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Cover illustration: Fig. 12a. Arrival of foreign envoys; riderless camel and animals aligned awaiting sacrifice; ritual tent and laceration, Panel II (see article Amy Heller)

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INTRODUCTION

When the subject of this conference was first mooted, one of the invitees expressed the concern that such an enterprise was hardly possible: not enough was known about the period to enable a viable seminar. By the time the conference had ended, even this doubter was converted, and was happy to admit that the period was indeed a worthwhile topic of study, and the conference a success. The inescapable reality is that even if our evidence is still at this stage somewhat fragmented, localised, or even hazy, the tectonic changes this period undoubtedly witnessed make it so significant that we simply cannot ignore it. Besides, hazy or fragmented evidence is not the same as no evidence, and we do indeed have plenty of such evidence to mull over. But there are no grounds for complacency, and there is no doubt that tremendous uncertainties still persist. The areas of uncertainty are legion. Some are methodological: How do we date the various Dunhuang texts and other finds? How reliable are the various rock inscriptions? How should we interpret the various Chinese sources? Other questions are substantive: What exactly caused the Tibetan Empire to fall? What economic changes marked the period? Which ethnic identities and political subgroupings were significant? What impacts might there have been from global forces outside of Tibet? A particular sub-set of questions concern religion and culture: What relation did the burial tumulus tradition have with the later Bon? Exactly how and when did Tantric Buddhism become so popular? How did intellectual systems like Tibetan medicine and astrology develop in this period? Finally there are interpretive questions: should we envisage a cataclysmic change, or should we envisage change as process, with differential rates within different sub-systems of society? To such questions, numerous others could be added, and none of them have so far been conclusively answered.

Because the evidence is so imprecise and so open to interpretation, completely contradictory views presently prevail, even amongst scholars who might otherwise think alike. In such circumstances of general disagreement, the convenors thought it best to put very few conceptual constraints on the participants, other than that their contributions should bring something useful to the table. It seemed still too early in the debate on this most important of historical periods to be too prescriptive regarding frameworks or themes. Hence one of the convenors' original ideas, of focussing more narrowly on the very distinctive propagation of Buddhism in this period (nowadays nick-named the *bar-dar*), proved unsuitable at such an early stage.

Yet this creative chaos has born fruit, and out of the conference discussions, a number of promising threads were seen to emerge, including two that have the definite potential to break the impasse currently existing in our understandings by presenting entirely new data for analysis. Both of these might develop, over the next

few years, into important Tibetological sub-disciplines with a considerable duration ahead of them, and both depend, one way or another, upon China. First is the opening up of Tibet to serious scientific archaeology, which, despite current constraints and obstacles, will hopefully flourish eventually. Second is the growing awareness of a much greater quantity than was previously realised of contemporaneous or near contemporaneous Chinese sources on post-Imperial Tibet.

While three of the conference papers directly addressed these promising new avenues (Hazod, Heller, Horleman) others showed that there is still a very great deal that can be fruitfully gained by a finer analysis of more traditional sources. A few previously unknown or unread documents are still appearing (Karmay, Vitali), new views can still be taken and new conclusions drawn from already known documents (Blezer, Cantwell & Mayer, Dotson, Hill, Martin, Mathes, Schuh, Tanzin, Walter), and fresh contextualising perspectives can be explored (Iuchi, Meinert, Schuh, Szanto).

Henk **Blezer** offers a very valuable overview of some of the salient findings of his Three Pillars of Bon research program at Leiden, which is amongst the largest and most significant research projects so far ever conducted into Bon. One of the most important of his findings emerges from his following up the initial clue offered by Anne-Marie Blondeau into the importance of the rMa clan. Blezer showed with repeated examples that Bon lore and literature developed or were formatted in the post-Imperial period, but now he also presents strong indications that a remarkable proportion of this took shape under the specific influence of the rMa clan, who were highly conversant with Buddhism. Nevertheless, later Bon tradition erases this fact from their histories, in the cause of disguising its diachronic transformations.

Cathy **Cantwell** and Rob **Mayer's** paper is one of two that analyse myth in early indigenous literature, and the manner in which its traditional patterns of usage continued to impact on Buddhist era texts. Their focus is the Dunhuang textual sources for Padmasambhava. Extending a theme begun in their contribution to Samten Karmay's festschrift,¹ they point out that all three proven Dunhuang sources for Padmasambhava—PT44, IOLTibJ321 and PT307—are self-evidently ritual texts, and that their narrative passages are in the cases of PT44 and PT307 Buddhist appropriations of the traditional ritual device of *smrang* or *rabs*, or in the case of IOLTibJ321, ritual verses of praise later appropriated by Nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer for his Zangs gling ma hagiography. Once such ritual contexts are systematically analysed, the texts yield historical conclusions often diametrically opposed to prevailing suppositions about them. Likewise, they show that the dyadic narrative

1 Cathy Cantwell and Rob Mayer, "Enduring myths: smrang, rabs and ritual in the Dunhuang texts on Padmasambhava", in *Tibetan Studies in Honor of Samten Karmay*, ed, Pommaret & Achard, Dharamsala 2009.

myths of Padmasambhava's 'womb' and 'miraculous' births take on an altogether different significance, once their embeddedness in tantric ritual is understood and analysed.

Brandon **Dotson's** contribution is the second paper looking at myths in early literature. It is an exploratory attempt to analyse and classify different genres and types within such myths. They occur very widely within early indigenous Tibetan literature, yet they function far beyond their mere narrative content, in addition providing complex internal conceptual and ritual structuring that is no longer very easy to understand. Looking at three different sources, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, the apocryphal Buddhist text the "History of the Cycle of Birth and Death" (*Skye shi'i lo rgyus*), and a document appended to the *Dbā' bzhed* narrating a debate between advocates of Buddhist and Bon burial rites called the *Zas gtad kyi lo rgyus*, all of which make structural use of myth, Dotson makes a distinction between what he terms the 'ritual antecedent tales' and the 'catalogue of ritual antecedents', and also between 'antecedent tales' and 'charter myths'. He raises the question of the relationship between such old indigenous forms and later literature, with especial focus on their transformations.

