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**'Come as lord of the black-headed' –
an Old Tibetan mythic formula**

Come as lord (*rjer gśegs*)

In the first chapter of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (PT 1287) Sha-khyi, one of the two the exiled sons of the emperor Dri-gum-bstan-po, sings an enigmatic victory song after killing the relatives of his father's assassin the horse groom Lo-ngam. Following that song, in the closing word of the chapter, is what would appear out of context to be a summary of the action.¹

*sgyed-po 'og gzugs-na / zangs rdo (61) bla-nas phab-ste / rje-ru gshegso //
bshos-na ñ Spu-de-gung-rgyal / grongs-na ñ Grang-mo-gnam-bse' / (62)
brtsig / 'greng mgo nag-gī rje / dud rngog-chags-kyi rkyen-du gshegs'o //*
When he created the hearth-stone below, copper stones fell from above. He came as the lord. In birth, [he was called] Spu-de Gung-rgyal. In death, they erected [the tomb] Grang-mo Gnam-bse'. He came in order to be the lord of black-headed and upright (men) and the owner of maned and bent (animals, esp. yaks).

This apparent summary of events does not conform to the events of the preceding narrative. His name is Sha-khyi and not Spu-de Gung-rgyal. It is his father and not him who has just been entombed. Comparing other attestations of the phrase *rjer gshegs* 'come as lord' sheds some light on this enigmatic passage.

The phrase *rjer gshegso* 'come as lord' is used in Old Tibetan texts to describe the descent from heaven of the first ruler. The Dunhuang text PT 1286, known as the 'Catalog of principalities' mentions the origin of the imperial dynasty with the following words.

*khri 'i-bdun-tshigs-kyī sras / khri Nyag khri btsan po' // (32) sa dog-la yul
yab-kyi rje / dog yab-kyi char-du gshegs-s'o // [...] thog-ma sa-la gshegs (35)-
pa yang / gnam mtha' 'og-gī rjer gshegs pas /*

¹ All Dunhuang documents cited in this study follow the text of Imaeda et al. (2007).

The son of Khri-'i Bdun-tshġgs, Khri Nyag-khri Btsan-po' came to the narrow earth as rain to rule the earth and the fathers of the land. [...] At first, he came to the earth, came as the lord of [all] below heaven.

The story is also found in the 'Prayers of the foundation of the De ga g.yu tshal monastery' (IOL Tib J 0751, circa 823).

(1) 'O-lde-spu-rgyal gnam-gyġ lha-las myġ'ġ rjer gshegs-pa yong
'O-lde-spu-rgyal came from the gods of heaven as ruler of men

The story of the divine descent of the imperial line is also told succinctly in the opening of several imperial inscriptions.

The Rkong-po Inscription (circa 800-815)

*thog-ma Phywa Ya bla-dbag-drug-gġ sras-las/ Nya-grġ btsan-po myi yul-gyġ
rjer// Lha-rġ gyang-dor gshegs-pa tshun chad*
In the beginning, from the time when Nya-grġ Btsan-po [who came] from the sons of the Phywa [god] Ya-bla Bdag-drug, went to Lha-ri Ryang-do as the lord of the land of men... (Li and Coblin 1987: 198, 205).

Inscription at the tomb of Khri Lde-srong-brtsan (circa 815)

btsan-po lha sras/ 'O-lde spu-rgyal// gnam-gyġ lha-las myġ'ġ rjer gshegs-pa//
The emperor, son of the gods, 'O-lde Spu-rgyal came down from the gods of heaven as lord of men (Li and Coblin 1987: 241 and 246).

Fragmentary tablet at Zhwa bavi lha khang

myġ'ġ mgon-du sa-la gshegs-nas
come to the earth as lord of men (Li and Coblin 1987: 274).

In the east face of the Sino-Tibetan treaty inscription the first ruler comes not as 'lord' (*rje*) but as 'king' (*rgyal-po*).

