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# BON RELIGION IN 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> CENTURY AMDO: A CASE OF KYANGPHAG MULA DRUNG MU (*SKYANG 'PHAGS MU LA DRUNG MU*)

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## *Abstract*

Despite the legendary narrations of Bonpo chronicles about the mythical past, some Bonpo masters of flesh and bones start to appear only from the turn of the first millenium onwards. There is a legend that Zhugom Trulzhig (*Zhu sgom 'khrul zhig*, 11th century) traveled from Central Tibet to Amdo and became a teacher of eighteen so-called *zhigpo* (*zhig po*). These *zhigpo* represent non-celibate ascetics or “crazy yogis” whose teachings were transmitted through the family lineages. Though at least two monastic communities in Amdo linked their origins to the alleged disciples of Zhugom Trulzhig, the legend seems to exaggerate. The early Bonpo masters from Amdo are also grouped into the triad called “three elevated ones” (*'phags pa gsum*). One of them is a certain Kyangphag (*sKyang 'phags*), who is the main focus of this article. Three texts that are allegedly composed by him might provide a glance into the lives and teachings of the early Bonpo masters in Amdo.

*According to a certain account [king Songtsen Gampo] was in conflict with priests and bonpos. Thus Drenpa Namkha casted a louse and in the presence of the king a louse the size of a pigeon appeared. [He] split it with his weapon and all the scattered blood and flesh transformed into lice. During the night on a certain day the king with his two queens were eaten up by lice. Only empty clothes were left there the following morning. The ministers did not dare to make it known to anyone. They announced that the king dissolved into the heart of the [statue of] Jowo Mahākāraṇika and the two queens dissolved into the right and left breasts [of the statue] without remainder.*

Bonpo chronicle *rGyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas*<sup>1</sup>

- 1 KHYUNG PO BLO GROS RGYAL MTSHAN, 1974: 142. *Lo rgyus kha gcig nas bon gshen rnam dang 'gal bas / gshen dran pas pra mo ha'i shig 'phangs pas / rgyal po'i mdun du shig phug ron tsam zhig babs / de mtshon gyis bshags pas sha khrag 'thor ba thams cad shig tu gyur te / zhag gcig nub mo rgyal po yab yum gsum shig gis zos nas nang par na bza' stong pa lus pas / blon po rnam kyis gzhan la zer ma phod nas rgyal po jo bo thugs rje chen po'i thugs khar thims / btsun mo gnyis nu ma g.yas g.yon gnyis la thims te lhag ma lus zhes grags skad /.*

## 1. Introduction

Bon religion is often described as an ancient religious tradition of Tibet. Such statements, however, do not correspond to the general historical data concerning the appearance of the vast textual tradition of contemporary Bon (called Yungdrung Bon, *g.yung drung bon*). This tradition appeared only after the 10<sup>th</sup> century and most of it belongs to “treasure revelations” (*gter ma*). It claims older origin, which, however, cannot be proved. The teachings and rituals of this tradition are under the strong influence of Buddhism.

The tradition of Bon considers itself to be heir to the indigenous religion<sup>2</sup> not only of the Royal period (ca. 650–850), but even one thousand years before. Buddhist authors tend to use the expression Bon very vaguely and label by this term almost everything which, according to them, does not seem to be Buddhist (cf. KVÆRNE, 2000).

Some texts dating mostly to the end of the Royal period in Tibet can be ascribed to the indigenous non-Buddhist religious tradition of Tibet.<sup>3</sup> Religious specialists called bonpo (*bon po*) and shen (*gshen*) figure in them, but problems appear when one would want to relate them to the contemporary Bon religion. The religious tradition they represent does not call itself Bon, and thus to speak of Bon religion during the Royal period is rather problematic. Such texts contain rituals and myths, which are distinct from those of today’s monastic tradition of Bon (cf. STEIN, 1988; STEIN, 2000).

One could generally say that Bonpo chronicles are strongly legendary in their nature when they deal with the ancient past. The same statement is also valid for the narrations concerning the Royal period of Tibetan history. The extract from a Bonpo chronicle translated above is a characteristic demonstration of the legendary character of the narratives, which cast doubt on the already established Buddhist ones. In this particular case it describes the passing away of the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo (*Srong btsan sgam po*, 605?–649). It is a counter-narration reacting to the well known Buddhist legend about the king’s dissolution into the statue of Avalokiteśvara (Mahākāraṇika).

While the Buddhist myth about the emperor’s dissolution into the statue can be taken as a part of a reinterpretation of the history through Avalokite-

2 The religion Rolf STEIN called “nameless”, compare STEIN, 1972: 191.

3 This concerns mostly a number of texts found in Dunhuang, but also probably later texts from a stūpa in Gathang (KARMAY, 2009; PA TSHAB PA SANGS DBANG ’DUS / GLANG RU NOR BU TSHE RING, 2007).



śvara's presence in Tibet, the Bonpo version expresses disagreement with it and places into the center of the narration its own hero, semi-divine master Drenpa Namkha (*Dran pa nam mkha'*) and his ritual of casting a ritual tool called "bomb" (*btso / btsva*). It leads to nothing to search for any historical grounds of such events, neither in the Buddhist case nor in the Bonpo one.

In case of the contemporary Bon religion, we enter safe historical ground only by the turn of the first millennium. This is the time when the textual tradition is "rediscovered", and some historically indisputable protagonists of Bon start to appear. One hypothetical explanation could be that the competition between emerging Buddhist religious movements since the turn of the first millennium led to the rise of the religious tradition of Bon, which was qualitatively different from the indigenous religion from the time of the Royal period. It developed only retrospectively its own interpretation of the past and claims its ancient origin through it.

