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gShen-rab Myi-bo

His life and times according to Tibet’s earliest literary sources

John Vincent Bellezza  
Senior Research Fellow  
Tibet Center, University of Virginia

The founder of the g.Yung-drung or ‘Eternal’ Bon religion is sTon-pa gshen-rab, a Buddha or Sangs-rgyas reckoned to have lived thousands of years ago. Also commonly known as gShen-rab mi-bo-che, his life is thought to have long preceded the historical Buddha of India, Śakyamuni (6th century BCE). Depending on the way in which gShen-rab mi-bo-che’s life is dated in traditional chronologies known as bstan-rtis, he was born as much as 23,000 years ago. Such an early periodization places this holy personage in the Upper Paleolithic, a remote age in which big game hunting and plant gathering dominated wherever Homo sapiens had spread.

The earliest major literary works to chronicle the life and times of gShen-rab mi-bo-che the Buddha are mDo-'dus and mDo gzer mig, texts which probably were composed in 1804 by Tshul-khrims rgyal-mtshan, Kvenrane (1990: 153, 154) calculates that gShen-rab was born approximately 23,000 years ago. Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin (born 1813) as elaborated by Lopön Tenzin Namdak places the birth of gShen-rab some 18,000 years back, while sPre'u-bstan kun-bzang lhun-grub determines that this event took place approximately 13,500 years ago (Martin 2003: 75). Relying on other g.Yung-drung Bon sources, Namkhai Norbu (1995: 156–158) ascertains that the birth of gShen-rab mi-bo occurred in 1917 BCE. For a synopsis of Buddha gShen-rab mi-bo’s life-story, see Karmay 1998, pp. 108–113; 1972, pp. xvii–xxi; 2005, pp. 139–210; Kvenrane 1995, pp. 17–21; Stein 1972, pp. 242–245; Martin 2001-a, pp. 30–39. A detailed study of Eternal Bon sources pertinent to the development of the sTon-pa gShen-rab legend is forthcoming in Blezer’s ‘Three Pillars of Bon’ project (see Blezer 2008 for announcement).

1 Translations of the Tibetan texts in this paper were made in consultation with Yungdrung Tenzin of sTeng-chen, a Tibetan scholar of exceptional philological aptitude, with whom I have worked for more than a decade. I am also most grateful to Pasang Wangdui and Don-drup Lhagyal of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences (Lhasa) for furnishing me with high quality digital images of the byol-rabs text. Furthermore, I must thank Geshe Chaguru Tritsun Namdak Nyima of Trten Norbutse (Kathmandu) for his input regarding my reading of PT 1068. I am indebted to Brandon Dotson (Oxford University) for perusing a draft of the paper, offering valuable advice, and for kindly making several articles available to me. Per Sørensen (Universität Leipzig) and Guntram Hazod (Hummelberg) also offered expert advice that helped to improve the quality of this paper. Sally Walkerman, Lisa Dhamija and Peter Kingsley provided editorial comment, for which I am most thankful. Finally, I want to express my appreciation to the staff of the website Old Tibetan Documents Online (http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp/), a wonderful facility for students of the Old Tibetan language.

2 Using the brTan rtis bskal ldan dang 'dren composed in 1804 by Tshul-khrims rgyal-mtshan, Kvenrane (1990: 153, 154) calculates that gShen-rab was born approximately 23,000 years ago. Nyi-ma bstan-'dzin (born 1813) as elaborated by Lopön Tenzin Namdak places the birth of gShen-rab some 18,000 years back, while sPre'u-bstan kun-bzang lhun-grub determines that this event took place approximately 13,500 years ago (Martin 2003: 75). Relying on other g.Yung-drung Bon sources, Namkhai Norbu (1995: 156–158) ascertains that the birth of gShen-rab mi-bo occurred in 1917 BCE. For a synopsis of Buddha gShen-rab mi-bo’s life-story, see Karmay 1998, pp. 108–113; 1972, pp. xvii–xxi; 2005, pp. 139–210; Kvenrane 1995, pp. 17–21; Stein 1972, pp. 242–245; Martin 2001-a, pp. 30–39. A detailed study of Eternal Bon sources pertinent to the development of the sTon-pa gShen-rab legend is forthcoming in Blezer’s ‘Three Pillars of Bon’ project (see Blezer 2008 for announcement).
date to the 11th century CE. These biographical works are surpassed in scope and size by the 14th century CE mDo dri med gzi brjid, which was recently republished in Tibet in 12 bound volumes. These Eternal (Swastika) Bon biographical works, as well as a host of other Bon ritual and philosophical literature, chiefly portray sTon-pa gShen-rab as an omniscient figure whose main mission was to show humanity the path to enlightenment. This he accomplished by subduing unruly spirits and by teaching a battery of moral, philosophical and esoteric practices.

The earliest mention of a personality called gShen-rab myi-bo (an earlier orthographic rendering of the name gShen-rab mi-bo-che) is found in ritual literature written in the early historic period (circa 650 to 1000 CE). Consisting of archaic funerary (bdur/ţur) and ransom (glud) rites, these Old Tibetan language texts belong to early historic religious traditions, the institutional and economic foundations of which are still very obscure. There are two sources for these archaic ritual texts: the Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ’bum-pa manuscripts. As is well known, the highly extensive Dunhuang collections were found on the edge of the Gobi desert 100 years ago by Paul Pelliot and Aurel Stein, among the greatest discoveries in the annals of Tibetology. The cache of dGa’-thang ’bum-pa texts was recovered in 2006 during the reconstruction of a mchod-rten in the southern Tibetan region of Lho-kha.

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3 mDo’-dus is believed to have been concealed by sNya-chens Li-shu stag-ring (8th century CE) and rediscovered at bSam-yas mchod-rten dmar-po by Sad-gu rin-chens grags-pa. mDo gzer mig was rediscovered at bSam-yas lho-phyogs khri-thang dur-khrod by Drang-rje btsun-pa gser-mig, probably in the 11th century CE. For more complete bibliographic information, see Karmay 1972, p. 4 (fn. 1), 163 (fn. 1). For an analysis of textual evidence pointing to either the 10th or 11th century CE composition of these two texts, and the ’Byung khung kyi mdo as their possible source, see Blezer forthcoming.

4 Traditionally attributed to sTang-chen dmu-tsha gyer-med (8th century CE), and rediscovered by sPhul-skro B1o-lchan myi-bo (born 1360 CE). It has been republished by Bod-ljongs bod-yig dpe-rnying dpe-skrun khang: Lhasa, 2000.

5 Also gShen-rab kyi myi-bo/gShen-rab kyi myi-bo. Shen-rab(s) means either best/excellent (rab) priest (gshen) or refers to the gshen priestly lineage (Classical Tibetan = gshen-rabs). Myi-bo/mi-bo-che denotes a holy or highly prestigious man, with the addition of che (great) in the more modern cognominal form, a semantic redundancy. According to Pasar et al. (2008: 182), mi-bo means ‘lord of men, ‘best of men’. I want to heartily thank Yasuhiko Nagano for kindly making available to me a copy of this work (A Lexicon of Zhangzhung and Bonpo Terms), as well as for other volumes in his Bon studies series.

6 This collection of texts was published in 2007 as facsimiles with accompanying transcriptions in the dbyul-can script under the title Gtams shul dga’ thang ’bum pa che nas gsar du rnyed pa’i bon gyi gtu dpe bdams bsgrigs (eds. Pa-tshab pa-sangs dbang’ dus (Pasang Wangdui) and Glang-ru nor-bu tse-ring); Bod-ljongs bod-yig dpe-rnying dpe-skrun khang, 2007. According to the introduction to this book (pp. 1–8), when local people undertook to rebuild a mchod-rten in mTsho-smad county known as dGa’-thang ’bum-pa, they discovered a cache of folios still preserved inside the ruined structure. The authors write that the discovered texts fall into two main categories: Buddhist examples written circa 1100 CE and a smaller body of Bon ritual and medical texts probably dating to the later period of the sBu-rgyal btsun-po rulers. On grammatical and paleographic grounds, but without giving details, the editors observe that these Bon ritual texts are comparable to certain Dunhuang manuscripts. As the dGa’-thang ’bum-pa manuscripts can be divided into two distinct types, the authors believe that the mchod-rten enshrining them was renovated more than once. The editors report that the Bon
The Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ’bum-pa manuscripts furnish telling details about the activities of gShen-rab myi-bo. These sources depict him in a very different manner from how he is framed in Eternal Bon literature. Absolutely no reference to gShen-rab myi-bo’s status as an omnipotent and all-knowing Buddha is noted in Old Tibetan literature. Rather, the Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ’bum-pa manuscripts place him in the mold of a priest, the guardian of ritual methods to safeguard the living and aid the dead. In the archaic ritual texts, gShen-rab myi-bo serves as a cultural icon, a laudable and highly influential personality of considerable antiquity, the memory of which must have been passed down to succeeding generations as an oral tradition. In his guise as a prototypic ritualist, gShen-rab myi-bo does not often act unilaterally and it conveys no assertion of omniscience. Rather, he is one of several priests working cooperatively with the support of special deities. In some instances, there is essential ritual work he is unable to perform on his own, so he must seek the assistance of other priests and patron deities. Although the nebulous time-frame and mythic activities associated with gShen-rab myi-bo in Old Tibetan literature militate against the historical validation of his life, the mere mortal status accorded to him in these accounts has a ring of authenticity. At the heart of the Old Tibetan legends potentially lies a real man, one who assumed an ever grander social aura with the passage of time. Like trees, legends build up gradually as more and more extravagant lore is accreted to their core.\footnote{I take an unabashedly euhemeristic stance here; aware that gShen-rab myi-bo viewed either as fact or fiction are equally unsupportable positions with the evidence at hand. Stein (2003: 598, 599) discounts a real-life identity for gShen-rab myi-bo, considering him instead to be a mythic or legendary figure. Conversely, Karmay (1998: 111) opines that he may have been an actual person of Tibetan origin who lived before the 7\textsuperscript{th} century CE. Stein (ibid.) finds this assertion improbable, stating in reference to PT 1289, that this is a ritual and not a historical text. Yet, ritual and history are often intertwined in the Tibetan literary tradition, somewhat diminishing Stein’s argument.}

In contrast, it is difficult to entertain a real-life personality behind the gShen-rab mi-bo-che of the Eternal Bon documents. The man of the archaic rituals was squarely replaced by a god-like being, which rises head and shoulders above all others. gShen-rab mi-bo-che is an individual qualitatively different from other men. No one can excel him in any field and none can resist his commands. Emerging as a Buddha in the eyes of his followers by the 11\textsuperscript{th} century CE, gShen-rab mi-bo-che came to be seen as infallible, not like ordinary men that must contend with limits to their intelligence and capabilities. From a modern rationalist angle, gShen-rab mi-bo-che’s sheer perfection and incredible supernatural powers and knowledge are not easily reconciled with the concept of an individual who once actually walked on the earth. Clearly, his divine aura is played out in the religious arena.

In the archaic funerary manuscripts of Dunhuang, the primary ritual function of gShen-rab myi-bo is to psychologically prepare the dead for the afterlife.
This reconditioning of the deceased’s consciousness principles was considered especially crucial when death was caused by violent circumstances. The Dunhuang proclamations of ritual origins (smrang) describe the carrying out of several different types of ritual activities by gShen-rab myi-bo in order to achieve this rehabilitation. As historical precedents and models of exemplary ritual conduct, the smrang were indispensable parts of the ancient funeral. Given as public recitations, they prefaced the actual archaic funerary rites to sanction and empower their practice. The smrang also functioned to elevate the cultural status of the officiating priests.

In the dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa manuscripts, the activities of gShen-rab myi-bo are found in two narratives of ritual origins. These smrang detail the rescue of a human luminary and a divine progenitor of the Tibetan kings through the performance of a special type of ransom offering or glud known as byol. The two aforesaid smrang of the byol-rabs text have the virtue of furnishing considerably more biographical information about gShen-rab myi-bo than do the Dunhuang manuscripts, expanding his occupational specialization beyond funerary rites to embrace rituals of benefit to the living. He is recorded as having participated in ancient ransom rituals, which acted as the prototype for analogous performances conducted in the period in which the text was written.

The existence of older and newer bodies of literature concerning gShen-rab myi-bo/gShen-rab mi-bo-che suggests that as Buddhism came to dominate the religious convictions and conceptions of Tibetans, the spiritual role of gShen-rab was modified accordingly. The historical details surrounding this biographical reengineering are virtually non-existent. Buddhist writers had little reason to dwell on the formation of Eternal Bon theology and Eternal Bon had good cause to suppress the memory of the transformation of their central personality. However, despite the very different perspectives in the Old Tibetan manuscripts and Eternal Bon materials, in both, gShen-rab myi-bo fulfils a soteriological role. In the early historic literature of Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa, he frees the dead through the correct performance of the funerary rites and he saves the living through the ransom rites. In Eternal Bon tradition, he liberates through a regimen of moral and philosophical imperatives. First as an accomplished ritualist and then as an enlightened master, gShen-rab’s evolving savior activities reflect profound changes in the cultural makeup of Tibet.

In the smrang of the Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa manuscripts, it is explicitly stated that these narratives of ritual origins are set in ‘ancient times’. Nevertheless, the timeline involved in these professions cannot be determined with any degree of precision. What can be safely asserted is that the authors of these smrang believed that the events and personalities described therein took place in an earlier age, that is, before the texts were written down, circa 650–1000 CE. They are tales of a prehistoric past, which unfold before the develop-

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8 According to Eternal Bon funerary literature preserving older cultural materials, the human consciousness (including self-awareness and basic mental faculties) is a bipartite phenomenon consisting of a bla and yid or a bka’ and thugs. See Bellezza 2008, passim.

9 As Stein (2003: 598) observes, circa the 11th century CE, when Eternal Bon authors chose the name of their founder, they did so in pursuance of a preexisting tradition.
ment of the Tibetan system of writing in the 7th century CE. This early historic literature preserves one of the finest windows into how the cultural prehistory of Tibet was once imagined.

The portrayal of gShen-rab mi-yi-bo in the Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ’bum-pa manuscripts alludes to a fundamental doctrinal difference between the archaic religious traditions and Lamaist Eternal Bon. Eternal Bon is founded on a ‘historic model of origins’, as it is endowed with definite temporal and geographic underpinnings. Religious beginnings, identity and authority are unambiguously ascribed to gShen-rab mi-bo-che of ‘Ol-mo lung-ring. Conversely, archaic religious traditions, as depicted in the early historic documents, appear to have been founded on what might be termed a ‘bardic model of origins’, one that minimizes the significance of a single personality, time period and locale as the exclusive wellspring of its existence. This seems to indicate that the archaic religious traditions were not as narrowly defined institutionally as Eternal Bon with its strong sectarian groundwork. Rather, the archaic religious traditions appear to represent a Tibetan cultural patrimony with very wide temporal and geographical roots. As I have written earlier (2008), I tend to see the archaic ritual origins myths as part of a socio-political bid to weld the various tribes of the Tibetan Plateau into a single polity held together by a shared cultural idiom. The development of an intellectual and aspirational common ground, the extant Old Tibetan ritual texts representing just one element of that, could only have been a project of massive proportions during the time of the bstan-po’s empire.

gShen-rab myi-bo as the guardian of the dead in the archaic funerary texts of Dunhuang11

The first historical occurrences of gShen-rab myi-bo can be traced to the Dunhuang manuscripts, in his seminal role as an archetypal funerary priest. His ritual activities are recorded in five different texts: PT 1068, PT 1134, PT 1136, PT 10

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10 Many vestiges of archaic funerary traditions amalgamated to Buddhist-inspired philosophical tenets and practices are found in a collection of Eternal Bon texts known as the Mu-cho’i khrom-’dur (Multitude of Funerary Rites’ of Mu-cho [ldem-drug]), which began to be compiled circa 1000 CE. Early historic period mythic, procedural and philosophical elements were faithfully gathered up by the authors of Eternal Bon texts and incorporated into the Mu-cho’i khrom-’dur mostly by unknown authors. The first text in this collection (Mu cho’i khrom ’dur chen mo las rin chen ’phreng gzhung gi le’u, by gSang-sngags grags-pa, New Collection of Bon bka’-brten, vol. 6, nos. 1-73), sets out the legendary history of the Bon funerary tradition, detailing its source, transmission and tangible benefits. The first four lineage-holders of the Mu-cho’i khrom-’dur are divine figures who occupy various heavenly realms. The fifth lineage-holder was the great founder of the systematized Bon religion, sTon-pa gShen-rab, who represents the divide between the divine (celestial) and human (terrestrial) holders of the funerary lineage. The Mu-cho’i khrom-’dur is studied in Bellezza 2008.

* Classical Tibetan = ’dur.
11 Notations used in paper: C.T. = Classical Tibetan, O.T. = Old Tibetan, words bracketed by {} = uncertain reading, {…} = one or more illegible syllables, ĭ = the reverse letter i, [] = interpolation, + = addition to text.
In this section of the paper, I review specific references to gShen-rab myi-bo in these manuscripts. The Dunhuang manuscripts under consideration contain abstruse grammatical constructions and lore that pose formidable philological challenges to their comprehension. Difficulties in language are compounded by the poor physical condition of certain parts of these texts. The grammatical and orthographical structures of the Dunhuang funerary manuscripts under review are somewhat more old fashioned than those of the dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa byol-rabs text. Obsolete grammatical structures in Dunhuang funerary literature are particularly noticeable in verb morphology and case forms. If written in the 8th or 9th century CE, these archaic manuscripts may predate the byol-rabs of dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa by two or more centuries.

In one smrang or origin tale of PT 1134 (lms. 48–66), mention is made of the fathers (pha) or venerable priests Dur-shen-rma, gShen-rabs myi-bo and

12 With the exception of PT 1289, the texts enumerated were the object of an in-depth study I carried out (2008). These funerary manuscripts of the Pelliot tibétains (Paris) and India Office Library (London) collections can be broadly dated circa 650 to 1000 CE. As part of a recent trend in Tibetology, some scholars place these texts in a more restrictive timeframe, claiming they cannot be older than the 9th or 10th century CE. An extreme and not well supported position is taken by Walter (2009), who maintains that archaic funerary texts such as PT 1042 were composed nearly as late as the bsTan-pa phyi-dar (circa 1000 CE) and have little or no relevance to imperial period burial practices. While the dating of the Dunhuang funerary texts remains largely a matter of educated opinion, PT 1068, PT 1134 and PT 1136 in particular may be authentic imperial period documents, composed between the second half of the 7th century and the middle of the 9th century CE. Only systematic codicological and paleographical study corroborated by archaeometric data will finally put to rest the debate surrounding the age of the Dunhuang funerary manuscripts. That is to say, a survey of text-internal features (grammar, orthography, calligraphy, format of document, type of paper, etc.) linked to the scientific study of the texts as physical objects (qualitative analysis of paper, ink, binding materials, etc.) is required to conclusively answer questions pertaining to chronology. With this proviso in mind, I tender the following observations that suggest an imperial period date for the manuscripts under consideration. Although it may not be warranted to compare different genres of Dunhuang literature, each has retained peculiar literary characteristics, PT 1136 does exhibit a paleography reminiscent of the Old Tibetan Chronicle (PT 1287), a text that can probably be dated to circa the mid 9th century CE. Moreover, the narrative content of PT 1068, PT 1134 and PT 1136 betrays no Buddhist influences, indicating that they are representative of religious traditions that circulated in Tibetan regions as a countervailing cultural force. In my opinion, these alternative religious traditions are likely to have been part of a cultural schema that existed in Tibet before the introduction of Buddhism. The period between the fall of the Tibetan empire and the bsTan-pa phyi-dar seems to be represented in a genre of Dunhuang funerary manuscripts with distinctive Buddhist concepts and polemical content, texts such as PT 126, PT 239 and ITJ 504. In my view, the transition from purely non-Buddhist to Buddhist cultural forms in Dunhuang funerary literature reflects a historical progression, not merely concurrent trends in the development of literary genres and religious traditions. A transitional stage for certain Dunhuang literature has also been postulated by Cantwell and Mayer (2008), regarding a class of Buddhist tantras, which they refer to as the Intermediate period (circa 850–1000 CE). According to Cantwell and Mayer (ibid.), these tantric texts (PT 44 and PT 307) were subject to an indigenizing process, whereby the appended myths of origins in content and form came to resemble the non-Buddhist smrang or dpe-srol structure of native Tibetan myths.

13 In the g.Yung-drung funerary Bon text Mu cho’i khrom ’dur chen mo las rin chen ’phreng gzhung gi le’u (by gSang-sngags grags-pa), the funerary priest ’Dur-gshen rma-da (C.T. spelling) is the
sKar-shen (gshen) thi’u-bzhug. In this narrative of funerary ritual origins, gShen-rab is not distinguished in any special way from his priestly counterparts; he is merely one of a trio of ritualists.14 These archetypal priests in no uncertain terms announce to the pyugs spos ma nye du (the beloved kindred horse on which the deceased’s consciousness principles are mounted) that death has occurred. This passage is found right after the deceased and his relatives (gnyen-bdun) meet for the last time and three words of the doctrine are spoken to the departed.15 Very potent metaphors are used by the three funerary priests to get their message across: “You are dead. The lord is dead, you are no more. Chipped, the turquoise is chipped, so it is no more. The degenerated son, yes, so it is no more. The degenerated16 son, yes,

14 Blezer (2008: 421, 424), reflecting earlier scholarly speculation on the matter, suggests that (pha) gShen-rab kyi myi-bo is not the proper name of an individual but rather a priestly title. He further opines (ibid.: 425) that it was Eternal Bon that created an individual out of this generic sacerdotal class during the bsTan-pa phyi-dar. The narrative content of the Dunhuang texts that mention gShen-rab myi-bo, however, unambiguously present him as an individual engaged in specific ritual activities (cf. Stein 2003: 597–600). As we shall see, gShen-rab myi-bo is also very much depicted as a person in the dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa text. In his work, Blezer (ibid.) resorts to polemics of a decidedly personal nature regarding my recent book (2008). I find this polemical approach unhelpful in furthering Bon studies and decline in this paper from addressing his various allegations.

15 “‘The teaching of three spoken words is sweet to the ear.’ (bsTand (C.T. = bstan) pa nγag tsi Glide (C.T. = tshig) sum ni rgar (= rgar, C.T. = mgar) mnyen (C.T. = snyan) |). This important archaic cultural tradition of saying three special words to the deceased is attested in the opening lines of the Eternal Bon funerary text rTa gshid brdzugs so (New Collection of Bon bka’-bten, Klong gyas sgrub skor, vol. 274, nos. 463–468): “Today, you magical equid (gor-bu), when we bequeath you as the patrimony (rdzongs) of the dead one (gshin), we praise you with three words from our mouths (de ring sprul pa’i gor bu khyed / gshin la rdzongs su rdzongs (= brdzongs) tsam na / zhal nas bstod ra tshigs (= tshig) gsum gyis (= bygi) |). See Bellezza 2008, p. 456.

16 ‘Pan This O.T. term is the precursor of the C.T. verb ‘phan-pa (injured/spoiled/damaged).
he is dead. The crane egg, yes, it is cracked. The sharp bow, yes, it is broken." PT 1134 goes on to state that through the efforts of Dur-gshen rma-da-na (sic) and gShen-rab myi-bo, the deceased or lord was able to bypass the infernal land of the dead and reach the ordered position of the expansive heights, thereby attaining the afterlife.

In the funerary manuscript PT 1068 (lns. 87–96), we read that the brother of sKyi-nam nyag-cig-ma, a girl who died in very tragic circumstances, invited gShen-rab myi-bo and two other funerary priests, Dur-shen gyi rma-da and gShen-tsha lung-sgra, to provide the dpyad (diagnostic) procedures for her funeral. The brother, sKyi-phug ’jon-pa, had enlisted their ritual services in order to rehabilitate his sister’s corpse and mind. The three ritualists advise the brother to travel to a distant land and procure a special female hybrid yak, which will be used to carry sKyi-nam nyag-cig-ma’s consciousness principles to the afterlife. The words of the three funerary priests can be paraphrased as follows:

‘Do you have the remedy, do you have the [bon gpyad (= dpyad)] for my sister sKyi-nam nyag-cig’s hair standing on end in the sky and lice eggs falling down, do you know? The fathers Dur-shen gyi rma-da, gShen-rab myi-bo and gShen-tsha lung-sgra, these three, replied, ‘We gshen have the ritual remedy (bong = bon), we have the dpyad, we have the means to rehabilitate (sös) the dead, those who are no more.’ For the hair standing on end in the sky, you can milk the mDzo-mo drama of the srin ford and daub the fresh lumps of butter. Brother sKyi-phug ’jon-pa, you go there to mDzo-mo dram-ma’s Yul-ggod khyer gi y ‘bri-mo srang, where the two yaks Glang khye-bo ru-gar and Sa sral-mo mated and have had the offsprings of the season.’

PT 1136 (lns. 30–60) contains a smrang describing a funeral in which two colts were used as the do-ma, the psychopomp horses that transport the consciousness principles of the dead to the afterlife. In this tale the deceased is a princess (tsuin) named Lady (ICam) Lho-rgyal byang-mo, who hailed from the headwaters region of the river country (yul-chab kyi ya-bgo) of southwestern Tibet.

