

Refuge and Revitalization: Hidden Himalayan Sanctuaries (Sbas-yul) and the Preservation of Tibet's Imperial Lineage¹

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Setting the Scene

During the past few decades, much research has centered on the geographical location and spiritual qualities of “hidden lands” (*sbas-yul*).² What follows is a contribution that diverges from earlier studies by focusing on a dimension of the *sbas-yul* that has hitherto not been discussed in detail. The purpose of this paper is to show how *sbas-yul* were considered by Tibetans to be lands where descendants of the me-

- ¹ I would like to thank Michael Walter for contributing insightful comments during various developmental phases of this paper, and Toni Huber for his critical reading of a previous draft. I would also like to thank Christopher Beckwith for helping clarify several key issues, and Elliot Sperling who assisted with the interpretation of some historical points.
- ² Several scholars have touched upon the topic of *sbas-yul*, beginning with Bacot (1912) and Bailey (1957) who came across a deserted community in Khams (in the case of Bacot) and a newly established community on the southern slope of the Himalayas (in the case of Bailey), both of which were the result of movements toward the *sbas-yul* Padma-bkod. Some *sbas-yul* have been visited and described (Reinhard 1978, Aris 1975, Bernbaum 1980, Diemberger 1992), *sbas-yul* texts have been translated (Reinhard 1978, Aris 1979, Orofino 1991, Childs 1993), current spiritual beliefs and practices centering on a *sbas-yul* have been detailed (Diemberger 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997) and historical notes about the opening of *sbas-yul* (Ehrhard 1997) and the context of *sbas-yul* searches (Brauen-Dolma 1985) have been recorded. In addition, several scholars have made peripheral remarks about the existence of *sbas-yul* in or near areas where they have worked (Dobremez and Jest 1976, Clarke 1980, Sacherer 1981, Levine 1988, Mumford 1990). *Sbas-yul* have even been found to exist in the sacred geography of non-Tibetan Himalayan dwellers such as the Tamang (Holmberg 1989) and Rai (Gaenszle 1993).

diaeval emperors could take refuge during politically unstable times. Based on a comparative reading of *sbas-yul* texts, it will be shown that a primary purpose of the *sbas-yul* was not necessarily to provide a haven for spiritual practice; more importantly, they were destined to be sanctuaries where the descendants of Emperor Khri-srong Lde-btsan and his patrilineal kin could seek refuge when there was a threat to the continuity of their biological lineage. After a brief introduction to the concept of the *sbas-yul*, a connection will be drawn between *sbas-yul* prophecies and the fate of the royal lineage. It will then be shown that one function of the *sbas-yul* is to preserve the royal lineage. Finally, some remarks will be made with regard to the ontological difference between members of this lineage and average Tibetans in order to illustrate why it was considered so important to safeguard the descendants of the emperors, without whom the well-being of all Tibetans was threatened. Throughout this study, the assumption is made that the prophecies contained within *sbas-yul* texts were not actually related by Padmasambhava to Khri-srong Lde-btsan or another member of the royal family (as implied in the texts themselves), but were later compositions that reflected the political situation in Tibet during the 13th - 15th centuries.³

What is a *Sbas-yul*?

The *sbas-yul* concept, although not exclusive to the Rnying-ma-pas,⁴ is most closely connected with the Byang-gter branch of the Rnying-ma-pas founded by Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can (1337–1408). Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can is credited with discovering many of

³ Tucci (1949) among others has advanced the opinion that much prophetic literature was composed during the 14th century, and believes that the political events described in prophetic format can be used as guidelines for dating the texts. More recently, Aris (1988) has suggested that Padma Gling-pa composed many of the *gter-ma* texts attributed to him, a view that has offended some (e.g. Butters 1995), but which is worthy of serious consideration.

⁴ *Sbas-yul* are mentioned in a 'Bri-gung text on sacred geography (*Gnas-bshad dkar-chags*: 2a), and in a Bon-po text written in 1301 (*Srid-pa rgyud-kyi kha-byang*: 40a-41a).

the texts detailing different hidden lands, and in fact he was the most influential figure in the rise of the popularity of hidden lands.⁵

Sbas-yul are valleys situated on the southern slope of the Himalaya. According to legend, they were concealed by Padmasambhava so that they could be used as sanctuaries during times of need. The hidden land is both a refuge for meritorious individuals from all strata of Tibetan society during a time of moral and political degeneration, as well as a place of accomplishment for those who are spiritually inclined. It is a land where the yogi can spend extended time in retreat, and where a *gter-ston* can reveal sacred treasures. As a refuge from social and political strife, it is a settlement destination, a fertile landscape where society can function with a king as the legitimate ruler, and where an idealized version of Tibetan society can be sustained remote from deteriorating conditions in Tibet. Unlike the mythical kingdom of Shambhala,⁶ the *sbas-yul* is not a staging point for a final war whereby the forces of good triumph over the forces of evil, but is a sanctuary wherein settlers and their traditions will be protected. The *sbas-yul* scale is far more modest than Shambhala, and the goal of reaching it is attainable for lamas and laymen alike.

There are several layers to a *sbas-yul*, including the outer, inner, and secret. The inner and secret aspects can be perceived and utilized for

⁵ A biography of this *gter-ston* was written by Nyi-ma 'Od-zer (*Rgod-ldem nam-thar*). Parts of this work were summarized by Boord (1993). In addition, abridged biographies are found in *Gu-bkra chos-'byung* (483-489), Kong-sprul's *Gter-ston brgya-rtsa* (121b-123a), Dudjom Rinpoche's Rnying-ma-pa history (Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 780-783), and in Ngag-dbang Bstan-'dzin Nor-bu's lineage history of *gcod* teachings (*Byin-rlabs gter-mtsho*: 51a-53a). See also Dargyay (1979: 129-132).

The Byang-gter ("Northern Treasure") branch of the Rnying-ma-pas was directly inspired by Rgod-ldem. They came to fruition under the guidance of Rig-'dzin Ngaggi Dbang-po, known as the first Rdo-rje Brag Rig-'dzin by virtue of the fact that he founded the Byang-gter monastic center of Rdo-rje Brag situated in the Gtsang-po valley to the west of Bsam-yas. Padma 'Phrin-las (1640-1718) was one of the most influential figures in this school.

⁶ Shambhala is a mythical kingdom situated somewhere to the north of Tibet. Since its textual tradition is associated with the Kalacakra Tantra which was brought to Tibet in 1027 C.E., the Shambhala literature most certainly pre-dates the *sbas-yul* literature. However, the *sbas-yul* prophecies include rewritings of even earlier material on the decline of Buddhism in Tibet and Central Asia (see Nattier 1991). The *sbas-yul* concept as it appears in the texts dealt with herein is significantly different in essence and scope than descriptions of Shambhala.

spiritual benefits only by those who have the correct training and insight. In a physical sense, they are locales of small geographic extent; in essence, the core of the *sbas-yul*. The outer dimension, on the other hand, consists of a series of interlinked valleys.⁷ It is a geographical area bounded by physical landmarks such as mountains and rivers. The areas are extensive, for according to the guides each *sbas-yul* contains space for hundreds, if not thousands, of households.⁸ In a coarse and practical sense, the outer *sbas-yul* is the real *sbas-yul*, since it must be capable of supporting a sizable population engaged in an agro-pastoral

⁷ Without exception, the descriptive guides detail systems of interconnected valleys. For example, the guide to Gnam-sgo Zla-gam describes a valley enclosed by mountains on the upper end and by a forested gorge on the lower end (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*: 4b). There is also a reference to large and small rivers within (12b), and a mirror-like plain on the southwest border (18b). The description adequately fits the entire upper Glang-'phrang Valley, which concords with Mi-'gyur Rdo-rje's assertion that Gnam-sgo Zla-gam and the Glang-'phrang Valley are identical (*Gnam-zla ngos-'dzin*: 3a). Yol-mo consists of three large valleys and three small valleys. The size of Yol-mo is indicated by the amount of days (four) that it takes to walk from the upper to the lower part of the valley (*Yol-mo snying-byang*: 1b). In a related text it is described as consisting of six small valleys: going upwards from the central valley, there are three convergent valleys (*Yol-mo gnas-byang*: 1b). The description of Skyid-mo-lung permits the interpretation that this *sbas-yul* consists of both Nub-ri and Ku-thang, and in addition is comprised of 101 uninhabited small valleys (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 2a). As for the guide to 'Bras-mo-ljongs, it delineates three major river valleys (*lung-pa kha-che gsum*) comprising the *sbas-yul*: 'Bras-mo-gshongs in the center, 'Bras-mo-lung to the right, and 'Bras-mo-khud to the left. These are further divided into their respective tributaries (*'Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 7a-8a). The southern door guide of the Bhutan Mkhan-pa-lung text delineates an extensive system of valleys and side valleys described in geographical relation to Bum-thang (*'Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 7a-8a). This section also appears in the Khum-bu Mkhan-pa-lung version, in addition to the description of a valley system to the east of Khum-bu. Diemberger (1992) has identified the large geographic extent of Mkhan-pa-lung. In each case, the texts describe systems of valleys, and not single isolated valleys.

⁸ "In that land [Gnam-sgo Zla-gam] there live ('tsho) 900 towns (*grong-khyer*)" (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*: 18a). "At that place, because there is a valley where 500 towns (*grong-khyer*) live ('tsho), there will arise a prince for the village (*yul*) that will be founded at the lower border of the valley for those for whom there is no place" (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*: 19b). "In the future, in the upper part of that valley [Padma-tshal] there will arise (*chags*) 7000 felt tents (*sbra-khyim*). In the lower part of the valley there will arise 7000 towns (*grong-khyer*)" (*Padma-tshal lam-yig*: 3a). "There will be the dwelling (*gnas-pa*) of 7000 towns (*grong-khyer*)" (*Yol-mo gnas-yig*: 2b). "7000 towns (*grong-khyer*) will arise (*chags*)" (*Yol-mo gnas-yig*: 4b). "In the middle of this land [Skyid-mo-lung], there live ('tsho) 300 towns (*grong-khyer*). (continued)

lifestyle. Although Tibetans have claimed many areas as *sbas-yul*,⁹ this paper will only deal with the following five (texts associated with each in parenthesis): Gnam-sgo Zla-gam in the Langtang Valley, Nepal (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*, *Gnam-zla ngos-'dzin*);¹⁰ Padma-tshal/Yolmo, Ne-

(Note 8 continued) In the small bordering valleys there live ('*tsho*) 1000 towns (*grong-khyer*) of the general populace" (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 4b).

