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Anna Sehnalova

The Bon po *sMan sgrub* Ritual: Medicinal Materiality of a
Universal Healing Ceremony pp. 5–45

William E. (Bill) Boyd, Kapil Negi, Saresh Thakur, Puran Chand, Geoff Bartram, William Meertens, Peter Slavich

Two new high-altitude petroglyph localities in the Tsomoriri and
Phirse Pho valleys, southeast Ladakh, India pp. 46-69

Georgios T. Halkias

Heavenly Ascents after Death, Karma Chags med's *Commentary on
Mind Transference* pp. 70-89

Manuel Lopez

In Search of the Lost Manuscript: The Obscure Recension History
of the Tenth-Century Text *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*
pp. 90-118

Robert Mayer

Rethinking Treasure (part one) pp. 119-184

Sonam Dugdak & Nathan W. Hill

'Share the sweets', An introspective analysis of copulas following
adjectives in Modern Standard Tibetan pp. 185-192

Trent Pomplun

Ippolito Desideri's Tibetan Works and the Problem of ARSI Goa
74, fols. 47r-92v pp. 193-216

Miguel Álvarez Ortega

When Fools Cannot Win: Social Determinism and Political
Pragmatism in Bodong's Reception of *Sakya Legshe*
pp. 217-250

Brenton Sullivan

The Body of Skyid shod sprul sku: The Mid-Seventeenth Century
Ties between Central Tibet, the Oirat Mongols, and Dgon lung
Monastery in Amdo pp. 251-283

Per K. Sørensen

In his Name: The Fake Royal Biography—Fabricated Prophecy
and Literary Imposture pp. 284-335


Per Kværne

Compte-rendu de : "Rossi, Donatella (ed.), Fili di seta.
Introduzione al pensiero filosofico e religioso dell'Asia"
pp. 336-340



The Bon po *sMan sgrub* Ritual: Medicinal Materiality of a Universal Healing Ceremony

Anna Sehnalova
(University of Oxford)

he *sman sgrub* ritual performed on a large scale in a monastic setting represents one of the rarest rituals of the contemporary Bon tradition.¹ It also counts as one of the most important and most expensive, and is attributed great power for healing, achieving longevity and spiritual progress. This article researches its performance at the Khri brtan nor bu rtse monastery on the outskirts of Kathmandu, Nepal, conducted in December 2012. This corresponded in the Tibetan calendar with the first half of the eleventh month of the water dragon year 2139.²

The rite and term '*sman sgrub*' is explained by the Bon pos themselves in English as a "ceremony for blessing healing medicine".³ This hints the purpose of the rite to transform medicinal and other ingredients into a matter of superior properties. The transformation is effected by deities conferring their powers and blessings, which is believed to change the nature of the material. This is accomplished through consecration of a meditative *sādhana* practice (*sgrub thabs*).⁴ The practitioners, as well as attending public, hereby seek awakening (*byang chub*), healing, rejuvenation and longevity. The term *sman sgrub* can be translated *verbatim* as "accomplishment of medicine" or "medicinal accomplishment", but also as "generating benefit". *sMan* denotes both "medicine, drug" and "benefit, use, good",⁵ whereas the verb *sgrub* designates an active

¹ This article is a preliminary introductory study of the subject accepted for publication in 2014 (based on Sehnalova, 2013); in the meantime several other studies came out (Sehnalova, 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019c). The most detailed is Sehnalova, 2018; photographic documentation of the ritual in Sehnalova, 2018, 2019b. I apologise for this inconsistency and repetition.

² The Tibetan calendar used by the institution, referred to as *Hor lo tho*. Cf. Ramble, 2013, p. 218.

³ *25th Anniversary of Founding Triten Norbutse Monastery*.

⁴ Cf. Bentor, 1996a, 1996b, Cantwell, 2015.

⁵ Das, 1998, Zhang, 1993.

action effecting it.⁶ Another name for this particular example of ritual discussed here is *bDud rtsi 'od zer 'khyil ba*, “The Radiating Light-Rays of Healing Nectar”,⁷ or “the Light-Swirled Nectar”. In this article, I would like to focus on the specific material core of the ritual, the so-called ‘medicine’ *sman*, *sman sgrub* medicine (*sman sgrub kyi sman*) or simply *sman sgrub*, its preparation, the processes it undergoes during the course of the ritual, as well as the various approaches to understanding it.

There exists a great diversity of *sman sgrub* rituals in both Tibetan Buddhism and Bon,⁸ differing according to the ritual tradition and the tutelary deity (*yi dam*) to which they are dedicated. The one dealt with here comes from the cycle of one of the main Bon po tutelary deities, Khro bo gtso mchog mkha’ ‘gying of the ‘Father tantras’ (*Pha rgyud*). It belongs to the Bru lineage (Bru rgyud, Bru lugs),⁹ historically the most successful of the six patrilineal transmissions of the teachings of Bon. Apart from larger *sman sgrub* ceremonies, there are many smaller *sman sgrub* rituals performed, conducted either occasionally or regularly (often yearly), especially in institutions that produce Tibetan medicine.¹⁰ To distinguish the two, the former is, at least in the Bon po context, generally referred to as *sgrub chen*, “great accomplishment”.

1. Origin and transmission of the ritual and its medicine

The Bon pos believe that the *sman sgrub* of the Light-Swirled Nectar comes from the deity Kun tu bzang po (Skt. Samantabhadra).¹¹ In ritual context, Kun tu bzang po is often apprehended as the source of all knowledge. He supposedly bestowed the *sman sgrub* practice on the deity gShen lha 'od dkar.¹² The transmission continued via a teacher-student lineage through the great Bon po master Dran pa nam mkha’, the chief protector of Bon during its alleged suppression

⁶ The term *sman sgrub* and its connections to *sgrub thabs* (*sādhana*) are discussed by Garrett, 2009, pp. 209-210.

⁷ As translated in *25th Anniversary of Founding Triten Norbutse Monastery*.

⁸ The differentiation between Bon and Buddhism applied here reflects the Tibetan distinction between *bon* and *chos*, both of which comprise the category of *nang pa*. Cantwell (2014, 2015) documented a *sman sgrub* ritual of the rNying ma bdud 'joms tradition.

⁹ Alternative spellings: 'Bru, Gru, 'Gru.

¹⁰ Cf. Bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho et al., 2007, Donden and Hopkins, 1997, Garrett, 2009, 2010, Craig, 2012, Blaikie, 2014, Cantwell, 2014, 2015, Meyer, 1995, Kind, 2002.

¹¹ The following paragraphs are mainly based on oral teachings on the ritual during its performance in 2012. Its history in historical sources in Sehnalova, 2017, 2018.

¹² On the deity see Kværne, 1995, pp. 25-26.

in the eighth century A.D. Along with many other scriptures, the text of the practice is also believed to have been concealed by him. Thus, the work itself is a *gter ma*, a treasure hidden in order to be rediscovered at an appropriate future time. The central text, *The Main Text of the Light Swirled Nectar Medicine* ('*Od zer 'khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung*), was revealed in 1108 by the treasure discoverer (*gter ston*) Rig 'dzin chen po gyer mi nyi 'od (11th-12th century) in Dang ra khyung rdzong in northern gTsang.¹³ He might have been accompanied in this act by rMa ston srin 'dzin (aka rMa ston srol 'dzin, b. 1092).¹⁴ Already in 1017 gShen chen klu dga' (996-1035)¹⁵ recovered a previous section of the ritual text from 'Brig mtshams mtha' dkar in southern gTsang.¹⁶ Moreover, during the discovery, the written work was accompanied by several objects: nine boxes of medicine together with nine vessels (*bum pa, ga'u*) containing a medicinal mixture that forms the main material of the ritual.

These items were passed down to Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, the fourth abbot of g.Yas ru dben sa kha monastery in gTsang in Central Tibet.¹⁷ It is the first known monastery of the Bon pos which had been established by the Bru lineage in 1072. Hence, the ritual was performed regularly at the monastery and was due to be conducted once in the lifetime of every abbot, i.e. approximately once within sixty years. After its disastrous destruction by a deluge in 1386, the tradition continued in the new monastery of bKra shis sman ri (usually known as *sMan ri*), founded at a nearby location in 1405. Each abbot of the monastery, gradually coming to be regarded as the head of the Bon pos, had to conduct the *sman sgrub* ritual as one of the two major commitments of his office. This obligation was stated even in the main legal code of the monastery, the *bca' yig*: "An abbot was free to retire once he had performed two obligatory acts which confirmed his abbacy: the erection of a *mchod-rten* for his predecessor and the organisation of *sgrub-chen* and *sman-sgrub* prayers."¹⁸ The scarcity of the performances was due to the enormous effort and financial investment put into the prescribed substances, as well as the prestige surrounding the tradition.

¹³ Millard and Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, unpublished, Kind, 2002, p. 47. Dating in Kværne, 1971, p. 230.

¹⁴ Kværne, 1971, p. 230; cf. the *Katen Catalogue*: Karmay and Nagano (eds.), 2001, pp. 1026 (168-1), 1027 (168-7), 1308 (230-22).

¹⁵ Dates in Kværne, 1971, p. 229.

¹⁶ Millard and Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, unpublished, Kind, 2002, p. 47.

¹⁷ Here "abbot" translates both Tibetan terms assigned to the heads of the monastery *ston pa* ("teacher") and *mkhan po* (which mostly stands for "abbot"), only the latter of which implies monastic ordination.

¹⁸ Cech, 1988, pp. 69-70, 85.

The practice of the *Light Swirled Nectar Medicine* has continued until the present. With the influx of Tibetans and their culture into exile after the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959, also religious texts and rituals travelled with them. The new sMan ri monastery in Dolanji, India (established in 1969), and Khri brtan nor bu rtse in Kathmandu (initiated in 1986, founded 1992), Nepal, preserve the traditions of the original bKra shis sman ri in Central Tibet. All three share a considerable part of their ritual curricula, including the *sman sgrub* ritual.

2. Place and time of the ritual

Khri brtan nor bu rtse monastery is currently one of the most important Bon po establishments, and the second biggest in exile after sMan ri monastery in Dolanji. Khri brtan nor bu rtse was founded by a former preceptor (*slob dpon*) of sMan ri monastery in Central Tibet, Yongs 'dzin bsTan 'dzin rnam dag rin po che (born 1926 in Khyung po, Tibet). He chose the name "Stable Seat of the Jewel Peak"¹⁹ and had remained its spiritual head until the present. The monastery has successfully expanded, and hosts more than two hundred monks (as in 2012). He supervised the *sman sgrub* performance in 2012 together with the incumbent abbot mKhan po bsTan pa g.yung drung (born 1969 in Dhorpatan, Nepal). bsTan 'dzin rnam dag was drawing upon his memory and experience of the ritual at sMan ri in Tibet before the Chinese takeover to insure its proper re-enactment.

The first great Bon po *sman sgrub* performance outside the Tibetan motherland took place at sMan ri in India in 1988, and then again in 2009. Khri brtan nor bu rtse followed with performances in 1998 and 2012. These *sman sgrub* rituals were of two types, the Light-Swirled Nectar (*bDud rtsi 'od zer 'khyil ba*, 1988, 1998, 2012), and the Light-Blazed Nectar (*bDud rtsi 'od zer 'bar ba*) of the *yi dam* Phurba (Phur ba, 2009). Presently, the first is typical of Khri brtan nor bu rtse, whereas the latter of sMan ri. The modern-day market accessibility, logistics and funding opportunities make it possible to conduct the ritual with a considerably higher frequency than the original sixty-year intervals.

The decision to celebrate the *sman sgrub* for a second time at Khri brtan nor bu rtse was based on two reasons. The year 2012 marked the 25th anniversary of the monastery, and mKhan po bsTan pa g.yung drung and bsTan 'dzin rnam dag chose the *sman sgrub* as

¹⁹ Translation according to *Triten Norbutse Monastery: 25th Anniversary Celebration*, p. 20.

appropriate for the occasion for its high importance and exclusivity. Secondly, as *sman sgrub* is valued for its healing power extending to creating universal harmony in degenerated times, they viewed its performance as especially urgent in the current state of the world explained as in crisis. In the contemporary globalised aspirations, the authorities deemed the *sman sgrub* ceremony to cure any instability functioning not only as medicine within physical bodies but equally in the overall global environment including its ecological, economic and political spheres. The most pressing problems they pointed out were global warming, natural disasters such as tsunamis, floods and earthquakes, general ecological instability, financial crisis, and political turmoil leading to wars and violence. In particular, they saw the recent wave of self immolations in Tibet (since 2009), the repeatedly worsening political situation in Nepal following the parliamentary elections won by the Maoist Party (2008), and revolutions in the Middle East (since 2011), as further reasons to perform the rite. Despite the monastery's anniversary falling in the middle of summer 2012, they scheduled the celebration period for winter when the people of the Himalayas flock into Kathmandu and the adherents of Bon in the West can take advantage of the Christmas holidays.

3. *The ritual medicine recipe*

“[O]btaining the precious medical offering substances, as listed in the texts, poses a great challenge”, states the abbot mKhan po bsTan pa g.yung drung in the monastery's anniversary booklet.²⁰ Indeed, according to him, gathering the needed material for the composition of the *sman sgrub* medicine has historically been the most demanding part of the whole ritual. The ‘texts’ he refers to is a list of the required ingredients that forms a short part of the main ritual manual – *The Main Text of the Light Swirled Nectar Medicine* (*‘Od zer ‘khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung*), included among the tantras of Khro bo in the *spyi spungs* part of the bKa’ brten.

This recipe list is translated below²¹ with the kind permission of the 33rd sMan ri khri ’dzin, the chief authority of sMan ri and Bon in exile. The rendering of the recipe into English is based on its reading by the person assigned the task of assembling and processing the

²⁰ *Triten Norbutse Monastery: 25th Anniversary Celebration*, p. 11.

²¹ Three versions of the text were available to me: the manuscript used at Khri brtan nor bu rtse (MsA) with folio pagination which I follow here, and two manuscripts incorporated into the bKa’ rten: *Sog sde sprul sku bstan pa’i nyi ma*, Lha sa, 1998, vol. 168, text 1, fol. 9-15 (MsB); vol. 230, text 22, fol. 444-449 (MsC).

substances, a practitioner of the Tibetan gSo ba rig pa medical tradition, Am chi Nyi ma bsam 'phel (born 1969, Jharkot, Mustang, Nepal). Am chi Nyi ma comes from a hereditary lineage of ritual and healing specialists (a lay tantric, *sngags pa*) from Jharkot in the Mukhtinath Valley. He received his from both his father and Bon po educational institutions in Nepal and India. Along with the *sman sgrub* recipe, Am chi Nyi ma was entrusted with its oral explanations (*shes rgyun*) from bsTan 'dzin nmam dag. The latter dictated these from memory as he remembered them from the time of his stay at the original sMan ri monastery in Tibet. Hence, Am chi Nyi ma's comprehension of certain terms differs from the standard one. Translating Tibetan medicinal remedies and gSo ba rig pa *materia medica* into English is a very difficult task. Tibetan mineral, plant and animal names and their classification do not correspond with the Western scientific binomical nomenclature and taxonomic system.²² I restrict myself to *genera* identification, within which one (*sp.*) or more (*spp.*) species were used, according to Am chi Nyi ma. All plants were identified with the help of Am chi Nyi ma either using samples *in situ*, sometimes using photographs, or both. For the sake of convenience, in the case of plants along with the Latin name, I list the Tibetan accompanied by the English when feasible. If a term is incomprehensible, I leave it untranslated in the Tibetan original.

The *sman sgrub* formula follows a firm fivefold pattern of a *maṇḍala* (*dkyil 'khor*) along Bon po spatial organisation rotating anticlockwise through the following: Centre, East, North, West, and South. Each cardinal point by its properties constitutes its units of ingredients, in the recipe individually called 'medicines'.²³ Firstly, human and animal ingredients are enumerated in five units. This frame is filled in with the five causes of the unwished cycle of *samsāra*, the five mental poisons (*dug lnga*),²⁴ and along with them the matching remedies overcoming them: the five wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*) associated with the five tantric nectars (*bdud rtsi lnga*).²⁵ Furthermore, the five mental aggregates (*phung po lnga*, Skr. *skandha*) are respectively linked to the five quarters: consciousness (*rnam shes*), form (*gzugs*), mental formations ('*du byed*), feeling (*tshor ba*), and perception ('*du shes*). They should be overcome by the *sman sgrub* practice and its medicine. Secondly, the recipe continues with five *maṇḍalic* units of plant and mineral gSo ba rig pa ingredients. Every

²² Cf. Boesi, 2007, pp. 6-7, Clark, 2000, Glover, 2005, Van der Valk, 2017.

²³ See the Table in Appendix.

²⁴ Extended from the initial count of three (*dug gsum*): anger, desire, and ignorance.

²⁵ Similarly described by Cantwell 2015, pp. 63-64. On the five nectars: Garrett, 2010, Wedemeyer, 2007.

unit has its own name and function in healing the bodily forces of the other cardinal points. The medical concepts of the three bodily forces: wind (*rlung*), bile (*mkhris pa*), phlegm (*bad kan*),²⁶ are inserted into the *maṇḍala*, as are the prescribed ingredients healing them. Thus, the Centre as the principal point provides ‘assemblies’ of elementary characteristics of medicinal substances in the *gSo ba rig pa*: taste (*ro*), essence (*bcud*), potency (*nus pa*), and aftertaste (*rjes, zhu rjes*).²⁷ In the East, the medicine is generally purifying and regenerating, in the North the wind creates a light and lifting medicine to counter balance disease caused by heaviness. The heavy fire medicine acquires the heat of the West to tackle cold disorders, and the mixture of the South cools down hot disorders with its element of water.²⁸ At the end, an eightfold structure reflecting the eight classes of consciousness is employed, of which the first five represent the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.²⁹

Am chi Nyi ma read the whole recipe through his *gSo ba rig pa* understanding. The recipe is translated here as it stands in the scriptures and as Am chi Nyi ma comprehended it. I try to keep its very succinct style (with no proportions of the ingredients indicated). A number of its terms are incomprehensible even for the contemporary Bon po community, thus the formula is subject to reinterpretation at every conduction of the rite. In practice, a large number of the prescribed ingredients had to be omitted, due to their difficult or even impossible accessibility. Am chi Nyi ma collected all herbal and mineral substances he could, and in fact avoided all those of human and animal origin.

[SECTION A: ORGANISATION OF A MAṆḌALA]³⁰

[SECTION Ai: ANIMAL INGREDIENTS ACCORDING TO THE CARDINAL POINTS]

[I. CENTRE]

Testicles and semen of unicorns and others to purify pride in consciousness refers to testicles and semen of all [animals with]

²⁶ Cf. for instance Gerke, 2014.

²⁷ Further in Gerke, 2014, Finckh, 1978, 1985, Parfionovitch et al., 1992.

²⁸ Further on this, including plant identifications, see Sehnalova, 2018, 2019a. The recipe is in more detail studied also in Sehnalova, 2013, 2019c.

²⁹ Cf. Schmithausen, 1987.

³⁰ The translation of the recipe with more extended comments and the accompanying Table (in Appendix) were published in Sehnalova 2019c, here they are added for the sake of coherence.

undivided hooves, such as dark-coloured, white-eyed unicorns and others.

To purify desire in consciousness refers to various eggs of birds, such as vultures and others.

To purify jealousy in consciousness refers to [various] kinds of flesh and hearts of carnivorous animals, such as hearts of crocodiles and others.

[Ia. CENTRE: ROOT MEDICINE (*rtsa ba'i sman*) OF PLANT INGREDIENTS]

Join this root medicine with chebulic myrobalan (*a ru ra rnam par rgyal ba*), belleric myrobalan (*ba ru ra g.yug 'dral*), emblic myrobalan (*skyu ru ra*), asafoetida (*shing kun*), the six good [substances], and others.

[II. EAST]

The medicine of *sha chen g.yung drung lta me long*³¹ refers to flesh of young virgin girls, human flesh of *gsang ba gal chen phyi*,³² and elephants' heart flesh, and is to purify the ignorance in form.

Purifying anger in form refers to heart flesh of various kinds of carnivorous animals, such as striped tigers and quietly walking foxes and others.

Purifying pride in form refers to heart flesh of various kinds of animals with undivided hooves, such as white-eyed whitish horses and others.

The medicine purifying jealousy in form refers to heart flesh of carnivorous animals living in water, such as otters, good tadpoles; and this is the particular pure root medicine of the East.

[III. NORTH]

The medicine of *dri chen kun 'byung mnyam pa*³³ refers to: In order to purify pride in volitions, stool of all animals with undivided hooves

³¹ This expression serves as an abbreviated title and introduction to the given section by providing a very brief summary of its content. A synopsis of the same style precedes each of the cardinal points' sections in the first half of the recipe. As a complex it does not make sense when translated. This example would be: "great meat (*sha chen*) – swastika (*g.yung drung*) – mirror[-like wisdom] (*lta me long [ye shes]*)". See the Table in Appendix.

³² An unclear expression to Am chi Nyi ma. Literally can be rendered as 'the outer secret and important, probably denotes a "certain part of heart" (Millard and Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, unpublished, p. 8).

dropped while running, such as dark coloured turquoise-maned mares and others [is needed].

In order to purify hatred in volitions, stool of various kinds of carnivorous animals, such as blue swamp lions and wolves, and of *dpnyid tshugs dpung*³³ [is needed].

In order to purify ignorance in volitions, droppings of [animals with] divided hooves, such as white sheep with a spot on the flank, white-eyed white yaks and others [are needed].

In order to purify desire in volitions, stool of various kinds of birds, such as red-crested white birds, cuckoos with harmonious voice and others [is needed].

In order to purify jealousy in volitions, stool of carnivorous animals, such as jackals and cats striped like tigers [is needed].

[IV. WEST]

[The medicine of] *khrag ni pad ma sor rtogs* refers to: In order to purify anger in sensation, blood of boys and girls with shining red complexion [is needed].

In order to purify desire in sensation, blood of red birds, such as red *mkha' lding*³⁵ [is needed].

In order to purify ignorance in sensation, blood of [animals with] divided hooves, such as yellow-headed sheep and others [is needed].

In order to purify pride in sensation, blood of [animals with] undivided hooves, such as vermilion horses with white heels and others [is needed].

In order to purify jealousy in sensation, blood of various kinds of carnivorous animals, such as quietly walking foxes and others, is requested.

[V. SOUTH]

[The medicine of] *dri chu las drug bya ba nan tan* refers to urine of glorious brown boys in the South, urine of radiating blue women, and of carnivorous animals with claws, such as dragons *kyus*.

³³ See footnote 31 and the Table in Appendix. Likewise for the following similar expressions.

³⁴ The phrase *dpnyid tshugs dpung* is not well understood by the Bon pos at the present. It might indicate a carnivorous animal or a corrupted verse.

³⁵ The term *mkha' lding* is usually taken to denote different kinds of birds: the mythical *Garuḍa*, eagles, or other bird species. According to Am chi Nyi ma, *mkha' lding* is synonymous to the Mustangi expression *kre mo* standing for the Alpine chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*).

In order to purify ignorance in perception, urine of [animals with] divided hooves, such as blue water *dzos* (*mdzo*)³⁶ [is needed].

In order to purify pride in perception, urine of [animals with] with hooves, such as young, blue female mules of shiny colour [is needed].

In order to purify desire in perception, blood and urine of birds, such as cuckoos, *gong ngon*³⁷ and others [is needed]; and this is the particular root [medicine] of the South.

Thus are the aggregates (*phung po*) classified.

[SECTION Aii: PLANT AND MINERAL INGREDIENTS
ACCORDING TO THE CARDINAL POINTS]

Then, as concerns joining [the medicine], it is classified according to the elements.

[I. CENTRE]

In the Centre the medicine of '*dus pa ldan ba'i nam mkha* refers to: the assembly of tastes—chebulic myrobalan (*a ru ra*), the assembly of essence—the six good [substances], the assembly of potencies—emblic myrobalan (*skyu ru ra*), the assembly of after-taste—belleric myrobalan (*ba ru ra*), and various others are also needed. This is the medicine of the Goddess of Space whose mind is without characteristics.

[II. EAST]

In joining the medicine of the East, the purifying and generating medicine refers to:

Spurge (*mang ther nu*), [also] called *du rum skad phyad*,³⁸ *Cyananthus* spp. (*du nu phro*), [also] called *sngon bu g.yu sna*, spurge (*mang bu phrum*), [also] called *ther nu zhes chen*, spurge (*skyes bu phrum*), [also] called *thar nu chung ba*. And also others, [as] dandelion (*'khur mang*), ephedra (*mtshe*), juniper (*shug pa*), *chud bu*,³⁹ mallow (*lcam bur*), geranium (*li do ka*), and others. This is called the immaterial medicine of the Earth Goddess.