Guntram **Hazod's** article is one of two that addresses the exciting new field of Tibetan archaeology, and builds on his pioneering expertise in the Tibetan tumulus tradition, the elaborate but still little-understood burial cult that prevailed between the 4th and 10th centuries. Its terminus came with the plundering of the venerated royal tombs in the civil strife of the 9th and 10th centuries, a trauma interpreted by Tibetans as emblematic of the lawlessness and decline of their times. Hazod presents the account of the plundering from the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, analysing it within the context of other sources of knowledge, to address questions of the local historical milieu in the period concerned, the identities of the clans who did the plundering, some characteristics of the Imperial funeral tradition, and questions of chronology.

Amy **Heller's** presentation is the other of the two addressing the new archaeology. She brings us many illustrations from the tumuli excavated at Dulan in Amdo, notably the painted coffin panels, and a discussion of current theories about these still mysterious artefacts. These extraordinarily important discoveries are still in the process of publication by Chinese and Tibetan archaeologists who have authorized Heller to consult their data. She is able for example to confirm a Sogdian cultural influence in several of the artefacts and details of the painting, and highlight repeated themes that are found in different coffin panels, as well as evidence of animal sacrifice. Her illustrations bring home to us the remarkably high level of craftsmanship and artistic expertise found even in these comparatively modest tumuli.

Nathan Hill offers a meticulous and exhaustive analysis of the terms ‘come as lord’ (*rjer gshegs*) and ‘the black headed’ (*mgo nag*). These are both components of a larger mythic formula ‘he came from among the gods of heaven to the narrow earth to be ruler of men (the black headed) and owner of yaks (the bent)’. The term *mgo nag*, ‘black-headed,’ is often found in Old Tibetan (and later) texts, to describe the Tibetan human population. Hill shows how in every known occurrence, this brief term refers synechdocally to the myth of the descent of the Tibetan Emperor from the heavens to take loving charge of the ‘black-headed’ Tibetan peoples. A classificatory differentiation between the god-like Emperor, his ‘black-headed’ human subjects, and the ‘bent and maned’ yaks and animals is in all cases being expressed, so that the term ‘black-headed’ cannot be taken simply as a synonym for *myi* (‘man’), but must also be understood to refer in addition to humans *qua* subjects of the emperor. Nor is such a usage unique to Tibet: ‘black-headed’ (*ṣalmāt qaqqadi*) for example occurs in the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary as ‘a poetic term for mankind as a totality, created by the gods and kept in safe pastures by the kings.’ Similar usages are found in Tangut and Chinese sources.

Bianca Horleman’s contribution opens the doors to a much greater quantity of contemporaneous Chinese sources than has so far been widely known about or utilised. She offers us a comprehensive and analytic bibliographic essay on the surprisingly substantial quantities of T’ang dynasty sources on Tibet, including internet-based research tools, which have now become available. In addition, she presents a select bibliography of contemporary Chinese scholarship on the Tibetan empire, as well as many items of Western scholarship that deal with the T’ang in a manner potentially useful to the study of early Tibet. Her bibliography is highly analytic, enabling the reader to see at a glance what topics each item deals with, and she also offers English translations for the Chinese titles.

Maho Iuchi opens up a very promising new approach to understanding the post-Imperial period by focusing on a specific location and its local histories. This location is ’Dan ma or ’Dan khog in Khams, which was where Atiśa’s three main disciples, Khu ston Brtson ’grus g-yung drung (1011-1075), Rngog Legs pa’i shes rab, and ’Brom ston pa Rgyal ba’i ’byung gnas (1005-1064), gained most of their education prior to Atiśa’s arrival in Tibet. ’Dan ma was thus very influential in the establishment of the Bka’ gdams school. For example ’Brom ston, its most important founder, spent a full twenty years there, studying mainly under Se btsun Dbang phyug gzhon nu and secondarily under the Indian Smṛtijñānakīrti. Se btsun himself was famous for his visit to India, and ’Brom ston learned Madhyamaka, the Old Tantras, and other teachings from him. Se btsun was a monk, who had received the *smad ’dul* vinaya ordination from Grum Ye shes rgyal mtshan, who in turn had been ordained directly by Dgongs pa rab gsal himself.

Samten **Karmay** presents a previously unknown *rnam thar* of Lha Bla ma Ye shes 'od recently discovered at the gNas bcu lha khang in Drepung Monastery, simply entitled *Lha bla ma ye shes 'od kyi rnam thar rgyas pa*. Although the text seems to be cobbled together from assorted fragments, its author clearly did have access to some important old documents. Karmay presents a summary of its contents, which include chronology, Lha bla ma's encounters with 'bad' teachers, his two wives and three children, his royal genealogy, how the Bon religion once prevailed in Zhang zhung, his ordination as a monk in later life, and some descriptions of Rin chen bzang po. This *rnam thar* also cites, without acknowledgement, from Ye shes 'od's already well-known Decrees. The founding of mTho gling temple in 996 is described, as well as Ri Cho 'phrul rmad byung temple, and its decoration by Kashmiri artists. The passing of various laws is also described. The colophon mentions one Grags pa rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po, a resident of mTho gling, but the text itself also references much later figures such as Sapan (1182-1251) and 'Gro mgon Chos rgyal 'phags pa (1235-1280).

