


Between Family and Transmission Lineage: Two Historical Works of the rNgog bKa' brgyud pa

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his paper presents two historical works on the transmission of the rNgog bKa' brgyud pa that were recently republished as copies of the works existent in the library of 'Bras spungs monastery in Tibet.¹

1. Overview

The works in focus are titled *The Jewel Garland of Spiritual Biographies of the Teachers of rNgog from gZhung, Fathers and Sons, who themselves stemmed from the venerable Mar pa (rJe mar pa nas brgyud pa'i rngog gzhung pa yab sras kyi bla ma'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba)*, written by Bodhiśrī (Byang chub dpal, 1360–1446) and *The Jewel Garland of Spiritual Biographies of the Teachers of rNgog, Fathers and Sons, that appeared in succession (Bla ma rngog pa yab sras rim par byon pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba)*, written by Puṇyaśrī (bSod nams dpal ba, 14th/15th centuries,). Both works are part of the collection *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, which chiefly contains reprints of texts belonging to the library of 'Bras spungs monastery in Tibet. They have been published at dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang under the guidance of A lags gzan dkar Thub stan nyi ma (b. 1943). In the 'Bras spungs catalogue Byang chub dpal's *rJe mar pa nas brgyud pa'i rngog gzhung pa yab sras kyi bla ma'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* is found under No. 017030 on p. 1511 and bSod nams dpal bas work *Bla ma rngog pa yab sras rim byon pa'i rnam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba* under entry No. 016990 on p. 1508.² Both

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Cecile Ducher for the fruitful exchange on the topic as well as for the drawings of the family trees of the rNgog.

² See bsTan 'dzin phun tshogs, *Drepung Catalogue*: 1508 and 1511. Already in 2007, Sørensen and Hazod pointed toward those two texts, which by the time they were listed the *Drepung Catalogue*, were not available. They refer to No. 017051

manuscripts are written in *dbu med* script and are comprised of twelve and thirteen folios respectively. The contents of both works are almost identical, sometimes one or the other provides slightly more information, yet the orthography of both is riddled with mistakes.³

The authors of these works are rNgog Byang chub dpal and bSod nam dpal ba, who might have been the former's successor. In these texts the genealogy of the rNgog-family is presented along with the succession of family members that acted as custodians for the lineage of Buddhist tantric teachings.

In the colophon of *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*, the "Yogin Bodhiśrī" (Byang chub dpal ba), who held the two teaching lineages of rNgog (gTsang tsha and rGyal tsha), states that he based his text primarily on the compilation of the Mantradhāra dPal gyi rdo rje whilst also providing his own supplementations at times. In view of the fact that no person bearing the exact name dPal gyi rdo rje is mentioned anywhere in the text, the given compiler could be Don grub dpal (1331–1398), his own father.

A gloss in the colophon of the second text, *rNam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, informs us that bSod nam dpal ba (Puṇyaśrī) composed this text during the year of the male iron rat (1420) in response to repeated requests from an unnamed person. In the year of the tiger (most likely in 1410 or 1422) he had received the teaching-cycles of the rNgog-Tradition from rNgog Rin po che Byang chub dpal and was asked to write these down. This indicates that he had taken notes from the teaching he attended beforehand or had finalised his original composition at this point. The given exposition could thus have been taught at occasions when the transmission of the rNgog were imparted to groups of students in order to instill respect for the transmissions as well as of the family.

In that case the *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* and likely the *rNam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba* of bSod nam dpal is the source for the *lHo rong chos 'byung* and the *Deb ther sngon po*.⁴

and No. 016991 which do not correspond to the version of the catalogue, available to me. See Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 175.

³ Both works have been published in 2011 as computerised versions. *rNgog slob brgyud dang bcas pa'i gsung 'bum*. Vol. 1, 1–68.

⁴ See gZhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*: 483–499 and rTag tshag tshe dbang rgyal, *lHo rong chos 'byung*: 48–63.

In order to facilitate the understanding of the work's structure, the *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* can be divided into chapters:

Introductory Verses	1b1–1b2
[I] Genealogy and Biography of Mar pa (1010–1098)	1b2–2a6
[II] Genealogy of rNgog Chos rdor, family lineage of gTsang tsha	2a7–4a4
[III] Genealogy of the family lineage of rGyal tsha	4a4–4b3
[IV] Dharma lineage	4b4–5a5
[V] Biography of rNgog Chos kyi rdo rje (1036–1102)	5a5–6a7
[VI] Biography of rNgog mDo sde (1090–1166)	6a7–7b4
[VII] Biography of Slob dpon Jo tshul (1115–1158)	7b4–8b4
[VIII] Biography of Slob dpon rGyal tsha Ra mo (1146–1182)	8b4–8b6
[IX] Biography of Bla ma Kun dga' rdo rje (1157–1234)	8b6–9a7
[X] Biography of Bla ma gZi brjid (1202–1281)	9a7–9b1
[XI] Biography of Slob dpon rGyal po dga' (1205–1284)	9b1–9b3
[XII] Biography of Slob dpon Seng ge sgra (1235–1308)	9b3–10a1
[XIII] Biography of Bla ma Rin chen bzang po (1243–1319)	10a1–10a8
[XIV] Biography of Bla ma Chos rgyal ba (1283–1359)	10a8–11a4
[XV] The buddha-qualities of the teachers	11a4–11a5
[XVI] The translations	11a5–11a7
[XVII] Works composed by the lineage holders	11a7–12a6
[XVIII] Years of conception and lifespan	12a6–12b8
[XIX] Close disciples	12b8–13b2
[XX] Concluding verses	13b2–13b6

2. The Genealogies

The exposition of the genealogy and biography of Mar pa here follows the genealogical approach in not strictly separating the successions of familial and spiritual lineage. In this case, the text states that Mar pa is preceded by five ancestors, whose names are listed, yet no further information about them is given besides an indication that they originate from the valley of Mar, hence the name.⁵ His sons are yet again mentioned by name and among them can be found his destined spiritual successor, mDo sde, who suffered a tragic death due to a horse riding accident that happened after attending festivities at his uncle's place. It concludes with the statement that all of Mar pa's sons died, save for Ja rid 'khor lo and that only he had continued the family lineage. Following this, a short biographical overview of Mar pa's life is given that is very much in line with known presentations.⁶ The reason for this passage might be to present the rNgog family as the true possessors of the teaching lineage, as Mar pa's family had ceased to maintain the transmission.⁷

Now, the text describes the main family lineage of rNgog, known as gTsang tsha. Again it begins long before the appearance of rNgog Chos kyī rdo rje, the first holder of Mar pa's bKa' bryud pa teachings. The first forebear of the family, rNgog rJe gTsang pa (also called bZings po), is said to have lived at the time of Lha tho tho ri snyan shal, the son of king Khri de thog btsan (ca. 4th/5th centuries) who is the twenty-seventh in the line of Tibetan mythical kings.⁸ According to legend, this king witnessed the descent of the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra*, the *Hṛdayaśaḍakṣarī*, the *sPang skong phyag brgya pa' mdo* and other objects of veneration upon the roof of his palace in 'Um bu glang mkhar, which was understood as a positive indication of the later spread of Buddhism in Tibet.⁹ rNgog rJe gTsang pa himself is not of human ancestry either but is said to have descended straight from the assembly of gods to earth by means of a nine-stepped ladder, just as the early Tibetan kings are believed to have done.¹⁰

⁵ The valley or Mar (mar lung) is located in south-west of Tibet, near the border with Nepal. See Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 642.

⁶ For an extensive discussion of the known sources on Mar pa's life, see Ducher (forthcoming).

⁷ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 1b2–2a6.

⁸ See Haarh 2003: 159 and list of kings (*ibid.*: 166–167).

⁹ See Sørensen 1994: 150–151.

¹⁰ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 2a7–2a8. For the Mythology of descending from heaven to earth see Bacot 1940: 85. The nine stepped ladder is found in the old Tibetan annals and served precisely the same function as a means for descending from heaven to earth, see Zeisler 2011: 123.

His grandson rNgog rTa gu snyan gzigs was installed either by King gNam ri srong bstan or Srong bstan sgam po as a common lower grade officer (*spyi dpon*)¹¹ stationed in the southern region of Nepal. His rank was confirmed by a golden badge of rank (*yig tshang*) bestowed upon him.¹²

His son rNgog dPal khrom is then said to have accompanied Thon mi sam bho ʼa on his travel to India during the lifetime of Srong tsan sgam po to and as being responsible for bringing the Tibetan script to Tibet, offering it to the King alongside Thon mi sam bho ʼa. Following this he was educated together with the ministers (*zhang blon*)¹³, descendants and subjects. It is further mentioned that at this time the four great and small councils were held in order to make administrative decisions, which are similarly mentioned in the *dBa' bzhed*.¹⁴ Units of measurements like weight and length were standardised at this time. Tibetans were divided into the “military” and “non-military”¹⁵ and Tibet itself into four horns and 1000 districts. A certain 'Chims was the commander in chief and rNgog dPal khrom acted as his regent. In the following years there must have been a conflict between king Srong btsan sgam po and rNgog dPal khrom as the latter was granted six wishes and praised by 21.000 households as a token of farewell, yet was murdered shortly after. By way of compensation his family received extensive weregild (*stong mnyam* or *myi stong*).¹⁶ This passage is quite ambiguous since it does not give any further information as to the reasons for this conflict, who acted as the murderer and thus who paid the blood money. As it further states that rNgog dPal khrom was the king's tantric priest (and special weregild was given for that) it appears rather unlikely that the king would have had him killed.¹⁷

¹¹ “‘General officer’ designates the lowest grade functionary at the village level. The main duty of such rank is to carry government messages between the *rdzong* and the village, hence the title ‘village messenger.’” See entry in Martin (2003).

