

LOST AND FOUND: A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY DISCUSSION
OF THEN-AVAILABLE SOURCES ON
GNUBS CHEN SANGS RGYAS YE SHES

JACOB P. DALTON
*University of California
Berkeley*

The field of gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes studies has been flourishing in recent years. The way is being led by several attempts to translate the late ninth to early tenth-century Tibetan master's most famous work, the *bSam gtan mig sgron*,¹ and has been further enriched by the recent discovery of the *bKa' shog rgya bo che*, an influential biography of gNubs chen.² gNubs chen stands as the foremost Tibetan author of Tibet's so-called Age of Fragmentation, and the numerous and sometimes quite lengthy texts attributed to him offer innumerable insights into the formation of early Tibetan Buddhism.³ The present article offers one more minor piece of the puzzle that surrounds this intriguing figure. As I have argued elsewhere, the *bKa' shog rgya bo che* claims to be gNubs chen's final testament and thus a work of autobiography, but it is without question a later composition, probably compiled by the *phyi dar* inheritors of gNubs chen's spiritual line. In the same article, I date the *rGya bo che* to between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, and more likely to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.⁴ Our most significant piece of evidence in this regard is an early quotation from the *rGya bo che* that appears in another recently discovered work from the same *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* collection in which the *rGya bo che* itself appeared, a work bearing the title, *gTad rgya lnga'i go don gyi brjed byang gi 'grel pa* (*Commentary for Remembering the Significance of The Five Seals of Entrustment*). The latter is a short collection of notes on the mDo dbang lineage that may be attributed to Zur ham shakya 'byung gnas and his circle of students and therefore dated to around the mid-fourteenth century. The work's quotation from the *rGya bo che* appears toward the end of a

¹ The forthcoming Ph.D. thesis by Dylan Esler of Université Catholique de Louvain being a particularly promising example.

² For some preliminary remarks on this work, see Dalton, forthcoming.

³ On the Age of Fragmentation and gNubs chen's role in it, see Dalton 2011, 44-76.

⁴ See Dalton 2014.

discussion of gNubs chen's life and in particular of his encounters with the *dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* and its mDo dbang ritual system. The present article offers a translation and transcription (the latter in an appendix) of this fourteenth-century biographical discussion and reflects briefly on its possible significance.

I. Summary of the Contents of the Volume

The *brJed byang gi 'grel pa* appears in middle of the second volume (*smad cha*) of a two-volume collection of materials entirely dedicated to the history and performance of the mDo dbang.⁵ According to the *dkar chag* at the beginning of each volume, the collection consists of just one work, an initiation manual (*dbang chog*) attributed to the late thirteenth-century master, gLan bsod nams mgon po. Closer examination reveals, however, a more complicated picture. What might be considered the *gLan chog* proper (though as we shall see, such judgments are difficult), which is, incidentally, our earliest full-length manual for the mDo dbang's complex initiation ritual, ends on vol. 22, f. 87b.1 (p. 174). That gLan bsod nams was indeed responsible for writing this first text is suggested at several points, including in the closing passage, where gLan refers to himself in the first person.⁶ Nonetheless, the lineage described in this same passage continues for three more generations, to end with Zur haṃ shākya 'byung gnas who is referred to with the honorific title of “*drung*” and reported to have granted the seal of entrustment to his disciples.⁷ It seems, then, that a later recension of gLan's manual occurred some time after gLan bsod nams' original composition, probably at the time of Zur haṃ and thus sometime around the second half of the fourteenth century.

Immediately following this initial text comes another manual for bestowing the initiations of the mDo dbang system. The previous manual does not actually provide much in the way of ritual detail, being

⁵ See *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vols. 22-23. The two volumes are 320 folios (640 sides) and 300 folios (600 sides) in length, respectively. On the mDo dbang tradition, see Dalton forthcoming.

⁶ See vol. 22, f. 87a.5-6 (p. 173): *glan ban bsod nams mgon po bdag gis bkod pa*. See also a passage on the seal of entrustment (*gtad rgya*) lineage that reads: *khong gnyis la blan pan bsod nams mgon po bdag gis gtad rgya dang bcas nas zhus pa lags so*; vol. 22, f. 54a.6 (p. 107).

