Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

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Bonpo monasteries and temples
in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions
The Nag chu region

One hundred and sixty kilometres west of Lhasa, along the Qinghai Tibet highway, lies a marvellous snow mountain called gNyan chen Thang lha, one of the Five Great Holy Mountains of Bon (*bon gyi gnas mchog gangs ri chen po lnga*). It is about 7,117 metres in height. The abode of the deity gNyan chen Thang lha (known in Buddhist tradition as lHa chen rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal), distinguished among the nine mountain divinities, gNyan chen Thang lha externally appears in the shape of a simple snow mountain, while internally it holds a crystal treasury glittering with various jewels. At the foot of the mountain is a lake topped with waves of nectar, half way up is a pretty rainbow-coloured tent. The mountaintop is covered with white clouds of mizzly jewels. The pastureland, blanketed with flowers, looks like a mandala of various flowers offered to the deity, and the whole area, surrounded by the crystal stupas; the snow mountains is a pilgrimage site of great superiority.

There is no definite iconographic description of gNyan chen Thang lha, but the *lHa bskyed nang gsal* describes it as follows: “gNyan chen Thang lha would be smiling, allowing his canine teeth to be seen slightly, his three brilliant eyes emitting light, his hair bound with fine white silk, being thoroughly dignified, holding a cane with a five-edged vajra in his highly raised right hand, and a crystal rosary in his left hand, clad in a tricoloured cloak of fine silk, his head crowned with blazing jewels, and beautifully dressed up, all over, with varieties of precious stones.”

gNam mtsho phyug mo, the goddess of the lake (also known as rDor rje kun grags ma or Rang byung rgyal mo in Buddhist tradition), the consort of gNyan chen Thang lha, is one of the twelve brTan ma, the ruling goddesses of Tibet. These twelve goddesses are Kun grags ma, Ya ma skyong, Kun bzang mo, bGegs kyi gtso, sPyan gcig ma, dPal gyi yum, Drag mo rgyal, Klu mo dkar mo, Bod khams skyong, sMan gcig ma, gYar mo sil and gYu sgron (in Buddhist tradition the name of each of these goddesses is preceded by the word rdo rje). Among these goddesses Kun grags ma takes precedence. She is superb, having a turquoise-coloured body, one face, two hands and three eyes of wisdom. Holding a banner of crowning victory in her right hand and a mirror of sanctity in her left, she has a great loveliness. Her indigo-blue hair hangs down to some length, and she is mounted on a turquoise-blue dragon in the centre of a swirling white cloud. It is believed that Kun grags ma, the consort of gNyan chen Thang lha, is the principal one among the twelve brTan ma, the protective goddesses of Bon.

The mountain deities surrounding gNyan chen Thang lha, in all directions, are rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal in the east, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal in the south, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal in the west, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal in the north, lHa chen sKyes bu bzhin bzang in the south-east, 'Brong g-yag zhol dkar in the south-west, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal in the north-west and lHa mchog Tshangs pa chen po in the north-east. All these deities are said to be engirded: by the 360 companion deities and trillion armed deities in
circumference, by the white conchs of miraculous transformation circling around in
the sky, and by a pack of white wolves of both sexes and a herd of long-haired wild
yaks, excited in anger, from above and all directions.

gNam mtsho phyug mo is a holy lake of Eternal Bon just like the other lakes,
including Dwang ra g-yu mtsho, Ma pang g-yu mtsho and Ma ma mtsho. It is a very
large lake, extending about seventy kilometres from east to west, and about thirty
kilometres from north to south. More than half of its area belongs to dPal mgon
rdzong in Nag chu. As it is possible to travel by car from 'Dam gzhung via gNam
mtsho up to dPal mgon rdzong, the lake can be visited and thoroughly enjoyed.

In shape, gNam mtsho phyug mo resembles rDo lje phag mo, foremost among
goddesses, lying on her back: the rivers Ngang chu and Gri chu look just like her
right hand, holding a sword and lifted high into the sky; the three small ponds on
the upper side of the lake bear a resemblance to the three eyes of wisdom looking
upward; the lHa lcam khan pa looks like her bound hair; Ma chags Se mo do looks
like the left hand of the goddess holding a skull filled with blood in front of her
breast; the counterpart of Ma chags Se mo do is a cave, which represents her right
leg, bent; the lower end of the lake represents her left leg, stretched out; and Hal
po gdong lies just like the mattress of the fainted figure under the goddess' foot.
Because of these, a mere glance at the lake may be enough for devotees of Bon to
have a feeling of real experience with Yum chen rDo rje phag mo. In their hearts,
devoted reverence to the lake may arise, as well as sincerity of supreme virtue.

Similarly, the glorious 'Khor lo bde mchog has as the seats of his body, speech
and mind the following: the snow mountain Ti se (Mount Kailash) as the seat of his
body, gNam mtsho phyug mo his speech and Tsa ri his mind, each of which has an
auspicious season for making pilgrimages. Ti se should be visited in Horse years,
gNam mtsho phyug mo in Sheep years and Tsa ri in Monkey years.

gNam mtsho phyug mo can be divided into three parts: bKra shis do do che
as the seat of his body of speech, Bya do Nam mkha’ do as the seat of his speech
of speech, and Ma chags Se mo do as the seat of his mind of speech. These are
subdivided yet again into thirteen do chen and thirteen gdong chen. Furthermore,
gNam mtsho phyug mo has so many other characteristic sites, such as rGa lo gzim
phug, mGon po phug, sGrol ma phug, O rgyan phug, bKa’ thang phug, Zhab s drung
phug, Bar do’i phrang, Cong zhi phug pa, Karma phug, Klupa phug and Nam
mkha’ mdzod, that it looks like the sky strewn with clusters of stars.

Both gNyan chen Thang lha and gNam mtsho phyug mo should be
circumambulated in Sheep years, the auspicious pilgrimage time. It can take from
fifteen to twenty days and nights on foot. A pilgrimage to gNam mtsho alone can
take at least seven to nine days. It is difficult to visit the island (do) called Se mo do
in summer because it is the centre of the lake and there is no boat, while bKra shis do
and Bya do may be very accessible. Currently a great many pious people both clergy
and laity frequently offer prayers in front of gNyan chen Thang lha in various ways, such as erecting cairns, burning incense, raising prayer flags or white ceremonial scarves, casting their possessions into the lake, and so forth. The sacred gNyan chen Thang lha has now become a particularly celebrated site to which numerous clerical and lay devotees of Bon pay a visit in search of protection or in order to offer prayers, irrespective of their sect, school or party.

The town of Nag chu is 154 kilometres from 'Dam gzhung. Then from Nag chu, a ten-kilometre drive northward on the highway and a further eighty-two kilometres in a north-easterly direction lead one to sNye rong rdzong. Because of the rather bad condition of the road between Nag chu and sNye rong rdzong, the trip can take some two and a half hours.

sNye rong rdzong

sNye rong lies to the north of Nag chu, south of the famous Thang khug la mountain range. It is about 14,560 square kilometres in area, and is 4,700 metres above sea level. Pastureland covers an area of 11,800 mu. sNye rong, with a population of 25,000, has one gu under its immediate supervision and thirteen xiang, in which there are 165 village committees.

At one time, when sNye rong was under Sa skya pa rule, there were three major tribes in the district, and another one was formed during the time of Phag mo gru pa rule. These four then joined with several other tribes of the area, including 'Bri ru, sBra chen and sTeng chen, to be united into the so-called Thirty-nine Tribes (Tsho ba so dgu), which is very famous in Tibetan history. In the middle of the Ming Dynasty during the time of the Phag mo gru pa, the Thirty-nine Tribes was were absorbed into the Mongolian Tumed and Khalkha tribes in mTsho sngon. It came under Mongolian control in 1637; and in 1732, the central government of the Qing Dynasty ceded it back to the Tibetan government. But in 1751, the Qing official (am ban) in Tibet looked after the Thirty-nine Tribes. In 1916, the Tibetan government established the post of governor-general of Hor (Hor spyi khyab), and put part of the Thirty-nine Tribes under its control. But in 1942, the Tibetan government abolished the post of governor-general of Hor and divided the Thirty-nine Tribes into six divisions and sNye rong rdzong is one of the six. On August 1st, 1960, the sNye rong rdzong office was established.

(9) sNang gsal Monastery

A brag sNang gsal g-yung drung gsal ba'i gling is under the jurisdiction of Dar 'dzum xiang (also known as mTsho dbyang qu), which lies more than twenty kilometres to the north of sNye rong rdzong. Although it is not very far, it takes more than an hour to get there by car because of the terribly muddy road, which makes the going difficult. This monastery is set in a fairly good natural environment.
The monastery was founded in 1906. The predecessor of this monastery was the ruins of an ancient monastery near Nag chu kha, recently identified as the Mad sog gYung drung 'dzin pa'i gling which was founded by Khyung po A bla grags pa and Sha ba sang grol. It was prosperous, with hundreds of monks and nuns. In spite of the extensive work devoted to the three noble deeds “keeping, defending and spreading the teachings of Eternal Bon” through generations of lamas, the monastery was upset by, needless to say, the troops of the Mongolian Jungar. During that time the Mongolians subjected the two Khyung po lamas, dBu se and dBu nag, to imprisonment and eventually murdered these two faultless lamas. The sight of this incident made their great many followers tremble and the lives of their followers subsequently fell into hopelessness.

Then a monastery called Khri dkar was set up on the bank of the Yag chu river and the teachings of Bon were spread by several generations of lamas. Destiny, however, reduced the monastery to a deteriorated state. Khyung po bsTan rgyal grags pa then laid the foundation for the next one at Khyung rdzong, situated at Gad Qgs la, and maintained it for a while, but it, too, collapsed in the Eleventh Rab byung.

Then Mi 'gyur grags pa, rGyal skyid grags pa, Nyi dbang, lHa dbang, Tshe dbang g-yung drung and others, established the residence (bla brang) of Khyung po sBra nag in A stod district, which burdened them with the expectations of many proponents of Eternal Bon that their thirst for a monastery would be satisfied.

In 1882, a miraculous baby, who emitted many auspicious signs, was born to a couple, Khyung dkar gDung pa lha bu, the father, and Gur bza' dpal 'dzoms, the mother. The baby was called Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. From childhood he stood out prominently among other children, with his varied talents. Endowed with auspicious signs, he was praised by everyone. Until the age of twenty-five, he lived as a herdsman in the manner of a yogi in order to avoid being possessed by unclean transmigratory existence. At that time, his parents repeatedly murmured their hope that their son would succeed to the leadership of the family, but he did not accept this, for he wanted to take an oath to become a monk.

In 1906, Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan was ordained in the presence of sMon rgyal Nam mkha’ dbang rgyal in rDza khog. In his mind, he conceived the idea of building a monastery at a certain rocky place surrounded by many outstandingly sacred sites such as the meditation cave of the great lama Dran pa nam mkha’, his foot-prints and the like. Then a prophecy was made by the yogi A lo, and in accordance with it, in 1911 Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan went to seek the place where a new monastery should be built.

It was a place with many auspicious signs, such as the following: to the right, lHa ri spang mtho, whose summit consists of a crystal rock; at the front, Un chen dur krod nor bu spungs ri and gNyan chen wa ra, which look like dextral white conchs;
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and mountains, including, at the back, 'Bul ri, the gathering place of deities, the klu, and the gnyan. As the place was filled with many springs, herbs and other auspicious symbols, he decided to build a new monastery there, which he did in 1918. A brag sNang gsal Monastery was thus established.

He then established the monastic discipline in the establishment with the establishment of the Three Trainings. He made pilgrimages to many places, such as the Four Divisions of Central Tibet (dbus gtsang ru bzhi), Ti se, Bon ri and so forth. He studied various doctrines under many teachers, irrespective of their sects, including 'Gro mgon Shes rab g-yung drung, bZod pa rgyal mtshan, and the great treasure-discoverer of A dbang, Rig 'dzin rgya mtsho, who was a Buddhist priest. He received from them the threefold lineages “initiation, transmission and explanation of texts” of the entire doctrine of inner, outer and secret. All the good deeds he had learned and performed over a decade led him to a state of knowledge of the most excellent quality. Every sign of his achievement thrilled the common people. Since he had obtained omniscience and omnipotence, he came to be known everywhere as the one who would save all the people in this and the next life, by the designation of A bla sNang gsal, from Khyung lung dNgul mkhar in the west to mTsho sngon in Amdo in the east.

As for the account of his previous lives, his origin is traced back to Tshad med 'od ldan in the time of gShen. The line then leads successively down to sTong rgyung mthu chen in the time of Bla chen Dran pa nam mkha’ in the early stage of Bonpo dissemination, and sPyang sprul Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan in the latter stage of Bonpo dissemination. To make the long story of his life short: he trained himself in the three deeds of hearing, thinking and meditating, and moved on into the three deeds of teaching, debating and writing; he preached extensively for his own sake and for the sake of others, which was openly praised everywhere, in consequence of which he turned into the one like the vast ocean of summer.

Main religious objects and activities of the monastery: Shar gling sham po lha rtse.

At the centre of this mezzanine-high building was a gilt-bronze statue of sTon pa Khri gtsug rgyal ba as tall as a mezzanine. There was also the sacred gilt-bronze statue of gShen rab Mi bo accompanied on either side by the cubit-high Four Principal Buddhas (bDe gshegs gtso bzhi).

On the sculptured wooden shelves to the right were the cubit-high Sixteen Arhats (gNas brtan bcu drug) in gilt-bronze. Along the left wall was a varnished wooden shelf with an outward appearance of Pho brang gling dgu, the Mandala of Peace, and an inward appearance of the gSas mkhar bcu drug, the flame of the potential nature of wrath. In front of sTon pa gShen rab Mi bo was the cubit-high silver statue of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan. Painted on the wall were murals of the Thousand Buddhas. Such was the magnificence of this shrine’s religious
objects.

bKa’ ’gyur lha khang

On the right-hand side of this two-storey building was a life-sized gilt-bronze statue of sMra ba’i seng ge, and on the left-hand side was that of Byams ma. Along the walls on either side were three hundred volumes (po ti) of the bKa’ ’gyur of both Buddhism and Bon, along with one hundred thumb-sized images of gShen rab made of silver, and another nine hundred of copper.

sKu gdung khang, gYu rtse khang and dBu rtse khang

The two-storey sKu gdung khang had a triple-headed stupa of Lo pan mchod rten, which nearly reached the roof of the building, and murals of the Forty-five Peaceful deities (Zhi lha zhe Inga).

gYu rtse khang had a complete set of religious objects: at its centre was a statue of ’Brug sras chem pa the height of an arrow, made of a compound of gold and silver. To the right was a cubit-high silver statue of Phur pa together with another nine of gilt-bronze. On both sides of Phur pa were one hundred stupas in gilt-bronze, and on the walls were murals of the thousand gShen lha ’od dkar.

Similarly, dBu rtse khang was adorned with many religious objects. At its centre was a gilt-bronze statue of gShen lha ’od dkar as tall as a two-storey house. To the right and slightly in front of the statue was a magnificent, elaborately worked gilt-bronze mandala, organized with holy elements to the height of a mezzanine. It was constructed of, from the bottom, the following: the four continents; the four islands; the seven mountains; the seven lakes; the abode of the Thirty-three gods, where the temple rNam rgyal khang bzang was found; and, on the top, the Garuda subduing the three worlds. To the left and slightly in front of gShen lha ’od dkar was a shrine of the Eighty-six Wrathful deities (Khro rgyal gya drug) in gilt-bronze. And above the gShen lha ’od dkar were the Forty-five Peaceful Deities (Zhi lha zhe Inga) in gilt bronze.

The construction of these five buildings, together with the fields around, presented a resemblance to that of the heart of ’Ol mo lung ring, the Holy Land. The beautiful and lovely scene of the purest land raises a deep faith and reverence in one’s mind when it comes into sight.

There were two meditation halls (sgrub khang), the old one and the new, with many religious objects in each. In the old one was a gilt-bronze statue of sTag la me ’bar, a thangka of Srid pa’i rgyal mo and masks of some Bonpo guardian deities. In the new one was a statue of the hundred-headed, thousand-armed lJang nag made of gold and silver, and the Four Queens (rGyal mo rnam bzhi) in gilt-bronze. There were also thangka embroidered with silk, and many other religious objects.

Of the two residences (bla brang), the older one had the Thang gsas lha khang,
inside which were many religious objects, such as the following: a gilt-bronze statue of rNam par rgyal ba; a gilt-bronze reliquary stupa of lHa bu, the father of sNang gsal Rinpoche; murals of about five hundred figures of Thang gsas sgrol ma, a wheel of life and the kings of the directions (rGyal chen sde bzhi); a statue of sTon pa made of pure gold, rediscovered in Kong po Bon ri by sNang gsal Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan; an image of the diety Zhi ba a gsal, which was an old relic of the Khyung po family; an Indian-made copper statue of gShen rab named “Black Gold of Thirteen Horse Head” (gSer nag rta mgo bcu gsum); large and small conchs called dBu yang.

Annual religious activities and monks of the monastery

1. During the three days from the 3rd to the 5th of the 1st month, a memorial service was held in honour of mNyam med Shes rab rgyas mtshan, during which assemblies were held to make flower-offerings.

2. From the 13th day of the 2nd month to the 18th of the 3rd month, prayers were offered in a memorial service for sNang gsal Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan, in the course of which an extensive procession of monks was arranged on the 27th day of the 2nd month.

3. From the 30th day of the 2nd month to the 18th of the 3rd month was the period in which the rituals of sKye sgo, rNam klong gnyis, and Zhi khro were performed. From the 8th to the 15th of the 3rd month, the ritual cycle of Khro bo and the recital of the Kanjur and Katen, were staged in the Shar rtse khang. The ritual of the Grub sman mam bzhi, the hundred offerings of Ma rgyud and other rituals were performed on a grand scale in the dBu rtse khang. During the three days from the 15th, a large group of devotees of Bon got together to enjoy the glory of the artistic religious dances performed by the monks; these dances included sNa sel, A tsa ra, Sa ‘dul khro ‘cham, Srid rgyal dus drug, gZe ma dgu ‘cham, Ha shang, Ma rgyud tshogs ‘cham, rNga chen mo, dPal mgon gral brgyad, Dur khrod gnas brgyad, the Snow Lion (seng ge), the Tiger, the Leopard, the dBu stag, the dBal ‘brug, the dBal g-yag and the dBal kyung.

4. In the 4th and 5th months, primary and principal instructions, along with various other teachings, were given, as well as guidance on general and detailed knowledge.

5. From the 6th to the 9th day of the 6th month, rituals rNam rgyal stong mchod, gYang skor and dGra lha dpang stod were performed. Similarly, there was propitiation of mountain deities and circumambulation of holy mountains, followed by a horseracing competition customarily organized by the monastery and the A brag community. The competition was a social occasion.

6. From the 13th to the 20th day of the 7th month rituals of Kun gsal byams
7. During the three months from the 8th month to the 10th, most of the monks and lamas visited each village to give religious services; otherwise they stayed in the monastery for daily tea.

8. From the 23rd to the 30th day of the 11th month, the dgu bzlog rite, based on the ritual cycle of sTag la, was performed.

9. In the 12th month, from the 3rd to the 5th day, the bskang gsol ceremony was held on a grand scale according to the Zhu tradition; from the 23rd to the 30th day, the dgu bzlog rite, based on the cycle of Phur pa, was held.

Formerly, the monastery had five hostels (khang tshan) each of which had a lama and a teacher: the lama Tshul khrims blo ldan and the teacher rMa rong Thar dkar in Shar rtse hostel, the lama Dwangs ra Zla zla and the teacher Seng ge in bKa’ ’gyur hostel, the lama Don nyid and the teacher bsTan tshul in sKu gdung hostel, the lama ’Bum thar and the teacher A ‘jab in gYU rtse hostel, and the lama Nyi mkha’ g-yung drung and the teacher A chig in dBu rtse hostel. There were 139 monks. The lama and teacher of each hostel took, in rotation, all the responsibilities for the annual religious activities.

At present, this monastery consists of the following buildings: one temple with one hundred long pillars, the assembly hall with four, the bKa’ ’gyur khang four, and the two meditation halls have four each; a new kitchen and more than thirty monks’ quarters have been built. Something that should be stressed is that a collection of religious objects remains in perfect condition. It includes the following: the relics of sNang gsal Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan; a mezzanine-high, three-headed stupa made of a compound of gold and silver; a mezzanine-high gilt-bronze statue of gShen lha ‘od dkar; a life-sized gilt-bronze statue of Byams ma and a reliquary stupa of the lama Nyi grags.

There are ten lamas and more than forty monks at present. The monastery’s main source of revenue is the circulation service around the village. It depends on every household for support.

(10) Chab mdo Monastery

The monastery’s full name is Chab mdo dgon dPal gShen bstan g-yung drung bde chen gling. It is located in Shag chu xiang, in the south-eastern part of the rdzong. Although it is no more than thirty kilometres from the rdzong to the monastery, it takes about one and a half hours by car because of the bad road condition. This is one of the Bonpo monasteries that has a long history. It was destroyed in 1641 when Mongolian troops led by Gushri Khan bsTan ’dzin chos rgyal invaded Tibet. Reconstruction was undertaken in 1917.

In the time of gNya’ khris bytsan po, the teachings of Bon became widespread in Tibet. During this period, however, the monastery experienced a rise and fall,
and met with great misfortune in that many masters of Bon gshen scattered to mDo kham and the nomad area because of the religious oppression by bTsan po Khri srong lde btsan. In the nomad area, those Bon gshen masters who had escaped established many monastic communities in order to get a foot-hold there, so that the precious teachings of Eternal Bon did not degenerate. At that time Khyung po A bla grags pa and Sha ba rang grol, who both came from the upper Dwang ra Khyung rdzong, established Sog gYung drung 'dzin pa'i gling monastery and greatly increased the number of monks. The three deeds of keeping, defending and spreading the precious teachings of Eternal Bon became widespread everywhere.

However, at the same time, Gushri bsTan 'dzin chos rgyal first captured mDo kham and then gradually penetrated gTsang by waging war against Karrna bstan skyong dbang po, the king of gTsang, and brought it under his control.

In 1642, the Tibetan government began to organize itself and the doctrine of the dGe lugs pa sect began to spread widely in Tibet. Simultaneously, a large number of monastic communities of the bKa’ rgyud pa and Eternal Bon were, as a matter of course, destroyed by the military power of Gushri bsTan 'dzin chos rgyal. Many Bonpo monks and nuns were ferociously tortured and eventually murdered. After that, although Khyung po bsTan rgyal grags pa, Khri bde gung grags and Khyung po ’Bun snang tried their best to practise the three deeds “keeping, defending and spreading the teachings” they gradually declined.

At that time, Khyung po Nang chen grags pa brought the statue Zhi kro rgyab bkrod and other religious objects to A smad district and took care of the monastery of Khyung po sBa nag bla brang. Khyung po sMan ri grags pa, gShen sras grags pa and sNang gsal grags pa are said to have followed successively in the line of this Bla brang.

A brag sPyi ba grags pa then put up a yak-hair tent on the pastureland so that they could declare that their monastery was settled there. They raised funds and scraped together enough monastic implements, including the offerings to the deities and costumes for religious dance. Besides that, they also obtained many religious objects such as the Zhi khro rgyab bkrod and other invaluable relics. Gathering a number of devotees in the nomad area, they performed prayer services and rituals to the satisfaction of the people.

There were about twenty, mostly tantric practitioners, but some of them were real monks. They practised chanting and meditation. They performed religious services based on the ritual cycles of dBal gsas, gTso mchog, Phur pa, sTag la and Byams ma. They also propitiated Srid pa rgyal mo dreI nag, Mi bdud, A bse, rGyal po Nyi pang sad and dGra bla’i rgyal mo. Since they performed these rituals extensively, the monastery became the object of worship for the people, for this life and hereafter.

From among these lamas came bsTan 'dzin grags pa in the lineage of sBra nag
bla brang, who had accomplished complete deliverance from every attachment of this world. But after his leaving for the purest land Bon dbyings (after his death), even the sBra nag bla brang lineage fell into a state like that of a rosary broken into pieces. Later on, this situation caused the sBra nag bla brang to invite, willingly or unwillingly, lamas of the Khyung po lineage from A stod district.

About the same time, in 1880, dBang phyug gYung drung tshul khrims, an accomplished yogi of the Nag ru lineage, one of the three lineages of Khyung po “White, Black and Yellow” was born, emitting many auspicious signs. From childhood, gYung drung tshul khrims had inborn knowledge quite unlike all other children. Being a master in the fields of calligraphy and arithmetic, he became the one most admired by all the laity and priests. When he grew up, he felt so deeply sad about the cyclic existences that he made pilgrimages to Central Tibet, Mount Kailash in Western Tibet, Bon ri in of Kong po; and when he visited monasteries including sMan ri (No.1), gYung drung gling (No.2) and mKhar sna (No.7) and he studied under many matchless teachers to receive initiations and instructions of outer, inner and secret. He then thoroughly learned the Sutra, Tantra and rDzogs chen. Adjusting himself to the monastery, he took the full ordination of Drang srong, consisting of 256 vows.

A prophecy was made at that time by sKal bzang nyi ma, the great abbot of gYung drung gling, that a new monastery would be built in sNye rong district. In accordance with the prophecy, a large group of devotees of Bon having united with some leaders of Shag chu smad community in sNye rong rdzong apprised mKhan chung Grags nam, the governor-general of Hor that they would establish Chab mdo dPal gShen bstan gYung drung bde chen gling, which they did in 1917.

gYung drung tshul khrims maintained the monastery by the observation of monastic discipline, such as the Three Trainings, in consequence of which he became the very guide of the three deeds of keeping, defending and spreading the precious teachings of gShen. Furthermore, he developed his unique abilities: he left a number of handprints and footprints all around the monastery, including places on the hills in front and at the rear; the flag of his reputation as Chab mdo rTogs ldan fluttered high.

However, due to the unfortune of devotees, he died on the 23rd day of the 8th month, 1947 with the signs of summer thunder booming through the sky above the monastery.

After that, until the Cultural Revolution, the monastery was looked after by his nephew, Bla chung tshe dpag of the Khyung po Nag ru family. During this time the monastery was enlarged and the necessary religious objects, such as statues, scriptures, stupas and implements of offerings, were greatly increased. Among many Bonpo establishments, this monastery had the high reputation of having grown just like a lotus that comes out of the mire.
Religious objects and rituals of the monastery:

sKu gdung lha khang

The main religious object of this three-storey temple was the gilt-bronze reliquary stupa of the sage of Chab mdo, gYung drung tshul khrims, in the style of the gYung drung bkod legs stupa, as tall as a two-storey house. To its right was a statue of Li shu about the same size as the stupa. Further to the corner was a gilt-bronze statue of sMon lam mtha’ yas. To the left of the stupa was a gilt-bronze statue of Dran pa nam mkha’ about the same size. Among these, there was also a gilt-bronze statue of rNam par rgyal ba as high as the ceiling.

On the upper floor was a gilt-bronze statue of sTon pa gShen rab as high as the ceiling. In front of it were religious objects that included the mandala, built at a cost of two thousand Chinese yuan, the butter lamp stand that cost one thousand yuan, a set of seven silver cups that cost one hundred yuan, the mandala of the Twelve Rituals (Cho ga bcu gnyis), an embroidered thangka, and a great many other equally sacred religious objects.

The assembly hall (’du khang)

At the centre of this two-storey building, which had fifty-two pillars, was a clay image of rNam par rgyal ba as tall as the building itself. Beside it, on both sides, were bronze statues of the four Buddhas and the four wrathful deities, and five large golden thangkas of the Thousand Buddhas. There was also a chamber with 122 wooden stupas in it. In addition to these, the number of invaluable religious objects in this building was beyond counting.

The Meditation hall (sgrub khang)

In this building there was a statue of the guardian rGyal po Shel khrabs and a number of masks of other guardians.

The Lama’s residence (bla brang)

Of the two bla brang, the upper bla brang was a building of three storeys. It consisted of bKa’ ’gyur khang, Zhabs brtan khang and Rig sngags lha khang. In the two Rig sngags lha khang were small gilt bronze images of Byams ma, gDugs dkar, sTag la me ’bar, Ma rgyud, Phur pa and many others.

The main religious object in the lower bla brang was the clay image of rGyal ba rgya mtsho, about half the height of the ceiling. On either side of it were cubit-high clay images of the Sixteen Arhats (gNas brtan bcu drug). In front of the relics of the Sage gYung drung tshul khrims was a mandala, built at a cost of two thousand Chinese yuan, small butter lamp stands of silver, silver water bowls in various sizes, and many other things.
The Communal quarters (*khang tshan*)

There were four *khang tshan* in Chab mdo Monastery: bDe chen smon grol, 'Dod 'byung phun tshogs, Lung rig grags rgyas and Srid gsum dbang bsgyur. There were more than thirty rooms for the 102 resident monks.

Annual religious services of the monastery

1. The 2nd day of the 1st Tibetan month is the commemoration of mNyam med Shed rab rgyal mtshan. Flower offerings are made for three days beginning on that day.
2. During the five days from the 15th day of the 2nd month, there are assemblies of the Twelve Rituals (Cho ga bcu gnyis).
3. In the 3rd month, assemblies are held for prayer services.
4. During the ten days from the 1st to the 10th day of the 4th month, a thousand offerings of rNam rgyal are made; simultaneously, the dancers of the monastery perform religious dances such as rGya nag Ha shang, Sa phyag, rNam brgyad, rGya tsha, Ging 'cham, sTag la'i rnga 'cham, Seng 'cham, g'Tbr rgyag and others. These are very well performed in a manner perfectly true to the origin.
5. From the 13th to the 25th day of the 5th month there are recitals of the bKa’ gyur.
6. During the seven days from the 5th day of the 6th month each *khang tshan* holds rituals to meditate on its own Yi dam. Concurrently with this, the lay and clerical devotees propitiate the local deities and they enjoy the summer festival by participating in competitive track events.
7. In the 7th month the Zhi khro ritual was performed.
8. During the three days from the 23rd day of the 8th month, a memorial service is held in honour of gYung drung tshul khrims, the sage of Chab mdo, and flower offerings are made.
9. From the 3rd to the 10th day of the 11th month, the ritual cycle of Me ri is performed.
10. From the 3rd to the 30th day of the 12th month, two rituals of Khro bo and Phur pa are simultaneously performed, finishing with the gTor rgyag che mo rite.

At present, there are three lamas and more than fifty ascetic monks in the monastery. Its buildings include the temples, the assembly halls, a kitchen and another building of about sixty pillars. Monks’ quarters number more than twenty. Moreover, the monastery is well equipped with the religious objects it needs. The religious services and rituals are also practised in a manner true to the tradition.

(11) Sha ri Monastery

rDza dmar Sha ri dgon Dar rgyas gling is located in the southern rDza dmar
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xiang, which covers the north-western part of sNye rong rdzong.

The monastery stands on top of a small hill, to the north of which stretches a range of magnificent rocky mountains. The plain around the monastery is beautiful, large and spacious. A great many people, both lay and clerical, would be fascinated at the sight of it.

The monastery was founded in 1890 by bSod nams g-yung drung of the sKam clan. The story of the monastery's beginnings is as follows:

The great abbot of sMan ri (No.1), bSod nams lhun grub dbang gi rgyal po, came to stay in rDza dmar in the Thirteenth Rab byung. During his stay he fasted on the 10th day of every month, and made flower-offerings. Having seen this, some senior Bonpo took it as being most important for them and adopted it as a part of their collective works. The accomplished saint repeatedly shouted out an oath to the territorial deities such as Ri rgan Bum rdza se mo, and made them take vows so that they would protect the peaceful communities.

Later, when the great abbot of sMan ri, Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, came to rDza dmar, he not only urged and explained the necessity of building a monastery there, he also made the most careful preparations he could afford.

Then another great abbot of mKhar sna (No.7), 'Gro mgron Shes rab g-yung drung, came to rDza dmar and built a five-storey stupa at bKra shis na mo che. In addition to this, he identified the sacred hill on which a monastery should be built, and made a thorough investigation of the place.

The story of the origin of the name rDza dmar Sha ri goes as follows: Once when gShen gSang ba 'dus pa captured some witches, he bound them all firmly to a chicken-shaped rock, on the part that looked like the head of a bird. But two of them, Me bza' brag sbyor and Chu bza' rlung sbyor, managed to escape, barely, and disguised themselves as deer. Later, however, gSang ba 'dus pa killed them with his sword, which made him famous as a deer hunter, Sha ba ri (hence the name Sha ri).

To the south of rDza dmar Sha ri there is a rocky mountain called TShe bum in which a number of treasures are kept, including the magical objects of sTag la me 'bar, the mysterious stick of 'Od ldan 'bar ba and the like.

To the east is Shel rdzong, the abode of Yum chen Thugs rje Byams ma. There is also a cave called the Shel phug, the abode of Kun bzang rGyal ba 'dus pa, in which there are many self-grown (rang byon) letters on the rock and self-grown figures of particularly eminent ones still visible. In 1892, sKam bSod nams g-yung drung founded rDza dmar Sha ri Monastery in accordance with the prophecy made by Shes rab g-yung drung, undertaking mass fasting, which had previously been practised by senior Bonpo on the 10th day of each month as the basis of their activities.

The altar and religious objects were completely renewed and the monastery was looked after by mKhan nag bla chung, Khro bla sKal bzang rgya mtsho, bZod pa dge slong and A mchod Ge khod. Although bsTan pa tshul khrims, who was then sent
from sMan ri, became widely known as the Sha ri abbot, the unfavourable climate gave him no choice but to finally return to his home in rGyal rong.

The next to take care of the monastery was mTshams pa Shes rab. However, to his misfortune, a gush of water from underground caused the temple and the schoolhouse to be ruined. The monastery suffered greatly, on the brink of annihilation.

At that time, in the course of a discussion involving officials, citizens and monks, an expectation grew that sKam Tshe dbang 'gyur med (generally called sKam 'Gyur dga' Rinpoche) would restore and maintain the monastery. They told him the essentials of the discussion, which he fully accepted.

Tshe dbang 'gyur med was exceedingly venerable; he had taken the monastic oaths in the presence of the abbot of sMan ri, Phun tshogs blo gros, had studied under many great teachers and had completed the quintessence of the three Sutra, Tantra and rDzogs chen. For the sake of all beings, he spread the teachings of gShen widely, so that his fame reached every part of the Bonpo community. All Bonpo experienced such heartfelt gratification that they respected him as their head.

He spent everything that had been given to him by many patrons and proponents, lay and clergy, solely on good deeds. Since there was no choice but for the monastery to be transferred to another place and rebuilt, the great abbot of sMan ri, Nyi ma dbang rgyal, and some others inspected Nor bu gdong, the plain below Ri rgyan bum rdza. However, the officials, citizens and monks of rDza dmar all raised an objection to this with the reason that the place was too far from Ge mo where the lord Kham pa Ge khod resided, along with other reasons. A discussion was then held among Tshe dbang 'gyur med, Zhwa khra 'Chi med, the chieftain of rDza dmar, and Kham pa Ge khod, the chieftain of Ge mo. They reached an agreement to build the monastery midway between rDza dmar and Ge mo.

As almost all the religious objects of the monastery except for one set manuscript of the bKa’ 'gyur and bKa’ brten and some fine incense had been dispersed by that time, sKam 'Gyur dga' began to gather together the religious objects and the people and the government of rDza dmar began to work on the temple. Since they participated in the construction in this way, the religious objects and the temple were soon nearly completed, when sKam 'Gyur dga' was struck down with an illness. Taking over his work, two of his disciples, bSod nams lhun grub and Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan of the sKam clan, completed the task.

With respect to the family of sKam, it is known to be in the line of the sGo, one of the five great clans of early Tibet: sGa, sGo, gDong, dBra and 'Bru. The forefather of the sKam transformed himself into a deity’s offspring called dGa’ ba mdangs Idan, and descended to this world for the sake of religious trainees, so that they would be led by the clear light of the deity. In order to tame the devil Bhyo ra nag po, he came down to a place called Yul bla ra na se with a turquoise drum booming in his hand.
There he was known by the name of sGo rgyal lha bon thod dkar.

The reason why he was known by the name of sKam is as follows: there was once a time when the lake Dwang ra g-yu mtsho overflowed naturally, and sGo rgyal lha bon thod dkar appeared and demonstrated his acquired ability by drying up the flood. After this, his clan came to be called by the name of sKam (which means drying).

Subsequently, in some districts, including Dwang ra g-yu mtsho, sDe dge, and Hor sBra chen, men of the sKam family through successive generations became the most talented leaders. It is said that that there have been some 180 masters in the sKam family, such as sGo A lod shig gzan, gYung drung nyi rgyal, the tutor of Nyi ma bstan 'dzin, the great abbot of sMan ri; sKam Khro rgyal grags pa, Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, the abbot of So brgyad, and others.

The way in which the sKam family formed the foundation of prosperity in the Hor sBra chen district was as follows: Once when a quarrel was provoked in the sDe dge district between sKam bsTan 'dzin gtsug phud and Ga lhug, the chieftain of dKar shul, they asked the king of sDe dge at IHa thog to deal with it. sKarri bsTan 'dzin gtsug phud won the decision that the monastery should be exempt from taxation. Hearing this, the chieftain of dKar shul developed a hatred for him, and threatened that no monk would be allowed in the monastery. However, sKam bsTan 'dzin gtsug phud felt generous enough to leave an excellent mark at the rTsi chu river as witness of his spiritual accomplishment. The Hor lineage eagerly wanted to leave for rTa sgo in upper Nag tshang. However at that time, Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, the elder son of the religious teacher of the Klu phug monastery in the Hor sBra chen district, repeatedly expressed his hope that he would fix his permanent abode in Hor sBra chen. Because of this, sKam bsTan 'dzin gtsug phud took up permanent residence in the Hor sBra chen district so that he could give full support to the hope of Nyi ma rgyal mtshan. Descendants of sKam gradually increased and the teachings of gShen became widespread in rDza dmar in the sNye rong district. The reputation of the sKam family thus came to be widely known in Hor sBra chen.

Structure and religious objects of the monastery

The monastery consisted of the following buildings: the assembly hall with four long pillars and sixteen short ones; two temples, rNam rgyal lha khang and Dran pa lha khang, each with four long pillars and four short ones; the two-storey bla brang; the meditation hall; and the large quarters for monks.

Formerly, this monastery possessed an abundance of religious objects including the following: a sacred gilt-bronze statue of gShen rab rNam par rgyal ba as tall as a two-storey house, the Four Buddhas of gilt-bronze and a gilt-bronze statue of gShen rab Mi bo. In the Dran pa lha khang were the reliquary stupas of sKam 'Gyur dga' and some other relics.
Among the many religious objects, the ones of particular importance were the following: the treasure-trove statue of sTon pa gGshen rab; the big conch called bKra shis 'od 'bar; multiple relics called Yid bzhin dbang gi rgyal po; three small tsha tsha clay images belonging to 'Chi med Dran pa, the father and sons; the golden flat-bell of self-deliverance; the self-grown white letter A, found in rTsa ri mtsho dkar by Karma pa Rang byung rdor rje; the footprint of mKha’ ’gro Klu yang sgong brgyad; the silver statue of gGshen lha ’od dkar called bKra shis 'od 'bar,rediscovered by Nyag gter gSang sngags gling pa; the “red gold” stupa discovered by Khro tshang 'brug lha in the rDzu 'phrul phug cave on Mt. Ti se; the self-grown image of Zhi ba Kun tu bzang po, which came out of the teeth of a Shel sku Khro bo rgyal mtshan; the self-grown image of gGshen lha, which appeared on the skull of Khyung po Gyer chen zla med; “six relics of the six directions”; and a phur pa dagger made of bronze.

