

# Imperial Traces of G.yo ru Gzhung<sup>1</sup>

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[You] should be concerned about the three [valleys of]  
Grwa, Dol and Gzhung.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Gzhung (or G.yo ru/G.yor po Gzhung) is the old name of the valley where the Lhasa-Gonggar airport is located.<sup>3</sup> This broad valley complex just south of the Gtsang po river lies 50 km south of Lhasa and 80 km to the west of Yar lung, the homeland of the Tibetan kings. Together with the neighbouring valleys in the east, Dol and Grwa, the Gzhung valley constitutes a central part of Southern Central Tibet and is counted among the most fertile plains in the region. Today, the main part of the valley, to the south-east of the airport, is referred to as Rnam rab Gzhung, or Rnam rab in its contracted form, a toponym that goes back to an ancient estate with the name Rnam rgyal Rab brtan.<sup>4</sup> Rnam rab Gzhung belongs to present-day Gong dkar County (Ch. 贡嘎县, Gònggá xiàn) in Lho kha Prefecture (Ch. 山南地区, Shānnán dìqū).<sup>5</sup> It runs from the lower Gtsang po banks to the valley's upper ranges (i.e. Gzhung phu) towards Yar 'brog in the south. At the time of the Tibetan empire, Gzhung embraced a central area in the heartland of the Left Horn Province, in close proximity to the emperors' residence at Yar lung and to Tibet's first monastery on the other Gtsang po side.

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper is dedicated to my friends from Gzhung, most of whom left their homeland long ago. I am truly grateful to them for sharing their stories and local knowledge with me over the years. I would also like to thank Losal Dondrub (Gongkar Choede, Dehradun), Guntram Hazod (IKGA, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) and particularly Reinier Langelaar (IKGA, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) for corrections and valuable comments on this article. The research for this paper was generously funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): F42 Visions of Community.

<sup>2</sup> Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan (1302-64), *Po ti bse ru*: 361.10-11: *grwa dol gzhung gsum la sha tsha byed dgos*/. For an alternative translation see Czaja 2013: 160, fn. 155, "[...] the estates of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung should be governed with loyalty and love (*sha tsha*)".

<sup>3</sup> The Lhasa-Gonggar airport (Lha sa'i gong dkar gnam gru 'bab thang; Ch. 拉萨贡嘎国际, Lāsà Gònggá Jīchāng) was built in the 1960s and has been operational since 1968.

<sup>4</sup> This estate has existed since at least the fifteenth century; see Rgya ston Byang chub dbang rgyal, *Rdzong pa kun dga' rnam rgyal gyi rnam thar*: 97, here Sger gzhis Rnam rgyal rab brtan; see also Akester 2016: 263, fn. 18; Fermer 2017: 75f.

<sup>5</sup> In 2015, the township of Rgyal grub gling (Ch. 甲竹林镇, Jiǎ zhúlín zhèn) became part of the Tibet Airport New Area (Ch. 西藏空港新区, Xīzàng kōnggǎng xīnqū), whose management has been entrusted to Lhasa City (Ch. 拉萨市, Lāsà shì). As this area surrounding the airport has not yet been established as a separate administrative unit, it currently remains part of Rgyal grub gling township of Gong dkar County; see 西藏空港新区管理委员会 (Bod ljongs mkha' 'grul khul gsar do dam u yon lhan khang), 西藏空港新区行政区划, URL: <http://www.lasa.gov.cn/xzkgxq/xzgh/ypwz.shtml>, accessed: 29.01.2021.

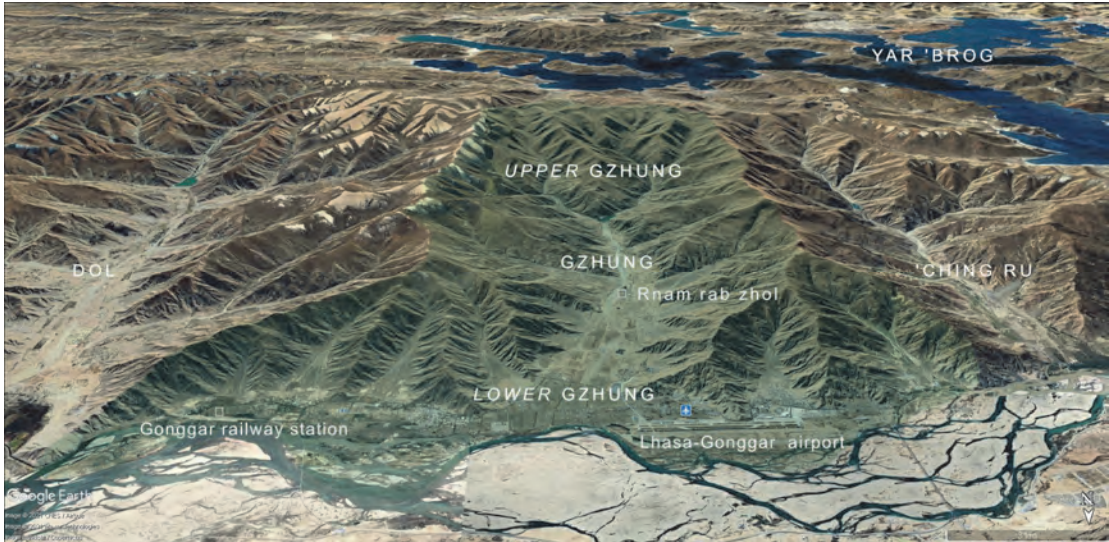


Fig. 1: The valley complex of G.yo ru Gzhung, view towards the upper valley. (Map data: Google Earth, 2021 CNES/Airbus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, Landsat/Copernicus; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

This contribution will inquire into the valley's imperial past (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cent.) by drawing on (a) textual claims from early and late medieval literature (Old Tibetan and post-dynastic), (b) aerial and on-site photographs, (c) satellite imagery (images taken between 2003-2021) and (d) interviews with Gzhung natives.

## 2. Methodological considerations

### 2.1. Source evidence and toponyms

Before inquiring into the valley's past, it should be frankly stated that most textual claims about the Tibetan empire examined for this paper are drawn from much later, post-imperial sources (spanning from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century). This highly disrupted state of the available evidence allows for only a very limited understanding of the religious, political, and social topography of the valley during the imperial period. Because this area experienced radical transformations in the past, we must also wonder to what extent claims about imperial territory and the presence of different family lineages can be linked to present-day Tibetan (and Chinese) place names, and to the contemporary oral accounts by locals and to recent aerial and satellite photography. These methodological issues will first be briefly addressed.

High-resolution satellite images, widely accessible through online satellite imagery providers such as Google Earth or Baidu Maps (Ch. 百度地图, Bǎidù dìtú), demonstrate that the valley has undergone substantial change within the past two decades. Particularly the lower valley (*mda'*) has seen significant growth in infrastructure around the airport area at Rgyal grub gling (Ch. 甲竹林镇, Jiǎ zhúlín zhèn) and in the environs of the county's headquarters around Skyid gshongs (var. Skyid mo gshongs; Ch. 吉雄镇, Jíxióng zhèn). Here, near the settlement of Grags chen, at present-day Hang



Fig. 2: Aerial view of Gzhung. (Photo: Gerd Eichmann, 31.06.2014, Wikimedia Commons, “Gonggar County in Tibet from the air”, CC-BY-SA-4.0, URL: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gonggar\\_County-from\\_the\\_plane-06-2014-gje.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gonggar_County-from_the_plane-06-2014-gje.jpg), accessed: 20.01.2021; additional data: M. Fermer 01.2021)

grong (var. G.yang rong; Ch. 夯仲, Hāng zhòng), a new railroad line has recently been completed.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, besides such recent infrastructural developments and the ideologically driven destruction of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tibetan historical sources attest that even before the arrival of the Chinese, the environment and old buildings were occasionally destroyed and the territory altered.

Like other districts of Central Tibet that look back upon a rich history of changing inhabitation, rulership and religious rivalry, Gzhung must have seen a constant transformation of its environment throughout history, both on a physical and symbolical level. This expressed itself through the emergence of new sites, the adaption or conversion of existent sites, as well as their occasional relocation or even complete abandonment. During such processes the names for those sites too could change, obtain new meanings, or be replaced entirely.

<sup>6</sup> The construction of Gonggar Railway station (Ch. 贡嘎站, Gònggá zhàn) in the eastern part of the lower valley began in 2014. It is part of the large infrastructure project of the Lhasa-Nyingchi railway (Lha sa Nying khri me 'khor; Ch. 拉林铁路, Lā lín tiě lù), whose tracks were completed in December 2020. This final section of the Sichuan-Tibet railway (Ch. 川藏铁路, Chuānzáng tiě lù) is expected to be completed in 2021. Situated in the middle of Skyid gshongs, Rwa ba smad monastery was utilised as Party offices by the Gong dkar county officials; personal communication with Gzhung natives, 01.2021; cf. also Dowman 1988: 155; Mkhan po Tshul khri ms Rgyal mtshan, *Thub bstan ra smad dgon pas gong rim la phul ba'i zhu yig*: 406.





Fig. 3: Historical landscape of Gzhung. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 CNES/Airbus, 2021 Maxar Technologies; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

These developments in the perception, utilisation and naming of the land need to be kept in mind when one, as here, attempts to reconstruct history on the basis of place names preserved in the literature and in the oral tradition. On the Tibetan plateau, fortunately, a high level of historical continuity can be observed for place names,<sup>7</sup> despite the tendency of toponyms to have somewhat shifting spatial connotations (i.e. geographical locations and demarcations of toponyms can shift, expand, diminish or move over time). Without ethnographic or archaeologic investigations, at best conducted in the field, such dynamic aspects of toponyms are at risk to be overlooked.<sup>8</sup> From extensive field work in Tibet, Hazod (2009: 163) observed “that toponyms are generally very long-lived and have a high degree of continuity; even if they are often covered by later historical structures, they can usually nevertheless be traced, whether through the fact that the name is still in local usage or just appears in the memory of a local oral account.” It is this strong persistence of place names that makes it possible to both identify historical toponyms and to provide contextualisation in terms of geographic regions. The anthropological practice of localising toponyms from literary sources with the assistance of locals “allows one to pin down narrated [hi]stories and to recognise them as part of a particular landscape”, a method which Hazod aptly

<sup>7</sup> Hazod 2009: 163. To this day, Tibetans both in- and outside of Tibet use the place names from before the arrival of Chinese rule, although the old names and history of sites are increasingly disappearing from local memory. Simultaneously, oral tradition, too, is increasingly vanishing in modern Tibet. The youth of the present generation, who often live, work or study away from home, seem to be more acquainted with the Chinese rendering of place names introduced with the country’s absorption into the PR China. See also *ibid.*: 163f.; Hazod 2010: 10.

<sup>8</sup> See also Hazod 2009: 163f. The inclusion of local topographic knowledge in the present study has, for example, illustrated that Rnam rgyal Rab brtan, a major fifteenth-century stronghold under the Gong dkar district, was relocated at some point in the past; see *Rnam rab guide*: 181 (see also below).

describes as the “geographic anchoring of texts” (“geographische Verankerung”).<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the linking of written sources to the physical environment in which the narrations take place helps to understand the complex relation between communities described in the sources and the landscapes they inhabited. Nevertheless, the localisation of toponyms through a combination of textual inquiry and local oral history remains a challenging undertaking that is by no means flawless.<sup>10</sup> The toponyms identified in the present study derive from repeated interviews and satellite imagery sessions conducted with natives from the Gzhung valley over many years. With their assistance I was able to localise toponyms mentioned in the sources, which often – unexpectedly and sometimes long after the field inquiries – turned out to be preserved in local memory.<sup>11</sup> Since the work of Sørensen, Hazod and Tsering Gyalpo in particular,<sup>12</sup> the identification and localisation of historical sites with the help of Tibetan language scholars and locals has become a crucial method for exploring the regional hegemonies on the Tibetan plateau, as far back as the Yar lung dynasty. As the present paper is concerned, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that many localisations, despite careful attempts to verify them remotely, remain approximate until archaeological, geological, or anthropological assessment can be carried out in the field. In addition to toponymic data from interviews with Gzhung natives, I have also relied on the work of Ngag dbang Thub bstan from Rnam rab zhol, who took great effort in documenting the valley’s historical landscape from the accounts of elders. His account, titled *Rnam rab lung pa’i gnas dang gnas shul khag gi ngo sprod*, has been very helpful in preparing this paper.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.2 Transformation of the landscape

The histories considered for this paper recount several instances of historical transformations of the landscape. The accounts on the Central Tibetan uprisings (*kheng log*) in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries

<sup>9</sup> On this method developed for historic-anthropological research on Tibet see Hazod 2010: 4f., 9f. On the identification of historical toponyms in the field see also Hazod 2009 (as above).

<sup>10</sup> See also *ibid.*: 164.

<sup>11</sup> The linking of textual evidence to contemporary places is often possible only after the acquisition of sufficient data. I rely on a large kml dataset of Tibetan place names with geographic positionings recorded in a series of satellite imagery interviews (Google Earth) that began in 2012 and continued until the completion of this paper. The geographical localisation of each site was done by considering the information provided by several informants who were interviewed independently from each other. This method of toponymic identification via aerial and satellite imagery proved very fruitful under the current circumstances, which make *in situ* investigations and historic interviews in the TAR (PR China) almost impossible. As regards the acquisition of information, my experience is similar to that of Hazod (2009: 163), who asserts that “[t]he identification of particular places is not always the result of a targeted search, but not infrequently a by-product of an investigation of a completely different (local) historical context.”

<sup>12</sup> See respective publications cited in this paper, foremostly, the joint publications on the G.ya’ bzang ruling house (i.e. Gyalbo *et al.* 2000), on the imperial Khra ’brug temple (i.e. Sørensen and Hazod 2005) and on Tshal Gung thang (i.e. Sørensen and Hazod 2007), as well as Hazod’s cartographical survey of imperial Central Tibet (Hazod 2009) and the recent study on the chief ministers (Hazod 2019). See also Hazod 2010: 4-6.

<sup>13</sup> See *Rnam rab guide*: 169-195.

remarkably exemplify the region's thorough reshaping in the wake of the Tibetan empire's collapse.<sup>14</sup> The civil rebellion that resulted in the collapse of the old territories and the plundering of the royal tombs must have likely hit Gzhung as well, which lay at Tibet's geopolitical centre. Several burial mound sites have been identified in the valley and the bordering area (see Chapter 4).

In the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, the region witnessed destruction from outside forces when the Mongol troops marched into Central Tibet. The historian Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba reports two invasions during which the heartlands of southern Central Tibet were attacked (and presumably conquered).<sup>15</sup> In 1252, an army led by Do be ta (var. Du pe ta Bā dur) reportedly razed Mon mkhar Mgon po gdong fortress (?) near Yar lung,<sup>16</sup> while the neighbouring region to the west suffered from another invasion by the Hur ta troops (var. Hur tang) in the following year. The Hur ta attacked territory along the Gtsang po, including Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba figuratively alludes to the hardships of the days, recounting that the valley's inhabitants were unable to cultivate their fields:

*Mkhas pa'i dga' ston* (ed. 1980), vol. 2, 596.2:

*gra dol gzhung gsum 'jag skyar 'phyur ba'i dus/ ces pa de byung/*

There arose what [is] referred [to as] a period of overgrowing weed [on the fields of] the three [valleys] Gra, Dol [and] Gzhung. (trans. by author)

According to another source, the same region saw military confrontations about a century later when Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan (1302-1364) fell into dispute with the Tshal pa over the estates (*mi sde*) of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung in the years 1348-1349.<sup>17</sup> According to Byang chub

<sup>14</sup> Regarding the plundering of the royal tombs (*bang so*), Hazod (2013) has carefully worked out this key historical event from Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba's (1504-64/66) detailed account in the *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. See also Dotson 2012 on the creation of regional principalities (*rje dpon tshan*) in post-imperial Tibet.

<sup>15</sup> *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 2, 596.1-2: 'di'i snga lo lcags byi (= chu?) [1252] la mong gor gan rgyal sar phebs cing bod tu (= du) byang ngos nas do pe ta'i hor dmag btang mon mkhar mgon po gdong du mi dpag med bsad/ de'i phyi lo [1253] hur ta'i hor dmag yongs rgyal tsha jo 'ber sogs bsad/ gra dol gzhung gsum 'jag skyar 'phyur ba'i dus/ ces pa de byung/. On those Mongol military expeditions into Central Tibet see also Szerb 1980: 277-279; Petech 1990: 12f.; Dung dkar Blo bzang 'Phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*: 525; Haw 2014: 46f.

<sup>16</sup> Several estates with the name Mon 'gar (var. Mon mgar, Mon mkhar) existed in Yar lung and the adjacent areas. The exact position of Mon mkhar Mgon po gdong, the seat of one of the Yar lung jo bo, remains unknown, but can apparently be localised somewhere around Yar lung; cf. Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 79, fn. 175; see also Czaja 2013: 446f.; Dung dkar Blo bzang 'Phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*: 525; Petech (1990: 13) assumes its location to be in Snya mo (?) and Pasang Wangdu (Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 79, fn. 175) in present-day Grwa nang. See also *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 75.13-14, here Spu gu rdo 'bum Mon mkhar mgon po gdong.

<sup>17</sup> For details and references on the Phag gru - Tshal pa dispute and military confrontations in Bying, Grwa and 'Phyong rgyas see *Po ti bse ru*: 192-201, 216f.; cf. also Czaja 2013: 130-132, 135f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423. The Phag mo gru pa were victorious in the conflict over the territories and the Tshal pa had to surrender. On the agreement for settling the conflict see *Po ti bse ru*: 216f.; Czaja 2013: 136f., fn. 94.

Rgyal mtshan's testament, the fighting concentrated around Mon 'gar in Bying,<sup>18</sup> Grwa phyi, Rgyal chen<sup>19</sup> and 'Phyong rgyas, but the conflict may have well reached into Gzhung, which was a part of the disputed Tshal pa territory further up the Gtsang po river.

