

# THE APPEARANCE OF *GCOD* IN THE RNYING MA SCHOOL\*

FABIAN SANDERS AND MARGHERITA PANSA  
(SHANG SHUNG FOUNDATION)

The *gcod* practice, having been formulated in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century by the famous *yoginī* Ma gcig lab sgron, should technically be considered a *gsar ma* tradition. Nevertheless, this dramatic and extreme Tantric *sādhana* has been widely taught and practiced in the rNying ma school for a remarkable number of centuries.

This paper aims to provide an analysis of what major *gcod* historiographers argue with regards to the origin and the most representative figures of *gcod* in the context of the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. In this school, the practice seems to be mainly linked to what we might call the '*khrol/’phrul gcod* issue as well as to the *gter ma* tradition. We will also briefly analyse the earlier *rnying ma gcod* text corpuses available to us at present, mostly dating up to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In a forthcoming paper we will examine them in greater depth.

## **The *gcod* Historiographies: The '*khrol/’phrul gcod* Issue**

In his well-known treatise *gCod kyi gdengs bshad nyung ngur bsodus pa bzhuḡs pa’i dbu phyogs*, Karma chags med (1613-1678) states that there are two sets of teachings, Indian and Tibetan, that constitute the *gcod* corpus. As for the first set of teachings, he mentions four currents that account for Indian *gcod* (*rgya gcod*). These are:

- a) Āryadeva’s *Great Poem [of the Perfection of Wisdom]* (*Tshigs su bcad chen mo*),
- b) Nāropa’s *The Equal Taste* (*ro snyoms*) and *The Secret Conduct* (*gsang spyod*),
- c) the *Teachings on Pacification* (*zhi byed*) by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas and
- d) O rgyan padma’s (Padmasambhava) *Severance of Illusion* (*’phrul gcod*).<sup>1</sup>

The first three items mentioned in this list were transmitted in Tibet during the later translation period,<sup>2</sup> only O rgyan padma’s *Severance of Illusion*, since it is attributed

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\* Our sincerest thanks to Katarina Turpeinen for information about the *dGongs pa zang thal* and to Susan Schwarz for reviewing the English.

1 Cf. Karma chags med 1981 : 231.

2 *The Great Poem of the Perfection of Wisdom* (Skt. *arya prajñāpāramitā upadeśa*, Tib. *shes rab*

to Padmasambhava himself, can rightfully be understood as being the true, original source of *rnying ma gcod*. Thus, if we are to look into the origin of *gcod* in the rNying ma school, whatever may be designated as '*phrul gcod*' seems to be the correct starting point, although unfortunately we have very scarce information in its regard.

What does the term '*phrul gcod*' refer to, however? Among the above sources mentioned by Karma chags med, only Āryadeva's 'Great Poem' is a clearly identifiable text. Nāropa's *Equal Taste* and *Secret Conduct*, as well as the teachings on Pacification (*zhi byed*) by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, are doctrinal, philosophical and soteriological complexes in their own right, presented and discussed in a variety of different texts. Furthermore, being themselves autonomous traditions, these teachings cannot actually be considered to be *gcod*, although they do bear similarities with it. Rather, they are mentioned because they are understood to constitute the various streams that were later combined to inspire and form the main current of the Tibetan *gcod* practice. Thus, it seems plausible that Padmasambhava's '*phrul gcod*' should not be understood as an individual text either, but as a textual corpus containing doctrines and practices outlining actual *gcod* ideas and *sādhanās*, as well as practices and instructions that can be considered progenitors of the well-known *gcod* constellation.

Unfortunately, the only explicit reference to '*phrul gcod*' in Karma chags med's text occurs in the list of the four Indian sources of *gcod* mentioned above. Aside from that, Karma chags med does not give any indication whether he considers '*phrul gcod*' to be a specific text or a doctrine, nor whether it has been transmitted by Padmasambhava directly or via the *gter ma* tradition. On the other hand, at one point he quotes two passages he attributes to Padmasambhava, yet without specifying whether they are linked to '*phrul gcod*'. One of these quotes actually comes from a *gter ma* discovered by Ratna gling pa (1403-1478), the *Thugs sgrub yang snying 'dus pa*, in particular from a text contained therein called *Gu ru 'i dmar khrid rim lnga*.<sup>3</sup>

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*kyi pha rol tu phyin pa 'i tshigs su bcad pa chen mo*) by Āryadeva the Brahman can be dated around the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The text itself states that the teaching therein contained had been taken from India by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, who taught it in Ding ri to Zha ma lo tsa ba; Zha ma, in turn, revisited it and produced the definitive version (see Edou 1996: 22, and Āryadeva 1974: 8-9). Regarding Nāropa's *Equal Taste* (*ro snyoms*) and *Secret Conduct* (*gsang spyod*), Ma cig's biography mentions that she received the five cycles of the *Single Taste* from Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (cf. Edou 1996: 80). *The Teachings on Pacification*, on the other hand, were given to Ma cig by Pha dam pa Sangs rgyas himself or, according to other sources, through sKyo ston bsod nams bla ma.