Dan **Martin** strives to illuminate the little-known and comparatively short-lived Highland Vinaya lineage (*Stod 'Dul*), by reconstructing from its two surviving fragments a complete 12th century text by Zhing mo che ba Byang chub seng ge, a champion of the *Stod 'Dul*. There seems little doubt that monastic ordinations occurred in Western Tibet before the return of the ordained men of Central Tibet from their ordinations in Amdo, Rin chen bzang po himself being a prime example. Varying uses of the term *Stod 'Dul* are disambiguated however, and Rin chen bzang po's ordination did not count as *Stod 'Dul* by a strict definition, which should include only those lineages descending directly from Dharmapāla, whose lineage came between 997 and 1024, a bit later than the Lowland Vinaya (*sMad 'Dul*). While clearly championing his own *Stod 'Dul* over all others, Zhing mo che ba was not so much concerned about *vinaya* ordination lineages *per se*, but rather in their traditions of explicating the major *vinaya* texts. Thus it is clear that *vinaya* studies were already in his day sufficiently developed to create complex differences of interpretation, with all their resultant debates.

Klaus-Dieter **Mathes** revisits the issue of Sa skya Paṇḍita's critique of bKa' brgyud Mahāmudrā, already the subject of debate in the 1980's between David Jackson and Michael Broido, but which Mathes can now approach with a quantity of decisive new evidence from Indian texts. Sa skya Paṇḍita feared that during the *bar dar*, influences from Chinese Ch'an had got mixed with genuine Indian Mahāmudrā, leading to what he saw as a mistaken belief that Mahāmudrā could be achieved simply through guru devotion and the suspension of discursive thought, but without the full gamut of prior Tantric practices and empowerments. While it is true that the earlier rNying ma master Vimalamitra had held such views, and he might have been open to Chinese influences, Mathes can now show that a range of Sanskrit texts by respected scholarly authors also supported this position, and they cannot have been Chinese-influenced.

Carmen **Meinert** opens an extremely interesting new perspective through a comparative study of the reception of Indian *ābhicāraka* rituals in China and Tibet, that is, tantric rites using violent imagery. She makes special reference to the *Guhyasamājatantra*, which occurs both in Chinese and Tibetan, including a Tibetan witness from Dunhuang. She shows how the Chinese translation of the *Guhyasamājatantra* by Dānapāla under the auspices of the Northern Song was censored: it was intended for the Imperial use of Buddhism for diplomatic purposes, so that translators like Dānapāla were compelled to produce texts ‘tactful’ for diplomatic purposes, with scant regard for the soteriological needs of China’s Buddhists. Thus the soteriological symbolism of *abhicāra* was never realised in China, and instead it was eventually taken up as a purely worldly black magic. By contrast, Tibetan translation, especially during the *bar dar* and at remote locations like Dunhuang, was free of such constraints, and *abhicāra* became fully integrated into soteriological practice, notwithstanding occasional abuse.

Dieter **Schuh** contributes a study of great significance for our understanding of the origin of divination practices in Tibet as well as the nature of religious belief in early Tibet. The study begins with an overview of the eventual Dge-lugs-pa recognition of these methods as acceptable to Buddhism. He then analyzes illustrations in Dunhuang manuscripts that demonstrate their relationship with the later, established teachings on *nag rtsis*. We thus gain for the first time a diachronic view of popular methods by which Tibetans have long dealt with uncertainty. The material from Dunhuang extends this tradition to a period likely immediately after the Btsan-pos. Schuh’s thorough knowledge of these subjects and the literature around them allows him to go even further, however. By presenting extensive lists of texts asserted to have been composed both during and after the Empire, Schuh provides the background for answering an important question most others have not even thought to ask: *Why* have these methods for dealing with troublesome spirits, etc., been so popular among the Tibetan peoples for so long? The answer lies in part in a mass of texts mentioned in standard Tibetan Buddhist sources. The very presence of these lists is a basis for the acceptance of their practices as ‘Buddhist’ by, in particular, the 5th Dalai Lama and Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho. If only some of these titles existed at such an early time as the 9th-10th centuries, the universal acceptance of their practices in Tibet is easily explained. Just as significantly, Schuh concludes that these texts may be evidence of a cultural alternative to Buddhism which arose after the fall of the Imperium. The author has provided us with both a vision and a challenge that we must take up if we are to understand Tibetan culture and religion in the Bar dar.

Péter-Dániel **Szántó** likewise opens up new vistas with extremely interesting contextualising and comparative observations. He points out firstly that the Pāla Empire, Nepal and Kashmir were themselves experiencing a ‘Dark Age’ of political collapse that co-incided almost perfectly with the Tibetan ‘Time of Fragments’, and

with many of the same symptoms, notably the cutting off of state patronage to Buddhism, and a dearth of surviving historical sources. Just as in Tibet this period saw the dramatic proliferation of tantric literature, so did it also in India and the Pāla Empire. Not only that, but the modes of composition of such tantras in India and Tibet could be strikingly similar: in both cases, fresh composition of ostensibly scriptural tantras could take a predominantly anthological mode, creating new sacred scriptures by weaving together passages from a range of existing texts, both anonymous (scriptural), and authored (commentarial). In Bengal, for example, the *Sampuṭatantra* was anthologised using fragments from a range of existing texts, which are listed in considerable detail.

Lopon P. Ogyan **Tanzin** is one of the leading *sngags pa* students of the late Dudjom Rinpoche. Here he presents the six greatnesses of the Early Translations (*snga-'gyur*) as formulated by the great scholar Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (11th century). These are: the greatness of the patrons; the greatness of the scholars; the greatness of the translators; the greatness of the places where the translations were made; the greatness of the doctrines translated; and, the greatness of the offerings made as a support for requesting the doctrine. While Rong zom Mahāpaṇḍita properly belonged to the later period of Buddhism's diffusion in Tibet (*phyi-dar*), and hence formulated these six greatnesses after the period concerned as a means to distinguish the Early from the New Translations (*gsar-'gyur*), they have remained an important element in the self-presentation of the *rNying-ma-pas* to this day. Nevertheless, despite various reports to the contrary, their actual provenance is in fact unclear, since they cannot be found amongst Rong zom's extant works, not even in his *dKon-mchog 'grel*, as claimed for example by Dorje and Kapstein (1991). It seems more likely then that they simply circulated amongst rNying ma lamas, from at least as early as Longchenpa's time, in the form of a list linked by oral tradition to Rong zom.