⁷ See vol. 22, f. 54b.1 (p. 108). And here we may add that, despite the volume title page's clear attribution of the manual to gLan bsod nams, in the earlier 110-volume version of the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* (TBRC Resource ID W21508), in which our texts appear in volumes 61 and 62, the left margin on the verso of each folio reads, “*zur haṃ mdo dbang*,” though the significance of this fact remains unclear.

more focused on the system's origin myths and so forth, and this second work fills in many of the gaps. The break between these two texts is marked by a *rdzogs so*, which ends the previous work, followed by a double *yig mgo* and an opening title printed in a smaller font: *A Ritual Manual for Entering into [the Vehicles of] Gods and Humans, Śrāvakas, and Pratyekabuddhas (Lha mi nyan rang 'jug chog bzugs)*.⁸ The second text itself is interrupted at various points by both “minor breaks,” each of which is marked by a gap followed by a decorative *shad*, and “major breaks”⁹ that are marked by a final *rdzogs so*, a gap, a single or double *yig mgo* (with no apparent rhyme or reason), and an opening “*na mo gu ru*,” but (perhaps significantly) no new title. This second manual continues in this way through vol. 22, f. 117a (p. 233), at which point one of the now familiar “major breaks” occurs, and a new section for performing the Mahāyāna *bodhisattva* initiations (for both Cittamatra and Madhyamaka, combined) begins. (Here it may help to clarify that the mDo dbang system involves a lengthy series of initiations into each of the nine vehicles of the rNying ma school's doxographical scheme, in an ascending order.) Why this section on the *bodhisattva* initiations was not mentioned in the original title (which names only the vehicles of gods and humans, of Śrāvakas, and of Pratyekabuddhas) is not explained. Nonetheless, what follows seems to be a continuation of the same text, i.e. the second text in the volume. At least one part of this *bodhisattva* section is said to have been written by Zur chos rje byams pa seng ge (who stands, with gLan bsod nams, two generations before Zur haṃ śākya 'byung gnas in the mDo dbang lineage, and was probably active around the same time as gLan bsod nams mgon po),¹⁰ but the section as a whole, and probably the entire text, was likely redacted later, possibly by Zur haṃ and his circle, as a lineage list that appears in the context of generating *bodhicitta* ends with these figures.¹¹

The text continues still further on vol. 22, f. 129b.2 (p. 258), where the initiations into the outer and inner vehicles of Secret Mantra begin, again with no new title. This section continues through f. 156b.1 (p.

⁸ In the earlier 110-volume version, there is also a line break (see vol. 61, p. 208). In general, the newer version appears to exclude line breaks. How this relates to the original manuscript remains unknown.

⁹ For an example of a major break, see the transition from the initiations of Gods and Humans and those of the Śrāvakas; see vol. 22, f. 96a.6 (p.191). Note that the Śrāvaka initiations here are divided into those of the *dge tshul* and the *dge slong*, with the transition occurring at vol. 22, f. 108b.5 (p.216).

¹⁰ See vol. 22, f. 121b.2 (p. 242).

¹¹ As suggested by vol. 22, f. 119a.4 (p. 237).

311), at which point there occurs a series of lengthy quotations from the *dBang bskur rgyal po'i rgyud*.¹² In his own seventeenth-century initiation manual, Lo chen dharmasrī terms the latter a “supporting tantra” of the mDo dbang system.¹³ Next comes a brief set of notes on the mDo dbang’s ritual structure which ends by citing the source as the *dBang don bsodus* by the legendary Indian master, bDe ba gsal mdzad.¹⁴ This is followed, without explanation, by two further short works by this same master on the mDo dbang ritual system—the *dBang don rnam par 'byed pa* and the far shorter *dBang don rgya cher 'byed pa*—followed again by a series of short sets of ritual instructions, all (it seems) purporting to have been originally taught by both Ācārya *Prakāśālamkāra (gSal ba'i rgyan, a.k.a. bDe ba gsal mdzad) and Jo bo sangs rgyas (i.e. gNubs chen himself).¹⁵ These are followed again by a series of short meditation texts (in a generally, and occasionally explicitly, Atiyoga style), at least some of which are attributed to gNubs chen as well.¹⁶

Next comes a series of three detailed discussions of the secret aspects of the secret, inner, and outer initiations, which in this system correspond to the initiations of Atiyoga, Anuyoga, and Mahāyoga, respectively. The first of these three sections (but none of the others) is marked with its own title in small print (*'di gsang dbang mdo la bskur ba legs*), indicating that such titles, like so many of the textual divisions in this volume, do not tell us much about what should be considered an actual text and what merely a section.¹⁷ Then come a few short ritual

¹² The text quoted appears to be different but possibly related to the Atiyoga tantra of the same name, and which also ends with its tenth chapter, at *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, vol. *nga*, 465.5-526.6. The series of quotations in our volume ends at vol. 22, f. 164a.2 (p. 327).

¹³ *rDo rje'i them skas*, 21, where it is listed as such along with the *Rnam par snang mdzad thig le dbang gi rgyud*.

¹⁴ Vol. 22, f. 164b.3 (p. 328).

