 'od kyi bya ru can;
6. sTa (so spelled) sgo'i yul; two:  
Shel rgyung hri do rgyal po zo dmar 'od kyi bya ru can; and  
Lig mur nam mkha' rgyal po baidur 'od kyi bya ru can;
7. Kha sgyor; one:  
Mu wer nor gyi rgyal po ga ljang 'od kyi bya ru can;
8. Kha yug; one:  
Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po utpala 'od kyi bya ru can;
9. La dag (so spelled) ; one:  
Nye lo wer ya rgyal po gnam lcags dbal gyi bya ru can;
10. Ru thog; one:  
Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po enda 'od kyi bya ru can.<sup>6</sup>

Five of the eight *bya ru can* kings associated with the alleged diffusion of 'Dul ba in Zhang zhung are mentioned in the list of eighteen. They are:

1. Khri wer La rje ruling from his castle in front of Gangs Ti se;
2. sPung rgyung gyer gyi rgyal po of Pu mar hring;
3. Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po of Kha yug;
4. Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po ruling from Khyung lung; and
5. Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po of Ru thog.

The lists of the *bya ru can* kings have several limitations that put their reliability in serious doubt. One of them is the late date of the source which records these enumerations, although all available literature is late in comparison with the period in which the *bya ru can* kings presumedly lived (see below).

Another is the suspicious grouping of these rulers into eighteen—a stereotype in Tibetan culture—according to one of the two available lists. In my view, one can dismiss the validity of this arrangement since dKar ru cites neither his authority nor the reason for grouping the *bya ru can* kings

<sup>6</sup> According to Dan Martin ("Birdhorns" n.95), *mu mar* is the equivalent of Tibetan *gser btso* or *gser rgod* meaning "golden bomb". I do not see the relevance of this reading in the context of the king's dynastic title. I would render *btso* as "refined", and thus *gser btso* as "refined gold". But I prefer to read it as a reference to a division of the Mu tribe characterised by the colour gold/yellow (see below).

so, but this argumentation is not sufficient to rule out their historicity. Ascertaining historical validity must rest on more probing evidence.

A third doubt is over the disputable record of the alleged diffusion of 'Dul ba in Zhang zhung, sponsored by some of the *bya ru can* kings, events also mentioned in the much earlier 'Dul ba *gling grags*.

#### *The bya ru crown*

I deal with this issue only as it concerns the kings mentioned by dKar ru. In his *Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*, Dan Martin contributes meaningful evidence that the *bya ru* was originally a religious emblem. He cites the various typologies of *bya ru*-s worn by g.Yung drung sems dpa'-s and Ye gshen-s in similar lists mentioned in *Khams brgyad 'bring po*—rediscovered by gShen chen Klu dga' in 1017—and *g.Yung drung las rnam par rgyud*—rediscovered by Khu tsha Zla 'od—which are remarkably close to the crowns of the kings in the list of eighteen (ibid. p. 118-137).<sup>7</sup> These are the first signs of the adoption of the *bya ru* in the extant literature, and they link it with the status of a Bodhisattva. Here there is no trace of the association of the *bya ru* with a secular function.

The first text to establish a link, although indirect, with the royalty is *Grags pa gling grags* text 1 (p. 13 line 2-p. 14 line 1)—a *gter ma* rediscovered by mTha' bzhi Ye shes blo gros either in the late 12<sup>th</sup> or the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and thus another early Bon po source—which attributes the use of the *bya ru* to gShen rab mi bo himself (also see Dan Martin's "Birdhorns"). This early source says that gShen rab put on headgear made up of a crystal *mchod rten* flanked by a *bya ru* on each side, from which a drum and cymbals were hung. He transformed into a *khyung* and flew to the land of rGya gar Pha sha ka ru.<sup>8</sup> There he imparted teachings to rGya gar Si ti gnya' na (Siddhijñāna according to Martin) and lha bdag ("divine lord", the king of Pha sha ka ru?) sNgags dro. The local king became his follower and the *ston pa* offered him the crystal *mchod rten* with horns which became his object of devotion. The king ordered his people to worship it.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A text attributed to Jo bo rje and translated by rGya brTson seng (thus before 1039 when the latter died)—the earliest so far known Buddhist work dealing with the *bya ru*—should be added to them (see Martin, "Birdhorns"). Entitled *sKu dang gsung dang thugs rab tu gnas pa*, it mentions the *bya ru* as a component of the *mchod rten* finial.

<sup>8</sup> D.Martin in his Ph.D. dissertation (ibid. n. 77) proposes, among other possibilities, to identify Pha sha ka ru with Puṣkarāvati.

<sup>9</sup> As well known, *bya ru*-s or rather horns appear on the finial of Bon po *mchod rten*-s in the place of the solar and lunar disc finial of the Buddhists (see D. Martin, ibid. p. 118-137). Apart from the references given by Martin, one should see Me nyag rNam dag gtsug phud's *mChod rten gyi dpe ris blo gsar mgul rgyan*, a modern collection of Bon po *mchod rten* typologies, where horns are an invariable feature of the design.

Given the antiquity attributed to gShen rab mi bo by the Bon po sources, one could presume that this account locates the inception of the custom of wearing the *bya ru* first in North-West India, where gShen rab is said to have operated, and then elsewhere. However, it documents only the transfer of the significance of this headdress between two regions of the Indian subcontinent.

Its royal significance was subsequent to the spiritual one because it was recognised as a symbol of Bon in a kingly milieu owing to the promulgation by the ruler of Pha sha ka ru. The episode thus emphasises that the cult of the *bya ru* was the result of royal patronage. This conception portrays the *bya ru can* kings of Zhang chung in a guise not too dissimilar from the *chos rgyal*-s of sPu rgyal Bod (primarily the *chos rgyal mes dbon rnams gsum*), who combined in their persons the power sanctified by their protection of the religion with their secular power as absolute monarchs.

*Grags pa gling grags* contributes further important indications, this time on the transfer of the *bya ru* from a religious milieu, supported by the royalty, to a more distinctively secular significance. It mentions the insignia granted to Bon po proponents in antiquity by the kings they protected. The marks of honour given to Gyer zla med and the reasons behind this grant are significant to the present study.<sup>10</sup> The text says that he was awarded insignia by Khri thobs nam brtsan. He received the *rgod gsum*: a turquoise *bya ru*, a vest of white female vulture/eagle feathers and a tiger skin collar (ibid p. 30 lines 3-6).

lHa Tho tho ri granted thrice signs of greatness (*che rtags*) to the Zhang chung Bon po Shel le mig dmar. He first gave him the skins of rat, lynx, and wolf; and, subsequently, the skins of tiger, leopard and a species of wild cat, known as *gung*, plus a tiger skin helmet. He finally awarded Shel le mig dmar the *khyung ru* and *dbal ru* (ibid. p. 32 lines 2-5; see below for Gangs Ti se Zil gnon rgyal po rlabs chen, who wore the *khyung gi bya ru*, and La dwags Nye lo wer ya rgyal po who wore the *gnam lcags dbal gyi bya ru*).

It should be noted that these *gshen*-s received their insignia not so much owing to their above mentioned attainments as Byang chub sems dpa', but following military conquests, for these accounts say that they were at the head of the armies which defeated foreign countries (lJang and minor kingdoms in rGya gar respectively).

Although these conquests at the expense of lJang and principalities of metropolitan India cannot be historically verified, the most pertinent notation to the subject of the *bya ru* is that, although Gyer zla med and Shel

<sup>10</sup> The *bya ru* is not mentioned among the components of the outfit of the *gshen*-s during the time of the gNam gyi khri bdun (*Grags pa gling grags* text 1 p. 22 lines 4-5). They comprised a white turban pierced with eagle feathers, and skins of white lynx, white wolf and *stag gzig gung gsum* ("tiger, leopard and another kind of wild cat").

le mig dmar were religious masters, the activity for which they were granted these signs of distinction was exclusively secular. Even the term adopted to describe these insignia (*che rtags*) echoes closely the marks of distinction given to members of various clans by the sPu rgyal Bod *lha sras btsan po*-s (see, e.g., *lDe'u Jo sras chos 'byung* p. 112 lines 8-16). This is the closest the sources get to making of the *bya ru* a symbol of religion and secularism, with secular symbolism being preponderant in these cases.

On the issue of its meaning, one can conclude that there are literary indications of the *bya ru* as a secular implement long predating dKar ru's attribution of the crown to kings of Zhang zhung.

### *Morphologies*

A passage formulated in a similar way in several Bon po sources—and best expressed in Shar rdza's *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod*—which relates in mythical terms the appearance of the Khyung po clan in Zhang zhung is useful for establishing that, in the traditional conception, the unusual “bird horns” are proper to male Garūda-s.<sup>11</sup>

In order to explore the features of these headdresses with Garūda horns and speculate on how zoomorphic the various types of *bya ru* crowns worn by those kings of Zhang zhung actually were, I will go through the descriptions before dealing with the accounts of dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin

<sup>11</sup> *Legs bshad rin po che'i gter mdzod* (p. 148 line 17-p. 147 line 4) has an articulated account of the event: “Dam pa Khyung gi gdung rabs dngos ni / Kun tu bzang po'i sprul pa Rig snang 'od kyi rgyal po zhes bya bas / 'gro ba'i don la dgongs nas sku gsung thugs las sprul pa'i bya khyung gsum yas mar 'phur nas Zhang zhung gi yul Kha yug Me tog mdzes pa'i tshal la bab / de la Zhang zhung gi mi rnams ngo mtshar skyes nas mthong ma myong ba'i 'dab chags zer ba la rgan po kha cig na re / rwa co 'dug pas khyung pho yin 'dug zer / der khyung gsum dbyings su 'phur nas song ba'i shul tu bltas pas spar mo sa la reg pa'i drod rlang las sgong nga (p. 147) dkar nag ser khra bzahir 'dril ba brdol ba'i nang nas mtshan dang ldan pa'i khye'u re re byung ba'i ming yang Khyung po zhes btags te / che ba Khyung dkar Thog la 'bar / de 'og Khyung ser lHa khyung / de 'og Khyung 'Phags khra mo / chung ba Khyung nag Mu Khyung rgyan zhes grags / /”; “As for the actual lineage of the noble Khyung po, three *khyung*, the body, speech and mind emanations of Rig snang 'od kyi rgyal po, the manifestation of Kun tu bzang po, flew down from space, for the sake of benefiting mankind. They landed at Zhang zhung Kha yug Me tog mdzes pa'i tshal (“grove”, i.e. “settlement”). The people of Zhang zhung were astonished. They said they had never seen birds like those. Indeed an elder remarked: “They have horns, so they must be male *khyung*-s (Khyung pho)”. On inspecting the place from where the three *khyung* birds flew away, on the spot the [birds] had touched with their claws, [they saw that] four eggs ripening from the vapour of the heat, (p. 147)—white, black, golden and multicoloured—were generated. Each of the handsome infants who appeared from them was named Khyung po. They were named [as follows]: the eldest, Khyung dkar Thog la 'bar; the next one, Khyung ser lHa khyung; the next one, Khyung 'Phags khra mo, and the youngest, Khyung nag Mu khyung rgyan”.

chen in full. The descriptions of the *bya ru-s* are more detailed in the list of eighteen than in that of eight which has just a few significant additions, so I will concentrate on the former and add the latter in cases of divergence.

- The three kings ruling from Gangs Ti se respectively wore a *bya ru* made of pure (*gu lang*) gold (*gu lang gser gyi bya ru*);<sup>12</sup> another with a Garūda depiction between its horns (*rlabs chen khyung gi bya ru*, a *bya ru* “with an imposing Garūda”) and a third one in crystal with a depiction of a heron (*kang ka shel gyi bya ru*).<sup>13</sup>

- Two of the kings ruling from Khyung lung respectively wore a radiant jewelled *bya ru* (*rin chen 'od kyi bya ru*), another one emitting a rainbow radiance (*gzha' tshon 'od kyi bya ru*), and the third a crown made of mother-of-pearl (*un chen dung gis bya ru*—*un chen* seemingly refers to a kind of mother-of-pearl—while the list of eight has rather the king of Khyung lung wearing a *rin chen 'od kyi bya ru*, which is more intelligible).