¹² See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 2a8–2b2. A *yig tshang* is a badge of rank that is attached to the shoulder. These differ according to rank. The *yig tshang* here cannot be classified precisely. See Kapstein and Dotson 2007: 9.

¹³ Though *zhang* as a term of family relations means uncle, the meaning of *zhang blon* is simply “minister,” since *zhang* here is employed only as a form of respect. This denomination was used particularly for high ranking ministers, who were not necessarily uncles in regards to their familial relations. See Dotson 2004: 79–80.

¹⁴ For a mention of the councils in *dBa' bzhed* see Wangdu and Diemberger 2001: 74.

¹⁵ The terms *rgod* and *g.yung* are translated here following Uray as “military” and “non-military,” see Uray 1971: 553.

¹⁶ The text gives a list of different items regarded as weregild (*stong mnyam* or *myi stong*). For a list of compensations given in the case of murder according to military and social status refer to Kapstein and Dotson 2007: 8.

¹⁷ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 2b2–2b6.

After this incident, his son mDo gzigs khrom bstan was apparently demoted to a rank lower than his father, for he took up the position of his forefathers to act as representatives of the Yar klung empire in Nepal.¹⁸

His five sons in turn were accredited with the subjugation of neighboring countries: Tsan rta nag po subjugated the kingdom of Persia and Rin la nag po subjugated the kingdom of Hor in the west. Rin chen ldan po is said to have carried an elephant, exactly as reported in Buddhist historiographical literature.¹⁹ Tsan rto ri gel po is said to have acted as chancellor of the king, to have later subjugated the kingdom of Gru gu²⁰ and to have conquered the four fortresses that were subject to quarrel between Tibet and the Tang dynasty. Again insignia were bestowed upon him as mark of the king's recognition.²¹

rNgog bTsan gnya', the middle of his five sons,²² was said to have taken up the succession of his father at the age of twelve, just as king Khri Srong lde btsan (742–c. 800) had seized power, at which point he met with a minister and served him as a wise person. In the following years, he served in the army in the war between China and Tibet and when he was fourteen years old, a certain rNam ral [from 'Ching phu] bestowed offerings upon him, whereupon he restored temples and defeated the tribes of rGya drug at the border. He then led the Tibetan Army against China, Tibet having 30.000 people at the time. This army, here unusually termed *dra ma drangs* in old Tibetan,²³ crossed the pass of Gong bu me ru.²⁴ After the main army was defeated, rNgog managed to defeat a small troop of 30 Chinese soldiers that were about to harm the Tibetan ruler. Here the term

¹⁸ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 2b6–2b7.

¹⁹ In *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* it says, too: "Carrying a baby-elephant (all the way from Nepal)." Sørensen 1994: 349.

²⁰ *Tshig mzod chen mo*, 401 gives an entry for Tsan rta nag po: "Earlier [he ruled] northern Tibet and the adjacent Xijiang along with Kokonor in the corners [of the empire] and the attached principalities." (*sngar bod byang rgyud dang shin cang mtsho sngon bcas kyi sa 'brel khul du chags pa'i rgyal phran zhig*).

²¹ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 2b7–3a1.

²² An entry in *Tshig mzod chen mo*, 2197 under *btsan snya* states: "[...] during the 35th generation of the kings, at the time of Sron mang btsan, he was a minister and great brother of mGar ston stong btsan." (*bod rgyal gdung rabs so lnga pa mang srong mang btsan skabs kyi blon chen zhig yin zhing mgar stong btsan gyi bu che ba'o*).

²³ For a discussion of the old Tibetan term *dra ma drangs* and its translation as "army" see Uray 1962: 219–230.