The term town (*grong-khyer*) in some of the above contexts is problematic, since a town should exist (*yod*), but should not live ('*tsho*) or dwell (*gnas-pa*). This leads me to believe that *grong-khyer* should be interpreted as *grong-ba*, a term for house/household that better fits the geographical context of a secluded system of valleys. Further evidence to support this supposition is that, in the Gnam-sgo Zla-gam passage, *yul* is used in reference to a village founded for the excess population of the 500 towns. Logically, this would make more sense if 500 families were meant, since *yul* is a taxonomically smaller settlement than *grong-khyer*. Also, *Yol-mo gnas-yig* opposes 7000 tent dwellings with 7000 towns. The latter would make more sense if interpreted as 7000 houses (implying households). The interpretation is further supported by the terminology used in the Mkhan-pa-lung texts, which do not refer to towns (*grong-khyer*), but to households (*dud-mangs*), as in, "There [in one of the valleys comprising the *sbas-yul* valley system], there is room (*shong*) for 300 households (*dud-mangs*)" (*Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig*: 12b, *Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig*: 33 where *lang* should be *mang[s]*). In addition, there is one reference to *grong-khyer*, "As for the 300 towns (*grong-khyer*) which are in the middle of that land [another valley in the *sbas-yul*], they have 500 inhabitants ('*bangs*)" (*Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig*: 12a). This latter instance makes more sense considering that it is more likely (although still demographically questionable) to have 1.4 residents per household than to have the same number per town. One reason for the apparent misattribution would be to exaggerate the size and importance of a *sbas-yul*.

9. Incongruous lists of *sbas-yul* can be found in different Tibetan sources. The problems of incompatible lists and the criteria by which a *sbas-yul* is defined are beyond the scope of this paper. One well-accepted tradition is that there are seven *sbas-yul*, listed in Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem's *Gu-ru'i ga'u bdun-ma* as Bde-ldan Skyid-mo-lung, Sbas-pa Padma-tshal, Rol-pa Mkha'-'gro-gling, Rgyal-kyi Mkhan-pa-lung, Lha-yi Pho-brang Sdings, *Sbas-yul* 'Bras-mo-shong, and Gro-mo-khud (*Ga'u bdun-ma*: 6b-7a, see also Schwieger 1985, and for a different list see Macdonald 1973: 232-233).
10. The former text was discovered by Tshe-brtan Rgyal-mtshan, also known as Chos-kyi Blo-gros. The dates of his life span are not certain, although Aris (1979:157) speculates that he lived sometime between 1147 and 1266. Thondup (1984:154) lists him as a 13th century *gter-ston*, and in *Gu-bkra chos-byung* he is listed as a *gter-ston* who lived during the 4th *rab-byung* (1207-1266). Tshe-brtan Rgyal-mtshan was born in Sna-ra-thang in upper Mon (*Gu-bkra Chos-'byung*: 403). (continued)

pal (*Padma-tshal lam-yig*, *Yol-mo snying-byang*, *Yol-mo gnas-byang*, *Yol-mo gnas-yig*);¹¹ Skyid-mo-lung near Kutang, Nepal (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*, *Ga'u bdun-ma*, *Gsal-ba'i sgron-me*);¹² 'Bras-mo-ljongs in Sikkim (*'Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*);¹³ and Mkhan-pa-lung in Bhutan (*Mkhan-pa-ljongs gnas-yig*, *'Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*)¹⁴ and adjacent to Khumbu, Nepal (*Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig*, *Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig*).¹⁵

(Note 10 continued) His major *gter-ma* discoveries were made at Mon Chu-mo-phug (*Gu-bkra chos-'byung*: 403. *Gter-ston brgya-rtsa*: 62b-63b, see also *Padma'i thang-yig*: 245b). *Gnam-sgo ngos-'dzin*, a text about the identification of the *sbas-yul* Gnam-sgo Zla-gam, was composed by Rdo-dmar Mi-'gyur Rdo-rje during the late 1600s (see Ehrhard 1997).

- ¹¹ All of the Yol-mo texts are attributed to the discoveries of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can.
- ¹² *Ga'u bdun-ma* and *Gsal-ba'i sgron-me* are both collections of prophecies related by Padmasambhava to Khri-srong Lde-btsan and attributed to the discoveries of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can. Each contains significant sections of *Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*, a text that centers primarily on the *sbas-yul* Skyid-mo-lung. Although the three texts obviously have a common origin, the significant orthographical differences suggest that they were copied at different times and places. The most reliable version is the *Skyid-lung lam-yig*. A concordance of the respective sections of the texts is given below.

Section	Text	<i>Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig</i>	<i>Gsal-ba 'i sgron-me</i>	<i>Ga'u bdun-ma</i>
<i>lam-byang</i>		1b-5a	75a-75b (partial)	38b-42b
<i>kha-byang</i>		6a-8a	73b-75a	x
<i>snying-byang</i>		10a-15a	66b-71b	26b-32b
<i>lde-mig</i>		15a-17a	71b-73b	x
<i>lde-mig</i>		17a-19a	x	34a-38b

- ¹³ One section of this text (4b-26b) is devoted to 'Bras-mo-ljongs (4b-26b), whereas another is devoted to Mkhan-pa-lung (26b-49b). Its discovery is attributed to Padma Gling-pa (1450-1521, see Aris 1988), although the colophon states that it was completed by Nyi-ma 'Od-zer, perhaps the same Nyi-ma 'Od-zer who was a disciple of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can. Also, the general *sbas-yul* text *Spyi'i them-byang* contains numerous references to 'Bras-mo-ljongs.
- ¹⁴ Both are attributed to the discoveries of Padma Gling-pa.
- ¹⁵ Both texts are attributed to the discoveries of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can. The identification of Mkhan-pa-lung has caused problems in the past since two distinct *sbas-yul* are called by the same name. (Continued)

Portents of Degenerate Times and the Need to Seek Refuge

Sbas-yul texts characteristically include a list of signs indicating that the time to seek a sanctuary has arrived. The signs can be divided into the following four categories: social decay (e.g., the inversion of social order, disregard for exogamous marital ideals); religious degeneration (e.g., the breaking of vows, the teaching and practice of distorted views, the destruction of religious property); natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, floods, inauspicious stellar alignments); and political unrest (e.g., foreign invasions, the demise of the royal lineage).

Only the politically related prophecies will be dealt with here. With regard to foreign invasions, the main antagonists in *sbas-yul* texts are consistently Mongol (Hor, occasionally Sog) and Turkic (Du-ru-ka).¹⁶ As for references to the royal lineage, the prophecies are recorded in the format of instructions given by Padmasambhava to Khri-srong Lde-btsan. Thus, it is no surprise that the fate of the emperor's lineage is of

(Note 15 continued) The first is in Bhutan, and legends associated with the creation of this *sbas-yul* are the topic of a lengthy discussion by Aris (1979). As a spiritual retreat it was in use since at least the late 13th-century, but was opened as a *sbas-yul* by Padma Gling-pa (1450-1521), an event that is narrated in his biography (Aris 1979: 60-63). The other Mkhān-pa-lung lies adjacent to the Khumbu Valley in Nepal. According to tradition, Rgod-Idem is credited with the act of unveiling the western Mkhān-pa-lung (Diemberger 1992: 422). Aris (1979: 81) has speculated that in the past there must have been a geographical shift in the recognized location of the *sbas-yul*, and considers the Bhutan Mkhān-pa-lung to be the antecedent of the Khumbu Mkhān-pa-lung, whereas Orofino (1991) considers the two to represent independent traditions.

¹⁶ Hor was a term originally applied to the Uighurs during the time of the Tibetan empire (Hoffmann 1950: 193, Stein 1972: 34). It was later used to designate the Mongols of the early 13th-century (Stein 1972: 34). During the Tibetan empire, Sog referred to Sogdians (Li 1957: 139). As pointed out by Sperling, it existed as a clan name in pre-Mongol Tibet. He suggests that Sog may have been applied to Mongols after they moved into Tibetan areas already associated with the term (Sperling 1992: 744-745). Later, Sog and Hor both denoted Mongols. In Classical and some Old Tibetan sources, Dru-gu is a generic term for Turkic peoples (Beckwith 1987: 63). Du-ru-ka is a variant form of the Sanskrit word for Turk, Turuṣka. Usage of the term Du-ru-ka in 14th-century prophetic literature probably reflects a connection between the *sbas-yul* texts and prophecies of decline dealt with by Nattier (1991). Another possibility is that it is a holdover from imperial times when the Turks were a primary Inner Asian rival of the Tibetans.

foremost concern in the dialogues. Passages from the general *sbas-yul* text entitled *Spyi'i them-byang* can be used to illustrate the interconnectedness of the two major themes within *sbas-yul* political prophecies: "The inner signs: After the power of the *mnga'-bdag* kings¹⁷ in Tibet is damaged, the laws will be destroyed. In Tibet there will be no law for 123 years. Then, [Tibet] will be subjected by the Mongol Black Mu-dur.¹⁸ There will be 125 years of Mongol rule. Then, the Mongol law will be destroyed. At that time, it is said that the Tibetans must go to the hidden land (*Spyi'i them-byang*: 2a-2b)."¹⁹ The text goes on to say: "Oh king, in the west, in Mang-yul Gung-thang one lineal descen-

¹⁷ *Mnga'-bdag* is a term used often in the prophecies when Padmasambhava addresses Khri-srong Lde-btsan. The term was not common in Old Tibetan sources. By the 14th-century, when much prophetic *gter-ma* literature arose, the title *mnga'-bdag* alludes to Khri-srong Lde-btsan and his descendants. Their biological lineage is referred to by the highly honorific term *gdung-rgyud*.