- Both kings ruling from Pu mar hring wore radiant *bya ru-s*, one made of coral (?)<sup>14</sup> (*bya ru 'od kyi bya ru*), and the other made of gold and silver decorations on iron (*phra men 'od kyi bya ru*); (the list of eight has one ruler wearing a *rin chen 'od kyi bya ru*).

- The kings ruling from Tsi na wore radiant *bya ru-s*, one in the iron used to make the typically Bon po hollow cymbals (? , *zom shang lcags kyi bya ru*),<sup>15</sup> and one radiant with flames (*me dpung 'od kyi bya ru*). This contrasts with the list of rulers associated with 'Dul ba which says that the rulers of sPos ri ngad ldan wore the same *bya ru*, the two ruling from sPos ri ngad ldan a *lcags kyi bya ru* and the one from Dum pa tshal in Tsi na'i shod a radiant *bya ru* made of turquoise (*ga ljang 'od kyi bya ru*; *ga ljang*: “turquoise” according to Nam mkha'i nor bu, *Zhang Bod lo rgyus Ti se'i 'od n.* 142 on p. 164).

- The two kings ruling from Da rog respectively wore an iron *bya ru* with solar disc and another radiant one with lunar disc, both in crystal (*nyi shel lcags kyi bya ru* and *zla shel 'od kyi bya ru*).

<sup>12</sup> *Gu lang* brings to mind the famous *Gu lang gser kha* in g.Yas ru byang/eastern Byang thang. There are references to the frequentation of this gold mine especially during *bstan pa phyi dar*. One proverbial episode describes a mature gNyo lo tsa ba, a very young Mar pa lo tsa ba and others extracting gold from there in order to finance their journey to India in search of the Noble Religion (*Kha rag gNyo kyi gdung rabs* (f. 2b line 2-3): “gNyo, who was fifty-six, was the oldest. rJe Mar pa, who was seventeen, was the youngest. Twenty children of Tibet went to India. They stayed for many days at the place called La stod Cung pa sa. Then they went to *Gu lang gser kha* to search for gold”).

<sup>13</sup> Nam mkha'i nor bu (ibid. n. 136 on p. 164) decodes *kang ka* as crystal, but such a reading is redundant because the crown is already said to have been made of crystal (*shel gyi bya ru*).

<sup>14</sup> Nam mkha'i nor bu (*Zhang Bod lo rgyus Ti se'i 'od p.* 81 line 10) corrects *bya ru* into *byi ru*.

<sup>15</sup> *Zom shang* is decoded by Nam mkha'i nor bu (ibid. n. 138 on p. 164) as “iron” in the language of Zhang chung. The presence of *zom shang* in the description of that crown would then be pleonastic, given that it was a *lcags kyi bya ru*.

- The two kings ruling from rTa sgo wore radiant *bya ru* made of *zo dmar* (what kind of red [*dmar*] material [*zo*] is it?) and *baidurya* respectively (*zo dmar 'od kyi bya ru* and *baidur 'od kyi bya ru*).
- The king ruling from Kha sgyor wore a radiant *bya ru* made of turquoise (*ga ljang 'od kyi bya ru*; see Nam mkha'i nor bu, *ibid.* n. 141 on p. 164).
- The king ruling from Kha yug wore a radiant *bya ru* with an *utpala* flower (*utpala 'od kyi bya ru*).
- The king ruling from La dwags wore a *bya ru* with a *dbal* (“pinnacle”?, “blade”?) in meteoric iron (*gnam lcags dbal gyi bya ru*).
- The king ruling from Ru thog wore a radiant *bya ru* made of *enda* (*enda 'od kyi bya ru*), a kind of precious stone (according to Nam mkha'i nor bu, *ibid.* n. 140 on p. 164). This is *indra* [*ni la*] in my view, hence his crown was made of emerald.

The headdresses all have *bya ru*-s upon them, but vary considerably in their material and implements. Indeed not a single *bya ru* worn by the rulers classified as eighteen is the same. The presence of horns in the headgear of the *bya ru can* kings is, in almost every case, its only zoomorphic feature. Only two *bya ru* are entirely zoomorphic. They are those defined as *rlabs chen khyung gi bya ru* and *kang ka shel gyi bya ru* (seemingly the full depictions of an imposing male Garūda and of the kind of migratory heron which is still found quite widely in the Himalaya, the Tibetan plateau and India despite ecological damage). They were worn in the list of eighteen by Zil gnon rgyal po and Hri do gyer spungs rgyal po respectively, who both ruled from Gar ljang g.Yu lo ljong pa'i rdzong mkhar in front of Gangs Ti se.

It was but natural that the allusion to the presence of Garūda horns on these crowns primarily attracted the attention of Tibetan savants of the past and present as well as western Tibetologists. I wish to stress here another feature of this headgear which is not secondary: the headdress of ten of the eighteen *bya ru can* kings radiated with light, a characteristic found in the crowns of Indo-Iranic rulers of the North-West.

#### *Coins from North-West India*

A first point of departure from the limitations in the understanding of dKar ru's accounts is to attempt an investigation of the crowns worn by the kings ruling in North-West India during different periods, given the contiguity with Zhang zhung. One should not exclusively look for zoomorphic crowns because the headgear had other features besides the

Garūda horns.<sup>16</sup> A search into numismatics is compulsory to detect traces of royal representations of the ancient kings of the Indo-Iranic borderlands, and shows that various monarchs had zoomorphic crowns. They belonged to dynasties of the Indo-Iranic borderlands often quite far apart in terms of cultural background and period of flourish.

This exploration has intrinsic limitations—and thus is attempted only briefly here—because the *bya ru* originally was a symbol of spiritual attainment and its transfer to a lay milieu may not support an assimilation to the crowns of the Indo-Iranic rulers, which, despite having manifest religious implications, fully belong to the secular sphere.

Emphasis on zoomorphic crowns is detectable as early as the Indo-Greek kings of Bactria during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century b. CE,<sup>17</sup> and since that time kings of the Indo-Iranic borderlands are depicted wearing crowns with animal ornamentations. No depictions of rulers with horned headgear are found among the coinage that has been unearthed during excavations with one possible exception which depicts an unidentified male personage and not necessarily a ruler.<sup>18</sup>

Winged crowns were much worn by Sassanid kings. They were sometimes full ornithomorphic depictions, the closest in conception to the insignia worn by the lords of Zhang zhung, but noticeably without horns (see, for instance, the coins of Hormisdas (Hormazd) II in F.D.J. Paruk, *Sāsānian Coins* p. 88-90, plate IX and table V). However it is far from

<sup>16</sup> Stang, “Arabic Sources on Amdo and A Note on Gesar of gLing” (p. 16-17) mentions the two horned forerunners of Islam. Alexander the Great is called “two-horned” (“Dū I-qarnain”), reminiscent of the *bya ru* worn by kings of Zhang zhung. Those considered his descendants, the Indo-Greek kings, wore zoomorphic crowns.

<sup>17</sup> Hellenistic coins depicting on the obverse the Indo-Greek king Demetrios (r. ca. 190 b. CE-171 b. CE) wearing an elephant scalp were struck at Balkh, Merv and other localities including North Afghanistan (Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage vol.1 The Indo-Greek and Their Early Antecedants*, Chapter Three: *The Expansion South of the Indu Kush* type 103). Some of them were overstruck by Phar, a lord seemingly of Iranian origin (ibid. type 122). The coins of another Indo-Greek ruler, Lysias (r. ca. 145 b. CE-135 b. CE), an associate of Eucratides south of the Indu Kush, are similar to those of Demetrios (ibid. vol. 2 *The Apogee of the Indo-Greeks*, Chapter Five: *The Apogee of the Indo-Greek Realm* type 259). Choresmian coins show an anonymous king wearing a crown with a lion head on the obverse (50 CE-500 CE; ibid. vol. 3 *Contemporary of the Indo-Greeks*, Chapter Nine: *Some Contemporary Coin Series Struck in Iran, Afghanistan and Turkestan* type 499). The coins of the Parthian ruler Phraates II (ca. 38 b. CE-2 b. CE) show on the obverse his diademed head with an eagle in the background (ibid. vol. 5 *Establishment of the Scythians in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Chapter Thirteen: *Parthian Coinage Struck in the Eastern Provinces* type 644).

<sup>18</sup> Coins of the Indo-Greek ruler Agathocles who reigned in present-day North Pakistan ca. 171 b. CE-160 b. CE show a standing male figure wearing long garments and boots, and holding a sword in the right hand and a hook in the left. The peculiarity of the image is its headdress which is apparently winged and has a pair of big, downward-turning horns (see Mitchiner, ibid. vol. 2 *The Apogee of the Indo-Greeks* Chapter 4: *The Greek Conquest of Pakistan and the Revolt of Eucradites* type 149).

proven that there was any common ground between the Sassanid crowns and the *bya ru*, owing to the difficulty in ascertaining the period during which the *bya ru can* kings ruled, if indeed they ever existed. My few historical observations at the end of this paper show that a tentative placement, if plausible, is beset by doubts and problems. They suggest that the Sassanians are too late to have influenced the court customs of the *bya ru can* kings.<sup>19</sup>

The winged headcrowns found in the dominions of the Western Turks during their control of areas such as Balkh and Gandhara are even later (those jointly struck by the Western Turk prince Vasudeva and the Sassanian viceroy Mandarshah, or else those of the Turkic Vajara Vakhu Devah and a later prince of Balkh; see Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and Their Values Non Islamic States and Western Colonies AD 600-1979*, Medieval Northern and Central India p. 26).

Judging from the extant material, it would seem that the *bya ru* was peculiar to Zhang chung, but the available hoards of coins cannot possibly exhaust the numismatic universe of the Indo-Iranic borderlands and thus any assessment is per force inconclusive.<sup>20</sup>

The other main feature typical of most of the *bya ru* crowns—that of being radiant with light—is shared by the crowns of several Indo-Iranic kings from the same broad period in which the kings of Zhang chung bearing horned crowns purportedly lived. The luminous feature of the helmets of the Indo-Iranic kings is represented by a filigree/relief dotted pattern around their crown. The radiant feature of the Zhang chung crowns finds parallels as early as the Indo-Scythians and Indo-Parthians (see, for one, the coins of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares in Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage vol. 8: The Indo-Parthians and Their Kushan Neighbours*, Chapter Twenty-three: *The Rise of the Indo-Parthians* type 1070).

One can provisionally assume that the crowns of these monarchs in the Indo-Iranic borderlands were indeed zoomorphic and radiant like those of the *bya ru can* kings, but lacked the horns of the Zhang chung rulers.

The *rlabs chen khyung gi bya ru* and *kang ka shel gyi bya ru*—apparently a prerogative of kings residing at Gangs Ti se—are thus the nearest in conception to the zoomorphic scalp on the head of some Indo-Greek kings

<sup>19</sup> In my *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang* (p. 163 and p. 425) I mentioned the influence of the Sassanian court customs upon local traditions in an array of Asian countries including Tibet, but I did not say that the *bya ru* of the kings of Zhang chung were so derived. I indeed refer there to the persistence of these royal manners in later periods of Tibetan history. This applies to the late Sassanid rulers such as Peroz who still wore winged crowns (see Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and Their Values Non Islamic States and Western Colonies AD 600-1979*, *Medieval Northern and Central India* p. 20-22).

<sup>20</sup> Dan Martin ("Birdhorns" p. 118-137) mentions paintings of personages with decorations resembling horns in the niches of Bamiyan.