Roberto **Vitali** focuses very fruitfully on post-Imperial Khams, and like Maho Luchi, finds strong evidence for the unbroken continuation of religious culture in that region throughout the period. He looks first at the political transformations concomitant with the fall of Empire in the Khams regions, and then at the consequences of this for religion. His hitherto untapped sources include materials preserved in the writings of Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang norbu and Karma Chags med, as well as Dunhuang materials such as PT 849. He presents rare evidence for the emergence of the four Eastern regional kingdoms known as the *ka bzhi*, and their relation to the territories previously coming under Yum brtan or 'Od srung. As well as elucidating the political changes, he is able to show that despite stereotypical claims to the contrary, religious life in fact continued effectively enough in the Eastern regions after the fall of empire to provide a basis for later revival, and that evidence even exists for some debate between competing interpretations of Buddhism, and for the study of sophisticated topics such as Abhidharma (cf. Dan Martin's paper on vinaya disputes in far-off West Tibet).

Michael Walter presents the first part of a detailed analysis of PT016/IO751, the '*De ga G.yu Tshal* document'. While this first part focuses on its language and culture, the next part will present a translation with commentary. The only significant political document often believed to date from the reign of Ral pa can (r. 815-836), Walter subjects PT016 to detailed paleographic analysis, followed by analysis of its nominal/adjectival vocabulary, verbal constructions, postpositional terms, and adverbials. Walter's meticulously detailed stylistic analysis then identifies PT016 as a pastiche, redacted from separate peices written at different times. He concludes it did not after all achieve its finished form during the reign of Ral pa can, nor is the work as we have it a simple transcription of Imperial-period documents. Rather, it seems to have been created to give models to Sanghas when offering confession rites at courts and to important officials in a post-Imperial world. Thus we obtain a picture of this pastiche as an early 'bar dar' document, the product of an independent Sangha preparing for service to rulers whose legitimacy was based on the aura of the last long-reigning *btsan po*.

‘COME AS LORD OF THE BLACK-HEADED’
– an Old Tibetan mythic formula

NATHAN W. HILL

Come as lord (*rjer gśegs*)

In the first chapter of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (PT 1287) Sha-khyi, one of the two exiled sons of the emperor Dri-gum-bstan-po, sings an enigmatic victory song after killing the relatives of his father’s assassin, the horse groom Lo-ngam. Following that song, in the closing word of the chapter, is what would appear out of context to be a summary of the action.¹

*sgyed-po ’og gzugs-na / zangs rdo (61) bla-nas phab-ste / rje-ru gshegso //
bshos-na ñ Spu-de-gung-rgyal / grongs-na ñ Grang-mo-gnam-bse’ / (62)
brtsig /*

’greng mgo nag-gñ rje / dud rngog-chags-kyi rkyen-du gshegs ’o //

When he created the hearth-stone below, copper stones fell from above. He came as the lord.

In birth, [he was called] Spu-de Gung-rgyal. In death, they erected [the tomb] Grang-mo Gnam-bse’. He came in order to be the lord of black-headed and upright (men) and the owner of maned and bent (animals, esp. yaks).

This apparent summary of events does not conform to the events of the preceding narrative. His name is Sha-khyi and not Spu-de Gung-rgyal. It is his father and not he who has just been entombed. Comparing other attestations of the phrase *rjer gshegs* ‘come as lord’ sheds some light on this enigmatic passage.

The phrase *rjer gshegso* ‘come as lord’ is used in Old Tibetan texts to describe the descent from heaven of the first ruler. The Dunhuang text PT 1286, known as the ‘Catalog of principalities’, mentions the origin of the imperial dynasty in the following words.

*khri ’i-bdun-tshigs-kyi sras / khri Nyag khri btsan po’ // (32) sa dog-la yul yab-
kyi rje / dog yab-kyi char-du gshegs-s’o // [...] thog-ma sa-la gshegs (35)-pa
yang / gnam mtha’ ’og-gñ rjer gshegs pas /*

The son of Khri-’i Bduñ-tshigs, Khri Nyag-khri Btsan-po’, came to the narrow earth as rain to rule the earth and the fathers of the land. [...] At first, he came to the earth, came as the lord of [all] below heaven.

¹ All Dunhuang documents cited in this study follow the text of Imaeda et al. (2007).

The story is also found in the ‘Prayers of the foundation of the De ga g.yu tshal monastery’ (IOL Tib J 0751, circa 823).

(1) *’O-lde-spu-rgyal gnam-gyī lha-las myī’i rjer gshegs-pa yong*
’O-lde-spu-rgyal came from the gods of heaven as ruler of men

The story of the divine descent of the imperial line is also told succinctly in the opening of several imperial inscriptions.

The Rkong-po Inscription (circa 800-815)
thog-ma Phywa Ya bla-dbag-drug-gī sras-las/ Nya-grī btsan-po myi yul-gyī
rjer// Lha-rī gyang-dor gshegs-pa tshun chad

In the beginning, from the time when Nya-grī Btsan-po [who came] from the sons of the Phywa [god] Ya-bla Bdag-drug, went to Lha-ri Ryang-do as the lord of the land of men... (Li and Coblin 1987: 198, 205).

Inscription at the tomb of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan (circa 815)
btsan-po lha sras/ ’O-lde spu-rgyal// gnam-gyī lha-las myī’i rjer gshegs-pa//
 The emperor, son of the gods, ’O-lde Spu-rgyal, came down from the gods of heaven as lord of men (Li and Coblin 1987: 241 and 246).

Fragmentary tablet at Zhwa bavi lha khang
myī’i mgon-du sa-la gshegs-nas
 come to the earth as lord of men (Li and Coblin 1987: 274).

In the east face of the Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription the first ruler comes not as ‘lord’ (*rje*) but as ‘king’ (*rgyal-po*).