<sup>3</sup> At the beginning of the text the Sanskrit title *Gu ru guhya dhana pañca na ma* (see Rin chen gling pa 1984, vol. 1: 124) is given. This text contains instructions that bear clear similarities and analogous imagery to a *gcod sādhanā*. Karma Chags med wrote a commentarial note on this *gter ma* text, with the title *Notes on the Teaching on Severance, Benefitting from the Five Gradual Secret Instructions* (*gSang khrid rim pa lnga 'i nang nas bog 'don gcod khrid kyi zin bris*). This work contains a visualisation practice focused on the dark blue form of Varahī (*phag mo mthing nag*). In the colophon of this text (Karma chags med 2010: 117) it is mentioned that it summarises the *gcod gter mas* of Padmasambhava, other textual traditions, and the teachings of the Kaḥ thog tradition, i.e. the main *bka' ma* and *gter ma* traditions of *rnying ma gcod*, to which we will come back later.

Karma chags med writes:

In the “Comment on the Exploits to Be Gained from Severance” by O rgyan rin po che (*O rgyan rin po ches mdzad pa'i bogs 'don gcod kyi 'khrigs las*) it is said: “[the benefits of severance are that] the obstacles to the path are cleared, the advantages of comprehension surface and the conceptual structures of dualism are released. Therefore the objects, [nothing more than] illusory manifestations, are removed. [Furthermore] existence and appearance are severed as mental [productions], and from that *samsāra* and *nirvāna* are by themselves liberated: once the true reality that underlies [everything] is comprehended, the profit is gained. As for that, meditating on a seat for a year, the resistances of pride are broken in haunted lands, and that is a great advantage.”

ཨོ་རྒྱན་རིན་པོ་ཆེས་མཛད་པའི་བོགས་འདོན་གཅོད་ཀྱི་ཁྲིད་ལས། ལམ་གྱི་གོགས་སེལ། རྟོགས་པའི་བོད་ཐོན། གཉིས་ཚོས་གྱི་  
མཚན་མ་གྲོལ་བས། འབྲུལ་སྤང་ཡུལ་འབྲུད། སྤང་སྲིད་སེམས་སུ་ཚོད་པས་འཁོར་འདས་རང་སར་གྲོལ་བར་འབྱུང་ཏེ། གནས་  
ལུགས་རྟོགས་ནས་བོགས་འདོན་པ་ལ། སྟན་ཐོག་དུ་ལོ་གཅིག་བསྐོས་པས། གཉན་སར་བསྐྱེམས་ཐག་གཅིག་བཅད་པས་བོགས་  
ཆེ། ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་དང་།<sup>4</sup>

Then he goes on saying:

Further, O rgyan rin po che has spoken of the benefits of the offering of the body: “It is said that, since the Jewels appreciate [the offering of the body], the current of the realizations will be prolonged; since one gives away<sup>5</sup> this dearly cherished body, inner and outer obstacles are appeased; since the Jewels appreciate [it, offering the body to them,] one remedies to the imperfections of *samaya*; since *dākinī* and guardians of the teachings enjoy it, [we offer the body to them and] they protect us from internal and external obstacles; since [such an offering] repays karmic debts, obscurations of actions are thus purified; since with the mind the concept of an individual ego is abandoned<sup>6</sup> existence and appearance are put under one’s control and act as allies, [which] is very profound. Further, in general, among all offerings, the offering of the body [counts as] ten million: it is as uncountable offerings of *dharma*.”

ཡང་ཨོ་རྒྱན་རིན་པོ་ཆེས་ལུས་སྤྲིན་གྱི་ཡན་ཡོན་གསུངས་པ། དཀོན་མཚོག་མཉེས་པས་དངོས་གྲུབ་ཀྱི་རྒྱན་རིང་། ལུས་ཀྱི་གཅེས་  
འཛིན་ཐེང་པས་ཕྱི་ནང་གི་བར་ཆད་ཞི། དཀོན་མཚོག་རྣམས་མཉེས་སྟེ་དམ་ཚིག་གི་ཉམས་ཆག་བསྐྱང། མཁའ་འགོ་ཚོས་སྐྱོད་  
མཉེས་པས་ཕྱི་ནང་གི་བར་ཆད་སྲུང་། ལན་ཆགས་བྱ་ལོན་འཁོར་བས་ལས་ཀྱི་སྤྲིབ་པ་དག་བདག་འཛིན་སྐོས་ཐེང་བས་སྤང་སྲིད་

4 Karma chags med 1981: 234-35, and Rin chen gling pa 2010, vol. 1: 157-58.  
5 We read *thong* instead of *theng*.  
6 We read *thong* instead of *theng*.

