

NYANG RAL NYI MA 'OD ZER AND THE *TESTIMONY OF BA*

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Introduction

Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192, henceforth Nyang ral)¹ was one of the great rNying ma *gter stons*, revealers of physical and written treasure (*gter*) supposedly buried during the imperial period. He identified himself as a reincarnation of the Tibetan dharma-king, Khri Srong lde btsan (742–c.800),² whom he believed to be one of the foremost disciples of the Indian Buddhist master, Padmasambhava.

According to generally accepted tradition, Khri Srong lde btsan invited Padmasambhava to tame the indigenous spirits of Central Tibet, in order that the king could then build the famous bSam yas Monastery. However, early tradition is split concerning how long Padmasambhava stayed in Tibet, and his relation to Khri Srong lde btsan. The *Testimony of Ba* (*dBa' rBa/sBa bzhed*) states that Padmasambhava left Tibet after arousing the distrust of ministers at court, having only partially tamed bSam yas. Nyang ral claimed that Padmasambhava took part in the consecration of bSam yas and then tamed other parts of Tibet until after the death of Khri Srong lde btsan. Before this, Padmasambhava bestowed many tantric lineages on Khri Srong lde btsan, then buried the texts containing guides to these practices as *gter* to be discovered and promulgated by his reincarnation, Nyang ral.

The *gter* texts buried for the benefit of future Tibetan Buddhists also include biographies of Padmasambhava himself. The earliest of these is called the *Zangs gling ma*, which Nyang ral supposedly recovered from the *Zangs khang gling* in the surrounds of bSam yas Monastery.³ I prefer to say that Nyang ral wrote it, and that as such it

¹ For recent discussion of these dates, see Kapstein 2000: 261, n. 24 and Hirshberg (2010: 62).

² On these dates, see Dotson 2009: 128–29.

³ To read more on this first full-length Padmasambhava biography, including the detailed arguments behind the discussion in this paragraph and the discovery of an unaugmented recension of the *Zangs gling ma*, see Doney *in press*. The monograph also includes reproductions of two exemplars of this oldest attested recension photographed by the Nepal German Preservation/Cataloguing Project (NGMP/CP). A

best approximates his conception of the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan and Padmasambhava's place in the conversion of Tibet to Buddhism. The *Zangs gling ma* was redacted several times, and the version that scholars have used recently, found as the first text in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* collection, contains a number of episodes not included in the other recensions of the text. Another, unaugmented version of the *Zangs gling ma* forms the basis for Nyang ral's description of the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan in his *magnum opus* religious history, the *Chos 'byung Me tog snying po* (henceforth *MTN*).⁴

This article compares the shared narrative of these two works with that found in the *Testimony of Ba*, and also in another work attributed to Nyang ral called the *Mes dbon gsum gyi rnam par thar pa* (henceforth *MBNT*).⁵ This latter is an anthology of the biographies (*rnam thar*) of three great dharma-kings of Tibet, including Khri Srong lde btsan. First, I argue that the *Zangs gling ma* (and *MTN* where it agrees with the *Zangs gling ma*) offers a very different version of Padmasambhava's time in Tibet to the *Testimony of Ba* tradition and *MBNT*, which takes the *Testimony of Ba* almost *in toto* as its source for the life-story of Khri Srong lde btsan. Second, I investigate the episodes that *MTN* interpolates into the *Zangs gling ma* frame-narrative on Khri Srong lde btsan. Some of these episodes resemble the *Testimony of Ba*. The evidence of parts one and two of this article, confirms the suggestions of other scholars writing on these works, who cast doubt on the attribution of the latter parts of *MTN*, and all of *MBNT*, to Nyang ral.⁶ It also brings into sharper focus the relation between Nyang ral and

further, unfortunately incomplete version of this recension is published by Ugyan Dorje as the *U rgyan padma 'byung gnas kyi bka' chems* (Sumra 1977). This text is currently included in Martin 1997: 229, entry no. 650, as an unattributed work. However it should, in any second edition of this indispensable bibliographic reference work, be placed under entry 20 as an exemplar of the *Zangs gling ma*.

⁴ There are four known versions of *MTN* extant today (a–d, see the bibliography and Martin 1997: 30–31, no. 18). Some slight differences exist between these versions (see Hirshberg 2012: 198–209), but they appear to tell the same narrative as each other in their sections on Khri Srong lde btsan. I use *MTNd* in this article, because it is the most easily available version for consultation; yet since it is an eclectic edition of manuscript A and B, its usefulness is limited to giving a sense of the narrative and where it diverges from other works discussed below.

⁵ See Martin 1997: 31, no. 19. Martin refers readers to the article in which János Szerb (1990) disputes *MBNT*'s attributed authorship, but then balances this with Sørensen's (1991: 79) appeal to the similarities between *MTN* and *MBNT* (*ibid*).

⁶ Leonard van der Kuijp follows Szerb (1990) in questioning the attribution of *MBNT* to Nyang ral (van der Kuijp 2013: 148–49, n. 75). He also relates that his doctoral student, Daniel Hirshberg, 'has cast very serious doubts upon' the attribution of *MTN* to Nyang ral (*idem*: 118, n. 6). The investigation of *MTN* in Hirshberg's PhD thesis

the *Testimony of Ba* tradition and repositions *MBNT* as an important source within that tradition.

The Testimony of Ba

The *Testimony of Ba* has its roots in the ninth-century imperial period. Though its earliest complete version is the fourteenth-century(?) *dBa' bzhed* reproduced and translated by Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, the main narrative of this version may date to the eleventh century.⁷ The discovery of other, more fragmentary versions of a similar narrative, suggests that the roots of this recension of the *Testimony of Ba* may be older still.⁸ The narrative concerns the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan and his attempt to build bSam yas Monastery and establish Buddhism in Tibet. Padmasambhava alone is responsible for

(Hirshberg 2012) was indebted in part to my thesis (Doney 2011), which includes an early version of this article; but this article is also partially indebted to the progress Hirshberg made on analysing *MTN* in the mean time. A proper evaluation of *MTN* will have to await the publication of Hirshberg *forthcoming*, but until then I thought it worth taking inspiration from van der Kuijp's further suggestion that '[t]he close textual relationship that exists between this work's biography of Khri srong lde btsan, Nyang ral's chronicle [*MTN*] and the *Sba bzhed*-s still requires detailed investigation' (van der Kuijp 2013: 149, n. 75).

⁷ Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 126ff. The *dBa' bzhed*, reproduced and translated in Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000, appears to be the oldest complete exemplar of the *Testimony of Ba* retaining many archaic features (see *idem*: Introduction). Michael Willis (2013: 146) gives a date-range of 1000 to 1100 CE as a working hypothesis for the core *dBa' bzhed* narrative, but notes its later amendments. Later versions of the *Testimony of Ba* display amplification, elision and alteration of the main narrative given in the *dBa' bzhed*.

⁸ Ninth/tenth-century fragments of the narrative or a source of the *Testimony of Ba*, concerning the invitation of Śāntarakṣita to Tibet, were recently found among the Dunhuang texts (Or. 8210/S.9498(A) and Or. 8210/S.13683(C), see van Schaik and Iwao 2008 and van Schaik *forthcoming*). Another, unfortunately incomplete exemplar from the same recension as the *dBa' bzhed* was published recently (contained in dPal brtsegs 2011: vol. 36, 63–70) I had the chance to examine this publication recently, and noticed that only the first four folios of the manuscript are part of the *rBa bzhed*. These folios are mistakenly combined with a very different history, which Longs khang Phun tshogs rdo rje failed to notice when he transcribed both texts as one (2010: 259–318; see under *rBa bzhed* the bibliography). van der Kuijp (2011) noticed that the majority of the narrative in Phun tshogs rdo rje's edition was completely different from the *Testimony of Ba* tradition, and by analysing the end portion was able to date this history to the early fourteenth century. However, he did not have access to the original manuscript, and so did not see that the opening narrative (2010: 259–270.1) is actually the beginning of different a text that contains a narrative similar to that of the *dBa' bzhed* folios 1–7a and the Dunhuang fragments. For a more detailed analysis of their correspondences, see Doney *forthcoming*.

the taming the Tibetan landscape that enables this building project to succeed. But in fulfilling this role, he is under the command of Khri Srong lde btsan. Indeed, the king asks him to leave Tibet just half way through the narrative; after which he plays no further part in the spread of the dharma there. Looking at the *Testimony of Ba* in outline, Padmasambhava plays only a limited role in bringing Buddhism to Tibet, and is ultimately of less importance than some of the other characters in the history, such as Śāntarakṣita or dBa' gSal snang.⁹ Padmasambhava's role in the *Testimony of Ba* is important and his depiction flattering. Yet, in the earliest extant recension of the *Testimony of Ba*, Padmasambhava does not hold the preeminent status that he does in the *Zangs gling ma*.

In the later *Testimony of Ba* tradition, Padmasambhava's role becomes more pronounced, yet it is still limited to taming Tibet *before* bSam yas is built. The same story outlined above is included in another exemplar of the *Testimony of Ba*,¹⁰ which expands and alters the entire narrative, for instance making Khri Srong lde btsan a more pious Buddhist and shifting the blame for dismissing Padmasambhava from the king to his jealous ministers.¹¹ This longer *Testimony of Ba*

⁹ For an outline of the *dBa' bzhed*, see Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 14–21. Stein gives a résumé of the longer *sBa bzhed* S in Stein 1961: vii–xii. See also Doney *in press*: 4–7 on the depiction of Padmasambhava in the *Testimony of Ba*.