Herbert D. have used the term "emperor" in reference to Khri-srong Lde-btsan and others who ruled over Tibet during the imperial period (ca. 650 - 842 C.E.). As Beckwith has pointed out (1987: 14), in Old Tibetan sources the rulers of Tibet were called emperors (*kyang*), a term that was substituted by postimperial Tibetan writers with "king" (*rgyal-po*). The *sbas-yul* texts invariably refer to the emperors as kings (*rgyal-po*).

¹⁸ The identification of Mu-dur Nag-po is problematic. As far as I know, it is not attested in Tibetan historical writings. It is perhaps a reference to Dor-rta Nag-po who appears in Tibetan sources such as Bsod-nams Grags-pa's *Sa-skya gdung-rabs*, Sum-pa Mkhan-po's *Dpag-bsam ljon-bzang*, and the 5th Dalai Lama's *Rdzogs-ldan gzhon-nu'i dga'-ston* (Shakabpa 1984: 61). In 1240, he was dispatched to Tibet by Kōdän with an invasion force, and therefore can be considered as the one who subjugated Tibet. However, the transition from Dor-rta to Mu-dur remains an obstacle to this interpretation. Another possibility is that Mu-dur Nag-po refers to Chinggis Khan, an interpretation based solely on the evidence that a descendent of Mu-dur Nag-po is described as a *bodhisattva* in one text (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 17a). The *bodhisattva* in question can be none other than Qubilai, who is highly regarded by Tibetans due to his support of Buddhism. Finally, as pointed out by Christopher Beckwith (personal communication), it is possible that Mu-dur is really Mu-ngur (the letters da and nga are easily confused in *dbu-can* texts). In this case Mu-ngur is simply Mongols, since l often becomes r when Mongol names are written in Tibetan. If this is a valid interpretation, then the passage would read, "Then, [Tibet] will be subjugated by the black Mongols, the Hor."

¹⁹ *nang-rtags Bod du mnga'-bdag rgyal-po'i mnga'-thang nyams nas khrims 'jig/ Bod la khrims-med lo brgya dang nyi-shu-tsa-gsum yong/ de na Mu-dur nag-po Hor-gyis 'dul/ Hor-khrims lo brgya dang nyi-shu-tsa-nga yong/ de nas Hor-khrims 'jig/ de'i dus-su Bod-[pa?] sbas-pa'i yul du 'gro-dgos ces gsung-sol*

dent of you yourself will be killed by knife, and the misery of Tibet will commence. Two will be killed by knife, and the decline of Tibet will begin. Three will be killed, and because the happiness of Tibet is finished, flee to hidden lands and southern valleys (*Spyi'i them-byang*: 13a-13b)."²⁰

The first passage is relatively straightforward. The downfall of the Tibetan empire is followed by a lawless period prior to Tibet's subjugation under the Mongols. If Black Mu-dur is in fact Dor-rta, the Mongol general who led the first campaign against the Tibetans in 1240, then the prophecy specifies that Mongol rule will last until 1365. Mongol power was eclipsed by the Phag-mo Gru-pas a few years before then, although 1365 nearly accords with 1368, the downfall of the Yüan Dynasty in China. The second passage is a reference to the demise of Khri-srong Lde-btsan's descendants in Gung-thang. The history of these kings is not well known. However, in a genealogy written in 1745, Kah:thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang Nor-bu said that the lineage was ultimately terminated by the king of Gtsang, who took control of Gung-thang in 1620. The fate of this lineage will be dealt with in more detail below. The above prophecy, if we assume that it was written around the end of the 14th-century by Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem, must have reflected a threat to the Gung-thang kings and not their actual demise.

The guide to Nam-sgo Zla-gam attributed to Tshe-brtan Rgyal-mtshan contains a lengthy section detailing future events that signal the time to search for the *sbas-yul*. For example, "At that time the armies of Rgya, Hor, Mon, upper and lower Sog-po,²¹ Karluk,²² and the rebellious troops from the frontier will march and all the regions of Tibet will be reduced to ruin. When the armies of the Du-ru-ka march, they will wander through the tutelary temples of the king himself and the tem-

²⁰ *kye rgyal-po stod Mang-yul Gung-thang du nyid-kyi gdung-brgyud gcig gri ru bkum-pa dang Bod-kyi sdug mgo-'dzugs-so/ gnyis gri ru bkum-pa dang Bod-kyi phung mgo-'dzugs-so/ gsum bkum-pa dang Bod-kyi skyid-pa zad-bas sbas-yul dang lhorong la bros-gcig/*

²¹ Usually, *stod* and *smad* are used in the context of Stod-Hor and Smad-Hor, which designate the western (Iran, Central Asia, Turkestan) Mongol empire under Hulegu and his successors, and the eastern (China) Mongol empire under Qubilai and his successors (Sperling 1992: 746). Sog and Hor may have been confused or used interchangeably in this text.

²² Gar-log refers to the Karluk Turks (Hoffmann 1950: 193), a people who gained notoriety in Tibetan sources for killing Lha-bla-ma Ye-shes-'od (Shakabpa 1984: 57).

ples of Lhasa, Bsam-yas, and the border-taming [temples] and those beyond the border. At that time, the correct time for going to that place [the *sbas-yul*] has arrived (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*: 7a-7b)."²³ Regarding the fate of the royal descendants, the prophecy reads: "In particular, the lineage of the religious kings, the rulers of the realm of Tibet, will in the end become barren [lit., 'empty']. The Tibetan subjects will be fragmented. Many upstart kings will appear (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*: 5b)."²⁴

The Gnam-sgo Zla-gam text is the only one to contain such a detailed list of armies. The portrayal is of an apocalyptic event: Armies from all the borders will invade Tibet. This may be a reflection of the early Mongol incursions, which would fit the general time frame of the text's discovery during the 4th *rab-byung* (1207–1266), or else it may be a reference to the collapse of the royal dynasty in 842 C. E., when literally all the borders of the empire disintegrated. It is highly significant to note that, unlike the other *sbas-yul* texts, the descendants of the Tibetan monarchs do not meet with a violent end in the Gnam-sgo Zla-gam text. The lineage will merely become barren. This could either be a prediction, or else it is a reference to the fact that early historians considered Glang-dar-ma to have died without issue (Petech 1994: 649). According to some, the lineage was perpetuated by a nephew ('Od-srung) and an adopted son (Yum-brtan). The latter interpretation fits the context of the invasion prophecy if we consider it to mean the collapse of the royal dynasty. This is supported by the statement that Tibet will fragment into many kingdoms, which is exactly how the post-imperial period was later described.

In one Yol-mo text, Padmasambhava prefaces his directions to the hidden land by saying, "Then, at the time when the Turkic demon army subdues India and Tibet, the Land of Snows, between Mang-yul to the west and Gnya'-nam to the east there is a safe valley, the upper part of

²³ *De-dus Rgya dang Hor dang Mon dang stod-smad-kyi Sog-po dang/ Gar-log-gi dmag dang log-pa'i mtha'i dmag-dpung g.yos nas kyang Bod-khams thams-cad phung-bar byed-do/ Du-ru-kha'i dmag g.yos-pas rgyal-po nyid-kyi thugs-dam gtsug-lag-khang Lha-sa Bsam-yas mtha'-'dul yang-'dul-gyi gtsug-lag-khang-rnams nyul-bar byed-do/ dus-der gnas-der 'gro-ran-pa'i dus la babs-pa yin-no/*

²⁴ *khyad-par du Bod-kyi rgyal-khams Mnga'-bdag chos-kyi rgyal-po nyid-kyi gdung-rgyud mtha' la stong/ Bod-'bangs sil-bur 'gro/ glo-bur-kyi rgyal-po mang du 'byung-ngo/*

which is cut off by mountains and the lower part cut off by forests (*Yol-mo gnas-byang*: 2a).²⁵ A similar historical prophecy places events in a better light: “Afterwards, the Turkic army will assemble in the Kathmandu Valley, and in the third year, because the need has again arisen to go to the medicinal land, the medicinal lake Phu’i Li, the time has arrived to seize the land [the *sbas-yul*] (*Yol-mo gnas-byang*: 4b).”²⁶ Similar to the Gnam-sgo Zla-gam text, the Yol-mo guides omit violent references to the demise of the royal lineage. Yet tangential remarks demonstrate that the degenerate time is characterized by the lack of a king: “As for the proper time to seek that land, there will be fighting among the subjects of Tibet, the Land of Snows, who will not have a king (*Yol-mo gnas-byang*: 3b).”²⁷

The reference to Turks in Kathmandu means that the text could not have been composed prior to 1349, the year when a Turkic army led by Shamsud-Din Iliyas invaded the valley (Regmi 1965: 312–322). This prophecy is unique, since events in most of the other texts center on Tibet. An important geo-political factor behind the perspective in the Yol-mo texts is that, according to several accounts, the area was once the possession of the kings of the Kathmandu Valley and was later granted to Tibetan immigrants (Clarke 1980, *Yol-mo gnas-byang*: 3a).