³⁶ Crossed bread of yak and domestic cattle.

³⁷ A certain bird, probably from the *Tetraonidae* family.

³⁸ This and the two subsequent couplets are by Am chi Nyi ma viewed as little translation devices in which plants firstly appear under their Zhang zhung name immediately followed by the Tibetan equivalents.

³⁹ A so far unidentified plant by me.

[III. NORTH]

In joining the medicine of the North, the lifting and light medicine refers to:

Resin of olibanum tree (*du ru ska na*), *so 'cha'*,⁴⁰ strawberry (*'bu ta pa 'dren*), *rtsi snga srin gyi 'bras*,⁴¹ wild indigo (*shing kyi ba'i 'bras bu*), red lac (*rgya skag*), juniper (*spang ma*), honey (*sbrang rtsi*), fritillary (*a ma bi la la len*), and others.

As concerns the aspect of lifting, this is the purifying medicine in the breath of the Wind Goddess.

[IV. WEST]

From the medicine, the heavy fire medicine refers to:

Three kinds of incenses, three kinds of salt, sugarcane molasses (*bu ram*), *gzhi mo*,⁴² *Inula racemosa* (*ma nu*), fennel (*la la phud*), asafoetida (*shing kun*), mercury (*ra sa ya na*), *Morina sp.* (*gzi ma byin tshor*), asparagus (*nyi shing snum can*), rhododendron (*bal bu sur bu*), *Cremanthodium sp.* (*ga sho*), *Inula racemosa* (*ma nu*),⁴³ mallow (*lcam thod dkar*), garlic (*sgog pa*), sulphur (*mu zi*), and others, these are the purifying medicine of the heat of the Fire Goddess.

[V. SOUTH]

The cold and cooling water medicine refers to: joining the medicine of the South.

Camphor (*ga pur*), musk okra (*sro ma ra tsa*), malabar nut, birthwort (*ba sha ba le*),⁴⁴ tamarisk (*g.yu shing*), wine grapes, juniper, pomegranate (*rgun 'bum sda ru*),⁴⁵ *Delphinium sp.* (*gla rtsi*),⁴⁶ *Althaea sp.* / mallow⁴⁷ (*ha li ka*), saxifrage (*sum cu tig tig*), blackberry (*ka ta ka ri*), moonseed (*sle tre*), bitumen (*brag zhun*), calcite (*cong zi*), and *Aucklandia lappa* (*sho sha rta*), *Meconopsis sp.* (*u dpal*), and others, these are the purifying medicine of the Water Goddess in blood.

⁴⁰ A so far unidentified plant by me – not *Sesbania grandiflora* (vegetable hummingbird, as *so 'cha'* usually is), but rather a small plant of Dhorpatan forests.

⁴¹ Not understood by Am chi Nyi ma and omitted.

⁴² Not understood and omitted by Am chi Nyi ma.

⁴³ Repetition, the ingredient already appeared a few verses above.

⁴⁴ Read as two ingredients: *ba sha ka*, *ba le ka*.

⁴⁵ Am chi Nyi ma read the term *rgun 'bum* to denote both wine grapes and a ground Juniper species, and *sda ru* as pomegranate.

⁴⁶ A plant substitution for deer musk (see below).

⁴⁷ Only one of the two plants was used, further not identified.

These are particular for the nectar of means and wisdom.

[SECTION B: INGREDIENTS ACCORDING TO THE EIGHT
CLASSES OF CONSCIOUSNESS]

Classification into eight branches:

[I.]

Various kinds of animals' eyes and the five essences, such as butter.
 Various kinds of ears and flowers producing sound, such as
Incarvillea compacta (*khug ches*).
 Animals' noses and five kinds of various incenses.
 Various kinds of tongues, such as of parrots, five kinds of various
 medicines, and various kinds of flesh, such as flesh of ferocious
 tigers.
 Silk, such as brocade.

[II.]

This is the element of extinguishing strong defilements:
 Lungs, throats.
 Various kinds of knots.
 Various kinds of flowers, such as meconopsis (*mkha' lding u pal*).
 Various kinds of essences, such as *mang bar*.⁴⁸
 Five kinds of grains, such as barley and peas.
 Life channels, flesh and glands.
 Five kinds of the five precious [substances], such as gold.
 The medicine of the [eight] branches of consciousness is classified as
 medicine of the four cardinal directions, according to its particular
 characteristics and sequence.

[CONCLUDING INSTRUCTIONS]

The medicine containers, their silk covers [and] the strings [should]
 match the colours of the cardinal directions. This is the explanation of
 the particular characteristics of the nectar medicine.

⁴⁸ *Mang bar* represents an unclear term, the substance was omitted.

4. *Compounding the medicine*

The preparations of the medicinal mixture for the *sman sgrub* ritual started several months in advance. During the collecting, processing, and substituting (*tshab*) the ingredients, rules of Tibetan *materia medica* production were observed – as if Am chi nyi ma was preparing medicines for his regular patients.

4.1 *Collecting the substances*

At first, the recipe ingredients were assembled from several sources: the Kathmandu medicinal market, bsTan 'dzin rnam dag (as the precious stones' mixture *rin chen lnga*), and others. A great part was collected in the wild by Am chi Nyi ma and his 'Bum bzhi clinic colleagues in different places of the Nepalese Himalayas.

The best locations for picking wild flora were considered *gnas*, 'sacred sites' or 'power places' themselves understood as empowered by residing deities and thus exercising special capacities. If this was not possible, the place must be high and clean or at least clean, and in the worst-case scenario, any spot will suffice. Ideally, material from the three chief sacred sites of the Bon pos should be obtained. These are Kong po Bon ri, Kailash (Gangs ti se), and Ri tse drug (also Ri bo rtse drug, Shel le rgya skar). In this particular *sman sgrub*, the following areas of Nepal were represented: Shel ri bo 'brug skra (Dragon Crystal Mountain), the main holy mountain of Dol po, Mukhtinath (Chu mig brgya rtsa), cave of Dran pa nam mkha' near Lubra (Klu brag) in Lower Mustang, Damdokunda in Upper Mustang, Dhaulagiri (Mu le gangs, Mu li gangs ri), and in the Kathmandu Valley Pharping and its adjacent sites (Pham ting, Yang le shod, A su ra'i phug), Swayambhunath ('Phag pa gshen sku, 'Phag pa shing kun),⁴⁹ and Nagarjuna forest (Glang ri lung bstan, Klu sgrub ri bo, Ri bo 'bigs byed) against the slope of which Khri brtan nor bu rtse monastery leans. Following the standards of gSo ba rig pa, cooling plant remedies were picked in cool and shadowed locations and dried in shade, whereas the warming ingredients were collected and dried in the sun.

⁴⁹ The first toponym in brackets is Bon po, the second Buddhist.

4.1.1 Other substances included

Apart from the prescribed list, other substances were included by Am chi Nyi ma following the oral teaching from bsTan 'dzin rnam dag. These were:

Various kinds of water: rain, spring, pond, sea, ocean, mineral, tap water.

Various kinds of alcohol: *chang* (home brewed barley beer), wine, spirits.

Various kinds of oils: sesame, sunflower, mustard, olive.

Various kinds of eggs: hen, goose, partridge.

Three sweet [substances]: crystallised sugar, molasses, and honey.⁵⁰

Three white [substances]: curd, milk, and butter from sheep, 'dri,⁵¹ dzo,⁵² cows and goats.⁵³

About seventeen more medicinal plants fulfilling the required properties.

4.1.2 Excluded substances

On the other hand, a significant part of the recipe was skipped. Am chi Nyi ma excluded all the ingredients he was not able to understand or obtain (such as *mang bar*), and then all the human and animal substances as a whole. These represent almost half of the list. In the justification of the Khri brtan nor bu rtse authorities, human and animal body parts were not to be collected, as they appear in the recipe rather as symbolic items.⁵⁴ Only the herbal and mineral ingredients were fulfilled.⁵⁵

4.1.3 Substituted substances

A second method of dealing with obscure or unavailable *materia* is to substitute (*tshab*) it with another substance sharing the same medicinal qualities according to the gSo ba rig pa medical system. For the *smān sgrub* medicine, deer musk (*gla rtsi*) was substituted by a plant of equal medical effects called *bya rgod spos* (*Delphinium* sp.).

⁵⁰ *mNgar gsum: shel ka ra, bu ram, sbrang rtsi*. As in Zhang, 1993, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1996, p. 345.

⁵¹ A female of a yak.

⁵² A *mdzo* is a cross-breed of a yak bull and a cow.

⁵³ *dKar gsum: zho, 'o ma, mar*. As in Zhang, 1993, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1996, p. 346.

⁵⁴ A discussion of this notion in Sehnalova, 2018, pp. 284-287.

⁵⁵ The red lac (*rgya skag*), an item of animal origin (from the lac insect *Kerria lacca*), was not perceived as such.

Since the plant is reminiscent of this resemblance and shares the typical smell of musk, it can be also called *ldum gla rtsi* (“plant *gla rtsi*”).⁵⁶ The reasons Am chi Nyi ma gave for the substitution were economic, pharmaceutical, and ethical.

4.2 The “yeast” pinch (*phabs gta’*, *phabs rta*)

All the procured materials had to be sorted and cleaned, then ground into powder and mixed. Into this dry mixture, all the liquids of about 200 litres were poured. Then, a very special component was added representing the most important part of the whole *sman sgrub* concoction – it is referred to as ‘yeast’ (*phabs*) and has exactly the same effects are ascribed to it. Its potency inheres in transferring a property contained in a tiny pinch into a great mass, and enhancing the whole with it. The property here is both blessings (*byin brlabs*) and healing power. The ‘yeast’ is the content of the *gter ma* vessel of the revealed *sman sgrub* medicine believed to have been discovered in the 11th century.

This ‘yeast’ is regarded as the crucial ingredient initiating the *sman sgrub* medicine production process. It is usually likened to making *chang* (only rarely to yogurt), including the fermenting phase referred to as *nyal* (“sleeping”).⁵⁷ To be certain that the old *gter ma* medicine and its properties are preserved, customarily only less than a half of its volume (one or two small handfuls this time) can be used as the *phabs* and the rest is stored. After the *sman sgrub* ritual has been completed and the new *sman sgrub* medical mixture made, the missing proportion is refilled.

The *gter ma* medicine is believed to embody all the substances prescribed by the text, without exception. This is ascribed either to its supernatural origin, or to the idea that in ancient times gathering them was still attainable for humans.⁵⁸ The continuity embraced in the ancient *gter ma* medicine is dual, material and spiritual. *sMan sgrub* medicine is mostly distributed from the hands of a venerated figure along with the master’s blessings.⁵⁹ Therefore, as the tradition of this particular *sman sgrub* and its *gter ma* medicine were previously kept at *sMan ri* monastery in Tsang, the *phabs gta’* is taken to be empowered by all its previous abbots (by *phyag dbang*, ‘hand

⁵⁶ dGa’ ba’i rdo rje, 1995, p. 274. Cf. Sabernig, 2011, Czaja, 2018.

⁵⁷ Alternatively spelled and pronounced causatively as *snyal*, “putting to sleep”. Cf. Kohn, 1998, p. 160, Gayley, 2007, p. 473.

⁵⁸ Likewise observed by Cantwell, 2015, p. 63.

⁵⁹ Cf. Kind, 2002, on *sman sgrub* in a Dolpo village setting, Kohn, 1988, on Mani Rimdu.

blessing') and as such represents a *byin rlabs kyi tshan kha* ("the potency of blessings"). Also, passed masters' relics are said to have been mixed in over generations. Hence, it functions as a material lineage incorporating all these qualities and reflecting masters' generations and their lineages *rgyud*. Thus, the concept of *rgyud* becomes materially expressed. By sight, touch, smell and taste, the *phabs gta'* does not differ from the compounded *sman sgrub* mixture. Each *sman sgrub* ritual, differentiated according to its *yi dam* and tradition, has such a catalyst of its own. Moreover, *sman sgrub* medicine in general gradually accumulates more and more of the described physical and spiritual constituents. The medicinal product of any *sman sgrub* ceremony conducted within the Bon religious school⁶⁰ is very welcomed to be incorporated into other Bon po *sman sgrub* compounds.⁶¹

4.3 Completing the medicine

After the wet mass had fermented for a few days in a closed chamber, it was kneaded into dough, then left to dry, and turned into powder again. The total weight of the *sman sgrub* medicine exceeded 900 kilograms⁶². A strong fragrance emitted from it. Given the quantity, the medicine was not rolled into pills, as might be done, but left in powder form. Once the mixture was ready, it had to be treated according to certain rules. It could not be stepped upon, kept in an unclean place or otherwise polluted. The whole mixture came in powdered form and was kept in cotton bags and containers used for storing medicine at the 'Bum bzhi clinic.

5. Performance of the ritual

The *sman sgrub* ritual was included in a month long "set of rituals" starting with the monastery's yearly 100,000 offerings ('*bum tshogs*) to Dran pa nam mkha' and closing with the dGe shes examinations with degree ceremony. The *sman sgrub* performance itself lasted fifteen

⁶⁰ The "*sman sgrub* denomination" always has to be observed even in areas where Bon to a certain degree mixes with rNying ma, for instance in Dol po.

⁶¹ A detailed discussion on *phabs rta*, including its possible relation to the concepts of *gta' chen*, *sman gta'* and *sman rta*, in Sehnalova, 2018, pp. 265-270.

⁶² The total cost of the material was nearly half million Nepali rupees, which at the current exchange rate corresponded to almost 6000 USD (the Gross domestic product *per capite* per year in Nepal in 2012 was 600 USD). www.inf.com (International Monetary Fund), www.nrb.org.np (Nepal Rastra Bank).

days, from the 14th until the 28th of December 2012. This corresponded to the Tibetan 1st until the 15th day of the eleventh month of the water dragon of the year 2139. It culminated with the final empowerment on the full moon. Three main phases of the ritual can be recognized:⁶³

5.1 Preliminary activities (*sngon 'gro*)

1.1 Outer preliminaries: practices directed towards the lama, practices directed towards the community, selection of a suitable place.

1.2 Inner preliminaries: collecting the ritual objects (*rdzas*) (including the *sman sgrub* medicine substances), offerings to local deities and obstructers (includes *sa len* or *sa'i cho ga*, ransom *glud* rituals), water purification (*chu gtor*), making *tshwa tshwa*, placing the ritual spears (deities' ornaments and weapons above the *maṅḍala*), rites of Namdag and Longyas (rNam dag and Klong rgyas, abbreviated as rNam klong).

1.3 Preliminary activities: setting up the ritual boundaries with the help of the four principal protectors (rGyal po bzhi, *mtshams bcad*), constructing the *maṅḍala*, opening its doors, taking vows and commitments.

5.2 The main activities

2.1 Blessing the raw medicine (*sman*): blessings of the peaceful deities (*zhi ba'i khrol sgrub*), blessings of the wrathful deities (*khro ba'i khrol sgrub*).

2.2 Blessing the powdered medicine (*sman phye*): blessings of the peaceful deities (*zhi ba'i khrol sgrub*), blessings of the wrathful deities (*khro ba'i khrol sgrub*).

2.3 Blessing the accomplishments (*dngos grub*).

5.3 Bestowing the empowerment (*dbang*) and distributing the *sman sgrub* medicine

The medicine occupies literally the cardinal place of the whole ritual. On the day preceding the onset it was carried into the main assembly hall of the monastery (*'du khang*), and loaded in piles in its centre

⁶³ Based on fieldwork and Millard and Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, unpublished, p. 4.

beneath a four-pillared metal structure of the *gzhi* ("base"). *gZhi* as a general term in the Bon po context designates the locus of rituals on which the act focuses and where all the most important implements are installed.⁶⁴ In the case of the *smān sgrub*, the individual glass shelves of the *gzhi* contained, in downward succession: 1. nine medicine containers (*bum pa* or *ga'u*), deities' ornaments (*rgyan rdzas*), sacrificial cakes (*gtor ma*), 2. a sand *maṇḍala*,⁶⁵ and, 3. the *smān sgrub* medicine lying on the floor. The cardinal points of the *maṇḍala* roughly corresponded to the actual ones. Furthermore, one of the most important elements of the ritual was prepared. Reminiscent of the original nine *gter ma* vases (*bum pa*, *ga'u*), eight vessels full of medicine were arranged. In the ritual they were to be completed by the surviving *gter ma* piece. The *gter ma* vessel would be put in the middle of the upper shelf, and the newly prepared containers would occupy the eight remaining directions. Those placed in the four cardinal points were covered with cloth and bound with strings of the corresponding colours. On top, they bore the direction's particular symbol (*rtags*).⁶⁶ For the sake of time, they contained the powdered mixture, exactly the same as in the bags on the floor. The four intermediate directions were of yellow colour and contained raw ungrounded medicine.

The vessels were installed into the *gzhi* on the very first day of the main *smān sgrub* activities (17.12. / 5.11. Tibetan calendar) in a short ceremony called "Inviting medicine" (*smān gyi spyān 'dren*), immediately following the ritual demarcation of the borders of the four protectors (*rGyal po bzhi*, *mtshams bcad*). Eight small monks impersonating eight offering goddesses (*mchod bu lha mo brgyad*) carried the vases in a procession while dancing three circuits (*skor ba*), around the *gzhi* (i.e. the 'inner circuit', *nang skor*). They were preceded by a spear (*gar mdung*) with ribbons in the five colours of the five main directions, and the *gter ma* medicine vessel carried by the offering master (*mchod dpon*). The order of the eight vessels in the procession was random. Every goddess, with dancing steps, placed the *bumpa* inside the *gzhi* on the shelf above the *maṇḍala*. Once all had been installed, the *gzhi* was covered by curtains of the cardinal points' colours set around the four pillars, and then sealed. After this, entering and looking inside was forbidden, and only permitted to the

⁶⁴ Kohn (1988, p. 167) records the term *dkyil 'khor (maṇḍala)* for a similar object, for which this term is always employed by the Nyingma, as Cathy Cantwell confirms (personal communication). Cf. Blaikie, 2014. A detailed description of a Nyingma *smān sgrub* ceremony in Cantwell, 2015.

⁶⁵ Subsequently four *maṇḍalas* were used. The main and concluding one can be seen in Namdak, Tenzin at al., 2000, p. 101.

⁶⁶ See the Table in Appendix.

appointed *mchod dpon*.⁶⁷ A five-coloured thread ‘spell cord’ (*byang thag*, *gzungs thag*) lead from the *maṇḍala* to two Bon po sceptres (*phyag shing*, *chag shing*) placed on the thrones of the two leading monks on each side of the ‘*du khang*.⁶⁸ The thread aids to concentrate the powers of the deities on the *maṇḍala* and the medicine.

Another turning point in handling the *sman sgrub* medicine came after the raw material blessing stage was finished, and the medicine needed to be grounded (21.12. / 9.11.).⁶⁹ Again, in the procession of the eight goddesses, the vessels and the bags were taken out of the temple into the courtyard. The content of the four cardinal *bumpas* was poured out and in sequence ritually ground (*sman brdung*, “beating the medicine”) by pestle and mortar. Each participant beat the medicine a minimum of three times, starting with the abbot, the *mchod dpon*, and the eight goddesses. The monks performing the *sman sgrub* chanted prayers of mixing, purifying and grinding medicine as the congregation chanted the medicine mantra (see below), while Am chi Nyi ma was supervising the process. After the beating, the crowd, including many pilgrims, moved in a procession headed by the *gter ma* vessel and the eight goddesses. Each of the goddesses bore a vessel of refilled ground medicine in sequence of the Bon po cardinal order: East, North, West, South. *sMan sgrub* sponsors toled the medicine bags. The procession circumambulated once around the monastery (the ‘outer circuit’, *gling skor*). Afterwards, the medicine was placed back into the *gzhi* beneath the *maṇḍala*, and its vessels above.

Most of the *sman sgrub* ritual took place in the main assembly hall with the medicine in its centre. Some of the dances (*chams*) took place around a large coniferous tree, functionally replacing a flag pole (*phyar dar*, *cha dar*), in the courtyard in front. The empowerments were conducted on a spacious platform next to the monastery enclosure. In addition, three circuits encompassing the monastery (*gling skor*) over the course of the ritual were performed. The central performers of the ritual consisted of twenty-four monks seated in rows of twelve on both sides of the hall. The settled number derived from doubling the original count of twelve in the Bru *drubchen* tradition, therefore the performers were still referred to as the “the twelve performing priests” (*a mchod bcu gnyis*). The performance included many specific mudras, mantras, and dancing steps which

⁶⁷ Cf. Kohn, 1988, p. 168.

⁶⁸ Cf. Cantwell, 2015.

⁶⁹ Similarly observed by Cantwell, 2015, pp. 61, 69. Originally, the whole medicinal mixture was grounded to powder at this stage, but at the present due to electric appliances, the medicine is processed beforehand.

the *a mchod bcu gnyis* learned in advance from the head master bsTan 'dzin rnam dag. The sound of recitation could not be interrupted for the whole duration of the performance. Therefore, during interludes or when the twenty-four monks deserved a break for meals or rest, the main *smān sgrub* mantra (*smān 'dzab*) was chanted by appointed young monks in daily shifts of triplets.⁷⁰ The melody of the mantra is characteristic of the Bru lineage and said to go back to Yeru Wensaka monastery. The lyrics read: “*bSvo ōM ba bā de na ra sa ya na g.yu 'brang bdud rtsi bsvo thā'*.”⁷¹

Apart from the selected *a mchod bcu gnyis* responsible for the *smān sgrub* ritual, the rest of the monks, as well as visiting tantrics (*ngags pa*), were engaged in conducting other rituals to support the main one. A great number of lay people was coming day and night to perform circumambulations inside and around the main temple (the ‘inner circuit’, *nang skor*, and the ‘middle circuit’, *bar skor*) reciting and singing the mantra.

6. Taking the medicine

The envelopes of the *smān sgrub* medicine packages read (in English):

“*sPyi spungs zhi khro'i sgrub smān 'od zer 'khyil ba bzhugs / /*”⁷²

Mendrub (Blessed nectar)

This envelope contains a blessed herbal medicine, considered as *negya menchik* (one medicine for 100 diseases).⁷³ It is composed of over 100 ingredients and blessed through an extensive ritual called *dutsi öser khyilwa* (radiating light rays of healing nectar),⁷⁴ which transforms the medicine, giving it the power to heal on more than just a biological level as it infuses it with spiritual energy. Without any side effects, it can be used by anyone at anytime and as often as

⁷⁰ Cf. Blaikie, 2014, p. 6.

⁷¹ Translation and analysis of the mantra in Sehnalova, 2018, pp. 161-166.

⁷² “This contains the light swirled medicine of the accomplishment of the peaceful and wrathful deities of the *spyi spungs* cycle.”

⁷³ Transliteration: *nad brgyad smān gcig*.

⁷⁴ Transliteration: *bdud rtsi 'od zer 'khyil ba*.

needed to heal and prevent all kinds of diseases as well as purify any internal of (*or)⁷⁵ external pollution.

Indications: Place a small amount in a glass of hot water, cover the glass and wait for it to dissolve. Stir the solution and drink it when it is warm. Swallow any remains at the bottom of the glass. Wait at least half an hour before eating any meat.”

The distribution of this powerful substance, along with the final empowerment, receiving blessings (*byin brlabs*) and seeing (*mjal*) the Rin po che bsTan 'dzin rnam dag and the abbot, represented the climax of the *sman sgrub*. It was the most anticipated and well-attended part of the ritual. The produced *sman sgrub* medicine was conferred from the hands of the abbot to the monks and public during a lengthy festive event on New Year's Day of 2013 (1st January 2013). dGe shes degree certificates were also awarded to the recent successful candidates. In order to incorporate more festivities into this one, the *sman sgrub* medicine was not distributed on the full moon accompanying the concluding empowerment of the ritual four days earlier.⁷⁶ Usually, the number of pilgrims and attendants at the ritual totalled around three hundred, however, for the conclusion it rose to as many as eight hundred. Therefore, together with the monks in attendance, there was a crowd of about one thousand. Apart from those present, the *sman sgrub* medicine was carried and dispatched to individuals and institutions around the world by the monastery's office and the pilgrims.