¹⁰ This recension is reflected in the 1980 text entitled *sBa bzhed ces bya ba las / sba gsal snang gi bzhed pa bzhugs / rtsom pa po / sba gsal gnang* (*sBa bzhed G*), mGon po rgyal mtshan's eclectic edition of three manuscripts. Since the editor shows at no point which reading comes from which manuscript, this edition is not very useful for textual analysis, but it does suggest an expanded recension of the *dBa' bzhed*, omitting the latter's opening and closing narratives. A very similar narrative to *sBa bzhed G* is transcribed in the 2009 collection of *Testimony of Ba* texts called <<*rBa bzhed*>> *phyogs bsgrigs*, apparently edited by bDe skyid (see also van der Kuijp 2011: 71), pages 80–158. The text bears a similar title (*sBa bzhed ces bya ba las / sba gsal snang gi bzhed pa bzhugs* / 2009: 80.1–2) but contains some minor differences from *sBa bzhed G* that places it closer to the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* recension. Since it is lacking that extended end section, and for other reasons discussed in Doney *forthcoming*, it is evidently not a part of that *zhabs btags ma* recension. It may be hoped that this transcription reflects only a single manuscript, perhaps even one of the ones forming the basis of *sBa bzhed G*.

¹¹ The increasing piety of Khri Srong lde btsan can be seen especially clearly when comparing the differing versions of the scene where he invites Śāntarakṣita to Tibet (see the texts transcribed in van Schaik and Iwao 2008: 484–6). On the changing depiction of the request for Padmasambhava to leave, see Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger 2000: 58, n. 177. Note also that the part of Padmasambhava's speech in which he suggests that Khri Srong lde btsan falls short of the *cakravartin* ideal of Buddhist kingship (*dBa' bzhed* 13b 3–4) is omitted in the later tradition (e.g. *sBa bzhed G* 31.22).

recension is also quoted in a number of later histories. One such important source of the tradition is the many quotes in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* by dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba (1504–1566), who appears to have had access to more than one version of the *Testimony of Ba* (henceforth the sum of these quotations will be referred to as *sBa bzhed P*).¹² At some later point, this narrative was condensed somewhat, and an extra section was added to the end that recounts the reigns of Khri Srong lde btsan's descendants and the descent and rise of the dharma after the fall of the Tibetan empire. This redacted text is known as the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* (*Extended Testimony of Ba*). It will serve as the main point of reference for comparison with *MTN* and *MBNT*, because these two works appear to include large borrowings from this extended recension.¹³

Per Sørensen, in his masterly annotated translation of the *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, already compared some of these works, the *Zangs gling ma*, *MTN* and *MBNT* attributed to Nyang ral and *sBa bzhed G*, *P* and *S* that form the later tradition of the *Testimony of Ba*. He argues:

BZH, CHBYMTNYP [i.e. the *Testimony of Ba* and *MTNc*] (*ab* 292a5ff., though interspersed with lengthy sub-sections), MBNTH followed by the lDe'u versions (GBCHY, DCHBY)¹⁴ display a fair degree of correspondence in the chain of events related, suggesting that they draw from a common proto-version of BZH, possible bSam-yas Ka-gtsigs chen mo (cf. the Introduction). Nyang-ral, moreover, has employed a version identical or cognate to the Chin. ed. of BZH [*sBa bzhed G*], while he cites a part of its colophon ([*MTNc*] 439b3–6), but, most surprisingly, Nyang-ral (*ab* 440a6, cf. *ad* note 1385ff.) shares long verbatim passages with the annotated version of BZH (found in Stein ed. [*sBa bzhed S*]), which indicates that the so-called *zhabs btags ma* was in circulation and inserted (?) into a BZH-version already in the XI–XIIth century.¹⁵

¹² Kazushi Iwao is currently researching the versions of the *sBa bzhed* used in this text (personal communication 20th February 2013) and in-depth analysis of these sources will have to await his findings. My comparison of the episodes below suggest that, generally, dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba quotes a source from the same recension as *sBa bzhed S*.

¹³ For a more in-depth analysis of the redactional history of the *Testimony of Ba*, see Doney 2011: 27–46 and *forthcoming*.

¹⁴ I understand that Dan Martin is currently preparing a translation of the *lDe'u chos 'byung* that will no doubt address both the sources Sørensen cites here as lDe'u versions (see also Martin 1997: 43–44, nos. 54 and 55), so at present I shall leave them out of this analysis.

¹⁵ Sørensen 1994: 634–35 (to which I have added my nomenclature for the texts in

This analysis constitutes a pioneering attempt to make sense of the relation between *MTN*, *MBNT* and the *Testimony of Ba*. Yet it appears to contradict Sørensen's claim later in the same work that *MBNT* 'is nothing but a condensed or abbreviated version of the *magnum opus* [*MTN*].'¹⁶ In this analysis, Sørensen pays insufficient attention to the *Zangs gling ma*, and because of this he mistakes the correspondences between *MTN* and the other works as a) a primary rather than secondary characteristic of *MTN* and b) indicative of Nyang ral's authorial intention. These misconceptions can be cleared up by looking first at the *Zangs gling ma*, then the congruences between it and *MTN* against *MBNT*. This comparison suggests that, as János Szerb made clear, *MBNT* should no longer be attributed to Nyang ral. It also sheds light on some of the unique elements of *MTN*, and the relationship between its depiction of eighth-century Tibet and that of the *Testimony of Ba* tradition.

The Zangs gling ma

The *Zangs gling ma* tells a very different tale of the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan from the *Testimony of Ba*. Blondeau placed the two, the *Testimony of Ba* and the *Zangs gling ma*, on two sides of a distinction between narratives of Padmasambhava drawn from *bka' ma* or oral transmission and those drawn from the *gter* or treasure tradition.¹⁷ As Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer also point out, the *Zangs gling ma* 'can be considered as a rather different category of literature [from the *Testimony of Ba*], so we would not expect the same kind of language to be used.'¹⁸ The *Zangs gling ma* falls under the category of Padmasambhava biography. It amplifies some of the mythographic

question in square brackets).

¹⁶ Sørensen (1994: 641) maintained this despite citing János Szerb (1990) and thus being aware of the agreement of Blondeau and Szerb on the mistaken attribution of *MBNT* to Nyang ral. Sørensen tentatively concludes that the text should be 'ascribed, in all probability, to Nyang ral' (1994: 641; see also Sørensen 1991: 79). This statement seems to contradict Sørensen's claim just quoted from pages 634–35. Perhaps he means that the Srong btsan sgam po section of *MBNT* follows *MTN*, while the Khri Srong lde btsan section is based on the *sBa bzhed*, but he does not make this clear. Following Sørensen, Martin likewise credits Nyang ral as author of *MBNT* in his book *Tibetan Histories* (1997: 31, no. 19). As shall become clear below, it appears that *MBNT* is based on the later *sBa bzhed bzhabs btags ma* recension of the *Testimony of Ba*, rather than a common proto-version.

¹⁷ Blondeau 1980.

¹⁸ Cantwell and Mayer *forthcoming*.

elements also evident in the *Testimony of Ba*, such as Padmasambhava's somewhat superior attitude to Khri Srong lde btsan as a mundane king and his prophecy of the decline of the dharma. Yet it does not draw on the *Testimony of Ba* as a framing narrative. Instead, it gives Padmasambhava's earlier life-story in India, and does not depict him leaving Tibet until after the king has died and the tale reaches its end. Furthermore, Padmasambhava attains his apotheosis as a perfectly enlightened Indian master in the *Zangs gling ma*.

The *Testimony of Ba* only introduces Padmasambhava within the context of his arrival in Tibet, where he works for the benefit of the socially superior ruler of Tibet, Khri Srong lde btsan. The *Zangs gling ma* begins instead in Uḍḍiyāṇa, where King Indrabhūti adopts this child-incarnation of Amitābha. The young prince soon arranges his own exile in order to perfect higher tantric practices in charnel grounds all over India. He is thus simultaneously a Buddha's incarnation and a king's son; but he turns to a *siddha's* life as a young man, just like Nyang ral. Padmasambhava has exiled himself from social mores to become a master of both spiritual and wrathful powers, rejecting and thus transcending social status. Padmasambhava's status as a powerful outcast *siddha* thus gives him power over even the two Buddhist kings, Indrabhūti and Khri Srong lde btsan. His conversion of the first in Uḍḍiyāṇa prefigures his display of superiority to Khri Srong lde btsan when he arrives in Tibet, where the *Me tog snying po* also begins to cover the same story.

The Me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud

MTN is a *magnum opus* history of the dharma in India and Tibet. Both texts contain the same narrative concerning Khri Srong lde btsan, summarised below. Yet *MTN* is far longer than the *Zangs gling ma*. It narrates the history of the dharma, from the teachings of the historical Buddha right up to the twelfth century and Nyang ral's own times.¹⁹ The section on Khri Srong lde btsan, though roughly following the unaugmented recension of the *Zangs gling ma*,²⁰ is not placed within the framework of the life of Padmasambhava, whose childhood and training in India are completely omitted from *MTN*. What remains is sandwiched, appropriately enough, between the narratives of two other Buddhist kings (*chos rgyal*)—Srong btsan sgam po and Khri gTsug lde

¹⁹ See Meisezahl 1985: 21–23 for a summary of the content of *MTN*.

²⁰ See Doney *in press* on the claims for this recension to constitute the earliest attested in the *Zangs gling ma* tradition.

btsan (Ral pa can). While *MTN* omits the first five chapters of the *Zangs gling ma*, it retains the rest of that narrative (by far its majority) within its depiction of the life of Khri Srong lde btsan. Nyang ral probably authored *MTN* after the *Zangs gling ma*, borrowing the latter's Tibet section *in toto* but not *verbatim* as the basis of his narrative of Khri Srong lde btsan's reign.