དབང་དུ་འདུས། ལྷ་འདྲེས་ལྗོངས་གྲོགས་བྱེད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་ཟབ་གསུངས་སོ། སྤྱིར་ཡང་སྦྱིན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས་ལུས་སྦྱིན་པ་གྲོ་  
བར་འགྱུར་བ་སྟེ། ཚེས་ཀྱི་སྦྱིན་པ་གྲངས་མེད་དག་ཏུ་འགྱུར། ཞེས་གསུངས་སོ།<sup>7</sup>

Another very interesting area to investigate while searching for the origins of *gcod* in the rNying ma school is the enormous *gter ma* repertoire. In this regard Karma chags med states that the *gcod* texts hidden by Padmasambhava “were rediscovered by Rin chen gling pa, Sangs rgyas gling pa and others.” He also mentions a number of texts which “Ma cig, her sons, Gangs pa sMug sang and others have hidden at bSam yas, mChims phu and the sKyo thang of Lha sa, and which were later revealed by Ma cig shes rab gsal ldan, Kun spang brtson ’grus seng ge and others” plus a number of texts for which there is no clear reference to their having ever been concealed, where and by whom.<sup>8</sup> He even quotes from a text introduced with the words *ma cig gis gcod gter ma las*.<sup>9</sup> So it seems that among *gter ma*, he also mentions a number of texts which have not followed the usual process of being originally taught or composed by Padmasambhava, later hidden, and finally rediscovered in later times. Probably he is referring here to the *gcod gter ma* that Ma cig is said to have concealed in order to purify the *gcod log* in later times, as we will see with greater detail in Dharma seng ge’s (1890-?) historiography.<sup>10</sup> Our interest here is limited for the time being to the ‘proper’ *gter ma*, since they are more closely related to the rNying ma school.

Thus, the information we obtain from the aforementioned passage is mainly that Karma chags med considers Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396) and Rin chen gling pa (1295-1375) to be the most important *gter ston* of *gcod gter ma*. Sangs rgyas gling pa’s famous *gter ma* cycle, the *Bla ma dgongs ’dus*, includes a rather extensive section containing thirteen *gcod* texts,<sup>11</sup> as well as another section containing an initiation ritual for *gcod*, the *gCod dbang nam mkha’ sgo ’byed*.<sup>12</sup> We will briefly discuss these texts later. As for Rin chen gling pa, a few questions arise. We have in fact not been able to locate any *gcod gter ma* among the texts discovered by this early *rnying ma gter ston*. At present we tend to think that Karma chags med, while referring to Rin chen gling pa, might actually have had Ratna gling pa in mind, a possibility worth considering since the two terms *rin chen* and *ratna* are Tibetan and Sanskrit words with the same meaning. We set this hypothesis forth for two main reasons: firstly, as mentioned above, Karma chags med actually quotes from the

7 Karma chags med 1981: 234-35. To date we have not been able to locate this quote, despite the fact that the *Gu ru ’i dmar khrid rim lnga* by Ratna gling pa – from which the previous quote is taken – also contains a section about the *lus sbyin* (Rin chen gling pa 2010, vol. 1: 156-57).

8 Karma chags med 1981: 230-31.

9 *Ma cig gis gcod gter ma las kyang* in Karma chags med 1981: 237.

10 See Gyatso 1985: 335.

11 These texts constitute part of the vols. 11 and 12 in the Gangtok edition (Sangs rgyas gling pa 1972, vol. 11: 483 - vol. 12: 120). See also Sanders & Pansa 2016: 173-75.