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17 rNo. This well-known metaphor describes sharp-edged weapons such as the sword and arrow.
18 Op. cit., Lns. 61, 62: khyed gyang (= kyang) grongs rje grongs gis myed grags g.yu grags gis myed na ‘pan gi ni bu grongs khrung khru (C.T. = khrung khrung) ni sgon g do/ rno’i ni gzhu chag gis…
19 rje gral nito (C.T. = mtho) yang slebs.
20 [gThod] ji mchis. Contextually, this appears to convey the asking for a remedy or method.
21 This is an abbreviated translation of the last clause in the sentence, which also includes [bon] la [ga byad] ci mchis (?).
22 This restoration refers to the refurbishment of the consciousness of the deceased so that he or she can rest easily and relinquish attachments to the world of the living. Sös or gso-ba does not refer to the reanimation of corpses. For a clarification of this term, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 399, 400, 538, 540. A seminal theme in the Mu-cho’i khrom’dur is the need to ease the suffering of the deceased in order that the rites of liberation can be successfully concluded. This sentence in the text is followed by: lan shing ni [cheru gthang] cha gar ni ring (du brtsid) ‘tshal ggis /, the meaning of which is highly obscure.
23 The name mDzo-mo dram-ma is etymologically related to the ’brog-pa term ’bri-mo/mdzo-mo grus-ma/drus-ma (a female yak/female yak hybrid that has calved in the current year).
Given the name of her father rTsang ho-de’i hos-bdag, we might expect this headwaters location to be that of the Yar-lung/Yar-chab rtsang-po/gtsang-po, a river whose principal source is Bye-ma g.yung-drung. rTsang refers to either a clan, tribal and/or geographic designation.24 ICam lho-rgyal byang-mo commit-

24 In reference to PT 1136, Blezer (2008: 431, 451) argues that rTsang in the name rTsang ho-de’i hos-bdag refers to the rTsang-chen region, one of the territories mentioned in Dunhuang documents, and that this region may have extended all the way from Central Tibet to Gangs ti-se and mTsho ma-pang/ma-pham. This expansive localization of rTsang echoes the view held by Thomas (1957: Geographic Introduction, p. 11). In line with his opinion on the extent of rTsang, Blezer (ibid.: 425) maintains that the seven occurrences of gShen-rab myi-bo in the Dunhuang manuscripts have nothing to do with Zhang Zhung, but as I shall show here his view of the territorial scope of rTsang-chen is unwarranted. Even if we take rTsang in the name rTsang ho-de’i hos-bdag as having geographic connotations (which it most probably does), it may well refer to the eponymous river and not the province, especially when we consider that the story is set in a very distant period of time (see infra, fn. 29). According to a chapter found in Chos-b’byung literature entitled “Section on Law and State”, Zhang Zhung was sufficiently puissant to have its own administrative chief (kho-b-dpon; Dotson 2009: 38, 50). The Old Tibetan Annals state that along with the Four Horns of Tibet, the Sumpa Horn and areas in eastern Tibet, Zhang Zhung had the distinction of being divided into stong-sde, and military administrative units of the Tibetan empire (ibid.: 39). That Zhang Zhung was considered a significantly-sized territory in imperial times is also indicated in the famous Chos-b’byung works mkhas pa’i dga’ ston and mkhas pa’i lde’u, which divide it into upper and lower halves, each consisting of five stong-sde (consisting of 1000 residential camps or households each; Bellezza 2008: 271; forthcoming-c; Vitali 1996: 433 (fn. 722). Zhang Zhung as an extensive polity is underlined by the inclusion of Gu-ge, a large region in itself, which constituted just one of the five stong-sde of lower Zhang Zhung. In fact, these five territorial divisions of Zhang Zhung include Yar-rtsang/Yar-tshang, which I take to refer to the headwaters region of the gTsang-po river (cf. Vitali 2006: 433), squarely placing it within the compass of Zhang Zhung. Another of these stong-sde, sPyi-gtang, may also be placed in the gTsang-po headwaters region (ibid.). For the possible correspondence of Yar-rtsang with Yang-rtsang of the Old Tibetan documents from Mazar Tagh, see Denwood 2008, p. 10. Furthermore, one of the five stong-sde of upper Zhang Zhung is Ba-ga stong-bu chung, which appears to be the Sum-pa’i stong-bu chung of Eternal Bon sources. This is a location in what is now ‘Bri-ru county (Bellezza 2008: 271; forthcoming-c; cf. Sorensen et al. 2007: 259, fn. 741), extending the administrative scope of Zhang Zhung 350 km farther east than my typological studies of ancient monuments would indicate fell directly under its cultural remit. Using references to Tibetan and Chinese sources, Denwood (2008: 10–12) equates the five stong-sde of upper Zhang Zhung with the “Changhang Corridor”, a region he hypothesizes sustained itself through long-distance trade in high value goods. On the approximate borders of Zhang Zhung stod and smad, see Hazod’s cartographic Corridor (2009: 168, 169).

Given the localization data as set forth above, the position taken by Macdonald (1971: 264) in her study of PT 1136, that yul-chab kyi ya-bgo is an expression designating Zhang Zhung is not uncalled for, even if this area was just part of its territory. The localization of yul-chab kyi ya-bgo in southwestern Tibet and its association with Zhang Zhung is confirmed in PT 1060 (see infra, fn. 149). Vitali (2008: 413) uses the occurrence of the word hos to place the same PT 1136 narrative in Zhang Zhung as well. The name of the patriarch rTsang ho-de’i hos-bdag includes hos, a term in Eternal Bon that is closely linked to Zhang Zhung and other western realms. In any case, it is imprudent to include Ti-se and mTsho ma-pang in the rTsang province, for as Vitali (ibid.: passim) shows in his work on the royal geographic parameters of Zhang Zhung, they are very much central to it (cf. Norbu 2009: 19). In Eternal Bon sources, Ti-se and mTsho ma-pang are consistently seen as an integral part of Zhang Zhung (its soul mountain and soul lake), a telling attribution in recognition of antecedent tradition. The 14th century CE text Khro bo dbyangs chen ngo mtshar fixes the [southeastern] border between Zhang Zhung and Tibet (Bod) in the vicinity of gTsang kha-rag, which encompasses the well-known mountain rTsang-lha phu-dar/gTsang-lha phu-dar (Bellezza forthcoming-c; 2008: 271).
ted suicide distraught over her betrothal to the lord of Gu-ge. Her father rTsang ho-de’i hos-bdag and brother sMra zing-skypes informed the father gShen-rab kyi myi-bo that the girl had killed herself bound to a black hair rope. They requested that gShen-rab kyi myi-bo untie the rope, so he called for divine aid in the form of sacred animals:

<Ins. 52–55> The father gShen-rab kyi myi-bo said, ‘I cannot untie the black hair rope, Bya-gshen ‘jon-mo’ can untie it.’ Well then, although

gTsang-lha phu-dar is located in the range of mountains dividing the Yar-chab gtsang-po and Ra-kha gtsang-po river systems, approximately 25 km southwest of Zang-zang, which is now in Ngam-ring county (approximately 86° 30’ E. longitude). The precision of the Khro text in delineating a critical paleocultural watershed is demonstrated in the areal distribution of funerary pillar monuments (erected in the prehistoric epoch and perhaps as late as the early historic period); those characteristic of Upper Tibet extend down the Yar-lung gtsang-po valley nearly as far east as gTsang-lha phu-dar (ibid.). This constitutes incontrovertible physical evidence that the western Tibetan upland belonged to an integral paleocultural order with monumental (and by extension, ideological) traits distinct from the cultural complexion of Central Tibet. The *sui generis* funerary pillar monuments of the Tibetan upland are not found downstream of gTsang-lha phu-dar in gTsang. Central Tibet possesses its own characteristic ensemble of prehistoric and early historic funerary monuments. This archaeological evidence accords nicely with Denwood’s hypothesis (based on Tibetan and Chinese sources) that lower Zhang Zhung extended down the gTsang-po valley as far east as the borders of Gung-thang (2008: 12). We can conclude from the above analysis that the toponym Zhang Zhung as used in Tibetan literature came to denote much of the Upper Tibetan paleocultural zone, if not its entirety. This does not necessarily signify that the ancient highlanders used this name to designate their homeland. We simply do not know how they may have referred to it. As we shall see, there is considerable textual evidence indicating that some if not the entire Byang-thang was known as sMra-yul thang-brgyad in early historic times.

Yet, even areas downstream of gTsang-lha phu-dar in what became known as Las-stod byang may have once come under Zhang Zhung jurisdiction (Hazard 2009: 171, 172, 190). ITJ 1284 reports that the famous minister [Khyung-po spung-sad] zu-tse conquered the principality of To-yo chas-la, which he offered along with Byang gi Zhang Zhung to Khri stod-rtsan (alias 5rong-btsan sgam-po; ibid.). Nevertheless, the hallmark pillar types of the Tibetan upland have not been documented in Byang, indicating that this region had a significantly different paleocultural makeup than areas west of Sa-dga’. Ascertain the precise cultural, political and geographic features of the old rTsang province would greatly benefit from the scientific excavation of tombs in Ngam-ring, Lha-rtsse and other areas that fell under its purview.

25 The nightingale (C.T. = ‘jol-mo) as a divine messenger and ally of the gshen ritualists. The avian identity of Bya-gshen ‘jon-mo is confirmed in an illuminated funerary manuscript in the interconnected card format consisting of some 40 color illustrations on paper, each of which has an accompanying text in the Tibetan language. I have translated this document, which was kindly made available by the art collector Moke Mokotoff (New York City). It will form the basis of a paper on the archaic funerary traditions of Tibet, a work in progress. On the basis of its paleographic characteristics, lexical archaisms and grammatical structure, this incomplete funerary manuscript can be dated to circa 1000–1250 CE. This has been confirmed through the chronometric testing of a fragment of the manuscript containing one of its standard polychrome illustrations: AMS analysis, sample no. Beta-272516; conventional radiocarbon age: 960 +/– 40 BP (years before present); 2 Sigma calibrated result (95% probability): Cal 1010 to 1170 CE; intercept of radiocarbon age with calibration curve Cal 1040 CE. It should be noted that its grammatical structure in general is somewhat more modern than that of the Dunhuang funerary texts or the dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa ritual text under study. The illuminated manuscript contains a funerary rite dedicated to women. It is primarily concerned with protecting the deceased and her surviving kith and kin from harm thought to
he sent Bya-bon bang-pa thang-reg to call Bya-gshen 'jon-mo, he could not bring Bya-gshen 'jon-mo, so he sent Skyin-po ru-thog rje (Lord Male Ibex Surmounted Horns) to call Bya-gshen 'jon-mo. He

emanate from the condition of death. This is accomplished through the invocation of a series of deities and divine animals. These figures can be divided into five main groups: 1) little birds, 2) jeweled deer protectors, 3) ste'u deities with analogous ritual structures, 4) lbe'u deities emanating from jeweled hail, and 5) special deities of the smrang. Among the little bird series is a pentad of forest birds that includes Bya-gshen 'jon-mo. He is one of four bird helpers born from an iron egg, which are led by a vulture. In the illustration accompanying the text the leader is depicted as a much larger bird than his four underlings. This type of vulture is referred to as gang-ka, which must be identical to or closely related to sacred bearded vulture, a bird that in Eternal Bon ritual traditions is known as bya-gshen rgyod-pa. The text of the card under scrutiny reads as follows: “The iron egg opened in the forest [and from it appeared] the little birds of the forest ke-ke (magpie?), khu-long (pheasant) zer-mong (?), and bya-gshen 'jon-mo (nightingale) who lead the way in the forest. They are the superior equipage.* They are the little bird defender-protectors of the long-beaked gang-ka who appear in the southern forest. He controls the forest. They are his little bird rosary (flock) who benefit. Act as the little bird protector-defenders that do not disperse in the forest.”

* dKor yi dam-pa. The mandatory presents and accompanying ritual procedures offered to the deceased and surviving relatives. See dkor/kor in PT 1042 (Bellezza 2008: 452, fn. 309). In the Klu 'bum nag po, a horse as valuable property (dkor) becomes the companion of the deceased (ibid.: 482, 484). In PT 1040, Ins. 100, 109, we find thang-ba'i dkor, sacrificial funerary gifts of some kind (on thang, see fn. 244). The word dam-pa here has the connotation of ‘essential’, ‘indispensable’, ‘superior’, or ‘excellent’, rather than its more common meaning, ‘holy’.

The leader of Bya-gshen 'jon-mo and his three feathered friends, the vulture, are species of birds with much significance in ancient Tibetan myths and rituals. According to Eternal Bon documents, the adepts of yore had the ability to manifest as vultures, the ‘king of the birds’. The use of vulture feather headdresses, robes and horns (crests) is also attested in these texts. Arrows with vulture feathers are used as tabernacles (trten) for various Eternal Bon deities, and native gods such as the wer-ma manifest in the form of vultures. In origins tales about the soul stone (bla-rdo srid-rabs) and ritual wing instrument (gshog-rabs) found in the Mu-cho'i khrom'dur, the vulture is cited as one of the three most important receptacles for the soul (Bellezza 2008: 413–417, 432–435). In the gshog-rabs, the vulture, along with a (precious) stone and juniper tree, serves as the protector of the soul of a divine human named Smra-dri ran-pa after his death. PT 1194 provides a smrang explaining how vulture wings came to be used in funerals to guide and protect the deceased (ibid.: 506–510).

26 A divine bird intermediary, most probably in the form of a species of pheasant. In Eternal Bon tradition, there are 13 species of bird messengers between humans and the deities (bya-bon 'phrin-pa bcu-bsum).

27 A divine animal messenger in the form of an ibex. The illuminated funerary manuscript (see supra, fn. 25) has this to say about this creature: “From the jeweled cervid habitat is the long horn male ibex and the female beautiful movement ibex and also the kid ibex with the beautiful gait,” these three. Their hair and wool are excellent clothes. Their yogurt cleanses diseases of the body. They are the attendants/messengers that can run very far. They can go wherever as fast as they think it. We offer this superior equipage (2x).” yang rin cen (C.T. = chen) sha slungs nes (C.T. = nas) / skyin po’ (C.T. = skyin-po) ru rings (C.T. = ring) dang / skyin mo stabs sduk dang / skyin ba’ yong stabs sduk sum (C.T. = gsum) / spu bal na bza’ mchog / zho yi’i snyun ‘byang / pho...
brought Bya-gshen ’jon-mo... <Ins. 56, 58> The black hair robe was untied from the neck of Lady Lho-rgyal byang-mo tsun. Her face took on a bright white complexion and she reposed as if smiling.

The funeral preparations could now proceed and in due course the colts were used to ritually whisk the departed princess to the afterlife. The account ends by stating, “In ancient times it was beneficial, now it is also beneficial. In ancient times it was meritorious, now it is also meritorious.”29 Similarly worded declamations of antiquity are made in smrang of other Dunhuang funerary manuscripts (and in the Mu-cho’i khrom-’dur and dGa’-thang bum-pa texts). These smrang are placed in an early or even primordial mythic setting. While the activities and personalities described in PT 1136 cannot be historicized with any degree of assurance, for the early historic period author(s) and users of PT 1136, the tale of the plight of Lady Lho-rgyal byang-mo was conceived of as belonging to an epoch that unfolded long before the text was written, as epitomized by the use of the word gna’ or ‘ancient’ to qualify it. The PT 1136 narrative was perceived as relaying happenings of a prehistoric character, people and events that preceded the author(s) and users by hundreds if not thousands of years. A clear parallel with the smrang of Eternal Bon texts can be drawn here, for many of these are also attributed to the mists of prehistory.

Despite their mythic and legendary flavor, the smrang of PT 1136 and related Dunhuang archaic funerary manuscripts are not strictly ahistorical in nature. They are early historic (probably more accurately dated to the imperial period) accounts written to link antecedent funerary traditions with the cultural milieu of the authors and users. That is to say, they encapsulate prehistoric cultural traditions, as they were understood by certain early historic authors. Given the chronological propinquity of the PT 1136 smrang to the pre-7th century CE period, I do not believe its prehistoric attribution was entirely contrived, but that, in fact, it captured antecedent funerary traditions to a greater or lesser degree. Such smrang were an integral part of an extensive, complex and long-

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28 In the text, skyin po has been crossed out as it is unneeded in the sentence.
29...gna’ phun da yang phan gna’ bsod da yang bsodo /. Rather than a simple statement, this conclusion to the text may express a wish, but this is less likely given its grammatical arrangement. In an aspirant format it would read: “As it was beneficial in ancient times, may [the do-ma] also be beneficial at this time. As it was meritorious in ancient times, may [the do-ma] also be meritorious at this time.”
standing Tibetan tradition, not an ad hoc embellishment, however they may have been altered or added to by their early historic period authors. Moreover, temporal continuity in funerary traditions is suggested by burial tumuli exhibiting cognate architectural traits, in which prominent Tibetan clans and royal figures of prehistoric and early historic Central Tibet appear to have been interred.\textsuperscript{30} Burial mounds of similar construction straddling the prehistoric and early historic divide are probably emblematic of the abstract cultural affinity between these two periods. Nevertheless, it cannot yet be determined with how much fidelity the Dunhuang smrang actually retain pre-7\textsuperscript{th} century CE funerary traditions. Exigencies of time and place may well have impelled their authors to significantly modify or distort these narratives to suit their own purposes. A codification or standardization of the archaic funerary materials is recognizable, particularly in formulaic geographic lists. As I have pointed out (2008), this was probably undertaken to cater to the needs of the Tibetan empire and its administrative apparatus.\textsuperscript{31} This ‘national’ mandate may have acted as a powerful force for tinkering with inherited prehistoric funerary traditions.

The most extensive tale explaining the origin of the funerary ritual transport horses (do-ma) still in existence makes up the bulk of ITJ 731\textsuperscript{r}.\textsuperscript{32} This smrang is also set in early times, in both heavenly realms and pastoral Tibet. It concerns three equid brothers, the youngest of which became the first riding horse of Tibet. At the death of his master, rMa-bu ldam-shar, this loyal horse named Khu rmang-dar was specially caparisoned to be the do-ma. The funeral was conducted by gShen-rabs myi-bo and Dur-gshen rma-dad (sic). Among the ritual procedures mentioned is the establishment of the rgyal and se, fundamental components of the tomb architecture. With the successful completion of the funeral, the deceased is able to ford the infernal river of the dead, and thus reach the joyous afterworld. The last part of the text reads:

<Ins. 122–130> The good turquoise was chipped. The lord died, he died from…\textsuperscript{33} The chipped turquoise is chipped from the head. The decayed

\textsuperscript{30} A recent survey of the Central Tibetan burial mounds has been made by Hazod (2009: 175–192). More survey work is now underway by a team of Sino-Tibetan researchers.

\textsuperscript{31} In a similar light, Dotson (2008: 44, 45) observes that the ritual traditions of the bon-po priests as recorded in Dunhuang literature may represent the invention from more localized traditions of an imperial period pan-Tibetan religious jurisdiction. Dotson (2007: 59) further comments that ITJ 740 reveals the formation of an imperial pantheon for prognoses, which must have developed through the Tibetan empire’s political expansion and administrative consolidation. I hold that the existence of a pan-Tibetan priestly tradition or corps in the imperial period, if it actually existed, presupposes overarching institutional structures governing the activities and conduct of its members. Occupational hierarchies, common administrative structures and collective organizational patterns can all be imagined in such a scenario. Such an institutional basis is given expression in Eternal Bon accounts of the ancient ‘du-gnas (religious assembly centers). See Bellezza 2008, pp. 283, 284, 290–292; Uebach 1999. This is not to imply that a pan-Tibetan sacerdotal institution reflected the presence of a monolithic religious tradition in the imperial period per se, but it does suggest that the empire’s religious affairs were marked by a high degree of ecclesiastic and ideological coherence.

\textsuperscript{32} This text is examined in Stein 1971, pp. 485–491; Bellezza 2008, pp. 529–537.

\textsuperscript{33} One or two syllables are effaced from this line.
lord perished and was sadly lost; he was no more,\(^{34}\) so the fathers gShen-rabs myi-bo and Dur-gshen rma-dad established the rgyal in concealment. They made the [se] in the valley. They made the gshin ste nyer-bu (?). The mattress wild yak bang-rtan was laid down.\(^{35}\) For the cherished do-ma\(^{36}\) they [erected turquoise horns on] the youngest brother Khu rmang-dar,\(^{37}\) he who would cross the ford. The ordered position of the lord was high...\(^{38}\) In ancient times, it was perfectly accomplished.\(^{39}\) Now we have collected [the ritual constituents]. Today, you phyugs spo ma nyedu, the cherished do-ma, be the chab-gang \(^{40}\) and cross the shallow ford.\(^{41}\)

g.yu ni bzang grugs rje grongs ni [...] las grongs g.yu grugs ni dbu las grugs / rje dphan te ni nongs sdu g ste ni lrag gis [...] myed nas // pha gshen rabs myi bo dang dur gshen rma dad bas la ni rgyal skos lung du (+ ni se) bchas / gshin ste nyer bu ni bchas rtan bang rtan khod mo ni bkhod de bzang ni se la ba [...] sa ni gnam du dngar te // do ma snying dgas su nu khu rmang dar [g.yu yi ru btsugs] [...] ba ni rab du sbogs te // rje gral ni mtho gnyer brang rtsi ni [...] mthungs mnyams dang ni mnyamso // gNa 'i ni pul pyungo da 'i ni la bsagso // de (+ ring) sang lda na phyugs spo ma nyedu do ma snying dgas khyed rmams khyang da de dang 'dra de dang [...] gyis / chab grang (= gang) ni la ru mdzod chig yang ba ni rab du sbogs shig /

gShen-rab myi-bo as the protector of the living
in the dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa manuscript

Operating in tandem with human and divine animal allies, gShen-rab myi-bo makes only fleeting appearances in the Dunhuang manuscripts. Despite his

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34 One syllable may be missing from this line.
35 This is followed by a description of a funerary procedure concerning the earth and sky. It contains one or two illegible syllables.
36 Thomas mistakenly treats do-ma snying-dgas as the proper name of a deceased person who is being told the story. See Thomas 1957, Texts, Translations, and Notes, pp. 1, 28 (n. 7).
37 There are missing and illegible words here. The transcription of ITJ 731r supplied in Old Tibetan Documents Online (http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp/), reads: 'is chab gang ni la ru [bgyi] [...]'. The complete sentence would then translate: “For the cherished do-ma the youngest brother Khu rmang-dar, was [made] as the chab-gang [...]", he who would cross the ford.”
38 The rest of this line is blighted by missing words; it has something to do with a ritual equivalency. Based in part on the transcription of the text in Old Tibetan Documents Online (http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp/), the words in question appear to read: brang rtsi gda mnabs mthungs [...] mthungs mnyams dang ni mnyamso /.
39 gNa 'i ni pul-byung (C.T. = phul-byung) ngo.
40 Literally: ‘over the water’, a reference to the ability of the do-ma to magically transport the deceased to the afterlife. In the archaic funerary rites of Dunhuang literature, chab-gang is a stock expression, indicating the ritual efficacy and magical power of the do-ma. In the Eternal Bon funerary tradition, chab-gang refers to various presents given by the next of kin to the deceased to aid his/her passage across the river of the dead (gshin-chu) or more generally, to help effect liberation. For more information about chab-gang, see Bellezza 2008, passim.
41 This sentence is the incomplete rendering of the last two lines of the excerpt of the text.
critical role in these accounts, given their cursory nature, relatively little can be
gleaned about the professional activities of this pivotal personality. Only with
the recent discovery of the dGa’-thang ’bum-pa byol-rabs text has a fuller picture
of gShen-rab myi-bo become possible. This Old Tibetan text appears to show
that gShen-rab myi-bo played a mainstream role in archaic religious traditions.
As seen from the perspective of the early historic individuals who venerated
him, gShen-rab myi-bo emerges as perhaps the most important legendary figure
of prehistoric Tibet.

The discovery of the byol-rabs in Central Tibet demonstrates that the archaic
funerary manuscripts of Dunhuang were not isolated geographic occurrences.
They were part and parcel of early historic religious traditions that spread far
and wide, their places of deposit being more an accident of history than any
indication of their original provenance. While the economic and institutional
basis of these religious traditions is virtually unknown, the remarkable narrati-
ve and philosophical coherence of the Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ’bum-pa
materials indicates that they were historically and culturally well-rooted in the
affairs of ancient Tibet. This anchorage seems to reflect the existence of a
pervasive folk religion, but one that may have been overlain by a variety of or-
ganized institutional structures.

The byol-rabs of dGa’-thang ’bum-pa occupies 13 folios of a volume of ritual
texts that is 23 folios in length. The volume is in the booklet format, as are
certain Dunhuang manuscripts. The first eight folios of this volume are
concerned with the origin tales of several other rituals of an obscure nature.
These are excluded from the analysis and discussion that follows as they bear
little thematic relevance to the byol-rabs. The last two folios of the volume are
devoted to the origins of golden beer libations (gs'er-skyems). The byol-rabs and

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42 A facsimile of the text under the name gNag rabs zhes bya ba has been reproduced in full in
Gtan shad dga’ thang ’bum pa che nas gsar du ringed pa’i bon gyi gna’ dpe dbams bshgrigs (pp. 85–
130). This book also includes a dbu-can transcription of the text (pp. 1–32). The numbers used
in this paper to designate various parts of the byol-rabs conform to the numbering system
employed in dGa’ thang ’bum pa che nas gsar du ringed pa. Annotations to the text are found in
the footnotes. A standardized positioning of the bshad-shad and nyis-shad are employed in the
transliteration; no attempt has been made to mimic their relative placements between lines.
The shad are used in a grammatically non-standard way in the text. In this study, I endeavor to
highlight every O.T. verb and ritual object, both those with C.T. cognates as well as those with
no apparent C.T. counterpart. I also make note of C.T. verbs that are used in the byol-rabs
somewhat differently than their standard lexical forms.

