


BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES FOR RESEARCHING THE LIFE OF  
NGOR CHEN KUN DGA' BZANG PO (1382–1456)<sup>1</sup>

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*Introduction*

gor chen Kun dga' bzang po was one of the most important masters of the Sa skya school in the 15th century.<sup>2</sup> That tradition honours him as one of its “Six Ornaments that Beautify the Snow Land [Tibet].”<sup>3</sup> Ngor chen was born in 1382 at Sa skya. Outwardly, his father appeared to have been Dpon tshang

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<sup>2</sup> The life of Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po and the foundation and historical development of Ngor monastery and its tradition is the topic of a dissertation in progress by the author. For a brief account on the Ngor tradition, see Davidson 1981. On the chronology and succession of the abbots of Ngor, see Jackson 1989.

<sup>3</sup> The list enumerating the “Six Ornaments that Beautify the Snow Land [Tibet]” (*gangs can mdzes par byed pa'i rgyan drug*) is made up of six Sa skya masters in pairs of two, from the generations after Bla ma Dam pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1312–1375): (1) two experts in *sūtra*: G.yag phrug Sangs rgyas dpal (1350–1414) with either Rong ston Shes bya kun rig (1367–1449) (*g.yag rong nam gnyis*) or Red mda' ba Gzhon nu blo gros (1349–1412) (*g.yag gzhon nam gnyis*), (2) the two experts in *mantra*: Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po and Rdzong pa Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1382–1446) (*kun dga' nam gnyis*), and (3) the two experts in *sūtra* as well as *mantra*: Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–1489) and Gser mdog Pañ chen Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507) (*go shāk nam gnyis*). The earliest source, I could find so far, enumerating these six ornaments is 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po's (1820–1892) *Gsang sngags gsar rnying gdan rabs*: 100.4–101.2, in which he designates them as the “Holders of the Teachings of the Venerable Sa skya Tradition, the Six Ornaments that Beautify the Snow Land [Tibet]” (*rje btsun sa skya pa'i bstan 'dzin gangs can mdzes par byed pa'i rgyan drug*). Prior to Mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, Rta nag Mkhan chen Chos nam rgyal (flourished 17th century) in his *Bstan rtsis dang bstan 'dzin gyi lo rgyus*: 159–160, had already presented Sa skya scholars under the categories of *sūtra* and *mantra*, but he did not arrange them into one group of ornaments. Though the individual expert pairs, except for the *go shāk nam gnyis*, are already mentioned in 15<sup>th</sup> century sources, the arrangement as a group of six ornaments seems to be a later development, probably originating with Shākya mchog ldan's reevaluation by the *Ris med* movement. Concerning the pair of *mantra* experts, a few sources mention Gong dkar Rdo rje gdan pa Kun dga' nam rgyal (1432–1496) as second *mantra* expert instead of Rdzong pa Kun dga' rgyal mtshan; see *Mkhas pa'i dga' ston*: vol. 2, 542.4–5 and Chogay Trichen Rinpoche 1983: 27. For sources naming Rdzong pa Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, see *Bstan rtsis gsal ba'i nyin byed*: 213, *Bstan rtsis dang bstan 'dzin gyi lo rgyus*: 160, *Ngor chos 'byung*: 344.2, *Rgyud sde kun btus*: 359.4–360.3, *Sa skya grub mtha' rnam bzhas*: 75, and *Sa skya chos 'byung*: 222.4. The pair of Ngor chen with either Rdzong pa Kun dga' rgyal mtshan or Gong dkar Kun dga' nam rgyal is also known under the term *ngor rdzong (rnam) gnyis*; see *Ngor chos 'byung*: 344.2 and *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*: 211.1–2 respectively.

Grub pa yon tan (b. 1356), a lay servant holding the rank of “Great Attendant” (*nye gnas chen po*) in the Sa skya tshogs<sup>4</sup> whose family line belonged to the old Cog ro clan of 'Bring mtshams. Some of its members had moved to the area of Sa skya, where they lived as nomads. In the course of time, they rose to the position of personal valets (*gsol ja ba*) to the Bdag chen Gzhi thog pa, the head of the Gzhi thog lama palace (*bla brang*) of Sa skya. Dpon tshang Grub pa yon tan even achieved a higher position, being promoted to the rank of Great Attendant to the Sa skya tshogs.

However, this version of Ngor chen's paternity was a fiction, probably aiming at concealing the true paternity of his real father. In fact, his father was the highest lama of Sa skya at that time, Ta dben Kun dga' rin chen (1339–1399) of the Gzhi thog bla brang, the seventeenth throne holder of Sa skya (ca. 1364–1399). This family relation was of great importance for Ngor chen's monastic education and future activities, since members of the Gzhi thog bla brang and one of its branches, the masters residing at Chu mig estate, would later patronize his activities and act as the main donors for the first abbots of Ngor.

Ngor chen spent most of his early years in Sa skya, studying in its old libraries the writings of the “Five Founding Fathers of Sa skya” (*sa skya gong ma lnga*). Among his main *gurus* we find such famous masters as Shar chen Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1359–1406), Dpal ldan tshul khriims (1333–1399), Sa bzang 'Phags pa Gzhon nu blo gros (1358–1412) and Grub chen Sangs rgyas dpal alias Buddha shrī (1339–1419), from whom he received the entire *Path with the Fruit* (*Lam 'bras*) teachings.

Ngor chen was a great tantric master, but he was at the same time a strict monk who carefully uphold the *vinaya* rules. Withdrawing from sectarian conflicts with the Dge lugs school on the one hand, and from the worldly distractions of the bustling town of Sa skya on the other hand, Ngor chen founded in 1429 the monastic retreat of E waṃ chos ldan in the remote Ngor valley, located around 20 km southwest of Gzhis ka rtse, hoping to go back to traditional Sa skya teaching and practice in a more supportive environment. Thinking

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Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in more recent Tibetan literature of the Sa skya school we find a group of not only six but nine ornaments mentioned, whose composition, again, varies to a certain extent; see *Gnas mchog sa skya*: 11 and *Sa skya pa'i slob rgyud*: 66, n. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The *Gnas mchog sa skya*: 168 contains an interesting description of a place called Ser skya tshogs, where the monastic as well as lay community came together for Buddhist teachings at special events. The throne at that place from which the teachings were given was the throne of Sa skya Paṅḍi ta Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251), on which the newly installed throne holders of Sa skya had to give their first public teachings. This was also confirmed by Mkhan Thub bstan snying po (Gzhis ka rtse, 6 February 2011) and his contacts in Sa skya, according to whom this place is generally known as the Sa skya tshogs. This gathering place was located just south of the Gzhi thog pho brang; see Ferrari 1958: 150–151, n. 501 and Schoening 1990: 35, Map 10. *The Bzhi-thog Pho-brang* (...), no. 15; and 47, n. 14.

of the benefits of “a remote place devoid of barmaids,”<sup>5</sup> he established his new monastic retreat instituting strict monastic rules.

Under Ngor chen and his successors on the abbatial throne of Ngor, the monastery became one of the most influential and well known centres for tantric study and teaching in the Sa skya tradition, attracting students and patrons from all over Tibet. It became the main institution for the transmission of the *Lam 'bras* teachings according to its exoteric transmission in larger assemblies, called the “Explication for the Assembly” (*tshogs bshad*). Ngor chen was the founding father of a dynamic Ngor tradition which developed quickly into a lasting and prominent subdivision of the Sa skya school.<sup>6</sup> In recent centuries, the Ngor tradition came to be considered as one of Sa skya's three main sub-schools, together with the Sa skya tradition proper and the Tshar pa (*sa ngor tshar gsum*).<sup>7</sup>

The religious influence of Ngor extended to western Tibet (Mnga' ris), including the regions of Dolpo (Dol po) and Mustang (Glo bo) within present-day northwest Nepal. Following the invitation of its kings, Ngor chen himself travelled three times to the kingdom of Mustang (1427–1428, 1436, and 1447–1449), establishing a strong link with this area by founding a number of monastic communities there.<sup>8</sup> During the following centuries, the influence of Ngor and its abbots also extended eastwards to the province of Khams, where the tradition became very influential in the kingdom of Sde dge and the area of Sga pa. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, the tradition enjoyed

<sup>5</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 524.3: *chang ma med par dben gnas shig tu bzhugs te 'chad nyan mdzad na* |. Based on the preceeding sentence that mentions too many festivities in Sa skya (*chang sa ches pa*) one could be inclined to correct *chang ma* to *chang sa*, but all available editions of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen uniformly read *chang ma*.

<sup>6</sup> Other sub-schools emerged such as the Rdzong pa of the Rdzong chung bla brang at Sa skya, the Na lendra pa of Na lendra monastery in 'Phan po in Dbus, or the Gong dkar ba in the monastery of Gong dkar chos sde in southern Dbus. On these sub-schools and their different exegetical systems of the *Lam 'bras*, see Fermer 2010: 163–189.

<sup>7</sup> The earliest use of the term *sa ngor tshar gsum* that I could find appears in the *Gsang sngags gsar rnying gdan rabs*: 87.1, 94.1, and 118.6. Further sub-schools of the Sa skya tradition such as the Gong dkar ba, founded by Gong dkar Rdo rje gdan pa Kun dga' rnam rgyal (1432–1496), and others are left out in this enumeration. However, one does find other similar terms, which do not include the Sa skya tradition proper, but summarize their various sub-schools: *ngor gong tshar gsum*, *ngor rdzong gong gsum*, and *ngor rdzong tshar gsum*; see *Bstan 'dzin skyes bu ming grangs*: 1211.2, *Zhwa lu gdan rabs*: 172.4, and *Gnas mchog sa skya*: 3 respectively.

<sup>8</sup> The connection to Mustang was maintained by Ngor chen's successors on the throne of Ngor such as Gtsang Chu mig pa 'Gar ston 'Jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho (1396–1474), the third Ngor abbot (tenure: 1462–1465), Mkhas grub Dpal ldan rdo rje (1411–1482), the fifth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1479–1482), Yongs 'dzin Dkon mchog 'phel (1445–1514), the seventh Ngor abbot (tenure: 1486–1513), and Rgyal ba Lha mchog seng ge (1468–1535), the ninth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1524–1534). On the connection between Ngor and Glo bo, see for example Dowman 1997, Jackson 1980, Jackson 2010: 150–156, Kramer 2008, Lo Bue 2010: 17–18, [76]–89, and Vitali 1999.

the royal patronage of the ruling family of Sde dge, where they became the dominant Buddhist tradition.<sup>9</sup> From the numerous

<sup>9</sup> According to tradition, a link between the Ngor tradition and the Sde dge family was already established by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was in 1446 when Thang stong rgyal po (1361?–1485) visited Sde dge that he became the teacher of Bo thar Blo gros stobs ldan, under whose patronage he founded the monastery of Lhun sgrub steng and whom he named Bkra shis seng ge; see *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 13.2–6, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 9–12, 20, 89, *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 29–30, 172, Kolmaš 1968: 31–32, and Stearns 2007: 56–57. The fact that Thang stong rgyal po had received teachings from Ngor chen was considered to be an auspicious connection with respect to Lhun sgrub steng becoming a Ngor pa monastery; see *Gsang sngags gsar rnying gdan rabs*: 84.4–85.1. From that time on members of the Sde dge ruling family have relied on Ngor pa masters as their teachers, also travelling to central Tibet for further studies and ordination. From the source material we know that Bla ma Dpal ldan seng ge, the first son of Bo thar Bkra shis seng ge, became a monk in Ngor, where he received teachings from Rgyal ba Lha mchog seng ge (1468–1535), the ninth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1524–1534), and returned to Khams only in old age; see *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 14.1–2, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 20, *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 31, 172, and Kolmaš 1968: 32. Also Dge sar bir alias Grags pa lhun grub, the son of Rdo rje lhun grub, is said to have studied under Lha mchog seng ge; see *Sde dge rgyal rgyabs*: 15.1–2 and *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 21–22. The Ngor related sources mention Shar chen Kun dga' bkra shis (1558–1615), the fourteenth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1595–1615), as the first Ngor pa master to have visited Khams. Following the order of Dkon mchog dpal ldan (1526–1590), the eleventh Ngor abbot (two tenures: 1569–1579, 1582–1590), to go to Khams and collect donations, Shar chen Kun dga' bkra shis embarked on his journey to Khams, where he spent seven years from 1584 to 1591; see *Ngor gdan rabs*: 26.6–27.1, 37.2–39.2 and *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 28, 666.3–675.2. The *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 32, 173 mentions that Kun dga' bkra shis was invited to Sde dge by Bla ma Kun dga' rin chen. Cf. *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 14.5 and *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 21, where it is only stated that Kun dga' rin chen relied on Kun dga' bkra shis as his teacher. The latter's biography mentions some places he visited in Khams, but neither records his visit to Sde dge nor mentions Bla ma Kun dga' rin chen among his disciples or patrons; see *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 28, 666.3–675.2, 704.1–708.2. On Kun dga' rin chen, see also Kolmaš 1968: 32. The next Ngor pa master in Sde dge was Sgrub khang pa Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan (1599–1673), the twenty-second Ngor abbot (tenure: 1667–1671), who seems to have spent most of the second part of his life in Khams. He had been invited to Sde dge by Bla chen Byams pa phun tshogs; see *Gsang sngags gsar rnying gdan rabs*: 85.2–4, *Ngor gdan rabs*: 48.6, *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 23.4, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 92, and *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 173. During his stay in Sde dge Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan was involved in various religious activities: among others, he performed rituals in the scope of Bla chen Byams pa phun tshogs' construction of the Gtsug lag khang Bsam 'grub mthong grol chen mo at the Sde dge family's main monastery of Lhun grub steng. He also instituted the *sgrub mchod* rituals known as the "Five or Seven *maṇḍalas* of the Ngor Tradition" (*ngor lugs dkyil 'khor lnga'am bdun*), gave teachings on a large scale in many monasteries of that area, and ordained numerous monks; see *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 23.5–24.1, 26.2–27.2 and *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 24–25, 92–93. Note that the presentation of his activities in Sde dge is somewhat different in his biography authored by Mnga' ris pa Sangs rgyas phun tshogs (1649–1705), the twenty-fifth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1686–1689); see *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 29, 90.1–93.5. The *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 24.1, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 25, and *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 41 note that as the result of talks between Bla chen Byams pa phun tshogs and Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan the tradition was established that monks from the majority of Sa skya monasteries in Sde dge would go to Ngor for further studies. It is interesting to note that already before Bla chen Byams pa phun tshogs invited Dpal mchog rgyal

branch monasteries that were founded in those regions, a steady stream of monks travelled to Ngor for ordination and further study.