²⁴ The place Gong bu ma ru at the border of China and Tibet plays a central role in the treatises of both countries from 730–734 and 821/823. Gong bu me ru could be the Chinese Ch'ih ling south-east of lake Kokonor, or it could be located further east and thus south-east of Ch'ih ling. See Uebach 1991: 502–522.

used for “harm” reads *glo ba 'dring*, again an old Tibetan term.²⁵ Overall this account remains sketchy and ambiguous. It is mentioned that the Fortress of Guazhou was defeated and the iron bridge of Bum gling, which can be identified as the bridge of Hongji, spanning over the Huang he, was severed.²⁶ rNgog bTsan gnya' had a retinue of 936 men and he was given presents of recognition and large fields for taxation in the region Grwa'i yi gur by the king.²⁷ The regions Bran gzi, 'Or rgyad, Chu ma, Kha bze and others offered twenty households as his subjects. In the *Deb ther sngon po* we find a similar mention, of a yet personally unnamed minister “the great rNgog,” who protected king Khri Srong lde btsan's life in the face of threat from Chinese soldiers.²⁸

Also his son rNgog bTsan pa rin po che was given subjects and lands for taxation. His son, rNgog bTsan gzigs snang pa is also mentioned in the *Gung thang dkar chag*²⁹ and is said to have acted as the preceptor (*upādhyāya*) of tantric teaching for king Khri srong lde btsan and to have held the office of the great commissioner of the Bhagavan.³⁰ He was also given subjects and lands for taxation.³¹

The following family members in succession are mentioned by name only, with the added information that two generations after Yul sbyin a certain rNgog Lo was born. This might point towards rNgog Lotsāwa Lo chung legs pa'i shes rab (11th century) and provide the missing link to the famous rNgog Lotsāwa Blo ldan shes

²⁵ A discussion of the old Tibetan term *glo ba 'dring* and its translation ‘to harm’ can be found in Li 1959: 55–59.

²⁶ See Dotson 2009: 132, n. 358.

²⁷ The term *zhing dor* (plow unit) is defined as the size of a field that can be plowed by one person in one day. It measures ten units of 1.5 acres. See Dotson 2009: 50.

²⁸ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 3a1–3a8. A passage on the relation between rNgog bTsan gnya' and Khri Srong lde btsan is found in Kramer 2007: 33: “An early member of the rNgog clan had been a minister to the Tibetan king Khri Srong lde btsan (born in 742). His personal name has not been handed down, but he was known by the epithet “the Great rNgog” (rNgog chen po). This minister was apparently a loyal supporter of his king, since he once defended Khri Srong lde btsan's life by killing some Chinese soldiers who assaulted him. The fact that he held the position of a minister at the royal court would allow us to assume that the rNgog family was of high rank, having probably obtained wealth and influence by that time. This is based on gZhon nu dpal: *Deb ther sngon po*: 391–392. For a translation see Roerich 1959b: 324.

²⁹ He was born in Yar 'brog do, was a disciple of Padmasambhava and served as *sku rim pa* of king Khri srong de btsan. See Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 175.

³⁰ *bCom ldan 'das kyi ring lugs* is the highest office that could be held by a monk in the government. This office goes back to the increasing influence of monks in the 8th century. See Dotson 2006: 115.

³¹ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 3a8–3b1.

rab (1059–1109) as his nephew.³² All in all eighteen ancestors preceded rNgog Chos kyi rdo rje and his son mDo sde, who were both disciples of Mar pa and thus belonged to the first and second generation of the lineage holders of the school of the rNgog bKa' brgyud pa. With the descendants of mDo sde, the family branched into two sections: out of his six sons, Slob dpon Jo tshul, whose mother was called Thul skyid, continued the main family lineage of gTsang tsha. Slob dpon Jo thog, whose mother was called Jo skyabs, began the family-branch of rGyal tsha.

Also, Chos kyi rdo rje is the first family member to be mentioned as residing in gZhung sPre'u zhing situated in a valley south of the Tsang po river not far from Gong kar, as did the holders of the lineage of gTsang tsha after him.³³

Apart from gZhung sPre'u zhing, the residence of the rNgog-family, no other residences or temples founded by family members are mentioned within Tibet. However, early on in Bhutan some dependencies seem to have been founded by rNgog Chos kyi rdo rje. These Monasteries in Bhutan include that of Glang mo gling which still stands in the sTang valley of Bum thang, just south of Mar pa's home region in lHo brag.³⁴

Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho (1880–1923/25) visited gZhung, in the early 20th century and found the place to be in a neglected and derelict state, indicating the decline of the rNgog-family at the time.³⁵