¹⁵ Vol. 22, f. 175a.6 (p. 349): *a tsarya gsal ba'i brgyan gyis mdzad gsung yang/ jo bo sangs rgyas kyi yin yang gsung ngo*. That gSal ba'i rgyan and bDe ba gsal mdzad are the same person is suggested at the end of the *Las tho rab gnas* (f. 173b.1-2), which reads: *slob dpon a tsa ra gsal ba brgyan gyi las tho rab gnas/ ལྷོག་པོ་འཇམ་མགས་པོ་འཇམ་པོ་འཇམ་པོ་འཇམ་པོ་ / bde bar gsal mdzad kyis mdzad pa rdzogs so*.

¹⁶ See vol. 22, f. 193a.4 (p. 385): “Written as a service by Sangs rgyas ye shes rin po che, for the aural transmission of dGa’ rab rdo rje” (*dga’ rab rdo rje’i snyan rgyud la/ sangs rgyas ye shes rin po ches zhabs thog tu mdzad pa rdzogs so*).

¹⁷ The text ends at vol. 22, f. 208a.4 (p. 415), by specifying that the foregoing text addresses, “the hidden and covert procedures for the outer, inner, and secret initiations is complete” (*phyi nang gsang bag sum gyi dbang lag len gab cing sbas pa rdzogs nga*).

notes, and then a distinct text (ostensibly a translation) bearing a title in both Sanskrit and Tibetan: *A Garland of Jewels: The Activities for the Initiation and Mandala (dBang dang dkyil 'khor gyi las rin chen phreng ba)*,¹⁸ followed by a related *brjed byang* (unattributed)¹⁹ and a *las khrigs* (also unattributed).²⁰

Next is a very short (one and a half folio sides) lineage list, the earliest generations of which resemble a rDzogs chen lineage, passing as they do from Kun tu bzang po through Vajrasattva, dGa' rab rdo rje, and so on, but the later generations of which resemble more usual mDo dbang lineages. When the line reaches gNubs chen (here named Jo bo sangs rgyas), we learn the following biographical details:

He was the son of these two: his father, rGyal ba bsod nams, and his mother, Sras mo sgron ma. He went to India seven times, absorbed the essence of the scholars of India, and was granted initiation by Vasudhara. He was able to unite in actuality with goddesses and female *nāgas*. He made all the gods and demons his servants. He mastered all the teachings and mastered the humans and non-humans. He was actually a *bodhisattva* of the eighth level. While dwelling at Gangs rdzong, he was actually aided and served food by the children of *yakṣasas*. He was assisted by the children of *gandharvas*. While traveling to the charnel grounds, he was actually paid homage and received with great reverence by spirits. When he practiced (lit. “enacted the intention”) at rNubs mtsho gling,²¹ he was actually served by a six-headed *nāga*-serpent.²²

¹⁸ The work runs from vol. 22, f. 210b.3 to 245a.6 (p.420-489, with no translation colophon at the end. Note that dMnyal ba bde legs, Zur ham's student, used the same title—the *Rin chen phreng ba*—as the title for his own mDo dbang initiation manual (*dbang chog*).

¹⁹ Ends vol. 22, f. 247b.5 (p. 494) with the title, *dBang rin chen phreng ba'i brjed byang*.

²⁰ Ends vol. 22, f. 252b.2 (p. 504) with the title, *dBang nor bu phreng ba'i las kyi khrig*.

²¹ Probably sic for sNubs mtsho gling, located in Yar 'brog, to the southwest of modern Lhasa. See also n. 48.

²² Vol. 22, f. 253b.3-253a.1 (pp. 504-5): *yab rgyal ba bsod nams/ yum sras mo sgron ma gnyis kyi sras so/ rgya gar yul du lan bdun byon rgya gar mkhas pa'i bcud stims/ bas u dha ras dbang bskur/ lha mo klu mo dang dngos su sbyor ba byed nus/ lha srin thams cad bran du 'khol/ bka' thams cad la dbang bsgyur/ mi dang mi ma yin pa la dbang bsgyur ba/ sa brgyad pa'i byang chub sems dpa' dngos yin/ gangs rdzong du bzhugs pa'i dus su gnod sbyin phru gus dngos su gsol zas drangs so/ dur khrod du byon pa'i dus su yid wags kyi dngos su 'dud cing zhabs spyi bos glangs so/ dri za phru gu phyag gis zin/ rnubs mtsho gling du dgongs pa mdzad pas klu sbrul mgo drug pa gcig gis dngos su gsol drangs so.*

Following this brief biographical sketch, the lineage continues, to end with Zur byams pa seng ge, who, we might guess, may have authored the text.²³