The differences between the *Testimony of Ba* and the shared content of the *Zangs gling ma* and *MTN* are manifold.²¹ In the latter two sources, Khri Srong lde btsan is an incarnation of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, and yet, when Padmasambhava arrives in Tibet, the Indian master nevertheless shows his superiority to the king by burning his robes of office and thus forcing Khri Srong lde btsan to bow. He eventually binds every Tibetan deity to an oath to protect Buddhism, and the spirits help to build bSam yas, as do the wives of Khri Srong lde btsan. Both Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita complete and consecrate the main shrine. When they then ask to return home, the king implores them to stay and teach Buddhism for the good of Tibet and the two masters agree. The narrative then moves on to other masters' feats on behalf of Buddhism, before finally returning to Padmasambhava. He initiates Khri Srong lde btsan into several *mahāyoga* lineages and prophesies that the king will discover the teachings again in a future life. He extends the lifespan of Khri Srong lde btsan, but eventually the king dies and Padmasambhava leaves Tibet to tame another country's demons. His lengthy farewell speech includes advice for all members of society, from the new king, Mu tig btsan po, downwards. It especially recommends practicing the mantra of Avalokiteśvara, *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. Mu tig btsan po, his retinue and the disciples of Padmasambhava are anguished at his departure, but vow to practice Buddhism and govern the country in the manner of the master and Khri Srong lde btsan respectively.

Contemplating the many differences between this narrative and the *Testimony of Ba*, it could even be argued that Nyang ral intended to write an account that contradicted the perspective of the *Testimony of Ba* in all of the episodes that had bearing on Padmasambhava. This strong claim would be difficult to prove however, and perhaps puts undue emphasis on a posited authorial intent of Nyang ral that recent literary theory has done much to undermine. Nonetheless, the *Zangs gling ma* and *MTN* offer a coherent position on the matter that stands in contrast to that of the *Testimony of Ba*.

²¹ Again, see Doney *in press*: 20–22 for a précis of their shared content.

MTN also interpolates eight other episodes into the main narrative framework of the *Zangs gling ma*. Of these, five seem to be drawn from the *Testimony of Ba* (see the list below). Then, in the final part of *MTN* (which Sørensen refers to as beginning at *MTNc* 440a6 in the quote above), content that shares even greater similarity with the *Testimony of Ba* is appended after the *Zangs gling ma* narrative ends.

After the *Zangs gling ma* narrative ends in *MTN*, in other words after Khri Srong lde btsan has died and Padmasambhava leaves Tibet, *MTN* appends a summation of the king's life and then the bSam yas Debate between Hwa shang Mahāyāna and Kamalaśīla and its consequences (*MTNd* 395–411). This is also narrated in the *dBa' bzhed* (17b–25a), *sBa bzhed S* (54–64), *sBa bzhed G* (62–77) and *sBa bzhed P* (381–92), but the *MTN* narrative follows a version of the *Testimony of Ba* most closely resembling *sBa bzhed S*.²² The bSam yas Debate episode stands out most obviously as an alien addition to *MTN*, since Khri Srong lde btsan has already died before Padmasambhava leaves Tibet (see the outline, above). To narrate the bSam yas Debate, *MTN* then returns to a time when Khri Srong lde btsan is still alive. It is thus appended to the Khri Srong lde btsan section of *MTN*, drawn from the *Zangs gling ma*, rather than interpolated into it.

As Sørensen noted, *MTN* then continues to quote from this recension (but with some of its own unique additions) until *MTNd* 446.2. This content describes the bSam yas Debate during the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan, the life-stories of the later dharma-kings, and the travails of Buddhism in Tibet after the fall of the empire. These events in *MTN* fall beyond the scope of this paper on those narratives focusing on the reign of Khri Srong lde btsan.²³

²² *MTN* does not completely resemble *sBa bzhed S* here, however. As David Seyfort Ruegg (1989: 79) noted in his excellent comparison of sources on the bSam yas Debate:

It should be noted, moreover, that the words ascribed to dPal dbyaṅs in this *Chos 'byun* [*MTNYd* 404.13], in one version of the *sBa bžed* (G, p. 70) and in the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (ja, f. 117b) [i.e. *sBa bzhed P* 388.13] are ascribed in the *Žabs btags ma* version of the *sBa bžed* (S, p. 59) to a certain Sañ śi, a name (or title) borne by another member of the 'Ba family...

Pasang Wangdu and Diemberger (2000: 83 n. 318) agree in their analysis and add that the *dBa' bzhed* agrees with *sBa bzhed S* and the *Bu ston chos 'byung* (Martin 1997: 50–51, no. 72) agrees with the rest; then the next speaker according to the *dBa' bzhed* and *sBa bzhed S* is dPal dbyang whereas it is Ye shes dbang po in *sBa bzhed G* and *P*. It seems to me that an ancestor of *sBa bzhed G* (quoted in *sBa bzhed P*) has been altered for some reason, after the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* recension was formed from an even earlier exemplar of the *sBa bzhed*.

²³ See Hirshberg 2012: 224–25 and *forthcoming* for further analysis of the end portion

The Mes dbon gsum gi rnam par thar pa

The biographical anthology, *MBNT*, comprises of three biographies of Tibet's imperial dharma-kings, Srong btsan sgam po, Khri Srong lde btsan and Khri gTsug lde btsan (Ral pa can). Its depiction of Khri Srong lde btsan and the history of Buddhism after his reign are based on the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* recension, and it seems that *MBNT* most resembles *sBa bzhed S* among the extant exemplars of that recension. Its quotation from the *Testimony of Ba* begins on 82a6, and the first omission that marks its divergence against *sBa bzhed G* and *P* in agreement with the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* is at 82b6.²⁴ It then immediately diverges slightly from the whole *Testimony of Ba* tradition in listing only some of the five temples built at that time according to the latter.²⁵

MBNT continues to follow the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* recension, but with its own minor omissions and additions, all the way through its depiction of the life of Khri Srong lde btsan.²⁶ *MBNT* then moves on to the *bzhabs btags ma* appendix and is based on its narrative (with minor divergences) right up to folio 150a1 (corresponding to *sBa bzhed S* 91.6). There it breaks off and goes into a little detail on figures like Brom ston pa, Nā ro pa, Mar pa and Mi la ras pa. *MBNT* appears to omit the colophon of the *Extended Testimony of Ba* from its end/colophon. However, folio 151 is missing, which links the end of the narrative to its colophon, and so it is not yet certain that this is the case.

of *MTN*'s narrative, its codas and colophons (including the part that Sørensen (1994: 634) recognised as taken from the *sBa bzhed bzhabs btags ma*). As mentioned above (and in van der Kuijp 2013: n. 6) Hirshberg concludes his PhD dissertation by expressing strong doubts over the attribution of *MTN* to Nyang ral (2012: 250–60).

²⁴ This whole narrative is omitted in the *dBa' bzhed*, ruling out this as a source. *sBa bzhed G* 1.15–16 and *P* 294.12–13 (with the part that *MBNT* 82b6 omits underlined) reads: *gser 'od dam pa'i mdo* (*P*: *dam pa*) *dang / kri ya dang / u pa ya* (*P*: omits *ya*) *shas tsam zhus glegs bam* *spyān drangs nas rgyal po'i mchod gnas su phul /*

sBa bzhed S 1.12 and *MBNT* 82b6 omit the underlined part, above, but include instead a part (in bold), reading: *gser 'od dam pa'i mdo* ***GNAS PA DE gnyis spyān drangs nas rgyal po'i mchod gnas su phul /***

²⁵ *sBa bzhed S* 1.13–14 (with *sBa bzhed G* 1.16–2.1 in parentheses) reads: *de'i zhugs khang lta bur lha khang lnga bzhengs te* (∧) *lha sa (na) 'khar (mkhar) brag / brag dmar (na) mgrin bzang / mtshims (mchims) phu (na) ne (na) ral / brag dmar (na) ka chu / bsam yas* (*G* omits *bsam yas*) *ma sa gong gi gtsug lag khang dang lnga bzhengs pas /*

MBNT 82b6–83a1 reads only: *de'i lha khang du lha mkhar brag dang / brag dmar 'gran zang zangs la sogs pa gtsug lag khang bzhengs pas /*

²⁶ For more detail, see Doney forthcoming.

MTN breaks off from the *Testimony of Ba* narrative earlier, (*MTN*d 450.4, corresponding to *sBa bzhed* S 87.4). Why *MTN* ends here is a question requiring further investigation. Yet this fact strongly suggests that *MBNT* did not base its narrative on *MTN*, since *MBNT* contains narrative agreeing with *sBa bzhed* S after *MTN* has stopped quoting this *zhabs btags ma* recension.²⁷ Before this, from the death of Śāntarakṣita to the monastic Buddhist abandonment of Central Tibet, *MTN* tells almost the same story as *MBNT*, perhaps with a few more divergences. This shared narrative is not necessarily due to their both being written by Nyang ral, but because at this point they are both quoting liberally from the appendix (*zhabs btags*) to the *Testimony of Ba*.

As Szerb first pointed out, the extant *MBNT* colophon only names Śākya rin chen (1347–1426?) as the owner (?) of that ‘copy’ (*dpe*).²⁸ However, the publisher attributed *MBNT* to Nyang ral.²⁹ The lack of internal reference to Nyang ral provides our first evidence to problematise attributing *MBNT* to Nyang ral. The second reason for doubt is the dissimilarity between the *MBNT* narrative on Khri Srong lde btsan and that shared by the *Zangs gling ma* and *MTN*.