With the steady influx of students, Ngor quickly developed into a substantial monastic complex. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the four main *bla brang* (lama estates or lama palaces) of Ngor were founded: (1) Thar rtse, (2) Klu sdings/lding, (3) Khang gsar / Khang (g)sar phun tshogs gling or Phun tshogs khang (g)sar and (4) Phan bde or Phan khang.<sup>10</sup> These *bla brang* were usually headed by monks who originated from religious-aristocratic families of Gtsang. Nevertheless, only the Klu sdings bla brang succeeded in maintaining an unbroken link with the Shar pa family up to the present day.

Initially, the abbots of Ngor were chosen mainly on the basis of their spiritual achievements, leaving aside their familial or financial background. With the founding of the four main *bla brang* the situation changed in so far as a large number of abbots were now selected from those aristocratic families with which the various *bla brang* were linked. These monks were chosen in their youth as "candidates to the abbacy" (*zhabs drung*) and had to pass through a special curriculum.<sup>11</sup> Around the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new system for abbatial appointments was established, whereby, at

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mtshan, he had relied on another Ngor pa master, namely Shar chen Shes rab 'byung gnas (1596–1653), the eighteenth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1625–1653/54?), probably in Ngor or Zhwa lu; see *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 18.2, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 23, and *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 35–36. On Bla chen Byams pa phun tshogs, see also Kolmaš 1968: 33–34.

Although the *Gsang sngags gsar rnying gdan rabs*: 85.1 mentions Shar chen Kun dga' bkra shis as the first Ngor master to have visited Sde dge, this source specifies in an annotation that Sgrub khang pa Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan was the first in the line of Ngor abbots that had visited Sde dge (*Ibid.*: 70.1). The *Gsang sngags gsar rnying gdan rabs*: 85.1–2 also mentions the invitation of Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan by Bla chen Byams pa phun tshogs, but does not specify any details of Shar chen Kun dga' bkra shis' visit. The fact that both masters visited Sde dge before they were installed as abbots rules out the explanation that the former had yet to become the abbot of Ngor while the latter already was the abbot of Ngor when they visited Sde dge. A possible explanation for the annotation mentioned above could be that Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan's activities in Sde dge were much more extensive than the ones of Shar chen Kun dga' bkra shis.

<sup>10</sup> At the present stage of my research, the following picture emerges. (1) The monastic structure of Thar rtse was established, probably in the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century, as a residence and place of retreat for former prominent abbots and was taken over by the Brang ti family in the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. (2) The Klu ldings bla brang was probably founded by Shar chen Kun dga' bkra shis (1558–1615), the fourteenth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1595–1615). He was the first abbot from the Shar pa family and might have founded Klu sdings as his private residence in Ngor. (3) The Khang gsar bla brang seems to have been established in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. (4) According to Jackson 2001:90 and Smith 2001: 89, the Phan bde or Phan khang was established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Dpal ldan chos skyong (1702–1759/69), the thirty-fourth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1733–1740). However, Ngor-related source material suggests that this monastic complex was already founded before Dpal ldan chos skyong's birth.

<sup>11</sup> See Stearns 2006: 660–661, n. 455.

least in theory, the abbacy rotated through the four *bla brang*, with each *bla brang* taking a three-year turn. With the exception of the Klu sdings *bla brang*, the other three *bla brang* also introduced a reincarnation system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by which important candidates for the abbacy were identified as rebirths of previous masters or abbots.<sup>12</sup>

### 1. Biographical Sources

Since Ngor chen did not compose an autobiography, the most promising sources for researching his life are the surviving independent full-length biographies that were written by his disciples, or by later adherents to his tradition. Among the numerous full-length biographies that once existed, only two are presently available. Let us first examine these two surviving biographies and then survey those that were lost. While we can gain further information on Ngor chen's life from biographies of his illustrious disciples such as Mus chen Sems dpa' chen po Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1388–1469), Gser mdog Paṅ chen Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507), Go rams pa Bsod nam seng ge (1429–1489) and from the autobiography of Glo bo Mkhan chen Bsod nam lhun grub (1456–1532), I will limit my examination here to Ngor chen's own biographies.<sup>13</sup>

### 2. Two Surviving Full-Length Biographies

The two surviving biographies were both authored by Ngor abbots; the first was a contemporaneous account, while the second was compiled more than two hundred years after Ngor chen's passing. Here, I would like to introduce both biographies, focusing on their authors' respective backgrounds and connections to Ngor chen, the circumstances of their composition, their different versions, and the textual relation between the two biographies.

#### 2.1. The Biography of Ngor chen by *Mus chen Sems dpa' chen po Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1388–1469)*

Mus chen Sems dpa' chen po Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan was one of Ngor chen's chief disciples and succeeded him as abbot on the

<sup>12</sup> See Jackson 2001: 90–91.

<sup>13</sup> Numerous short sketches of Ngor chen's life story are also recorded in various religious histories and in compositions of more recent origin. See, for example, *Ngor chos 'byung*: 339.7–343.6 and *Bstan rtsis gsal ba'i nyin byed*: 212–216. For short biographies of more recent origin, see for instance *Sa skya chos 'byung*: 204.1–214.5 and Khetsun Sangpo 1979: vol. XI, 391–409.

throne of Ngor (tenure: 1456–1462).<sup>14</sup> He composed a contemporary biography of Ngor chen entitled *Concise Biography of the Dharma Lord Kun dga' bzang po, the Great Vajradhara of the Degenerating Age*.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.1.1. *Mus chen's Life and Relation with Ngor chen*

Mus chen was born at Gling skya in Rta mo in the upper Mus valley.<sup>16</sup> In 1424, at the age of thirty-six, he had his first personal

<sup>14</sup> The main sources for researching Mus chen's life and relation with Ngor chen are the Ngor chen biography Mus chen himself composed (*Ngor chen rnam thar I*) and Mus chen's own biographies written by his disciples Go rams pa Bsod nams seng ge (1429–1489), Gung ru Shes rab bzang po (1411–1475), and Bdag chen Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1444–1495). Go rams pa's biography of Mus chen, *Rje btsun bla ma mus pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar rgya mtsho* (*Mus chen rnam thar I*), was completed on the eighth day of the fifth Tibetan month in 1465 in the monastery of Gling kha bde ba can (*Mus chen rnam thar I*: 621.5). This biography is the explanation of his Mus chen biography in seventy verses, *Rje btsun bla ma mus pa chen po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar chu rgyun* (*Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum*: vol. 11, 7.1.3–9.3.4), of which he wrote sixty-four verses in 1462 in 'Bras yul skyed tshal and added six more in 1465. The prose biography includes a supplement, *Rnam par thar pa'i kha skong* (*Mus chen rnam thar I*: 621.5–627.6), covering the last years of Mus chen's life from 1465 until his death in 1469. This work is the explanation of a thirty-three verse supplement (*Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum*: vol. 11, 9.3.4–10.3.1), composed in 1469 in the Gle lung chos sde, to the above mentioned verse biography. Gung ru Shes rab bzang po completed his composition of Mus chen's biography (*Mus chen rnam thar II*), *Rje btsun sems dpa' chen po dkon mchog rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa gsung sgras ma*, when his master was eighty-one years old on the twenty-third day of the third month of 1469 in the monastery of Bde ba can in the upper Mus valley; see *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 250.2–3 and also van der Kuijp 1994: 177, n. 4. Bdag chen Blo gros rgyal mtshan finished his Mus chen biography, *Rje btsun bla ma dam pa dkon mchog rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar phreng ba* (*Mus chen rnam thar III*), on the fifteenth day of the tenth Tibetan month in 1479 in Dpal 'khor bde chen of Rgyal rtse; see *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 33.4. Among these biographies of Mus chen, the one by Go rams pa and Gung ru ba are the more detailed ones. The one by Bdag chen Blo gros rgyal mtshan seems to be partly based on Go rams pa's account, which the Bdag chen also mentions among the sources available on Mus chen's life; see *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 33.5–6.

For thangka depiction Ngor chen and Mus chen together, see Jackson 2010: 193, Fig. 8.9 and *Ibid.*: 194, Fig. 8.10. See also HAR: no. 128. For depictions of Mus chen together with his disciples, see HAR: no. 368 and no. 73818.

<sup>15</sup> See *Lam 'bras India*: vol. 1, 432.1: *Snyigs dus kyi rdo rje 'chang chen po chos kyi rje kun dga' bzang po'i rnam par thar pa mdor bsdu pa* l. Davidson 1991: 234, n. 57, probably accidentally, ascribed this work to a certain Dkon mchog dbang phyug. The *'Bras spungs dkar chag*: vol. 2, 1515, no. 017073 records this work under a different title: *Rje btsun rin po che rdo rje 'chang chen po kun dga' bzang po'i zhal mnga' nas kyi rnam par thar pa*, 30 fol. (10 x 3cm).

<sup>16</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 588.4 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 207.5. Cf. *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 4.2 and *Ngor gdan rabs*: 4.1, where instead of Rta mo the spelling is given as Stag mo. On the region of Rta mo in the upper Mus valley, see Everding 2006: Teil 2, 20–22, according to whom the region west of the Mus chu river is called Rta mo Nub and the region to its east Rta mo Shar. Mus chen's birthplace of Gling skya is located in Rta mo Shar, and it is there where we find the residence of a family, among whom, beside Mus chen, numerous scholars of

encounter with Ngor chen at Sa skya.<sup>17</sup> However, his wish to meet Ngor chen and study with him had already manifested itself while accompanying his teacher Sems dpa' chen po Gzhon nu rgyal mchog (b. 1384?) as an attendant to Bo dong in 1423.<sup>18</sup> At that time, a certain Nyag re Grags pa skam po or Nyag re Man ngag pa approached Gzhon nu rgyal mchog and requested ordination as a *bhikṣu*.<sup>19</sup> When he heard Grags pa skam po's description of Ngor chen's special qualities and knowledge, Mus chen developed a deep conviction in Ngor chen's teaching abilities and thought of studying the three Cakrasaṃvara traditions of Lūhipāda, Kṛṣṇacārin, and Ghaṇṭāpāda (Bde mchog lo nag dril gsum) under him.<sup>20</sup>

When Mus chen reached Sa skya in late 1423, Ngor chen was in a strict retreat in his residence, the Shāk bzang sku 'bum. Through a messenger, Mus chen submitted his request to study Cakrasaṃvara ('Khor lo bde mchog) with Ngor chen, who agreed. After Ngor chen came out of retreat at the beginning of 1424, the two finally met, and Mus chen received various initiations and teachings from him.<sup>21</sup> Until 1429, Mus chen stayed for longer periods in Sa skya, eventually receiving from Ngor chen the *Lam 'bras* instructions.<sup>22</sup> During that crucial time for the Sa skya school, the leading lama of Sa skya, Theg chen Chos rje Kun dga' bkra shis (1349–1425) from the Lha khang bla brang, passed away (in 1425) and Ngor chen suffered from a severe illness (in 1426).<sup>23</sup> After recovering, Ngor chen urged Mus chen to also receive the *Lam 'bras* teachings, which he upheld.

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this region emerged: Mus chen Sangs rgyas rin chen (1453–1524), who was a nephew of Mus chen and served as the eighth abbot of Ngor (tenure: 1513–1524), Mus chen Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan (1542–1618), Grub chen Dkon mchog blo gros (b. 1428), and 'Dren mchog Dkon mchog rgya mtsho; see *Ibid.*: 22 and 22, n. 30. For the geography and history of the Mus valley, see *Ibid.*: 1–59 and 17, *Map Skizze des Mus chu-Tals*. The *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 207.5 specifies his place of birth as: *dpal ldan sa skya dang khad nye ba'i dgon pa 'phrang brag dmar gyi dge ba'i bshes gnyen bya 'phrang pa zhes bya bas bstan pa gzung ba'i gtsug lag khang mus stod gling skya zhes bya bar byon te* |.

<sup>17</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 597.5–6, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 214.3–5, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 9.5.

<sup>18</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 594.5, 596.5, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 213.3, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 8.4. In total, Mus chen relied on Gzhon nu rgyal mchog as his teacher for about seven years; see *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 210.5. According to the *Mdo smad chos 'byung I*: vol. 1, 28.5 and *Mdo smad chos 'byung II*: 11.19, Mus chen composed a biography of this master: *sems dpa' chen po gzhon nu rgyal mchog gi rnam thar mus chen gyis mdzad pa*.

<sup>19</sup> The *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 596.6 gives his name as Nyag re Grags pa skam po, whereby the *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 213.4 as well as *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 8.4–5 specify his name as Nyag re Man ngag pa.

<sup>20</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 596.5–597.4, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 213.3–6, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 8.4–9.2.

<sup>21</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 597.4–598.2, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 214.3–6, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 9.2–10.1.

<sup>22</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 602.2: *mdor na sa skyar sngar lo gsum | phyis zla bdun | (...)*.

<sup>23</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 598.2–599.3, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 215.2–6, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 10.1–11.3.



Thus in the summer of 1426, Mus chen received the *Lam 'bras* from Ngor chen for the first time over a period of four months.<sup>24</sup>

After some time devoted to spiritual practice, Mus chen returned to his homeland, Mus, in the fall of 1426, where he stayed until the summer of 1428, when he followed Ngor chen's invitation to return to Sa skya. By that time, however, Ngor chen had already left Sa skya for his first journey to Glo bo (from 1427 to 1428).<sup>25</sup> But it seems that he had made arrangements to invite Mus chen to Sa skya before his departure, allowing Mus chen to stay in the Shāk bzang sku 'bum during his absence.<sup>26</sup>

After Ngor chen returned to Sa skya, he taught Mus chen the *Lam 'bras* for seven months, from the second half of 1428 until the first half of 1429. Initially, he taught these instructions to a group of about seventy disciples, but eventually the group was reduced to only about fourteen more qualified students, including Mus chen, who also received the experiential instructions (*nyams khrid*).<sup>27</sup> It is said that Mus chen received a very special transmission of the *Lam 'bras*, one not given by Ngor chen in the same way to others, as can be seen from the outline of the main points (*chings*) regarding Ngor chen's teaching style recorded among Mus chen's notes of these teachings.<sup>28</sup> This might refer to the special *Slob bshad* transmission of the *Lam 'bras*, which, according to tradition, Mus chen received alone and in secret from Ngor chen.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 598.4–599.3, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 215.5–6, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 11.3–4.

<sup>25</sup> The *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 599.4–6 informs us of Ngor chen's invitation to Mnga' ris in the fall of 1427 and his return one year later in the fall of 1428. According to the *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.1–4, Ngor chen left for Glo bo in 1427 and came back six months later.