In the early fifteenth century, shortly after the three valleys had fallen under the command of the Yar rgyab family, the region witnessed further armed clashes. In the conflict over the Phag mo gru pa succession of the year 1434, the Yar rgyab district (i.e. Grwa and Dol) is reported to have turned into a battlefield.<sup>20</sup> Mon rtse pa Kun dga' Dpal ldan (1408-1475?), a local of Ba ri sgang, a settlement located between Dol and Gzhung, witnessed the turmoil in his homeland, stating in his autobiography: "In the Tiger year (1434) when I was twenty-seven, the Phag mo gru pa troubled times erupted. The levies of the armies of Dbus and Gtsang in a large sense divided Dol and Gzhung in two. The route of march for both the Great Army and the Gtsang Army came through Ba ri sgang."<sup>21</sup>

For the second half of the same century, the historian Paṇ chen Bsod nams Grags pa (1478-1554) records that the Yar rgyab family, who had become the new regional power administering the Yar rgyab and Gong dkar district, repeatedly joined campaigns against the Phag mo gru pa.<sup>22</sup> Bsod nams Grags pa does not elaborate on the military operations against the Sne gdong court and it remains unknown whether Gzhung under the Gong dkar district officer was also affected by the confrontations. Likewise, the extent to which the demise of the Yar rgyab pa at Grwa involved direct military actions is as of yet unknown.<sup>23</sup>

Unquestionably, the region suffered severe destruction during the Dzungar invasion in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The targets of the Mongol invaders' vandalism in the years 1717/18 were mostly, though not exclusively, Rnying ma and Bka' bgyud institutions in the Lhasa region and along the Gtsang po valleys in Lho kha. Later histories report that the Rnying ma monasteries of Smin grol gling and Rdo rje brag suffered complete destruction.<sup>24</sup> According to contemporary local accounts, religious institutions of the Gzhung valley also fell victim to the plundering and destruction, among them the Rngog pa monastery of Spre zhing (founded by Rngog Kun dga' Rdo rje, 1157-1234) and

<sup>18</sup> I assume that Bying refers to the region west of Yar lung around present-day Bying (Ch. 金, Jīn) to the east of Mon mkhar Rnam sras gling (personal communication with Skyid gshongs native, winter 2012/13). For the geographical position (29.244643, 91.612510) see also Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 12, Sat-Map 1, N11.

<sup>19</sup> *Po ti bse ru*: 199.9, 194.9-10, here Rgyal chen gzhis kha; probably identical with Rgyal chen gling (Ch. 吉林村, Jílín cūn) of present-day Grwa nang; see also Fermer 2017: 84f.

<sup>20</sup> *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 21b5-6; see also Fermer 2017: 71f., fn. 19; Czaja 2013: 221, fn. 43. The conflict over the succession of the Phag mo gru pa throne was between Grags pa 'byung gnas (1414-1444/45) and his father, the Che sa Sangs rgyas Rgyal mtshan (1389-1457). Addressed in several Tibetan histories, the detailed circumstances of these events remain unknown.

<sup>21</sup> Translation acc. to Smith 2001: 50, see also 282, fn. 121.

<sup>22</sup> *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* (Tucci 1971): 222, 224f.; also Czaja 2013: 227, 230f., 235f.

<sup>23</sup> The Yar rgyab seat of Lhun grub gling in Grwa phyi was conquered in the mid-sixteenth century by the Dga' ldan Skyid shod ruler Bkra shis rab brtan (1531-1589); cf. Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 768, fn. 9, 174, fn. 423. Under the command of Karma phun tshogs Rnam rgyal (?1597-1621), the Gtsang pa rulers defeated the Yar rgyab pa in 1610 and took possession of their territory; see Czaja 2013: 306f.

<sup>24</sup> Smith 2001: 18ff.



the Bka' brgyud monasteries Lcang lo can and Btsun dgon Smon 'gro Dgon gsar.<sup>25</sup> Several sites of cultural and historical significance must have fallen into complete extinction in those days. Any that survived would have subsequently been destroyed during the "Cultural Revolution" that brought a wave of unprecedented destruction and desecration over all of Tibet. Only a few religious sites were spared from total destruction in the 1960s and 70s for purely practical reasons: their solid, multi-storeyed stone buildings particularly suited the new administration as grain depots (i.e. Dwags po Grwa tshang monastery, Rnam rab zhol), storage houses (i.e. Bka' 'gyur lha khang, Sban rtse) or as government offices (i.e. Rwa ba smad monastery, Skyid gshongs).<sup>26</sup> Since the 1980s, these and other sites have been handed over again to local communities, under whose initiative restorations could begin.

### 3. Geographic contextualisation

#### 3.1. Gzhung of the Upper Left Horn

In the imperial period, Gzhung<sup>27</sup> was part of the Left Horn province (G.yo ru/G.yu ru or G.yon ru) of "Central Tibet" or Bod, as this larger region was known from the mid-seventh century onward. In post-imperial histories the valley is frequently called G.yo ru Gzhung, G.yor po Gzhung or G.yon ru Gzhung.<sup>28</sup> The Left Horn province covers the south-eastern part of Central Tibet, roughly

<sup>25</sup> *Rnam rab guide*: 171, 172, 186f.; Akester 2016: 266; Ducher 2017: 356; Ducher 2020: 161. Earlier, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Spre'u zhing monastery and Nya [mo] skyur temple had been restored; *Lnga pa chen po'i rang nam kha skong*: vol. 8 (*nya*), 443, 444f. (see below). Gzhung natives trace the destruction of several other monasteries in the valley to the Dzungar presence, including Se lung (see below), Bde thang (geographical position: 29.246375, 90.910736), Bsam gtan gling (approximate geographical position: 29.245147, 90.901194), 'Bu thang (see below and *Rnam rab guide*: 187f., here 'Bu gdang); personal communication, winter 2012/13. The Mongol invaders are said to have vandalised other monasteries on the southern Gtsang po side, including Bya sa temple (personal communication with the Bya sa temple caretaker, 2015), Gsang sngags Chos 'khor gling of Mon mkhar (*Lho kha sa khul gyi gnas yig*: 39), Ri bo rnam rgyal (*Lho kha sa khul gyi gnas yig*: 26), Grwa thang (Chan 1994: 394; Akester: 274), Snye mdo (Chan 1994: 504) and Sdings po che (Chan 1994: 506; Akester: 281). Apart from religious establishments, it can be assumed that other sites of socio-cultural and political significance (fortifications, shrines, burial mound sites, etc.) suffered during the Dzungar troubles. Chan states that the Ser khung tombs (1994: 367) and burial tombs in 'On (*ibid.*: 372) suffered desecration under them, while Richardson (1998: 222) reports that the royal tombs at Yar lung were ransacked.

<sup>26</sup> Personal communication with Gzhung natives, winter 2012/13, 01.2021; cf. also Dowman 1988: 147, 153, 155.

<sup>27</sup> Another Gzhung in the Left Horn is Sne gdong Gzhung of Yar lung, known as the birthplace of Sman lung pa (*Blo mchog rdo rje'i rnam thar*: 194.8, here G.yu pa (= ru) gzhung) and Sangs rgyas Sgom pa Rdo rje Gzhon nu (13<sup>th</sup> cent.) (*Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 364.5; *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*: 359.6; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 735.6); see also 'Jigs med Gling pa's (1729/30-98) autobiography citing a prophecy of O rgyan Gling pa (*'Jigs med gling pa'i rnam thar*: 485.20-21, here Dbus g.yor gzhung).

<sup>28</sup> Occasionally, other spellings are also encountered. See, *inter alia*, *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 220.2-3, here Shar lho g.yu ru gzhung; *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 5.1 (cited below); *Klong chen pa'i rnam thar*: 124.20, 196.5, here G.yor po gzhung; Rta tshag Tshe dbang rgyal, *Dam pa'i chos kyi 'byung ba'i legs bshad lho rong chos 'byung ngam rta tshag chos 'byung*: 665.4, here Yor po gzhung (= G.yor po gzhung); *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*: 356.10-11, here G.yon ru gzhung.



corresponding to the later Lho kha province.<sup>29</sup>

The Fifth Dalai Lama, in the biography of his teacher Blo gros mchog gi Rdo rje (1595-1671), explains that the toponyms G.yor po and G.yo ru are contemporary (i.e. 17<sup>th</sup>-century) and corrupted phonetic renderings (*sgra zur chag pa*) of G.yon ru, one of the Four Horn divisions (Dbus gtsang ru bzhi) of the dynastic period.<sup>30</sup> Géza Uray (1960: 41), on the contrary, claims that “the original name of the horn [was] *G-yo-ru*”.<sup>31</sup>

Whatever the original name of the Left Horn may have been, the literature refers to it by the toponymic forms G.yo ru/G.yu ru, G.yon ru or G.yor and occasionally offers divisions into further parts and sub-regions.<sup>32</sup> Don dam Smra ba'i Seng ge (15<sup>th</sup> cent.), in his compendium of knowledge (*Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*), presents a geographical classification (*sa dbye ba*) of the Left Horn (G.yu ru) into a Northern and Southern part (*g.yo ru lho byang gnyis*), each of which are divided into upper (*stod*), middle (*bar*) and lower (*smad*) sections consisting of three further sub-regions, thus resulting in a total of eighteen sub-regions of the Horn.<sup>33</sup> According to his classification, Gzhung, together with Gra and Dol, constitute the Upper part of Northern G.yu ru. Its geographical shape resembles a king resting on a throne (*gdan*). Like here, the sources usually localise Gzhung in the Upper part of the Left Horn (G.yo ru stod).

*Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu* (ed. 1969), 196.2-3:

*stod kyi gra dol gzhung gsum te/ rgyal po gdan la bzhugs pa 'dra/*

As for the [valley] trio Gra, Dol and Gzhung of the Upper [Left Horn], [its shape] resembles a king resting on a throne (*gdan*). (trans. by author)

Other authors speak of Upper and Lower G.yo ru<sup>34</sup> (G.yo ru stod, G.yo ru smad), of Upper and Lower G.yor po<sup>35</sup> (G.yor po stod smad) or distinguish between an Inner and Outer G.yor po (G.yor

<sup>29</sup> Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 8, 68, fn. 107; Hazod 2009: 198, Map 5, 202f., Map 6b-c.

<sup>30</sup> *Blo mchog rdo rje'i rnam thar*, 194.3-5: [...] *dam pa 'di nyid 'khrungs pa'i yul ni chos rgyal mes dbon gyi dus dbus gtsang ru bzhir grags pa las g.yon ru ste/ deng sang g.yor po dang g.yo ru zhes sgra zur chag pa'i 'don tshul snang zhing / [...]*.

<sup>31</sup> Uray (1960: 40f.) argues that G.yor po derives from G.yor which is a secondary form of G.yo ru; also Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 68, fn. 107. Uebach (1987: 69, fn. 237) likewise proposes that G.yor is an abbreviation of G.yo ru. In this context, the various occurrences of the toponymic phrase Dbu[r] g.yor [gnyis] in the historical literature should also be considered.

<sup>32</sup> The traditional Four Horn division obviously changed over time; cf. Smith 2001: 323f., fn. 733.

<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly, Don dam Smra ba'i seng ge places the Phag mo gru pa powerbase at Sne gdong at the centre of the Left Horn in his work compiled during the Rlangs Phag mo gru pa dominance of the region; *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*: 196.1-2. For the division of G.yo ru see *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*: 196.2-197.2 (here G.yu ru); cf. also Smith 2001: 222; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 43f., fn. 15; Hazod 2009: 197. For G.yo ru's boundaries in the four cardinal directions see *Bshad mdzod yid bzhin nor bu*: 194.6-195.3, 24, fn. 56.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 164.25, 165.2; *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 439.15, 439.19; cf. also Uray 1960: 38; Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 14; Hazod 2009: 198, Map 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Rwa lo tsā ba'i rnam thar*: 239.1-2.

po phyi nang).<sup>36</sup> Two important figures of the religious and political scene of the fourteenth century, the first Phag mo gru pa ruler Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan and the Sa skya pa hierarch Bla ma Dam pa, speak of “the Nine lands of G.yor po”<sup>37</sup> (*g.yor po yul dgu*) and “the Four lands of G.yor po”<sup>38</sup> (*g.yor po yul bzhi*). The two leaders place their respective strongholds in Dbus – Yar lung and Bsam yas – prominently at the centre of this geography, but do not lay out their divisions into nine and four lands. Traditionally, it is the ancient Khra 'brug temple in Lower Yar lung that is regarded as the centre of imperial G.yo ru.<sup>39</sup> The *Bka' thang sde lnga*, on the other hand, counts “Sixteen lands of G.yon ru” (*g.yon ru'i yul gru bcu drug*), twelve of which are identified by name.<sup>40</sup> Etymologically, one could speculate that the Gzhung valley complex might have once constituted a “central body” of a larger region (of Ngam shod or G.yo ru).<sup>41</sup>

### 3.2. Legendary sites of Padmasambhava

As the above passages illustrate, Gzhung is often mentioned as a geographic unit along with the valleys of Dol and Grwa.<sup>42</sup> The first literary appearance of the trio of valleys on the southern Gtsang po banks, typically listed from east to west, can be attested by the *Testament of dBa'* (circa 11<sup>th</sup> cent.), as was pointed out by Sørensen and Hazod.<sup>43</sup> In the *Dbal' bzhed*, the three valleys are associated with the miraculous activities carried out by Padmasambhava for transforming the

<sup>36</sup> Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423 (citing from a work by the seventh Dalai Lama Bskal bzang rgya mtsho); also *Rnam rab guide*: 169.10-11, here [...] *g.yor po phyi dang g.yor po gzhung g.yor po nang sog*s [...]. A Rnam rab zhol native explained to me that G.yor po phyi might have once referred to Phyi[ng] ru, G.yor po gzhung to Gzhung Rnam rab and G.yor po nang to the Dol valley; personal communication, 02.2015.

<sup>37</sup> See Ta'i si tu Byang chub Rgyal mtshan's (1302-64) *Bstan bcos 'gyur ro 'tshal gyi dkar chag yid bzhin gyi nor bu rin po che'i za ma tog* [Catalogue of the Sne gdong Bstan 'gyur compiled in 1362]: 457.7. A classification of G.yor po into nine lands is also given in *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 3b5, here *g.yor po yul dgu'i nang nas* [...].

<sup>38</sup> See Bla ma dam pa Bsod nams Rgyal mtshan's (1312-1375) *Bsam yas su chos 'khor mdzad pa'i mos pa mdzad pa*: 649.6, 653.6.

<sup>39</sup> Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 22; cf. also Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: 14, 37, fn. 92; Hazod 2009: 197.

<sup>40</sup> *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 185.18; Hazod 2009: 209, Table 2, 205, under “administrative districts”.

<sup>41</sup> Gzhung's characteristic topography with its broad valley entrance at the Gtsang po shore, stretching approximately 23 km in a west-east direction from Lugs smad to Sna bo la, might itself have inspired the valley's naming. On the term *gzhung* (var. *gzhong*) denoting a “main valley of an area, i.e. a (usually broad flat) valley of the core river” see Anna Sehnalova in this volume. In former times, the area by the riverside at Lugs smad and Gling stod might have stretched much more into the Gtsang po river.

<sup>42</sup> The toponymic triad of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung is frequently mentioned by Byang chub Rgyal mtshan; *Po ti bse ru*: 170.3, 194.18, 196.4, 196.10, 200.1, 201.19. 361.10-11 (cited above); see also citations from other histories below. Atiśa's journey through the valleys of 'Phying ru (var. 'Ching ru), Gzhung, Dol and Grwa is recorded in *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 162-164; *Snar thang gi gdan rabs*: 134-136; *A ti sha'i rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*: 601ff.; *Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 313f.; see also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 249-251.

<sup>43</sup> Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423.

environment into a fertile landscape. The text recounts that the tantric master proclaimed the appearance of springs in Drwa (i.e. Grwa), Dol and Gzhung.

*Dbā' bzhed* (Wangdu and Diemberger 2000), 13a3:

*drwa dang dol dang gzhung gi phug shod dang stag la man chad chu mig cher phyung la*  
[...]

[...] in the inner (i.e. upper) and lower [lands] (*phug shod*) of Drwa and Dol and Gzhung, and as far as [the] Stag la<sup>44</sup> [pass], springs will appear in great [number].<sup>45</sup> (trans. by author)

This passage, wrapped in legendary content, alludes to the fertility of the land in ancient times.<sup>46</sup> The oral local history and the *gter ma* literature also recount Padmasambhava's activities in the valley. The people from Gzhung locate the sacred mountain Byu ru Dmar rtse, where Guru Rinpoche is believed to have subdued demons, in the eastern branch of the upper valley (i.e. Phu shar, Phu g.yon),<sup>47</sup> and place caves associated with him and his consort, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, in the western upper valley (i.e. Phu nub, Phu g.yas).<sup>48</sup> The *Padma bka'i thang yig*, Padmasambhava's famed biography reportedly revealed by Gter ston O rgyan gling pa (1323-1360/1367/1374), lists two treasure sites in the valley.

*Padma bka' thang* (ed. 1996), canto 91, 555.17-556.3:

*gra phyi'i brag* [556] *po che la bod gter sbas: gra yi sne gdong zur la ral gri sbas: dol gyi lce ti'i zur la khrab rmog sbas: gzhung gi ra skong rgyab la gter ka sbas:*

<sup>44</sup> Stag la (unidentified) seems to be situated to the west of Gzhung, maybe around lower Skyid smad.

<sup>45</sup> Alternative translations by Wangdu and Diemberger (2000: 57) and recently Doney (2021: 125): “[...] large numbers of springs will appear in the inner valleys of Drwa, Dol and Gzhug (*sic!*) as far as (the mountain of) Stag la”. The 1982 edition misses Gzhung, cf. *Sba bzhed*, 31.3-5: *grwa dang dol stag la phul po la sogs pa chu dkon pa dang / chu chung pa rnam su chu phyung la/ gram pa thams cad zhing byas la/ zhing gis bod kun 'tsho bar bya/*. Later histories omit Gzhung in this episode, e.g. *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 323.5 and *Lnga pa chen po'i rang nam kha skong*: vol. 8, 140.9-10.

<sup>46</sup> Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba in the passage cited above also seems to point to the fertility of the soil in the three valleys. In the biographies of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, the fertile land of the neighbouring Dol valley is compared to the central regions of Nepal and Mang yul grong; see *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 163.14-16; *Snar thang gi gdan rabs*: 135.7-8; *A ti sha'i rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*: 602.8-9; see also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 250. Ernst Schäfer (1910-92) and his expedition team passed through Gzhung in 1938. The unpublished, type-written itinerary of the German expedition, now preserved in the German Federal Archive (Berlin-Lichterfelde), explains the valley's fertility in view of its topographic characteristics; see R135-56, *Routenbeschreibung*: 51 (165124): “Seit Dschettäschöh [i.e. Lce lte zhol of Lower Dol] ändert sich anscheinend etwas grundlegend: die Äcker liegen nun vielmehr in der Tsangpoebene, z.T. bis an den Fluß heran, so daß der Weg besonders vor und nach Gehschong [i.e. Skyid gzhongs] nur durch Äcker führt. Bis vor Dschettäschöh beschränkte sich der Ackerbau in der Hauptsache auf die Seitentäler. Der Grund für diese Wandlung mag darin liegen, daß es sich hier um humusreiches Schwemmland des Tsangpo handelt; womöglich haben sich aber auch die Windverhältnisse aus irgendwelchen Gründen gebessert. Jedenfalls ist die andere Seite der Tsangpoebene weiterhin wüsten- und steppenähnlich mit sehr wenig Siedlungen.”