12 Sangs rgyas gling pa 1972, vol. 5: 583-602.

*Thugs sgrub yang snying 'dus pa*, a *gter ma* discovered by Ratna gling pa containing instructions which are clearly connected with *gcod* practice. Karma chags med even composed a commentarial note on this *gter ma*.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, in a much later historiography which we will consider more in detail, Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu (1867-1940) mentions Ratna gling pa instead of Rin chen gling pa.<sup>14</sup>

Let us now consider what other historiographical sources on *gcod* say about '*phrul gcod* and its relationship with *gter ma* literature. Dharma seng ge's *Zhi byed dang gcod yul gyi chos 'byung rin po che 'i phreng ba thar pa 'i rgyan* contains only a single occurrence of the term "Severance of Confusion" (*'khrul gcod*), which is clearly a spelling variant of '*phrul gcod*, and which is used in Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu's historiography as well. Dharma seng ge mentions '*khrul gcod* among the teachings which do not belong to Ma cig's transmission, but he associates it to the various *gter ma* teachings extracted from different repositories (*o rgyan rin po che 'i 'khrul gcod skor gter kha so so nas*).<sup>15</sup> Without mentioning the names of the *gter ston* responsible for their discovery, he associates Guru Padmasambhava's '*khrul gcod* with different *gter ma* cycles on *gcod*. He refers to Ma cig's revelations with the designation *gter ma* as well,<sup>16</sup> similarly to the way Karma chags med uses this term in an enlarged sense, not only to refer to the texts concealed and later rediscovered in the usual fashion. In fact he mentions a number of *gter ma* which were hidden in various repositories in order to be rediscovered and taught in future times to counteract the perverted teachings (*gcod log*).<sup>17</sup> In any case, it may be useful to remark here that Dharma seng ge does not seem to make any reference to the earlier *gter ston*, but he mentions Kaḥ thog bya bral kun dga' 'bum (1332-1381), abbot of Kaḥ thog, in relation to the cycle of the profound meaning (*zab don skor*).<sup>18</sup> We will come back later to the *gcod skor* attributed to him and included in the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* of Kaḥ thog.

Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu, in his *gCod yul nyon mongs zhi byed bla brgyud rnam thar*, mentions the '*khrul gcod* three times. First, following Karma chags med,

13 See note 3.

14 Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu 1972: 110.

15 Cf. Khams smyon dharma seng ge 1974: 549. See also Kollmar-Paulenz 1993: 194-95.

16 Khams smyon dharma seng ge 1974: 477.

17 Khams smyon dharma seng ge 1974: 557. Interestingly Dharma seng ge refers to the cycle of teaching of the four daughters (*bu mo bzhi 'i chos skor*) as a *gter ma* teaching hidden for this specific purpose. It is not clear if these are the four daughters of Ma cig, usually collectively called 'the four daughters' (*sras mo bzhi*) or 'the four ornament daughters' (*sras mo rgyan bzhi*) since each have the word 'ornament' (*rgyan*) as part of their names (see Harding 2003: 19). They were recipients of the transmission combining Sūtra and Tantra (see Edou 1996: 91) and Karma chags med (1981: 233) defines theirs as the female lineage of *gcod* (*mo gcod*). See also Edou 1996: 80. In a work by Kun dga' 'bum pa (1332-1381), the only reference to the *gter ma* transmission are the *sras mo bzhi* (*gter ma ni / sras mo bzhi la byin rlabs kyi bka' bab cing / sras mo bzhi 'i chos thams cad la ma rgyud gter ma 'i chos skor bya ba grags so*, cf. 'Jam dbyangs 1999: 16). On *gcod log* in Dharma seng ge's text see also Gyatso 1985: 335.

18 Cf. Khams smyon dharma seng ge 1974: 549; Kollmar-Paulenz 1993: 194.

he mentions it among the four Indian streams of *gcod*.<sup>19</sup> Later he mentions it as a separate section of Tibetan *dharma* (*bod chos*), alongside Ma cig's teachings. On this occasion he states that the '*khrol gcod* cycle had instead been hidden originally by Padmasambhava and later rediscovered in various repositories by Sangs rgyas gling pa, Ratna gling pa, rGod ldem can (1337-1408) and others.<sup>20</sup> Like Dharma seng ge, he seems to employ the term '*khrol gcod* to designate the whole corpus of *gcod gter ma*, hidden as various treasure texts by Padmasambhava, referring in particular to those discovered in more ancient times by the earlier *gter ston*. Thus, if we compare the list compiled by Karma chags med to Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu's list, we note that the latter maintains the reference to Sangs rgyas gling pa, substitutes Rin chen gling pa with Ratna gling pa and adds rGod ldem can. We already briefly discussed the *gcod* texts of the first two. As for the latter, some sections contained in the *dGongs pa zang thal*<sup>21</sup> clearly exhibit *gcod*-related imagery. Finally, while describing the *gter ma* succession, Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu does mention the lineage of the '*khrol gcod* treasure hidden by O rgyan rin po che (*o rgyan rin po che 'i 'khrol gcod gter gyi brgyud ni*).<sup>22</sup> He actually uses this designation to refer to the particular lineage of the section of the Northern *gter ma* (*byang gter*) which was later revealed as *yang gter* by mNga' ris gter ston gar dbang rdo rje (1640-1685).<sup>23</sup>

From the analysis of these occurrences, it seems to us that the '*khrol gcod* or '*phrul gcod* formula is probably not used to designate a particular text, since both Dharma seng ge and Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu refer the term to *gter ma* rediscovered by different *gter ston* and not to a specific text or cycle. Rather, this term seems to carry a more general meaning, like Pha dam pa's *zhi byed* or Nāropa's *ro snyoms*. In fact, it seems to refer in a rather general way to those teachings attributed

19 He gives the four as Āryadeva's *tshigs bcad*, Nā ro pa's *ro snyoms*, O rgyan's '*khrol gcod*, Pha dam pa's *zhi byed*. Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu 1972: 4-5.