(5) *’phrul-gyī lha btsan-po ’O-lde spu-rgyal// yul byung sa dod tshun cad (6)*
gdung ma ’gyur bar// Bod-kyī rgyal-po chen-po mdzad-pa yang// (7) « gangs
ri mthon po’i ni dbus// chu bo chen po’i ni mgo// yul miho sa gtsang// » zhes//
 (8) *gnam-gyī lha-las// myī’i rgyal-por gshegs te/*

From when the sacred god, the emperor, ’O-lde Spu-rgyal, came to this land and emerged [on] this earth, his unchanging lineage served as the great kings of Tibet. Saying, “It is the center of the high snow mountains, the source of the great rivers, the high lands, the pure earth,” he came from among the gods of heaven as the king of men (Li and Coblin 1987: 47, 95).

The 14th century *Rgyal-po bka’i thang-yig* edited by O rgyan gling pa has two versions of the story,² the first of which is phrased very similarly to that in the first chapter of *Old Tibetan Chronicle*.

Rje gcig Gñā’ khri btsan-po bya-ba de mgo nag mi-dang srog chags rkyen-du
byon

2 There are many other post-dynastic versions of the Gñā’-khri-btsan-po myth and an extensive secondary literature treating elements of this tale, which would need to be taken account of in a larger study (e.g. Hazod 1991, Karmay 1994). The *Rgyal-po bka’i thang-yig* is referred to here only as one of many possible instances.

A ruler named Gñā'-khri-btsan-po arrived on behalf of black-headed men and animals. (18v qtd. in Haarh 1969: 233).

de dus Bod khams mi-la rje med-pas [...] Bod-kyi btsan-po 'O-de spur-rgyal de: gnam-gyi lha-las mi yul rje-ru gshegs

Because at that time the men of Tibet had no ruler, 'O-de spu-rgyal came from among the gods of heaven as the ruler of the land of men (18r qtd. in Haarh 1969: 233-234).

The vocabulary and the grammar of these phrases is stereotyped, a mythic formula. A divine ancestor (either 'O-lde-spu-rgyal or Nya-gri-btsan-po) comes from heaven to earth as the lord of men. The changed name of Sha-khyi at the end of chapter one of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* is Spu-de Gung-rgyal, a name similar to 'O-lde-spu-rgyal. By retaking his father's castle, and restoring the legitimate line of royal descent, Sha-khyi reenacts the founding of his dynasty by a mythic ancestor who descended from the heavens. This passage identifies Sha-khyi both with his recently interred father Dri-gum btsan-po and with his divine ancestor 'O-lde-spu-rgyal. The only part of the formula which is missing is 'from heaven to earth', which is appropriate, since Sha-khyi is not a divine ancestor but rather the son of a usurped king reasserting his tradition rights. He has not come from heaven.

The black-headed

Of the passages quoted so far, it is only in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and much later *Rgyal-po bka'i thang-yig* that the divine leader comes as the lord of the 'black-headed' rather than of 'men'. The context immediately suggests that 'black-headed' is an epithet for 'men'. A number of passages in Old Tibetan texts corroborate this meaning. In the Dunhuang document PT 0126, 'The envoy of Phywa to Dmu', messengers of the Phywa gods are trying to convince the lord of the Dmu gods to, among other things, come to earth as the ruler of men.

(111) *Phywa-'is bka' stsald / «rje ni zhu phud-nas / mgo nag 'greng-la rje myed (112) rje skos-la / rngog chags dud-la khram thob-cig!» ces bka' stsald-pa /*

Phywa decrees: «When you have met (?)³ a lord, the black-headed and upright (men) have no lord; in addition to appointing a lord (for them) for the maned and bent (animals, esp. yaks), draw up a ledger!»

The narrative of this text is part of the pre-story of divine descent signaled by the phrase *rjer gshegs*. The god must be convinced by messengers that he should descend. One of the three versions of the origin of the imperial dynasty contained in a text called the *Yo ga (yi ge) lha gyes can*, quoted in the *Lde' chos 'byung*, contains the

3 “王をあえてお願いした後。[When you are able to meet the king and request of him.]” (Ishikawa 2001: 151).

same story, the god being convinced to descend from heaven to rule over men (Karmay 1998[1994]: 299-300). A disembodied voice addressed a council of Tibetan leaders who are worrying about their lack of a leader.

*bka' Bod 'bangs mgo nag-gi rje 'dod-na/ Rmu yul ngam 'brang lchang 'brang
bya-ba-na/ gnam rim-pa bdun-gyi steng / gser mkhar g.yu bad-can-gyi nang-
na lha'i gdung rmu'i tsha lha rje Gña'-khri-btsan-po bya-ba bzhugs-kyi mgo
nag-gi rjer spyan drongs-shig ! bya-ba'i sgra byung-ngo /*

If the black-headed Tibetan people wish to have a ruler, on the seventh stage of heaven, the place of Dmu, in a gold castle with a turquoise roof, there is a lord Khri Bar-gyi Bdun-tshigs who is a descendant from the Phywa gods and a cousin of the Rmu gods. Invite him to be your ruler! (Mkhas-pa-lde'u 1987: 233, 2003: 262, translation follows Karmay 1998[1994]: 299).

On the advise of the voice the Tibetans employ the god Skar-ma-yol-lde as a go-between to negotiate with Khri Bar-gyi-bdun-tshigs on their behalf that he descend to be their ruler. In a version of the same story contained in the 14th century *Blon-po bka'i thang yig* edited by O rgyan gling pa, this narrative is more abbreviated. The lord Skar-ma-yol-sde recommends that the Tibetans invite Gña'-khri-bstan-po to be their lord. This recommendation also serves as the opening of Skar-ma-yol-sde's negotiations with Gña'-khri-bstan-po for his descent.

*«gnam sa rim-pa lnga-yi sdeng [sic steng] bzhugs-a /
Gña'-khri-btsan-po bya-ba Lha-yi sras /*

Dmu-yi dbon-po yod-bas spyan-drongs!» gsungs

«He who dwells atop the five part land of heaven,

the son of the gods called Gña'-khri-btsan-po,

because he is a nephew of Dmu, invite him!» said [Lord Skar-ma-yol-sde] (7r qtd. in Haarh 1969: 235).