There were also a great many precious manuscripts including a high quality set of bKa’ ‘gyur and bKa’ brten, the Khams brgyad, the Mi nub mtshan mdo and the Dri med gzi brjid.

Annual religious activities and rituals
This monastery followed various traditions such as that of Zhu, Bru and the New Tradition.

1. In the 1st Tibetan month a fast was performed.
2. In the 6th month there was an annual festival during which an assembly was held on the 10th day, concurrently with which a religious dance was performed.
3. During the three months from the 10th to the 12th, the dgu gtor rite was performed once each month, three times in all. In the old days when the monastery flourished, there were monthly prescribed services.

At that time, this monastery was an establishment where there were both monks and tantric practitioners. There were about twenty monks and some sixty tantric practitioners.

It is said that there were “the eighty generations of Bonpo tantric practitioners of rDza dmar”. Some of these must have observed the tantric vows properly. Among the monks there were many who observed their vows strictly. The famous chanting master of sMan ri, called the Teacher sBa ba, was also a monk from Sha ri Monastery.

At present, this monastery has eight lamas and twenty-five monks whose conditions are good in every respect.

(12) rTing ngu Monastery
Sog rTing ngu bon dgon Nor bu gling is located in Khro bo la xiang, to the
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north-east of sNye rong rdzong. It is about eighty kilometres from the rdzong to the monastery. As the road is very bad, it is impossible to get there by car in summer. Even on horseback it is an extremely difficult task to reach it.

The monastery was founded in 1748 by lHun grub dbang ldan. He was born in 1703 in the sDe dge district of Khams. From childhood, he had innate knowledge and intelligence of remarkable lucidity. He devoted himself to the practice of meritorious deeds. He had love and compassion for all religious trainees. In the manifestation of right discernment that he displayed he was quite unlike any other child.

When he reached the appropriate age, he received the most careful initiations and transmissions of Sutra and Tantra in the presence of the great abbot of sMan ri, gYung drung tshul khrims. Having done this, he made rapid progress in practising meditation. He circumambulated the holy mountains in Amdo and Central Tibet, regardless of the schools they belonged to. At the same time, he studied under many excellent masters of several monasteries. Since he respected them as his chief masters and received profound initiations, text-transmissions and religious teachings, he reached a state worthy of praise from everyone.

Then he went to see lHo rTogs ldan dkar po, whose name was widely known. He prostrated himself, bowed his head and asked for blessed initiation and teachings. lHo rTogs ldan dkar po said,

“O You, the noble one, protector of fortunate religious beings!
Having easily obtained selfhood without searching or exertion,
Today we have met here naturally without motivation,
You have had the fate [to see me] pulsing in your veins without fading,
The fate of sentient beings lies on you; I shall tell you without concealment,
You are the one called the Possessor of Self-created Power (lHun grub dbang ldan) of lHa thog,
Act true to your name, and you will gain the ear of all the people.”

Following the instruction, lHun grub dbang ldan continued reciting prayers and devoted himself to making pilgrimages and sitting in hermitages, carrying with him the scriptures and a medical kit. Then he went northward, close to the yak hair tent of the chieftain of the Sog community, and asked for alms.

There were three brothers in the chieftain’s family: the elder, middle and younger, whose names were, respectively, Khro bo rgyal, Khro bo dar and Khro bo srung. At that time, Khro bo rgyal, the elder one, had been suffering from an illness for a year, during which all medical care and religious rituals had no effect at all. The three brothers invited the saint lHun grub dbang ldan into their tent, and the elder one, Khro bo rgyal, said,

“Happiness is welling up inside me at the very sight of you,
Flowing through my body is energy that I have never felt before,
I would like to remember what name you bear,
I prostrate myself with reverence,
I wonder what caused me to suffer from illness,
I beg from you the best divinatory service to turn my illness away.”

IHun grub dbang ldan said in reply: “I am the one called IHun grub dbang ldan, but I am not the one who tells whether the divination comes out good or bad. What I can do for you is to give you medical treatment.” Then he made an examination of urine and faeces, and gave the most careful medical treatment to satisfy the elder brother’s wishes.

Forty-nine days later the patient finally got far better than their expectation, which, at the same time, raised faith and reverence in the brothers’ minds. Though they repeatedly asked him what kind of thing he wanted as a doctor’s fee, he said “I do not need any kind of doctor’s fee, but I have a wish to build a monastery in accordance with the prophecy made previously by the superior saint. Therefore I shall request you to give me a small piece of land where a monastery could be built. The three brothers were so happy to hear his words that they said, “We shall do as you tell us.”

Then the saint IHun grub dbang ldan, accompanied by the three brothers, went on to examine all the area under their jurisdiction within the Sog district, and encamped for a night at a place called Pha bong thang, where they saw many auspicious manifestations that night.

Therefore, in 1797, a decision was made to establish a monastery on this distinctive land. The future monastery was given a good name, the Glorious Nor bu gling, and an elaborate purification ritual was performed.

With regard to the surroundings of this square piece of land, they appear to be very good, described as follows: to the east is the protective mountain rGya stag khro bo, a white rocky mountain with the appearance of a haughty tiger that is thirsty, to the north is the protective Rus sbal ser po, a meadowy hill shining like a hero’s helmet, to the west is the protective Bya dmar mtshal lu, a beautiful scarlet hill of slate mingled with verdigris, to the south is the protective gYu ’brug sngon po, a blue rocky mountain sticking high into the sky.

All the lamas, leaders, patrons and priests were summoned, and worked without being lazy or negligent. Because of this, they managed to build the assembly hall of the monastery within the very year of the decision being taken. Not only that, by mutual agreement among the assembled monks of the Three Trainings, they increased the number of monks from four to six, then gradually from six to thirteen. In the early days, when there were only four monks, they were called “the four young qualified ones” (mTshan ldan khye’u bzhi), when six, “the six gShen who guide the beings” (’Dul ba gShen drug), and when increased to thirteen, they came to be known everywhere as “the thirteen gShen” (Ye gshen bcu gsum). From that
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time, the Bon doors of outer, inner and secret were opened and the great tradition of the teachings of chanting services and meditation came to be established, especially the rNam rgyal and gYung drung klong rgyas which were performed according to the tradition established by the former adepts. This contributed to the increase of the monastery’s activities and the spread of Eternal Bon.

The lineage of the monastery is as follows:
1. lhun grub dbang ldan, the founder of the monastery
2. rGyal tshab lhun grub 'od zer
3. bKra shis tshul khrims
4. Tshul khrims 'od zer
5. dPal ldan tshul khrims
6. gYung drung rgyal ba
7. mChog gyur grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen nam mkha' bde chen snying po
8. bsTan 'dzin rgyal dbang
9. bsTan 'dzin lhun grub
10. Kun dga' dbang ldan
11. Kun mkhyen Sangs rgyas grags pa
12. mNyam med Tshul khrims grags pa
13. bsTan pa'i nyi ma

The size of the monastery and its religious objects

'Du khang ka dgu ma
At the centre of this assembly hall, built by bsTan 'dzin rin chen bde chen snying po, was a gilt-bronze statue of rNam par rgyal ba, about the height of an eight-year-old child. On the shelves on either side of the statue were some eighty poti of bkA' 'gyur written in a mixture of gold and silver. On the walls were murals of the Thousand Buddhas.

sKu gdung lha khang dmar bkod ma
At the centre of this two-storey reliquary temple was a gilt-bronze statue, as tall as the ceiling, of sTon pa Khri gtsug rgyal ba sitting on the throne. On either side of the statue were rows of four gilt-bronze reliquary stupas of Ka ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin lhun grub, rGyal tshab bsTan 'dzin dbang rgyal and bsTan 'dzin lhun grub, and the tomb, in the style of the gYung drung bkod legs stupa, of a senior master of the gShen lineage, about the height of the ceiling. Similarly, there were murals of the Twelve Rituals (Cho ga bcu gnyis).
bKa’ ’gyur lha khang

In the bKa’ ’gyur lha khang, built by Kun mkhyen Sangs rgyas grags pa, was a number of religious objects such as the gilt-bronze tomb, in the style of the gYung drung bkod legs stupa, of sKyab mgon bsTan ’dzin lhun grub. To the right of the tomb was a life-sized gilt-bronze statue of sMra ba’i seng ge, the deity of wisdom. To the left was a life-sized gilt-bronze statue of Yum chen Shes rab byams ma. On the shelves along the walls on either side were complete sets of the bKa’ ’gyur and bKa’ brten. There were, as well, many other sacred objects, including stupas.

lHa khang Khri smon lha rtse

At the centre of this two-storey, twenty-pillared building was a gilt-bronze statue of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mthshan. To its right was a gilt bronze statue of Tshad med ’od ldan, and further towards the corner was a gilt-bronze statue of Kun dga’ dbang ldan. To the left of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mthshan was a gilt-bronze statue of ’Brug sras chem pa, and towards the corner were gilt-bronze statues of the Four Buddhas (bDe gshegs gtso bzhi). In front of mNyam med was the tomb of IHun grub dbang ldan in the style of the gYung drung bkod legs stupa. On the eastern walls were murals of paternal and maternal figures of Bonpo guardian deities. In the gNas brtan lha khang upstairs was a complete mural of the Sixteen Arhats (gNas brtan bcu drug); drawn there, as well, were many kinds of diagrams with poetic verses written in them (sNyan ngag gi sgra ‘khor).

sKu gdung lha khang

In this building, built by mNyam med Tshul khrims dbang rgyal grags pa, was a gilt-bronze tomb, in the style of the gYung drung bkod legs stupa and as tall as a two-storey building, of Kun mkhyen Sangs rgyas grags pa.

There were many marvellous murals: on the walls on either side of the tomb were gShen lha ’od dkar, at the porch were the Ten Guardian Deities (Phyogs skyong bcu) and above the porch were the Twelve Deeds (mDzad pa bcu gnyis) of gShen rab.

Kun bzang rgyal ba ’dus pa’i lha khang

At the centre of this large three-storey temple, built by mNyam med Tshul khrims dbang grags, was a gilt-bronze statue, as tall as a two-storey house, of Kun bzang rgyal ba ’dus pa with five faces and ten hands. To the right of it was a gilt-bronze statue of Nam mkha’i lha mo, and to the left was a gilt-bronze statue of Byams ma. On the walls were murals of the Thousand Buddhas (bDe gshegs stong sku).
On the ground floor, at the centre of the inner temple of this large eight-pillared, three-storey assembly hall, built by mNyam med Tshul khrims dbang grags, was a gilt-bronze statue of rNam par rgyal ba. To the left of it was a gilt-bronze statue of Shes byams ma.

On the first floor up, at the centre, was a gilt-bronze statue, as high as the ceiling, of rGyal ba rgya mtsho with a thousand hands and a thousand eyes. To the right of it was the Wheel of Time (dBang ldan Dus kyi 'khor lo), and at the back of it were the images of the Twelve Rituals (Cho ga bcu gnyis). Further to the right corner was a stupa of bKra shis sgo mang, as high as the ceiling. To the left of rGyal ba rgya mtsho was a gYung drung bkod legs stupa. Further to the left corner was a gilt-bronze statue of rNam par rgyal ba, as tall as a two-storey house, accompanied by the Eight Glorious Protectors (dPal mgon brgyad) at the back.

In one room on the top floor was a mural of mNyam med. In another room were murals of the thousand sTag la me 'bar and the Thousand Buddhas, between which were murals of the hundred-and-twenty mandalas. Similarly, another room had a figure and a mural of a Bonpo protective deity. Another room had murals of the master Pad ma 'byung gnas, the Lord Tsong kha pa, and the line of thirteen reincarnations of the Dalai Lama. A mural of a complete set of the Sixteen Arhats (gNas brtan bcu drug) was drawn in the last room on the top floor.

The Lama’s residence (bla brang)

The residence was a two-storey building with ten rooms. At the centre of the chapel upstairs was a gilt-bronze statue of Dran pa nam mkha’, and on the wall was a mural of Yi dam Sram dkar khyung ba. On the shelves behind the statue were volumes of scriptures of many kinds. In the meditation hall on the ground floor were several figures of Bonpo protective deities, masks, murals and many other sacred objects.

Annual religious activities and rituals

1. In the 1st Tibetan month, flower offerings were made and the ritual based on the rTsa sgrup bla ma sgrup pa was performed, as well as the recitation of the bKa’ ‘gyur and bKa’ brten.

2. On the 13th day of the 4th month, the recitation of the gSer 'od gzugs chen nyi ma shar 'bum, the Yab sras tshogs 'khor, the sTong rgyung brgan bsang and the renewal ceremony of gSas khang kha bstod, and invocation of dGra lha, Lam lha and the Yul lha of the four directions.

3. About the 6th month, sacrificial offerings to the Bonpo protective deities were elaborately made in rituals such as the bZlas chog bum sgrub, the ritual rNam rgyal stong mchod, the Khro phur zhang gsum and others. There were
performances of various artistic dances such as rNam brgyad gar ’cham, Zhwa nag tshogs ’cham, brTan srung ’bag ’cham, dPa’ bo’i ging ’cham and gYung drung dgu ’cham, performed in a way that can hardly be imagined.

4. In the 10th month, chanting services were performed in the most profound manner; there was a complete programme for the ritual performances of sTag la me ’bar, as well as that of Byams ma.

5. In the 12th month the following rituals were performed: the great dgu gtor rite; the evocation of the two tutelar dieties, Khro bo and Phur pa; the mdos ritual based on the Khro bo ngo mtshar rgyas pa; and the srung zlog ritual in which the deity ‘Brug gsas chem pa is invoked. Moreover, there were artistic events that featured various dance performances such as Zhwa nag tshogs ’cham, bsTan srung ’bag ’cham and dPa’ bo’i ging ’cham.

Presently there are two lamas and more than one hundred monks in this monastery. The temple, assembly hall and other buildings are held up by fifty-five pillars in all, and the monks’ quarters consist of one hundred and ten individual rooms.

This monastery has an abundance of religious objects including the tombs of the successive lamas of this monastery, the relics of the saint mNyam med, scriptures and a great many other objects. Annual religious services and rituals are practised as they were in former ancient times.

(13) gSang sngags rtse Hermitage

The gSang sngags rtse Hermitage is located in gYu rtse xiang, west of the sNye rong rdzong. The hermitage has a certain number of religious objects. Three monks are under training here.

(14) rGyal po shel khur Hermitage

This hermitage is in Be gzhung xiang, north-east of the sNye rong rdzong. Twenty-four monks and two lamas reside here. Considerable difficulties lie on the way to the hermitage.

After arriving from sNye rong rdzong at the uneven Qinghai-Tibet highway, one must travel nineteen kilometres along the highway and then leave it and head west. From there it is about 176 kilometres to dPal mgon rdzong. It is a very difficult road to travel and the trip takes more than six hours by car. However, there are several stopping places, like tea houses or petrol stations run by the local people, which make the going very convenient for pilgrims.
(9) sNang gsal Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(10) Chab mdo Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

(11) Sha ri Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(12) rTing ngu Monastery, Plate 1 A stone-carved Matri at the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Plate 2 The zhwa nag dance at the monastery 
(Photo Phuntso Tserving Sharyul 1998)
**dPal mgon rdzong**

dPal mgon rdzong is situated between the two celebrated lakes, gSer gling mtsho and gNam mtsho, on the Northern Plateau of Tibet. Higher in elevation to the north and lower to the south, the rdzong is blessed with beautiful mountains and large areas of pastureland.

The rdzong is 101,992 square kilometres in area, 14,500 mu of which is pastureland. With a population of about 29,000, the rdzong has one qu and eighteen xiang under its direct control. There are one hundred and four village committees in the rdzong, as well as one Bonpo and nine Buddhist monasteries.

During the time of the Qing dynasty, dPal mgon rdzong was a part of gNam ru rdzong, classified into one of the four tribes on the Northern Plateau, and was taken care of by the Am ban, the Manchu official in Tibet. The regional government of dPal mgon rdzong was established in 1959.

**(15) Shel phug Monastery**

dPal gShen bstan Shel brag phug pa monastery is located in Khyung shog xiang, the southeastern part of dPal mgon rdzong. Although it is fifty-four kilometres from the rdzong, one can reach the monastery within an hour by car as the road is in good condition.

The monastery was founded by mKha’ yag gYung drung ye shes in 1716. He was a distinguished master who started on a pilgrimage from sGang ru in Khyung po and eventually entered the cave Shel brag phug pa, where he practised meditation. After sitting there for three years, when he reached the age twenty-five, he built a new private room, kitchen and storehouse at ’Bum pa near the cave. In addition, he named the site Shel phug, “Crystal Cave”, and stayed there for several more years.

When he reached the age of forty-seven, the Mongolian troops of Jungar invaded the region, inflicted extreme brutalities, and finally killed him by beheading. They plundered all his properties.

The story of the Mongolian troops is told in many legends. One relates that when the Mongolian troops arrived below the hill of Shel phug, bsTan grags, the cook, invoked the goddess Srid pa rgyal mo, who brought a storm of iron hail down upon them, which consequently caused many deaths among the Mongolian troops.

In 1747, Rig ’dzin Zangs skyong dbang po Tshul khrims bstan ’dzin, the reincarnation of mKha’ yag gYung drung ye shes, was born in sTeng chen, Khyung po dKar ru. From childhood he recognized himself as the reincarnation and when he reached the age of nine, he left on a journey to sTod in search of his own monastery. Upon arriving at Shel phug he said, “This is my seat”, and he stayed there for thirteen years as a hermit, practising meditation. He said that it was necessary to build Shel phug Monastery at the very site where the hermitage lay.

Later, at the age of thirty-three, he made a pilgrimage to Kong po Bon ri and
other places. When he came back, after travelling for three years, he again devoted himself to meditating in the hermitage. He was sixty-eight when he died.

A long time passed before the birth of the next reincarnation took place. During this period, there was a hermit called Nang do mshams chen, who was reincarnation of Li shu. He spent many years practising meditation in the hermitage. He piously consecrated the place.

Then in 1831, the third master in the line of incarnation, bsTan 'dzin 'od zer rgyal mtshan, was born in a family called sDe rnying Nor lha tshang. He was enthroned as soon as he was recognized as the reincarnation by sNang ston Zla ba rgyal mtshan (1796-1862).

At the age of nineteen, he constructed at the cave a new red-painted meditation hall, Zhi khro lha khang, kitchen and storehouse. He also renewed part of the monastic equipment.

It was during his time that an agreement was made that this monastery should be a branch of Ra lag gYung drung gling (No.2) and he devoted his whole life to meditating on his tutelary dieties in all their aspects and was able to call upon religious protectors such as Ma, bDud and bTsan. He strongly advised against making a distinction between the teachings of Buddhism and Bon. He died at the age of eighty-four.

In 1879, the fourth in the line of incarnation, sKal bzang bstan 'dzin grags pa, was born in the vicinity of the monastery. He had only his mother when he decided to go to gYung drung gling in order to be ordained as a monk. Having done this, he later took full ordination.

Then, at Shel phug Monastery, he built an eight-pillared assembly hall with a complete entrance hall and five rooms upstairs, a meditation hall, another three-roomed building, a kitchen, a residence for the head of the monastery (bla brang). He spent his whole his life looking after the monastery. He maintained the doctrine of non-differentiation between Buddhism and Bon. He lived to the age of eighty years.

In 1915, a boy was born to be recognized as the reincarnation. The recognition was made by Shes rab blo ldan, the 5th abbot of gYung drung gling, who gave him the name Shes rab bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan. He was the fifth in the line of this monastery, and was enthroned at the age of five. He built a bla brang and greatly spread the teachings of Eternal Bon. In 1945, motivated by the prophetic words of sTag lung sgrol sprul chos sgrol (alias sTag lung mkha' 'gro), he revealed Shel brag as a sacred site. In 1948 he established the ritual called bDud rtsi bum sgrub, and among the hills behind the monastery he hid twenty-five sets of treasure bottles of all-wish-fulfilling.

On the whole, it was during the days of the dGe slong sKal bzang bstan 'dzin grags pa and Shes rab bstan 'dzin (rgyal mtshan) that the monastery flourished
The main religious objects of this monastery in those days were the life-sized gilt-bronze statues of Buddhas of the three ages and another two-cubit-high Buddha, a life-sized silver statue of rNam par rgyal ba, a gilt-bronze statue of Byams pa five cubits tall, a life-sized gilt-bronze statue of sNang ston Zla ba rgyal mtshan, a cubit-high statue of sGrol ma, clay images of many kinds, two gilt-bronze reliquary stupas bigger than a person, eight sets of wooden stupas, many poti of scriptures, and sixty-seven thangka of the Twelve Rituals (Cho ga bcu gnyis), tutelary deities and religious protectors.

There were also implements used in making offerings, such as various water bowls and butter lamp stands made of silver or copper, eight silver vases and eight complete sets of costumes for religious dances.

At that time, this monastery had such treasures as these, and fifty-three monks under training.

Annual activities and rituals

1. During the days from the 24th of the 12th Tibetan month to the 6th of the 1st month, there were many rituals including the dgu gtor rite and the thousand offerings.
2. For more than a month, from the 29th day of the 3rd month to the 8th day of the 5th month, the monks gathered together for prayers.
3. During the whole period from the 29th day of the 6th month to the end of the 7th month, a summer fast was observed.
4. Assemblies were held for twenty-one days of the 8th month.
5. Assemblies were customarily held for seven days of the 11th month.

To sum up, 149 days of the year were spent practising the regular above-mentioned services.

This monastery raised a considerable number of livestock, including according to one record 379 cattle, 698 sheep and 593 goats as a source of income.

At present, the number of monks is twenty-five. There is an assembly hall and a temple containing religious objects which are kept in very good condition.

Next, one must go to Nag tshang Nyi ma rdzong. It is 381 kilometres from dPal mgon rdzong to Nyi ma rdzong and, moreover, it is very difficult to get through the mud before reaching the highway. To relate our experience, it was too difficult for us to find our way and we wound up facing a serious problem: after finding an old, wide road, we proceeded one kilometre, depending completely on a map, when we found we had lost our way. We did not know what to do as we were at an empty place without a single person around, where we could see nothing but the sky above, the ground below. It was after a good while that we happened to meet a kind-hearted nomad, who knew the area and was able to help us. Following his guidance, we went
back about ten kilometres eastward, turned to the left, went another ten kilometres straight north, and finally came upon the highway from Amdo to mNga’ ris. After driving eighty kilometres on the highway, we saw a by way which led us to Nag tshang Nyi ma rdzong.

The highway is good and wide, with many services such as tea houses, small grocery shops, petrol stations and guesthouses along the way. These services provide comfort to pilgrims.
(15) Shel phug Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

Nyi ma rdzong

Nyi ma rdzong lies to the west of Nag chu. It once belonged to the Nag tshang tribe, which gave it the name Nag tshang Nyi ma rdzong, which has now become familiar to many people of this area. Late in the 17th century, it was governed by the Tibetan government, and functioned as an important access point for travelling to mNga' ris, Nepal, Ladakh and other places. It is now possible to reach sGer rtse rdzong in mNga' ris by car in one day or less.

Nyi ma rdzong has an area of about 150,000 square kilometres and a population of about 30,000. Two qu, thirteen xiang and ninety-nine villages are under the immediate supervision of this rdzong.

This area is surrounded by mountains, such as the Kun lun mountain range in the north and the sacred snow mountain Ti se in the south, and the land is, on average, more than five thousand metres above sea level.

In this region, at present, there are many places of pilgrimage: three Buddhist monasteries, including 'Gro dpal bDe chen 'gyur med gling; four Bonpo monasteries, including 'Om bu bSam gtan gling; as well as the mountain rTa sgo and the lake Dwang ra g-yu mtsho. This is also a perfect treasure house of mineral resources and animals, both carnivorous and herbivorous. The district was established as Nyi ma rdzong in 1983.

(16) 'Om bu bSam gtan gling Monastery

'Om bu bSam gtan gling is in 'Om bu xiang, seventy-six kilometres south-west of Nyi ma rdzong. This xiang lies on the northern side of the lake Dwang ra g-yu mtsho.

The monastery was established by bSod nams g-yung drung around 1890. He is regarded as one of the Thirteen Spiritual Leaders of Lake Dwang ra (Dwang ra g-yu mtsho'i 'gro 'dren bcu gsum) and belonged to the lineage of Guru. This lineage is traced back to Guru gYung dmng phun tshogs, from which it descends to bZod pa and down to the Guru 'Od zer, who is the fourth in the line.

The main religious objects are the sacred statues of Bla chen Dran pa nam mkha' with his twin sons. It is said that there used to be an important old manuscript called Bya rgod mchu bris ("written with the beak of vulture").

Every year in the 1st Tibetan month, a large-scale, prescribed service of the bum sgrub ritual is held, during which the monks meditate mainly on the deity Khro bo. Otherwise, services on a smaller scale are performed frequently.

In the old days there used to be more than twenty monks, but now there are no more than ten monks and one lama; the present condition of the monastery is not as good as it was previously.

Some degree of restoration was carried Guru 'Od zer. The main source of income, to maintain the monks and the lama, is donations from each household and
the performance of religious services in the village.

rGya rgod xiang lies thirteen kilometres away. The road is convenient for driving between the two xiang, 'Om bu and rGya rgod, and rGya rgod xiang has good facilities for travellers. We met more than one hundred pilgrims who were on their way to Ser zhig Monastery (No.19) or Mount rTa sgo, and we took many pictures of each other.

(17) gYU bun Monastery

The monastery is in the eastern part of rTa sgo xiang. It is a whole day’s ride on horseback from the rTa sgo xiang. The location of this Bonpo monastic community is an earthly sphere of purity in the middle of Zhang zhung.

More than three thousand years ago, there was a group of eighty great masters of Eternal Bon, the first ten of which, the gShen, reigned over the area. Among the ten gShen was Mu khri btsan po, the son of gNya' khri btsan po, who had a very high regard for the teachings of Eternal Bon. During Mu khri btsan po’s time, the thirty-seven tantric communities ('Du gnas so bdun) were established. Dwang ra gYU bun Monastery was founded in the places where the Gangs gnyan rta sgo and Dwang ra'i mtsho 'gram of the thirty-seven communities were situated.

The place where the monastery is found is, moreover, one of the twenty-four sacred places mentioned in the Bonpo Ma rgyud tantra. The self-grown five jackal-headed mKha' 'gro can still be seen in this place, as stated in the text of the Ma rgyud tantra.

The sPyi spungs khro bo dbang chen states that Sad ne ga'u of Zhang zhung trained himself in Dwang ra gYU bun. This implies that it was Sad ne ga'u of Zhang zhung sgo pa who first established gYU bun Monastery. He is one of the thirteen masters found among the eighty adepts of the Bon tradition.

Sad ne ga’u was born in Zhang zhung. His father was rGyal mtshan bde ba and his mother was rGyal bza’ klong yang. He studied under several teachers, like A nu 'phrag thag, so that he was finally able to accomplish his learning.

He exhibited many miraculous signs in the gYU bun community, such as curing leprosy patients just by looking at them, forcing back attackers and floods, taming wild carnivorous animals so that he could use them for transportation, igniting himself, subduing wickedness, being able to cross the lake Dwang ra riding on a drum and being able to build a crystal stupa in a river.

After having meditated for attaining perfection, he vanished just like the light of a rainbow. After that, history tells us, many great masters appeared one after another. Although the monastery sometimes experienced periods without strong leadership, there were other times when it had several holy ones who maintained universalism and remained meditating. Among them was mTshungs med rNam dag tshul khrims, who came to the monastery around 1687. He promoted the development of the
monastic community and it continued to grow through the time of his disciples, including Tshul khrims lhun grub, up until the time of the fourth master. After that the monastery was suppressed, but was taken care of and rehabilitated by sKyid gsum bla brang, who was the benefactor of the master gYung drung lha rtse.

In short, this monastic community was one that was outstandingly blessed, to which many excellent masters came at every stage of the early development of Bonpo teachings, and where many holy ones of Zhang zhung died, passing into the rainbow light.

The monastery possessed a number of important religious objects, some of which were later moved to other places: for example, Sad ne ga’u’s conch was taken to Thob rgyal sMan ri Monastery (No.1).

In the 1980s the monastery was reconstructed under the responsibility of the reincarnation bsTan ’dzin dbang grags. At present the monastery has one lama and twenty-two monks.

(18) Phyug tsho Monastery

Travelling about forty kilometres straight south from rGya rgod xiang, we arrive in rTa sgo xiang. Turning right at the top of a small mountain pass, and travelling another fifty kilometres, we reach Phyug tsho Monastery. Since the sacred sites of the snow mountain rTa sgo, the lake Dwang ra g-yu mtsho and the mountain called dGe bsnyen are visible from the top of the pass, love and respect arise in people’s minds, which may inspire them to prostrate themselves with all their faith, to perform the bsang ceremony as an offering and to raise ritual flags. Many of them, moreover, pile up as many stones as their own age to make a cairn.

Like Gangs Ti se, rMa chen sPom ra, Yar lha Sham po, gNyan chen Thang lha and sPu rgyal, the sacred snow mountain rTa sgo is an important pilgrimage site for both Bonpo and Buddhists.

The lake Dwang ra g-yu mtsho, as one of the three greatest pilgrimage sites, is a “soul lake” (bla mtsho). On its shore is a two-metre-high phallus made of dried mud, in accordance with the ancient custom in token of worship of the Bonpo protective deities. The term dwang ra is a Zhang zhung word meaning lake (mtsho).

A number of devotees from Nag tshang Nyi ma rdzong, mNga’ ris mTsho chen rdzong and other regions have infinite belief in the sacred blue lake and the snow mountain. There are always many pilgrims circumambulating the mountain, but on the 15th day of the fourth Tibetan month in particular, a huge number of lay devotees and clergy come to accumulate merit through performing the circumambulation because it is the great pilgrimage day (ri bskor che mo). Some of them repeatedly prostrate themselves and circumambulate the mountain.

The road between the above-mentioned pass and Phyug tsho Monastery is not very good, but it is nice that wild asses, rock goats, cranes and many other wild
animals can be seen on the fields stretching out on both sides.

Phyug tsho Monastery is situated on the hill beside the lake Dwang ra g-yu mtsho. One can see at a glance that among the monasteries of Eternal Bon it is particularly distinguished.

This monastery was built around 1849 by gYo lag sgom chen, a disciple of sNang ston Zla ba rgyal mtshan. After being founded, it was taken care of by Khyung ser sMon lam bstan pa, the lama of gcod practice, who had prodigious knowledge. Thereafter followed the two lamas, the famous Khyung dkar bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, who had the qualities of wisdom, compassion and power, and his attendant, the Sa ge gYung drung ye shes. During their time, Bonpo teachings were kept, defended and spread so well that the monastery flourished greatly.

Later, when the dge bshes of gYung drung gling (No.2), gYung drung bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan from Shar khog in Amdo, became the abbot of this monastery, he renovated it and collected many religious objects.

Then the dge bshes Khyung dkar bsTan pa lhun grub followed him as abbot. He arranged for the future supervisor and abbot of this monastery to be sent from gYung drung gling and that their principal practice should be based on the mKha’ ’gro gsang gcod.

At present, Phyug tsho Monastery has a number of buildings: the assembly hall, a temple, bKa’ ’gyur khang, protector’s temple, monks’ quarters and others. As for the religious objects, there is a statue of s’Ibn pa gShen rab and many kinds of scriptures, including the bKa’ ’gyur and bKd ’brten. Of particular note are the knotted knife and the knotted needle which are believed to be examples of proof of the spiritual accomplishment of the masters. There are also a great many medicine-pots, because the bum sgrub ritual has customarily been performed in this monastery.

In the protector’s temple there are only the images of the Bonpo protective deities. They look very fearsome.

At present, there are fifty monks and one lama in the monastery. Some of the regular religious services are synchronized, for the most part, with those of gYung drung gling.

Now, retracing our way southward from the lakeshore of Dwang ra g-yu mtsho to the above-mentioned mountain pass, and travelling several kilometres south-eastward, we reach the river rTa sgo gtsang po. rTa sgo Ser zhig Monastery is situated on the west bank of the river. Although it is only a little more than ten kilometres from the xiang to the monastery, the summer flooding period makes it very difficult for a car to cross the river.

(19) Ser zhig Monastery

From the description written by the supreme master who belonged to the celebrated eighteen Zhig families, it appears that rTa sgo Ser zhig Monastery was
contemporaneous with sMan ri (No.1). It is therefore apparent that the monastery was named Ser zhig after the family name of the lama who founded the monastery in 1405. Ser zhig Monastery is the biggest one in the Nag tshang Dwang ra g-yu mtsho area. Because of this, the Fifth Dalai Lama recognized it as a monastery of the government and permitted it to have a certain number of the local people as its retainers. The monastery is also called Se zhig skor lde, since it is one of the seven Nag tshang sger tsho.

The monastery consisted of a two-storey temple, the bla brang and monks’ quarters. There were many religious objects and books. Besides these, there were religious objects transferred from Nyi lung ’gram, the seat of ’Dzi bon dBang gi rgyal mtshan, when it was destroyed. However, invaded by the barbarous Mongolian forces of Jungar, Ser zhig Monastery was turned into a military camp, and the temple and monks’ quarters were soon destroyed.

After that, a number of people launched themselves into its reconstruction, as well as maintaining the doctrine. They included the one called Zhang zhung Lama, a descendant of Gu ru lama, a lama of the Zhu family from ’Jed spang lung, a lama of the Shel zhig family and others.

The main religious objects of the monastery were as follows: a black square stone called A ma sa gsum with the three white letters A, Ma and Sa on it; a small conch made of a devotee’s teeth; a tooth of the sTon pa gShen rab’s horse with a self-risen letter A on it; a Garuda’s claw as big as a yak’s horn; and a self-grown figure of Zhi ba Kun du bzang po within a crystal stupa.

Besides these, the monastery had a small drum, which is said to be a present given to a Ser zhig lama by the local deity gDong dmar lha btsan of rTa sgo. Among the patrons of the monastery it used to be the custom for patrons to appeal to the abbot to let one of them beat the drum when the ritual Ma tri bum sgrub was performed, for it was said that if one could beat the drum three time, he might get rid of all the bad luck or misfortune of the whole year, and his wish might be fulfilled. The patron was expected to offer five silver tam kar and a ceremonial scarf for each beat. All the people in the neighbourhood, lay and clergy, both Buddhists and Bonpo, showed boundless respect for this drum. At mass meetings, three beats of the drum by the abbot preceded the chanting; only then was the prayer conductor to begin leading the chorus.

In the protector’s temple was a mask of the deity A bse, called Nga ’dra ma. This designation was derived from the words spoken by the deity to the mask maker, “this mask looks like me” (nga ’dra), which turned the mask into an object of great rarity.

It is said that there were many old, important religious objects in the monastery, such as the skull of sTon pa gShen rab with a self-produced letter A on it, his teeth with a self-produced Gu ru on them, a statue of sTon pa with a self-produced mantra
Om ma ti ma ye sa le’du on the upper right part of it, and armour that belonged to sTon pa (said to have been taken to Xian in China).

The teaching and practice of this monastery have actually experienced rise and fall in every stage of its history. The recent significant figures of this monastery are as follows: Grags dbang Rinpoché of the Zhu family; sTāg la dbang rgyal of the Zhu family; the lama called Zhang zhung mKhan po; 'Og tshom dkar po; and the young Shel zhig. The early ones are said to be in the ’Phrang lugs lineage of Nag tshang.

The monastery is administered by a lama, a prayer conductor, a dge bskos, a treasurer and an assistant. Besides them, two monks are charged, in turn, with the detailed tasks of religious activities, such as the accounts of Ma tri bum sgrub, and so on.

Practice of Rituals and Religious Services

Rituals are practised in the manner of the so-called sTod Nag tshang ’phrang tradition, prominent among other old traditions of Zhu. The way of chanting the ritual text of the deity Khro bo is considered special and the text is said to have been composed when the masters had visions of the deity. The same manner is said to have been adopted by the other monasteries of the region, including 'Om bu Monastery (No.17).

1. In the 3rd Tibetan month the following religious activities take place:
   Preparations, which take five days, are made for the great bum sgrub ritual based on the Ma tri rin chen sgrol ma; the great bum sgrub ritual is thereafter performed for fifteen days. Religious dances are performed inside and outside the monastery, one day for each, and another two days are spent giving initiation.

   In the course of the bum sgrub ritual, lamas and monks from the monasteries of Phyug tsho, gYu bun and 'Om bu, besides the permanent resident monks of Ser zhig itself, are allowed into the monastery, and so are any others, including hermits and pilgrims, who know how to chant the Ma tri mantra. More than 150 people may enjoy a share of the offerings at times of great mass meetings.

   2. In the 12th month the dgu gtor rite of Phur pa is performed. Initiations are given at the end of the month.

   Besides the above-mentioned activities, several other small-scale services are performed throughout the year.

   There are a number of sacred sites surrounding Ser zhig Monastery: to the south-west lies the rTa sgo mountain range. At a good distance from the monastery, towards the range, at the foot of a hill, is a marvelous meditation cave called Shod tram phug pa. It was the abode of the master dMu Shod tram chen po, who was in the exalted ja’lus lineage of Zhang zhung oral tradition. Near the cave is a spring filled with limpid water that is said to cleanse sins.
At quite some distance up towards the rTa sgo mountain range, there is another meditation cave called rTa sgo rDzu 'phrul phug (the Miraculous Cave of rTa sgo); it is about the size of a two-pillared room and is shielded in the four cardinal directions by big rocks and overhead by a heap of big stones. It is also called rTa sgo gDong dmar lha btsan gyi phug pa, in which resided the yogi Nam mkha’ blo ldan, one of the three chief masters of gShen Nyi ma rgyal mtshan. There is a limpid spring beside the cave.

Further up, at the top of the hill, is a lake called Nag mer mtsho, edged with piles of stones. It is a blessed holy lake with two different aspects: the external, which looks like the right eye of Dwang ra; and the internal, like the eye of mKa’ ‘gro sKye ma ’od mtsho. Innumerable Buddhists and Bonpo, both lay and clergy, visit the lake to circumambulate it or to pay respect to it. It is believed that every pilgrimage site brings many blessings, especially in Tiger years.

Climbing up into the mountain range, at a good distance from the hilltop, midway up the slope of the ice-capped mountain Ngo dmar lha btsan, there is an area where heaps of the btsag (a kind of mineral used for medical purposes) can be found around the edge of the snow. It is actually the spot where the divine btsag of rTa sgo can be obtained.

Another source of btsag, according to some people, is in the mountains to the east of the rTa sgo gtsang po waterfall, which can be reached via the route in front of Ser zhig Monastery. Many people believe it to be the divine btsag of rTa sgo, because the mountain rTa sgo casts a shadow over the site.

Formerly there were more than twenty monks in Ser zhig Monastery. At present there are fifteen monks and one lama. Many Bonpo, laity and clergy, come to make pilgrimages.