(5) *'phrul-gyġ lha btsan-po 'O-lde spu-rgyal// yul byung sa dod tshun cad* (6) *gdung ma 'gyur bar// Bod-kyġ rgyal-po chen-po mdzad-pa yang//* (7) « *gangs ri mthon po'i ni dbus// chu bo chen po'i ni mgo// yul mtho sa gtsang// » zhes//* (8) *gnam-gyġ lha-las// myġ'ġ rgyal-por gshegs te/*
From when the sacred god, the emperor, 'O-lde Spu-rgyal, came to this land and emerged [on] this earth, his unchanging lineage served as the

great kings of Tibet. Saying, “It is the center of the high snow mountains, the source of the great rivers, the high lands, the pure earth,” he came from among the gods of heaven as the king of men (Li and Coblin 1987: 47, 95).

The 14th century *Rgyal-po bka'i thang-yig* edited by O rgyan gling pa has two versions of the story,² the first of which is phrased very similarly to that in the first chapter of *Old Tibetan Chronicle*.

Rje gcig Gnya' khri btsan-po bya-ba de mgo nag mi-dang srog chags rkyen-du byon

A ruler named Gnya'-khri-btsan-po arrived on behalf of black headed men and animals. (18v qtd. in Haarh 1969: 233).

de dus Bod khams mi-la rje med-pas [...] Bod-kyi btsan-po 'O-de spur-rgyal de: gnam-gyi lha-las mi yul rje-ru gshegs

Because at that time the men of Tibet had no ruler, 'O-de spu-rgyal came from among the gods of heaven as the ruler of the land of men (18r qtd. in Haarh 1969: 233-234).

The vocabulary and the grammar of these phrases is stereotyped, a mythic formula. A divine ancestor (either 'O-lde-spu-rgyal or Nya-gri-btsan-po) comes from heaven to earth as the lord of men. The changed name of Sha-khyi at the end of chapter one of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* is Spu-de Gung-rgyal, a name similar to 'O-lde-spu-rgyal. By retaking his father's castle, and restoring the legitimate line of royal descent, Sha-khyi reenacts the founding of his dynasty by a mythic ancestor who descended from the heavens. This passage identifies Sha-khyi both with his recently interred father Dri-gum btsan-po and with his divine ancestor 'O-lde-spu-rgyal. The only part of the formula which is missing is 'from heaven to earth' which is appropriate, since Sha-khyi is not a divine ancestor but rather the son of a usurped king reasserting his tradition rights. He has not come from heaven.

The black headed

Of the passages quoted so far, it is only in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* and much later *Rgyal-po bka'i thang-yig* that the divine leader comes as the lord of the 'black headed' rather than of 'men'. The context immediately suggests that

² There are many other post-dynastic versions of the Gnya'-khri-btsan-po myth and an extensive secondary literature treating elements of this tale, which would need to be taken account of in a larger study (e.g. Hazod 1991, Karmay 1994). The *Rgyal-po bka'i thang-yig* is referred to here only as one of many possible instances.

'black headed' is an epithet for 'men'. A number of passages in Old Tibetan texts corroborate this meaning. In the Dunhuang document PT 0126, 'The envoy of Phywa to Dmu' messengers of the Phywa gods are trying to convince the lord of the Dmu gods to among other things come to earth as the ruler of men.

(111) *Phywa-'is bka' stsald / « rje ni zhu phud-nas / mgo nag 'greng-la rje myed* (112) *rje skos-la / rngog chags dud-la khram thob-cig ! » ces bka' stsald-pa /*

Phywa decrees: « when you have met (?)³ a lord, the black headed and upright (men) have no lord; in addition to appointing a lord (for them) for the maned and bent (animals, esp. yaks) draw up a ledger! »

The narrative of this text is part of the pre-story of divine descent signaled by the phrase *rjer gshegs*. The god must be convinced by messengers that he should descend. One of the three version of the origin of the imperial dynasty contained in a text called the *Yo ga (yi ge) lha gyes can* quoted in the *Lde'u chos 'byung* contains the same story, the god being convinced to descend from heaven to rule over men (Karmay 1998[1994]: 299-300). A disembodied voice addressed a council of Tibetan leaders who are worrying about their lack of a leader.