The following contribution will focus on Amdo, the north-eastern region of Tibet. The general situation described above repeats itself with regard to what the Bonpo sources have to say about Amdo until the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Again we have to rely on legendary narrations that present counter-stories to the Buddhist ones. This is the case with the narratives about a certain Sherab Dragpa (*Shes rab grags pa*) from Amdo during the rule of Langdarma<sup>4</sup> and about the retrieval of a Bonpo *vinaya* from Amdo by the turn of the millennium.<sup>5</sup>

- 4 The Chronicle *rGyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* tells us that during the reign of Langdarma, Bon prospered in Amdo through the exertions of the extraordinary priest Sherab Dragpa. This caused jealousy among the Buddhists (*chos pa*), who stirred up the wrath of king Langdarma against him, saying that he performed magic (*mthu byed*). The king sent riders to him, but they were unable to cut his body with their weapons. He himself advised them to smear his body with a water-plant (*chu bal*) first, since in his previous life he had killed some tiny water-worm (*'bu srin*). Following his advice they were able to cut off his head and limbs. After their report, the king felt embarrassed, realizing that his actions were caused by instigations from the Buddhists (*ban de*). As a result Buddhism (*chos*) declined (KHYUNG PO BLO GROS RGYAL MTSHAN, 1974: 171).

There are no other references of this story about Sherab Dragpa. It does not figure in other narratives and apparently did not leave any traces among the Bonpo communities in Amdo. Thus, this story can again be taken as a counter-narration to the already established Buddhist legend about Langdarma.

- 5 Recently, this story has been the topic of two detailed articles (KALZANG NORBU GURUNG, 2011; NYIMA WOSER CHOEKHORTSHANG, 2011). To relate one version of the Buddhist chronicles: There was a boy in Amdo, who is referred to as Bonpo. He started to study Buddhism with three refugee Tibetan monks and later became ordained with the help of Chinese monks from that area. He received his ordination name Gewasel (*dGe ba gsal*), but is mostly



It is only during the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries when the contemporary Bonpo monastic communities in Amdo were formed – even according to their own accounts (see below). The founders of these Bonpo communities were, however, lay persons. Their portrayal at the present time tends to see them through the eyes of monastic Bon, which developed only later after the life-time of these founding figures.

## 2. Bon in Amdo during the time of the “later spread” of the Doctrine

In general, the first historical Bon protagonists start to appear from the legendary mist only in connection with the early discovery of Bon scriptures at Tsonga (*mTsho rnga*), Southern Tibet, by Shenchen Luga (*gShen chen klu dga'*, 996–1035) in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century. Detailed accounts about him have come down to us, even an autobiographical text on his discovery of “treasures”. These texts about him and some of his disciples are written in a rather matter-of-fact style and contain a number of every-day details from their lives. As such they are in contrast to the legendary tone of the above described Bonpo chronicles. The historical existence of Shenchen Luga seems to be beyond any doubt (MARTIN, 2001). It is only through his disciples that a more or less realistic connection with the masters of Bon in Amdo emerges.

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known as Lachen Gongpa Rapsel (*Bla chen dgongs pa rab gsal*). Later he stayed in a retreat-temple known as Dentig (*Dan tig*). Still later, several students from Central Tibet travelled to him. They studied under his guidance and received ordination from him. Afterwards they returned to Central Tibet and through them the *vinaya* lineage was reestablished there (ROERICH, 1996: 65–67). A later and already developed Bonpo version in the chronicle *Rgyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* (KHYUNG PO BLO GROS RGYAL MTSHAN, 1974: 142) tells us that once there was a horse-herder of the Tangut (*Mi nyag*) king who found a sage in a cave, who was dressed as an ordained monk. He received his ordination from him, and the ordination was eventually passed through four men to a certain Muthur (*Mu thur*), who was no other than Gongpa Rapsel. He later taught Buddhism, Bon, and tantras to the four men from Central Tibet and ordained them. Thus, the *vinaya* that was spread in Tibet actually is the Bonpo *vinaya*. In his recent article (KALZANG NORBU GURUNG, 2011) Kalzang Norbu Gurung concludes that the Bonpo and Buddhist versions were dependent on each other. There is, however, no proof for the existence of celibate Bonpo communities in Amdo prior to this event. Though it still requires further research, the Bonpo version seems to be highly improbable.

One of his main disciples was Zhuye Legpo (*Zhu yas legs po*, ca. 1001–1051, for details see MARTIN, 2001), who is reported to be from the family of the funeral specialists (*dur bon*) of the Tibetan kings residing in the valley of Zhui Bamo Lung (*Zhu'i ba mo lung*). He served Shenchen Luga for a long time and later received “mental teachings” (*sems sde*) from him. Zhuye Legpo then became principal master of the Zhu family with their seat near today's Gyantse (cf. KARMAY, 2007; KUN BZANG BLO GROS, 2003: 359; 'Gro ba'i mgon po mtshan ldan zhu yas legs po'i rnam thar [...]: 486–497).

Zhuye Legpo had a son, Zhu Kyipo (*Zhu sKyid po*). He is also called Zhu Kyipo Jothog (*Jo thog*), because the name was allegedly given to him by Jowo Atīśa (KUN BZANG BLO GROS, 2003: 359). According to some sources he had also a second son by the name of Zhu Kyese (*Zhu sKye se*, *sKye se smra ba'i seng ge*, cf. KARMAY, 2007: 64). But some sources consider the latter to be the son of the previously mentioned Kyipo, i.e. the grandson of Zhuye Legpo (KUN BZANG BLO GROS, 2003: 359).