Like the *Yo ga (yi ge) lha gyes* the Dunhuang text PT 1038 relates three version of the origin of the royal clan. The third version given is the by-now familiar descent of the ruler from heaven.

*(12) rnam gsum-du nī gnam rīm-pa bcu gsum-gyī steng-na/ (13) Khrī-bar-la-
bdun-tshīg/ shes bgyī// gnam gī lha las/ sa ga (14) dog drug du// 'greng 'go
nag-gī rje myed-gī rje// dud rngog chag (15) bla myed-kyī blar/ blon po lho
rngegs/ bon-po mtshe gco/ phyag (16) tshang sha spug// myī rje lha-dang
bdud/ du brgyīs-nas// yul bod ka (17) g.yag drug-du byon zhes mchī//*

Concerning the third [theory], there are some who say that one called Khrī-bar-la-bdun-tshīg came from the heavenly gods atop the thirteenth level of heaven with the ministers Lho and Ngegs, the Bon-po Mtshe and Gco, and the 'intendants' (*phyag-tshang*) Sha and Spug to the six [parts of the] narrow earth to serve as lord to the lordless black-headed men and as authority over those maned animals without an authority.

This version most closely resembles the succinct reenactment given in the first chapter of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. In both passages the lord must deal both with 'black-headed' men and with 'maned' yaks. The epithet 'black-headed' indicates mankind, particularly in its need of divinely descended political leadership, and in contrast to 'maned' yaks.

The contrast between human and divine inherent in the epithet 'black-headed' is brought to the fore in the Bon-po marriage liturgy *Ming sring dpal bgos dang lha 'dogs*, as translated by Karmay.

"My daughter Srid-lcam will go from the gods to the gods. She is not made for black-headed man. The rising and the setting of the sun and moon takes place in the real of the sky. Have you ever seen them fall down to the plain? We are the gods of the heavens. You are a black-headed earth-word!" (Karmay 1998[1975]: 148).

The fact that the marriage is ultimately permitted shows that although the chasm separating god and man is wide it can be crossed. The cosmogonic text *Dbu mi 'u 'dra chags*, where man is given the epithet *dbu nag* 'black-headed' employing *dbu* the honorific term for 'head' instead of *mgo*, goes a step further by intentionally undermining the opposition between god and man.

der dbu nag mi zhes-pa 'di/ dang-po byung-ba 'i phug btsun-ste/ 'od gsal lha 'i gdung la(s) grol/

First, the one called little black-headed man, (2a) is of good origin since he was produced by the race of luminous gods. (Karmay 1998[1986]: 261).

Both the use of *dbu* instead of *mgo*, and the claim that not only royalty, but mankind as a whole descends from the gods serve to undermine the division between men and gods. This conscious inversion of the normal semantics of the phrase *mgo nag* 'black-headed' itself reveals the categorical separation of man and god usually implied by the use of the term *mgo nag*.

The passages examined so far establish beyond doubt that the phrase *mgo nag* 'black-headed' refers to mankind in general, both in opposition to gods and in opposition to animals. The phrase is particularly associated with the narrative of divine descent of a ruler, both in phrases such as 'the black-headed have no ruler' and in 'come as ruler of the black-headed'.

However, the narrative of divine descent occurs more frequently without the term *mgo nag* than with it. The phrase *mgo nag* as an epithet has the same meaning as *myi* 'man'. Therefore it is not surprising that the more straightforward term would sometimes appear instead of it. A possible additional reason for not using the term *mgo nag* is that, none of the passages where *myi* (*yul*) is used in place of *mgo nag* is any mention made of the divine leaders role vis-à-vis yaks. The word *myi* can be used whenever men are discussed *mgo nag*, the specific association laden term peculiar to

this context, necessarily invokes men as the wards of the divine leader and in opposition to the animals.

Most of the occurrences of the phrase *mgo nag* in Old Tibetan occur outside of the actual narration of the ruler's divine descent. In these passages the phrase serves as a short hand reminder of the myth. The most frequent context in which the phrase occurs is in descriptions of the Tibetan emperor's good governance and benefits to his subjects that his rule brings. Two passages in 'Prayers of the foundation of the De ga g.yu tshal monastery' (PT 0016, circa 823) make this clear.

(33v1) rje lha sras-kyi zha snga-nas // «myi rje lhas mdzad-pas thugs-la 'phrul mnga' / lha'i chos gtsug lag bzang-po rgyas-par mdzad-pa'i thugs-rjes gnam mtha' 'og gun-du yang khyab / dbu rmog brtsan mnga' (33v2) thang che-ba'i byin-kyis ni blon chen-po 'phags-pha-dang ldan-ba rje blon 'phrul-kyis ni 'og-gi rgyal-po chen-po Rgya Drug las-stsogs-pa gdul dka'-zhing / sngan-cad bka' 'og-tu ma cud-pa'i rnam-la (33v3) rlabs chen-pos btul-te / rgyal-po chen-po Rgya Drug-dang 'Jang las-stsogs-pha bka' 'og-du dus gcig-du 'dus-te / mjal-dum-gyi gtsigs chen-po bcas-te / Bod 'bangs mgo nag-po mtha yun-du (33v4) bde skyid-par gnang-ba'i bka' drin chen-po stsald-pas kyang ma 'tsalte / mtha' bzhī thams cad-du bde-pa'i bka' drin-kyis bkab-nas ...

The son of god, the ruler says: «The divine ruler of men acting possesses sacred power in his heart. His compassion which greatly performs divine customs and good governance pervaded [all] below (*gun du*) heaven. The sacred minister and lord who has a noble great minister with the grandeur (*byin*) of a mighty helmet and great majesty [subdued] the great kings below the sun such as China and the Turks who are difficult to subdue, with great glory (*rlabs*) subdued those who are ma cud under the previous (?) commandment. The great kings such as China, the Turks and 'Jang (Nanzhao 南詔) gather together beneath the commandment. Have made a great peace treaty (*mjal dum*), bestowing great kindness which grants the black-headed Tibetan subjects happiness for a long time (*mtha yun du*), he did not seek [anything for himself], having blanketed all four directions with happy kindness ...