The guide to ’Bras-mo-ljongs completed by Nyi-ma ’Od-zer discusses the appropriate time to open the *sbas-yul*. For the most part, Padmasambhava details a host of social and religious ills which will afflict Tibet at the time. He then states that, “There will arise a war [between] China (Rgya) and the Mongols (Hor) of the border (’*Bras-mkhan lam-yig*: 12a).” Furthermore, “As for the army of the border, it will arise and move from China (’*Bras-mkhan lam-yig*: 12b).”²⁸ In a subsequent section dealing with the appropriate time to go, the timing of the border invasions is specified: “In the male iron dog year, the bor-

25. *de nas Rgya-gar dang Bod kha-ba-can-gyi yul bdud-dmag Du-ru-kas brdul-ba’i dus na nub Mang-yul la gtad-pa/ shar Gnya’-nam la gtad-pa’i bar na phu gangs-kyis chod-pa/ mda’ nags-kyi chod-pa’i lung-pa btsan-po gcig yod-dol/*

26. *dus-phyis Bal-po’i yul du Du-ru-ka’i dmag ldags-pa dang/ lo-gsum Phu’i Li sman-mtsho sman-gyi yul du ’gros dgos-pa yang yong-bas/ dus la bab-pa’i tshe yul bzung-gcig/*

27. *yul de btsal ran-pa’i dus-ni/...Bod kha-ba-can-gyi yul du rgyal-po med-pa’i ’bangs-nang ’khrugs byed/*

28. *mtha’i Rgya dang Hor gnyis ’khrug-pa ’byung/ ... mtha’i dmag ni Rgya nas langs zhing g.yos/*

der army will arrive in Tibet. The subjects of Tibet will suffer and be despondent. The Mongol (Hor) army will seize Dbus-gtsang. The survivors will flee to the hidden land (*'Bras-mkhan lam-yig: 26a*)."²⁹ The general *sbas-yul* text (*Spyi'i them-byang*) concurs: "After that, when the armies of the Mongols, etc., who [will] fill all of Dbus-gtsang, have invaded at the same time, forsake Tibet and flee to *'Bras-mo-bshongs* (*Spyi'i them-byang: 11a*)."³⁰ However, none of the *'Bras-mo-ljongs* texts cite the demise of the royal lineage as a sign to seek the *sbas-yul*.

The above passage is unambiguous in stating that *'Bras-mo-ljongs* should be a migrational destination around 1250, the iron-dog year. Unlike prophecies associated with other texts, the time frame does not extend into the 14th century through references to the downfall of Mongol administration in Tibet. One possible conclusion is that *'Bras-mo-ljongs* was considered a *sbas-yul* prior to the birth of Rig-'dzin Rgodldem. The lack of reference to the violent sundering of the royal lineage further supports this assertion. It is similar to the Gnam-sgo Zlagam text, which appears to be the oldest *sbas-yul* guide, in that there is no prophecy linking the killing of the royal descendants with the flight to a hidden land.

The Skyid-mo-lung texts are more specific when it comes to detailing who will invade and when they will do so. The prophecies preceding the guide to the inner door specify, "In particular, after nine nations' armies come here to Tibet, because Mongol and Turkic armies will come at that time, it is necessary to flee (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig: 9a*)."³¹ These are merely general allusions compared to the following passage: "Until the royal administration of the *mnga'-bdag* king is destroyed, there will be happiness in Tibet. After the Tibetan administration is destroyed, there will be suffering. From the east, the Mongol army will boil over like water. The Mongols and those who are like the Mongols will conquer Tibet. In the work of killing, [they are] the majesty of power. There will be born an emanation of a bodhisattva in the royal

²⁹ *lcags-pho-khyi la mtha'-dmag Bod du sleb/ Bod-'bangs sems-can mi-skyid sdug la gtad/ Hor-gyi dmag-gi Dbus-gtsang 'dzin-par 'gyur/ lhag-ma-rnams kyang sbas-yul gnas su 'bros/*

³⁰ *de'i phyi la Dbus-gtsang-gi thams-cad khyab-pa'i Hor-dmag sogs dus-gcig la brtolnas Bod-yul bor la 'Bras-mo-bshongs su bros-shig/*

³¹ *khyad-par du dmag-rigs dgu Bod-'dir 'ong-bas/ de dus Hor dang Du-ru-ka'i dmag yong-pas 'bros-dgos-sol/*

lineage of [the] Black Mu-dur.³² During his reign, there will be happiness in Tibet. Then, the Mongol administration will gradually decay. The happiness of Tibet will gradually be consumed. In western Mnga'-ris, the lineage of the Tibetan kings will be severed.... In particular, at the end of an era, the lineage of the kings will be subdued by a demon. They will be deprived of power and will be killed. At that time, the happiness of Tibet will be finished. Three lineal descendants will die by knife, and in Tibet nine demon armies will gush forth. The virtue of wellness and happiness will be damaged. Various sufferings [due to] non-virtue will arise. Thus it is said (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 17a-17b)."³³ Another passage in the text forges a more overt link between the demise of the royal lineage and flight to a hidden land: "Various evil sounds and omens will arise. In western Gung-thang, moral defilements [and] blood will scatter. The lineage of the religion-protecting kings will be destroyed. At that time, the sentient beings of Tibet will flee quickly to the isolated forested valleys (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 19a)."³⁴

The events narrated above are relatively straight forward. Tibet is considered prosperous during the imperial period, but when the royal administration collapses a serious decline ensues, capped off by the Mongol invasion. This is followed by a stable Mongol administration under Qubilai. Similar to the above passage from *Spyi'i them-byang*, the *sbas-yul* migration must take place after the disintegration of Mongol power, and following the killing of Khri-srong Lde-btsan's descendants in Gung-thang. Also, as with *Spyi'i them-byang*, there is a reference to three lineages (or lineal descendants) that will be violently ter-

³² As mentioned above, this is probably a reference to Qubilai Khan.

³³ *mnga'-bdag rgyal-po'i rgyal-khrims 'di/ ma-zhig bar du Bod-khams skyid/ Bod-khrims zhig nas sdug-bsngal spyod/ shar nas Hor-dmag chu-ltar lud/ Hor dang Hor-'dras Bod-yul 'jom/ gsod-pa'i las la shugs-kyi rngam/ Mu-dur nag-po'i rgyal-brgyud la/ byang-chub sems-dpa'i sprul-pa 'byung/ de'i ring la Bod-khams skyid/ de nas Hor-khrims rim-kyis 'jig/ Bod-kyi skyid-pa rims-kyis 'dzad/ Mnga'-ris stod-kyi phyogs-su/ Bod-kyi rgyal-po'i gdung-rabs 'chags/ ... kyad-par lnga-rgya tha-ma'i dus/ rgyal-po'i gdung-rgyud bdud-kyi 'dul/ mnga'-thang 'phrog-cing srog la rgol/ de dus Bod-kyi skyid-pa zad/ gdung-gsum gri ru gum-pa dang/ Bod-du bdud-dmag sde-dgu rdol/ bde-zhing skyid-pa'i bsod-nams nyams/ mi-dge sdug-bsngal sna-tshogs 'byung/ ces gsungs-so/*

³⁴ *sgra-ngan ltas-ngan sna-tshogs 'byung/ Gung-thang stod du dme-khrag 'thor/ chos-skyong rgyal-po'i gdung-rgyud 'joms/ de dus Bod-kyi sems-can-rnams/ nag-rongs dbon-par [sic, for dben-par] myur du bros/*

minated, except this time the event coincides with the invasion of “nine types of demon armies”. As alluded to above, the Gung-thang line was finally severed in 1620, a problem that will be dealt with below.

Mkhan-pa-ljongs gnas-yig and *'Bras-mkhan lam-yig* differ significantly with regard to the specification of invading armies. In the former, there is only a passing reference to a war between Tibet and China which makes the road impassible (*Mkhan-pa-ljongs gnas-yig*: 10a).³⁵ Otherwise, the political prophecies deal mainly with events in Bhutan. There is one further allusion to invading armies which concerns the security of the *sbas-yul*: “When the Tibetan subjects are conquered by the Turks, the Turks will not come to this place (*Mkhan-pa-ljongs gnas-yig*: 13a).” The *Mkhan-pa-lung* section of *'Bras-mkhan lam-yig* is far more specific. In fact, there is a chapter entitled “The teaching [about] the time when the Turkic army comes [to Tibet]”, wherein it is stated that, “At the time when the border people conquer Tibet, the king’s reign will expire, the monks’ vows will be finished, the tantric priests will not be bound by oath, ... [and] an emanation of Gnam-the Dkar-po³⁶ will appear from the land of Hor. He will lead an army of Mongols ... [passage detailing movements of Mongol army throughout Tibet] ... In the male iron dog year they will seize the teachings of Tibet. The three mighty ones will seize Rdzong-mkhar. There will arise that which is called the law of king Chinggis: ‘Kill husbands; build walls of flesh. Girls kill the sons of servants. Alas, com-

³⁵ *Rgya Bod 'khrugs nas lam 'grul-cad/*

³⁶ Pho-lha Gnam-the Dkar-po is another name for Pe-har, who was considered to be a tutelary deity of the Mongols prior to becoming a deity in Tibet. According to the Dge-lugs-pa, Pe-har is the chief of the worldly protectors (*'jigs-rten-pa'i srung-ma*). Due to his foreign origin, he is classified at a lower taxonomic level by the Rnying-ma-pas (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 94-97). In the context of this paper, the reference to Gnam-the Dkar-po is significant due to the connection this deity has with Mongols.

passionate Tibetans, consider happiness without doubt in exactly that way. Since the Turkic armies will not have come yet, males and females of Tibet, this is your opportunity! Go to the four *sbas-yul* where happiness arises³⁷ (*'Bras-mkhan lam-yig: 36a-37a*)!"³⁸

The later Mkhan-pa-lung tradition was never so specific with regard to invading armies. There are general remarks about the Karluk and Mongol armies (*Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig: 3a; Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig: 5*), and further specifications that, "During a degenerate period of decline, the Mongol (Hor) army will arrive here in the center of Tibet." In addition, "When the descendants of yourself, the king, are killed by knife in Mang-yul, it is the proper [time] to open [Mkhan-pa-lung]... . Due to the lack of a king in Tibet, subjects will fight among themselves (*Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig: 3b; Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig: 8*)."³⁹

The similarities that link all of the prophecies cited above are that the time for opening a *sbas-yul* is signaled by destructive invasions and a