From Ser zhig Monastery back to Nyi ma rdzong is about 180 kilometres, and it takes about six hours by car. The distance from there to dPal mgon rdzong generally requires stopping for a night, but the direct way to Nag chu may be chosen as an alternative.

From the town of Nag chu, driving seventy kilometres eastward on the Nag chu-Chab mdo highway, one arrives at ’Bri lung xiang. Turning south-eastward and driving another seventy kilometres, one reaches ’Bri ru rdzong. Although the road is good between the highway and the rdzong, two mountain passes must be crossed.

Of the rdzong within Nag chu region, this is one with relatively good local characteristics.
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(18) Phyug tsho Monastery, Plate 1
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(18) Phyug tsho Monastery, Plate 2
A phallic symbol on the Dwang ra g'Yu mtsho Lake's shore, near the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
'Bri ru rdzong

'Bri ru rdzong lies in the eastern part of Nag chu region. It has an area of 11,456 square kilometres, out of which 3,300 mu is farmland, 30,000 mu forest, and 11,566 mu pastureland. The population is about 39,000. The average altitude is no more than 4,000 metres. At present, it is an area of semi-nomadic people with eleven xiang and 176 village committees.

In ancient times when Tibet was divided into twelve small kingdoms, 'Bri ru was under the jurisdiction of one of them, Sum pa. A battle for the unification of Tibet broke out in the time of gNam ri slon btsan, and thereafter, during the time of Srong btsan sgam po in the 7th century, Sum pa was absorbed into Tibet and was formed into one of the four Ru of Tibet. At that time, 'Bri ru was still under the jurisdiction of Sum pa.

In 1732, 'Bri ru came under direct control of the Manchu officials posted in Tibet (am ban).

The revolution having taken place in China in 1911, the government of Tibet took 'Bri ru back under its rule. In 1941, the Tibetan government abolished the governor-general of Hor (Hor sPyi khyab), and established six rdzong there. 'Bri ru rdzong was one of the six. At the end of September in 1951, the people's commune of 'Bri ru rdzong was established.

The territory governed by the rdzong is very rich in mineral resources and carnivorous and herbivorous animals. It is convenient for communication and is blessed with natural beauty.

In 'Bri ru rdzong, at present, there are nineteen Buddhist monasteries, including O rgyan chos gling in Chags ri, and six Bonpo monasteries, including gSa’ mda’ bon dgon. 'Bri ru rdzong has more monastic communities than any other rdzong in Nag chu region.

(20) Sen tsha Monastery

The monastery's full name is Sen tsha dgon rNam rgyal kun grags gling. Travelling sixty-four kilometres southward from 'Bri ru rdzong and crossing two mountain passes, one reaches Sen tsha village in gYang shod xiang, which lies halfway up the mountain on the north side of the river rGyal chu.

In its early years, Sen tsha Monastery was situated in the village of Sen tsha itself, but around 1440, Kun dga’ dbang ldan of the Bru family, who was a disciple of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, regarding the recess at the foot of Byug ri phyug mo as auspicious, built a temple there. It is said that there were many auspicious signs when it was built.

This establishment became a monastery, which had many buildings and blessed religious objects, as well as many lay priests. Many lay priests of gYang shod Mar thang later moved, one after another, into the vicinity of the temple. This caused
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not only a blurring in the distinction between clergy and laity, but also a serious hindrance to the development of the monastery.

In 1918, when the great abbot of sMan ri (No.1), sKu 'dun Phun tshogs blo gros, came to rGyal shod, he decided to transfer the monastery in accordance with the plan made by the lord of Sen tsha, bSod nams lha rgyal, and others. However, there was slight internal discord at that decision. Therefore, in order to avoid the merging of monks and lay priests, a monastery called Phun tshogs glang chen 'gying ri spo ra dgon rNam rgyal kun grags gling was established.

The monastery’s religious objects at that time included the following: a statue of sTon pa gShen rab within which was a relic of his body as big as a skylark egg, the reliquary stupa of Khyung btsun bSam gtan nyi ma, several bigger clay statues, scriptures written in gold on a black ground, a treasure-trove consisting of such items as a helmet and a coat of mail, and many scriptures, including a complete set of the bKa’gyur and bKa’brten.

The youngest son of bSod nams lha rgyal, the chief of Sen tsha, was ordained in the presence of the abbot, sKu 'dun Phun tshogs blo gros, and was given the name Tshul khrims rgya mtsho. He was esteemed as the head of the institution, which then became a veritable monastery. In order to collect donations, Tshul khrims rgyal mtsho travelled to the nomad area of Hor, where there was a good number of contributors, which was useful for the subsistence of the monastery. His paternal lineage was in the Zhu family, which had branched from the family of the rDzum chief. He kept a close patron-priest relationship with Hor, hence the alternate name of the monastery, Sen tsha Zhu tshang gYang shod dgon.

Religious services and practice of rituals

The rituals mainly practised in this monastery were divided into two sections: rituals based on the rNam rgyal and Klong rgyas of the non-Tantric section and the dBal gsas zhi drag of the Tantric section and the propitiatory texts for the religious Bon protectors, especially the deity Brag btsan A bse.

The main annual religious services were the chanting of the ritual cycles of Khro bo, dBal gsas and Phur pa. Besides these, the ritual Ma tri bum sgrub was practised, religious dances were performed, initiations were given and other services were performed.

The organization of the monastery’s personnel was just like every other monastery: dbu bla (head), dge bkos, dbu mdzad, and las sne (monk officials).

After the first transfer, the monastery was in a state of pure asceticism; morality was tightly maintained, just like a knot of silk. However, it later gradually declined and the monks and lay priests began to live together. As a monastery, it remained so only in name.

It was Thugs dga’ of rMe’u who took responsibility for the reorganization of
the monastery. The temple, assembly hall, monks’ quarters and other buildings were restored to their former condition. A collection of religious objects of body, speech and mind was also completed.

At present, this monastery has six lamas, including Thugs dga’, and fifty monks. The annual activities and religious dances have been revived. Moreover, the monastery has been undergoing restoration and expansion under the guidance of Thugs dga’, who has broad knowledge of Sutra, Tantra and the Mind class of the Bon doctrines, as well as magnificent conduct.

(21) dGa’ ri Monastery

Sen tsha dGa’ ri Monastery is also in gYang shod xiang, but located on the other side of the river rGyal chu. In 1697 or so, mKhas btsun bSam gtan nyi ma established the site as a place for meditation practice. There he meditated upon the tutelary deity dBal phur nag po and finally attained realization.

The monastery is regarded as the sacred site of Phur pa. It is said that there are clear traces of a tiger, a snow lion, a Garuda and a dragon having landed on the cardinal points of this monastery. To the north is the mountain sBas yul gtsang ma dga’ ba’i ri. The fact that the mountain is said to have a hidden place (sbas yul) where Tshe dbang rig ’dzin attained realization explains why it is called dGa’ ri (the Mountain of Joy).

bsTan pa’i nyi ma, who was a disciple of the great saint bsTan ’dzin rin chen bde chen snying po, practised meditation in this place and attained realization. He built a temple and collected religious objects, so that the hermitage was finally transformed into a monastery. He attracted many disciples by giving teachings based on the dMar khrid dug Inga rang grol, which is a mental-treasure (dgongs gter) of Grub dbang bsTan ‘dzin rin chen. He lived a long life.

After that, in the second half of the Fifteenth Rab byung, sKal bzang rgya mtsho, a lama of the rMe’u lineage, was recognized as the reincarnation of bsTan pa’i nyi ma. He looked after the interests of dGa’ ri Monastery. He took an oath to be a monk in the presence of Phun tshogs blo gros, the great abbot of sMan ri (No.1), and rendered great services during his whole life.

The main religious objects of this monastery are a reliquary stupa of mKhas btsun bSam gtan nyi ma, a gilt-bronze statue of rNam par rgyal ba as high as the ceiling, a statue of rGyal ba mNyam med pa made of a mixture of medicine and clay, and statues of rGyal yum Byams ma and Dran pa nam mkha’ with his twin sons. There is also a great collection of scriptures written in gold and silver.

The principal deity of this monastery is dBal phur nag po, but offerings are constantly made to Khro bo, dBal gsas and sTag la, as well as the performance of the ceremony of “thousand offerings” to rNam rgyal.

In 1940, bsTan pa’i nyi ma, the reincarnated lama of Srid rgyal dgon chen
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(No.88) of Bon ri in Kong po, after paying a visit to his native land, stayed at dGa’ ri Monastery in solitary meditation. At that time there were seventeen monks there. At present, his descendant, lama Tshul khrims blo gros, and fifteen other monks reside there.

Travelling about six kilometres eastward from gYang shod xiang up to Ban dkar xiang and another five kilometres eastward from there leads one to Klu mkhar Monastery.

(22) Klu mkhar Monastery

This is a “Tantric monastery” (sngags dgon) built in 1460 by gYung drung khri ‘od of the Zhu lineage. When the brutal military forces of the Mongolian Jungar invaded the Northern Plateau (Byang thang), this monastery was completely destroyed.

Later, reconstructed by a descendant of the Zhu lineage, the monastery was protected by a branch of the Zhu family based in gDong rdzong and became known as Klu mkhar dgon. Its main religious object is a sacred statue of sTag la, celebrated as the one bestowed by rGyal ba mNyam med pa. The monastery is called Klu mkhar (the fort of Klu) after a small lake that only appears in summer and is situated behind the monastery. The lake is believed to have been a residence of a water spirit (klu).

Thereafter, the monastery was regarded as having been managed by the lama sPu la, but in fact it was taken care by Shes lding. Lama sPu la originally came from Sog rdzong and later moved into sBra chen rdzong. He was in the line of Khyung nag, one of the thirteen families of Khyung, which was recognized as such by the Tibetan government. Historical documents do not state clearly how long he maintained Klu mkhar Monastery.

The lamas who appeared after him were Rig ’dzin g-yang skyob, gYung drung bstan ’dzin and bSod nams chos rgyal. Then bSod nams ye shes supported the reconstruction of the monastery, which involved a great deal of expense, with his own property.

The principal image of this monastery, the gilt-bronze statue of s’Ibn pa gShen rab as high as the ceiling, was said to have a bit of body heat in its breast, and so was called the Golden Statue of Baby Warmth (gSer sku Byis drod ma). This statue had been brought from somewhere else. Besides this, there were several other religious objects, including the statue of gShen lha ’od dkar made of “red gold” (dzi gim) and a statue of sTag la.

The religious services performed in the monastery were the Zhi khro, rNam rgyal stong mchod and others. Formerly there were thirty-one resident monks there.

At present, Klu mkhar Monastery is surrounded by homes of common people. In the monastery there are several thangka and small implements used for offerings.
Upstairs is a small altar room. There is one lama and thirty monks, most of whom are said to be lay priests.

On either side of the outer gate there is a stone pillar on which the term rnam gzhag is carved in dbu can letters. There is also a marvellously colourful bluish stone called Shar rGya stag khra bo. It is heart-breaking to see the poor condition of this monastery.

From Klu mkhar Monastery, travelling five kilometres eastward on the highway, dNgul kho village can be seen lying half way up the mountainside on the northern side of the road. dNgul kho Monastery is near this village, on the west side.

(23) dNgul kho Monastery

dNgul kho dgon gYung drung dar rgyas gling was built by Kyu ra 'od zer in 1240 in the present-day dNgul kho village. It is a traditional “Tantric monastery”, small but influential, and has been in a state of stability with no serious ups and downs for a long time. History does not tell clearly the individual names of every lama who has cared for and protected the monastery so far, but it is said that descendants in the Ko bo lineage, one of the three descent groups of the region called Ko bo, Rag shi and Shel sku took care of the monastery and rendered great service in keeping, defending and spreading the doctrine of Eternal Bon.

Later, in the Fifteenth Rab byung, Me ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, a hermit from Brag dmar ri 'dun in Khyung po, and sTag zhig Rin chen dbang ldan, a disciple of Grub chen sMon lam rgyal mtshan, on their way to Kong po, established a close patron-priest relationship with the villagers and monks of rGyal shod. According to the wishes expressed by the Shel sku villagers, these hermits decided to take care of the dNgul kho Monastery.

Several years after that, sTag zhig Rin dbang, accompanied by some others, arrived in rGyal shod and became the head of this monastery.

At the end of the Fifteenth Rab byung, dNgul kho Monastery was moved from dNgul kho village to the western outskirts, midway up the slope of the mountain. It now takes about twenty minutes to go up to the monastery by car.

When the monastery was built, Ban dkar stag phu chos rje Ngag dbang bstan 'dzing rgya mtsho, who was of the dGe lugs pa school, gave a huge amount of tea, grain and the like, by way of offering congratulations for the completion of the monastery.

Having fully completed dNgul kho Monastery with excellent buildings and religious objects, sTag zhig Rin dbang summoned all the monks of the Eternal Bon monasteries and hermitages in rGyal shod district to his monastery and performed the “medicine rite” (sman sgrub) based on the Khro bo 'od zer 'khyil ba. This was the first time such a rite, on such a grand scale, was performed in the region. He bestowed upon the participants all the teachings they wished for. Not only that,
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according to the manner of each monastic community, he continually arranged plentiful offerings and brought back the lost rules of the regular services of dNgul kho Monastery and recruited more monks and lay practitioners than before.

Since this lama himself relied upon those laymen who had taken some vows, he obtained the real nature of power of wisdom and compassion by means of Tantric practices. He is said to have been a man of outstanding virtue and deeds, and who had rediscovered the Tshogs bdag rol pa and the statue of Tshe dbang rig 'dzin among the rocks of Sen ge gnam rdzong in gSa' phu.

According to the description in his biography, he was born in 1883. A special ordinance was given to the monastery by His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thub bstan rgya mtsho.

During the time of sTag zhig Rin dbang, dNgul kho dar rgyal gling made progress in deserving its name. Later, around the 1920s, both the lama and his disciple died, one after the other.

Since this monastery was a mixture of old and new Bonpo tradition, the regular prayer services and rituals are also practised accordingly.

Main religious objects

The monastery’s religious objects, which were in perfect condition, included the following: a bronze statue of Zhi ba Kun bzang a skor; one of Tshe dbang rig 'dzin, rediscovered in gSa’ phu by sTag gzhi Rin dbang; a conch of enlightenment that belonged to sTag gzhi Rin dbang; and the three relics of sTag gzhi Tshul khrims called sha ri ram, me ri ram and chu ri ram, which came out of his brain. However, after the death of sTag gzhi Rin dbang, the monastery declined, due to many problems.

This monastery had a slob dpon, a dbu mdzad, a dge bskos and a spyi phyag. The latter took all the responsibilities for supervising the monastic work. There used to be about forty monks.

This monastery was recently restored to some degree by A bu bSam med and others, and has about thirty monks at present. It is situated in a beautiful environment, and near it there is a sacred graveyard.

At present, dNgul kho Monastery is, on the whole, in a state of more serious decline than ever before.

From dNgul kho Monastery, travelling about six kilometres eastward along the river rGyal chu, we come to Ban dkar xiang, in which rDo rting Monastery is located. The monastery is situated on a hill to the south-west of the river rGyal chu. It takes about twenty minutes on foot to reach the top of the hill.

(24) rDo rting Monastery

rDo rting dgon Ngo mtshar Phun tshogs gling was founded in 1420 by Kun
dga’ dbang ldan of the Bru family. It stands in the middle of Bon lung skya mo in rGyal shod, as if protected all around by the Eight Sisters of Mo nam smug po. It is a pleasant place, with a hill resembling a Garuda stretching its wings at the back of the monastery, an eight-spoked wheel in the sky, double-petalled lotus flowers on the ground, and five big juniper trees, symbol of the “five families” (rigs lnga), at the front.

When Bru ston mTshungs med bsod blo, the heart-emanation of sTong rgyung and one of the eighteen gYas ri teachers who were greatly famed in the latter stage of Bonpo development, travelled all over mDo khams, he paid a visit to this place and gave a blessing. Before the establishment of this monastery, it is said that there was already the residence (bla brang) of the Shel sku family in rDo rting.

Some call this monastery rDo gter because Bru Kun dga’ dbang ldan built it at the very site where Shel sku Khro bo rgyal mtshan rediscovered a nine-edged black iron vajra (rdo rje) from a mine (gter). Kun dga’ dbang ldan not only established rDo rting Monastery but also taught cosmogony and monastic discipline according to the Bru tradition and, moreover, developed the practice of rituals. rDo rting became a veritable monastery preserving the pure tradition of rGyal ba sMan ri ba and came to be reputed as sMan ri bar ma.

There were two residences (bla brang) in rDo rting Monastery called Bru tshang and Shel tshang. A big juniper tree planted by Bru Kun dga’ dbang ldan himself, in order block the view of inauspicious geomantic signs, is still seen to the north of the Bru tshang residence.

At the time of Kun dga’ dbang ldan, there were about one hundred monks at this monastery. They performed the following religious services every three years: the great medicine-completion ceremony of Khro bo ’od zer ’khyil ba, the great initiation of Gu ya and the mdos ritual based on the mKha’ klong gsang ba’i mdos chen. These were normally performed just like the regular services of rGyal ba sMan ri ba.

The lamas of the Bru and Shel sku residences took turns, for three years each, to look after the monastery. At the time, the monastic buildings were extraordinarily beautiful. At the centre of the monastery were nine long pillars, on which vases were carved. They were topped by a carved Garuda and supported by a base that was a carved turtle. The roof rafters, fashioned into a pa tra, the family crest, were supported around the edge by eight pillars. There were four large mandalas drawn on the ceiling (facing down). They were of the mDo g-yung drung klong rgyas, the Zhi ba g-yung drung yongs rdzogs, the Khro bo dbang chen and the Mu tra lha’i dkyil ’khor. In the verandah outside were carvings of reticulated swastikas.

With respect to the Shel sku residence of this monastery, there has been a steady succession of lamas:

1. Shel bla sMon lam bkra shis
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2. Nam mkha’ ’od zer
3. gYung drung rgyal mtshan
4. Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan
5. rNam rgyal tshul khrims
6. Grags pa rnam rgyal

These were all in the line of descent from gNam gsas rgyal po of the Shel zhig family, a branch of the line of sTang chen dMu tsha gyer med. Then followed the Shel lamas invited from the Shel zhig family in the north:
1. rGyal mchog nyi ma
2. Nam mkha’ rgyal po
3. Nam mkha’ bsod rgyal
4. lHun grub dbang rgyal
5. rGyal ba tshul khrims

These lamas first began by making preparations to set up their residence in the monastery. Then, in collaboration with the Bru family, they established rDo rting Monastery. For a period of time, care for the monastery was shared with the lama Be ’o, who had come to stay here; later on, its religious teachers were just Shel sku lamas.

Of the above-mentioned Shel lamas, some were monks, and some were text-discoverers, that is to say, married. Not only that, they recreated one of their unique traditions called bDud rtsi khi khar: the practice of religious festivals wherein the way the ritual was carried out was inspired by the early masters, both men and women. Shel bla gYung drung rgyal mtshan rediscovered a crystal image called Dri med shel sku at the Shel sbug of Kong po Bon ri, the holy mountain. bTsan rje dmar po, the local deity of Bon ri, is also one of the protective deities of rDo rting Monastery. Some of the Shel zhig lamas were thus referred to by the abbreviation Shel bla.

The religious object of major importance in rDo rting Monastery at that time was the statue of Khro bo gtso mchog as high as the ceiling. It had been rediscovered by Shel bla Khro bo rgyal mtshan from the source of the river Khro tshang, which runs through the side of the monastery. In the temple there was said to be a golden statue and many other religious objects.

As for scriptures, there were sixteen volumes of the Khams chen, written in gold, called ’Dzam gling rgyan (the ornament of the World). It was also called gSer chos zho ’bru skar tsheg. The name denotes that every single letter (yig ’bru) of the golden text (gser chos) is written with as much gold as one zho of gold, and every tsheg with one skar ma of gold. The gold was provided by the protector of water, the great dge bsnyen of Yag zam kha, who offered a pair of goldfish in honour of the Shel sku lama and the monastery. According to oral tradition, the lamas and the monks, considering the possibility that the powerful local lord might come to seize
the gold if the news leaked out of the monastery, smelted it secretly so that they could use it to write the *Khams chen* with it.

Later, the monastery experienced a change that was considerable. As is quite a common course of events in the human world, the Shel sku family broke up into several factions. Even the Shel sku bla brang in the monastery itself was spilt up, and the family finally abandoned the monastery altogether. The members of the family became common people like any other. The Bru tshang bla brang also became helpless with no protector.

At about the same time, Be’o Lama, who had come from the north, took up permanent residence in rDo rting Monastery. At first he tried to help the monastery, but this elicited much criticism internally and as a result the monastery suffered further. Caught by the tide and destiny, the interests of the monastery and the deeds of the lamas were all reduced to a state of withered winter flowers.

rDo rting Monastery, in spite of its previous reputation as SmAn ri Bar ma, eventually declined into a lay establishment. Not only that, the religious objects that were easily carried became scattered everywhere. The two lamas, lHa thog and lHa mgon, went elsewhere, and the monastery itself was threatened with complete destruction.

At that time, the community leaders of the four tents, having learned a lesson from the past, launched a reconstruction of rDo rting Monastery in order to avoid its total decline. They took on responsibility for the work and took the decisions that the two Shel sku lamas who had fled to Glas rgyud should, by turn, take care of the monastery as religious teacher and that the number of lay practitioners (*ser khyim*) should not be reduced to less than forty. They distributed the monastic funds and other properties to all the villagers so that the villagers would be able to help maintain the yearly expenses of the establishment.

Then they restored the temple, and made continuous efforts to bring back the scattered religious objects and resolve other issues. Having succeeded in regaining the image of Khrö bo gTsos mchog, they relocated the dBu rtse temple and made a new clay image. The large and small conchs, which were the ritual instruments of Sad ne ga’u, and those of Ti ti mi slag can, were well kept in the monastery.

The principal religious services practised at the monastery were based on texts such as the *Bon skyong sgrup pa*, the *mKha’ klong gsang mdos*, the *Ngo mtshar rgyas pa* and the *Zhi khro*. Formerly, rDo rting Monastery was one of the thirteen monastic communities of rGyal ston lding dgu.

The monastery now exists in its restored condition and contains an assembly hall, a temple and several religious objects. At present there are twenty-seven monks and one lama.
(25) gSa’ mda’ bon Monastery

gSa’ mda’ bon dgon Mi g-yo bsam gtan gling is situated to the south of the river rGyal chu. Although a road has been built from gYang shod xiang to the monastery, there is no bridge over the river rGyal chu capable of carrying traffic. So a ride of about five hours on horseback is required.

The monastery was founded by Zhu btsun gYUng drung khri ’od in 1465. rGyal shod, the seat of the monastery, is one of the so-called Four Rong (gorge) and Eight or Eighteen Shod (lowland) that a number of holy men have visited. In ancient times, the district was called Sum pa’i stong bu chung and was part of sGo pa, one of the three regions of Zhang zhung known as sGo, Phug and Bar. During the reign of Srong btsan sgam po, Tibet was divided into four ru and the core of the third ru, called rGyal shod sTag pa tshal, corresponds to the present-day rGyal shod.

The derivation of the monastery’s name is as follows: This monastery was built on a protruding from the hill site called gSa’ mda’ (gSa’ lung mda’), which was counted as one of the Thirteen Treasures (Rin chen bcu gsum) in a region where various flowers of surpassing beauty bloom, such that the place was called rTsi thog steng (Plateau of fruits and flowers). The monastery was commonly called gSa’ mda’ bon dgon, which was a combination of the alternate name of the site and the name of the religious tradition, while its real name is Mi g-yo bsam gtan gling.

The area has a mountain called Phu ru lho yi ’dzam bu klu ri and a lake, gSa’ phu mgon lha dkar po. These are regarded as two of the Thirteen Treasures of gSa’ (snow leopard). Around them, to the right lies rGod kyi dar rgyas bcu gsum, to the left lies La gong gi drag rtsal bcu gsum, and in front, Mo nam smyug mo mched brgyad, just like servants surrounding their king. They are places of outstanding sacredness where teacher Kun tu bzang po meditated and bestowed blessings. In the caves of these places Dran pa nam mkha’ and his twin sons are believed to have concealed texts containing profound teachings and had also left marks of their spiritual attainment.

As the site is a meeting point for travellers between China and Tibet, the name gSa’ mda’ bon dgon frequently appears in documents and is, therefore, a well-known place. Over the years the fortunes of the monastery have risen and fallen.

In regard to the origin of gSa’ mda’ bon dgon, it is difficult to specify from historical documents. According to a document, before gSa’ mda’ was founded, there was another monastery called Mar khu thang established by either Ko bo Ye shes rgyal mtshan or Khu btsun gYung drung khri ’od.

According to recent study on the origin of the Bon religion and its lamas, it was the masters of the Zhu g-yas lineage that had established many monastic centres, including Sog gYung drung gling and Khra rgan nyi yu in the latter stage of Bonpo development, when the dying embers of teaching began to rekindle all over Tibet. The Zhu g-yas is a powerful lineage whose forefather is Zhu g-yas Legs po, the
authorized proprietor of the Bon tantric and Mind class teachings, which had been
handed down from gsShen chen Klu 'dga'. The latter was the principal one among the
one hundred text-discoverers who had opened the door to Bonpo teachings.

In 1465, Zhu btsun gYung drung khri 'od founded Mi g-yo bsam gtan gling. It
generally followed the Zhu tradition called Zhu lugs Sog zam and the rituals were
practised following the manner of Sog gYung drung gling Monastery.

Ko bo Ye shes rgyal mtshan meditated in the gSa’ bu mdzod 'chang smug mo
hermitage. During the latter half of his lifetime he went to Khyung po and founded
a monastery, and worked hard for the sake of sentient beings. The monastery was
taken care of by the adherents of Ko bo Ye shes rgyal mtshan, including Ko ston
sByin pa rgyal mtshan and Ko bo Kun bzang, who had appeared in succession. Since
these Ko lamas were benevolent enough to look after the monastery, they developed
it by giving continuous teachings based on Sutra, Tantra and the Mind texts so that
the monastery developed further, making its name known everywhere. It is said that
when Ko bo Ye shes rgyal mtshan passed away, many self-grown relics appeared
(from the cremation of his body) which were worshipped as the most auspicious
objects in this monastery.

In 1718, misfortune befell Mar khu thang Monastery when the vicious
Mongolian troops of Jungar came to rGyal shod district and plotted to destroy the
monastery. The two Bonpo local leaders, lHa eje skyen ga yu and Thod pa thad
ga yu, undertook armed operations and killed some of the vicious Mongolian
soldiers, including the chief, but could not prevent the rest of the Jungar entering
the monastery. They plundered the monastery beyond all imagination, destroying it
totally. All the religious objects were instantly turned into a ball of fire. However,
one of the main religious objects, the word-uttering statue of gsShen rab (sTon pa
gSung byon ma), escaped destruction, along with the two short pillars, and they were
regarded as the auspicious symbol of the monastery’s restoration.

Preparations for restoration of the monastery were made. Of all the things that
were lost, they searched in particular for one of the main religious objects, called
'Phar chen dkar po rGyang grags ma (the Big White Conch of Far-flung Fame),
made of sTon pa gShen rab’s teeth, which had gone missing in the chaos. It was
found on a rock at gSa’ yar kha, which influenced the decision to rebuild the future
monastery there.

During the several years of hard work that was being done making preparations,
Sangs rgyas gling pa, alias Byang chub rdo rje, who upheld the tradition of the New
Bon, was travelling in the regions of the four rong, such as Kong po and the eight
shod where he made rediscoveries of texts. In 1727, he came to rTsi thog steng
and carried out the ceremony of consecration of the new location. The officials, lay
practitioners and people of the Bu rdzum tribe made him the religious teacher of
this monastery, and he bestowed upon the new monastery the name Mi g-yo gsam
gtan gling, the same as before, plus abundant funds and materials to make continual offerings. The monastery maintained its ritual practices of the Zhu tradition, but Sangs rgyas gling pa also introduced some of those of the New Bon.

At that time there were about sixty monks and lay practitioners in all, so some people began to call the monastery the Sixty Monastic College of gSa’ mda’ (gSa’ mda’ grwa tshang drug cu).

Later, Mi ’gyur rgyal mtshan, an incarnate lama, visited rGyal shod. He resided at Kong po Bon ri and was one of the twenty-five Red Hat masters who were regarded as the masters of Sangs rgyas gling pa’s teachings.

Mi ’gyur rgyal mtshan began to have a close patron-priest relationship with the officials and people of the Bu rdzum tribe. Formerly, when Sangs rgyas gling pa was the head of the monastery, the officials, people and priests of Bu rdzum expressed a strong hope that the holy man Mi ’gyur rgyal mtshan would be the proprietor of both rGyal ri and gSa’ mda’ monasteries, which he accepted.

To the religious dances performed during the Ma tri bum sgrub festival of gSa’ mda’ bon dgon, Mi ’gyur rgyal mtshan added some elegant styles following those performed in rGyal ri Monastery. He gave gSa’ mda’ bon dgon a mask of mKha’ ’gro seng gdong ma crafted by ’Brel ’Gyur med rgyal mtshan, as an object of worship. He worked, in particular, on reframing the written moral code of the monastery by rectifying its defect; this was regarded as an invaluable deed for the entire community and was indeed very beneficial to the interests of the monastery.

The reconstruction of gSa’ mda’ bon dgon began with the building of the twelve-pillared assembly hall. It had a porch and stairway. Then the monks’ quarters and other buildings were built, all in a good fashion.

The main religious objects of the monastery were as follows: the big conch made of gShen rab Mi bo’s teeth; the relic stupas of the successive Ko bo lamas; a bronze statue of gShen rab; a gilt-bronze statue of mKhan chen Mu zi gsal bzang; statues of gShen lha ’od dkar, Khro bo gtso mchog and gShen gSangs ba ’dus pa, all made of a mixture of medicine and clay; as well as stupas, including rNam rgyal mchod rten. In the assembly hall were murals of the Twelve Deeds (mDzad pa bcu gnyis) and the deities of gSas mkhar mchog lnga. At the porch were, in common with every other monastery, the murals of the Four Great Kings (rGyal chen sde bzhis), the wheel of existence and so forth, and, not common to all monasteries, murals of the territorial deities of peaceful nature (yul lha), such as gSa’ yi nor bu bcu gsum and Chis kyi rin chen bcu gsum. In the tantric room upstairs were images of principal religious protective deities of peace and wrath, and on both sides of them stood the Six Bonpo Protectors (Bon skyong sde drug) and Zhu btsan Grags rgyal in a frightening aspect, as if guarding the Bonpo doctrine.

A brief history of the influential Zhu lineage, which had maintained gSa’ mda’ bon dgon in Bu rdzum, is as follows:
Once there was the chief gyung drung bsod nams, one of the successive Burdzum chiefs. It is said that originally these were offspring of the local deity. Gyung drung bsod nams had only a daughter named Rin chen lha mo, who remained without offspring. There were no chiefs for the community and so there was the danger that the chieflain lineage might be ended. However, she was a person capable of leading her community. The members of her community, both lay and clerical, decided that they should try to look for a suitable man of a good family who would marry her. At that time, in 1777, the gTer ston Yung drung grags pa of the Zhu family, who was learned and compassionate, began to have a very close relationship with gSa’ mda’ bon dgon. The leaders of the monastery therefore requested him to marry Rin chen lha mo so that he could look after the monastery.

He provided a powerful remedy for the local community and the Bonpo doctrine. He established a close patron-priest relationship with Tshe ring rab brtan, the king of Hor, and became the king’s spiritual master.

Gyung drung grags pa rediscovered hidden texts in the sacred site Brag dkar lha lung, situated in the vicinity of Kluphug Monastery (No.31) in sBra chen, and recognized the place as a pilgrimage site as well as tracing the path around it. At that time, the people of the Burdzum tribe, both laity and clergy, thought that since the monastery was founded by a man of the Zhu family and its tradition belonged to this family, it would be most appropriate if the Zhu family also now looked after it, and they congratulated the lama. From that time on, in the Burdzum tribe, the lineage of the local chief was united with that of Zhu g-yas.

Concerning the way in which this Bonpo monastery, whose inmates were a mixture of monks and lay practitioners, was transformed into a proper monastery, it happened as follows: When Sangs gryas bstan ’dzin dbang gi rgyal po, the incarnation of rJe btsun Byang pa Khro tshang ’Brug lha and the twenty-fifth throne holder of sMan ri Monastery (No.1) in gTsang, where the Second Buddha mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan resided, came to the lower rGyal shod, he said that if the monastery followed the monastic tradition of sMan ri it would be a great benefit in the future for the interests of monastery itself and living beings. Every Bonpo devotee in the place, lay and clerical, willingly accepted the proposal. The leaders of the region, members of the monastery and ordinary people took vows to respect the recommendation.

mGon lha, the younger son of the chief Zhu g-yas Pad ma rin chen, took monastic vows and was given the name bsKal bzang gtsug phud. The lay practitioners in the monastery also took monastic vows. Moreover, many people from the tribe became monks, so that the number of monks grew by nearly one hundred. The abbot wrote the regulations of the monastery based on the Vinaya and Sutra.

When the abbot was about to leave for sMan ri Monastery, he called at Mi
g-yo bsam gtan gling and gave an instruction saying that they should follow the Bru tradition, in accordance with the sMan ri practice, but the Zhu tradition of the dGu gsum festivals is of such magnificence that it should be maintained as before. For this reason, the Zhu tradition of the festivals has been kept till the present day.

Later on, the above-mentioned mGon lha vacated the throne and went to live with the family of the Sen tsha chieftain. However, he continued to do a lot of work that was beneficial to the monastery: he had many invaluable monastic articles made in the assembly hall, such as victorious banners decorated with various ornaments, the 'phan, the phyé 'phur and canopies, all made of thick Hor cloth.

bsTan pa 'brug grags became a monk in this monastery. He was one of the four nephews of the king of Hor, Tsung chen hu Tshe dbang lha rgyal. The latter was a son of Zhu g-yas bSod nams dpad rgyal, the chief of Bu rdzum. However, bsTan pa 'brug grags could not do much for the monastery.

After that the local community needed another lama. The leaders of Bu rdzum, therefore, sent a messenger with one rdo tshad of silver and many other things to Ri zhing Monastery (No.4) in the upper Nyang in gTsang in order to invite a lama of the Zhu family. A lama called sTon pa of rTsa phu bla brang in Ri zhing, who was learned in the tradition of srid gshen, considering the benefit to sentient beings, accepted the invitation and came to rGyal shod. As a departing gift, the rTsa phu bla brang gave him the so-called He la nam mkha'i 'phur mo che, which is a statue of Phur pa rediscovered by gShen chen Klu dga'. It was made of five different precious metals with three faces and a Garuda hovering above its head.

The lama sTon pa lived among the people of rGyal shod as if he were a simple layman. He worked a great deal for the beings, not caring for either wealth or fame. He had four sons. One of the middle two took monastic vows in the presence of the abbots of the upper and lower monasteries, and received the name bsTan 'dzin gtsug phud. He received initiations and teachings of the outer, inner, and secret so well that the proper practice of rituals spread everywhere. As hoped by the people, priests and officials, he became the head of gSa’ mda’ bon dgon. He travelled often to the nomad areas of Hor in order to collect donations. In 1916, he completely rebuilt the monastery with new buildings, such as the temple with forty-eight long and short pillars, the dBu rtse with its stairway, the dance hall and so forth. However, he did not live to see the religious objects and murals completed.

After the death of bsTan 'dzin gtsug phud, bsTan pa rgya mtsho of Zhu g-yas took over the work. Many lay and clerical devotees made donations, so that the murals and religious objects were completed. In the dBu rtse temple were the following: a gilt-bronze statue of rGyal ba rgya mtsho with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes, as high as a two-storey house; a life-size gilt-bronze statue of Tshe dbang bod yul ma; clay images of rNam par rgyal ba, sMra ba'i seng ge, Thugs rje byams ma, mNyam med chen po, gTso mchog mkha' 'gyings and sTag la me 'bar,
each of which stood as high as a two-storey house, installed on fully draped thrones.

On the shelves, on both sides of the assembly hall, are said to have been a collection of countless scriptures, including the *bKa' 'gyur* and *bKa' brten* of Eternal Bon, the *'Bum* and *mDo gzer mig* written in gold and the *'Bum* of the three versions: detailed, standard and compact. There were the murals of the Thousand Buddha, Cho ga bcu gnyis, the Twelve Deeds of gShen rab Mi bo, the deities of gSas mkhar mchog lnga and the protective deities of Bon. Around the upper structure of the temple were murals of the lineage of the masters of monastic tradition. At the porch were the murals of the Four Great Kings and the wheel of existence.

Upstairs, in the bsKangs gso khang, were clay images of sTag la spu gri dmar nag and the religious protectors of Bon. On the lattice-work fence were clay images of dBal gsas and Tshe dbang Bod yul ma. The murals were of the assembled deities of Zhang zhung Bon skor.

Zhu g-yas bsTan pa rgya mtsho was the younger of the two sons of Pad ma mram rgyal, a chief of Bu rdzum. He was born in 1905 and his lay name was bSod nams grags pa. He later took monastic vows in the presence of sKu 'dun Phun tshogs blo gros of sMan ri Monastery, and was given the name bsTan pa rgya mtsho. He received teachings in the presence of the mKhan chen Phun tshogs blo gros, the yogi bZod pa rgyal mtshan from Khyung po and the hermit gYung drung ye shes. He mastered the esoteric learning of Bon and became the head of gSa' mda' bon dgon, which consequently brought great prosperity to the monastery. In the latter half of his life he handed over all the responsibilities of teaching to his nephew Nyi zla tshe dbang, alias bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, and practised meditation for the rest of his life at the cave gSa' phu. He passed away in 1966.

Nyi zla tshe dbang is the present head of gSa' mda' bon dgon. He was born in the family of the chief of Bu rdzum and was the younger of the two sons of Zhu g-yas Rin chen dbang rgyal. In 1934, he took monastic vows in the presence of bsTan pa blo gros, the abbot of sMan ri, and was given the name bsTan pa rgyal mtshan. He studied the precepts of Bon under the same master and bZod pa rgyal mtshan, the yogi of Khyung po. Similarly, he received teachings from the three other masters: Zhu g-yas gYung drung rgyal mtshan from Yung drung dpal ri in Khyung po; Shel zhiig gYung drung mam rgyal, a personal disciple of Grub dbang Shar rdza pa; and bsTan pa rgya mtsho, his paternal uncle. He also studied the general culture of Tibet, including Tibetan linguistics. He has been in charge of all aspects of the headship of this monastery up to the present day.

Annual Religious Services and Practice of Rituals

For about fifteen days, from the 3rd day of the 1st Tibetan month, there were ceremonies of *lnga mchod* and from the 16th, for three days, the *smon lam* festival is celebrated. Besides these, normally after finishing daily tea, the monks assemble
to perform various rituals: the eight-day ritual based on the *sGrib sbyong mun sel sgron ma*, called the dPon tshang ma a dkar; the *Zhi khro* ritual, for over twenty days; the seven-day ritual of *Ma rgyud*; the five-day ritual of gDugs dkar; the Twelve Rituals (*Cho ga bcu gnyis*), for twelve days; the recitation of the *bKa' gyur*; and the five-day ritual of Phur pa. On these occasions, a number of local devotees come to make flower offerings.