Next comes a manual for establishing the mandala (titled at the end and in transliteration, a *Maṇḍala-nopika*),²⁴ and then another purportedly translated work bearing a title provided in both Sanskrit and Tibetan: *A Sādhana for the Wrathful Vajra Family* (*Khro bo rdo rje rigs kyi bsgrub thabs*), associated in some way with bDe ba gsal mdzad.²⁵ This is followed by a long series of manuals for establishing the mandala and oneself within it, in preparation for the granting of initiation. These run through the end of the first volume and into the second (i.e. into volume 23 of the *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*).²⁶ The texts, perhaps better seen as mere sections, are not attributed, but the next series of short works on the “methods for bestowing initiation” (*dbang bskur ba'i thabs*) is said to have been “the system of the great lama lHa rje nya tshal pa” (i.e. gLan bsod nams mgon po).²⁷

After these, we move into a series of texts by Zur haṃ shākya 'byung gnas, beginning with a description of the *a ti'i rtsal dbang*,²⁸ and followed by some additional prayers on rDzogs chen that are similarly attributed to Zur haṃ.²⁹ Then come some further Zur haṃ-authored notes on the lineages of the highest vehicles of rNying ma pa tantra, and a series of vajra songs.³⁰ And now, finally, begins the text that is our primary concern here, the *gTad rgya lnga'i go don gyi brjed byang gi 'grel pa*.

Before turning to the *brJed byang* itself, however, we should note that the *brJed byang* is followed by one final and very long text that ends the second volume of the collection. The text contains an array of notes on the rites associated with the mDo dbang ceremonies, all arranged by vehicle. The lengthy 108-chapter discussion of the initiations into the vehicle of Yoga-tantra is of some interest for the refrain that ends each chapter, a prayer that the initiation may be received in the same way that Siddhārthasiddhi did atop Mount Meru,

²³ See vol. 22, f. 253a.3 (p. 505).

²⁴ Ends at vol. 22, f. 262a.3 (p. 523).

²⁵ Ends at vol. 22, f. 285a.4 (p. 569) with the line: *rgyu bde bar gsal mdzad/ lung gi zhi khro lhag ma dang bcas pa snang*.

²⁶ Ending at vol. 23, f. 12b.1 (p. 24).

²⁷ See vol. 23, f. 17b.1 (p. 34).

²⁸ Ends on vol. 23, f. 36a.4 (p. 71) with the claim that the preceding text represents the “handwritten notes” (*zin bris*) of Zur haṃ shākya 'byung.”

²⁹ See vol. 23, f. 41a.6 (p. 81).

³⁰ Ending on vol. 23, f. 53b.5 (p. 106).

in a clear reference to the opening scene of the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha*.³¹ Unfortunately this last text is unattributed, but we may suspect the hands of Zur haṃ and his students.

II. Overview of the Commentary for Remembering

By now it should be abundantly clear that what we are looking at here, in volumes 22 and 23, is a collection of mDo dbang-related materials—a loosely organized ritual manual for the performance of the initiation ceremonies (*dbang chog*)—that grew out of the early Zur tradition and represents the work of three principal authors: gLan bsod nams mgon po, Zur Byams pa seng ge, and Zur haṃ shākya ’byung gnas. The former two figures lived two lineal generations before Zur haṃ, both probably in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, while Zur haṃ flourished in the mid-fourteenth century. Though the collection as a whole bears the marks of Zur haṃ’s redactorial hand, its individual works are arranged in a vaguely chronological order, at least in the sense that gLan’s writings open the collection and Zur haṃ’s close it.

The *brJed byang* itself, as I have identified it for the purposes of this article, runs from f. 53b.5-90b.5 (pp. 106-180) of volume 23.³² The work begins with a relatively clear title that is marked by a double *yig mgo* and a final “*bzhugs so.*” Like most of the “texts” contained in these two volumes, its contents are divided by a number of text-breaks of varying strengths. Given that all of its sections remain focused on the “seal of entrustment” (*gtad rgya*) and the lineages associated with that tradition (once termed a *gTad rgya snyan rgyud*),³³ it seems reasonable to identify them as a single “text.” By now it should be clear, however, that the lines between “texts” and “sections” in this volume are vague, at best.

No clear attribution appears in the text. Given the names listed in the various lineages that are discussed, however, and the structure of the volume as a whole, it seems safe to assume that the *brJed byang* represents the work of Zur haṃ and his circle of students. In various places, moreover, we see Zur haṃ referring to himself as “myself, Zur haṃ shākya ’byung gnas.”³⁴ That said, there is some reason to believe that the text may be built upon earlier writings by gLan bsod nams

³¹ Ending on vol. 23, 181a.3 (p. 361).

³² In the earlier 110-volume collection, it may be found at vol. 61, f. 438a.4 to 481a.3 (pp. 875-962).

³³ See vol. 23, f. 56a.5 (p. 111).