The Bon pos view the medicine generated by the *sman sgrub* ritual as a kind of universal drug for humans and animals, the environment, and the universe as a whole. They understand its power to be both curing and preventative. Its potency emerges from the medicinal components, as well as the deities' and masters' blessings, and thus the substance represents “blessing and medicine in one”.⁷⁷ It is mostly consumed as a basic general drug for any bodily discomforts, diseases and illnesses, both mental and physical. The “100 diseases” advertised in the monastery's prescription roughly reflect the number of ingredients included, and also allusively the number of illnesses recognised by the Tibetan medical tradition, which are supposed to count four times one hundred and one, i.e. four hundred and four. The *sman sgrub* medicine is usually applied for minor ailments, such as cold and influenza, and body pains, headache, stomach ache, and digestion problems. It also helps “if you

⁷⁵ My correction.

⁷⁶ As observed by Kohn, 1988, p. 215, and similarly by Kind, 2002, p. 71.

⁷⁷ *Byin brlabs dang sman gnyis ka yod red*. See also Sehnalova, 2019a.

don't feel well for any reason"⁷⁸ by bringing back strength and abilities (*nus pa*). In remote areas where no other medicaments are available, Bon po take *sman sgrub* to cure anything and view it universally, similarly to how Paracetamol or Aspirin are perceived in the West. It always has to be taken orally, ideally in the morning on an empty stomach with boiled water, but not boiling water, as the heat would damage its healing properties. Just a very small bit is utilized every time, thus a packet lasts for a long time, often over decades until the next opportunity to receive a new one. The storage place must be unpolluted, "clean and nice", for example the home altar.

Yet the comprehension of the *sman sgrub* ritual and its medicine is more complex and far-reaching. In the view of the monastic elite, philosophy and individual soteriology are employed. The whole rite serves solely as an external support on the way to the highest spiritual aim of every being, awakening (*byang chub*), and is of no use to anyone without the right motivation for pursuing it. The substance that requires real transformation is our mind. Those caught in the *samsāra* are patients infected by the five poisons of anger (*zhe sdang*), ignorance (*gti mug*), pride (*nga rgyal*), desire (*'dod chags*), and jealousy (*'phrag dog*),⁷⁹ which need to be cured. Such benefits of the *sman sgrub* and its medicinal material for spiritual practice have long been celebrated. According to present Bon po narratives in the exile, some of the ancient Bon po masters are remembered for having refrained from food subsisting solely on *sman sgrub* medicine. Apart from physical strength and health, they achieved spiritual qualities, such as the rainbow body (*'ja' lus*). *sMan sgrub* is also likened to *rtsa rlung* and *bcud len* practices. Furthermore, it is associated with dying, and believed to ease the passage through the intermediate state after death (*bar do*) and help for a favourable rebirth. *sMan sgrub* medicine is given to humans during their last breath, as well as to animals before slaughter. With these assumptions are linked the medicine's effects of rejuvenation. During a teaching, the abbot suggested that everyone taking it would become ten years younger – to the great joy of the audience, needless to say!⁸⁰ By protecting one's body, slowing down the aging process, and sharpening the senses, the *sman sgrub* medicine is viewed as allowing the individual to make a better use of the precious human existence.

⁷⁸ A commonly held and expressed view by both lay people and monastics of the Bon po community.

⁷⁹ See the Table in Appendix.

⁸⁰ See the connection of *sman sgrub* to alchemy and its quest for immortality in Garrett, 2009.

7. *The complex interplay of the ritual*

The *sman sgrub* rite is composed of several discourses intertwined with each other forming a whole: Buddhist philosophy, soteriology and cosmology, tantra and *sādhana* practices, Tibetan medical principles and alchemical knowledge, and Tibetan indigenous cultural concepts. The fivefold *maṇḍalising* cosmological framework, so common in Tibetan ritual, and producing the universal connotations and implications of the *sman sgrub* or other practice, is employed in the Bon po order as stated before.

At each instance, the listed *sman sgrub* medicine constituents are chosen to fit into the fivefold cosmological pattern, or into the scheme of the eight classes of consciousness. The formula of a particular cardinal point acquires various attributes and represents pharmacological concepts in accordance with the characteristics of the point in question. For example, in the West we find the hot *mkhris pa* bodily constituent, from the animal ingredients blood of red birds, and among the plants warming remedies. The qualities of the medicine of each cardinal point are directed to healing the mental poison of the point, and to balance the opposing qualities of another point or points. All the substances are in accordance with all the characteristics of that direction. The notion of collecting them is very universalistic, the more representatives of a prescribed category are involved, the better. Thus, Am chi Nyi ma aimed at assembling the highest possible number of various kinds of water, oils, eggs, different plants of the same name, etc. These different discourses are expressed by the ritual's material product, the *sman sgrub* medicine. Many of the over one hundred components come from tantric rituals and serve as offerings to deities, as the offerings of the five senses, et cetera.⁸¹ Also, some medicinal plant species are used for the same purpose, such as *Ephedra* (*mtshe*).

sMan sgrub and its medicine (*sman*) are perceived to transform poison (*dug*) into nectar (*bdud rtsi*) by purifying (*dag, gsal*) it. The word *sman* denotes anything beneficial, not purely 'medicine' as generally translated, and can be synonymous to *phan*, 'benefit'.⁸² The direct opposite of *sman* is *dug*, poison. *Dug* in a broad sense means anything harmful to sentient beings, for instance the mental poisons and physical poisonous substances. Actually, it is poison which arises from initial ignorance (*ma rig pa*) and through which this ignorance

⁸¹ Such as the five sweet and white substances, five kinds of medicines, five kinds of incense, five kinds of essences, grains, precious gems, fine silks, animal blood, different kinds of flesh, and various liquids.

⁸² Cf. Das, 1998, Zhang, 1993.

causes *saṃsāra* and disease. A similar opposition emerges in the anticipated *bdud*, usually translated as 'demon', and *bdud rtsi*, mostly rendered as 'nectar' or 'ambrosia'. The latter etymologically encompasses the former and denotes a substance overcoming the *bdud*.⁸³ The two pairs seem to draw upon a third relation of antagonistic poles, *bdud* and *smān* indigenous to Tibet. *bdud* is a name of harmful and evil supernatural beings, whereas *smān* refers to a class of female deities. The word *bdud* was also chosen by Tibetan translators for the Indian name of the chief demons' representative Māra,⁸⁴ the main tempter and enemy of the Buddha. These sets of oppositions are incorporated into the *smān sgrub* ritual, each consisting of a problem and a remedy. The antagonism of poison and a remedy, with the aim of transformation of the former into the latter, is prominent in tantric practices in general.⁸⁵ Poison might be epitomized for example by material poisonous substances and demons, Māra, as well as by the five afflictions (*nyon mongs*, Skt. *kleśa*) or the five aggregates,⁸⁶ the second by *materia medica*, deities, the five wisdoms and Teachings propagated by the Buddha or the alleged founder of Bon, sTon pa gShen rab mi bo. The *smān sgrub* practice of the the Light-Swirled Nectar builds on these precepts.

The *smān sgrub*'s play of interlocking medicine and philosophy or religion is made possible by their close relationship in Tibetan culture. The primary cause of *saṃsāra* giving rise to the five mental poisons is the initial ignorance, *ma rig pa*. Exactly the same cause is identified in the medical tradition for all diseases and illnesses.⁸⁷ Based on these precepts, treatment "requires somatic, psychiatric and religious approaches"⁸⁸ employed at once, and this is exactly what *smān sgrub* does. Having developed in a non-dualistic discourse of not separating the entities of body and mind, the *smān sgrub* medicine is apprehended as a substance curing the individual as a whole – to be translated into Western terms: physically, mentally and, moreover, on the spiritual level by helping pursue religious goals. Applying the universal *maṇḍalic* device, this healing power is perceived to extend to the universe.

⁸³ Cf. Zhang, 1993, Karmay, 1975, p. 145, Kohn, 1988, p. 159. The term *rtsi* itself stands for liquid substances, close to English 'juice' or 'extract'.

⁸⁴ Māra's Sanskrit name derives from the word root denoting 'death'. Cf. *amṛta* ('nectar overcoming death'), the Sanskrit for Tibetan *bdud rtsi*.

⁸⁵ Cf. Snellgrove, 1967, p. 149, Wayman, 1973, p. 156.

⁸⁶ Cf. Zhang, 1993.

⁸⁷ For instance *rGyud bzhi* (2. book, 8. chapter), '*Bum bzhi* (2. book, 8. chapter).

⁸⁸ Vargas, 2010, p. 385.

8. Conclusion

The *sgrub chen* or great *sman sgrub* of the Bon pos represents a universal healing ritual. As such, it is a well-attended, long-awaited and a key event of the Bon po community. This extensive and elaborate ceremony centres upon producing 'medicine', a substance to which miraculous effects are ascribed.

The medicine of the the Light-Swirled Nectar *sman sgrub* is presently composed mainly of Tibetan medicinal substances. This medicine is blended following a complex formula and demands a preparation procedure in many stages. Collecting the ingredients is a lengthy, demanding, and expensive enterprise, the more challenging by the occasional incomprehensibility of the recipe to the contemporary Bon po community. The recipe is subject to reinterpretation of the medical practitioner in charge for each celebration of the ritual. The treatment of the ingredients follows standard procedures of the *gSo ba rig pa* medical tradition for drug production, thus the whole *sman sgrub* mixture is powdered.

The recipe intrinsically follows principles of the Tibetan medical tradition, as well as conventions of tantric ritual. The core of this healing medicinal substance, the *phabs gta'* or 'yeast' embodies the particular Bon po lineage of masters, teachings and knowledge transmission. The practice of this ritual come from treasure-texts uncovered in the early 11th and 12th century. Since then, the practice has been passed down in a supposedly unceasing succession of Bon po masters associated with the main Bon po monasteries in Central Tibet.⁸⁹ It now flourishes among the Indian and Nepalese Bon po communities in exile. Both the performance and the resulting medicine are perceived as a remedy restoring the ideal balance of sentient beings with the cosmos, which at the present extends to globalised rationale for organising the ritual. On the worldly level, restoring the balance is articulated as health and peace. On the soteriological, as awakening.

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⁸⁹ Millard and Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, unpublished, p. 1, Sehnalova, 2017.

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Appendix

The maṅḍalic fivefold division of the *sman sgrub* recipe

Direction <i>Phyogs</i>	Centre <i>dbus</i>	East <i>shar</i>	North <i>byang</i>	West <i>Nub</i>	South <i>lho</i>
Buddha (<i>rGyal ba rigs lnga</i>)	Kun snang khyab pa	gSal ba rang byung	dGe lha gar phyug	Bye brag dgos med	dGa' ba don grub
Element * ⁹⁰ <i>'byung ba</i>	Space <i>nam mkha'</i>	Earth <i>sa</i>	Wind / Air <i>rlung</i>	Fire <i>me</i>	Water <i>chu</i>
Colour * <i>tshon mdog</i>	White <i>dkar po</i>	Yellow <i>ser po</i>	Green <i>ljang khu</i>	Red <i>dmар po</i>	Blue <i>sngon po</i>
Poison * <i>Dug</i>	Anger <i>zhe sdang</i>	Ignorance <i>gti mug</i>	Pride <i>nga rgyal</i>	Desire <i>'dod chags</i>	Jealousy <i>'phrag dog</i>
Aggregate * <i>phung po</i>	Consciousness <i>rnam shes</i>	Form <i>gzugs</i>	Mental formations <i>'du byed</i>	Feeling <i>tshor ba</i>	Perception <i>'du shes</i>
Nectar * <i>bdud rtsi lnga</i>	Semen <i>thig le</i>	Flesh <i>sha</i>	Stool <i>dri chen</i>	Blood <i>khrag</i>	Urine <i>dri chung</i>
Secret names of special medicine ⁹¹	"Thought of awakening" <i>byang sems gab pa</i>	"Secret flesh" <i>gsang sha gal chen</i>	"Incense of great smell" <i>zhim phod dri chen</i>	"Lotus blood" <i>pad ma rak ta</i>	"Scent of sameness" <i>mnyam nyid dri chu</i>

⁹⁰ The asterisk (*) indicates categories found in the main *sman sgrub* ritual text: 'Od zer khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung.

⁹¹ According to Snellgrove, 1967, pp. 178-179.

Wisdom * <i>ye shes</i>	Wisdom of emptiness <i>stong nyid ye shes</i>	Mirror-like wisdom <i>me long ye shes</i>	Equalizing wisdom <i>mnyams nyid ye shes</i>	Discriminating wisdom <i>sor rtogs ye shes</i>	Accomplishing wisdom <i>bya grub ye shes</i>
Sign * <i>rtags</i>	<i>A dang ma</i> A and ma syllables	Swastika <i>g.yung drung</i>	Dharma wheel <i>'khor lo</i>	Lotus <i>pad ma</i>	Jewel <i>nor bu</i>
Animal * <i>ris rtags</i>	Lion <i>seng ge</i>	Elephant <i>glang chen</i>	Horse <i>rta</i>	<i>Khyung</i> (Garuda) ⁹²	Dragon <i>'brug</i>
Medicine vessel material *	Crystal <i>shel</i>	Gold <i>gser</i>	Turquoise <i>g.yu</i>	Copper <i>zangs</i>	Iron <i>lcags</i>
Body functions and parts	Mind <i>thugs</i>	Flesh and bones <i>sha rus</i>	Breath <i>rlung</i>	Heat <i>drod</i>	Blood <i>khrag</i>
Bodily force <i>nyes pa</i>		Phlegm ⁹³ <i>bad kan</i>	Wind <i>rlung</i>	Bile <i>mkhris pa</i>	Phlegm <i>bad kan</i>
Characteristics of the medicine *	Root medicine <i>rtsa ba'i sman</i>	Generating and purifying <i>bskyed cing dag</i>	Light and Lifting <i>'degs shing yangs</i>	Warming: Heavy fire medicine <i>lci ba me'i sman</i>	Cooling: Cold and cooling water medicine <i>grang shing bsil ba chu yi sman</i>
Title of the medicine *	<i>'dus pa ldan pa'i nam mkha'i sman</i>	<i>sha chen g.yung drung lta me long</i>	<i>dri chen kun 'byung mnyam pa'i sman</i>	<i>khrag sna pad ma sor rtogs</i>	<i>dri chu las drug bya ba nan tan</i>

⁹² The Garuḍa understanding of *Khyung* is rather Buddhist. The position of *Khyung* and dragon is sometimes switched in the Bon tradition.

⁹³ In the gSo ba rig pa tradition, the three bodily forces correspond to the mental poisons differently than here: anger is representative of *mkhris pa*, ignorance of *bad kan*, and desire of *rlung*.

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Tibetan text

The three versions of the text compared in a diplomatic edition, all in manuscript form (the latter two as facsimile), are:

1) MsA: 'Od zer 'khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung bzhugs lags s+ho. Manuscript used at Triten Norbutse monastery during the *sman sgrub* performance. MsA was taken as the main version, the other two were compared with it.

2) MsB: 'Od zer 'khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung bzhugs pa lags sho. In: dKar ru Grub dbang sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma 1998, vol. 168, text 1.

3) MsC: 'Od zer 'khyil ba bdud rtsi sman gyi gzhung bzhugs pa'i dbus phyogs legs sho. In: dKar ru Grub dbang sprul sku bstan pa'i nyi ma 1998, vol. 230, text 22.

(82)⁹⁴ glang chen dung gi gtsug phud can la sogs tel/ 'bras bu dang/ thig le dang rnam shes la nga rgyal gnas su dag par zhes bya ste/ rta gro bo shel
 (83) mig la sogs ste/ rmig zlum mtha' dag gi 'bras bu dang thig le dang/ rnam shes la 'dod chags gnas su dag par zhes bya ste/ lha bya rgod pa la sogs ste/ 'dabs⁹⁵ *(dab) chags kyi sgong nga sna tshogs dang/ rnam shes la 'phrog (*phrag) gnas su dag par zhes bya ste/ chu srin ma ha'i snying po la sogs tel/ gcan gzan gyi sha sna snying rnams so/ de rtsa ba'i sman de yi 'phrad a ru ra⁹⁶ rnam par rgyal ba dang/ ba ru ra g.yug 'dral dang/ skyu ru ra shing kun dang/ bzang po drug la sogs gsal lo/ sha chen g.yung drung rta (*lta)⁹⁷ me long sman zhes bya ste/ lang tsho dri ma ma phog⁹⁸ pa'i sha chen dang/ [gsang ba gal chen phyi yi sha chen/]⁹⁹ glang po che'i snying sha dang/ gzugs la gti mug gnas su dag pa'o/ gzugs la zhe spang gnas su dag par zhes bya ste/ rgya stag khra'o/ wa chen ldang 'gyu la sogs tel/ gcan gzan sna tshogs gyi snying sha dang/ (shar phyogs rtsa ba dag/)¹⁰⁰ gzugs la nga rgyal gnas su dag par zhes bya ste/ (84) rta ngang pa shel gi mig la sogs rmig zlum sna tshogs gyi snying sha dang/ (gzugs la nga gyal gnas su dag pa'i phyir/)¹⁰¹ gzugs las 'phrog (*phrag) gnas su dag pa'i sman ches bya ste/ chu sram lco

⁹⁴ MsB: starts on fol. 9, MsC: starts on fol. 444.

⁹⁵ MsB: 'dab.

⁹⁶ MsB: a ru.

⁹⁷ Corrected according to gNyoos tshul khriims rgyal mtshan (Millard and Khenpo Tenpa Yungdrung, unpublished, p. 8) denoting *me long lta bi'i ye she* (Mirror-like wisdom).

⁹⁸ MsC: phogs.

⁹⁹ The phrase is added following MsB, MsC (the latter adds *dang* to the end of the phrase).

¹⁰⁰ Not in MsB, MsC. *Homoio teleuton*, bracketed in MsA.

¹⁰¹ Not in MsB, MsC. *Homoio teleuton*, bracketed in MsA.

(*lcong) bzang la sog's ste/ gcan gzan chu la gnas pa rnams kyi snying sha dang rnams ni/ shar phyog rtsa ba dag sman gyi bye byag go// dri chen kun 'byung mnyams (*mnyam) pa'i sman ches bya ste/ 'du byed las nga rgyal gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ rta gro mo g.yu rngog la sog's ste/ rmig zlun mtha' dag gi dri chen rgyug 'phro la byung ba dang// 'du byed las zhe sdang gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ 'dam seng sngon po dang ri khyi sngon po dang/ dpyad¹⁰² (*dpyid) tshugs dpung pa la sog's ste/ gcan gzan sna tshogs kyi sbrun dang/ 'du byed la gti mug gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ lug dkar po bang mig dang/ g.yag dkar po shel mig la sog's ste/ rmig pa kha brag rnams kyi lce (*lci) ril dang/ 'du byed [la] 'dod chags gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ bya dkar (85) ze dmar dang/ khu byug gsung snyan la sog's te/ 'dabs chags sna tshogs kyi sbrun dang/ 'du byed la 'phrog (*phrag) gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ ci spyang dang byi la stag ril dod pa la sog's te/ gcan gzan rnams kyi gzugs sbrun rnams soll khrag na (*ni)¹⁰³ pad ma sor rtogs zhes bya te/ tshor ba las zhe sdang gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ khye'u dang bu mo mdangs dmar gyi khrag dang/ tshor ba la 'dod chags gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ mkha' lding dmar po rnams kyi khrag dang/ tshor ba la gti mug gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ lug mgo ser la sog's ste/ rmig pa kha brag gi khrag dang/ tshor ba la nga gyal gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ rta mtshal bu rting dkar la sog's te/ rmig pa zlum po'i khrag dang/ tshor ba la 'dod chags (*phrag)¹⁰⁴ gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ wa chen ldang 'gyur la sog's te/ gcan gzan sna tshogs kyis (*kyi) khrag gsol/ dri¹⁰⁵ chu las drug bya ba nan tan ches bya te/ lho ru khye'u smug la gzi byin chags pa dang/ bud med sngo (86) las gzi mdangs chags pa'i dri chu dang/ 'brug kyus pa'i chu la sog's te/ gcan gzan sdir (*sder) chags kyi chu dang/ 'du shes las gti mug gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ chu mdzo sngon po la sog's te/ rmig pa khe (*kha) brag gi chu dang/ 'du shes la nga gyal gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ dre'u ngon po ldang tsher (*gdang 'tsher)¹⁰⁶ la sog's te/ rmig pa zlum pa'i chu dang/ 'du shes las 'dod chags gnas su dag pa'i phyir/ g.yu bya gong ngon la sog's te/ 'dod (*dab) chags kyi khrag chu dang/ lho rtsa ba'i phyir¹⁰⁷ (*bye) brag go// de nas¹⁰⁸ phung po rigs su phye ba'ol/ de nas¹⁰⁹ gros¹¹⁰ (*grogs) su bstan (*bsten) pa nil 'byung ba las dbye ste/ dbus su 'dus pa ldan ba'i nam mkha'i sman ces bya ste/ ro 'dus pa a ru ra¹¹¹ dang/ bcud 'dus pa bzang drug dang/ nus pa 'dus

¹⁰² MsB, MsC: *dpyid*.

¹⁰³ As in MsB, MsC.

¹⁰⁴ Emended according to the text pattern (see below).

¹⁰⁵ MsC: *dra*.

¹⁰⁶ Alternatively, might be also *mdang tsher*. dGe shes Nyi ma 'od zer chos 'khor tshang, personal communication (Oxford, February 2013).

¹⁰⁷ MsB: *phyi*.

¹⁰⁸ MsC: The first two words omitted.

¹⁰⁹ MsB: *yi*.

¹¹⁰ MsB: *grogs*.

¹¹¹ MsB: *a ru*.

pa'i skyu ru ra dang/ rjes 'dus pa ba ru ra¹¹² dang/ gzhan yang sna tshogs par dgos te/ de ni nam mkha'i lha mo sems can (*sems) mtshan ma¹¹³ dang bral sman bya'o/ (87) shar gyi sman gyi grogs su/ bskyed cing dag pa'i sman ces bya ste/ mang ther nu zhes bya ste/ du rum skad phyad dang/ du nu phro ces ste¹¹⁴/ sngon bu g.yu sna dang/ mang bu phrum ces bya te/ ther nu zhes chen dang/ skyes bu phrum zhes chen dang/ thar nu chung ba dang/ gzhan yang 'khur mang dang/ mtshe dang shug pa dang/mchud bu dang/ lcam bur li do ka la sogs pa ni/ de ni sa'i lha mo sha gdos pa bral pa'i sman ces bya'o// byang gi sman gyi grogs su btang pa ni/ 'deg (*'degs) shing yangs (*yang) pa rlung gi sman ces ste/ du ru ska na dang/ so 'cha'¹¹⁵ dang/ 'bu ta pa 'dren¹¹⁶ dang/ rtsi snga srin gyi 'bras dang/ shing kyi ba'i 'bras bu dang/ rgya skag dang/ spang ma dang/ sbrang rtsi dang/ a ma bi la la len la sogs/ 'deg (*'degs) pa'i rnams (*rnam) pa ni/ rlung gi lha mo dbug (*dbugs) la gnas su dag pa'i sman ces bya'o/ (88) sman las lce¹¹⁷ (*lci) ba me'i sman bya ste// spos snag gsum dang/ tshwa snag gsum dang/ bu ram dang/ gzhi mo dang/ ma nu dang/ la la phud dang/ shing kun dang/ ra sa ya na dang/ gzi ma byin tshor dang/ nyi shing snum can dang/ bal bu sur bu dang/ ga sho dang/ ma nu dang/ lcam thod dkar dang/ sgog pa dang/ mu zi la sogs pa rnams ni/ me yi lha mo drod gnas su dag pa'i sman ces bya'o/ drang zhing bsil ba chu yi sman ces byas ste// lho yi sman gyi grogs ni// ga pur dang/ sro ma ra tsa dang/ ba sha ba le¹¹⁸ dang/ g.yu shing dang/ rgun 'bum sda ru dang/ gla rtsi dang/ ha li ka dang/ sum cu¹¹⁹ tig tig dang/ ka ta ka ri¹²⁰ dang/ sle tre dang/ brag zhun dang cong zi dang sho sha rta dang/ u dpal la sogs pa ni/ chu'i¹²¹ lha mo khrag las¹²² (*la) gnas su dag pa'i sman ces bya'o/ de rnams na¹²³ (*ni) thabs she rab rtsi ba'i bye brag gol/ yan lag brgyad ni rnams la dbye ste/ (89) sems can gyi mig sna tshogs pa dang/ mar la sogs snying po lnga dang/ rna ba sna tshogs pa dang/ khug ches la sogs sgra byung ba'i me tog dang/ sems can gyi sna dang/ spos sna tshogs rnam pa lnga dang/ ne rtsa la sogs lce sna tshogs/ sman sna tshogs pa lnga dang/ rngam pa'i stag sha la sogs sha sna tshogs/ shi shon la sogs dar ba dang/ drag bo'i (*po'i) sgri (*sgrib) na snubs la 'byung ba zhe bya ste/ glo ba dang/ 'og ma dang/ mdud sna

¹¹² MsB: rje 'dus pa bstun. This reading would change the phrase: "in accordance with the assembly of after-tastes".