Comparing *MTN* with the *Testimony of Ba* and *MBNT*

As mentioned above, *MTN* not only includes the majority of the *Zangs gling ma* in its life-story of Khri Srong lde btsan, but also interpolates eight other episodes into that frame-narrative, some of which resemble

²⁷ van der Kuijp (2013: n. 75) suggests that the details in *MBNT* figures like Marpa and Mi la ras pa may suggest a *terminus ante quem* for either this manuscript copy or the original compilation of *MBNT*. However, we do not know exactly where the author stopped, because folio 151 is missing along with the beginning of the colophon. We may again ask why the author of *MBNT* chose to break off from the *Testimony of Ba* here, but we do not know, indeed, whether there was any further narrative in the exemplar of the *Testimony of Ba* that *MBNT* is based on. As mentioned above, *MTN* breaks off earlier, but again we do not know what, at the point of inclusion into *MTN*, constituted the end of the *Testimony of Ba* narrative that it evidently used.

²⁸ The colophon is missing one folio, but the next (152a3–4) reads: *btsun pa shakya rin chen ces bya'i dpe / chos rgyal mes dbon rnam kyi rnam par thar pa / rin po ches'i sgron mo zhes bya ba / rdzogs sho //*. Szerb (1990: 143 and *idem*: 146, ns. 3–4) tentatively identifies him with ‘the *sgom pa* of ’Bri gung, a contemporary of Sa-skya Pandita’ (*idem*: n. 4). The dates of Śākya rin chen are based on the TBRC (www.tbrc.org, accessed 19/12/09).

²⁹ Szerb explains:

Nyang Ral Nyi-ma-'od-zer is indicated as the author in most libraries. This mistake is probably due to the error of the Bhutanese publisher... I am indebted to Prof. A.M. Blondeau for calling my attention to the wrong attribution of authorship to Nyang Ral-pa-can. (*idem*: n. 3)

the *Testimony of Ba*'s account. It is clear that *MBNT* does not resemble the *Zangs gling ma*'s portrayal, or *MTN* before it begins to follow the *Extended Testimony of Ba*. *MBNT* does not contain any of the episodes on Khri Srong lde btsan that *MTN* borrows from the *Zangs gling ma*. *MBNT* includes *some* of those episodes that *MTN* borrows from the *Testimony of Ba* tradition and interpolates into the *Zangs gling ma* frame-narrative, but it copies them directly from that tradition, using quite different language to *MTN*. Here is a list of the interpolated episodes in *MTN* with their corresponding occurrences (or lack thereof) in other sources:

1. Khri Srong lde btsan's speech aged five (*MTNd* 273) is not included in the *dBa' bzhed*, but is in *sBa bzhed* G (4–5), *sBa bzhed* S (4) and *sBa bzhed* P (*MTNd* 297–98). It is also contained in *MBNT* (85a).
2. The choice that he gives to his ministers regarding what to build in Tibet (*MTNd* 274) does not feature in the *dBa' bzhed*, but is in *sBa bzhed* G (36), *sBa bzhed* S (29–30) and *sBa bzhed* P (334). It also features in *MBNT* (101a–b).
3. His support for a heretic rite (*MTNd* 274–75) is not included in the *dBa' bzhed*, but is in *sBa bzhed* G (40–42), *sBa bzhed* S (33–34) and *sBa bzhed* P (338–39). It is not included in *MBNT*.³⁰
4. The lavish descriptions of the bSam yas temples in prose and poetry (*MTNd* 294–302) do not resemble the *dBa' bzhed* (16b–17a), *sBa bzhed* G (43–53), *sBa bzhed* S (35–45) or *sBa bzhed* P (340–49), or *MBNT* (104b–14b).
5. Padmasambhava taking the form of the mythical Garuḍa bird (*MTNd* 291–92) is not present in any versions of the *Testimony of Ba* tradition or *MBNT*.
6. The king's dream that leads to finding statues of the gods on a hillside (*MTNd* 293–94) is narrated by the *dBa' bzhed* (16b), *sBa bzhed* G (42–43), *sBa bzhed* S (34–35) and *sBa bzhed* P (339–40), and in *MBNT* (104a–b).
7. The appearance of a huge lotus at the consecration of bSam yas (*MTNd* 302–03) does not feature in the *dBa' bzhed*, but is in *sBa bzhed* G (57), *sBa bzhed* S (48) and *sBa bzhed* P (354–55). It also features in *MBNT* (117a–b).

³⁰ *MBNT* omits the entire episode (corresponding to *sBa bzhed* S 33.1–34.8) with the inclusion of a gloss that makes it appear that the model for bSam yas was decided in a speech by Khri Srong lde btsan.

8. Padmasambhava's attempt to prolong Khri Srong lde btsan's life with a vase initiation (*MTNd* 347–351) is included in the *dBa' bzhed* (12b–13a), *sBa bzhed G* (30), *sBa bzhed S* (24–25) and *sBa bzhed P* (326–27). It is not included in *MBNT*.³¹

Of these, episodes 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8 are roughly similar to, and may be drawn from, the *Testimony of Ba* tradition—but probably not from the *dBa' bzhed* recension, which omits 1, 2, 3 and 7. Apart from numbers 3 and 8, *MBNT* contains all these episodes when they also feature in *sBa bzhed S*. However, neither *MBNT* nor the *Testimony of Ba* includes either the particular description of bSam yas or Padmasambhava as a Garuḍa (episodes 4 and 5) that are apparently either created from scratch or drawn from a tradition other than the *Testimony of Ba*. Below, I analyse a few of these interpolated episodes in *MTN*. Comparing the representation of these scenes in each of the traditions discussed above uncovers a matrix of witnesses attesting to the relative antiquity of each history in the matrix. There is only one episode in the life of Khri Srong lde btsan where such analysis can be wholly effective—the story of Khri Srong lde btsan's prophetic dream—since it alone is narrated by all the sources under discussion here.

The dream episode is in fact decisive for the argument built up so far, namely that *MBNT* follows the same recension as *sBa bzhed S* rather than *MTN* when narrating the life of Khri Srong lde btsan. The other episodes that I examine merely provide ancillary evidence for the same argument, but also show how *MTN* differs from the *Testimony of Ba* and *MBNT* in its description of these events. Finally, I analyse those episodes that are unique to *MTN*, and may be the most likely of all the interpolations to be written by Nyang ral himself. I shall focus on the dream narrative, with some corroborating evidence from other episodes, but shall not attempt to cover all nine from the list above given the space constraints of this article.

*The Episodes that Resemble the Testimony of Ba:
The King's Dream of bSam yas' Statues*

This episode is described in the *dBa' bzhed* (16b1–6), *sBa bzhed G* (42.14–43.10), *sBa bzhed P* (339.21–40.15), *sBa bzhed S* (34.12–35.6),

³¹ *MBNT* omits all the narrative corresponding to *sBa bzhed S* 23.3–26.7 (containing many of Padmasambhava's acts in Tibet before he is asked to leave), but adds a précis of these events (98b1–99a6). Then *MBNT* 99a6 omits Padmasambhava's prayer that he and unstinting benefactors may be reborn and practice Mahāyāna yoga in Akiniṣṭha heaven, and the ministers' plot to kill him (*sBa bzhed S* 26.8–13).

MTNd (293.17–94.6) and *MBNT* (104a4–4b5). Every other episode in the *MTN* list, above, is omitted in at least one other text. In this episode, Khri Srong lde btsan dreams that a guide shows him rocks on Khas/Has po ri Hill near bSam yas, which are in fact self-manifested statues of Buddhas and other deities. He awakes and transports the rock statues, notably one of Mahābodhi, to bSam yas to be worshipped in the central shrines. The *dBa' bzhed*, *sBa bzhed* G and P narrate similar versions of this episode. *MBNT* instead resembles *sBa bzhed* S's version. For example, part of the *dBa' bzhed* description (16b3–4) reads:

[Khri Srong lde btsan] arrived at Khas po ri [in the dream] and [his guide] made him examine all the rocks and said that this and this had such and such *tathāgathas'* names and the bodhisattvas had such and such names. [He] was also shown all the wrathful deities.

...khas po rir phyin pa dang / brag kun ltar bcug pa dang / 'di dang 'di ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i mtshan 'di dang 'di zhes bya ba dang / byang chub sems dpa'i mtshan 'di dang 'di zhes bya ba dang zhes mtshan smos so // khro bo kun yang bstan

sBa bzhed G (42.20–43.1) and *sBa bzhed* P (340.3–6, in parentheses) add detail to the *dBa' bzhed* version.³²

That [king] went to Has po ri; and after [the guide] made [Khri Srong lde btsan] look at all the rocks, [he] said the names of all [the deities]: 'These are the Buddha and such and such Bodhisattva.' There were nineteen deities. Being shown all the deities and (P: together with) the wrathful deities, the king laughed out of great joy.

de has po rir phyin pa dang / brag kun la (P omits la) bltar bcug nas / 'di ni sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' 'di dang 'di zhes kun gyi mtshan yang smos nas lha bcu dgu 'dug / khro bo dang (P adds bcas pa) kun bstan te / rgyal po dgyes ches nas he he byas

sBa bzhed S (35.1) omits much of the narrative featured in *sBa bzhed* G and P, including even those parts that *sBa bzhed* G and P share with the *dBa' bzhed*. *sBa bzhed* S therefore provides only a brief statement of the episode: 'When that [king] went, there were 19 deities. [He] laughed out of joy' (*de phyin tsa na lha bcu dgu 'dug / dgyes nas he he byas*).

sBa bzhed S only shares one word (*phyin*) with the *dBa' bzhed* here. *MBNT* (104b1–2) agrees with *sBa bzhed* S almost *verbatim*: 'When

³² They also omit one line (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i mtshan 'di dang 'di zhes bya ba dang /*), which may or may not have featured in the early recensions of the *Testimony of Ba*.