³⁷ This is similar to a passage found in the autobiographical writings of the "Mongol Repeller" (Sog-bzlog-pa) Blo-gros Rgyal-mtshan (b. 1552). He quoted the following from a prophecy entitled *Bstan-pa gso-thabs-kyi lung-bstan*: "In the male fire dog year, the lower throne (*khri-shod*) queen will move from 'Gram and threaten some nomads in the north. In the female fire pig year they will come to Tibet. 'Bri[-gung] and Stag[-lung] will run to near 'O-yug. In the earth mouse and ox years, they will go eastward. They will arrive in the male iron tiger year. In the rabbit year, Tibet will fry liked popped barley. In the water dragon and snake years, pouring out like rope, they will run westward. In the wood horse and sheep years, they will run like a horse. If one person is going to do the repelling, in the wood horse and sheep years, repel [them] to their own land. In the fire monkey and bird years, there will be war in the west. Three *dmag-dpon* will conquer Rdzong-kha. They will beat the three drums of war. In all the safe valleys such as Skyid-mo-lung, Ku-thang, and Tsums, the royal descendants (*lha-sras gdung-rgyud*) must make dwelling places" (*Sog-bzlog-pa: 16b*). This prophecy is not found in the Skyid-mo-lung texts. In this prophecy, there is no mention of the cessation of the royal lineage. People are instructed to flee southward when Rdzong-kha, the power center of the Gung-thang kings, is conquered in the fire monkey and fire bird years. [*me-pho-khyi'i lo dag la/ khri-shod rgyal-mo'i 'Gram-nas gyol/ byang-gi 'brog-pa 'ga'-la bsdig/ me-mo-phag la Bod du 'ong/ 'Bri Stag 'O-yug snye-mor rgyug/ sa-phyi-glang la smad-du 'gro/ lcags-pho-stag la sleb-yong ste/ yos la Bod-khams yos-ltar brngod/ chu-'brug-sprul-gyi lo nyid la/ thag-ltar bran zhing stod du rgyug/ shing-rta-lug la rta-bzhin rgyug/ skyes-bu gcig-gis bzlog-pa na/ shing-rta-lug la rang-yul bzlog/ me-spre'u-bya la stod du 'khrugs/ dmag-dpon gsum-gyis Rdzong-kha 'joms/ dmag-gi rnga-chen nam-gsum brdung/ lha-sras gdung-rgyud gtsang-ma kun/ Skyid-mo-lung dang Ku-thang Tsums/ rong-btsan kun la gnas chos shig/*]

threat to the royal descendants. The next step is to examine the political prophecies in light of Tibet's political climate at the time when these prophecies became widespread, primarily through their dissemination by Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem during the latter part of the 14th century. It will thereby become clear that the prophecies were by no means disconnected from events and ideological trends that were characteristic of that time.

Contextualizing the Prophecies

Connections can be made between the historical events related in the political prophecies and the general political atmosphere in Tibet during the 13th and 14th centuries. Predictions about the coming of the Mongols were common in many contemporary *gter-ma* discoveries. A contemporary of the first invasion, Chos-kyi Dbang-phyug (1212–1270), is even said to have forecast the event (Dargyay 1979: 111). In many ways, the *gter-ma* traditions of the 14th century and political prophecies about Mongol and Turkic incursions are inextricably linked. Consider, for example, the prophecies contained within O-rgyan Gling-pa's *Padma bka'i thang-yig*, discovered in 1352. The arising of eminent *gter-ston* such as Chos-kyi Dbang-phyug, (Nyang-ral) Nyi-ma 'Od-zer, Rin-chen Gling-pa, and O-rgyan Gling-pa are all mentioned in the context of foreign invasions. For the Rnying-ma-pas, the 13th century

²⁸ *mtha'-mis Bod du 'dzoms-pa'i dus/ rgyal-po srid-med bskyod-ngan byed/ btsun-pa khrims-med rdog-rdzog byed/ sngags-pa dam-med nang-rme byed/ ... Gnam-the Dkar-po'i sprul-pa gcig/ Hor-gyi yul nas yar-byung nas/ de-yi Hor-gyi dmag sna 'dren/ me-khyi-lo la dmag-ring shar/ mtha'-dmag Bod-kyi srog-mkhar btsugs/ sa-byi-glang la dmag-kha bsgyur/ stag-yos-leags la Khams su gnas/ chu-'brul-sbrul la smad-du 'khrugs/ shing-rta Khams su rta-ltar rgyug/ shing-mo-lug la dmag-kha lud/ Mang-yul sprul-rangs dur-sgo 'dzoms/ me-spre-bya la dmag-kha byed/ sa-khyi-phag la Dbus su lta/ leags-byi-glang la Dbus-gtsang nyul/ chu-stag Zer-'phro yul-khams bcom/ shing-'brug-sbrul la Dbus su rgyug/ me-rta-lug la ma-bcom-na/ sa-spre-bya la zos-bde srid/ leags-pho-khyi la Bod-bstan 'jig/ dbang-chen gsum-gyis Rdzong-mkhar 'dzin/ Jing-gir rgyal-po'i khrims zhes 'byung/ khyo-kha gsod cing sha-yi rtsig-pa brtsig/ bud-med bran-khol bu-tsha gsod/ a-tsa-ma-na Bod-rnams snying-re-rje/ de-'dra kho-na bde-mno the-tshom med/ Du-ru-kha'i dmag ni ma-yongs-bar/ Bod-khams skye-bo pho-mo-rnams/ bde-skyid 'byung-ba'i sbas-yul bzhir/ khyod-rnams 'gro-ba'i thabs mdzod cig/*

²⁹ *Mang-yul du rgyal-po nyid-kyi gdung-rgyud gri ru gum-pa'i dus na phyed ran/ Bod kha-ba-can-kyi ri la rgyal-po med-par 'bangs-gi nang 'thab byed/*

Mongol invasion and subsequent political domination was traumatic, at least according to later interpretations. Although the *sbas-yul* concept certainly predates Rgod-ldem, it seems to have crystallized during his lifetime amidst a proliferation of prophetic material, much of which reflected political realities.

The fate of the Gung-thang kings is likely to have been a prediction that was actually fulfilled at a later date. As detailed above, the final sign that it is time to flee to the *sbas-yul* is when the Gung-thang lineage is severed. Some of the prophecies specify that three descendants of Khri-srong Lde-btsan are to be “killed by knife.” Who the three descendants are is unclear, yet a source for determining the ultimate demise of the Gung-thang kings is a short genealogy (*Bod-rje gdung-rabs*) of the royal lineage written by Kah:thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang Nor-bu (1698–1755) in 1745.⁴⁰ After listing the successive Gung-thang kings, Tshe-dbang Nor-bu concludes by saying that, “In that way, in not enumerating the brothers and throne generations, counting father and son as one,⁴¹ there were 23 royal generations. In the iron monkey year of the 10th *rab-byung* (1620), the king of Gtsang's army seized Gung-thang.⁴² The lineage (*gdung*) of the kings of Gung-thang, tantric practitioners (*sngags-pa*) of Padmasambhava, vanished entirely because the merit of Tibet was uprooted. Then, 21 years later in the iron snake year (1641), the Oirat army seized the throne of the Gtsang-pa. From that iron monkey year (1620) to now, the wood ox year (1745), 125 years have elapsed (*Bod-rje gdung-rabs*: 16b).”⁴³

The earliest *sbas-yul* text (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*) only commented that the royal lineage would become barren. The later texts associated with

⁴⁰ The first section of the text is devoted to chronological problems associated with the reigns of the Tibetan emperors. The third and final section concerns the dating of events in the *phyi-dar*. The middle section of the text is a genealogy of the descendants of the Tibetan kings.

⁴¹ Father and son being Glang-dar-ma and Dpal-'khor-btsan.

⁴² In 1620, the king of Gtsang was Karma Phun-tshogs Rnam-rgyal (Shakabpa 1984: 98). Most historical accounts are silent about this event.

⁴³ *de-ltar mched dang khri-rab ma-bsgrang-bar/ yab-sras rkyad-bsgrangs rgyal-rab nyer-gsum mthar/ rab-byung bcu-pa'i lcags-pho-sprel-lo la/ Gtsang-pa rgyal-po'i dpung-gi Gung-thang blang/ Gu-ru'i sngags-pa Gung-thang rgyal-po'i gdung/gangs-can bsod-nams bog-bas de-tsam gyur/ de nas nyer-gcig lo 'das lcags-sbrul la/ O-rod dpung-gi Gtsang-pa'i rgyal-srid blang/ lcags-sprel de-nas da-lta'i shing-glang-bar/ mi-lo brgya dang nyi-shu-rtsa-lnga song/*

Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem state that the lineage will meet a violent end. By discarding the notion that the prophecy arose in a contextual void, an event must be sought during Rgod-ldem's lifetime that could have been the source for the prediction. In 1345, a Mongol mission was dispatched to Tibet. One of the objectives was to quell a revolt in Mnga'-ris led by the king of Gung-thang and Zhang *mkhan-po*. Both were offered a pardon if they surrendered quickly, but when Zhang *mkhan-po* voluntarily capitulated, he was promptly executed. Dar-ma Rgyal-mtshan, the leader of the punitive expedition, subsequently suggested to the imperial court that the descendants of the Gung-thang kings should be banished (Petech 1990: 102).⁴⁴ Such an event represented a serious threat to the Gung-thang lineage, and may have been the inspiration for the prophecy.