20 This Indian '*khrol gcod* (which both Karma chags med and Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu include in the four Indian streams of *gcod*), imported and concealed by Padmasambhava, becomes *bod chos*, Tibetan *dharma*, once it has been rediscovered, an interesting way to indicate how these teachings were 'tibetanized' by virtue of being rediscovered on Tibetan soil. Cf. Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu 1972: 5.

21 Cf. rGod kyi ldem 'phru chen 2000, vol. 4: 515-89, and vol. 5: 271-79. Many thanks to Katarina Turpeinen for pointing this out.

22 Cf. Ngag dbang bstan 'dzin nor bu 1972: 193.

23 He initially expounds the general transmission of the *rnying ma* teachings, both the *bka'* series (*bka' sde*) and the *sgrub* series (*sgrub sde*), from Kun tu bzang po down to the human realm, from India to Tibet via *bka' ma* and *gter ma*. Then he lists the *gter ma* lineage of mNga' ris from Padmasambhava giving also the biographies of sNa nam rdo rje bdud 'joms (pp. 203-04), rGod ldem can (pp. 204-08), mNga' ris gter ston zla ba rgyal mtshan, alias Gar dbang rdo rje (pp. 208-23), Rigs mchog rdo rje bzhad pa rtsal (alias Kun mkhyen chos kyi dbang phyug, pp. 225-359), Gar dbang 'phrin las rnam rgyal (pp. 359-73), rGyal sras padma 'jigs bral (pp. 373-98), Sems dpa' dbang phyug rgyal po (pp. 398-401), Gar dbang ye shes mchog grub (pp. 401-02), 'Gyur med padma bstan 'dzin (pp. 402-03) and E rje 'phrin las rnam rgyal (pp. 403-10).

to Padmasambhava which can be considered to be progenitors and inspiring sources of *gcod*, as well as to those *gter ma* in which the *gcod* practice and doctrine is fully present,<sup>24</sup> particularly those rediscovered in more ancient times. There are a few other important occurrences of '*khrol*/'*phrul gcod* in *gcod*-related texts, but their origin is not explicitly attributed to Padmasambhava.

'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899), in the section of his famous *Shes bya kun khyab mdzod* in which he discusses *zhi byed* and *gcod*, quotes from a text by the title "Severance of Illusion" ('*phrul gcod las*):

A triple classification emerges: the severance [realised by means of] the point of view [which looks at] the essence of phenomena (*dharmatā*) is supreme; the severance [realised by means of] a remembrance which leads to control is middling; the severance of the proliferation of thought is inferior.

རབ་ཚོས་ཉིད་ལྟ་བུ་བའི་གཅོད། འབྲིང་དབང་གྱུར་རྟེན་པའི་གཅོད། ཐ་མ་རྣམ་རྟོག་སྣོམ་པ་གཅོད་པ་དང་གསུམ་གྱི་རྣམ་གཞག་གྱུར་  
འབྱུང་ངོ།<sup>25</sup>

'Jam mgon kong sprul gives also a different nomenclature for the four Indian streams that converge in *gcod*: instead of '*phrul*/'*khrol gcod* he mentions *The Secret Severance of the Guru* (*gu ru'i gsang gcod*) and instead of Āryadeva's *Great Poem* (*tshigs su bcad chen mo*) he refers to the *Orally Transmitted Meaning Severance* (*bka' brgyud don gcod*). He omits Nāropa's *Equal Taste* (*ro snyoms*), mentioning only his *Secret Conduct* (*nā ro'i gsang spyod*), and yet he does mention Pha dam pa sangs rgyas's *Pacification*.<sup>26</sup>

Without the attribution to Padmasambhava, the term '*khrol gcod* also appears in Ma cig's biography, and is listed among the doctrines transmitted to her by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas.<sup>27</sup> It also appears in Tsong kha pa's commentary on *gcod* (*Zab lam gcod kyi khrid yig*), where we find some quotes from a text called '*khrol gcod* discussing the choice of the correct place and time for doing the practice of Severance.<sup>28</sup>

24 This possibility has already been suggested by Janet Gyatso 1985: 338.

25 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1997, vol. 4: 166 (f. 82b). Cf. Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye 2008: 284.