Kyese is reported to be born around 1022 (RTSE ZHIG TSHANG SHES RAB BSTAN PA'I ZLA BA, 2006: 5) or 1046 (wood-dragon year of the first *rabjung*, KUN BZANG BLO GROS, 2003: 359). According to a certain source (ZHANG SGOM RIN CHEN RGYAL BA, 1974: 391; ZHANG SGOM RIN CHEN RGYAL BA, 1981: 284), Kyese took as a consort a certain Jomogyen (*Jo mo rgyan*). In his old age of 85 years he then fathered a son, who was later known under the name Zhugom Trulzhig (*Zhu sgom 'khrul zhig*). Other texts maintain that he became a father in his younger years. According to one source, the date of his birth is given as 1094 (wood-dog year of the second *rabjung*, RTSE ZHIG TSHANG SHES RAB BSTAN PA'I ZLA BA, 2006). Yet another birth-date suggested in the literature is 1064 (KUN BZANG BLO GROS, 2003: 359). Following a recent Tibetan text mentioning him (BYA 'PHUR NAM MKHA' RGYAL MTSHAN, 1994), Donatella Rossi repeats that he was born in 964 (ROSSI, 1998: 61). This is surely too early, since he was also the teacher of Bonzhig Khyungnag (*Bon zhig khyung nag*, 1103–1183), whom he is reported to have met around the year 1120 (cf. ACHARD, 1998: 29).

Typically, the exact dates of this important figure, who is credited with transmitting his teaching to many masters in Amdo, remain uncertain. Most probably he was born towards the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

With Zhugom Trulzhig, a number of legendary narrations appear again. He is generally believed to be the master of eighteen so-called *zhigpo* (*zhig po*) from Amdo. The tradition even speaks of eighteen *zhigpo* clans in Amdo (cf. THAR, 2003: 272), indicating thus some principle position of these *zhigpo* masters within the clan structures. The early versions and the development of this



legendary narration are not known. The eighteen *zhigpo* are mentioned in a number of sources, but all the sources I am aware of are of recent origin.<sup>6</sup> Briefly, the story says that after many years of meditation in Central Tibet he eventually became master of eighteen *zhigpo* in Amdo by Mt. Machen Pomra (and also Mt. Nyenpo Yutse according to one source). The eighteen *zhigpo* are organized symmetrically into three-fold groups as “six disciples of body”, “six disciples of speech” and “six disciples of mind”.<sup>7</sup>

Before returning to this narration concerning the introduction of the teaching of Zhugom Trulzhig to Amdo, one should shortly pause here and examine the possible larger significance of this master Zhugom Trulzhig. He was one of the first in whose name appears the designation *zhigpo*, abbreviated as *zhig* in his case. The hagiography of Zhugom Trulzhig recounts that he “destroyed” (*zhig*) all “illusions” (*'khrul*), thus realized truth and was hence forth called Trulzhig (*'Khrul zhig*) (ZHANG SGOM RIN CHEN RGYAL BA, 1974: 396). *Zhig* or *zhigpo* is, however, not merely a name, but also the designation of a certain type of ascetic. If we look for masters in whose names the appellation *zhigpo* appears, we note the rather surprising fact that it is not restricted to Bonpo masters, but also includes around fifteen Nyingma and Kagyu masters.<sup>8</sup> It is striking that the majority of the persons that can be dated lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Some of them were physicians, which is also an interesting detail. The family of Zhu, from which Zhugom Trulzhig also hails, was well-known for its tradition of medicine (cf. KARMAI, 2007). This fact confirms that the Bonpo masters of the 12<sup>th</sup> century were not totally isolated from their Buddhist surroundings.

6 The story appears in the hagiography of a 17th century Bonpo master from Rebkong (*gShen gyi dge sbyong khri ka ba kun bzang rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar*, cited in RTSE ZHIG TSHANG SHES RAB BSTAN PA'I ZLA BA, 2006: 19, note 3). One source quotes an unidentified hagiography of Zhugom (*Zhu sgom rnam thar*, BSTAN 'DZIN PHUN TSHOGS / 'JAM DBYANG BRTSON 'GRUS: 20–21) and mentions only six *zhigpo* who met him personally by Mt. Machen Pomra and Mt. Nyenpo Yutse (*Se zhig, Ba zhig, 'Bri zhig, Shel zhig, Stag zhig, Gling zhig*). This account is, however, rather suspect, because it also mentions the meeting of Tronyen Gyaltsen (*sPrul sku Khro gnyan rgyal mtshan*), who is usually dated to around the year 1400. One version based on such a recent text is retold in the article by Rossi (ROSSI, 1998: 61–63).

7 Six disciples of body (*sku sras*): *Snang zhig, 'Bru zhig ('Gru zhig), lDong zhig, Glang zhig, Shel zhig, rKya zhig*; six disciples of speech (*gsung sras*): *Nag zhig, G.yu zhig, sTag zhig, sKyang zhig, Se zhig, Khri zhig*; six disciples of mind (*thugs sras*): *rGya zhig, 'Ga' zhig, Ba zhig, Cog zhig, Go zhig, Ur zhig*. For the list see ROSSI 1998: 69, note 35; BYA 'PHUR NAM MKHA RGYAL MTSHAN, 1994: 27.