<sup>26</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 599.3–6 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.1–3. According to the *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 599.5–6, Mus chen stayed in the summer of 1428 in the Shāk bzang sku 'bum giving teachings to a certain group of students. Cf. *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.1–3, in whose accord he stayed with some masters and disciples in the Shāk bzang sku 'bum and received teachings such as the *G.yag t̄tk* and *Dpe chos rin spungs* from (*chos rje g.yag pa'i phar tshad kyi 'chad nyan pa*) Slob dpon Sangs rgyas dpal and Tshul bzang ba.

<sup>27</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.3–4. According to the *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 599.6–600.1, whose presentation varies slightly, Ngor chen gave the *Lam 'bras* instructions immediately after his return from the fall of 1428 for a period of seven months. Mus chen received those teachings as experiential instructions (*nyams khrid*). Although in the beginning a group of about seventy people had attended the teachings, in the end only about fourteen disciples including Mus chen successfully completed those instructions. The text (*Ibid.*: 600.1–3) goes on to describe the actual succession of the instructions and practices.

<sup>28</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 599.6–600.3 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.4–5. In total, Mus chen received the *Lam 'bras* instructions three times from Ngor chen; see *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 11.5–6.

<sup>29</sup> At that time the term *Slob bshad* ("Explication for Disciples") and its counterpart *Tshogs bshad* ("Explication for the Assembly") had not yet been in use. A reference to these transmissions was first made by Bdag chen Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1444–1495), who had received both transmissions from Mus chen in Mus in 1464; see Stearns 2001: 39–45 and Stearns 2006: 2–3, 245–246. According

In the same year of 1429, Ngor chen founded Ngor monastery. Mus chen was among the group of disciples who accompanied Ngor chen and acted as his attendants.<sup>30</sup> In the fall of that year, Ngor chen asked Mus chen to stay in Ngor and teach, but Mus chen declined, wishing to care for his elderly father in Mus.<sup>31</sup> Some years later, in 1434, Ngor chen requested Mus chen to again stay in Ngor and teach. Obviously trying to get Mus chen's approval, Ngor chen offered to name his newly established monastic retreat in accordance with Mus chen's wishes, telling him to take from the *bla brang* whatever he needed, and asking him to act as the ceremony master in the ordination of a nephew of Bdag chen Grags blo ba.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, Mus chen turned down Ngor chen's request once again, hoping to devote his life to spiritual practice. When Mus chen was about to leave for Mus in 1435, he revealed to Ngor chen that he planned to go into a strict retreat for three years and was considering staying the rest of his life in seclusion. At that time, Ngor chen advised Mus chen to accept a few students. In order to achieve Buddhahood, he explained, one needs perfect insight, which realizes the fundamental reality of things. Though it is possible to achieve Buddhahood through profound tantric methods, it is difficult to accomplish. Therefore, it is of greater benefit to practice by means of study and contemplation. One's insight will actually broaden furthermore by teaching others what one has learned.<sup>33</sup>

From their first meeting in 1424 until Ngor chen's death in 1456, Mus chen spent much of his time studying under Ngor chen. The main exceptions were those times when he travelled back to Mus for

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to Stearns 2001: 40, "these terms had not been used before the time of Bdag chen Blo gros rgyal mtshan, and many would later object to such a classification. For several more generations the *Slob bshad* instructions remained essentially oral and were completely unknown outside a very small circle of great teachers and their students."

<sup>30</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 601.5 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.5. Cf. *Lam 'bras bla brgyud rnam thar II*: 62, which states that Mus chen acted as a "construction worker" (*mkhar las pa*) in the establishment of Ngor monastery. This statement is probably based on the misinterpretation of the following line from the *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.5: *de nas rje 'di dang dpon slob ngor du byon khar las dang gsung chos kyang dmar po byung!*.

<sup>31</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 601.5–6.

<sup>32</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 606.5–6 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 219.2–3. Bdag chen Grags blo ba possibly refers to Grags pa blo gros (1367–1437/46), who was the second son of Ta dben Kun dga' rin chen (1339–1399) and thus Ngor chen's half brother. His nephew could probably be identified as Kun dga' dbang phyug (1418–1462), who was the son of Ta dben Kun dga' rin chen's first son Gu shri Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1366–1420) and the twentieth throne holder of Sa skya (ca. 1442–1462).

<sup>33</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 606.6–607.3 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 219.2–4. The picture emerges from Mus chen's biographies that in the first part of his life Mus chen avoided taking on monastic tasks and responsibility in favor of his own spiritual practice and development. See for example *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 593.6–594.2, 594.5–595.1, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 212.4–6, 213.6–214.1, 219.6–220.4, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 6.6–7.2, 9.2–3.

meditative retreats.<sup>34</sup> During such periods, he founded the monastery of Gling kha Bde ba can (in 1437) and constructed the hermitage of Bsam gtan phug (in 1454).<sup>35</sup> At times when Ngor chen was absent from Ngor, such as during his second journey to Glo bo in 1436, he asked Mus chen to give such important instructions as the *Lam 'bras*.<sup>36</sup>

When Ngor chen was about to pass away in 1456, Mus chen was called back to Ngor. During their final meeting, Ngor chen disclosed to him that he would be the successor to the throne of Ngor and instructed him on the teachings that he should give.<sup>37</sup> After Ngor chen's passing, Mus chen stayed at Ngor for the next two years, taking responsibility for the monastic seat, giving teachings and commissioning the construction of inner and outer reliquaries for his deceased *guru*.<sup>38</sup> In 1458, Mus chen bestowed teachings on Drung chen Nor bu bzang po (1403–1466)—the Rin spungs pa lord who had replaced his own former overlords, the Phag mo gru pas—in Bsam 'grub rtse. Afterwards he travelled back to Mus, where he founded the monastery of Bde ldan ri khrod.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 602.2: *mdor na sa skyar sngar lo gsum | phyis zla bdun | e wam chos ldan du lan brgyad phebs nas |*. See also *Ngor gdan rabs*: 5.2, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 216.5–6, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 11.4–6.

<sup>35</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 607.5, 608.6, *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 239.2–240.1, 240.1–2, and *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 23.6. The circumstances of founding Gling kha Bde ba can are mentioned in the *Gnyags ston pa'i gdung rabs*: 171–172. According to this source, Mus chen was reluctant to found this monastery, but, not listening to his words, the supplicants started with its construction. This account is probably based on its mention in the *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 219.6–220.4. See also Everding 2006: Teil 2, 48–49, who states that the monastery was founded in honour of Mus chen, and that the patron of its foundation was probably the ruler of La stod Byang. Gling kha Bde ba can was located in the upper Mus valley; see *Ibid.*: 22, n. 29 and 17, Map *Skizze des Mus chu-Tals*. For a picture of Gling kha Bde ba can taken by Hedin, see *Ibid.*: 48, Image *Das Kloster Gling kha bDe ba can*. For two drawings by Hedin of this monastery, see *Ibid.*: 21, Image *Zwei Zeichnungen Sven Hedins mit Aussichten des Klosters Ling [sic] kha bDe ba can*.

<sup>36</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 219.1–2. For other occasions, see *Bde mchog chos 'byung*: 232.3, *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 608.2–4 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 218.2–3.

<sup>37</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 561.2–562.1, *Ngor chos 'byung*: 351.1–2, *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 613.4–614.1, and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 220.6–221.1. Mus chen, however, mentions his last meeting with Ngor chen, but does not refer to his appointment as Ngor chen's successor; see *Ngor chen rnam thar I*: 471.6–472.2.

<sup>38</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 614.1–615.5 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 221.1–3: *de nas bzung ste byi glang stag gsum la ngor gyi gdan sa'i khur bzhes (...)*.

<sup>39</sup> See *Bde mchog chos 'byung*: 232.4 and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 221.3–5. Cf. *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 615.5, which states that Mus chen first left Ngor in 1458 for Mus, where he established Bde ldan ri khrod, before coming back to Ngor to teach in autumn of the same year. Afterwards, he followed the invitation of the Rin spungs pa ruler and travelled during that same autumn back to Mus. The *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 23.6 mentions Mus chen as founder of the monasteries Bde ba can and Ya ma bde ldan, referring to Gling kha Bde ba can and Bde ldan ri khrod respectively. The *Bde mchog chos 'byung*: 232.4 gives the full name of Bde ldan ri khrod as Ya ma Bde ldan gyi ri khrod and the *Mus chen rnam thar III*: 221.5 as Ya ma'i dgon pa Bde ldan ri khrod. This monastery is located on the western side of the Mus river in the region of Mdog lhado to the north of Gnäs

In the following years, Mus chen continued to act as the head of Ngor, though he did not stay there continuously.<sup>40</sup> Instead, he travelled on a yearly basis between Ngor and different monastic establishments in Mus, also visiting Ngam ring(s) Chos sde,<sup>41</sup> until he installed Gtsang Chu mig pa 'Gar ston 'Jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho (1396–1474) as third Ngor abbot in 1462.<sup>42</sup> Later on, in 1465, Mus chen was again invited to Ngor, but instead he installed, in accord with Ngor chen's wishes, Ngor chen's nephew Rgyal tshab Kun dga' dbang phyug (1424–1478) as fourth abbot (tenure: 1465–1478).<sup>43</sup>

Acting as teacher to Ngor chen's community of disciples, Ngor chen and Mus chen were known as the "[spiritual] father, [i.e.] the

gsar; see Everding 2006: Teil 2, 19–20. *Ibid.*: 20–21, n. 28 also mentions its foundation based on the *Bstan rtsis gsal ba'i nyin byed*: 220.11–12; the latter source's chronology of events is in accord with the *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 221.3–5.

<sup>40</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 221.5–6.

<sup>41</sup> In 1461, Mus chen followed the invitation of the ruler of Lha stod Byang, Ta'i si tu Rnam rgyal grags pa dpal bzang po (1395–1475), and the monastic community of Ngam ring(s); see *Bde mchog chos 'byung*: 232.5, *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 616.1–3, and *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 231.6–232.2. On Ta'i si tu Rnam rgyal grags pa dpal bzang po, see Stearns 2007: 283, 546, n. 763. On Ngam ring, see *Ibid.*: 497, n. 346. On the Ngam ring(s) Chos sde, see *Gzhis rtse sa khul gnas yig*: 106–107. For its location, see *Ibid.*: [99], *Ngam ring rdzong khongs kyi gnas skor sa bkra*, Everding 2006: Teil 2, 11, Map *Das Fürstentum La stod Byang*, and Everding and Dawa Dargyay Dzongphugpa 2006: Map *Kartographische Skizze des Fürstentums La stod lHo*.

<sup>42</sup> We know from *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 615.6–616.4 that Mus chen stayed in a strict retreat in Bsam gtan phug in 1460 and at the beginning of 1461 went to Bde ldan ri khrod, where he gave the *Lam 'bras* and other teachings. Following the invitation of the Byang ruler Ta'i si tu Rnam rgyal grags pa dpal bzang po (1395–1475) and of masters of the Ngam ring(s) monastery, he bestowed in Ngam ring(s) empowerments on the ruler and gave the *Lam 'bras* teachings to the *dge bshes* of Ngam ring(s). Mus chen then proceeded in the fall of 1461 to Ngor, where he stayed until the spring of 1462, teaching the *Lam 'bras* and other instructions to an assembly of about one thousand disciples. Afterwards he left for Bde ldan ri khrod in Mus. The enthronement, however, of Gtsang Chu mig pa 'Gar ston 'Jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho is not mentioned. The *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 232.2–3 unambiguously dates the installation of 'Jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho to the year 1462 as does the *Bde mchog chos 'byung*: 232.5–6. According to the *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 232.1–3, Mus chen stayed in retreat in Bsam gtan phug in 1460 and proceeded to Ngam ring(s) in the summer of 1461, where he taught among others the *Lam 'bras* for seven months, before installing 'Jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho as abbot of Ngor. The installation date of 1462 is also given in the *Ngor chos 'byung*: 351.1–2, according to which Mus chen acted as abbot from 1456–1458. After staying in retreat in Bsam gtan phug in Mus, Mus chen appointed 'Jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho as Ngor abbot in 1462. This entry seems to be primarily based on the *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 221.1–2, 232.1–3. Cf. *Ngor gdan rabs*: 8.3, where it is mentioned that 'Jam dbyangs shes rab rgya mtsho was installed as abbot on the fourth day of the sixth Tibetan month of 1473 (*chu sprul*). As Jackson 1989: 53 proposed, the dating needs to be corrected to the iron-snake year (1461).

<sup>43</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar I*: 620.3–5.

master, and [his spiritual] son."<sup>44</sup> During Mus chen's tenure as abbot, even more students reportedly came to Ngor than during the time of the great founder, Ngor chen.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.1.2. Description of Mus chen's Biography of Ngor chen

From the colophon of Mus chen's biography of Ngor chen, we learn that he finished the greatest part on the thirteenth day of the ninth month of 1455, while at his hermitage Bsam gtan phug. As requested by Ngor chen's faithful disciples, Mus chen wrote it while Ngor chen was still alive and in his seventy-third year.<sup>46</sup> After Ngor chen's passing, Mus chen completed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of 1457, in the *gtsug lag khang* of Ngor monastery, a short addendum focusing on the circumstances of Ngor chen's death and the subsequent religious activities that took place.<sup>47</sup> Mus chen composed the biography as a supplement to the lives of the lineage masters of the *Lam 'bras*.<sup>48</sup> At that time, Srad pa Kun dga' blo gros acted as Mus chen's scribe, who is also known to have written his own biographies of Ngor chen and Mus chen.<sup>49</sup>

Mus chen's biography of Ngor chen is available in two editions. First, in a section of twenty-two folios found among the lives of lineage masters in the *Slob bshad* section of a *Lam 'bras* collection that was reproduced from Sde dge prints from the library of the Ven. Klu lding Mkhan chen Rin po che (b. 1931) and published in India by the Sakya Centre in 1983 (*Ngor chen rnam thar I*).<sup>50</sup> The second edition is available in sixty-eight folios in a one-volume edition of biographies of famous *Lam 'bras* masters entitled *Sa-skyapa lam 'bras bla brgyud kyi rnam thar*, which was also published by the Sakya Centre in India in 1985.<sup>51</sup> Apart from the different sizes of folios, differing script and

<sup>44</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs*: 5.2: *ngor pa'i bu slob thams cad kyi bla mar khur te | bla ma yab sras zhes 'bod |*.

<sup>45</sup> See *Mus chen rnam thar II*: 241.2.

<sup>46</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar I*: 467.6–468.2.

<sup>47</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar I*: 473.4–6.

<sup>48</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar I*: 473.5.