In the 6th Tibetan month a summer retreat is observed for about thirty days. Then comes the end of the month, when the *dgu gtor* rite called Khro bo dmar chen, which is the short one (*dgu chung*), is performed.

In the 8th month there is a big festival, Ma tri bum sgrub, for twelve days. On this occasion, religious dances that consist of thirteen different ones are performed over two days and on another day the public initiation is given.

On the 24th day of the 10th month another *dgu gtor* rite is performed, this time an elaborated one (*dgu chen*), based on the recital of the *Khro bo ngo mtshar rgyas pa*.

From the 3rd day of the 12th month the ritual *sTag la tshogs stong* is performed, and at the end of the month the *dgu gtor* rite of *sTag la* is performed, leading to the New Year’s general celebration.

To sum up, they assemble for rituals for more than ten months of the whole year.

As for the organization of this monastery, it consists mainly of a *dbu bla* (head), four *las sne* (official), *dbu mdzad* and *dge bskos*. In addition to these, there are several senior monks from Khyung po and Ya nge thod pa in the lineage of old Bonpo masters, who take responsibility for managing the big festivities. For prescribed monastic activities the first four above-mentioned members should take responsibility. The main annual ceremonies are Nag po spam chen, Tshogs stong, INga mchod, sMon lam, Zhi khro, Ma rgyud, gDugs dkar, Phur pa, Dung yon, bsNyen bsnyung, the dGag dbye, sNgags rgyun, dBu rtse mar chen, sNgags rgyun mar chen, 'Khor chen, Khyi khrud, gSar 'phar, and sPyi gso. The expenses of the eight-day ritual of A dkar are met by the chief of Bu rdzum. Funds for the above-mentioned activities are raised from livestock and farmland production. In the old days, it was with tea and silver that they raised funds to erect the so-called Four Stupas (*mChod rten bzhi*) of Nag po spam chen. Out of the funds, they must save cash to hand over so that the budget for the rest of the year might be met. There was a special rule in the monastery that according to the amount of the funds, four or two monks must take responsibility in turn for the funds.

With regard to monastic discipline, the legal document of the monastery serves as its basis. For example, if a monk breaks one of the four primary rules, he must be punished with a fine of eighteen *tam rdo* and he must find a substitute to be his replacement. Although the monastery used to be called “the Sixty Monastic College
of gSa’ mda’”, because it had only sixty monks, it actually now has more than one hundred monks. The regulations of the monastery are very strict. The monks are not even allowed to wear undershirts at any time, and even in the courtyard of the public houses, including the four or five monks’ quarters, they were under close surveillance.

During the recent period of its history (i.e., the Cultural Revolution) the monastery declined markedly for many internal and external reasons. However, it was rebuilt in 1985. Several religious objects hidden and kept safe by the senior monk Byang chub grags pa, bsTan ’dzin bzang po and the dKar ya nge family were returned to the monastery. rDo rgyal kha ba rNam rgyal dbang grags of the Zhu family purchased a complete set of the bKa’ ’gyur in two hundred volumes printed in Chengdu, and presented it to the monastery.

After all this, at present this monastery is in pretty good condition in terms of size and equipment, and has come out as one of the principal Bonpo monasteries of Nag chu region. In the monastery there are three lamas, including Lama Nyi zla tshe dbang, mentioned above, who is very learned in Bon culture, and there are about forty-seven monks.

A trip of about 250 kilometres from ’Bri ru rdzong takes us to sBra chen rdzong.
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

sNye-rong County

sBra-chen County

sBri-ru County

Sog-County

dPal-'bar County

Lha-ri County

1/1,080,000
(20) Sen tsha Monastery
(Photograph by Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(22) Klu mkhar Monastery
(Photograph by Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

(25) gSa’ mda’ Monastery, Nyi zla tshe dbang, the head lama of the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
sBra chen rdzong

sBra chen rdzong is located in north-eastern Tibet. It is 10,326 square kilometres in area and averages 4,500 metres in altitude. The people of the rdzong all believe in the Bon religion. There are two qu and six xiang within the jurisdiction of the rdzong - sBra chen qu, Gla shi xiang, sKar rgod xiang, gYa' mga’ xiang, Chab mda’ xiang, Ye tha xiang, ICang smad qu and Mam tha xiang - within which there are 161 village committees.

The place name sBra chen is an abbreviation of sBra gur chen po, which means “the big yak-hair tent”. There used to be many of these and they were also called Khri langs stong bzhugs, which means that such a tent could hold ten thousand people standing and one thousand seated.

Hor sBra chen originally belonged to Sum pa, a part of the Tibetan empire. During the Mongol empire it was under the local Hor kings who paid allegiance to the Mongol emperors of China. During the Ming dynasty of China it was incorporated into Sichuan province, and during the Manchu rule it was one of the Thirty-nine Tribes (Tsho ba so dgu). In the time of the emperor Guang xu, it was taken back by the Tibetan government. In 1941, the Tibetan government established Hor sBra chen rdzong. After China’s “peaceful liberation” of Tibet in 1951, it came under the jurisdiction of the liberation committee of Chab mdo, and in 1959, the people’s commune of sBra chen rdzong was set up. In 1960, it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Nag chu regional committee.

The whole population of the rdzong, 30,000, followed the Bon religion. Before the democratic reform was carried out, Bonpo monasteries were not allowed to tile their roofs and, they did not have anything like real estate, farmland, taxpayers or servants, but just a few livestock that could not even cover living expenses. Because of this, they had to live on the help received from each household and on the visiting prayer services they provided. Bonpo monasteries had neither privileges nor duties to provide labour or pay tax to the Tibetan government.

Around the time of democratic reform in the rdzong there were nine Bonpo monasteries with 1,031 monks, and six hermitages with twenty-three monks. After the democratic reform, all the monasteries were totally destroyed except Klu phug, Lung dkar and Phur nag Monasteries, and these three remained monasteries only in name.

In 1978 restoration of monasteries was started and there are now eight Bonpo monasteries that have been rebuilt. In these there are 520 monks. There is one hermitage in which three illustrious sages live: Rag shu rTogs ldan Dri med g-yung drung, Kha bo rTogs ldan Shes rab phun tshogs and A drung Tshul khrims dga’ ba.

The local population in the vicinities of the monasteries in dBra chen rdzong is as follows:

1. Klu phug Monastery: 2,835 people in 399 households
2. Phur nag Monastery: 2,835 people in 445 households
3. sPa tshang and sPa ma Monasteries: 4,624 people in 736 households
4. Lung dkar Monastery: 3,476 people in 469 households
5. rMa rong and Khrom tshang Monasteries: 3,827 people in 510 households
6. sGang ru Monastery: 1,459 people in 236 households

On the whole, sBra chen rdzong is an important bastion of the Bon religion. Today the Bonpo monasteries in this rdzong are kept in good condition in many respects.

(26) sPa tshang Monastery

sPa tshang dgon gYung drung rab brtan gling belongs to Ye tha xiang and can be reached within ten minutes, walking from sBra chen rdzong. It was founded in 1847 by sPa ston gYung drung nam bzang, who was of the holy sPa lineage. The sPa is one of the six sacred families: Bru, Zhu, gShen, sPa, rMe’u and Khyung. The Bon Sources and some other historical documents give reasons why the sPa family is important:

IHa bu sPa ba spa thog, a son of Sangs po and Chu lcam, was born in heaven. He descended to earth from rTsa gsum lha and preached Bon. Then he went to Zhang zhung rNam rgyal lha rtse. From there he went to the Crystal Cave on Mount Ti se where he practised meditation on the tutelary deity Me ri for three years and so attained the divine body and was called Kri smon lcags kyi bya ru can. At that time, in Zhang zhung, people used to say, “In the sky the divine son is beautiful. On earth the king is great.” IHa bu’s descendants were ancestors of the sPa family and some of its members held the position of prelate at the court of kings of Tibet.

sPa ston Khyung ’bar, who had obtained spiritual power of mysticism in the latter stage of Bon development, demonstrated his acquired abilities. He transformed himself into a wrathful deity in order to subdue heretics and into a garuda bird to subdue the naga spirits.

Other masters who belonged to the sPa family were as prodigious:

1. Zhig po Kun rtse
2. Shes rab rgyal mtshan
3. sPa rTogs ldan drang srong
4. sPa ston rGyal ba shes rab
5. sPa ston dPal ldan bzang po
6. Nyi dpal bzang po

There were other masters of the sPa lineage who were based at La phug in Western Tibet called the “Thirteen good masters” (sPa bla bzang po bcu gsum); to name six of them, we have the following:

1. Zla rgyal bzang po
2. sTobs chen bzang po

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However, their seat in Western Tibet declined and some members of the family migrated to MDosmad.

One of these was sPa ston gYung drung rgyal po, who had two sons: dGra 'dul bstan rgyal and bSod nams dbang grags. They proceeded from Amdo to the domain of the Hor Ye tha tribe and finally settled there. Their offspring were gYung drung nam bzang, lHun grub grags pa, Shes rab grags pa and Yon tan. gYung drung nam bzang became the prelate of the king of Hor and later he founded sPa tshang Monastery. After that, the centre of activities of the sPa family was shifted from west to east. All Bonpo sources agree that the monastery in Hor Ye tha constituted the most important monastic centre of the sPa lineage.

The manner in which sPa tshang Monastery was founded in the region of the present Hor Ye tha tribe is as follows:

In the time of sPa gYung drung nam bzang, sNang ston Zla ba rgyal mtshan arrived in Hor on a visit. When he took a night’s lodging near the site of the future sPa tshang Monastery, he regarded the place, from the point of view of topography, as auspicious, and thought of founding a monastery there. His idea finding agreement with the king of Hor, construction began with the six-pillared assembly hall and its contents. Nam mkha’ sgron gsal and Nyi ma ‘bum gsal of the sPa family added another assembly hall and its ornaments. Nyi ma ‘bum gsal also obtained a complete set of bKta ’gyur and had a temple of the gSas mkhar mchog lnga built. He also had several big gilt stupas made.

Later, sPa ston gYung drung bstan pa ’brug grags had other assembly halls built, with passages around them, on the three storeys of a building that had one hundred pillars. He also had the following religious objects erected: a stupa of bDud ’dul sggra sggrags, and statues of sTon pa rdzogs sku and rNam par rgyal ba, all gilt-bronze works. They were as high as a three-storey building. There were many small images as well. There was also the temple of bKra shis sgo mang that had twenty-pillars and contained a stupa of bKra shis sgo mang, a giant reliquary stupa and gilt-bronze images of rGyal ba rgya mtsho and sMra seng as tall as a three-storey building. He also had a large number of new religious objects built in the gTso bzhi temple.

The Bonpo doctrine was spread widely through the setting up of a flawless preaching school, under the system of the monastic tradition of sMan ri (No.1) and gYung drung gling (No.2) as well as the teachings of Shar rdza, the one who attained the “rainbow-body”. Thus the members of the sPa family made the Bon religion flourish there.
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

The lineage of the masters of sPa tshang Monastery in Ye tha is as follows:
1. sPa gYung drung nam bzang
2. sPa ston Nam mka' sgrol gsal
3. sPa ston Nyi ma 'bum gsal
4. sPa ston gYung drung bstan pa 'brug grags (alias 'Brug Rinpoche)
5. sPa bsTan pa rgyal mtshan (alias Nyi 'bum sprul sku)
6. sPu la Zla ba rgyal mtshan
7. bsTan pa 'brug grags
8. Kho bo rTog ldan Shes rab phun tshogs

The last master did not belong to the lineage of the sPa family, but observed the rules of monastic discipline according to the sPa tradition.

Among the above-mentioned lamas, Nyi ma 'bum gsal, who was very active in the development process of the monastery, is described in some historical documents as follows:

He was born in 1825. He took full ordination in the presence of Zhu ston rGyal mtshan nyi ma and mKhan chen sKal bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma and heard teachings from these masters. He acquired an extraordinary knowledge of Buddhism and Bon under the tutelage of Me ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, 'Gro mgon Shes rab g-yung drung, Grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen and gTer ston Tshe dbang grags pa. As mentioned above, he had temples built and various statues made as well as making copies of the bKa 'gyur and bKb 'bren. Having established the practice of preaching and meditating, he passed away at the age of sixty-seven.

Another important figure in the development of sPa tshang Monastery was gYung drung bstan pa 'brug grags. He was born in 1832. He took ordination at an early age in the presence of his paternal uncle, Nyi ma 'bum gsal. He received the entire course of initiation, transmissions and explanations of Sutra, Tantra and Mind. While practising these three, he also studied and became very learned. He wrote many books, about ten volumes on Bon, and established a school of metaphysical studies in the monastery. He had a gilt stupa of bKra shis sgo mang built, and another stupa of bDud 'dul sgra sgrags, as mentioned above. His deeds and name came to be known all around, and he passed away at the age of sixty.

Annual Religious Services and Rituals
1. At the end of the 11th Tibetan month the ritual of sTag la me 'bar was performed for five days.
2. In the 12th month, at the end of the year, the dgu chen ritual based on the ritual cycles of Kho bo and Phur pa was performed over seven days, and on the 30th day the ceremony of confession was held.
3. In the 1st month flower offerings, A dkar bum sgrub and bCo lnga mchod pa were performed, occupying seventeen days in all.
4. In the 2nd month the ritual based on the mKha' klong gsang mdos was performed for nine days.

5. In the 3rd month Dus chen che mo was performed for seventeen days, as well as religious dances (dbang 'cham) and the ritual based on the Rig 'dzin gsang sgrub.

6. In the 6th month the rituals of Ma rgyud and rNam rgyal were performed and the summer retreat was observed for seventeen days.

7. In the 7th month the ritual based on the Zhi khro was performed for fourteen days.

8. In the 8th month the ritual of Ma tri bum sgrub was performed for nine days and there were religious dances.

9. In the 10th month a debate on metaphysics was conducted for ten days.

The organization of the monastery at that time consisted of the following:

- mkhan po
- dpon slob
- dbu mdzad
- dge bskos
- grwa dpon
- phyag mdzod
- spyi gso
- gnyer pa

There were 250 monks in the monastery.

In the assembly hall and at its porch, there were excellent murals of deities. In the assembly hall from the right, there were the following:

1. Srid rgyal Drel dmar: a goddess with a dark blue body, three faces and six arms; the three faces are of different colours, the right being white, the left red, and the centre blue. She holds a zhing dbyug (a stuffed object made of human skin), a sword and a sash in her three right hands, and in the left three are a swastika, a trident and a skull cup. She is adorned with rosaries of fresh skulls around her neck and rosaries of dry skulls on her limb joints. She is mounted on a red mule whose four legs are supported by the Four Great Kings.

2. mKha' dbyings lha mo: a goddess with a red body, nine heads and eighteen arms. She is mounted on a white mule in a state exhibiting bravery.

3. Dus yum lha mo: a goddess with a blue body, nine heads and eight arms. She is mounted on a blue mule and has a frightening air.

4. Srid rgyal drel nag ma: a goddess with a dark blue body, three heads and six arms. Her faces being white to the right, red to the left and blue in the centre, she possesses a perfect beauty. She holds a banner, a sword and a peg in her three right hands, and a mirror, an iron hook and a skull filled with blood in
the left three. Mounted on a black mule, she presents a wrathful appearance.

5. Bya ra ma gsum: 1) dKar mo srid rgyal: a goddess with a white body, one head and two arms. Sitting astride a bird, she exhibits a comfortable wrath. 2) sMug po srid rgyal: a goddess with a brown body, one head and two arms. Riding a leaping mule, she exhibits a terrifying air. 3) Nag mo srid rgyal: a goddess with a blue body, one head and two arms. In some murals she is mounted on a Garuda and in others an iron wolf.

6. rDzu 'phrul sman bzhi: 1) gNam phyi gung rgyal: a single headed, two-armed goddess with a white body. Riding a snow lion, she exhibits a brave look. 2) Ye phyi gung sangs: a single-headed, two-armed, yellow-bodied divinity. Mounted on a dragon, she has an air of glory. 3) Phyi ma ye sangs: a divinity with one head, two arms and a red body. She is a terrifying divinity riding a Garuda. 4) gNam sman che mo: a goddess with a dark blue body, one head and two arms. Riding a sheep, she shows an air of magnificence.

7. Ma rgyud yi dam gsang mchog: a divinity with a blue body, seven heads and sixteen arms. Possessing Garuda's wings, he shows an air of passionate wrath.

8. sTag la me 'bar: a divinity with a red body, one head and two arms. His attributes are a gold wheel in his right hand, lifted up into the sky, and nine crossed swords in the left hand.

9. Phur pa, the Deity of Action: a divinity with a blue body, three heads and six arms; the lower part of his body is in the form of a frightening dagger.

10. dBal chen Ge khod, the Deity of Virtue: a divinity with a blue body, nine heads and sixteen arms. He presents fierce looks while holding, to his bosom, his consort, who has a red body, three heads and six arms and is in a rage. In his peaceful form, he is called A ti mu wer in the Zhang zhung language, and Sangs rgyas mkha’ rgyal in Tibetan.

11. gTso mchog mkiia’ 'gyings, the Deity of Mind: a divinity with a blue body, three heads and six arms. His consort has a red body, one head and two arms. When in his peaceful form, he is called gYUng drung yongs rdzogs.

12. IHa rgod thog pa, the Deity of Speech: a divinity with a blue body, four heads and eight arms. His consort has a green body, one head and two arms. In his peaceful form he appears as sMra ba’i seng ge.

13. dBal gsas rngam pa, the Deity of Body: a divinity with a blue body. Adorned with a tiger, snow lion, Garuda and a dragon above his head, he presents a wrathful appearance. His peaceful form is Kun bzang rgyal ba’ dus pa.

14. Mi bdud 'byams pa khrag mgo: Ge ta ge rgya in the Zhang zhung language, he has a dark blue body, one head and two arms. He brandishes an axe in his right hand, and holds either a bow and arrow or a black banner in his left. He is mounted on an otter or a black horse.
Besides all these, there are the Four Principal Peaceful Deities (bDe gshegs gtso bzhi) of Sutra rituals, rNam par rgyal ba and rGyal ba rgya mtsho with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes.

Below the porch the murals of the wheel of existence and the Four Great Kings were drawn. All this vividly shows the particular tradition of the Bonpo tradition.

sPa tshang Monastery in Hor Ye tha was an important seat of the sPa family, and it still plays an important role as the centre of the sPa tradition. At present, this monastery’s chief lamas are Kho bo rtogs Idan Shes phun tshogs, bsTan pa ’brug grags and Nam mkha’ dbang grub. sKal bzang dbang grags, the aged dance master of sPa tshang Monastery, is very skilled in the art of the ’cham dance. Twice a year, therefore, they customarily perform religious dances. They maintain the art of ’cham well and have good costumes for it. In fact, we saw the staging of the ’cham dance based on the Rig ’dzin gsang sgrub, which consists of several dances, such as gSer skyem, mtShams bcad, sPyan ’bebs, sPyan ’dren, rNam brgyad tshogs ’cham, sKu bstod, Nang ’cham and others. These are of the Bonpo tradition but have unique features. The present sPa tshang Monastery has over one hundred monks, and the religious activities are kept in the way they used to be.

(27) Lung dkar Monastery

The monastery’s full name is Ye tha Lung dkar dgon gShen bstan rin chen gling. Travelling thirty-odd kilometres from sBra chen rdzong, we reach Ye tha xiang. Lung dkar Monastery is located on top of a hill at the western outskirts of the xiang. It is possible to approach the gate of the monastery in a car, but the track to the top of the hill is not very good.

The seat of Lun dkar Monastery is called Upper Ye tha, and that of sPa tshang Monastery Lower Ye tha. The limpid stream gliding past the front of sBra chen rdzong is called Ye chu. Ye tha, which is one of “the Thirty-nine Tribes”, is an important local community.

Lung dkar Monastery derives its name from the local deity (gzhi bdag) Lung dkar. He is a deity that wears a hat made of felt, holds a gem in his right hand and is mounted on a white horse.

The predecessor of this monastery is said to be Sog gYung drung gling (already mentioned in connection with the Zhu family in the section of ’Bri ru rdzong).

It was located in Cham mda’, the border area of the two rdzong, sBra chen and Sog. At present, to the best of my memory, this area is no more than a vast plain with a stone dyke and many prayer flags fluttering. Concerning Sog gYung drung gling Monastery, the sKal bzang mgrin rgyan, a Bonpo work, describes it as follows:

“It is not certain when this monastery was founded, but it certainly existed in the Third Rab byung (1147-1206). There were four monastic colleges and more than two thousand monks. It is said that the establishment was so big that horn-calls for
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nqgchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

assemblies had to be blown in the four directions.

There were two official residences, Zhu and Khyung po. Many accomplished scholars from other monasteries, including the lamas of the 'Brug stan family, came to the monastery. The principal ones among them — mKhas btsun Nam mkha’ 'od zer, mNga’ ris bSod nams rgyal mtshan, Khyung sgom gYung drung 'od zer, Zhu Khri 'od rgyal mtshan, Khyung po dPon dge, dPon rin and others — stayed there and developed the monastery to a great degree. However, it was totally destroyed by the Mongolian troops of Jungar.”

After the destruction of Sog gYung drung gling by the barbarous Mongolian Jungar, the Mongol hordes plundered several important religious objects, which they carried away and gave to Sog Tsan dan dgon, an important dGe lugs pa monastery situated in the same region.

The belongings of lamas of Khyung and dBu, who were members of thirteen individual establishments in Sog gYung drung gling, and some irreplaceable sacred objects, including the golden statue of sTag la me 'bar and the skull of dBu ri lama, were given to Lung dkar Monastery. This was why Lung dkar Monastery considered Sog gYung drung gling to be its predecessor.

Lung dkar Monastery’s history can be presented in three parts. First, in 1715, Chos 'bum, chief of the Hor Ye tha tribe, and his son Mu khri rgyal ba tshul khrims, who was a lama, founded the hermitage called Ri rgyud dkar po in Lung bzang. The objective of this was to perform religious services for the lama and peace in the region. In that year bsKal bzang rgya mtsho, the Seventh Dalai Lama, passed through the Hor area from mGar thar in Khams on horseback. Chos 'bum successfully solicited him to issue a decree officially recognizing the hermitage. But after the death of Mu khri rgyal ba tshul khrims, the hermitage collapsed due to internal discord.

Second, Ye tha Nor bu tshe rgyal, the scholar bSod nams lhun grub of dBu ri house and dBra Khyung rGyal ba bstan 'dzin founded gYU lung Monastery in 1808 at the same place. The king of Hor, Tshe ring rab brtan, issued a proclamation, with a preamble by rTa tshag Ho thog thu of Kun bde gling in Lhasa, that this monastery, which was an establishment for the leaders of the Ye tha community, should be lead by the lamas of sPo la and dBu ri. It actually became a real monastery from the time of dBu bla rGyal ba tshul khrims, the reincarnation of Mu khri, and it was called gYU lung. However, in 1868 it was destroyed by an avalanche of snow.

Third, rNam rgyal dbang 'dus, the king of Hor, then gave orders that the monastery should be restored at once, for it was an extremely bad omen that the monastery was destroyed by an avalanche and he gave twenty 'bri (young female yaks), along with a measure of Chinese silver, as a contribution to the restoration of the monastery. In 1925, on the 22nd day of the 9th month, dBra khyung sKal bzang dbang grags and dBu ri bsTan 'dzin dbang rgyal — supported by the local people and in accordance with a prophecy by gYung drung dbang rgyal, the Twentieth abbot
of sMan ri — began to restore the monastery. On this occasion, important prelates of the Bon religion, such as Nyag gter gSang sngags gling pa, his wife mKha’ \’gro bDe chen dbang mo and Me ston Kun dga’ rgyal mshan all came and the monks of the monastery, joined by the local people, welcomed them with a procession.

On the same occasion, at the holy mountain called gSang brag nor bu lha rtse situated behind the monastery, the secret abode of the three wrathful deities blessed by the three holy ones, a profound text was rediscovered by gSang sngags gling pa and he, after tracing the path of circumambulation of the mountain, wrote a guide to it. There was a performance of the debate between gods and demons, in which the gods won and their sons went up to occupy the upper part of the Lung dkar valley and those of demons defeated went down to the lower part of the valley.

Around the holy mountain there are other mountains such as gYu lung, Lung dkar and dByi dkar with all their spirit proprietors. The proprietor of Mount dByi dkar is a white Tibetan lynx as the name indicates. There is a “soul-lake” (bla mtsho) called Ma ma mtsho, which is said to be the source of the lake of Ma pang gYu mtsho. There are footprints of gShen rab Mi bo and mKha’ \’gro bDe chen dbang mo, and the treasure cave of gSang sngags gling pa as well as the meditation caves of the eighty adepts. There is also the head-print in the rock of dBu ri bSod nams rgyal mshan.

The principal religious objects of this monastery were as follows: the bronze statue of gShen rab Mi bo that remained unburned when Sog gYung drung gling Monastery was destroyed; a five-finger-breadth-high bronze statue of gNam phyi gung rgyal; a statue of Kun dga’ rgyal mshan that had not been caught in the fire; an icon of gShen lha ’od dkar drawn on cotton; the skull of the dBu ri bsTan ’dzin phun tshogs, which contains his skylark-egg-size relic; a ghost-exorcising knotted knife used by dBu ri sKar ma rgyal mshan; a small white conch derived from a Khyung Zla sras can and a self-grown letter A. Similarly, there were a great many scriptures, including a complete set of bKa’ ‘gyur and bKa’ brten.

There were four important lamas in this monastery: dBu rGyal ba tshul khrims, sPo bSod nams g-yung drung, sGang ru bsTan pa kun khyab and dBu Tshul khrims rgyal mshan. From among these, I shall give a brief account of rGyal ba tshul khrims and Tshul khrims rgyal mshan:

dBu rGyal ba tshul khrims was born in 1864 to the father Rin chen phun tshogs and the mother dMar rtsa bza’, as their second son among four — the eldest bSod nams gYung drung, the second himself, the third sKar ma rgyal mshan and the youngest bsTan ’dzin phun tshogs. From childhood, he had an intellectual power incomparable with any other children. gSang sngags gling pa mentioned his name in his book on a prophetic lineage entitled the sKyes phreng gsol ’debs as follows:

“The emanation who converts the sentient beings may come having the following names:
Yongs su dag pa, the gShen of the gods, in heaven;
Dam pa rgya gar, the great saint;
U ri bsod nams rgyal mtshan, the incomparable;
Shes rab seng ge, in the land of rGyal rong;
Ban rde Rin chen, in the valley of Kong po;
bSod nams ye shes, in gTsang;
rGyal ba tshul khrims, in the land of Gyi ghir.
To this lineage of rosary of pearl I pray."

dBu rGyal ba tshul khrims was exceedingly intelligent when he was young. He could grasp, when he was just showing how to write, read and recite, which brought him public praise. When a deep compassion for the cyclic existence arose in his heart, he became absorbed in meditation in hermitages and accomplished his self-training. In the presence of sPa ston Nyi ma ’bum gsal, Nyag gter gSang sngags gling pa and Grub dbang sMon lam rgyal mtshan he took initiations and received the very essence of the ocean of precepts. He excelled in all learning. Not only that, he showed signs of unparalleled spiritual accomplishment. His name, rGyal ba tshul khrims, became widely known all over the district, like an ensign fluttering. He was only seven when he took over responsibility as the head of Lung dkar Monastery, and passed away at the age of ninety-six.

As for dBu Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, he was born in 1924 as the eldest of four sons of the father sKal bzang bstan ’dzin and the mother Zo bza’ dgyes skyid. When he was six he began writing and reading, and before long he attained the highest perfection. He took ordination to enter the priesthood in the presence of dBu rGyal ba tshul khrims and received the name Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan. He received complete instruction in the rediscovered holy texts in the presence of Tri bo bSod nams rgyal mtshan, and learned metaphysics mainly from Khyung slob Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan. He spent six years learning such subjects as grammar, phonetics, poetics, dkar rtsis and nag rtsis, chanting and mandala-painting. As he also studied Sutra, Tantra and Mind, he became a veritable scholar.

In the presence of rGyal ba tshul khrims, Khyung po bZod ba rgyal mtshan, sPa ston ’Brug Rinpoche and Khyung slob Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, he asked for numerous initiations and instructions on texts. In the presence of the rGyal tshab Blo gros rgya mtsho he took a complete course of initiations and transmissions of texts by Grub dbang Shar rdza, and took the dge tshul vows of monk. He worked hard for Lung dkar Monastery to develop its study and practice and made sure that it followed the Bru tradition. In 1984 he passed away. He was sixty-one.

Besides those mentioned above, this monastery has produced many other great meditators: Tre bo bSod nams rgyal mtshan, brDa snga gYung drung rab brtan, sGyes sum Byams pa tshul khrims and lCags tsha Tshul khrims bstan dbang, who all gave their lives to meditation.
Practice of rituals and religious services of this monastery

1. In the 1st Tibetan month there is the commemoration of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan.
2. In the 2nd month the A dkar bum sgrub ritual is performed.
3. In the 3rd month the ritual cycle of Khro bo and Phur pa is performed.
4. In the 5th month the propitiatory ritual for Bonpo religious protectors is performed.
5. In the 6th month the ceremony of rNam rgyal stong mchod is held.
6. In the 7th month the Ma tri bum sgrub ritual is performed.
7. In the 8th month the Me tog mchod pa ceremony is held.
8. In the 11th month rituals based on the cycle of Khro bo are performed.
9. In the 12th month there is a performance of the complete ritual cycle of sTag la me 'bar.

In each of the three winter months there is the performance of the dgu gtor rite. In all, the monks gather together for eighty days of the year for the purpose of performing rituals.

As for daily ceremonies, there is a morning assembly preceded by the sounding of a big white conch, along with the playing of a long oboe and a drum. Tea is served seven times a day, and meetings are observed seven times a day. The main rituals are based on the following texts: Phur nag, Khro bo, Kun rig, rNam rgyal, Me tog mchod pa, rGyal ba rgya mtsho, Kun rig, Byams ma, 'Dul chog, rNam 'joms, sMan lha, Dus 'khor, Phar phyin, Kun dbyings, sMon lam mtha' yas, dGe bsnyen and rNam dag.

The head and other leaders of the monastery in 1998 were as follows: the abbot Nyi ma lhun grub, who was sixty-one years old; Tshul khrims 'byung gnas of Lung nag, who was twenty-nine; bShad sgrub rab 'phel, also of the Lung nag lineage, who was seventeen; bsTan 'dzin mtshung med of the sPa family, fifteen years old; and Drang srong g-yung drung of sGrub, who was sixty-six.

Other members of the monastery were as follows: teacher, Drang srong gYung drung; senior chanting conductor, Blo gros brtan pa; the younger chanting conductor, Tshe dbang phun tshogs; and disciplinarian, gYung drung phun tshogs. There were more than forty ordinary monks.

For the main source of income, the monks receive financial help from their own families and they perform visiting services in the village one hundred days a year, for which they are paid ten yuan each day. In summer, when the people leave for gathering the dByar rtswa dgun 'bu ("grass in summer, worms in winter", Cordyceps sinensis) in the mountains, most of the monks return home and help look after their families’ livestock. The monastery itself has no property apart from about thirty yaks.
(28) sGra rgyal Monastery

sGang ru sGra rgyal Monastery is situated in ICang smad qu, sBra chen rdzong. The qu is ninety kilometres north of the rdzong, and the monastery is reached by travelling two hours further northward on horseback.

In this nomad area of sGang ru, initially, a lama from Khyung po founded a monastery called Chu lung dgon, which, after a long time, declined. After that, another lama, also from Khyung po, founded a monastery in the same place and called it Na g-yang dgon, which also collapsed, having nobody to look after it. Thereafter, for a long period there was neither a communal leader nor a lama. Many believers longed for a new monastery to be built.

At that time, however, there was a monk named Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, who was the former chief teacher in gYiing dmng gling Monastery (No.2). He was himself a native of sGang ru. He had a great reputation as an accomplished scholar. After leaving his duty in gYung drung gling he devoted himself to meditation for eight years on the island of the lake Gyer ru mtsho. He had a close connection with the chief of the Kre ba tribe, one of the seven Sa skya tribes that inhabited the area around the lake gNam mtsho. The monks and laymen of the sGang ru Byang ma district held repeated discussions and sent bsTan pa lhun grub as a delegate to invite Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, who, however, refused to accept the invitation. This left the people of sGang ru helpless. The following year, Tshe rab, the brother of Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan, appealed to him and this time he agreed to come.

Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan returned on horseback to his native land. He looked for a good site and in 1957 he founded sGra rgyal Monastery in front of Mount Gung sman yul sa. This mountain had the look of a white conch and is situated at the back of the monastery.

The monastery closely followed, in all its ceremonies, the tradition of gYung drung gling. There was the performance of the ritual cycle of Khro bo, the commemoration of sNang ston Zla ba rgyal mtshan and annual rituals such as the Zhi khro 1dri mchod and rNam rgyal stong mchod. The head of the monastery was lHa dge of Khyung nag. He was assisted by gDung pa me gsas and sKar yu.

As for religious objects, the monastery possessed a gilt-bronze statue of rNam par rgyal ba, another statue of Sa trig er sangs and a complete manuscript set of the bKa’ ’gyur. There was also a large gilt-bronze reliquary stupa of bZod pa rgyal mtshan, which bDud ’dul of Khyung po had had made.

At present the monastery has fifty-five monks. It has several chapels and some religious objects.

(29) A krong Hermitage

From sBra chen rdzong, driving twenty-four kilometres westward on the highway and then another ten kilometres northward, we come to sKar rgod xiang. A
The Hermitage is reached by travelling nine more kilometres eastward. It is at an altitude not less than 5,000 metres, and because of the difficulty the ascent presents to cars, one must go on foot from the bottom of the hill.

The hermitage was established by rTogs ldan Tshul khrims dga’ ba in 1981 at a place where previously there was nothing but a cemetery and a small temple. At the spot backed by the holy mountain A krong and fronted with another holy mountain, Yi ge, he built a temple adorned with religious objects of body, speech and mind, and a mural of local deities of considerable quality. Although it is not very long since the hermitage was established, it has been a place of pilgrimage for many people because of the cemetery, which is regarded as very special.

With regard to the way the monks perform funeral rites, they maintain the distinct traits of Bonpo tradition. Firstly, at the death of a person, the family invites a monk called the dbugs chad lama, and then on the 3rd day another monk called the zhag gsum lama, to whom it presents a horse saddle. On the forty-ninth day the family invites a monk called the zhe dgu lama. The funeral rite is based on the Kun rig. Many flat, hand-sawn wooden boards are inscribed with scriptures in gold and silver to be burned in the cremation. So for the funeral rite, a rich family spends over 100,000 yuan and one that is not so rich about 50,000. For very poor families, it has been a custom to leave the corpse strewn with barley flour up in the mountains.

No more than three monks reside in this hermitage.

(30) Phur nag Monastery

The monastery’s full name is Phur nag dgon gYung drung ’o tshal gling. Travelling from A krong Hermitage back to sKar rgod xiang, then sixteen kilometres towards the north, which includes a river-crossing on the way, we arrive at Phur nag Monastery. It was easy going for us, with a Tantrist guide who had a fearful look.

This is an excellent Bonpo tantric establishment, a glance at which can inspire one with delight and awe. It was founded in 1864 by bSod nams g-yung drung, a Tantrist of A skyid, and his assistant, Dar dga’. Before the tantric establishment, it is said that there was a custom of the local community making offerings on the 15th day of the month at the same site. bSod nams g-yung drung, the founder of the establishment, belonged to a long lineage of able Tantric practitioners. He was much respected by the local people as he was able to perform the funeral rite for the dead and carry out religious services for the living. Lama Dar dga’ was also esteemed as he belonged to the lineage of rMe’u.

As the main tutelary deity of the establishment was dBal phur nag po, it was called Phur nag. The temple and assembly hall had their religious objects and were fully equipped. In the temple there were statues of gSas mkhar mchog lnga and Bonpo religious protectors in all their majesty. As there was a fair number of Tantric practitioners in Phur nag it was one of the three famous Tantric establishments in the
Hor region known as Klu rTing Phur gsum, i.e. Klu phug (No.31), rTing ngu (No.12) and Phur nag (No.30). The ritual tradition of Phur nag followed closely those of the families gShen, Bru, Zhu and rMe’u.

The monastery has murals of its own protective local deities, which are as follows:

1. rGyal mtshan po: a deity with one head and two arms. His body is white like a conch, and he holds a white conch in his right hand and a jewel in his left. He is mounted on a white horse.

2. Yi ge rag sna: a local deity with a red body, one head and two arms. Holding a red lance in his right hand and a lasso in his left, he is mounted on a stallion.

3. mKhan chen: a local deity that resides to the left of the mountain behind the monastery complex. He has one head, two arms and a snow-white body. Mounted on a light-bay horse, he holds a lance with a banner in his right hand and a white conch in his left. He exhibits a peaceful air.

4. ’Brig gu: a local deity with a white body, one head and two arms. Holding a white conch in his right hand and a jewel in his left, he is mounted on a white yak with a turquoise mane.

There were a number of mural paintings of other local deities as well.

As for activities, offerings are made on the 15th day of each month. The practitioners gather together for religious services eight times during the year. Formerly the establishment had about seventy inmates. At present, there are sixty-six, who continue reviving the earlier tradition.

(31) Klu phug Monastery

The monastery’s full name is Klu phug dgon gYung drung bde chen gling. From Phur nag Monastery, there is a direct road that leads to Klu phug Monastery, but it is a trip of extreme difficulty and danger. To the right of the road stretches a high mountain range with yawning craggy abysses. To the left runs the reddish river Sog chu, swirling waves. Before reaching the monastery seven narrow ledges must be traversed, the mere sight of which can make one’s hair stand on end. People call these the “Seven ledges intermediate between death and rebirth” (bar ma do’i ’phrang bdun). Thus we arrive at rDza gseb xiang. This xiang is completely surrounded by green-clad mountains. Herds – black, white or other colours – on the verdant plain look just like the stars scattered in the sky. To the far north-west of the xiang is a high, white, rocky hill that looks like an elderly monkey sitting on his haunches, the appearance of which may strike one as strange.

To reach Klu phug Monastery, which is situated in sBra chen qu, one must travel further away from the riverbank. It is one hundred kilometres from the rdzong to the monastery, but twenty-four kilometres of this can be covered conveniently by
car on the highway.

Here I shall give an account of where and how this monastery originated: this monastery is situated on the upper part of Brag dkar lha lung valley in sBra chen qu. On the hill at the back of the monastery there was a cave in which, it is believed, a water spirit klu lived. That is why the monastery is called Klu phug.