Bod chen-po 'phrul-kyi lha btsan-po sku-la byind chags / thugs-la 'phrul mnga'-ba'i zha snga-nas // (34v1) 'greng mgo nag-gi rjer myi rjer lha-las gshegs-te / rgyal khams gzhan-gyi rgyal-po gang-bas kyang 'phags-shing thugs-la 'phrul mnga' dgongs-pa nam-ka'i dbyings-dang 'dra-bar yangs-shing rgya che / ri-rab lhun-po bzhin-du bkra' drang (34v2) gsung rtag / gnī zla'i 'od-dang 'dra bar / byams-pa-dang thugs-rjes khyab-par mdzad-de / mtha'-yun-gyi don-du dkon mcog gsum-gyi mcod-rten btsugs-shing dam-pa'i chos bdud-rtsi'i sgo phye-nas ...

Come from the gods as lord to upright and black-headed (men), nobler than any kings of other kingdoms, the thought of the sacred majesty in his heart permeates and extends like the sky. His eternal word splendid and upright like mount Meru, acting with exceeding love and compassion like the light of the

sun and moon, he plants the stūpa of the triple jewel for the benefit of the ages and opens the door of ambrosia of the sacred Dharma ...

This text was produced at the height of Buddhist influence at the imperial court, when the Buddhist monk Bran-ka Dpal-gyi yon-tan was the prime minister. Although it is heavily laden with Buddhist imagery and vocabulary, it is impressive that the overriding metaphor remains the pagan notion of the emperor as divinely sent caretaker of humanity.

Good governance and benefit to subjects are also prominent themes in the three contexts where the phrase *mgo nag* occurs in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (PT 1287) apart from the attestation in the first chapter discussed above.

bla-na rje sgam-na / Khrī Srong-brtsan / 'og-na blon 'dzangs-na Stong-rtsan yul-zung / (447) rje nī gnam ri Pywa- 'i lugs // blon-po ni sa- 'i ngam len-gyi tshul // mnga' thang chen-po- 'i rkyen-du / jī dang jir ldan-te / pyi- 'i (448) chab srid nī pyogs bzhīr bskyed // nang-gī kha bso ni myi nāms par lhun stug / 'bangs mgo nag-po yang mtho dman nī (449) bsñams / dpya' sgyu nī bskyungs / dal-du nī mchis / ston dpyid nī bskyal // 'khor bar nī spyad / 'dod-pa nī byin / (450) gnod-pa nī pye / btsan-ba nī bcugs / sdo-ba ni smad / 'jigs-pa nī mnan // bden-ba nī bsñen / 'dzangs-pa nī bstod / (451) dpa'-bo nī bkur / smon par nī bkol // chos bzang srid mtho-ste // myī yongs-kyis skyid-do //

Above, the profound lord, Khrī Srong-brtsan. Below, the wise minister Stong-rtsan Yul-zung. The lord [acted] in the manner of the Phywa and the heavenly mountains. The minister [acted] in the manner of earthly majesty. Endowed with all the conditions of great majesty (*mnga'-thang*), they increased the outer polity in the four directions and the internal welfare (*kha-bso*) was abundant and undiminished. They created parity between the high and the low among the black-headed subjects. They reduced tax fraud and created leisure. They swore [oaths] in the autumn and spring and adhered to this cycle. They gave to the needy and cut out the harmful. They employed the powerful and degraded the insolent (*sdo-ba*). They quashed the frightened and allied with the truthful. They praised the wise and respected the heroic. They employed the devoted. The customs being good and the polity lofty (*chos bzang srid mtho ste*), all men were happy.

Here the divine nature of the emperor is stressed, in contrast to the human nature of his minister. In a way similar to that used in the 'Envoys of Phywa to Dmu,' the mythical pre-story of the divine descent covers the happy ending in historic time. The emperor descends to earth in part against his will in order to benefit human beings, and here we see exactly how the emperor is capable of benefiting his subjects. They are all happy.

\$/:/ btsan-po khri 'dus srong // sku chung-nas gzhon-gyis kyang // phag rgod-la bshan-gyis mdzad / g.yag rgod sgog-du bcug // (329) stagī rna-ba-la bzung-ba-la stsogs-pa' // thugs sgam-ba- 'ñ steng-du / sku rtsal ched-pos bsnan-te / myī-dang myi 'dra'-bar 'phags-pas (330) // ññ ngog rgyal-po thams-chad-dang / 'bangs mgo nag pyogs-kyis // mtshan bla dags 'phrul-gyi rgyal-po zhes / (331) btagste / bka' mchid-kyi dper brjod-do //

Even from the time when emperor Khri 'dus-srong was young, he killed wild boar, put wild yaks into fetters, seized tigers by their ears, and so forth. On top of his profound mind he added great energy. Unlike men, he was exalted, and all the kings under the sun and the black-headed subjects attached to him the name "sacred king attached to the gods" (*bla dags 'phrul-gyi rgyal-po*), as it is said in the edict (*bka'-mchid*).

This passage stresses the emperor's superhuman qualities, saying explicitly that he is not like men, and that his subjects and vassals referred to him as such. In the final passage, which uses the phrase *mgo nag* in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, the benefit the emperor brings to his subjects is quite concrete.

'bangs (343) mgo nag-pos kyang / Rgya dar bzang-po khyab-par thob-bo //
The black-headed subjects obtained to their fill fine Chinese silks.

The subjects benefit from stealing spoils from the Chinese. By mentioning that the subjects are black-headed we are reminded that it is due to the beneficence of their monarch that they are able to benefit from the spoils of war. A similarly practical benefit of royal patronage is mentioned in the *Old Tibetan Annals* (IOL Tib J 0750 line 306).