<sup>49</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 565.2. On Srad pa Kun dga' blo gros' biography of Ngor chen, see below under 3. Lost Biographies.

<sup>50</sup> The *Lam 'bras dkar chag*: 2, text no. 21 of the Sde dge par khang records a *Lam 'bras* collection in twenty-three volumes in which this biography is included at the same place as it is in the Indian reprint, namely in vol. *ka*, text no. 21, fols. 216b1–237a6. The *Lam 'bras dkar chag*: 2, text no. 21 also lists the biography's outline.

<sup>51</sup> See *Lam 'bras India*: vol. 1, 432–473 and *Lam 'bras bla brgyud rnam thar I*: 189–325. In the latter source (*Ibid.*: 189), the biography bears only the abbreviated title *Chos rje rdo rje 'chang gi rnam thar*. It includes some folios that are printed only halfway through (*Ibid.*: 279–280, 283–284) or are totally blank (*Ibid.*: 281–282). One can speculate that the original manuscript folios were torn or missing. The whole volume is part of a collection of golden manuscripts from Mustang published by the Sakya Centre in five volumes. For a description of this

numbers of lines per page, these two editions also vary to a certain extent in their wording and punctuation.<sup>52</sup> The second edition concludes with a five-lined stanza of merit dedication followed by four stanzas of Tibetanised Sanskrit not included in the first edition.<sup>53</sup> However, apart from such minor variations, there are no differences in content.

Recently, Mus chen's biography of Ngor chen has also become available in three reprint editions: (1) in a *Lam 'bras* collection in *po ti* format published by the Rdzong sar lnga rig slob gling in 2007,<sup>54</sup> (2) in the *Slob bshad* section of a newly arranged *Lam 'bras* collection in *po ti* format published by Guru Lama of Sachen International (Rgyal yongs sa chen) in Kathmandu in 2008,<sup>55</sup> and (3) in the *E waṃ bka' 'bum*,<sup>56</sup> a compendium in book format of collected works of Ngor abbots edited by the Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang in 2010. All three of these newly inputted editions seem to be based on the Sde dge redaction of Mus chen's biography of Ngor chen that is included among the biographies of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters. Apart from these editions, TBRC also holds a *dbu med* manuscript version of the biography in forty-one folios, entitled *Rje btsun dam pa kun dga' bzang po'i rnam par thar pa*.<sup>57</sup> Another *dbu med* manuscript in forty folios, *Chos rje kun dga' bzang po'i rnam thar*, is preserved in Rome, as recorded by the *Catalogue of the Tucci Tibetan Fund in the Library of IsIAO*.<sup>58</sup>

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collection and, especially, the contents of this volume, see Jackson 1991: 3–5, 30–32.

<sup>52</sup> Variations in wording include the use of different but synonymous terms. In the *Lam 'bras India*: vol. 1, 456.2 we have *snga skad* and *phyi ma red*, for example, while in the *Lam 'bras bla brgyud rnam thar I*: 269.3–4 *snga dro* and *phyi dro*. In this case, some archaic term might have been changed to a more common one. Other variations include the shortening of phrases. In the *Lam 'bras India*: vol. 1, 467.6 we have *shin tu mdor bsdus* and *dge ba'i bshes gnyen*, while in the *Lam 'bras bla brgyud rnam thar I*: 305.4 *mdor bsdus* and *bshes gnyen*. We also encounter further variations such as *steng nas* and *tshes bcu gsum* (*Lam 'bras India*: vol. 1, 468.1) on the one hand, and *stengs na* and *yar tshes bcu gsum* (*Lam 'bras bla brgyud rnam thar I*: 306.1–2) on the other hand.

<sup>53</sup> See *Lam 'bras bla brgyud rnam thar I*: 324.5–325.5. Shorter or longer versions of these Tibetanised Sanskrit stanzas are found at the end of six out of the seven biographies included in this volume (*Ibid.*: 55.6, 107.3–5, 187.5, 325.3–5, 407.2–5, 573.2–5). These seem to have been included by the compiler of the volume because at the end of six of the biographies one finds the otherwise remaining blank lines of each folio filled in with these stanzas. This also explains why the last biography does not feature them since its main text ends at the end of the last line (*Ibid.*: 653.5). Nevertheless, the origin of the dedication is still in question.

<sup>54</sup> See *Lam 'bras China*: vol. 1, 614.4–675.

<sup>55</sup> See *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 1, 535–587.

<sup>56</sup> See *E waṃ bka' 'bum*: vol. 8, 262–311.

<sup>57</sup> See TBRC: W2CZ7931.

<sup>58</sup> See De Rossi Filibeck 2003: 334, no. 670, section 11.

2.2. *The Biography of Ngor chen by  
Mnga' ris pa Sangs rgyas phun tshogs (1649–1705)*

Mnga' ris pa Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, the twenty-fifth abbot of Ngor (tenure: 1686–1689),<sup>59</sup> was the author of the second full-length biography of Ngor chen. Its full title was *The Biography of the Victorious Vajradhara Kun dga' bzang po, The Ocean Assembling the Streams of [Biographical] Good Sayings, The Source of the Wish-fulfilling Jewel of Excellent Qualities*.<sup>60</sup>

2.2.1. *Biographical Sketch of  
Mnga' ris pa Sangs rgyas phun tshogs*

Sangs rgyas phun tshogs was from Tre ba,<sup>61</sup> a nomadic settlement in lower Mnga' ris. In 1669, at age twenty, he was brought to Ngor by Grub thob Sko phrug pa Kun dga' lhun grub. Following a written petition from his maternal uncle, he was committed to the care of the Thar rtse bla brang.<sup>62</sup> He primarily stayed in Ngor in the following years, engaging in religious studies and practices, until he was sent in 1673 to Gdong sprad Bsam gling sgar in Sga stod in Khams to collect offerings and gifts as funds for the Thar rtse bla brang's expenditures.<sup>63</sup> He seems to have stayed there until 1686,

<sup>59</sup> Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' own biography, *'Jam pa'i dbyangs sangs rgyas phun tshogs bkra shis grags pa rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa thub bstan snang ba'i nyin byed*, written by Shar Mi nyag Rab sgar pa Byams pa Tshul khriims dpal bzang (1675–1710), the twenty-eighth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1703–1710), is now available in *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 29, 265–361. This collection also contains his autobiographical account entitled *Bya bral ba sangs rgyas phun tshogs kyi myong ba brjed pa nges 'byung gtam gyi rol mtsho*; see *Ibid.*: 145–264. I could not consider both sources within the scope of this article. A short autobiographical sketch also survives in the *Ngor gdan rabs*: 50.6–51.4, as does a longer biographical sketch in the *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 498.5–516.1 by Dpal ldan chos skyong (1702–1759/69), the thirty-fourth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1733–1740).

<sup>60</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 476.1: *Rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po'i rnam par thar pa legs bshad chu bo 'dus pa'i rgya mtsho yon tan yid bzhin nor bu'i 'byung gnas*.

<sup>61</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs*: 50.6. Cf. *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 498.6, where the spelling of the settlement is given as Kre.

<sup>62</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs*: 51.1–2 and *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 499.6–500.4.

<sup>63</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 500.4–501.3. The monastery of Gdong sprad Bsam gling sgar seems to be identical to Gdong sprad Bsam gtan chos 'khor gling, whose history is sketched in *Khri 'du*: 236–240. This historical sketch even mentions Sangs rgyas phun tshogs as reference point for ascertaining the lifetime of Kun spangs pa Shes rab rin chen, the seventh Gdong sprad Sprul sku (*Ibid.*: 237). According to Jackson 2003: 529, Gdong sprad Bsam gtan gling was one of the twenty-one monasteries of the Sa skya pa school in Ldan ma, whose monks went to Ngor for ordination. Although traditionally one spoke of twenty-one monasteries, twenty-four could be enumerated in recent times. For this list, see *Ibid.*: 529. On the history of this monastery, see also Gri rkyang Tshe ring rdo rje (b. 1971), *Sga khri 'du gdong sprad bsam gtan chos 'khor gling gi lo rgyus zla shel dngul dkar me long*, [s.l.]: Pho brang dmar po'i las sgrub khang, n.d.

where he also acted as head of the monastery.<sup>64</sup> In the same year, he handed over the monastery to Shabs stod Rdzi lung pa Byams pa shes bya bzang po (1661–1702?), who had come up from Ngor to Sga stod in 1683 to collect monastic funds and who would later become the twenty-seventh Ngor abbot (tenure: 1695–1702?).<sup>65</sup> In 1686, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs returned to Ngor, where he was installed as abbot, filling this position for three years until 1689.<sup>66</sup> Having completed his tenure, he accepted the request of the Sde dge Sa skyong Bla ma Tshe dbang rdo rje,<sup>67</sup> which was reinforced by an official decree of the sixth Dalai Lama, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho (1683–1706/46). He departed in 1699 on his journey to Sde dge.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 501.3–4.

<sup>65</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs*: 52.2 and *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 501.4, 516.5.

<sup>66</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 501.4–503.2.

<sup>67</sup> Except for the *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 503.3, the only other source that I could find that mentions this name is a modern history of Lhun grub steng monastery (*Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*). In Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biographical sketch, Tshe dbang rdo rje's alias is given as Bla ma Sangs rgyas dpal bzang (*Ibid.*: 95). Earlier in the text, the same source (*Ibid.*: 33) mentions this master by the name Bla ma Dpal bzang po. In the *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 43.5 he appears under the name Bla ma Sangs rgyas dpal bzang. He was the third son of U rgyan bkra shis (*Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 39.3, 43.5–6, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 33–34, *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 50, and Kolmaš 1968: 50). He took on the actual responsibility (*'gan bzhes*) for inviting Sangs rgyas phun tshogs to Sde dge, though the official invitation came from Khri chen Bla ma Sangs rgyas bstan pa, who was the third or fourth abbot of Lhun grub steng, depending on whether or not one counts Byams pa phun tshogs as first abbot (*Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 29.5–39.3, 43.5–6, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 27–28, 95, *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 44–46, 50, 172–173, and Kolmaš 1968: 34, 50, 52). In the context of this invitation, the *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 43.6 addresses Sangs rgyas phun tshogs by the name of Byang chub sems dpa' Buddha Lakṣmi pa. Khri chen Bla ma Sangs rgyas bstan pa had been to Ngor before and studied with Sa skya pa and Ngor pa masters, among whom Sangs rgyas phun tshogs is listed; see *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 29.6–30.3, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 27–28, and *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 44.

<sup>68</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 503.2–504.2. Sangs rgyas phun tshogs was among the first Ngor pa masters who followed the invitation of the Sde dge ruling family to serve as religious master at their seat in Sde dge. He was succeeded by Gtsang Mdo mkhar ba Mkhan chen Bkra shis lhun grub (1672–1739/40), the thirty-first Ngor abbot (tenure: 1722–1725), who, after his abbatial tenure, had come up to Sde dge following the invitation of Sa skyong Bstan pa tshe ring (1678–1738) and stayed there until his death. At that time, a messenger was sent to Lhasa to deliver to the ruler of Tibet (*mi dbang*) the request of Sde dge Khri chen Bla ma Phun tshogs bstan pa, the son of Bstan pa tshe ring, that Dpal ldan chos skyong (1702–1759/69), the thirty-fourth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1733–1740), should come to Sde dge and act as its new religious teacher (*mchod gnas*). Following the official order of the *mi dbang*, Khang gсар Byams pa bsod nams bzang po (1689–1749), who had served as the thirtieth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1713–1722), was installed as *gdan tshab* of Ngor (in 1739/40). Dpal ldan chos skyong proceeded to Sde dge, where he should stay for fifteen years; see *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 533.2–4, 544.2–546.4, 566.2–6, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 35, 49, 98–99, 110, and *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 52, 61. On Bstan pa tshe ring, see Kolmaš 1968: 36–40, 50, 52 and on Phun tshogs bstan pa, see *Ibid.*: 40, 50, 52. The ruler of Tibet, who is here referred to as *mi dbang*, is identified earlier in the *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 565.6 as Mi dbang Bsod nams rab rgyas, according to whose order Dpal ldan chos skyong had earlier been installed as abbot of Ngor. Mi dbang Bsod



The *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong* highly praises his activities in service of the flourishing of the Buddhist teachings in the region of Sde dge, where he finally passed away six years later, in 1705.<sup>69</sup>

Sangs rgyas phun tshogs was surely one of the greatest Ngor masters of his time. It is due to his literary efforts that we are equipped with the basic sources on the early history of the Ngor tradition. It was he who wrote the *Abbatial History of Ngor* (*Ngor gdan rabs*) and, in addition to Ngor chen's biography, composed biographies of other Ngor abbots.<sup>70</sup> He also completed the famous

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nams rab rgyas is probably identical to Mi dbang alias Pho lha nas Bsod nams stobs rgyas (1689–1747). Regarding the invitation of the early Ngor pa masters to Sde dge, the *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong* mentions official degrees and orders of the Dga' ldan pho brang government, as well as orders and approvals of Sa skya itself. More research is needed to find out if this was merely a formality, or, if not, to clarify these connections. Apart from the Ngor pa masters visiting Sde dge, members of the ruling family came to central Tibet to visit such monasteries as Ngor and Sa skya. For the visits of Bstan pa tshe ring's sons, Mi dbang Bsod nams mgon po, Bla chen Phun tshogs bstan pa, and Bla ma Blo gros rgya mtsho (1722–1774), see *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 64.3–5, 65.2–4, 67.6–78.2 respectively. See also *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 45–51 and *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 58–63. The *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong* 533.1–2 also mentions the visit of a certain Sa skyong Sde dge Bla ma Kun dga' phrin las rgya mtsho to Ngor, who according to the *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 46–47 and the *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 58 is identical to Phun tshogs bstan pa; the latter name being his ordination name that he had received from Dpal ldan chos skyong during his *bhikṣu* ordination in Ngor. For other Ngor pa masters in Sde dge, see for instance *Gsang sngags gsar rnying gdan rabs*: 85.4–96.6, *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 111–145, and *Sde dge lo rgyus*: 172–174. On the early connection between Ngor and Sde dge, see also above n. 8.

<sup>69</sup> See *Ngor gdan rabs kha skong*: 504.5–508.3, 513.4–515.1.