There was a Tantric establishment called mKhar dmar bla brang founded in 1626 by Khri rgyal rje chen, the twelfth king of the Thirty-nine Tribes of Hor. He was a tantric practitioner and followed both Bon and 'Bri gung bKa' rgyud pa traditions.

mKhar dmar was situated at a saddle-shaped craggy red hill called Gung lhag. It was a two-storey building. On the top of the roof it had various emblems unique to the ancient Bon tradition, such as the perch of birds. In the centre and at the four corners of the roof there were spears erected and decorated with yak’s hair on their tips, surrounded by deer and wild yak horns. In the assembly hall on the upper floor there were four pillars and it was the place where twelve Tantric practitioners gathered together. There were the following religious objects: clay images of the four-armed sPyan ras gzigs, sGrol dkar, rNam par rgyal ba and Khri gtsug rgyal ba; scriptures, including the Khams chen in sixteen volumes and the bDal ‘bum in twelve volumes; eight stupas made of a mixture of medicine and clay, each of which was as tall as an arrow. On the west side of the floor there was a single-pillared meditation room in which Khri rgyal rje chen erected gilt-bronze statues of Kun bzang rgyal ba ’dus pa and dBal gsas rngam pa (this statue still exists) less than a cubit in height. These had been concealed in the ground at Sham po during the suppression of Bon in Central Tibet and was rediscovered by rMa ston lHa rgod Shes rab seng ge. Moreover, there were images of Dran pa nam mkha’ with his twin sons made of the li from Zhang zhung, a span in height (two of these statues still exist). These were rediscovered in Phyug mo dpal ri by Bon zhig gYung drung gling pa.

The Twelve Tantrists, including sGrub khang Khri rgyal, took turns performing the ritual cycle of dBal gsas. They performed the dgu gtor rite at the end of the 12th Tibetan month. As for the ritual tradition — recitation, chanting, playing the musical instruments — they followed that of Zhu, both systems of lCags zam and Nag tshang. The main religious protectors to whom they dedicated rites were the three white, black and multi-coloured Thel.

In 1786, lHa mkhar bstan rgyal, the elder son of Khri rgyal rje chen, was enthroned and maintained the mKhar dmar establishment as his father did. He married gShen bza’ dPal ’dzin, a lady of the gShen family. He abandoned his family’s tradition to follow ‘Bri gung bKa’ rgyud and was content to keep only the Bon tradition. Dpal ’dzin, the queen, became a nun in her later life and lived in a cave to devote herself to meditation. Her cave can still be visited.

Tshe ring rab brtan, the son of lHa mkhar, succeeded his father. However, he
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was more concerned with politics. He had two tent residences. One of these two was in sBra chen and it was in this that he used live and it became the seat of his government.

In mKhar dmar, there was lHa bla bS tan pa phun tshogs, who is said to be a native of rGyal rong. He looked after the tantric establishment (which usually had twelve tantrists). lHun grub ’od zer (alias Shang Drang srong) of rTing ngu Monastery came to join him and he was ordained by bS tan pa phun tshogs. So mKhar dmar started having monks in its midst. lHa bla also established there the ritual practice of the Zhi khro dgongs ’dus according to the New Bon tradition. This was to be performed in the 8th month every year.

Here is an account of how Klu phug Monastery was founded. In 1827 Nyi ma bstan ’dzin, the twenty-third abbot of sMan ri Monastery (No.1), travelled to the region of Hor. He came and stayed in Klu phug Monastery. There he presided over the ceremony of the enthronement of bS tan ’dzin dbang grags, the reincarnation of lHa bla bS tan pa phun tshogs, at mKhar dmar bla brang. On the same occasion, he encouraged bS tan ’dzin dbang grags and the twelve tantrists to take monastic ordination. Klu phug then with its mKhar dmar bla brang became a real monastery and the abbot gave it the name gShen bstan gYun dmng bde chen gling and wrote a monastic code for it entitled the Thar lam them skas, setting out regulations in accordance with the Bonpo monastic tradition. Not only that, he issued an edict establishing the monastery as being the first branch of sMan ri in the region. He entrusted the monastic management to Ma bdud btsan rgyal bzhi, the Bonpo protectors, and bestowed upon the monastery a large flat bell discovered in rGyal rong Brag steng and it has been one of the principal religious objects of this monastery up to the present day.

bS tan ’dzin dbang grags maintained the time-honoured custom of mKhar dmar bla brang, except that the twelve tantrists were now all monks. He added an eight-pillared assembly hall and established the commemoration of sTon pa gShen rab’s birthday on the 15th day of the 1st Tibetan month, and the performance of the ritual gShin eje gshed dmar. Following
this, religious dances were performed, to which he added new dances: sNang bgyad, Tshogs 'cham, and the Yamantaka.

rNam rgyal dbang 'dus, a brother of bsTan pa dar rgyas, entered the priesthood and succeeded his brother in the monastery, but the seventeenth king of Hor, Nor bu dbang rgyal, died prematurely, so he had to leave the monk body and succeed to the throne. As a confession (of having broken the monastic vows) a two-storey temple with six pillars was build in the monastery. There were gilt-bronze statues of rNam par rgyal ba and the Four Principal Buddhas, a span in height. Families of the 'Brog shog and Bon tha tribes of the Thirty-seven Tribes of Hor took an oath that they would send their second son (if there was one) to become a monk. From that point the monastery began to have many monks.

bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, of the royal house of Hor, ascended the monastic throne. From childhood he was faithful, industrious and intelligent, so that he became the focus of praise from all the people. He took monastic vows at the age of thirteen. After that, according to custom, he made offerings to the three monasteries, including sMan ri. In the presence of sKal bzang nyi ma, the second abbot of gYung drung gling, he took full ordination. He then set out on pilgrimage to Mount Ti se and the soul-mountain of Bon in Zhang zhung and also the lake Ma pang g-yu mtsho. There he made circumambulations and prostrations.

He then returned to his monastery where he had various stupas built, including a reliquary stupa of a gShen lama in the form of gYung drung bkod legs and another reliquary stupa of bsTan pa dar rgyas in the form of rNam rgyal mchod rten made of silver, the height of a person and adorned with varieties of vivid gems. He had a temple built to house the stupas he had had made. His main spiritual masters were gTer ston Nam mkha' khri khyung of Zhu and Grub dbang sMon lam rgyal mtshan of Khyung po. gTer ston gYung drung grags pa of Zhu, who was the prelate of the king Tshe ring rab brtan, made Mount Brag dkar lha lung, where the monastery is situated, into a sacred site and established a new custom of circumambulating the sacred hill in the region.

bsTan pa rgyal tshan made copies, by himself, of the bKa' 'gyur and bKa' brten in vermilion ink and had a temple with eight pillars built to house them. This temple also contained a gilt-bronze statue of sTon pa gShen rab and a reliquary stupa of Zhu Nam mkha' khri khyung the height of an arrow. An assembly hall was also built, with two storeys and six long pillars and sixty-six short ones. In the inner sanctuary there was a complete set of lTung bshags lha 'khor of gilt-bronze. On the right wall were murals of the Bya rgyud and sPyod rgyud deities. On the left wall were the principal deities of the Ye shes and Ye she chen po'i rgyud. On the walls around the upper structure were the Four Principal Buddhas and the masters who maintained the monastic tradition. On both sides of the door were Bonpo religious protectors, both male and female. In the front hall were murals of the eight dPal mgon chen po
This monastery followed the Bru tradition in its activities as exactly as that of sMan ri Monastery: in the 8th month, the ritual of Kho bo, and in the 3rd month that of Phur pa, finishing with a whole day’s dance performance.

In 1912 the Thirty-nine Tribes of Hor came under the control of the Manchu officials resident in Tibet and then, later, the Tibetan government began to rule over the tribes. This Tibetan (dGe lugs pa) rule over the region soon had an adverse effect on the Bonpo monasteries.

Then Sangs rgyas bstan ’dzin, a Hor lama, took care of the mKhar dmar Bla brang residence. sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan succeeded him. The latter was born in 1937 at lHa thog in sDe dge, in a family of the sKam lineage. He later became the head of Klu phug Monastery. He reorganized the cemetery in the vicinity of the monastery by subduing the ground and building a stone mandala there. The place was the abode of mKha’ ’gro Seng gdong ma and the ground looks like the crooked knife of a mkha’ ’gro ma and the bare hills nearby resemble a woman’s breasts.

mKhan chung Grags mnam, the first Hor governor, assigned by the Tibetan government, appointed the head of Klu phug Monastery as the abbot of thirty-eight monasteries among the Thirty-nine Tribes by issuing an edict and a seal. This official position of the abbot is called So brgyad mkhan po.

After that, Thugs ije nyi ma of sKam, using his own resources and assisted by gYung drung ye shes of Kha btags, made gilt-bronze statues of the deities of gSas mchog lnga and sTag la the height of an arrow, and two large reliquary stupas of bsTan pa rgyal mtshan and Tshe dbang lha rgyal as tall as a two-storey house.

rMe’u ston sKal bzang rgyal mtshan succeeded sGo ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan as the head of the monastery. He was born in 1912 and was recognized as the reincarnation of his predecessor by Phun tshogs blo gros, the twenty-eighth abbot of sMan ri. In the presence of the abbot he took monastic vows, then ascended the throne of Klu phug Monastery. He twice carried out restoration work at mKhar dmar bla brang, during which he built a new twelve-pillared temple containing religious objects such as gilt-bronze statues of rNam pa rgyal ba, rGyal ba rgya mtsho and sMon lam mtha’ yas, each of which was as tall as a two-storey house. He paid visits to the Three Principal Bonpo Monasteries in Central Tibet and distributed, in accordance with old custom, much of his own wealth among the monks there. He, moreover, took full ordination in the presence of Nyi ma dbang rgyal, the thirty-first abbot of sMan ri. At his own monastery he had two copies of the bKa’ ’gyur made. When the Bonpo monasteries were persecuted by the garrison, consisting of five hundred guards, posted in sBra chen by the Tibetan government, he was obliged to escape for a short period of time; consequently he was unharmed. He died in 1954.

gYung drung rgyal ba of the royal house of the king of Hor succeeded rMe’u ston sKal bzang rgyal mtshan as head of the monastery. He was born in 1936 and
was recognized as the rebirth of Sras smyon pa. The latter was regarded as the reincarnation of gYung drung bstan pa rgyal mtshan. gYung drung rgyal ba took monastic vows in the presence of rGyal tshab gYung drung rgyal mtshan of mKhar sna (No.7). At the age of five, he entered Klu phug Monastery and then travelled from one monastery to another. He obtained initiations and teachings from a number of masters living in Khams and Amdo. In 1956, he took full ordination in the presence of bsTan pa blo gros, the ex-abbot of sMan ri. While helping maintain Klu phug Monastery, he was particularly involved in political affairs of both laity and clergy.

The hierarchical system of the monastery is as follows:

- mkhan po and sprul sku
- phan tshun che mo
- dge rgan, five teachers selected from the four colleges: Ke’u tshang sGron gsal gling, dGa’ ldan ’bul sde gling, bsTan pa yar dar gling and gSer sde bde chen gling
- dbu mdzad
- dge bskos
- phyag mdzod
- sphi gnyer
- rgyun gnyer
- tshang dpon

Formerly there were about three hundred monks.

Among the eighty-seven Bonpo monasteries in the Tibet Autonomous Region, Klu phug Monastery is, at present, one of those that have good facilities such as assembly hall, temple and other buildings. Its religious objects are in good condition. A broad range of teachings on study, practice and meditation are taught by the following individuals: the abbot sKal bzang g-yung drung; rTogs ldan Rag shu; Dri med g-yung drung (alias Dri med rdo rje), the highly illustrious one who has reached the age of ninety years; Rag shu Kun bzang snying po; sGo rigs Ye shes kun ’byung; sPa tshang ’Phrin las rgya mtsho; and Zhu gYung drung rang sgrol. Altogether, there are 130 monks presently living there.

Principal among the religious objects still kept in this monastery is the pair of statues of rGyal ba ’dus pa in tranquil aspect and dBal gsas rngam pa in wrathful aspect. They are regarded as rediscoveries of rMa ston IHa rgod. As well, there are numerous other religious objects of great importance: the silver image of gShen lha ’od dkar, rediscovered by Bon zhig Khyung nag; bronze statues of Dran pa nam mkha’ and Pad ma mthong grol, alias Pad ma ‘byung gnas, both considered to be rediscoveries.

The mountain called Nor bu lha rtse, behind the monastery, is regarded as a holy mountain blessed by Dran pa nam mkha’ and his twin sons - Tshe dbang rig ’dzin
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and Pad ma 'byung gnas. The mountain to the right is called Nyi ma lha rtse and the one to the left is Zla ba lha rtse. There are three hills designated as gatekeepers: Phyi Gung ma, Bar rGyal po brag dmar and Nang bSe ru. There is a cave that is supposed to be that of Dran pa nam mkha' and a lake called sPyang thang mtsho nag.

There are twelve tantrists: dGe 'dun grags pa, dGe siong dBang dga', Ban sal Blo bzang dpal ldan, Nag ru tshul khrims, sTag rgyal bsTan pa dge grags, Nag ru bsTan 'dzin ye shes, Ba ha bon dkar, gTsang tsha Tshul khrims bstan rgyal, Khor bSam gtan tshul khrims, rGyu ne bsTan 'dzin lhun grub, Hor Tshul khrims nyi ma and Ba ra bsTan 'dzin lhun grub. All are, in fact, monks strictly observing their tantric vows.

The main protective deities of this monastery are as follows: Srid rgyal drel dmar, Srid rgyal drel nag, Ye shes dbal mo, Bya ra ma gsum, rDzu 'phrul sman bzhi and Mi bdud 'Byams pa khrag mgo. There are murals of the following deities:

1. gNam sman che mo: a goddess with a blue body, one head and two arms. Mounted on a sheep, she has the look of great bravery.
2. dGra lha rgyal mo: a goddess with a midnight-blue body, one head and two arms. She holds a sword in her right hand and a breath-gathering bag in her left. Dressed in black silk, she is mounted on an iron wolf.
3. Yum sras Ma bdud khro gnyer ma: a goddess with a midnight-blue body, one head and two arms. Holding a club in her right hand and a lasso in her left, and presenting a frightening appearance, she is mounted on a black waterfowl.
4. lCam mo lam lha: a goddess with a yellow body, one head and two arms. She holds a lance and a key in her right hand, and an axe and a gem in her left. Mounted on a gold bee, she is in a state of ever-lasting stability.
5. gCan lha mig dgu: a three-headed, six-armed deity with a brown body. He presents his right face as a bird, his left face as a pig and the centre one in a wrathful state. He is mounted on a nine-headed black-pig.
6. rMa rgyal spom ra: a deity with a white body, one head and two arms. Well clad in armour and a conch-shell helmet, he holds in his right hand a lance with a flag fastened to it and in his left hand, a gem. Mounted on a snow lion, he presents a brave look.
7. bTsan rgod hur pa gsod skyen: a deity with a red body, holding a lance in his right hand and a lasso in his left. He is mounted on a blue horse with a blackish lower half.
8. dMag dpon rgyal po yang ne wer: a deity with one head, two arms and a yellow body. In his right hand he holds a symbolic lance with a flag attached to it and in his left, a lasso. Mounted on a blue horse with a blackish lower half, he presents a frightening appearance.
9. Brag btsan A bse rgyal ba: a deity with a red-body, holding a noose made of
a snake in his right hand and a big owl in his left. He is mounted on a horse with a blackish back and whitish feet.

10. rGyal chen Nyi pang sad (also called Nyi ma’i rgyal po): a deity with a white body. His right hand holding a lance with a flag fastened to it and his left hand holding a lasso, he is mounted on a white horse with a reddish back.

11. bTsan rgod Grags pa rgyal mtshan: a deity with a red body, holding in his right hand a lance with a flag fastened to it and in his left, the heart of an enemy. He is mounted on a red male horse.

12. Pho lha gNam thel dkar po: a deity of Hor with a white body and hair tied up at the top. Dressed in glossy white silk, he is adorned with turquoise, coral and pearls. He holds a crystal sword in his right hand and in his left, on which he wears a silver bracelet, he holds a white lasso; his arms are equipped with white wooden conchs. Mounted on a white horse with a reddish back, he presents a brave appearance.

13. sGra bla dpa’ stod: a deity with a white body, a single head and two arms. Clad in a leather helmet and golden armour, he holds a sword in his right hand and a lasso in his left. A tiger, a snow lion, a Garuda and a dragon hover above his head, and he is mounted on a white horse.

14. rGyal chen Shel kirrab ‘bar ba: a deity with a white body and wearing a coat of crystal mail. His right hand is giving a signal of unravelling an enigma, and the left holds a multi-coloured ice-conch. He is mounted on the best breed of Amdo horse.

15. Dzam sngon ku be ra: a deity with a midnight-blue body. Holding a golden sword in his right hand and an ichneumon in his left, he displays an imposing air. He is mounted on a horse with a turquoise mane.

16. bSe ru: a deity with a blue body, riding a fish. He terrifies even violent serpents.

In regard to daily activities of the monastery, they perform the bsang ritual in the morning and, in the evening, rituals to propitiate the protective deities.

Since the monastery has neither farmland nor livestock, they have to rely on each household for financial support, so more than one hundred of the monks go out to give prayer services in villages. In payment, they receive one hundred yuan a day in the highest paid cases, twenty to fifty in moderate cases, and about ten yuan in the lowest.

With regard to Klu phug ri khrod, which is an hermitage, it is situated close to the monastery itself, on the mountain to the south. Its main religious objects are the relics of gYung Nyi ma rgyal mtshan and sGo Thugs rje nyo ma. At present there are four monks in the hermitage.
(32) sPu la Monastery

The monastery is also known as sPu la ri khang dgon. From Hor sBra chen rdzong, travelling twenty kilometres eastward on the highway, another eight kilometres northward, and then crossing a big river, we reach sPu la Monastery in Ye tha xiang. This monastery is situated at the foot of a mountain that is the source of the river. It was founded by Khyung nag Shes rab rgyal mtshan in 1853.

Shes rab rgyal mtshan’s family belonged to one of the four lineages of Khyung: Khyung dkar, Khyung nag, Khyung ser and Khyung khra. Thog la ’bar of Khyung dkar, Mu khyung rgyal of Khyung nag, lHa khyung rgyal of Khyung ser and Khyung ’phags khra bo of Khyung khra each built a temple near a soul-lake and soul-rock. I will not take up in detail the process by which they built the temples and spread the Bon doctrine, but I shall give here an account of the masters of sPu la who belonged to the lineage of Khyung nag Mu khyung rgyal.

Khyung nag Mu khyung rgyal, who had propagated his doctrine in Zhang zhung, was invited, together with lHa khyung, to Tibet by the king Pu lde gung rgyal. The two helped spread the doctrine of Bon in Tibet. Khyung nag Mu khyung had two sons, sTag sgra dun gtsug and dPal gyi ’ger sti, who practised the tantric teachings called sPyi spung. sTag sgra dun gtsug was an accomplished devotee and did great deeds for sentient beings. His son, gNya’ gshen gtsug phud, became a great teacher in Zhang zhung where he had great influence in both religion and politics. gNya’ gshen gtsug phud’s son was Khyung mChog rgyal, whose son was Khyung rgod. Thus, there was an long unbroken continuing line. In the time of Khyung po sTong rgyung, there was an internal conflict that caused him to migrate from the west to the east.

In this line, there was Khyung po sGom nag and his two sons, Gyer mi nyi ’od and Khyung nag Klu rgyal. Of these two, the latter is said to have founded Sog gYung drung gling Monastery. From Khyung nag Klu rgyal a line continued as follows: Mu la ti ro, Khod rtsal hur min, Zla ri a kab, Gu ra ta kra, lHun grub ’phrin las, (who is said to be the founder of gZu bon Monastery), and Mu ri ha ra, whose two sons were dPon dge and dPon ’ud. It was these two brothers who were the leaders of Sog gYung drung gling Monastery when the Mongolian troops of Jungar began to attack their monastery and destroy it.

After that, Drung mu tshul ming of Khyung came to sPu la kha by way of dKar shod. He stopped there for the night. During the night he was shot and killed by accident when there was an archery contest organized by the local chief, gZu pa. This news reached Khyung nag Sa trig, who took the case to court and obtained the sPu la kha land as compensation for the killing. Khyung nag Sa trig then became known as sPu la Lama.

Shes rab rgyal mtshan of Khyung nag then founded sPu la Monastery. It was destroyed by the Jungar troops, but restored by Khyung A brla. The latter’s son,
dBang rgyal lhun grub, is said to have rediscovered a statue of sTon pa gShen rab on the island in the lake gNam tsho. It is still preserved in the monastery. dBang rgyal lhun grub’s son was A ti mu wer. The latter’s son was Ge khod dBang rgyal, who was regarded as a manifestation of the deity A ti mu wer and is said to have rediscovered a statue of rNam par rgyal ba, which is also kept in the monastery. Ge khod dBang rgyal had a son called Khyung A dar. From him the line continued through Bla sgur, gYung drung tshe mchog, dBang dbang and gYang ’job. In the monastery there was also the dagger called gNam lcags phur pa, rediscovered by Khyung Rin chen dbang rgyal, and relics of various sizes produced from the cremation when he died.

When the abbot of sMan ri, Nyi ma bstan ’dzin, came to sPu la Monastery, he bestowed upon it the name dPal gShen bstan gYirng drung gling. Following that, there were masters such as Khyung nag bSod nams g-yung dmng and bSod nams chos rgyal at the monastery. There were about sixty-five tantric practitioners strictly observing the tantric vows.

The main religious objects, in addition to those mentioned above, were as follows: three excellent statues of Byams ma; those of Nang chen grags pa and sTag la, a cubit in height; a small one of Dran pa nam mkha’; rGyal ba rgya mtsho, a cubit in height; two excellent ones of sTon pa gShen rab; and a multi-coloured statue of Kun tu bzang po. All were made of copper. Besides these, there was a thangka of the Twelve Deeds and a large thangka made of the silk of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan. As for scriptures, there was the Khams chen in four volumes, written in gold, called ’Dzam gling rgya mtsho (“the only gem of the world”). There were also the following objects: a black stone with a self-risen letter A formed of tricoloured onyx on it; bone relics the size of a goose egg; four knotted knives made when the spirits sPyang ‘gag were subdued; eight reliquary stupas made of gold, silver and copper; eight cubit-height stupas made of sandalwood and juniper; a maroon coloured conch; a dragon flint; a horse-whip made of native onyx; a sacred gold horse-saddle; a serpent made of turquoise; a cannibal demon’s right hand made of coral; a maroon coloured precious stone; and a pair of oboes made of gold. This monastery had this manifold wealth of religious objects and innumerable treasures.

The range of holy mountains behind the monastery includes gYung drung dpung rdzong, sTag la me ’bar, A mgul ’ bri ri phyung mo and Pha bong bon ri. It is said that if one performs circumambulation around Mount Pha bong bon ri it is equal to doing that once around Kong po bon ri. There are footprints of sTon pa gShen rab and the four scholarly men. Near the lake mTsho chen ma there is the footprint of Srid pa rgyal mo drel dmar.

The monastery closely follows the sMan ri tradition. The monks assemble sixty times a year amounting to seventy-nine days. There are fifty monks, including the abbot gYung drung rgyal mtshan, sKal bzang dbang grags, who oversees the observation of the fasting ceremony, Rin chen blo gros, the disciplinarian, and
bsTan pa tshul khrims, the chanting conductor. Among the fifty monks there are the teachers who have twenty-two monk students.

(33) rMa rong Monastery

The monastery's full name is rMa rong dgon gYung drung lha brag gling. From sPu la Monastery, driving twenty-five kilometres further eastward on the highway leads us to the lower terrace of rMa rong village. To reach rMa rong Monastery, a further thirteen kilometres must be driven northward on a terribly bad road, which can take an hour.

In 1390 dBra khyung Nam mkha’ rin chen built a hut in this place for the purpose of retreat. It then gradually developed into a monastery.

This monastery is found near Mount sPu rgyal gangs bzang and is one of four monasteries situated at the four cardinal points of the mountain. It is also known as Nang mdun dgon. sPu rgyal is a holy mountain for both Bonpo and Buddhists. Its being a holy site was prophesied by early sages and this is particularly clear in the guide written by gTer ston bDe chen gling pa. rMa rong Monastery was later enlarged by Drung mu, who had overcome many obstacles brought on by the local deities. He tells this story in his 'Dzam bu yig chung, as well as in the communication he had with the local deity, entitled 'Dzam bu lha rtse.

Khyung po Kun bzang grags pa and his brother were living in dByis stod, where they were involved in a dispute with Rong po dgon, a dGe lugs pa monastery. Intending to migrate to Western Tibet, they arrived at the residence of the rMa rong local chief. A rgya, the chief of rMa rong, was a patron of Kun bzang grags pa. A rgya and his people requested Kun bzang grags pa to be the head of rMa rong Monastery. However, Kun bzang grags pa and his brother declined the offer. They continued their journey. A rgya then informed Khri rgyal nje chen, the twelfth king of Hor. The king told Kun bzang grags pa that not only could he not leave for Western Tibet, he should settle down in the pastureland where the king had his herd of mdzo animals, as well as look after rMa rong Monastery. From that point the monastery had to perform religious services for the benefit of the king and, in return, the king issued an edict in recognition of the monastery.

Khyung po gYung drung rnam dag, the son of Khyung po Kun bzang grags pa, had a temple called rNam rgyal lha khang built in the monastery, containing many religious objects. He made majestic masks of the religious protectors such as the Ma (Srid pa rgyal mo), the bDud (Mi bdu ’byams pa khrag mgo) and the bTsan (Brag btsan A bse rgyal ba). The mask of the bTsan is regarded as special since no dust ever stays on it.

Of the three sons of gYung drung rnam dag, the eldest, Nam mkha’ rgyal po, made many copies of scriptures for the monastery. He had two sons, Nyi ma ’jig rten and dBang po. Nyi ma ’jig rten is said to have been chivalrous. His son was Khyung
po g-yung dpal. When Khyung po g-yung dpal died, it is said that where his corpse was buried the tree stag ma grew from his tongue. His son was gYung drung phun tshogs, whose sons were Blo ldan grags pa and Tshe dbang grags pa. Tshe dbang grags pa brought considerable development to the monastery. After that, Blo ldan grags pa was involved in a dispute with bSod nams bkra shis, the brother of the rMa rong chief, so Blo ldan grags pa strongly wished to leave for Western Tibet, but was prevented by the king of Hor. The king told him that unless he would live in rMa rong he would have to live in either Khrom tshang or sGong ru. So Blo ldan grags pa stayed in Khrom tshang for several years, during which rMa rong Monastery declined a little. After that, bSod nams dbang ’dus, the son of the rMa rong chief, requested the lama to come back to the monastery, but the lama was unwilling. Through the mediation of a representative of the king and the Be hu of the Sog tribe, the lama was reinstalled as the head of the monastery. He undertook as much restoration as he could. He lived to one hundred years of age. His son is Khyung po Bla rgan gYUng dga’, who is presently at the monastery. There were nine lamas in the line of succession, from Kun bzang grags pa to Blo ldan grags pa. The king of Hor recognized a number of them by issuing official letters to them.

The monastery’s main religious objects, all of which were of great sublimity, were as follows: a large white conch whose sound travelled very far, rediscovered by gTer ston gYung drung grags pa of Zhu; the horn of a female deer, which was the private property of Khyung A sha ba rang grol; the reliquary stupa of Khyung po Nang chen grags pa, called gSer ’od ’bar ba or rTen bya ’phur ma; and a statue of Dzam bha lha made of A ya sbug ge, rediscovered in dKyis ’khor thang in rTa shod by rTa shod Bu mo pad ma mtsho. In the temple of the monastery there were the following religious objects: statues of sTon pa gShen rab, rNam par rgyal ba, Byams ma, Khro bo gtso mchog, sTag la, Dran pa nam mkha’ and his twin sons Tshe dbang rig ’dzin and Pad ma ’byung gnas; a number of gold-painted thangkas; and scriptures including the bKd’tgyur and bha’brten.

This monastery is surrounded by the holy mountains sPu rgyal, ’Dzam bu, JHag pa, gYe rtse and lHa brag.

There are six lamas in the monastery: rGyal mtshan nor bu, dGe dbang, gYang rgyal, bSam ’phel nor bu, dGa’ ’degs and Sri thar, who all belong to the Khyung po lineage. The disciplinarian is sTag skyabs, and Nor dga’ is the chanting conductor. Of the forty inmates presently at this monastery, three are proper monks and the rest are lay religious practitioners.

There are four annual rituals, held in different seasons: the rNam rgyal ritual in summer and autumn, and the rituals of sTag la, Phur pa and Byams ma in winter and spring, each lasting twenty days. The monastery is regarded as a branch of Klu phug Monastery (No.31).

As for the main source of income, the monks have to depend on their families
for support. People usually offer from ten to fifteen yuan for the occasional religious services the monks perform in villages. As there are only three proper monks, the temple of the monastery and its contents are in a pitiful condition.

(34) Khrom tshang Monastery

The monastery's full name is Khrom tshang dgon gYung drung kun grags gling. From the lower terrace of rMa rong village, travelling thirteen kilometres eastward on the highway, one reaches Khrom tshang Monastery lying on the hillside to the north. This monastery is in a beautiful environment.

In the Seventh Rab byung (1387-1446) Kun mkhyen Ye shes saying po, who was a disciple of mNyam med gShes rab rgyal mtshan and supported by Nyi ma legs chen, chief of Khrom, founded the monastery Dar lung dgon in Khrom. It was then maintained by a series of lamas of the Khrom family and others:

1. Khrom sras bsTan pa lhun grub
2. Khrom sprul gYung drung mthong grol
3. Kun mkhyen Sangs rgyas grags pa
4. sNgags 'chang bKra shis rgyal mtshan
5. Khrom tshang bsTan 'dzin nor bu
6. dBang chen dge legs

The monastery was a well developed centre, with its temples full of religious objects and scriptures including the bKa’ ‘gyur and bKa’ brten. However, it was completely destroyed by the evil Jungar troops of Mongolia and remained a monastery only in name. After that, the lamas of the Khrom family lived in tents made of the yak hair or in hermitages.

After a long period of misfortune, Shes rab g-yung drung, the Twenty-fifth abbot of sMan ri Monastery (No.1), paid a visit to the region. He instructed the Khrom family to rebuild the monastery and restore its tradition. After examining the place, he decided upon a site for it, and in 1845 rNam rgyal grags pa, the chief of Khrom and Blo mgar began to rebuild the monastery as they had promised in the presence of the abbot. It was called gYung drung kun grags gling. The head of the monastery was dGe bzang gYung drung dbang rgyal. A series of six heads of the monastery followed him, down to Yon tan rgya mtsho. In 1998 there were fifty-two inmates, both monks and tantric practitioners.

The principal religious objects of this monastery were two reliquary stupas and statues of rNam par rgyal ba, sMon lam mtha’ yas, rGyal ba ‘dus pa, Kun snang khyab pa, sTon pa of the nine ages, Khro bo gtso mchog, dBal gsas, lHa rgod, sTag la and the eight Lo pan gshen. Other religious objects were a large conch, relics of sTon pa gShen rab; a dextral conch made of the teeth of lHun grub grags pa, and an image of Kun bzang that had risen from the central energy channel of dGe bzang Bon chung. Besides these, there was a set of the bKa’ ‘gyur and eighty volumes of
works on Tantra.

As for the annual activities, the inmates assemble five times a year:

1. In the 4th Tibetan month Me tog mchod pa and rNam rgyal stong mchod were celebrated for ten days. During these ceremonies 11,000 butter lamps were lit.

2. In the 6th month there was the observation of the smyung gnas fasting for eleven days and 20,000 butter lamps were lit.

3. In the 7th month the ritual of A dkar bum sgrub was performed for ten days with 50,000 butter lamp being lit.

4. In the 9th month the Zhi khro ritual was performed for eleven days.

5. In the 11th month Ma rgyud was performed for eight days.

Because the monastery customarily offered a huge number of butter lamps, people called the monastery the Butter Lamp monastery (Mar me’i dgon pa). As for the funds for the above ceremonies, the monastery had about six hundred ’bri (female yak) which had to be taken care of and whose number had to be kept at six hundred by a certain number of the local villagers.

The personnel of the monastery were as follows:
- dbu bla
- dbu mdzad
- dge bskos
- gnyer pa
- spyi gso

All held their positions for a certain number of years.

At present there are four head lamas: gYung drung yon ten rgya mtsho, bSod nams g-yung drung, Ye shes dbang Idan and Shes rab blo gros. The disciplinarian is Tshul khrims dbang rgyal, and the chanting conductor is sTobs Idan ye shes. There are one hundred and six monks.

The holy mountains around the monastery are Gangs ri sPu rgyal, lDe’u chen and rTsa ri rtsa gsar. The holy lakes are Srid rgyal bla mtsho, sPu rgyal bla mtsho and Rum mtsho rgan. The protective deities are Srid rgyal drel nag, Mi bdud ’Byams pa khrag mgo, A bse and rGyal po Shel khrab can; these four are called Ma bdud btsan rgyal bzhi.

As daily activities, they perform the bsang ritual in the morning and chant the Zhi ba a gsal. When we visited the monastery, they were in the course of the rNam rgyal stong mchod ceremony. Of the rituals performed in the monastery, the four important ones are based on the gYung drung klong rgyas, rNam rgyal, Byams ma mdo lugs and rNam dag pad ma klong yangs.

This monastery is a branch of sMan ri. Apart from sixty-two yaks, it has no material means of food production or income generation. Income to cover all expenses comes from performing religious services in villages, for which they are
paid from two to fifteen yuan.

Driving 190 kilometres south-eastward on the highway, one reaches sTeng chen rdzong. As three high mountain passes must be crossed on the way, it takes eight and a half hours.
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

(26) sPa tshang Monastery, Plate 1
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(26) sPa tshang Monastery, Plate 2
Stupa bKra shis 'od 'bar in the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
(27) Lung dkar Monastery
(Phuto Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(30) Phur nag Monastery
(Phuto Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

(31) Klu phug Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(32) sPu la Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

(34) Khrom tshang Monastery, Plate 2 A monk at the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
sTeng chen rdzong

sTeng chen rdzong is in Khyung po, north-eastern Tibet. It covers an area of 11,562 square kilometres, of which 110,000 mu is farmland, 11,500 mu pastureland and over 35,000 mu natural forest. It has a population of about 53,000 and consists of sixteen xiang and sixty-five village councils.

During the period of the Mongol empire and the Ming dynasty of China, sTeng chen formed a part of the Sog sde territory. In 1647, it came under the direct control of the Manchu government. In 1751, it came to be ruled by the Manchu officials resident in Tibet and in 1916, control was handed over to the Tibetan government. In 1959 sTeng chen rdzong was established and absorbed into Chab mdo region. At one point in history it was called Sum pa glang gi gyim shod, a territory of Zhang zhung sgo pa, which was one of the three provinces of Zhang zhung called sGo, Phug and Bar.

The story of the Khyung lineage begins with three brothers: lHa lung rgyal, Khyung Thog la 'bar, and dMu khyung rgyal. Around the 10th century, Shes rab rgyal mtshan, of the dMu khyung lineage, migrated to Sum pa glang. As the Khyung lineage prospered there, the place came to be known as Khyung po.

(35) sTeng chen Monastery

The monastery's full name is sTeng chen dgon gYung drung bstan rgyas gling. sTeng chen Monastery comes under the administration of the municipality of sTeng chen and is situated on the hillside to the west of the rdzong. It was founded in 1061 by Khyung dbus Shes rab rgyal mtshan.

The story of the Khyung lineage is told as follows: A long time ago, a big Garuda (khyung) flew into a flower garden and there it produced three crystal-like eggs, from each of which appeared a very beautiful boy. The eldest was called lHa khyung, the second Thog la 'bar and the youngest dMu khyung rgyal. The latter had two sons and a daughter, sTag sgra dun gtsug, dPal gyi gir ti and Khyung bza' Ye shes mtsho rgyal. The daughter, Khyung bza’, married Lig mi rgyal, the king of Zhang zhung. Her elder brother, sTag sgra dun gtsug, flourished in sTeng chen. He had a son called Gyer nam zur rtse, who had two sons, sTong rgyung rin mo and sTang la skyes. The former had three sons, Khyung sgom mu langs, Khyung 'phags khra mo and Khyung sder sngon mo. Khyung sgom mu langs's son was Khu byug, and his three sons were sTag pa, Zur dkar ba and mDo bkra ba. sTag pa’s son was Myes tshab, and he had four sons, sTon pa 'bar, Dam pa Khyung sgom (alias Shes rab sgom), dBen pa ma lugs (alias sTon lug), and Dam pa Khyung dbus (alias Dad pa rgyal mtshan). sTon pa 'bar’s son was sTon thar, and he had six sons, sTon sras, Shes rab rgyal mtshan, sTon mnyan Dam pa bang bkra, dPon dge, dPon dbus and sTon 'bum. The mother of these six was a rGya lady, so they came to be known as “The Six rGya tsha Brothers” (rGya tsha spun drug). Of the six brothers, Khyung
dbus Shes rab rgyal mtshan was guided by a prophecy as follows:

“The one who holds the lineage of dBra dkar Khyung po
Must go to mDo khams smad.
The doctrine rises and falls like the sun and the moon,
Even if they fall tonight, they would shine tomorrow.
At the bottom of Sum glang lies rNgu rdzong,
In front of the six magnificent fortresses of crystal.
sTeng chen is situated like the gold fish in a lake,
There is the site for a seat of the Khyung family.
Now go towards that site.
The river of knowledge will wind there,
And the flag of the Khyung lineage will be stable there.”

When Khyung dbus arrived in sTeng chen there was a Chinese man there called gTsug gtor nyi ma 'brug grags (hereafter, Nyi ma 'brug grags). He was a man both powerful and learned. He realized that the time had come and that his was a suitable place to welcome Khyung dbus.

At that time, Khyung dbus was travelling in the places called Khri, rDo, rMa and La. Nyi ma 'brug grags constructed a throne at Khyung khri thang in rMa and gave a reception for the lama. Then the lama was invited to go to a fortress called Khams gsum dbang 'dus. From there he proceeded to sTeng chen, which he thought corresponded to the description in the prophecy. The lama first founded two colleges called Kun khyab gling and bsTan rgyas gling. The first one was for practising meditation according to Sutra and the second according to Tantra. bsTan rgyas gling produced a series of eminent monks and Kun khyab gling had tantric practitioners such as Tha yud wer zhi and the eighteen masters in the Do khung line, who were all tantrists with long locks.

Nyi ma 'brug grags then offered his adherence to Khyung dbus by telling him:
“I have my own Chinese culture in China.
I must return to my own country.
I offer you this seat of mine as your abode.
And this large field for which I paid a bowlful of gold,
As a seat for yourself, king of Khyung.
The plateau up there,
Is the place where I play the gold dice.
Make it your royal seat, you, the king.
Below the junction of the three gSer ru valleys,
Above the confluence of the two rivers,
This is the land I, the old China man, bought.
Make it your royal seat, you, the king.
The red rock, which is like a fortress of fire (down there),
Is like a Garuda lying in its nest.
Make it your royal seat, you, the king.
It is there where you should build your fortress and palace…”
And he added,
“The spring of water in rDza dkar so ma,
Is the place for your horse to drink.
All this is given to you, please accept them.”
Khyung dbus replied: “I am simply a monk who has abandoned the family life, so I would not know how to manage a fortress and be a leader of a community. If you mean to give your land and fortress to the Khyung family, my brother’s sons A brla and Nang chen grags pa are at Khyung lung in Zhang zhung. I hope you will be able to send two messengers with a present from me to go to Khyung lung.