'bangs mgo nag-poe khral thud scungs-par lo gcīg/
[746-747] [The emperor] reduced the additional taxes of the black-headed subjects; so one year.

The emperor's reduction of the tax burden is a reaffirmation of his sacred role of benefiting the relatively helpless humans he lives among. This tax reduction follows immediately after an oath of fealty that official 'from the prime minister down' (*blon chen po man chad*) swear. The oath and the change of tax burden are two components of the reaffirmation of his divine role. To a more cynical reader, the mention of a tax burden draws attention to the way in which this god-sent shepherd expropriates and exploits his flock.

The south face of the Zhol inscription (circa 764) makes clear the extent to which according to this ideology of divine descent the bodily well being of the ruler is tied to the welfare of the state.

(11) *btsan-pho sras Khrī-srong-lde-brtsan-gyi* (12) *sku-la ni dard-du ñe// Bod*
(13) *mgo nag po 'i srid ññ 'khrug-du* (14) *byed-pa-las /*

[Ministers 'Bal Ldong-tsab and Lang Myes-zigs] came close to harming the body of the emperor, the son, Khri Srong-lde-brtsan, and put the polity of the black-headed Tibetans into strife. (Li and Coblin 1987: 143, 158)

That his own subjects would threaten the life of a Tibetan emperor is a reversal of the natural order of the universe. The use of the term black-headed in this passage emphasizes the need the Tibetans have for their ruler, and the unnaturalness of the conspirators crime. These associations would be absent if a different word for 'men' had been used.

The phrase *mgo nag* also occurs on the east side of the Zhol inscription.

(13) *Bod* (14) *mgo nag-po'i srid-(15)-la phan-ba legs //* (16) *dgu byas-so ////*
 [Minister Stag-sgra-klu-khong] performed many goods beneficial to the polity of the black-headed Tibetans. (Li and Coblin 1987: 141, 152)

This phraseology puts the minister in a role similar to that of the emperor vis-à-vis the subjects, a very high compliment of of the minister's service.

Like Sha-khyi's reenactment of the divine founding act of the Tibetan monarchy, all of the passages using the phrase *mgo nag* – where the narration of divine descent is not actually related – gesture toward this myth and thereby reassert the Weltanschauung it implies.

Two attestations of the phrase *mgo nag* remain to be discussed. The first occurs in an obscure divination text IOL Tib J 0739. The terse and cryptic lines are difficult for me to make sense of. Although I am not in a position to argue the manner in which this text reinforces or evokes the formula of divine descent, there is also no reason to think that it does not. Instead, the formula probably provides the key to understanding the passage. I suspect that the images of the other lines are also formulaic, and the whole can be understood only after identifying and elaborating on the other mythic formulae which it employs.

kya bsam-dang ni (13r9) *bka-bo che /*
na cung ni 'u gzhon-la /
spyang dor ni ma gum shig (13r10)
gros-gyis ni ma bshad-cig /
sang byi ni gnangs sgong-du /
'greng (13r11) *'dud ni 'du tshogs nas /*
'go nag ni brgyab stan sa /
btsan-dang (13v1) *ni kha yad mñam /*
mgyogs-dang ni bang yang 'grin (13v2)
mo bzang rab-bo //

[The role of the dice is] 2-4-1

O, with a thought a great *bka bo*
 the small meadow (?), for that young one
 do not die in the two eyes!

do not speak with advice!

Tomorrow the rat, the day after tomorrow as an egg
 from the gathered upright (men) and bent (animals)
 the black-headed man *nI brgyab stan sa /*
btsan (13v1) *dang ni kha yad mnyam /*
 with speed *ni bang yang 'grin* (13v2)
 a very good divination.

The final occurrence of *mgo nag* to be discussed, in the Dunhuang text IOL Tib J 0733, 'The Decline of the Good Age' presents a nightmarish apocalyptic inversion of the formula.

'ung-nas skyin-dang 'bab-pa'i (46) *[d]usla sum brgya' drug cu las sa-dang /*
rgya' yul-gyi 'og / mtsho' chen-po zhig' pha-[rol]-nas rgyal-po g[d]o[ng]
nag-po shing-[r]ta (47) *nag-po zhon-ba zhig lo drug cu'i bar-du dang-te /*
rgya mgo nag-po de-la phyag-'tshal-zhing des bkol-bar 'ong-ngo' /

After that, in the time of falling and reckoning, beneath China and a land from among 360, from across a great lake a black faced king riding a black chariot for sixty years. To that black-headed Chinese [king] they will prostrate, and by him be made slaves.

Rather than the ruler being sent from heaven he comes from the other side of a lake. Rather than a god coming to rule the black-headed, he a human being, even worse Chinese, and is himself black-headed. Rather than making all subjects happy, he enslaves them. The term *mgo nag* in this passage, by evoking the narrative of divine descent, draws out the degree of the perversity of the future imagined. I think it is very clever that this black faced and riding a black chariot fit the general sense of being sinister. From this text alone, one would not realize that the term 'black-headed' has any special significance, but having looked at the other passages it is clear that it is the key term of the passage.

The full mythic formula of which *mgo nag* is an element can be paraphrased "men had no ruler, yaks no owner, N. came from the gods of heaven to the narrow earth to be the ruler of men and the owner of yaks". Any of the key phrases of this formula *rjer gshegs*, *mngog chag* or *mgo nag*, might synecdochally refer to the whole. These associations are present in all occurrences of the phrase *mgo nag* in Old Tibetan Texts. If one were writing a dictionary of Old Tibetan, a possible definition for *mgo nag* would be 'a poetic term for mankind as a totality, created by the gods and kept in safe pastures by the kings.' The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary gives this definition for Akkadian phrase *ṣalmaāt qaqqadi* 'black-headed'.⁴

4 The epithet black-headed is also used in other parts of Asia with more or less similarity: for Chinese see de Lacouperie (1891) and for Tangut see Kepping (2003).

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