(mainly elephant heads with trunk) or Choresmian rulers (lion-headed), as shown by their coinage.<sup>21</sup>

Other features of the *bya ru*, for instance the material of which they were made (metals, such as meteoric iron, simple iron, pure gold etc., and precious stones such as turquoise, crystal, coral [?], *baidurya* etc.), remain perforce elusive partly because of the linguistic difficulties of decoding the passages which describe them and partly because they are problematic to ascertain on coins.

Two or three same crown insignia of the sPos ri ngad ldan rulers (see below) are a sign that, in some areas of Zhang zhung, kings would have borne regalia specific to their dynastic line. This is somewhat confirmed by the above mentioned crowns of the *bya ru can* kings reigning from Gangs Ti se, which were fully zoomorphic, a feature not shared by the headgear of the other rulers of Zhang zhung.

#### *Royal geography*

dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag* holds that the *bya ru can* kings shared the same kind of insignia, distinguishable by some variants, but ruled from different capitals in Zhang zhung.<sup>22</sup> Seen from the viewpoint of the territories comprised in the dominions of the *bya ru can* kings, the two lists differ significantly.

The lands composing Zhang zhung according to the list of the eighteen *bya ru can* kings are the areas of Gangs Ti se and Khyung lung; Pu mar hring; Tsi na; Kha yug; Kha sgyor; the areas of Da rog/Ta rog mtsho and sTa sgo ; La dwags and Ru thog.

<sup>21</sup> The transmission of Phur pa'i Bon (dPal ldan tshul khriims, *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 107 line 17-p. 108 line 8), originated in 'Og min, was imparted by gShen rab mi bo along a lineage which included, in the fifth generation after him, a master who wore Garuda attire (dBal Bon khyung slag can, lit. "dBal Bon wearing a Garuda skin")—possibly a dress made of feathers (ibid. p. 107 line 22). This lineage is conspicuous because some of its members had zoomorphic outfits (tiger and bird [*ti ti me sic for ti ti re/ri*, "partridge"?]). Judging from a calculation by *mi rabs*, if the lineages of the alleged 'Dul ba diffusion in Zhang zhung and Phur pa'i Bon are not mythical, the use of Garuda symbols, in this case as a sign of spiritual achievements, would have predated the reference to the first *bya ru can* king. The feather attire worn by dBal Bon is an early sign that, in the Bon po perspective, a spiritual value was attributed to anything pertaining to the Garuda and continued to be so for a remarkably long time after the Bon po literature ceased to document the use of the horned crown among the royalty. In perceptibly later times, Buddhists too made use of the *bya ru* as a symbol of attainment (see, for instance, the case of Ling gor Cha ru [sic for Bya ru], a disciple of Mi la ras pa; *Nyang ral chos 'byung* p. 493 line 4).

<sup>22</sup> For a reconnaissance of sites in Zhang zhung, including those associated by dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen with the *bya ru can* kings, see Bellezza, "Territorial Characteristics of the Pre-Buddhist Zhang-zhung Paleocultural Entity", forthcoming. I am grateful to him for giving me a copy of his article.

The lands of Zhang zhung mentioned in the list of eight are the area of Gangs ri chen po; Pu mar hring; Tsi na'i yul (centred on sPos ri ngad ldan) and Tsi na'i shod; Kha yug, plus the area of Khyung lung, and Ru thog.

The discrepancies between the two lists of the *bya ru can* kings are that Tsi na'i shod (Dum pa tshal) is missing from the longer one, and Da rog/Ta rog, sTa sgo, Kha sgyor and La dwags are missing from the shorter one. But beyond these peculiarities that obviously descend from a comparison between the two lists, it is the meaning that the lands assume in the territorial layout of the kingdom that is significant.

If one looks at the alleged diffusion of Bon po 'Dul ba in Zhang zhung as gleaned from the reference to the territories in which it purportedly occurred, one realises that it would have been restricted to a limited area in comparison with the extent of lands ruled (concomitantly or subsequently) by the eighteen *bya ru can* kings. Religious diffusion, if ever it actually took place in the form described in 'Dul ba gling grags, is not a criterion with which to assess secular divisions of power. The two lists of *bya ru can* kings seemingly indicate that Zhang zhung had a different territorial extent in as much as the kingdom is larger in the classification into eighteen rulers. There are no clues as to whether the different extents of the kingdom are due to the fact that not all the kings in the list of eighteen, who are said to have ruled over additional areas of the region, were *chos rgyal* like those in the list of eight and thus were not included in the latter, or whether the kingdom actually underwent an expansion into neighbouring territories such as Nag tshang and other areas in central Byang thang on its eastern border and La dwags on the north-western border.

One cannot even say that the *bya ru can* kings formed a confederation, implying some form of balanced or unbalanced equal standing, or whether they obeyed a hierarchy in which Khyung lung and sPos ri ngad ldan, said to have been *grong khyer chen po*-s, were the major centres in the region. Even the term *grong khyer chen po* does not allow one to conclude that they were the centres of power—possibly the two capitals—as they may only have been major places of cultural aggregation. Castles must have exercised that function, and the localities defined *tshal*-s in the list of eight rulers must have been the major religious centres.<sup>23</sup>

Going then by a simply territorial criterion based on the principles of centrality and contiguity, one could suggest that the regions enumerated in the list of eight rulers were considered as the core lands of the kingdom

---

<sup>23</sup> The monastic centres allegedly founded during that phase are called *tshal*, with the exception of Dum pa tshal (a secular centre). In its most basic meaning *tshal* stands for a vegetated locality (hence an oasis?), apt for survival, but here it is used in the sense of a grove where spiritual beauty makes natural beauty meaningful.

(Zhang chung khri sde).<sup>24</sup> The areas of Da rog/Ta rog—bordering on Tsi na to the north of the latter—and of sTa sgo, La dwags and marginally Ru thog, the latter rather more for political reasons than territorial, would have been more peripheral. The dual nature of Ru thog should be stressed because, although contiguous to the territorial core of Zhang chung and no more distant from Khyung lung or Gangs Ti se than, for instance, Tsi na'i shod Dum pa tshal, it was a separate (but related) centre of power at least during the last period of the Zhang chung kingdom (see Vitali, "Fragments of Zhang chung's secular history: the Lig myi hrya dynasty and its "destruction"", forthcoming).

According to dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag*, Khyung lung is not a single site but an area of limited extent, composed by the contiguous localities of rNgul/dNgul mkhar and Khyung chen spungs pa'i ri. The relative position of Khyung lung and Kha yug is often confused in the Bon po sources. Khyung lung, being on the border of Kha yug, is believed to be part of it in several cases, and in others outside it, but the former understanding is preponderant. dKar ru keeps the two areas separate, and thus he propounds for the latter solution.

The identification of Kha sgyor is more doubtful. bsTan 'dzin rnam dag suggests that Kha sgyor corresponded with the area of Gangs Ti se and the lakes.<sup>25</sup> I am unable to propose an assessment of my own and thus to adopt a constructive approach. It should be noted that the distinction in the list of eighteen between the *bya ru can* rulers who reigned from Gangs Ti se (one in the list of eight and three in the list of eighteen) and the one ruling from Kha sgyor does not rest on close contiguity, as in the case of Khyung lung and Kha yug, because the mountain and lakes would have fallen well within Kha sgyor according to bsTan 'dzin rnam dag. It is also possible that Gangs Ti se was kept separate owing to its prominence.

The note accompanying the reference to Pu mar hring which says that this territory was centred on La ngag mtsho helps to identify it with the western sector of Pu hrang stod. It is somewhat conspicuous that there is no trace of Pu hrang smad among the lands of Zhang chung associated with the *bya ru can* rulers despite the fact that its lower elevation makes it more fertile and wealthy, thus more hospitable. But the catalogues of lands of Zhang chung in *Ti se'i dkar chag* show that, with the exception of La dwags, the lands ruled by the *bya ru can* kings were located at an higher

<sup>24</sup> In the list of eighteen, dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen's *Ti se'i dkar chag* makes use of the Zhang chung khri sde bco bryad and yul chen bco bryad concept, which at least in the case of the list of the eighteen *bya ru can* kings is a stereotype, because they ruled, as said above, over ten territories at best. This is a recurring cliché in the *dkar chag*, for dKar ru applies the same number to 'Dzam gling itself, and mentions the 'Dzam gling gi yul chen bco bryad (ibid. p. 583 line 7).

<sup>25</sup> bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, g. *Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i byung khung nyung bsdus* (p. 622 line 1): "Zhang chung Kha skyor ni/ Gangs ri mtsho gsum gyi rgyud du yin tshod/"; "[I] guess that Zhang chung Kha skyor was the area of the Gangs ri mtsho gsum".

altitude on the plateau than in neighbouring lands giving way to the Himalayan range.

*Lands of Zhang zhung in the lists of  
the bya ru can kings and sPyi spungs khro 'grel*

It is worth making a brief comparison with a Bon po territorial classification of the strongholds of Zhang zhung not associated with the *bya ru can* kings. Three of the four *dbus kyi mkhar* mentioned in the classifications in many Bon po sources—the late 14<sup>th</sup> century *sPyi spungs khro 'grel* by sKyabs ston Rin chen 'od zer being possibly the earliest, neatly compacted by bsTan 'dzin rnam dag in his *'Bel gtam snying po*—correspond with castles inhabited by *bya ru can* kings.<sup>26</sup> They are Gangs Ti se g.Yu lo mkhar, Khyung lung and sPos ri ngad ldan.

Gad kyi Byi ba mkhar, the additional castle in the *dbus kyi mkhar bzhi*, probably does not correspond with the *bya ru can* king's residence sTag chen rngam pa'i yongs rdzogs mkhar in the vicinity of La ngag mtsho, but they seem to have been in the same zone. It remains unclear whether the area of Gad—comprising Byi ba mkhar and gSer gyi bya skyibs—east of La ngag mtsho, is believed to have been part of Pu mar hring, Kha yug or the area of Gangs Ti se. A major discrepancy concerns the last of the four *dbus kyi mkhar*, sTag la mkhar situated in Pu hrang smad, a region to which no castle of any of these kings is attributed.

<sup>26</sup> bsTan 'dzin rnam dag, *g.Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i byung khungs nyung bsdu* (p. 620 lines 6-p. 621 line 6): "The four central (p. 621) castles were Khyung lung rngul mo mkhar on a peak in eastern Gu ge; Pu hreng sTag la mkhar in the centre of Pu hreng; Ma pang sPos mo mkhar to the east of [mtsho] Ma pang; and La shang g.yu lo mkhar to the north of Gangs ri [Ti se]. Some include Gad kyi Byi ba mkhar in the enumeration, which is on the border of the upper side of Gro shod. The six regional forts were Dwang ra Khyung chen rdzong in Byang [thang] smad; Ra bzhi Seng ge rdzong in Byang [thang] stod, corresponding with the land north of Ru thog; Mang yul sTag mo rdzong [note: sPyi rong, sic for sKyi rong] in lHo smad; Se rib 'Brug mo rdzong in lHo stod, [situated] in upper Glo Dol po; rBal te rTa mchog rdzong in the west; and Gyim rngul Glang chen rdzong in the east". In *sNga rabs Bod kyi byung ba brjod pa'i bel gtam snying po* (p. 28 line 17-p. 29 line 5) bsTan 'dzin rnam dag revises his previous assessments, possibly on the basis of sKyabs ston's *sPyi spungs Khro 'grel*, for he says: "There were four castles in the central region and four regional forts, which enjoyed great fame as royal residences of Zhang zhung. The four castles were Khyung lung dngul mkhar, sPu hring sTag la mkhar, sMe Shang Byi ba mkhar and Ma pang sPos mo (p. 29) mkhar plus Gad kyi Byi ba mkhar. As for the latter, on p. 59 of sKyabs ston's *Khro 'grel* it is said: "Among the five castles, Gad kyi byi ba mkhar has *g.yag* and *rkyang* skulls hanging from the ceilings. This is where all the *rig 'dzin-s* gathered". Many other castles are said to have existed, such as Kha yug 'Dam khar, Gu ge rTsa hring mkhar and Byang gi Ra bzhi mkhar. The four regional forts were Dwang ra Khyung chen rdzong, Se rib 'Brug mo rdzong, Ru thog Seng ge rdzong and Mang yul sTag mo rdzong. It is said that there many others, such as sBil ti Hrang rdzong".