¹¹³ MsB: mtsan.

¹¹⁴ MsC adds: dang.

¹¹⁵ MsB: so 'chal.

¹¹⁶ MsC: 'dran.

¹¹⁷ MsB, MsC: lci.

¹¹⁸ MsB, MsC: ba sha ba le ka.

¹¹⁹ MsC: bcu.

¹²⁰ MsC: ra.

¹²¹ MsC: chu yi.

¹²² MsC: la.

¹²³ MsC: nas.

*tshogs dang/ mkha' lding u pal la sogs me tog sna tshogs dang/ mang bar la
 sogs snying po sna tshogs dang/ nas dang khye'u la sogs 'bru lnga dang/
 srog rtsa dang sha shan¹²⁴ sman bu dang/ gser la sogs rin chen lnga sna lnga
 dang/ rnam shes yan lag gi sman zhes bya ste/ mtshams bzhi sman gyi bye
 brag go/ bye brag dang go rim gyis dbye ba'o// sman snod dang/ dar kheb
 dang/ gzungs thag ni/ phyogs kyi kha dog dang sbyar ro/ bdud rtsi sman gyi
 bye brag bstan pa'o/*




¹²⁴ MsC: *dang* inserted.

Two new high-altitude petroglyph localities in the Tsomoriri and Phirse Pho valleys, southeast Ladakh, India

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Introduction

his report records two new localities at which ancient petroglyphs have been found on boulders in the valleys of the Tsomoriri (lake) and Phirse Pho (river). These lie in an area in which there is no previous record of petroglyphs (Aas, 2017; Bellezza, 2017a, b; Bruneau & Bellezza, 2013; Bruneau & Vernier, 2010; Devers et al., 2015; Jamwal & Thangspa, 2011; Orofino, 1990; Singh et al., 2017; Tshangspa, n.d.; Vernier, 2016; Vernier & Bruneau, 2017). The information recorded here was collected during a hiking trek in August 2018, following the discovery of the first locality by some of us on a previous hiking trek (September 2016). The second locality noted in this report is a new locality, discovered in passing during the 2018 trek. As in the nearby region of Spiti, it appears that these localities are associated with long-established pathways (Bellezza, 2017b).

The area in which these petroglyphs are found is part of the Changtang, the high altitude Tibetan Plateau. The Ladakh section of the Changtang includes the Changtang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary. The Sanctuary is designated to protect and conserve many high elevation flora and fauna, including more than 200 species of plants, several rare and endangered species, and one of the few Indian populations of kiang (Tibetan wild ass). The study locality lies south of the Indus River, close to the 120 km² Tsomariri lake and its lakeside village, Korzok (variously spelt Karzog, Karzok, etc.). Korzok is reputed to be the world's highest year-round inhabited village and highest arable agricultural area (c. 4,560m above sea level). The terrain all lies above 4,500m, comprising broad valleys, steep-sided gorges and ranges, and many mountains over 6,000m. The study locality is arid with little vegetation growth and negligible rainfall and snowfall.

Locality 1: Kyangdam c. 78°18.5'E 32°46.5'N

This locality lies 3km south of the locality of Kyangdam at the southern end of the lake Tsomoriri on the western slopes of the valley side, in two lateral valleys some 40m above the valley floor (Figure 1). According to the available topographic maps (Pointet, 2005; Banerjee, 2016), and GPS measurements of location made at the sites on a camera GPS, the sites lie around an elevation of 4,600m above sea level in an area surrounding 78°18.5'E 32°46.5'N.

The petroglyphs are pecked or scratched onto boulders of mostly fine-grained metamorphic slate, phyllite and some schist, with the petroglyphs mostly on weather-varnished surfaces. Typically, the petroglyphs avoid irregularities on the rock surface, and only overlap cracks in the rock where these appear to post-date the petroglyph. This pattern of placement accords with a previous assessment of the role of boulders in communicating rock art in Ladakh (Aas, 2017). Aas notes that the rocks should be understood to be communication devices between hunters and supernatural beings, with the message being delivered through the rock surface. Interestingly, Aas suggests that irregularities on the surface play no role in the communication, and that they are generally avoided. While this report cannot test this assumption, the observations provided here support it.

The petroglyphs have been formed either by pecking, probably by stone, or by being scratched onto the boulder surface, again using stone. Most of the images, with three exceptions, are outlines, with no infilling. Some are linear images, while most present realist outlines of the objects being depicted. All the images are of the order of 10-15cm across, with the exception of a possible mandala or sun disc and an image of a tiered shrine or chorten, which are about 30cm across and 30cm high respectively.

The bedrock in this area is part of the Tsomoriri crystalline complex, comprising metamorphics and granite; the Korzok Range at this locality is dominated by Precambrian-Palaeozoic metasediments (Steck et al., 1998; de Sigoyer et al., 2004; Mishra et al., 2015). It is from this bedrock that the boulders are derived as rockfall and colluvium from the mountain slopes to the southwest above the locality. The lower slopes upon which these boulders lie comprises glacial lateral moraine deposits plastered along with lower valley slopes, interspersed with small alluvial fans (Hedrick et al., 2011; Mishra et al., 2015). The locality is spread across a ridge and its neighbouring mountainside valleys in the alluvial fans defined by the runoff from the mountain slopes. The valleys drain the slopes towards the east (slightly north of east) down to the main valley of the Phirse Pho and Tsomoriri. Sites 1 to 5 are on the southerly side of

the northern valley, while sites 6 to 9 are to the south of sites 1 to 5, on the ridge and the northern side of the next valley; site 10 was only noticed in passing and its exact location was not recorded.



Figure 1: Kyangdam petroglyph locality, looking south towards the Phirse Pho valley; the floodplain to the east drains northwards into Tsomoriri, which is out of sight to the left of this scene. The boulder in the middle of the image has people around it. Many of the boulders in the ridge ahead have petroglyphs. (Photo: W.E. Boyd).

Ten sites are noted at this locality. The recoding was limited by time available (this was not an expedition to record these sites, and so recording was limited by the opportunity of a half day available during the hike). The group noted that there were more similar boulders at this locality, mostly downslope, that were not examined. The individual sites are spread over quite a large area, and other boulders were seen in passing that may also have petroglyphs. The locality may prove to be somewhat richer than is recorded here. None of the local nomadic horsemen, based in the nearby location of Korzok on the west shore of Tsomoriri, who accompanied our trekking group, knew of the petroglyphs previously. They explained that there was no tradition in their community of making such images on rock. The monastery at Korzok is around 300 years old, as is likely to be the community living around it.

Site 1: This site comprises a large slate boulder containing many petroglyphs on one face and one on a side face (Figure 2). The main set of images face northeast, while the other one faces more northerly. Images include a possible face (it is a mask- or face-like shape with features inside the oval), a horse with possible person on its back (cf. Bellezza, 2017b, Figure 10), and two swastikas.

One of the swastikas is angular, while the other is curved. A third swastika, on the side face, is angular. The first swastika has a curve extension to one arm (top right, Figure 2). It is possible that this and the curved swastika represent a class of swastika recorded by Bellezza (2017a) that links the swastika motif with sun and moon motifs. The swastika motif is, according to Bellezza (2017a) the most common sign or symbol in Upper Tibetan rock art, and he suggests that it plays a significant role in ritual and other forms of abstract communication through the prehistoric period and into historical times (1000 BCE through to 1000 CE).

There are also indeterminate shapes on the main face, some seemingly random, but others with clear order to their shape.



Figure 2: Kyangdam Site 1: Top left, the boulder; top right, horse with possible person plus angular swastika; bottom left, angular swastika; bottom middle, possible face; bottom right, rounded swastika. (Photos: W.E. Boyd).

Site 2: This is a small boulder of schist (Figure 3). One petroglyph appears to have shape, possibly representing a curved body with three legs. An alternative interpretation is that it is an image of a standing bird; Jamwal & Thangspa (2011, Figure 8) illustrate what they call a rock carving of an eagle, albeit with clearer ornamentation and definition than this one. The pose is reminiscent of Vernier & Bruneau's (2017, Figure 21.3) front type C bird image. It appears to have been scratched onto the rock surface rather than pecked.

Site 3: This is a small boulder of slate with an elongate petroglyph comprising single lines (Figure 3). This may be possible long thin animal, a horizontal line with four shorter lines perpendicular to it (possibly legs), an extension in one direction (a short tail) and a head-like outline at the other. The head-like outline has a cat-like appearance; it compares with Vernier's (2016, Figure 111.12) illustration of a "tiger/feline representation", although lacks the body detail. This petroglyph may, nevertheless, represent a snow leopard. Snow leopards are known in this district. This is also an image that has been scratched onto the rock surface rather than pecked.

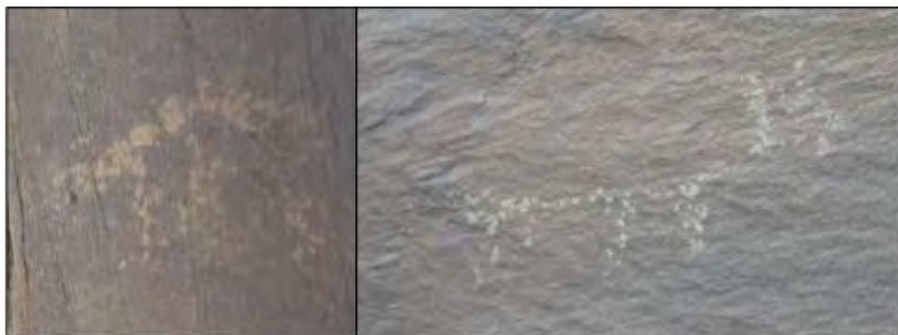


Figure 3: Kyangdam Sites 2 and 3: Left, site 2, possible animal; right, site 3, possible snow leopard. (Photos: W. Meertens [left] & W.E. Boyd [right]).

Site 4: The site comprises a cluster of boulders, three of which have petroglyphs.

Boulder A: This boulder is a shale boulder that has been split in two due to the effect of freeze and thawing; the two parts of the rock have separated slightly. The splitting of the boulder has divided one of the most distinctive images into two parts. The petroglyphs are on two faces, a side surface facing to the south, and an upper top surface facing towards the east.

The south face contains three animal images (Figure 4). One is a horse with a person on it. The second is clearly an ibex. The third is unclear, and may represent two animals; curved horns are clear but are in the middle of the 'back' of the animal. There is also an indeterminate oval shape. The ibex appears to be of the fully formed form *sensu* Jamwal & Thangspa (2011, p.286), of Vernier's (2016, Figure 3) stylistic group 3. This contrasts the image of the horse and person, which is of Vernier's group 1 linear style.

The east face contains several indeterminate shapes; they comprise various curves and other shapes that clearly have form (Figure 4). One angular swastika is present, with three and a half legs (i.e. one end return is absent). There is an image of a deer with clear antlers.

This is the face that has been split by freezing and thawing, resulting in part of the boulder moving away from its parent by some centimetres. The two parts contain halves of a single image. The original image is complex, with two concentric circles surrounded by five or six lateral and attached curved rectangles (Figure 4, bottom right; this photo has been taken from an angle to allow the complete image to be seen without its separation). This image appears to be in the form of a mandala of some type, but also bears some resemblance to an image of a painted "solar disc" published by Devkota & Bellezza (2017, Figure 13). Devkota & Bellezza describe their image thus: "In the middle of the panel there is a large solar orb with diamond-shaped rays that appear to be nine in number. ... This pictograph is assigned to the Protohistoric period ... The sun symbols of Spiti and Lo Mustang have decorative elements inside the central disc (including one or more concentric rings). In both peripheral plateau regions of the WTP [West Tibetan Plateau], these large sun symbols with nine rays occupy a prominent position among a panel of pictographs" (pp. 16-17). While the context of the circular image recorded here is not central to the panel, it may be considered to be associated with other images. To its right there appears to be a stepped shrine or chorten. The image comprises five rectangles upon each other, with some possible ornamentation at the top; it is hard to see if there is much other detail or ornamentation, but the image seems to be quite unornamented. Bellezza (2017a & 2017b), Singh et al. (2017, Figure 10), Devers et al. (2015, Figure 9), Devkota & Bellezza (2017, Figure 28), and Orofino (1990, Figures 2 & 3) all illustrate similar stepped shrines elsewhere in the region. This image does not have the intricate design found at other sites (Bellezza, 2017a).

Close to the shrine are two slightly overlapping images, perhaps composed together, of birds. Whether these are intended to be associated with the shrine image is unclear. This image (to the right of the shrine image, Figure 4, bottom left) appears to be of two non-

raptor birds. Drawn side on (cf. Vernier & Bruneau's, 2017 Figure 21.3, side group G style), they appear to be typical of images of partridges, quails and affiliated birds; these are drawn typically in profile standing on short legs and feet, with a rounded body and head and beak visible (Bruneau & Bellezza, 2013). Vernier & Bruneau (2017, pp.325-326) note that these characteristics “enable us to hypothesize the representation of snowcocks, partridges, geese or ducks, without being more specific”. Three characteristics of these images strongly suggest that they are images of partridge- or quail-like birds: (i) the shape of the bodies; (ii) lack of ornamentation (cf. Bruneau & Bellezza, 2013, Figure IV.13); and (iii) lack of a curved beak (signifying, according to Vernier & Bruneau (2017), possible identification as a goose or duck).

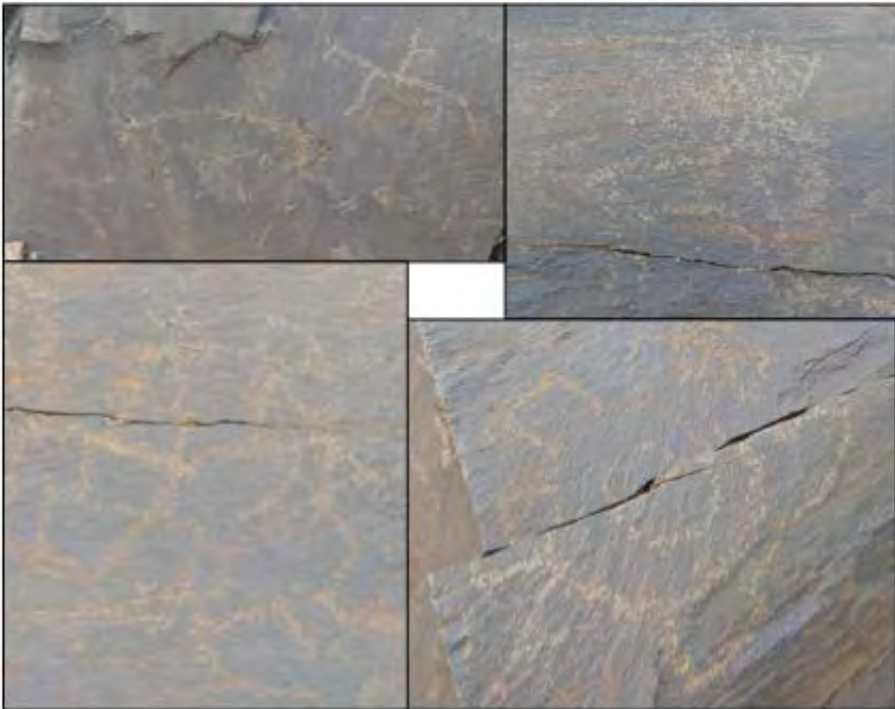


Figure 4: Kyangdam Site 4, Boulder A: Top left: the south face, showing a person on a horse (top right), an ibex (lower left) and less determinable images further to the left. Top right: the east face, a deer, located above the images of the shrine or chorten and mandala or sub disc image. Bottom left: the east face, showing a stepped shrine and possible bird images to its right. Bottom right: the east face, showing the mandala or solar disc image. (Photos: W. Meertens [bottom] & W.E. Boyd [top]).

Boulder B: This slightly schistose boulder has three petroglyphs, one on a more or less vertical east-facing side, and two on an upper

surface inclined towards the north (Figure 5). The east face has an image resembling an ibex or yak, more likely the latter. It is cut into the strike face of the boulder, across the rock bedding. The upper surface contains an image of sheep, plus an angular swastika. These images have been scratched onto the rock surface.

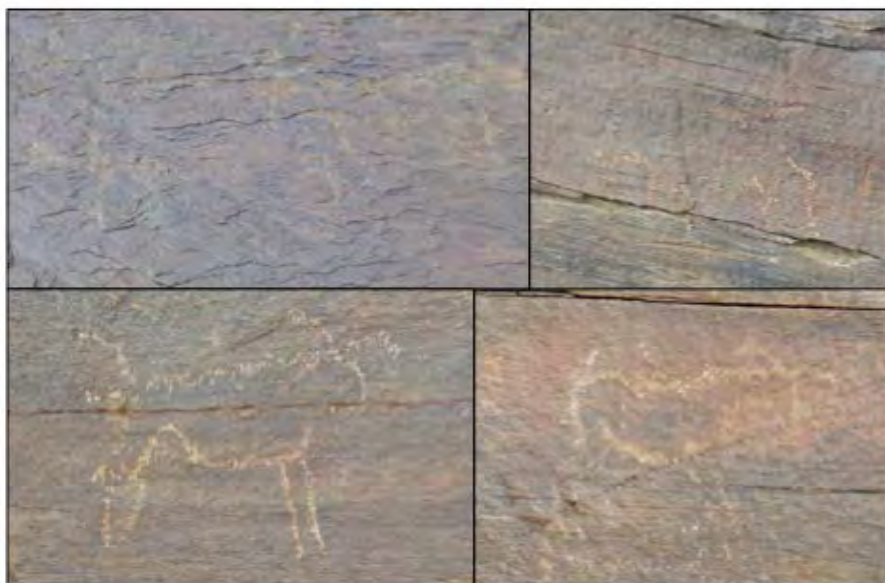


Figure 5: Kyangdam Site 4: Top: Boulder B, with image of a sheep and an angular swastika on the upper surface (left) and yak on the side surface (right). Bottom: Boulder C, showing two of the three sheep images. (Photos: W. Meertens).

Boulder C: This boulder has images of three sheep, also on the strike faces of the boulder, two very clearly showing the distinctive shape of their horns (cf. Vernier, 2016, Figure III.6), the third less clearly so (Figure 5).

Site 5: This site comprises a single large schistose boulder, with modern carvings on one vertical face. On the east-facing surface, inclined slightly towards the north, however, are some ancient pecked petroglyphs typical of the others in this locality (Figure 6). They comprise a dynamic image of two yaks facing each other, possibly fighting. There is much detail, including eyes and raised tails, with the ball tails and other detail typical of Vernier's (2016, Figures 3 & 4) stylistic third group. These stand out as examples of Vernier's observations (p. 79) that "they reflect a high sense of observation and a sharp knowledge of the ... animal specificities ... portray[ing] very accurately the animals in their most characteristic

postures". There are marks above the heads that resemble clouds of dust, plus lines extending northwards towards a further dynamic component of this image, a standing person. The person is holding a bow and arrow, facing the yaks. This scene appears to be a carefully composed scene rather than a collection of individual images, a characteristic that differentiates this site from most of the others. The lines above the animals may be variously interpreted as representing the sky or mountains in the background. This scene is not dissimilar to typical scenes of a hunter on foot hunting a yak from elsewhere in the region (Bruneau & Bellezza, 2013, Figure V.8.). Tshangspa (n.d.) notes that hunting scenes are common, and that they may date from throughout antiquity, still being made in places until recently.



Figure 6: Kyangdam Site 5: Dynamic scene of yaks and person with bow and arrow. There may be dust or clouds above the heads of the yak, and lines connecting the animals with the person. (Photo: P. Slavich).

Site 6: This site comprises a group of boulders on a ridge on the northern side of a valley, six of which are recorded here to have petroglyphs.

Boulder A: This is a single boulder of slate with a number of images on one horizontal surface. It appears to contain dynamic images of people (Figure 7). There is one small image of a person-like shape, arms with clearly marked hands (spread fingers) extended outwards and upwards, one leg vertical and one leg bent sideways. This is a finely pecked image, with fine detail. It has a weathering patina over it, and so may be relatively older than the other images. It appears to be dynamic, showing movement of some type, perhaps dancing. Tshangspa (n.d.) provides similar images from Domkhar Sanctuary II, claimed to date from what Tshangspa identifies as the

Achaemenid period (550-330 BCE). Such antiquity accords with the degree of weathering over this image.

There are two larger similar images, made with coarser pecking that this first image (Figure 7). The impression is that these may be derivative of the smaller image, perhaps copied from them at a later date. They may have extra legs, and it may be that at least one of the images is either conflating a person and an animal, or represents a person on an animal. They appear to be in a dynamic pose, and are probably wearing headdresses. These zoomorphic images of possible hybrid animal-person beings may be representing some form of priest or spirit. Bellezza (2017a, Figure 13) illustrates what he calls “a lone figure with avian and anthropomorphic qualities”. Is it possible these two images also represent such animal-person hybrids? Bellezza (2017a, p.22) explains that the “carved motifs lend themselves to comparison with traits of ancient priests enumerated in Yungdrung Bon and Old Tibetan literature”, although cautions that none of the identifications are certain. It may be, nevertheless, that the association between the dancing person and these apparently hybrid animal-people or priestly figures is deliberate.



Figure 7: Kyangdam Site 6, Boulder A: People in dynamic poses. Left, moving or dancing person; this was particularly hard to photograph due to the weathering patina on the rock surface. The two right hand ones appear to have possible headdresses. (Photos: W. Meertens [left] & K. Negi [centre and right]).

There are various other images on this boulder, including some less obvious shapes. Animal images include ibex, sheep and deer. This also contains a possible dynamic scene with a person on horse with bow and arrow hunting a yak (Figure 8, bottom right); there may be a smaller second person on a horse with a bow and arrow nearby, and perhaps a third horse and person (very faint) to the left of two circles. Bruneau & Bellezza (2016, Figure V.9) show a similar scene. There is

a line drawing that resembles a running horse, with the mane depicted.

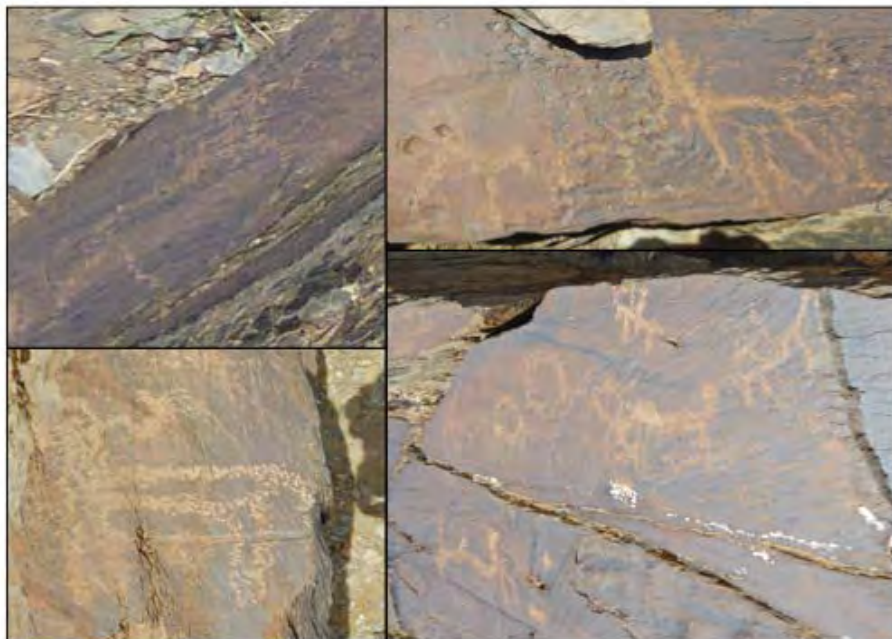


Figure 8: Kyangdam Site 6, Boulder A: Top left, moving horse; bottom left, deer. Top left and right, a variety of animals, including possible ibex and sheep. Near the top of bottom right is a possible dynamic scene with a person on horse with bow and arrow (and possibly a second person on a horse) hunting a yak; there may be a third horse and person to the left of the two circles. Below the crack is a yak image in linear form (Photos: W. Meertens [bottom left and top & bottom right] & P. Slavich [top left]).