bka' Bod 'bangs mgo nag-gi rje 'dod-na/ Rmu yul ngam 'brang lchang 'brang bya-ba-na/ gnam rim-pa bdun-gyi steng / gser mkhar g.yu bad-can-gyi nang-na lha'i gdung rmu'i tsha lha rje Gnya'-khri-btsan-po bya-ba bzhugs-kyi mgo nag-gi rjer spyang drongs-shig ! bya-ba'i sgra byung-ngo /

If the black-headed Tibetan people wish to have a ruler, on the seventh stage of heaven, the place of Dmu, in a gold castle with a turquoise roof, there is a lord Khri Bar-gyi Bdun-tshigs who is a descendant from the Phywa gods and a cousin of the Rmu gods. Invite him to be your ruler! (Mkhas-pa-lde'u 1987: 233, 2003: 262, translation follows Karmay 1998[1994]: 299).

On the advise of the voice the Tibetans employ the god Skar-ma-yol-lde as a go between to negotiate with Khri Bar-gyi-bdun-tshigs on their behalf that he descend to be their ruler. In a version of the same story contained in the 14th century *Blon-po bka'i thang yig* edited by O rgyan gling pa, this narrative is more abbreviated. The lord Skar-ma-yol-sde recommends that the Tibetans invite

³ “王をあえてお願いした後。[When you are able to meet the king and request of him.]” (Ishikawa 2001: 151).

Gnya'-khri-bstan-po to be their lord. This recommendation also serves as the opening of Skar-ma-yol-sde's negotiations with Gnya'-khri-bstan-po for his descent.

« *gnam sa rim-pa lnga-yi sdeng [sic steng] bzhugs-a /*
Gnya'-khri-btsan-po bya-ba Lha-yi sras /
Dmu-yi dbon-po yod-bas spyang-drongs ! » gsungs
 « He who dwells atop the five part land of heaven,
 the son of the gods called Gnya'-khri-btsan-po,
 because he is a nephew of Dmu, invite him ! » said [lord Skar-ma-yol-sde] (7r qtd. in Haarh 1969: 235).

Like the *Yo ga (yi ge) lha gyes* the Dunhuang text PT 1038 relates three version of the origin of the royal clan. The third version given is the by now familiar descent of the ruler from heaven.

(12) *rnam gsum-du ni gnam rim-pa bcu gsum-gyi steng-na/* (13) *Khri-bar-la-bdun-tshig/ shes bgyi// gnam gi lha las/ sa ga* (14) *dog drug du// 'greng 'go nag-gi rje myed-gi rje// dud rngog chag* (15) *bla myed-kyi blar/ blon po lho rneggs/ bon-po mtshe gco/ phyag* (16) *tshang sha spug// myi rje lha-dang bdud/ du bgyis-nas// yul bod ka* (17) *g.yag drug-du byon zhes mchi//*

Concerning the third [theory], there are some who say that one called Khrī-bar-la-bdun-tshig came from the heavenly gods atop the thirteenth level of heaven with the ministers Lho and Ngegs, the Bon-po Mtshe and Gco, and the 'intendants' (*phyag-tshang*) Sha and Spug to the six [parts of the] narrow earth to serve as lord to the lordless black-headed men and as authority over those maned animals without an authority.

This version most closely resembles the succinct reenactment given in the first chapter of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*. In both passages the lord must deal both with 'black-headed' men and with 'maned' yaks. The epithet 'black-headed' indicates mankind, particularly in its need of divinely descended political leadership, and in contrast to 'maned' yaks.

The contrast between human and divine inherent in the epithet 'black-headed' is brought to the fore in the Bon-po marriage liturgy *Ming sring dpal bgos dang lha 'dogs*, as translated by Karmay.

My daughter Srid-lcam will go from the gods to the gods. She is not made for black-headed man. The rising and the setting of the sun and moon takes place in the real of the sky. Have you ever seen them fall

down to the plain? We are the gods of the heavens. You are a black-headed earth-word!" (Karmay 1998[1975]: 148).