³⁴ See, for example, vol. 23, f. 63a.4 (p. 125) and 63b.4 (p. 126).

mgon po, as we have seen occurring elsewhere in the same volume.³⁵ In short, we can date the work with some assurance to around the second half of the fourteenth century. (Unfortunately Zur ham's dates remain difficult to pinpoint more precisely.)³⁶

III. *Translation of gNubs chen's Biography from the brJed byang*

The biographical notes that are our primary focus appear in the midst of this *brJed byang*. They are of particular interest not only for the details they provide, but for the variety of sources cited in them. Given that the recently discovered biography of gNubs chen, the *bKa' shog rgya bo che*, mentioned at the outset of the present article, does not make much of gNubs chen's involvements with the *dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, the notes translated here are also significant for being some of our earliest evidence on those activities. But before drawing any further conclusions, we should turn to the text itself.

We join the account of the lineage immediately following a discussion of Vasudhāra and Che btsan skyes, two early masters of the mDo dbang tradition (from Nepal and Bru sha, respectively), receiving the initiations at Rājagrha in exchange for an offering of gold. For more on these two figures and the Indian gTsug lag dpal dge, the reader is directed to the *Sutra Initiation Guidebook (Mdo dbang gnas yig)*, written by sLob dpon sangs rgyas himself.³⁷ Then the text continues as follows:

At that time, some masters prophesied that a man of the charnel grounds, the great mountain of sGregs, with the secular name rDo rje khri gtsug—a great scholar—would be born to the Zung mkhar ba of the bsGregs region,³⁸ the father gSang ba'i dbang phyug, and the

³⁵ “This was born from the mouth of lHa rje gLan chen po” (*lha rje glan chen po'i zhal nas 'khrungs pa*), we read at the end of one section; see vol. 23, f. 62a.1 (p. 123).

³⁶ Here we may note that our *brJed byang* has Zur ham teaching both dMyal ba bde legs, the author of the *'Dus pa chen po mdo'i dbang chog rin chen phreng ba*, and the treasure revealer rDo rje gling pa (1346-1405), which would seem to place Zur ham's dates squarely in the middle of the fourteenth century.

³⁷ Vol. 23, f. 78b. 4 (p. 156).

³⁸ *Yul bsgregs kyi zung mkhar ba*. bsGregs is an alternate spelling for sGregs, i.e. the valley just west of Samye (for a map, see Dotson 2009, 202). Zung mkhar (more typically spelled Zung kar) is located high in the same valley. Note that the grammar is odd here, with the three epithets for gNubs chen separated from his description as a “great scholar,” but rDo rje khri gtsug is supposed to have been his birth name, so I read it like this.

woman of the gNubs line, 'Chims mo bKra shis mtsho.³⁹ From youth, that one was possessed of faith and wisdom. He was granted initiation by lHa dpal gyi ye shes. Having been led to mChims phu and Phung po ri bo che by Khrab 'khyags pa dkar po, he offered four hundred and received initiation.⁴⁰

[79a] Furthermore, when that Sangs rgyas ye shes was twenty, he broke up his orchards for gold. Gathering up the profits, he departed for the valleys of Nepal.⁴¹ [There,] he met and studied (*sgra shes*) with the Nepalese Vasudhāra, receiving many tantras and *sādhana*s. When he requested the initiations, [Vasudhāra] prophesied that he should ask the Indian scholar *Dharmarājapala (Chos rgyal skyong). [gNubs chen] went to the land of India, and there he met with Ru *Dharmarājapala and made the request, whereby he was taught the tantra, the initiations, and many *sādhana*s.

According to some histories (*lo rgyus la la na*), he requested initiation from Ru *Dharmarājapala, who then prophesied that he should ask Master *Prakāśālamkāra. Here, there lived a great master *Prakāśālamkāra who was 1,600 years old. There is also what is said in the *Initiation Manual (Dbang byang)* by Lama gLan bsod nams mgon po: “[gNubs chen] was told, ‘you should go before him,’ so accordingly, having gone to India, he also received the initiations for the nine vehicles of the [*Dgongs pa*] ‘*dus pa chen po*. He received many [teachings] from the Accomplishment Class (*bsgrub sde*) and the Tantra Class of mantra.”⁴²

So, regarding the Sutra Initiations (*mdo'i dbang*) having been requested and granted: The guru *Dharmarājapala [taught] the *dharmarāja* of Nepal [i.e. Vasudhāra]. [79b] Also regarding that, when that king of Nepal, Vasudhāra, requested initiation from the wealth-holder [i.e. from *Dharmarājapala], he said the following: “On one occasion, having been invited to the land of Bru sha, I, the Indian scholar *Dharmarājapala, traveled there. Then the three—Dhanarakṣita, Ru Dharmabodhi, and the scholar of Brusha, Che btsen skyes—set out to translate it in the district of Bru sha. But, due to a

³⁹ *Rgya bo che*, 695.1 has the father as gSal ba byang chub snubs. Padma 'phrin las' version combines the two, when he gives gSal ba'i dbang phyug ('*Dus pa mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 160).