<sup>70</sup> Sangs rgyas phun tshogs mentions that (1) he wrote an “expression of realizations” (*rtogs brjod*), meaning here a biographical narrative, of three masters from the Thar rtse bla brang (*Ngor gdan rabs*: 43.6), (2) he supplemented the works of Rgyal rtse ba Byang pa Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1598–1674), the twentieth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1657?), with his biography (*Ngor gdan rabs*: 45.4–5), (3) he wrote the biography of Sgrub Khang pa Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan (1599–1673), the twenty-second Ngor abbot (tenure: 1667–1671, *Ngor gdan rabs*: 49.2), and that (4) he wrote the biography of Shar Mi nyag Ston pa Lhun grub dpal ldan (1624–1697), the twenty-fourth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1673–1686, *Ngor gdan rabs*: 50.6). The three masters from the Thar rtse bla brang referred to under number (1) are Brang ti Mkhan chen Nam mkha' sangs rgyas, the seventeenth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1622–1625), Brang ti Mkhan chen Nam mkha' rin chen (1612–1657), the nineteenth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1653/54–1657), and Hor ston Paṅ chen Nam mkha' dpal bzang (1611–1672), the twenty-third Ngor abbot (tenure: 1671–1672). All these works are now available in *Lam 'bras Nepal*. For the three biographies of the masters from the Thar rtse bla brang, *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa brang ti nam mkha' sangs rgyas kyi rnam thar 'phros dang bcas pa byin rlabs chu rgyun*, see *Ibid.*: vol. 28, 745–782. For the biography of Ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *Rje btsun bla ma dam pa shar rgyal mkhar rtse pa ngag dbang bsod nams rgyal mtshan gyi rnam par thar pa byin rlabs char 'bebs*, see *Ibid.*: vol. 28, 829–865. For the biography of Dpal mchog rgyal mtshan, *Rje bla ma dam pa dpal mchog rgyal mtshan dpa'i rnam par thar pa dad pa'i gsal 'debs*, see *Ibid.*: vol. 29, 79–105. For the biography of Lhun grub dpal ldan, *Mkhan chen rdo rje 'chang lhun grub dpal ldan gyi rnam par thar pa legs byas dpal gyi dga' ston*, see *Ibid.*: vol. 29, 107–144. The three latter biographies were originally included in vol. 1 (*ka*) of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' *Collected Works*; see *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog*: 114–119.

*Ngor chos 'byung*, which had been left incomplete by the great tenth abbot Ngor chen Dkon mchog lhun grub (1497–1557). Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' *Collected Works* were carved and printed in Sde dge in four volumes, but only a few sections seem to have survived.<sup>71</sup> Recently, some of his writings were published in the *E wam bka' 'bum*.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.2.2. Description of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' Biography of Ngor chen

From the colophon of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen, we learn that he completed it on the fifteenth day of the ninth month of 1688, at the *gtsug lag khang* of Ngor monastery, 232 years after Ngor chen's passing. His biography of Ngor chen seems to have been printed in two different versions: one that was included among the biographies of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters and a second that existed as an independent volume. Both versions are available to us in the following two editions: the former in the *Slob bshad* section of the *Lam 'bras* collection that was reproduced from prints of the Sde dge redaction from the library of the Ven. Klu lding Mkhan chen Rin po che (b. 1931) and published by the Sakya Centre in 1983 (*Ngor chen rnam thar II*),<sup>73</sup> and the second as a publication in 1976 in India alongside a practice text on Hevajra written by the king of Sde dge Yab chen Tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin (1786–1842), alias Byams

<sup>71</sup> The second volume of his *Collected Works* seems to have survived and was scanned by TBRC: W1CZ1145: *Ngor chen sangs rgyas phun tshogs kyi gsung 'bum las pod kha pa*. A list of the texts included in his *Collected Works* is given in *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog*: 114–119. For this list, see also TBRC: P796. Seventeen of his writings are also recorded in the *Sde dge par khang par shing dkar chag*: 385–387.

<sup>72</sup> See *E wam bka' 'bum*: vol. 19–20.

<sup>73</sup> See *Lam 'bras India*: vol. 1, 475–585. There exist different Sde dge compilations of the biographies of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters. In one edition, Ngor chen's biography is included in vol. 1 (*ka*), as it is in the reproduction from the Sakya Centre "as arranged by 'Jam-dbyaṅs-blo-gter-dbañ-po and supplemented by texts continuing the lineage through Khañ-gsar Dam-pa and Sga-ston Ñag-dbañ-legs-pa Rin-po-ches;" see *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 475–585. 'Jam dbyangs blo gter dbang po (1847–1914) originally arranged and oversaw the carving of the *Lam 'bras slob bshad* collection in seventeen volumes; see *Lam 'bras India*: vol. 8, 316.2–3. In another edition, Ngor chen's biography is included as the first text of vol. 2 (*kha*), as is the case in the collection made available by TBRC: W00CHZ0103345 (*Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fols. 1a1–53b6). The *Sde dge par khang par shing dkar chag*: 140–143 and the *Lam 'bras dkar chag*: 7–20 both list and record the individual texts for two different editions of vol. 2 (*kha (ya)* in 455 fols. and *kha (ma)* in 324 fols.) and 3 (*ga (ya)* in 400 fols. and *ga (ma)* in 304 fols.) of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters' biographies of a *Lam 'bras* collection in twenty-three volumes. The *Sde dge par khang par shing dkar chag*: 140–143 and the *Lam 'bras dkar chag*: 7–8 record Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen, including its outline, as the first text of vol. 2 (*kha (ya)*).

pa kun dga' sangs rgyas bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (*Ngor chen rnam thar VI*).<sup>74</sup>

Recently, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen has also been made available in three large collections: (1) the *Lam 'bras* collection published by the Rdzong sar lnga rig slob gling in 2007,<sup>75</sup> (2) in the *Tshogs bshad* section of the *Lam 'bras* collection published in 2008 by Guru Lama of Sachen International,<sup>76</sup> and (3) in the *E wam bka' 'bum*,<sup>77</sup> a compendium of the collected works of Ngor abbots edited by the Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang in 2010. All three of these newly inputted versions seem to be based on the same edition of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen, namely the one included among the lives of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters, since all three feature the same orthographic mistakes, which are already found in the reprinted edition of the Sakya Centre I mentioned before.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, TBRC holds scans of two volumes of biographies (vol. *kha* and *ga*) of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters that were printed from blocks carved at the Sde dge printing house and whose copies were made available from the library of Ta'i si tu Rin po che at Shes rab gling, Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, India.<sup>79</sup> In this collection of the *Lam 'bras*, the biography of Ngor chen is included in the second volume, volume *kha*, (*Ngor chen rnam thar III*).<sup>80</sup> The aforementioned reprint from the Sakya Centre and the scan from TBRC seem to originate from the same xylographs, as they contain similar miniatures and the same orthographic mistakes.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>74</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar VI*: 135–315. The “Preface” to this publication states that the two works “are reconstructions from two very old and faded blockprints from Sde-ge and presumably Ngor redactions.” The title page provides the information that the texts were “reproduced from tracing and manuscripts from the library of Mkhan-po Rin-chen by Trayang and Jamyang Samten.” Davidson 1981: 94–95, n. 10 mentions that this “published manuscript is rife with orthographic errors.”

<sup>75</sup> See *Lam 'bras China*: vol. 1, 677–823.

<sup>76</sup> See *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 27, 1–133. This collection includes a huge number of biographies that were heretofore unavailable or considered to be lost, such as those of the Ngor abbots in the *Tshogs bshad* transmission line (*Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 27–29).

<sup>77</sup> See *E wam bka' 'bum*: vol. 20, 1–117.

<sup>78</sup> Compare for example the passage in *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 482.1 and *Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fol. 4b1: *gu ge pañ chen gyis sa bcad gsum du mdzad | chos dpal bzang pos sngar [lngar] mdzad pa sogs mang yang gnad don gcig go |*. The spelling mistake of *sngar* instead of *lngar* is found in all three of the recently inputted editions: *Lam 'bras China*: vol. 1, 686.1, *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 27, 8.4, and *E wam bka' 'bum*: vol. 20, 7.4. It is not found in the *Ngor chen rnam thar IV*: fol. 6a4, *Ngor chen rnam thar V*: fol. 6a4, and *Ngor chen rnam thar VI*: 146.5, however.

<sup>79</sup> See TBRC: W00CHZ0103345.

<sup>80</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fols. 1a–56a.

<sup>81</sup> For the miniatures (left margin: Sa chen Kun dga' snying po, right margin: Ngor chen), see *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 476 and *Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fol. 1b. For orthographic mistakes, see for example *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 482.1 and *Ngor*

Aside from being included among the lives of the *Lam 'bras* lineal *gurus*, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen was also printed separately as an independent volume. TBRC holds scans of two xylograph versions of this biography, each in sixty-six folios.<sup>82</sup> Of these two versions, only a scan of the former one (*Ngor chen rnam thar IV*) is accessible at the moment. A similar xylograph version in sixty-six folios also exists in Mang spro monastery in La dwags and was photographed by Blo gsal don grub of Gong dkar Chos sde (Dehradun, India) (*Ngor chen rnam thar V*).<sup>83</sup> The aforementioned edition of Ngor chen's biography that was published in 1976 in India together with a liturgy for Hevajra is based on such an individually printed version. These independent printed versions of Ngor chen's biography differ slightly from the biography as it appears among the lives of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters, as can be recognized from the miniatures at the beginning and end of the text, the arrangement of the text in seven rather than six lines per page, and the appearance of some orthographic variations and mistakes.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, the independently printed versions contain the biography's versified printing-colophon together with a merit-dedication, followed by a prayer written in Lantscha, Tibetanised Sanskrit, and Tibetan.<sup>85</sup> From the printing-colophon we know that the main

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*chen rnam thar III*: fol. 4b1: *gu ge pañ chen gyis sa bcad gsum du mdzad | chos dpal bzang pos sngar [Ingar] mdzad pa sogs mang yang gnad don gcig go |*.

<sup>82</sup> See TBRC: W2CZ7950 and TBRC: W3CZ1323.

<sup>83</sup> On the history of Mang spro dgon Thub bstan shwa gling chos 'khor gling, see *Mang spro dgon gyi lo rgyus*.

<sup>84</sup> As an illustration, I would like to mention here only two examples, the first being an orthographic variation and the second being an orthographic mistake. (1) The Ngor chen biographies included among the biographies of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters all read *sku rims* (*Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 484.5, *Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fol. 5b5, *Lam 'bras China*: vol. 1, 689.3, *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 27, 11.4, and *E wam bka' 'bum*: vol. 20, 9.18–19), whereas the independently printed biographies of Ngor chen (*Ngor chen rnam thar IV*: fol. 7b4, *Ngor chen rnam thar V*: 7b4, and *Ngor chen rnam thar VI*: 150.2) read *sku rim*. (2) The Ngor chen biographies included among the biographies of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters (*Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 488.3, *Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fol. 7b3, *Lam 'bras China*: vol. 1, 694.4–5, *Lam 'bras Nepal*: vol. 27, 16.1, and *E wam bka' 'bum*: vol. 20, 14.3) read as follows: *so so'i bslab bya rnams byang ba [sa] dang |*. In comparison, the independently printed biographies of Ngor chen (*Ngor chen rnam thar IV*: fol. 9b6, *Ngor chen rnam thar V*: fol. 7b4, *Ngor chen rnam thar VI*: 155.6) all correctly read: *so so'i bslab bya rnams byang sa dang |*. Also, the title of the biography contained in the *Lam 'bras* collection varies in so far that it is shortened, due to the fact that it also includes the title for the whole volume of biographies of *Lam 'bras* lineage masters: *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi bgrod pa gcig pa'i lam chen gsung ngag rin po che'i bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar glegs bam gnyis pa las rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po'i rnam par thar pa legs bshad chu bo 'dus pa'i rgya mtsho*; see *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 475.3 and *Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fols. 1a3. The biography's full title is, however, given in the incipit; see *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 476.1 and *Ngor chen rnam thar III*: fol. 1b1. The marginal title of the former collection reads *Lam 'bras bla ma'i rnam thar*, whereby the latter biography's marginal title reads *Rdo rje 'chang rnam thar*.

<sup>85</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar IV*: fols. 65a4–66a7, *Ngor chen rnam thar V*: fols. 65a4–66a.7, and *Ngor chen rnam thar VI*: 312.6–315.6.

patron of the printing project was the Sde dge Sa skyong Bla ma Tshe dbang rdo rje.<sup>86</sup> The scribe was Dge slong Bkra shis dbang phyug and one of the carvers was Dbu mdzad Lha skyabs. In terms of their orthography, these independently printed versions seem more reliable.

Further xylograph exemplars of the two different editions of Ngor chen's biography are preserved in Rome at the Library of the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (IsIAO). De Rossi Filibeck records the presence of the first three volumes of biographies (*ka-ga*) of the *Lam 'bras* lineage masters, among which Ngor chen's biography is found at the beginning of vol. 2 (*kha*). She also writes of two sixty-six folio block prints of Ngor chen's individually printed biography, specifying that they were engraved by Dbu mdzad Lha skyabs.<sup>87</sup>

### 2.2.3. The Editorial Work of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs

A closer look at Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' work reveals that he did not simply compose a new Ngor chen biography. Rather, he compiled older biographies into his new work, expanding on their information through his own explanatory additions.<sup>88</sup> From some of his statements we can see how he worked in putting together this biography. Here I would like to describe his way of compiling and editing, as I believe it will contribute to a better understanding of the make up of the work.

<sup>86</sup> The printing colophon contains the name elements of the patrons in the form of a eulogy. It seems that they should be combined in the following way: Sde dge Sa skyong Bla ma Tshe dbang rdo rje, Sangs rgyas bstan pa'i dpal, Bsod nams dpal, and Phun tshogs bzang po; see *Ngor chen rnam thar IV*: fol. 65a5–6, *Ngor chen rnam thar V*: fol. 65a5–6, and *Ngor chen rnam thar VI*: 313.2–3. The identification of the main patron, Bla ma Tshe dbang rdo rje, presents some difficulties. TBRC: W2CZ7950 and TBRC: W3CZ1323 state that the printing blocks were carved during the time of the Sde dge king Yab chen Tshe dbang rdo rje rig 'dzin (1786–1842). Another possibility could be to identify Tshe dbang rdo rje with the Tshe dbang rdo rje alias Bla ma Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, who took on the responsibility of inviting Sangs rgyas phun tshogs to Sde dge. In line with this, the *Sde dge rgyal rabs*: 43.5–6 mentions that Sangs rgyas dpal bzang established among others the *dkyil 'khor sgrub mchod* rituals of the Ngor tradition in monastic institutions such as Ri khrod Smin grol gling and Dbon stod gdan sa, and also commissioned the printing of the *Collected Works* of previous masters and many volumes of biographies. The *Sde dge dgon chen lo rgyus*: 34 specifies that these works and biographies were from Ngor pa masters. Moreover, the second patron mentioned, Sangs rgyas bstan pa'i dpal, could be Khri chen Bla ma Sangs rgyas bstan pa, who officially invited Sangs rgyas phun tshogs to Sde dge. On Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' invitation to Sde dge, see n. 68.