³² This is only mentioned in Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 3b6–3b7. Both rNgog Lotsāwa Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109) and rNgog Chos skyi rdo rje lived at the same time and stood in the same generation. For a mention of a distant cousinage rNgog Blo ldan shes rab see Kramer 2007: 21. This finds further mention in Mi bskyod rdo rje, *rJe btsun mar pa lo tsā'i rnam thar ngo tshar sa ma ya*: 159 with the note: "Notably with rNgog Lotsāwa there was a relation of uncle-nephew and as the teacher, he was a contemporary of the father's offspring" (*khyad par rngog lo ts'a ba khu dbon dang bla ma ni / phas spun tshes mnyam yin no /*). Padma dkar po, *Chos 'byung bstan pa'i pad ma rgyas pa'i nyin byed*: 348 makes a connection with rNgog Lotsāwa with the statement: "The uncle-nephew[-lineage] of rNgog Lotsāwa and his father Tshan drung po were yak herds in the beginnig." (*rngog lo ts'a ba khu dbon dang yab tshan drung po / dang po 'brog pa yin la /*). Here nevertheless the name of the father differs entirely.

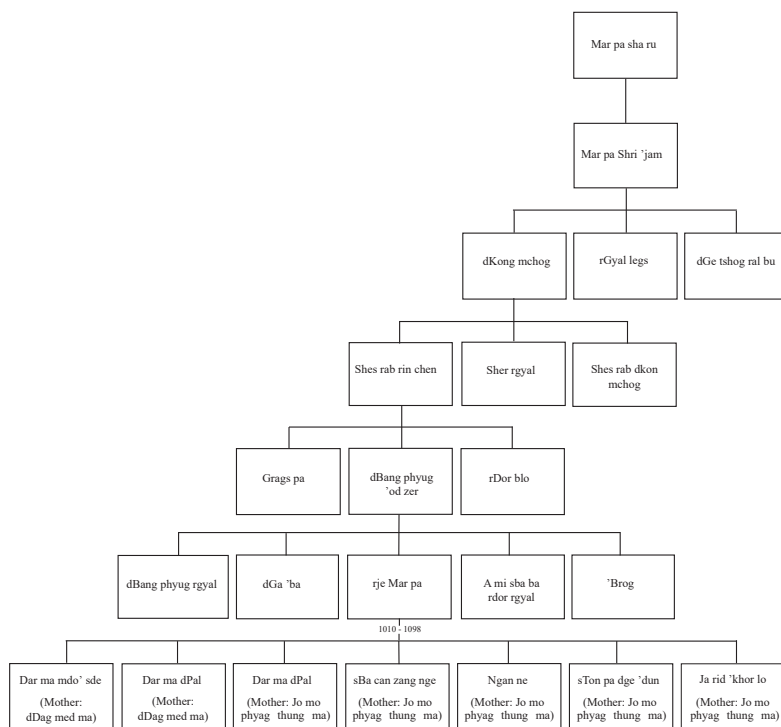
³³ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 5b1. For a detailed description of gZhung see Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 174–175.

³⁴ See Aris 1979: 167 and Phuntso 2013: 137. The source for the accounts of Aris and Phuntso is the *lHo 'brug chos 'byung* of dGe 'dun rin chen (1926–1997), see dGe 'dun rin chen, *dPal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhing lho phyogs nags mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan*: 181.5–182.3. About this work see also Ehrhard 2008: 62, n. 1)

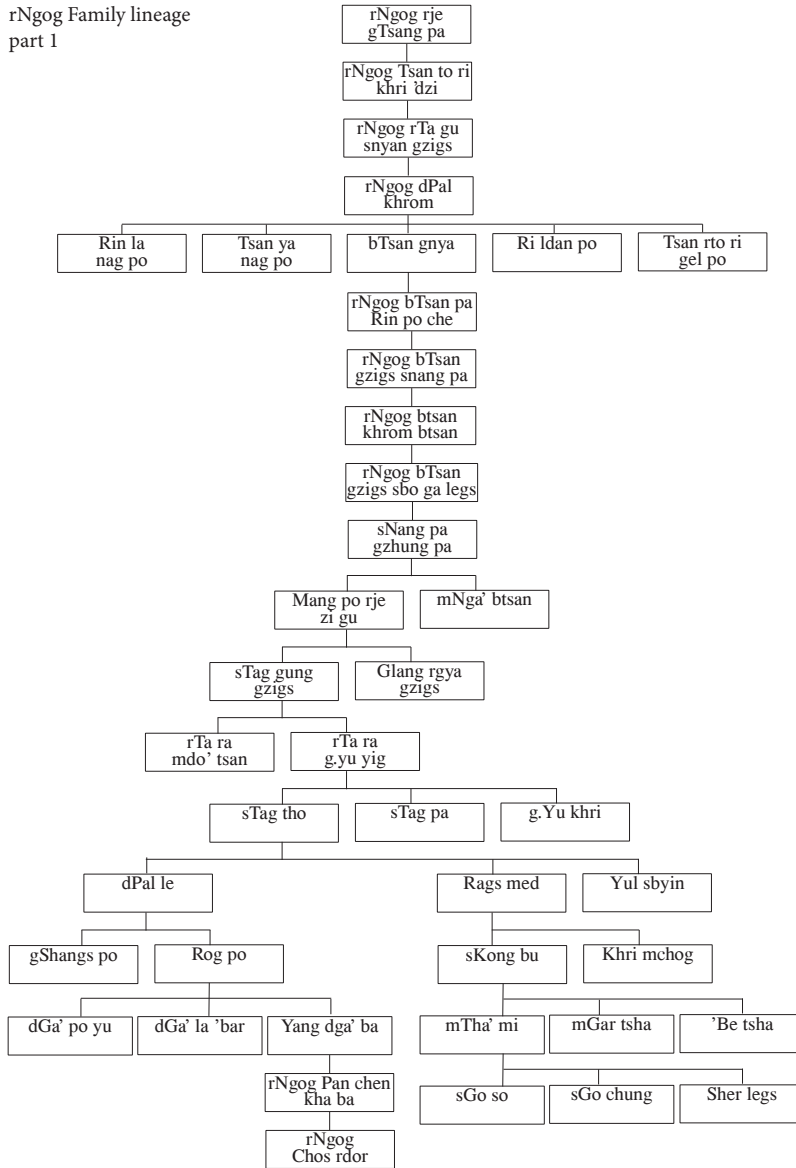
³⁵ See Chos kyi rgya mtsho: *Si tu chos kyi rgya mtsho'i ganggs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do*, 119–120. Another rather short description