Then Khyung dbus, as a sign of assurance, gave a dagger with a white haft to the messengers dispatched by Nyi ma ’brug grags. They called on Khyung A brla, offered the present and told him why they came to see him. Khyung A brla consented to come to sTeng chen. He, with the two messengers, travelled by the southern road. They happily arrived in the land of Khyung po.

Then Khyung dbus and Nyi ma ’brug grags met Khyung A brla. Nyi ma ’brug grags, having given all the land to Khyung A brla, went back to China accompanied by his own servants. Khyung dbus and all the people saw him off. Khyung dbus passed away on the shore of the river rNgul chu after exhibiting immense miraculous signs of his spiritual accomplishment.

Later Nang chen grags pa paid a visit to China and had an audience with the emperor. Upon returning to sTeng chen, he fixed his residence at sTeng chen itself. Thereafter, sTeng chen’s spiritual and temporal laws became very famous. A brla continued working for the monastery and exhibited signs of spiritual accomplishment. He finally died at the age of sixty-two. He had many religious objects of body, speech and mind made.

One of A brla’s four wives, ‘Dan bza’, had three sons, Khyung zhig Ye rgyal ba, dBang rgyal grub and Byang nang pa Byang shes. Ye rgyal ba was an eminent monk. He practised meditation on Khro bo and Phur pa. Kindling his divine power, he reinforced his deeds for religious beings. He died at seventy. A brla’s son bSod nams rgyal mtshan by the lady of Rong was a very learned man. He possessed awe-inspiring dignity, convincing speech and foresight, and his reputation spread. He passed away when he was eighty-two. Drung chen Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan, another son of A brla by Rong mo za, was a man with a broad knowledge of Bonpo scriptures. With the great power and skill obtained from constant meditation on Srid rgyal drel dmar, in particular, he laboured for sentient beings. At the age of seventy-two, he died in sTeng chen. From here the offspring of A brla were succeeded as the head of the monastery by a series of masters:
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

1. Rin chen rgyal mtshan dar
2. gYung drung rgyal mtshan
3. Rin chen rgyal mtshan
4. bsTan pa'i rgyal mtshan
5. Ye shes rgyal mtshan
6. I Hun grub bsod nams dbang rgyal
7. dBang gi rgyal mtshan
8. Yid bzhin rgyal ba
9. rGyal ba don grub
10. Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan
11. Blo ldan snying po (b.1360)
12. Khyung chen Yon tan rin chen
13. Khyung dkar
14. Khyung po A 'je
15. Khyung po rNam rgyal
16. sPyang Be zhu Blo bzang
17. sKyang 'phags Tshe dbang bstan rgyal

Blo ldan snying po, the eleventh, was born of the dBra clan in the lower part of Khyung po. He received the Oral Tradition, which he wrote down, filling about fifty-four volumes, including the mDo Dri med gzi brjid. He is said to have had a five-storey temple built, called bKra shis 'od 'bar. It had statues of deities of the forty-five vehicles, as well as the Khams chen nag phran ma written in gold. He died at forty-seven.

sKyang 'phags Tshe dbang bstan rgyal, the seventeenth, studied at gYung drung gling Monastery (No.2) and obtained the degree of dge bshes there. Having thoroughly mastered dozens of subjects, he received completely perfect teachings of texts and instructions from Lama rGyal mtshan in sTeng chen. At that time, gTer ston bDe chen gling pa arrived in sTeng chen. He visited the place called gTer sgrom kha and prophesied that there would be a monastery there. Since Tshe dbang bstan rgyal had been given the very same prophecy by sKyabs mgon Zla ba rgyal mtshan, Tshe dbang bstan rgyal fulfilled the prophecies of the two masters by uniting the two establishments, gYung drung bstan rgyal gling — the monastery of Khyung dkar lineage holders in the Upper sTeng chen — and the one called Kun khyab gling — which had been the abode of eighteen series of Khyung tantric practitioners — into one and moving them to gTer sgrom kha in 1862.

The new monastery was large with a number of monks. It had over four hundred households to support it. Moreover, he had over a hundred temples built, of various sizes. These establishments followed a strict monastic tradition; assemblies were to be held fifteen times a year. The monastery had many important visitors, so it became known all over Tibet.
Then, in sTeng chen Monastery, there was the accomplished scholar gYung grags pa (gYung drung Tshul khrims dbang grags), who had the whole bKa’ 'gyur and bKa’ brier copied to the best quality and made an excellent catalogue of the collection. After gYung grags pa, Khyung sprul Tshe dbang g-yung drung followed as the head of the monastery in 1913. During this time, China and Tibet were at war with each other which caused the monastery to be burnt down. However, Khyung ser sga sprul Tshe dbang g-yung drung took the initiative to rebuild it. A large and splendid temple was built, containing many religious objects. At that time, bsTan pa, having obtained the degree of dge bshes in metaphysics in gYung drung gling, returned to his native monastery. When Nyi ma dbang rgyal, the Thirty-first abbot of sMan ri Monastery (No.1), came to this monastery, the abbot appointed bsTan pa as head of the monastery. mKhan po bsTan pa had many religious objects made and did great deeds for sentient beings.

Before 1959, there were about 180 monks in sTeng chen Monastery. At present there are sixty-one monks, led by the following: the abbot, rGya mtsho nor bu, who is thirty-three years old in 1998; the chanting conductors, 'Chi med g-yung drung and bsTan pa tshul khrims; and the disciplinarians, bSod nams bkra shis and sNying rje bstan ’dzin. There are, in fact, no more than fourteen who reside permanently in the monastery.

As daily activities, in the morning the monks recite the rtsa rlung prayer. Then they perform the bsang purification ritual and the water offering based on the bDud rtsi chu rgyun and the rTsis ‘go bdun pa.

Other rituals that the monks perform on different occasions are based on the texts sMon lam mtha’ yas, ‘Dul chog (during the summer retreat), Ma tri, rNam rgyal and mKha’ klong gsang mdo. They also perform rituals for wrathful deities, gShed dmar, Khro bo and the propitiation of the religious protectors.

The mountain behind the monastery is called Brag dmar ri ’dus, the abode of the local deity Rin chen ‘bar ba, and at its left are those called gZi yar sku, Mar sku and Gong rgyal. In front of the monastery is the holy mountain known as Ri rtse drug.

The monks’ main source of income is religious services in the neighbouring villages of Ye tha, which have a population of more than 3,200 farmers and nomads, in over 500 households. For these services the people customarily pay the monks from five to twenty yuan a day.

(36) sTeng chen Hermitage

This is a hermitage that lies to the east of sTeng chen Monastery, less than a stone’s throw away.

The hermitage has a large temple of magnificent design. The main religious objects are the reliquary stupa of sMon lam rgyal mtshan at the centre, another
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

reliquary stupa of Me ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan to the right and that of Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan to the left. There is also an old thangka of the Twelve Deeds of sTon pa gShen rab.

Before 1959, there were about fifty monks in this hermitage. Presently there are two lamas, Ifun grub rgya mtsho and Yon tan rgya mtsho, and the chanting conductor, bKra shis dbang ’dus. It is considered to be a branch of dGyes ri Monastery in Kong po.

With regard to the main daily activities, in the morning the monks perform the bsang ritual and the water offering; at midday they recite the mantra of the tutelary deities; and in the evening, they chant the bKa’ skyong.

Every year, in the 4th Tibetan month, from the 23rd to the 30th day, the monks perform the Cho ga bcu gnyis ritual. From the 5th month to the end of the 6th month, the ritual of rNam rgyal is performed. In the 9th month, from the 21st to the 30th day, they perform the dgu gtor rite based on deities, sometimes Yi dam Dran pa drag po and other times the goddess Srid pa rgyal mo.

(37) Ko bo Monastery

Ko bo Monastery is under the administration of the sTeng chen villages. It is about nine kilometres from the rdzong. It lies on a small hill west of the rdzong and access to it is difficult.

This monastery was founded by Ko bo Ye shes rgyal mtshan in 1408. It is below the sacred mountain — the abode of the local deity ’Jag rgyal smug po — which is on the highland between the rivers rNgul chu and rDza chu in Khams.

The line of masters of the monastery is as follows:
1. Ko bo Ye shes rgyal mtshan
2. Zla grags Rin chen rgyal mtshan
3. Zla grags Rin chen dpal bzang
4. Zla grags Nyi ma ’od zer
5. Zla grags Tshul khrims dbang rgyal
6. Ha Rinpoche
7. Zla grags Rin chen phun tshogs

Main Religious Activities
1. In the 1st Tibetan month, from the 3rd day, annual activities begin with the commemoration of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan. The monks perform the ceremony based on the Klong rgyas, as well as chanting the Bla ma mchod pa and the ’Tshogs ’don. The ritual cycle of Phur pa is performed while two monks perform that of Ge khod separately.
2. In the 2nd month, on the 24th day, the commemoration of Zla grags is celebrated with the ceremony based on the rNam dag and Klong rgyas. On
the 27th day there is a recitation of the 'Tshogs 'don. The monks practise silent reading of the Khro bo and the Ma tri rin chen sgron ma. On the same occasion they make offerings to the klu spirits.

3. In the 5th month, on the 29th day, the summer ritual (dbyar sgrub) begins. There is a ritual of A dkar and a performance of the sDe brgyad bzlog mdo. Besides these, the bsKang 'bum is chanted. In the gNas brtan lha khang, two monks chant the gNas brtan bcu drug, a rediscovery of Sangs rgyas gling pa. The dbyar sgrub is adjourned on the 6th day of the 6th month.

4. In the 6th month, on the 7th and 8th days, there are religious dances. On the 9th day, all the laity and clerics come, making the circumambulation called 'bum bskor. The zhi khro and gsol kha rituals are performed during the day, the bKa' skyong in the evening and the bsKangs 'bum during the night.

5. During the Summer retreat (dbyar gnas) there is a recitation of Sutra, such as the mDo dri med.

6. In the 10th month, on the 23rd day, the ritual cycle of Khro bo is performed according to the local tradition, as well as the ceremony of the Yab sras tshogs 'khor. The chanting of the bsKangs 'bum by two monks takes place separately. On the 29th day, there is a religious dance and the gtor rgyag ceremony. On the 30th day, the gathering is adjourned.

As there are many great and complete murals in the assembly hall and at the porch of Ko bo Monastery, I shall give here the names of the main deities and some remarks concerning their iconography.

The four great local deities (gnyan chen sde bzhi):
1. rMa chen sPom ra: a deity riding on a white horse
2. Thang lha Yar bzhur: a deity riding on a red horse
3. Ti se: a deity riding on a snow lion
4. Yar lha Sham po: a deity riding on a dragon

The local deities of the holy mountains surrounding Ko bo Monastery:
1. sMug po ri btsun (alias Brag btsan thog rgod 'bar ma): a goddess with one head, two arms and a red body. She holds a white conch in her right hand and a gem in her left. Wearing a black hat on her head, she is mounted on a black horse.
2. Rin chen 'bar ba, the proprietor of Mount Rin chen 'bar ba: a deity with a red body, one head and two arms. Mounted on a black horse, he exhibits a terrifying air.
3. 'Ga' rgyal Rin chen spungs: a deity with a white body, one head and two arms. He holds a lance with a flag fastened to it in his right hand and a gem in his left. Mounted on a blue horse, he has an air of bravery.
4. sPen ne ri bkra: a deity with a white body, one head and two arms. Dressed in a king’s garment, he holds a gem in his right hand and a lance with a flag fastened to it in his left. He is mounted on a light-bay stallion.

5. Jo mo g-yu rtse: a goddess with a white body, one head and two arms. She holds a lance with a flag fastened to it in her right hand and a vase in her left. Mounted on an antelope, she has a peaceful appearance.

6. Ri dmar dBu lha btsan rgod: a deity with one head, two arms and a conch-like white body. He holds a lance with a flag fastened to it in his right hand and a gem in his left. Clad in a king’s garment, he rides a red horse.

7. dMag dpon rTa rgod 'bar ba: a deity with a white body, one head and two arms. His right hand is clenched in a fist and in his left hand he holds a gem. Standing on a blazing fire, he shows extreme bravery.

8. sTag lo kha yan: a goddess with a yellow body, one head and two arms. She holds a sword in her right hand and a gem in her left. Mounted on a tigress, she is in an extreme rage.

9. rDzong dmar: a deity with a red body, one head and two arms. He holds a lance with a flag fastened to it in his right hand and a lasso in his left. Riding a reddish-brown horse, he is in a rage.

10. Grogs rdis Nor skyong dpal ldan: a deity with a white body, one head and two arms. He holds a vase in his right hand and a gem in his left. Clad in a nomad’s garment, he sits peacefully on a cushion.

11. Rag pa g-yu rtse: a deity with a blue body, one head and two arms. He holds a lance with a flag fastened to it in his right hand and a gem in his left. Riding a light-bay stallion, he exhibits an air of bravery.

12. sTag thus bon mtshan: a deity with a blue body, one head and two arms. He clenches his right hand while holding a vase in his left.

13. sTag thus bon rgan: a deity with a white body, one head and two arms. He holds his hands in the manner of a meditating monk.

14. rTa sgo: a deity with a white body, one head and two arms. He holds a drum in his right hand and a flat gold bell in his left. Riding a divine yak, he exhibits an air of dignity.

15. Gangs rgyal: a deity with a white body and plaied hair. He has one head and two hands. His right hand holds a lance with a flag fastened to it and the other holds a gem. He is mounted on a light-bay stallion.

There are also murals of the thirteen mGur lha:

1. gNyan rje Gong sngon, mounted on a red Garuda
2. gTsang lha Bye yug, on a white horse
3. Srog lha Gangs dkar, on a yellow gander
4. sGyog chen sDong ra, on a divine white yak
5. 'Brong nam Yang rtse, on a blue buffalo
6. Dung lha Byang rtse, on a red horse
7. ICog lha Tshal rtse, on a blue dragon
8. IHa ri gYu rtse, on a yellow deer
9. sPom ra Nag po, on a black mule
10. 'Gyu chen IDong khram, on a red mule
11. dByig chen Ra rngam, on a white horse
12. Ba ru Ser glang, on a white ox
13. 'Bri chen sDong ra, on a red horse

The twelve brTan ma goddesses, the guardians of the Bon religion:
1. Kong btsun De mo, mounted on a tigress
2. Gangs dkar Sha med, on a yellow gander
3. rMa ting 'Phrul mo, on a white horse
4. sKyi mthing Ya ma, on a sorrel yak
5. Ma btsun 'Brog chen, on a blue ox
6. rMa ri Rab khyams, on a blue horse
7. IHa ri Ya ma, on a light-bay horse
8. sKyi mthing Nag mo, on a blue deer
9. Gangs kyi gYu sgron, on a blue parrot
10. Ka ga Ser mo, on an antelope (Hodgson's)
11. Kha rag Khyung btsun, on a black mule
12. gDa' la bTsun mo, on a deer

Ko bo Monastery has, moreover, a magnificent mural of 'Ol mo lung ring. People of different countries call it by different names: bDe ba can by the people of U rgyan, Mi 'gyur g-yung drung can by the people of Shar gling, dBang bsgyur 'khor lo can by the people of Byang gling, Me tog bkod pa can by the people of Nub gling, and Yid bzhin bkod pa can by the people of 'Dzam gling.

Further, it was named Sham bha la by the Indian people, Mu khyud gter gyi gling by the Chinese people, dBang ldan 'khor lo gling by the people of Za hor, Gar ma gar shom spro by the people of Yu gur, 'Gyur med 'od ma tshal by the people of Bru sha, Kha la g-yu gshog by the people of Kha che, dPag bsam ljon pa'i gling by the people of Li bal, Nub byang rtag gzigs khyim gyi yul by the people of Zhang zhung, Nub phyogs 'Ol mo lung ring or 'Od mo gling by the people of Tibet, rTag gzigs ga sho nor gyi gling by the people of Mon yul, and dMu yul 'phyo ba gling by the people of 'Jang.

At present there are two lamas in this monastery, Zla grags Rin chen phun tshogs, who is fifty-eight, and Bla chung mKhyen rab rgya mtsho, who is twenty-two in 1998. There are two abbots, dGe legs tshul khrims and rNam rgyal gtsug phud. There are more than eighty monks. In the vicinity of the monastery there are over three hundred households. The population of this area is about 3,500.
The main source of income for the monks is the religious services they perform in villages. The lamas of high rank are customarily paid from fifty to one hundred yuan a day and the common monks from ten to twenty yuan a day.

The location and murals of this monastery possess special qualities that distinguish it from other Bonpo monasteries. This monastery is now undergoing significant restoration and enlargement.

(38) Ka legs gYung drung gling Monastery

Ka legs dgon gYung drung gling is under the administration of the sTeng chen villages. From sTeng chen rdzong, travelling about twelve kilometres westward on the highway, we reach the village of Ra khrom. After crossing a small bridge, a walk of more than half an hour in a south-westerly direction leads us to the monastery. Situated on a hill and surrounded by a number of holy mountains, it lies to the east of the Four Great Sacred Places of Tibet, south of the Thang lha range, on the highland between the rivers rNgul chu and rDza chu, and near sTeng chen Monastery (No.35). It was the place where sPrul sku Blo ldan snying po received the mDo Dri med gzi brjid as an oral tradition and wrote it down.

The monastery was first supported by benefactors gSas sar Nam mka' g-yung drung, the owner of the land, 'Be ru bon srung and sTag rtsa rGyal mtshan. The Shel masters played an important role in the monastery. The origin of the Shel lineage is as follows: long ago in China, there was a man called Kun dga' 'od 'phro. He lived amidst flowers in an ocean that emitted lights. He miraculously produced a white crystal egg from which a little man appeared. He had turquoise hair and a white chin-tuft; he was dressed in white silk and was holding a lotus. He was found by the king of China, who called him Zing ba mthu chen. He became a prelate in the court and came to have the name Legs tang mang po. bSam gtan rgyal mtshan, one of his descendants, migrated to Tibet, where he subdued many gods and demons. He was followed by Khro bo rgyal mtshan and Zhig chung Nam mkha' mtha' bral.

In 1454, Yag snya bSod nams rgyal mtshan founded the monastery at gYang ra brag rtsar. He named the monastery Ka legs gYung drung gling. He raised funds for the commemoration of the great master mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan and made sure that the rituals he established in the monastery closely followed the teachings of the master. There were only seven monks, including the lama Tshe dbang rgyal mtshan of rDzogs mda' and Tshul khrims. There was a complete set of religious objects and implements for making offerings, such as the gandi, a drum, a stone gong and a conch. There was also the tradition of studying the tshad ma logic.

In 1564, reasons for moving the monastery to a new place arose. The old site was small and unsafe. So, in the time of lhun grub rgya mtsho, a discussion was held among all the laity and clergy and it was agreed that the monastery should be moved to Ka bzos sribs. It was therefore rebuilt and the religious objects of body, speech
and mind were installed. Celebrations and the study of the tshad ma logic were re-established. There were about twenty-five monks at that time and the monastery became known even among the people of Amdo and rGyal rong.

There was a series of masters as the head of the monastery:

1. 'Gro mgon bsTan pa 'brug grags
2. lHun grub bzhi
3. gYung drung mi zhig rdo rje
4. Yid bzhin rgyal ba tshul khrims
5. bSod nams ye shes
6. Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan
7. Zla ba grags
8. Phun tshogs rgyal mtshan
9. bsTan 'dzin grags pa
10. Nyi ma bstan rgyal
11. gYung drung rgyal mtshan

However, in 1914, the Tibetan troops led by the commander rTa nag (who were of dGe lugs pa obedience), came to the area and they began to murder many of the local people. They also completely burned the monastery. Phun tshogs bstan 'dzin grags pa (1888-1954) and his three disciples, Nyi ma grags pa, bsTan pa'i rgyal mtshan and gYung drung rgyal ba, could no longer live there. They left for Hor where there were benefactors of the Bon religion.

The teacher Phun tshogs bstan 'dzin grags pa was a capable physician. He was able to cure illnesses of man and animal, and prevent epidemics.

At that time, there was, in sTeng chen, the famous governor-general of Hor, Grags pa rnam rgyal. He assigned A drung to the restoration of the monastery and sent him to Hor in order to bring back the above-mentioned monks. The governor-general ordered the chief of dKar ru and his people to provide labour, as well as to transport the timber that was needed.

In 1914, Phun tshogs bstan 'dzin grags pa himself laid the foundation of the main hall. He maintained the monastic tradition of sMan ri as was established by mNyang med Shes rab rgyal mtshan. He also established the study of the five minor and five major sciences, the summer and winter festivals for fifteen days each and the dgu gtor rite based on Khro bo and Phur pa, as well as the chanting of the bKa' skyong.

There were two gilt-bronze stupas in the form of gYung drung bkod legs and a statue of rNam rgyal as tall as a two-storey house. He also had new copies of the bKa' 'gyur and bKa' brten made and obtained new offering implements, as well as having thangka made. New monk quarters were built. At that time, there were more than seventy monks in the monastery.
A reliquary gilt-bronze stupa of Phun tshogs bstan ’dzin grags pa (1888-1954) as tall as a two-storey house was made.

A prayer for a quick birth of his reincarnation was offered, in consequence of which his reincarnation was born in 1956. In the process of searching for the reincarnation, Ka legs Monastery made offerings of twelve thousand sacrificial cakes (tshogs) to the tutelary deity Phur pa and to the protective deities. It was known that the reincarnation himself said, “I am going to Ka legs”, and showed many miraculous signs, which were actually heard by the attendant monks. The father of the reincarnation, who was called Tshang stobs rgyal mtshan, belonged to the lineage in which Me ston Shes rab ’od zer in Yar ’brog was born and the mother belonged to the lineage of Zhig po. At that time there were about seventy monks in the monastery. Among them were Rin chen tshul khrirns, bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, Ye shes dbang ldan and bZod pa mthar phyin, who were all very learned, having studied logic and Sanskrit, as well as being accomplished in meditation according to the Oral Tradition of Zhang zhung.

In short, this monastery has experienced rises and falls in the course of its own history, but it had the capacity to produce a series of eminent monks who were able to uphold the Bon doctrine and it is one of the oldest and important Bonpo monasteries.

The monastery is surrounded by the following sacred sites: Sa yi brag ri sgor mo, where the mDo Dri med gzi brjid was written down by Blo ldan snying po; Sa sho mda’, where there is the self-risen Ma tri mantra and swastika; bDe chen lha ri gnam rdzong; Chu na ma; and the holy mountain Dong rdzong smug po mched brgyad, regarded as the site blessed by Dran pa nam mkha’ and his son Tshe dbang rig ’dzin. There is a place called gYang ra nang, which was the previous site of the monastery.

Before 1959, there were seventy monks in the monastery. At present there are sixty-two, including the lama Tshe dbang stobs rgyal. Rituals are performed according to the old custom, and all the religious objects, murals and the like in the assembly hall are kept in reasonably good condition.

(39) sMon rgyal bla brang

This is a residence of an important lineage and is under the administration of the sTeng chen villages. It is located four kilometres to the south of the rdzong. It was established in 1842 by Nam mkha’ dbang. Before 1959, there were seven monks in the residence. At present there are no more than seven monks and a lama. It is very limited in scale, and in poor condition in every respect.

(40) Nag ru Monastery

The monastery is usually known as Nag ru dgon bSam gtan gling.
From sTeng chen rdzong, travelling three kilometres eastward on the highway, turning right, then southward to cross a bridge and travelling another five kilometres, we reach IHa mthong village, which lies at the foot of a mountain. It takes an hour on foot to reach the monastery from the village, climbing up the mountain behind the monastery. There is another route that leads to it from its front side.

Nag ru Monastery was founded in 1751 by Li shu stag ring. The present lamas are Pad ma kun legs and gYung drung grags pa. Before 1959, there were 105 monks in the monastery. At present there are forty.

The successive heads of the monastery were as follows:
1. mTha' zhu bDud 'dul sprul sku
2. bZod pa
3. Pad 'byung
4. sTag dbang
5. Grags sdis
6. gYung drung grags pa
7. Pad ma kun legs

The main religious object of this monastery was the gilt-bronze statue of Li shu stag ring. There were also statues of the four deities Srid rgyal, bTsan and bDud. The monastery obviously followed the tradition of sMan ri Monastery (No.1).

The monastery is surrounded by the following sacred sites: The mountain behind the monastery is called rDzong gseb, whose proprietor is Ba lha btsan. There are caves regarded as those of Dran pa nam mkha', sTag la me 'bar and gShen gSang ba 'dus pa, and footprints of a hawk, a falcon and a wolf.

As daily activities, in the morning the monks recite the 'Zlrhogs 'don and perform the bsang ritual, at midday the ritual texts of dBal gsas, and in the evening those of Byams ma and sTag la.

The monastery performs the following annual services:
1. In the 1st Tibetan month, from the 1st to the 3rd day, they recite the Klong rgyas.
2. In the 4th month, from the 13th to the 16th, they recite the bDe shegs bsdus pa.
3. In the 5th month, from the 26th to the 29th day, there is the commemoration of an abbot.
4. In the 9th month, from the 22nd to the 29th day, they perform the dgu gtor rite.

For the main source of income, the monks and lamas must go out to perform religious services in villages, which comes to no more than ten yuan every four days. This monastery has fallen into decay. At present the only religious objects are
two masks and two drums, one big and one small.

(41) Zhe nang Monastery

The monastery’s full name is Zhe nang dgon gYung drung dpal ri.

From sTeng chen rdzong, Zhe nang Monastery is reached by travelling three kilometres eastward on the highway and another eight kilometres along the waterway on the left. It is located to the west of the river Zhe zhung, in front of the mountain Gangs chen dbang po. It is a place of beauty and interest, surrounded by glorious forest-covered mountains, and the harmonious singing of birds is heard.

This monastery was founded in 1735 by Bru zhig Ybn tan rgya mtsho. It was the seat of the Khyung spru1 series. Later it was maintained by the hermits gYung dga’ Rinpoche and rNal ’byor bZod pa Rinpoche. The latter undertook its renovation.

The lineage of Khyung sprul starts with the sage Kun dkar 'Od ldan and then later continued as follows:
1. gYu sgra snying po
2. Shes rab blo ldan
3. Grags pa rgyal mtshan
4. lI Hun grub rgyal mtshan
5. gYung drung phun tshogs
6. gYung drung bstan ’dzin phun tshogs
7. Gangs rgyal who was four years old in 1998

Around the monastery are the following sacred mountains: Mount Gangs chen dbang po, regarded as the abode of Dran pa nam mkha’ and his twin sons Tshe dbang rig ’dzin and Pad ma ’byung gnas, is situated at the back of the monastery; to its right is Mount gYag se, to the left, Ra mdung, and in front, sPen ne ri bkra. There are also the two lakes of sPas thang mtsho, the large and the small.

The monastery has the following religious objects: a relic of sTon pa gShen rab as big as a hen’s egg, a conch made of his teeth and a tooth of bZod pa Rinpoche. Before 1959, there were 130 monks in the monastery. At present, there is the lama ’Chi med rig ’dzin and more than eighty monks.

(42) Zhu tshang Monastery

Zhu tshang Monastery is in INga stod village, sPa zla xiang. The xiang lies seventy-six kilometres west of sTeng chen rdzong. To reach INga stod village, a further ten kilometres of difficult driving northward is required.

This monastery was founded by bsTan ’dzin grags pa in 1567. Before 1959, there were sixty monks in the monastery. At present there are sixty-one. There used to be three lamas, but now only one. The condition of this monastery is reasonably good in many respects, like the assembly hall, the temple and the religious objects. The main source of income is, as with other Bonpo monasteries, the performance of
religious services in villages.

(43) Ri dmar Monastery

Ri dmar Monastery is in Wang khog village, Khri rdo xiang. From the rdzong, after travelling sixty-five kilometres westward on the highway, another two-hours eastward and towards the mountain pass is required to reach Wa khog village.

This monastery was founded by Shel rgya Shel zhig dbu dkar in 1573. Before 1959, there were eighty monks in the monastery. At present there are no more than twenty monks and one lama. The temple and religious objects of this monastery are in a somewhat poor condition. They have no source of income other than the religious services the monks perform in villages.

(44) sGang ru Monastery

The monastery is known as sGang ru dgon Dar rgyas. It is situated to the east of Srib mda’ village in Khri rdo xiang. From the rdzong to Khri rdo xiang is a distance of sixty-five kilometres along the main road. From there, it is five kilometres further to Srib mda’ village.

This monastery was founded by Rin chen bstan 'dzin in 1310. Before 1959, there were eighty-seven monks in the monastery. At present there are fifty-six monks and one lama.

(45) Be sgo Monastery

Be sgo Monastery is situated in gTarn stod village, in gTam stod xiang, which lies to the south of sTeng chen rdzong. It is a distance of forty-five kilometres from the rdzong to the xiang. As there is no road, the monastery is extremely difficult to reach.

This monastery was founded by dBal 'bar stag slag in 1590. Before 1959, there were seventy monks in the monastery and now there are twenty-eight.

(46) rGya sgo Monastery

rGya sgo Monastery stands within gTam stod village, gTam stod xiang. From the rdzong, gTam stod xiang is reached by travelling forty-five kilometres northward, which, however, is very difficult because of the absence of a road to the xiang.

This monastery was founded by bSam gtan tshul khrims in 1869. Before 1959, there were twenty monks in the monastery. At present there are fifty monks and one lama. The condition of the assembly hall, temple and religious objects remains good. Rituals and services have been preserved as they used to be.

(47) gNam steng Monastery

The seat of gNam steng Monastery is a place called gZi, which lies to the
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

south-west of gTam stod village in gTam stod xiang. gTam stod xiang is reached by travelling forty-five kilometres southward from the rdzong. To reach gZi, it is necessary to travel ten more kilometres in a south-westerly direction from gTam stod village, which is very difficult because there is no road.

This monastery was founded by sMon lam 'od zer in 1496. Before 1959, there were twenty-one monks in the monastery. At present there are thirteen monks and one lama. The assembly hall, temple and religious objects of this monastery are in poor condition.

(48) dMu g-yad Monastery

dMu g-yad Monastery is located to the south-east of gNu khug village in gTam stod xiang. It is a distance of forty-five kilometres from the rdzong to gTam stod xiang. From the xiang, the monastery is reached by travelling four kilometres in a south-easterly direction. As there is no road to this xiang, it is very difficult to reach the monastery.

This monastery was founded by Kun dga' rgyal mtshan in 1910. Before 1959, there were forty-five monks in the monastery. At present it is taken care of by seventeen monks and one lama, who maintain the time-honoured customs of Bonpo rituals and services. The assembly hall, temple and religious objects are in reasonably good condition. The monks have no source of income other than performing religious services in villages and support from each household.

(49) Yang rdzong Monastery

The location of Bya ze Yang rdzong Monastery is east of Kha thang village in a place called Bya ze which is in Ser tsha xiang. From the rdzong, it is reached by driving forty-five kilometres in a north-westerly direction.

This is a magnificent monastery. It was founded by Khyung po 'Bum rgyal grags pa in 1413. sPru1 sku Blo ldan snying po came to this monastery and he is said to have been aided by the local deities in his efforts to improve the monastery. By miraculous means, he constructed the magnificently-designed main hall on top of the high craggy hill. It had many sacred objects.

Before 1959, there were 350 monks in the monastery. Now there are seventy monks and three lamas.

(50) Tsha ne Hermitage

This hermitage is located to the east of Ru pha village in Ser tsha xiang. From sTeng chen rdzong, Ser tsha xiang is reached by driving forty-five kilometres in a north-westerly direction. Travelling another three kilometres eastward from the xiang one reaches Ru pha village.

The hermitage was established by Shes rab phun tshogs in 1838. Before 1959,
there were ten hermits in the hermitage; now there are five.

(51) Ma rdzong Monastery

Ma rdzong Monastery is situated to the west of 'Bu tshab village in Ser tsha xiang. It is a distance of forty-five kilometres from the rdzong to Ser tsha xiang. From there to 'Bu tshab village is a further five kilometres. As there is a road, it is reasonably convenient for cars to reach the village.

This monastery was founded by gYung rgyal in 1774. Before 1959, there were forty-five monks in the monastery. At present there are twenty-one monks and one lama.

The temple and religious objects of the monastery look reasonably good. Similar to other Bonpo monasteries, the monks have no means of earning a living other than performing religious services in villages and gathering support from their own parents and relatives.

(52) Phug leb Monastery

Phug leb Monastery is situated to the west of 'Bu tshab village in Ser tsha xiang. Ser tsha xiang is forty-five kilometres north-west of the rdzong. 'Bu tshab village is five kilometres from the xiang. As there is a road, it is a relatively convenient trip.

This monastery was founded by Khyung po 'Bum chen in 1413. Before 1959, there was one lama and two hundred monks in the monastery. At present there are twenty-one monks and one lama. This monastery, being one of the centres of the Khyung lineage, follows the old school of Bonpo tradition. The assembly hall, temple and monks' cells are elegantly made on a grand scale, and it has a great number of statues of sTon pa gShen rab, Dran pa nam mkha', sTag la me 'bar and rNam rgyal. There are many books of excellent quality.

Like all other Khyung po monasteries, rituals and services are held many times a year. Various aspects of this monastery, such as the temple and religious objects, are kept in relatively good condition.

(53) Kha spungs Nunnery

Kha spungs Nunnery is located in Kha spungs village in Ga ngad xiang. From sTeng chen rdzong, travelling more than eighty kilometres westward on the main road and then more than ten kilometres further northward, one reaches Kha spungs village, in the south-east part of which lies Kha spungs Nunnery.

The nunnery was founded by Tshul khrims dbang mo in 1928. Before 1959, there was the head nun and twenty-two other nuns in the nunnery. At present there are twenty. The assembly hall, temple and the religious objects of the nunnery are in fairly good condition. The activities, such as annual religious services, have
been successively preserved. As the nunnery has no property, for their living the nuns must receive support from their own families and earn money giving religious services in villages.

(54) Mar khu Monastery

Mar khu Monastery is located to the west of Ngas pa village in Ga ngad xiang, sTeng chen rdzong. From the rdzong, Ga ngad xiang is reached by travelling more than eighty kilometres westward on the main road and then more than ten kilometres northward. Ngas pa village is a further five kilometres from the xiang and the monastery lies to the west of the village.

This monastery was established by lHun grub rgyal mtshan in 1691. Before 1959, there were thirty-nine monks in the monastery; now there are twenty-five. The condition of the assembly hall, temple and religious objects is reasonably good. The monks perform the bsang ritual every morning and other rituals every evening. Their source of income is the same as other small Bonpo monasteries.

(55) rTse drug Monastery

rTse drug Monastery is situated in Sa sgang xiang in sTeng chen rdzong. Travelling thirty kilometres in a south-easterly direction from the rdzong, one reaches the foot of the hill on which rTse drug Monastery is located. It is a two hour’s traverse on horseback from the west side of the hill up to rTse drug Monastery at the top.

All around the monastery is a land of great beauty where birds, big cuckoos and small Jon mo, are heard singing. Along the mountains and gorges stretching right and left, there are many legends woven around Ge sar, the King of Gling, and Seng lcam brug mo, his wife. There are also numerous tales of the local deities.

The monastery was founded by Blo idan snying po in 1383. It is one of the places blessed by innumerable sages and is often called Shel le rdzong drug. Its formal name is Shel brag gShen bstan Dri med gling. It is regarded as one of the five holy places in the world:

“Ri bo rtse lnga, abode of the mkha’gro in China,
rTsa ra’i tsha khang, abode of the mkha’gro in India,
Me tog spungs mdzes, abode of the mkha’gro in Orgyan,
Bho di, abode of the mkha’gro in Shambhala,
Shel le rdzong drug, abode of the mkha’gro in Tibet…”

“The hill at the back looks like an elephant lying,
With a gem held in its mouth.
The hill to the right looks like the rising moon,
With little stars in the sky.
The hill to the left looks like a snow lion leaping,
With turquoise mane on its chin.
The mountain range looks like white silk spread…"

The monastery is surrounded by many marvelous signs and self-grown objects. Beneath the heap of boulders in front, there is a footprint of sTon pa gShen rab the length of a cubit, which is still visited by devotees. At the back of the monastery is a self-grown statue of rGyal ba rgya mtsho, a miraculous foot print of sTon pa 'Chi med gtsug phud and the self-grown letters A and Ma as evidence of teachings of Buddha having been spread. On a rock regarded as the throne of Bla chen Dran pa nam mkha’ there is a self-grown swastika and a self-grown letter A. To the left of the craggy hill is a self-grown statue of mkha’ ‘gro Seng gdong ma. In front of the monastery there is a cemetery called Dul khrod bsil ba gling. Beside it is a large rock resembling a human lying on his back; it is regarded as the seat the mkha’ ‘gro Seng gdong ma.

On the surface of a boulder is a verse that Sangs rgyas gling pa wrote with his fingers, as if he were drawing in mud:

“All the virtuous work that I have accomplished
with my body, speech and mind in sincerity,
I share it with the sentient beings of the three realms,
May it aid them all to purify all their misdeeds, and
Rapidly obtain Buddhahood, endowed with three perfect bodies!”

On the surface of another boulder within an arrow’s range, there are the self-risen letters Ya, Ra, Kha, Sru and A, which can actually be seen. On the surface of the high crag Bon ri, there are clear footprints and letters, around which is a self-grown statue of Khro bo gTsog mchog mkha’ ‘gyings and a statue and a mandala of Sangs rgyas sman bla. Moreover, in rTa rgyas rdzong, there is a cave of Gyim tsha rma chung with a spring in the middle of it, a self-grown conch on the peak of Shel brag dri med dngos dga’, and caves of Dran pa nam mkha’, Tshe dbang rig ‘dzin, Padma ’byung gnas and Blo ldan snying po.

Blo ldan snying po, founder of the monastery, was of the dBra clan. He was born in 1360 in Khyung po. From childhood he naturally displayed cleverness and dexterity unlike other children. He quickly mastered writing and reading. He was such a miraculous one that he inspired awe and respect in the minds of the people at the first sight of him. He met the scholar Rin chen blo gros, and in his presence took monastic vows and was given the name dBra btsun Nam mkha’ rin chen. He became an eminent scholar versed in Sutra, Tantra and Mind.

In a vision, he received an oral transmission, which he wrote down, filling fifty-five volumes. They are about the Bon doctrine and the deeds of sTon pa gShen rab, such as the following works on Sutra: Dri med gzi brjid in twelve volumes, mTshan mdo in six volumes, lHun po brtsegs mdo, bKra shis dal ‘bar khab and Ma tri rin chen sgron ma. There were also works on Tantra: dBal gsas rtsod zlog, Phur
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pa spyi ’dul gshed damar, gSang mchog rig pa khu byug and Thabs chen mkha’ rgyud.
He wrote other works on Dran pa nam mkha’, the local deities of the place, as well as various religious songs (mgur) and instructions (zhal gdams).

He had a number of statues and stupas made, as well as a copy of the Khams chen in gold. He practised meditation in other sacred places, such as Bya ze yang rdzong.

His close disciples were sGo rigs rGyal mtshan ’od zer and ’Be tsha Grags rgyal. Other disciples were Khyung po Yon rin, sTogs ldan Nam mkha’ rin chen of A ba, rGya ra bSam gtan rgyal mtshan, rGya po Rin chen ’od zer rgyal mtshan, Gru zhig Nam mkha’ ’od zer and La dpyil rGyal mtshan ’od zer. Having completed these deeds, Blo ldan snying po passed away.