<sup>87</sup> See De Rossi Filibeck 2003: 345–346, no. 731–733 and 338, no. 690 and 695 respectively.

<sup>88</sup> Davidson 1991: 234, n. 57 designates Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' work as "pasticcio."

Sangs rgyas phun tshogs reveals his method in a terse statement at the beginning of the biography:

(...) Regarding how [Ngor chen] performed in this life deeds for the Buddha's teachings, from among the many biographical accounts written by disciples of the master himself, [I] based [myself] here on the biography written by [Ngor chen's] chief spiritual son Sems dpa' chen po Mus chen Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan. What was not explicitly mentioned in [that work] [I] completed by adding [information from] other texts as I have seen them myself.<sup>89</sup>

When we read Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' composition, we find that this is exactly how he proceeds. He incorporates Mus chen's entire Ngor chen biography, even quoting its colophons, but making a few minor changes in its wording. In between, he adds additional information that he cites from older biographies composed by Ngor chen's disciples. He also presents further descriptions and explanations that probably originate in these older biographies, cites additional sources such as praises of Ngor chen, and presents oral accounts. Since we do not have access to these older biographies, it is impossible to say how much of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' descriptions and explanations actually originate from them.<sup>90</sup>

In this regard, it would be interesting to know where the opening part of the biography comes from. Sangs rgyas phun tshogs quotes at length two *sūtras* in which the Buddha, according to the tradition, prophesied Ngor chen's coming and Ngor chen's future attainment of buddhahood, and then continues with a short account of Ngor chen's previous lives.<sup>91</sup> These parts are missing from Mus chen's

<sup>89</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 480.6–481.1: (...) *sku tshe 'dir yang sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la bya ba mdzad tshul la | rje nyid kyi slob ma rnams kyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar gyi yi ge mang du snang ba las | 'dir thugs sras sems dpa' chen po mus chen dkon mchog rgyal mtshan gyis mdzad pa'i rnam thar gzhir bzhag der mi gsal ba rang gis ji ltar mthong ba'i yi ge gzhan gyis kha bskang nas bkod pa la |*.

<sup>90</sup> For instance, the account on the founding of Ngor monastery is given briefly in Mus chen's biography of Ngor chen, while Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' presentation is much more detailed; see *Ngor chen rnam thar I*: 459.1–460.2 and *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 524.2–529.3 respectively.

<sup>91</sup> Sangs rgyas phun tshogs cites from the following two *sūtras*: (1) *Kuśalamūla-paridharasūtra* / *Kuśalamūlasaṃparigrahasūtra* / *Dge ba'i rtsa ba yongs su 'dzin pa'i mdo* (*Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*: no. 119, *Ötani*: no. 769, and *Tōhoku*: no. 101); (2) *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* / *Dam pa'i chos pad ma dkar po'i mdo* (*Bka' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*: no. 131, *Ötani*: no. 781, and *Tōhoku*: no. 113). The *sūtras* are also identified in Stearns 2006: 245, 654, n. 362–365. For Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' quotes, see *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 477.3–479.1 and 479.1–479.4 respectively. He quotes the first *sūtra* in a rather confusing way, however, as he picks out only certain verses and skips others, while presenting them as one single quote. In the last quote, he even reverses the sequence of the *sūtra* quoting back to front. His quotes correspond to *Tōhoku*: no. 101, 187.2, 187.4–5, 187.5–6, 187.6–7, 188.5–7, 190.2, 190.4, 190.1–2, 190.3, 189.1–2, 189.3–4 and *Tōhoku*: no. 113, 162.2–5. Already in the *Gsang chen bstan pa rgyas byed* it seems that the reading of this *sūtra* was

Ngor chen biography. Nevertheless, the first part at least cannot be attributed to Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, since we already encounter short citations from both *sūtras* in the sketch of Ngor chen's life that is included in the *Gsang chen bstan pa rgyas byed* composed by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang phyug (1524–1568) and translated by Cyrus Stearns.<sup>92</sup>

The passage on Ngor chen's family relations serves as a good example of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' method. In the paragraph below, the text in bold letters originates from Mus chen's life of Ngor chen. The parts not in bold letters are Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' remarks and additions, and the text in a smaller font is a citation from a Ngor chen biography authored by Srad pa Kun dga' blo gros.

(...) *rnam par thar pa cung zad cig brjod par bya ba la gnyis te | rab tu ma byon pa dang | rab tu byon pa'i rnam par thar pa'o |* |gu ge pañ chen gyis sa bcad gsum du mdzad | chos dpal bzang pos sngar [lŋgar] mdzad pa sogs mang yang gnad don gcig go | **dang po rab tu ma byon gong gi rnam thar ni | rje 'di'i rigs dang gdung ni |** rgyal po chen po'i sku zhang du gyur pa cog ro'am cog grur grags pa cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan la sogs pa mang du byung ba'i brgyud pa bzang po'o | **lyab mes gong ma rnams 'bring 'tshams nas sa skya phyogs su byon te | ga ra la sogs par 'brog mdzad cing bzhugs pa las rim gyis bdag chen gzhi thog pa'i gsol ja bar gyur pa yin la | khyad par rje 'di nyid kyi phyi ltar gyi yab ni | sa skya tshogs kyi nye gnas chen po dpon tshang grub pa yon tan zhes bya ba dpal ldan bla ma dam pa'i drung nas zhus pa'i yongs rdzogs dge bsnyen yin cing | nang ltar na bdag chen gzhi thog pa kun dga' rin chen yin te | grub chen srad pa kun blos | phyi ltar nye gnas chen po grub pa'i sras |** |sbas pa'i yab ni bdag chen kun rin yin | |dpal ldan kun dga'i rigs brgyud sa skya pa | |dpal ldan sa skya pa la gsol ba 'debs | |zhes gsungs |.<sup>93</sup>

altered and one verse added. This is interesting since these lines are interpreted as the prophecy for Ngor chen's controversy with Mkhas grub rje Dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438). The *sūtra* (Tōhoku: no. 101, 190.2) reads: *gang dag phyi dus dge slong rnams 'byung ba | rtsub dang gtum dang shin tu rtsub pa yin |*. In the *Gsang chen bstan pa rgyas byed*: 150.2–3 we read: *'phags pa dge ba'i rtsa ba yongs su 'dzin pa'i mdor | (...) khor dang gtum dang shin tu rtsub pa yi | dge slong gzhan gyis de la rtsod par 'gyur | zhes chos rje mkhas grub pas mdo ma yin zhes skur pa 'debs pa'ang lung bstan pa dang (...)*. Sangs rgyas phun tshogs (Ngor chen *rnam thar II*: 478.3–4) cites this part as: *gang dag phyi dus dge slong rnams 'byung ba | rtsub dang gtum dang shin tu rtsub pa yi | dge slong gzhan gyis 'di la rtsod par 'gyur |*. Then, he adds a quote from two lines later in the *sūtra* (Ngor chen *rnam thar II*: 478.4, Tōhoku: no. 101, 190.4): *chos 'di rgyal bas gsungs pa ma yin zhes | 'jig rten phyin ci log la kun dgar ltos |*. Up to now I could not identify the line *dge slong gzhan gyis 'di la rtsod par 'gyur |*. It might have been added, and the *yin* in the preceding verse changed to *yi*. However, this is just my first impression and deserves more research.

<sup>92</sup> For the translation of the *Gsang chen bstan pa rgyas byed*, see Stearns 2006: 129–251. For the biographical sketch of Ngor chen, see *Ibid.*: 245–246.

<sup>93</sup> Ngor chen *rnam thar II*: 482.1–5.

Another aspect of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' editorial method becomes clear when we examine how he treated diverging information from his sources. In these cases, he strictly separates the differing versions, as the following example illustrates:

If [I] explain a little what is not explicit in [Ngor chen's] record of teachings received [it is like this]: "[Ngor chen] heard by Chos rje Ye shes rgyal mtshan five times the *Prajñāpāramitā* based on Bu [ston's] commentary" [as said in] the work [of] Chos dpal. Paṇḍi ta said [Ngor chen] heard [these teachings] four and a half [times]. Mus pa said four [times] and also that [Ngor chen] heard [them] based on Mkhan chen Buddha Shrī pa's<sup>94</sup> notes.<sup>95</sup>

In the colophon to his work, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs provides us with information on the circumstances that caused him to engage in this literary project.

(...) [I] put on my head the diadem of command given by [my guru] Khyab bdag Bla ma Lhun grub dpal ldan, who performed for a long time the activities [as] the sublime regent [of Ngor chen]: "Although the previous superior ones wrote down many biographical accounts [of Ngor chen], these days it has become difficult to bring [all these] books together and it is difficult to understand the meaning [of their] sections. Therefore, [you] should write an account incorporating the good parts of those previous biographies."<sup>96</sup>

From this passage, we learn that Sangs rgyas phun tshogs was requested by Mi nyag pa Lhun grub dpal ldan (1624–1697), the twenty-fourth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1673–1686), to engage in this project. Moreover, we learn that the lives of Ngor chen composed by

<sup>94</sup> Here, Mkhan chen Buddha Shrī pa refers to G.yag phrug alias G.yag ston Sangs rgyas dpal (1350–1414), who attended Ngor chen's novice ordination. According to Jackson 1987: vol. 1, 135, "This great scholiast was not only a key transmitter of *Prajñāpāramitā* exegesis, but he is also said to have been a noteworthy reviver of Pramāṇa studies within the Sa-skyapa tradition."

<sup>95</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 491.1–2: *gsan yig tu mi gsal ba cung zad bshad na | chos rje ye shes rgyal mtshan pa'i drung du | phar phyin bu ti ga gi steng nas tshar lnga gsan zhes chos dpal pa gsungs | paṇḍi tas phyed dang lnga | rje mus pas bzhi gsan gsung zhing | mkhan chen buddha shrī pa'i zin bris kyi steng nas kyang gsan gsung |*

<sup>96</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 579.6–580.2: *ces pa rgyal bas lung bstan pa'i skyes bu chen po rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po'i rnam par thar pa legs bshad chu bo 'dus pa'i rgya mtsho yon tan yid bzhiin nor bu'i 'byung gnas zhes bya ba 'di ni dam pa gong ma rnams kyi rnam thar gyi yi ge du ma mdzad kyang | deng sang dpe rnams 'dzom dka' zhing skabs don rnams rtogs dka' bas rnam thar snga ma rnams kyi legs cha bsdus pa'i yi ge zhis bgyis [gyis] zhes rgyal tshab dam pa phrin las yun ring du bskyangs pa'i khyab bdag bla ma lhun grub dpal ldan gyi zhal snga nas kyi bka'i cod pan gnang ba spyi bor blangs shing |*



his personal disciples were “difficult to bring together” (*dzom dka'*). One can speculate that they were scattered across various locations, hard for even an abbot of Ngor to lay his hands on. It was, apparently, high time to preserve the old biographies of the founder of the Ngor tradition and its mother monastery for the generations to come. This project was undertaken by Sangs rgyas phun tshogs by incorporating the information of these old biographies in his own compilatory work, following the command of his own *guru*. However, as the following two sources illustrate, in the years to come the biographies of Ngor chen were still not easy to access. The scarcity of some of Ngor chen's biographies is attested to by a later list of rare Tibetan texts compiled by A khu Ching Shes rab rgya mtsho (1803–1875). Beside Mus chen's and Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' works, the list records two further Ngor chen biographies composed by personal disciples.<sup>97</sup> From an annotation at the end of Mus chen's Ngor chen biography—probably stemming from the compilers of a part or the whole *Lam 'bras* collection—we can conclude that the rarity or at least inaccessibility of these biographies persisted then, too:

If the biographies of this master [Ngor chen] written by Gu ge Paṅ chen and Ye chen po are found, [they] must be included again.<sup>98</sup>

Before I turn to consider the lost biographies, let me make a few remarks about the structure of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' Ngor chen biography. He divides his work into two parts: the “Actual Subject” (*dnegos*) and a second part called “Additional Subjects” (*phros*).<sup>99</sup> In the former, he presents Ngor chen's life story as discussed above. In the latter, he adds both a discussion of the meaning of the term *e waṃ* from the sūtric and tantric perspectives,<sup>100</sup> and supplements the chapter entitled “Qualities of the Sacred Site” (*gnas kyi yon tan*), which includes three praises of Ngor monastery by Glo bo Mkhan chen Bsod nams lhun grub (1456–1532), E waṃ chos ldan gyi Zur chen Bla ma Sangs rgyas lhun grub, and Karma 'phrin las pa Phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba (1456–1539).<sup>101</sup> After Sangs rgyas phun tshogs'

<sup>97</sup> See *Dpe rgyun dkon pa 'ga' zhid gi tho yig*: 508, no. 10928–10931.

<sup>98</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar* I: 473.6: *rje 'di'i rnam thar gu ge paṅ chen dang | ye chen po mdzad brnyed na slar 'dzud dgos | |*.

<sup>99</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar* II: 477.1: *'dir rgyal ba rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po zhes snyan pa'i ba dan srid pa gsum na g.yo ba'i rtogs pa brjod pa la don gnyis ste | dnegos dang 'phros sol*.

<sup>100</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar* II: 566.1–569.1.

<sup>101</sup> Glo bo Mkhan chen wrote his praise down according to the words of Gu ge Paṅdi ta Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1415–1486). Its full title is *E waṃ gyi bkod pa la bstod pa'i tshigs su bcad pa theg chen sgra dbyangs*; see *Glo bo mkhan chen gsung 'bum*: vol. 1, fols. 90b–91b and vol. 4, fols. 104a–105b. Zur chen Bla ma Sangs rgyas lhun grub's praise is titled *Dpal e waṃ chos ldan bstod pa kā li'i rgyan rnam par bkra ba*. The third praise bears the title *Dpal e waṃ chos ldan gsang snyags kyi*

closing verses, colophon and short versified conclusion (*smras pa*), another work entitled *Rje btsun rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po'i lam 'bras kyi bka' rgya thim pa'i gzigs snang gi gsal 'byed*, composed by Sgrub khang pa Dpal ldan don grub (1563–1636), the sixteenth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1618–1622), is added. That text explains and illustrates a vision Ngor chen had that indicated to him whether or not he was allowed to teach the *Lam 'bras*. Tucci in his *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* mistakenly took this text's colophon to be the colophon for the entire Ngor chen biography, which led him to wrongly ascribe it to Dpal ldan don grub.<sup>102</sup>

### 3. Lost Biographies

I have already mentioned several older biographies of Ngor chen written by his disciples. Here I would like to present what I have been able to learn about these works and their authors. In his *Ngor gdan rabs*, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs lists several of these earlier lives of Ngor chen:

Those and other virtuous activities [of Ngor chen] are beyond one's imagination and shall be known from the work by **Mus pa**, the texts written by [Ngor chen's] disciples **Gu ge Paṅ chen**, **Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan**, **Srad pa Kun blo**, **Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po** and others, and from the *Ocean of Good Sayings*, the biography I have written [myself], which [is] a compilation of all these [works].<sup>103</sup>

The first person mentioned, Mus pa, is Mus chen Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan (1388–1469), whom I have already introduced. The other four authors frequently appear in Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen and are all included among Ngor chen's personal disciples.<sup>104</sup>

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*pho brang chen po'i rten gdan rabs dang bcas pa la bstod pa dā ki rnam par bzhad pa'i glu dbyangs*. For the three works, see *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 569.1–570.5, 570.5–571.4, and 571.4–577.6 respectively.