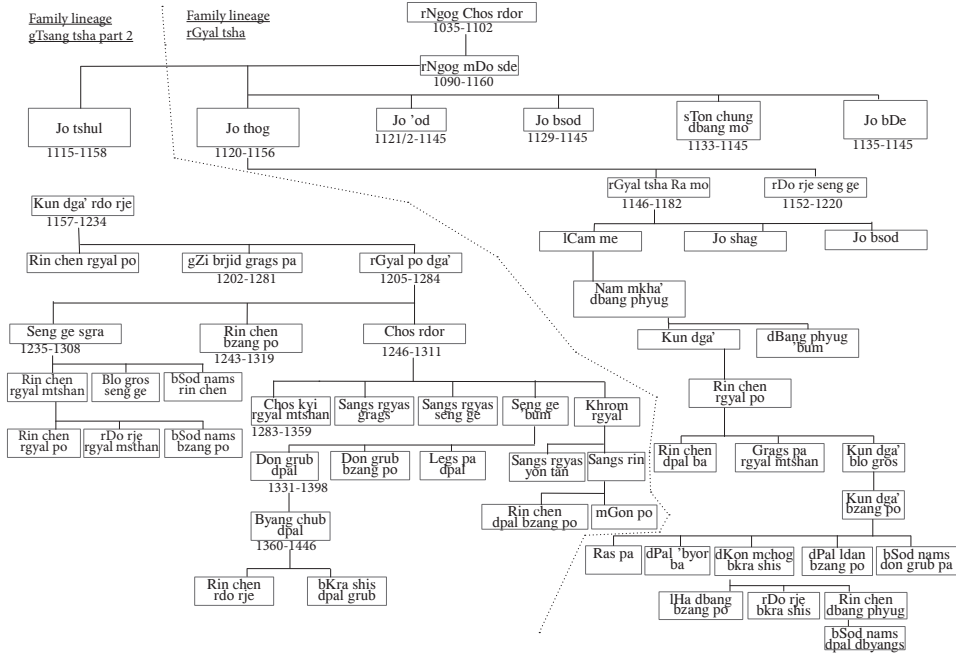
3. Family Trees

Family lineage Mar pa



of gZhung was given by mKhyen brtse dbang po (1820–1892) who visited the place in 1848. See Ferrari 1958: 134, n. 334).

rNgog Family lineage
part 1



4. The Dharma Lineages

Chapter [IV] of the *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* is devoted to the lineage of Buddhist tantric teachings held by the family lineage. The slightly simplified version of the *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* serves as the basis for the list. This begins with the general lineage of bKa' brgyud pa teachings:

Vajradhara, Saraha, Ācārya Nāgārjuna, Ḍākinī Subhaginī, Ācārya Lawapa > Tilopa > Nāropa > Mar pa > rNgog Chos kyi rdo rje > mDo sde > Kun dga' rdo rje > gZi brjid grags pa > Rin chen bzang po > Chos kyi rgyal mtshan > Don grub dpal

- 1.) *Hevajramūlatantra* and *-vyākhyātantra*: Nāgārjuna > Tilopa > Nāropa > Mar pa >³⁶ mDo sde > Kun dga' > gZi brjid grags pa

³⁶ The author omits rNgog Chos kyi rdo rje, since mDo sde received this transmission alongside his father Chos kyi rdo rje from Mar pa.