The fact that the marriage is ultimately permitted shows that although the chasm separating god and man is wide it can be crossed. The cosmogonic text *Dbu mi'u 'dra chags*, where man is given the epithet *dbu nag* 'black-headed' employing *dbu* the honorific term for 'head' instead of *mgo*, goes a step further by intentionally undermining the opposition between god and man.

der dbu nag mi zhes-pa 'di/ dang-po byung-ba'i phug btsun-ste/ 'od gsal lha'i gdung la(s) grol/

First, the one called little black-headed man, (2a) is of good origin since he was produced by the race of luminous gods. (Karmay 1998[1986]: 261).

Both the use of *dbu* instead of *mgo*, and the claim that not only royalty, but mankind as a whole descends from the gods serve to undermine the division between men and gods. This conscious inversion of the normal semantics of the phrase *mgo nag* 'black headed' itself reveals the categorical separation of man and god usually implied by the use of the term *mgo nag*.

The passages examined so far establish beyond doubt that the phrase *mgo nag* 'black headed' refers to mankind in general, both in opposition to gods and in opposition to animals. The phrase is particularly associated with the narrative of divine descent of a ruler, both in phrases such as 'the black headed have no ruler' and in 'come as ruler of the black-headed'.

However, the narrative of divine descent occurs more frequently without the term *mgo nag* than with it. The phrase *mgo nag* as an epithet has the same meaning as *myi* 'man'. Therefore it is not surprising that the more straightforward term would sometimes appear instead of it. A possible additional reason for not using the term *mgo nag* is that, none of the passages where *myi* (*yul*) is used in place of *mgo nag* is any mention made of the divine leaders role vis-a-vis yaks. The word *myi* can be used whenever men are discussed *mgo nag*, the specific association laden term peculiar to this context, necessarily invokes men as the wards of the divine leader and in opposition to the animals.

Most of the occurrences of the phrase *mgo nag* in Old Tibetan occur outside of the actual narration of the ruler's divine descent. In these passages the phrase serves as a short hand reminder of the myth. The most frequent context in which the phrase occurs is in descriptions of the Tibetan emperor's good

governance and benefits to his subjects that his rule brings. Two passages in 'Prayers of the foundation of the De ga g.yu tshal monastery' (PT 0016, circa 823) make this clear.

(33v1) rje lha sras-kyi zha snga-nas // « myi rje lhas mdzad-pas thugs-la 'phrul mnga' / lha'i chos gtsug lag bzang-po rgyas-par mdzad-pa'i thugs-rjes gnam mtha' 'og gun-du yang khyab / dbu rmog brtsan mnga' (33v2) thang che-ba'i byin-kyis ni blon chen-po 'phags-pha-dang ldan-ba rje blon 'phrul-kyis ni 'og-gi rgyal-po chen-po Rgya Drug las-stsogs-pa gdul dka'-zhing / sngan-cad bka' 'og-tu ma cud-pa'i rnams-la (33v3) rlabs chen-pos btul-te / rgyal-po chen-po Rgya Drug-dang 'Jang las-stsogs-pha bka' 'og-du dus gcig-du 'dus-te / mjal-dum-gyi gtsigs chen-po bcas-te / Bod 'bangs mgo nag-po mtha yun-du (33v4) bde skyid-par gnang-ba'i bka' drin chen-po stsald-pas kyang ma 'tsalte / mtha' bzh'i thams cad-du bde-pa'i bka' drin-kyis bkab-nas

The son of god, the ruler says: « The divine ruler of men acting possesses sacred power in his heart. His compassion which greatly performs divine customs and good governance pervaded [all] below (gun du) heaven. The sacred minister and lord who has a noble great minister with the grandeur (byin) of a mighty helmet and great majesty [subdued] the great kings below the sun such as China and the Turks who are difficult to subdue, with great glory (rlabs) subdued those who are ma cud under the previous (?) commandment. The great kings such as China, the Turks and 'Jang (Nanzhao 南詔) gather together beneath the commandment. Have made a great peace treaty (mjal dum), bestowing great kindness which grants the black headed Tibetan subjects happiness for a long time (mtha yun du), he did not seek [anything for himself], having blanketed all four directions with happy kindness.