<sup>102</sup> See Tucci 1949: 157. Khetsun Sangpo 1997: vol. XI, 402 and Sobisch 2008: 89, 182, no. #641#, probably due to the same reason, also ascribed it wrongly to Dpal ldan don grub. The fact that Sangs rgyas phun tshogs included Mus chen's colophons in his work seems to have misled Shen Weirong 2002: 149, n. 92, 207–208, n. 289, 400 in his monograph on the first Dalai Lama Dge 'dun grub (1349–1474) to ascribe Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen to Mus chen.

<sup>103</sup> *Ngor gdan rabs*: 3.5–6: *de la sogs pa'i rnam par dkar ba'i phrin las bsam gyis mi khyab ste | rje mus pas mdzad pa | gu ge paṅ chen | sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan | srad pa kun blo | gu ge chos dpal bzang po sogs | slob ma rnam kyis mdzad pa'i yi ge rnam dang | de thams cad kyi sdud pa kho bos bris pa'i rnam thar legs bshad rgya mtshor shes par bya'o |*. Emphasis added by the author.

<sup>104</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 532.3–4, 533.5.

3.1. *Gu ge Paṇḍi ta Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1415–1486)*

The Gu ge Paṇ chen mentioned by Sangs rgyas phun tshogs is Gu ge Paṇḍi ta Grags pa rgyal mtshan.<sup>105</sup> Sangs rgyas phun tshogs mentions some background information on the relation between Ngor chen and Gu ge Paṇḍi ta and the sources that Gu ge Paṇḍi ta based his work upon, probably taking this information from the colophon of Gu ge Paṇḍi ta's life of Ngor chen:

[Regarding Ngor chen's] biography up to this point, Gu ge Paṇ chen said that he himself relied [on Ngor chen as his teacher] for seventeen years and acted as [his] ritual attendant and servant (*go re len*).<sup>106</sup> [Concerning Ngor chen's] many activities before and after, [he] wrote them according to the oral accounts of Bla ma Dpal ldan, who [himself] had relied for fifteen years on Rje Rin po che [i.e. Ngor chen], Rgyal tshab Chos rje Kun dbang pa,<sup>107</sup> and others.<sup>108</sup>

As a further source illuminating the relation between Ngor chen and Gu ge Paṇḍi ta, we have a photocopy of a nineteen folio *dbu med* manuscript of the Gu ge Paṇḍi ta's own biography, entitled *Rnam thar dgos 'dod 'byung ba*.<sup>109</sup> It was written shortly after the Paṇḍi ta's passing by his disciple Mnga' ris G/Bzhi sde pa 'Jam dbyangs nam mkha' brtan pa in 1488 at Ngor.<sup>110</sup> According to this work, Gu ge

<sup>105</sup> *Ngor chos 'byung*: 343.1–2: *gu ge paṇḍi ta grags pa rgyal mtshan 'di la gu ge paṇ chen zer* |. Sangs rgyas phun tshogs uses both titles alternately in his Ngor chen biography. He further uses short forms like Paṇ chen Grags rgyal (*Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 499.3) or only Paṇḍi ta (*Ibid.*: 491.2).

<sup>106</sup> This term is probably identical to *go re long*. For a similar passage from Gu ge Paṇḍi ta's biographical sketch, see A myes zhabs' (1597–1659) *Bde mchog chos 'byung*: 233.2–3: *khyad par rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po'i mchod g.yog dang* | *gsol dpon sogs go re lan* [sic] *gyi tshul du lo bcu bdun gyi bar du zhabs pad bsten te gsung gi gsang ba zab mo 'dzin par mdzad cing* |.

<sup>107</sup> Chos rje Kun dbang refers to Ngor chen's paternal nephew Rgyal tshab Kun dga' dbang phyug (1424–1478), the fourth Ngor abbot (tenure: 1465–1478).

<sup>108</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 554.2–3: *'di yan gyi rnam thar gu ge paṇ chen gyis kyang khong rang gis lo bcu bdun bsten cing mchod g.yog dang go re len bgyis pa dang* | *gzhan snga phyi'i mdzad pa mang po rje rin po che lo bco lnga'i bar brten pa'i bla ma dpal ldan pa dang* | *rgyal tshab chos rje kun dbang pa sogs kyi gsung sgras bzhin bkod pa yin gsungs so* |.

<sup>109</sup> This work survives in the Beijing collection and Leonard van der Kuijp possesses a photocopy of it. I kindly received a copy of it through Franz-Karl Ehrhard.

<sup>110</sup> 'Jam dbyangs nam mkha' brtan pa finished a small part of it in the first Tibetan month, and, requested by some faithful ones, he added further parts, ultimately finishing his work in the eighth Tibetan month of 1488; see *Gu ge paṇḍi ta rnam thar*: fol. 19a3–7. The colophon states that this manuscript was written or probably copied by a certain Lugs thang pa (*Ibid.*: fol. 19a7): *lugs thang pas sor mo'i 'du byed* | |. The manuscript is full of orthographic mistakes, though it was proofread once, as annotations to the main text and a remark after the colophon indicate. 'Jam dbyangs nam mkha' brtan pa's full name is given in the *Dkon mchog 'phel rnam thar*: 798.5 as Bzhi sde Chos rje 'Jam dbyangs nam mkha' brtan

Paṅḍi ta met Ngor chen for the first time in his twenty-first year, while in Glo bo.<sup>111</sup> Their meeting took place during Ngor chen's second visit to Glo bo in 1436 when the Gu ge king Khri Nam mkha'i dbang po (b. 1409) had sent G/Bzhi sde pa Drung Nam mkha' rtse mo to Glo bo to invite Ngor chen to Pu hrang. At that time Gu ge Paṅḍi ta accompanied Nam mkha' rtse mo as a servant. During the winter of that year, Gu ge Paṅḍi ta received the *Lam 'bras* teachings from Ngor chen. Afterwards the inviting party travelled back to Pu hrang. Ngor chen, accepting the invitation, followed a little later and ordained the king of Gu ge in Kha char.<sup>112</sup> When Ngor

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pa and in the *Sa skya gdung rabs*: 478.1 as Gzhi sde Chos rje 'Jam dbyangs nam mkha' brtan pa. He was from the Ngor pa monastery of G/Bzhi sde in Mnga' ris. The *Mnga' ris khul gyi gnas yig*: 44–45 and the *Mnga' ris chos 'byung*: 141–148 record this Ngor pa monastery under the name Zhi sde lha sde dgon. According to the *Mnga' ris chos 'byung*: 141–142, already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century a small temple existed at that place, but the original foundation of the monastery dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Some of its marvelous and lively paintings, such as one of the lineage of the Sa skya 'Khon family and one of the *Lam 'bras* masters, survived the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. For a picture of Zhi sde as well as one of its old murals, see *Mnga' ris chos 'byung*. For its location (24°30'N, 18°81'E), see *Ibid.*: Map, no. 60. Vitali 1996: 391–392 mentions Zhi/Bzhi sde as an important castle of Pu hrang: “Zhi sde was in Pu.hrang.smad south of sTag.la.mkhar, where remains of a massive castle are still extent. Zhi sde, a place held by the Tshal.pa-s in the third quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and by the Ngor.pa-s from the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, goes back to antiquity, as traces dating to the period of the Yar.lung dynasty are found in its area.” According to the *Chos 'khor rnam gzhag*: 470.7–471.1 (Jackson 1987: vol. 1, 135–136) of Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507), Ngor chen founded the monastery of Thub bstan rnam rgyal in Glo bo, Dga' byed tshal in Pu hrang, and Chos 'khor nor bu gling in Chu 'dus. Under his instructions the monasteries of Brgya gling thang in Gu ge and Chos 'khor dga' ldan rtse mo in Rting khebs (Gting skyes) were founded. Based on this source, Vitali 1996: 392, n. 635 remarks: “This name [Chos sde dga' byed tshal], obviously referring to the monastery and not to the place where it was sited, does not rule out a location at Zhi.sde.” There also seems to be a connection with the Zhi sde regional dormitory of Ngor, which was one of Ngor's eleven regional dormitories (*khang tshan*) and whose monks came from Mnga' ris; see Jackson 1989: 49–50, n. 2.

<sup>111</sup> According to Tibetan tradition of chronological calculation, Gu ge Paṅḍi ta's twenty-first year corresponds to 1435. However, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen states that Ngor chen's second visit to Glo bo took place in 1436; see *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 538.4. Altogether, Ngor chen had visited Glo bo three times: 1427–1428, 1436, and 1447–1449.

<sup>112</sup> According to Vitali 1996: 258–265 and Vitali 2003: vol. 2, 57–59, the monastery of Kha char was founded around 996 and its foundation was patronized by Kho re (reigned: 988–996), the king of Gu ge and Pu hrang and brother of Ye shes 'od (947–1024). For the building phases until the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, see *Ibid.*: 264. For an investigation of the foundation history of Kha char, see also *'Khor chags dgon pa*: 9–33. Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po (b. 1961) mentions that in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, after some border regions of Pu hrang had fallen under the control of the kings of Glo bo, the Kha char monastery's 'Bri gung affiliation was lost and it was transformed into a Ngor pa branch monastery due to the Glo bo kings' strong support for the Ngor tradition; see *'Khor chags gtsug lag khang gi byung ba brjod pa*: 342 and *Mnga' ris chos 'byung*: 123–124. The *'Khor chags dgon pa*: 85–86 mentions in the biographical sketch of Ngor chen that at the time of Ngor chen's second visit to Glo bo in 1436 the king of Glo bo, A ma dpal (variation A me dpal, 1380–ca. 1440) had offered 'Khor chags and numerous monasteries of

chen was about to travel eastwards and return to central Tibet, he was requested by Gu ge Paṇḍi ta's teacher, Chos rje Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, to take care of Gu ge Paṇḍi ta and accept him as his servant. From that time on, Gu ge Paṇḍi ta acted as Ngor chen's attendant and served him for seventeen years.<sup>113</sup>

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Glo bo to Ngor chen. Due to that, 'Khor chags monastery changed into a monastery of the Ngor pa school. For the general history of 'Khor chags monastery and a description of its religious objects, see *'Khor chags dgon pa*. On the monastery's history, see also *'Khor chags gtsug lag khang gi byung ba brjod pa*: 333–349, *Mnga' ris khul gyi gnas yig*: 5–9, *Mnga' ris chos 'byung*: 119–127, and Vitali 1996: 258–265. The *'Khor chags dgon pa*: 25–27 presents eight different orthographic variations for the monastery's name including their explanation: mKho chags, Kho chags, Kha char, Khwo char, 'Khor chags, Khwa char, Kho char, and Khur chags. Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po also lists a couple of variant spellings; see *Khor chags gtsug lag khang gi byung ba brjod pa*: 333–335. The monastery is also known by its Nepali name Khojarnath.

<sup>113</sup> See *Gu ge paṇḍi ta rnam thar*: fol. 3a2–3b5. This source (*Ibid.*: fol. 3a2–3b2) presents an account regarding Ngor chen, Drung Nam mkha' rtse mo and Gu ge Paṇḍi ta that clearly attests to Drung Nam mkha' rtse mo's presence in Glo bo at that time. However, the account of inviting Ngor chen to Pu hrang differs from the one in the *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 539.2–6. According to this source, Bzhi sde pa Drung Nam mkha' rtse mo held talks with the Gu ge king Khri Nam mkha'i dbang po before a certain Gu ge Mkhan chen Chos nyid seng ge was sent to invite Ngor chen and about one hundred of his disciples to Pu hrang. Following the invitation, Ngor chen stayed for three months at Rgyal lde'u (Rgyal ti), one of the former capitals of Pu hrang and the castle of their kings (Vitali 1996: 390–391, 510), giving teachings to masters and reincarnations from Gu ge, Mkhan po Rin bsod from Spi ti, some *dge bshes* from Mar yul and many monks from Pu hrang. He also ordained the Gu ge king and established a large monastery (*chos sde chen po*). The Gu ge king who was ordained by Ngor chen was Nam mkha'i dbang po Phun tshogs lde (b. 1409); see *Ibid.*: 391, 508–511. The mentioned *chos sde chen po* might refer to the Chos sde Dga' byed tshal, which is mentioned as having been established by Ngor chen in Shākya mchog ldan's (1428–1507) *Chos 'khor rnam gzhag*: 470.7; see also Jackson 1987, vol. I, 135–36. On the discrepancies in the sources concerning the ordination of Nam mkha'i dbang po, see Vitali 1996: 508–511. According to Vitali's source, Nam mkha'i dbang po was ordained at Kha char in 1449 under the name Shākya 'od. In contrast, the *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 539.2–6 states that Nam mkha'i dbang po was ordained by Ngor chen during his second visit to Glo bo in 1436. The *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 539.2–6 does not specify the place of ordination, but mentions that Ngor chen stayed for three months in Rgyal lde'u, established *sgrub mchod* rituals in Nya rtse rig and Bzhi sde, and gave teachings in the latter monastery. The *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 539.5–6 goes on to mention the Gu ge king's ordination, the founding of a *chos sde chen po*, and Ngor chen's writing of a *bstan rtsis*, before Ngor chen's visit to Kha char is mentioned, where he made a butter lamp offering in front of the Three Jo bo Brothers (Dngul sku rigs gsum mgon po) and prayed for the flourishing of the Buddha's teachings. This episode of the king's ordination by Ngor chen is also mentioned in Glo bo Mkhan chen Bsod nams lhun grub's (1456–1532) autobiography; see Kramer 2008: 118, 148. According to this source, Ngor chen went to make his butter lamp offering in front of the Jo bo mched gsum in Kha char. At the same time the king of Gu ge travelled to Kha char, took monastic vows and was ordained as a full monk by Ngor chen. I disagree with Vitali 1996: 511, who states that "it cannot be ruled out that his [Ngor chen's] biographers have decided to credit him [Ngor chen] also with the ordination of the Gu.ge king, linking it with that of A.ma.dpal." I propose that Sangs rgyas phun tshogs based his account on Gu ge Paṇḍi ta's biography of Ngor chen, which was, as mentioned before, along with Mus

In general, Gu ge Paṇḍi ta was known by quite a number of different names. This is important for correctly identifying his biography of Ngor chen, which is listed among the sources of the *Mdo smad chos 'byung* of Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1801–1866), and also as an entry in A khu Ching Shes rab rgya mtsho's list of rare writings. Alongside other Ngor chen biographies, both of these sources record a biography written by a certain Gu ge Dbon po Nam mkha' blo gsal.<sup>114</sup> Sangs rgyas phun tshogs comes to our aid in identifying him when he remarks in his Ngor chen biography that Gu ge Paṇḍi ta was also known as Dbon po A tsa ra, Dbon po Nam mkha' blo gsal, Ma ti tsi tra, and Gu ge Paṇ chen.<sup>115</sup> Together with Gu ge Mkhan chen Ngag dbang grags pa (flourished in the 15<sup>th</sup> century) and Zhang zhung Chos dbang grags pa (1404–1469), Gu ge Paṇḍi ta Grags pa rgyal mtshan was included in the group known as the “three [masters who bear the name] Grags pa” (*grags pa rnam gsum*) who originated from the region of Gu ge.<sup>116</sup>

Regarding the Gu ge Paṇḍi ta's life of Ngor chen, we know from Mus chen Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan's (1542–1618) record of received teachings that the work had the title *Rnam thar dngos grub dbang gi rgyal po*.<sup>117</sup> Sangs rgyas phun tshogs states that this biography comprised three main topical subjects or outline sections (*sa bcad*).<sup>118</sup> He also informs us that due to the fact that Gu ge Paṇḍi ta's life of Ngor chen was, like Mus chen's, “a little bit more detailed,” he took these two as main sources when compiling his own Ngor chen biography.<sup>119</sup>

### 3.2. Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan (flourished in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> c.)