43 I have translated this text in full. It is dedicated to extolling the parentage and qualities of beer
(chang) and gold. The beginning of the text reads (no. 43, lns. 1–4): “In the origins tale of the
gs'er-skyems, the grandfather of beer is called gNam’-khun ding-ba. The grandmother of beer is
called Sa-khun ding-ba. The name of the father, the patriarch, is Lha-chu rngam-ba. The name
of the mother, the matriarch, is rMu-chu ding-ba. The sons of their coupling in the season
were the nine begotten beer brothers. They are the combined essence of grain, the most excel-
lent of all foods.” The origins of gold are given as follows (no. 44, lns. 1–4): “The grandfather
of gold is dGar-po shel-le dung and the grandmother of gold is Bye-ma bdal-dro (Uniform
Warm Sand). The name of the father, the patriarch, is bZang-shod gser-pochen. The name
of the mother, the matriarch, is sTong gyi spyi btud-ma. The son of the mating of these two in the
season is small (pretty) gold, pure gold (sa-le sbram), he that is stable and heavy (brling la ti) so
he can infiltrate everywhere (gar yang phyogs-ris thub). He that is soft and malleable (mnyen la
des) so he is compatible with all other things (kun dang nithun bar shes).” From these smrang we
The byol-rabs was written with a more even hand than many of the archaic funerary manuscripts of Dunhuang. The script used in the byol-rabs appears to be a direct precursor of the various dbu-med yi-ge that developed after 1000 CE. With it we see the attenuation of the heads of some letters, anticipating the creation of the distinctive headless scripts. The byol-rabs letters are inscribed in a consistent manner indicating that they were the handiwork of a single scribe. The language employed is clearly Old Tibetan with its telltale verb morphology, case forms, orthography, and obsolete vocabulary. However, its grammatical structure and orthography appear to be slightly more ‘modern’ than texts such as PT 1068, PT 1134 and PT 1136. Along with its less florid calligraphy, this suggests that the byol-rabs somewhat postdates these Dunhuang funerary manuscripts. The archaic nature of the grammar and narrative content of the text, however, seems to signal that it was composed before the bsTan-pa phyi-dar and the emergence of the Eternal Bon textual tradition. Thus, provisionally, the byol-rabs can be dated to the aftermath of the Tibetan empire, circa 850 to 1000 CE. The various smrang of the byol-rabs contain references to Yab bla bdal drug, Lha-bo lha-sras and gShen-rab myi-bo, personages that first make their debut in the Tibetan literature of Dunhuang. For this reason as well as the character of the ransom rites presented in the text (for example, their reliance on animal sacrifice), I am inclined to see its smrang as having been known in the imperial period, even if they were not written down until sometime later.

In Classical Tibetan the verb ‘byol-ba (byol is the past tense and imperative form) denotes ‘to escape’, ‘to avoid’ or ‘to step aside’. According to the manner in which the term byol is used in the byol-rabs text, it has three areas of signification:

1. Byol is a type of glud ritual. It shares the same underlying philosophical basis as other ancient ransom rituals. The name of this ritual indicates a method of freeing one caught up in a web of misfortune and is etymologically related to its usage as a verb.

2. Byol-[po] is a kind of demon as well as the pernicious affliction caused by it (this sense of the word is also found in PT 126, In. 31).

can see that gold and beer have divine male personifications. These ritual substances are gods in their own right, an intrinsic nature that makes them ideal offerings to all manner of divinities. In the final part of the gser-skyems kyi rabs text, the two are written about together as a prelude to the actual offering of libations: “When beer and gold are combined their color is brighter than the sun and moon. They are more magnificent and beautiful than Ri-rab. They are more splendid than the earth. They are also more profound then the ocean. [To whom] are they offered and presented? They are offered and presented to the mighty lha and dre (C.T. = ’dre) of the four continents. Please accept this golden libation. Do not be capricious and angry. The golden libation origins tale is completed.” (chang dang gser du sbyar pas su / gnyi zla bas ni mdog yang gsal // ri rab bas ni lhun yang bstug / sa gzi bas ni byin yang che // rgya mtsho bas ni ging yang zab / ’di dbul zhing bsngo ba ni / ’dzam bu ging bzhin / lha dre gnyan po la dbul zhing bsngo bo // gser skyems ’di bzhes la / ma nyo (= yo) ma nthur cig /gser skyems kyi rabs rdzogs so //).
3. **Byol** is a verb meaning ‘to repulse’ ‘to cast away’ or ‘to escape’. As noted, this sense of the word has been preserved in Classical Tibetan.

The **byol-rabs** contains six different origin tales of the **byol** ritual. Taken together they furnish a comprehensive geographic, historical and technical exposition of the **byol** performances. The **byol** ritual is designed to buy the freedom of humans and gods who find themselves in the clutches of treacherous demons. Through bribery, material exchange, and coercion, evil spirits are made to relinquish their hold on a victim. The substitution of something of equal value for the life of an individual stricken by harm is the basis of all **glud** rituals. This principle of reciprocity permeates the philosophy of many Tibetan rituals in both the ancient and modern contexts.

The first proclamation of ritual origins is a narrative that is entitled or described as ‘In the chapter of the heart ransom rite **byol-po** and **ltas-ngan** and propagation of the **bdud** (**byol po snying glud dang** / **ltas-ngan dang** / **bdud rgyas pa’i le’u la**; 17:1–23:8). Literally, ‘bad omens’, the **ltas-ngan** are a class of demons that personify evil signs and portents. The **ltas-ngan** as harbingers of misfortune have remained an active part of Tibetan demonology to this day. The **byol-po** however are now an obscure class of evil beings. In the **byol-rabs** the **bdud** are depicted as a somewhat ambivalent class of spirits, one turned dangerous due to adverse circumstances rather than any inherent malevolence towards human beings.

The first **smrang** of the **byol-rabs** relates how the divine progenitor of the Tibetan kings, Yab bla bdal-drug came under sustained attack by the **ltas-ngan** and **bdud** demons. In order to save his life, Yab bla bdal-drug enlisted the help

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44 The Bon historical text **bsGrags pa gling grags** records that the royal priests (**sku-gshen**) saved the life of Mu-khrī btsan-po through a ritual regimen that included all the major remedial procedures of Bon. In addition to the **glud**, these included ablutions (**khrus**), fumigation with aromatic substances (**bsang**), purificatory rites (**sdi**), apologies to the Bon protective and lineage deities (**gyod**), offerings for their fulfillment (**bskang**), atonement exercises (**bshags**), and restorative rites (**gtö**). See Bellezza 208, pp. 220, 221

45 This underlying theme in Tibetan rituals as well as the mythic precedents of the **glud** is examined in Karmay 1998, pp. 339–379. In Eternal Bon, the **glud** and related **midos** rites are part of the second vehicle of teachings, sNang-gshen theg-pa. Significant studies of the **glud** are also made in Snellgrove 1967, 77–97; Namkhai Norbu 1995, pp. 77–86; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, pp. 359–362.

46 For a discussion of the ancient identity of the **bdud** according to Eternal Bon documents, see Bellezza 2005, pp. 279–287. For **bdud** in the rNyung-ma tradition, see Blondeau 2008, pp. 204–206.

47 Among the earliest references to this royal ancestral deity are found in the 9th century CE **rKong-po** pillar inscription and in PT 1286. In both of these sources, Yab bla bdal-drug/Ya bla bdag-drug, a **phywa** lineage god, is the direct forebear of Tibet’s first king, Nya-khrī btsan-po/De-nyag khrī btsan-po (C.T. = gNyā’khrī btsan-po). For these readings, see Bellezza 2005, pp. 397, 398 (fn. 193); Richardson 1954, pp. 159-162; Richardson 1998, p. 124; Haarh 1969, p. 311. For Yab bla bdag-drug as the appointer of the grazing lands of the horse and wild yak in ITJ 73r, see Thomas 1957, Texts, Translations and Notes, p. 24; Stein 1971, pp. 486, 487; Bellezza 2008, pp. 530, 534. Extensive theogonies related to the progenerative role of Yab bla bdal-drug in the foundation of the Tibetan dynasty, taken from various sources, are studied in Bellezza 2005, pp. 395–403; Bellezza 2008, pp. 272–276, 350–352; Haarh 1969, pp. 224, 255, 258–262, 317, 318; Karmay 1998, pp. 116, 126–131, 178 (fn. 31), 250, 260–274, 294–303, 367.
of four gshen versed in the glud. Each of these figures officiates over his own ransom ritual. Among them is gShen-rab myi-bo, whose ritual entails the sacrifice of a specially marked sheep. In the text, it is gShen-rab myi-bo who has the distinction of consummating the byol rituals with his personal performance. His ritual activities are directly credited with rescuing Yab-bla bdal-drug. Although it is never explicitly stated in the text, this function seems to confer on gShen-rab myi-bo a higher level of prestige than that enjoyed by his three colleagues.

The mythic importance of the origins narrative under scrutiny cannot be overstated, for the very existence of the line of Tibetan kings was insured by those who preserved the life of its most famous progenitor, Yab-bla bdal-drug. As a consequence of the byol rituals carried out by the four priests, the foundation of the Tibetan state became possible according to the traditional view of history. This could only have accorded the highest honors on these ancestral priests, elevating them to the position of cultural heroes, at least for those who wrote and used the byol-rabs. Moreover, a ransom ritual worthy of a divine ancestor of the Tibetan kings was surely good enough for others. There could hardly have been a better way for the author(s) to legitimize its practice and raise the social standing of the priests responsible for its propagation.

The byol-rabs begins by introducing its two major antagonists, the king of the bad omens (ltas-ngan gyi rgyal-po), Gang-par ge-ber (often simply referred to as Bad Omen), and the king of the bdud, She-le ru-tshe (alias bDud). She-le ru-tshe sends a bird minister (bya-blon) to set up a meeting on top of a pass with Gang-par ge-ber, an individual he holds in great esteem. The king of the ltas-ngan is described as wearing a robe (slag) of bird feathers, common attire for supernatural beings and priestly personages in the archaic cultural traditions of Tibet, including its rock art. True to his awesome reputation, when the king of the bad omens appears for his encounter with She-le ru-tshe, the entire sky and earth was obscured by his gaping jaws:

<17:1–7> The bdud She-le ru-tshe stays above the 13 layers of the sky. The king of the ltas-ngan, Gang-par ge-ber, stays below the nine layers of the earth. What mount does the king of the ltas-ngan, Gang-par ge-ber, ride? He rides a copper musk deer with three legs and three heads.48 From high above the sky the king of the bdud She-le ru-tshe said, ‘below the nine layers of the earth there is no one greater or mightier (btsan-ba) than him, king of the ltas-ngan.’ bDud (She-le ru-tshe) said to the bird minister with the crest (pub-shud), ‘you go on top of the bdud pass Yor-mo and meet the bdud and Bad Omen.’ The bird minister, having eaten49 the bad omen food and messenger food, a yellow golden halter was placed on (mthur) him.

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48 'Go (C.T. = mgo).
49 gsal. It appears that gsal is an O.T. inflected form of the verb gsol-ba (in this context: ‘to consume’, ‘to eat’), and can be glossed ‘eaten’ or ‘had consumed’. Thus far, I have not located other examples of the word gsal being used in this manner in Old Tibetan literature.
gnam rim pa bcu gsum gyi steng na // bdud she le ru tshe bzhugs // sa rim pa ngu'i 'og na // ltas ngan gyi rgyal po // gang par ge ber bzhugs ste // ltas ngan gyi rgyal po gang par ge ber gyis // chibs su ci bchibs na // zangs kyi gla ba rkang pa sum 'og gsum ba cig bcibbs nas // gnam gyi ya bla nas // bdud ky'i rgyal po she le ru tshe'i zhal na re // sa rim pa ngu'i og na // ltas ngan gyi rgyal po // gang par ge ber las che zhing btsan ba med zer / na / bya blon pub shud song la / bdud la yor ma'i gong du // bdud dang ltas ngan mal gsungs // bya blon than zan phrin zan gsal nas // gser mthur ser mo mthur /

<17:7 to 18:5> The bird minister told to the ear of Bad Omen,\footnote{I.e. gave the message he was delivering.} on what mount does Bad Omen ride? He rides a copper mule with red legs on which there are nine eyes of sparking iron.' Bad Omen said, 'bDud, you come up here.\footnote{gShags. This is either a variant spelling or an O.T. inflected form of the C.T. verb gshegs (to depart).} I myself will come down there.' The king of the ltas-ngan, for the bad omen message, put a striped brocade robe\footnote{Zab-slag (C.T. = za'-og-slag) khra-bo.} on the bird minister with the crest. What does the king of the ltas-ngan, Gang-par ge-ber, wear on his body? He wears various bad omen manifestations and a robe of various types of bird feathers on his body. Coming down, the king of the ltas-ngan's upper jaw\footnote{Yan-kal (C.T. = ya-mgal). Cf. yan-kal/yan-gal (upper jaw) in PT 1039, passim.} engulfed the sky and his lower jaw\footnote{Man-kal (C.T. = ma-mgal). Cf. man-kal/man-gal (lower jaw) in PT 1039, passim.} engulfed the earth.\footnote{The predicate in this sentence is the O.T. term bshal, which in this context appears to mean 'engulfed' or 'covered'. In PT 1289 (lns. r3-12 to v1-05, v3-01 to v3-03), the several occurrences of bshal/bshald have the connotation of 'to lead', as in the leading of a female hybrid yak (mdzo-mo) with a line.} His right eye turned\footnote{The O.T. verb bshal is again used here. In this context it can be glossed as 'opened'/?'turned'/?'raised'/?'moved'.} towards the white sunny mountain. He left eye turned towards the black shady mountain. He stayed like that.

bya blon gyis ltas ngan snyan du zhus // ltas ngan gyi chibs su ci bcibbs na / zangs kyi dre'u rta / rkang dmar la // lcags kyi tsha tsha myig rgu can cig bcibbs // ltas ngan rgyal po'i zhal nas // bdud yas gshags cig // bdag mas mchi bo / ltas ngan gyi rgyal po 'is / bya blon pub shud la // than dang phrin ngan du / zab bslag khra bo bskon no // ltas ngan gyi rgyal po gang par ge ber gyis // sku la ci gsol na / ltas ngan sprul pa sna tshogs dang / bya spu sna tshogs kyi slag pa sku la gsol de // mas mchi na / ltas ngan gyi rgyal po yan kal gnam la bshal // man kal sa la bshal // myig g.yas pa gdags ri dkar la bshal // / myig g.yon pa sris ri gnag la bshal de // de ltar bsdad pa la //

She-le ru tshe, the king of the bdud, proved no match for Gang-par ge-ber and when confronted by him he quickly capitulated. With his new ally, the king of
the bad omens trained his savage intent upon Yab-b bla bdal-drug. The ancestor of the Tibetan kings found himself surrounded by a horseman of the bdud and a soldier of the ltas-ngan:

<18:5 to 19:2> The king of the bdud [She-le ru-tshe] also manifested in the manner of Bad Omen and went in the appearance of Bad Omen. What mount was he riding on? He was riding on an iron deer with three legs and three heads. Wearing the bdud clothing ban-mo bun-mo (?) on his body, he came up, he went above the bdud pass Yor-mo. There the bDud and Bad Omen met. Upon seeing the king of the ltas-ngan, the king of the bdud suddenly panicked and fainted. Later, when the king of the bdud revived (bgyal-sangs), he said, ‘bDud could not challenge Bad Omen. There was no one bDud could not challenge. There was nothing I could not do and no one I could not subjugate. There is nowhere that the (honeyed) rain (sbrang-char) of the sky does not reach. It seems that there is no one greater and more powerful below the blue sky and above the grayish brown earth than the king of the ltas-ngan, Gang-par ge-ber. As I the bdud could not challenge Bad Omen, you lead us Bad Omen. I the bdud shall come wherever you go.’

bdud kyi rgyal po yang ltas ngan gyi tshul ltar sprul de ltas ngan la ltar gshags ste // chiibs su ci bcibs na // lcags kyi sha ba rkang gsum ’go gsum ba cib bcibs // bdud gos ban mo bun mo sku la gsol nas / yas kyiis gshags na // bdud la yor mo’i gong du bdud dang ltas ngan mjal na / bdud kyi rgyal pos / ltas ngan rgyal po mthong nas // bdud yed kyiis sngangs nas // bgyal de bzhugs na / de nas bdud kyi rgyal po // / bgyal sangs nas / bdud kyiis ltas ngan la ma thub // / bdud kyiis ma thub pa yang myed / byas shing kha ma bcags pa yang myed / gnam gyi sbrang char gyis ma phog pa yang myed / gnam sngon po ’og sa dro bo’i steng na // ltas ngan gyi rgyal po gang par ge ber las che zhing btsan ba ma mchis pa dra’ // / bdud kyiis ltas ngan la ma thub kyiis // ltas ngan khyod kyis sna drongs shig bdud ngas khyod gar gro bar ’ong gyis bgyis na //

<19:3–6> Saying that, the king of the ltas-ngan replied, ‘above the firmament on the apex of the sky, bDud and Bad Omen became allied against Yab-b bla bdal-drug. We shall take the tribute (dpya blang) of three years. We shall take the three sleeping hearts.’ Thus he spoke, so outside the residence of the lord Yab-b bla bdal-drug a horseman.

57 ‘To subjugate’/’to defeat’/’to best’ is the reconstructed meaning of the phrase kha-ma bcags-pa (literally: ‘to break the mouth’).
58 Dro-bo (C.T. = gro-bo). A color parallelism is intended in the sentence, thus dro-bo cannot mean ‘warm’ in this context.
59 rNal (C.T. = rest, composedness) is the semantic equivalent of nyal.
60 rGya = rkya. See Bellezza 2008, p. 528 (fn. 609), for instances of rkya (horsemanship; in Dunhuang materials rkya also denotes a unit of agricultural land for taxation purposes). Also see rkyas-bros (to escape on horseback; Pasar et al. 2008: 13). The best known bdud horsemen are the Rol-po
circled. A horseman of the bdud circled. Behind the [house] a soldier was stationed. A soldier of the ltas-ngan was stationed.

His life in imminent danger, two bon-mo or female priests conduct a divination (mo) and a class of beneficial rites known as gto on behalf of Yab-bdal-drug. In this context, the gto, like the mo, is an initial diagnostic or divinatory procedure that may have included astrological calculations. The priestesses determine that four gshen, those who specialize in the glud ritual must be invited. Yab-bdal-drug is recorded as compensating them with livestock and providing gold for their ritual performances. He also puts up a boy as the ‘small’ (nice or pleasing) collateral. The nature of this security or pledge made on the part of Yab-bdal-drug is unclear. This appears to have been some kind of good will gesture or sign of earnestness on his part:

<19:6 to 20:1> The bon-mo of the sky sDing-nga sding-lom and the bon-mo of the earth ‘Byo-ra ‘byor-jong, these two, with 42 little crystal stones of divination, did the gto and mo as bDud and Bad Omen arrived. [The bon-mo said], ‘four gshen should be invited. It is good to send four glud [makers]. The bdud-bon Dreng-nag chu-lcags, the thar-bon Dru-skyol, the glud-bon Ngag-snyan and gShen-rab myi-bo, these four.’ These four gshen were invited by Yab-bla bdal-drug. For the gift he gave a cow, and for the ritual constituents (yas) he offered gold. As the nice collateral, a boy was kept.

gnam gyi bon mo sding nga sding lom dang / sa ’i bon mo ’byo ra ’byor ’jong gnyis kyis / shel kyi mo rde’u bzhhi bcu rtsa gnyis la / gto dang mo bgyis na / bdud dang ltas ngan bab / gshen bzhhi spyan drang ’tshal / glud bzhhi gtang bar bzang / bdud bon dreng nag chu

rkya-bdun/Rol-pa skya-bdun, a group of fierce spirits that have been inducted into the Lamaist pantheon. The murder of two hapless hunters by these horsemen is recounted in the ancient ritual text Klu ’bum nag po (ibid.: 482–485). For a detailed description of these semi-divine beings taken from both Eternal Bon and Buddhist texts, see Bellezza 2005, pp. 287–302.

rMag (C.T. = dmag).

Bab. This could also be translated as ‘deployed’/’placed’.

According to a work originally written in Chinese, bon-mo (che-mou) functioned as the mouthpiece of spirits and were involved in the sacrifice of animals, making offerings to the lha, ’dre and srin-mo, and appeasing the klu (Stein 2003: 594). For the gto as a diverse class of rites, see Norbu 2009, pp. 188, 189; Dotson 2008, p. 43 (after Lin Shen-yu).

gTe’u (C.T. = gta’-ma).

As in the ritual constituent (yas) Ephedra in bon (the ritual performance and its underlying philosophical and historical context; ITJ 734r, ln. 3r98): bon kyi ni yas mishe /.
The text now proceeds to describe the ritual undertakings of the four gshen summoned, beginning with Dreng-nag chu-icags/Dreng-nag dreng-khug. Described as a bdud-bon, a priest who propitiates the bdud, this figure is either identical or closely related to the bdud-bon Kha-ta greng-yug of Eternal Bon. Kha-ta greng-yug is described as clad in a black cloak, wielding an ax (the weapon of choice for the bdud) and riding a dark brown horse of the lda (a major bdud lineage). 66 The byol-rabs furnishes a synopsis of Dreng-nag dreng-khug’s propitiation of She-le ru-tshe and his retinue of bdud. In the performance, two main ritual instruments are noted: an ornamented arrow and a sacrificial sheep. 67 Satisfied with what had been offered them, the bdud release Yab-bla bdal-drug from their scourge. This freeing of his body is amply conveyed in the text through the use of two metaphors:

<20:1-7> Then the bdud-bon Dreng-nag dreng-khug (sic) tied the dark blue silk cloth of the bdud to the bdud arrow with the black nock. On the arrow shaft of three joints he tied a [sheep] skin with an ornamental border (dra’-chags). On the black sheep of the bdud with the white

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66 Kha-ta greng-yug and the origins of the god Mi-bdud are presented in Dra ba nag po lda zor bsgrub. See Bellezza 2005, pp. 283–287. In this text, set in very early times after the birth of Mi-bdud, the bdud-bon Kha-ta greng-yug is documented ritually preparing for war against his archenemy, Hor-dzum mul-sam-pa lag-rings. This entailed the slaughter of a black sheep of the bdud with a white forehead (bdud-lag nag-po spyi-dkar) and a special type of bay yak. The deity propitiated by Kha-ta greng-yug was Mi-bdud ‘byams-pa khrag-mgo, the central god of the bdud-bon tradition and an important Eternal Bon protector. In the Eternal Bon funerary cycle known as the Mu-cho’i khrom’-dur, a description of a prototypic bdud-bon practitioner is given. In the guise of a bdud himself, he subdues the demonic agents of death. For good measure, in this Classical Tibetan account with its Buddhist-style doctrinal orientation, the bdud-bon named Chu-icags rgyal-ba discourses on or explains [the doctrine] in a compassionate manner (snying-rje bshad) to the bdud: “bSwo! You bdud-bon Chu-icags rgyal-ba have a black body color that emits bright light. You possess tremendous force and mighty skill and are extremely powerful. Subduing the world of the bdud, you teach them compassionately. You are the gshen who conquers the world of the bdud. Destroy to dust the bdud and sri killers (gshed). Accomplish the activities unhindered and quickly. It is time for your wishes to be fulfilled. It is time for the departed dead one to be [guided to salvation]. (bswo bdud bon chu icags rgyal ba ni / sku mdog nag la ‘od zer ‘phros / drag shugs stobs ldan mthu rtsal can / bdud khams ’dul zhung snying rje bshad / bdud khams kha lo bskyur bu’i gshen / bdud dags sri gshed rdul du rlog / ma thug (= thugs) myur du phrin las nmad / khyod kyi thugs dam dus la bab / lxhe’ ’das gsong pa’i dus la bab /). See sNgags gyi mdo ’dur rin chen ’phreng ba nu cho’i khrom dur cher mo las mtshan bon g.yen sde ’dul la, anonymous (New Collection of Bon bka’-brten, vol. 6, nos. 1007–1070), nos. 1018, ln. 4 to 1019, ln. 1.

67 In the reengineering of ancient religious history by Eternal Bon, it is gShen-rab who is supposed to have opposed the bloody immolations of the bdud-bon. For example, this abolition is described in the Srid pa spyi midos (Norbu 2009: 79, fn. 7, 89).
forehead (spyi-gar) he tied black mouth Ephedra\textsuperscript{68} of the bdud to its right flank.\textsuperscript{69} A black spiraling conch was tied to the left flank. A saddle bag of cotton (ras kyi phrag-sgye) was loaded on it. The bdud-bon Drenga dreng-khung chanted and chanted\textsuperscript{70} throughout the night, and at dawn he sent the glud to whomever the glud was offered. These were offered to the hands of the king of the bdud She-le ru-tshe, his minister sNy-a-lde ngag-rtsan, the bdud brother Ri-che 'gong-nyag,\textsuperscript{71} Nag-po bkrag-med,\textsuperscript{72} [and the orders of the bdud] Nyes-po\textsuperscript{73} and mThongs-po. So, Yab-bl'a bdal-phrug (sic) was rescued from the hands of the bdud. The snare\textsuperscript{74} was untied from the neck of the bird. The trap\textsuperscript{75} was cut off the leg of the deer.