8 Cf. TBRC <<http://tbrc.org/>>, accessed on February 26, 2013.



The names containing the appellation *zhigpo* are, however, more numerous within the tradition of Bon, and it seems that Zhugom Trulzhig might play some initiation role in introducing the *zhigpo* type of meditator. The *zhigpo* meditators appear mostly around the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Tibet, only a few of them can be dated to later periods. The word *zhigpo* stands for a kind of “mad yogin” or “ascetic”. Typically, the *zhigpo* are non-celibate practitioners who appear within a family line (*gdung rgyud*). It is interesting to note that the designation *zhigpo* used for ascetics does not seem to translate any existing Indian term. This might point to an indigenous background. Moreover, in the brief hagiography of Zhugom Trulzhig, written probably by his almost contemporary master Zhangom Rinchen Gyalba (*Zhang sgom rin chen rgyal ba*),<sup>9</sup> it is said that he “established the teaching of Bonpo yogis, through which the Bonpos became known” (*bon po'i rnal 'byor pa'i bstan pa tshugs te / bon po zhes grags so*). This early text thus surprisingly speaks about his crucial role in developing the ascetic style among Bonpos.

To come back to the story about his meeting with eighteen *zhigpo* from Amdo, we are left with more questions than answers. The legend does not appear in the above mentioned old hagiography. Still, the text mentions that he traveled to Chinese Zarang (*rgya'i za rang*, if *rgya* means China here), where he imparted many instructions on his disciples (ZHANG SGOM RIN CHEN RGYAL BA, 1974: 398). This perhaps might be some early indication of the later developed legend.

When seen from a different side, i.e. through the recently written local histories of the monasteries in Amdo, there are at least two well-established monastic communities of Bon, which claim that their first master was a disciple of Zhugom Trulzhig. Despite the lack of trustworthy accounts, this cannot be dismissed. Though the legend of the eighteen *zhigpos* is too simplified, it at least indicates that Bonpo communities in Amdo remember Zhugom Trulzhig as an initiation figure of their own traditions.

9 It indicates in its colophon that it is based on accounts of those who met him personally (ZHANG SGOM RIN CHEN RGYAL BA, 1974; ZHANG SGOM RIN CHEN RGYAL BA, 1981).



Plate 1: Tsezhig monastery (photo by D. Berounsky, 2003).

The first monastery, which traces its foundation back to the legendary *zhigpo* and disciple of Zhugom Trulzhig at the same time, is Tsezhig monastery located in the locality called Gengya (*rGan gya*). Very little is known about the founder of the monastery. Recent sources, however, state that it was founded by Tsezhig Tongnyi Japhur (*rTse zhig stong nyid bya 'phur*) known also as Gomchen Yungdrung Gyaltsen (*sGom chen gyung drung rgyal mtshan*, see RTSE ZHIG TSHANG SHES RAB BSTAN PA'I ZLA BA, 2006: 4–5; ANONYMOUS, 1993: 25–26; THAR, 2003: 272–277). He is mentioned as a disciple of Zhugom Trulzhig and founder of the monastery, which leads us to set both his life-time and the founding of the monastery in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Histories of Nangzhig monastery claim that the first master of its family-lineage was a certain Nangzhig Lodroe Gyaltsen (*sNang zhig blo gros rgyal mtshan*) known also as Dophag (*Do 'phags*) or Yonten Gyaltsen (*Yon tan rgyal mtshan*).<sup>10</sup> Two sources consider the latter to be the son of the first (ROSSI, 1998;

10 His birth is recorded on three different dates in the literature. Kværne (KVÆRNE, 1998) as well as Rossi (ROSSI, 1998) date the birth of Yonten Gyaltsen to 1028, but Tsering Thar gives 1168 and mentions also a Tibetan source giving the date 1088 (THAR, 2003: 527, 531–532).



BYA 'PHUR NAM MKHA RGYAL MTSHAN, 1994; KVÆRNE, 1990), other sources take for granted that Yonten Gyaltsen is only a different name for the same person (BSTAN 'DZIN PHUN TSHOGS / 'JAM DBYANG BRTSON 'GRUS; THAR, 2003). The texts mention his consort Nyima Dron (*Nyi ma sgron*), also known as Kyangza Nyima Dron, Nyima Bum (*sKyang bza' nyi ma sgron* / *Nyi ma 'bum*) of Ama Zhigmo (*A ma zhig mo*, see KVÆRNE, 1990). He had three sons, two of them are credited with founding temples or monasteries. The elder son Jachen Nyima Dzin (*Bya chen nyi ma 'dzin*) founded Gyatigar (*rGya tis sgar*) temple, which is not far from the location of the Nangzhig monastery today. The contemporary head of the monastery is the 39<sup>th</sup> in the lineage of “monastery holders” (*dgon bdag*) and the whole lineage traces its origin back to Nangzhig Lodro Gyaltsen, a disciple of Zhugom Trulzhig.<sup>11</sup>

With the founder Nangzhig we slowly step beyond the legend of disciples of Zhugom Trulzhig in Amdo. He is also a member of another group of saints from Amdo in the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century who are nowadays known as the “three elevated ones” (*'phags pa gsum*). Besides Dophag, the founder of the lineage of Nangzhig monastery holders, the other two are known as Tsophag (*gTso 'phags*) and Kyangphag (*sKyang 'phags*). According to a certain narration (THAR, 2003: 251), the three were brothers, but this account does not seem to be trustworthy. In some general accounts (cf. note 6 listing also *sKyang zhig*) the other two of the triad are often also connected with the legend about Zhugom Trulzhig's coming to Amdo. But a glance into the local histories shows that they do not mention this connection.

11 For literature on the monastery in western languages see ROSSI, 1998; KVÆRNE, 1990; THAR, 2003. For the Tibetan texts see BYA 'PHUR NAM MKHA RGYAL MTSHAN, 1994; BSTAN 'DZIN PHUN TSHOGS / 'JAM DBYANG BRTSON 'GRUS.