Preventing the Demise of the Imperial Lineage

The *sbas-yul* is impervious to foreign invasions, a point made explicit in several texts. In the *lam-byang* section of the Skyid-mo-lung text, after detailing the various valleys that comprise the *sbas-yul*, Padmasambhava states that, "Because those [valleys] are able to withstand the Hor, border, and Turkic armies, virtuous ones must go there at a future time (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 2a)."⁴⁵ Padma Gling-pa's guide to Mkhan-pa-ljongs asserts that, "When the Tibetan subjects are conquered by the Turks, the Turks will not come there [to Mkhan-pa-ljongs] (*Mkhan-pa-ljongs gnas-yig*: 13a)."⁴⁶ This same point was made most emphatically by Mi-'gyur Rdo-rje, who wrote with regard to Gnam-sgo Zla-gam, "In short, a hidden land is a land where a person flees in the face of terrifying enemy troops. Its characteristic is that of a fully secure abode. If, therefore, Yol-mo and La-phyi, for example, are termed 'hidden lands', what is to be said [of a land] that surpasses even them in matters of security?" (Ehrhard 1997).

⁴⁴ Petech tentatively suggested that *gdung-rgyud* was a reference to the families of the Mnga'-ris rebels, and hence it was the families of the rebels who should be banished. However, since *gdung-rgyud* is the highly honorific term for a patrilineage, I believe that it was the Gung-thang king and his paternal relatives who were slated for banishment.

⁴⁵ *de-rnams-kyis Hor-dmag dang mtha'-dmag (added: Du-ru-kha'i-dmag) thub-pas ma-'ongs-pa'i dus na/ dge-byed-rnams der bros gcig/*

⁴⁶ *Bod-'bangs Du-ru-khas bcom dus/ gnas der Du-ru-khas mi-sleb/*

In some cases, there are *gter-ma* hidden within the *sbas-yul* for the exclusive purpose of thwarting Mongol invasions. For example, treasures found in Mkhan-pa-lung include, “instructions for repelling the Mongols” (*’Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 45b),⁴⁷ and “harmful *mantras* for repelling the Mongols” (*Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig*: 20a, *Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig*: 60).⁴⁸ Thus, not only is the *sbas-yul* physically secure from invaders, it also contains the means to conduct spiritual warfare against marauders who manage to penetrate the outer defenses.

Surprisingly, the preservation of religion, although crucial, is not necessarily at the forefront of the migrational agenda. Instead, the preservation of the royal lineage is of paramount concern. Several scholars have pointed out that an adept practitioner who has received the prophecy of opening a *sbas-yul* must lead the way to the *sbas-yul*. This is true, but he is not the only person required when it comes to settling a *sbas-yul*. Members of the royal lineage are a prerequisite for taking possession of the hidden land and establishing a new administration. For example, “In going to a hidden land, you need a religion-protecting king (*Spyi’i them-byang*: 2b).”⁴⁹ and, “A tantric who is blessed and who is from the unbroken lineage of the *mnga’-bdag* kings themselves is necessary to possess that land (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*: 17b).”⁵⁰ Although the Yol-mo texts do not specifically refer to a descendant of the kings, they leave no doubt that a kingdom will arise in the *sbas-yul*: “Cattle, horses, and sheep are tended in the upper part of the valley. Six [types of] grain grow in the lower part of the valley. In the middle, royal administration will arise (*Padma-tshal lam-yig*: 3a-3b).”⁵¹ Furthermore, when settling in the hidden land, “There [in the center of the land] it is essential to establish a realm of the king (*Yol-mo gnas-yig*: 4a).”⁵² and,

47. *Hor-dmag bzlog-pa’i man-ngag dang/ ...*

48. *Hor bzlog-pa’i ngan-sngags bcas-pa yod/*, and *Hor zlog-pa’i ngan-sngags dang-byas-pa yod/*

49. *sbas-pa’i yul du ’gro-ba-la chos skyong-pa’i rgyal-po gcig dgos te/*

50. *yul ’de ’dzin-pa la mnga’-bdag rgyal-po nyid-kyi rigs-ma mnyams-pa’i sngags-pa byin-rlabs-can-gyis ’dzin dgos-so/* This is the only version that refers to the descendants of the kings as *sngags-pa*. Yet many of the royal lineages were also important *sngags-pa* lineages. For example, male members of a branch of the family living in Nub-ri are hereditary *sngags-pa* (see Childs 1998). In addition, Tshe-dbang Nor-bu refers to the Gung-thang kings as *sngags-pa* (*Bod-rje gdung-rabs*: 15a).

51. *phu ru gnag rta lug gsum skyong/ mdo ru ’bru-drug sman/ bar du rgyal-khrims chags/*

“Royal administration will arise in that place [the *sbas-yul*] (*Yol-mo gnas-byang*: 4a).”⁵³ The *Skyid-mo-lung* text’s *lam-yig* section contains the following proclamation: “This land of mine which I spoke of, at the end of a future era and after the armies of the four borders mobilize, it is the time when Tibet will be conquered. The time will have arrived for the virtuous ones who hold my [teaching] lineage, and the descendants of the religion-protecting king, to search for the attainment place of Padma (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 3b).”⁵⁴ Furthermore, “The religious practitioners who follow after me, Padma; the descendants of the religion-protecting king; and the esteemed noble ones who have pure thoughts; all of them must go to glorify the hidden land, the innermost mind (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 15b).”⁵⁵ The text further specifies that, “Having found the [hidden] land, in the third year build a palace of the king and the esoteric teachings (*gsang-sngags*) in the upper part of the valley ... In the lower part of the valley, establish agricultural land for the Buddha’s disciples (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 7a).”⁵⁶ One of the people necessary for taking possession of ‘Bras-mo-ljongs is, “a king with untainted lineage (*’Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 25a).”⁵⁷ After listing the different types of people who should settle in the *sbas-yul*, the same text states, “If you have those [kinds of people], the royal administration will grow in happiness (*’Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 25a).”⁵⁸ The *Mkhan-pa-lung* texts again raise some interesting problems. The Padma Glingpa guide only refers to a descendant of the mythical king Khyi-kha Rathod, considered to be the bastard son of Khri-srong Lde-btsan’s consort. Since heredity is determined through the male bloodline, he was technically not a member of the royal lineage. The ‘Bras-mo-ljongs

⁵² *der rgyal-po’i gling gdab-dgos/*

⁵³ *sa-yul der rgyal-po’i khrims chags/*

⁵⁴ *nga’i gnas ’di bsung-par gyis/ ma-’ongs snga-brgya’i tha-ma la/ mtha’i dmag-bzhi g.yos-nas kyang/ Bod-khams ’joms-pa’i dus byung tshel/ dge-byed nga’i brgyud-’dzin dang/ chos-skyong rgyal-po’i gdung-brgyud [?]/ Padma’i bsgrub-gnas tshol-dus ’ong/*

⁵⁵ *Padma nga’i rjes nas ’jug-pa’i chos-byed dang chos-skyong rgyal-po’i gdung-brgyud dang/ mi-chen ya-rabs bsam-pa dkar-ba thams-cad blo-phugs sbas-pa’i yul du bstod la song gcig/*

⁵⁶ *yul rnyed nas lo-gsum na stod du rgyal-po dang gsang-sngags-kyi pho-brang btsig/ ... smad du skye-bo phal-pa dang nyan-thos ’dul-ba’i gnas btab/*

⁵⁷ *rgyal-po gdung-brgyud ma-nyams la/* Since the highly honorific term *gdung-brgyud* is used, it is reasonable to assume that the passage refers to a descendant of the kings.

⁵⁸ *de-ltar ldan na rgyal-khris (sic: khrims) bde-bar ’gyur/*

text completed by Nyi-ma 'Od-zer stipulates that a descendant of both Mu-khri Btsan-po⁵⁹ and Khyi-kha Ra-thod are necessary for possessing the land. Although Khyi-kha Ra-thod is mentioned in the Khum-bu Mkhan-pa-lung texts, he is not mentioned in the context of people required for taking possession of the land. Instead, only a descendant of Mu-khri Btsan-po is designated (*Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig*: 16a; *Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig*: 43).⁶⁰ In addition, these texts mention that a member of the royal lineage must act as a guide to the *sbas-yul* (*Mkhan-pa-lung lam-yig*: 16b; *Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig*: 45).⁶¹

A primary reason for taking a royal descendant to the *sbas-yul* is that it is a place where the lineage of the kings can be sustained: "Having gone there [to Skyid-mo-lung], you will be saved from damnation. The bridge of royal generations of the religion-protecting kings will not be severed (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 9a-9b)."⁶² More interestingly, Padmasambhava asserted that, "For the future benefit of the king's descendants, [I]hid many *bla-gter*⁶³ of the king. As for the time of discovery, at the ruinous time when the lineage of the kings is destroyed, after a person blessed by myself, Padma, reveals the treasure troves in succession, the teachings will perpetuate. In particular, when the rock door of this treasure trove concealed at Brag-dmar⁶⁴ tumbles to the west, there is a *bla-gter* of the king at a distance from here of 14 leagues to the southwest in the hidden land Bkra-shis Gangs-kyi-ljongs.⁶⁵ Seek that land, and the time for restoring the *bla-gter* of the king has arrived. Re-

⁵⁹ Mu-khri Btsan-po was the eldest son of Khri-srong Lde-btsan. However, since he died at a young age without any sons, it is probable that Mu-tig Btsan-po is meant here.

⁶⁰ *O-rgyan bdag-gis rgyud-'dzin chos-mdzad pho-mo dang/ Mu-khri btsan-po'i gdung-rgyud mjal-gyur cig/ bod-'bangs phyi nang-gi gdung-rgyud las-'phro-can/ rgyal-gyi Khan-pa-lung bzud na/ bsam-pa 'grub-pa'i dgos-pa yod/*

⁶¹ *rgyal-brgyud tshig-gi sna-drangs nas/...*

⁶² *der phyin-pas phal-che ngan-song-gi 'jigs-pa las grol/ chos-skyong rgyal-po'i rgyal-rabs zam mi-cad/ tha-ma-rnams kyang Hor dang mu-ge'i 'jigs-pa las grol-ba'i snyigs-ma'i dus dge-byed-rnams sbas-pa'i yul der gnas-chos gcig/*

⁶³ In *Ga'u bdun-ma* and *Gsal-ba'i sgron-me*, *brla-gter* and *rla-gter* are written respectively. *Brla*, "thigh", makes no sense in this context, whereas *rla* is an alternative form of *bla*.