⁴⁰ In the *rGya bo che*, the young gNubs chen travels to Samye to meet, make offerings to, and receive initiation from, the Nepalese master Vasudhāra (see f. 697). No mention of Phung po ri bo che is made at the parallel point in the *rGya bo che*, though the site does appear elsewhere in that work (f. 743) as one of gNubs' treasure sites.

⁴¹ Compare the similar account in *Rgya bo che*, 698.1.

⁴² For the apparent source of this passage, see *gLan chog*, f. 126.6-127.2. (Note that the “Accomplishment Class” appears to have been added here, as it is not in the original.) For more details on what *Dharmarājapala might have taught, see *rGya bo che*, 702-4.

lack of faith [among the locals], only the first part was translated.” So then they moved to India,⁴³ where the Nepalese Vasudhāra, the Brusha translator Che btsen skyes, and gNubs again requested the [remaining] three initiations [from *Dharmarājapala], so he granted them, and thus were the four rivers of initiation completely transmitted.

Later, through the blessings of that [initiation], the scholar *dharmarāja*, Dharmabodhi, the Bru sha translator, and gNubs sangs rgyas subsequently combined [the mDo dbang system] with the traditional teachings of Śāntarakṣita (sic)⁴⁴ and Master Padma[sambhava], and then the translation was finished in the district of the Bru sha realm, and it was taught to gNubs sangs rgyas. It also seems to be said in the *Clan History (Rigs brgyud lo rgyus)* that, because he [sought to] combine it with the initiation lineage of the protectors, having offered the [necessary] tools for the mDo dbang, gNubs Sangs rgyas requested [the teaching] from Ru *Sukhoddyotaka.⁴⁵

Moreover, in Lord [gNubs] sangs rgyas’ biography (*rnam thar*) it says more generally that when he was meditating in the region of the Crystal Cave, [80a] he was granted initiation by Vajrapāṇi with a wisdom-vajra. When he was meditating at Bamboo Grove (’Om mo’i tshal),⁴⁶ the son of a Gandharva named him Sangs rgyas ye shes rin po che, granting him the name initiation. When he was meditating in the place of *Pūrṇabhadra,⁴⁷ the son of a *yakṣa* granted him initiation with the good quality of greatness. When he was meditating at gNubs mtsho gling dgu,⁴⁸ the son of a *nāga* granted him an initiation for poison and poison’s antidotes. When he was meditating at Dur khrod lhas, the son of a hungry ghost granted him initiation for gaining power. He was granted initiation by many *paṇḍitas*—Dhanasamṣkrta, and so forth. The Chinese Heshang Moheyan also gave him many initiations and instructions. When the Indian Dhanatala came to Tibet, he gave him many initiations and instructions.

He went to India seven times. It is said that six times he translated wrathful mantras for protecting the dharma and the teachings, and once

⁴³ Note that Dam pa bde gshegs (*Yang khog dbub*, 48.4) has them returning to Nepal, which was the home country for Vasudhara.

⁴⁴ Probably should be Dhanarakṣita, as indicated by Padma ’phrin las (see *’Dus pa mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa’i rnam thar*, 162.7).

⁴⁵ Dudjom 1991, 609 notes that this is the same as Prakāśālaṃkāra.

⁴⁶ Sic for ’Od ma’i tshal.

⁴⁷ See *rGya bo che*, 698.

⁴⁸ Note that above this same place is referred to as rNubs mtsho gling, elsewhere sNubs mtsho gling (see n. 21). See *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (Pelliot tibétain 1287), l. 469: *gnubs mtsho ni kling dgu’* (easily found online at: http://otdo.aa.tufs.ac.jp/archives.cgi?p=Pt_1287). The site is located northwest of Yar ’brog; see Hazod 2002, 35 n. 19.

he edited them (*zhu tig mdzad*). He occupied the sites, found power, and was renowned as a great scholar.

He had many students who became his disciples. His heart-sons were four or eight in number. The root system says they were (i) 'Bre khro chu of Nyang stod, (ii) the Supreme Great One of Nyang shor, [80b] (iii) Ye shes 'byung ba of Nyang chung, and (iv) Zur shākya 'byung. Of those, both 'Bre and Myang chen encountered him early on, while both Myang chung and Zur encountered him only later [in life].