<sup>47</sup> *Rnam rab guide*: 182f.; see also Akester 2016: 263, fn. 18, here Ma rtša'i nor bu/Byu ru ma rtša.

<sup>48</sup> *Rnam rab guide*: 184.1-3.

At Brag po che of Gra phyi, [a] Tibetan treasure was hidden; by the side of Sne dgong of Gra, [a] sword was hidden; by the side of Lce ti of Dol, armour and [a] helmet were hidden; behind Ra skong of Gzhung, a treasure was hidden.<sup>49</sup> (trans. by author)

Here again, Gzhung is mentioned as part of the valley trio. The treasure site of Ra skong, where Padmasambhava is said to have buried a treasure, remains unidentified.

*Padma bka' thang* (ed. 1996), canto 91, 554.13-14:

*lug stod brag dkar gdong la nor g.yu sbas:*

At Brag dkar gdong of Lug stod, jewels and turquoises were hidden.<sup>50</sup> (trans. by author)

Lug stod, on the other hand, can probably be identified with the upper portion of a short valley in the western part of Gzhung that still bears the same name (Fig. 3).<sup>51</sup> This toponym is also registered in the *Testament of Dba'*. According to the text version below, statues for a minor temple of Bsam yas were casted at Lugs stod in Gzhung before being installed at Tibet's first monastery in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The patroness of this temple, named Dge rgyas, was none other than the emperor's wife, 'Bro gza' Khri Rgyal mo btsun (var. 'Bro za Rgyal mo brtsan), also known by her later ordination name, Byang chub rje. The set of cast statues featured Buddha Amitābha as the central image, accompanied by a retinue of nine figures, two of whom, as the story goes, sank into the Gtsang po when they were being shipped to Bsam yas.<sup>52</sup>

*Rba bzhed phyogs bsgrigs* (ed. 2009), 131.11-15:<sup>53</sup>

'bro gza' khri rgyal mo btsun sras med pas rab tu byung pa'i mtshan byang chub rjer gsol  
ba'i phyag ris dge rgyas kyi gtsug lag khang lags te/ snang ba mtha' yas gtso 'khor dgur

<sup>49</sup> For an alternative translation see Douglas *et al.* 1978: 617.

<sup>50</sup> For an alternative translation see Douglas *et al.* 1978: 615.

<sup>51</sup> Lugs stod (Ch. 拉堆, Lā duī); see also *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 49.13, here Lug stod. The lower part of the valley can probably be identified as Lugs smad, which might correspond to G.yor po Lugs smad, which is mentioned in the *Blue Annals* (*Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 2, 826.5; Roerich 1996: 706).

<sup>52</sup> On the patronship of the Dge rgyas temple (var. Dge rgyas Bye ma'i gling) see also Uebach 1987: 108f. (cited below); Sørensen 1994: 388f., 569; Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 68. The 'Bro lady Khri rgyal Btsan mo, who later became a Buddhist nun, is also credited with the founding of a temple in Upper Gtsang (Gtsang stod) in the domain of her own family lineage; see *Sngon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba* (Uebach 1987), 108f. (f. 12b1): 'bro gza' byang chub {gloss: rab tu ma byung ba'i gong du khri rgyal btsan mo zer:} kyi dge rgyas dang: rtsang kyi stod kyi gtsug lag khang bzhengs:. See also *Yig tshang gsal ba'i me long*, 83.7: 'bro {gloss: sad na legs gyi btsun mo:} bza' byang chub sgron gyis: dge rgyas bye ma gling dang : gtsang du spyod mdzes kyi lha khang bzhengs so/.

<sup>53</sup> For parallel text passages see also *Sba bzhed*, 54.8-12: 'bro bza' khri rgyal mo btsun sras med pas rab tu byung ba'i mtshan byang chub rjer gsol ba'i phyag ris dge rgyas kyi gtsug lag khang lags te/ snang ba mtha' yas gtso 'khor dgur mdzad pa lugs stod du btab nas gtsang po la spyang drangs pas/ 'khor gnyis chab la shor/; see also *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 346.1-2: 'bro bza' khri rgyal mo btsan phyis rab tu byung nas byang chub rjer mtshan gsol ba de'i phyag ris dge rgyas kyi gtsug lag khang lags te snang ba mtha' yas gtso 'khor dgu gzhung gi lugs stod tu (= du) lugs btab nas chab la spyang drangs pas 'khor gnyis chab la shor/. The founding of the Dge rgyas temple is also mentioned in *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 143.6-8.



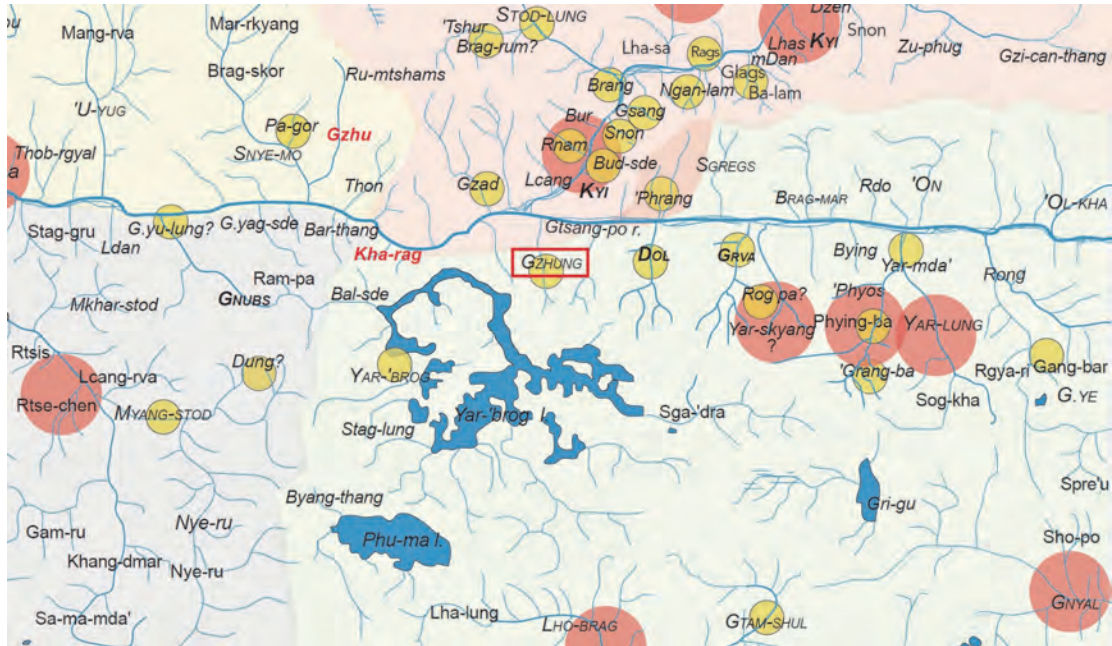


Fig. 4: Grwa, Dol and Gzhung of the Upper Left Horn (G.yo ru stod); detail from *The districts of the four Horns* (Hazod 2009: 202, Map 6b; red circle = *stong sde*, yellow circle = *yul sde*; red box on map by M. Fermer).

*mdzad pa gzhung gi lugs/ stod du lugs btab nas gtsang po la spyang drangs pas 'khor bra (= gnyis) chab la shor/*

The temple of Dge rgyas is the legacy (*phyag ris*) of the 'Bro lady Khri Rgyal mo btsun, who was given the name Byang chub rje upon her ordination, [which she undertook] because she had no sons. After [an image of] Amitābha (Snang ba Mtha' yas), surrounded by a retinue of nine, had been casted (*lugs btab*) at Lugs stod of Gzhung, two of the retinue [figures] were lost to the water (*chab*) when being shipped (*spyang drangs*) over the Gtsang po. (trans. by author)

### 3.3. Imperial district

The *Bka' thang sde lnga* and the *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa* list Gzhung and Dol (old spelling: Dold) collectively as a territorial unit of the Left Horn province (Fig. 4).<sup>54</sup> The *Old Tibetan Annals* (i.e. PT 1288, IOL TIB J 750) note that the council site of Drib nag and the royal residences Zhur and Mar ma are in the Dol valley, and these have been approximately localised.<sup>55</sup> For Grwa (old

<sup>54</sup> *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 185, Gzhung and Dol are listed here under *G.yon ru'i yul gru bcu drug* (as above); *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 162.20–21, Gzhung is listed here under *G.yu ru'i yul dpon tshan bcu drug*. See also Hazod 2009: 205, 209, Table 2. Contrary to what Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423) state, Grwa, Dol and Gzhung are not listed as *stong sde* unit, but as administrative districts in the *Bka' thang sde lnga*.

<sup>55</sup> For Dold gyi Mar ma and Drib nag see Dotson 2009: 100, 113f., 242, 247; Hazod 2009: 215; also shown on maps on pp. 214 (Map 7.2) and 219 (Map 7.3); Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 173, fn. 423. For Zhur, a long side valley located in Dol, see Chapter 4 (below) and Dotson 2009: 103f., 244; Hazod 2009: 218. A place called Mar ma Gser stengs of Lower Dol figures in Gtsang pa rgya ras's biography; see *Deb ther*

spelling: Dra), the *Old Tibetan Annals* list the council sites of Dra'i Rtse gro, Dra Bye, Dra'i Gro pu and 'Dra'i Zar phu.<sup>56</sup> However, the *Annals* do not register any sites in Gzhung. In contrast to this relatively meagre information, the later sources yield more on the different family lines that inhabited the three valleys.

### 3.4. Lineage distribution

#### 3.4.1 The Zhang Sna nam

The Sna nam or Zhang Sna nam were one of the chief aristocratic families of the dynastic period. As the epithet *zhang* ("maternal uncle") implies, they belonged to the important family houses that provided heir-bearing queens to the Tibetan royal line. The family's original territory lay in Lower Stod lung (Stod lung smad), in the Central Horn (Dbu ru).<sup>57</sup> Several later historians claim that the Sna nam pa became the rulers of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. In his biography of Padmasambhava, Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552-1624) recounts that the three valleys were conferred on the Sna nam as compensation for the murder of the son of Khri Srong lde btsan's minister, Sna nam Zhang Rgyal tshan Lha snang.<sup>58</sup>

*Padma 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar* (ed. 2010), 65.10-12:

[...] *sras mu rug btsan po mtha' 'dul ba'i dmag la lo gsum thongs/ zhang gi bu'i stong la om bag gi wa chu nga byin/ rje 'bangs byin po bder chug zer bas thams cad dga' ste/ zhang gi bu stong la grwa dol gzhung gsum byin/ grwa dol gzhung gsum la rje med zer ba'i gnam yang de yin zer/*

The prince Mu rug btsan po was sent to war for three years [to] pacify the border [region] (*mtha' 'dul ba'i dmag*). As wergild (*stong*) [for the murder] of the son of the Zhang, [the Sna nam] were given the five? ([*l*]nga) irrigation canals of Om bag (?). Because [the Zhang (i.e. Rgyal tshan Lha snang) (?)] said that the general [populace] – lord and subjects – should rest at ease, everybody rejoiced.<sup>59</sup> The three [valleys of] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung were conferred

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*sngon po*: vol. 2, 782.19; Roerich 1996: 667. Gser stengs (of Mar ma) might correspond to present-day Gser thang/Gser theng village in the lower valley (geographical position: 29.276950, 91.089723), reported by several Dol natives. Ta'i si tu passed through Dol Mar ma on his way to Gtsang; *Po ti bse ru*: 122.15.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. respective references in Dotson 2009 and Hazod 2009; on Dra'i Rtse gro (Dotson 2009: 127f., 253; Hazod 2009: 215), Dra bye (Dotson 2009: 124; Hazod 2009: 215, 220, Map 7.4), Dra'i Gro pu (Dotson 2009: 98f., 110, 242, 247; Hazod 2009: 215, 220, Map 7.4), 'Dra'i Zar phu (Dotson 2009: 111, 247; Hazod 2009: 215, 222, Map 7.7).

<sup>57</sup> Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 30f., 75, fn. 11, 564.

<sup>58</sup> Sna nam Zhang Rgyal tshan/tsha Lha snang (d. 796) was one of the four ministers of the Sna nam family who reigned from 783-96 under Khri Srong lde btsan; Hazod 2019: 110. On him, see also Sørensen 1994: 387, fn. 1302. The name of his murdered son was 'U rings.

<sup>59</sup> I.e. Wergild is paid out, and Zhang Rgyal tshan Lha snang agrees with this compensation and therefore proclaims (*zer*) that the people can remain at peace. No further retaliation will take place.

as retribution for the Zhang son. The saying “There is no ruler for the trio Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung” also expresses this.<sup>60</sup> (trans. by author)

This incident is also recounted by Gter bdag Gling pa (1646-1714) in his autobiography, where he notes that the Sna nam received control over the three valleys as compensation for Mu rug btsan po's (r. 800-02; var. Mu rug brtsan) murder of Zhang Sna snam's son (i.e. 'U rings).<sup>61</sup> This passage also points to later affinal relations between the Sna snam and the Gnyos lineage from which Gter bdag Gling pa hailed.

*Gter bdag gling pa'i rnam thar* (ed. 1982), 32.2-4:

*de'i tshe sngon lha sras mu rug btsan pos zhang sna nam gyi bu bkum pa'i zhal lce 'gos rgan gyis bcad de grwa dol gzhung gsum gyi bdag por dbang ba'i zhang gi stobs 'byor rnams kyang bags kyis bri zhing khyad par brgyud mtha' rdzogs pa na/ gong ma'i zhal tas smyos grags rgyal gyi sras jo 'bum dpal gyis zhang gi sar sku mag tu byon pa [...]*

At the time when the powerful and prosperous [rulers] (*stobs 'byor rnams*) of the Zhang [Sna nam] – [the family which], due to the 'Gos rgan's ('*gos rgan gyis*) adjudicating in the murder case of Zhang Sna nam's son by prince Mu rug btsan po, [came to] rule as the lords of the three [valleys] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung – had gradually declined and the [family] line came to an end, Jo 'bum dpal (ca. 14<sup>th</sup> cent.), the son of Smyos (i.e., Gnyos) Grags rgyal, by the order of the [Phag mo gru pa] sovereign (*gong ma*), went as bridegroom to the Zhang territory [...] (trans. by author)

The post-dynastic presence of the Sna nam pa in the region is also attested to by 'Gos lo tsā ba (1392-1481) and Dpa' bo Gtsug lag Phreng ba (1504-1564/66), who recount that Grwa pa Mngon shes (1012-1090) built the Grwa thang temple in Lower Grwa at the border of the Sna [nam] and Shud [phu] territories.<sup>62</sup> Grags pa Smon lam Blo gros (13<sup>th</sup> cent.) and Mkhas pa lde'u (13<sup>th</sup> cent.),

<sup>60</sup> This phrase may be understood in two different ways: There was no ruler for the three valleys due to the loss of the land to the Sna nam, or alternatively, due to the murder of Zhang Rgyal tshan Lha snang's legitimate heir.

<sup>61</sup> This information from Gter bdag gling pa's autobiography has been incorporated into later Rnying ma histories; see O rgyan chos kyis grags pa (b. 1676), *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 267a4-6: *de'i sras jo 'bum dpal la gong ma'i zhal tas/ sngon lha sras mu rub btsan pos gra dol gzhung gsum gyi bdag por dbang bar byas pa'i zhang rnam snang gi sar sku dmag tu byon pa las [...]*. *Gu ru bkra shis chos 'byung*, vol. 2, 312.20-313.1: *de'i sras jo 'bum dpal la gong ma'i zhal tas/ sngon lha sras mu rub btsan pos gra dol gzhung gsum gyi bdag po byas pa'i zhang sna snam gyi sku mag tu [313] byon pa las [...]*. This claim has been referred to by Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423). For more details on the figure of Mu rub btsan po, the murder of the Zhang son and further references see Hazod 2019: 95, 98-100.

<sup>62</sup> *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 1, 126.18-19 (Roerich 1996: 96), 105.8-11: *yongs kyis dge ba'i bshes gnyen grwa pa mngon shes kyis sna shud gnyis kyis so mtshams su bzhangs pa'i gtsug lag khang / lha khang gis khyad par du 'phags pa grwa thang yin no/* (Translation in Roerich 1996: 77); also *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 474.1: *rna shud (= sna shud) kyis so mtshams su gnod sbyin gyis lung bstan ste gra thang brtsigs [...]*; see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 76f., fn. 15, 660 (ivb). The bordering territories, one can assume, facilitated affinal bounds between the two families; cf. *ibid.*: 31, 77, fn. 15.

on the other hand, report that the chief minister (*blon chen*) Sna nam Rgyal tshan Lha snang (r. 783-796) already had a temple in Grwa (var. Gra; old spellings: Dra, Drwa) during the imperial period.

*Sngon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba* (Uebach 1987), 114 (f. 13b2-3):

*sna nam rgya tsha lha snang gis: gra'i lha khang bzhengs:*

Sna nam Rgya tsha Lha snang built the temple of Gra.<sup>63</sup> (trans. by author)

*Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa* (ed. 2013), 186.19:

[...] *sna nam gyis dwa'i lha khang* / [...]

[...] [The] Sna nam [built] the temple of Dwa (= Dra/Drwa) [...]. (trans. by author)

According to Hazod (2019: 95), the unnamed dynastic temple associated with Rgya tsha Lha snang can probably be linked to the ancient site of Gtsang grong in Grwa phyi (Ch. 扎其乡, Zhāqí xiāng) or to the Grwa thang temple in present-day Grwa nang (Ch. 扎囊县; Zhānáng xiàn). At present-day Gtsang grong (Ch. 藏冲, Zàng chōng), a stone stele (*rdo ring*) from the late imperial period has been preserved.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, the *Padma bka' thang* links Grwa pa Mngon shes's most famous temple in Lower Grwa to an earlier sanctuary, which had reportedly been erected by a king.

*Padma bka' thang* (ed. 1996), canto 92, 563.1-4:

[...] *gter ston gra pa mngon shes bya ba 'byung: sa steng gnas gzhi brgya dang rtsa brgyad 'gengs: gro mda' (= gra mda') 'di la gtsug lag khang zhig 'byung: rgyal pos bzhengs pa'i lha khang bdag po byed:*

[...] one with the name Gter ston Gra pa Mngon shes will appear, [who] will cover ('gengs) the earth with 108 sacred foundations (*gnas gzhi*). At Lower Gra, a *vihāra* will emerge [and] [he] will take over (*bdag po byed*) the temple erected by [a] king. (trans. by author)

Taking this prophecy at face value would rule out the identification of the temple of the Sna nam chief minister with the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Grwa thang temple. Interestingly, the anonymous king referred to in the *Padma bka' thang* is identified in Khams smyon Dharma seng ge's *Zhi byed History* as the legendary figure of Khyi kha Ra thod. This source reports that Khri Srong lde'u btsan's son Khyi kha Ra thod had built a *vihāra* at Grwa thang in Lower Grwa, the site where Grwa pa Mngon shes later erected a temple due to his auspicious mastery (*sgrub pa'i rten 'brel*) in the practice of

<sup>63</sup> For an alternative translation see Uebach 1987: 115; cf. also Hazod 2019: 95, 97.