26 'Jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1997, vol. 4: 159 (f. 79b); Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye 2008: 277-78, 433. The formulas implied by 'Jam mgon kong sprul seem to diverge only from a merely formal point of view from the list given by Karma chags med, and probably they refer to a set of less specific terminology to refer to the same teachings.

27 Cf. Edou 1996: 138, and Savvas 1990: 66.

28 In reference to these quotes Savvas considers the possibility of a mistake attributing them to the Pha dam pa sangs rgyas's *Six Sections* ('*brul tsho drug pa*), a text frequently quoted in commentarial works on *gcod*, which is supposed to constitute the foundation of the teaching of this *siddha* on the topic of severance. Unfortunately, the location of this text is uncertain and thus it is not possible to confirm or deny this supposition. Cf. Savvas 1990: 316-17.

To conclude the discussion of *'khrul'phrul gcod* it might be interesting to note that among the works of the *rnying ma* master gTer bdag gling pa 'gyur med rdo rje (1646-1714) is a *gter ma* with the title "Oral Instruction for the Severance of the Confusion of Dualism" (*gnyis 'dzin 'khrul gcod man ngag*) which, although extremely short, contains instructions clearly stemming from a *gcod* background. It says:

From the Realisation of the Heart of Vajrasattva, the oral instructions for the severance of the confusion of dualism. If one wants to rescind the root of dualism, one should go to cemeteries, islands, lonely trees and other places which terrify the distracted mind. Here, after having purified one's continuum, one clearly visualises in the space in front numberless guests and offerings, and without attachment one offers one's own body, flesh, blood and all that is desired and then relaxes in equanimity free from mental activity. At that time, as for the deluded conceptual visions, [one understands that] illusory appearances, [like] the arising of many dreams and concrete meditative experiences, prove that the permanence or nonexistence of the phenomena of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, apparent yet nonexistent in their empty real condition, are an illusion similar to [the reflection of] the moon in water. In this way cutting through<sup>29</sup> one's own baseless and rootless mind, it is of the same nature as ether, the self-luminous state of spontaneous knowledge in which there are no mind or objects, conceiver and conceived. [Thus] the base of confusion, hope and fear, acceptance and rejection, is severed, and [thus] one recognises one's own abode, the naked perception [of reality]; one remains present in a state free of pride and adverse circumstances self-liberate. [These are] the authentic secret instructions on severing confusion, which lead to perfection.<sup>30</sup>

### The *gcod* Texts in the rNying ma School: Earliest Examples

At present the most ancient texts on *gcod* in the rNying ma school we have been able to identify are from the 14<sup>th</sup> century:<sup>31</sup> one from the *bka' ma* and three from the *gter ma* tradition.

The only *bka' ma* corpus is the *Kaḥi thog kun dga' 'bum gyi bka' srol bka' ma'i gcod skor*.<sup>32</sup> It is positioned as an addendum (*zhar byung*) to the texts distributed

29 The words *tshur bcad*, 'in this way cutting through', could also be read *tshar bcad*, 'taming', 'to cut off completely'.

30 gTer bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 12: 61.

31 Here we will give only a brief overview of these large corpuses. We are currently preparing a more detailed paper on this topic, analysing in particular the approaches that the ancient *rnying ma* masters have adopted to bypass the anachronism generated by considering their teaching to belong to a far earlier age than the life of the official founder of *gcod*, while at the same time keeping this doctrine and the related practice among their most treasured repertoire.

32 See 'Jam dbyangs 1999.



according to the nine-vehicle doxographic structure of the *rnying ma* school seen in the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* of Kaḥ thog. It contains *gcod* texts attributed to Kun dga' 'bum pa himself, along with invocations, *sādhana* texts and addenda by other authors. According to a recent biography written by Kaḥ thog mkhan po 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (b. 1929), Kun dga' 'bum pa was the throne holder of Kaḥ thog from 1357 to 1369<sup>33</sup> and himself a *gcod* and *zhi byed* specialist. 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan emphasizes his interest in these practices and tells us that before becoming abbot of Kaḥ thog he became holder of the teachings of the oral transmission of *zhi byed* and *gcod* (*zhi gcod snyan brgyud*). As throne holder, Kun dga' 'bum pa later introduced the *gcod* practice into Kaḥ thog monastery and his transmission, contained in a lengthy volume which is still available, became known as “the *gcod* teachings according to Kun dga' 'bum pa's system” (*gcod kyi gdams pa kun dga' 'bum pa'i lugs srol*). His other compositions are no longer extant.<sup>34</sup> The introduction to this cycle (*kaḥ thog pa'i gcod kyi lo rgyus*), written by one gZhan phan mthar phyin, whose exact identification has proven difficult, describes Kun dga' 'bum pa's *gcod* tradition as the only *bka' ma* tradition of *gcod* in the rNying ma school. It also asserts that the teaching traditions related to the three series of the inner tantras, taught by masters such as gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes (9<sup>th</sup> century) and his disciples So ye shes dbang phyug and Zur shākya 'byung gnas, are completed in Kun dga' 'bum pa's treatises, belonging to the lineage of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas and sKyo ston bsod nams bla ma.<sup>35</sup>