Boulder B: This is a large slate boulder further up the hill slope from Boulder A. It has five images, on an upper surface, of yaks, plus three swastikas (Figure 9). One is an angular swastika, while the second is a hybrid angular-curved swastika. This latter swastika has two angular legs, one curved leg and one slightly curved corner, and may represent type of swastika that is linked with sun and moon motifs (Bellezza, 2017a), with the curved arm extensions representing the moon crescent. The third swastika only has three legs. There are also seemingly random pecking marks on this boulder.

Boulder C: This boulder is at the highest elevation at this locality (Figure 9). It contains images of three people, with some detail, including hands and feet. One may be holding an object in one of its hands. All are scratched onto a horizontal surface.



Figure 9: Kyangdam Site 6. Top: Boulder B: two of the swastikas with one of the images of yaks. Bottom: Boulder C, showing three three images of people. (Photos: K. Negi).

Boulder D: This is a small boulder with an image of a possible person holding a bow.

Boulder E: This is a north-facing schistose boulder with a single pecked image of a yak (Figure 10). The image differs from most of the others recorded at this locality, in that its body is filled in rather than just being an outline, and contains detail. It represents Vernier's (2016, Figure 3) stylistic group 3B. There may be another animal behind the horns of this one.

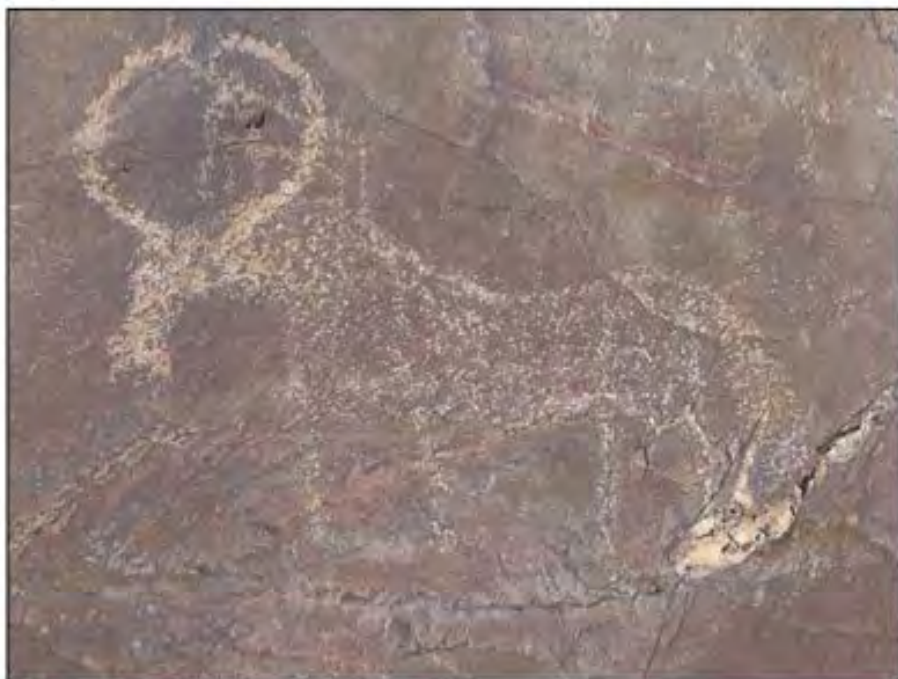


Figure 10: Kyangdam Site 6. Top: Boulder E, with a single image of a yak; unusually for this locality the image is infilled. (Photo: P. Slavich).

Boulder F: This is a small east-facing boulder with several images in it (Figure 11). There is person on a horse on one north-facing vertical surface, and three yaks on a westerly facing near-vertical surface. The yaks, facing to the left, are of Vernier's (2016, Figure 3) stylistic group 3B. They may be composed into a scene. There is a probable horse and rider behind them, and a possible bird above them. There is one small squat animal-like image on the same surface, which may represent a marmot. Its legs are very short, and its head is close into the body. If this does represent a marmot, it is a rare occurrence, since marmots are not known to be represented in the petroglyph art of the region (Vernier & Bruneau, 2017).



Figure 11: Kyangdam Site 6. Boulder F, with with a dynamic scene of three yaks and possible horse and person behind them, and a bird above them (right). Top right, a horse and person on another face of this boulder, and bottom right depicts a possible marmot (Photos: W.E. Boyd [left and bottom right] & K. Negi [top right]).

Site 7: This site comprises two boulders with a rich collection of petroglyphs (Figure 12).

Boulder A: On the first slate boulder, petroglyphs are present on two surfaces (Figure 12). One small smooth southerly facing dip surface has three animal images on it. One is a deer stag, another resembles a sheep, and the third is difficult to identify. The latter has a dog-like appearance, and may represent a canid of some type; the long legs may suggest it is a wolf. The image is much fresher than the others and has been scraped onto the rock surface; it may be a recent or modern addition to the images. On a nearby similar surface there is another sheep. A northwesterly-facing vertical strike surface on the same boulder has four animal images, along with other patterns and shapes. Images each of one ibex and one deer look like all others at the locality, while one image of a yak looks much fresher and is probably a more recent addition. The ibex is, as elsewhere at this locality, of Jamwal & Thangspa' (2011) fully formed type. There is one image that has an appearance of a canid, and may represent a wolf or a fox. There is also a short-legged animal image that may represent a marmot. There is one possible bird image resembling a standing bird with its wings out and head and beak held upwards; it resembles a water bird such as a cormorant. In addition to these animal images, there are various indeterminate petroglyphs that

appear to be abstract or deliberate shapes, including one circle. They may be symbols. The combination of a rectangle and circle (right, Figure 12) may represent a stepped shrine (cf. Bellezza, 2017a, Figure 7), although this should be taken as a very tentative identification.

Boulder B: On the second boulder, on a vertical strike surface facing, there are two more dynamic animals (Figure 12). They have large tails, resembling images of yaks, although the bodies better resemble horses. One is associated with another image with the appearance of something standing behind it at its side. Whether this is another animal or a person is difficult to determine. These images are tentatively interpreted as moving horses, one with a rider.



Figure 12: Kyangdam Site 7: Left: Boulder A, showing a deer, a sheep and an unidentified animal (top left) and an ibex, a deer, a yak and a possible canid, plus other shapes (right). Bottom left: Boulder B, showing the dynamic scene of possible multiple animals and rider (Photos: W.E. Boyd [left] & P. Slavich [right]).

Site 8: This is a boulder in the vicinity of the others; its details were not recorded at the time, but a photograph was taken of it in passing (Figure 13). The image is a dynamic image of two yaks facing each other, with a possible person between them, and a fourth image to the right, a possible second person or a bird. The yak images are unusual at this locality in that they are filled in, and they fall into Vernier's (2016, Figure 3) stylistic group 3.



Figure 13: Kyangdam Site 8: Boulder with a dynamic scene of two yaks facing each other with one or two people; unusually, these images are shaded in. (Photo: W. Meertens).

Site 9: This is also a boulder in the vicinity of the others, and as for site 8, its details were not recorded at the time. However, a photograph was taken of it in passing (Figure 14). The image is of dynamic scene of one horse and rider and one person with a bow and arrow seemingly following a yak. All are facing right. These images are shaded in, and all fall into Vernier's (2016, Figure 3) stylistic group 3. While Jamwal & Thangspa (2011, p. 289) suggest that carvings showing "crude weapons such as ... bow and arrow" can be considered older than those with modern weapons, this dating method is not reliable.



Figure 14: Kyangdam Site 9: Boulder with a dynamic scene of one horse and rider and one person with a bow and arrow following a yak, all facing right; unusually, these images are shaded in. (Photo: D. Trezise).

Site 10: Several further boulders with petroglyphs were observed in passing, and while no notes were made of these images at the time, some were photographed (Figures 15 - 17).

These boulders contain two yaks (one boulder), and an indeterminate shape (not illustrated here). A second boulder also has a yak, along with a distinctive image that resembles a horse and rider (Figure 15, top right). The latter differs from other horse and rider images at this locality in that it appears to represent movement: the rider appears to be holding reins, the horse's legs are in a running position, and the tail is streaming out behind. Two boulders contain images of three sheep (Figures 15 & 16 both bottom right), while a fifth boulder has the image of an ibex (Figure 16 top right).

One boulder has an image of a chorten (Figure 15 bottom left); this comprises the outline of three rectangles, one upon the other, the middle one being narrower than the others, with some possible ornamentation at the top. Orofino (1990, Figures 17 & 18) illustrates similar images.

A further boulder has the partial image of an inscription (Figure 15, bottom middle). This appears to have been pecked with a round-ended metal object (the peck marks are circular and resemble the marks an awl would make) and is much fresher than other petroglyphs at this locality. It resembles completed inscriptions on collections of Buddhist Mani stones or stone plates that are common throughout Ladakh. There are linear mounds of these between this locality and the village of Korzok, and occasional mounds elsewhere in the valleys of this district. This is probably modern or recent.

One boulder contains a dynamic scene (Figure 16) in which two yaks appear to be facing a snow leopard. To the right of the yaks is the faint image of a person on a horse.

Further images (Figure 17) include four more yaks, one in the linear style, an ibex, and two zoomorphic images. One of the latter has the appearance of a canid, and may represent a wolf.



Figure 15: Kyangdam Site 10: Various boulders at Locality 1 with petroglyphs: Top left, two yaks. Top right, yak and moving horse and rider. Bottom left, chorten. Bottom middle, partial Mani inscription. Bottom right, sheep (Photos: P. Slavich).

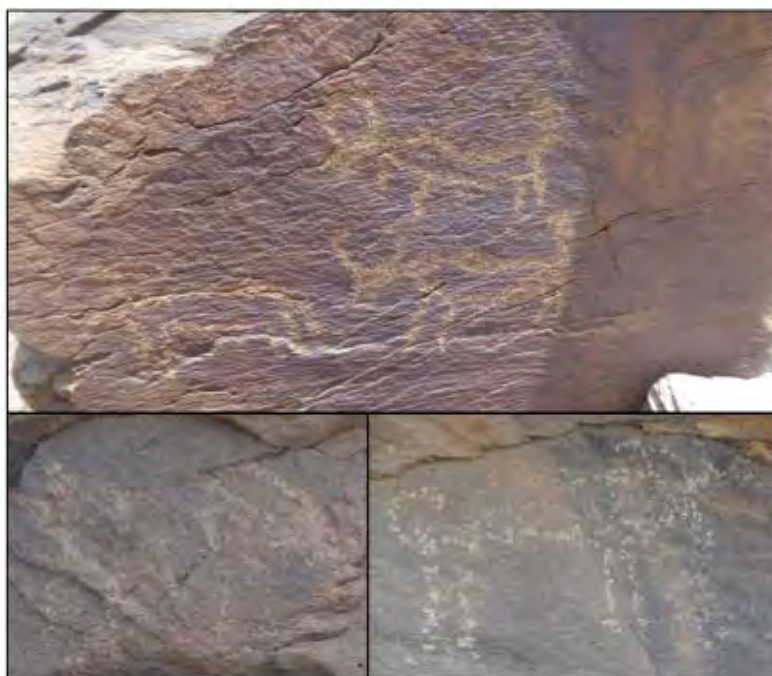


Figure 16: Kyangdam Site 10, various boulders, continued: Top: A dynamic scene, with two yaks in the centre, facing a snow leopard, and, on the other side (faintly) a person on a horse. Bottom: ibex (left) and sheep (right). (Photos: P. Slavich [top] & K. Negi [bottom]).

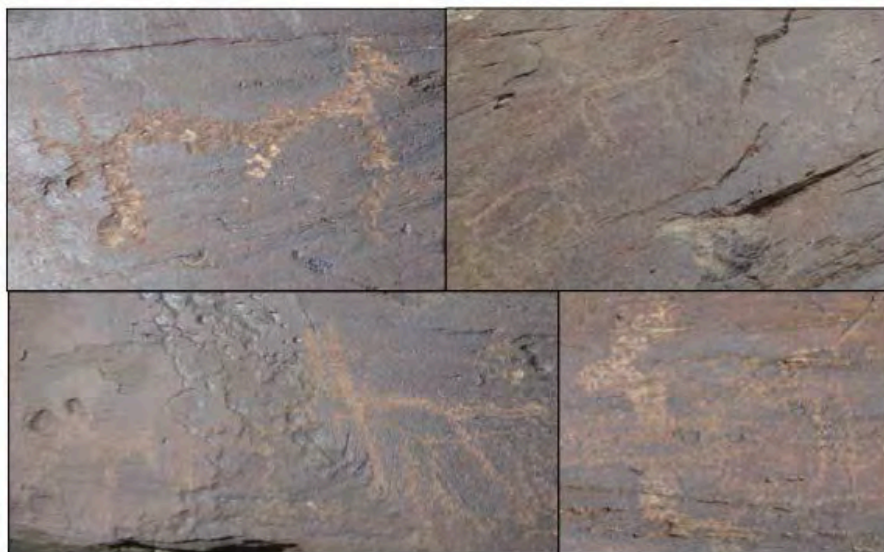


Figure 17: Kyangdam Site 10, various boulders, continued. Top right, three yaks. Bottom left, two zoomorphic images, the right hand one having a canid appearance. Bottom right, ibex. The image at top left is a close-up of the linear form yak at Site 2 Boulder A (Figure 8) (Photos: K. Negi).

Locality 2: Latho Gongma

This locality is close to a former nomadic trading post on the northeastern side of the floor of the Phirse Pho valley, close to a path. It lies at an altitude of approximately 4670 m above sea level and at the location $78^{\circ}12'E$ $32^{\circ}47'N$. The site sits on the lower slopes of a large alluvial fan, draining northeast to southwest from the nearby Korzok Range. At this location, the nearby mountain bedrock comprises the Precambrian-Palaeozoic metasediments component of the Tsomoriri crystalline complex (Steck et al., 1998; de Sigoyer et al., 2004; Mishra et al., 2015). The underlying bedrock in this area comprises the Tethys sediments of the Zanskar Spiti Basin, mostly marine sediments, but with alluvial and colluvial input from the crystalline rocks of the mountains to the northeast providing much of the alluvium and colluvium, including some of the boulders in this locality.

This site was only noted in passing as the trekking group passed through this area. The petroglyphs are found on deeply weathered (strong varnish) quartzitic boulders. Only brief observations were made, recording impressions of one yak, one ibex and other some indeterminate shapes.

Summary and overview

While identification of the intended image is uncertain in some cases, it is clear that the petroglyphs at these localities are deliberate depictions of animals, people, symbols and other objects. This is in keeping with interpretations of petroglyphs elsewhere in Ladakh (Aas, 2017; Bellezza, 2017a, b; Bruneau & Bellezza, 2013; Bruneau & Vernier, 2010; Devers et al., 2015; Jamwal & Thangspa, 2011; Orofino, 1990; Singh et al., 2017; Tshangspa, n.d.; Vernier, 2016; Vernier & Bruneau, 2017).

The following is a summary and tally of both confident and tentative identifications of the identified images at the Kyangdam locality.

Animals

- **Yak:** Twenty-four confident and one tentative identifications; four infilled and one in linear style; several are in dynamic scenes.
- **Horse:** Nine confident and four tentative identifications; eight of these with a person on it and four others may have a person. Only one is without a rider. None of the horses have the distinctive build and upright mane of the native kyang (cf. Bruneau & Bellezza, 2013, Figure V.25).
- **Sheep:** Nine confident and one tentative identifications; these may be blue sheep, although there are many ovicaprid species in the region.
- **Birds:** Four confident and four tentative identifications; the tentative identifications include one possible eagle, while the confident identifications are likely to be partridge- or quail-type birds, while one resembles a larger waterbird.
- **Ibex:** Five confident identifications.
- **Deer:** Four confident identifications.
- **Canid; wolf or fox:** Three tentative identifications. Vernier & Bruneau (2017) note the difficulty in differentiating wolves from foxes, although the long legs of one of the images suggests a wolf-like appearance, and build of a second also suggests a wolf-like appearance.
- **Snow leopard:** One confident and one tentative identification. Vernier & Bruneau (2017) note that these tend to be relatively easy to identify, commonly with long thin tails curled at the tip and having spots. Likewise, Bruneau & Bellezza's (2013, Figure III.5 and V.18) images of snow leopards or "spotted felines" are quite distinctive. The image tentatively identified

here is less clearly defined, while the confident identification clearly shows the body, head and long curved tail.

- **Marmot:** Two tentative identifications. If these are correct identifications, they may represent a new element to the zoomorphic fauna of the region. Vernier & Bruneau (2017) note that marmot (along with bear, hare and pika) is not represented amongst the petroglyph art of the region.
- **Uncertain:** Three images appear to be animals but are unclear as to what type of animal.

People

- **People:** Six confident and three tentative identifications; all are standing, and some may be moving, possibly dancing; two are dynamic with a bow and arrow, and a two more may be holding a bow and arrow.
- **People on horses:** See above; eight confident and four tentative identifications. Most of the images appear to be static, in some cases with the rider holding (or firing) a bow and arrow; in one case, the horse is moving and the rider appears to be holding reins.
- **Face or mask:** One tentative identification.
- **Hybrid animal-human zoomorphic forms:** Two images are distinctive, and may represent a hybrid animal-person, in dynamic pose with headdresses; these may represent priestly figures, and are associated with the one possibly dancing person.

Symbols

- **Swastikas:** Eight confident identifications; various styles are present, some angular, some curved, and others mixed. The curved swastikas may include sun or moon motifs.
- **Mandala or solar disc:** One confidently identified; the image is very clear and clearly a deliberately designed and ordered image; it may be associated with a stepped shrine or chorten.
- **Stepped shrine or chorten:** Two confidently identified and one tentatively identified. One may be associated with partridge-like bird images; this is on the same face as, and possibly associated with, the mandala image.
- **Unidentified image:** One very distinctive image may represent a spirit or other totemic image.

- ***Partial inscription:*** One confident identification of a partial inscription typical of Buddhist Mani stones. This may be recent or modern.

Miscellaneous shapes: In addition to the above, there are many seemingly random or abstract peckings, curves, ovoid or rectilinear shapes, and lines.

This assemblage aligns well with Vernier & Bruneau's (2017) assessment of the region, in that the majority of motifs tend to be zoomorphic. The order of abundance in this study differs slightly from theirs. The main forms identified here are yak and sheep, with a few ibex and deer. Vernier & Bruneau (2017) suggest that ibex are the most common, comprising about half of the zoomorphic images in the region. This difference may reflect the lower altitudes of many sites in the region. It is likely that fewer people will travel through this locality and at the altitude of the Kyangdam locality. They are likely to be predominantly yak herders or sheep herders, hence the predominance of yak and sheep images. There are no permanent settlements in this part of Ladakh, which may account for the lack of domestic animals other than horses.

Jamwal & Thangspa (2011, Table 1) list categories of rock art in Ladakh. It is notable that the domesticated or lower altitude animals in their list are absent in this assemblage (antelope, elephant, bison, dog and double humped camel). It is likely that there are images of heavenly bodies, and religious and other symbols present, but for the moment, only those identified as swastika, chorten and possible sun and moon images, along with the putative mandala (not listed by Jamwal & Thangspa) are noted here; some of the undetermined images are relatively simple (e.g. circles), and there is little evidence for symbols such as cupules and more complex signs. Human images are all either standing or hunting, with one possible dancing person. People in rituals, dancing, fighting or at worship appear to be rare, although the two potential priestly figures may represent the ritual category of images. The presence only of bows and arrows (and apparent absence of axes, swords, maces, shields, daggers or sticks) supports an interpretation of the assemblage of images being related to hunting in this high-altitude region.

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Heavenly Ascents after Death Karma Chags med's *Commentary on Mind Transference*


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Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven
as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like god,
as far as possible and to become like him is to become just,
holy and wise.

PLATO, *Theaetetus* (176b)

Celestial Journeys

isionary accounts of heavenly ascents and descents by means of a ladder, a tree, a rope and so forth, play an integral part in the sacred narratives of religions around the world.¹ These varied experiences—which arguably represent an archetypal journey that connects the spiritual explorer to a supra-mundane reality—are often associated with notions of spiritual sublimation, divine kingship, and the transition of the soul from this life to a transcendent state, heaven or the underworld. Legendary reports of celestial travels reported by yogis, theurgists, and shamans are attested across traditions; for example, in Menelaus' transfer to the Elysian fields, Heracles' admission to Mt. Olympus, the assumption of Mithra into heaven by a celestial chariot, and the visions of Jacob and the prophet Muhammad of a ladder reaching towards God. Further to the East, Yudhiṣṭhira of the *Mahābhārata* rides on Indra's chariot to higher realms and the Buddha ascends and descends from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods.

Tibetan legends speak of the 'seven sky thrones' (*gnam la khri bdun*), the first line of kings descending from heaven to earth to act as rulers. Upon completing their task, by means of a sacred cord (*dmu thag*)—a white light beam—they ascended to heaven leaving no mortal remains on earth. In the *Pillar Testament*, it is said:

¹ In his comprehensive study, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (1958: 99–111), Mircea Eliade has noted the prevalence of sky myths and related hierophanies, commenting on their function and symbolism across diverse religious traditions.

With reference to those seven, they possessed, on their crowns, the so-called 'divine daemon-cord' (*mutak*). This was a ray of white light. When those seven passed from suffering and journeyed to the realm of the gods, they dissolved into light from their feet upwards, and after the light faded into the sky they left no corpses behind. So it is said that the mausoleums of the seven thrones were planted in space.²

Across the Eurasian continent, we encounter narratives of divine kingship. In China, the emperors were regarded as sons of heaven (*tian zi* 天子) and Tibetan rulers and hierarchs of various schools exploited, to their advantage, Buddhist sagas of celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas reincarnating as returning bodhisattvas (*sprul sku*) for the welfare of their polities, enjoying indisputable rights of secular and spiritual sovereignty over their subjects.

Tucci (1980: 246) has long noted that, for the Tibetans, the connection between heaven and earth was a primeval article of faith that found ritual expression in the worship of mountains as contact zones between this world and another, and as sacred places for pilgrimage. The symbiotic relationship between shamanism and clerical Buddhism has shaped the development and expression of Tibetan religion and society,³ and resulted in the role of the Buddhist lama appropriating the functions of a shaman. He was thus expected to display mastery of supernatural forces when performing tantric rituals to extend life, summoning wealth and prosperity, interpret dreams and omens, defeating negative beings, and guiding the spirits of the dead in their transition to the afterlife. In time, ritual mastery, along with expertise in Buddhist doctrinal learning, became the highest Tibetan ideal embodied in the person of the 'scholar-siddha' (*mkhas grub*).

Despite attempts to purge Early Buddhism from mystical elements and repackage it as a rational system compatible with modern science, 'supernatural themes' are not altogether absent. In the Pāli sources, we read of miraculous events performed at Śrāvastī by Śākyamuni: the immediate growth of a mango tree; doppelgängers of himself manifesting in heavenly and terrestrial abodes; and the emissions of fire and water from his shoulders and feet as he rose into the air. Having performed these miracles, Śākyamuni ascended to Trāyastriṃśa, the Heaven of Thirty-Three, where he spent three months teaching his deceased mother, Māyā, while seated on the Armolika rock (*ar mo ling ka'i rdo leb*). The Armolika was later

² *Bka' chems ka khol ma*, pp. 84–85; translation by Kapstein (2006:37). For an extensive discussion on Tibetan kingship and cosmogony, see Davidson (2003).

³ The implication of the Central Asian or, rather, Eurasian roots of such themes have been explored by Geoffrey Samuel in *Civilized Shamans* (1993).

identified with the celestial seat of Buddha Vajradhara, an emanation of Buddha Śākyamuni teaching the tantras in non-human realms.⁴

His descent from Trāyastrimśa, by means of a bejewelled ladder provided by Śakra, is a cause for festivities in many Buddhist countries. In Tibetan societies, it is celebrated as the Buddha's descent from the gods (*lha babs dus chen*) commemorated on the twenty-second day of the ninth month. Astral journeys to celestial realms are, in fact, at the core of Buddhist lore. Śākyamuni is said to have resided in Tuṣita heaven as the bodhisattva Setaketu (Dam pa tog dkar po) before his final rebirth in our world, and the bodhisattva Maitreya is currently there waiting to descend to earth for his final birth as a buddha. The motif of heavenly arrivals and departures is common in Mahāyāna where it is believed that all bodhisattvas who have realized the tenth *bhūmi* will take birth in Tuṣita before their final birth in our human world to attain enlightenment. Nevertheless, bodhisattvas who descend to our world can take different forms. While early Buddhism did not promote the notion of the divinity of kings, in the twelfth chapter of the late Mahāyāna sutra, the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama* ('Phags pa gser 'od dam pa mdo sde'i dbang po'i rgyal po; Noble Utmost Golden Light, King of Kings of Sūtra-s; Tōh. 557), a virtuous and moral ruler is a divine son who is said to have descended from the realm of the gods to our mortal world to teach us righteousness and justice.