<sup>64</sup> See Richardson 1985: 155. The Gtsang grong Rdo rings is preserved in a small temple courtyard at the following geographical coordinates: 29.247074, 91.388049. On the imperial inscription pillar at Gtsang grong, see Sha bo Kha' byams, *Grwa phyi gtsang grong rdo ring dang de'i da lta'i gnas stangs skor gleng ba*, *TsanPo.com* (*Btsan po dra ba*), posted 30.10.2020; URL: <https://www.tsanpo.com/forum/32843.html>, accessed 12.11.2020 (website down when this article went to press) and the references quoted there. Sha bo Kha' byams understands "Gtsang grong" literally as referring to its close proximity to the Gtsang po river: *rdo ring 'di [...] grwa phyi gtsang 'gram grong tshor 'dug cing [...]*. The village is said to have previously accommodated an estate called Gtsang grong gzhis ka; personal communication with Grwa phyi native, winter 2012/13. I wonder whether Gtsang grong might be phonetically linked to Rtse gro, the royal assembly site in Dra (i.e. Grwa) where the minister Mang pho rje, Zhang 'bring rtsan and others convened the winter council in 747/748 (Dotson 2009: 127f., 253; Hazod 2009: 215).



Rakta Jambhala (Dzam dmar).<sup>65</sup> Note that prince Khyi kha Ra thod's mother, the queen Tshe spong bza' Dmar rgyan, is also associated with Lower Gra Gzhung in a treasure text revealed by Padma gling pa (1450-1521).<sup>66</sup>

Whatever the case, Hazod (*op. cit.*, p. 95) concludes that Rgyal tshan Lha snang's founding of a Buddhist temple in the Grwa region "confirmed (or extended) the former estates of the [Sna nam] lineage" in this pivotal valley.



Fig. 5: Grwa thang monastery in Lower Grwa, as seen from Byams pa gling. (Photo: Edmund Geer, April 1939; German Federal Archive, Bild 135-GA-2-02-30, detail)

<sup>65</sup> *Zhi byed chos 'byung* (late-19<sup>th</sup> century), 492.5-493.1: *khyad par grwa mda'i gtsug lag khang ni shrī ko ṇa sthā la ste dpal grwa thang du 'bod pa sa gzhi la chos rgyal khri srong lde'u btsan gyi sras/ bzhi mi legs par khyi kha ra thod du grags pas bzhengs pa'i gtsug lag khang byang gi sa phug tu dzam dmar sgrub pa'i* [493] *rtēn 'brel gyis lha khang bzhengs/* (Translation in Kollmar-Paulenz 1993: 161). On the ancient Vairocana image housed at Grwa thang see Sørensen 1994: 495; see also *Zhi byed chos 'byung*, 493.3: *rtēn khyad par ba yang rnam snang blugs mal*; cf. also Kollmar-Paulenz 1993: 162. The same source mentions another temple with the name Rgyal gyi lha khang Gra'i rdo 'phrang in the vicinity or temple complex (?); see *ibid.*: 140 and *Zhi byed chos 'byung*: 455.6-456.1, here *rgyal gyi lha khang gra'i rdo 'phrang la byon 'ongs pa* [...].

<sup>66</sup> According to this source, she was exiled to Lower Gra Gzhung of Gtsang po Yar rgyab for the murder of Mu khri btsan po, the son of the king's consort, Mendhe bzang mo (?). Here, Dmar rgyan is said to have founded the temple of Sgra tshad, the consecration of which Śāntarakṣita was invited to. See Aris 1979: 66, 303 (*Sbas yul mkhan pa ljongs kyi gnas yig padma gling pa'i gter ma*, f. 4b): *de dus rgyal po'i btsun mo mendhe bzang mo la 'khrungs pa'i sras mu khri btsan po la rgyal srid gtad pas dmar rgyan gyis phrag dog byas te gsol gyis bkrongs pas + rgyal po mya ngan gyis non + dmar rgyan la chad pa phab ste + gtsang po yar rgyab gra gzhung gi mdar yul bton pas + dmar rgyan gyis sgra tshad kyi gtsug lag khang bzhengs + rab gnas la mkhan po zhi ba 'tsho spyān drangs + dmar rgyan gyis phyi mjug bka' gdams ma gtogs gsang sngags mi dar ba'i smon lam btāb bo +*. See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423, the authors suggest reading "Grwa tshad" for Sgra tshad.

He further suggests that the large, central mound of the Gser khung field in Grwa (late 8<sup>th</sup>/early 9<sup>th</sup> cent., 70-80m; M-1 of TTT 0047) might be the elite tomb of the Sna nam chief minister (*op. cit.*, 95, 97; see also 148f., Fig. 58). This is supported by the historic claim that the Sna nam family held sway over the Yar rgyang<sup>67</sup> thousand-district (*stong sde*), which can likely be identified with the Yar skyang of modern maps.<sup>68</sup> Located in the Left Horn to the south-east of present-day Grwa nang, the Yar rgyang *stong sde* was likely centred around the larger Grwa region (i.e. Grwa and Grwa phyi).<sup>69</sup> Yar rgyang, one could speculate, might have orthographically changed into Yar rgyab, as Yamaguchi and Hazod have suggested.<sup>70</sup> By around the late fourteenth century, Grwa became the headquarters of the Yar rgyab ruling house, who claimed descent from Thon mi Sam bho ʼta (7<sup>th</sup> cent.) and controlled a large territory on the southern banks of the Gtsang po.<sup>71</sup> The region's longstanding territorial links to the Sna nam lineage might explain how the three valleys had, prior to the Yar rgyab pa, come under the control of the Tshal pa rulers in the 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Tshal pa founder, Gung thang Bla ma zhang (1123-93), after all, had himself been born into the renowned Sna nam line.<sup>72</sup>

### 3.4.2 The Shud pu<sup>73</sup>

The Shud pu, who shared a border at Grwa with the Sna nam in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, are already registered in the region in the late imperial period. The family's ancestral origin appears to have

<sup>67</sup> *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 163.10 (here Yar rgyang), 164.24 (here Yar rgyangs); see also Uebach 1987: 21, 52f. (f. 2a4), here Yar rkyangs, also G.yar skyang (*ibid.*: 52, fn. 145); Hazod 2009: 205 (here Yar rgyang, Yar rkyangs, Yar skyang), 208, Table 1: *The Ru-bzhi stong-sde Lists*; Fermer 2017: 80f., fn. 57.

<sup>68</sup> Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 12, Sat-Map 1, here Yar skyang. Map no. 2991 of the Tibet Map Institute (Serie 90, Edition July 2009) locates “Yarkyang” in the western part of Upper Grwa phyi; see URL: <http://www.tibetmap.com/2991o150.jpg>, accessed: 11.04.2011; this map is archived by Wayback Machine; see URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160315125651/http://www.tibetmap.com/2991o150.jpg>, accessed: 02.06.2021). The TAR map of 1981 (i.e. *Bod rang skyong ljongs srid 'dzin sa khul gyi sa kra*) gives the name Yar skyar (*sic!*) in the Upper Grwa phyi valley. It should be noted that Gtsug lag Phreng ba (*Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 188.7) has Yar mtshams; see also Ryavec 2015: Map 12, here Yartsam; Hazod 2009: 205, 208. The *Blon po bka'i thang* reads *Ljang kyang lung pa gnyis po* for the two thousand-districts under the Myang and Sna nam; see *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 439.12-13; cf. also Hazod 2009: 208.

<sup>69</sup> As a side note, there is a village with the name Btsan yul (Ch. 赞隅, Zàn yú; geographical position: 29.188731, 91.343879) registered in Rgyal gling shang (Ch. 吉林村, Jílín cūn) of Grwa nang, see also *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 71.8.

<sup>70</sup> Yamaguchi 1995: 102 and Hazod 2009: 205; see also Fermer 2017: 80f., fn. 57; Hazod 2019: 95.

<sup>71</sup> See Fermer 2017: 67, Fig. 2.

<sup>72</sup> See Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 30, 564, 171, fn. 423. As has been mentioned in Chapter 2, Grwa, Dol and Gzhung constituted individual “lay communities” (*mi sde*, i.e. taxable estates/units) of the Tshal pa myriarchy (*khri skor*) during the Phag mo gru pa supremacy. See *Gung thang dkar chag*, in Sørensen and Hazod 2007: Appendix vi.1, f. 31b1, here *Gra dol gzhung gsum*; see also 171, fn. 423 and Map 1 (*The mi sde units of the Tshal-pa territory*), nos. 26-28.

<sup>73</sup> Registered orthographic variants include Shud phu, Shud bu, Shul pu, Shul phu, Shul phul, Shod bu.

been Yar 'brog<sup>74</sup> or Lho brag.<sup>75</sup> According to the Shud pu genealogy included in the biography of Lho brag Grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1326-1402), a family branch headed by Shud phu Bsod nams seng ge is said to have governed the valley trio of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

*Phyi'i nram thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa* (ed. 1985), 648.2-3:

*shud phu dpal gyi sengge'i sras/ shud phu bsod nams sengge dang / chos kyi sengge gnyis  
'khrungs/ bsod nams sengge ni/ grwa dol gzhung gsum gyi rje dpon mdzad/ srid pa ma mo'i  
grub pa thob/ rgyal khams la dbang sgyur/ dbang stobs dang ldan pa gcig byon/*

The two, Shud phu Bsod nams Seng ge and Chos kyi seng ge, were born [as] the sons of Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge. Bsod nams Seng ge acted as local ruler (*rje dpon*) of the trio [of] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung. [He] gained accomplishment in [the practice of] Srid pa Ma mo, governed the realm [and] appeared as a [man] of power.<sup>76</sup> (trans. by author)

Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge (late 8<sup>th</sup> cent.), who typically figures among Padmasambhava's twenty-five disciples (*rje 'bangs nyer lnga*),<sup>77</sup> is registered as a religious minister (*chos blon*) under emperor Khri Srong lde btsan (742-c. 800). Several alternative monikers of his are registered in the text cited above: Khri 'gri Thog btsan/rtsan, Khri 'bring Thog btsan and Shud phu Khong leb.<sup>78</sup> If Khri 'bring Thog btsan (one of Dpal gyi seng ge's monikers) is in fact the same name as Shud pu Khri 'bring Khong btsan, thus the Lde'u chronicles, he served together with Sna nam Rgyal mtshan Lha snang and Lde sman Gur bzher Lde chung as a principal minister of Mu ne Brtsan po (r. ca. 797-98).<sup>79</sup>

Interestingly, the Shud phu genealogy places Dpal gyi seng ge's miraculous activities in the immediate vicinity of Grwa. At the Gtsang po river around Yar rgyab, the text recounts, the accomplished yogin jabbed a ritual dagger into the ground and caused the river to separate into two streams for seven days.<sup>80</sup> One may wonder whether the unidentified temple of Brag sna, whose

<sup>74</sup> *Phyi'i nram thar bdud rtsi phreng ba*, 2.5-3.1: *che ba rje gnya' khri btsan po bya ba cig yod pa de spyang drangs [3] mgo nag yongs kyi rgyal po mdzad pa yin/ chung ba de shud phu ba'i pho lhar byon te yar 'brog dgra lha yin/*; see also *Phyi'i nram thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*: 645.2, here Yar 'brog sba tshal kha; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 76, fn. 15; Hazod 2013: 99.

<sup>75</sup> In the aftermath of the *kheng log* uprisings, the Shud pu are said to have gained foothold at Gtam shul in Lho brag for which there seem to have existed earlier, imperial (?) links; see *Phyi'i nram thar bdud rtsi phreng ba*: 4 (cited below) and *Phyi'i nram thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*: 648 (cited below). See particularly Dotson 2012: 165, 167, 176f., 192f. and given references; cf. also Vitali 2004b: 116f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 76, fn. 15, 711, fn. 5; Hazod 2013: 99, 100, fn. 46; Hazod 2019: 68.

<sup>76</sup> For this passage see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423; Hazod 2013: 99.

<sup>77</sup> See Neumaier-Dargyay 1998: 34; cf. also *Bka' thang sde lnga*: 131f., here listed under *thugs kyi sras brgyad rje 'bangs bcas pa*.

<sup>78</sup> Shud pu Dpal gyi seng ge's life is briefly retold in *Phyi'i nram thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*: 646.2-648.2.

<sup>79</sup> *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 224.10-11; see also *Lde'u chos 'byung*: 133.6-7, here Rna nam Rgyal tsha lta snang (= Lha snang), Shud pu Khri 'bring Khong btsan and Lde sman Gung bzher lde chung; Hazod 2019: 99f.

<sup>80</sup> *Phyi'i nram thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*, 647.1-2: *rdo rje phur pa dang ma mo'i grub pa thob/ sgrub rtags su phur pa yar rgyab kyi gtsang po la btab pas/ chu yan man du chad pa zhag bdun byung / brag la*

founding is ascribed to Dpal gyi seng ge, might have been located within the territory controlled by his son Shud phu Bsod nams Seng ge (i.e. Grwa, Dol and Gzhung).<sup>81</sup> In the 9<sup>th</sup> century the family branch seems to have abandoned their land in Grwa and returned to former Shud pu territory in Lho brag where they settled at a place called Gnam thang. The short genealogical sketch in Lho brag Grub chen's biography contextualises this event in the (third or) fourth generation after Dpal gyi seng ge at the outbreak of the G.yo ru revolt (*kheng log*).

*Phyi'i rnam thar bdud rtsi phreng ba* (ed. 1985), 4.2-4:

*shud phu dpal gyi seng ge nas mi rabs bzhi na grwa yi ru rje la 'kheng log byung nas/ tshur byon nas yugs nags su yod pas / rtsangs dkar phu nas gzigs pas / gnam mthong ba ma gi ru yul 'debs gsungs/ gnam thang du chags phab yul btab/ rim pa bzhi du yul bcas pa yin par gda' /*

In the fourth generation after Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge, after the civil revolt (*'kheng log*) had emerged against the local ruler (*ru rje*) of Grwa, [Shud phu Zla ba'i seng ge] went back to [the family's former territory.] While at Yugs nags, as [he] looked down from Upper Rtsangs dkar, [he] said: "Let's establish [our] land down there, where [we can] see the sky". [He] went downhill (*chags phab*) to Gnam thang and founded a land (*yul*). There [they] dwelled (*gda*'), gradually restoring [their former] land.<sup>82</sup> (trans. by author)

Another indication for the Shud pu's presence in or around Grwa is a marriage alliance registered with the Rngog, who held land there around the same time. Rngog Btsan gnya' (8<sup>th</sup> cent.), a mighty warrior who had served the emperor Khri Srong lde btsan, took as a bride a Shud pu lady, who subsequently gave birth to his heir Rngog Brtsan pa rin po che.<sup>83</sup> In contrast to claims of the clan's

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*btab pas brag ral ba la sogs byung / sgrub rtags khyad par can mang du byung /*. The condensed passage in *Phyi'i rnam thar bdud rtsi phreng ba* (4.1-2) reads Ngam shod for Yar rgyab: *rdo rje phur pa dang / ma mo'i grub pa thob nas / phur pa ngam shod chu la btab pas chu yas man* {gloss: *du*} *chad pa byung /*.

<sup>81</sup> On the dynastic Brag sna'i lha khang; cf. Uebach 1987: 114f. (f. 13b2); *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 186.19.

<sup>82</sup> For an alternative translation of the passage see Vitali 2004a: 9, fn. 9. Compare the cited passage with the section on Shud phu Zla ba'i seng ge's life in *Phyi'i rnam thar gdung rabs dang bcas pa*, 648.4-5: *de nas bra yer* (= *grwa yi* ?) *khen log* (= *kheng log*) *byung nas/ gam lha pho dguś gdan drangs/ yugs rtsang dkar gyi phu na phebs/ yugs nags su yod pas/ gnam mthong pa'i thang ma gir yul byed zer/ gnam mthong bzung zhing lung pa dang rigs rgyud mang du dar rol/*.

<sup>83</sup> *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 3a5: *jo mo shud bu bza' blangs: de'i sras rngog brtsan pa* {gloss: *rnam thang du babs:*} *rin po che bya ba lags:*; see also below and Ducher 2017: 212, 375f. The daughter of Rngog Btsan gnya' was given as a bride to 'Chims G.yu ber; see *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*: 3a5, here 'Phyims G.yu ber; *Rngog pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 3a8, here 'Chims G.yu ber. Though not further addressed in this paper, affinal relationships between other dynastic families in the region can be assumed.



resettlement to Lho brag following the *kheng log* uprisings, another source seems to suggest that a branch of the Shud pu had remained in the region.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.4.3 The Mchims

Gter ston Grwa pa Mngon shes, the founder of the aforementioned Grwa thang temple, is considered an incarnation of Shud phu Dpal gyi seng ge by some later Rnying ma historians.<sup>85</sup> With regard to his biological descent, these and other sources state that the master was born into the family line of Khri Srong lde btsan's chief minister Mchims Rdo rje Spre chung (8<sup>th</sup> cent.), on the central plains of Grwa at Skyid ru<sup>86</sup> (var. Skyid, Skyi ru, Dkyil ru).<sup>87</sup> Rdo rje Spre chung from the mighty lineage of the Mchims<sup>88</sup> (var. 'Chims) is credited for founding the temple of Bya 'ug (Bya 'ug gi lha khang) which, according to later hagiographies, might have been located in the Grwa region.<sup>89</sup> 'Gos lo tsā ba's history is the earliest source to mention Grwa pa Mngon shes's descent from this branch of the Mchims that had settled in Grwa at an unknown time.

*Deb ther sngon po* (ed. 1984), vol. 1, 124.12-16:

*khri srong lde btsan gyi blon po mchims rdo rje spre chung zhes bya ba/ nor ha cang mi che  
yang shes rab che zhing smra mkhas pas rgyal po dgyes pa zhig byung / des bsam yas kyi  
mchod rten sngon po dang byang chub gling gong bzhengs/ de la bu gsum las 'bring po lhar  
chos grwa'i skyid ru gzung /*

<sup>84</sup> For the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a military conflict between the Sna and Shud families (*sna shud kyi 'khrug pa langs*) is reported, probably referring to the area in question (i.e. Grwa); see *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 149.16-17; cf. also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 240.

<sup>85</sup> Neumaier-Dargyay 1998: 95; Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 753.