[the king] went there, there were 13 deities. [He] laughed with (?) joy' (*der phyin tsa na lha bcu gsum 'dug / dges grogs he he byas*).

It appears that *MBNT* agrees with *sBa bzhed S*, which has already removed much of the content included in *sBa bzhed G, P* and the *dBa' bzhed*. This adequately counters any claim that the omissions in *sBa bzhed S* are the result of centuries of transmissional errors, since *sBa bzhed S* and *MBNT* were transmitted completely separately. The long, almost *verbatim* quotes from *sBa bzhed S* in *MBNT* suggest that the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* was created before *MBNT* was written. There are, undoubtedly, some transmissional errors in *sBa bzhed S*. A close comparison of the *Testimony of Ba* versions with *MBNT* would help to correct these. *MBNT* also differs slightly from *sBa bzhed S*. For example, it mentions thirteen deities in the quote above, whereas the *Testimony of Ba* versions state that there were nineteen deities on the hill. This discrepancy may be the result of *MBNT*'s compiler deciding to stray from his copy text, or a transmissional error.

MTN contains a short and confused narration of the same episode, based only loosely on the *Testimony of Ba* tradition.³³ It reads:

The king thought: 'How should the statues (*rten*) in my temple be built?' Then in a dream a god from the intermedite space prophesied: 'Since Your Majesty's tutelary (*vid dam*) deity stands in the place decided by the blowing of the red cow,³⁴ invite [that deity] and ask it to

³³ Clearly the later *Testimony of Ba* tradition is its source, rather than the *dBa' bzhed*, because almost every interpolated episode in the Khri Srong lde btsan section of *MTN* comes from the later *Testimony of Ba* tradition and nowhere else. Also, in describing this episode, *MTNd* 294.4 uses the phrase *rdo sku rang byon de dbu'i gtsug tor nyug gi byon*. This closely resembles the wording of *sBa bzhed S* 35.3–4, *rdo'i sku rang byung the'u'i rjes med pa gtsug gtor nag ldem pa*, or of *sBa bzhed G* 3.4–5, *rdo sku byung / the'u'i rjes med pa gtsug tor nag po ldem me ba*. This sentence is not present in the *dBa' bzhed*.

³⁴ It is difficult to know what this may mean, though the wanderings of a red cow (*ba dmar po*) occurs in a similar context in a text translated by Franz-Karl Erhrhard (2004). The cow refuses to give milk, but instead offers it to a sandalwood tree in a nearby forest, alerting locals to the appearance of statues of the four brothers *Mahākarunika* (*thugs rje chen po mched bzhi*) there (see the *rTa ljang* chapter II.4, transliterated and translated in *idem*: 164 and 237–38). Perhaps, though, *ba* is a later correction of *ra*, goat, influenced by the narrative of the four brothers. This possibility is suggested by Heller's (1985) description of Nyang ral's *rKyal 'bud* texts, in which the skin of a red goat makes a bag (*rkyal*) 'used as a support for the *bla* and *srog* of an enemy for the purposes of its subjugation by illness or death' (*idem*: 259). The practitioner blows ('*bud*) into the bag and then the deity sGrol ging dmar po appears as a red man brandishing a sword (*idem*: 261). He kills the practitioner's enemy, but 'without being transferred to a paradise' (*idem*: 263) This suggests its peripheral relationship to classic Buddhist "liberation" ritual.

reside in the monastery!’ Having heard that voice, [Khri Srong lde btsan] thought to decide the [the meaning] of the speech on the peak of Has po ri. Arriving at the peak of Has po ri and not seeing anything at all, the king thought ‘This is the [prophesied] spot.’ Scratching [the earth] with his hand, the self-arisen rock-statue [of] Mahābodhi poked its top-knot [out of the earth]. [Khri Srong lde btsan] invited and asked it to reside as the principal deity of [bSam yas] Monastery in the lower, Tibetan-style chapel.³⁵

Unlike *MBNT*, *MTN* does not quote any extant *Testimony of Ba* version directly.³⁶ This strengthens my hypothesis that *MBNT* is not based on *MTN*, even where it narrates the same episode. *MBNT* could not possibly have arrived at a version so close to *sBa bzhed S* by quoting *MTN*. *MTN* differs greatly from the *Testimony of Ba* narrative’s details, even in the truncated form that *MBNT* quotes. It does not mention nineteen (or even thirteen) deities, or the king’s laughter. Nor does it mention *tathāgathas*, buddhas or bodhisattvas; *MTN* speaks of a *yid dam* instead. The details are almost all different but *structurally* it is recognisably the same narrative. It also appears in the same place in the life of Khri Srong lde btsan where the *Testimony of Ba* positions the episode. Interestingly, *MTN* alone implies that the king discovers the means for his own liberation on Has po ri, since he finds there not merely statues, but instead his tutelary deity (*yid dam*).

The Prince’s Speech Aged Five

In this episode, Khri Srong lde btsan announces himself to be the son of the Chinese queen, Jincheng Gongzhu, in order to counter the claim of the sNa nam clan to the child. The *Old Tibetan Annals* and *Royal Genealogy* make it clear that Khri Srong lde btsan’s mother *was* born in

³⁵ *MTNd* 293.17–94.6 reads: *nga’i lha khang du rten ji ltar bzhengs dgongs pa dang / rgyal po’i gzims pa’i mnal lam na bar snang nas lhas lung bstan te / rgyal po khyod kyi yid dam gyi lha ba dmar po ’bud pa’i skad {thag} [added by editors] chad pa’i sa der bzhugs pas gdan drongs la / gtsug lag khang du bzhugs su gsol cig bya ba byung ba dang / de’i (294) skad byung ba thos pas skad thag has po ri’i rtse mor chad pa snyam byed pa byung bas / de ma thag has po ri’i rtse mor byon pas mngon sum par ci yang mi ’dug pa la / rgyal pos sa de ’di yin gsungs nas / phyag gis brad pas / byang chub chen po rdo sku rang byon de dbu’i gtsug tor nyug gis byon / de gdan drangs te ’og khang bod lugs kyi gtsug lag khang gi lha’i gtso bor bzhugs su gsol lo /*

³⁶ Because of this, I cannot ascertain which version of the *Testimony of Ba*, if any, is its source. *MTN* could here be based on another source that radically retells the *Testimony of Ba* narrative. We find no greater degree of fidelity in any of the other episodes in the list given above that are in both *MTN* and the *Testimony of Ba*.

the sNa nam clan.³⁷ This tale is absent in the *dBa' bzhed* but in the later *Testimony of Ba* tradition the prince is described as of Chinese descent:

The sNa (r)nam queen, (b)Zhi steng(s) abducted Gongzhu's (*kong jo'i*) son and said: 'This [boy] was born to me.' ... The prince said: '[I,] Khri Srong lde btsan, am a Chinese uterine descendant (*rgya tsha*³⁸), whatever sNa nam Zhang [khrom pa] does.' Then [he] went to the lap of the Chinese [queen]. So [his] name itself was self-given.³⁹

Kapstein proposes that this episode constitutes a rhetorical literary device. It perhaps reflects a later, Buddhist belief in Jincheng Gongzhu's parentage of Khri Srong lde btsan.⁴⁰ *MBNT* (85a2–5) agrees with *sBa bzhed* S (4.5–10), though it diverges more than in the episode above. Its source is evidently an ancestor of *sBa bzhed* S rather than of G or P. It spells (Jincheng) Gongzhu's name *ong jo* rather than *kong jo*; and the lines that *sBa bzhed* S omits are also absent in *MBNT*.⁴¹

³⁷ See Dotson 2009: 123 and n. 313; also Bacot *et al.* 1940: 25–26 and 82.

³⁸ I would like to thank Brandon Dotson for clarifying this point in the translation.

³⁹ *sBa bzhed* G (4.16–5.2), with P's (297.19–98.3) variations in parentheses, reads: *kong jo'i bu sna rnam (nam) bza' bzhi (zhi) stengs kyis (steng gis) phrogs nas 'di (omits 'di) nga la skyes pa yin zer / der blon po kun gyis brtag par (pa) bya ba'i phyir / thang tshigs kyi (zhig gi) bug gar (par) bu bzhag nas bu su (sus) thob byed du bcug pas / kong jos sngon la zin pa bzhi stengs kyis zhi (reads zin pa sna nam bzas shi) na'ang shi snyam te (nas) phrogs pas / kong jos bu shi dogs nas lhod (inserts kyis) btang ste / yin dang nga'i yin te dri (gri) mo khyod zer nas btang (inserts bas) / bu kong jo'i yin par shes / lo gcig lon tsa na zhabs 'dzugs pa'i dga' ston byas te (ste) / sna nam pa rnam ber chung ngu re lag na thogs nas zhang po'i pang du shog zer (inserts bas) / rgyal bu na re / khri srong lde btsan rgya tsha lags / [5] sna nam zhang gi (gis) ci bgyi 'tshal / gsungs nas rgya'i spang (pang) du song bas / ming yang rang gis btags so /*

sBa bzhed S (4.7: ...*zin pa bzhi stengs...*) agrees with G against P in the only major difference between the latter two here.