\textit{bdud bon dreng nga dreng khug gyis // bdud mda’ llong nag la // bdud dar mthing nag btags / mda’ rgyud tshigs gsum la / dpags bu dra’ chags btags // bdud lug nag po spyi gar la // bdud mtshe kha nag ba ‘bri g.yas la btags // bdud dung khyl nag ni / ba ‘bri g.yon la btags // ras kyi phrag sgye bkal de / bdud bon dreng nga dreng khug gyis // srod la bsgyer bsgyer nas // tho ras glud du btang // glud su la phul na // bdud kyi rgyal po / she le ru tshe dang / blon po snya lde ngag rtsan dang / bdud kyi jo bo ri che ‘gong nyag dang / nag po

\textsuperscript{68} nTshe. A primary ritual substance in the archaic funerary traditions of PT 1136 and the Mu-ch’o’i khorom-dur. Ephedra, often ritually used with mustard seeds and barleycorn, is a signaling and exorcistic agent. See Bellezza 2008, pp. 376, 379, 381, 382, 402, 410, 413, 523 (fn. 584). Ephedra has been discovered deposited in ancient tombs throughout much of Inner Asia, one of a number of transcultural funerary traditions in the region (for some of these cultural linkages, see ibid.). For example, along the southern tier of East Turkestan, the Swedish archaeologist Bergman discovered Ephedra pedicels strewn in several coffins in conjunction with arrows and grains of wheat and millet. He notes that in the Nan-shan region, Tibetans add Ephedra to funerary pyres as a kind of fumigant. See, op cit. Bergman 1939, pp. 70–73, 87. One of the three brothers of Tibet’s first king, gNy’a-khri btsan-po was called mTshe-mi (Ephedra man). He was a sku-gshen or bon-po class priest. For lore about mTshe-mi, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 274–278; Karmay 1998, pp. 385–388; Sørensen et al. 2005, pp. 57 (fn. 68), 155, 156. For the use of Ephedra in an archaic glud ritual, see Thomas 1957, Texts, Translations and Notes, pp. 56, 57; Stein 1971, p. 507.

\textsuperscript{69} ‘Flank’ or ‘haunch’ is a conjectural reading for the term ba-’bri.

\textsuperscript{70} bsGyer. This is an O.T. past tense verb for ‘to chant’. Compare with what appears to be a more archaic form of the same verb in PT 1136, bsgyird. See Bellezza 2008, p. 529, fn. 620.

\textsuperscript{71} The name of this well-known bdud in various sources is given as Re-ti ‘gong-yag/Re-ste mgo-yag/Re-ste ‘gong-nyag (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 255, 259, 274, 287, 288). In one Buddhist source this spirit is said to be the brother of the wrathful goddess Remat (Tucci 1949: 219). A vivid description of Re-te mgo-yag (sic) is found in a mdo ritual of the rNyung ma’i rgyud 'bum (Blondeau 2008: 231). This fearsome king of the bdud rides a black horse and throws a black lasso. Re-sde mgo-g-yag (sic), as the bdud ruler of one of ten prehistoric Tibetan kingdoms, is noted in mKhas pa lde’u’ (Bellezza 2008: 280; Norbu 2009: 17).

\textsuperscript{72} For information on this bdud see Blondeau 2008, pp. 205, 231; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956, pp. 268, 281. This dull black killer rides a black horse, brandishes a black lasso, and has a black beard and black breath.

\textsuperscript{73} Literally, the ‘One of Misfortune/Evil/Injury’.

\textsuperscript{74} sNy’i (C.T. = snyi/rnui). For the use of snares to capture funerary ritual transport horses in PT 1136, see Bellezza 2008, p. 527.

\textsuperscript{75} gDos (C.T. = gdol).
bkrag med dang / nyes po dang / mthongs po dang / de rnams kyi phyag du phul na // rje yab bla bdal phrug ni / bdud lag nas blus so // bya mgul nas snyi bkrol / sha rkang las gdos bcad do /

The next gshen mentioned in the text is Dru.skyol, whose name is prefixed by thar-bon, designating that he is a priest who liberates through a group of rituals known as thar. In one of the origin tales of the Mu-cho’i khrom-dur, the thar-bon Gru.skyol (C.T. rendering of his name), along with gShen-rab, is credited with being one of the 18 original funerary priests (’dur-gshen; Bellezza 2008: 378). In the Eternal Bon historical text bsGrags pa gling grags, Thar-bon grub-skyol (sic) and another sku-gshen known as Co-mi carried out glud and gto rites to free Tibet’s second king, Mu-khri btsan-po, from grievous injury caused by the demigods (ibid.: 220, 221). In the byol-rabs, Dru-skyol’s ritual activities are specifically directed towards the btsan, another common group of ambivalent spirits. Among the objects in his ritual armory is brocade in the characteristic red color of the btsan. A fine bull yak constitutes the animal used in the thar offerings (its fate is not specified in the text). Dru-skyol’s labors conclude with an affirmation that the exchange between the two sides was equal (mnyam gyis brie), leading to a successful outcome for Yab-bla bdal-drug. The benefits thus accrued are stated to have taken place in ancient times:

<20:7 to 21:4> Also, the thar-bon Dru-skyol erected the white thar tent (sbra). A white silk curtain was drawn. A tent of brocade26 was erected. A thar felt with a striped border was spread out. He collected all kinds27 of the thar ritual constituents. An arrow shaft with three joints and the ritual presents (yon) were distributed to the [patron deities of the] thar: an arrow, bam (?) and rope, these three;28 red-colored29 brocade; a purplish khar-thabs;30 a prized bull (sham-po) yak of the thar; and a bow31 were arranged in an orderly manner.32 He chanted and chanted throughout the night and at dawn he sent the glud. For one third, yes, of the night, for one fourth, yes, of the middle of the night,33 it was offered into the hands of the three btsan. The btsan became pleased. The exchange between them was equal and it was accepted [by the btsan]. In ancient times, the benefit was like that benefit.34

76 Za-bug (C.T. = za-’og) gyi gur.
77 Cho-rgu (‘all kinds’, ‘nine kinds’). See infra, fns. 91, 205.
78 Possibly, this clause can be better translated: “three bunches (bam-[chags]) of arrows, [each of which was tied with] a rope.”
79 drMar-mtshon (C.T. = dmar-tshon).
80 C.T. = mkhar-thabs (a model house or castle designed for spirits to reside in during Bon ritual performances).
81 sknyogs-dgar (= mchog-dgar). See text infra, no. 39, In. 7. For an occurrence of mchog-gar (sic) in IP 731r, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 536, 537.
82 Dral du mngar (C.T. = dagar).
83 This is the import of the line: rgung gyi ni bzhi ’brum (na) /.
84 gNya’ phan de ltar phan no /.
The third gshen to work on behalf of Yab bla-bdal drug was the glud-bon Ngag-snyan (Melodious Speech). This specialist in glud rituals mainly appeased bdud class demons. Ngag-snyan’s performance is actually credited with winning back the soul of Yab bla-bdal-drug:

<21:5 to 22:2> Also, what glud was sent by the glud-bon Ngag-snyan: a golden spindle with a bright turquoise drop-spindle wheel and a turquoise spindle with a bright golden drop-spindle wheel, [and] a living chough, the bird of the bdud, on which a large golden bell was tied. The glud-bon Ngag-snyan chanted and chanted throughout the night and at dawn it was offered as the glud. It was offered, yes, to whom was it offered? To the three sisters of rJe-btsun, yes, Pho-ba; rGya-btsun, yes, rMang-ba; g.Yu-btsun nga-ra; these three: A-ma ya-mo, one; Rab-ma de-shor, two; Sho-ma myi-bdag btsun-mo, these three. It was offered in the hands of the three sisters and three brothers. It was offered in the hands of the younger brother bDud-bzangs ste-'tsher-ba and the elder sister rGu-ri za’i-phwa sangs-ma. It was offered in the hand of Ma-gdon bdud dram-pa. The soul of the lord Yab bla-bdal-drug was exchanged for the glud. The benefits were like that.

yang glud bon ngag snyan gyis / glud du ci btang na’ / gser gyi mo ’phang la // g.yu ’i mong lo gsal // g.yu ’i mo ’phang la / gser gyi mong lo gsal // bdud bya skyung kha gson ma la / gser gyi dril chen btags // glud bon ngag snyan gyis / srod la bsgyer bsgyer nas / tho ras glud du phul // phul ba ni su la phul // rje btsun ni pho ba dang // rgya btsun ni rmang ba dang // g.yu btsun nga ra gsum gyis // sring mo lcam gsum na’ // A ma ya mo gcig / rab mā de shor gnyis // sho ma myi bdag btsun mor gsum // lcam dral gsum gyi phyag du phul // mying po bdud zangs ste ‘tsher ba dang // sring mo rgu ri za’i phwaangs ma’i phyag du phul // ma gdon bdud dram pa’i

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85 Mong-lo (C.T. synonym = ’phang-lo).
86 Gyis = gyi.
87 The text incorrectly reads: btsun-mor.
88 Brla (C.T. = bla). ski'i-brla (sku'i-bla) occurs in ITJ 734r and brla-na (bla-ma) in PT 1285. For the spelling brla, also see para iii of a soul invocation text in the Mu-cho’i khrom’-dur (Bellezza 2008: 619).
The fourth and final ritual performance is carried out by gsShen-rab myi-bo. He is attributed with carrying out the byol itself, a subclass of glud rituals. This entailed the elaborate packaging of a heart that came from a sacrificial sheep of the thar ritual group. By exchanging this specially prepared sheep heart for that of Yab bla bdal drug, the god’s life was spared. To my knowledge, the byol-rabs is the only Old Tibetan text that directly implicates gsShen-rab myi-bo in the ritual sacrifice of an animal.93

<22:2–8> Also, gsShen-rab sent a byol from his body. He mercifully90 caught a thar sheep. Above the bdud pass Yor-mo he [collected] all the various aspects91 of the byol and removed the heart from the body cavity of the thar sheep Ya-gangs. It was wrapped up in the dark blue cloth of the bdud. As its outer ornament, silk and brocade. As its inner ornament, gold and turquoise. To exchange the beating human heart and beating sheep heart, the beating sheep heart was put92 inside a white cloth folded over nine times.95 It was pursued,94 it was pursued

93 Chos ’byung me tog snying po, by Nyang-ral nyal ma’i od zer (12th century CE), states that a guer-bon (an ancient class of rituals and practitioners) glud in the country of sTag-gzig (in this account, localized in northern Pakistan), with its reliance on animal sacrifices, was not in conformance to the teachings of sTon-pa [gsShen-rab]. This Buddhist historical reference indicates that by the 12th century CE, Eternal Bon has re-emerged as the religion we know today by repudiating the slaughter of animals commonplace in archaic religious rites. See Bellezza 2008, pp. 233–235. The glud rituals of Eternal Bon and Buddhists are still charged with the symbolism of animal sacrifice. In particular, the plant and mineral substances used to make the ngar-mi or effigy of the patient treated in the glud is described in the liturgies as forms of blood and flesh (Karmay 1998: 345–348; Norbu 1995: 84–86; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 361). The dpa’-bo (spirit-mediums) of the Sikkimese Lhopos in Tingchim village have oral texts known as bon, which were used to induce a state of trance, in order that they could reach the bon paradise where the ancestors and deities reside. Among the bon recitations is one recounting the activities of Yum ma-chen ’dus-gsum sangs-rgyas, who is supposed to have been the daughter of gsShen-rab. This daughter is said to have been empowered by all the deities of Tibet through the sacrificial offering of a mythical animal. A king of Yar-lung enlisted Yum ma-chen’s help in ridding his kingdom of malefic entities. With the aid of her deities she catches and kills an animal with the head of a pig, the body of an onager and the voice of a goat. Through the decapitation of this creature all the deities of Tibet (Bod-lha rnam-dgu) are summoned and fumigated. The tail, legs, ribs, liver, lungs, blood, kidneys, intestines, and waste material of the immolated animal are offered to a variety of spirits. For this tale and background on the bon recitations of the Lhopos, see op. cit. Balikci 2008, pp. 353, 354. Balikci (ibid.: 374, 375) hypothesizes that residents of Tingchim village may have migrated to their present homeland from Yar-lung before the people of Mi-nyag arrived in the 13th century CE, taking their bon oral traditions along with them.

90 Yang-ngas (C.T. = ya-nnga). This word can also be translated as ‘compassionately’, ‘pitiably’.
91 Cho-sna-rgu (‘all the various kinds’, ‘nine kinds’). See infra, fn. 205.
92 gsSal. This appears to be an O.T. inflected form of the verb gsol (in this context: ‘was put into’, ‘wrapped’).
93 This is the probable reading for dar kar (C.T. = dkar gyi rgyu (C.T. = dgu) ldong. The O.T. verb ldong appears to be etymologically related the C.T. term ldong (blinded) as kind of concealing or shrouding.
94 gsDas (C.T. = bdas).
by whom? It was pursued by the growling wolves of the bdud.\(^95\) It was seen by the bdud and it looked like a golden pestle that was decorated and [well] placed. As Yab-bla and the bdud became happy, the beating human heart of the lord Yab-bla bdal-drug was exchanged for the sheep heart. That was the benefit.

yang gshen rab myi bo ‘is // sku las byol cig gtang ba dang / thar lug yang ngas bzung / bdud la yor mo’i gong du / byol cha sna rgu dang // thar lug ya gangs kyi khong nas snying phyung ste // bdud dar mthing nag du dril de // phyi ‘i rgyan du dar dang zab / nang gyi rgyan du gser dang g.yu // myi snying ’phar ba dang / lug snying ’phar ba brje ru // lug snying ’phar ba ni dar kar gyi rgu ldong gyi nang du gsal // gdas ma su la gdas na / bdud kyi spyang ngar ‘das // bdud kyiis gzigs pa la / gser gyi gtun bu rgyan du bcug pa dra’ // yab bla bdud mnyes nas / rje yab bla bdal drug gyi / myi snying ’phar ba dang // lug snying du brjes de phan no //

The text continues to describe sacrificial rites presumably carried out by gShen-rab myi-bo. The significance and symbolism behind these ritual operations is hard to assess, as much of the tradition has been blotted out of the Tibetan collective memory (peripheral regions perhaps notwithstanding). In addition to the sheep, the flesh of the argali (gnyan-sha), which is magically empowered by Ephedra and mustard seeds, is mentioned. Through these flesh offerings the life of Yab-bla bdal-drug was rescued, ransomed or purchased (blus). In describing this exchange between the protagonist and his various enemies, the nape of the neck (ltag) is used as a metaphor for Yab-bla bdal-drug’s life and that of the sacrificial animals. After the ritual butchering is completed, the meat and barley cakes known as zan were used to construct a khar-thabs, a ritual domicile for habitation by the demons:

<22:8 to 23.4> Also, the flesh of the back of the neck of the argali was dangled here and dangled there.\(^96\) From the door of dreng (?) the nape of the neck of the sheep was cast (byol) through the door. Incantations were said on Ephedra and mustard (nyungs) seeds on the back of the neck flesh of the argali. Rescued by the glas (ritual fare) and glud. By the nape of the neck of the sheep, the nape of the neck of the man was rescued. The byol flesh forearm, grunting here and grunting there, grunting like a wild yak, was sent. By the byol flesh haunch: whose haunch was this haunch? It was cast off as the right haunch of the enemy.\(^97\) It was cast away to the enemies\(^98\) and obstructors.\(^99\)

\(^95\) bdud kyi spyang ngar ‘das (C.T. = bdas) //. This sentence is not well constructed, casting some doubt on its actual meaning.

\(^96\) Phas dreng ni tshus dreng na //. In this context, ‘dangled’ seems the most appropriate gloss for the word dreng. This appears to be an O.T. verb form closely related to ‘grengs (placed upright).

\(^97\) gra (C.T. = dgra).

\(^98\) Gra’ (C.T. = dgra).
of the ribs and that side of the ribs was cast away from the spine (rtsib gyi gung). The medicinal flesh rump and bdud barley cake khar-thabs, fashioned (btod) with, yes, four doors of the byol, were put inside the lho-skur and mon-skur.

yang gnyan sha ltag pa de / phas dreng ni tshus dreng na / dreng gyi sgo mo las / lug kyi ltag pa sgo mo las byol / gnyan sha ltag pa la mtshe dang nyungs kyis bsnags / glas dang glud kyis blus / lus kyi ltag pa 'is / myi 'i ltag pa blus / byol sha lag ngar la / phas ngar tshus ngar na / 'brong ltar ngar la byol / byol sha dpung pa 'is / dpung ni tshus dpung na / gra dpung g.yas la byol / gra' dang btags la byol / phar rtsib tshur rtsib na rtsib gyi gung ru las byol / sman sha bzhug do dang / bdud zan khar thabs la / byol gyi ni sgo bzhi btod / lho skur mon skur nang du gsal /

It is gShen-rab myi-bo who has the honor of finalizing the ritual recovery of the divine sire Yab-bdal-drug. As is customary in contemporary glu rituals, the byol ensemble of offerings was deposited at a major crossroads. To consummate the expulsion of the demons, gShen-rab myi-bo shoots a special arrow at the byol and casts magically empowered Ephedra and mustard seeds. These exorcistic procedures still find expression in Bodic glu rituals carried out today:

<23:4–8> gShen-rab myi-bo displayed mystic hand signals (phyag-rgya). He cast away (bor) the byol at the main crossroads. In ancient times whose byol was it? It was the byol of the lord Yab-bla bdal-drug. Also, removing an arrow from the quiver when looking at the vane (sgro), it is the vane of Ephedra. When looking at the arrow point, yes, it is the arrow point of wood. The byol does not like the arrow point. Incantations were said on Ephedra and mustard seeds (yungs) and they were thrown at the residing five 'dre of the body and five enemies. Thus, in ancient times the byol was like that. Yab-bla bdal-drug was rescued from his illness by the byol. [Once again] he was sleeping and mating.

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99 bGags (C.T. = bgegs)
100 sMan-sha bzhug-do. Rather than ‘medicinal’ sman here could also denote ‘beneficial’. Another possibility: sman = dman, an O.T. term related closely in meaning to dma’ (lower).
101 Apparently, these are types of ritual vessels or baskets. See Bellezza 2008, p. 329 (fn. 374) for a similar occurrence. Lho-skur, mon-skur and the rgya-skur are noted in ITJ 734r, ln. 4r157, as part of an offerings regime in a not unlike ritual performance.
102 Shul kyi khri mdo. I am treating khri here to mean ‘seat’, as in a major or centrally-placed crossroads (shul kyi mdo). It is also possible, however, that khri is related to the khri-zhi, a word that is supposed to be the Zhang Zhung equivalent of ‘gro-ba’ (to go, to walk; Pasar et al. 2008: 26).
103 Me-bshed (C.T. = me-bshad).
104 ‘Rescued’ or ‘recovered’ seems the most appropriate gloss here for the word shos-pa. Shos-pa appears to be closely related to the C.T. term bshol (‘canceled’, ‘refunded’, ‘rescinded’).
The tale of Yab bla bdal-drug’s ritual rescue by gShen rab myi-bo and his three associates is followed by five more smrang, each of which unfolds in a different part of Tibet. These regions include rKong-po, Bal-yul (in gTsang), Yar-lung, sKyi-yul (in dBus), and finally sMra-yul thang-brgyad (in Upper Tibet). Together the five regions selected for the byol narratives represent the geographical core and cultural heartland of imperial Tibet. While different languages may have once been spoken and different customs followed in these constituent regions, they are depicted as sharing the same ritual idiom undergirded by a common religious, cultural and social ground. The wide geographic compass of the origin tales demonstrates the universal reach of the byol ritual, insomuch as the author(s) and users of the text were concerned. This welding of disparate corners of Tibet in a single ritual system would have proven useful in the cultural integration of the Plateau in the time of the empire and even in its aftermath. Accordingly, practitioners of the byol and related rituals must have seen themselves as being accorded a pan-Tibetan socio-religious standing, significantly elevating their stature.

The first of these geographic-based smrang takes place in Myi-yul rkyi-mthing (23:8 to 25:7). Known as Myi-yul skyi-mthing in the smrang of ITJ 731r, this storied land has been identified with a location in rKong-po by Karmay (1998: 211–227). Myi-yul skyi-mthing is best known for its association with the descent of Tibet’s first king, gNya’-khri btsan-po. The byol-rabs origins tale proceeds to describe a disaster in the form of a livestock epidemic, with horses, yaks, sheep, goats, and pigs contracting diseases peculiar to their species. The inclusion of

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105 Myi-yul skyi-mthing also has a much larger geographic compass as a metaphorical expression for the land of humans (myi-yul). I will demonstrate this in a forthcoming paper featuring a pha-rabs text of considerable historical importance, which I have translated. In ITJ 731r, Myi-yul skyi-mthing may well refer to the earth as a whole or the realm of human beings rather than merely a location in rKong-po. In this Dunhuang text, there are two instances of Myi-yul skyi-mthing being directly prefixed to sMra-yul thag-rgyad (variant spelling of the more frequently occurring sMra-yul thang-brgyad, see infra, the introduction to the final origins tale in the byol-rabs text). This syntax indicates that Myi-yul skyi-mthing is a larger geographic entity than sMra-yul thag-rgyad, the latter falling within it. As sMra-yul thag-rgyad/thang-brgyad appears to be a location in Upper Tibet, the events described in ITJ 731r, concerning the first funerary ritual transport horse’s (do-ma) relationship with its owner rMa-bu ldam-shad, may have transpired in the highlands of western or northern Tibet, not rKong-po. From an archaeological perspective, the origins of the do-ma riding horse in Upper Tibet or northeastern Tibet, regions in closer communication with the Eurasian steppes, is sounder than its placement in the forested valleys of rKong-po. For a cultural historical analysis of ITJ 731r, see Bellezza 2008, pp. 544-553. Also see Stein 1971, pp. 485-491.
swine and a sacrificial cock in this smrang seems to reflect its eastern Tibetan setting. Another terrible omen described in the text is the spectacle of wild animals locked in mortal combat. The text then goes on to boldly state that the demons in the form of bad omens were banished by the byol:

<23:8 to 24:3> The origin tale of the ltas-ngan, the origin tale of repulsing the ltas-ngan: There in the country, of residences (khab), doors (livestock?) and leaders (btsan), these three, the disasters (sdig) of the ltas-ngan appeared. The horses contracted (byung) drug-phrum. The cattle (gnag) contracted tshe-ma. The sheep contracted ro-gal. The goats contracted zangs-lan. The pigs contracted skar-mda’. From the sky appeared the stone of the epidemic. Deep cracks appeared on the earth. The vultures fought with their claws. The stags fought with their antlers. The male musk deer fought with their tusks. The fish fought with their tails. For the habitations and livestock these were bad signs. How could these ltas-ngan be repulsed (bzlog)? The ltas-ngan were repulsed by the byol.

ltas ngan gyi rabs la // ltas ngan bzlog pa’i rabs la // khab sgo btsan sum ’dīr ltas ngan yul sdiɡ byung // rta la drug phrum byung // gnag la tshe ma byung // lug la ro gal byung // ra la zangs lan byung // phag la skar mda’ byung // gnam las dal rdo byung // sa la gting drum byung // bya rgod sder ’dzings byung // sha pho ru ’dzings byung / gla pho mche ’dzings byung / nya mo rnga ’dzings byung // khab sgo mtshungs su ngan na // ltas ngan cis bzlog na // ltas ngan byol gyis bzlog //

The story now jumps to the lord of Myi-yul rkyi-mthing, Myi-rab ru-cho, a Tibetan progenitor or venerable ancestor. He is witness to the bad omen of a pair of vultures fighting, which had been sent by the bdud and ltas-ngan demons. After both vultures die, Myi-rab ru-cho flings their corpses off the top of his castle. This has no effect on his steed Khug-khug but it causes his colt ‘Phywo-phywo to take flight. ‘Phywo-phywo flees across mountains and valleys all the way to the desert of rGya thang-myed. The flight of the colt underscores the great danger that Myi-rab ru-cho faces from the bdud and ltas-ngan. In order to be released from their curse, Mus-dpal phrogs-rol, a bon-po specializing in the byol, is called in. In the Mu-cho’i khrom-dur, Mus-pa ’phrul-rol (sic) is described as a sri-bon (a priest specializing in countering the harm caused by the sri demons; Bellezza 2008: 471). In the byol-rabs this bon-po is said to have come from the apex of the sky (gnam-rgung), a reference to his mythical celestial residence as well as his extremely high socio-religious status. Mus-dpal phrogs-rol’s byol includes two hybrid yaks mounts that appear to be models or figurines, rather than actual animals. As for actual animals, there is a sheep of the bdud and a cock in the ritual performance. The arrow, an important ritual

106 Drum (C.T. = grum).
107 This sentence is the imprecise signification of the line: khab sgo mtshungs su ngan (na) /.
implement, is also a part of the byol ensemble, as are decorated long sticks (shing-rings) empowered with the incantations of the bon and gshen. These sticks may be related to the rgyang-bu and pho-tong/pho-gdong, objects that commonly feature in glud and mdos rituals. The magical activation of the ritual instruments through the incantations of the gshen and bon said in tandem epitomizes the complementarity that exists between these two types of priests throughout the byol-rabs text. The text goes on to tell us that once the byol was commended to the bdud and ltas-ngan, Myi-rab ru-cho was benefited:

<24:3 to 25:2> The name of the country, yes, is Myi-yul rkyi-mthîng: who was the lord staying there? The lord Myi-rab ru-cho stayed there. What kind of bad omens did the ltas-ngan and bdud send to Myi-rab ru-cho? They sent the vultures that fight with their claws. Early one morning the Dreng,109 Myi-rab ru-cho went to the peak of the castle [and saw] his iron mount Khug-khug and his copper colt110 'Phywo-phwo, these two, which were tethered (brtod) in a turquoise meadow (gsing). On the peak of the castle, seeing the corpses of the two vultures that had fought with their claws, the lord said, ‘oh no, what happened here?’111 Then with his staff of white copper112 he hit (bgyab) the corpses of the vultures that had fought. Casting them off his castle into the turquoise meadow,113 his iron mount Khug-khug, brave and tame,114 was not spooked.115 The copper colt 'Phywo-phwo of little116 bravery and docility was spooked, thus it cut across the peaks of three mountains. It cut across the folds of three valleys. Like rolling felt, it came to the great sands, the country of rGya thang-myed.