In the *gter ma* tradition, as we notice examining the historiographies above, we have the treasure texts which Sangs rgyas gling pa extracted from the sPu ri cave on 23 August 1364. In fact, the *gcod gter ma* unearthed by Sangs rgyas gling pa belong to the famous, albeit little-studied, collection of *gter ma* called *Bla ma dgongs 'dus*. They include one text for the initiation ritual, the *gCod dbang nam mkha' sgo byed*, and thirteen further texts grouped under the title *rDzogs rim bdud kyi gcod yul zab mo shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i dgongs pa*, which are actually understood to be part of the practices of the completion stage (*rdzogs rim*). Interestingly, almost all titles of the individual texts contain a metaphoric reference to *nam mkha'*, starting from the initiation (*nam mkha' sgo byed*).<sup>36</sup>

The *gCod skor gter chen rdo rje gling pa'i gter chos*<sup>37</sup> by rDo rje gling pa (1346-1405) seems to be a rather non-homogeneous collection of sixteen texts on *gcod* composed or revealed by rDo rje gling pa. At present we have had the opportunity to study it only in a rather preliminary way, yet we can say that it contains two histories

33 According to Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz (1993: 194), he was the seventh abbot.

34 See 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan 1996: 46-47; Samten Chhosphel, *Kun dga' 'bum*.

35 'Jam dbyangs 1999: 6.

36 We already published a paper on this topic. See Sanders & Pansa 2016: 173-75.

37 Cf. rDo rje gling pa 1984.

of *gcod*, one brief<sup>38</sup> and one extensive,<sup>39</sup> with lineages and biographies of lineage holders, at least one commentary to Ma cig's *bKa' tshom chen mo*,<sup>40</sup> plus initiations (*dbang*), introductions (*ngo sprod*) and instructions on the practice. For the most part they are *gter ma* texts which mention the *gter ston* rDo rje gling pa and the place of discovery, the *ka ba bum pa can*, a pillar in the Jo khang in Lha sa, but do not mention who hid them and when, nor the circumstances of their rediscovery. It contains other texts difficult to classify, for example one titled '*Khrul pa rtsad gcod / gcod yul 'phags ma sgrol ma'i rdzogs rim*,<sup>41</sup> which not only lacks *gter tshog* mark in the first part of the text, but also starts with the common formula introducing translations from Sanskrit (*rgya gar skad du*) and the typical sūtra opening formula ('*di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus cig na*). The first part of the title could be an extended form of '*khrul gcod*, and it also appears to belong to the *rdzogs rim* as does Sangs rgyas gling pa's texts.

A number of sections within the *dGongs pa zang thal*, the most important *rdzogs chen* cycle in the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*) collection unearthed by rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, contain statements and practices connected to the *gcod* imaginary. Examples include the explanation of demons as aspects and tendencies of one's own mind, the selection of awe-inspiring places like ravines and cemeteries for practice, a process of offering the physical body which includes a '*pho ba* like visualization, the visualization of one's own bodily remains becoming enormous in size and so forth. However, unlike the other texts we just mentioned, here we do not have a homogeneous corpus, but instead some rather scattered instructions included in a much larger context. The first *gcod* instructions are distributed in the text titled *gSang ba rmad du byung ba'i lde mig*<sup>42</sup> and the second, shorter instance, is contained in the *Gegs sel nor bu rin po che'i mdzod*.<sup>43</sup> In both cases we have a *gcod*-like *sadhānā* suggested by Padmasambhava as a useful and effective practice to be adopted as yogic conduct (*brtul zhugs*) in the context of the behaviour (*spyod pa*) one should apply.