Some say that Master Sangs rgyas granted [his lineage] to three precious ones—Shangs kyi stong tshab byang chub rin po che, and so forth. The explanation according to the Se tradition (Se lugs) says he gave it early in life to four: (i) brGya gzhon nu bshes gnyen, (ii) Me gnyag mchog gi rin chen, (iii) sTong tshab 'phags pa rgya mtsho,⁴⁹ and (iv) lHa rje 'ug pa lung pa zur chen shākya 'byung gnas.

IV. *Observations on the Biographical Passage*

The first point to remark upon is simply the number of other texts that are cited in this short passage. In all, we may list six different sources:

1. *Sutra Initiation Guidebook (mDo dbang gnas yig)*
2. some histories (*lo rgyus la la*)
3. *Initiation Manual (Dbang byang)* by gLan bsod nams mgon po
4. *Clan History (Rigs brgyud lo rgyus)*
5. Lord Sangs rgyas' Biography (*rnam thar*)
6. *rGya bo che*

By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it seems, gNubs chen had become the focus of considerable literary attention. Thanks to the new *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, we may now read versions of two of the texts cited, namely the *dBang byang* by gLan bsod nams mgon po and the *rGya bo che*, but most of the texts cited are lost. Of particular interest would be the *mDo dbang gnas yig*, which might tell us much about the history of this tradition in early Tibet, the *Rigs brgyud lo rgyus*, presumably a history of the gNubs clan, and the unascribed but clearly early biography of gNubs chen. We can only hope that some day these works might come to light.

In terms of its contents, the passage is useful for how it ties gNubs chen's involvements with the mDo dbang tradition into the biographical account that we already have thanks to the *bKa' shog rgya*

⁴⁹ Note the existence of an Anuyoga tantra said to be translated by gNubs chen and sTong tshab 'phags pa, the *Rnal 'byor nang pa'i tshogs rgyud* (see rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum, vol. *tsa*, 176.4-251.4).

bo che. Of particular interest is the suggestion that gNubs chen might have been involved, along with several others, in the final redaction of the *dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo* and its ritual systems. This is a remarkably frank suggestion and one not repeated, to my knowledge, anywhere else.

Also of interest is the passage's account of the *dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo's* troubled and interrupted translation efforts, a project that likely included considerable *composition* as well as translation.⁵⁰ The account we see here may well have been the source for Padma 'phrin las' own narrative, written three or four centuries later, which uses much of the same language and follows more-or-less the same order of events.⁵¹ In comparing the present passage to Padma 'phrin las' account, we may observe that the later narrative writes gNubs chen completely out of the final redaction of the Mdo dbang ritual system. Instead, Padma 'phrin las tells us only that, "the scholar of Bru sha combined it with the teachings of Dhanarakṣita."⁵² Certainly from a later normative perspective, this is a far less surprising statement, as it has no Tibetan involved in the composition of the tantra and its rituals. Perhaps the change is a reflection of Padma 'phrin las' discomfort with the line. Certainly the lines translated here, and the entire volume in which they appear, seem to reflect a remarkably loose sense of what is canonical and what a locally produced text, a perspective from which the divisions between text, note, ritual manual, and translated text were fairly blurry. We are left to wonder whether this attitude is representative of the approach taken more generally toward textual composition within the early Zur tradition.

⁵⁰ On the composition of the *dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*, see Dalton forthcoming, ch. 1.

⁵¹ Compare *'Dus pa mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 162.2-163.1.

⁵² *'Dus pa mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, 162.6. *de yang bru sha'i mkhan pos d+ha na ra k+Si ta'i bka' dang sbyar te*.

APPENDIX

Transliteration of the gNubs chen Biographical Passage

from *gTad rgya lnga'i go don gyi brjed byang gi 'grel pa*, vol. 23, f. 78b.4-80b.4 (156-160)