108 The complementarity between the gshen and bon-[po] is the subject of a paper by Dotson (2008). He observes that these two classes of priests were identical or nearly so, because they performed the same sets of healing, divinatory and funerary rites. My analysis of Dunhuang and Eternal Bon materials certainly bears this observation out. The subscription of the gshen and bon to the same ritual traditions disproves an earlier Tibetological hypothesis that holds they existed in fundamental opposition to one another. This is not to say there was not professional competition between the various non-Buddhist priests in the early Tibetan setting, but it did not stem from major sectarian or ideological divisions.

109 Dreng (C.T. = 'greng) either signifies ‘that which stands upright’ as an epithet for humans, or it is the name of a clan ('Greng). For reference to the 'Greng clan of southern Tibet, see Sørensen et al. 2005, p. 224 (fn. 10).

110 s'Te (C.T. = rte'u). This is probably an elision of ste' (ste' 'Phywo-phyo).

111 These spoken words represent the rough meaning of the line: 'dl ci brla ci bshan gsung (nas) /.

112 bSe'i ldam-kar (C.T. = bse yi ldam-dkar). See Bellezza 2005, p. 182, para ii.

113 Ne'u-sing (C.T. = na-gsing).

114 ‘Brave and tame’ is the general import of the line: rdal dang sed che (ste') /.

115 Ma-drogs (C.T. = ma-'drog).

116 Khungs = chung.
<25:2–7> The human Myi-rab ru-cho was nearly had by the ltas-ngan and bdud. The bon-po of the byol, Mus-dpal phrogs-rol, was invited from the apex of the sky to perform (btab) the divination (mo) and make the prognosis,¹¹⁷ [for it was shown that] nothing else could aid him, except the aid of the byol. What byol [was presented] to the ltas-ngan? A golden hybrid yak (rtol-po) mounted by a turquoise man, a turquoise hybrid yak mounted by a golden man, a black sheep of the bdud with a white face, a black-breasted rooster,¹¹⁸ an arrow with three joints, and long sticks with white ornaments on which three words of the father (gshen) spells and three words of the bon spells were cast (btab). It was sent (btang) as the byol of the ltas-ngan and bdud. The human Myi-rab ru-cho was luckily benefited [by the byol]. For those humans who have the byol [performed] they will be luckily benefited.

dreng myi rab ru cho ni ltas ngan dang / bdud kyis ’tshal ma khad / mo btab phywa klags na / ‘di cis yang myi thub byol gyis thub / byol gyi bon po mus dpal phrogs rol / gnam rgung nas gnyer de / ltas ngan ci las byol na / gser gyi rtol po la / g.yu ’i myi bskyon ba dang / g.yu ’i rtol po la / gser gyi myi bskyon ba dang / bdud lug nag po spyi gar dang / bya mtshal bu brang gnag dang / mda’ rgyud tshigs gsum dang / shing rings rgyan dkar la / pha sngags tshigs gsum dang / bon sngags tshigs gsum btang ste / ltas ngan bdud kyis byol de btang / dreng myi rab ru cho la phan de bsod do / myi su la byol ba la / phan de bsod do / 

The second geographic-based byol origins tale is set in Bal-yul, a location in the eastern portion of gTsang (25:8 to 26:6). The central character of the narrative, Bal-lce rmang-ru-ti, resides in the castle of Kha-rag with its nine doors. It appears that Bal refers to his country, while lCe is his clan, once a prominent genealogical grouping in Central Tibet. This ostensible lord or king is beset by the bad omen of deer fighting with their horns (ru ’dzings shig) and by marauding bdud. It is made amply clear that lCe rmang ru-ti’s (sic) is in mortal danger when the text states that he is surrounded by the gshed (gshed kyis ’khor), the agent of death. Unnamed practitioners perform the dual divinatory (mo) and

¹¹⁷ Phywa-klag. In the archaic funerary texts of the Dunhuang manuscripts we find the orthographic construction pya-bklags.
¹¹⁸ Bya mtshal-bu (C.T. = bya mtsha’-lu).
prognosticatory (*phya*) rites, and it is decided that a *byol* must be carried out in order to liberate the victim from the demons. The ensemble of offerings in this ritual includes the obligatory Ephedra, mustard seeds, beer, and barley cakes. It appears that the *srin*, a class of semi-divine telluric beings, were implicated in the dangers confronting Bal-Ice rmang-ru-ti, for the *byol* features four types of *srin* livestock. These were either ritually sacrificed or banished, but the text is silent on this point. The favorite (*snying-rag*) clothes and possessions of Bal-Ice rmang-ru-ti noted in the text were most probably used to produce the *ngar-mi* or *zhal*, an effigy of the victim used in the ritual exchange.

The text states that the *byol* had the intended effect of saving the life of the protagonist. The account also informs us that there are three grades of *byol*: greater (*che*), lesser (*chung*) and smallest (*yang-chung*). It is in the greater *byol* that real animals and other prized objects are used. The lesser *byol* is made with facsimiles, but this in no way diminishes its efficacy. This tripartite system of classification seems to reflect socio-economic conditions in the time in which the *byol-rabs* was written as much as it does variations in praxis:

<25:8 to 26:4> Also, from where does a *byol* origin tale come from? In Bal-yul Lang-thang, in the 'Bal (sic) castle of Kha-rag sgo-rgu, lived Bal-Ice rmang-ru-ti. Stags fighting with their horns were sent in front of the gate of the castle. The back of lCe rmang-ru-ti's [castle] was surrounded by the *bdud*. His forehead was circled by an agent of death (*gshed*). He was surrounded by the *gshed* of bad omens. Performing the *mo* and making the *phya*, [it was decided] that it was better [to make] a *byol* for the *ltas-ngan*. It was better to be rescued (*blu*) from the descending *bdud*. What *byol* was made for the *byol*? An oxen and a male hybrid yak of the *srin*, and a horse and mule of the *srin* [were made] as the *byol*. The *byol* [was made] from a platter full of the barley cakes of the *byol*, and a pit-cher full of beer (*chang*) of the *byol*, mustard seeds and Ephedra on which incantations were said, favorite clothes, and favorite possessions.

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119 The *gZi brjid* states that ransom offerings in the *mdos* rites must be better than the actual objects they represent (Snellgrove 1967: 87). This prescription shows that the *glud* and *byol*, whatever their material status, provided they are executed properly, are effective therapeutic measures.

120 Bal-yul lang-tang/leng-tang is noted in PT 1040 (ln. 106) and PT 1285 (ln. r144). This is a region situated on the northwest side of g.Yar-brog g.yu-mtsho (Hazod 2009: 172). For the Bal toponym, also see Serensen *et al.* 2007, pp. 125 (fn. 254), 169 (fn. 422). The name of the castle, Kha-rag, points to the same general vicinity. In the contemporary context, Kha-rag is the name of a side valley on the south side of the gTsang-po, in sNa-dkar-rtse County (*ibid.* 120 (fn. 221), 417, 674 (fn. 7)). This Kha-rag should not be confused with the eponymous region in rTsang-stod.

121 Both *sha-pho* and *sha-mo* are indicated in the text, the syllable *ma* being subscribed in a different hand under the syllable *pho* (25:9). This interpolation is entirely unnecessary and the reading 'stags' is the appropriate one.

122 *Phyo = phya.*
yang byol rabs geig ga las byung na // bal yul lang thang na // 'bal mkhar kha rag sgo rgu na // bal lce rmang ru tĭ bzhugs ste // de la bdud kyis ltas ngan ci btang na // sha pho ru 'dzings shig / mkhar gyi sgo khar btang la // lce rmang ru ti la ltag phyi bdud kyis 'khor // dpral snga na gshed cig 'khor / ltas ngan gshed kyis 'khor // mo btab phyo klangs na / ltas ngan byol bar bzang // bdud bab blu bar bzang / byol ba ci la byol // srin glang mdzo po dang / srin rta dre'u la byol / byol zan sder gang dang / byol chang skyogs gang dang // nyungs dang mtshe la bsngags ste // gos snying rag dang / nor snying rag las byol na //

<26:4–6> lCe rmang-ru-tĭ was luckily benefited. The great byol [is made] with actual\textsuperscript{123} things. The lesser byol is [made] from substitutes (gsob). The extremely small byol is [made] with cloth. Whatever is obtained (phrad) early is used early in the byol. Whatever is obtained later is used later in the byol. The byol is directed towards the hating enemy.\textsuperscript{124} The byol is directed towards the harmful obstacles (gnod-pa’i bgags).

The third geographically designated byol-rabs unfolds in Yar-khyim sogs-kha\textsuperscript{125} and pertains to an ancestral figure known as gShang-spo yo-rgyal-ba (26:6 to 27:5). The evil portent of the bdud he beheld was musk deer clashing in a narrow defile. Again, through the execution of the mo in tandem with the phyA by unknown priests/priestesses, it was determined that a byol had to be made. For this purpose, Mus-dpal phrog-rol (sic), the byol specialist credited with aiding Myi-rab ru-cho of Myi-yul rkyi-mthing, was summoned from the sky.\textsuperscript{126} The text goes on to specify typical offering substances of the byol before digressing to present the parentage of an exceptional ape or langur (sprA) named sNya-bo lag-ring, alias sPra-myi zin-thang-po. Although he is unable to communicate with humans, this divine ally of Mus-dpal phrog-rol was able to directly

\textsuperscript{123} rNgos (C.T. = dngos).
\textsuperscript{124} sDang-ba’i gra’ (dgra).
\textsuperscript{125} The Yar-lung region. The history and culture of this region are surveyed in detail in Gyalbo et al. 2000; Sørensen et al. 2005. Nowadays, Yar-lung sog-kha (sic) refers specifically to a site with the ruins of ancient tower structures, which according to the local oral tradition, were first erected before the time of King Srong-bsan sgam-po (Gyalbo et al. 2000: 11, 206–208). For mention of Yar-lung sog-kha in Dunhuang catalogues of principalities, see Lalou 1965, pp. 203, 204, 215ff.
\textsuperscript{126} gNam nas ’kug (C.T. = bkug).
communicate with the bdud. Precisely, what actions he carried out during the byol ritual are not noted, but his presence was instrumental in its success.\textsuperscript{127}

<26:6–9> Also from where did the byol origins come? In the country of Yar-khyim sogs-kha, gShang spo-yo rgyal-ba was sent what bad omen? Male musk deer fighting with tusks in between tightly joined rock formations.\textsuperscript{128} sPu-yug rgyal-ba (\textit{sic}) was stricken by illness.\textsuperscript{129} Performing\textsuperscript{130} the \textit{mo} and making the \textit{phya},\textsuperscript{131} [it was determined] that this was caused by the bad omens of the bdud. Nothing could aid him except the aid of the byol.\textsuperscript{132}

yang byol rabs gcig ga las byung na’ / yul yar khyim sogs kha na / gshang spo yo rgyal ba la / ltas ngan či btang na / gla po so ‘dzings cig / brags dang ra bar byung na / spu yug rgyal ba snyin ksys zin ste / mo btab phyo klags na / ’di bdud kyi lhas ngan byung / čis yang myi thub byol gyis thub / /

<26:9 to 27:5> Mus-dpal phrog-rol (\textit{sic}) was summoned\textsuperscript{133} from the sky. A platter full of byol cakes and seven pedicels (\textit{nyag}) of byol Ephedra – the name of the father and patriarch of the ape sNy-a-bo lag-ring was sTangs kyi ‘o-yug rgyal-ba [and] his mother was Byi-shi za’i gnam-mtha’ ‘khor – an arrow with three joints, an arrow, \textit{bam} (?), and \textit{thags} (cord or woolen cloth), these three, a long stick with white ornaments, and the ape Myi-zin thang-po (\textit{sic}) repulsed [the bad omens of the \textit{bdud}]. The ape Myi-bzhin thang-po (\textit{sic}) could not communicate with humans\textsuperscript{134} but he could communicate with the \textit{bdud}. In ancient times, the benefit was like that benefit. Now, if the human can ransom, the \textit{bdud} can rescind\textsuperscript{135} [their bad omens]. If the humans can repulse, the lhas-ngan are repulsed.

mus dpal phrog rol gnam nas ‘kug / byol zan sder gang dang / byol mtshe nyag bdun dang / spra snyo bo lag rings kyi / pha dang yab kyi mtshan / sTangs kyi ‘o yug rgyal ba lags / ma byi shi za ‘i gnam mtha’ ‘khor / ma’ rgyud tshigs gsum dang / ma’ dam thags gsum dang / shing rings rgyan dkar dang / spra myi zin thang po bzlog / spra myi bzin thang po yang / / myi dang bda’ myi mjal bar / / bdud

\textsuperscript{127} A foundational ritual role for the monkey in a triad that includes the badger and bat (\textit{geol-chung na-ro bu-tsa/khu-tsa}) is also found in the Mu-cho’i khrom-’dur. As in the \textit{byol-rabs}, these divine creatures or zoomorphic ritual instruments are employed to pacify or dispel evil spirits. See Bellezza 2008, pp. 380–382, 390, 405.

\textsuperscript{128} Brags (C.T. = \textit{brag}).

\textsuperscript{129} sNyin (C.T. = \textit{snyin}) kyiis zin.

\textsuperscript{130} bDab = \textit{btab}.

\textsuperscript{131} Phyo = \textit{phya}.

\textsuperscript{132} ‘Cī yang myi thub byol gyis thub / .

\textsuperscript{133} ’Kug (C.T. = \textit{bkug}).

\textsuperscript{134} Myi (C.T. = \textit{mi}) dang bda’ (C.T. = \textit{brda’}) myi (C.T. = \textit{mi}) mjal bar / .

\textsuperscript{135} Shol (C.T. = \textit{bshol}).
The fourth byol-rabs specifying a geographic location transpires in the dBus region of sKyi-yul la-mo ‘jing-sngon (27:5 to 29:1). More recently this region was known as sKyi(d)-shod. The antagonists in this tale are the king of the ltas-ngan Gang-par ge-ber and five bdud horsemen known as ram-pa. In conjunction with an inauspicious nine-headed wolf, four bdud, each associated with a different-colored precious substance, appear from their walled-in spheres to attack the protagonist of the story, rMag-btsun gyi rgyal-po na-ra. In Tibetan ritual traditions, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, gods and demons of the cardinal directions are often assigned four different colors, while a fifth color represents the center. After the mo and phywa (sic) are conducted to pinpoint the hazard, the bon-po of the byol ritual Mus-dpal phrogs-rol is once again called for help. The metaphors used to describe the predicament of rMag-btsun gyi rgyal-po nga-ra (sic) as well as the objects featured in the byol are of the same type found in the byol-rabs we have already examined. Likewise, this sKyi-yul origins tale is set in the distant past:

<27:5 to 28:3> From where did a byol origin tale come from? In the country sKyi-yul la-mo ‘jing-sngon there lived a lord. There lived (bzhugs) a certain rMag-btsun gyi rgyal-po na-ra. The five horsemen bdud ram-pa asked (zhus-pa) the king of the ltas-ngan, Gang-par ge-ber, ‘what bad omens should we send’ The king of the ltas-ngan said, ‘an iron wolf with nine heads is to be sent as the bad omen.’ It fell at the gate of sKyi-yul la-ma ‘jing-sngon (sic). As one head was howling (ngus-pa), the mouths of the nine heads opened. From these in a downward direction the five horsemen bdud re-pa were sent to come. From [the yard] with nine walls and nine ridgelines (rgu-ra rgyud) of conch, the white bdud man with a white horse appeared. From [the yard] with nine walls and nine ridgelines of turquoise, the blue horseman with a blue horse appeared. From [the yard] with nine walls and nine ridgelines of copper, the red horseman with the red horse appeared. From [the yard] with nine walls and ridgelines of gold, the yellow horseman with the yellow horse appeared. The five horsemen bdud rim-pa (sic) came and were on the earth.

byol rabs cig ga las byung na / yul skyi yul la mo ‘jing sngon na / rje ru su bzhugs na / r mag bstun gyi rgyal po na ra shig bzhugs /
bdud ram pa rkya lnga 'is // ltas ngan gyi rgyal po gang par ge ber la // ltas ngan du ci btang zhus pa la // ltas ngan gyi rgyal po'i zhal na re // lags kyi spyang po 'go rgu bo zhig // ltas ngan du btang ba dang // skyi yul la ma 'jing sngon gyi sgo ru babs ste // 'go gcig nas ngus pas // 'go rgu kha nas byung ste // de 'i phyi na mar // bdud re pa rkya lnga btang ste 'ongs so // dung gyi rgu ra rgu rgyud nas // bdud myi dkar rta dkar byung // g.yu 'i rgu ra rgu rgyud nas // rkya myi sngo rta sngo byung // zangs kyi rgu ra rgyud nas // rkya myi dmar rta dmar byung // gser gyi rgu ra rgu rgyud nas // rkya myi ser rta ser byung // bdud rim pa rkya lnga yang sa la lhags de gshags //

<28:3 to 29:1> rmag-btsun gyi rgyal-po nga-ra was almost taken like a bird in a trap by the five horsemen bdud ram-pa. He was nearly snatched like a bird in a tshed (a type of snare or trap). Performing the mo and doing the phywa (sic), [it was determined] that it was better he be rescued from the bdud that had descended. It was better [to send] the byol against the bad omens. It was better to repulse the disasters of the country. Inviting the bon-po of the byol Mus-dpal phrogs-rol, a plate full of byol cakes, one pod (rkang) of byol mustard seeds, one pedicel of byol Ephedra,\(^{137}\) one pitcher full of byol beer, thousands of long sticks, rgya-rings ol ol (?), and stong-ri phywa-phywa (?) were offered to the five horsemen bdud ram-pa. Nothing could [pacify] the bdud and ltas-ngan except the byol. The bdud and ltas-ngan exchanged the man for the byol, that byol. Nothing could repulse them except the byol. The benefit of ancient times luckily benefited like that.\(^{138}\)

rmag btsun gyi rgyal po nga ra yang // bdud ram pa rgya lngas bya ltar gtor gyis blangs ma khad // nya ltar tshed kyi bcus ma khad // mo btab phywa klags na // bdud bab blu bar bzang // ltas ngan byol bar bzang // yul sdiq bzlog par bzang // byol gyi bon po mus dpal phrogs rol gnyer nas // byol zan sder gang dang // byol nyungs rkang cig dang // byol mtshe nyag cig dang // byol chang skyogs gang dang // shing rings stong cho dang // rgya rings 'ol 'ol dang // stong ri phywa phywa dang // bdud ram pa rkya lnga la phul ba la // bdud dang ltas ngan cins yang myi thub // byol gyis thub // bdud dang ltas ngan yang // byol de // myi dang byol du brjes // cins yang myi zlogs // byol gyis zlogs // gna' phan de ltar phan de bsod do //

The sixth and final origins tale in the byol-rabs text also has definite geographic underpinnings (29: 2 to 42: 8). It takes place in sMra-yul thang-brgyad (Land of sMra Eight Plains). This is a major location somewhere in Upper Tibet, in the

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\(^{137}\) Byol nyungs rkang cig dang / byol mtshe nyag cig (dang) /. This same offerings formula is found in PT 1060, Ins. 5, 7, 60, 69: mtshe-mo nyag cig / yungs-mo sgangs (sic) cig /.

\(^{138}\) gNa' phan de ltar phan de bsod do /.
region now known as the Byang-thang. It is one of a number of locations mentioned in the Dunhuang catalogues of principalities. The pastoral associations of sMra-yul thang-brgyad are emphasized by the occupation of the sMra patriarch and matriarch’s son, sMra then-pa, a horse herder in the upper part of a valley. sMra as a common noun refers to a type of primal man, as in the smra mt gshen gsum, three types of prototypical humans (cf. Norbu 2009: 42, fn. 43). This signification of the word smra is closely related to the term smrang as a designation for narratives dealing with phenomena characterized as primal or antecedental. The smrang were designed to be proclaimed before the ritual they describe was performed. The saying or telling of the smrang is itself etymologically linked with the verb smra (to utter, to tell). sMra also denotes an ethnic or tribal group connected to Zhang Zhung. The Eternal Bon religion views Zhang Zhung as a fountainhead of their traditions (cf. Stein 1959: 51), reflecting Upper Tibet’s paleocultural importance in the archaeological record. The two main applications for the noun sMra/smra, therefore, are likely to be interconnected, for both have precedential connotations.

As in the final byol-rabs narrative, a smrang for a bumblebee god known as Sri-gsas bong-ba stag-chung found in an eponymous funerary text is also set in

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139 In ITJ 739 (lns. 14r1, 14r2), sMra-yul thags-brgyad (sic) appears to share a border with Dru-gu (Turkic lands): “Dru-gu, yes, along that margin, at sMra-yul, yes, Thags-brgyad” (smra yul ni thags brgyad na / dru gu ni mtha’ bskor ba /). For a tabulation of territories in PT 1060, PT 1285, PT 1286, PT 1290, see Lalou 1965. For the lists of territories in two later histories (as well as PT 1287), see Norbu 2009, pp. 143–145. Dotson (2009: 37, 38) notes that these formulaic lists of place names have much overlap with toponyms found in Dunhuang historical texts such as the Old Tibetan Annals and Old Tibetan Chronicle.

140 For this ethnonym and toponym and its association with Zhang Zhung in clan compendium (rus-mdax) and historical literature such as sDung rabs padma dkar po’i phreng ba, Pha rabs mthong ba kun gsal and La dwags rgyal rabs, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956 (after Waddell), p. 311 (fn. 125); Stein 1959, pp. 4, 51, 54, 71; Vitali 2003, pp. 40–45, 60; Bellezza 2005, pp. 204, 205; 2008, pp. 260 (fn. 168), 369, 476, 518; Tashi Tsering 2008, pp. 73–77. In reference to sMra-yul thang-brgyad/thag-rgyad in PT 1136 and PT 1285, Stein (2003: 602) suggests that smra simply means man as in the [bilingual] expression smra-mi, disregarding its ethnic and geographic connotations as surveyed by him earlier (1959). Stein grappled with the difficulties in discerning how the epithets sMra, sBra and dMu correspond to Zhang Zhung and with the nature of the territoriality they express (ibid.: 51, 52, 54).

141 Lung gi ya pu (C.T. = phu).

142 For comprehensive surveys of archaic cultural monuments and rock art in Upper Tibet see, for example, Bellezza forthcoming-a; forthcoming-b; forthcoming-c; 2008; 2002-a; 2002-b; 2001; 2000, 1999; 1997-a; 1997-b. The identification of much of Upper Tibet with Zhang Zhung in Eternal Bon sources does not necessarily mean that the inhabitants of Upper Tibet before, during, or in the aftermath of the imperial period actually called their homeland Zhang Zhung. As I have already observed, we do not know how the indigenes of Upper Tibet may have referred to their territory in antiquity. Commenting on PT 1285 and its lists of gshen and bon practitioners, Blezer (2008: 431, 432) identifies the upper reaches of the rTsang-po river as an important ancient religious center, stating that it may have been “the actual historical proto-heartland of ‘Bon’”. Generally speaking, this is the implication that should be drawn from the textual evidence.
Mra-yul thang-brgyad. In this origins tale, there is a castle called sMra-mkhar ldem-pa in which the father rMa-rje btsun-po and the mother sMra-za 'brang-chung resided. The text records that this father was a deer hunter and the mother a collector of gro (Potentilla anserina), economic activities commonly but not exclusively associated with the Tibetan upland. Likewise, in a Mu-cho'i khrom-’dur smrang about the homicidal sri demons set in sMra-yul thang-brgyad, a major figure in the tale is sMra-rje btsan-po, a deer hunter. Ancient deer hunting is very well attested in the rock art record of Upper Tibet. The pastoral character of sMra-yul thang-brgyad is also referred to in another smrang about the sri, where the female protagonist, Klu-za ye-mo btsun, is described as a herder of sheep. The sri responsible for her murder flees to Kha-la rtsang-stod (a location in upper gTsang) and to Yar-yul sogs-ka before being summoned back to sMra-yul thang-brgyad by the gshen-bon and dbal-bon Gong-rum.

In PT 1136 we meet sMra-myi (Man of sMra), who along with his bosom friend rMa-myi de, hails from dGa'-yul byang-nams (Northern Joyous Land). sMra-myi is killed while hunting wild yaks in Byang-’brog snam-stod, an Upper Tibetan locale. While dGa'-yul in the Mu-cho'i khrom-’dur and Srid pa'i mdzod

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144 For information on this text see Bellezza 2008, pp. 475–477. After the sMra couple’s son and daughter are slain by a sri demon, the gto, dpyad and sri-khung rites were performed by gShen-rab myi-bo and SRI-bon dmü-'phen be'u-ra.