Three of the four *phyogs kyi rdzong*-s mentioned by sKyabs ston do not correspond with the castles of the rulers in the more peripheral areas (Da rog/Ta rog, sTa sgo and La dwags). Ru thog is the only shared territory, but rNam rdzong mkhar, the castle attributed to the *bya ru can* king of the region, does not correspond with the fort of Ru thog included in the groups of *phyogs kyi rdzong*, namely Seng ge rdzong. Given the alleged antiquity of the eight *bya ru can* kings linked with alleged 'Dul ba activities (see below), one may have to opine that rNam rdzong mkhar should be seen as an earlier residence.

The extent of Zhang chung conveyed by the positions of the *phyogs kyi rdzong*-s of sKyabs ston's *sPyi spungs khro 'grel* and its imitators is considerably greater than the larger conception of territories of the kingdom in the two lists of *bya ru can* kings. The list of eighteen adds Ru thog, Byang thang and La dwags to the core of the kingdom. sKyabs ston includes the more distant territories of Mang yul, Se rib and sBal ti within the boundaries of Zhang chung in the east, south and west respectively.<sup>27</sup>

Does the dissimilar demarcation of the kingdom in these Bon po sources refer to different historical phases? Or is it the outcome of different criteria, based on cultural diffusion rather than sovereignty/political control?

The increase in number of the Zhang chung regions in the list of eighteen kings vis-à-vis the list of eight in dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag* cannot be taken as evidence that the kingdom had undergone a territorial expansion. The notion that Da rog/Ta rog, sTa sgo, Kha sgyor and La dwags were territories annexed after the reigns of the first eight *bya ru can* kings should be dismissed. If bsTan 'dzin rnam dag's location of Kha sgyor is accepted, this would have been an integral area around Gangs Ti se and the lakes that linked Kha yug, Pu mar hring and Tsi na, territories in the core of the kingdom. So at least for Kha sgyor this hypothesis is untenable. Otherwise, collateral royal lineages would have been formed in areas contiguous to the major centres such as Gangs Ti se.

To sum up the geography of Zhang chung according to the lists of *bya ru can* kings:

- Gangs Ti se was possibly part of the region known as Kha sgyor;
- The small area of Khyung lung marked the border between Gu ge and Kha yug;
- Pu mar hring was the western sector of Pu hrang stod (west of Ma pang g.yu mtsho);

<sup>27</sup> With the distinction between areas in the centre and at the periphery in mind, it should be noted that the extent of the territories said to have been controlled by the various *bya ru can* kings were drastically different. Regions such as Tsi na, Ru thog or Nag tshang were vast in comparison with Kha yug, Kha sgyor or Pu ma hring, but the latter probably fell within the wider geographical notion of Zhang chung khri sde.

- Tsi na was Gro shod;
- Da rog/Ta rog yul (including the lake of the same name) was the area to the north of Tsi na, bordering on Nag tshang in the east, possibly Kha sgyor in the west and Tsi na in the south;
- sTa sgo'i yul was Nag tshang;
- Kha sgyor could have been the eastern part of Pu hrang stod, inclusive of Gangs ri mtsho gsum;
- Kha yug (inclusive of Preta puri) was the area with borders demarcated by Khyung lung in the west and La ngag mtsho in the east;
- La dag (so spelled) possibly corresponded with the present-day region of the same name;
- Ru thog was centred on the locality still known by the same name; it extended up to the La dwags border in the west, towards north-western Byang thang in the east (inclusive of the area of the gold mines) and towards the Onion Range in the north.

*The lists of the bya ru can kings: myth or history?  
A classification of these rulers*

*The alleged 'Dul ba Bon masters*

Although *'Dul ba gling grags* has no trace of the *bya ru can kings*, this source deals with the various generations of masters said to have diffused *'Dul ba Bon* in Zhang zhung and, according to dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag*, to have received the support of the contemporary generations of these kings. Several names in this lineage differ between the two sources, but their temporal sequence is substantially the same:

<i>'Dul ba gling grags</i> (p. 121 line 3-p. 123 line 3 and p. 125 line 3):	<i>dKar ru's Ti se'i dkar chag</i> (p. 573 line 7- p. 578 line 5):
Mu cho ldem drug	Mu cho ldem drug
rTsug gshen rgyal ba	
Drang srong rgyal ba	
rTsug sras rMa lo	
Khri lde Gung grags	
dMu tsa tra he pe	
Khri lde 'od po	Khri lde 'od po
lHang lhang rtsug phud	
Thar pa yid rings	Dang ba yid ring
Thugs dkar ye shes	
Gu rum btsan po	Gu rum gtsug phud
'Od la gsal 'bar	
rDzu 'phrul ye shes	rDzu 'phrul ye shes
Ye shes tshul khrim	Ye shes tshul khrim

g.Yung drung tshul khrim Ga chu/ 'Pham shi/ Ya gong and lDe btsun   Co Ye shes	g.Yung drung tshul khrim Ye shes rgyal ba [Pam shi] dPal gyi dbang phyug
---	--

*Bya ru can kings and alleged 'Dul ba Bon masters*

A rough idea of the relative positioning of these Bon po masters and the *bya ru can* kings can be had from the teacher-disciple succession in the transmission of 'Dul ba Bon in 'Dul ba *gling grags*, and more cursorily in dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag*, which has the merit of linking the two groups:

<i>bya ru can</i> kings	alleged 'Dul ba masters
1. Zhang chung srid pa'i rgyal po Khri wer La rje (interval corresponding with the preaching of lHang lhang gtsug phud)	Khri lde 'od po
2. sPung rgyung gyer gyi rgyal po (interval corresponding with the preaching of Thugs dkar ye shes)	Thar pa yid rings
3. Gu wer nor gyi rgyal po (interval corresponding with the preaching of 'Od la gsal 'bar)	Gu rum btsan po
4. sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem	rDzu 'phrul ye shes
5. Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po	Ye shes tshul khrim
6. Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po	g.Yung drung tshul khrim
7. Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po	gTsug phud tshul khrim
8. sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem	Ye shes rgyal ba

The first three in the list of eight *bya ru can* kings are said to have patronised each alternate generation of 'Dul ba masters. The second half of the list of these kings shows that sponsorship by the rulers purportedly became continuous.

Incidentally, the list of the 'Dul ba masters associated with the *bya ru can* kings is incomplete in *Ti se'i dkar chag* if one compares it with 'Dul ba *gling grags*. Several masters in the segment allegedly active in sTag gzig are entirely absent. dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen begins his list of 'Dul ba proponents with Khri lde 'od po, the disciple of Mu tsa tra he pe, because he is credited with bringing 'Dul ba from the Indo-Iranic borderlands to Zhang chung.

dPal ldan tshul khrim (*bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 219 line 3-p. 221 line 10) defines the lineage of 'Dul ba Bon up to rDzu 'phrul ye shes as the *sTag gzig gi mkhan rgyud*. From his disciple Ye shes tshul khrim up to gTsug phud tshul khrim it is called the *Zhang chung gi mkhan rgyud*. The lineage of Zhang chung mNga' ris descended from his disciple Ye shes rgyal ba, and that of dBus gTsang from Ya gong.

The lineage of the *'Dul ba* masters of Zhang zhung in *'Dul ba gling grags* is only partially more complete. It omits the last proponent before monastic discipline purportedly suffered a setback in the kingdom.<sup>28</sup> Thus

<sup>28</sup> *'Dul ba gling grags* (p. 121 line 3-p. 122 line 3 and p. 125 line 3): “De’i mkhan po Mu chos khriims kyis sde bzung nas rang ’byung mchod rten bzhi’i rtsa bar khriims phog/ ’Dul ba rtsa bor bzung/ de’i mkhan po rTsug gshen rgyal ba/ ri khrod gcig pu la bzhugs/ de’i mkhan po Drang srong rgyal ba/ de’i mkhan po rTsug sras rMa lo/ de’i mkhan po Khri lde gung grags/ de gsum gi bka’ zhung snyan bshad kyis sde bzung/ de’i mkhan po dMu tsa tra he pe/ brag rgon bka’ thub kyis sde bzung/ de’i mkhan po drang srong Khri lde ’od po Mu cho’i stan pa bzung/ bshad snyan gyi sde bzung/ de’i mkhan po drang srong lHang lhang rtsug phud kyis/ ’Dul ba rgyud drug gi yig sna btab/ ’Dul ba rnam par ’byed pa’i sde mig tu mtshan btags/ khriims sde btsugs/ khriims ’chal ba kun gsos/ de’i mkhan po drang srong Thar pa yid rings/ mNgon pa sde bzhi la yig sna btab/ bshad nyan gyi sde btsugs/ mNgon pa dri med gsal (p. 122) ba’i lung zhes su grags/ de’i mkhan po drang srong Thugs dkar ye shes/ las khriims byang bu bzhi bcu la phyag len mdzad/ Las khriims gal ba rig pa’i sgron ma zhes su grags/ de’i mkhan pu drang srong Gu rum btsan pos gong ma’i rjes su bzung/ stan pa’i gnyer mdzad/ de’i mkhan pu ’Od la gsal ’bar/ dus chen gyi sde bzung/ de’i mkhan pu drang srong rDzu ’phrul ye shes kyis rdzu ’phrul stobs kyis sTag gzig gi yul ’Ol mo lung ring su byon/ rang ’byung shel gyi mchod rten nang nas/ ston pa’i gdung Sha ri ram la rGya gdan drangs/ gzi’i ga’u ru gsal nas/ dngul zhun ma la khyung mo byas na stan pa’i rten du bzhag/ de nas Ye shes tshul khriims kyis/ rDzu ’phrul ye shes la lung bzhi bslangs pa la/ lung dang po sde bzhi/ gnyis pa bskyangs thabs lnga/ gsum pa yon tan drug/ bzhi pa mNgon pa bla med skor/ de ltar blangs nas gnas dang sde ru phye/ de’i mkhan pu g.Yung drung tshul khriims/ Brag dkar rtse rdzong la g.Yung drung lha rtse’i gas mkhar bzhengs/ khriims sde la gnas par byas/ de la mkhan pu bzhi byung ba la/ Ga chu rTsug phud rgyal mtshan/ Ya gong Ye shes rgyal mtshan/ ’Pham shi Pal gyi dbang phyug/ lDe btsun Rab gsal dang bzhi byung/ de bzhi’i ring la sde bzhi chen po bzhengs/ Ga chu Byang ’Dam (p. 123) shong sNar mo ljongs su/ g.Yung drung khri ’dul gyi lha khang bzhengs/ Bra nag rTa brgo sum lag tu/ Khri ’dus gsang ba’i dgon pa bzhengs/ Bon gyi ’khor lo skor/ Ya gong lHa sa Yer pa’i rlungs su bDud ’dul g.yung drung khriims gnas kyis lha khang bzhengs/ bdud po Bir rdong tshar bcad/ ’Pham shi La stod Gram pa ru/ Khri ’dus ’od kyis lha khang bzhengs/ nyan bshad rka bzhi Bon gyi stan pa mdzad/ lDe btsun gyis Ra sar g.Yung drung rol pa’i lha khang bzhengs/ g.Yas ru g.Yon ru ru gnas phran bcu gnyis rtsigs/ /”; “His (i.e. gShen rabs’s) disciple, Mu cho, ruled the monastic communities and imparted the law at the foot of a self-originated *mchod rten*. He mainly upkept *'Dul ba*. His disciple was rTsug gshen rgyal ba. He exclusively stayed at hermitages. His disciple was Drang srong rgyal ba. His disciple was rTsug sras rMa lo. His disciple was Khri lde gung grags. The latter three ruled the community practising austerities, [studying] the doctrine, teaching and listening. His disciple was dMu tsa tra he pe. He ruled the community practising austerities at a rock monastery. His disciple, drang srong Khri lde ’od po held the teachings of Mu cho. He ruled the community practising teaching and listening. His disciple drang srong lHang lhang rtsug phud composed the miscellaneous document on the six lineages of *'Dul ba*. The title *'Dul ba rnam par ’byed pa’i sde mig* was given to it. He established a monastic community. He restored the law that had degenerated. His disciple was drang srong Thar pa yid rings. He composed *mNgon pa sde bzhi* and founded a community of teaching and listening. The title *mNgon pa dri med gsal* (p. 122) *ba’i lung* was given to it. His disciple was drang srong Thugs dkar ye shes. He composed [a text] on the practice of the monastic observations (*las khriims*) [written] on forty wooden tablets. The title *Las khriims gal ba rig pa’i sgron ma* was given to it. His disciple, drang srong Gu rum btsan po, followed in the footsteps of his predecessors. He was a keeper of the teachings. His



one learns about Ye shes rgyal ba only from dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen's *Ti se'i dkar chag*.