Transferring one's consciousness

The tantric technique of *phowa* ('*pho ba*),⁵ or transferring one's consciousness (*rnam shes*) at the time of death to a celestial realm, may very well be situated within the framework of comparative studies in religion; however, other than pointing at some profitable areas of comparison, a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of the present study. *Phowa*, also known as 'buddhahood without meditation' (*ma sgom sangs rgyas*),⁶ belongs to the traditions of the highest yoga tantra

⁴ The appeal of this motif for later tantric teachings is evident in the preparatory training required for the performance of *phowa*, where the yogi is instructed to repeatedly fly in his dreams to the celestial seat of Buddha Vajradhara located in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three; see *Dags po'i bka' 'bum*, Kragh (2015: 356).

⁵ From the intransitive Tibetan verb '*pho ba*'; to pass, to change place, shift, migrate, eject, transfer or transit. The term is often used in the compound *tshe 'pho ba* (lit. 'transiting between lives'), referring to dying and transmigrating to another life. It is also attested in several tantric texts with reference to the transit of energy-winds ('*pho ba dbugs*) where during the course of 24 hours, 21.600 energy-winds flow in 24 transits.

⁶ This phrase, in reference to *phowa*, is attested to in several works of a later date, such as the *Collected Works of Gampopa* (*Gsung 'bum*, vol. 32, 10b) and in the *Six Dharmas of Niguma* (*Ni gu ma chos drug*).

and it is the most popular post-mortem ritual performed in funerals by adepts on behalf of the deceased to ensure a favourable rebirth.⁷ Its unique feature entails the visualization of an interiorized ‘ladder’ (i.e. a transparent channel) inside the subtle-body that serves as passageway for the transference of consciousness directed out of the crown of the head into a state subjectivized as a Mahāyāna deity, one’s guru (lama) or, more commonly, a ‘pure land’ (*dag pa’i zhing khams*) of one’s choice.



Illustration 1: Jade Burial Suit, Han Dynasty
(Aurora Museum, Shanghai; photo by Georgios T. Halkias).

Although *phowa* is used in the higher tantras,⁸ it constitutes the lesser of two ways to disconnect the coarse from the subtle levels of mind. Cozort (1986: 98) explains that mind-transference merely separates the coarse and subtle bodies but does not lead to the attainment of the

⁷ According to Thubten Sangay (2011: 50), *phowa* is an important ritual performed by expert lamas on behalf of the dead who may also prescribe ‘consciousness transference pills’ pressed upon the crown of the deceased.

⁸ Thubten Yeshe (1991: 1) has noted that, although mind-transference belongs to the highest level of tantra, “many skillful Tibetan lamas have extracted it from this context and have presented it in terms of the deities of the lower levels of tantra.”

illusory body (*sgyu lus*) realized during the completion-stage meditation known as the ‘final mental isolation’ (*sems dben*) that necessitates the intimacy of a physical partner, a tantric consort or ‘action-seal’ (*las kyi phyag rgya*; Skt. *karma-mudrā*). According to subtle body theory, one’s awareness circulates in the form of motility (*rlung*; Skt. *prāṇa*) across a plane comprising a thin, luminous network of conductors and circuits emanating from a trilateral axis visualized in the physical body. The middle axis, called the *avadhūti* (*dbu ma rtsa*), runs parallel to the cerebrospinal column joining the circuit-of-bliss in the crown of the head with the phallus or vagina. Two channels adjacent to the middle axis run in lateral courses or in a helix. The left (*rkyang ma*) and right (*ro ma*) channels bifurcate respectively at the left and right nostrils and join the central channel at the perineum. According to the *Condensed Kālacakra Tantra*, “when the winds of the two [channels] are stopped, an opening is made at the crown of the head, whereupon one goes to the cities of the supreme.”⁹

Consistent with general Buddhist thought, all sentient beings—propelled by the force of karma—are bound to experience a recurring cycle of deaths and rebirths labelled *saṃsāra*. The *phowa* technique enables the practitioner to evade the karmic consequences of his actions and free himself from this cycle, attaining either final release from *saṃsāra* or rebirth in a pure land. In line with tantric theory, when a person dies, his subtle-mind exits through one of nine orifices (*bu ga dgu*) that comprise the lower openings (urethra and anus) and the upper ones, namely the mouth, eyes, ears, nose, and the so-called aperture of Brahmā (Skt. *brahmarandhra*; *tshangs bug*) located on the cranium.¹⁰

For most individuals, consciousness exits through any of the eight openings leading to various rebirths in *saṃsāra*, whereas the *phowa* adept directs it to egress through the aperture of Brahmā. Among the signs of successful practice, a minute hole is said to appear at the anterior fontanelle on the crown of the head, enabling one’s subtle-mind to depart at the time of death. Concerning this process, Guenther (1963: 201) explains:

When a competent Guru imparts this instruction to his disciple, the region of the fontanel opening becomes highly sensitive to touch and remains so for some time. Moreover, when after the instruction he

⁹ Cited in Butön’s *Rgyud sde spyi’i rnam par gzhag pa rgyud sde rin po che’i mdzes rgyan*; see Hopkins (2008: 237).

¹⁰ In his massive encyclopaedic work, the *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, Dung dkar blo bzang ‘phrin las (1927–1997) lists the spot between the eyebrows (*smin mtshams*) and the navel (*lte ba*) in this enumeration. This corresponds to the orifices enumerated in the *Catuṣpīṭha-tantra* (4.3.37); see Szántó (2012: 458).

touches this region with Kusa-grass, symbolically representing the opening of the passage to the ultimate, the distinct sensation of being pierced from top to bottom is created. Needless to say, this practice is not without its dangers and under no circumstances can it be performed when there is any deformation in the bones of the skull or in the spinal cord.

This controversial esoteric technique (Skt. *utkrānti*), by which a tantric practitioner is able to sever his connection to the physical body, goes by the Indian reference to ‘yogic’ or ‘ritual’ suicide. It is attested in many Śaiva scriptures, in one *Vaiṣṇava Samhitā*, and a handful of Śākta Tantras.¹¹ It appears to be of non-Buddhist origin.¹² The *Catuṣpīṭha-tantra*, one of the earliest late ninth-century *Yoginī-tantras*, is likely the first Indian Buddhist scripture to contain teachings on this method. Mention of *utkrānti* is found in an earlier text, the *Dvikramatattvabhavānā Mukhāgama* of the siddha Buddhāśrījñāna/ Jñānapāda before the second half of the eighth century.¹³ Yogic methods of ejecting consciousness out of one’s body and into the body of another (*parakāyapraveśa*) finds evidence in the *Mahābhārata*, such as when Vidura enters the body of Yudhiṣṭhira to strengthen him. Mallinson and Singleton (2017: 661) note that “the entry of one’s mind into another body (*cittasya paraśarīrāveśaḥ*) is listed as one of the special powers in *Pātāñjalayogaśāstra* 3.38 (10.4), and the commentator Vijñānabhikṣu notes that this process is accomplished along a particular subtle channel.”

Tibetan references to the different varieties of *phowa* are to be sought in post-imperial sources traced, for the most part, either to Indian masters or Tibetan revelations (*gter ma*). In his commentary, *Three Convictions: A Guide to the Stages of Training in the Profound Path of Naro’s Six Dharmas* (Tōh. 5317), Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) states that there are

¹¹ See White (2009: 114). Testimonia to the Śaiva tantra *Mālinīvijayottara* (17.25-34), contains a list of Śiva texts teaching methods for exiting from the physical body and it should be distinguished from the “fanatical practices of suicide practiced by the Māheśvara laity” (Somadeva Vasudeva, 2004: 437).

¹² According to Szántó (2012: 456), “the earliest sources to teach something akin to *utkrānti* are brahmanical. E.g. the *Brhadāranyakopaniṣad* describes the soul leaving the body through one of the bodily apertures (4.4.1 ff.) and its path to different levels of the Universe (5,10.1). A similar course is described in the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* (5,10.1 ff.), while another passage (8,6.1 ff.) also describes tubes in the body and an egress through which one obtains immortality.” It seems that the belief that the soul ought to depart from the upper top of the cranium, Brahmā’s aperture, may not be confined to Brahmanical sources. A jade burial suit (175 cm in length), sewn with gold wire, that dates to the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE) shows all bodily apertures closed save of a hole in the fontanelle; see Illustration 1.

¹³ Szántó (2012: 455). The Tibetan translation of *Catuṣpīṭha-tantra* (*Gdan bzhi pa*; Tōh. 428) by Gayādhara and Khug pa lhas btsas dates from the eleventh century.

a number of oral traditions on the method of transference. Its origins can be traced to the *Catuṣpīṭha-tantra* but it is also taught in the *Vajradāka* and *Samputa* tantras and their commentaries (Mullin 2005: 86, 209). All orders of Tibetan Buddhism practice it widely and trace it to different lineages, including the Bön.

For the Gelug and Kagyü schools, *phowa* is commonly included in the *Six Dharmas of Nāropa* (*Nā ro chos drug*).¹⁴ Marpa's biography recounts that, when Marpa was to die, a rainbow appeared in the sky and flowers rained down. When asked by his attendant what was happening, he replied: "Prepare excellent offerings. Glorious Naropa surrounded by immeasurable hosts of dakas and dakinis has arrived to escort me as he promised. Now I must go to the celestial realm as his attendant." (Tsang Nyön Heruka, 1995: 200).

In the tradition of the Old Kadampa, we find reference to this practice in the manual, *The Hero Entering the Battle* (*'Pho ba dpa' bo g.yul 'jug pa*) and, in the school of the Sakya, it is based on the *Hevajra-tantra* included in the *Lamdrë* (*Lam 'bras*) teachings brought to Tibet by Gayādhara and Brog mi lo tsa ba in the late tenth to early eleventh centuries.¹⁵ For the Nyingma and some of the Kagyü lineages, *phowa* is traced to revealed treasures (*gter ma*).¹⁶ It also features in the independent lineage of Chöd (*gcod*) in the technique known as *opening the gates of space* (*nam mkha' sgo 'byed*). For the Bön there are several *phowa* lineages such as, the *Six Principles of Expediency* (*lam khyer drug*), the 'sphere of accomplishment' (*grub pa'i thig le*) found in the *Three Buddhahood Tantras* (*Sangs rgyas rgyud gsum*) rediscovered as *terma* by Gu ru rnon rtse sometime early in the twelfth century.¹⁷

Although it seems that *phowa* became an integral part of the tantric repertoire of Tibetan schools from post-imperial times (*phyi dar*) onwards, there are allegedly earlier references to a unique Dzogchen procedure that leads the superior practitioner to bypass the process of dying and realize the 'Rainbow Body of the Great Transfer' (*'ja' lus 'pho*

¹⁴ For an informative study of the *Six Dharmas of Nāropa* and the inclusion of *phowa* in selective textual lineages, see Kragh (2015).

¹⁵ Related to the *Vase Initiation* in the *Lamdre*, the 'globe of light transference' (*'od kyi gong bu'i 'pho ba*) is mentioned as a transference technique (Stearns 2002: 221, fn. 64). The *phowa* practice of corpse-animation (*grong 'jug*) can be traced to Gayādhara, a mysterious and controversial figure said to have been the sole recipient of the *Lamdre* lineage in India (ibid: 48).

¹⁶ There are several *terma* on the practice of *phowa*. The most well-known among these, the *Standing Blade of Grass* (*'Jag tshugs ma*), has been adopted by the Drikung Kagyü. It was revealed sometime in the late 14th century by Nyi zla sangs rgyas and appears to be the earliest Nyingma *terma* that links *phowa* with the cult of Padmasambhava and Sukhāvati; see Halkias (2013: 154–163).

¹⁷ Martin (1994: 33) notes that four of these may be compared with the *Six Dharmas of Nāropa*.

ba chen po). For the Nyingma and Bön schools, there are a few individuals said to have attained the 'Great Transfer'; among them, Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, G.yu thog yon tan and the Bön adept Tapihritsa. The early Dzogchen masters, Garab Dorje, Mañjuśrīmitra, Śrī Siṃha, Jñānasūtra and Vairocana the translator, are reported to have realized a process akin to the 'Great Transfer' — that of dissolving their bodies into the essence of the elements at the time of death and manifesting as a 'rainbow body' (*'ja' lus*).

Despite the secretive nature of this esoteric practice, *phowa* has been popularized during a public event known as *Drigung Phowa Chenmo* (*'bri gung 'pho ba chen mo*). It was traditionally performed at Terdrom (Gter sgrom) in the district of Drigung in Central Tibet, every twelve-year calendrical cycle. Formalized by two Drigung Kagyü hierarchs, the brothers Dkon mchog rin chen (1590–1654) and Rig 'dzin chos grags (1595–1659), it was enacted in open space where initiations and instructions based on a *terma* by Nyi zla sangs rgyas, the *Standing Blade of Grass* or *Planting the Stalk* (*'Jag tshugs ma*), were granted to large number of pilgrims arriving from different parts of Tibet.¹⁸

*The Mind Treasure of the Sky Dharma:
A Compilation of Extensive Instructions
for Transferring to Sukhāvātī*

The seventeenth-century monk Karma Chags med Rā ga Asya (1613–1678) is an important figure, not only for the Kagyü school, but also for the Nyingma because of his close association with the Dpal yul lineage and his contribution to the redaction of the *Namchö* (*gnam chos*) collection of treasure-teachings revealed by his gifted disciple Gnam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje (1645–1667). A disciple of the tenth Karmapa Chos dbyings rdo rje (1604–1674) and the Sixth Zhamar Gar dbang chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630), he is the founder of one of the two main branches of the Kamtsang Kagyü lineage, the Nēdo Kagyü that takes its name after his hermitage in Gnas mdo in Eastern Tibet.¹⁹ Karma Chags med (hereafter KC) was a formidable scholar and prolific author who composed some sixty volumes of texts on a variety of subjects while in retreat. He is perhaps best-known for his

¹⁸ For the background history and description of the 1992 celebration of the *Drigung Phowa Chenmo*, see Kapstein (1998: 95–119).

¹⁹ The other branch is the Zurmang tradition. The Nēdo Kagyü developed into two systems, one emphasizing the Kagyü that is the Nēdo lineage, and one focusing on the Nyingma transmission of his students Palyul Rigzin Kunzang Sherab (1636–1698) and Padma Rigzin (1625–1697). For Karma Chagme's biography and that of lineage masters of the Nēdo system of practice, see *Rgyal ba gnas mdo pa'i bla brgyud dang dam pa'i chos kyi byung ba mdor bsdus dwangs shel me long*.

contributions to the Tibetan genre of Pure Land literature, with his *Aspiration Prayer to the Pure Land Sukhāvātī* and its commentary which are widely considered classic texts of the *demön* (*bde smon*) genre.²⁰

As stated in the introduction of *The Mind Treasure of the Sky Dharma: A Compilation of Extensive Instructions for Transferring to Sukhāvātī* (*Gnam chos thugs kyi gter kha las bde chen zhing du 'pho ba'i gdams pa rgyas par bsgrigs pa*),²¹ KC's commentary is included in the *Namchö* collection of scriptures dedicated to attaining Amitābha's pure land, Sukhāvātī (*bde chen zhing sgrub kyi skor*).²² Even though nowadays Sukhāvātī features as the soteriological goal for the majority of *phowa sādhanas*, this was not the case prior to the fourteenth century. To the best of my knowledge, it was first introduced in two treasure texts (*gter ma*): *The Standing Blade of Grass* (*Jag tshugs ma*), revealed by Nyi zla sangs rgyas, and the *Dying without Regrets* (*'Da' ka 'chi brod*) which was redacted by the Nyingma adept Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396). The fact that there are no references to Sukhāvātī-*phowa* in India or East Asia would suggest that it is a unique Tibetan innovation of the *terma* tradition.

According to the colophon of the *Transferring to Sukhāvātī*, it was composed by KC at the behest of Gnam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje to elucidate the *phowa-sādhanā* as it was revealed to the latter during his visionary encounter with Buddha Amitābha in the year 1657. The *sādhanā* titled *Means for Attaining Sukhāvātī: Empowerment and Oral Instructions* consists, in addition to the practice of *phowa*, instructions for visiting Sukhāvātī in one's dreams (*rmi lam du bde chen zhing mjal thabs*), an Amitābha long-life *sādhanā* (*snang ba mtha' yas kyi tshes sgrub*), related empowerments (*bde chen zhing gi dbang*) and supplication-aspiration (*gsol 'debs dang smon lam*) prayers for taking rebirth in Sukhāvātī.²³

In the opening passage to the *Transferring to Sukhāvātī*, KC presents Mi 'gyur rdo rje as a legitimate *tertön* citing prophetic proclamations from Ö ryan gling pa's fourteenth-century treasure-text, the *Five Chronicles* (*Bka' thang sde lnga*). He further relates that he is the single emanation of Vairocana the translator and the 'religious minister' (*chos*

²⁰ For an introduction and English translation of the *Rnam dag bde chen zhing gi smon lam*, see Skorupski (1994). For Karma Chagme's contributions to Tibetan Pure Land literature, see Halkias (2013: 113–116).

²¹ The same text with a slightly different title, *Gnam chos thugs kyi gter kha snyan brgyud zab mo'i bskor las: bde chen zhing gi 'pho ba'i gdams pa rgyas par 'grel pa*, is found in the *Collected Works* of Karma Chags med, Vol. 6: 413–436. Skorupski (2001: 145–154) has brought attention to this text from a block-print manuscript he acquired in Nepal.

²² For a list of various editions and liturgical texts of the *Gnam chos bde chen zhing sgrub kyi skor*, see Appendix II in Halkias (2013: 209–212).

²³ For an introduction and English translation of the *Bde chen zhing sgrub dbang las tshogs zhal gdams dang bcas pa*, see Halkias (2006).

blon) Pälseng (Dpal gyi seng ge) of the Shud pu clan and concludes with a prophetic prediction (*lung bstan pa*) that Mi 'gyur rdo rje will become, in the future, the Buddha Jñāna-Samantabhadra (Ye shes kun bzang). Having situated his commentary within the *Namchö* corpus, he explains that, although there are many *phowa* lineages in the New and Old schools, Mi 'gyur rdo rje's transmission is fresh and 'warm with the voice' (*gsung dron mo*) of Buddha Amitābha and therefore it carries great blessings. This is a common strategy for the legitimation of *terma* since they are not only novel teachings but are more intimately connected to an 'enlightened source' in contrast to the 'oral lineage' (*bka' ma*) of canonical scriptures that may get diluted along the way.

Having presented the credentials of his lineage and its legitimate source, KC invokes the authority of Padmasambhava who endorses the method of *phowa* for 'lazy yogis' (*rnal 'byor le lo can*) and extolls the virtues of this practice for distracted and unconfident practitioners who do not find time to meditate. It is even applicable to those who have committed grave unvirtuous actions;²⁴ even if one is unable to complete the technique at the time of death, having received the *phowa* oral transmission ('*pho lung*) will make it easier for the lama to perform it on his behalf after death. He then goes on to reference the Tibetan version of the *Catuspīṭha-tantra*, the earliest source referring to this teaching in Buddhist scriptures, to substantiate his claim that this method is supreme for crossing over *saṃsāra* to the other shore.

Then follows an enumeration of six different kinds of transference: 1. *dharmakāya phowa* (*chos sku 'pho ba*); 2. *saṃbhogakāya phowa* (*longs sku 'i 'pho ba*); 3. *nirmāṇakāya phowa* (*sprul sku 'pho ba*); 4. common *phowa* (*tha mal pa 'pho ba*); 5. forceful *phowa* (*btsan thabs kyi 'pho ba*); and 6. entering other bodies *phowa* (*grong du 'jug pa*).²⁵ The *dharmakāya phowa* is

²⁴ He will return to this theme later in the commentary. It is said that even those who have committed the five inexpressible deeds entailing immediate retribution (i.e., matricide, patricide, killing an arhat, causing schism in the sangha and wounding a buddha) will take rebirth in the higher realms or attain liberation. Stated in a similar way in the *Catuspīṭha-tantra* (4.3.52cd–53): "[Even] a destroyer of gods [and a murderer] of brahmins, [even] one who performs the five [acts] of immediate retribution, [even] one who steals [and/or] relishes pleasures will become pure through this path (i.e. *utkrānti*). He shall not be tainted by sins, and [will be] far [removed] from the conditions of existence;" Szántó (2012: 467). This stands as a challenge to the long *Sukhāvatiṣṭhā-sūtra* where the bodhisattva Dharmākara declared that beings who aspire to be born in Sukhāvati and dedicate their merits for that purpose, will take rebirth there except for those who have committed the five heinous deeds; see his 19th vow in the Sanskrit version of the sūtra (Gómez 2002: 71).

²⁵ Jamgön Kongtrul (2007: 202–203) explains that many early works give three divisions (i.e., *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya phowa*), but according to Nāropa's *Bka' dpe phyi ma*, there are eleven divisions. In the *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*, Rdza dPal sprul rin po che (1808–1887) enumerates five kinds of *phowa*,

intended for those practitioners who are able to unite the mother and son luminosities at the time of death because of their practice of Mahāmudrā or *trekchö* (*khregs chod*) of the Great Completion (*rdzogs chen*). Given that this is the highest of all kinds of *phowa*, free from concepts of agency and agent, it is said that there are no good or bad openings.²⁶

As for the signs of successfully performing the *dharmakāya phowa*, the external sign (*phyi rtags*) is the appearance of a pure and clear sky, the inner sign (*nang rtags*) is that of one's body retaining a lasting lustre of radiance, and the secret sign (*gsang ba'i rtags*) is the appearance of a white syllable *āh*, a blue *hūṃ*, and so forth (on the skull or bones left behind after the cremation). Without explaining the workings of the *sambhogakāya phowa*,²⁷ KC lists the outer sign as a sky replete with rainbows and lights, and the inner sign as blood or pus emerging from the aperture of Brahmā, or as a dew-like moisture. From the cranial swelling, steam and heat will rise, and some hair will fall out. And as for the secret sign, relics of the five Buddha families (*gdung rigs lnga*), and either forms or hand gestures of deities will appear (on the bones and skull of the cremation). Concerning the *nirmanakāya phowa*, KC advises that one lies on his right side, breathes from his left nostril, and places in front of himself a representation of Śākyamuni, Padmasambhava, or another deity. While meditating on the image, he recommends the performance of transference from the left nostril with the intention of returning as a *nirmanakāya* (emanation) for the benefit of sentient beings and reciting aspiration prayers towards that end.

starting with the common three divisions and adding 'ordinary transference using three metaphors' and 'transference performed for the dead with the hook of compassion;' Patrul Rinpoche (2010: 351–366).

²⁶ Dharmakāya *phowa* does not rely on any formal visualization and is free from notions of a subject transferring from one place to another, let alone of locating a pathway of transference. The recognition of one's own nature of mind is the 'son luminosity' (*'od gsal bu*) or the 'luminosity of the path' (*lam gyi 'od gsal*), that unites with what is innately present, the 'mother luminosity' (*ma 'od gsal*) or 'ground luminosity' (*gzhi''od gsal*). In effect, there is no actual transference here. It corresponds to the transference of consciousness into empty space, which is known in the Chöd tradition as opening the gates of space (*nam mkha' sgo 'byed*).

²⁷ In the *Quintessence of Nectar: Instructions for the Practice of the Six Dharmas of Nāropa*, the Zhwa dmar Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630) explains that, during the *sambhogakāya phowa*, one transfers one's consciousness into the heart of a wisdom being, a Buddhist deity like Vajrayoginī visualized about an inch in size in the heart of a guru (Roberts 2011: 371). Jamgön Kongtrul (2007: 205) further explains: "This is for those of intermediate faculties who will not recognize the luminous clarity at the end of the three lights and the dissolution process of the death phase, or who might recognize it but cannot remain in it. They should revive themselves with their previous impetus by thinking, 'I will rise up in the illusory body of sambhogakāya,' and rise up as the deity's illusory form at the end of the three lights in reverse order."