⁶⁴ Brag-dmar is the region where Bsam-yas is located, and hence the locale where most if not all of the "prophecies" were related by Padmasambhava to Khri-srong Lde-btsan.

⁶⁵ This is another name for Skyid-mo-lung (see *Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 2a).

garding the positive attributes of restoration, in whatever place the *bla-gter* staying in Tibet is restored, from there the teachings of the Buddha will spread. The lineage of the kings will multiply and spread out. Thus it is said (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 11a).⁶⁶

The term *bla-gter* is unattested in any dictionary. As many have noted (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993: 481, Stein 1972: 226, Tucci 1980: 190), *bla* is the animating principle of the body. If lost, death will ensue. Thus, the *bla-gter* of the king seems to be a resource for preserving the life, and by extension the lineage, of the king. This interpretation is bolstered by another version of the same theme. While describing the qualities of the hidden land 'Bras-mo-ljongs, Padmasambhava told Khri-srong Lde-btsan that this *sbas-yul* is, "A life-preserving treasury for yourselves, the *mnga'-bdag* father and son ('*Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 6a)."⁶⁷ In other words, it is a locale where the perpetuation of the royal lineage can be maintained. The best clue for what the *bla-gter* consists of comes from O-rgyan Gling-pa's *Bka'-thang Sde-lnga*, wherein a section of *Rgyal-po'i bka'i thang-yig* entitled "Religious Treasures and the King's *Bla-gter*"⁶⁸ is found (*Bka'-thang Sde-lnga*: 166–177). In this section, the term *bla-gter* is not explained. However, it consists of numerous texts [e.g. tantras (*rgyud*) and instructions (*lung*)] and other sacred objects that were concealed by Padmasambhava. It is clear from the passage in *Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig* that *bla-gter* is somehow connected to the success of the royal lineage, in terms of both power and procreation, and their reemergence in the exile sanctuary of the *sbas-yul*.

⁶⁶ *rgyal-po nyid-kyi gdung-brgyud la phan-pa'i phyir rgyal-po'i bla-gter mang du sbas-so/ 'don-pa'i dus ni rgyal-po'i gdung-brgyud nyams dams-pa'i dus-su Padma bdag-gis byin-gyis brlabs-pa'i gang-zag res gter-mdzod rims-kyis bton-nas bstan-pa yun-brsings-par 'gyur-ro/ khyad-par du Brag-dmar la sbas-pa'i gter-mdzod 'di/ brag-sgo nub la 'gyel-ba dang/ 'di-nas nyi-ma lho-nub-kyi mtshams dpag-tshad bcu-bzhi 'das-pa na/ rgyal-po'i bla-gter sbas-pa'i yul Bkra-shis Gangs-kyi Ljongs zhes-bya-ba gcig yod/ de'i gnas btshal-ba dang/ rgyal-po'i bla-gter gso-ba'i dus la bab/ bsos-pa'i yontan ni/ Bod na gnas-pa'i bla-gter gang bsos-pa'i sa-phyogs su Sangs-rgyas-kyi bstan-pa dar-bar 'gyur-ro/ rgyal-po'i gdung-brgyud spel-byed thams-cad dar zhing rgyas-par 'gyur-ro/ ces gsungs-so/*

⁶⁷ *mnga'-bdag yab-sras bdag la gson-mdzod dang/ ...*

⁶⁸ *chos-gter dang rgyal-po'i bla-gter.*

The settlers of a *sbas-yul* must include more than just a descendent of the kings. In fact, several texts (*Gnam-zla gnas-yig*: 10b; *Padma-tshal lam-yig*: 2b-3a; *Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 4b; *'Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 25a; *Mkhan-pa-ljongs gnas-yig*: 10a; *'Bras-mkhan gnas-yig*: 40b-41a; *Mkhan-pa-lung gnas-yig*: 43–44) provide detailed lists of the people who should go as a group to settle the *sbas-yul*, including ministers, tantric practitioners, celibate monks, *bon-pos*, strong and skilled laymen, and virgin women. The lists of settlers include an array of specialists who can satisfy all the spiritual and material needs of the migrant community. Together, they represent the type of society that was envisioned for a *sbas-yul* settlement; a king, being an actual descendent of the imperial dynasty, reigns supreme and is supported by religious specialists and the laity.

The above citations reveal the important connection between the royal lineage and the *sbas-yul*. Thus far, most scholarship has centered on the spiritual attributes of the *sbas-yul*, and considered these hidden lands as sanctuaries for religious adepts. However, the combination of the forecasted demise of the Gung-thang rulers and the conception of the *sbas-yul* as a place where the royal lineage can be reinstated demonstrates that the hidden land must be considered as the ideal setting where an exemplary version of Tibetan society can be sustained. Bearing in mind that the rise of Rnying-ma-pa monasticism in Dbus-gtsang and Mnga'-ris was a relatively late phenomenon (17th century), the description may be rooted in a medieval conception of a Tibetan society such as that which existed in the Rnying-ma-pa kingdom of Gung-thang. Furthermore, the representation may have been an attempt to revive a conception of Tibetan society as it existed (or was thought to have existed) during the imperial dynasty. Why else would a fulcrum of the system be somebody who was descended from the kings of that period?

Linking the Imperial Lineage with the Ideology of Revitalization

The idea of saving the imperial lineage is a theme of central importance in the *sbas-yul* literature. Perhaps this theme represents an old idea based on the conception that, without a legitimate monarch as the supreme secular ruler, life in Tibet will be characterized by social instability, political fragmentation, and manifestations of external threats. During the 14th century there was a revival of the monarchist ideal in

Tibet, as Tucci has pointed out in connection with Tai Situ Byang-chub Rgyal-mtshan and the rise of the Phag-mo Grub-pas (1949: 23).⁶⁹ Furthermore, Tucci connected the *gter-ma* tradition of that time (e.g. Örgyan Gling-pa's discoveries in 1347 and onward of the *Padma bka'i zhang-yig* and *Bka'-thang sde-lnga*) with an attempt to recall the glory of the imperial period of Tibetan history. This is precisely the historical and political context under which Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem was working. In fact, he became intimately connected with the Gung-thang branch of the royal descendants.⁷⁰ At Zang-zang Lha-brag, Rgod-ldem discovered numerous scrolls containing instructions given to the Gung-thang kings (*Gung-thang rgyal-po-la gsungs-pa'i shog-ril*) (*Rgod-ldem rnam-thar*: 20a). Presumably, these were prophecies, and may have been similar in content to the prophecies which made their way into the *shas-yul* texts. Shortly thereafter, the king of Gung-thang became Rgod-ldem's patron (*Rgod-ldem rnam-thar*: 28a).⁷¹ The latter cited a prophecy that if he and the Gung-thang king united, a period of happiness in Tibet would ensue (*Rgod-ldem rnam-thar*: 25b). Afterwards, the biography says that, 'The king of Gung-thang died. In Dbus-gtsang, many bad omens arose including preparations for war. In *Gab-pa snying-gi lde-mig*, it is said, 'If signs of decay arise in Tibet, hasten to Yol-mo in the west, Gro-mo in the east, and precious 'Bras-mo-bshongs in the center.' In *Snying-tig don-bdun*, it is said, 'Set off from Gung-thang at the commencement of Tibet's suffering. Because the lake of Tibet's suffering will burst, you, my *gter-ston* who is not born to this worldliness, must flee to Bum-thang in Mon.' Based on these

He was a member of the Rlang clan, members of which were considered to be in the direct line of descent from the Tibetan emperors (see *Bod-rje gdung-rabs*: 14b). This is confirmed by the fact that his successors took the title of *lha-btsun* ('Divine Lord') (Snellgrove and Richardson 1968: 153).

⁶⁹ See Ehrhard (1997) for some details concerning the connections between the Gung-thang kings, treasure finders, and hidden lands during the 16th and 17th centuries.

⁷⁰ Gung-thang in western Tibet (Mnga'-ris) was a minor kingdom that was established by the senior lineage of the royal descendants following the collapse of the empire in 842 A.D. (see *Bod-rje gdung-rabs*).

prophecies, the desire to go to 'Bras-mo-ljongs arose (*Rgod-ldem rnam-thar*: 29a)."⁷² He commenced the journey to 'Bras-mo-ljongs in 1370.

The connection between the royal lineage of Gung-thang and the well-being of Tibet was made explicit in several of the *sbas-yul* texts: "At the end of an era, the lineage of you, the king, will appear in Gung-thang. At that time, because the limit of happiness and suffering has been surpassed in Tibet, this treasure which defends [against] the suffering of Tibet will be revealed. At that time, happiness and suffering in Tibet will arise according to the wish of the Gung-thang king. If the king desires and reveres my religious treasures, his power will increase like the waxing moon. In Tibet, happiness will arise for a long time. If the king has contemplations on wrong views and doubts, a brawl for the teaching throne of Tibet will ensue. The six kinds of armies of the black direction will appear in Tibet. After that, because suffering will be inflicted upon you, at that time those who grasp the oral tradition of me, Padma, flee to the southern valleys and forested caves! (*Yol-mo gnas-yig*: 1b-2a)."⁷³ The Skyid-mo-lung guide echoes this sentiment: "The royal lineage of Khri-srong Lde-btsan and the happiness of Tibet are integrally related. If the royal lineage increases, Tibet is well. If the royal lineage is afflicted, there will be misery in Tibet (*Skyid-mo-lung lam-yig*: 17a)."⁷⁴ Thus, according to the ideology found within *sbas-yul* texts, there is a direct connection between the preservation of the royal