<sup>86</sup> According to Grwa nang natives, Skyid ru (Ch. 吉汝村, Jí rǔ cūn) is located in present-day Grwa nang rdzong (Ch. 扎囊县, Zānáng xiàn; geographical position: 29.133943, 91.307450); personal communication with Grwa nang natives, 2012, 2021. Skyid ru temple, another sanctuary founded by Grwa pa Mngon shes, can be localized at the centre of the village at the geographical position 29.133714, 91.306672; communication with Grwa nang native, 02.2021.

<sup>87</sup> *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i nyi ma*, 157b2-5: *dge bshes gra pa mngon shes ni/ khri srong lde'u btsan gyi blon po 'chims rdo rje spre chung zhes bya ba shes rab che zhing smra mkhas pas rgyal po dgyes pa zhig byung/ des bsam yas mchod rten sngon po dang byang chub gling gong bzhengs/ de la bu gsum las 'bring po lhar rjes grwa'i skyid ru bzung/ de nas brgyud pa lnga'i bar mchims su 'bod/ lnga pa zhang se tsha logs brtan nas zhang du 'bod/ Zhi byed chos 'byung*: 484.3-4, here *grwa'i dkyil ru na yab kyi cho rigs zhang stag dkar zhes pa [...]* la bltams te [...]; see also Neumaier-Dargyay 1998: 95; Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 753.

<sup>88</sup> Mchims Rdo rje spre chung (var. 'Chims Rdo rje Spre chung) is counted one of the four ministers from the Mchims family; cf. Sørensen 1994: 388, fn. 306. The Mchims were another of the four so-called *zhang* families who provided the emperors with queens to produce heirs.

<sup>89</sup> The temple founding is recorded in Nel pa paṇḍita's chronicle, see Uebach 1987: 114f. (f. 13b3): *'chims rdo rje spre chung gyis: bya 'ug gi lha khang bzhengs*; see also *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*, 186.20, here *Bya zug lha khang*; Sørensen 1994: 388, fn. 306. The dynastic temple might be linked to Klong chen pa who extensively dwelt in the Grwa region in the fourteenth century; cf., for example, *Klong chen pa'i rnam thar*, 182.15-17: *bya 'ug lha khang du mgon po phyag bzhi pa/ rdo rje bdud 'dul/ dge bsnyen nyer gcig gzigs so/*. A possible relation to Bya 'ug sa tshigs (var. Bya 'ugs sa tshigs), the territory under the Drang rje Pha lha, has been noticed in Hazod 2009: 193.

[There] appeared [a man] called Mchims Rdo rje Spre chung, Khri Srong lde btsan's minister, who, though not very great in wealth, pleased the king with his great intellect and eloquence (*smra mkhas pa*). He (*de*) built the blue *stūpa* of Bsam yas and the upper (*gong*) [branch of] Byang chub gling. Lhar cho,<sup>90</sup> the middle of [his] three sons, took hold of (*gzung*) Skyid ru of Grwa.<sup>91</sup> (trans. by author)

Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho (1653-1705) records his name as Lha rje and states that he governed Gra Dags po grong, which is also known as Skyi ru (i.e. Skyid ru).<sup>92</sup> In around the late 9<sup>th</sup> or early 10<sup>th</sup> century the family's name is said to have changed from Mchims to Zhang,<sup>93</sup> which may be explained by the Mchims's earlier role as bride-givers (*zhang*) or by the affinal relations that might have existed with the Zhang Sna nam active in the region.<sup>94</sup> In the wake of the uprisings (*kheng log*), the Mchims gained new principalities in Yar lung stod, while their ancestral homeland has been localised in the eastern part of the Left Horn, in the Skyems stong district, east of Dwags po. In this area, at the hill behind Slebs Village, one of Tibet's largest imperial burial mound field is found, a site associated with the Mchims family (or Mchims rgyal) that has more than 200 mound graves (10m-80m; TTT 0092, 0093; see Hazod 2019: 85-92).<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> An old block print of 'Gos lo's *Blue Annals* seems to read Lhar che (?); see BDRC: W3CN15333, *kha* 14b2.

<sup>91</sup> For an alternative translation see Roerich 1996: 94-95. The Mchims branch at Grwa, who claim genealogical origins from Rdo rje Spre chung's son, is discussed in Hazod 2019: 98.

<sup>92</sup> Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho, *Gso ba rig pa'i khog 'bugs bai dūrya'i me long*, 126.17-20: *chos rgyal khri srong lde'u btsan gyi blon po mchims rdo rje spre chung zhes bya ba nor ha cang mi che yang shes rab dang ldan zhing smra mkhas pas rje'i thugs zin pa zhig byung ste/ bsam yas kyi mchod rten sngon po sogs bzhengs pa'i lag dpon mdzad/ de la sras gsum las/ 'bring po lha rjes gra dags po grong ngam skyi ru bzung /*.

<sup>93</sup> *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 1, 125.1-2: *de yan du mchims nas 'bod/ se tsha nas zhang du 'bod/; Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 473.4: *mchims rdo rje spre chung gi rgyud pa yin la bar? cig nas zhang du 'bod/*.

<sup>94</sup> Hazod (2019: 85) notes on their role as bride-givers for the royal line: "The position of *zhang*, heir-bearing lineage, was once again attributed to them in the early eighth century (Khri Lde gtsug brtsan's mother was Mchims), which resulted in the altered name of "Mchims zhang" (also "Zhang Mchims"), an addition that seems to have been common since the 'Bro zhang of the early eighth century [...]"

<sup>95</sup> Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 609, fn. 70; Hazod 2009: 173f., 175, 198 (Map 5), 203 (Map 6c); Dotson 2012: 190f.; Hazod 2019: 89-92; Hazod 2013: 90, fn. 14: "The core area of mChims, the ancient territory of the mChims-rgyal dynasty, corresponds to present-day sKyems-stong, the district at the border between Dvags-po and traditional (Lower) Kong-po, and according to this location it is variously given in the sources as Dvags mChims or Kong mChims."

3.4.4 The Sbal ti<sup>96</sup>

Yet another post-dynastic history claims that a branch of the Sbal ti family ruled over the three valleys in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The monastic history of Skyor mo lung,<sup>97</sup> compiled in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, claims that Grwa, Dol and Gzhung were granted to three brothers from the Sbal ti lineage as a reward for their military accomplishments.<sup>98</sup> Seng ge Gung btsan, having apparently returned successfully from war, was given authority over Gzhung, where he and his descendants settled.

*Skyor lung chos 'byung* (ed. 2007), 149 (f. 13ab):

*de dag gi bdag rkyen du gung [13b] btsan sku mched gsum la grwa dol gzhung gsum gnang / de yang seng ge gung btsan gyis gzhung / stag gung btsan gyis dol/ gzig gung btsan gyis bzang yul bzung nas bzhugs so/*

The three Gung btsan brothers (*gung btsan sku mched gsum*) were given the three [valleys of] Grwa, Dol [and] Gzhung as a reward (*bdag rkyen*) for those [military achievements] (*de dag*). Indeed, Seng ge Gung btsan took control of (*bzung*) Gzhung, Stag Gung btsan of Dol [and] Gzig Gung btsan of Bzang yul<sup>99</sup> (i.e. Grwa?) and [they] settled [there]. (trans. by author)

Earlier in the text, it says that the three sons of Sbal ti Dge ba rgyal mtshan, referred to as Gung btsan spun gsum and Gung btsan gsum, served as commanders during a military campaign against China and Mongolia, which was led by Khri Srong lde'u btsan's son, the prince Mi khri btsan po (i.e. Mu khri btsan po / Mu tig btsan po).<sup>100</sup> Under Seng ge Gung btsan, a branch of the Sbal ti settled in Gzhung, where the family appears to have retained territory even after the empire's decline. The founder of Skyor mo lung, Dgra bcom pa (1129-1215) of the Sbal ti clan, was born at Shel dkar in Upper Gzhung,<sup>101</sup> and took ordination at Nya mo skyur in the lower valley.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Registered orthographic variants include 'Bal ti and Wal ti. According to Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423, 697, fn. 11) the name Sbal ti may historically associated with the Dpal sde area located west of the Yar 'brog. See also Uebach 1987: 79, here Yar 'brog Sbal pa; Hazod 2009: 172, 215; Hazod 2019: 73f.

<sup>97</sup> The monastic institution in Stod lung was headed by the Sbal ti family members until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 689.

<sup>98</sup> *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 149 (ff. 12a-13a); see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423, 697, fn. 11; Hazod 2019: 98. The conferment of the valley trio to the Sbal ti family is also retold in Bshes gnyen Tshul khriims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan*: 250f.

<sup>99</sup> Bzang yul seems to refer to (a place in) the Grwa region. A place with the name Zangs yul (Ch. 桑玉村, Sāng yù cūn) can be found 10km to the west of Grwa nang (geographical coordinates: 29.236871, 91.221227); personal communication with Lce bde zhol native, 07.2015.

<sup>100</sup> *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 149 (ff. 12ab); see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 171, fn. 423; Hazod 2019: 98.

<sup>101</sup> *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 148f. (ff. 12a, 14a). Bshes gnyen Tshul khriims (*Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan*: 251) summarizes that Sbal ti Dgra bcom pa descended into the Sbal ti lineage at Shel dkar of Gzhung, which had earlier been conferred to Seng ge gung btsan. Rnam rab Ngag dbang thub bstan (*Rnam rab guide*: 185) locates Shel dkar lung pa in the Upper Gzhung valley.

<sup>102</sup> *Skyor lung chos 'byung*: 149 (f. 14a). Sbal ti Dgra bcom pa took ordination from a certain Rgya Nya mo skyur pa, a disciple of Gsal ba Shes rab who apparently headed Nya mo skyur during the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century; see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 690.

### 3.4.5 The Gnyos<sup>103</sup>

Two chronicles of the Gnyos report that a family member migrated to G.yor po in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century, where the family subsequently obtained territory on the southern Gtsang po banks at Gzhung and Kha rag. The Gnyos is another important lineage that reportedly hailed from Skyid shod near Lha sa. From here, the lineage split into several sub-branches and settled in different Central Tibetan regions and beyond.<sup>104</sup> The Gnyos genealogies, a fifteenth-century work (compiled in 1431) and a more recent, nineteenth-century work, recount these events in the following manner:

*Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs* (ed. 1978), 4.5-5.2:

*che shos rta mkhar rje rdzings du bcas nas chab kyi gzhung la byon/ yul gyi gzhung gcig 'tshol [5] zos nas g.yor po gzhung du byon/ de la sras thug ge dang / zheng gnyis zheng nges g.yor stod zhal gyi srin mo gung mkhar du byon/ kha rag dang 'grang sil bzung /*

The eldest [son], Rta mkhar Rje, travelled along the river stream (i.e., the Skyid chu) by boat (*rdzings du bcas*).<sup>105</sup> Searching for a central (i.e. broad?) portion of land (*yul gyi gzhung*), he went to G.yor po Gzhung. From his two sons, Thug ge and Zheng [nge], Zheng nge went to Zhal gyi srin mo Gung mkhar of Upper G.yor (G.yor stod), where [he] took control of (*bzung*) Kha rag and 'Grang sil.<sup>106</sup> (trans. by author; *zos* (line 5.1) untranslated)

*'Brug gi smyos kyi gdung rabs* (ed. 1983), 66.1-9:

*dang po bkra mkhar rje ni/ chu la gzings bcas te g.yor mo'i gzhung du byon/ mgo nag gi rje bor khur zhing der bzhugs pa las/ sras smyos rabs lnga pa thugs rje dang zhang nge bcas spun gnyis byung / dang pos gzhung bzung bas smyos shan tsha ba rnams byung bar grags/ gnyis pas phyams g.yor stod zhal gyi khrims mo gur mkhar dang / 'brang sil kha rag rnams bzung bas kha rag gi smyos zhes grags pa rlung ltar khyab/*

The first [son], Bkra mkhar Rje, travelled by boat along the river to Gzhung of G.yor mo (= G.yor po). [He] took up the burden (*khur*) as ruler of the black-headed [people]<sup>107</sup> (*mgo nag*) and settled (*bzhugs pa*) there. For sons, [he] begat Thugs rje and Zhang nge, two brothers of the fifth Smyos generation. Because the first [son] governed Gzhung, [his family branch]

<sup>103</sup> Registered orthographic variants include Smyos, Snyos and Mnyos; also Kha rag Gnyos. The Gnyos clan is also counted as one of the sub-clans of the Dmu/Rmu; cf. Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 672, 674, fn. 2f.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 3ff.; see also Vitali 2004b: 133f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 415ff. The authors (*ibid.*: 416) resume: “[D]uring the fou[r]th generation counting from the common ancestor [...] the different lines ramified by gradually crossing [the] gTsang-po to spread out into g.Yor-po, into western lHo-kha and into the gTsang province itself [...]”. For a genealogical synopsis of the Gnyos family lineage see *ibid.*: 671-681. For later branches of the family line see *ibid.*: 681, Map 3 (*Main stations of the Gnyos clan settlement history*).

<sup>105</sup> *chab gyi gzhung la byon* means to travel downstream a river (in its middle) by boat (e.g. coracle), rather than to cross a river from one side to another; cf. with the meaning of *gzhung ko* in Krang dbyi sun 1985, s.v. *gzhung ko*: *chu bo'i gzhung du gtong ba'i ko ba*.

<sup>106</sup> For an alternative translation see Vitali 2004b: 133f., fn. 31. See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 672, 674, fn. 8f.

<sup>107</sup> This is a euphemism for “common people or subjects”; see Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 674, fn. 4.



became known as Smyos Sban tsha ba. Because the second governed Zhal gyi khriims mo Gur mkhar and 'Brang sil Kha rag of Upper G.yor (G.yor stod), [his family branch] became widely known as the Smyos of Kha rag. (trans. by author; *phyams* (line 66.6) untranslated)

Around the 8<sup>th</sup> century, in the fourth generation that descended from the Gnyos clan's heavenly ancestor (Bya thul dkar po), Rta mkhar Rje (var. Bkra mkhar Rje) left behind his homeland in the Central Horn and travelled downstream the Skyid chu river. He settled at Gzhung of the Left Horn (G.yor po) where his son Thug ge (var. Thugs rje) established the family lineage at Sban tsha. His second son Zheng nge (var. Zhang nge) moved further westwards to Kha rag (var. Mkha' reg) which became the Gnyos's future stronghold. It is due to this fact that they became known as the Kha rag Gnyos.<sup>108</sup> Rta mkhar Rje and his descendants, who became known as the Smyos Sban tsha ba, apparently settled near the southern Gtsang po shore at present-day Sban tsha village<sup>109</sup> (Ch. 变扎, Biàn zā/zhā/zhá) in the lower valley. This small settlement is known for a former government ferry station (Sban tse gru kha; functional up to the 1950s) and a small, two-story Kanjur temple with the name Sban tsha Bka' 'gyur lha khang.<sup>110</sup>



Fig. 6: The ancient Gnyos settlements of Sban tsha and Nya mo skyur of Lower Gzhung. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2005; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

<sup>108</sup> Vitali 2004b: 133f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 417.

<sup>109</sup> Geographical position: 29.290675, 90.945800; alternative spellings include Sban rtsa (*Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 44.4, 44.16), Ban tsa (*Rnam rab guide*: 191), Sban tse (Lange 2014: 80).

<sup>110</sup> Personal communication with Gzhung natives, winter 2012/13; see also *Rnam rab guide*: 191.3-12, here Ban tsa Bka' 'gyur lha khang. Prior to the 1950s, Sban tsha accommodated an estate building (*gzhis ka*) in the middle of the village; personal communication with a Rgyal grub gling native, 2012/13, 2015.

The Gnyos's presence in the surrounding area continued after the dissolution of the empire. According to various historical sources, 'Byung gnas Shes rab (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> cent.) of the Gnyos established several *vinaya* communities during the period of Buddhist revival. 'Byung gnas Shes rab was the elder brother of Gnyos lo tsa bā Yon tan grags (b. 973) and a disciple of Dbya' btsun Dkon mchog rgyal ba.<sup>111</sup> Drawing on the fifteenth-century Gnyos genealogy, Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 418) identify him "as the founding figure behind the establishment of up to thirteen further monastic 'Bring settlements, among them Khi-ldir of sKul and Nya-mo-skyur (~ 'gyur) of gZhung [...]".



Fig. 7: The ruin site of Nya mo skyur in Lower Gzhung. (Photo: Mathias Fermer 2010)

*Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs* (ed. 1978), 16.4-17.1:

*mnyos 'byung gnas shes rab ni/ [...] gzhan yang skul gyi khi ldir/ 'brog zad/ gzhung [17] nya mo skyur/ gzad sogs pa ri la sogs pa gnas gzhi bcu gsum gyi rmang bting /*

Mnyos 'Byung gnas shes rab [...] additionally laid the foundations (*rmang bting*) of thirteen sites (*gnas*), including Khi ldir (= Khe ldir) of Skul, 'Brog zad (= 'Brog bzad/gzad), Nya mo skyur of Gzhung and Gzad Sogs pa ri.<sup>112</sup> (trans. by author)

Gzhung Nya mo skyur<sup>113</sup> can probably be located in the Lower Gzhung valley at a place that is

<sup>111</sup> Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 418, 672, 675, fn. 12; Uebach 1987: 148f. (f. 22b, cited above). On him see *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 16.4-17.3; cf. also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 664 (IIIb).

<sup>112</sup> Remains unidentified.

<sup>113</sup> Registered orthographic variants are Nya mo gyur, Nya mo kyur, Nya mo skyur and the shortened form Nya skyur. On Nya mo gyur see *Rgya bod yig tshang*: 255.13, here Nya mo gur (*sic!*); *Deb ther dmar po*: 76.9 (here Nya mo kyur), 76.15 (here Gzhung Nya mo gyur). See also *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 23f., here Nya mo skyur lha khang. Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho traces its foundation

locally known by the name “Myang khyug” / “Nyan rgyud” (Ch. 念久, Niàn jiǔ),<sup>114</sup> a phonetic shortening of the original toponym. Today, the site features a small protector shrine dedicated to Rgyal po Li byin ha ra and the wall traces of a larger building (dimensions of the outer walls ca. 29x26m; geographical position: 29.291692, 90.939760).<sup>115</sup> Up to the 1950s, this site, located half a kilometre to the west of Sban tsha, constituted an estate (*gzhis kha*) with a protector chapel under the control of Gong dkar Chos sde.<sup>116</sup> While another fifteenth-century history ascribes the founding of Nya mo gyur to Rba Tshul khriims blo gros,<sup>117</sup> elders from Gzhung claim that the site originated as a border-suppressing temple (*mtha’ ’dul gyi gtsug lag khang gyi ya gyal*) from the imperial period.<sup>118</sup> Nel pa paṇḍita Grags pa Smon lam Blo gros (13<sup>th</sup> cent.) credits Gnyos ’Byung gnas Shes rab with the founding of another community in the Gzhung valley.