de'i dus su yul bsgregs kyi zung mkhar ba/ pha gsang ba'i dbang phyug/ gdung rus gnubs ma 'chims mo bkra shis mtsho/ dur khrod pa/ sgregs kyi ri bo che/ mi chos kyi ming rdo rje khri gtsug/ slob dpon rnams kyis mkhas pa chen po 'byung bar lung bstan pa/ chung nas dad pa dang shes rab tu ldan pa des/ lha dpal gyi ye shes la dbang bskur/ mchims phu [79a] dang phung po ri bo cher khrab 'khyag pa dkar pos sna drangs nas bzhi brgya phul te bang nos so/ ! /yang sangs rgyas ye shes des lo nyi shu pa la ldum ra gser du dkrum ste khyed du gril nas bal po'i mthil du byon/ bal po ba su dha dang mjal sgra shes te/ rgyud sde dang bsgrub thabs mang du zhus so/ dbang zhus pas/ rgya gar gyi mkhan po chos rgyal skyong la zhus cig par lung bstan/ rgya gar gyi yul du byon te ru chos rgyal skyong la mjal bar byas nas zhus pas/ rgyud dang dbang bsgrub thabs mang du gnang ngo/ lo rgyus la la na/ ru chos rgyal skyong la dbang zhus pas/ slob dpon gsal ba'i rgyan la zhus cig par lung/ 'dir ni slob dpon chen po gsal ba'i brgyan bya ba la stong drug brgya lon pa cig bzhugs kyis khyed de'i spyang sngar song cig/ gsung pa ltar du rgya gar du byon nas 'dus pa chen po mdo theg pa dgu'i dbang yang gsan/ sngags kyi bsgrub sde dang rgyud sde mang po gnas ces bla ma glan bsod nams mgon gyi dbang byang na gsungs gda'/ mdo'i dbang bskur zhus cing gnang ces pa ni gu ru chos rgyal skyong de bal po'i chos rgyal [79b] lo/ de'an bal po'i rgyal po ba su dha ra nor 'dzin la dbang zhus pa'i tshe nga yi/ lan cig na/ rgya gar mkhan po chos rgyal skyong bru zha'i yul du spyang drangs der gshegs te/ dha na rakshi ta dang/ ru dharma bo de dang/ gsum la bru zha'i mkhan po che btsan skyes kyis bru zha'i khrom du bsgyur bar byas/ mos pa chungs bas dang po ma 'gyur skad/ de nas rgya gar yul du byon te/ bal po ba su dha ra dang/ bru zha'i lo tswa ba che btsan skyes dang/ gnubs yang dbang gsum gyis zhus pas gnang ste/ dbang gi chu bo bzhi rdzogs par bskur ro/ ! /de'i byin gyis brlabs kyis phyi mkhan po chos rgyal dang/ dharma bo dhe dang/ bru zha'i lo tstsha ba che btsan skyes dang/ gnubs sangs rgyas kyis/ physis ring lugs shan ta rak kshi ta slob dpon pad ma'i bka' dang sbyar nas bru zha'i yul gyi khrom du bsgyur nas gnubs gsangs rgyas la bshad do/ rigs brgyad lo rgyus de skad zer yang/ mgon po'i dbang rgyud dang sbyar bas mdo dbang gi phyag cha rnams btang nas ru bde ba gsal mdzad la'ang gnubs sangs rgyas kyi zhus pa 'dra bas spyad do/ de yang jo bo sangs rgyas kyi rnam thar spyir du 'di [80a] la shel brag ngos la bsgoms pa'i tshe/ phyag na rdo rjes ye shes rdo rjes dbang bskur/ 'om mo'i tshal du bsgoms pa'i tshe/ dri za'i phru gus sangs rgyas ye shes rin po cher/ ming btags te ming gis dbang bskur/ gang bzangs gnas la sgoms pa'i tshe/ gnod sbyin phru gus che ba'i yon tan gyis dbang bskur/ gnubs mtsho gling dgur sgoms pa'i tshe/ klu phru gus dug dang gdug pa sel ba'i dbang bskur/ dur khrod lhas su sgoms pa'i tshe/ yi

dwags phru gus mthu rtsal brnyes pa'i dbang bskur/ dha na sams kri ta la sogs pa paṅ ḍi ta mang pos dbang bskur/ rgya nag ha shang ma hā yā nas kyang dbang dang gdams ngag mang po gnanḡ/ rgya gar dha na ta la bod du byon te dbang gdams ngag mang po gnanḡ/ rgya gar gyi yul du lan bdun byon/ lan drug chos dang bstan srungs drag sngangs bsgyur/ lan cig zhu tig mdzad skad/ sa gzhi sa non pa dang/ mthu rtsal brnyes pa/ mkhas pa chen por grags pa lags so/ ! /de la slob mo mang yang thugs zin pa thugs kyi sras bzhi la brgyad de/ ! /rtsa ba lugs ni/ nyang stod kyi 'bre khro chu: nyang shor chen [80b] mchog: nyang chung ye shes 'byung ba/ zur shākya 'byung dang bzhi'o zer te/ de rnam kyi 'bre dang/ myang chen gnyis shin tu zhal mthong ba snga la/ myang chung dang zur gnyis phyi bas bzhal mthong tsam mo/ la la na re slob dpon sangs rgyas kyi shangs kyi stong tshab byang chub rin po che la sogs pa rin po che gsum la gnanḡ/ des brgya gzhon nu bshe gnyen dang/ me gnyag mchog gi rin chen dang/ stong tshab 'phags pa rgya mtsho dang/ lha rje 'ug pa lung pa zur chen shākya 'byung gnas bzhi la sku tshe yi stod la bskur ces mdo se lugs ltar bzhed do.

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