Apart from being a disciple of Ngor chen, the biographer Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan also seems to have served as an attendant of

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chen's biography of Ngor chen, one of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' main sources in compiling his Ngor chen biography.

<sup>114</sup> See *Dpe rgyun dkon pa 'ga' zhig gi tho yig*: 508, no. 10930 and *Mdo smad chos 'byung I*: vol. 1, 25.5–6. The *Mdo smad chos 'byung I*: vol. 1, 25.5 correctly reads *dbon po*, whereby the *Mdo smad chos 'byung II*: 3 incorrectly has *dpon po*.

<sup>115</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 535.6.

<sup>116</sup> On Ngag dbang grags pa, see Vitali 1996: [89]–96. On Chos dbang grags pa, see Samten Chosphele, “Chowang Drakpa,” <http://www.tibetanlineages.org/biographies/view/240/6770>.

<sup>117</sup> See Sobisch 1998: 173. The information given in the corresponding note (*Ibid.*: 73, n. 25) seems to have been a misunderstanding, since it is not the Paṇḍi ta's Ngor chen biography that survives in the Beijing collection (of which Leonard van der Kuijp possesses a photocopy), instead it is the Paṇḍi ta's own biography. The existence of such a biography was already noted before by Smith 1970: 2, n.8.

<sup>118</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 482.1: *gu ge paṇ chen gyis sa bcad gsum du mdzad | chos dpal bzang pos sngar [lŋgar] mdzad pa sogs mang yang gnad don gcig go |*.

<sup>119</sup> *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 554.3–4: *de ltar rje mus pa dang | paṇ chen gyi rnam thar gnyis cung zad zhib par snang bas khungs bcad pa'o |*.

Ngor chen. He is mentioned in Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' life of Ngor chen as having counted and recorded the number of teachings and ordinations Ngor chen gave.<sup>120</sup> He is referred to, among others, as Gyong por grags pa Mdo khams stod pa Kun mkhyen Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan or Mdo stod Rtsa mdo pa Gyong po Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan.<sup>121</sup> From his titles we can infer that he was originally from Khams, and was either from a place called Rtsa mdo or was an expert in pulse diagnosis (*rtsa mdo pa*). He was also known as being very rough or obstinate (*gyong po*) in character.<sup>122</sup> In one of two letters Ngor chen addressed to him, he elaborates on Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan's character by describing him as "[being] the complete summed up essence of all obstinate people of this world in all the ten directions." Or elsewhere: "at the time when he shows his rough behavior, [he] outshines even extremely hard dry leather and so, needless to say, [he] is more obstinant than yaks (*g.yag*) or dzos (*mdzo*)."<sup>123</sup>

Except for the citations in Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' Ngor chen biography, we don't know anything about Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan's own biography of Ngor chen.

### 3.3. *Srad pa Kun dga' blo gros* (flourished in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> c.)

The biographer Srad pa Kun blo mentioned by Sangs rgyas phun tshogs refers to Srad pa Kun dga' blo gros. Judging from the few quotes taken from his life of Ngor chen in Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' work, he wrote his in verse.<sup>124</sup> Its printing blocks were once available at both Ngor and Sde dge.<sup>125</sup> According to Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, he acted as the scribe of Mus chen's biography of Ngor chen.<sup>126</sup> Kun dga' blo gros also wrote a biography of Mus chen and an explanation of the *Lam 'bras*, both of which are presumed to be lost.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>120</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 511.3–4, 516.1.

<sup>121</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 479.6–480.1, 533.5.

<sup>122</sup> Although *gyong po* is used in Lhasa Tibetan for a person who is very capable, here it is used in its other meaning and refers to a person rough or obstinate in character. For both meanings, see Goldstein 2001: s.v. *gyong po*.

<sup>123</sup> *Sa skya'i bka' 'bum*: vol. 10, 392.4.6–393.1.4: *sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan pa la springs pa | om swa sti | phyogs bcu'i 'jig rten khams kyi gyong po kun | | ma lus gcig tu bsdus pa'i ngo bo la | sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan zhes par mtshan gsol ba'i | | rtag par rang rgyud bsreg la phyag 'tshal lo | | gang gis gyong po'i kun spyod bstan pa'i tshel | | ko skam shin tu mkhregs pa'ang zil gnun na | | g.yag dang mdzo bas gyong ba smos ci 'tshal | (...).*

<sup>124</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 482.4–5, 483.3–4, 565.3–4.

<sup>125</sup> See *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog*: 437.

<sup>126</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 565.2.

<sup>127</sup> See *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog*: 72.

### 3.4. *Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po (flourished mid 1400's)*

Identifying the biographer named Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po mentioned by Sangs rgyas phun tshogs presents many difficulties. Sangs rgyas phun tshogs lists him among a group of Ngor chen's disciples associated with the regions of Mnga' ris and Glo bo.<sup>128</sup> He informs us that Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po's biography of Ngor chen was arranged in five topical sections, and he quotes from it a couple of times.<sup>129</sup> This biography is also recorded in A khu Ching Shes rab rgya mtsho's list of rare works.<sup>130</sup> A reference to another of Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po's literary works is found in the opening part of the *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, where he is mentioned as author of a genealogy of the Shar pa family.<sup>131</sup>

One could speculate that Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po might be identical with Bla chen Chos dpal bzang po (1371–1439), a senior Sa skya master who lived in this same period.<sup>132</sup> Bla chen Chos dpal bzang po was born in Sa skya as the son of Rin rgyal, who was the "Great Attendant" (*nye gnas chen po*) of Bla ma Dam pa Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1312–1375). Later in his life he acted as *Sku rim pa*—a person in charge of rituals for clearing away obstacles—of the Gung thang rulers and in 1420 became the spiritual advisor to the king of Gung thang, Khri Lha dbang rgyal mtshan (1404–1464).<sup>133</sup> His biography, *Bla chen chos dpal bzang po'i rnam thar*,<sup>134</sup> mentions a meeting between him and Ngor chen when the latter visited Rdzong dkar in Gung thang during his first journey to Glo bo in 1427.<sup>135</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po was Bla chen Chos dpal bzang po. In the first place, Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po's name closely associates him with the region of Gu ge as his place of origin while Bla chen Chos dpal bzang po was born in Sa skya, (though he is still sometimes referred to as Gung thang gi Bla chen or Mnga' ris Bla chen).<sup>136</sup> Second, Sangs rgyas phun tshogs does not refer to Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po as *bla chen*. Third, Bla chen Chos dpal bzang po passed away seventeen years before Ngor chen's death, which makes it unlikely that he composed an early biography of Ngor chen.

<sup>128</sup> See *Ngor chen rnam thar II*: 532.3–4.

<sup>129</sup> See n. 119.

<sup>130</sup> See *Dpe rgyun dkon pa 'ga' zhis gi tho yig*: 508, no. 10931.

<sup>131</sup> *Mdo smad chos 'byung II*: 6: *glo bo mkhan chen*[1] *gu ge chos dpal bzang po* | *kwan ting ku* [gu] *shri* [shri] *nam mkha' bzang po rnam kyis mdzad pa'i ngor shar pa'i gdung rabs lnga* | . Ordained members of this aristocratic family acted and still act as the heads of the Klu sdings bla brang of Ngor.

<sup>132</sup> We already know about some aspects of Bla chen Chos dpal bzang po's life from the research of Everding 2000, Ehrhard 2004 and Diemberger 2007.

<sup>133</sup> See Everding 2000: vol. 1, 126–127 and vol. 2, 517–519 and Ehrhard 2004: 258, 367, n. 90.

<sup>134</sup> I thank Franz-Karl Ehrhard in helping to obtain this biography and Hildegard Diemberger for sharing it.

<sup>135</sup> See *Bla chen rnam thar*: fols. 27b.6–28a.4.

<sup>136</sup> See *Bstan rtsis gsal ba'i nyin byed*: 212.



## 4. Ngor chen's Biographies in recent Dkar chags

All the biographies mentioned so far are recorded in the late Mkhan po A pad Rin po che Yon tan bzang po's (1927–2010) *Bibliography of Sa-skyapa Literature*, though they are mostly only referred to with descriptive titles:

1. Mus chen Sems dpa' chen po Dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, *Ngor chen rdo rje 'chang gi rnam thar mdor bsdus*;
2. Gu ge Paṇḍi ta Grags pa rgyal mtshan, *Rdo rje 'chang gi rnam thar*;
3. Srad pa Kun dga' blo gros, *Rdo rje 'chang gi rnam thar*;
4. Sangs rgyas rgyal mtshan, *Rdo rje 'chang gi rnam thar*;
5. Gu ge Chos dpal bzang po, *Rdo rje 'chang gi rtogs brjod*;
6. Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar*.<sup>137</sup>

The bibliography also contains the following interesting entry: *kong ston sogs mkhas pa mang pos mdzad pa'i ngor chen gyi gsung rnam mi 'dra ba bcu gsum | sde dge mi nyag sog yul sogs la par bzhugs la pod brgya [brgyad?] skor*!.<sup>138</sup> In this passage *gsung rnam* seems to be a recent honorific form of *rnam thar*, as confirmed to me independently by two Sa skyapa Mkhan pos. Hence, we are told here that there once existed a total of thirteen lives of Ngor chen that were available in Sde dge, Mi nyag and Mongolia, totally about one hundred (eight?) Tibetan-style books.<sup>139</sup> Among the authors of these biographies is an unknown figure named Kong ston.<sup>140</sup>

An additional hint about a possible Ngor chen biography is given by the *'Bras spungs dkar chag*. Beside Mus chen's Ngor chen biography, it records a work entitled *Rdo rje 'chang kun dga' bzang po'i rnam thar* in twenty-four folios by a certain Btsun pa Bde mchog dpal bzang.<sup>141</sup> Aside from Ngor chen, I have not come across any

<sup>137</sup> See *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog*: 54, 57, 72, 73, 73, 114 respectively.

<sup>138</sup> See *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog*: 437.

<sup>139</sup> Other possible interpretations for the term *gsung rnam* might be to take *gsung* for *gsung 'bum* and *rnam* for *rnam thar* or even to take the whole phrase as *gsung rnam pa*. However, it seems unusual to me to use the verb *mdzad* in this context to mean to compose or to edit Ngor chen's *Collected Works*. Furthermore, I did not come across any information pointing to a "Kong ston" having edited Ngor chen's *Collected Works*.

<sup>140</sup> However, the entry for the only Kong ston recorded in the *Dkar chag mthong bas yid 'phrog*: 67, Kong ston Dbang phyug grub pa (b. 15<sup>th</sup> c.), a disciple and biographer of Go rams pa (1429–1489), does not designate him as such an author. Volker Caumanns has pointed out to me that a certain Kong ston Chos kyi rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po alias Kong ston Mgon po rgyal mtshan acted as the scribe of Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507). However, Shākya mchog ldan's biographies do not specify him as a biographer of Ngor chen.

<sup>141</sup> See *'Bras spungs dkar chag*: vol. 2, 1555, no. 017555.

other Tibetan master named Kun dga' bzang po who is also referred to as Vajradhara (Rdo rje 'chang) in human form.

In an annotation at the end of Mus chen's biography of Ngor chen, translated above, we also encountered a certain Ye chen po whose Ngor chen biography should have been inserted in the biographical collection of *Lam 'bras* masters, in case it would have been found later on. I haven't been able to identify who Ye chen po was, however. We should probably take *ye* as a place name and so we are dealing here with the "Great Master from Ye."

### 5. Conclusion

This investigation of Ngor chen's biographies has hopefully shown that in addition to the critical evaluation of a biography's content, an important approach to biography-based research is the investigation of the background of the biography's author, the author's relation to his biographical subject, the sources he or she employed, and his or her methods of composing and editing. These steps are necessary for us to properly understand and assess the text, not to mention for us to explain how the biography originated and what purpose its composition served. The critical compilation of sources that constitutes Sangs rgyas phun tshogs' biography of Ngor chen is a rarity in Tibetan biographical literature. Nevertheless, the same patient methods should still be used to investigate biographies that are not compilations of this kind.

Concerning Ngor chen's biographies, at least five of his disciples composed lives of their teacher. From amongst those five, only one has become available, that by Mus chen, Ngor chen's chief disciple and successor to the throne of Ngor. Due to the efforts of Sangs rgyas phun tshogs, the contents of the other four biographies have also been preserved, as is attested to in the detailed biography that he painstakingly compiled a full 232 years after Ngor chen's passing. Though his work is a solid beginning, several Tibetan sources, both old and recent, suggest the existence of even more biographies of Ngor chen. We should make an effort to trace more of them in the future.

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