During this session, the outer sign is seeing clouds or rainbows in the form of a tree and the raining of flowers. The inner sign is blood, pus, bodhicitta or mist coming out of the left nostril. And the secret sign comprises hand gestures of the deities on the skull or many small relics (*ring bsrel*) manifesting (after cremation).

As for the forceful *phowa*, it is not appropriate to rehearse it even if all the signs of impending death (*'chi ltas*) are present, for one should first carry out the ritual of ransoming death (Skt. *mṛtyu varīcana*; *'chi ba bslu ba*) three times.²⁸ Not doing so will incur the offence of 'killing the deities' (*lha bsad*). It is inappropriate to do so even if one is condemned to death by the king, is seriously ill or in pain. 'Deities' means the assembly of one hundred deities that reside inside the body.²⁹ This is the reason why it is inappropriate to perform the forceful *phowa* at any time other than when the lifespan has been exhausted. KC invokes the authority of the *Catuspīṭha-tantra* to illustrate this point³⁰ and the *Transference: Liberation through Recollection*, a treasure-text attributed to Padmasambhava.³¹

What follows is a brief mention of the *phowa* of entering other bodies (i.e. reanimating corpses). KC informs us that the textual tradition (*bka' ma*) exists but the lineage of practice has been lost.³² KC

²⁸ The oldest Tibetan canonical Buddhist texts prescribing rituals for 'cheating' or 'ransoming' death are found in the Tengyur, indicating their Indian origins and dating from the eleventh century onwards. Namkhai Norbu asserted that these ransoming rites were part of Bön religion that date to Tibetan imperial times (Mengele 2010: 104). For an informative introduction on this subject, see Mengele (2010).

²⁹ This is in reference to the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities (*zhi khro rigs brya*) said to reside throughout the body and the head.

³⁰ The relevant section in this tantra (4.3.55) is given by Szántó (2012:468): "[The yogin should perform] the egress only when the time [of death] is nigh. [Should he do it] at an improper time, [he will be tainted by the sin of being] a murderer of the deity. Therefore, the wise one should start [undertaking this procedure only after] the signs [of death have manifested] on the body." He further writes, "If [the yogin] performs *utkrānti* when the time of death is not yet nigh, he will become a murderer of the deities from the five [Tathāgata-]families. For the five skandhas have as their nature the five families." The *locus classicus* for this idea is the *Guhyasamāja* (17.50ab).

³¹ Although not stated in the commentary, KC is quoting from the '*Pho ba dran pa rang grol*, a *gter chos* included in the Zhitro cycle discovered by Gar dbang rdo rje (1640–1685).

³² In *Three Convictions*, Tsongkhapa appries that, should one wish to delve deeper into the principles of this extraordinary technique, he ought to consult the *Oral Tradition of the Body-Form of Glorious Guhyasamāja* (*Dpal 'du pa'i sku lus kyi man ngag*); see Mullin (2005: 218). Marpa Chökyi Lodro (1012–1097) was apparently a virtuoso of this practice as attested in his biography; see Tsang Nyön Heruka (1995: 146–155). It is traditionally believed that the transmission of "entering another's body" ended with the death of the son of Marpa, Darma Dodé, who transferred his

reserves the most detailed treatment for the so-called common *phowa*. Given that death may come unexpectedly because of a variety of causes and conditions (i.e., falling into a pitfall, drowning, killed by weapons and so forth), whenever one is scared or in a panic, he should direct his awareness towards Amitābha or Padmasambhava as visualized above his head. Through the force of familiarizing oneself with this, should the circumstances of mortality arise, one's consciousness will exit from the crown. For this type of transference, one should lie on his right side with his head facing north envisioning the Tathāgata Ratnaśikhin (Rin chen gtsug tor can)³³ or the Medicine Buddha above his head. By reciting the names of the Three Jewels, dhāraṇī-mantras and prayers, one will not take rebirth in the lower realms.

Quoting from *The Vajra Song that Captures the Six Dharmas* (*Rje btsun nā ro pas rje mar pa la gsungs pa'i chos drug dril ba rdo rje'i mgur*) attributed to Nāropa (956–1040), we read: "Eight doors are the cavities of *saṃsāra*, one door is the path to Mahāmudrā."³⁴ Then follows a quote from the *Profound Inner Principles* (*Zab mo nang gi don*), an extensive work on the subtle-body by the Third Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), which draws from many tantras. It explains that if the 'ālaya-consciousness' (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) departs from the opening of Brahmā, it will lead to rebirth in the 'formless realms' (*gzugs med kham*s),³⁵ from the *bindhu* (*thig le*) to the Great Goddess (*lha mo che*),³⁶ from the navel as a god of the desire realm,³⁷ through the eyes as a powerful human being, from the nose as a *yakṣa*, from the ear as a god of accomplishment (*grup pa'i lha*),³⁸ from the 'door of existence' (*srid*

consciousness, after being mortally wounded, into a pigeon and flew to India. However, as noted by (Roberts 2011: 9) "there are a number of instances in the biographies of medieval Kagyü master, where they display their mastery of this practice by briefly reanimating a dead animal or bird while in meditation. In any period, however, accounts of permanently abandoning one's body and continuing one's life in another body are rare."

³³ He is the last buddha in the line of buddhas of the first great eon. KC is likely referring to the story of Siddhartha's previous life as Jalavāhana who saved ten thousand fish by adding water in a dried-up pond. He then recited, for their benefit, epithets of the Buddha Ratnaśikhin having been told that anyone who hears the name of this Buddha will be reborn in the heavens; see the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama-sūtra*, chapter 17.

³⁴ *sgo bryad 'khor ba'i skar khung can / sgo gcig phyag rgya chen po'i lam.*

³⁵ I.e., one of the four formless realms (Skt. *arupadhātu*).

³⁶ I.e., born as a god in one of the sixteen form realms.

³⁷ I.e., one of the six heavens of the desire realm.

³⁸ I.e., a vidyādhara in Trāyastriśa Heaven.

pa'i sgo)³⁹ a hungry ghost, from the urethra an animal, and from the lower door⁴⁰ in the hell realms.⁴¹

KC goes on to clarify the assertion that, if one departs from Brahmā's aperture, he will take rebirth in the formless realms as opposed to the oral instructions that assert rebirth in the pure lands. He quotes from Nāropa's *Vajra Verses of the Hearing Lineage* (*Snyan brgyud rdo rje'i tshig rkang*; Skt. *Karṇatantravajrapada*, Tōh. 2338)⁴² which states that all nine doors should be blocked. In this case, the aperture that is located four fingers back from the hairline leads to the formless realms, whereas the actual Brahmā opening, located eight fingers back from the hairline, leads to rebirth in the celestial worlds (pure lands). Although these two traditions exist, according to Padmasambhava there are substantial differences with the paths of transference which are divided into superior, middle and lower.⁴³ The three superior pathways are egress from: (a) the aperture of Brahmā for rebirth in the pure realms (*dag pa mkha' spyod*); (b) the eyes for rebirth as a *cakravartin* king (*khos los bsgyur ba'i rgyal po*); and (c) the left nostril for rebirth in a purified human body. The middle paths include transference through the right nostril that leads to rebirth as a *yakṣa*, from the ears as a god in the form realm and from the navel as a god in the desire realm. The lower pathways involve the urethra for rebirth as an animal, from the so-called 'door of existence' for rebirth as a hungry ghost and the anus for rebirth in the hell realms.

KC then quotes instructions from the *Catuṣpīṭha-tantra* for employing the visualization of syllables and *prāṇa*, but his description is as obscure in the Tibetan text as it is in the Sanskrit.⁴⁴ Citing from the *Vajra Verses of the Hearing Lineage*,⁴⁵ he explains that the process of transference is transformative in that it brings buddhahood without meditation. It entails drawing inside the *avadhūti*, or subtle central channel (*rtsa dbu ma*), the syllable *hūṃ* that is indivisible with *prāṇa* and mind.⁴⁶ The transference to the buddha-field of the dharmakāya-lama is accomplished by propelling the syllable *kṣa* through the path of Brahmā. KC cites, from an unidentified source, a quote attributed to Padmasambhava: "If you are unable to attain *nirvāṇa* without

³⁹ I.e., the mouth.

⁴⁰ I.e., the anus.

⁴¹ The nine doors here correspond exactly to the after-death destinations prescribed in the *Catuṣpīṭha-tantra*; Szántó (2012: 458–461).

⁴² See Jamgön Kongtrul's *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 7.

⁴³ KC is quoting from the '*Pho ba dran pa rang grol*.

⁴⁴ Szántó (2012: 462–465).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Gdams ngag mdzod*, vol. 7, p. 91.

⁴⁶ According to tantric physiology, the central channel runs from the base parallel to the spine and ends at the crown of the head.

reminder in this life and desire to reach the pure lands apply yourself to the activities and training.” And also, “these teachings are a powerful method for bringing buddhahood even to those who have committed grave sins. They are like a miraculous dharma made of gold, through which a yogi will be liberated from the seal of the body and attain buddhahood.”⁴⁷

The rest of the commentary is divided in two parts: (a) training in *phowa*; and (b) the application of the practice. These sections are detailed and are clearly intended for practitioners of this method. I will provide here only a general outline on the specific instructions for applying the method of transference. First, as for training in *phowa*, one should: (a) offer a maṇḍala to his guru requesting the teachings of transference; (b) go for refuge to the three jewels, the three roots⁴⁸ and all other sources of refuge; and (c) generate the mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*). The following visualizations for generating oneself in the form of Avalokiteśvara, namely the transference prayer, the aspiration prayer to Sukhāvātī and the long-life prayer, are taken from Gnam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje's *Means for Attaining Sukhāvātī: Empowerment and Oral Instructions (Bde chen zhing sgrub dbang las tshogs zhal gdams dang bcas pa)*.⁴⁹ KC offers details for the visualization of the subtle central channel and of Buddha Amitābha envisaged above the crown of one's head. He continues with the prayer for successful transference and offers guidelines on the sealing of thirteen orifices⁵⁰ with light-rays in the form of the syllable *hrīh*. Then come the actual instructions on how to perform the technique of *phowa* utilizing breath and visualization. The practice ends with the recitation of an aspiration prayer to take rebirth in Sukhāvātī, a prayer to Amitāyus for longevity and the dissolution meditation. After practicing *phowa*, there will be signs of accomplishment visible on the aperture of Brahmā such as, swelling, numbness, heat, blood or pus.

⁴⁷ *tshé 'dir lhag med ma grub na / 'pho tshé mkha' spyod 'grub 'dod pas / sbyang dang las la sbyar ba'o / zhes dang / sdig po che btsan thabs su sangs rgyas par byed pa'i gdams ngag / rnal 'byor pa lus rgya grol ba dang sangs rgyas pa dus mtshungs pa'i gser chos 'phrul zhun du gdams pa 'di ston par byed /*

⁴⁸ I.e. the guru (*bla ma*), deity (*yi dam*), and *dākinī* (*mkha' 'gro*).

⁴⁹ See Halkias (2006: 115–116). For a depiction of Amitābha's pure land executed in Tibetan style, see illustration 2.

⁵⁰ I.e. the anus, urethra, secret place, mouth, navel, two ears, two nostrils, two eyes, spot between the eyebrows and the cranial opening that leads to rebirth in the formless realms.



Illustration 2: Tibetan depiction of Sukhāvati
(courtesy of Himalayan Art Resources).

The next section deals with the actual application of *phowa* performed for oneself when all the signs of death are present and for others when their outer breath has ceased. It is well-known that the consciousness remains in the body for up to three nights and a day and, therefore, it is important that the transference is performed during this time. The *Book of the Kadam* (*Bka' gdams glegs bam*) explains that it may remain up to seven days so it acceptable to practice *phowa* until the seventh day. The village priests maintain that it is appropriate to invite the consciousness in a name-card used in death rituals since they have the tradition of summoning the consciousness into a corpse after the passing of many days and then transferring it from there.⁵¹ KC states that he does not see any contradiction even though this method is not mentioned in the tantric scriptures.

KC concludes that there is great benefit in giving the oral transmission of the authentic *Namchö* root text,⁵² and goes on to cite the root text of the stages of transference, the prayer for transference

⁵¹ The tradition of village priests utilizing an effigy, after disposing of a corpse to ensure that the deceased goes to Sukhāvati, is also observed among the Sherpas of Nepal; see Furer-Haimendorf (1964: 235–237). The ritual for summoning the consciousness of the dead to an effigy-card (*byang chog*) and directing it to take rebirth in Sukhāvati is detailed in another *Namchö* text authored by KC, the *Gnam chos thugs kyi gter kha snyan brgyud zab mo'i skor las bde chen zhing sgrub gi byang chog thar lam dkar po*.

⁵² See fn. 23 in this work.

and the prayer of aspiration. The colophon informs us that, having been urged to do so by the *nirmāṇakāya* (Gnam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje), this elaborate commentary on *phowa* was composed by Rāgasya who takes on the responsibility for any mistakes and contradictions that may be found in the text.

The *phowa sādhana* is well-established in Hindu and Buddhist tantric scriptures but that should not deter us from searching for fruitful parallels in spiritual traditions across Eurasia relating visionary ascensions to celestial realms and shamanic transferences to other bodies. It is noteworthy that, for Tibetan Buddhists, the possibility of meeting Buddha Amitābha can be accomplished through the technique of transference, which might involve the visualization of a luminous hook attracting one's consciousness in the shape of an incandescent globe projected from Amitābha's heart. Tucci (1991: 365) explains:

Out of Amitābha's heart a hook of light is projected, which draws towards itself the devotee's conscious principle, represented by a luminous globe, the size of a grain, residing in his heart; the principle, thus attracted, disappears and is dissolved into the god's heart, with which it is substantially unified; next, it is once again emanated from it, in order to give birth to the new divine incarnation in the center of the lotus miraculously sprung up in front the of the god.

The popularity of one's own ascent to Sukhāvātī may explain why Amitābha's descent from Sukhāvātī to meet the pious in the hour of death—a widespread theme in Chinese Buddhist literature and art—occupies a surprisingly subordinate position in Tibetan culture.

Although the *Transferring to Sukhāvātī* was evidently written by KC, it is marked by *terma*-signs (*gter tsheg*) by virtue of its inclusion in the *Namchö* collection of treasures which, even if attributed to Mi 'gyur rdo rje, were presumably redacted by KC himself. KC labours to endorse Mi 'gyur rdo rje as a genuine *terton* suggesting that, in the early times of their inception, the sky-dharma *termas* had to undergo a process of legitimation and acceptance before being incorporated in the ritual corpus of the Nyingma and Kagyü traditions. Moreover, they stand witness to the creative collaboration between the Kagyü and Nyingma schools, and to an age-old symbiosis between lay ascetics (*sngags pa*) and monastic bodies (*dge 'dun*) which contributed to the revitalization of Buddhism in Tibetan history despite, or rather because of, the competitive tension that arises between individual creativity and institutional orthodoxy.

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In Search of the Lost Manuscript: The Obscure Recension History of the Tenth-Century Text *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*

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Introduction

In 1974, with the help of the Library of Congress's Tibetan Text Publication Project under the direction of Gene Smith,¹ an edition of the long-thought-lost *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation* (*bsam gtan mig sgron*),² a tenth-century treatise written by the Tibetan scholar gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, was published in India. The importance of this text was immediately acknowledged by scholars,³ and led to a reconsideration of the figure of gNubs chen, as well as of the

¹ This project, popularly known as Public Law 480 (PL480) was described by Gene Smith as a program that “allowed [at the time] for the purchase of current publications from the developing world with payment made from blocked foreign currency owed to the U.S. Government. This program was funded from the sale of excess agricultural commodities and allowed the Library of Congress to purchase new impressions from all of the blocks in India, Nepal, and Bhutan and to encourage refugees to print the treasures they had been able to carry from their homeland. The program for the acquisition of Tibetan library materials began in 1961 and eventually resulted in over 4000 Tibetan bibliographic titles, some of which were over 200 volumes [...] The excess rupees were also used for cataloguing and shipping these library materials to research institutions in the United States.” See Smith and Schaeffer 2001: xi-xii. The success of the program helped protect a literary Tibetan heritage that had been under enormous duress during the early years of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, and also was responsible for the spread of Tibetan Studies in the United States, with the creation of important collections of Tibetan literature previously unknown outside of Asia. On the effects of PL480 on the emergence of the Tibetan Studies field in the United States, see Lopez 1998: ch. 6.

² The *Lamp* from now on.

³ Japanese scholars such as Ryutoku Katsumi and Katsumi Okimoto published articles as early as 1975 acknowledging the importance of the text for our reconsideration of the history of Chan in Tibet, and the transmission of the Chan tradition in China. For an overview of early Japanese scholarship on this topic see Ueyama 1983.

period in which he lived, the so-called Tibetan Dark Age (842–986 CE).⁴ The text was also remarkable for a variety of reasons. The *Lamp* was one of the very few texts that have survived from the period, and it was one of the earliest and most important systematic accounts of the various Buddhist schools that had taken hold in Tibet from the time of the introduction of Buddhism during the Tibetan empire in the seventh century all the way up to the tenth century when it was written. The *Lamp* offers a more complex account of the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet than the one presented in later Tibetan historiography, which has a tendency to emphasize the Indian origins of the tradition.⁵ gNubs chen describes a Buddhist tradition arriving in Tibet from India, but also from China and other parts of Central Asia.

The *Lamp* also shows that Buddhism had not simply disappeared from Tibet during the Dark Age period. Some forms of Buddhism suffered greatly, particularly the Indian gradual (*rim gyis 'jug pa*) and the Chinese sudden (*cig car 'jug pa*) approaches. The first one suffered because it depended on the monastic institutions to survive, and these institutions collapsed together with the empire. The reasons for the disappearance of Chan are still unclear, but the *Lamp* offers a very different picture of the disappearance of the tradition in Tibet than the one presented by later Tibetan historiography, which usually has Chan vanished from Tibet after the debacle of the bSam yas Debate.⁶ In gNubs chen's text, we also witness the success during the Dark Age period of previously forbidden forms of tantra on the Tibetan plateau, represented by Mahāyoga,⁷ as well as the emergence of the new Atiyoga tradition.⁸ In fact, the *Lamp* is one of the earliest, and definitely the most comprehensive, treatises that describes the emergence during

⁴ For a discussion on periodization in Tibetan history see Cuevas 2006, Dalton 2011, and Lopez 2014. On the use of the label 'Dark Age' to describe this period of Tibetan history see Snellgrove 1987: 464, Kapstein 2000: 10-17, Denwood 2010: 1, Manchester 1992: 3-5, and Lopez 2014: 35-58.

⁵ On this issue see Kapstein 2011.

⁶ This is not the place to discuss at length the controversies surrounding the historicity of the bSam yas Debate. Traditional Tibetan history, as transmitted by texts like the *sBa bzhed* (in its various versions), Nyang nyi ma 'od zer's *Chos 'byung me tog snying po* and, most famously, Bu ston's *Chos 'byung*, had presented the debate as a confrontation that took place between 792–794 between the Indian gradualist school, represented by Śāntarakṣita and, most directly, by his student Kamalāsīla, and the Chinese subitist or instantaneous school, defended by Heshang Moheyan that was settled by the Emperor Khri srong lde btsan in what came to be known in western scholarship as the bSam yas Debate. For more on the historiography of this debate see Demiéville 1952 and 1970, Tucci 1956, Houston 1980, Ruegg 1992, and Kapstein 2000.

⁷ On the early Mahāyoga tradition in Tibet see Takahashi 2009 and van Schaik 2004.

⁸ On the emergence of Atiyoga as a new vehicle of Buddhist practice see Karmay 1988, Germano 1994, van Schaik 2004.

this period of what is arguably the first Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), as an independent vehicle (*theg pa*), considered different from and superior to those imported from India and China.

While the text received the attention of numerous scholars who have looked for clues within the text that may help explain a wide variety of questions (how was Buddhism introduced into Tibet? Did Chan disappear from Tibet after the bSam yas debate? Was there even a bSam yas debate? What are the origins of the Great Perfection tradition?), little attention has been paid to the accidental and, I would add, mysterious transmission history of the text. As we will see, three more editions of the *Lamp* have been published since the first one in 1974, and the study of the text has produced a diplomatic edition,⁹ and a critical edition.¹⁰ But during my own research of the text, a few questions regarding the source of all of these editions kept emerging, mainly, how did the text arrive in the hands of Gene Smith and his collaborators in the PL480 program? Was the text a manuscript? A print? A block print? And where are the original sources now? As this article will show, incorrect assumptions about the physical origins of this text do not only have consequences for the assumptions made about the elaboration of the current diplomatic or critical editions, but also affect the way in which we interpret it.

The goal of this article, then, is to explore the historical vicissitudes of the *Lamp*, with a particular focus on the obscure recension history of the text and a search for the long-lost sources of the present editions. As the famous classics scholar Martin West has said about Greek and Latin works:

[T]extual criticism is not the be-all and end-all of classical scholarship, which is the study of a civilization. But it is an indispensable part of it. By far the greater part of our knowledge of that civilization comes to us from what the ancients wrote. In almost all cases those writings have survived, if they have survived at all, only in copies many stages removed from the originals, copies of which not a single one is free from error. Often errors are so great that it is no longer possible to tell what the author meant to say. It follows that anyone who wants to make serious use of ancient texts must pay attention to the uncertainties of the transmission [...] if he is not interested in the authenticity and dependability of the details, he may be a true lover of beauty, but he is not a serious student of antiquity."¹¹

⁹ Donati 2007.

¹⁰ Esler 2018.

¹¹ West 1973: 7.

PART 1 – gNubs chen, The Tibetan Dark Age,
and the *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*

The precise dates of gNubs chen's life have been the focus of some scholarly debate.¹² Most scholarship places him with a high degree of certainty between the second half of the ninth century and the first half of the tenth, during one of the most tumultuous times in Tibetan history, the so-called Dark Age (842–978). This was a period of social, political, and economic instability that followed the collapse of the Tibetan empire in 842 CE (618–842 CE), a remarkable era of military, political, and cultural expansion (including the introduction of Buddhism) that transformed Tibet into one of the most important geopolitical players in Asia for almost 250 years.

Native Tibetan scholars, particularly those of the gSar ma tradition, have traditionally discussed the Dark Age in stark contrast with what they see as the incredible achievements of the empire. If the Tibetan empire was responsible for the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, and oversaw a massive project of translation of hundreds of Buddhist texts, as well as the creation of many temples and monastic institutions all over Tibet, the Dark Age was simply a period of intellectual decay and moral corruption, a period in which Buddhism almost disappeared from the Tibetan plateau. While there is no doubt that the collapse of the political and economic structures that had sustained the Tibetan empire also meant the loss of the most important source of support for Buddhism, to say that Buddhism simply disappeared does not accurately describe the complex processes by which Buddhism was adapting to Tibet's new historical circumstances. Maybe a certain form of Buddhism, the one supported by the state and represented by the early monastic institutions, was disappearing, but that same event, the collapse of the empire, also unleashed a decentralized and innovative period in which Tibetans such as gNubs chen were able to transform what had been a foreign religion imposed by the state into a vehicle able to express genuine Tibetan religious ideas and concerns.¹³ During this period, we could argue, Buddhism became Tibetan Buddhism. This more positive view of the period is defended by Tibetans belonging to the rNying ma tradition, who rooted themselves in the Buddhism that developed during the Tibetan empire and that survived during the Dark Age, and who considered gNubs chen to be a beacon of light in an otherwise dark and difficult period. For those of

¹² One of the first problems we face when studying the life of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes is the uncertainty surrounding his dates. For a detailed discussion of this issue as discussed in Tibetan as well as Western sources see Lopez 2014: 64-71.