Bod chen-po 'phrul-kyi lha btsan-po sku-la byind chags / thugs-la 'phrul mnga'-ba'i zha snga-nas // (34v1) 'greng mgo nag-gi rjer myi rjer lha-las gshegs-te / rgyal khams gzhan-gyi rgyal-po gang-bas kyang 'phags-shing thugs-la 'phrul mnga' dgongs-pa nam-ka'i dbyings-dang 'dra-bar yangs-shing rgya che / ri-rab lhun-po bzhin-du bkra' drang (34v2) gsung rtag / gñi zla'i 'od-dang 'dra bar / byams-pa-dang thugs-rjes khyab-par mdzad-de / mtha'-yun-gyi don-du dkon mcog gsum-gyi mcod-rten btsugs-shing dam-pa'i chos bdud-rts'i sgo phye-nas

Come from the gods as lord to upright and black headed (men), nobler than any kings of other kingdoms, the thought of the sacred majesty in his heart permeates and extends like the sky. His eternal word splendid and upright like mount Meru, acting with exceeding love and

compassion like the light of the sun and moon, he plants the stūpa of the triple jewel for the benefit of the ages and opens the door of ambrosia of the sacred Dharma.

Considering that this text was produced at the height of Buddhism influence at the imperial court, when the Buddhist monk Bran-ka Dpal-gyi yon-tan was the prime minister. although it is heavily laden with Buddhist imagery and vocabulary. it is impressive that the overriding metaphor remains the pagan notion of the emperor as divinely sent caretaker of humanity.

Good governance and benefit to subjects are also prominent themes in the three contexts where the phrase *mgo nag* occurs in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (PT 1287) apart from the attestation in the first chapter discussed above.

bla-na rje sgam-na / Khrī Srong-brtsan / 'og-na blon 'dzangs-na Stong-rtsan yul-zung / (447) rje ni gnam ri Pywa-ī lugs // blon-po ni sa-ī ngam len-gyi tshul // mnga' thang chen-po-ī rkyen-du / jī dang jir ldan-te / pyi-ī (448) chab srid ni pyogs bzhir bskyed // nang-gī kha bso ni myi nams par lhun stug / 'bangs mgo nag-po yang mtho dman ni (449) bsñams / dpya' sgyu ni bskyungs / dal-du ni mchis / ston dpyid ni bskyal // 'khor bar ni spyad / 'dod-pa ni byin / (450) gnod-pa ni pye / btsan-ba ni bcugs / sdo-ba ni smad / 'jigs-pa ni mnan // bden-ba ni bsñen / 'dzangs-pa ni bstod / (451) dpa'-bo ni bkur / smon par ni bkol // chos bzang srid mtho ste // myi yongs-kyis skyid-do //
Above, the profound lord, Khrī Srong-brtsan. Below, the wise minister Stong-rtsan Yul-zung. The lord [acted] in the manner of the Phywa and the heavenly mountains. The minister [acted] in the manner of earthly majesty. Endowed with all the conditions of great majesty (*mnga'-thang*), they increased the outer polity in the four directions and the internal welfare (*kha-bso*) was abundant and undiminished. They created parity between the high and the low among the black-headed subjects. They reduced tax fraud and created leisure. They swore [oaths] in the autumn and spring and adhered to this cycle. They gave to the needy and cut out the harmful. They employed the powerful and degraded the insolent (*sdo-ba*). They quashed the frightened and allied with the truthful. They praised the wise and respected the heroic. They employed the devoted. The customs being good and the polity lofty (*chos bzang srid mtho ste*), all men were happy.