Plate 2: Nangzhig monastery (photo by D. Berounsky, 2010).



Plate 3: Map of the area (by Daniel Berounsky).

Very little precise information is known about the second of them, Tsophag (*gTso 'phags*). His alternative name is given as Dawa Gyaltzen (*Zla ba rgyal mtshan*). He is supposed to be a contemporary of both Dophag and Kyangphag, the rest of the triad. Although there are several monasteries connected with him in Thewo region (*The bo*) and Sharkhog (*Shar khog*), called Tsotsang, “Family seat of Tso [phag]” (*gTso tshang*), they were probably founded several generations after his life-time. There seem to be almost no older textual sources on him, with the exception of one short prayer to his family lineage (see *NAM MKHA' RGYAL MTSHAN*). But there are still living descendents of his family scattered in Amdo, and he is still remembered in Thewo region through his meditation caves and rock-imprints left in the area. It is often said that he was the “manifestation” of the last of the triad, Kyangphag.<sup>12</sup>

12 Despite a number of recent texts dealing with him, apparently no older text about his life survived. His life story is recorded in oral tradition. For the sources see *A NGAG TSHE RING*



### 3. Kyangphag (*sKyang 'phags mu la drung mu*)

Introducing Kyangphag (*sKyang 'phags*, written also as *sPyang 'phags* and known also as Mula Drungmu (*Mu la drung mu*) or Namkha Gyaltsen (*Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*), the last of the triad of the “three elevated ones”, I have to confess that very little concrete information on him survived in the sources. But still, when compared with other masters mentioned here, there are at least bits and pieces that appear to allow a glance into the nature of the Bonpo masters in Amdo of his time.

Being not unknown to the Bonpo historians outside Amdo, Kyangphag is briefly mentioned by a number of them. These short notes concern his “treasure revelation” of Bon scriptures at Mt. Dragkar Jagoe (*Brag dkar bya rgod*).<sup>13</sup> At this place, he revealed some thirty volumes of texts, which were divided into four collections (*g.Yung drung chu 'bum*, *gNyan 'bum*, *Lha 'bum* and *Ba ga yum 'bum*). Apparently, these texts were later considered strange, and the lineage connected with them was interrupted. After the Cultural Revolution, his revealed texts seem to have vanished.

As for the family of Kyangphag, the most reliable information is found in a text entitled *The History of the Triple Supports* (*rTen gsum lo rgyus*, SKAL BZANG / PADMA SGRON, 1999: 19):

The youngest of the three sons of the Druzhi (*'Gru zhig*) family was named Nyima Dragpa (*Nyi ma grags pa*). Upholding the hidden ways, he worked for the benefit of the sentient beings. He came to the place Gurba (*sGur ba*) of Azha (*'A zha*) in Do (*mDo*).<sup>14</sup> A son with the name Bumkyab (*'Bum skyabs*) was born to him. When he grew older, he was called by other people Kyangtse Tsang (*sKyang rtse tshang*). He had four sons, and the youngest was called Phagpa Kyab (*'Phags pa skyabs*) who became renowned for his many miraculous deeds.<sup>15</sup>

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BKRA SHIS, 2006: 200–208; THAR, 2003: 250–252; SKAL BZANG / PADMA SGRON, 1999: 254–263; ANONYMOUS, 1995: 116, 120–122; NAM MKHA' RGYAL MTSHAN.

13 Though the names of the revealed volumes are not always identical, the sources more or less agree. See KHOD PO BLO GROS THOG MED, 2011: 189; KARMAY, 2001: 171; KHYUNG PO BLO GROS RGYAL MTSHAN, 1974: 328; sPA BSTAN RGYAL BZANG PO, 1991: 242; dPAL TSHUL, 1988: 336.

14 I.e. the place of today's Gurba monastery (*sGgur ba dgon*) in Amdo (*mDo*), which is near the place called Azha.

15 *'Gru zhig gdung las 'khrungs pa'i sras gsum gyi / chung ba nyi ma grags pa'i mtshan zhes te / sbas pa'i tshul 'chang 'gro don mdzad pa zhig / mdo gam 'a zha sgur ba'i yul du phebs /*





Plate 4: Thangka of the “three elevated ones” from Akyi Kyangtshang monastery. Kyangphag is in the centre, Dophag to the left and Tsophag to the right (photo by D. Berounsky, 2006).

*sras ni 'bum skyabs zhes pa bya ba 'khrungs/de ni cher skyes skyang rtse tshang zhes pa / de la sras bzhir 'khrungs pa'i tha chung ni / mtshan ni 'phags pa skyabs zhes bya ba byung /.*



Plate 5: Dragkar Jagoe (*Brag dkar bya rgod*) (photo by D. Berounsky, 2006).

From the passage quoted above we learn that already Kyangphag's grandfather (the person mentioned as Nyima Dragpa) came to the place of today's Gurba monastery. According to the text, Kyangphag would then be from the Dru (*'Gru*) clan and his original name would be Phagpa Kyab (*'Phags pa skyab*). The syllable Kyang is probably a family-name, which is given in many older sources as Jang (*sPyang*). The area of Thewo is mentioned in older sources also as Jangrong (*sPyang rong*) and thus it seems that this designation followed the name of his family (*'BRUG THAR / SANGS RGYAS TSHE RING*, 2005).





Plate 6: Place of the treasure revelation (*G.yung drung rdzong*) by Kyangphag (photo by D. Berounsky, 2006).