⁴⁰ The tale resembles that of Solomon's judgement over two conflicting claims to ownership of a child. It is contained in the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya*, but may just as easily have come through Khotan from Judeo-Christian narratives passed along the Silk Road. Kapstein, who has traced these influences, rightly notes that this story 'appropriated a canonical Buddhist tale to justify a claimed Buddhist genealogy for a Buddhist king' (Kapstein 2000: 36) rather than a pro-Chinese stance on the Tibetan line of kings.

⁴¹ For example, in the note above *sBa bzhed* G (P in parentheses) reads: *der blon po kun gyis brtag par (pa) bya ba'i phyir / thang tshigs kyi (zhig gi) bug gar (par) bu bzhag*; whereas *sBa bzhed* S (4.6) reads *blon po kun gyis thang rtsigs kyi bug par bu bzhag*. *MBNT* (85a3) reads: *blon po kun gyi thang rtsis kyi bug par bu chung bzhag*; also omitting the only words of this text found in the *dBa' bzhed*.

Without the *dBa' bzhed*, we cannot be sure that these lines are omitted from *sBa bzhed* S and not merely added later to an ancestor of *sBa bzhed* G and P. However, the evidence from the king's dream episode, above, shows that *sBa bzhed* S does omit

MTN again differs from all *sBa bzhed* versions in its details:

When the prince reached the age of five, sNa nam Zhang khrom pa skyes and the sNa nam pa [clan] said ‘Prince Khri Srong lde btsan is our uterine descendant’, they put great pressure on the Chinese queen [Jincheng Gongzhu, and] arrived to abduct the prince.⁴² All the royal ministers assembled one day for a large festival and bothered the son-prince, asking: ‘Is your mother the Chinese queen or are [you] the son of the sNa Nam pa? Take sides!’ The son, Khri Srong lde btsan, answered: ‘holding up [my] hand with a claim (*gral rim*), [I] Khri Srong lde btsan am a Chinese uterine descendant, whatever sNa nam Zhang [khrom pa] does.’ He became famous for that claim.⁴³

MTN is similar to the *Testimony of Ba* only when quoting the words of Khri Srong lde btsan at the end of this episode. This latter part of the prince’s proclamation is almost incomprehensible in the form it has come down to us;⁴⁴ but *MTN* still quotes it *verbatim*. Unfortunately, this quote cannot be traced to any single *Testimony of Ba* version against the others, since they all give the same quote here.⁴⁵

elements from *sBa bzhed* G and P in its narrative. The new evidence from this episode shows that *MBNT* agrees with *sBa bzhed* S in its own text.

⁴² Sørensen (1994: 359, n. 1152) glosses this sentence: ‘but as the Chinese Kong-jo was very powerful, the child was kidnapped (by Kong-jo [Jinchen Gongzhu]?)’, though his parenthetical doubt suggests that this reading is tentative. Such a reading would make Khri Srong lde btsan the sNa nam clan’s descendant in *MTN*, kidnapped by Jinchen Gongzhu but colluding with her to promulgate the lie of his Chinese descent. Such a reading would contradict Nyang ral’s earlier description of Jinchen Gongzhu divine insemination (*MTNd* 272.9–72.14).

⁴³ *MTNd* 273.4–11 reads: *de nas rgyal bu dgung lo lnga lon pa na sna nam zhang khrom pa skyes dang / sna nam pa rnam rgyal bu khri srong lde btsan nged kyi tsha bo yin zer nas rgya mo la dhang che byas / rgyal bu ‘phrog tu byung ba la / der rgyal blon kun nyi ma gcig thams cad tshogs nas dga’ ston chen po byas nas / sras rgyal bu la khyed kyi ma rgya mo yin nam / sna nam pa’i sras yin ngos ‘dzin tu gcug pa las sras rgyal po [=bu] khri srong lde btsan na re / gral rim gyis phyag g.yas pa gdengs nas / khri srong lde btsan rgya tsha la / sna nam zhang gis ci zhi gbyi / zhes gral rim gyis bsgrags so*

⁴⁴ See Sørensen 1994: n. 1165 for other variants of *ci zhi gbyi* such as *ci byar yod* or *ci bgyi ‘tshal*. *ci bgyi* could also mean ‘a servant, valet; one who does what he is ordered to do’ (Das 2000 [1902]: 380 col.ii).

⁴⁵ *sBa bzhed* S (4.9–10) reads: *rgyal bu na re khri srong lde btsan rgyal tsha legs / sna nam zhang gi ci bgyi ‘tshal*
sBa bzhed G (4.24–5.1) reads: *rgyal bu na re / khri srong lde btsan rgya tsha lags / [5] sna nam zhang gi ci bgyi ‘tshal*
sBa bzhed P (298.1–2) reads: *rgyal bu na re / khri srong lde btsan rgya tsha lags / sna nam zhang gi ci bgyi ‘tshal*

I do not think we can make too much out of the fact that *sBa bzhed* S currently reads *rgyal tsha legs* for *rgya tsha la*. *MBNT* (85a5) reads *rgya’i tshab la*, which is

The evidence of this episode corroborates that of the episode above. *sBa bzhed* G and P tell largely similar tales, whereas *sBa bzhed* S is abridged and *MBNT* agrees with it against the other *Testimony of Ba* versions. *MTN* gives a structurally similar account, but with different details. In the end, their characterisations of the Khri Srong lde btsan in this episode are quite similar.

The King's Choice to his Ministers

In this episode, Khri Srong lde btsan seeks to persuade his ministers to build bSam yas Monastery, by presenting it as the least extravagant of his proposed constructions in Tibet. While *MBNT* agrees with *sBa bzhed* S again, *MTN*'s version is *closer* to those of *sBa bzhed* G and P. However, *MTN* places the episode earlier in Khri Srong lde btsan's life, before Padmasambhava arrives in Tibet.

The *sBa bzhed* tradition (S: 29.13–30.2; G: 36.5–13; P: 334.2–9) positions this episode after Padmasambhava has left Tibet; the master has begun to bind the chthonic deities to protect the dharma but also turned many ministers against him by using unorthodox methods. The land is more conducive to erect bSam yas Monastery on, but the local clan leaders of Tibet are perhaps even less willing to support Buddhist building projects than the local chthonic forces are. So Khri Srong lde btsan gives them the choice of what edifice to construct in Tibet; involving them in the process while making all the alternatives to bSam yas untenable. The choices, as recorded in *sBa bzhed* G and P, include:

Covering Has po ri in copper, so that all the nail heads show on the inside; or hiding the gTsang po [river] inside a copper tube and making it [reach] as far as 'Chong (P: Phyong); or digging a well 991 fathoms deep into Ka chu plain.⁴⁶

obviously transmitted from *rgya tsha la* rather than from the current reading of *sBa bzhed* S. *MBNT* draws on an ancestor of *sBa bzhed* S rather than any other version, therefore that their shared ancestor most probably read *rgya stsha la*. *MTN* could, therefore, as easily have quoted from an ancestor of *sBa bzhed* G, P or S here.

⁴⁶ *sBa bzhed* G 36.10–13 (P 334.6–9) reads: *yang na* (omits *yang na*) *has po ri zangs kyis btums la (nas) gzer mgo thams cad nang du bstan pa gcig (zhig) bya'am / yang na* (omits *yang na*) *gtsang po zangs ma'i (kyi) sbubs su bcug cing 'chong (la phyong) du ring bar (ba zhig) bya'am / yang na* (omits *yang na*) *ka chu (chu'i) thang la khron pa 'dom dgu brgya dang dgu bcu rtsa gcig 'bru'am /* Either dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba or, more likely, some intermediary scribe of *sBa bzhed* P has omitted *yang na*.

sBa bzhed S omits several elements of this list, and *MBNT* agrees with its reading:

Covering Khas po ri in copper; or hiding the gTsang po [river] inside a copper tube; or digging a well 990 fathoms deep into Ka chu plain.⁴⁷

MBNT positions this narrative after Padmasambhava leaves Tibet, again like *sBa bzhed S*. *MTN* appears to correspond to *sBa bzhed G* or *P* when it says that ‘option four was to cover Has po ri with copper, so that the heads of all the nails showed.’⁴⁸ The latter part of this choice is absent in *sBa bzhed S* and *MBNT*. However, the *Testimony of Ba*’s order of options is different to that of *MTN*; while the latter also omits some choices and adds others in their place. Unlike *sBa bzhed S* and *MBNT*, *MTN* situates this episode *before* Padmasambhava’s arrival in Tibet.⁴⁹

It is now possible to see the pattern of shared readings and divergence among our texts that I discussed in the *Testimony of Ba* section of this article. *sBa bzhed G* and *P* are linked by some common ancestor that constitutes an extension of the *dBa’ bzhed*’s core narrative. *sBa bzhed S*’s truncated narrative on Khri Srong lde btsan suggests a further recension (*sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*), perhaps redacted when the *zhabs btags* appendix was added to the end of it. *MBNT* follows this recension closely, which may date its existence to before or early in the fifteenth century (if the Śākya rin chen named in the *MBNT* colophon indeed lived from 1347 to 1426). *MTN* follows this recension after the end of the *Zangs gling ma* frame-narrative, but not necessarily before. *MTN*’s interpolations into the *Zangs gling ma* frame-narrative could be based on either the *sBa bzhed* or *sBa bzhed*

⁴⁷ *sBa bzhed S* 29.15–30.1 (with *MBNT* 101b1–2 in parentheses) reads: *yang na khas su (po) ri gser cha* (omits *gser cha*) *zangs kyi (kyis) gdum (btum) mam / yang na gtsang po zangs ma’i sbubs su ’jug (gzhug) gam / yang na bka’ chu’i (chu) thang la khron pa ’dom dgu brgya dang dgu bcu sa (pa gcig) bru’am /*

MBNT has been more faithfully transmitted than *sBa bzhed S*, and so agrees in some of its details (but not its general content) with *sBa bzhed G* and, to a lesser extent, *P*.