⁷² *Gung-thang rgyal-po grongs/ Dbus-gtsang du ste-'khrugs-kyi mgo g.yos-pa la-sogs-pa'i rtags ngan-pa sna-tshogs byung ste/ Gab-pa snying-gi lde-mig las/ Bod-khams phung-ba'i rtags byung na/ Yol-mo stod la Gro-mo smad/ bar-yul rin-chen 'Bras-mo-bshongs/ gang-gi rtags byung de ru rgyug/ ces-pa dang/ Snying-tig don-bdun las/ Bod-kyi sdug-mgo Gung-thang nas btsugs te/ Bod du sdug-bsngal-gyi mtsho-brdol yong-bas/ skyes-bu khyod nga'i gter-thon la/ 'jigs-rten 'di la ma-chags-par Mon Bum-thang du bros-shig/ ces-pa la sogs-pa'i lung-bstan zhal-tshams-rnams la brten-nas/ 'Bras-mo-gshongs su 'byon-pa'i thugs 'khrungs nas/...*

⁷³ *Rgyal-po nyid-kyi gdung-brgyud tha-ma la Mang-yul Gung-thang du 'byung/ de'i dus-su Bod-kyi bde-sdug-gi so-tshams su song-pas/ Bod-kyi sdug-bsngal skyob-pa'i gter-'di thob-par 'gyur-ro/ de'i dus-su Gung-thang-gi rgyal-po'i dad-pa la Bod-kyi bde-sdug 'byung ste/ rgyal-po nga'i gter-chos la dad cing gus na/ mnga'-thang zla-ba yar-gyi ngo-bzhin du dar cing rgyas-par 'gyur te/ Bod la bde-skyid yun du 'byung/ rgyal-po la log-lta dang the-tshom-gyi rtog-pa byung na/ Bod du bstan-pa khri-dur 'thab-tsod 'byung ste/ nag-po'i phyogs-kyi dmag-rigs drug Bod-du 'byung ste/ de nas sdug-bsngal nyid la spyod-pas/ de'i dus-su Padma nga'i bka'-bzhin spyod-pa-rnams/ lho-rong dang nags-phug tu bros-gcig/*

lineage and the fortunes of the Tibetan people. Rig-'dzin Rgod-Idem expressed an intimately awareness of this association.

One possible basis for the expressed link between royalty and prosperity may be rooted in the ontological difference between kings and commoners, a difference that is clearly seen in the earliest Tibetan sources. According to ancient Tibetan concepts recorded in the Old Tibetan Annals and Chronicle, the first kings of the land were known as *lha btsan-po* ('Divine Mighty One') or *lha-sras* ('Divine Son') (Snellgrove and Richardson 1968: 23–25), since they were descended from *lha* (divinities) and following death ascended a sky-rope (*dmu-thag*) leaving only their bodies behind.⁷⁵ Quoting from another Old Tibetan text, Stein relates how prior to the imperial period Tibetans lacked a ruler with a divine mandate. Messengers were dispatched to heaven, and "The divine king of Great Tibet, of magical power, came from the gods as ruler of men; ..." (Stein 1972: 48). By contrast, there is the well-known story of how the Tibetan people evolved from the offspring of a monkey and a rock ogress, a story which recounts the origin of common Tibetans and *not* the kings. The divergent stories of human origins present the fundamental ontological difference relating to the Tibetan conception of human taxonomy.

Tibetans classify people according to *rigs*, which can refer not only to social and ethnic distinctions (caste, class, nation, tribe), but also to ontological distinctions (kind, sort, species). Tibetan people are generally categorized into two *rigs*, *lha-rigs* and *mi-rigs*. The latter refers to those who are descended from the mating of the rock ogress and monkey, the former are those who have divine descent. In later Tibetan sources (not in Old Tibetan sources, but mainly in *gter-ma* prophecies and other texts discovered during the 14th century) the Tibetan emperors and their descendants are referred to as *mnga'-bdag rgyal-po* ('Mighty King'), or have *mnga'-bdag* prefixed before their names as a sort of honorific title. In many cases the term precedes the name of

⁷³ *Khri-srong Lde-btsan rgyal-rgyud dang/ Bod-kyi bde-skyid mnyam-par 'grogs/ rgyal-rabs rgyas na Bod-khams bde/ rgyal-rabs sdug na Bod-khams sdug/*

⁷⁵ This notion of divine descent contrasts with later origin myths claiming the kings as descendents from the human lineage of the Śākya clan in which the historical Buddha was born. For a detailed analysis of these contrasting versions of royal descent, see Karmay 1994. Although the Buddhist version of descent from the Śākyas became widely accepted after the 11th century, those who claimed descent from the kings still to this day consider themselves to be ontologically different from other Tibetans.

someone in the royal lineage, as if it were a title (see *Bod-rje gdung-rabs*).⁷⁶ The term *mnga'-bdag* is used only when there is a connection between a person and the royal lineage through incarnation or descent.⁷⁷ The same holds true for *lha-sras*, a term which establishes a direct connection between divinity and those related patrilineally to the imperial line.

The ontological difference between those who have a divine origin (*lha-rigs*) and those who do not (*mi-rigs*) lies at the heart of the Tibetan understanding that the fate of the royal lineage and the fortunes of the people are inextricably bound together. Without a ruler invested with a divine mandate, peace and prosperity cannot be assured. According to concepts laid out in the *sbas-yul* literature, the best way to secure harmony in Tibet is for descendents of the imperial lineage to take refuge in the hidden lands where they can reign unperturbed from foreign invasions and the concomitant social decay.

Conclusions

In summary, the *sbas-yul* texts explicitly state that the hidden lands are to be sought during a time when foreign armies threaten the security of Tibet. The invasion of Mongol and Turkic armies is one signal that the time has arrived to commence a *sbas-yul* search. Furthermore, there must be a concurrent threat to the lineage of the Tibetan emperors, especially the senior ranking line whose members were based in Gung-thang. When the Gung-thang lineage is severed, then the *sbas-yul* should be a settlement destination for adept Buddhist practitioners and a member of a collateral lineage of the Tibetan royal family. Once in the *sbas-yul*, a new regime can be established with a legitimate descendant of the emperors occupying the prime position of secular authority. By doing so, the happiness of Tibet will be ensured, since, due to the

⁷⁶ In Nubri, there is a descent lineage (*rgyud-pa*) called by this name. The Mnga'-bdag lineage of married tantrics (*sngags-pa*) claims descent from Khri-srong Lde-btsan, and has a document sealed by the 5th Dalai Lama to bolster its claim (see Aris 1975).

⁷⁷ Nyang-ral Nyi-ma 'Od-zer often has *mnga'-bdag* prefixed to his name. Although he was not a biological descendant of the Tibetan emperors, he was considered to be a reincarnation (*yang-sprul*) of one of them, namely Khri-srong Lde-btsan (*Gu-bkra chos-'byung*: 379).

divine origin of this particular line of rulers, there is a direct connection between the perpetuation of the lineage and prosperity in Tibet.

Several citations have been used to demonstrate the Rnying-ma-pa concept that a virtuous royal administration is seen as a prerequisite for a stable society in Tibet. It therefore comes as no surprise that a primary sign that it is time to migrate to a *sbas-yul* centers on the termination of the royal descendants. The idea that the *sbas-yul* is a refuge for the royal descendants may seem to contradict the prophetic statements that the lineage of the Tibetan kings will be severed prior to the commencement of a *sbas-yul* migration. Bear in mind, however, that the lineage being severed is the Gung-thang-based lineage, which represents only the senior line of descent from the emperors. Beyond them are a host of collateral lineages found throughout the length and breadth of Tibet.⁷⁸ Thus, an implication of the texts is that anyone who has a legitimate claim to being a descendant of the royal lineage is a potential *sbas-yul* expedition member. Furthermore, Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem was intimately associated with the lineage of Khri-srong Lde-btsan's descendants who had settled in Mang-yul Gung-thang, which may be another reason why the *sbas-yul* literature attributed to him focuses much attention on the royal descendants. The link between *sbas-yul* seekers and the Gung-thang kings continued into the 16th-century, as Ehrhard (1997) has pointed out. Thus, it is clear that the *sbas-yul* tradition was intimately associated with the cult of royalty in Tibet, a theme that adds historical significance to this particular conception of sacred geography.

In no way is this paper meant to imply that the only interpretation of the *sbas-yul* is the one discussed above. Indeed, like so many symbolic complexes, the *sbas-yul* is multivalent and open to interpretation on diverse spiritual and material levels. The specific intent of this paper is to distill one such layer of meaning from the texts, one that may have had an influence on tangible human actions. With this in mind, the next logical questions to ask are: What influence did the *sbas-yul* concept have on actual trans-Himalayan migrations? Were the 16th-18th century

⁷⁸ There are many people who claim descent from the old Tibetan imperial family. Tshe-dbang Nor-bu mentioned a few places where collateral lineages were located in the 18th-century: Glo-bo, Gtsang-rong, Yar-klung, Gtsang-khar (in Khams), Rta-nag (in 'Jang), La-dwags, 'Bras-ljongs, Nub-ri, and Gro-shod (*Bod-rje gdung-rabs*). This is only a fraction of the locales where royal descendants have been found in the past.

trans-Himalayan migrations to the southern slope of the Himalaya in any way connected with the *sbas-yul* prophecies and prescribed actions? Is it a coincidence that many Tibetan populations on the southern slope of the Himalaya are Rnying-ma-pa adherents who follow the Byang-gter teachings of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi Ldem-phru-can? We know that there are descendants of the emperors living in Upper Nubri, not far from the *sbas-yul* Skyid-mo-lung, and in Sikkim near to the *sbas-yul* 'Bras-mo-ljongs. Indeed, there are some tantalizing clues that *sbas-yul* searches, conducted according to the guidelines set forth in the texts, may have accounted for at least some of the current populations inhabiting the southern slope of the Himalayas. If a firm link between *sbas-yul* ideals and actual trans-Himalayan migrations can be established, then the *sbas-yul* must be viewed as more than a mere myth about sacred geography, but as an alluring concept that played a significant role in the historical movements of people.

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