Here the divine nature of the emperor in contrast to the human nature of his minister is stressed. In a similar way to how the 'Envoys of Phywa to Dmu' relates the mythical pre-story of the divine descent, this passage covers the

happy ending in historic time. The emperor descends to earth in part against his will in order to benefit human beings, and here we see exactly how the emperor is capable of benefiting his subjects. They are all happy.

\$ /:/ btsan-po khri 'dus srong // sku chung-nas gzhon-gyis kyang // phag rgod-la bshan-gyis mdzad / g.yag rgod sgog-du bcug // (329) stagī rna-ba-la bzung-ba-la stsogs-pa' // thugs sgam-ba-ī steng-du / sku rtsal ched-pos bsnan-te / myī-dang myi 'dra'-bar 'phags-pas (330) // ñī ngog rgyal-po thams-chad-dang / 'bangs mgo nag pyogs-kyis // mtshan bla dags 'phrul-gyi rgyal-po zhes / (331) btagste / bka' mchid-kyi dper brjod-do //

Even from the time when emperor Khri 'dus-srong was young, he killed wild boar, put wild yaks into fetters, seized tigers by their ears, and so forth. On top of his profound mind he added great energy. Unlike men, he was exalted, and all the kings under the sun and the black-headed subjects attached to him the name “sacred king attached to the gods” (*bla dags 'phrul-gyi rgyal-po*), as it is said in the edict (*bka'-mchid*).

This passage stresses the emperors superhuman qualities, saying explicitly that he is not like men, and that his subjects and vassals referred to him as such. In the final passage which uses the phrase *mgo nag* in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle*, the benefit the emperor brings to his subjects is quite concrete.

'bangs (343) mgo nag-pos kyang / Rgya dar bzang-po khyab-par thob-bo //
The black-headed subjects obtained to their fill fine Chinese silks.

The subjects benefit from stealing spoils from the Chinese. By mentioning that the subjects are black headed we are reminded that it is due to the beneficence of their monarch that they are able to benefit from the spoils of war. A similarly practical benefit of royal patronage is mentioned in the *Old Tibetan Annals* (IOL Tib J 0750 line 306).

'bangs mgo nag-poe khral thud scungs-par lo gcig/
[746-747] [The emperor] reduced the additional taxes of the black-headed subjects; so one year.

The emperor's reduction of the tax burden is a reaffirmation of his sacred role of benefiting the relatively helpless humans he lives among. This tax reduction follows immediately after an oath of fealty that official 'from the prime minster down' (*blon chen po man chad*) swear. The oath and the change of tax burden are two components of the reaffirmation of his divine role. To a more

cynical reader the mention of a tax burden draws attention to the way in which this god sent shepherd expropriates and exploits his flock. The south face of the Zhol inscription (circa 764) makes clear the extent to which according to this ideology of divine descent the bodily well being of the ruler is tied to the welfare of the state.

(11) *btsan-pho sras Khrī-srong-lde-brtsan-gyi* (12) *sku-la ni dard-du ñe// Bod*
 (13) *mgo nag po'i srid ni 'khrug-du* (14) *byed-pa-las /*
 [Ministers 'Bal Ldong-tsab and Lang Myes-zigs] came close to harming the body of the emperor, the son, Khri Srong-lde-brtsan and put the polity of the black-headed Tibetans into strife. (Li and Coblin 1987: 143, 158)

That his own subjects would threaten the life of a Tibetan emperor is a reversal of the natural order of the universe. The use of the term black-headed in this passage emphasizes the need the Tibetans have for their ruler, and the unnaturalness of the conspirators crime. These associations would be absent if a different word for 'men' had been used.

The phrase *mgo nag* also occurs on the east side of the Zhol inscription.

(13) *Bod* (14) *mgo nag-po'i srid-(15)-la phan-ba legs //* (16) *dgu byas-so ////*
 [Minister Stag-sgra-klu-khong] performed many goods beneficial to the polity of the black-headed Tibetans. (Li and Coblin 1987: 141, 152)

This phraseology puts the minister in a role similar to that of the emperor vis-a-vis the subjects, a very high compliment of of the minister's service.