⁴⁸ *MTNd* 274.14–15: *has po ri zangs kyis phur (=phub) nas gzer thams cad kyi mgo nang du bstan pa byed dang bzhi*. Note too the spelling *has po ri* rather than *khas po ri*. Sørensen (1994: 634) believes that *MTN* ‘has employed a version identical or cognate to the Chin. ed. of BZH,’ i.e. *sBa bzhed G*. However the use of *nas* and the absence of *yang na* here could equally point towards an ancestor of *sBa bzhed P*.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, the *Padma bka’ thang* (1987: 343–45) agrees with *MTN* in placing this episode before Khri Srong lde btsan invites Indian masters to Tibet. This suggests that O rgyan gling pa may have had access to *MTN*, or at least been aware of that tradition of ordering the events. See Doney *in press*: 33–38 for correspondences between the *Padma bka’ thang* and the *Zangs gling ma*.

zhabs btags ma, or some other history loosely based on those recensions.⁵⁰ *MTN*'s novel re-ordering of the episodes suggests the latter, or at least a much stronger authorial presence than is shown in the last portion of *MTN*.

*The Episodes that are unique to the Me tog snying po:
The Poetic Descriptions of bSam yas*

MTN contains a number of unique sections. Their free-flowing narratives resemble Nyang ral's writing style, displayed in the unaugmented recension of the *Zangs gling ma* and the corresponding passages in the rest of *MTN*. The most arresting and poetic of these creations concerns the construction of bSam yas Monastery.

The *dBa' bzhed* (16b7–17a6) also contains a brief description of bSam yas. *sBa bzhed* G (43.10–53.17) and P (340.15–49.17) contain a wealth of extra detail.⁵¹ *sBa bzhed* S (35.6–45.9) includes most of this

⁵⁰ As quoted above, Sørensen (1994: 634–35) suggests that Nyang ral may have quoted a free-floating source that later became the *zhabs btags* appendix of *sBa bzhed* S. It is true that we do not yet know when the *zhabs btags* appendix was added to the *sBa bzhed* (though it evidently took place before the compilation of *MBNT*). Nonetheless, given the seamless move in both *MTN* and *MBNT* from the main narrative of the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* to its *zhabs btags* appendix (while omitting its self-references), I think it unlikely that either *MTN* or *MBNT* may have borrowed these quotes from another source, which the redactors of the *Testimony of Ba* also used when extending their narrative to become the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*. If the *Testimony of Ba* episodes were added to *MTN* after the twelfth century, then we need not suggest (as Sørensen does) an eleventh/twelfth-century date for this redaction, such that Nyang ral himself would have been aware of the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*. We can with more certainty assert (with Hirshberg 2012: 224–28) that the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* or a dependent history is quoted in *MTN*, but not necessarily by Nyang ral.

⁵¹ In the *dBa' bzhed*, the construction of bSam yas, begins with the installation of the statues found on Khas po ri. *dBa' bzhed* 16b7 (*de nas na bza' gsol / gser gyi ska rags bcings pa'i steng du 'jim pa g.yogso / /*) roughly equates to *sBa bzhed* G 43.10–13 and P 340.15–17 (in parentheses): *de nas khri la bzhugs pa dang btsan po dgyes te / man dhe (dhi) dang gser ga (rka) gsol / na bza' gsol nas btsan po nyid kyi gser gyi sku regs shākya thub pa'i* (P reads *na bza' dang rgyal po nyid gser gyi rka rags) sku la bcings so / cings pa'i (so / de'i) steng du* (omits *du*) *'jim pas g.yogs / phywa (gzugs) mkhan na re /*

sBa bzhed S omits much of this material, including *all* the *dBa' bzhed* text, in its version (35.6–7): (S omits *de nas*) *khri la bzhugs pa dang btsan po dgyes te / man dhe dang gser ka gsol / phywa mkhan na re /*

The later *Testimony of Ba* versions then add a lengthy description of the construction of bSam yas, before returning to the *dBa' bzhed*'s text. At the end of their descriptions of bSam yas, *sBa bzhed* G 52.19–53.17 and P 348.21–49.17 copy the description of the central pole being erected in the southern blue *stūpa* from *dBa' bzhed* 16b7–17a6, but with extra added detail about a miraculous golden set of

information, but has lost some in the course of its redaction. *MBNT* appears to agree with *sBa bzhed* S at first,⁵² but contains its own details later on.⁵³

MTN again describes events in a different order to the *Testimony of Ba*. Some of this earlier detail (e.g. *MTNd* 287–93) agrees with this tradition.⁵⁴ However, the subsequent lengthy prose and poetry description of bSam yas (*MTNd* 294–302) appears to be Nyang ral's own invention or based on a source differing from the *Testimony of Ba* tradition. Nyang ral must have been familiar with the layout of bSam yas; he would not have needed to base his description on any literary source. It is perhaps not intertextual historiography that he writes here, but a description of the monastery as it stood in his day.

armour. *sBa bzhed* S 44.14–45.9 follows the *dBa' bzhed* more loosely here, omitting some parts of this description.

Between these two stories in the *dBa' bzhed* (16b), there is an interlinear note on the different coloured *stūpas* of bSam yas. It is similar to *sBa bzhed* G 50.3–12, P 346.14–23 and S 42.2–9—except that all *sBa bzheds* give the description in different orders to the *dBa' bzhed*. Michael Willis (2013: 146–47) claims and that many of the interlinear annotations in the *dBa' bzhed* manuscript were added later, and did not belong to the original text. It is possible that this interlinear note was present in the version of the *dBa' bzhed* that the later *Testimony of Ba* redactor copied, perhaps also as an interlinear note that he/she then incorporated into the main text. However, because of the sparse details and the difference in order between this note and the rest of the *Testimony of Ba* tradition, it is more likely that the later *dBa' bzhed* scribe added the information in the interlinear note from his/her own knowledge of bSam yas. The question of the interlinear notes to the *dBa' bzhed* remains part of the continuing mystery surrounding its creation.

⁵² *MBNT* 104b5–6 omits the same part that *sBa bzhed* S (35.6–7, above) omits. It reads: [*MBNT* omits *de nas*] *khri la bzhugs pa dang bisan po shin du dgyes te / man de dang gser sga gsol / de la phyra mkhan na re /*

⁵³ See *MBNT* 104b–14b. An in-depth study of the early description of bSam yas in Tibetan literature will have to await a more detailed comparison between the architectural features of the monastery as far as we know they existed in the twelfth century and the textual accounts given in *MTN*, the *Testimony of Ba*, and *MBNT* (among other sources), all of which lies beyond the scope of this article. What follows is merely an early indication of the divergences of *MTN* from the other sources under discussion here.

⁵⁴ For example, *MTN*'s list of *stūpas* (*MTNd* 287.16–20) corresponds to the later *Testimony of Ba* tradition rather than the *dBa' bzhed*, in listing first the white, then red, black and finally blue *stūpas*. *MTN*'s list is in an earlier place in the description of bSam yas than that in the *Testimony of Ba*, though, and may merely be in accord with it because they both describe the same extant edifice. *MTN* positions the episode concerning the Has po ri statues later in the narrative (*MTNd* 293.17–94.6), therefore see above on its rough correspondence to the *Testimony of Ba* there.

Padmasambhava in the Form of Garuḍa

MTN includes in its section on building bSam yas, an arresting poem on *nāga*-subjugation that is not included in the *Testimony of Ba* tradition. Here, Padmasambhava takes the form of a mythical Garuḍa bird (*Khyung*), using this bird's natural predator-prey relationship with snakes to symbolise overcoming subterranean forces.⁵⁵ It reads:

The king and ministers went into the presence of the master.

In the great cave of mChims phu
They saw a frightening great Garuḍa incarnation (*sprul pa*).
It shone with plumes the colour of purified gold,
And all its fur was a fire of sharp *vajras*.
[Each] leading feather was like a brandished sword,
The tips like a turned razor.

It had a glowing-iron beak, bones and talons,
As if from a blacksmith's forge.
Its eyes, the sun and moon, were bulging and transforming.
The king of *nāgas*, Mal gro gzi chen,
And his minister Nag po glong rdol, both
Were seized by their snake bodies in its claw and subdued with its foot.

It forced their snake mouths open, lifted and shook their bodies.
Bringing their two palms together [in obeisance],
They bowed their serpent heads before the Garuḍa's face/ presence.
The Garuḍa's great fire being lit, the rocky canopy crackled.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The episode itself is included in the *Zangs gling ma*, but the long poem about Padmasambhava in the form of a Garuḍa is unique to MTN. It is possible that this description is inspired from other earlier narratives or religious descriptions of the mythical bird (for instance, Brandon Dotson pointed out to me its similarity to part of the Khra 'brug Monastery narrative given in Sørensen, Hazod and Gyalbo 2005). However, an added poem is well within the limits of a master creator of religious imagery like Nyang ral, and may merely be based on his own visions of the Garuḍa or Padmasambhava.