145 This smrang is examined in ibid., pp. 469–471.

146 For this smrang, see ibid., pp. 471, 472.

147 Kha-la/Kha-rag gtsang-stod of Eternal Bon sources constituted the western border of imperial g.Yas-ru. It appears to have encompassed La-stod byang and other areas in present-day Lhasa and Ngam-ring counties. For this geographic identification, see Hazod 2009, p. 170; Sørensen et al. 2007, p. 674 (fn. 7); Bellezza forthcoming-c.

148 This first do-ma origins tale in PT 1136 is examined in Bellezza 2008, pp. 517–522; Stein 1971, pp. 501, 502. Another location, Byang-kha snam-brgyad, also features in the narratives of the archaic funerary texts of Dunhuang, underscoring the importance of uninhabited northern regions to early historic period religious mythology. In the Klu ‘bum nag po, Byang-kha snam-brgyad (sic) is the place in which deer, antelope and blue sheep are hunted (Bellezza 2008: 485; cf. Stein 2003: 602). As Stein (ibid.) notes, in PT 1060 Byang-ka mam-brgyad (sic) is connected to the Turcic country Drugu (see also Bellezza 2008, p. 524). However, rather than Turkic lands proper, a location in the Tibetan uplands seems to be indicated here (ibid.). Dotson (2009b) observes that Byang-ka mam-brgyad in PT 1286 and other catalogues is generally considered synonymous with the Byang-thang. In the Klu ‘bum nag po and other Dunhuang texts, this toponym with its eight sections does indeed seem to refer to part or all of the Byang-thang, a vast land that lends itself to be partitioned in such a way by its meridian ranges. In the Klu ‘bum nag po narrative noted above, Tshangs-pa is prefixed to the names of the protagonists, a clan or tribal designation that, given the common meaning of the word (i.e. purified, cleansed), suggests an identification with the upper Yar-chab gtsang-po river valley more than it does the province of rTsang/gTsang per se. In this regard, it must also be noted that Tshangs-kha is one of the nine gods of Zhang Zhung, according to the rGyat bod kyi chos byung (Bellezza 2008: 300, fn. 295). In any event, a hunting expedition to a distant Turkic territory is not in keeping with the storyline in the Klu ‘bum nag po narrative. Antelope, blue sheep (and deer in early times) are very plentiful in the Byang-thang, obviating the need to travel further north into the Turcic hinterland, which has far fewer numbers of the quarry sought after. A similar land, Byang-kha sna-brgyad, is noted in PT 1068 as a place for hunting deer and antelope (ibid.: 538, 539). Moreover, in Byang-kha sna-brgyad, the hunter in the Klu
phug is a metaphorical paradisiacal realm, its placement in the north implies a venatic or pastoral character. The geographic association of the sMra tribe or clan with Upper Tibet rather than the northeastern highlands of the Tibetan Plateau is confirmed by the second smrang in PT 1136, which speaks of sMa-bu zing-ba’i zing-skyes/sMra-bond gyi zing-pa zing-skyes/sMra-bon zing-ba’i zing-skyes, the son of rTsang ho-de’i hos-bdag and gShen-za’i gyi myed-ma. As we have seen, this family resided in the ‘headwaters of the river country’, a location probably along the upper reaches of the gTsang-po river (see supra, fn. 24). Finally, it is again worth citing the sMra-yul thag-rgyad (sic) of ITJ 731r, a location in which the equestrian arts originated according to this text. This equestrian mythology is culturally and archaeologically consonant with the highland identity of sMra-yul.

The final origins tale in the byol-rabs, which is set in sMra-yul thang-brgyad, has as one of its most important characters a man named sMra then-pa, and is by far the longest smrang in the byol-rabs text. The sheer length of the story (it is as long as the other five smrang combined) mirrors the formative nature of the sMra tribe and country in the origin tales of the archaic funerary rituals of the Dunhuang manuscripts and Mu-ch’o’i khrom-’dur. The role accorded the sMra in this literature underlines the importance of Upper Tibet as a cultural wellspring, a widely held perception in Eternal Bon-po historiography, which is certainly borne out by archaeological findings in the region. This is not to say that Upper Tibet was the only foundation of Tibetan civilization; to the contrary, it was one of several constituent regions spread across the Tibetan Plateau, which contributed to the cultural-scape of imperial period Tibet. The composite geographic nature of imperial period cultural traditions is well illustrated by the territorial scope of funerary transport horses in PT 1060. These do-ma are associated with 12 different Tibetan principalities, as well as Drugu (Dru-gu/Gru-gu) in the Turkic lands north of Tibet. PT 1060 places the headwaters country (yul-chab gyi ya-bgo) in southwestern Tibet as part of Zhang Zhung, confirming the localization assigned the second origins tale in PT 1136 (see supra, fn. 24).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ 'bum nag po, Tshangs-pa rab-byor, met a srin and the group of seven fierce horsemen known as bDud rol-po skya-bden, which are very much part of the native pantheon of Tibet. In ITJ 731r, Byang-ka snam-brgyad is the homeland of a wild yak, confirming that this is indeed a location in the Tibetan uplands (see ibid.: 534, 536; Stein 1971: 486). In the first of the two smrang of PT 1136, Byang-ka snam-brgyad is either identical to Byang-brg sam-stod or on the way to it. Byang-brg sam-stod, a northern wilderness for hunting is highly suggestive of the northern Byang-thang. Stein (1959: 54 (fn. 151); 2003: 602) also notes the correspondence between Byang-brg sam-stod and Byang-ka snam-brgyad in PT 1136 and PT 1289. As noted above, the first PT 1136 funerary ritual origins narrative concerns two friends rMa-myi btsun-po and sMra-myi ste (a hunter), sMra being indicative of an Upper Tibetan (Zhang Zhung) location. Although it is often associated with the rMa-chu river and the rMa-chen spom-ra mountain, even the ethnonym rMa has Zhang Zhung connotations. For the rMa Zhang Zhung as one of four northern tribes, see Vitali 2003, p. 54. For the use of rMa as a Zhang Zhung term in monosyllabic and compound forms, see Martin 2001-b; Dagkar 2003.
The formative role played by Upper Tibet as a generator or incubator of important Tibetan cultural traditions, as implied in the Old Tibetan documents and manifested in Eternal Bon texts, must be understood in a very broad chronological context. The deep-rooted nature of the ensemble of archaic residential and ceremonial monuments in Upper Tibet and the absence of foreign epigraphy for the protohistoric period (circa 100 BCE–630 CE), indicate that the Tibetan highland was not open to major cultural intrusions during this era. As I have considered earlier (2008), based on the morphology and chronology of the characteristic funerary pillar monuments of Upper Tibet, the era of intensive cultural interchange with north Inner Asia appears to predate the protohistoric period. The ubiquity and uniformity of the Upper Tibetan sui generis residential structures (all-stone corbelled edifices) and funerary pillars (walled-in pillars and arrays of pillars appended to temple-tombs) of the protohistoric period reveal a land and people that enjoyed a stable and enduring cultural bedrock. In part, this perdurability was a function of geography, for no land is as high as Upper Tibet. Exacerbated by Late Holocene climate degradation, its forbidding environment must have prevented whatever foreign cultural inputs there were from materially affecting the monumental assemblage of the region. It was in an insulated environment such as this that abstract cultural traditions could also be nurtured and propagated. In contrast, the northeastern Tibetan Plateau, which is in closer proximity to the Silk Road,
was buffeted by a host of cultural forces over time. The portion of the Plateau known to the Tibetans as A-zha had a strong Turco-Mongolian makeup, while the ancient region of Mi-nyag was conterminous to the Gansu Corridor, a region of extremely high cultural interactivity, recalling other major Eurasian cross-roads such as the Panjab and Balkh. While significant cultural and social innovations are likely to have reached Tibet from the northeast in the protohistoric period (this was certainly the case in the imperial period), its innate cultural dynamism may have dissuaded imperial period Tibetans from seeing this region as the prime source of critical ritual traditions. The same may be observed for the southeastern regions of the Tibetan Plateau: the presence of many different ethnic and linguistic groups may have rendered it unsuitable as a fountainhead of Tibetan culture, at least as far as imperial period Tibetan religionists were concerned. How different for Upper Tibet, a cultural sanctuary of sorts; its ritual practices were accorded a key place in the early historic period. The same can generally be observed for Central Tibet (rTsang to rKong-po). Its ancestral cultural traditions were lent much weight in Old Tibetan documents. Nonetheless, it was Upper Tibet and its pastoral and venatic way of life that appears to have been most influential in the formation and codification of imperial period non-Buddhist ritual traditions.

This last smrang in the byol-rabs text begins by introducing the parents and two siblings of sMra-yul thang-brgyad. It then turns to the parentage of another key character in the story, Klu-rab bzang-to-re, who belongs to the klu lineage either as a human being or water spirit. As in other smrang, these characters are elite figures, rulers or ancestral celebrities of considerable merit. The daughter of the sMra, sMra-lcam si-le-ma, and the son of the klu, Klu-rab bzang-to-re, fall deeply in love and begin to spend all their time together. In the course of agricultural activities, byur, demonic obstacles in the form of pigeons and choughs, fell upon the loving pair. The byur commonly manifest in the form of disasters and serious misfortunes, as they do in this story:

<29:2–5> From where did a byol origins tale come? In sMra-yul thang-brgyad the father and patriarch called by the name of sMra-rgan thang-po and the mother and matriarch called by the name of sMra-bdag btsun-mo. The son of the season of their coupling was the brother (mying-po) and male sibling (dral-po) called sMra then-pa, and the sister (srin-mo) and female sibling (lcam-mo) was called sMra-lcam si-le-ma. The brother and male sibling herded horses and took care of the

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150 The byur as a misfortune-causing agent and its association with demonic entities such as the bdud, gdon, 'dre, yi-dags, and 'gong-po is recorded in PT 1051, ln. 48; PT 1283, ln. 459; ITJ 739, Ins. 12v01, 14v09, 16r04. For the occurrence in the divination text PT 1051, see Bellezza 2005, p. 349 (fn. 24). In ITJ 730, ln. 25, byur is associated with evil and disease; and in PT 126, ln 094, with the pernicious contamination (mnol) of the lha. In the Eternal Bon texts Nyi sgron and gZer mig, the byur is one of the 11 types of earth gyen, an important system of classification of spirits (Norbu 2009: 85).
steeds\textsuperscript{151} in the upper part of a valley. The sister and female sibling sMra-lcam s\textsuperscript{le}-ma.

byol rabs cig ga las byung na' // smra yul thang brgyad na // pha dang yab kyi mtshan // smra rgan thang pos bgyi // ma dang yum gyi mtshan // smra bdag btsun mos bgyi // bshos dang nams kyi sras // mying po dral po ba // smra then bas bgyi // sring mo lcam mo ni // smra lcam si le mas bgyi bo // mying po dral po ni lung gi ya pu na // rta 'tsho rmang skyong na // sring mo lcamo ba // smra lcam si le ma /

\textless 29:5 to 30:1> In the kl\text{u} castle of rTse-rgu'i khri-po the father was named Klu-rje btsan-po and the mother and matriarch was named rDog-za g.yas-mo btsun. These two mated and the son of the season was Klu-rab bzang-to-re. He was born as the male issue\textsuperscript{152} and there was no one better than him. He and sMra-lcam sil-ma (sic), these two, fell in love.\textsuperscript{153} At the edge of a blue (verdant) meadow they spread out a white felt of byam (love?). On the water they cast some unspoiled [offerings].\textsuperscript{154} Doing that, they mated.\textsuperscript{155} When the time came to dip water,\textsuperscript{156} rain was falling from above. When the time came to weed,\textsuperscript{157} 100 pigeons and 100 choughs were the byur.

klu mkhar rtse rgu'i khris po na // yab klu rje btsan ba dang // ma dang yum smos na / rdog za g.yas mo btsun gnyis / bshos dang nams kyi sras / klu rab bzang to re // stangs pho cig skyes pa la // de las bzang ma mchis / smra lcam sil ma gnyis / skyes bu na chung bgyis // gsing ma sngo mtha' ru // byam phying dkar bting nas / myi rul de chab gang la ru bor // zhing mchis pa la // bshos zhing ra snga dor bdun n\text{f} // chab bcu ran na // char pa yas se bab // nyur ma yur ran na / phug ron brgya dang / skyung kha brgyas byur yang lags //

Word of sMra-lcam si-le-ma and Klu-rab bzang-to-re's relationship reaches the sMra son, sMra then-ba, through a herdswoman. Apparently, on account of her love affair, sMra-lcam si-le-ma neglects her work of weeding and watering.

\textsuperscript{151} rTa 'tsho rmang skyong. On the word rmang, see Thomas 1957, Text IA, pp. 9–16; 20–28; Bellezza 2008, p. 521 (fn. 567). On the Tibeto-Burman linguistic origins of rmang, see Coblin 1974.

\textsuperscript{152} st\text{angs}-pho. This obscure O.T. term can probably also be glossed ‘scion’. The term stang denotes a husband (Bellezza 2008: 327 (fn. 364); Pasar et al. 2008: 95).

\textsuperscript{153} skyes-bu (young man) na-chung (young woman) bgyis. This literally means, ‘did as a young man and young woman’.

\textsuperscript{154} Myi rul de chab gang la ru bor / . An alternative reading of this line is, ‘Unspoiled things were given as presents.’ Chab-gang (‘over the water’) denotes the presents and ritual instruments that aid the deceased in his/her passage over the river of the dead (see supra, fn. 40). In the byol-rabs, perhaps this term alludes to a rite performed by couples so that after death they would be reunited in the afterworld.

\textsuperscript{155} Zhing mchis-pa la / bshos zhing ra… / . This second line concludes with the words: snga dor bdun n\text{f}, which is of unknown import.

\textsuperscript{156} Chab-bcu (to collect water by dipping a ladle).

\textsuperscript{157} Nyur ma-yur = Yur ma-yur (see no. 30, ln. 3 of the text).
sMra then-ba becomes deeply resentful of his sister and goes to confront her paramour. Perhaps he was so antagonistic towards the liaison of sMra-lcam si-le-ma and Klu-rab bzang-to-re because they belonged to different tribes, but the text is mute on this subject. When sMra then-ba arrives he slays Klu-rab bzang-to-re with his sword. Despite being mortally wounded, Klu-rab bzang-to-re is able to retaliate by hurling a metallic thunderbolt at sMra then-ba. Not wanting to lose her brother as well, sMra-lcam si-le-ma intervenes by magically shielding sMra then-ba. Her brother saved, sMra-lcam si-le-ma proceeds to bury Klu-rab bzang-to-re in a deep pit:

<30:1–5> A herdswoman of cattle looked and saw sMra-lcam si-le-ma and Klu-rab bzang-to-re, these two. All the day these two did not take their eyes off each other. All night they did not pass beyond the edge of the felt. In the daytime [sMra-lcam si-le-ma] did not weed (yur ma-yur). In the nighttime she did not collect (myi-gtong) water. [The herdswoman] told [sMra-lcam si-le-ma’s] brother [all these things]. From then on, the familial affection (mdza’-sdug) between them was spoiled in hatred (sdang ’phra-ma). sMra then-ba went to see Klu-rab bzang-to-re and sMra-lcam si-le-ma. He took the sword lon rked chod and struck [Klu-rab bzang-to-re], cutting him asunder at the waist. He was killed (bkum-mo).

phyug gyi bo mos bltas de gzigs pa las // smra lcam si le ma dang // klu rab bzang to re gnyis // nyin zhing spyan gyi zur myi dre // mtshan zhing byam phying mtha’ myi dre // bshos zhing ra snga la // nyin zhing yur ma yur // mtshan zhing chab myi gsong // mying po’i snyan du zhus // mdza’ sdug gi bar du // sdang ’phra ma de nas byung / smra then ba yang / klu rab bzang to re dang // smra lcam si le ma’i drung du mchis de // ral gyi dre lom rked chod brgyab ste // rked pa bcad de bkum mo //

<30:5–8> Klu-rab bzang-to-re made a thunderbolt fall from the sky. It appeared as an iron pestle as large as a six to seven year old yak (g.yag-drus). sMra-lcam lcam si-le ma (sic) threw a me-long rgya-long filled with water at sMra then-ba. That was placed right on top of sMra then-ba’s head. That [iron pestle] hit there. Its [magic power] was

158 Physug gyi bo-mo (C.T. = phyugs gyi bu-mo).
159 This sentence is the imprecise translation of the line: nyin zhing spyan gyi zur myi dre /. The meaning of the verb dre is unclear.
160 mtshan zhing byam phying mtha’ myi dre /. As the meaning of the verb dre is in question, the actual reading of this sentence may differ somewhat from that given in the translation. The next line of the text has something to do with the couple making love: bshos zhing ra snga la /. Ral gyi dre (C.T. = ral-gri).
161 The name of the sword includes the phrase ‘waist-cutter’.
162 This probably denotes some kind of shiny round basin used in ritual activities.
163 bKang (C.T. = khengs, derived from gang)
neutralized\(^{165}\) and he was saved. sMra-lcam si-le-ma cast (performed) the chab-gang [rite] for the klu. She dug\(^{166}\) a hole layer by layer nine spans deep [and placed] the corpse (spur) of Klu-rab bzang-to-re [in it].

klu rab bzang to res // gnam nas thog babs ste / lcags kyi gtun bu g.yag drus tsam cig byung / smra then ba la 'phangs na / smra lcam lcam si le mas // me long rgya long chab kyis bkang / de yang / smra then ba'i // spyi bor bzhag pa la // de la phog ste / de la rdugs de thar ro // smra lcam s le mas / klu la chab gang bor de // klu rab bzang to re'i spur ni // dong 'dom rgu rim du gsal de //

Heartsick with worry, the Klu patriarch, Klu-rje zing-brtsan, is recorded as waiting an entire month for his son Klu-rab bzang-to-re to return, before going to look for him. An entire year passes in a blur, but the grieving Klu-rje zing-brtsan is unable to locate his son. Extremely distraught, he unleashes a deluge and an inferno, as he leaves no stone unturned in the search for Klu-rab bzang-to-re:

<30:8 to 31:3> Klu-rje zing-brtsan (sic) waited for his son day after day for a month but he did not come. The klu lord said, ‘the father has become old as the son is lost (stor-ro).’ Saying, ‘woe unto me, I am heartsick,’\(^{167}\) he put a worn out hat on top of his head and took a white copper staff in his hand. The path of a year he cut (passed) in a month. The path of a month he passed (bcad) in a day. Although he searched for his son, he did not find him. He [made] a torrent\(^{168}\) fall from the sky. He made a conflagration\(^{169}\) blaze (g.yos) from the earth. He also passed through\(^{170}\) the nine layers of the earth (sa rimrgu) but did not find his son.

klu rje zing brtsan nī / bu zhag bsdad zlar ma byon // klu rje'i zhal na re / pha rgas na bu stor ro // za ma snying re na gsung nas // zhwa rul glad la bgos nas / bse'i ldan dkar lag na thogs nas / lo lam zlar bcd / zla lam zhag du bcd // bu btsal yang ma rnyed do // skyin

\(^{165}\) rDugs. This O.T. word is etymologically related to C.T. terms such as thabs-sdugs (declined abilities).

\(^{166}\) The O.T. verb gsal is employed here; its action determinable by the context of the sentence.

\(^{167}\) Za ma snying re na. sNying re-na can also be translated as ‘very sad’, ‘despondent’, ‘forlorn’, ‘inconsolable’, ‘downcast’, or ‘miserable’. Za-ma is an O.T. word (forms of which appear to be used in certain contemporary Tibetan dialects) that denotes something to the effect of ‘I, myself’.

\(^{168}\) sKyin-dang. The meaning and variant spellings of this word are discussed in Daqkar 2003, pp. 39, 113, 114. See Stein (1971: 545, 546) for a discussion on sKyin-dang and rman-dang and their association with calamities. See also PT 1285, Ins. v32, v33, for a torrent falling/not falling from the sky (sKyin-dang gnam las babs / myi 'bab').

\(^{169}\) rMan-dang (C.T. = rma-'dang). This word is noted in Daqkar 2003, p. 113. In PT 1285, Ins. v32, v33 (rMan-dang chu ngu sa las myi g.yos) and ITJ 731r, ln. r39 (rMan-dang g.yos kyi 'og), we find very similar applications of the term.

\(^{170}\) BZlog. ‘Passed through’ appears to be the contextual meaning of this O.T. verb.
The story now focuses on the murderer sMra then-ba. At the site of the evil deed he meets a lha and a srin, a pair who appear to be guardians of the life-force. These divine figures sit on the same felt that the ill-fated couple made love on. Through potent proverbs these two forthrightly condemn sMra then-ba’s actions, and he is made to face a tribunal of lha and srin. The accused pleads his case by stating he did not kill Klu-rab bzang-to-re for personal gain. Although it is not elaborated in the text, sMra then-ba relies on the defense that his was an honor killing, a form of homicide far less grave than murder committed in the course of a robbery. In any case, sMra then-ba owns up to his crime. Also present at the hearing was Klu-rje Zin-brtsan (sic), who was not at all pleased by this admission. The Klu patriarch and sMra son begin to fight but it is broken up by the chief lha, Lha-btsan bas dang-rje. Interestingly, the text notes that the custom of intervening in conflicts between rival parties began with this incident. This dpe-srol or historical precedent for an established practice, once again drives home that for the authors of the byol-rabs, the constituent origin tales were set in distant times. Thanks to Lha-btsan bas dang-rje, sMra then-ba once again avoids being killed. Not to be denied his revenge, Klu-rje zin-brtsan resorts to various magical means to apprehend the killer of his son, but they prove ineffective:

<31:3–9> sMra then-ba with his palms joined, sat in front of Lha-btsan bas dang-rje and Srin-btsan rgu-bo-kha, these two, who were at the edge of the meadow on the spread out white felt of byam. [They said], ‘By your many rash deeds you destroyed your own life. By many deeds the horse breaks the golden saddle. The river of many actions cuts a broad swathe of ground.’ [sMra then-ba] went in front of the united lha and srin. Lha-btsan bas dang-rje said, ‘You sMra then-ba are devious (sgyu-che) and dissembling (’phrul-drag). If you are actually that devious and dissembling, we the united lha and srin shall rule against (zhal che chod) you.’ That was said. Smra then-ba replied, ‘If I did it for criminal gain that would be fine, but it was not like that. Klu-rab bzang-to-re, the son of the klu Zing-brtsan, was killed by me.’ Thus he spoke.

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171 This clause is the possible meaning of lag pa sor bko.b pa.
172 These binary figures are described performing rnyi’i sreg la brgyas (ste) /. This has something to do with an action made to the life-force of humans; perhaps its augmentation.
174 sGo = sga.
175 bKag = bsas.
176 rGya-ba / brgya-ba. This word has the connotation of ‘united’ or ‘all together’, as in the textual phrase, lha srin rgya-ba.
177 This clause is the approximate meaning of the line: sgyu-lta (C.T. = rgyu-lta) yongs yang che /. 
<32:1–9> Klu-rje Zin-brtsan (sic) said, 'You, the evil doer, finished my son,' so Klu-rje btsan-ba (sic) and SMra then-ba fought. Lha-btsan bas dang-rje broke up these two. The [custom] of breaking up a fight began then. [Lha-btsan bas dang-rje] held Klu-rje zin-brtsan and SMra then-ba escaped. Klu-rje zin-brtsan threw a magical mirror bearing visions and a magical white conch mirror, these two, [at SMra then-ba]. What magically appeared in that magical mirror bearing visions and the magical white conch mirror? A magical armored man (myi-zhub) and armored horse (rta-zhub), these two, magically appeared. SMra then-ba also had great magical power. SMra then-ba sensed that these armored figures were coming at him. SMra then-ba magically appeared as two doe. Sometimes [the doe] were behind [the armored figures]. Sometimes [the doe] were in front of them. [The doe] escaped ahead, so the armored man let them go. Klu-rje btsan-ba came there. He asked where SMra then-ba was. The armored man replied, 'SMra then-ba did not come.' He said, 'Two doe came.' Klu-rje btsan-ba retorted, 'You are like one with completely useless magical power.' Thus he spoke.

klu rje zin brtsan gyi zhal nas // las ngan ba khyod nga'i bu thong bo gsung nas // klu rje btsan ba dang // smra then ba 'thabs te // lha btsan bas dang rje dang // de gnyis shugs mo bshugs de // shugs mo de nas byung ngo // klu rje zin brtsan bzung // smra then ba bros // klu rje zin brtsan gyi / 'phrul kyi me long snang long de / 'phrul kyi

178 Thong-bo. In some Kham and Hor dialects thong describes an activity done or finished.
179 This is the contextual meaning of shugs mo bshugs. The C.T. equivalent of this expression is not immediately apparent to me.
180 An armored horse (rta-zhub) along with its man of iron rider as swift as the wind and lightning, as part of a series of offerings, is found in PT 126, Ins. 133, 136.
181 rDzu-phrul (= rdzu-'phrul) che.
182 This clause is the rough translation of: snga la dros (C.T. = bros) de bgyis (pas) /.
183 Grar = gar.
184 Yung ngo = ma yung ngo.
185 This sentence is the general import of the line: rduz 'phrul ma rus pa khyod gra' (C.T. = 'dra) ba yin no /.
The narrative continues to describe the hot pursuit of sMra then-ba by a formidable apparition, a man girt for battle, but Klu-rje btsan-ba’s magic is countered at every turn. sMra then-ba’s main stratagem is to take the form of doe, yaks and tigers, fooling the armored man in every instance. sMra then-ba finally finds shelter in the great castle of rMa pho’bra, the seat of the lha of Me-nyag. Me-nyag (Mi-nyag), described as a northern land (byang-phyogs), presumably refers to an ancient region in the extreme northeastern corner of the Tibetan Plateau, extending east of mTsho-sngon (Kokonor) and north almost as far as the Ordos. Despite Klu-rje btsan-ba unleashing a terrific attack on the Me-nyag castle, Byang-ka dmar-mo, it withstands the onslaught. Consequently, sMra then-ba flees to the castle of gNam-gasas phyi-rum, a god who is described as the lha of bon in the west (nub phyogs na bon gyi lha). The word bon here denotes the body of non-Buddhist ritual traditions, leaving aside any broader connotations it might have had for the author(s) of the text. Given the localization of gNam-gasas phyi-rum in the west and the inclusion of gsas in his name, the lexical equivalent of lha (rendered in the Zhang Zhung language as sad), it appears that sMra then-ba sought refuge on the opposite end of the Tibetan Plateau. The great physical distances involved in the flight of sMra then-ba, help lend the narrative its epic quality. Klu-rje btsan-ba with his klu army attacked the ‘castle’ (which may have been a tent) of gNam-gasas phyi-rum with a salvo of world-shattering proportions. Next, the text concentrates on the appearance of gNam-gasas phyi-rum, an awe-inspiring divine warrior clad in tiger skins and iron. His blazing glory is of such tremendous intensity that Klu-rje btsan-ba and his klu army succumbs to it:

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186 For this localization, see Stein 1959, pp. 2, 33, 69, 70, 75. This Mi-nyag of the Sino-Tibetan marches is distinguished from the eponymous region centered in Lha-sgang and rTa’u in eastern Khams. In PT 1283, the term byang-phyogs is used to refer to the countries of Hor and Dru-gu.