So, unlike the scattered *gcod* instructions contained in the *gter ma* rediscovered by rGod ldem can, the other three instances of ancient *gcod* texts in *rnying ma* context we just mentioned are quite extensive textual cycles explaining the doctrine and the practice of *gcod* in a manner which is already explicit, well structured and organized, as well as integrated with the crucial aspects of the *rnying ma* doctrine. This seems to be particularly true for the texts by Kun dga' 'bum pa and the *gter ma* discovered by Sangs rgyas gling pa. It is all too reasonable to think that these are not the earliest examples of the integration of *gcod* into the corpus of *rnying ma* doctrinal and practical heritage. On the other hand, an important antecedent and inspirer of the

38 Cf. rDo rje gling pa 1984: 5-16.

39 Cf. rDo rje gling pa 1984: 17-52.

40 rDo rje gling pa 1984: 365-447. See also Sorensen 2013: 257-58.

41 rDo rje gling pa 1984: 53-123.

42 rGod kyi ldem 'phru chen 2000, vol. 4: 515-89.

43 rGod kyi ldem 'phru chen 2000, vol. 5: 271-79.

appearance of this extensive *gcod* literature in rNying ma school could probably be identified in the earlier fervent commentarial production present in the bKa' brgyud school, such as the works of the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, although these four are the earliest examples we found of *gcod* texts in an explicitly *rnying ma* context, this does not, of course, exclude that from the doctrinal perspective some concepts expressed in earlier *gcod* texts can be assimilated, or at least read, in a *rnying ma* and/or *rdzogs chen* fashion. Also, it goes without saying that many earlier *rnying ma* masters had practiced *gcod*, giving birth to various transmission lineages, and it could be that they also included some *gcod* instructions and *sadhānās* in their works. However, at the present state of our research, it seems that it was not until the 14<sup>th</sup> century that a widespread need emerged in the rNying ma school for both *bka' ma* commentarial literature and treasure texts on *gcod*.

To conclude, it would be appropriate to mention a few earlier *rnying ma* masters to whom *gcod* texts are attributed, but regrettably we were unable to locate any or confirm the respective attribution. One of the more prominent examples is the popular account of a transmission of *gcod* and the figure of Khros ma nag mo<sup>45</sup> going back to Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124-1192). Nevertheless, according to Dan Hirshberg,<sup>46</sup> although there are links between the lineages of Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer and Pha dam pa sangs rgyas,<sup>47</sup> most probably the *gcod gter ma* assigned to Nyang ral in reality belong to the re-discovered texts (*yang gter*) by gTer bdag gling pa after he had visions of this master. On the other hand, Karma chags med and other historiographers never explicitly mention *gcod gter ma* discovered by that great *gter ston*. As stated above, this obviously does not exclude the possibility of the existence of a *gcod* tradition linked to his figure or that, buried somewhere in his *gter ma*, some *gcod*-like instruction or some recommended practice might be found.

Also, a recent edition of Klong chen pa's (1308-1364) *gsung 'bum*<sup>48</sup> includes a volume with *gcod* texts discovered in Bhutan in 2003; nevertheless, as mentioned in its preface (titled *gCod kyi gsal bshad nyung bsdus*), although in the colophons of most of these texts the author is said to be Klong chen pa, a thorough analysis is required to establish the correctness of this statement;<sup>49</sup> the transmission of these

44 See Gyatso 1985: 335.

45 The deity Khros ma nag mo frequently appears in *gcod* liturgies. Incidentally, she is also mentioned in the initiation text of the *dGongs pa zang thal* collection with the title *gSang ba rmad du byung ba 'i dbang zab mo 'i cho ga* (Cf. rGod kyi ldem 'phru chen 2000, vol. 4: 573-89).

46 See the comment by Dan Hirshberg in the *kili kilaya* blog available at <http://blogs.orient.ox.ac.uk/kila/2011/09/19/the-wonderful-orgyan-ling-manuscript-kanjur/#comment-802>.

47 It is said that Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer received a transmission of *gcod* from Bla ma rdzong pa, who is mentioned in the Blue Annals (see Roerich & Gendün Chöphel 1976: 914) among those who had received teachings from Pha dam pa sangs rgyas and was the holder of some teachings on Pacification. See the comment by Dan Hirshberg in the *kili kilaya* above-mentioned blog.

48 Cf. Dri med 'od zer 2009.

49 Cf. Dri med 'od zer 2009: 19-20

teachings is attributed to Padma gling pa (1450-1521), considered to be the immediate rebirth of Klong chen pa. For the most part, the teachings contained in this volume of the new edition of Klong chen pa's *gsung 'bum* correspond exactly to the *Zab don thugs kyi snying po bdud kyi gcod yul gyi skor*<sup>50</sup> by Padma gling pa, except for the initial invocation and the concluding vajra verses, plus a quite interesting historical/biographical text.<sup>51</sup>

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50 Padma gling pa 1981.

51 Cf. Dri med 'od zer 2009:101-123.

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