- > Rin chen bZang po > Chos kyi rgyal mtshan > Don grub dpal
- 2.) *Catuṣpīṭhatantra*: Nāgārjuna > Āryadeva > Prajñābhadra > Nāropa > Mar pa etc. The short lineage: Vajradhara > Ḍākinī Chu shing gi rnye ma can > Mar pa > mDo sde etc.
 - 3.) [*Mahā-*]māyātāntra: Nāropa, Maitripa, Śāntibhadra > Mar pa > to the same lineage as before
 - 4.) *Samputatantra*: Vajradhara > Ḍākinī Kamala > Amkila > Krisnācārya > Tilopa > Nāropa > Prajñārakṣita > the Newar sPyi ther pa > Rwa Lo tsā ba rdo rje grags > mDo sde >> Don grub dpal
 - 5.) [*Mañjuśrī-*]nāmasaṃgītantra: Ārya Mañjuśrī > Līlavajra > Sūryasimha > Dharmavajra > Mūdrasiddhi > Deveśvara > Śāntigarbha and Smṛti > Ngag gi dbang phyug > Khams pa shes rab rdo rje > Chos rdor >> Don grub dpal. Also: Śāntigarbha > Sūryasiddhi > Kyi bye ma lungs Chos kyi seng ge > Chos rdor etc.
 - 6.) [*Mañjuśrī*]guhyapannakatantra: Up to mDo sde the transmission lineage is the same as for the *Nāmasaṃgīti*, from him it went to Tshar dar ma rgyal po > 'Tshur dum bu kha pa > dGe bshes bzang mo ba > Rin chen bzang po > Chos kyi rgyal mtshan > Don grub dpal
 - 7.) [*Pañjara*] *Rigs bsdus Tantra*: up to mDo sde it is the same as for Hevajra. Then it went to Ram rdo rje grags > bKa' lung pa sNyan bsgom > sNga ris pa Byang chub tshul khriṃs > rGya pho ba lung pa > Slob dpon Rāja Ānanda and Bla ma Siṃhanāda > Chos kyi rgyal mtshan > Don grub dpal
 - 8.) *The vyākhyātāntra of the far-reaching Downfalls*: Mañjuśrīkīrti > Bīrvapa > Padma > Somatri > Vajrahasa > Vajrayanta > Āryadeva > Candrakīrti > Paiṇḍapa > Pham gting pa, dPe mtha' bzhi pa Lotsāwa > sKu ston chos rgyal > dPug rgya ga ra dza > A sang kīrti > IHo nag smon lam khri > Kun dga' etc.

- 9.) *The Tantra of Black Mañjuśrī*:³⁷ Chag Lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal > Bla ma mDo sde > rGyal tsha ra mo > > Kun dga' >> Don grub dpal.³⁸

In contrast to these nine transmission lineages stand the “seven Maṇḍalas of rNgog” (*rngog dkyil bdun*), which form the basis for the collection *bKa' brgyud sngags mdzod* compiled by Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899). It is in this format that the transmissions of the rNgog are widely passed on nowadays. These seven Maṇḍalas are:

- 1.) The nine deities of Hevajra; 2.) the consort of Hevajra, the 15 deities of Nairātmya.; 3.) the 49 deities of Vajrapañjara; 4.) the 97 deities of the Catuśpīṭhatantra; 5.) the consort of the Catuśpīṭhatantra, the 13 deities of Jñānadākinī; 6.) the five deities of Mahāmāyā; 7.) 53 deities of Mañjuśrīguhyapanna, coming from Smṛtijñānakṛti.³⁹

These seven are the main Maṇḍalas to be transmitted via initiation, when the above listed nine streams of tantric teachings are passed on to students.

In *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* and *rNam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba* no mention of the later known set of the seven Maṇḍalas of rNgog is to be found. 'Gos Lotsāwa gZhon nu dpal (1392–1481) had received the transmissions from rNgog Byang chub dpal ba, the last of the seven holders of rNgog, in the year 1441 at the behest of the Phag mo gru pa ruler Grags pa 'byung gnas. On this occasion the young bSod nams rgya mtsho (1424–1482) was present as an attendant. It is thanks to his biography that this event can be traced back to this date.⁴⁰ It can be assumed that the *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* written by rNgog Byang chub dpal ba was used to introduce the background of the transmission and its lineage to the audience. Later, this event was included into the *Deb ther sngon po* in the context of the biography of bSod nams rgya mtsho.⁴¹

³⁷ This could be the Krisnayamaritantra. The given transmission cannot be fully identified. For a list of the works translated by Chag Lotsāwa see Roerich 1959a: XLIV.