Like Sha-khyi's reenactment of the divine founding act of the Tibetan monarchy, all of the passages using the phrase *mgo nag* where the narration of divine descent is not actually related, gesture toward this myth and thereby reassert the Weltanschauung it implies.

Two attestations of the phrase *mgo nag* remain to be discussed. The first occurs in an obscure divination text IOL Tib J 0739. The terse and cryptic lines are difficult for me to make sense of. Although I am not in a position to argue for how this text reinforces or evokes the formula of divine descent, there is also no reason to think that it does not. Instead, the formula probably provides the key to understanding the passage. I suspect that the images of the other lines are also formulaic, and the whole can be understood only after identifying and elaborating on the other mythic formulae which it employs.

///@@///@@@///@///
 kye bsam-dang ni (13r9) bka-bo che /
 na cung ni 'u gzhon-la /
 spyang dor ni ma gum shig (13r10)
 gros-gyis ni ma bshad-cig /
 sang byi ni gnangs sgong-du /
 'greng (13r11) 'dud ni 'du tshogs nas /
 'go nag ni brgyab stan sa /
 btsan-dang (13v1) ni kha yad mñam /
 mgyogs-dang ni bang yang 'grin (13v2)
 mo bzang rab-bo //

[The role of the dice is] 2-4-1

O, with a thought a great bka bo
 the small meadow (?), for that young one
 do not die in the two eyes!
 do not speak with advice!

Tomorrow the rat, the day after tomorrow as an egg
 from the gathered upright (men) and bent (animals)
 the black headed man ni brgyab stan sa /
 btsan (13v1) dang ni kha yad mnyam /
 with speed ni bang yang 'grin (13v2)
 a very good divination.

The final occurrence of *mgo nag* to be discussed, in the Dunhuang text IOL Tib J 0733, 'The Decline of the Good Age' presents a nightmarish apocalyptic inversion of the formula.

'ung-nas skyin-dang 'bab-pa'i (46) [d]usla sum brgya' drug cu las sa-dang /
 rgya' yul-gyi 'og / mtsho' chen-po zhig'i pha-[rol]-nas rgyal-po g[d]o[ng] nag-
 po shing-[r]ta (47) nag-po zhon-ba zhig lo drug cu'i bar-du dang-te / rgya mgo
 nag-po de-la phyag-'tshal-zhing des bkol-bar 'ong-ngo' /

After that, in the time of falling and reckoning, beneath China and a
 land from among 360, from across a great lake a black faced king
 riding a black chariot for sixty years. To that black headed Chinese
 [king] they will prostrate, and by him be made slaves.

Rather than the ruler being sent from heaven he comes from the other side of
 a lake. Rather than a god coming to rule the black headed, he a human being
 even worse Chinese, and is himself black headed. Rather than making all
 subjects happy, he enslaves them. The term *mgo nag* in this passage, by evoking

the narrative of divine descent draws out the degree of the perversity of the future imagined. I think it is very clever that this black faced and riding a black chariot fit the general sense of sinisterness. From this text alone, one would not realize that the term black headed has any special significance, but having looked at the other passages it is clear that it is the key term of the passage.

The full mythic formula of which *mgo nag* is an element can be paraphrased “men had no ruler, yaks no owner, N. came from the gods of heaven to the narrow earth to be the ruler of men and the owner of yaks”. Any of the key phrases of this formula *rjer gshegs*, *rngog chag* or *mgo nag* can synecdochally refer to the whole. These associations are present in all occurrences of the phrase *mgo nag* in Old Tibetan Texts. If one were writing a dictionary of Old Tibetan a possible definition for *mgo nag* would be 'a poetic term for mankind as a totality, created by the gods and kept in safe pastures by the kings.' The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary gives this definition for Akkadian phrase *ṣalmaāt qaqqadi* 'black-headed'.⁴

⁴ The epithet black-headed is also used in other parts of Asia with more or less similarity: for Chinese see de Lacouperie (1891) and for Tangut see Kepping (2003).

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