Several short texts mention that he had two sons<sup>16</sup> and one daughter by the name of Yudronma (*g.Yu sgron ma*). One of the recent local texts tells us that his daughter married Dophag (or Nangzhig) and even adds that the marriage took place in Dophag's 60<sup>th</sup> year of life, which would mean that the dates for the life of Kyangphag are similar to Dophag. This would be in agreement with the dates of Kyangphag giving 1081 as date of birth and 1171 of his passing away (RIN CHEN RGYAL MTSHAN: fol. 22a). The precise dates are, however, hardly verifiable. In some sources his birth is dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (cf. HUBER, 1998) and in others even as early as the 10<sup>th</sup> century (ANONYMOUS, 1995).

16 Thog rgod nam mkha' rgyal mtshan and Thogs med nam mkha' dbang phyug (SKAL BZANG / PADMA SGRON, 1999: 42).



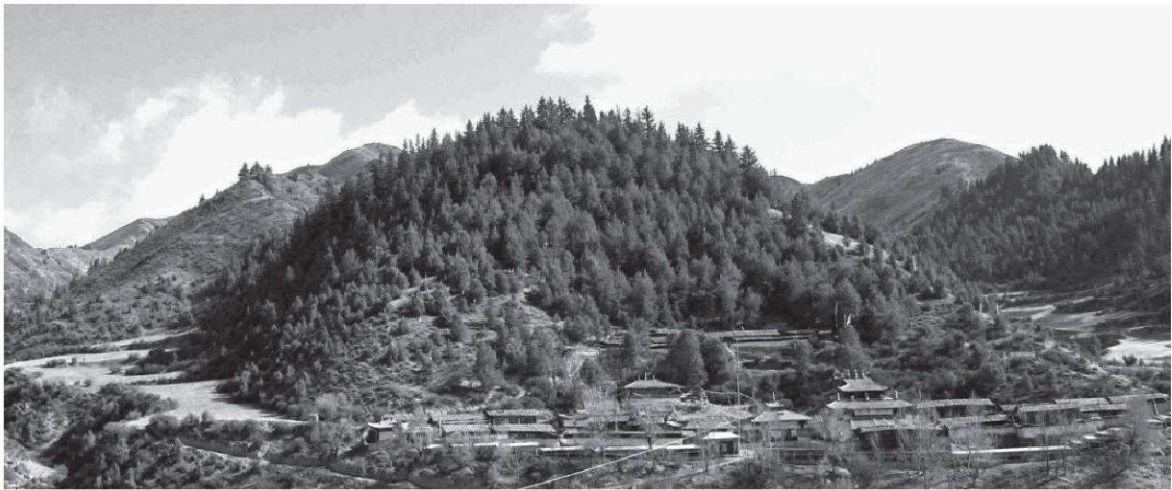


Plate 7: Akyi Kyangtshang (*A skyid skyang tshang*) monastery, which probably evolved from the seat of Kyang family (photo by D. Berounsky, 2006).



Plate 8: Gurba monastery (*Sgur ba dgon*), the place of probable past Kyang family seat (photo by D. Berounsky, 2006).

The area near Dzorge (*mDzod dge*) and in Thewo (*The bo*) is full of various stone imprints attributed to him (imprints left by the hoof of his horse, his

rosary, his spear, after his pissing (*gsang chab rjes*), and springs of water he is believed to have brought out from the earth.<sup>17</sup>

He is believed to be the person who opened a number of “pilgrimage places” (*gnas*). The text from Gurba monastery gives a list of six of them (*Brag dkar bya rgod*, *Bya dur*, *'Phags rgod*, *Bab bzo*, *sNang rtse brag dkar*, *Dar rgyal lha rtse*, see RIN CHEN RGYAL MTSHAN) but there are even more that were allegedly opened by him, for example the famous Dungri place (*Dung ri gnas*, see HUBER, 2006). The pilgrimage place most associated with him is Dragkar Jagoe, “White Vulture Rock” (*Brag dkar bya rgod*).<sup>18</sup> In later times, descendents of his family established a network of monasteries influential throughout the eastern part of southern Amdo.

#### 4. Texts ascribed to Kyangphag

There are at least three texts considered to be authored by Khyanphag available to me. This is actually no small achievement, since very little remains nowadays from other masters of that time.

The first text is a very short ritual text of three folios entitled *Black female warrior deity – a change of eagle by raven* (*dGra bla mo nag mo pho rog lding 'gyur*, Katen 122–15). It contains a simple ritual used for killing an enemy. According to the text the ritual was transmitted by the legendary ancient sage Tongyung Thuchen (*sTong rgyung mthu chen*). The colophon mentions Kyangphag as the author, who wrote it down first.

According to the text, a *linga*<sup>19</sup> of the enemy should be drawn and a weapon attached to it with a string, to the left a goat-horn should be placed, some

17 They are interpreted as “signs” (*rtags*) either of his power or his instruction, often addressed to the local deity or demon. A number of them are listed in the sources (SKAL BZANG / PADMA SGRON, 1999; A SLONG DGE 'PHEL / 'DRI MED 'OD ZER, 1995; A NGAG TSHE RING BKRA SHIS, 2006; ANONYMOUS).

18 For traditional guidebooks to a number of these places see *rNga ba khul kyi gnas yig* (ANONYMOUS) and a collection of guidebooks with the rather misleading title *mDo smad shar phyogs su thog ma'i g.yung drung bon gyi lo rgyus* (A SLONG DGE 'PHEL / 'DRI MED 'OD ZER, 1995). Among them is also a rather long text dedicated to Dragkar Jagoe written by Hortsun Tendzin Lodroe Gyatso (*Hor btsun bstan 'dzin blo gros rgya mtsho*, 1889–1975), who spent some fifteen years there. For guidebooks to Dungri, see A NGAG TSHE RING BKRA SHIS, 2006. For some pilgrimage places in the area, see BEROUNSKÝ, 2007.