The differences between the two texts indicate either that their authors did not draw information from the same tradition, or that dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen only deals with the alleged Bon po masters who were sponsored by the *bya ru can* kings while *'Dul ba gling grags* records a more complete list, including masters not known for their interaction with those local kings, and the foundation of monastic centres.

#### *The bya ru can kings of Gangs Ti se*

Khri wer La rje gser gyi bya ru can, the earliest ruler bearing the horned crown in the list of eight, which is conceived in temporal sequence, is given the appellative of Zhang zhung *srid pa'i rgyal po* ("lord of existence" or "lord of creation" of Zhang zhung). To my knowledge, no other *bya ru can* king is attributed the same title.<sup>29</sup> Is this a sign that, in the case of the *bya ru can* kings, Zhang zhung *srid pa'i rgyal po* identifies the first ruler of the group?

He is described as a contemporary of Khri lde 'od po, credited in dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 574 lines 1-7) with bringing *'Dul ba* from sTag gzig

---

disciple 'Od la gsal 'bar ruled the community of the holy celebrations. His disciple drang srong rDzu 'phrul ye shes, owing to the power of his miracles, went to sTag gzig 'Ol mo lung ring. From inside a self-originated *mchod rten* he extracted the relics of the *ston pa*, the Sha ri ram [from] rGya. Having displayed them in a *ga'u* made of *gzi*, he made a female *khyung* with melted silver to consolidate the teachings. Then, as for the the four instructions of rDzu 'phrul ye shes received by Ye shes tshul khirms, the first instruction was the four communities, the second the five methods of preserving [the monastic community], the third was the six qualities, and the fourth the cycle of the supreme *mNgon pa*. Having received them likewise, he opened [the door of] holy places and monastic communities. His disciple g.Yung drung tshul khirms built g.Yung drung lha rtse'i gsa mkhar at Brag dkar rtse rdzong. He firmly preserved the monastic communities. As for his four disciples, they were Ga chu rTsug phud rgyal mtshan, Ya gong Ye shes rgyal mtshan, 'Pham shi Pal gyi dbang phyug and lDe btsun Rab gsal, altogether four. During their time the four great communities were established. Ga chu built g.Yung drung khri 'dul gyi lha khang at Byang 'Dam (p. 123) shong sNar mo ljongs. He built Khri 'dus gsang ba'i dgon pa at Bra nag rTa brgo (so spelled) sum lag. He turned the wheel of Bon. Ya gong built bDud 'dul g.yung drung khirms gnas kyi lha khang at lHa sa Yer pa'i rlungs. He eradicated the demon with a fly head. 'Pham shi built Khri 'dus 'od kyi lha khang at La stod Gram pa. He promoted the instructions of Bon on teaching and listening, and the four austerities. lDe btsun built g.Yung drung rol pa'i lha khang at Ra sa. He built the twelve minor holy places in g.Yas ru and g.Yon ru". *Ibid.* (p. 125 line 3): "lDe btsun gyi mkhan pu Co Ye shes //"; "lDe btsun's disciple was Co Ye shes".

<sup>29</sup> Dagkar Namgyal Nyima, "Concise Analysis of Zhang zhung Terms in the Documents of Tun-huang" (p. 430-431) says that many kings of Zhang zhung are attributed the title of *srid pa'i rgyal po*. This frequency may be found especially in the case of the kings of the rMu/dMu dynasty, but does not apply, as I say in the text, to the *bya ru can* rulers.

to Zhang zhung. His castle, Gar ljang g.Yu lo mkhar rdzong, in front of the southern face of Gangs Ti se, is associated with the locality where, in the first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the 'Bri gung pa monastery of rGyang grags was founded by rdor 'dzin Ghu ya sgang pa.<sup>30</sup>

One passage of *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 554 line 7-p. 555 line 5) is useful to establish that the lineage of Khri wer La rje is considered by this source as the main one in the kingdom. It says that gshen chen po lDe bo gsung chen, an emanation of gShen rab mi bo, went to Gangs Ti se—defined as the Zhang zhung *yul gyi dbus dkyil*, the “centre of the land of Zhang zhung”—sPos ri ngad ldan and mtsho Mu le rgyud. He gave instructions to srid pa'i rgyal po Khri wer La rje gung (so spelled) lang gser gyi bya ru can and others. A temple, namely gsa khang Nor bu spungs rtse was built at this centre (i.e. the royal capital Gar ljang g.Yu lo mkhar rdzong). The temple, too, is thus placed in front of Gangs Ti se which, the same sentence says, was also the centre of lHo 'Dzam bu gling.

This would imply that the capital of Zhang zhung is situated by the *bya ru can* accounts at Gangs Ti se, and only subsequently at Khyung lung, and that the three *bya ru can* rulers who, according to *Ti se'i dkar chag*, reigned from their castle in front of the mountain could have been the supreme lords of the kingdom. But it is not known whether, according to dKar ru, they were contemporary with other kings wearing the *bya ru*, and thus no clue is given to ascertain whether others were subordinate to them. Indeed only one ruler with his seat at Gangs Ti se (Khri wer La rje) is included in the lineage of eight *bya ru can* kings who were active in some sort of (broken?) sequence, and the way they are classified may imply that the other seven *bya ru can* kings after him also enjoyed some type of sovereignty.

However, it seems doubtful that the seat of the main Zhang zhung *bya ru can* kings (Gangs Ti se, sPos ri ngad ldan, La ngag, Khyung lung, Kha yug, Dum pa tshal and Ru thog) was moved so often and its control changed hands so frequently in the course of a limited number of generations. These royal seats are likely to be mentioned in dKar ru's compilation of eight because of the alleged establishment of monastic centres in each of these areas, and, going by dKar ru's idea, it is probable that the hierarchy remained unchanged.

<sup>30</sup> dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 565 lines 2-5) has Khri wer La rje interact with gShen rab mi bo. This is in contradiction with the indications provided by the *dkar chag* itself that the same king was ruling when Khri lde 'od po brought 'Dul ba to Zhang zhung. Another reference to Khri wer La rje in *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 524 line 3-p. 525 line 5) is in relation with *gter ma*-s hidden by the *srid pa'i rgyal po* wearing the *gu lang gser gyi bya ru* with the collaboration of the Bon po Hri rtsa mu wer dkar po, and bound to be rediscovered by Dran pa nam mkha'. The *gu lang gser gyi bya ru* is the crown attributed exclusively to Khri wer La rje in dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag*.

It is more difficult to formulate suggestions concerning the seats of power of those *bya ru can* kings who are not linked with alleged 'Dul ba activities because dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen gives no explanation for grouping them together. Hypotheses as to why there is more than one king associated with the same locality in the list (Ti se, Khyung lung, sPos ri ngad ldan, Pu mar hring, Da rog/Ta rog and sTa sgo) would be gratuitous.

*The bya ru can kings of Tsi na*

The two courts in the land of Tsi na (one in Tsi na proper, the other in Tsi na'i shod) appearing in the list of eight, with their own rulers and individual secular and religious centres, apparently show that power in this land was divided into two halves comprising the territory later known as Gro shod, as dKar ru says in a note.

He says that the earliest of those rulers was Gu wer nor gyi rgyal po who reigned from the castle of gSer mkhar at Dum pa tshal in Tsi na'i shod, manifestly the secular seat in the area. He is credited with the patronage of the activity of Gung rum gtsug phud, the disciple of Dang ba yid ring (better spelled Thar pa yid rings by 'Dul ba gling grags), at Bye ma g.yung drung tshal. This shows that the border of the two areas of Tsi na is drawn not far from Bye ma g.yung drung, the sources of the rTa mchog kha babs.

Four different rulers of Tsi na sPos ri ngad ldan are recorded in the two lists in *Ti se'i dkar chag*. The two kings in the list of eight and one in the list of eighteen bore the title of sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po but wore different kinds of iron *bya ru*; the fourth ruler, Zo dmar this spungs rgyal po, wore an individual crown (a *me dpung 'od kyi bya ru*).

The earlier of the two, sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem of the list of eight, seemingly dwelled at the castle sTag sna dBal gyi ljong mkhar in the town (*grong khyer*) of sTag sna gling, at the foot of sPos ri ngad ldan. Apart from Khyung lung, sTag sna gling is the only site qualified as a *grong khyer* (see above), which indicates that dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen reckons these two localities the main ones in Zhang zhung khri sde.

The religious centre allegedly established by Gung rum gtsug phud's disciple rDzu 'phrul ye shes, and patronised by the *bya ru can* king sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem, is placed at La mor sdo yi khang bu'i gling, to the east of sPos ri ngad ldan. It is thus assigned to the side of the Gangs Ti se mountain range facing Byang thang, with sPos ri ngad ldan itself, part of the same range, being the westernmost edge of this geographical divide.

Four generations after the first sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem, the last *bya ru can* king mentioned in the list of eight, who bore the same dynastic title as his predecessor, is said to have reigned from the same

castle—sTag sna dBal gyi rdzong mkhar—in the town (*grong khyer*) sTag sna gling, at the foot of sPos ri ngad ldan. The same account adds that a focal point of sTag sna gling was the Ghan dha *mchod rten* near which Ye shes rgyal ba, the disciple of gTsug phud rgyal ba, established a monastic community with the sponsorship of the king. He seemingly was responsible for the building of the *mchod rten*, the name of which may indicate its typology as a large bell.

There is at least a fifth king of Tsi na found in the sources, another sTag sna rgyal po Khri ldem lcags kyi bya ru [can] of sPos ri ngad ldan, who does not appear in either of dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen's lists. He is mentioned by dPal ldan tshul khrims (*bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 96 lines 20-22) in the transmission of Ge khod and mGon po, which this *bya ru can* king received from Mu wer btsan po. He wore the iron *bya ru* used by other kings from this locality, which could be taken as the prerogative of these rulers, given the similarity of their headgear.