187 The word gsas and sad and their various compound forms are presented in the lexicons of Dagkar 2003; Martin 2001-b; Haarh 1968; Pasar et al. 2008. The same or similar deity, gNam-gasas dbyangs-rum, is found in a 13th century good fortune summoning text compiled by Brunston rgyal-ba as one of the gods of the cardinal directions, which serves as the basis for good fortune capabilities (g.yang; Bellezza 2005: 456–458). Another related god is gNam-gasas khyung-rum, who appears in an apotropaic ritual of the Mu-cho’i khrom-’dur (Bellezza 2008: 446). gNam-gasas is one of five gsas gods connected to Tibetan royal bloodlines (Karmay 1998: 47).
<33:1–7> Also, [Klu-rje btsan-ba] sent the [armored man] ahead.\(^{188}\) sMra then-ba also sensed that. He magically appeared as two six to seven year old yaks. These were fighting up ahead and when seen by the armored man, the doe looked like demons.\(^ {189}\) There were just two yaks. Klu-rje btsan-ba came there and said, ‘where are the doe?’ The armored man replied, ‘The doe and yaks, these two, are fighting. Klu-rje btsan-ba saying, ‘that is them’, dispatched (‘phangs) the [armored man] in front of the two six to seven year old yaks. sMra then-ba sensed that. He magically appeared as two tigers that were fighting. sMra then-ba escaped to the northern castle of the lha of Me-nyag, rMa pho-‘bra, [which had] four sides, four gateways in the sides and doors of bse,\(^ {190}\) and was as high in the sky almost as far as an arrow can reach.\(^ {191}\)

yang sngun du ‘phangs ste // yang smra then bas tshor de // g.yag drus gnyis su brdzus de // sngun du ‘thab cing mchis na // myi zhub kyis btaas na // sha ba yu mo ni ‘dri dra’ na // g.yag gnyis gda’ na // klu rje btsan ba de ru byon nas // sha ba yu mo gar re gsung ste // myi zhub mchid nas // sha ba yu mo dang g.yag gnyis ‘thab cing mchis na // klu rje btsan ba yang de kho na yin no gsung ste // g.yag drus gnyis sngun du ‘phangs na’ // smra then bas tshor de // stag gnyis su brdzus de // ‘thab cing mchis na // smra then bas nī // byang phyogs kyi me nyag kyi lha // rma pho ‘bra mkhar logs bzhi // byad kyi logs sgO bzhi // bse’i sgo // gnam la mda’ rgyang gyis myi lcebs pa’i nang du bas de // mchis na’ //

<33:7 to 34:3> Klu-rje btsan-ba ordered (bka’-gsal) that the lha of Me-nyag, rMa pho-bra (sic), remove sMra then-ba. Dispatching hundreds of armored men and armored horses of bse, Klu-rje btsan-ba became enraged. He let fall a torrent from the sky. He ignited a conflagration on earth. [The castle] Byang-ka dmar-mo nearly (ma-khad) collapsed from the summit and nearly collapsed from the foundation, [but] he could not defeat rMa pho-‘bra (sic). Thereafter, the lha of bon in the west, gNam-gsas phyi-rum’s\(^{192}\) castle: the four sides were the sides of iron, the eaves were the three eaves of turquoise, the roof was the three roofs of silk, and the doors were the doors of conch. [sMra then-ba] escaped inside that [castle]. Klu-rje btsan-ba led the klu army. They appeared at the gateway of [the castle of] gNam-gsas. He let fall a torrent from [the sky] and he ignited a conflagration from the earth.

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\(^{188}\) This is the rough meaning of the line: yang sngun du ‘phangs ste //.

\(^{189}\) Dri = (= ‘dre). It is also possible but less likely that ‘dri = ‘bri (female yaks).

\(^{190}\) Probably a white copper or some other kind of lustrous white metal, but certainly not rhinoceros hide in this context.

\(^{191}\) This part of the sentence is the general signification of the line: gNam la mda’ rgyang gyis myi lcebs (= ltsebs) pa’i nang du bas de //.

\(^{192}\) Gyis = gyi.
Moreover, gNam-gsas phyi-rum’s [head was covered] all around in tiger skins, so many tiger skins. He was with a tiger-skin helmet. [His body was clad] all around in iron, so much iron. He was with a phu-nu of iron. He wore a ber-chen (greatcoat) of iron. In his right hand he held up a chain lasso 990 spans long. If looked up at he was a blazing fire, lams se lams. If looked down upon he was glowing embers, rums se rums. The light of the fire struck the klu and water. The light of the fire struck the klu and water dried up. They could not submerge (ma-nub) even half the castle. The lha-gsas of bon, gNam-gsas phyi-rum, was victorious. Klu-rje btsan-ba was bested and defeated.

gnam gsas phyi rum yang // gor stag shing du stag // stag kyi rmog zhu can // gor lcags shing du lcags // lcags kyi phu nu can // lcags kyi ber chen bsnams // phyag ma g.yas gong na // lcags kyi dril zhags ’dom rgu brgya rgu bcu bsnams // thog du yar ltas na me ’bar lams se lams // drung mar btas na’ // ’dag ma rums se rums // me ’od lams se lams // me ’od klu dang chu la phog ste // klu dang chu skams ste // mkhar gyi phyed ma nub // bon gyi lha gsas // gnam gsas phyi rum rgyal de // klu rje btsan ba zhan de ’pham //

Defeated in battle, Klu-rje btsan-ba is compelled to find redress for the murder of his son through adjudication. The lha rule that sMra then-ba must pay 770,000 srang as the blood money (stong), an impossibly huge amount. In 18th to 20th
In the event of hunting accidents, payment of 20 to 10,000 srang in blood money (myi-stong) are levied on hunters who inadvertently kill another member of the hunt. The amount of the fine is dependent on the relative social status of the perpetrators and victims. Fines for injuring someone with an arrow while hunting are generally half that of manslaughter. PT 1071 also specifies that 50 to 500 srang be paid out to those who have fallen under a yak. For an analysis of PT 1071, see Richardson 1998, pp. 151–158; Dotson 2007, pp. 10, 11. ITJ 753 records a fine of two srang levied on the accomplices of a thief (Dotson 2007: 14, 15).

200 For srang as a unit of currency and unit of measurement, see Bertsch 2002, pp. 3–5.
201 Richardson (1998: 165, fn. 48) notes that bcad/gcad is the O.T. cognate of chad (penalty, punishment, fine), as in chad-pas gcod-pa (to punish).
202 Dreng-myi (C.T. = ‘grang-mi); literally: ‘bipedal humans’.
Klu-rje btsan-ba, heartbroken and anguish, fielded an army of klu. He also fielded the army of the king of the ltas-ngan, Gang-par ge-ber. He also fielded the 13 yab-bbud-po of the upper valley and the 12 ma-bla bcd-po of the lower valley and each and every kind of yi-dags. [The custom of] fielding an army began then. sMra then-ba was like a little bird nearly taken in a gtor. He was like a fish nearly snatched in a tshed.

\[\text{klu} \text{rje} \text{btsan} \text{ba} \text{thugs} \text{chad} \text{brang} \text{gam} \text{nas} / \text{klu} \text{rmag} \text{b} \text{zlog} \text{ste} / \text{ltas} \text{ngan} \text{gyi} \text{rgyal} \text{po} \text{gang} \text{par} \text{ge} \text{ber} \text{gyi} \text{rmag} \text{yang} \text{b} \text{zlog} / \text{phu} \text{ya} \text{bla} \text{bdud} \text{po} \text{b} \text{cu} \text{g} \text{sum} \text{dang} / \text{ma} \text{ma} \text{bla} \text{bcd} \text{mo} \text{bcd} \text{mo} \text{gyis} \text{dang} / \text{yi} \text{dags} \text{cho} \text{ma} \text{cho} \text{rgu} \text{b} \text{zlog} \text{ste} / \text{rmag} \text{b} \text{zlog} \text{pa} \text{de} \text{nas} \text{byung} \text{ngo} / \text{smra} \text{then} \text{ba} \text{zhig} \text{bya} \text{ltar} \text{gtor} \text{gyis} \text{blangs} \text{ma} \text{khad} / \text{nya} \text{ltar} \text{tshed} \text{kyis} \text{bcd} \text{ma} \text{khad} / \]

In desperation, sMra then-ba turns to gShen-rab myi-bo to save him from his enemies. sMra then-ba asks this venerable priest of the gshen lineage (called ‘father’ (pha) as a term of respect for his high priestly position) if he has the four types of prerequisite rites. gShen-rab myi-bo replies that he does indeed possess these therapeutic measures. As a first step, ablutions (mtshan = tshan) to the lha must be made. The tshan is a class of rites that relies on methods of lustration, which acts as a prelude to other ritual exertions. The tshan is carried out to purify the defilement of deities caused by human actions, thereby reestablishing a concord between both parties. The text also intimates another essential preliminary practice, that of fumigation. This fundamental ritual...
operation is conducted for the purification and propitiation of the deities using aromatic substances (bsang-gsol):

<35:4–7> sMra then-ba asked father gShen-rab myi-bo, ‘Do you have the gto and dpyad? Do you have the mo and mtshungs?\textsuperscript{210} gShen-rab said, ‘I, the man (myi kho-bo), have the gto and dpyad. I have the mo and mtshungs to do. ‘Let us make ablutions to the lha. Let us collect the beautiful firewood and iron.’\textsuperscript{211}

smra then ba’i mchid nas // pha gshen rab myi bo la // gto dang dpyad bgyis sam // mo dang mtshungs bgyis sam // gshen rab zhal na re //’ myi kho bo lo // gto dang dpyad mchis // mo dang mtshungs bgyis nas mchis ste // lha la mtshan gsal ’tshal // zhugs shing mtshaw pa lcag dgum ’tshal /

After gShen-rab myi-bo announces that preparations for the preliminary ritual exercises must be put in place, the narrative digresses to proclaim the parentage of the god Lha-bo lha-sras. Lha-bo lha-sras is described as being a holy or great man (myi-pho) intelligent or accomplished even when young (chung du bsgam). Lha-bo lha-sras (Lha Person Son of the Lha), a god of the phya lineage and an ancestral figure, belongs to the otherworld (Bellezza 2008: 451). In ITJ 734r, a glud ritual text, this god is referred to utilizing a more old-fashioned orthography: rje (the lord) Bla-bo bla-sras (Soul Person Son of the Soul; \textit{ibid.}: 436, 437). In ITJ 734r, this figure acts as a divine officiant who summons the good fortune capability (\textit{g.yang}), using mustard seeds and Ephedra.\textsuperscript{212} Upon

\textsuperscript{210} Literally: ‘equivalence’. This term refers to the glud class of rituals and related practices. The \textit{gZi brjid} states that the glud is the exchange of two things of equal value carried out within the context of the beneficial rite of equivalence (mtshungs-gto; Snellgrove 1967: 77).

\textsuperscript{211} \textit{Zhugs shing mtshaw pa lcag} (C.T. = lcags) \textit{dgum} (\textit{?}) \textit{tshal} (C.T. = mtshal, vermillion). Firewood is a metaphor for incense and red-colored iron for the fire-maker. The placement of tshan and bsang rites at the beginning of the Eternal Bon ritual regimen is noted in Bellezza 2005, p. 175. Needless to say, in Tibetan studies much has been written about the practice of offering of incense and fumigation. Karmay’s (1998: 380–412) landmark study on the subject is of course requisite reading.

\textsuperscript{212} For mention of Bla-bo bla-sras in ITJ 734r, also see \textit{Ins.} 88, 100. In the divination text ITJ 740, Lha-bo lha-sras delivers prognoses, along with other prominent deities such as Thang-lha yab-zhur, ‘O-de gung-rgyal, Yar-lha sham-po, and Sha-med gangs-dkar [now commonly known as Jo-mo gangs dkar]; see Dotson 2007: 22–25). Dotson (\textit{ibid.}) also notes that in the Buddhist histories \textit{mKhas pa’i dga’ ston} and \textit{mKhas pa lde’u}, Lha-bo lha-sras is associated with the descent of King gNyaa’-khri bsan-po from heaven to earth. Reference to the same god, Lha-sras lha-bo-che, is made in the illuminated funerary manuscript (see \textit{supra}, fn. 25). The illumination accompanying the text depicts Lha-sras lha-bo and his consort Lha-za gang-cig-ma suspended above a range of seven mountains. The god holds a feather or cloth-like object in each of his hands, the weapon of the dbal. The two figures are plainly but elegantly attired. The text below the drawing reads, “In the country Sa-le ljon above is the castle of the rock formation sMon-lam and the conch white swirling lake. In between the lake and the rock formation is Lha-sras lha-bo che [and] Lha-za gang-cig ma when she came to benefit. The castle of the lhe’u (‘little lha’) and fortress of the sman is that of the general, lord of the sgra-bla [Lha-sras lha-bo che], the fortress of the sman, the fortress of the sgra-bla. In his hand he [holds the weapon] of the dbal. He subdues the gzed, btsan and epidemics of violent death. Also, we call [to be blessed with]
formally introducing Lha-bo lha-sras in the language of the smrang, the narrative moves to a journey undertaken by gShen-rab myi-bo on a swift stallion of the gsas. That his horse is possessed of a divinity underscores this priest’s high and holy status. gShen-rab myi-bo goes to an unspecified place to seek the assistance of Lha-bo lha-sras. gShen-rab myi-bo is described as attired in a long gown and carrying a drum and flat bell (gshang), ritual instruments that became stock in trade for the Eternal Bon-po. The drum and gshang of gShen-rab myi-bo each have their own special name or description. This ancient tradition extended to the personal weapons of kings and warriors, which were given specialized titles as well.213

<35:7 to 36:1> According to the speech214 of the lha, the son of the mighty father and mighty patriarch ’O-la sha-btsan;215 the noble mother and noble matriarch, the son of the noble woman, the son of Chab-ma nyi-lon btsun, was the holy man, intelligent even when young, Lha-bo lha-sras, intelligent even when young. The stallion was swift even when young. Lag-pa’i mthing-ge ning-ge-ba was swift even when young. gShen-rab-myibo mounted a saddle on the brownish horse

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213 For some examples of this tradition, see Vitali 1996, p. 124; Bellezza 2008, p. 342. See also, supra, fn. 162.
214 bKal = ’bka’.
215 This figure is the same as ’Ol-la sha-bzan of the ’Ol-pu dag-dang locality, one of the nine lha-dgu (sha-bla) protectors of local chiefs and the Tibetan kings) in ITJ 734r. See Thomas 1957: Texts, Translations and Notes, p. 76); Karmay 1998, pp. 436, 437. According to the Can lnga, ’Ol-lha sha-zan (sic) is one of the two names for ’O-de gung-rgyal after his descent to earth, the father of nine great regional mountain gods (Karmay 1998: 297). According to Rlangs kyi po ti bse ru, ’O-de gung-rgyal was one of the four divine forebears of human beings (Bellezza 2008: 351). The name of Lha-bo lha-sras’s father as well as the geographic signposts given in the byol-rabs (see text, 36:1–9) indicates that this god also originated in the ’Ol-kha region.
gShen-rab myi-bo

with a white face of the gsas. He wore a long ral-ga (gown) of silk. He carried the large drum ding-chen ding-drag on his back. He placed the gshang khri-lo with the sweet sound on his side.216

lha ‘i bkal na / pha btsan yab btsan na // ‘o la sha btsan gyi sras // ma btsun yum btsun / btsun btsun gyi sras // chab ma nyl lon btsun gyi sras // myi pho chung du bsgam / lha bo lha sras chung du bsgam / rta po chung la mgyogs / lag pa’i mthing ge ning ge ba chung la mgyogs // gshen rab myi bo’i gsas rta dro bzhur n’i gsas bstad de // dar gyi ra lga ring la gsol // rnga ding chen d ding drags rgyab la khur // gshang khri lo skad snyan mchan du gsal //

In order to take up the invitation extended to him by gShen-rab myi-bo, Lha-bo lha-sras and his horse must travel through the sands. I am of the opinion that this mention of sands is metaphorical in nature, an allusion to the wasteland that separates the world of the living from the world of the dead. As noted, Lha-bo lha-sras does indeed have a role to play in the archaic funerary rites; he is a companion and guardian of the dead. After the sands, in route to his rendezvous with gShen-rab myi-bo, this god passes through four places, the name of each of which begins with ‘Ol. This prefix suggests that Lha-bo lha-sras’s journey transpired in the ‘Ol-kha region of southern Tibet. The word sGam prefixed to his name seems to reinforce this geographic placement, for the mountain [Dwags-lha] sgam-po is in the same general vicinity.217 When the two finally meet, gShen-rab myi-bo bends down to make prostrations (phyag-ma-duu kyis btsal) to Lha-bo lha-sras, something his Eternal Bon counterpart would never deign to do. gShen-rab myi-bo tells the god about the murder of Klu-rab bzang to-re by sMra then-ba, the subsequent arbitration by the lha, and how the manslayer refused to pay the blood money. Using a series of vivid similes, 

216 In Eternal Bon documents, the gshang of sTon-pa gShen-rab is referred to as khri-lo gnam-grags (Pasar et al. 2008: 27). PT 1289 (Ins. v3-11, v3-12), a manuscript containing a snyang for the funerary ritual transport female hybrid yak (mdzo-mo), describes the funerary priest gShen-rab at the very end of the extant text: “He came suddenly." gShen-rabs kyi myi-bo came suddenly. He held the gshang great bell in his left hand. He held the wing the-ra ther-bu in his right hand. He [made] the funeral rites (bdur) for the dead (shī) [and] searched for the lost [soul(s)?]. The dead human[s] (myī-gshin) by the gshen…twenty-seven...” (pha pha se gshes na gshen rabs kyi myi bo pha se gshes / gshang dril chen na phyaq ma g.yon na snams / gshog the ra ther bu ni phyaq ma g.yas na snams / shī ni bdur rlag ni tshol / myī gshīn ni gshen kyis […] pha’ na […] nyī shu’ rita bdur…).

217 ‘Suddenly’ is a conjectural reading for pha-se. This translation also seems to best suit the occurrence of the same word in the Klu bum nag po. Formerly, I rendered it ‘queer-looking’ (see Bellacza 2008: 485, para. iv).


For the localization of Dags-lha sgam-po, see Hazod 2009, p. 173; Sørensen et al. 2007, p. 259 (fn. 741).
gShen-rab myi-bo also recounts how Mra then-ba was almost killed by Klu-rab btsan-ba. Then gShen-rab myi-bo requests the assistance of Lha-bo lha-sras in instituting protective measures for sMra then-ba:

<36:1–9> Also, Lha-bo was invited, he was invited through the sands. He crossed, he crossed over the sands. Also, his horse trotted, it trotted over the sands. That intelligent Lha-bo lha-[sras] stayed in 'Ol-phu g.yang-gang, then in 'Ol-phu lung-rings, then in 'Ol-phug rga, then in 'Ol kyi spang-bzang. gShen-rab myi-bo made prostrations [to Lha-bo lha-sras].

The intelligent Lha-bo lha-sras said, ‘Father gShen-rab myi-bo where are you going?’ These words having been spoken, gShen-rab myi-bo replied, ‘In sMra-yul thang-brgyad, sMra then-ba killed Klu-rab bzang to-re, so all the lha acted as the arbitrators. For the blood money of the klu, 770,000 srang was decided. sMra then-ba could not accept that. Klu-rab btsan-ba was allied with the ltas-ngan, bdud and yi-dags. sMra then-ba was nearly taken like a bird in a gtor. He was nearly snatched like a fish in a tshed. He was nearly seized like a sheep by the scruff of the neck. Intelligent Lha-bo lha-sras please come to advise (bka’-gsal). Please come to strike the iron on the beautiful firewood.’ [gShen-rab myi-bo] thus requested.

lha bo drongs yang bye la drongs // 'gam yang bye la 'am / bdur yang bye la bdur // brgyugs yang bye la brgyugs // 'ol phu g.yang gang na // 'ol phu lung rings na // 'ol phug rga dang 'ol kyi spang bzangs na // sgam lha bo lhas de na bzugs de / gshen rab myi bos phyag ma dud kyis btsal // sle ba 'ong gyis blangs ste // bsgam lha bo lha sras zhal nas / pha gshen rab myi bo gar ru gshags // de skad bgyis pa la // gshen rab zhal na re / smra yul thang brgyad na // smra then ba 'is / klu rab bzang to re bsad pas // lha rgus gzu dpang bgyis ste // klu'i stong du / srang bdun 'bum / bdun khri sra ma nyag 'bum cig / phab ste // smra then ba ma nyan de / klu rab btsan ba 'is / ltas ngan dang / bdud dang / yi bdags dang bsdongs ste // smra then ba bya ltar gtor gyis blangs ma khad // nya ltar tshed kyis bcus ma khad // lug ltar gnyas nas bzung ma khad // bsgam lha bo

Drongs (C.T. = drangs).

'Gam (C.T. = bgam).

'Am = gam.

In PT 1285, ‘Ol-phu dga’-dang (sic) is the place where ‘Ol-rje zin-brang tragically attempts to arrange the marriage of his daughter ‘Ol-ža lham-bu (Dotson 2008: 47). According to Hazod (2009: 173), toponyms such as ‘Ol-phu dga’-dang/dga’-thang/rga-dang and ‘Ol-phu kyi spang-bzangs (sic) appear to be situated in upper ‘Ol-kha. Also see Karmay 1998, p. 437. These toponyms also recall ‘Ol-mo lung-rings, a mythical land of Eternal Bon, generally placed north and west of Tibet.

The next line in the text reads: sle ba 'ong gyis blangs ste /. Its general import is that gShen-rab made a demonstration of respect to Lha-bo lha-sras.

Also, as compensation, the text adds: sra-ma nyag 'bum (100,000 strands of sra-ma?).

gNya (C.T. = gnya)
Lha-bo lha-sras and gShen-rab myi-bo commence to perform the initiatory gto and dpyad rites, but they are unable to complete them. Lha-bo lha-sras advises that they invite no other than Mus-dpal phrog-rol bya-ba from his celestial abode, so a messenger (phrin-pa) is sent for the purpose. After hearing the messenger out, Mus-dpal phrog-rol decides to comply with the request. The text indicates that the messenger, rji-dang skye ched-po, beckoned three gshen from the sky, so it appears that Mus-dpal phrog-rol bya-ba may have had two companions, but nothing is said about them in the text. In order to reach the earth, he rides a divine white horse and uses the same type of celestial cord that Tibet’s first king g,Nya-khri btsan-po is supposed to have relied on. Thus gShen-rab myi-bo has two supernatural comrades to aid him in his worthy efforts. With Mus-dpal phrog-rol among their numbers, Lha-bo lha-sras and gShen-rab myi-bo are able to complete the gto and dpyad:

<36:10 to 37:6> The intelligent Lha-bo lha-sras and gShen-rab myi-bo erected (btsugs) the gto in the morning. In the evening they performed\(^{225}\) the dpyad, but they could not complete the dpyad.\(^{226}\) The intelligent Lha-bo lha-sras said, ’Mus-dpal phrog-rol bya-ba, the bon-po of the sky, of great magical power and tremendous prowess, is skilled in the gto and is keenly knowledgeable in the dpyad.’ As the bringer of tidings and messenger, [Lha-bo lha-sras sent] rji-dang skye ched-po. Lha-bo lha-sras asked [the messenger to relay to Mus-dpal phrog-rol bya-ba]: ‘in\(^{227}\) Smra-yul thang-brgyad, Smra then-ba was opposed to each and every kind of ltas-ngan and each and every kind of yi-dags of Klu-rje btsan-ba. He was like a bird nearly taken in a gtor. He was like a fish nearly snatched in a tshed. Please make the gto and dpyad. Three gshen please come from the sky.’ Thus he spoke these words.

bsgam lha bo lha sras dang // gshen rab myi bo ‘is / nang gsum gto ru btsugs // nub gsum dpyad du dpyad nas // do tshor do ma tshor / dpyad kyi do tshor do tshor // bsgam lha bo lha sras kyi zhal nas // gnam gyi bon po mus dpal phrog rol bya ba dang // sgyu che ‘phrul drag ste // gto mkhas la dpyad rno // than dang phrin pa ru / rdzi dang skye ched po la // lha bo lha sras zhal nas // smra yul thang brgyad nas / smra then ba la // klu rje btsan ba’i ltas ngan cho ma cho rgu dang // yi dags cho ma cho rgu // bya ltar gtor gyis blangs ma khad // nya ltar tshed kyis bcus ma khad // gto dang dpyad bgyi ‘tshal // gshen gsum gnam las gshegs su gsol / de skad bygias pa la //

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\(^{225}\) Here the word dpyad is used as the verb: dpyad du dpyad.