³⁸ See Byang chub dpal ba, *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 4b4–5a5.

³⁹ Shes rab rgya mtsho, *rNgog dkyil bdun las brtsams pa'i gtam du brjod pa snyan bskul lha'i rnga sgra*: 3a. (kye rdor lha dgu / de'i yum bka' bdag med lha mo lha bco lnga / rdo rje gur rigs bsdus lha zhe dgu / rdo rje gdan bzhi'am rnal 'byor nam mkha' lha go bdun / de'i yum bka' ye shes mkha' 'gro lha bcu gsum / rgyu ma chen mo lha lnga / smṛ ti nas brgyud de rngog pa la byung ba 'jam dpal gsang ldan lha nga gsum ma'i dkyil 'khor rnam so / /).

⁴⁰ See Ehrhard 2002: 38, 38 n. 5, for Grags pa 'byung gnas see Ehrhard 2004: 258.

⁴¹ For a descriptive list of the seven Maṇḍalas of rNgog see Shes rab rgya mtsho, *rNgog dkyil bdun las brtsams pa'i gtam du brjod pa snyan bskul lha'i rnga sgra*: 3a. The mention in *Deb ther sngon po* can be seen in See gZhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po*:

After Byang chub dpal grub the destiny of the rNgog family remains largely in the shadows as they lost the monopoly over their own transmission lineage. Single family members of rNgog do find mention at later times, yet it is not clear if and to what extent they were charged with responsibility to hold the lineage of rNgog. One example for this is rNgog Karma Blo bzang (17th century), who upheld an important position within the Karma bKa' brgyud pa as resident priest of Brag dkar rta so. In his biography there is no mention of him being involved in the Buddhist lineage represented by his family.⁴²

Chapters V to XIV contain the individual biographies of the family members that acted as Buddhist teachers. The main difference here is that *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* concludes the biographies with the account of Don grub dpal whereas *rNam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba* gives the biography of Rin chen rgyal mtshan instead. These biographies are for the most part well represented in the *Deb ther sngon po*. Chapter XV is devoted to praising the qualities of the lineage's teachers, XVI gives a list of Indian tantric source texts and their Tibetan translators that are important for the Buddhist transmissions held by the rNgog family, and XVII lists titles of works composed by the lineage holding family members, many of which can be found in the collection *rNgog chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* published in 2007. XVIII presents the Years of conception and the individual lifespan of the teachers of rNgog, the dates have been incorporated into the biographies in the *Deb ther sngon po*. XIX lists the close disciples of each. This chapter starts out with a prophecy attributed to Nāropā: "Your lineage will be blessed for seven [generations], [then] I [personally] will come."⁴³

Byang chub dpal ba, the author of the work, was considered to be the seventh holder of rNgog.

948 and Roerich 1959b: 809. The biography of bSod nams rgya mtsho has been included into the *Deb ther sngon po* at the time when the wood blocks for printing were carved, as stated in the colophon of the print.

⁴² In Karma Blo bzang, *mKhas grub chen po karma blo bzang gi rnam thar mchod sprin rgya mtsho*: 664 he calls himself "I, the teacher of rNgog" (*rngog ston nga*). For him holding the position as resident priest of Brag dkar rta so see Ehrhard 2013: 229–230.

⁴³ Byang chub dpa, *rJe mar pa nas brgyud pa'i rngog gzhung pa yab sras kyi bla ma'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba*: 13a1–2 (/ khyad par du jo bo n'a ro p'a'i gsung nas / khyod kyi rgyud pa bdun tshun chad du / byin gyis brlabs pa la nga rang gis 'ong pa yin gsung nas lung bstan mdzad par gngang /).

5. Concluding Remarks

The history of the rNgog family along with the transmission of bKa' brgyud pa teachings held by its members has so far only been accessible via biographies contained in religious chronicles such as the *Deb ther sngon po* and the *lHo rong chos 'byung*. The historical works treated here, namely the *rNam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* and the *rNam thar rin po che'i rgyan gyi phreng ba*, preceded those religious chronicles and provide a much deeper insight into the history of the family along with its genealogy. These works were most likely taught to students when the transmissions of Buddhist teachings pertaining to the family were passed on to students and thus reveal further detail about the mode of transmission of this once very important branch of the bKa' brgyud pa school. They show the indivisibility of familiar and Buddhist lineage descent as it was handed down in the 14th/15th centuries.

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