*The bya ru can kings of Pu mar hring*

The name of the sTag chen rngam pa yongs rdzogs mkhar castle of the Pu mar hring ruler sPung rgyung rgyer gyi rgyal po who purportedly sponsored Thar pa yid rings has significant implications. Its description as *rngam pa* ("sinister", "horrifying") seemingly depends on the fact that it was situated on the shores of Mu le mtsho'i gling, also known as La ngag mtsho, in the list of eight. The account of the *bya ru can* kings holds the well known view that La ngag was the lake of evil forces vis-à-vis Ma pang g.yu mtsho, the lake of good forces.<sup>31</sup>

*The bya ru can kings of Kha yug*

I have tried to shown the location of Zhang zhung Kha yug, the land associated by dKar ru with Sad hri gyer gyi rgyal po, who ruled from Mu rdzong chen po khro chu'i mkhar, elsewhere ("Fragments of Zhang zhung's secular history: the Lig myi hrya dynasty and its "destruction"", forthcoming). Kha yug included Preta puri and the sources of the Glang chen kha babs up to the western shores of La ngag mtsho. In the other

---

<sup>31</sup> One should remark that the negative value assigned to La ngag mtsho could be a relatively new concept from the Indian tradition. Staal ("The Lake of the Yakṣa Chief" p. 283) says that the inauspiciousness of La ngag mtsho is absent in the epic and Purāṇic literatures and attributes it to late Hindu sentiments. This would have happened as late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the Hinduisation of Jumla (ibid. n. 26). If so, it would mean that a late notion was incorporated by dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen into an ancient historical layer.

direction, its western limit, bordering on Gu ge, extended to the vicinity of Khyung lung. Ye shes tshul khrim, the disciple of rDzu 'phrul ye shes, allegedly established a monastic community in this area of Zhang chung with the sponsorship of the same king.

The name of the royal castle of Kha yug is meaningful in more ways than one. The association with the Mu (or rMu/dMu), the ancestral ethnos of Zhang chung of Indo-Iranic origin, is not immediate in my view because *mu* also means “sky” in the local language. Hence Mu rdzong chen po khro chu'i mkhar could mean either “molten-metal castle, great fort of the sky” or “molten-metal castle, great fort of the Mu”. It should be noted that following the migration of a group of them to Zhang chung, the Khyung po had their stronghold in Kha yug (see n. 10), and one wonders whether the definition Mu rdzong betrays an ethnic overlap. The fact that the castle is said to have been of molten metal refers—I think—to the outstanding feature of Preta puri, i.e. its sulphurous hot spring.

*The bya ru can kings of Khyung lung  
and the local seats of secular and religious power*

dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen has it that Khyung lung was the sphere of activity of both the *bya ru can* ruler Slas kra Gu ge'i rgyal po and g.Yung drung tshul khrim, the disciple of Ye shes tshul khrim, whom the king patronised. The king is said to have ruled from his castle dNgul mkhar dkar po (i.e. Khyung lung dngul mkhar) khro chu'i rmengs rdo can, and the purported 'Dul ba master was at Khyung chen spungs pa'i ri. dKar ru remarkably adds that the latter was also called mKhar gdong. These statements show that he regarded Khyung lung dngul mkhar as distinct from mKhar gdong.

*Ti se'i dkar chag* states that mKhar gdong was the spiritual seat of the area and a main centre of human aggregation (*grong khyer chen po*). The location of this place, famous for a stone statue of Dran pa nam mkha', is high up on a barren hill in the eastern part of the Khyung lung area, and overlooks dPal rgyas, a temple which was part of Srong btsan sgam po's *srin mo* scheme.<sup>32</sup> The secular seat was a short distance to the west, where the (later) ruins of Khyung lung dngul mkhar, the residence of the Khyung

<sup>32</sup> Ne'u pandi ta, *sNgon gyi me tog gi phreng ba* (p. 18 lines 17-18): “[Srong btsan sgam po] built both Pra dum and dPal rgyas kyi lha khang to prevent the floods of mtsho Ma 'phang (so spelled) [note: if it overflows, it will swell the sKyin thang river]”. It should be noted that Srong btsan sgam po chose the sacred area of Khyung lung—indeed the foot of the hill on which its ancient religious centre stood—to build dPal rgyas, but it is equally conspicuous that Ne'u pandi ta includes in the same classification a temple which he says was built at Khyung lung itself. *Nyang ral chos 'byung* (p. 244 lines 17-18), *lDe'u Jo sras chos 'byung* and *mKhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung* (respectively p. 117 line 2 and p. 286 lines 18-19) have a temple in Khyung lung but not dPal rgyas.

lung *bya ru can* rulers and later the Lig myi rhya dynasty—thus the centre of royal power—stand amidst an extensive cave colony on both sides of the Glang chen kha babs.

These statements disprove the view popular among some modern Bon po savants and inherited by some western Tibetologists that mKhar gdong is the spot where Khyung lung dngul mkhar, the archetypal capital of the kingdom, was situated.

Another factor in favour of reading dKar ru's placement of Khyung lung dngul mkhar in this locality is the association of dNgul mkhar dkar po with *khro chu* ("molten metal", "molten/boiling substance"), in the same way as the description of the site in Kha yug identifies Preta puri. This geological feature does not exist at mKhar gdong. In its entirety, the description of Khyung lung dngul mkhar conveys the sense that the castle's foundation stones were rooted (*rmengs* [i.e. *rmang*] *rdo can*) in a boiling sulphurous spring (*khro chu*), and indeed there is another boiling sulphurous spring in the area adjoining the grassy flatland which leads to the Khyung lung village.<sup>33</sup>

A passage in *Ti se'i dkar chag* concerning the well-known division of Zhang zhung into successive, tripartite sets of regions (*phug*, *bar* and *sgo*, "inner, intermediate and outer [regions]") usefully reiterates dKar ru's view on the subject. When discussing the *dbus sgo* ("the central outer [region]") of Zhang zhung and its *phug* ("inner") sub-division in particular, dKar ru keeps Khyung lung dngul mkhar and Khyung chen spungs pa'i ri as two separate localities.<sup>34</sup>

A collation of the two theories (pro and con mKhar gdong as the site of Khyung lung dngul mkhar) shows that the understanding of the Khyung

<sup>33</sup> dKar ru seems inclined to locate the silver castle to the southern side of the Khyung lung cave complex on the left bank of the Glang chen kha babs. My own inspections, although lacking any scientific criterion, at least convinced me that the morphology of this area, where there are equally massive remains of troglodite inhabitations, could have allowed the construction of a castle. Its traces could have been obliterated. One should consider that devastation was visited upon Khyung lung dngul mkhar not only by sPu rgyal Bod, which seems to have diligently cleansed the traces of Zhang zhung (and most likely of its capital in particular), but also that sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon contributed a further imposition of non-indigenous power there centuries later. Ruins of ramparts at mKhar gdong might apparently be a sign of the existence of a castle. The hill of mKhar gdong on the right bank of the Glang chen kha babs and a twin one on the left occlude on both banks the bed of the river which flows on flatland. It is not a gorge, for it is more spacious, but a strategic point where natural defenses can be improved with ramparts. This is a better place to fortify the access to the Khyung lung area than farther downstream towards the Khyung lung village, and ramparts were seemingly meant to control entrance to it rather than to defend the residence of the Zhang zhung king.

<sup>34</sup> dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 598 line 6): "De ltar du'ang dbus sgo ni/ phug Khyug chen spungs pa'i ri dang Khyung lung dngul mkhar/ /"; "Likewise, as for the *dbus sgo*, its *phug* is [composed by] Khyung chen spungs pa'i ri and Khyung lung dngul mkhar".

lung area in antiquity underwent a remarkable change in late times. The assessment of the lost sites of Khyung lung, presumably based on ancient documents, completed by dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen in wood dragon 1844 (see p. 656 line 2 in its colophon), was drastically reformed.

dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen was a forerunner of the movement for revival of the ancient glory of Zhang chung in the Bon po tradition of his day. His painstaking effort to study the ancient geography, history and culture of the area of Gangs Ti se—the heart of the ancient kingdom—and the crude anti-Buddhist polemical outbursts in *Ti se'i dkar chag* betray his line of thinking. This revaluation of Zhang chung continues unabated in exile well after the Chinese invasion.

Khyung sprul 'Jigs med nam mkha'i rdo rje (1897-1955) was one of the main proponents of this movement, and his selection of the plain below the mKhar gdong hill as the site for his monastery of Gur gyam in 1936 was meant to recall the ancient past of Zhang chung at a major centre of the kingdom (see *Khyung sprul gyi rnam thar* vol. II p. 1-88). But despite the association of mKhar gdong with Khyung lung dngul mkhar attributed to him by the above-mentioned masters of Bon, it is significant that Khyung sprul did not establish his monastery at the village of Khyung lung. I am of the opinion that Khyung sprul himself did not reform the traditional conception that mKhar gdong was a religious centre of Zhang chung, masterfully recorded by dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen half a century before Khyung sprul was born. Indeed Khyung sprul built his monastery where dKar ru held that the religious centre of Khyung lung stood. The reform of mKhar gdong's significance from a religious to a secular function was the work of later Bon po masters.

#### *The bya ru can king of Ru thog*

Mu mar thog rgod rgyal po, the name of the Ru thog king who resided at the gNam rdzong mkhar castle according to *Ti se'i dkar chag*, and sponsored g.Yung drung tshul khriims's disciple gTsug phud rgyal ba, the purported establisher of a monastic community at gSang brag gyung drung gtams pa tshal, seems to indicate divisions in the Mu/rMu/dMu tribe (see above n. 6). At least one of them is identifiable by the colour gold/yellow—*mar* in the language of Zhang chung means "gold" according to various Tibetologists.<sup>35</sup> Further, the presence of a Mu/rMu/dMu ruler in Ru thog expands the known diffusion of this clan

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, the decoding of the name Sad mar kar by Rolf Stein ("La langue Zhang-zhung du Bon organisé" p. 249). He says *sad*: "dieu"; *mar*: "or" and *kar*: "lumière", which I read as "Divine golden light" in a way similar to Hoffmann ("Zhang chung: the Holy Language of the Tibetan Bon po" p. 377) rather than Stein's "Reine splendeur d'or".

to the north of Zhang zhung khri sde, in an area where toponymic evidence suggests the migration of another sTag gzig ethnos, the gNyan.

All in all, the two lists in *Ti se'i dkar chag* mention twenty-one *bya ru can* kings (the eighteen who appear in the larger list plus three who appear only in the enumeration of those associated with the alleged diffusion of 'Dul ba). A few stray references in the literature can be added, such as the sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po mentioned by dPal ldan tshul khrim (bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan p. 96 lines 20-22) (see above).

*Some speculative observations on the bya ru can kings*

'Dul ba gling grags (p. 125 line 8) attributes the end of the alleged diffusion of 'Dul ba Bon in Zhang zhung to disputes between the local monastic communities. They occurred after the time of the last of the eight *bya ru can* kings, as I show immediately below. The same text adds that the strife coincided with the reign of Mu la sangs, the son of Mu wer btsan po; neither of these two is said to have worn the ornithomorphic crown.

The last *bya ru can* king mentioned in dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag* as having been connected with the last master of 'Dul ba in Zhang zhung was the above mentioned sTag sna gzi brjid rgyal po Khri ldem of sPos ri ngad ldan, who interacted with Ye shes rgyal ba.

According to dKar ru's *Ti se'i dkar chag*, the end of the alleged diffusion of 'Dul ba communities in Zhang zhung occurred one generation after Ye shes rgyal ba. 'Dul ba gling grags delays the disputes that led to the disruption of those 'Dul ba communities by one generation. He assigns them to the time of Co Ye shes who came after Ye shes rgyal ba and the latter's disciple, lDe btsun in the lineage of 'Dul ba Bon (ibid. p. 125 line 7). The same text says that the first signs of the strife had already manifested during the time of lDe btsun and his contemporaries (Ga chu rTsug phud rgyal mtshan, Ya gong Ye shes rgyal mtshan, 'Pham shi Pal gyi dbang phyug and lDe btsun Rab gsal; ibid. p. 125 lines 2-3).<sup>36</sup>

'Dul ba gling grags offers a more consequential interpretation because a placement of the end of 'Dul ba Bon in Zhang zhung one generation earlier would not allow for the reign of dMu wer btsan po, the father of Mu la sangs.