The reincarnation of Blo ldan snying po was Mi shig rdo rje, who produced fifteen volumes of writings on Bon doctrines, including the sNyan brgyud zhi khro dgongs ’dus.

The Third Blo ldan snying po was Sangs rgyas gling pa, who greatly developed rTse drug Monastery. His benefactors were the chiefs of Khyung dkar, Khyung nag and Khyung ser in the Khyung po region. He was invited to go to rGyal rong by the king of dGe bshes. In rGyal rong he gave teachings to the people. When he was about to return to rTse drug Monastery, he was invited to the hall rNam rgyal khang bzang in the palace of the dGe bshe king. The king gave him the following gifts: an image of rGyal ba rgya mtsho that uttered words by itself, a pair of dragon-figured cymbals and a bronze gong named Khro chen dgu ’phar ma. The king also called on thirty young men to be ordained and become monks of rTse drug Monastery.

The king of Brag steng gave Sangs rgyas gling pa the following gifts: thirty pairs of cymbals and thirty pairs of little flat bells of the Bon tradition. The king of Rab brtan gave him a large pair of cymbals named IHa mo rang grags and another called Srid pa rang grags, a large flat bell, canopies called rTa rgyugs ma and Khyung lnga ma, and the curtain called Seng thod ma. The Chinese emperors gave him large plaques (pan), on which there were words in Chinese characters written in gold.

Sangs rgyal gling pa, who was venerated by all, wrote many works, which are in two categories. First, the Oral Traditions he received, which are as follows: gNas brtan bcu drug, gSang mchog rol pa, Dran pa bdud ’dul, Gu ru zhi drag, Tshe dbang g-yung drung, Gur khang, sTag la, and rDzong ’phrang le’u gsun pa. Second, the texts he rediscovered, which are as follows: Tshe sgrub rdo rje’i go khrab, Bla ma dgongs ’dus, bKa’ thang kun snang gsal sgron and Che mchog dran pa drag po.

There were also sacred objects that he rediscovered: a blue statue of Pad ma ’od ’bar; a skull of the Brahman; a figure of the mkha’ ’gro Thugs rje kun sgrol and her belongings, such as her flat bell, dagger and vajra; as well as the tsha tsha image that belonged to Vairocana.

Sangs rgyas gling pa, the great treasure-rediscoverer and savior of beings,
having carried out the keeping, defending and spreading of the doctrines of Bon, and having done great deeds for sentient beings, finally passed away.

Sangs rgyas gling pa’s successors at the monastery were:
1. dMu btsun Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan
2. Mi pham ’gro ba’i mgon po
3. Zhu sprul bSod nams dbang rgyal
4. Me ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan
5. Pad ma gar gyi dbang phyug
6. sNyan rgyud dPal ’bar stag slag
7. bSod nams blo gros dbang gi rgyal po
8. Khyung dkar Yon tan

Me ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, the fourth in the line, was regarded as the embodiment of Dran pa nam mkha’i. He gave up eating food, yet lived on at rTse drug for a long time. He established the hermitage of Gyim shod yang dben mthong grol near the monastery.

In 1926, Nyag gter gSang sngags gling pa was invited to the monastery. He rediscovered various texts from the cave called Seng ge g-yu rtse and he established in the monastery the “religious dance of the 10th day” and the sman sgrub ceremony. On this occasion there were over five hundred monks and nuns, a larger number of pilgrims, plus the local people all gathered together. The number of Bonpo pilgrims and spectators rose to nearly one hundred thousand.

In 1934, Kun grol hum chen ’Gro ’dul gling pa was invited to the monastery. On this occasion, when he gave teachings concerning the Zhi khro, there were people from Hor, Khyung po and Tsha ba rong; about 700 monks and nuns came to listen.

The monastery also invited Khyung nag Tshul khrims phun tshogs - a disciple of ’Ja’ lus pa Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan - who gave extensive teachings there and initiated the making of copies of the bKa’ gyur and bKa’ brten, consisting of five hundred volumes, and paintings of more than fifty thangka of the life of Sangs rgyas gling pa; as well, he initiated the restoration of temples. His disciples were Phun tshogs dbang rgyal, Tshul khrims dar rgyas, bSod nams blo gros dbang gi rgyal po (the fifth rebirth of Sangs rgyas gling pa), Gar dbang rNam rgyal gYung drung rgyal mtshan and Tshul khrims mam rgyal.

gYung drung bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan and Tshul khrims mam rgyal are presently resident in the monastery. They have set up a new monastic school there, in which they have established the practice of meditation based on the Che mchog dran pa drag po, and the performance of the tshogs ’khor ceremony on the 10th, 15th and 22nd day of every month. There are seven permanent resident monks.
The monastery has many invaluable religious objects:

In the gSer gdung khang: a solid gold reliquary stupa of Sangs rgyas gling pa in the form of gYung drung bkod legs as tall as the ceiling, which contains his remains; a reliquary stupa of Sangs gling Pad ma ma dbang; a statue of Tshe dpag med made of a mixture of medicine and clay; a statue of Sangs gling nga 'dra ma carved by 'Gro mgon; and murals depicting the life stories of Sangs rgyas gling pa.

In the bKa’ 'gyur khang: a statue of sMon lam mkha’ yas as tall as a two-storey house, its back curtain adorned with the assembled deities of Cho ga bcu gnyis; and murals depicting the twelve deeds of sTon pa gShen rab.

In the bedroom: a bronze image of Guru Rinpoche; images of him in eight forms, made of dzi gim (red gold); and murals of Mi shig rdo rje and the Bonpo deities, including sMra ba’i seng ge, Gu ru Drag dmar and dPal mgon bdun cu.

On the outer walls of the bedroom: murals of the Sixteen Arhats, the thousand images of sTon pa gShen rab, Guru, Nyi pang sad, the guardian of rTse drug and Me srung ral gri.

In the 'Tshogs chen lha khang: a life-sized statue of Dus kyi ’khor lo; eight pairs of stupas; and murals of the Bonpo deities according to the Ma tri rin chen sgron ma by Blo ldan snying po, Phur pa, gShed dmar and Las gshin nag po chen po.

In the gSeng khang: a gilt-bronze statue of gShen lha 'od dkar of good quality; statues of Shes rab smra ba’i seng ge, Dus 'khor, Tshe dpag med and rNam par rgyal ba, each an arrow’s length in height; hundreds more statues of gNas brtan and others; and murals of the assembled deities of the Che mchog dran pa drag po and of the three Seng, Ma and gShin.

In the Pod brtsegs kun dga’ rwa ba bskang gsol khang: a stuffed image of rGyal chen Shel khrab and the supports of other religious protectors.

In the 'Khor khang: statues of Yum chen Shes rab byams ma and rGyal ba rgya mtsho, made of a mixture of medicine and clay; murals of the Eight Guru; and three conch-shell ornaments.

In the upper storey of the gSeng khang: Nor bu me ‘bar made of gilt-bonze and a banner of victory.

In the back room of the large assembly hall: a statue of gShen lha 'od dkar made of a mixture of medicine and clay; statues of sTon pa Khri gtsug rgyal ba, sTon pa gShen rab and gYung drung mthong grol, each of which is as tall as a three-storey house; 108 stupas and murals of Blo ldan snying po, Mi shig rdo rje, Sangs rgyas gling pa, Kun grol grags pa, bDe chen gling pa and the deities of Cho ga bcu gnyis.

In the bShad grwa’i ’du khang: a statue of Yum chen Kye ma 'od mtsho and a life-sized one of ’Ja’ lus pa Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan.

There are also caves of Mu cho ldem drug, Dran pa nam mkha’, Tshe dbang rig 'dzin, Pad ma 'byung gnas and Blo ldan snying po.

There were six sanctuaries of the religious protectors in the monastery, in each
of which lay many statues beyond all value. Among the objects in these sanctuaries were the following: a word-uttering statue of Gyal ba rgya mtsho made of dzi gim, a cubit in height, which was rediscovered in rGyal rong by Sangs rgyas gling pa; large and small conchs made of the teeth of sTon pa gShen rab, rediscovered at Pha bong g-yag ro in the south by Go bde 'phags pa alias dBang ldan gShen sras lha rje.

There were, as well, the following: the statue of Pad ma 'od 'bar, rediscovered in the dBus phug cave of Bon ri by Sangs rgyas gling pa; a statue of Rig 'dzin Dran pa bdud 'dul, rediscovered in rTa shod dkyil 'khor thang by Blo ldan snying po; a small flat bell worn by the mule of the goddess Srid rgyal drel dmar and rediscovered by gShen chen klu dga'; a statue of Hum chen, the 6th Kun grol; a statue of gShen lha 'od dkar rediscovered at rTse drug by 'Gro 'dul gling pa; and a statue of sTon pa Khri gtsug rgyal ba rediscovered at rTse drug by sPa tshang gter chen. There were also the rediscoveries by gSang sngags gling pa: a bronze statue of Zhi khro gSang ba 'dus pa, two phur pa daggers and a statue of 'Chi med gtsug phud made of iron.

Later a new development took place in the monastery. Gar dbang rNam rgyal and his associates began to take an interest in the teachings of Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan. They began to unify various meditation establishments in the monastery and appointed Khyung nag Tshul khrims phun tshogs as the head of the monastery. Then a new meditation centre was established, where the new head of the monastery began to give teachings based the "Five mDzod" of Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan. His disciples were brTson 'grus rgyal mtshan, sMon lam bstan 'dzin, gYung drung dge legs, sKal bzang g-yung drung and Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan.

The successive abbots of the new establishment were as follows:
1. Khyung nag Tshul khrims phun tshogs
2. brTson 'grus rgyal mtshan
3. sMon lam bstan 'dzin
4. gTsug phud tshul khrims
5. gTsug phud 'od gsal (d.1923)
6. gTsug phud tshul khrims (a second time)
7. gTsug phud tshul khrims continued giving teachings based the "Five mDzod" of Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan.

Annual Services and Rituals at present
1. In the 1st Tibetan month there is the commemoration of mNyam med chen po, based on the Klong rgyas.
2. In the 2nd month, the gDugs dkar cycle is performed.
3. In the 3rd month there is the commemoration of Sangs rgyas gling pa.
4. In the 4th month there is the performance of the rituals for offerings of the sacrificial cake (tshogs) one thousand times to Ma, gShin and Seng.
5. In the 5th month, with the monks from several monasteries, the ceremony based on the Bla ma rig ’dzin ’dus pa is held, and on the 10th day, the tshes bcu ceremony with a religious dance.

6. In the 6th month the summer retreat take place.

7. In the 7th month the ritual based on the Zhi khro dgongs ’dus is performed.

8. In the 8th month there is the performance of the ritual based on the Ma mo rbod gtong.

9. In the 9th month, with the monks from other monasteries, the ritual cycles of Khro bo and Dran pa drag po are performed.

10. In the 10th month there is the performance of the rite based on the rTa mgrin ga ’u dmar nag.

11. In the 11th month the srung zog rite based on the ritual cycle of Phur pa is performed.

12. In the 12th month there is the performance of the rite based on the ritual cycle of Gu ru drag po.

During the months from the 9th to the 12th, all the monks also follow a programme of meditation based on the rDzogs chen sku gsum rang shar by Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan. During this course of meditation the monks practise rtsa lung, gtum mo, ’phrul ’khor, lus sbyong, rlung sbyong, chu sbyong, rlung ras, chu ras, rgyab thur, and bcud len.

rTse drug Monastery had the following branches: Wa dge dgon Phun tshogs g-yung drung gling, rDa shis Bum steng dgon, sBra kho Dar rgyas dgon, Gyim shod Yang dben mthong grol ri khrod, Bon dgon gSas gdong g-yung drung gling, Na ba dgon gYung drung bstan rgyas gling, sBis tho dgon gYung drung lha steng, Lam lha dgon gYung drung gtam brag gling, dByibs dgon gYung drung lhon po rtse, rTa ’tshel dgon, Phug la dgon, Ru tha Ngang rdzong dgon and dGyes ri dgon, all of which were deemed to correctly maintain the tradition of rTse drug Monastery.

The storekeeper and the treasurer of the Bla brang were fully responsible for all the procedure and financial affairs. In the sGrub grwa khang, seven lamas and monks practised the four stages of the tantric meditation while they learn other subjects. Likewise, the abbot and teacher gave lessons to more than fifteen monk students, on the first four of the “Five mdzod” by Shar rdza.

In the sGom grwa khang, twenty lamas and monks, headed by the abbot, practised the rDzogs chen meditation based on the dByings rig rin po che ’i mdzod, one of the “Five mdzod”.

In the Srung ma khang, three monks continuously performed the bskang gso ritual for the Bonpo religious protectors.

In the ’Khor khang, three persons continuously turned the three wheels of rolled scripture. Besides those who had responsibility in the monastery, there were other lamas who had to make visits to the branch monasteries twice a year in order to see
if the monastic codes were observed; others appointed monk officials, exchanged offerings and performed rituals for the people and for the dead. The other duty of these monastic officials was to collect donations.

This monastery’s main sources of revenue were its manors — brDa shes, Kha lung, Wa dge, sPra kho, sBa nag and Brang rtswa thang — which produced as much as 250 khal of seed, and Upper and Lower rTa shod in dKar smad, Kha lung and Wa dge, from which they received payment for the rituals of rain-bringing and protection from drought and hail.

The total grain earning of the monastery was: from Bam sti'ng, Bal tho, Shog lnga, and Chu gzhung. The monastery also received gifts such as rape-oil. When the year’s harvest was bad the monastery lent about 500 'bo of grain to the villages below the monastery, such as Wa dge, for which it received interest.

In brDa shes and other places, the monastery possessed real estate with animals for ploughing, seventy or eighty mdzo mo for dairy purposes and about forty horses and mules for transport.

Two families of herdsmen kept the monastery’s 180-plus yaks and 'bri, and one hundred goats and sheep. In the nomad areas, such as dNgul phug, ‘Gis nang, Om thog kha and brDa ris mdap, the monastery had nomadic people called Thab gsos dud gsum who provided much of the annual expenditure, such as butter for making butter-lamp offerings.

The material revenue of the abbot and high lamas covered the cost of living for about forty monks.

As for the great hermits in the caves of Mu cho ldem drug, Dran pa nam mkha’, Tshe dbang rig 'dzin, Pad ma 'byung gnas and Blo ldan snying po, they were customarily supported by the well-off families, such as the chiefs of dKar stod, dKar smad, sGar khang, Bya ze, and Nag ru.

Before 1959, there were about five hundred monks in this monastery. At present there are six lamas, including Gar dbang rNam rgyal, and about 210 monks. This monastery has an assembly hall with thirty-six pillars, gSer gdung khang, a meditation hall, a college building and other buildings, all of which are adorned with excellent interiors. The main religious objects, of immense value, are as follows: the word-uttering statue of Jo bo nga 'gro, which, having been hidden by many lay and clerical devotees during the Cultural Revolution, was presented to the monastery; a cubit-high statue of Kun bzang rGyal ba rgya mtsho made of rdzi gim; a pair of large and small conchs, which are the transformations of gShen rab’s teeth and his melodic voice; a blue statue of Pad ma 'od 'bar; a statue of gShen lha 'od dkar made of pure gold; a statue of sTon pa Khri gtsug rgyal ba; a statue of Rig 'dzin Dran pa bdud 'dul; a bronze statue of Phur pa ten cubits high; and a seal of Dran pa nam mkha’. All of these can still be seen in the monastery.

Annual services and rituals are performed according to the age-old tradition. In
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particular, in 1984, there was the sman sgrub medicine ceremony based on the dBal phur 'od zer 'khyil ba'i sman sgrub, during which as many as eighteen thousand lay and clerical devotees from Hor, Shog Inga, Lam lha, Khyung dkar, Khyung nag, Khyung ser, lHa ru and Bag sre crowded into rTse drug Monastery in order to receive initiation and the “medicine” distributed at the time, as well as to enjoy the religious dances. All who gathered there made the festival a great occasion.

(56) Wa dge Monastery

From sTeng chen rdzong, travelling south-east for forty-three kilometres on the main road, we reach Sa sgang xiang. Crossing a small bridge on the right, half an hour’s walk eastward leads us to Wa dge Monastery.

This monastery was founded by Blo ldan snying po in 1383 as one of the main branches of rTse drug Monastery. Before 1959, there were forty-two monks and at present there are ten. This small monastery is now in poor condition.

(57) Bya chen Monastery

This monastery is situated in the eastern part of gYam tha village in dMu tha xiang, on the northern edge of sTeng chen rdzong. As it is 170 kilometres from the rdzong to dMu tha xiang, it is difficult to reach unless travelling by car.

Bya chen Monastery was founded by gYung drung rgyal mtshan in 1885. Before 1959, there were sixty monks. At present there is one lama and twenty-five monks.

(58) lHa lung Monastery

This monastery is located in dMu tha village, dMu tha xiang, which is on the northern edge of the rdzong. It is 170 kilometres from the rdzong to the xiang, so it would be very difficult to travel there without a car.

lHa lung Monastery was founded by gYung drung dbang rgyal in 1636. Before 1959, there were six lamas and fifty-eight monks in the monastery. At present there is one lama and thirty monks. The monastery is suitably equipped with an assembly hall, a temple, religious objects and implements for making offerings.

(59) gYu mtsho Monastery

The monastery is located to the west of sPyang tha village, Ga tha xiang. From the rdzong, one reaches Ga tha xiang by travelling 130 kilometres in a north-westerly direction. This monastery is forty kilometres north of the xiang. As there is no road between the xiang and the monastery, it is a very difficult trip.

The monastery was founded by rGyal rong bla ma in 1494. Before 1959, there were ninety-eight monks in the monastery and at present there are thirty. The monastery is fairly well equipped with an assembly hall, a temple and other
buildings. There are religious objects and offering implements appropriate to such an establishment.

(60) Ga shel Monastery

The monastery is in the western part of Shar 'dra village, Ga tha xiang. It is reached by travelling 130 kilometres in a north-westerly direction from sTeng chen rdzong, which is an extremely hard journey because there is no road; one must go on horseback or on foot.

This monastery was founded by Nam mkha' mtha' bral in 1585. Before 1959, there were four lamas and 145 monks. At present there is one lama and fifty-two monks. This monastery is counted as one of the rather large Bonpo monasteries in the northern part of sTeng chen rdzong. It has an assembly hall, a temple, a meditation hall and other fairly large buildings, inside of which are religious objects, implements and the like, which are in good condition. Annual services and the practice of rituals have been, as is the case with the large majority of Bonpo monasteries, maintained in accordance with the old tradition.

(61) Re ne Monastery

This monastery is situated on a hill on the eastern outskirts of Re ne village, Zam zhig xiang. It is seventy-five kilometres from the rdzong to the monastery.

The monastery was founded by sNang zhig Zla ba rgyal mtshan in 1704. Before 1959, there was one lama and 120 monks in the monastery. At present there is one lama and sixty monks.

This monastery is counted as one of the larger Bonpo monasteries belonging to sTeng chen rdzong. The buildings include an assembly hall, meditation hall and a temple, inside of which there are religious objects and implements, all well kept. The practice of annual ritual services has been, on the whole, maintained as it was before.

The lama and monks must earn their living, as those in other Bonpo monasteries do, by going out to perform religious services in villages.

(62) Ngang rdzong Monastery

The monastery is in Ru tha village, 'Bo tha xiang. 'Bo tha xiang is seventy-five kilometres from the rdzong and Ru tha village is thirty kilometres south of the xiang. It is accessible by car.

This monastery was founded by Rin chen rgyal mtshan in 1941. Although there were fifty-three monks in the monastery before 1959, there are no more than fourteen at present. This is a small monastery, with a temple, meditation hall and religious objects in poor condition.
(63) lJong phu Monastery

lJong phu bon dgon Monastery is located to the east of lJang shod village, Sa mdo xiang. From the rdzong, the xiang is reached by travelling south-east for forty-five kilometres on the main road. It is a mere ten kilometres from the xiang to the monastery, but the trip can be difficult because there is no road.

This monastery was founded by Blo ldan snying po in 1446. There were only ten monks in the monastery before 1959. This number has increased to fifteen today. Although this is one of the old Bonpo monasteries established in sTeng chen rdzong by Blo ldan snying po, it has shown little development over the past five hundred odd years.

(64) Zla shel Monastery

Zla shel bon dgon Monastery is located in Zla shel village, Sa mdo xiang. From the rdzong, Sa mdo xiang is reached by travelling forty-five kilometres in a south-easterly direction on the main road, and the monastery is fifteen kilometres from the xiang. However, one may find it very difficult to reach because there is no road from the xiang.

The monastery was founded by Blo ldan snying po in 1446. The number of monks in the monastery before 1959 was thirty-two, which, today, has increased to thirty-nine, plus one lama. Although Zla shel bon dgon is also counted as one of the ancient Bonpo monasteries, the past five hundred odd years have brought it little prosperity. It is now in a rather poor condition, in every aspect of the monastic buildings and religious objects.

(65) sBra hor Monastery

sBra hor Monastery is located to the south of sBra hor village, Gyang sngon xiang. From the rdzong, Gyang sngon xiang is reached by travelling south-east for sixty-five kilometres on the main road. The road between the xiang and sBra hor Monastery, which is just one kilometre, is very good.

This monastery was founded by Blo ldan snying po in 1446. Before 1959, there were fifty-eight monks in the monastery, but now there are only eighteen. Although this is also one of the old Bonpo monasteries from the latter stage of Bonpo development, internal and external affairs have prevented it from developing during the past five hundred odd years, so it is still small.

From sTeng chen rdzong, a six-hour drive eastward on the Nag chu-Chab mdo Highway leads us to Chab mdo district. Then driving another six hours eastward, we reach 'Jo mda' rdzong. It is an extremely dangerous and difficult trip from Chab mdo to 'Jo mda' rdzong because we must cross mountain after mountain.
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(35) sTeng chen Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
(36) sTeng chen Hermitage, A silver pall at the hermitage
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
(37) Ko bo Monastery, Plate 1
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
(37) Ko bo Monastery, Plate 2 Zla grags rin chen phun tshogs, the head lama of the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
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(38) Ko legs gYung drung gling Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
(40) Nag ru Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(41) Zhe nang Monastery, Plate 1
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
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(41) Zhe nang Monastery. Plate 2 Stupas in the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(41) Zhe nang Monastery. Plate 3 bZod pa Rinpoche’s tooth
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
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(55) Tse drug Monastery. **Plate 2** The monastery and its followers' tents
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(56) Wa dge Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
'Jo mda' rDzong

'Jo mda' rDzong lies in the north-east of Tibet. It covers an area of 13,155 square kilometres, of which 77,080 mu is farmland and 10,823 mu is natural forest. It has a population of about 58,000. There are 152 local councils, eighteen xiang, two townships and one city.

'Jo mda' is also called sDe dge 'Jo mda' because the ruler of sDe dge once governed it. In 1909, the self-governing body of sDe dge was abolished and 'Jo mda' began to have close relations with Sichuan province. In 1959 the people's commune of 'Jo mda' rDzong was established.

Historically, 'Jo mda' is a place well known for its handicrafts and other skilled work such as iron-work, silver-smithing and other metal work, as well as wood carving. It is particularly celebrated as being one of the homes of Tibetan musical dramas.

At present in the domain of this rdzong there are six Bonpo monasteries to which many lay and clerical devotees associate themselves. The Sa skya school of Buddhism also flourishes there. The monastic buildings and religious objects of Bon and Sa skya monasteries are in good condition in every respect.

(66) sTag gzhi Monastery

sTag gzhi Monastery is situated near Kha srub village, dBang po steng xiang. From the rdzong, dBang po steng is reached by driving thirty kilometres northward. From dBang po steng, the monastery is a whole day's trip further northward on horseback.

The monastery was founded in 1180. Before 1959, there were five monks in this monastery. At present there are two lamas, sKu gsung blo gsar and Ye shes nyi ma, and thirty monks. This is one of the earliest Bonpo monasteries of the latter stage of Bonpo development. However, it is still rather small because of the rise and fall in the history of the Bon doctrine.

The monastery has fifty statues, including those of sTon pa gShen rab, Dran pa nam mkha' and sTag la me 'bar. It also has about sixty thangka. The main source of income is, as with other Bonpo monasteries, the performing of religious services in villages, from which the monks and lamas make their living.

(67) Zha zhi Monastery

Zha zhi Monastery is situated in Khra dge xiang, which is reached by driving forty kilometres northward from the rdzong. The monastery is a whole day's ride on horseback from Khra dge.

The monastery was founded in 1409. Before 1959, there were eighty monks and at present thirty-five. The monastery is one of the old Bonpo monasteries in the Chab mdo region. It is a rather large monastery, but over the past six hundred years, due
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to grave adversity, both internal and external, it has been unable to develop itself. It has the look of being very small from outside. As regards religious objects, it has twenty statues including those of sTon pa gShen rab, gShen lha 'od dkar, rNam par rgyal ba and Byams ma, as well as twenty-odd thangka. The monks raise, as a source of income, sixty-three 'bri and yaks, given by devotees. Besides these, they receive support from households and go out to perform religious services in villages.

**rDis bon Monastery**

rDis bon Monastery is located in the vicinity of Ri mda’ village, Thung phu xiang. Thung phu xiang is within a stone’s throw of the rdzong and Ri mda’ village is seventy kilometres from the xiang. The road between the rdzong and the monastery is reasonably good. One can drive right up to the monastery.

The monastery was founded in 1600 and is situated on the eastern side of the mountain Ma gling khrig bya ba. To the south-west of Ma gling khrig bya ba at sPa rdis steng, there is a large hermitage. To the left of the monastery is a holy mountain called Shugs chen, and in front is a big river called mDo chu, which comes from mDo gzhung, the upper part of the valley.

In the 17th century, when the Be ri king ruled over the region, the master lCe tsha mKhar bu of Mi nyag became the prelate of the king. He established a hermitage on top of the mountain sPa rdis, halfway up the mountain Ma gling khrig bya ba.

In 1641, the Mongol chief Gu shri Khan (of dGe lugs pa obedience), leading his horde, destroyed the monasteries of the bKa’ brgyud pa and Bonpo in the area, including rDis bon Monastery, and overthrew the Be ri king. Later, sTag gzhi bKa’ bo rgyal and Khram Tshe dbang rgyal po, who were disciples of Ba ya dKar ‘dzang and had been hiding themselves when the Mongol horde was about in the region, rebuilt rDis bon Monastery and it became a fairly large establishment. Later, in bSod nams dbang ldan’s time, there were two important residences (bla brang) of lamas in the monastery, one was called rTse gzhung and the other Bla gzhung. There was a series of masters belonging to the Se family:

1. Se zhig Mu la thogs med
2. Se Nam mkha’ thogs med
3. Se kho Nam mkha’ dbang phyug
4. Se kho Ra ma mkha’ spyod
5. Se sprul Tshe dbang mchog legs

At present, there is a monk called rTogs ldan bsTan ’dzin who was sixty-two years old. In spite of his being in the course of three years’ retreat, he was kind enough to grant us an exceptional audience. This monastery is counted as one of the large Bonpo monasteries in the Chab mdo region.

Before 1959, there were forty-four monks and at present there are forty-seven.
This monastery now has an assembly hall, a temple and a meditation hall (sgrub khang), all well designed and spacious. There are religious objects such as statues, scriptures and reliquary stupas.

As for annual services and daily activities, they follow the sMan ri tradition only. In the morning they say prayers, then they chant the Kun rig, followed by more prayers. In the evening they perform the gsol kha ritual to the protective deities, including Srid rgyal drel dmar.

The annual rituals are as follows:
1. In the 1st Tibetan month the ritual of sTag la me 'bar is performed, followed by a five-day ritual of Phur pa.
2. In the 5th month there are commemorations, the observance of the summer retreat, and the performance of rituals based on the Klong rgyas and rNam rgyal.
3. In the 9th month there is a performance of the ritual based on the Khro bo ngo mtshar rgyas pa and the 'cham dance of Khro bo.

(69) sPong Monastery
sPong Monastery is located near Tar grong, sPang ge xiang. The xiang is reached by driving eighty kilometres northward from the rdzong; from the xiang to Tar grong takes several hours on horseback. The long distance makes it difficult to reach the monastery.

The monastery was founded in 1697. Before 1959, there was a lama and eighty-three monks and at present there are thirty. In spite of its long history, it has seen little growth due to the rise and fall of Bonpo fortunes. There is only a temple, an assembly hall and a meditation hall, all very small. Religious objects in its possession include twenty statues, large and small, including those of gShen lha 'od dkar, Dran pa nam mkha' and Yum chen Byams ma, and six thangka. The monastery depends upon ten yaks and a small number of horses and mules for income. The monks must make their living, as in other Bonpo monasteries, by obtaining support from households and by going out to perform religious services in villages.

(70) Bla khri Monastery
Bla khri Monastery is located in the vicinity of Bla khri village, sPang dge xiang. sPang dge xiang is reached by driving eighty kilometres northward from the rdzong. Then it is a few hours on horseback from the xiang to the monastery.

The monastery was founded in 1754. Before 1959, there were eighty monks and at present there are fifty. The head of the monastery is sPrul sku rGyal ba g-yung drung. Its assembly hall, temple and meditation hall are all fairly large. There are many religious objects, including about twenty statues, tall and short, of such figures
as sTon pa Khri gtsug rgyal ba, gShen lha 'od dkar, rNam par rgyal ba, Khro bo, sTag la me 'bar, Dran pa nam mkha', his son Tshe dbang rig 'dzin and Srid rgyal drel dmar, twenty-five thangka and scriptures, including the *bKa’ 'gyur* and *bKa’ 'brten*.

Compared with other Bonpo monasteries in 'Jo mda’ rdzong, this monastery is in better condition in every respect. It has thirty 'bri and yaks, thirteen goats and sheep, five horses and mules, and a car.

(71) dKar tshang Monastery

*dKar tshang* Monastery is located near Bla khri village, like Bla khri Monastery, for whose location, see above.

The monastery was founded in 1696. Before 1959 there were fifteen monks, but at present no more than ten. Although this is an old monastery with a long three-hundred-year history, it is still very small. Its religious objects include the following: seven statues, tall and short, of sTon pa gShen rab and Dran pa nam mkha'; forty thangka; and several books.

For their source of income, as in other Bonpo monasteries, the monks depend on the support of households and earn money by performing religious services among the people in the villages. They have no property apart from eight yaks and thirteen sheep, given by devotees.

From 'Jo mda’ rdzong to Chab mdo, it takes six hours by car. To go up to lHo rong rdzong, we must drive a further seven hours via Ri bo che. On our way, at a pass near Chab mdo, we were all of a sudden struck by a heavy snowfall, which caused us difficulty and risks. Between Ri bo che and lHo rong rdzong the road is fairly good and does not, therefore, present that much difficulty.
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(68) riDi bon Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
IHo rong rdzong

IHo rong rdzong is in the north-east of Tibet. It covers an area of 8,108 square kilometres, of which 85,000 mu is farmland, nine million mu is pastureland and 1,270,000 mu natural forest. It has a population of about 36,000. There are eleven xiang and one town.

During the period of the btsan po, it was under the Tibetan imperial government and later under Mongol rule. Around 1644, the area was incorporated into the land holdings of Chab mdo Monastery. In 1725, control of the rdzong was transferred to the government of Tibet. In 1959, the people’s commune of IHo rong rdzong was set up. The rdzong is within the administration of Chab mdo region.

IHo rong is highly productive. It possesses about twenty mineral veins, such as gold, silver, copper, coal, asbestos and others. Its people are largely semi-nomadic, and the area is home to a great many animals, such as leopards, bears, wild yaks, deer, musk deer, otters and other carnivores and herbivores.

(72) Khra rgan Monastery

The formal name of the monastery is Khra dgon gYung drung kun grags gling. It is also known as Nyi phug sgrub. It is located in Wa sgo xiang, dMar ri qu. From the rdzong, dMar ri qu is reached by travelling twenty kilometres eastward. Then, driving ninety kilometres in a north-easterly direction, one reaches Khra rgan Monastery. The monastery was founded in 1699 by Khra chags med bKra shis rgyal mtshan.

Khra chags med was the son of Gling Ra khra rgen po of the royal lineage of Gling ’Gu zi. During his childhood, Khra chags med lived in Ylig yul. At that time prophecies were made by Ma mchog Srid pa rgyal mo that Khra chags med should go and preach the Bon doctrine in sacred places in mNga’ ris, Western Tibet and Central Tibet in order to establish places for the practice of meditation.

In accordance with these prophecies, Khra chags med visited several sacred places in mNga’ ris, and in particular, IHon grub sgang, the monastery of the Zhu family in gTsang (also known as Ri zhing Monastery, No.4). He obtained initiations and teachings of Bon in the presence of Blo gros bstan rgyal of the Zhu lineage, who upheld the Zhu tradition. Motivated by the prophecies, he went to Khams and searched for a place to settle down. He found the place, where he later founded Khra rgan Monastery, very auspicious. Before he founded the monastery a small religious establishment was already there. It is said that the monastery is called Khra rgan (old falcon) because the mountain behind the monastery looks like a falcon warming itself in the sun.

There was no line of reincarnation in this monastery, but a series of successors. Khra chags med was succeeded by Zhu btsun gYung drung khri bde as the head of the monastery. From him a succession of masters coming from the Zhu family.
followed. The lineage of the monastery was, therefore, as follows:

1. Khra chags med bKra shis rgyal mtshan
2. Zhu btsun gYung drung khri bde
3. Zhu ston Tshul khrims grags pa
4. Zhu btsun gYung drung dbang grags
5. Zhu gYung drung bsod nams
6. Zhu Nyi ma grags pa
7. Zhu Phun tshogs dbang rgyal
8. Zhu Tshul khrims rgyal mtshan
9. Zhu rGyal ba dbang grags
10. Zhu bsTan pa dbang grags
11. Shi cu drung mu
12. Zhu ston gYung drung rgyal ba
13. Zhu Shes rab bstan 'dzin
14. sNan zhig Grub thob
15. Zhu Zla ba grags pa
16. Kun mkhyen Nyi ma bsod nams grags pa
17. rGyal sras Phun tshogs nam rgyal
18. Zhu rNam rgyal dbang grags
19. Zhu lHun grub rgyal mtshan
20. Zhu gYung drung ye shes
21. Zhu Nyi nyi lags
22. bsTan 'dzin lhun grub
23. bsTan pa dbang rgyal
24. A drung
25. Zhu bsTan 'dzin gtsug phud
26. Zhu bsTan 'dzin grags pa
27. Nyan sgom Rin chen rgyal mtshan
28. Zhu ston bsTan pa lhun grub
29. Zhu Khri 'od
30. Zhu khri gYung drung grags rgyal
31. mKhan po sKal bzang g-yung drung

In 1951 mKhan po sKal bzang g-yung drung was still the head of the monastery and his successors right up to 1991 have maintained the tradition of studying, practising and preaching the Bon religion in the monastery.

This monastery is large and its architectural design is elegant. It stands in marvelous surroundings with a forest of many different trees where one hears large and small birds singing here and there. It is a wonderful place of beauty rarely seen elsewhere.

As for religious objects, there are twenty-two gilt-bronze statues such as gShen
lha 'od dkar, sTon pa gShen rab, rNam par rgyal ba, Byams ma, Dran pa nam mkha', sTag la me 'bar, Khro bo and Srid pa rgyal mo. There is also one silver statue, one bronze statue, twelve copper statues, three fine thangka, a reliquary stupa, scriptures and a complete set of ceremonial implements, including a white conch, a pair of cymbals, a large oboe, a trumpet made of bone and a silver incense burner. Before 1959, there were thirty-one monks and this number has been maintained, led by bSam gtan tshul khrims.

Annual Services and Practice of Rituals according to the Zhu tradition
1. In the 1st month there is a congregation and performances of religious dances.
2. In the 2nd month there are religious services for thirty days.
3. In the 3rd and 4th months there is a performance of rituals of sTag la me 'bar for seven days.
4. In the 5th month there is the commemoration of Khra chags med bKra shis rgyal mtshan for two days.
5. In the 6th month there is the performance of the ceremony stong mchod and the observance of the smyung gnas fast.
6. In the 7th month there is the performance of the ritual Ma tri 'bum sgrub for seven days.
7. In the 9th month the ritual cycle of Khro bo is performed.
8. In the 12th month the dgu gtor rite is performed.

Daily activities:
In the morning, prayers are said, followed by the practice of meditation and performance of the ceremony of water offering. In the evening, the propitiation of the religious protectors such as Ma, bDud and bTsan is performed. The religious protectors are known as bka 'skyong. In addition to these religious services, the ritual cycles of Khro bo, dBal gsas, sTag la, Phur pa, Ge khod, sPyi 'dul and Khyung dmar are also performed.

The monastery’s personnel consists of a lama, an abbot, a disciplinarian, two chanting conductors, a storekeeper for the bla brang and two storekeepers for the monastery.

With regard to their source of income, at present the monks themselves raise sixty-two 'bri and yaks. Apart from this, they must derive their living mainly from the support of their own parents and the religious services they perform in villages. They are customarily given a 'bri or a yak, along with one hundred yuan, for a programme of religious service lasting three days, performed by five monks.
(73) Lam lha Monastery

Lam lha Monastery is in Shog lnga xiang, Nag lcog qu. From lHo rong rdzong, Nag lcog qu is reached by driving two hours in a south-easterly direction. It is a day’s ride on horseback up to Lam lha Monastery. There is also a shorter way, from dPa’ shod rdzong.

The date of this monastery’s establishment remains uncertain, but it is counted as one of the earlier monasteries in Khams. Before 1959, there were sixty-eight monks in the monastery. At present there are thirty-three. The condition of the assembly hall, temple and religious objects is reasonably good. As in other Bonpo monasteries, the monks must earn their living by going out to perform religious services in villages as well as receiving support from their own families.

(74) Bal tho Monastery

Bal tho Monastery is near Bal tho village, Shing rong xiang. From the rdzong, Shing rong xiang is reached by driving northward for one hour. Then, to reach the monastery, a five-hour ride further north on horseback is required.

No clear record of the date of establishment of this monastery has been found, but it is said to be one of the earlier ones. At present there are twenty-four monks.

The monastery is somewhat in decline in all aspects of its exterior and interior. Like other monasteries, for means of livelihood it is dependent on support from the monks’ families and going out to perform religious services in the villages.

(75) Brag dkar Hermitage

This hermitage is in Ri dmar xiang, lHo rong rdzong. Ri dmar xiang is reached by driving twenty kilometres eastward from the rdzong.

This is a very small hermitage. Nothing seems to have been written about this establishment before 1959. At present there are three hermits.

From lHo rong rdzong to mDzo sgang rdzong, it is 330 kilometres. Since the region is so mountainous within lHo rong rdzong, travelling can be laborious. Going by way of sPom mda’ airport, the road is easy, but it can take eleven hours.
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(72) Khra rgyan Monastery. Plate 1
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(72) Khra rgyan Monastery. Plate 2 Monks of the monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Plate 3 The Monastery's Lama bSam gtan tshul khrims (right)

(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
**mDzo sgang rdzong**

mDzo sgang rdzong lies in the south-west of Tibet. It covers an area of 11,726 square kilometres of which farmland occupies 42,000 mu, and forest 392 mu. The population of this rdzong is about 380,000, most of which is engaged in agriculture. Forestry and livestock farming are doing quite well. The rdzong has one qu, sixteen xiang and 160 village councils under its direct control.