*Sngon gyi gtam me tog gi phreng ba* (Uebach 1987), 148 (f. 22b3-4):

*yang dbya’ rgyal ba’i mkhan bu: snyos ’byung shes rab kyis: [...] yang khe ldir nas gzhung gi skam bu’i gnas btat: de nas nya mo gyur btat:*

Yet [another] ordinand (*mkhan bu*) of Dbya’ [Dkon mchog] Rgyal ba, Snyos ’Byung Shes rab, [...] moreover founded Skam bu’i gnas of Gzhung from (i.e. as a branch of) Khe ldir.<sup>119</sup> Subsequently, [he] founded Nya mo gyur.<sup>120</sup> (trans. by author)

Evidently, the Gnyos were prominent *vinaya* proponents of the region with several *phyi dar* settlements (i.e. ’Bring tsho) in the Central and Left Horn provinces, namely at Gzad (var. Bzad) of

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back to Klu mes; cf. *Lnga pa chen po’i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8, 443.10, here *klu mes kyis gtsug lag khang skyid gshongs nya mo skyur*; cf. also *ibid.*: vol. 9, 357.14.

<sup>114</sup> Personal communication with Gzhung natives, 2010, winter 2012/13.

<sup>115</sup> Field visit, 2010; see also *Rngog chos brgyud pa’i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 24.

<sup>116</sup> Personal communication with a pre-1950 Gong dkar Chos sde monk from Rgyal grub gling, winter 2012/13; cf. also *Rngog chos brgyud pa’i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 24; Jackson 2015: 245, no. 8. The informant further explained that one Gong dkar Chos sde monk was permanently based at Nya mo skyur to be in charge of the rituals; personal communication, 2010, winter 2012/13.

<sup>117</sup> *Rgya bod yig tshang*, 236.20: *sbas kyis gzhung nya mo gyur dang / lan pa spyil bu btsigs/*; see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 665 (Ib-1), here Rba btsun Blo gros Dbang phyug (*sic!*).

<sup>118</sup> *Rnam rab guide*: 191.3-5; personal communication with Rnam rab zhol native, winter 2012/13. In addition to this, Sde srid Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho mentions in his supplemental volumes to the Fifth Dalai Lama’s autobiography a religious establishment in Rnam rab (i.e. Gzhung) with the name Zil gnon Bdud ’dul gling, which is most likely a reference to Nya mo skyur; see *Lnga pa chen po’i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8 (*nya*), 469.2-3: *rgyal grub gling sngags pa gnas chung pa gra slob dgu/ rnam rab zil gnon bdud ’dul gling du gra pa sum cu tham pa/*.

<sup>119</sup> Khe ldir can be localized in Skul, the short valley below Gong dkar fortress to the west of ’Phying ru (see citation below).

<sup>120</sup> For an alternative translation see Uebach 1987: 149. For a parallel text passage see the anonymous *Rgyal rabs sogs bod kyis yig tshang gsal ba’i me long* (dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> cent.), i.e. *Yig tshang gsal ba’i me long*, 88.5-6: *yang dmar gsal ba’i shes rab kyis: skul gyi khe ’dir gnas dang : gzhung gi dkon phu gnas dang : nya mo kyur dang : ’brog zad gnas dang : nu ma sgang dang dbya zhing gnas dang : sha zan gnas la sogs pa rnams btat/ yang dmar gsal ba’i shes rab kyis (= kyis) slob ma: dmar phu rangs pa bya bas: [...]*. See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 418, 664 (IIIb); *Rngog chos brgyud pa’i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 23.



Skyid smad, as well as in Kha rag and Gzhung.<sup>121</sup> In Gzhung, Gnyos 'Byung gnas Shes rab, apparently with good access to land property, established communities at Nya mo skyur and Skam bu'i gnas (var. Dkon phu gnas) in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Nel pa paṇḍita, in the subsequent sentence, lists another community with the name Bye zhing that might also go back to the vast founding activities of the Gnyos scion.<sup>122</sup> The toponym Bye zhing (var. Dbya zhing gnas) may be localised at Lugs stod in the western part of the valley (see Fig. 3).<sup>123</sup> The Gnyos's influence during the *phyi dar* movement might go back to family's migration to G.yor po in the imperial period.

### 3.4.6 The Rngog<sup>124</sup>

In the late 1040s, perhaps while Gnyos 'Byung gnas Shes rab was still alive, Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982-1054) passed through Lower Gzhung. Biographical sources report that the Bengali master and his entourage found themselves in front of closed doors at Nya mo skyur, not welcome by its inhabitants.<sup>125</sup> No more than a century later, Nya mo skyur was taken over by

<sup>121</sup> *Kha rag gnyos kyi gdung rabs*: 16.5-17.2 (cited above); see also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 664 (IIId and IIIf).

<sup>122</sup> Uebach 1987, 148f. (f. 22b4): *de nas 'brog gzad dang: ra la sgang dang: bye zhing dang: sha zan gnas la sogs pa gyes*::; see also *Yig tshang gsal ba'i me long*: 88.5-6 (cited in footnote above); also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 664 (IIIf).

<sup>123</sup> An abandoned ruin site on the eastern mountain slope of Lugs stod is locally known as “Bro pa” or “Gye? zhing rgyang ro” (“ruins of Gye? zhing”); personal communication with Rgyal grub gling native, 02.2021, geographical position: 29.271202, 90.868210. Bye zhing figures repeatedly in Ta'i si tu's testament as a location where the Phag gru ruler sojourned or passed through; cf. *Po ti bse ru*: 122.15, 180.8-10, 281.17-18. According to a fifteenth-century lineage history, the Tsha mig tshogs pa from among the Four Communities safeguarding Śākyaśrībhadra's *vinaya* tradition (i.e. Jo gdan tshogs pa sde bzhi) reunited in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century at Bye zhing temple of Gzhung under the mediative efforts of the Gong dkar district officer Sangs rgyas Dpal rin; see Shākya dge slong Grags pa rdo rje, *Mkhan rgyud rnam gsum byon tshul gyi rnam thar*: 23a6, here Gzhung gi bye zhing lha khang; see also Heimbels 2013: 196. The Gzhung valley counts other, unlocalised *phyi dar* settlements that might go back to earlier, imperial (?) foundations, e.g. Ra srag kyi gtsug lag khang in Lower Gzhung (est. by 'Be so ker ba; cf. *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 727.5-6, here Ra sregs kyi lha khang) and Sgre mkhar (est. by 'Be so Ker ba or Bhe ston Rdo rje Shes rab; cf. Uebach 1987: 140f. (f. 20b7); *Yig tshang gsal ba'i me long*: 87.3, here Gzhung gi Sgre 'khar; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 475.1-2). Sgre mkhar might be related to the Atiśa cave preserved at present-day Thar pa gling, locally known by the name Stag dkar Gad phug (geographical position: 29.274428, 90.929793; see also *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 163.9-10, here Gzhung gi Stag dkar gyi Gang phug; *Rnam rab guide*: 190, here Rta dkar Gad phug). The unidentified Gong dkar temple of the Five Buddha families (Gong dkar gyi Rigs lnga lha khang), mentioned in fifteenth-century hagiographies (e.g. *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 18a4), might have also been located in Gzhung of Gong dkar district. An old map of Lama Ugyen's itinerary (i.e. *Parts of Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan showing Lama Ugyen Gyatso's third season's explorations in Tibet in 1883*. Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1916) locates the “Rianga lha khang” between Sban tsha (here “Pan dsa”) and Rwa ba smad (here “Ra medh”).

<sup>124</sup> Registered orthographic variants include Rngogs, Rngegs, Ngegs, Gnyags; cf. Hazod 2009: 173; Hazod 2019: 66f.

<sup>125</sup> *A ti sha'i rnam thar bka' gdams pha chos*: 163.8-9, here Nya mo gyur; *Snar thang gi gdan rabs*, 135.1-2: *de nas nya mo gyur du byon pas lo paṇ mi theg zer te sgo bsdams*; *A ti sha'i rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, 601.19-602.4: *de nas nya mo kyur du byon pa dang sgo bsdams* {gloss: [...] [602] [...] dge bshes spyen



another prestigious family that came to shape the valley's landscape in centuries to come. The estate that sprawled across the lush fields of the lower valley became the residence of Rngog Mdo sde (1078/90-1154/66), the son of the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud founder Rngog Chos sku Rdo rje (11<sup>th</sup> cent.). Mdo sde continued the family lineage at Nya mo skyur, where he held a religious council in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and would later pass away.<sup>126</sup> The estate may have already passed into the hands of his father, who was born in Gzhung<sup>127</sup> and given the epithet Rngog Gzhung pa. Rngog Chos rdor had invited Mar pa Lo tsā ba (1012-97) to his homeland and established the family seat of Gzhung Ri bo Khyung lding in the upper valley at present-day Gzhung steng (Ch. 雄达, Xióng dá). In the following centuries, the Rngog Gzhung pa line, as they became known, gained dominance over large parts of the valley. Rngog Chos rdor's descendants founded several temples and family abodes (*bla brang*) throughout the valley, many sites of which can still be traced back to their activities (Fig. 8).<sup>128</sup> Foremost among these are Nya mo skyur, Gzhung Ri bo Khyung lding (geographical position: 29.193333, 90.983551), Spre zhing (var. Spre'u zhing, Sprel zhing; Ch. 雄扁兴, Xióng biǎn xīng; geographical position: 29.210653, 90.964235), Dben tsha thel (var. Sben tsha thel;<sup>129</sup> geographical position: 29.209510, 90.961109), Zlum khyung (var. Ldum chung (?);<sup>130</sup> geographical position: 29.211639, 90.962136), Se lung (var. Si lung; geographical position: 29.197139, 90.933056), Bsam gtan gling (approx. geographical position: 29.178786, 90.951001), Chos 'khor gling (Ch. 琼格岭, Qióng gé lǐng; geographical position: 29.236585, 90.891882), Sras thog bla brang (Ch. 色拖, Sè tuō; geographical position: 29.129770, 90.899018), Sras mgon bla brang (Ch. 散圭, Sàn guī; approx. geographical position: 29.163779, 90.905295), 'Bu thang (geographical position: 29.225941, 90.890397) and Rngog tshang 'og ma Thar pa gling (var. Dbon skya Thar pa gling; Ch. 塔尔巴林, Tǎěr Bālin; geographical position: 29.273433, 90.922913). Until

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*snga ba'i zhal nas/ gzhung pa'i gra pa byung ba kun la shog med glags med g.yog po og nag pa nga'i jo bo la sgo bsams phod pa gsung skad} nas lo paṇ mi theg zer ba dang l[...];* cf. also Eimer 1979: vol. 1, 249.

<sup>126</sup> Rngog Mdo sde, also known by the pen name Zhe sdang Rdo rje, had gathered Mar pa's relics at Nya mo skyur and built a reliquary; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 792.6-7; *Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 491f., here Nya mo gyur (Translation in Roerich 1996: 406f.); see also *Pad dkar chos 'byung*: 459; also Ducher 2017: 258f., 262ff., 397f. (on the religious council), 268, 399f., 417f. (on his death); Ducher 2020: 156. Nya mo skyur represented the seat of one branch of the Rngog family in the following centuries.

<sup>127</sup> *Deb ther dmar po*: 75.18-19, here Gzhu Ri bo (*sic!*); *Rgya bod yig tshang*: 255.3; *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 1, 790.5, here 'khrungs yul gzhung ri bor 'khrungs/; cf. also *Pad dkar chos 'byung*: 459.4; *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 17.

<sup>128</sup> Coordinates according to Gzhung natives, personal communications, winter 2012/13, 2015, 2018, 2021. See also *Rnam rab guide*: 169-195, *Rnam rab lung pa'i gnas dang gnas shul khag gi ngo sprod* for a detailed geographical survey. On the Rngog sites of Chos sdings and Rngog pa'i bla brang, see Chapter 4 below.

<sup>129</sup> *Deb ther dmar po*: 75.23; nowadays referred to as Dben gnas sgang, see *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 20-22.

<sup>130</sup> *Rgya bod yig tshang* (255.17) and *Deb ther dmar po* (76.14) mention a site called Ldum chung. See also *Rngog chos brgyud pa'i gdan sa skor bshad pa*: 22f., here Khyung lding lha khang.

the decline of the family line in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>131</sup> Gzhung constituted the headquarters of the Rngog pa sect, the area where their teachings were transmitted from one generation to the next.<sup>132</sup>



Fig. 8: Post-imperial Rngog pa presence in Gzhung. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 11.2017; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

The valley's links with the family line, however, go back in time much later. The lineage histories of the Rngog recount that family members had been granted land on the southern Gtsang po already during the time of Khri Srong lde btsan (r. 756-ca. 800). Rngog Bsod nams dpal (15<sup>th</sup> cent.) gives the following account in the *Rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, a work based on an earlier family chronicle authored by Dpal gyi rdo rje (14<sup>th</sup> cent.):

*Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 3a4-5:

[...] *dgos su rngog gnya' la: stag gsum gyi glag pa la seng ge dkar mo'i gung btang ba gnang: gser gyi yi ge rtseg mar mnos nas: yul yang gra'i yid dgur zhing dor brgya'i gling dang: bran bzi' dang : 'or brgyad dang : chu mi dang : kha gze la sogs ste mi khyim nyi shu 'bangs su bcad: jo mo shud bu bza' blangs:*

<sup>131</sup> Smith 2001: 325, fn. 740; Ducher 2017: 351-354; Ducher 2020: 142, 161. According to Sangs rgyas Rgya mtsho's supplement volumes to the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography, Nya mo skyur and Spre'u zhing passed into the hands of Bla mkhyen Ngag dbang in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; see *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8, 443; *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 9, 357. A restoration under Bla mkhyen Ngag dbang, whose full name seems to have been Nang ra ba (= Rnam rab pa ?) Bla mkhyen Ngag dbang 'Jam dpal blo gros, is recorded for Nya skyur temple in the fire-hare year (*me yos*) and again in the iron-horse year (*lcags rta*); *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8 (*nya*), 443f.; also *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 9, 406. Rnam rab Spre zhing was restored at the same time; cf. *Lnga pa chen po'i rang rnam kha skong*: vol. 8, 432.

<sup>132</sup> On the central teachings of the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud see Ducher 2020: 146-153.

In particular, Rngog [Btsan] gnya' was given [by the emperor] skin [made from] three tigers (*stag gsum gyi glag pa*) with a white lioness [coat] as the lower part (*gung btang ba*). He obtained [insignia] with golden letters attached to it (*rtseg mar*) [and] also lands: in Yid dgu of Gra, fields (*zhing*) [in the size of] a land plot (*gling*) of hundred ploughing units (*dor*), and as subjects he was assigned (*'bangs su bcad*) the *bran* Bzi' and 'Or brgyad and Chu mi and twenty households including Kha gze and others. He took a Shud bu lady as wife.<sup>133</sup> (trans. by author)

Earlier in the text, Rngog Btsan gnya' (b. 744) is portrayed as a terrifying warrior under Khri Srong lde'u btsan who, for his successful warfare at the Tibetan-Chinese border, was awarded with land and subjects: The emperor rewarded him with insignia, hundred fields in Yid dgu (var. Yi gur) of the Grwa region, servants (*bran*) and households (*mi khyim*). Rngog Btsan gnya' also figures in the *Blue Annals* and in Gu ru bkra shis's religious chronicle (early 19<sup>th</sup> cent.) where he is portrayed as the emperor's minister (*blon po*) called "the Great Rngog" (Rngog chen po).<sup>134</sup>

The lineage history by Bsod nams dpal also conveys that Btsan gnya's grandfather, Rngog Dpal khrom, had served as representative of a thousand-district (*stong tshab*) headed by the Mchims family.<sup>135</sup> Hazod (2019: 67, fn. 17) contextualises this piece of information by clarifying that "[t]his either refers to the Mchims-dominated area of eastern G.yo ru (G.yo ru smad) or to the Mchims branch of Grwa". The text continues with describing the merits of Btsan gnya's grandson, Rngog Btsan gzigs Snang ba from Snang thang (?).<sup>136</sup> In Dol Phu mangs/mda' (?) (var. Dol phu Ma bu), Btsan gzigs Snang ba had obtained arable land in the size of three hundred ploughing units, together with forty households as subjects. The Blo bo from among his subjects/servants built the Zangs mkhar fortification<sup>137</sup> and controlled the means of transportation (?) in the area.

<sup>133</sup> Alternative translation in Ducher 2017: 212, 376. The parallel text passage in the *Rngog pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* (3a7-8) reads: *dgos su rngog gtsan bnya' la stag gsum gyi blag pa dang : seng ge dkar mo'i gung btang pa snang // gser gyi yi ge rtser mar?* (= *rtseg mar*) *mno nas: yul yang grwa'i yi gur/ zhing dor rgya'i gling dang : bran gzi dang/ 'or brgyad dang : chu ma dang/ kha bze la sogs ste mi khyim nyi shu 'bangs su bcad: jo mo shud bu bza' slangs.* (Translation in Walther 2012: 95f.). See also Hazod 2019: 67, fn. 17.

<sup>134</sup> *Deb ther sngon po*: vol. 1, 391.19; Roerich 1996: 324. *Gu ru bkra shis chos 'byung*, vol. 1, 545.3-4: *rgyal po khri srong lde'u btsan gyi blon po rngog chen po'am gnyan btsan gyis [...]*, here referred to as Gnyan btsan.

<sup>135</sup> *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 2b1: *stong dpon ni 'chims: stong tshab ni rngog dpal khrom gyis bgyis so//*; parallel text passage in *Rngog pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*, 2b3-4: *stong dpon ni mchims stong tshab ni rngog dpal khrom gyis bgyis so*:. See also Walther 2016: 519; Ducher 2017: 209, 374.

<sup>136</sup> Mentioned as the birthplace of the two successive family members, Rngog Btsan pa Rin po che and his son Rngog Btsan gzigs snang, Snang thang (var. Rnam thang) seems to have been an important family residence in the vicinity; cf. *Rngog pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 3a5 and 3a6 (glosses).

<sup>137</sup> A place named Bzang mkhar (Ch. 索康定, Suǒ Kāngdìng) can be located in Upper Gzhung; personal communication with Gzhung native, 2012/13; see also *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 46.9, here Bzang mkhar; *Rnam rab guide*: 169.15, 184.6, here Zangs dkar.