<sup>36</sup> 'Dul ba gling grags says that 'Dul ba Bon was brought to Central Tibet during the time of Ga chu, 'Pham shi, Ya gong and lDe btsun because they allegedly built temples, defined as the four great *gnas sde*, in this region but also one temple in Zhang zhung (Ga chu at Byang 'Dam shod sNar mo gling and Bra nag rTa bsgo (so spelled) sum lag; Ya gong at lHa sa Yer pa'i rlung; 'Pham shi at La stod Gram pa; lDe btsun at Ra sa, in g.Yas ru and g.Yon ru) (ibid. p. 122 line 7-p. 123 line 3).



The Bon po sources classify the first *bya ru can* king and then dynastic succession in Zhang zhung after the last of them by means of both evidence internal to their tradition and reference to the sPu rgyal dynasty. These are shaky attempts at fixing a chronology and thus at attributing a period to the existence of the *bya ru can* kings, if they existed. These attempts fall short of acceptability because dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen links the appearance of the first *bya ru can* king with the Bon po master Khri lde 'od po whose historicity is not proven by external evidence, and the last of the eight to the gNam gyi khri bdun kings of sPu rgyal Bod whose attribution to a period in antiquity is far from ascertained. Khri lde 'od po is said to have spearheaded the alleged spread of 'Dul ba Bon in Zhang zhung some eighty years after Mu cho ldem drug, the immediate successor to gShen rab mi bo (dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *Ti se'i dkar chag* p. 573 line 7-p. 574 line 2). There is a recurrence of the number eight in dKar ru's work which seems to be more symbolic than historical.<sup>37</sup> The reference to eighty years after Mu cho ldem drug does not help to fix a period for Khri lde 'od po either, if he actually existed.

The statement in *Ti se'i dkar chag* that the eighteen *bya ru can* kings were contemporaries of the gNam gyi khri bdun and Sa'i legs drug is equally inconclusive.<sup>38</sup> This assertion, mentioned in a prophecy ascribed to gShen

<sup>37</sup> There were eight generations of *bya ru can* kings, eighteen *bya ru can* kings ruling from different seats of power, eight generations of disciples of gShen rab mi bo and the alleged eighty years of Khri wer La rje's reign, not to mention the eighteen divisions of the Zhang zhung communities (Zhang zhung khri sde bco bryad) and the eighteen lands of Zhang zhung (Zhang zhung yul chen bco bryad).

<sup>38</sup> dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen (*Ti se'i dkar chag* p. 572 line 7-p. 573 line 5) cites a prophecy by gShen rab which announced the coming of the eighteen *bya ru can* kings in Zhang zhung and of the gNam gyi khri bdun and Sa'i legs drug in Bod at the time of Khri lde 'od po. This reads as follows: "De yang bdag gis mdzad pa brya dang drug cu'i 'gro don mthar phyin zhing/ gdung tshab chen po Mu cho ldem drug (p. 573) byon pa'i dus der/ Zhang zhung dang Bod yul gyi 'du gnas gsum cu rtsa bdun dang/ sTag gzig gshen gyi yul nas drang srong 'Od kyi ming can gcig gis dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'i 'dus sde brya stong khri 'bum grangs med bstan pa spel par gyur cig/ de'i dus su yang bstan pa de la zhabs nas 'degs pa'i rgyal po/ Zhang zhung gi yul du Ye srid lha las bab pa'i rgyal po bya ru thob pa bco bryad 'ong par gyur cig/ Bod kyi yul du'ang gnam nas bab pa'i khri bdun/ sa las bab pa'i legs drug soggs/ 'khor lo bsgyur pa'i rgyal po bcu gsum 'ong par gyur cig/ /"; ""After I complete 160 deeds for the benefit of sentient beings and my great successor Mu cho ldem drug comes, the thirty seven 'du gnas of the lands of Zhang zhung and Bod, plus the *drang srong* from the gShen land of sTag gzig, whose name will be 'Od, will contribute to spread the teachings [at] the 100, 1,000, 10,000, 100,000 and innumerable gathering places of the *dgra bcom g.yung drung sems dpa'*-s. At that time, too, rulers who will support the teachings [will appear]. Eighteen kings wearing the *bya ru* and descended from the *Ye srid lha*-s will appear in the land of Zhang zhung. In the land of Bod, too, the Khri bdun will descend from the sky (i.e. the gNam gyi khri bdun) and the Legs drug originating from the earth (i.e. the Sa'i legs drug) will appear as thirteen kings altogether who will turn the wheel of the teachings". There is an internal inconsistency in *Ti se'i dkar chag*. Before gShen rab's prophecy about the coming of the *bya ru can* kings at the time of Khri lde 'od po's

rab mi bo, implicitly assigns those kings in the list of eighteen and missing in the list of eight, to the period after the decline of 'Dul ba in Zhang zhung. Reference to the Sa'i legs drug seems to imply that, according to dKar ru, those rulers reigned after the *bya ru can* kings in the list of eight.

No less inconclusive is the statement in bsTan 'dzin rnam dag's *g.Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i byung khungs nyung bsdus* (p. 624 line 4) that Mu wer btsan po lived during the time of gNya' khri btsan po,<sup>39</sup> which would make of Mu la sangs a contemporary of Mu khri btsan po, the second of the gNam gyi khri bdun. For his part, in *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan*, dPal ldan tshul khrims says that the reigns of Mu la mu sang and Deng khri btsan po, the third gNam gyi khri bdun ruler, were coeval.<sup>40</sup>

Even if one of these correspondences is correct, linking the *bya ru can* kings with the gNam gyi khri bdun does not solve the problem of assigning gNya' khri btsan po and his successors to a specific period of antiquity, a conundrum complicated by contradictory hints at large. In short, the assessment of the Bon po sources based on the gNam gyi khri bdun does not provide absolute evidence.

The signs gathered up to now do not allow one to say with confidence that the accounts of the *bya ru can* kings provide irrefutable evidence of their historicity. If, nevertheless, one should try to assign them a place in history on the basis of the indications provided by dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen, a few clues are provided by the Bon po literature.

An important historical reference in 'Dul ba *gling grags* to major events in North-West and Central India—military campaigns and regnal foundations—allows an approximate temporal positioning of Mu wer btsan po and Mu la sangs, which lends them historical credibility. This material touches upon the waves of invasions of North-West India by Indo-Iranic peoples in antiquity. I have discussed this supportive external evidence at some length elsewhere in relation with other issues ("Fragments of Zhang zhung's secular history: the Lig myi hrya dynasty

---

preaching, dKar ru makes a not better identified Khri wer gser gyi bya ru can interact with gShen rab mi bo (ibid. p. 565 line 2-p. 566 line 3).

<sup>39</sup> In the passage in which he says that Mu wer btsan po and gNya' khri btsan po were contemporary (*g.Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i byung khungs nyung bsdus* p. 624 line 4: "Mu wer sTag sna rgyal po/ 'di Bod rgyal gNya' khri'i dus//"), bsTan 'dzin rnam dag conflates the identities of Mu wer btsan po and the sPos ri ngad ldan ruler sTag sna rgyal po Khri ldem. The often mentioned passage of dPal ldan tshul khrims's *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* (p. 96 lines 20-22) shows irrefutably that they were two persons.

<sup>40</sup> dPal ldan tshul khrims, *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* (p. 223 lines 11-12): "Zhang zhung rgyal po Mu la mu sang dang/ Bod rgyal Deng khri btsan po'i sku tshe'i smad/ 'Dul bstan nang 'khrugs rim bzhin nyams gyur te/ 'dus gnas khag ni lo rim bzhin du zhig//"; "During the later part of the lives of the Zhang zhung rgyal po Mu la mu sang and the Bod rgyal Deng khri btsan po, the 'Dul ba teachings progressively declined owing to internal disputes, and the various gathering places were destroyed year after year".

and its “destruction”, forthcoming). The magnitude of these issues prevents any hasty discussion here. I wish only to summarise its salient aspects. This material helps to approximate the period of the takeover by the rMu/dMu of the throne of the Hos rulers of Zhang chung, whose reign is documented in a Tun-huang manuscript (P.T. 1136), and the circumstances surrounding this achievement, which is ascribed to Mu la sangs’s father, Mu wer btsan po. This confirms that dynastic change in Zhang chung occurred one generation after the purported existence of the last of the eight *bya ru can* kings, followed in the next generation by the disputes that disrupted the alleged ‘Dul ba communities in Zhang chung.

Hence, if they actually were historical monarchs, the eight *bya ru can* kings who supported the monastic foundations in Zhang chung described by dKar ru would have ruled before this dynastic and religious change in the kingdom. During the time of ‘Pham shi dPal gyi dbang phyug, the last of the alleged Bon po masters of ‘Dul ba before the purported transfer of these teachings to Bod, the monastic communities declined. At the time, Mu la sangs, the son of the Mu wer btsan po who had established the rMu/dMu on the throne of Zhang chung, was already in power. The inclusion of one Mu wer rgyal po ruling from Kha sgyor in the list of eighteen indicates that some *bya ru can* kings reigned after the Hos relinquished the throne of Zhang chung to the rMu/dMu.

An approximate assessment of those events, among others more directly related to the political developments in Zhang chung, assigns the regnal period of the last *bya ru can* king to around the third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century b. CE (see *ibid.*, forthcoming).

dKar ru’s idea that some of the *bya ru can* kings ruled after the end of the alleged diffusion of ‘Dul ba in Zhang chung is not an isolated one. Bon po sources have it that the *bya ru* as royal insignia continued to be used after the last ruler of the group of eight and did not end with the secular and religious changes in Zhang chung. During the period immediately following the takeover of the throne of Zhang chung by the rMu/dMu, at least the above mentioned sTag sna rgyal po Khri ldem lcags bya ru [can], who was active under the sovereignty of Mu wer btsan po,<sup>41</sup> bore the iron bird-horned crown worn by other rulers of this locality (see dPal ldan tshul khriims, *bsTan ‘byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 96 lines 20-22). It goes without saying that reference to additional rulers bearing the same crown further complicates understanding of the relation between the groups of *bya ru can* kings mentioned by dKar ru.

Their treatment shows that the *bya ru can* kings, if ever they existed, cannot be defined as a dynasty as they are presented by dKar ru bsTan

<sup>41</sup> Mu wer btsan po imparted to him the transmission of Tantric teachings concerning Ge khod Zhang skor and mGon po (see above). Like dKar ru’s *Ti se’i dkar chag*, dPal ldan tshul khriims’s passage, owing to its brevity and focus on religious matters, does not clarify the aspects of royal hierarchy between the two.