19 A phallus drawn for ritual purposes.



mustard seeds put in poisonous water and a ritual cake from black grains should be prepared. A piece of the ritual cake is placed into one's mouth. Then one imagines the Female Warrior deity riding a black mule and killing the enemy. At this moment, a few prescribed mantras are recited. The ritual should be repeated for seven days until a sign appears. If the heart of the enemy is cut, one should press down the *linga* and goat-horn, etc. The next sentence contains the clue to the meaning of the title of the text, but unfortunately it is not very clear. I read it as: "when the raven destroys a part of the shade of the eagle, they become equal."<sup>20</sup> The sentence seems to be part of the justification of the act of killing an enemy.

The second text consists of a short ritual text with a commentary entitled *Kyangphag's removing defilement [ritual]* (*sPyang 'phags grib sel*, Katen 64–27D). The text starts with a praise, including the usual phrases such as "It is done through the compassion with the sentient beings", etc. The praise is followed by a passage, explaining that the ransom-effigy (*ngar mi*) should be prepared and covered by the cloth of the defiled person and adorned by ornaments. Then, fox, mouse, monkey, frog and snake should be prepared and finally "flesh, blood and other offerings".

The ritual text itself asserts that the monkey expels the anger from the place of the heart, and the rest of the five poisons are expelled by a frog from the crown of the head, by a monkey from the throat, by a fox from the navel, and by a mouse from the private parts. One should imagine that all the defilement is absorbed into the prepared grains. Then one evokes deities on the respective five parts of the body: Tongyung Thuchen (*sTong rgyung mthu chen*), Sipay Gyalmo (*Srid pa'i rgyal mo*), Tsemchog (*rTse mchog*), i.e. the mythical sage and deities well known in the monastic Bon. The text alludes to the name of Kyangphag, asserting that this is an oral tradition coming from Drenpa Namkha.

These two texts are probably only small remainders in comparison with the quantity of the texts Kyangphag revealed and probably composed. On the one hand, we are able to discern some deities, persons and notions typical of Yungdrung Bon. On the other hand, the texts are rather weird and obscure, and there is evidence of the influence of popular or black magic in them.

20 *Dgra bo lo (?) mi 'khor dri rgod dag du dgul / pho rog nam mkha' lding pa'i gribs (sic) la thun gtor nas thang ma sgyur ro.* The passage translates verbally thus: "Stain of the enemy died into purity. When the raven destroys a part of the shade of the eagle (or garuda), they become equal." The justification of killing the enemy is probably meant.

The third and longest text contains his autobiography and survived in a hand-written manuscript; it is preserved in the so called “Bonpo Katen” (Katen 200–1). The text is entitled *Previous lives and autobiography of Rigzin Gyermi Nyioe* (*Rig 'dzin gyer mi nyi 'od kyi skyes rabs rnam thar yon tan thugs rje nyi ma*), alluding to the life and previous rebirths of the legendary sage Gyermi Nyioe (*Gyer mi nyi 'od*). Above the title we find a gloss by a different handwriting: Great Gyermi Kyangphag (*Gyer mi skyang 'phags chen po*). It consists of 55 folios, some of them are hardly intelligible. The colophon provides little information. It only states that the text was written down in Dargyal Lhatse (*Dar rgyal lha rtse*), which was probably the residence of Kyangphag, located not far from today's Kyangtsang monastery (*A skyid sKyang tshang dgon*) in Dzorge (*mDzod dge*) county.

Roughly half of the manuscript deals with a large number of Kyangphag's previous births. The second half of the text concentrates on Kyangphag himself and is often written in the first person. Although no name is mentioned in the colophon, it somehow naturally follows that he is the author.

The first half of the text starts with remembering his life as eagle. He was then reborn as Shinje (*gShin rje*, the Lord of Death), then goes through the birth as tortoise, tiger, etc. He was born for a short time as deity, and then, by the power of compassion of Yelha, the door of bad rebirths was closed and he was born as a human in Upper Tsang, i.e. in Tibet. From this moment, the text turns into a list of the names of his births as human, painstakingly providing the names of parents and teachers. These details are later extended into a list of the places he visited. He traveled to Tazig, Zhang-zhung, India and Tibet, surrounded by *dākinīs* and deities and using his power of “miraculous transformations”.

Then the king Drigum Tsenpo (*Gri gum btsan po*) is mentioned, and the text obtains a new dimension, turning into a personal recollection of historical events leading to the partial decline of Bon. Kyangphag then easily changes into yaks and tigers, but curiously also into a Chinese prostitute, in whose form he still works for the benefit of sentient beings. The larger part of this section is dedicated to his previous life as Bagor Vairocana. It describes the king's misunderstanding of his teaching, not distinguishing between Bon and Buddhism (*chos*), his exile to Gyalrong (*rGyal mo rong*), and his final recognition by the king. The text deals with king Darma Udumtsen (*Dar ma U dum btsan*, better known as *Langdarma*) and describes briefly the decline of Bon during his reign. Buddhism (*chos*), on the other hand, only partly declined. Subsequently, Kyangphag was reborn in Monyul and in the form of a tiger tamed the evil ones.



The following part is dedicated to the description of Kyangphag's life as Gyermi Nyioe.<sup>21</sup> It also includes his vision of Drenpa Namkha (*Dran pa nam mkha'*). In a lengthy poetical dialogue Drenpa Namkha reveals to him the teaching on non-duality.