This rdzong, which had been under the rule of the government of Tibet, was set up as the people's administration of mDzo sgang in 1959. The rdzong is blessed with such animals as wild yaks, leopards, bears, otters and musk deer, which thrive in the vast forest, and, moreover, with considerable mineral resources, such as gold, silver, iron and coal. There are nine Bonpo monasteries in this rdzong. This is the most prosperous rdzong, in terms of Bonpo tradition, next to sTeng chen rdzong.

**(76) sTong mda’ Monastery**

The monastery is also known as mDo dar dgon. Driving for twenty-six kilometres eastward from the rdzong, we come to mDo dar village in dBu yag xiang, from which a one hour's drive up the mountain brings us to sTong mda’ Monastery. This monastery is situated in the midst of several agricultural villages.

The monastery was founded by gTsug phud tshul khrims, from whom the lineage of the heads of the monastery has led down to the ninth. Religious objects possessed by the monastery are as follows: a clay image of sTon pa gShen rab six cubits high; two white stupas, six cubits high; and more than ten masks of various kinds. Before 1959, the monastery had twenty-eight monks; this has now decreased to only seven. The practice of rituals is much the same as those of other Bonpo monasteries.

Fifteen kilometres west of the monastery is a holy mountain called sGro ra Pad ma ’byung gnas. It looks just like a Garuda flying with its wings fluttering. Every year on the 15th day of the 6th month, the local people get together to circumambulate the mountain, perform religious dances and engage in other festivities.

**(77) La ngu Monastery**

The monastery is located near Srib gru kha village, Krung gling kha xiang. The village is fifty kilometres south-west of mDzo sgang rdzong. The absence of a road makes travelling there very difficult. The place called Srib gru kha used to be the site of one of the main ferries across the river rGyal mo rngul chu.

This is one of the oldest Bonpo monasteries and is said to have been founded by Rin spungs dBang rgyal. It stands in front of Mount Rin chen spungs. Initially, it was built on verdant grassland. Later, it was moved to a larger place up the mountain. Though small, La ngu Monastery has special old architectural characteristics. A story
tells why the monastery is called La ngu: at the time of its inauguration, musical instruments such as conch, oboe, drum, and cymbals were played, making the local deities of the four directions and those who resided on the mountain pass (la), cry (ngu) for joy. The monastery’s religious objects are of considerable quality and include statues of sTon pa gShen rab, Byams ma and sTag la me ’bar. There was also an image of the Buddha, said to have descended to the monastery by itself.

In the old days, there were sixty-two monks in this monastery. This number had diminished to thirty-five in 1959, and at present there are only fifteen monks, led by Tshul khrims rnam dag 'od zer. This lama is very learned in the Bon tradition, its history and other sciences.

Practice of Rituals
1. In the 1st Tibetan month, from the 4th day to the 6th, there is the commemoration of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan.
2. In the 3rd month, from the 14th to the 22nd, the ritual cycle of Phur pa is performed.
3. In the 5th month there is the thousand offerings of sacrificial cake to sTag la me ’bar.
4. In the 9th month, from the 1st to the 9th day, the rtsa rlung meditation is practised and from the 14th to the 21st, there is the performance of the gunacakra offerings to Khro bo.

Daily Activities
From five o’clock to seven in the morning, the monks practise meditation. In the evening, from seven to eight, they perform the bsang ritual and recite prayers.

(78) Sa bla Monastery
The monastery is located near gCig yon village, sTobs ’bangs xiang. It is sixty kilometres from the rdzong to the village. As there is no road the trip can be very difficult.

It is said that this monastery was founded in 1497. Before 1959, there were ten monks in the monastery. The number has been reduced to only five now. In spite of its long history of some five hundred years, it has remained something like a small hermitage and has only a few religious objects, such as the statues of sTon pa gShen rab, rNam par rgyal ba, Byams ma and sTag la me ’bar.

(79) Ri sna Monastery
The monastery is located in Krung gling kha xiang, on the eastern bank of rGyal mo rngul chu, in the southern part of mDzo sgang rdzong. In the old days the place was called Rab pa. The distance between the rdzong and the xiang is no more
than sixty kilometres, but it is very difficult to traverse.

No record concerning the date of establishment of this monastery has remained. Still it is one of the fairly old Bonpo monasteries.

Before 1959, there were nineteen monks; today there are ten. In the temple there are just a few religious objects, like the statues of sTon pa gShen rab and Yum chen Byams ma. In terms of facilities, it is poorly equipped.

Rituals are practised in the same manner as those of other Bonpo monasteries. The monks rely mainly on support from their own families for their living and occasionally go out to perform religious services in villages to supplement their income.

(80) mDangs ’phyar Monastery

This monastery is located near Bal stod village, in the northern part of the former Rab pa village, in the present Krung gling kha xiang, which lies on the eastern side of the river rGyal mo rngul chu, in the southern part of mDzo sgang rdzong. It is a mere sixty kilometres from the rdzong to the village, but it is still a difficult distance to be travelled.

There are no historical documents clearly recording the date of the monastery’s establishment and there is little oral information. Still, based on the architectural aspect of the building, it is said to be one of the fairly old Bonpo monasteries.

Before 1959, there were thirty monks, and at present thirty-two. The assembly hall, temple and religious objects are in quite good condition. The monastery’s activities have no unique characteristics, but are much the same as other Bonpo monasteries.

As for their source of income, the monks mainly receive support from their families and the occasional performance of religious services in the monastery or in villages.

(81) Shug rdzong Monastery

The monastery is near 'Os bab village, Krung gling kha xiang. Originally, the present Krung gling kha was called Rab pa, and is located on the east side of the river rGyal mo rngul chu, in the southern part of mDzo sgang rdzong. It is sixty kilometres from the rdzong to Krung gling kha, and 'Os bab village is in the northern part of the xiang, close to Bal stod village. The absence of a road makes travelling very difficult.

It is not clear when this monastery was founded. Before 1959, there were eighty-five monks and at present there are thirty-five. There is an assembly hall, a temple and other buildings of appropriate design and size. There are religious objects of considerable quality, such as the statues of sTon pa gShen rab, Byams ma, mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan and Khro bo. As for scriptures, there is the bKa’
In regard to rituals and services, they practise what is commonly done in other Bonpo monasteries, and have no special activities. For their living, the monks depend mainly on their own parents and relatives for financial support. Occasionally they are invited to perform religious services, such as conducting funerals, which helps supplement their income.

(82) Rab pa Monastery

Rab pa Monastery is located near Rab pa village (which is now called Krung gling kha) on the east side of the river rGyal mo rngul chu, in the southern part of mDzo sgang rdzong. From the rdzong to Rab pa is a distance of only sixty kilometres, but as there is no road, the going is very hard.

Although there is no recorded date for the establishment of this monastery, it is said to be one of the oldest Bonpo monasteries.

Before 1959, there were no more than eight monks, but at present there are fourteen. The name of this monastery is said to be related to the fact that the area where the monastery is located is so large that it would take a day on horseback to circumambulate it. The place is therefore the best among the local areas and that is why it is called Rab pa, the “Best”.

In the temple of the monastery are several statues of sTon pa gShen rab, Dran pa nam mkha’ and Byams ma, a few thangka and Bonpo scriptures. Otherwise the facilities are very poor.

As for the monks’ main source of income, they depend, just as in the other small Bonpo monasteries, on their own parents and relatives for support. Besides this, to make their living, they must supplement this support by going out to perform religious services.

(83) dByibs pa Monastery

dByibs pa Monastery is located near dByibs pa village, which is to the west of Gug pa village in Zhwa gling kha xiang. Zhwa gling kha is situated on the east side of the river rGyal mo rngul chu, in the southern part of mDzo sgang rdzong. From the rdzong to Zhwa gling kha is a distance of more than fifty kilometres. Although the distance is not great, travelling it is very hard because of the absence of a road.

The date of this monastery’s establishment is unknown, but according to oral history it is one of the oldest Bonpo monasteries. Before 1959, the monastery had forty-seven monks. At present, it is a moderate-sized Bonpo monastery of thirty-one monks, with an assembly hall, a temple, monks’ quarters and other buildings. It has religious objects appropriate to its size and needs, such as statues of sTon pa Khri gtsug rgyal ba, Dran pa nam mkha’, his son Tshe dbang rig ’dzin, sTag la me ‘bar and Srid pa rgyal mo, thangka, the bKa’ ‘gyur, and other books concerning religious
practice. Rituals and services are practised in this monastery as they are in other Bonpo monasteries of average size. It has no special activities.

As for the monks’ main source of income, they receive financial support from their own parents and relatives. The monastery itself has no other means of earning revenue. Occasionally the monks are invited to perform religious services, such as funerals, in villages, which helps supplement their income.

(84) ITag tsha Monastery

ITag tsha Monastery is located near Su mgo village, on the bank of the river rGyal mo rngul chu, to the south of Gug pa village, Zhwa gling kha xiang. Zhwa gling kha xiang is in the southern part of the rdzong and Su mgo village is more than forty kilometres from the rdzong. It is a very difficult distance to travel because there is no road.

In spite of there being no recorded date for its establishment, this monastery is also customarily said to be a fairly old Bonpo monastery.

Before 1959, there were seven monks in the monastery, but at present there are fourteen. The main religious objects in the monastery’s temple are statues of sTon pa gShen rab, mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, Byams ma and others, as well as several thangka and books. Apart from these it has hardly any facilities.

As for rituals and services, the monks perform the bsang ritual in the morning and recite prayers in the evening. They perform the common daily activities. There are no rituals or services specific to this monastery. The monks’ main source of income is, much the same as in other poor Bonpo monasteries, financial support from their own parents or relatives. The monastery itself has no means of generating revenue. Occasionally the monks are invited to perform religious services, such as funerals, in villages, which helps supplement their income.

Proceeding north from mDzo sgang rdzong by car, through the grassland of sPom mda’, where an airfield is situated, and along the river rGyal mo rngul chu, one arrives at dPa’ shod rdzong. Driving from mDzo sgang rdzong to dPa’ shod rdzong takes six and a half hours. When we reached the district of dPa’ shod rdzong, the way had been blocked to traffic by road construction, which prevented us from proceeding. After a long wait of five and a half hours, the road was finally opened.
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

(76) sTong mda’ Monastery
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)

(77) La ngu Monastery, The monastery’s Lama tshul khrims rtam dag 'od zer
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
dPa' shod rdzong

dPa' shod rdzong is in eastern Tibet and is part of Chab mdo region. The rdzong was created by the Tibetan government about eighty years ago. It covers an area of 12,564 square kilometres, of which 734,000 mu is forest. It has a population of 33,000 and administratively consists of one qu, one town and fourteen xiang, which contain 125 village councils.

dPa' shod is said to have got its name from the village that used to be near (shod meaning “nearby place”) Mount dPa' rgod. dPa’ shod Bla brang was founded in 1694. In 1959, the people’s administration of dPa’ shod rdzong was established.

This rdzong stretches over the basin of three rivers, rGyal mo rngul chu, rDza chu and ’Bri chu. While higher and mountainous in the north-east, the rdzong contains deep gorges formed along the river rGyal mo rngul chu.

This rdzong is rich in natural resources, such as iron, coal and aluminum, and is inhabited by many wild animals, including monkeys, deer, musk deer, otters, the rna ba (Ovis ammon hodgsoni), wild sheep and wild yaks. Moreover, it is an area highly productive in medicinal materials like the dByar rtswa dgun 'bu (Cordyceps sinensis), antlers and musk, as well as agricultural products.

(85) dBen mdzod Monastery

dBen mdzod Monastery is situated halfway up the hill, to the west of dBen mdzod (Wa ’bru) village in ’Jo ’ju xiang, dPa’ shod rdzong. From the rdzong, the monastery is reached by driving twenty kilometres eastward on the highway and then riding south for six hours on horseback.

This monastery was founded in 1256. Before 1959, there were only four monks, but at present there are twenty. It is counted as one of the oldest Bonpo monasteries in Chab mdo region, but has not shown much development because of the lack of transport facilities and because of other unfavourable conditions. Currently it has an assembly hall, a temple, monks’ quarters and other buildings, and is fairly well equipped with religious objects such as statues of sTon pa gShen rab, Dran pa nam mkha’, his son Tshe dbang rig ’dzin, rNam par rgyal ba, sTag la me ’bar, mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan and Srid pa rgyal mo, as well as several thangka and Bon scriptures.

Rituals and services of this monastery are much the same as those of other Bonpo monasteries of this region. It does not have any special activities.

As the monastery itself has no means of providing a living for the monks, they depend on their own parents and relatives for support.

(86) ’Bur lung Monastery

’Bur lung Monastery is situated halfway up the hill to the east of dBen mdzod (Wa ’bru) village in ’Jo ’ju xiang, dPa’ shod rdzong. From the rdzong, ’Bur lung
Monastery is reached by driving twenty kilometres eastward on the highway and riding south on horseback for six hours.

This monastery was founded by Khro tshang 'Brug lha in 1096. Before 1959, there were only ten monks, but at present there are thirty. This was the oldest Bonpo monastery in the whole of Tibet. The newly built assembly hall and temple are very fine looking buildings. The religious objects include a clay image of sTon pa gShen rab as tall as the ceiling, statues of Dran pa nam mkha’, mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan, Byams ma and Khro bo, as well as several thangka and Bon scriptures.

The monks, like those in other Bonpo monasteries, depend on support from their own parents and relatives for their livelihood, as the monastery has no means of providing a living for them.

(87) bKra shis rtse Monastery

bKra shis rtse Monastery is also called Wa dag bon dgon. It is located near the village of Wa dag in Gla ge xiang, dPa’ shod rdzong. From the rdzong, Wa dag village is reached by driving twenty kilometres eastward on the highway. The monastery is situated halfway up the hill to the south of Wa dag village.

This monastery was founded in 1589. Before 1959, there was a fairly large assembly hall and a temple containing religious objects that included the following: a statue of sTon pa gShen rab as tall as the ceiling, statues of rNam par rgyal ba, Byams ma and the three guardian deities - Ma, bDud and bTsan - each of which was as tall as the ceiling, and other gilt-bronze statues numbering over three hundred. There used to be eighteen monks; at present there are twenty.

The mountain at the back of the monastery is the abode of Dam can Yul lha dkar po, a local deity with one head and two arms. He is depicted as mounted on a nanny goat, holding a knife in his right hand and a black flag in his left. The mountain in front of the monastery is the abode of gZhi bdag Bon thung, a local deity with a blue body. He holds a knife in his right hand and an ensign in his left. The mountain to the right is called lHa g-yag dkar po and the one to the left, rDo rje gzer 'phrang.

As regards rituals and services, in the morning the monks recite prayers, then practise the rtsa lung meditation, followed by further recitation of ritual texts of the tutelary deities. In the evening they propitiate the protective deities, as well as performing the bsur ceremony, which involves casting barley flour into fire.

For their main source of income, the monks depend on their own families for support. Customarily they are not paid for performing religious services in villages, but are paid ten yuan a day for funeral services.

To go to Nying khri from dPa’ shod rdzong, one passes through the regions of sPo smad, mThong smad and Klu nang.

The roads in Khams are fraught with difficulty and extreme danger. When we came to the boundary between dPa’ shod rdzong and sPo smad rdzong, we were
struck all of a sudden by a small flood from above, and our car was stuck in the mud. We were quite helpless and could not move, but after finally getting help from Chinese soldiers, over thirty in number, who dredged up mud and pulled our car up, we were able proceed on our way. As there were no bridges on the way, we fell into difficulty and danger again.

Another time, when in despair, we received help from a Khams pa tribesman with a devout disposition. He guided us along the route, which led us out of danger.

Then again, when we were passing in front of a sand hill on the confines of mThong smad, our car sank into the sand and we had no way to get out of it. A shovel was the only tool we had and we struggled with it to get our car out of the sand. At the same time, rocks began to roll down frequently from above us, so we had to keep watching out for them. At last we managed to drag the car out and headed in the direction of Nying khri.

It took us seventeen and a half hours to travel from dPa’ shod rdzong to Nying khri.
Nying khri rdzong

Nying khri rdzong lies in the south-western part of Tibet, at the confluence of the rivers Nyang chu and Yar lung gTsang po. It covers an area of 10,238 square kilometres, 28,000 *mu* of which is farmland, 565,000 *mu* is pastureland and 5,020,000 *mu* forest. Its population is about 26,000. Administratively, it consists of one town.

In 1959, the three old rdzong — Kong po rTse la rdzong, bDe gling rdzong and Jo mo rdzong — were joined together to form Nying khri rdzong and at the same time its people’s administration was established; but in 1964, the administration was dismantled and Nying khri rdzong came under the direct control of Lhasa. Then, in 1976 the administration of Nying khri rdzong was restored again.

The rdzong is situated along the river Yar lung gTsang po. It contains beautiful mountains and the region is rich in natural forest. Along the river there is good farmland where the agriculture is fairly prosperous, as is the pasturage. Various medicinal herbs grow here, cattle thrive and the area is abundant in carnivores and herbivores. Roads are good for travellers. Moreover, this rdzong has much that is of interest, scenically and historically, including Kong po Bon ri, celebrated in Tibet and beyond.

**Bon ri, the Great Sacred Place**

From rTag gzigs 'Ol mo lung ring, sTon pa gShen rab, accompanied by five attendants, came to rescue his seven horses, which were stolen by the demons of Kong po. sTon pa gShen rab and his attendants travelled down the river Yar lung gTsang po to Kong po, the land of demons. While travelling, sTon pa gShen rab was obstructed along the way by the three evils - klu, bdud and btsan - out of envy, but in spite of all the serious obstacles, he subjugated the land, which belonged to black demons by performing miracles that were beyond all imagination.

Then sTon pa gShen rab and his attendants reached the palace rTse la 'bar ba, where they were welcomed:

“The lady Kong btsun De mo was the first to honour him. Holding a nectar-producing bough of juniper in her hand, she proposed a way in which restitution could be made for the seven horses. The matter was settled through offers of compensation: firstly, by offering the lady Kong bza’ khri lcam to sTon pa gShen rab as his wife; secondly, by offering bushels of gold and turquoise; and thirdly, Kong rje, the king of the demons, offered himself and his subjects, who then became sTon pa gShen rab’s attendants.”

sTon pa gShen rab then buried many treasures, including the gold and turquoise he received, at the foot of the craggy hills that looked like scattered jewels, so that they would be the essence of the soil of the four quarters of Tibet. Saying prayers to the nectar-producing bough of Kong btsun De mo, he thrust it into the ground there
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions as a sign of eternity.

On top of Mount gNyan, he also planted a juniper tree as tall as himself, where handprints of his four distinguished disciples still remain. The tree is called sKu shug Idem drug.

He preached the Bon of the Nine Vehicles and he, himself being the lord of the dMu lineage, identified a mountain and gave it the name dMu ri smug po. This is the central peak of Mount Bon ri. The summit is also called lHa ri gyang tho. He entrusted the local deities who reside on various peaks to guard the treasures he had concealed: gYung drung lha gnyan rtsal as the guardian of treasure in the centre, Gangs gnyan stag rtsi as the king of the east, Nyang lha btsan drug as the king of the north, bDud nag rngams sgra sgrogs as the king of the west and gYu 'od sman btsun as the goddess of the south. Kong btsun De mo is the overall protectress of the place and rDzu 'phrul klu dbang is the special protector of treasures.

The sacred mountain Bon ri and its surroundings became a centre of the teachings of Bon. gNya' khri btsan po is said to have descended from the sky onto the summit lHa ri Gyang tho. He was the first king of Tibet. Co'u and 'Tshe mi were the first religious attendants of the king; between them and the king there was the "priest-patron" relationship. The king and his religious attendants resided at the foot of Mount dMu ri smug po and inspired the spreading of the Bon teachings.

Since then a number of the gshen religious practitioners have come up to this holy place and established places for religious practice. dMu ri smug po, the main peak of Mount Bon ri, is the very highest among the peaks, which include lHa ri Gyang tho, Nor bu ri and gShen ri bde ldan. On the slopes and in the valleys of Mount Bon ri, there were the following religious sites: Srid rgyal, sTag bro sa, dGyes ri, dGon rnying, Srin mo phug, dBus phug, Yang dbes, Bya de phug, lHa ri Gyang tho, gSang gling, Phug gu, Nyi ma phug, sNang ngog, Thugs dkar brag, Brag dkar zhas rjes, rDzong chung steng, Shel sku sbug and the cemetery Mi yul skyid mthing. Mount Bon ri is, therefore, not only a special place for the Bonpo, but Buddhists as well, who join in its veneration.

Mount Bon ri still receives a stream of pilgrims who accumulate merit by making circumambulations and many prostrations. Mount Bon ri and its surroundings present unearthly scenery, with the beautiful high mountains filled with pine trees, bamboo, medicinal herbs, flowers, herbivores and various kinds of birds.

There were periods of great celebration in the vicinity of the mountain. One of the major festivities in a cycle of twelve years was an event called Nyang po lha gsol, held in the tiger year, from the 1st to the 8th day of the 8th month. During this period, people got together in the seven Bonpo monasteries, including sNang ngog, and went through the ceremonies, true to the time-honoured tradition, of initiation, the fortune-call ritual and religious dances. The lay folk also performed dances, horse-racing, horseback archery and the fortune-call parade.
In the mouse year, on the 8th day of the eighth month, there was the performance of the fortune-call ceremony by the religious practitioners, and dances and songs by the lay folk, as in the case of the tiger year. The origin of this festival goes back to a Bonpo hermit:

In the Sixth Rab byung (1327-1386) a lama of Shel zhig from the Khams province rediscovered a crystal image of ston pa gShen rab called Dri med' shel sku, in the place called Shel sku sbug, and took it back to Khams. Similarly, three text-rediscoverers from Khyung po found, in Thugs dkar brag, a conch believed to be self-grown from the teeth of ston pa gShen rab and took it back to Khyung po. Following that, in Kong po, a mountain crumbled, rainfall became rare, fields produced little harvest, disease spread among people and cattle, famine struck and many other disasters ensued, which reduced the people to a state of helplessness. During this time, the hermit dPon gsas Ri pa 'brug gsas was in meditation at the cave Thod g-yu phug in Nying khri. The hermit understood the reason for the disasters and said, “The fertility of the soil had been weakened because of the excavation of the treasures, the image Dri med shel sku and the tooth conch.” He therefore made the people perform the ritual of propitiation dedicated to the local deities and the fortune-call ceremony. When these ceremonies ended, rain began to fall, people had a good harvest and the epidemic abated.

The local people propitiated the goddess Srid pa rgyal mo in her various aspects: at Srid rgyal Monastery, it was dKar mo Srid rgyal; at rDzong chung steng Monastery, sMug mo Srid rgyal; and at sTag bro sa, Srid rgyal drel nag. The people of the three villages of Nya mgor propitiated the goddess A ma Yu mo. They also kept the tradition of performing the bsang ritual on the 15th and 30th of every month at different sacred sites of Mount Bon ri where there were special signs, such as footprints of early sages on rocks. This holy mountain, to which all devotees pay homage and make pilgrimages, is one of the most important religious sites in the world and, as such, it is well known.

(88) Srid rgyal Monastery

Srid rgyal dgon chen is situated close to Nying khri rdzong, halfway up the holy mountain Bon ri. Cars can reach the foot of the mountain.

One of the thirty-seven centres of Bon was rKong yul Se mo thang. These centres were established during the time of Mu khri btsan po, a son of gNya’ khri btsan po. It is at Se mo thang in Kong po that Srid rgyal Monastery is located.

The lineage of lamas of this monastery goes back to Ri pa ‘Brug gsas. He is said to have been the emanation of the tutelary deity sTag la med ‘bar. A historical document states:

“In the land called Bon ri
There will be a hermit named ‘Brug gsas

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Who will possess a ‘magic-stone’,  
Will be courageous and avert wars,  
And guide 300,000 people to salvation.  
Anyone who contacts him will be rewarded.”

This hermit was born in 1270 in rDza rong into the clan of sMa ra. sMa ra is a subdivision of the clan Rang bya. He was the second son of dKon cog dge, the father, and A lcAm U gu, the mother. Having been in religious service until the age of thirteen years, he was given the name 'Brug gsas rgyal. From the time he was fourteen until he was nineteen years of age, he practised meditation. He then listened to various masters in China, 'Jang and Mi nyag. He then became conscious of the impermanence of life. He therefore travelled to Central Tibet and began to practise more meditation, as well as to perform circumambulation around sacred sites such as Ti se, Ma pang, Bye ma g-yung drung and sPos ri ngad ldan. He then travelled down to Kong po in accordance with a prophecy of Srid pa rgyal mo. In 1330, he “opened the door of Bon ri” (that is to say, he identified the mountain), because people had forgotten the fact that the place was one of the thirty-seven religious centres of Bon. This was due to the long period of time that passed since sTon pa gShen rab’s visit to the place and also due to the chequered history of the Bon religion.

'Brug gsas took up residence in the cave gYU phug, near which the three streams of Nyang meet. He remained there in meditation for three years and countenanced deities of tranquil and wrathful aspects from whom he received more prophecies. He was able to make the eight kinds of demons serve him. While devoting himself to retreat-practice of Khro bo and Phur pa on the mountain, he received signs from the goddess dKar mo Srid rgyal for founding a monastery at this place. He therefore founded Srid rgyal Monastery there. The interior and exterior of the monastic buildings were of good design and their religious contents were rich. More than one hundred monks from all directions gathered together there.

He left traces of his body and footprints on rocks around the site of the monastery and passed away at the age of eighty. He promised that he would come back in the form of a bird to see the monastery every year on the 13th day of the 4th Tibetan month. A festival called dGon chen Bya mjal was, thereafter, held on this day and it was the occasion when people went to see the bird.

The line of the heads of the monastery was as follows:
1. Ri pa 'Brug gsas
2. Rag shi Nyi ma rgyal mtshan
3. Bru ston Nyi ma rgyal mtshan
4. La tri rdi rda (Zhang zhung language: Dam pa blo gros)
5. sDong sgom bsTan pa lhun grub
6. rNal 'byor Nam mkha' lhun grub
7. Tshe dbang lhun grub
8. bsTan pa rgyal mtshan
9. gYung drung rnam rgyal
10. Rin chen tshul khrims
11. Kun bzang lhun grub
12. rGyal ba gtsug phud
13. Tshe dbang legs mchog
14. gYung drung rgyal mtshan
15. rGyal ba blo gros
16. Mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan
17. IHun grub dbang rgyal
18. gYung drung dbang rgyal
19. Tshe dbang 'od zer
20. Khyung sprul gYung drung phun tshogs
21. Zla ba don 'grub
22. Tshul khrims blo gros
23. mTha' yas rgya mtsho
24. Nor skyabs Rinpoche

Dam pa blo gros, the fourth in the line, founded the monastery called rDzong chung kha. gDong sgom bsTan pa lhun grub, the fifth, founded sTag rtse Monastery (No.89) in his later life. bsTan pa rgyal mtshan, the eighth, carried out all the duties delegated to him by sPyan gsal Kun 'phel gling, an official serving under the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682). As a reward, the Dalai Lama granted the monastery the special privilege of establishing an independent monastic code, building a rooftop and making a double tamarisk-stems-work on the outer wall of the monastic building. At that time there were four hundred monks in the monastery. Mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan, the sixteenth in the line, founded dGyes ri Monastery. Khyung sprul gYung drung phun tshogs, the twentieth, founded dGon sding Monastery.

At present there are nineteen monks in the monastery. It has a complete set of the printed edition of the bKd ' 'gyur and a complete set of manuscripts of the bKa' brten. Besides these, there are ritual texts and more than two hundred volumes of manuscripts.

Annual Ritual Services

1. In the 1st month the birthday ceremony of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan is celebrated on the 5th day, and the memorial service of sTong rgyung mthu chen was held for fifteen days.
2. In the 2nd month there is a recitation of the bKa' 'gyur and on the occasion of the festival of sTon pa gShen rab’s conversion of demons.
3. In the 3rd month the ritual cycle of one of the five tutelary deities is
Bonpo monasteries’ and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

performed for ten days.
4. In the 4th month, on the 10th day, the birthday of Dran pa nam mkha’ was celebrated; on the 13th, the memorial service of Ri pa ’Brug gsas was held. For the latter, the Zhi khro khri mchod ceremony was performed. This festival, called dGon chen Bya mjal (“Meeting the bird of the great monastery”), was the occasion when the local people would dance and sing, and expect to see the vulture, as Ri pa ’Brug gsas had promised that he would come in the form of the bird every year.
5. In the 5th month, starting from the 5th day, the memorial service of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mthsan was held for ten days.
6. In the 6th month, on the 10th day, the birthday ceremony of Tshe dbang rig ’dzin and Pad ma ’byung gnas was held.
7. In the 7th month, starting from the 15th day, the confession ceremony was held for five days.
8. In the 8th month there was the performance of the ritual cycle of dBal gsas and the offering of the sacrificial cake a hundred times to the guardians of the Bon religion for eight days.
9. In the 9th month, starting from the 13th day, there was the performance of the Ma tri ’bum sgrub ceremony as a memorial service of sTon pa gShen rab for fifteen days.
10. In the 10th month, on the 15th day, a general religious service was held.
11. In the 11th month, there was the performance of the thousand offerings of the sacrificial cake to sTag la me ’bar and the short dgu gtor rite for fifteen days.
12. In the 12th month, there was a the performance of the birthday celebration of sTon pa gShen rab on the 15th day, based on the gYung drung klong rgyas and the dgu gtor rite based on the ritual cycle of Khro bo for fifteen days.

Daily assemblies are held to make offerings to the deities.
Tea is served twelve times a day, and meals with meat and butter are provided according to availability. Apart from this, the monks must make their living by going out and performing religious services in villages and receiving support from their parents and relatives.

(89) sTag rtse gYung drung gling Monastery
sDong sgom bsTan pa lhun grub, the fifth head of Srid rgyal Monastery, was a native of Amdo. He founded sTag rtse gYung drung gling in 1680.

The line of the heads of this monastery is as follows:
1. sDong sgom bsTan pa lhun grub
2. Tshe dbang lhun grub
3. Rin chen tshul khrims
4. sKal bzang lhun grub
5. rGyal ba gtsug phud
6. Tshe dbang mchog legs
7. lhun grub dbang rgyal
8. gYung drung dbang rgyal
9. bsTan pa rgyal mtshan
10. Tshe dbang rnam rgyal
11. Tshe dbang bdud ’dul

This monastery formerly possessed such religious objects as the following: a marvelous precious stone found on the peak of Bon ri by sDong sgom bsTan pa lhun grub; the latter’s image, called ICe me thub; and statues of Phur pa, rTa mgrim and Padmasambhava. There were more than two thousand manuscripts including the bKa’ ‘gyur and bKa’ brten.

At present the monastery possesses relics of sDong sgom bsTan pa lhun grub, a large white conch, more than ten statues, including Phur pa, rTa mgrim, and bKa’ ‘gyur and bKa’ brten. There are no more than twelve monks in this monastery now.

Near the monastery there is a rock-face upon which sDong sgom bsTan pa lhun grub inscribed the five syllables stag, rtse, g7ung, drung and gling with his fingers, and a stone with his handprint on it. At the back of the monastery there is a meditation cave of the four scholarly ones; to the north there is a rock with an amazing shape, called Ye shes dbal mo; up the valley there is the meditation cave of sDong sgoms bsTan pa lhun grub. The area around the monastery is covered with dense forest of various kinds of trees and is considered to be the abode of the three protective deities, Ma, bDud and bTsan. It stands in a magnificent place surrounded by mountains, the abodes of the local deities, including lhA gnyan gYung drung rtse in the centre, rGyal po Kong gnyan rgyal in the east, bDud nag rNgams sgra sgrog in the west, Ma mo gYu ’od sman in the south and Nyang lha bTsan drug in the north.

Services and Rituals
1. In the 1st month there is the memorial service of mNyam med Shes rab rgyal mtshan for six days starting from the 1st day of the month, and the performance of the offering of sacrificial cake one hundred times to sTag la me ‘bar and one thousand times to the protective deities for nine days.
2. In the 2nd month, offerings of the sacrificial cake are made to Ge khod gsang drag for eleven days.
3. In the 3rd month, starting from the 8th day, offerings of the sacrificial cake are made to dBal gsas for ten days.
4. In the 5th month, starting from the 8th day, the ritual of rNam rgyal stong
mchod is performed for seven days.
5. In the 9th month, starting from the 22nd day, offerings of the sacrificial cake are made to sTag la me 'bar for ten days.
6. In the 11th month, starting from the 9th day, the sTag rtse me mchod is performed for seven days.
7. In the 12th month, starting from the 22nd day, the dgu gtor rite is performed for ten days.

As for daily activities, the day is divided into four parts: in the first, the bsang ritual; in the second, water offering and the bsur ceremony; in the third, prayers; and last, propitiation of the protective deities.

The local deity residing on the hill behind the monastery is called Pho lha 'Ba' ba dpal ldan and the local deity of sTag rtse village is the goddess A ma Pad mo.

For their means of living, the monks receive an annual stipend of 2,880 yuan from the lama, and the local devotees offer over ten thousand yuan for the expenses of the performance of the rituals mentioned above.

To go to rTse thang in lHo kha from Nying khri rdzong one takes the route that passes through Glang rdzong. The road is reasonably good, but it is very often winding and, moreover, one must go up and across the big mountain pass called sPor thang la. It can, therefore, take some twelve hours to reach rTse thang.

From rTse thang to sNye mo rdzong is a drive of three and a half hours, crossing the large bridge at Chu shur.
(89) sTog rtse gYung drung gling Monastery, **Plate 1**
(Photo Phuntso Tsering Sharyul 1998)
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

Plate 2 The 'Du khang in construction
(Photo S. G. Karmay 1987)
The juniper tree sKu shug ldem drug at Nying khri
(Photo S. G. Karmay 1987)
Prayer wheels at Nying khri sKu shug Idem drug
(Photo S. G. Karmay 1987)
sGar rdzong, mNga’ ris

sGar rdzong lies in the west of Tibet, along the river valleys of the Seng ge gtsang po and sGar gtsang po, and is one of the eighteen rdzong in this region. It is 17,018 square kilometres in area, 8,900 mu of which is farmland. Administratively, it consists of four qu, one town and eleven xiang. There are thirty-six village councils.

The name sGar is said to have come from the many military camps (sgar) that dGa’ ldan tshe dbang set up in this area as reinforcements for the government of Tibet. After that the area came to be called sGar. The rdzong was created in 1959.

The region of sGar is populated by semi-nomads. There are many livestock animals, such as yaks, goats and sheep, oxen, bulls, mdzo and mdzo mo, horses and mules. There is also a considerable amount of wheat, barley and beans harvested. The rdzong is rich in minerals, including coal, white salt, gold, lead and salt. It is, moreover, the habitat of a great many animals, such as wild yaks, yellow leopards, wild asses, black bears, Tibetan lynxes, antelopes, Tibetan antelopes, foxes and wolves. There are also many unique characteristics of sGar rdzong to be seen in the popular old legends, myths, music, dances and other facets of the culture.

sGar rdzong possesses a number of sites of historical interest, including the monasteries of Dri bda’ spos ri, Gyam smyug lha khang, mDun chu Monastery and Gu ru gyam, the Bonpo monastery. Many of the important Bonpo monasteries can still be visited.

(90) Gu ru gyam Monastery

Gu ru gyam Monastery is located in Mon mtsher qu, sGar rdzong. It is 250 kilometres from sGar rdzong to Gangs sTi se. From there, one must travel sixty kilometres further to Mon mtsher xiang, then seven kilometres to Dri bda’ spos ri, and another seven kilometres westward. The distance is long, but the road is in good condition.

The place where Gu ru gyam Monastery is located is called Khyung lung dngul mkhar, which is one of the oldest Bonpo religious sites. It was there that the capital of the Zhag zhung kingdom was found. It was there too that gShen chen Dran pa nam mkha’, one of the most important Bon masters, flourished. Then the Bon religion’s fortune declined and its religious establishments fell as lamp-light dying from lack of oil. Now they are nothing but names.

In 1936, Khyung sprul ’Jigs med nam mkha’i rdo rje founded the monastery mDo sngags grags rgyas gling at Gu ru gyam. It has now become fairly large and the condition of its buildings, religious objects and offering implements is reasonably good. At present, the monastery is taken care of by the scholar bsTan ’dzin dbang grags, and there are seven monks and three nuns.

In regard to annual services and rituals, those practised at this monastery are much the same as other Bonpo monasteries.
The main Bonpo religious sites in Pu rang rdzong

Pu rang rdzong is in the south-western Tibet. It is 12,497 square kilometres in area, which includes 11,000 mu of farmland. It has a population of 7,300, and consists of three qu and ten xiang. There are fifty-one village councils.

Pu rang is one of the oldest and most celebrated places in Tibetan history. There are a number of sacred sites in this rdzong: Mount Ti se; sPos ri ngad Idan; Mount sMan mo nag snyil, the abode of the goddess Gangs can ma; Gangs tshe ring, where the cave of Mi la ras pa is situated; Mount rTse brgyad, the abode of the goddess Tara; the lake Ma pang g-yu mtsho; the spring mThong ba rang grol, said to be the source of the river Ganges; the cliff Gad pa gser gyi bya phibs; and the lake Gung brgyud dngul gyi mtsho mo. There is also the famous Buddhist monastery 'Khor chags.

Pu rang rdzong is populated by semi-nomadic people, and produces one-third of the grain output of the whole mNga’ ris region. It also has good pasturage for yaks, goats and sheep, cows, bulls, horses, donkeys, mules, mdzo and mdzo mo.

Moreover, this rdzong is very rich in mineral resources, such as iron, white salt and gold, and animals, such as yellow leopards, wild yaks, Tibetan lynxes, wild asses, wild sheep, foxes, otters, antelopes, rgo ba, wolves, wild geese and cranes.

Mount Ti se

Mountain Ti se was, originally, in ancient times, a specific holy place of Bon. With the spread of Buddhism in Tibet, it became a holy mountain of both Bonpo and Buddhists, but due to the history of the Bon doctrine, the monastic communities around the mountain were gradually taken over by various Buddhist orders such as bKa’ dgams pa and bKa’ brgyud pa. The venerable Mi la ras pa even claimed to be the proprietor of the mountain.

Ma pang g-yu mtsho

Ma pang g-yu mtsho is an important sacred site for both Bonpo and Buddhists, and is visited every year by many lay and clerical devotees of Bon and pilgrims from other countries. They make circumambulations of the lake, prostrating themselves with all their devotion.
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngari regions

(90) Gu ru gyam Monastery, Plate 1
(Photo F. Pommaret 1999)
Bonpo monasteries and temples in Nagchu, Chamdo and Ngarl regions

(90) Guru gyam Monastery, Plate 3  Guru-gyam Monastery with the view of Sutlej
(Photo F. Pommaret 1999)
(90) Gu ru gyam Monastery, Plate 4 Cave of Dran-pa nam-mkha'
(Photo F. Pommaret 1999)