'dzin rin chen in the opening sentences of his list of eight (see above n.37) but, at best, a compilation of micro-dynasties reigning in different divisions of Zhang zhung and belonging to slightly different periods. dKar ru's classification as an incoherent group makes any attempt to assign a period to those eighteen *bya ru can* kings not mentioned in the list of eight a futile exercise. Nothing more can be said than that their grouping implies some kind of fragmentation of power, which must have been the system dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen had in mind. This includes the possibility of collateral lines ruling semi-independent areas of Zhang zhung, farther away from the cradle of the kingdom (such as La dwags, or Nag tshang where sTag sgo is located) and in different (later?) periods.<sup>42</sup>

The structural and conceptual tidyness of the classifications in the two lists of *bya ru can* kings, supported by accounts of the political developments in the contiguous Indo-Iranic borderlands, does not help to remove the doubts about the historical authenticity of these rulers' patronage of monastic discipline.<sup>43</sup>

I have no grounds on which to establish whether the diffusion of 'Dul ba before the turn to the CE is an exercise of fantasy dignifying the reformed

<sup>42</sup> bsTan 'dzin rnam dag in his *g.Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i byung khungs nyung bsdu* compacts the reigns of the *bya ru can* kings into two or three phases (*skabs 'gar*). He says (ibid. p. 624 lines 1-3): "De nas Gu ge'i rgyal po Slas tra 'od kyi bya ru can la sogs bya ru thob pa'i rgyal po bco brgyad ni/ Gu ge/ Pu hreng/ Ru thog/ La dwags/ Shang/ Gu rib [note: Me ri gsang ba 'khor lo las so] rnam su dngos dang rdzu 'phrul ci rigs pas byon no/ 'di'i bya ru thob pa'i rgyal po rnam ky mtshan zhib tu Grub dbang gi Gangs ri'i dkar chags su gsal/ 'di byon tshul ni skabs 'gar nyis gsum tsam mnyam sdebs dang/ skabs 'gar re rer byon no/ /"; "Then the eighteen kings bearing the *bya ru* such as the Gu ge king Slas tra (so spelled) 'od kyi bya ru can appeared in Gu ge, Pu hreng, Ru thog, La dwags, Shang and Gu rib [note: the latter excerpted from *Me ri gsang ba 'khor lo*] with all kinds of power and miracles. The names in detail of the kings wearing the *bya ru* are elucidated in Grub dbang's *Gangs ri'i dkar chags* (so spelled). Their appearance coincided with two or three [different] slots of time. They appeared in each of those slots of time". His statement remains unsubstantiated, for he neither singles out the *bya ru can* kings who could have been contemporary nor attempts to link these kings to any period after classifying them in those few different time slots. He is of the opinion that the *bya ru can* kings acceded quite erratically, but believes they were a genealogy.

<sup>43</sup> In his "On Swat. The Dards and Connected Problems", Tucci first cites passages from Lamotte (*Histoire du Bouddhisme indien des origines à l'ère Śaka* p. 366-369) who says that Buddhism was first diffused in the north-western sector of the Indo-Iranic borderlands, such as in Gandhāra and Uḍḍiyāna, during the Maurian period, and then in Kapiśa and Kashmir when Kaniṣka was ruling (ibid. p. 57). Tucci holds that *Vinaya* went through a phase of prosperity in those territories during the reign of the same Kuśāna king, and mentions Levi ("Les éléments de formation du Divyāvādāna") who is of the opinion that some related texts of the Sarvāstivādin-s and Mulasarvāstivādin-s can be dated to not later than the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (ibid. p. 59). But in the long run Tucci opines that, although the literary tradition of monastic observance can be linked with Kaniṣka, versions of these *Vinaya* texts in the local languages were commonly circulated before this ruler (ibid. p. 60).

Bon po tradition responsible for elaborating it, or whether it is a phase in the religious history of Zhang zhung that long predates the activity of Bon po proponents, characterised by rituals in general and funerary rites in particular, contained in the Tun-huang material. It is nowhere confirmed that monastic discipline was the first form of Bon po preaching. Had it (ever) been so, one would have to envisage, on the basis of *'Dul ba gling grags* and *Ti se'i dkar chag*, that developments in Zhang zhung and sPu rgyal Bod led to a drastic change in the religious panorama of the two kingdoms. Both would have lost their ancient traditions of monastic discipline, for the Bon po sources believe that it was transferred to Bod when it declined in Zhang zhung. I cannot offer any elaboration on such statements that could carry much historical and religious weight if proven correct. Their appraisal is a difficult task that has yet to be attempted.

Although external evidence is instrumental in attributing a tentative period to the literary references to the *bya ru can* kings, it is not much help in establishing whether they were historical rulers. While the Hos and rMu/dMu dynasties are substantiated by evidence external to the Bon po sources (Tun-huang documents and fragments of ancient Indo-Iranic political developments), the existence of the *bya ru can* kings is not. It is indeed significant that a text such as *'Dul ba gling grags*, dealing with the time and context in which dKar ru says they operated, does not mention them at all. They could have been, as said above, kings from different (collateral) lineages or could have belonged to quite different periods, as bsTan 'dzin rnam dag is inclined to believe (see n. 41), if they existed at all. There are signs that their court customs resembled those of the Indo-Iranic borderlands, but this could amount to cultural cosmopolitanism rather than historical traces. Moreover the putative fragmentation of power in the core lands of Zhang zhung into many royal or princely seats held by many lords in a limited span of time conveys the sense of an improbably extreme feudalism.

It is easy to infer a theory about dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen's mental process in writing about the *bya ru can* kings of Zhang zhung. In the pursuit of his legitimate aim of bringing back to light the buried glory of Zhang zhung, he could have taken the references to the *bya ru* in the ancient sources as a sign of spiritual attainment and transferred them to a secular milieu, like *Grags pa gling grags* more vaguely does. It would seem that dKar ru based himself on *'Dul ba gling grags* for the religious context into which he placed his list of eight *bya ru can* kings. However this is a bold theory, for it would mean acceptance of the dismissive view that makes kings who wore the distinctive crown imaginary.

On the one hand I hardly believe that dKar ru was so bold and imaginative. It is also incorrect and against historical method to assess events on the basis of an inference about the mental disposition of an author. On the other, it is equally bold to accept the existence of the *bya ru*

*can* kings blindly. Any judgement of the question awaits evidence to be unearthed in the future. For the time being, dKar ru's accounts of the *bya ru can* kings should be seen as one more proof that history can be [willingly or unwillingly] written in undecipherable ways.

### Bibliography

#### Primary sources

*Kha rag gNyos kyi gdung rabs*: Anonymous, *Kha rag gNyos kyi rgyud pa byon tshul mdor bsdus*, handcopy by bKra shis tshe ring after an original in the library of 'Ba' nyag A teng gDan sa pa.

*Khyung sprul gyi rnam thar*: Tshul khriims dpal ldan (with the Zhal gdams and Nyams gur of Khyung sprul), *sKyabs rje mkhas grub 'Jigs med nam mkha'i rnam thar dbyar skyes rnga dbyangs dad pa'i rma bya rnam par rtse ba'i gsung pod dang po bzhugs*, 2 vols., Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji 1972.

*mkhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung*: mKhas pa lDe'u, *rGya Bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*, Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs ed., Gangs can rig mdzod vol.3, Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, lHa sa 1987.

*mKhas pa'i dga' ston*: dPa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, *Dam pa chos kyi 'khor lo bsgyur ba rnams kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, rDo rje rgyal po ed., Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, Beijing 1986.

*Grags pa gling grags text 1*: g.Yung drung Bon gyi rgyud 'bum bzhugs, in Tenzin Namdak (compiler and editor), *Sources for a History of Bon*, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji 1972.

Ne'u pandi ta, *sNgon gyi me tog gi phreng ba*: Ne'u pandi ta Grags pa smon lam blo gros, *sNgon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba zhes bya ba*, in *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga*, Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs ed., Gangs can rig mdzod vol.9, Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, lHa sa 1990.

Me nyag rNam dag gtsug phud, *mChod rten gyi dpe ris blo gsar mgul rgyan bzhugs*, privately published, no place and date of publication.

dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *Ti se dkar chag*: dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *'Dzam gling Gangs rgyal Ti se'i dkar chag tshangs dbyangs yid phrog zhes bya ba dbus phyogs bzhugs so*, in *sNang srid mdzod phug*

*gi rtsa ba dang spyi don gyi gsung pod*, Tashi Dorji ed., Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji 1973.

Kun grol grags pa, *bsTan 'byung*: Kun grol grags pa, *Sangs rgyas bstan pa spyi yi 'byung khungs yid bzhin nor bu 'dod pa 'jo ba'i gter mdzod*, in *Three Sources for the History of Bon*, Tendzin Namdak ed., Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Delhi 1972.

dPal ldan tshul khrim, *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan*: dPal ldan tshul khrim, *Sangs rgyas g.yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i byung ba brjod pa'i legs bshad skal pa bzang po'i mgrin rgyan rab gsal chu shel nor bu'i do shal bzhugs so*, Don grub phun tshogs ed., Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, Zi ling 1988.

'Dul ba gling grags: rMa Srid 'dzin or rMa lCam me, 'Dul ba gling grags, in *bsTan 'dzin rnam dag* ed., *Sources for the History of Bon*, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Community, Dolanji 1972.

lDe'u Jo sras chos 'byung: lDe'u Jo sras, *Chos 'byung chen mo bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*, Chos 'dzoms ed., Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, lHa sa 1987.

sKyabs ston, *sPyi spungs Khro 'grel*: sKyabs ston Rin chen 'od zer, *Khro bo dBang chen ngo mtshar rgyas pa'i rnams bshad gsal ba'i sgron ma zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, in *sPyi spungs Khro bo dBang chen gyi 'grel ba dang dBal phur spyi don nyi shu rtsa lnga'i 'grel ba bcas*, Yongzin Sangyay Tenzin ed., Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji 1973.

*bsTan 'dzin rnam dag*, 'Bel gtam snying po: *bsTan 'dzin rnam dag*, *sNga rabs Bod kyi byung ba brjod pa'i bel gtam lung gi snying po*, Paljor Publications, reprint New Delhi 1997.

*bsTan 'dzin rnam dag*, *g.Yung drung Bon gyi bstan pa'i byung khungs nyung bsdus zhes bya ba bzhugs so*, Khedup Gyatso ed., Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji 1974.

Nam mkha'i nor bu, *Zhang Bod lo rgyus Ti se'i 'od*, Krung go Bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, Zi ling 1996.

## Secondary Sources

Bellezza J., "Territorial Characteristics of the Pre-Buddhist Zhang-zhung Paleocultural Entity", to appear in a forthcoming volume of the Proceedings of IATS 10, held in Oxford (September 2003).

Blondeau A.M., "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrags-pa Bon-lugs", in T. Skorupski ed., *Indo-Tibetan Studies, Papers in honour and appreciation of Professor David L. Snellgrove's contribution to Indo-Tibetan Studies*, Buddhica Britannica Series Continua II, The Institute of Buddhist Studies, Tring U.K. 1990.

Dagkar Namgyal Nyima, "Concise Analysis of Zhang zhung Terms in the Documents of Tun-huang", in H. Blezer ed., *Tibet, Past and Present*, Tibetan Studies I, PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 9th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000, Brill, Leiden 2002.

Hoffmann H., "Zhang zhung: the Holy Language of the Tibetan Bon po", *Zeitschrift d. Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft*, 117, 1967.

Martin D., "Birdhorns", in *The Emergence of Bon and the Tibetan Polemical Tradition*, Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington 1991.

Mitchiner M., *Indo-Greek and Indo-Scythian Coinage*, Hawkins Publications, London 1975-1976.

Mitchiner, *Oriental Coins and Their Values, Non Islamic States and Western Colonies AD 600-1979*, Hawkins Publications, London 1979.

Namkhai Norbu, *The Neclace of gZi: A Cultural History of Tibet*, Information Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala 1981.

Paruk F.D.J., *Sāsānian Coins*, Indological Book Company, New Delhi 1976.

Staal F., "The Lake of the Yakṣa Chief" in T. Skorupski ed., *Indo-Tibetan Studies, Papers in honour and appreciation of Professor David L. Snellgrove's contribution to Indo-Tibetan Studies*, Buddhica Britannica Series Continua II, The Institute of Buddhist Studies, Tring U.K. 1990.

Stang H., "Arabic Sources on Amdo and A Note on Gesar of gLing", *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*, tomus XLIV 1990.



R.A. Stein, "La langue Zhang-zhung du Bon organisé", Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient, tome LVII 1970.

Tucci G., "On Swat. The Dards and Connected Problems", East and West 24 1974.

Vitali R., *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang According to mNga'.ris rgyal.rabs by Gu.ge mkhan.chen Ngag.dbang grags.pa*, Tho ling gtsug lag khang lo gcig stong 'khor ba'i rjes dran mdzad sgo'i go sgrig tshogs chung Publishers, Dharamsala 1996.

Vitali R., "Fragments of Zhang chung's secular history: the Lig myi hrya dynasty and its "destruction"", forthcoming.