Eventually, the text addresses the current life of Kyangphag himself. Kyangphag describes his blissful stay in his mother's womb and his travels to Khyunglung Ngulkhar, all continents, and paradises, etc. shortly after his birth. He explains that his mother was originally a *nāginī* (*klu*), and his father is a descendent of the deities (*lha*). The rest of the text consists of a long list of brief visions, miraculous travels and many miraculous transformations of his body.

Despite his travels to paradises and hells,<sup>22</sup> he frequently mentions localities from his probable native place. Most frequent are mountains close to his probable seat, Dragkar Jagoe (*Brag dkar bya rgod*) and Dargyal (*Dar rgyal*). He also describes the rediscovery of treasure-texts (*gter*) in the visionary style from these localities.

During his travels he "miraculously transforms" into beasts of prey, most frequently into a vulture.

These visions contrast with the few brief notes on the people surrounding him. In one section he describes how he appeared as a beggar among the people. He alleges that in his behavior good and bad was united, and, due to slander, he was also called "The False Kyang" (*sKyang rdzun*). The sections which are perhaps the most personal, summarizing his life, are the following (fol. 74):<sup>23</sup>

From the age of 19 until 21, I miraculously transformed [into so many appearances] that it is not possible to enumerate them. I opened hidden treasures without obstacles. When I reached my 22<sup>nd</sup> year, I opened the face of the hidden treasure of Mt. Jagoe (*Bya rgod*). At the age of 24 I opened the surface of the hidden treasure at Mt. Dargyal (*Dar rgyal*). Now, at the age of 25, I show unstable behavior, at times good, at times bad. My other appearances are at times venerated, at times not. In [some of my] sons and disciples surrounding me faith was born, [some] reject the faith. [...] Once I appear as furious and once as loving. With

21 One of the sages listed in the lineage of Oral Teaching of Zhang-zhung (*Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*).

22 I.e. 'Og min, hells, U rgyan, Tazik, Dang ra g.yu tsho, Wutaishan.

23 *Bcu dgu lon nas nyi shu rtsa gcig bar / gsang ba'i gter kha gang 'byed thogs pa med / dgung lo nyi shu rtsa gnyis lon pa'i dus / bya rgod gsang ba gter gyi zhal yang phye(s) / rtsa bzhi'i dus na dar rgyal gter zhal phye(s) / da lta dgung lo nyi shu rtsa lnga'i dus / chol bu'i spyod pa res bzang res mi bzang / nga gzhan dag snang ba res mos res mi mos / bka' 'khor bu slob dad skyes dad pa zlog / [...]. lan re khros zhing lan re byams tshul ston / kho bo bzang ngan bka' 'brel mthu stobs che /.*

regard to myself, good and bad is united and I possess great strength and magical power [...].

Later in the text, towards the end of the autobiographical part, he vividly describes his desperate situation (fol. 103):<sup>24</sup>

From the age of 26 until 31, as if I would not be of material body, with ease I miraculously transformed into birds, beasts of prey, animals and people. From the age of 33 until the present age of 39 years, I have taken the defilement of the others into my material body. I was hit by the bad pollution of fault and my brightness declines step by step. I began to drink chang, my body becomes fat, and I am even losing my teeth.

From the text one can clearly discern an obsession with the recollection of previous lives and “transformation power” (*rdzu 'phrul*). Interestingly, through the memory of his previous lives the historical past is interpreted from the Bonpo perspective. When the text addresses the more personal details of his biography translated here, it becomes clear that Kyangphag can be considered a kind of “mad yogin”.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The present Bonpo communities are heirs to these masters from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century. They claim as origin of their teachings Zhugom Trulzhig and Central Tibet. At our present stage of knowledge about Bonpo history, however, we are only aware of rather recent legends about his meeting with the eighteen *zhigpo* in Amdo. While in case of Nangzhig there could be some historical credibility concerning his connection with Zhugom Trulzhig, this does not seem to be probable in the case of Kyangphag. We can only assume that the local religious traditions based on family transmission played a role in his case as well.

The heritage of the early Bonpo masters in Amdo was later transmitted to both non-celibate tantrics and monastic communities. While the communities of monks probably tended to depict them in conformity with the later, developed monastic version of Bon, village tantric priests could have developed their herit-

24 *Nyer drug nas ni sum cu rtsa gcig bar / gdos pa'i lus bzhin ma yin ci bde ru / bya gcan ri dvags mir sprul thogs pa med / so gsum nas ni lta so dgu'i bar / dgos pa'i lus la gzhan sgrib bdag gis len / grib ngan skyon phog mdangs log bar bar bsnyung / chang 'thungs sha rgyas bzhin 'gyur so yang bud /.*



age as well. Non-celibate tantrics were frequent in the area until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, resembling the practitioners who continued their practices in the area of Rebkong (cf. THAR, 2008). Some of them were recorded on several pictures by Joseph Rock in the 1920's. He noticed many such "Bon sorcerers" in the area of Thewo (*The bo*; WALRAVENS, 2003). Their tradition probably declined when the Gelugpa monasteries in the area spread and soon came to dominate the region. There is, however, also the possibility that their decline is connected to the Bonpo monastic communities. Allegedly, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hortsun Tendzin Lodroe Gyatso (*Hor btsun bstan 'dzin blo gros rgya mtsho*, 1889–1975), a well known monk-scholar of the area, collected similar texts from the area, which he considered incompatible with the monastic Bon and burnt them.<sup>25</sup>

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25 This is stated by Ngag dbang rgya mtsho in his draft of the article published later (NGAG DBANG RGYA MTSO, 2005). It was omitted in the published version.

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