⁵⁶ MTNd 291.17–92.6 reads: *der rgyal blon rnams kyis slob dpon gyi drung du phyin pa dang / {de yang} [added by editors] mchims phu phug pa chen po'i nang na / sprul pa'i khyung chen 'jigs shing skyi bun pa / {spu} mdog btso ma'i gser du snang ba la / ba spu tham cad mtshon cha rdo rje'i me / gshog pa'i sgro ni ral gri lham pa 'dra / spu rtse rnams ni spu gri lham pa 'dra / mchu dang rus pa sder mo lcags sbar can / mgar ba'i so mal nang nas bton pa 'dra / nyi zla'i spyen ni 'bur zhing 'phrul pa can / klu'i rgyal po mal gro gzi chen dang / klu'i ded dpon nag po glong rdol gnyis / sbrul kyi sked pa phyag gis bzung ste mjug ma zhabs kyis nman / sbrul gyi kha ni gdangs btsum sked pa 'khyog cing 'gul / lag gnyis thal sbyar sbrul mgo khyung gi zhal du gsol ba khad / khyung gi me chen spar bas brag phub tsheg sgra can*. See also MTNc T 214.1.1–213.2.1.

Padmasambhava frightens the king with his display, but the transformation is necessary in order to tame the ground for building bSam yas. This poem is unique to *MTN*. The episode is not contained in the *Testimony of Ba* tradition, therefore the compiler of *MBNT* does not include it in the narrative.

Conclusion

We can now seriously question the attribution of *MBNT* to Nyang ral, since it seems to lack any influence from the *Zangs gling ma* or *MTN*. *MBNT* does not contain either of the two unique episodes added to *MTN*, or any of the multitude of episodes that *MTN* borrows from the *Zangs gling ma*. Nor does *MBNT* resemble *MTN*'s rendering of the episodes that it perhaps based on the *Testimony of Ba* or a similar source. That is because *MBNT* follows the *Testimony of Ba* tradition and not *MTN*. *MBNT* thus includes many episodes found in *sBa bzhed S* but not covered in *MTN*. It also omits some details and includes its own unique additions, mentioned in footnotes 30 and 31 above. Generally though, *MBNT* remains faithful to an ancestor of *sBa bzhed S*, which would suggest it had no access to, or simply ignored the *Zangs gling ma* and *MTN* when describing the life of Khri Srong lde btsan. Its almost *verbatim* quotation of the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* does not in any way lessen its value as either literature or as part of the story of changing historiography in Tibet.

Just as the door to interpreting *MBNT* as a work by Nyang ral finally closes, the door to interpreting its second half within the changing tradition of the *Testimony of Ba* opens. It is clear that *MBNT* follows an ancestor of *sBa bzhed S*, which resembles the *dBa' bzhed* less than *sBa bzhed G* does. As such, *MBNT* is a useful source for identifying transmissional or even redactional changes in *sBa bzhed S* against the other exemplars of the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*, because *MBNT* quotes the *Extended Testimony of Ba* and then follows its own transmissional line after that. Hitherto, it was very difficult to know how much of *sBa bzhed S* had been affected by much later redaction or transmission. The *dBa' bzhed* now shows that the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* is a redaction of the shared ancestor of *sBa bzhed G* and *P*. *MBNT*'s witness indicates that this redaction took place before the compilation of *MBNT*. If the identification and dates of Śākya rin chen are correct, then this dates the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma* to the early fifteenth century or earlier, as has long been assumed. The first half of *MBNT* still requires detailed comparison with the other similar life-

stories of Srong btsan sgam po (including those contained in Nyang ral's works), following Sørensen.⁵⁷

The case of *MTN* is more complex, raising a number of difficult questions. There are eight episodes interpolated into the *Zangs gling ma* story arc in *MTN*. Are they Nyang ral's, or later interpolations? Do they therefore constitute twelfth-century, or subsequent, depictions of Padmasambhava and Khri Srong lde btsan? All versions of *MTN* appear to contain the same episodes as each other, but may nevertheless all stem from a later recension.⁵⁸ The episodes interpolated into the *Zangs gling ma* frame-narrative do not appear to conflict with any of its details, unlike the return to a living Khri Srong lde btsan after the *Zangs gling ma* narrative ends in *MTN*. Furthermore, they lack the similarity to the *Testimony of Ba* that the later parts of *MTN* show. These interpolated episodes appear at one remove from the *Testimony of Ba*, as if they were uniquely adapted rather than copied *verbatim* from an exemplar in front of the author.

This is in contrast to the final portion of *MTN*, which resembles the *Testimony of Ba* far more closely. So, where both *MTN* and *MBNT* relate similar depictions of the bSam yas Debate and the history of Buddhism after the (second!) death of Khri Srong lde btsan, they also share this narrative with the *sBa bzhed zhabs btags ma*. *MBNT* stands closest to the *Testimony of Ba* in this regard, just as it was almost completely faithful to the same narrative in its entire life-story of Khri Srong lde btsan. The person who put down on paper the latter portion of *MTN* based it on the *Testimony of Ba*, but then apparently diverged from it (and it seems more often than the compiler of *MBNT*), though

⁵⁷ Sørensen (1994:641–42), despite attributing *MBNT* 'in all probability, to Nyang ral,' notes that its first half 'shows also a close affinity to KCHKKHM' rather than the *Maṅi bka' 'bum*, which Nyang ral is believed to have had a hand in producing (see Ehrhard 2000: 207). Evidently, having investigated the *Maṅi bka' 'bum* (which contains a life-story of Srong btsan sgam po that is similar to those above and also his life-story in *MTN*), Sørensen apparently believed it did not resemble *MBNT* as closely as the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* did. He does not specify which of the three versions of the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* (Martin 1997: 24, no. 4) that he investigated it most closely resembles (see *idem*: 639), and ascertaining the relation between all these texts would be a *desideratum* for any future analysis of *MBNT*.

⁵⁸ The late Gene Smith informed me that all four versions stem probably from the same recension (personal communication, 15th October 2008), and this certainly appears to be the case when comparing their accounts of the life of Khri Srong lde btsan (see Doney *in press*: 46–58). Therefore their shared details do not necessarily prove that the original *MTN* contained all these episodes until another recension of the text appears. All the currently available versions contain the additional episodes, but that is no proof of their antiquity. It is hoped that the future discovery of other *MTN* manuscripts will throw more light on the *MTN* tradition.

we cannot be sure what was and was not in their respective copy-texts. It also remains to be seen whether the episodes that resemble the *Testimony of Ba*, interpolated into the *Zangs gling ma* frame-narrative in *MTN*, were added at the same time as the later portion of the narrative, and/or at the same time as those that appear unique to *MTN* (the description of bSam yas and the poem about the Garuḍa). If allowed to make an aesthetic judgement, informed by wider reading of Nyang ral's narratives, I would guess that the unique additions maintain a greater claim to be his work than the adaptations of the *Testimony of Ba*. They at least seem to share his ease of style and flair for poetry, while the episodes that resemble the *Testimony of Ba* appear garbled or stilted and lack his fluid prose style and all of his poetry.

It is now possible to update Sørensen's pioneering attempt to understand the relation between these texts. *MTNc* 292a5ff. (i.e. on the life of Khri Srong lde btsan) does not follow the *Testimony of Ba* with lengthy sub-sections taken from the *Zangs gling ma*, but in fact the reverse.⁵⁹ Those parts that diverge from the *Zangs gling ma* are either unique to *MTN* or only roughly similar to extant version of the *Testimony of Ba*. In these latter cases, Sørensen may be right that *MTN* draws from a common version of the tradition. It is still unclear whether or not these interpolations are Nyang ral's own or those of a later scribe or editor. The degree of resemblance that Sørensen rightly saw between the later parts of *MTN* and *sBa bzhed S* could suggest that they were not by the same hand who earlier in the narrative (and in time?) interpolated the loose adaptations of vignettes from the *Testimony of Ba* tradition. However, for the present, it is necessary to halt before agreeing with Sørensen that Nyang ral (rather than some later compiler/editor of *MTN*) 'employed a version [of *sBa bzhed G*]...cites a part of its colophon...[or] shares verbatim passages with the annotated version' of the *Testimony of Ba* tradition. What Sørensen saw as signs of shared authorship actually reflects a more complex relationship between the narratives that may in the end defy simple categorisation, say in a critical edition or stemma.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Sørensen may not have noticed that the latter's entire description of the life of Khri Srong lde btsan is included in *MTN*, since he only had access to the interpolated recension of this narrative that is included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* and the dependent edition published in 1989 (see Sørensen 1994: 640–41 for the sources he uses for the *Zangs gling ma*).

⁶⁰ Following the ideas of Paul Zumthor (1972: 65–75), who connects the anonymity of authorship in Medieval French poetry to a high degree of mutability of the textual tradition (see also Doney *in press*: 40–41, n. 50).

So it is unlikely that Nyang ral compiled *MBNT*, and perhaps the same is true of the *MTN* as we have it today. Nevertheless, both works' accounts of the history of Tibet from the ninth century onwards, as well their depictions of the important (if perhaps legendary) bSam yas Debate, make them important additions to the collection of sources that contain the *Testimony of Ba* in quotation. Their witness will aid any future textual analysis of this tradition and the possible dating of its strata back to the ninth century. *MTN*'s overall depiction of the eighth-century reign of Khri Srong lde btsan and Padmasambhava's role in bringing Buddhism to Tibet can be tentatively attributed to Nyang ral, with some doubt regarding those parts that resemble the *Testimony of Ba* account (but less concerning those that are unique to *MTN*). Together with the *Zangs gling ma*, on which I would argue the depiction of this reign in *MTN* is largely based, *MTN* is a largely trustworthy source of Nyang ral's conception of imperial-period Tibet, and thus a very important early source of changing Tibetan historiography. Such sources allow us to continue a discussion that Sørensen has been highly influential in forwarding. By this I mean the conversation about how memory, encoded in story, was passed down the generations and spread to become integral to Tibet's self-image as a largely Buddhist country.

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