\(^{226}\) This second half of the sentence is the incomplete import of the lines: do tshor do ma tshor / dpyad kyi do tshor do tshor /.

\(^{227}\) Nas = na.
The father Mus-dpal phrog-rol said, ‘It is ordered by Lha-bo lha-sras. It is better if I come’, he said. He rode the white horse of the lha. A white dog of the gsas followed him. From the sky he was conveyed down to earth by the celestial cord. He arrived in the country of ‘Ol-phu rgu. Lha-bo lha-sras, Mus-dpal phrog-rol and gShen-rab myi-bo performed the gio in the evening and performed the dpyad in the morning.

As a ritual substitute for the 770,000 srang, the glud or byol primarily relies on three types of animals: a langur, sheep and bird. Various ornaments and clothes also make up the ransom offering. No ordinary offerings, these ritual embellishments manifest as hybrid yaks and horses, recapitulating the tremendous efficacy of even modest objects in the byol. A number of ritual objects are named but the identity of some of them has been forgotten. What is clear is that these and the more familiar ritual objects listed were offered to various troublesome spirits, namely the yi-dags (hungry ghosts) and bdud:

As the blood money and glud: the langur Myi-bo lag-ring (Human Long Hand), the sheep of the bdud Yor-ba, the white bird Tho-lo. On the right ba-'brī, a red spear of bse was bound. On the left ba-'brī, a blue turquoise snake was tied. These were ornamented with nine types of good silk and, colored brocade, the tenth. The flight of the ornaments was like a man sallying forth to battle. Each bamboo arrow manifested as a hybrid yak and horse with loads. Each banner (‘phan) with bird feathers manifested as a hybrid yak and horse with a load. Each snges (anterior?) banner manifested as the leader of each hybrid yak and horse. Each felt banner manifested as a youth herding from behind.
In each tshags-phur hundreds of dmar-srang were placed, thousands of shing-rings (long sticks), bgrya-ris 'ol-'ol (?), and stong-rings phy-o-phyo (?), which manifested as the country of the yi-dags, places, castles, people, wealth, and livestock. These [offerings] were apportioned in thousands [of parts]. An arrow with brocade was offered to the hundreds of male demons (bdud-pho), sGag-po. The golden spindle with the turquoise drop-spindle wheel was offered to the yi-dags female gatekeepers. Golden libations (gser-mngon) with the good mouth, and turquoise libations tshig-pa (?), these two, were offered as the manifested possessions of all kinds of yi-bdags (sic). Milk, with the beautiful face (appearance) and mustard seeds with the good hull (rgang), the secret and essence [food] of the yi-dags, were offered as libations [to the yi-dags].

tshags phur re re la / dmar srang bgryar bcad // shing rings stong cho dang / bgrya ri 'ol 'ol dang / stong rings phy-o phy-o ni // yi dags yul dang / sa dang / mkhar dang / myi dang / nor dang phyugs su sprul de // stong du bcad / mda' za bug ma ni / bdud pho bgrya sgag po rnams la phul // gser 'phang g.yu lo ni // yi dags sgog mo rnams la 'bul lo / gser mngon kha bzangs dang // g.yu mngon tshig pa gnyis // yi dags cho rgu' i / dkor dad du sprul de phul / dkar mo bzhin bzangs dang // yungs mo rgang bzangs ni // yi dags kyi gshang dang bcud dang / skyems su gsol bas //

In the conduct of the byol ritual a female ritualist or bon-mo is mentioned by name. Called Shib-pa gshen-'brang, she is responsible for a series of offerings being transformed into large numbers of goats and sheep. This symbolic or
magical transformation forms a major part of the blood money (*stong-*ri), the substitute payment made in lieu of the 770,000 *srang*. The text informs us that this event was the historical precedent for both the glud ritual and the custom of blood money, once again highlighting the exceptional significance of the narrative. The practices of making glud and paying blood money retained a prominent place in the culture of Tibet until recent times:

<39:2–5> Then the *bon-*mo of the earth Shib-pa gshen-*’brang* with the remaining offerings and libations, apportioned one after another, manifested them as 770 tan sheep. A basket (*slo-ma*) full of the feathers of the *bya-*bang manifested as seven herds of blue (perse) female goats. The blood money of death was cut (paid) like that. The blood money of murder (*bsad-pa’i stong*) of the *klu* was completed by sMra then-ba. The glud of the father *bon-[po]* and also blood money (*stong-ri*) began and existed then.

lhag dang zhon lus pa ni // sa ’i bon mo shib pa gshen ’brang / rims kyi dpog mgnon cha gcig la // lug dro mo bdun brya bdun cur sprul lo // bya bang gyi spu slo ma gang la // ra sngon mo khyu bdun du sprul lo stong thang de ltar bcad do // smra then bas klu bsad pa’i stong khor ro // pha bon gyi glud yang / stong ri yang de nas byung zhing bsrid do //

Alas, even though the *ltas-ngan* and *bdud* demons partook of all that was offered to them, their ire was not fully appeased. They send an evil portent in the form of an ox-stag to sMra then-ba, but he is able to slay it with his bow and arrow. He displays the flesh of this slain creature in strategic locations, ostensibly to repel the demons plaguing him. Yet there were still more demons to contend with in the form of ‘dre, vexatious beings common in Tibetan demonology. On account of the ‘dre, sMra then-ba is once again extremely hard-pressed. It is Mus-dpal phrog-rol who performs the *gto* and *dpyad*, determining that the ‘dre need their share of the *byol* barley cakes, beer, Ephedra, and other choice things. It is stated that Mus-dpal phrog-rol chants and makes spells to Khrab ’bun-bye mun la ’bar. Apparently, this is the name given to the entire offering ensemble of the *byol* ritual performance. Mus-dpal phrog-rol succeeds in luring all the afflicting demons into this ritual edifice, in order that gShen-rab myi-bo can shoot it with his bow and arrow. This has the effect of causing the evil spirits to disperse and again seek out sMra then-ba, who must appeal to Mus-dpal phrog-rol to save his life:

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242 This is the general import of the line: *lhag dang zhon lus pa ni* //.
243 The *bya-wang*, one of 13 messenger birds in the *Dri med gzi brjid*. It is a bluish and white pheasant found in places such as sTeng-chen.
244 *sTong-thang*. The O.T. word *thang* has to do with death. *Thang-khrims* are prescribed funerary activities and *thang-sha* is a funerary sacrificial meat offering (Bellezza 2008: 381, 405, 435, 452, 470, 471).
<39:5 to 40:1> A time came when the ltas-ngan, bdud and each and every kind of yi-dags even though they had eaten, were not sated with the miraculous wealth and viands. The ltas-ngan and bdud sent what bad omens to sMra then-ba? They sent an ox with tiger stripes and a stag head with antlers of ten points fixed on it. sMra then-ba sensed that. He placed the arrow and drew the bow (mchog-gar).\textsuperscript{245} With the arrow he shot the ox with the tiger stripes, killing it. One portion of its flesh was hung (bskal) on the white sunny mountain. One portion of its flesh was sent (bskyal) to the black shady mountain.\textsuperscript{246} One portion of its flesh was sent to the middle of the river.

\textsuperscript{245} mChog gar dra' bkug lu mar ldong sbyar. The spelling li-mar (arrow) also occurs in Bon ritual texts.

\textsuperscript{246} The fundamental opposition of the sunny (gdags) and shady (sribs/srib) sides of mountains and other things is a recurring theme in Old Tibetan literature. For a discussion of the related term nyin (sunny) and srib as a binary system of classification in the construction of toponyms, see Chayet 2008. Also see Dotson 2008, pp. 48, 49.

\textsuperscript{247} Dre (C.T. = 'dre).

\textsuperscript{248} De bcas g.yos pas byol bgyi 'tshal ba(s) /.
<40:6 to 41:3> [Mus-dpal phrog-rol] chanting and chanting and casting spells and spells on Khrab ‘bum-bye mun-la ‘bar, threw it away in the lower valley. The sunny demons, shady demons, water demons, and other orders [of demons] assembled at Khrab brgya-bye mun la ‘bar (sic). gShen-rab myi-bo, placing an arrow, drew a bow with an arrow point (mda’ ste’u-kha) as large as the scapula of a goat. He shot it at Khrab brgya-bye mun la ‘bar, so the sunny demons, shady demons and water demons dispersed and returned. They were assembled around sMra then-ba, thus he was nearly taken like a bird in a tshed. He invited the father Mus-dpal phrog-rol from the sky.

The text now enumerates more byol objects offered to the ltas-ngan (and other demons). These ransom offerings were deposited at a crossroads and are discovered by a noble hunter. The hunter proceeds to take the valuable ritual offerings he finds. The demons react very badly and attempt to take his life through a wild yak attack. It appears, however, that the hunter was also rescued by a subsequent byol offering, the consummating ritual performance of the narrative. This last byol consists of more chanting and the casting of spells as empowering devices. This time the offerings ensemble, which is placed in a multitude of copper containers, is deposited in a river that runs through a gorge or past a large boulder beside a crossroads.249 Even today, glud offerings are deposited at crossroads; this text setting the example for such a practice. The water rushing past the rock formation pushes the copper containers into the current, and this causes the figurines of a man herding an ox, fundamental parts of the byol offerings, to be lost to the water.250 The ‘death’ of this man and ox represents a ritual slaughter (bsad-pa), the sacrifice that finally satiates the demons’ thirst for human blood:

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249 On the downstream function in expelling rituals, see Dotson 2008.
<41:3–8> What was offered to the ltas-ngan? The byol [offered] was the favorite wealth. The turquoise mtsho-ro lu-gu, the little (pretty) gold, pure gold, that byol was sent. In the top of the valley, the only son of the wealthy was hunting deer (sha-shor) and hunting antelope (rgo-’drim). At the crossroads of three paths he came across the turquoise mtsho-ro lu-gu and pretty gold, sa-le sbram. He took what he had found, so by the ltas-ngan and bdud, the only son of the wealthy was nearly taken like bird in a gtor. He was nearly snatched like a fish in a tshed. As the only son of the wealthy was befallen by bad omens and byol, the man was taken on the right horn of the northern [wild] yak sKar-ba. His horse was taken on the left horn. They nearly perished (nongs ma-khad).

ltas ngan ci las byol na // nor snying rag las byol // g.yu mtsho ro lu gu dang / gser chung sa le sbram la byol de btang // phyug gyi bu cig pa lung gi ya ru // sha shor rgo ’drim mchis na / lam gi mdo sum na / g.yu mtsho ru lu gu dang // gser chung sa le sbram dang phrad de mjal / de ‘tshal de mchis na // ltas ngan dang bdud kyis / phyug kyi bu cig po // bya ltar gtor gyis bangs ma khad / nya ltar tshed kyis bcus ma khad // phyug gyi bu cig po la // ltas ngan byol bab nas // byung g.yag skar ba’i rwa g.yas bas // myi bangs / rwa g.yon pas rta blangs de / nong ma khad na /

<42:1–4> The byol [was made] with the objects of preference (bag-chags) of the ltas-ngan and bdud. The bon-po and zor-byol [placed] the objects of desire of the ltas-ngan and bdud into hundreds and thousands of copper containers (zangs), altogether with those of the yi-dags. The [priests] chanted and chanted and said spells and spells. Then they cast out [the containers] at the crossroads of four paths, where the river and rock formation meet. The copper containers were pushed away by the rock formation, the ox was pushed away by the copper containers, and

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251 Sā-le sbram, sBram-bu = unwrought gold (Das 1902: 943), while sa-le is reported to be the Zhang Zhung equivalent of gsal-bu (bright, clear, lucid; Pasar et al. 2008: 270). Therefore, perhaps ‘bright gold’ instead of ‘pure gold’ might be more fitting here. For the mythic origin of gold, see supra, fn. 43.

252 These terms for the hunting of deer and antelope (dgo-’drim) are found in PT 1040 and PT 1289, as noted in Stein 2003, pp. 600, 602. See variant spellings sha-bshor and dgo-’drem in PT 1068 and sha-shor in PT 1134 (Bellezza 2008: 511, 539; Stein 2003: 602).

253 For mtsho-ro / mtsho-rog (sic) as a synonym for turquoise, See Bellezza 2008, pp. 35, 419, 450: 2005, p. 350 (fn. 27). This term is also represented in PT 1051, ln. 11; PT 1052, ln. v006; ITJ 738 v004; ITJ 739, lns. 02r10, 11v05. This word is supposed to be of Zhang Zhung origin (cf. Pasar et al. 2008: 211). mTsho-ro is semantically related g.yu-mtsho (turquoise lake).

254 The transcription of the text incorrectly transcribes in both instances of its occurrence rwa as rba (Gtam shul dga’ thang ‘bum pa che nas goar du rayed, no. 41, ln. 8).

255 The wild yak sKar-ba is also found in ITJ 731r. In this Dunhuang manuscript, sKar-ba, who refuses to share his pasture with a horse, gores it to death. The slain horse is the older brother of the first funerary ritual transport equid or do-ma. See Bellezza 2008, p. 534, 535. Also see Stein 1971, pp. 486, 487.

256 A ritualist specializing in removing the byol afflictions.
the man was pushed away by the ox, thus the man died (gum-mo) there in the river.

ltas ngan bdud kyi bag chags kyis byol // bon dang zor byol gyis / zangs brgya ma stong ma la / ltas ngan dang bdud kyi bag chags dang / yi dags chas pa’i spyi der // bsgyer bsgyer bsngag bsngag nas / / lam gyi bzhi mdor bor de btang na // brag dang chu phrad de // brag gyis zangs phul / zangs kyis glang phul nas / glang gyis myi phul bas // / myi ’dron po glang ded yang chab du gum mo //

The narrative is concluded by reaffirming the value of the byol, stating that it was the only thing that could possibly help sMra then-bal. It is also unambiguous in declaring that the story occurred in the distant past; for the early historic period ritualists this was crucial in establishing the integrity and authenticity of the smrang:

<42:4–6> In ancient times the byol benefited in that way. Once when sMra then-bal was captured by the klu, ltas-nginx, bdud, and each and every kind of yi-dags, nothing could aid him except aid by the byol. He was benefited by the glud. In ancient times it was of benefit to sMra then-bal.

byol gna’ de ltar phan no // smra then ba zhig // klu dang ltas ngan dang // bdud dang yi dags cho ma cho rgu su / bzung ba yang / cis yang ma thub byol gyis thub // glud kyis ‘phan no / gna’ smra then ba la phan no //

In the last instance, the text skips to a byol ritual made in the period of its composition or use. It notes a current client, which rather than the proper name of an individual appears to be a generic appellation for patients in general or a class of men. The power and efficacy of the byol is reiterated one last time, before the text ends with the three prototypic words recited by the bon priests:

257 Myi ’dron-po (C.T. = mgon-po). mGron-po refers to a person or deity that is the object of invocation (Das 1902: 288).

258 Thomas (1957: Texts, Translations and Notes, pp. 53–55), commenting on ITJ 734r, considers rMa-bu mchin-rgyal/mching-rgyal (sic) to have been a real historical figure, and equates him with Mi-cheng, a ruler of the T’ang-chang kingdom who lived sometime after 500 CE. Stein (1971: 497, 503, 504) and Dotson (2008: 45) take a much different view, seeing the rMa-bu mching-rgyal occurs in the present tense as the current successor to the smrang narrative. On ITJ 734r, also see Bellezza 2008, p. 437. A contemporary context for rMa-bu mching-rgyal in the wake of an attestation of the ancient nature of a funerary ritual is also found in PT 1039, ln. 26. This narrative framework in four different Old Tibetan texts leads me to concur with the position taken by Stein and Dotson as outlined above, discounting Thomas’s historical hypothesis regarding the identity of rMa-bu mching-rgyal.
<42:6–8> Now, the man sMra-bu mchis-rgyal has been befallen by bad omens. When the byol contacts the river, the river becomes dry. When the byol contacts the wood, the wood is broken. When the byol contacts the flying bird, it falls down. When the byol contacts the stone, it cracks. By the bon spells, three words of incantations are recited.

da myi smra bu mchis rgyal la ltas ngan bab na / byol da chu phrad na chu skams so / shing dang phrad na ’chag go / byol dang bya ’phur ba phrad na lhung ngo / rdo dang phrad na ’gas so / sngags bon sngags tshigs gsum bzlas so /

Conclusion

As we have seen, the byol-rabs in its two longest narratives establishes gShen-rab myi-bo as one of the first and most important practitioners of the byol class of glud rituals. He is depicted among several prototypic priests and divinities responsible for instituting the practice of the byol for the well-being of human beings and gods. gShen-rab’s function as an archetypal priest and ancestral hero in the dGa’-thang ’bum-pa text is corroborated by the smrang narratives in the archaic funerary manuscripts of Dunhuang discussed in this paper.

The identity of gShen-rab myi-bo as an archetypal priest in Old Tibetan literature has enormous implications for the development of Tibetan culture and religion, for it demonstrates that in the early historic period he was not thought of as a Buddha figure. Although the Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ’bum-pa biographical materials are limited in scope, they preserve enough of the ritual practices and ethos of early historic religious traditions to conclude that they do not merely ignore another side of gShen-rab as a Buddha. For their authors and users, such a figure very probably did not exist. The nature of the rituals described and the manner in which they are carried out (for instance, the presence of animal sacrifice and gShen-rab’s reliance on deities), the evolved character of the dress and other material cultural supports, and the highly developed hagiography of the gods and priests cited, supply convincing evidence that Old Tibetan literature had in mind just what is presented, an indigenous sacrificial priest, not a Buddha in the Indic mold.

What does such a revelation possibly signify for the Eternal Bon religion, which has been faithfully preserving its omniscient Buddha characterization of gShen-rab myi-bo for 1000 years? The textual evidence indicating that the gShen-rab myi-bo of the Old Tibetan documents was a priest and not a Buddha may possibly lead its adherents to reappraise their historical and doctrinal stance. Nevertheless, Eternal Bon is no stranger to criticism of its doctrinal legitimacy and historical perspective coming from fellow Tibetans. More recently, foreign scholars and practitioners of other religions have also critically

259 ’Chag (C.T. = chag).
260 Below the last line of the text six lines of mantras are written; these are read by the ritualists for the slaughter of the demons. See text, no. 45, Ins. 5, 6.
analyzed gShen-rab’s posture in Eternal Bon sources. The last millennium in Tibet has been riven by sectarian struggles for power and domination, sweeping up Eternal Bon as both perpetrator and victim. In these rivalries, which have a distinctively political underbelly, Eternal Bon has often found itself in an underdog position. Representing just 10 to 15% of the total Tibetan population, the Bon-po have labored relentlessly to counteract their minority status and further their influence in the great clearing house of Tibetan religion.

To interpret Old Tibetan texts as claiming that gShen-rab myi-bo was not a Buddha strikes at the very core of the Eternal Bon identity. For the traditionalists who whole-heartedly accept the hagiographic accounts of gShen-rab mi-bo-che in Eternal Bon literature as the basis of their faith, the Dunhuang and dGa’-thang ‘bum-pa materials will perforce be viewed as irrelevant, false or heretical. Understandably, there will be Eternal Bon scholars who will vociferously counter the view that gShen-rab was exclusively an archetypal priest in his earliest form. These defenders of the traditional position have two major polemical strategies at their disposal: 1. to call into question the authenticity and authority of the Old Tibetan documents, and 2. to deny that their gShen-rab mi-bo is represented in them. Eternal Bon scholars might argue that the Old Tibetan manuscripts were written by a heterodoxic Bon sect or perhaps even by Buddhists in order to discredit them. The reasoning may go, therefore, that the Old Tibetan documents are not an accurate rendering of their religion in the early historic period. Yet, there are no extant Old Tibetan documents vindicating the Eternal Bon view of gShen-rab as a Buddha. The documents now available to us paint an intricate picture of religion during and somewhat after the Tibetan imperium, replete with intimate knowledge of ritual procedures and the philosophical basis that underlies them. What’s more, the origin myths are framed in consistent, unambiguous epic language, hinting that they were part of a well-established mainstream tradition, not the voice of a marginal or renegade group of religionists.

Alternatively, Eternal Bon savants might attempt to show that the personage called gShen-rab myi-bo in the Old Tibetan documents refers to an entirely different individual than the eponymous figure in their tradition. This position will also be difficult to defend, however, because in the Old Tibetan texts gShen-rab myi-bo appears with his colleagues Dur-shen rma-da Thar-bon dru-skyol, and Mus-dpal phrogs-rol, all of which fulfill similar roles in the ritual traditions of Eternal Bon. It is simply not plausible that all four men are alter-egos, sharing the same name but not the same identity.

Given these fundamental weaknesses in a polemical bulwark against the depiction of gShen-rab in the Old Tibetan texts, it is possible that religious scholarship on the matter will increasingly support the idea that they furnish the most accurate and complete picture of the historical or legendary personality known as gShen-rab myi-bo. I hasten to add that any such reevaluation is likely to be a very complicated and problem-fraught process that will take many years to complete. Naturally, there will be huge resistance to any

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261 For example, Snellgrove (1967: 15, fn. 1) very plainly states that the tale of gShen-rab is a deliberate fabrication modeled on the Buddha Sākyamuni.
movement in the orthodox position of Eternal Bon, as matters of faith and belief are often impervious to change. But crucial doctrinal innovation must come if the Old Tibetan documents are indeed accepted as the most valuable source for assessing the early identity of gShen-rab myi-bo.

Eternal Bon could simply hold its ground intellectually, shrugging off yet another assault on its integrity and authority. However, in the increasingly secularized and transparent world of the 21st century, such an insular approach may not be feasible or even desirable. Be that as it may, ultimately Eternal Bon can come out of the debate as to the historical reality of its founder in a much stronger institutional position than they find themselves in today. In the final analysis, the emergence of a new and more powerful Eternal Bon religion will hinge upon it making two major admissions: 1. that the historical Śākyamuni Buddha is the cornerstone persona of all Tibetan religious sects, and 2. that Eternal Bon has best safeguarded the older Tibetan heritage while adopting the Buddhist patrimony of India.

If gShen-rab myi-bo, the ancestral priest, was re-imagined as a Buddha after the 10th century CE, we must ask ourselves why. This was not part of some grand scheme to deceive; to the contrary, it was part of a systematic attempt to interpret ancient traditions by framing them in the predominant ideological framework forged by Buddhism. It can be cogently argued that preexisting personalities such as gShen-rab myi-bo and their ritual and magical activities were wedded to a Buddhist ethos in order that they might live on in a Tibet where religion and ideology were undergoing radical change. Those still calling themselves Bon-po attempted to conserve early historic and older vestigial customs, practices and lineages by stamping a Buddhist philosophical imprint upon them. For all those who valued and still value the native Tibetan cultural legacy this must be seen as a most laudable endeavor.

There is also the other side of the coin concerning the degree to which the Buddhists, beginning with the rNying-ma sect, absorbed non-Buddhist traditions for basically the same reason: to contend with and honor antecedent cultural traditions while holding fast to the Buddhist zeitgeist. In practice, Tibetan Buddhists continued to embrace many indigenous traditions by conferring a Buddhist rationale and dictum upon them, scarcely acknowledging their historical roots.

During the course of the present century, the day of reckoning may come when both Eternal Bon and Tibetan Buddhism are compelled to fully and openly disclose their huge cultural debt to an earlier fund of Tibetan tradition. This can only come about if all Tibetan sects readily acknowledge that they are more or less syncretistic affairs, born out of an ancient cultural crucible filled with ideas and personalities of Indic origins. In this regard, it is Eternal Bon that has done the most to preserve and propagate old Tibetan traditions over the last millennia, for which it deserves much more credit from Tibetans in general.

In the 21st century, with its unparalleled threats to the cultural integrity of vulnerable peoples, those like the Tibetans must strive to gain a fuller and more objective picture of who they are and where they come from. In this critical endeavor, Eternal Bon as a stalwart guardian of tradition will prove invaluable,
potentially affording it a place in the religious and intellectual life of Tibetans much greater than it enjoys today.

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gShen-rab myi-bo


The Byol-rabs Text

No. 17

No. 18
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No. 23

No. 24
No. 25

No. 26