*Rngog pa'i nram thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, 3a6-7:

*de'i sras rngog btsan gzigs snang* { gloss: *snang thang* (= *nam thang*?) *du babs* } *ba lags: bu mo sbas che btsan la sjangs: dol phu mangs/mda[']* (?) *su zhing dor sum brgya bcad: bran li dang : bya dang : rang 'gro dang: rang rta dang: blo bo dang: mi khyim bzhi bcu 'bangs su bcad: la khra la khre la dang: 'brog phar cham tshur cham dang tshun chad kho ra khor yug du bcad: blo bos zangs ril gyi thang du zangs 'khar byas: chu rta 2 ka la dbang mdzad: jo mo lde sman bza' blangs:*

His [i.e. Rngog Btsan pa Rin po che's] son was Rngog Btsan gzigs Snang ba {[who] descended to Snang thang}. [His] daughter (*bu mo*; i.e. Rngog Btsan pa Rin po che's) was sent [as bride] to Sbas che btsan. In Dol Phu mangs/mda['] (?)<sup>138</sup> fields [in the size of] three hundred ploughing units (*dor*) were assigned (*bcad*) [to him]. As subjects [he] was assigned the *bran* Li and Bya and Rang 'gro and Rang rta and Blo bo and forty households. [He] was assigned passes and nomadic pastures and the boundaries of the dominion.<sup>139</sup> The Blo bo erected the Zangs fort (Zangs 'khar) at the plain of Zangs ril and exerted authority over both, the water and horse [transportation?]. [Btsan gzigs Snang ba] took a Lde sman lady as his wife.<sup>140</sup> (trans. by author)

Gu ru Bkra shis portrays Rngog Btsan gzigs snang as a disciple of Padmasambhava and the tantric ritual preceptor (*sku rim pa*) of the king (i.e. Khri srong lde'u btsan). Gu ru Bkra shis links his lineage to the Yar 'brog lake area,<sup>141</sup> as does 'Gos lo for the lineage descending from Rngog chen po *aka* Rngog Btsan gnya'.<sup>142</sup> Considering the acquisition of land in Grwa and Dol in the late 8<sup>th</sup> or

<sup>138</sup> The toponym Dol Phu mangs (var. Dol phu ma bu) can also be understood as "Mangs" (Ma bu) of Dol phu (i.e. Upper Dol). Alternatively, the text might indicate here a contracted form for *phu mda' su*, referring to fields granted in the Upper and the Lower Dol valley.

<sup>139</sup> Translation of this sentence uncertain.

<sup>140</sup> Alternative translation in Ducher 2017: 214, 378. The parallel text passage in *Rngog pa'i nram thar nor bu'i phreng ba* (3b1-3) reads: *de'i sras rngog btsan gzigs snang pa lags so/ bu mo sbas lce tshan la sdzangs// dol phu ma bur zhing dor sum rgya gcad/ bran li dang/ bya dang/ rang { ' }gro dang/ rang rta dang/ blo bo dang/ mi khyim bzhi bcu 'bangs su gcad/ la khra la khre la 'brog phar cham dang tshur cham tshun chad: 'khor ra 'khor yug du gcad: glo bas zangs ril gyi ltems su zangs 'khar byas chu rta ra ga la dbang mdzad jo mo lde sman bza' blangs* (Translation in Walther 2012: 96). See also Walther 2016: 520f.; Hazod 2019: 67, fn. 17.

<sup>141</sup> *Gu ru bkra shis chos 'byung*, vol. 1, 545.9-12: [...] *yar 'brog de'i phyi rol mtsho chen po'i 'gram du grong chags pa'i slob dpon padma'i dngos slob rngog btsun gzigs snang* (= *btsan gzigs snang*) *zhes pas rgyal po'i sku rim gyi sngags mkhan chen mo mdzad/*.

<sup>142</sup> *Deb ther sngon po*, vol. 1, 392.5-7: [...] *zer ba de'i brgyud pa/ ya 'brog do'i phyi rol gyi mtsho chen po'i 'gram du grong chags pa'i sngags rnying ma ba'i dge bshes rdo rje gzhon nu zhes bya ba la sras lnga byung ba'i che ba rngog legs pa'i shes rab/*. (Translation in Roerich 1996: 324). Rngog Btsan gnya' and Rngog Btsan gzigs snang are also mentioned in *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*, vol. 1, 790.6-7: *rngog gtsan gnyan* (= *btsan gnya'*) *gyis chos rgyal khri srong gi sku srog bton zhing rngog gtsan gzigs snang* (= *btsan gzigs snang*) *zhes slob dpon padma'i dngos slob tu gyur pas rgyal po'i sku rim pa sngags mkhan chen po mdzad/*. See also Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 175, fn. 423(†). The authors locate Yar 'brog Do in the middle of the Yar 'brog G.yu mtsho lake; cf. *ibid.*: 169f., fn. 422, Map 2 (*The westerm (sic!) section of gZad Chu-shul*), here Do nang; Hazod 2009: 173, 220, Map 7.4, here Rdo nang ri); Ducher (2017: 216) points out that a



early 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Rngog presence in Yar 'brog can probably be explained as a later settlement of the family line.<sup>143</sup>

Unmentioned by Bsod nams dpal, the Lde'u chronicles mention two further Rngog descendants named Sngog Dpal gsum sgra che and Rngog Rgyal to ro rgyal. Together with a certain *blon po* Dgu khri thog sgra, they served as Khri 'Od srung's ministers (*blon po*) and must thus have lived at the time of the civil revolt (*kheng log*) in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>144</sup> According to the historical accounts, Tibet's last emperor Khri 'Od srung and his fraction controlled the Left Horn with Yar lung at its centre after the empire had split into new regional principalities.<sup>145</sup> One can assume that the three ministers administered lands in the realm of their king – maybe in those parts of G.yo ru for which the above sources have claimed presence of the Rngog family.

The analysis of historical works in combination with interviews on local geography allowed me to map toponyms linked to the region's ancestral family lineages. With the exception of the branches of the Rngog and Gnyos, however, the identification of any particular "lineage territory" proved difficult due to the fragmentary state of evidence. Because the histories assert the regional presence of different ancestral lineages for the period of the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, it remains impossible to connect them to more specific territories in the area. Sørensen and Hazod (2007: 171, fn. 423) have also noted for Grwa, Dol and Gzhung that "[t]he clan distribution in the area down through history remained complex." Some of the sources cited here claim that descendants of the Sna nam, Shud pu and Sbal ti exerted power over the entirety of the three valleys of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. Without further evidence such claims seem historically too simplified. One might speculate whether these family branches were in control of mountain passes and transportation routes next to each other and inhabited distinct settlements, portions of arable land and pastures within the same valleys. Such a scenario in which family lineages would have been scattered across the landscape would make it extremely difficult to reconstrue individual clans' territories and their spheres of influence.<sup>146</sup>

#### 4. Burial mound sites

This pertains also to the identification of imperial grave fields that have been located in the region. Among the several hundred burial mound fields surveyed for the *Tibetan tumulus tradition* (TTT)

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Rngog ancestor with the name "Yul sbyin settled in sGog, which is a place on the peninsula called Do, on the northern shore of the Yar 'brog Lake". See also SRC: L821.

<sup>143</sup> Hazod 2019: 67, fn. 17.

<sup>144</sup> *Lde'u chos 'byung rgyas pa*: 231.12-13; *Lde'u chos 'byung*: 142.1-2, here *blon po ne'u khri thog sgra spyang sprel dang rdegs dpal gsum sgra rje spangs dang / rngog rgyal tho re gel pa rnams kyis byas te / [...]*; see also *G.yu yi phreng ba*, vol. 1, 436.11-12: [...] *blon po dgu khri thog sgra dang / rngog dpal gsum sgra che/ rngog rgyal to re rgyal rnams kyis byas/*; Vitali 2004b: 110, fn. 6.

<sup>145</sup> Hazod 2013: 101f.; Sørensen and Hazod 2005: 23; *G.yu yi phreng ba*: vol. 1, 441-443.

<sup>146</sup> Elsewhere, Hazod (2018: 20) identifies the mobility and the transregional presence of families as further challenges for determinating (ancestral) territories.



Fig. 9: Burial mound sites in Gzhung (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2005; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

project,<sup>147</sup> there are sixteen tomb sites recorded for the Gzhung valley (Fig. 9). To link those sites to any dynastic family, however, has so far been impossible. Hazod notes in this regard that “it is often exactly this regional multi-presence in the history of the clans that makes it difficult to identify a lineage’s principal home territory and place of its (chief) burial ground.”<sup>148</sup> It follows that all family lineages for which the histories claim presence – the Sna nam, Shud pu, Mchims, Sbal ti, Gnyos and the Rngog – must be considered as possible candidates for the burial grounds discovered in the Gzhung valley. At the same time, one should admit the dominance of the Rngog gzhung pa line from at least the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Though unreported in the available sources, their prevailing might have resulted from longstanding ancestral links to the region.

Following Hazod’s previous work, this final chapter will briefly introduce the burial mound sites of the valley and put them into a regional context.<sup>149</sup> Certainly, most impressive among the grave

<sup>147</sup> The long-term FWF project on the tumulus tradition of imperial Central Tibet is conducted at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The project research involved extensive *in situ* surveys and remote topographic analysis from satellite imagery over the past decades. The surveyed sites of the project (616 entries) were recently published as a map with an annotated index (scale 1:800.000); see Kriz and Hazod 2020. As for March 2021, the TTT project website lists 636 sites, see URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/sites-by-id/>, accessed: 03.2021.

<sup>148</sup> TTT website, *Tombs and clan*, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/tombs-and-clan/>, accessed: 01.29.2021.

<sup>149</sup> For a classification of imperial burial sites see recently Kriz and Hazod 2020: 9f. and TTT website, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/introduction-and-legend/>, accessed: 19.01.2020. An evaluation of presently registered site types is presented in Hazod 2019: 22-25. Size specifications relate to the front of the (trapezoid) mounds at ground level, where rather than the actual walls, the earth sloping at the side of the mounds was taken as the reference point (*ibid.*: 111).

fields of Gzhung are the tombs behind Rgyal grub gling town (Ch. 甲竹林镇, Jiǎ zhúlín zhèn) registered under TTT no. 0053.

TTT 0053

3630m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (35m);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);

Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.280000, 90.89361;

References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Hazod 2019: 112; Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L758.

TTT 0053 features ten middle-sized, rectangular tombs (around 10-35m) that can be seen from the plane when approaching the Lhasa-Gonggar airport on a clear day (Fig. 12). According to an exiled Rgyal grub gling native the site where the six smaller tombs are located (geographical position: 29.277512, 90.889916) is called “Min ji” or “Min ji’i pu” (spelling uncertain; Min ci ?).<sup>150</sup> In 2010, I captured the tomb field while visiting the Gong dkar Chos sde branch temple of Chos sdings (var. Chos lding; Ch. 曲定, Qū dìng) on the eastern mountain slope behind the airport town (Fig. 10).<sup>151</sup>



Fig. 10: TTT 0053 Burial mound field behind Rgyal grub gling, seen from Chos sdings temple. (Photo: Mathias Fermer 2010)

<sup>150</sup> Personal communication, 02.2021: *smin bye'i pu/ yul mi tsho'i kha rgyun la smin bye zhes zer*.

<sup>151</sup> See also Jackson 2015: 246, no. 9.



According to Gong dkar Chos sde senior monks (i.e. pre-1950?), the origin of the temple below the grassy pasture known as Spang kha che goes back to the period of the early dissemination (*bstan pa snga dar*; i.e. 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cent.),<sup>152</sup> a thrilling claim for which I could not find any textual support. The restored temple is part of a larger complex with a damaged *stūpa* and several building ruins including the wall remains of a building referred to as Rgyal po khang (now a *yul lha* site).<sup>153</sup> Formerly, a Buddha image (Ston pa) surrounded by a retinue of eight great bodhisattva sons (*Nye ba'i sras chen brgyad*) had been the main support of Chos sdings's central chapel (*gtsang khang*).<sup>154</sup>



Fig. 11: Restored Buddha statue in the *inner sanctum* of Chos sdings (Photo: Mathias Fermer 2010)

<sup>152</sup> *Gong dkar chos sde'i gnas yig*: 95, here Chos lding ri khrod.

<sup>153</sup> Personal communication with pre-1950 monks from Rgyal grub gling, 2010, 2012.

<sup>154</sup> Personal communication with pre-1950 monks from Rgyal grub gling, 2010, 2012. According to another Gongkar Choede monk from Rgyal grub gling, the lower part of the Buddha clay image (*'jim sku*) with its solid throne foundation survived until the 1980s and was later restored; personal communication, 02.2021. The same informant reports that Gongkar monks performed rituals for Lha mo 'Dod khams ma (i.e. Lha mo Dud sol ma; Skt. Dhūmāṅgārī) in the Lha mo chapel on the second floor; personal communication, 02.2021. This might hint at a connection with the Rngog pa Bka' brgyud of the valley. In fact, a large fifteenth-century Rngog pa monastery with the name Gzhung Ri bo Chos lding gi *chos grwa chen po* is mentioned in Ducher 2017: 349.



Several natives that were asked about the rectangular shaped structures in the back of their hometown have never recognised them as imperial-time Tibetan tombs (*bod kyi bang so*).<sup>155</sup> In close distance to the large tombs, on a mountain offset to the south-east of the town, lies the site of TTT no. 0054, another field of several small tomb ruins (5-10m), round and rectangular in shape.

TTT 0054

3665m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.28138, 90.90083;

References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L759.

Behind the settlement of Rog rog (Ch. 若若, Ruò ruò) in the lower part of the central valley stretch (see Fig. 6), lies TTT no. 0378 which is classified as a middle-sized tomb ruin measuring a front length of approximately 25m. According to local accounts, several clay images (*phyag tsha*) of Rwa lo tsā ba Rdo rje grags (1016-1128/98) surfaced under a white earth *stūpa* (*sa 'bum dkar po*) at Rog rog.<sup>156</sup>

TTT 0378

3630m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (25m) (?);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

Rog rog, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.26475, 90.95681;

References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L757.

At Lha yul (Ch. 拉玉, Lā yù), in close proximity to the valley's water reservoir<sup>157</sup> (*chu mdzod*) at the convergence of the two upper valley branches (i.e. Phu gnyis), Hazod identified rectangular, coffer-shaped tombs during a field trip in 2010 (TTT site no. 0055; see Fig. 14). The burial field on a mountain slope above Lha yul, at an elevation of 3810m, features at least three middle-sized tomb ruins (ca. 25-36m). Online satellite maps indicate the name Pí jiāng (Ch. 皮江) at this geographical position (Tibetan orthography unknown).<sup>158</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Hazod reports similar experiences from his fieldwork. He told me about common synonyms used by the locals to refer to burial mound sites: "Little Lhasa" (Lha sa chung ma), earth heap (*sa phungs*), landing place of a Garuḍa (Bya khyung 'bab sa), etc.; personal communication, 11.2018; see also TTT website, *Tumulus fields in Central Tibet: local perceptions and classifications*, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/perception/>, accessed: 29.01.2021.

<sup>156</sup> *Rnam rab guide*, 171.19-172.2: [...] *rog rog ces pa'i lung gshongs nang sa 'bum dkar* [172] *po yod pa'i 'og nas rwa lo tsā ba'i phyag tshwa yin par grags pa'i byin can gyi swatstsha 'ga' zhig thon/*.

<sup>157</sup> The reservoir, locally referred to as Mdo la'i chu mdzod, was constructed in 2013; geographical position: 29.173941, 90.931804.

<sup>158</sup> Google Maps, accessed: 19.01.2021. On Lha yul see *Rnam rab guide*, 169.16, 186.15-16: *lha yul grong tsho'i byang gi ri steng du gdengs phyi dgon pa'i shul dang* [...]; *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 46.7.

TTT 0055

3810m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (35m);

visited (2010);

Lha yul, Rgya ri, central valley, geographical position: 29.19597, 90.92458;

References: TTT website (accessed: 07.2018); Hazod 2019: 112; Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L760.

In preparation for the present paper, Hazod and myself were able to detect further grave fields in the valleys of Grwa, Dol and Gzhung. These tumulus sites, identified exclusively through aerial and satellite imagery have meanwhile been added to the TTT database,<sup>159</sup> and are mentioned in Hazod's recent study on the chief ministers' graves (Hazod 2019).<sup>160</sup> The sites also figure in the project's recent cartographic realisation of an annotated map of *The Burial Mound Sites of Imperial Central Tibet*.<sup>161</sup> Considering the historical and physical transformations of the environment addressed in Chapter 2, it needs to be pointed out that the findings in this domain also remain provisional until the sites can be inspected *in situ*. What might at first look like the traces of ancient tombs on satellite images may occasionally turn out to be the remains of much later building structures (e.g. fortifications, monasteries, temples, *stūpas*, shrines) or simply geometrical rock formations on the surface.

The burial sites studied in preparation for this workshop are mainly of mound type C (coffer-shaped) with front side or diametral dimensions of 20m or more. While completing this paper, locals informed me about two further sites that might have retained tombs until their disappearance in the 1990s. A Rnam rab zhol native told me about a potential burial ground in the Lower Spre zhing valley, not far from the bank of the Shar 'gram pa river (Fig. 6).<sup>162</sup> According to him, valuable findings (scriptures, gold, relicts, skulls?) surfaced when chunks of the mountain side were blasted away in the 1990s (geographical position: 29.218672, 90.930210). The history of the place could not further be verified, and it cannot be excluded that it constituted a later, post-dynastic Buddhist relict site or a place where locals may have buried precious religious artefacts to save them from

<sup>159</sup> TTT website, under *Sites in Lokha prefecture, I.4 Gong dkar county*,

URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/sites/i-lokha-prefecture/>, accessed: 19.01.2020.

<sup>160</sup> Hazod (2019: 117) lists the TTT IDs 0563-0579 and 0582-0593. Among those, the ten new burial sites in the Dol (Dold) valley (i.e. TTT 0563-0569, 0576, 0578-0579) that constituted with Gzhung an administrative district of the empire will not be addressed here. Three burial grounds in the Zhur valley of Dol (i.e. TTT 0563, 0564, 0579) should nevertheless be mentioned. Dol gyi zhur, which is mentioned in several medieval sources (e.g. *Byams pa gling pa'i rnam thar*: 44b2), can probably be identified as the valley where royal residence of Btsan po Rgyal gtsug ru (cf. Dotson 2009: 103f., 244) was located. The burial fields of Zhur accommodate coffer-shaped tomb ruins of middle-size (25-35m) on the lower hillocks of the southern valley (see Fig. 9). Nowadays, Zhur (var. Shur; Ch. 秀伍村, Xiù wǔ cūn) belongs to Rnam rgyal zhol xiang (Ch. 朗杰学乡, Lǎng jié xué xiāng) of Dol.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13, under *Gong dkar County*.

<sup>162</sup> Personal communication, 02.2021. On the other potential tomb site located behind Rgyal grub gling see below under "Bang grong/so".

destruction during the “Cultural Revolution”.<sup>163</sup> Satellite images show a small shrine on the top of the slope at the mountain foot. In higher elevation, about 350 meters above the shrine, lies another possible grave field of with heavily eroded, dispersed round mounds measuring about 6m in diameter, which also has not yet been included in the TTT database:

Spre zhing *bang so* [TTT n/a]

3770m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

Type and size of grave field unknown (site strongly damaged);

Spre zhing, Rgya ri, central valley, approx. geographical position: 29.215857, 90.932361.

The satellite images convey another grave field (TTT 0582) on the opposite, northern mountain ridge of the Lower Spre zhing valley.

TTT 0582

3760m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);

Spre zhing, Rgya ri, central valley, geographical position: 29.22609, 90.94035;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

Further tomb fields have also been identified in the lower valley at Rgyal grub gling (TTT 0573, TTT 0574). The fields in close distance to TTT 0054 feature small round and rectangular-shaped mounds (under 10m) scattered on the eastern mountain slope of the town and to the south of TTT 0054.

TTT 0573

3660m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C), round tomb (MT-A);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);

Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.28444, 90.90472;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0574

3660m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C), round tomb (MT-A) (?);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);

Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.27833, 90.89944;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

Assuming that tombs were established in close proximity to settlements,<sup>164</sup> the area around Rgyal grub gling must have been the homeland of an influential imperial family lineage, maybe from among those attested in the above histories. The area shows the highest density of grave fields and

<sup>163</sup> Personal communication with Rnam rab zhol native, 06.2021. Later, since the 1980s, this mountain side became a major spot where the local community of Rnam rab zhol used to extract stones (*rdo brkos sa/~thon sa*) for the construction of buildings.

<sup>164</sup> Hazod 2018: 9 and Hazod in this volume (Chapter 2).



Fig. 12: Burial mound sites around Rgyal grub gling, south of the Lhasa-Gonggar airport (Photo: David Cowhig, [Virginia], 18.10.2009, URL: <https://m.flickr.com/photos/74568056@N00/4094137965/>, accessed: 14.03.2021; additional data: M. Fermer 01.2021)

accommodates the most impressive and largest tombs of TTT site no. 0053. In addition, there is evidence for the existence of another burial ground in the vicinity. An exiled Rgyal grub gling native informed me about a place near Lha dkar po ri zur that was locally called “Bang gro[ng]” or “Bang so” (in the 1970s/80s and apparently before the Chinese arrival) and most probably constituted a tomb site (*bang so'i grong*; see Fig. 12).<sup>165</sup>

Bang grong/so [TTT n/a]

3595m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);

Type and size of grave field unknown (site strongly damaged);

Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, approx. geographical position: 29.289029, 90.885523;

References: personal communication, Rgyal grub gling native, 02.2021.

An old xylograph carved in the fifteenth century at Rgyal grub gling points to the village's former wealth and glory by referring to it as 'Byor ldan Rgyal grub gling.<sup>166</sup> In addition to that, some locals pointed out to me that Rgyal grub gling was called “Gnon” (spelling uncertain) in ancient times. In the 1970s/80s, according to several informants, the neighbouring village of Gling stod (Fig. 12) was

<sup>165</sup> Personal communication, 02.2021.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Bsod nams Rtse mo, *Don yod zhags pa lha lnga'i stod pa lo rgyus bsodus don rgyud chung gi'i ka dang bcas pa bzhus*: 13a7. Rgyal grub gling is also mentioned in *Lcags stag zhib gzhung*: 46.12.



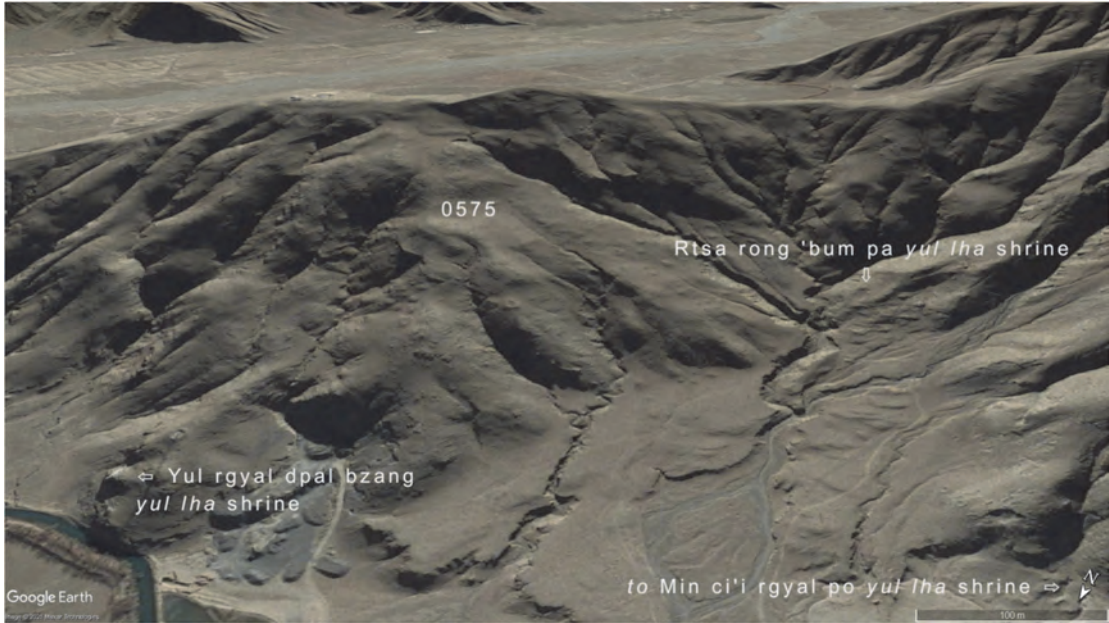


Fig. 13: Burial mound field TTT 0575 on the back mountain of 'O rag, locally known as Yul rgyal Dpal bzang. (Map data: Google Earth, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2003; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

still referred to as “Gnon stod” and the valley’s upper part as Gnon phu (or Gnon gyi phu).<sup>167</sup> This oral toponym may allow to link the valley to the ancient Mnon family (var. Rnon, Snon, Gnon), although this requires further research.<sup>168</sup>

Not far from Rgyal grub gling lies TTT site no. 0575. The field on the wide-stretching mountain behind present-day 'O rag (Ch. 沃拉, Wò lā) comprises numerous coffer-shaped tumulus ruins dispersed throughout the place (Fig. 13).<sup>169</sup> Among locals, this part of the mountain slope is known as Yul rgyal Dpal bzang or Yul rgyal/G.yul rgyal (spelling unverified).<sup>170</sup>

#### TTT 0575

3675m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m); additional mounds in vicinity;

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);

Yul rgyal Dpal bzang (var. G.yul rgyal Dpal bzang, Yul rgyal), 'O rag, Rgyal grub gling, lower valley, geographical position: 29.281800, 90.92295;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC: L876.

<sup>167</sup> Personal communication with Gzhung and Rgyal grub gling natives, 06.2021.

<sup>168</sup> The homeland of the Mnon family has been localised in the area of present-day Rgya ma; see Fig. 4 above (here Snon on map); cf. also Hazod 2009: 216, 223, Map 7.8; Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 182, fn. 433.

<sup>169</sup> For a close-up of the grave field with marked tomb mounds, see also TTT website, no. 0575, Fig. 1, URL: [https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetanumulustradition/sites\\_by\\_id/0575/](https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetanumulustradition/sites_by_id/0575/), accessed: 19.01.2021.

<sup>170</sup> Personal communication with 'O rag natives, 08.2018, 01.2021.



The toponym Yul rgyal can be linked to the place deity (*yul lha*) of the same name which is worshipped at the mountain foot (geographical position: 29.284919, 90.924061) by the villagers of 'O rag Bsam grub khang. The shrine of Yul rgyal is one among several *yul lha* sites on the back mountain of 'O rag (Fig. 13).



Fig. 14: Burial mound fields and *yul lha* shrines at Lha yul. (Map data: Google Earth, Landsat/Copernicus, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 13.2016; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

The *yul lha* sites of “Rtsa rong ’bum pa” (spelling uncertain) and of “Min ji rgyal po” (Mi’am ci’i Rgyal po?) are located in close proximity of Yul rgyal,<sup>171</sup> while the villagers of 'O rag Kha byang worship their local place deity, Lha tshangs pa [dkar po?], on a low ridge on the eastern part of the mountain (Fig. 2). The presence of *yul lha* seats in the environs of the Yul rgyal grave field might point to the remains of an earlier, imperial-era (?) landscape at 'O rag.<sup>172</sup>

A second burial field (TTT 0590) has been discovered at Lha yul, which is already known for TTT 0055. On a mountain to the north-west of Lha yul village, TTT 0590 features heavily eroded cemeteries scattered over different parts of the mountains at an elevation up to 3925m (Figs. 14, 15).

#### TTT 0590

3925m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B), in non-arable zone (FT-A);  
round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m), large number of tombs;  
not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

<sup>171</sup> Personal communication with 'O rag natives, 01.2021.

<sup>172</sup> On possible relations between burial grounds and the worship of territorial deities see references below (under Lha yul).

Lha yul, Rgya ri, central valley, geographical position: 29.20056, 90.91745;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

A conversation with a native revealed interesting information about the Lha yul village that rests on a small hillock. At its centre, which is the highest point of elevation, the village houses a shrine for worshipping the territorial deity *Rdzong ra'i rtse yul lha*.<sup>173</sup> Considering other instances of grave fields that later turned into sites for *yul lha* worship, one wonders whether the seat of the local *yul lha* at the summit of Lha yul might be the indication of a former burial mound or earlier fortification (*rdzong*).<sup>174</sup>

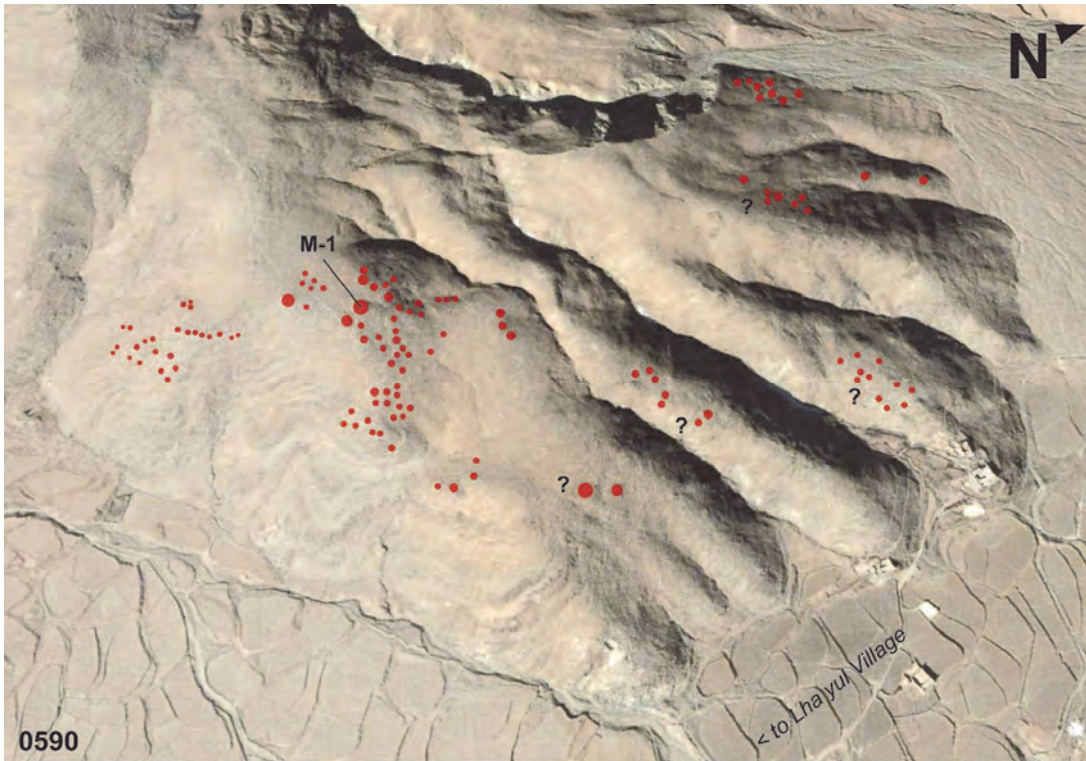


Fig. 15: Burial mound field TTT 0590 at Lha yul. (Satellite photo: Google/DigitalGlobe (01/2003), TTT website, edited by Hazod 2018)

The area on the other riverside at Se lung (Ch. 斯隆, Sī lōng) is pocked with many traces of building walls, albeit extremely eroded, indicating the existence of a vanished settlement of considerable size (geographical position: 29.199876, 90.929653). One of the remains must be the

<sup>173</sup> Communication with Lha yul native, Wechat, summer 2018.

<sup>174</sup> On tumulus sites as places for the *yul lha* worship see Hazod 2009: 185, 181; Hazod 2010: 7f.; Hazod 2018: 25; Hazod 2019: 41, 59. See also TTT website, *Tumulus fields in Central Tibet: Local perceptions and classifications*, URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/thematic-introduction/perception/>, accessed: 29.01.2021. For examples of burial mounds that turned into the seat of a local place deity see TTT 0126, 0184, 0257. Hazod noticed elsewhere that the name and history of the *yul lha* can “often turn out to be important indications for the identification of ancient clanscapes”.

former walls of Gzhung Se lung (var. Si lung),<sup>175</sup> a monastery from the time of the Buddhist revival where Dge bshes Dgyer chung ba<sup>176</sup> (11<sup>th</sup> cent.) resided. In this context it should be mentioned that the area at Se lung, according to the accounts of elders, is the original site of Rnam rgyal rab brtan before it was relocated to present-day Rnam rab zhol.<sup>177</sup>

The upper ranges above Se lung feature another tumulus site (TTT 0571) at a place called Skyid sdings<sup>178</sup> (Ch. 杰廷, Jié tíng) high on a mountain slope at an elevation of 4130m. The mound field is located approximately 500m above a former, post-dynastic Rngog family residence known as Rngog pa'i bla brang<sup>179</sup> (an old *mchod rten* seems to be all that remains of this ancient site). The grave field constitutes three or four rectangular tombs measuring up to 40m (Fig. 16).

#### TTT 0571

4130m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (40m);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image/reference);

Skyid sdings (var. Dkyil lding), Rgya ri, central upper valley, geographical position:

29.19367, 90.94607;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13; SRC:

L761.

Further burial fields are Sgang brgyud (TTT 0587), Nag sgor (TTT 0588) and Grags chen (TTT 0591) in the valley, G.yang rong (TTT 0593) in the lower valley and at Brag dmar (TTT 0585), (?) Shar 'bras (TTT 0589) in the central valley plains.

#### TTT 0585

3805m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);

round tomb (MT-A) (15m);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

Brag dmar, Rgya ri, lower valley, geographical position: 29.23861, 90.90354;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

#### TTT 0587

3720m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

<sup>175</sup> *Rnam rab guide*: 180f. The ruins of the former monastery are said to have been utilized as sheep enclosures (*lug tshang*, 'brog ra; Ch. 牧场, Mù chǎng); personal communication with Rnam rab zhol natives, 08.2018, 03.2021.

<sup>176</sup> Var. Dge bshes Sgyer chung ba. Considering that Padma dkar po refers to him as Gtsang Sgyer phu'i dge bshes Sgyer chung pa can (*Pad dkar chos 'byung*: 459.4-5) one wonders whether he can be identified with Mar pa's disciple Dgyer phu'i Klog skya jo sras, from La stod Gtsang.

<sup>177</sup> On the original site of Rnam rab zhol and its relocation at an unknown point in time see *Rnam rab guide*: 181.

<sup>178</sup> Spelling uncertain; alternately Dkyil lding. One might wonder whether the toponym "Skyid sdings" may phonetically be linked with the vanished Rngog pa seminary of Gzhung Ri bo Chos lding; see Ducher 2017: 349 (see also above under Chos sdings).

<sup>179</sup> *Rnam rab guide*: 182.1-3.



round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

Sgang brgyud, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.27221, 90.96086;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0588

3770m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (15m);

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

Nag sgor, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.26182, 90.97504;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.



Fig. 16: Burial mound field TTT 0571 at Gzhung Skyid sdings. (Map data: Google Earth, 2021 Maxar Technologies, historical imagery: 03.2005; modifications and additional data: M. Fermer 02.2021)

TTT 0589

3800m; on hillock/higher mountain region (FT-B);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (20m), single tomb;

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

Shar 'bras, Rgya ri, lower valley, geographical position: 29.23776, 90.948900;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0591

3595m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);

coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (30m) (?);



not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

Grags chen, Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position: 29.27851, 91.01665;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

TTT 0593

3635m; in non-arable zone (FT-A);

round tomb (MT-A), coffer-shaped/walled tomb (MT-C) (15m)?;

not visited by TTT project team (satellite image);

G.yang rong (i.e. Hang grong), Skyid gshongs, lower valley, geographical position:  
29.27805, 91.04416;

References: TTT website (accessed: 19.01.2021); Kriz and Hazod 2020: 13.

This contribution has focused on the geography of the fertile and well inhabited Gzhung valley on the southern banks of the Gtsang po river, in the central lands of the Left Horn province. While the evidence in this case is limited, the choice of written toponyms as the primary evidence for sketching the valley's historical landscape has allowed me to produce a reasonable sketch of this region's imperial past. Several of the old place names were able to be localised through previous research findings and fruitful, long-term collaboration with natives from Gzhung. The toponymic connotations for Gzhung and its adjacent valleys (Dol and Grwa) differ in the sources and it can be assumed that they would have changed over time and in real-life scenarios of shifting social contexts (see Hazod's example of a Tibetan peasant passing the seat of a place deity in this volume). The narrations about the imperial period that have been examined for this article link the land to different domains of human activity, including the categories of the so-called "religious" and the "social", which represent the conceptual framing of the present volume. While most of the text passages draw a close connection between region and ancestral lineages, they also describe how its inhabitants and rulers reportedly related to their environment. This finds expression in the depiction of the land in different ways: as an area of fertile and arable soil, as a favourable region for settlement, as an administrative unit of the empire, as a reward granted by the emperor, as retribution in legal matters, as a stage for religious activities pursued by Buddhist adepts, and most prominently of all, as territory belonging to particular families of prestigious descent.

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### Abbreviations

BDRC = Buddhist Digital Resource Center. URL: <https://www.tbrc.org/>

SRC = Sakya Research Centre. URL: <https://sakyaresearch.org>

TTT = *The Tibetan Tumulus Tradition (TTT)*, project website: *The Burial Mounds of Central Tibet: A Historical-anthropological Study and Documentation of the Tumulus Tradition of Early Central Tibet (4<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Century CE)*. URL: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/tibetantumulustradition/>

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