¹³ For the best defense of this argument see Dalton 2011.

the Nyingma tradition, gNubs chen almost single-handedly preserved the teachings imported during the Tibetan empire and protected them during the difficult times of the Dark Age. The renowned eighteenth-century rNying ma scholar Gu ru bKra shis in his *Religious History*¹⁴ describes gNubs chen as a brave protector of the Buddha's teachings during this period who did not hesitate to use violence in order to stop the evil King gLang dar ma, the last ruler of the Tibetan empire, from destroying Buddhism in Tibet:

At the time when King gLang dar ma was destroying the teachings of the Buddha, [gNubs chen] scared this evil king. The king asked him: "What powers do you have?" and Sangs rgyas ye shes replied: "Look at the power of my mantra!" and [gNubs chen] raised his index finger towards the sky and, on the tip of his finger there was a black iron scorpion [the size] of a nine story building. This vision frightened the king and he said: "I will not challenge this precious mantrin! [I will allow you to] practice your dharma!" Then [gNubs chen] said: "Look again at my power!" He pointed his index finger towards a rock, and a lightning bolt destroyed it into pieces. Then, the terrified king said: "I will not harm your followers!" **It is clear that due to Sangs rgyas ye shes's kindness the mantrins with white robes and long hair were not harmed and, in general, [this was of] great benefit to the teachings of the Buddha.**¹⁵

Discussions of gNubs chen, then, came to reflect the perceptions that Tibetans had about this tumultuous period of their history. As Jacob Dalton has argued in his study of gNubs chen's purported autobiography, the *gNubs kyi bKa' shog chen mo*:

In many ways, **gNubs chen is the very embodiment of Tibet's age of fragmentation [...]** However one thinks about this controversial period in Tibetan history, so will one think of gNubs chen. If it was

¹⁴ See Gu ru bKra shis' *Chos 'byung* 1990. In chapter 3, the section "The Old Tantra Translations Teachings of gNyags, gNubs, and Zur" (pp. 242-321) there is an important, although rather late, biography of gNubs chen. On Gu ru bKra shis's *Chos 'byung*, see Martin 1991: 329-351.

¹⁵ Translation and bold are mine. The Tibetan is "khyad par du rgyal po glang dar mas sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa bshig pa'i dus slob dpon 'dis rgyal po sdig can skrag par mdzad def rgyal pos khyod la nus pa ci yod zer bas ngas sngags tsam bzlas pa'i nus pa 'di la gzigs shig ces sdigs mdzub gnam du phyar bas sdigs mdzub kyi steng na lcags kyi sdig pa nag po g.yag po tsam dgu brtsegs su 'dug pa mthong bas rgyal po skrag ste dkon mchog sngags pa'i sku la mi bsdo'o chos mdzod cig zer/ da dung nus pa 'di la gzigs shing zer nas sdigs mdzub kyis thog phab ste pha ri'i brag la bsnun pas tshal bar song/ der rgyal po 'jigs shing skrag nas khyed 'khor bcas la gnod pa mi byed do zer nas btang ste/ sngags 'chang gos dkar lcang lo can rnams la gnod pa ma byung na khong gi drin du mngon te sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa spyi la'ang phan pa cher byung ngo." In Gu bkra'i *Chos 'byung* 1990: 167.

an era of absolute corruption, when the flame of the dharma was extinguished in Tibet, then gNubs chen represents a prime example of a Tibetan misled by demons and an unhealthy obsession with the tantras and tantric violence. If, conversely, it was a time when at least *some* strands of the “early dispensation” (*snga dar*) Buddhist tradition (and especially those non-monastic strands) managed to survive, then he is a holy man and a brave protector of the faith, who faced down the forces of darkness almost single-handedly.¹⁶

The various accounts of his life¹⁷ present us with a figure deeply engaged in the intellectual Buddhist world of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, traveling to India, Nepal, and Central Asia from a very young age, learning from a wide variety of teachers, collecting and translating texts, and composing commentaries and treatises on some of the most cutting-edge Buddhist literature of the period, such as that of the Anuyoga and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) traditions.

His works, or, we must say, the few that have survived, such as the *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation* and *The Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go cha*), a commentary on the main text of the Anuyoga tradition, the *Sūtra of the Gathered Intentions* (*dGongs pa 'dus pa'i mdo*), reveal a remarkable intellectual, who was well-versed in a wide variety of Buddhist contemplative traditions. His texts are filled with constant citations from hundreds of Buddhist scriptures, as well as the works of other Buddhist intellectuals from India and China, offering the most comprehensive window to the textual and intellectual world of Tibet during that period.

Although, as we have seen, we need to be careful when considering gNubs chen's dates, he seems to have written the *Lamp* around the year 901, when he was sixty-one years old. In his purported autobiography, he claims that he wrote the text “for the benefit of future generations,” and in order to purify himself for a “sin” (*sdig*). The sin he refers to is the killing of a group of soldiers who tried to attack him and a group of monks in the fortress of Nyemo (*sNye mo*), in Central Tibet.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Dalton 2014: 2. Bold is mine.

¹⁷ For the various narrative accounts of gNubs chen's life, see Lopez 2014: 64-86.

¹⁸ The full account in his autobiography is as follows: “Then, [when] I reached sixty-one years of age, in the year of the year of the rat (901), which befell in my obstacle [year], the second uprising took place. [Since] I could not stay in Grags, I fled to gNubs yul valley [...], since I could not stay there either, I went to the fortress of sNye mo. [...] Then, when the rebel army surrounded the place, Tibetan monks sought refuge inside the fortress, Then, on the side of the mountain of the fortress of sNye mo, I saw many soldiers discussing [how] they were going to kill the Tibetan monks, until there were no Buddhist monks [left]. Then, [I] the little Tibetan monk [...] went to the top of the castle, [and said to the army]: ‘Listen to me, rebel [soldiers]! Gods and Demons of the World be my witness! In order to nurture the nectar of the Excellent Teachings, I have travelled the whole world from the time I

gNubs chen's *Lamp* is a meditation manual that discusses the contemplative practices of the main Buddhist traditions in Tibet, from the very early introduction of Buddhism into the Lands of Snows in the seventh century, up to the time of the writing of the *Lamp* in the tenth century. It is structured as a doxography,¹⁹ or classification of philosophical views, in which gNubs chen ranks those contemplative traditions in a hierarchical order according to what he thinks are their soteriological effectiveness. The traditions discussed in the text are four. First, the Indian Gradual Approach (*tseñ men rim gyis 'jug pa*), which described the traditional Mahāyāna textual and scholastic tradition coming mainly from India and introduced into Tibet by the famous abbot of Nālandā Śāntarakṣita and his main student, Kamalaśīla.²⁰ Meditation within the gradual tradition placed emphasis on the posture of the body (sitting cross-legged, spine straight, eyes gazing low) that served as the foundation for the traditional two stage contemplative Buddhist practice of calm abiding (*zhi gnas*) in order to subsequently develop special insight (*lhag mthong*). The second tradition is

was thirteen years old. I went to India and Nepal seven times, [where] I tirelessly served many scholars. I have offered tormas and offerings to those deities holding a promise [to protect Buddhism]. I have practiced Dharma and worshiped the deities. I have meditated on the thought of enlightenment for the sake of [all] beings without making any distinction between myself and others. I escaped but it was useless, since [the revolts] followed me, as if the revolts were happening because of me! I [hope that] all of the *vidyādhara*, their consorts, the protectors of the oceanic holy dharma, and all of the powerful yakṣas of Tibet come to assist me. If you go away, [those deities] will not commit any crime or revenge.' Having said this, I folded my robe three times. Then [I] cried and, when I stopped crying, all the witnessesses to my promise [the deities] appeared in front of me and said: 'With our strength and power, we could lift mountains, empty the oceans, and although we could have offered you our strength and power, because of the ripening of your karma (actions) of your previous lives, until now, we could not help you. Now, do you want us to destroy the world? What do you want us to do?' Then, taking out a wooden kilaya from my robe I gather them by using the life mantra of the gods, demons and those bound by the samayas, and I said (the mantra) 'ma ra ya phat' while (I faced) the mountain. The mountain started to catch fire, and the rebel army burned and was destroyed in an instant. *In order to purify [myself] from this sin [sinful action], I composed the Lamp for the Eye in Meditation for the benefit of future generations.* Then, although the rebellion was pacified, I suffered poverty for three years, I went to the [Grag] Yang rDzong where I accomplished the sid-dhis. I was invited by the powerful Divine son [i.e., the King], to establish the Dharma teaching in the Bodhi temple in bSam yas." See *Sangs rgyas Ye shes rin po che'i lo rgyus gNubs kyi bKa' shog chen mo* 1999: Folios 20a-21b. Translation is mine. For a discussion of this text see Dalton 2014.

¹⁹ Modern Buddhist scholars use this term to describe a genre within the Buddhist tradition named *siddhānta* in Sanskrit, *panjiao* in Chinese, and *grub mtha'* in Tibetan. On the topic of Buddhist Doxographies see Gregory 2002, Mestanza 2005, Mun 2006, and Dalton 2014.

²⁰ On Śāntarakṣita's philosophical views see Blumenthal 2014.

the instantaneous, or Sudden Approach (*ston mun cig car 'jug pa*), represented by Chinese Chan. According to the *Lamp*, Chan was introduced into Tibet by the obscure figure of Hashang Mahāyāna, who is presented as the 7th patriarch of the tradition, in a clear contrast with traditional Chan narratives found in the Platform Sutra and other texts.²¹ This Sudden Approach was, overall, a rejection of the idea that enlightenment could be “reached” in a gradual way since you were or you were not enlightened and there really was nothing in between. The main practice of the tradition as described by gNubs chen was known as “looking at the mind” (*sems la bltas*), which can be traced back to Bodhidharma and his practices of “quieting the mind” (Ch. 安心 *an xin*) and “wall gazing” (Ch. 壁觀 *bi guan*).²² The third tradition described in the *Lamp* is Mahāyoga, which includes the new tantric developments that had become popular during this period all across Asia, starting in the seventh/eighth century. The translation and practice of Mahāyoga during the Tibetan empire was highly restricted and, in its most radical forms, forbidden,²³ since it involved antinomian practices that challenged accepted social norms and established hierarchies. The spread of most of these practices in Tibet happened after the collapse of the empire. Mahāyoga practices centered on the body’s interior and had as a main goal the reproduction and transformation, for soteriological purposes, of extreme human experiences, such as death, violence, and sexuality. These new esoteric forms of Buddhism

²¹ The *Lamp* offers a more complex picture of the Chan tradition from the view of the Tibetan plateau, which does not follow either the Northern nor the Southern schools, but that of the Baotang lineage, that proclaims the obscure figure of Hashang Mahāyāna as the rightful inheritor of the Chan patriarch tradition. In fact, none of the main teachers of these schools, after the supposed split between the Northern and the Southern schools, are mentioned in the *Lamp*. For a discussion of Hashang Mahāyāna see Adamek 2007: 8. For a discussion of the history of the Chan lineage in Tibet, read Kapstein 2000: ch. 5, Karmay 2007 [1988]: 93 n. 42, and Meinert 2002: 241.

²² For a discussion of Bodhidharma and his meditation practices see Broughton 1999, McRae 2003, and Jorgensen 2014.

²³ The *Mahāvvyutpatti* (*Bye brag tu rtogs par byed pa chen po*), the key lexicographical work used during the empire to ensure the consistency and viability of scriptural translation makes this prohibition very clear: “(All lexical work) must be presented to the ‘Religious Council’ [...] at the Palace and to the ‘Editorial Board’. If approved, it can then be added to the dictionary (i.e. *Mahāvvyutpatti*). **The tantrās are to be kept hidden in accordance with their basic texts. Their contents should not be disclosed to those who are unsuitable to receive them.** Recently some tantrās were allowed to be translated and practiced, but there were people who, unable to understand the intention behind them, took the literal meaning and practiced them wrongly. **It is known that terms have been collected from tantrās and then translated into Tibetan, but from now on unless authorised, neither *dhāraṇī* nor tantrās are permitted to be translated and no vocabulary is to be collected from them.**” Translated in Karmay 1988: 5.

grounded their transgressive and antinomian discourses and practices on a radical understanding of the non-dual nature of reality (*gnyis su med pa*), a realization that there was ultimately no difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.²⁴ Unlike the gradual and especially the sudden approach, Mahāyoga will include complex rituals, visualizations, chanting, and sometimes even the use of sexual consorts (real or imagined). Finally, gNubs chen introduces Atiyoga, or the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), a new tradition that was probably a genuine and original Tibetan reinterpretation of the Buddhist tradition²⁵ (although the text claims to be of Indian origins), and that presents itself, at least rhetorically, as a rejection of all types of practice. Atiyoga can be seen to a great extent as a unique continuation of some meditational experiences of the Mahāyoga tradition, as well as a rejection of its rhetoric, and in particular of its sexual and wrathful practices. In the *Lamp*, gNubs chen uses the doxographical genre not only to passively organize the various forms of Buddhism that were being imported into Tibet, but also to actively and creatively engage in the construction of a unique Tibetan Buddhist view.

The Fate of gNubs chen's *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*

While the *Lamp* has been relevant for modern scholars as an important source of knowledge of Buddhism in Tibet during the Tibetan empire as well as during the Dark Age period, relevance of the text within the Tibetan Buddhist world faded almost immediately after its composition, and it became a rare work in Tibet itself.²⁶ We barely find traces of the transmission of the text in the later tradition,²⁷ and there are no

²⁴ For the development of Mahāyoga in Tibet see Takahashi 2009, and Dalton 2004.

²⁵ For a discussion of the autochthonous nature of the Great Perfection see Karmay 1988, and Germano in his unpublished manuscripts *The Secret Tibetan History of Buddhist Tantra in the Great Perfection* and *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*.

²⁶ As Samten Karmay has noted, “[The *Lamp*] is not a work that gained any popular esteem even among the later rNying ma pa school. It was a rare work in Tibet itself, not even mentioned in the list of the rare works made by A-khu-chen Shes-rab rgyamtso (1803–1875).” See Karmay 1988: 102.

²⁷ Karmay offers the following summary of instances in which the *Lamp* appears in later texts and biographies: “It is mentioned in the *bka' shog* of Pho-brang Zhi-ba-'od (latter half of the eleventh century A.D.). As seen, O-rgyan gling-pa (1329–1367) has used it for writing his BK [*Blon po bka' thang*]. In his *Lo rgyus rin po che'i phreng ba*, Klong-chen rab-'byams (1308–1362) records that his master Rig-'dzin Kumaraja listened to the exposition of SM in the presence of Slo-dpon sGom-pa. It is also mentioned in BA [*The Blue Annals*] among similar types of work described as the great works of meditation of the Rong system (*rong lugs kyi sgom yig chen po*), and so is in JT [*Jig rten gsum gyi bde skyid pad tshal 'byed pa'i nyin byed*] of the Vth Dalai

available Tibetan commentaries on the text.²⁸ There are several possible reasons that can help explain this fate. Karmay argues that this was “perhaps due to the fact that it has accepted the [Chinese Chan] tradition in Tibet which the Tibetan religious tradition generally regards as officially banned.”²⁹ One of the main attacks on the Great Perfection tradition was its intellectual similarities to Chinese Chan, so the fact that gNubs chen considered Chinese Chan superior to the Indian gradual tradition probably played a role in the lack of influence of the text in the later tradition. The attacks on the figure of gNubs chen by some of the early representatives of the gSar ma movement, such as the late tenth century figure, Lha bla ma Ye shes 'od (959–1040 CE), and his eleventh century nephew, Pho brang Zhi ba 'od (1016–1111 CE), who accused gNubs chen of authoring scriptures while claiming an Indian origin for them, probably also did not help with gNubs chen's standing and that of his works in the later Tibetan tradition. He became a hero to the rNying ma school, which hailed him as a savior of the Buddhist tradition during perilous times, but he was also attacked as a charlatan by the gSar ma tradition for using the lack of institutional supervision during the period to forge new Buddhist scriptures.

While all of these factors may help explain the little regard for gNubs chen's work by the later tradition, I think another important reason explaining the text's fading into obscurity was the fact that the *Lamp*, and the intellectual world represented in it, became quickly irrelevant under the weight of the historical and doctrinal developments that began to take place in Tibet in the eleventh century, during the Tibetan Renaissance. In this new religious environment there was no place for the Chan tradition, the Indian gradual system became thoroughly internalized within the tantric, esoteric model, and the Great Perfection tradition described in the *Lamp* was superseded by a multitude of new Atiyoga movements that moved away from the initial

Lama. According to the *par byang*, the xylographic edition from which the present photostat is produced was based on a manuscript copy which belonged to Tāranātha (b. 1575). The well-known historian Ka-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698–1755) also has quoted it in his history of the Ch'an teaching in Tibet.” But as he also mentions, it was overall a “rare work in Tibet itself.” See Karmay 1988: 102–103.

²⁸ The only exception is the recent commentary published by the 20th century Tibetan scholar, *Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche*, entitled *Opening the Eyes of Wisdom, A Commentary on Sangs rgyas ye shes's Lamp of the Eye of Contemplation*. Its late composition makes it interesting for our understanding of the contemporary rNying ma tradition to the text, but it does not have much value for our understanding of the early historical reception and interpretation of the text. See Palden Sherab n.d.

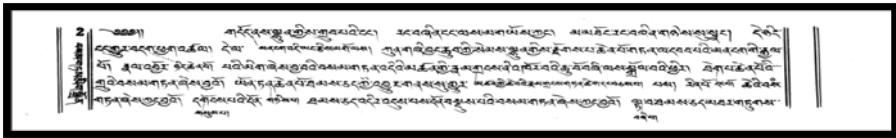
²⁹ See Karmay 1988: 102.

rhetoric of rejection of Mahāyoga practices and were now incorporating them into the Great Perfection tradition.³⁰ The *Lamp*, then, became less of a path to follow (of Buddhist doctrines and practices), and more of a window to a very specific period of the history and intellectual developments of Buddhism in Tibet.

PART 2 – Recension History and Editions of the *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*

As we have seen in this brief summary of the text, the study of the *Lamp* has allowed us to reconsider much of what we know about Buddhism during the Tibetan empire and the Dark Ages periods. One aspect of the study of the text that has not received as much attention though, is the recension history of the text. How did the text survive through the ages? How was it transmitted? How did it make it into the hands of Gene Smith and his collaborators in India in 1974? And where is the original source of the text now? In order to explore the somewhat obscure and confusing transmission history of the text, let's start with a brief description of each of the four editions available, including an image of the first page of each edition for comparative purposes.

Leh edition – 1974



The Leh edition³¹ (from now on, Leh), the earliest one available, was published in 1974, and according to the preface written by Gene Smith, it was

a copy of a **block print** from eastern Tibet. The text was **xylographed** through the efforts of a student of the 'Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse and 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul tradition. The colophon to the blocks is signed by one 'Jam-dbyangs Blo-gros-rgya-mtsho, a teacher connected to Kah-

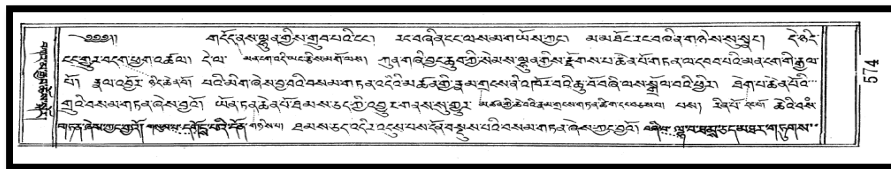
³⁰ On the diversity of traditions that operated under the label of "Atiyoga," see Germano 1994.

³¹ gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, *Rnal byor mig gi bsam gtan, or, Bsam gtan mig sgron: A Treatise on Bhāvana and Dhyāna and the Relationships between the Various Approaches to Buddhist Contemplative Practice*. Leh: smanrtsis shesrig spendzod, 1974.

thog. The **blocks** were prepared on **the basis of a manuscript** which had belonged to the great Rnying-ma-pa scholar Smin-gling Lo-Chen Dharma-shri (1654–1718). This manuscript, in turn, was based on a manuscript from the library of the famed Jo-nang Rje-btsun Tāranātha (b. 1575).³²

I have added emphasis (bold) to the terms “block print,” “xylographed,” and “manuscript,” because, as we will see later, this first description of the physical text by a figure such as Gene Smith will determine many of the assumptions that will be made later by other scholars who will study this text and will go unquestioned for decades.

Volume 104 of the 120 Volume Collection of the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* - 1999³³



The second edition, published in volume 104 in the 120-volume collection of the *Extremely Extensive Spoken Teachings (bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa)* was an initiative of Khen po Mun sel³⁴ in order to incorporate additional *bKa' ma* works that had not been included in the early *bKa' ma*

³² Bold is mine. The full description of the text as given by Gene Smith in his preface to the Leh edition is interesting in and of itself: “The text here is a legible, though not elegant, copy of a block print from eastern Tibet. The text was xylographed through the efforts of a student of the ‘Jam-dbyangs Mkhyen-brtse and ‘Jam-mgon Kong-sprul tradition. The colophon to the blocks is signed by one ‘Jam-dbyangs Blo-gros-rgya-mtsho, a teacher connected to Kah-thog. The blocks were prepared on the basis of a manuscript which had belonged to the great Rnying-ma-pa scholar Smin-gling Lo-Chen Dharma-shri (1654–1718). This manuscript, in turn, was based on a manuscript from the library of the famed Jo-nang Rje-btsun Tāranātha (b. 1575). The text belonging to Smin-gling Lo-chen was defective according to the editor of the block print edition,” in *ibid*. It is interesting that Smith did not recognize the author of the colophon as the famous ‘Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros.

³³ gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, *Bsam Gtan Mig Sgron 120*, vol. 104, 120 vols. Chengdu: kaH thog mkhan po ‘jam dbyangs, 1999. My discussion of the various editions of the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* has benefited from various conversations with Michael Sheehy, former head of Literary Research at TBRC. He also wrote an overview of the various editions of this collection at the TBRC page which has now been deleted from the site but can still be read in the [Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia](#).

³⁴ Khenpo Munsel (mKhan po Mun sel) 1916–1994. For a short biography, see <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Khenpo-Munsel/9929>.

collection edited by bDud 'joms rin po che in 1982.³⁵ The work was carried out by mKhan chen 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan³⁶ with the help of dKar ma bde legs and published in 1999.³⁷ As Esler conveys in his critical analysis of the various editions of the *Lamp*, though, and as it can be easily recognized looking at the first page of both editions as seen in this section, the edition found in the 120 collection “is useless for text-critical purposes, as it is merely a photostatic reproduction of [the Leh edition from 1974], with a few typographical amendments to make all the interlinear glosses fit into the Tibetan page format.”³⁸

Volume 97 of the 110 Volume Collection of the bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa – 2000/2001



The third edition published in volume 97 of a revised and shorter collection of the *Extremely Extensive Spoken Teachings (bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa)* in 110 volumes (Chengdu 110)³⁹ is, according to Esler, a xylographic reprint of a Tibetan block-print, which is the same description given

³⁵ bDud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje. *Rñin Ma Bka' Ma Rgyas Pa: A Collection of Teachings and Initiations of the Rñin-ma-pa Tradition Passed through Continuous and Unbroken Oral Lineages from the Ancient Masters*. Kalimpong, Dist. Darjeeling, W.B.: Dupjung Lama, 1982.

³⁶ Khenpo Jamyang (mKhan chen 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan). For a biography of him, see <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jamyang-Gyeltsen/8536>.

³⁷ Karma Delek (dKar ma bde legs) is the head of the Peltsek Research Center on Tibetan Language and Ancient Texts (dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang), in Lhasa, and one of the main Tibetan scholars who have studied the figure of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes.

³⁸ See Esler 2018: 325. Note: this is the page number from an early version of the critical edition that Esler shared with me. I have not had access to the final version.

³⁹ gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. *bSam gtan mig sgron 110*, vol. 97, 110 vols. Chengdu: kaH thog mkhan po 'jam dbyangs, n.d., ca. 1990. The TBRC site does not give a date for this collection. In a personal communication with Michael Sheehy, former Head of Literary Research at TBRC, he mentioned, “The 110 vols. edition was actually the initial collection that Karma Delek put together, but it was published about a year after Khenpo Jamyang’s edition [in 1999]. The KaH thog edition was made rather hurriedly for the ceremony at KaH thog Monastery and was printed in a small batch. Zenkar Rinpoche and Karma Delek took out all of what was considered non-bKa’ ma texts from that KaH thog edition and printed the 110 vols. edition sometime in 2000/2001.” Personal e-mail 3/11/2014.

editions.⁴⁴ These textual differences have been explored in a diplomatic edition prepared by Donati, and a critical edition prepared by Esler.⁴⁵ In both cases, Chengu 110 has been given preference since both scholars consider it a more reliable witness of the text.

In order to have a better sense of the recension history of the text and, in particular, of the relation between the Leh and the Chengdu 110 editions, the most logical place to start is the colophon of the text, which is identical in both editions.⁴⁶

According to the text, the colophon was written by 'Jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtsho⁴⁷ (1893–1959), of Kaḥ thog monastery, a reincarnation of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892), both very important figures in the non-sectarian movement (*ris med*) that swept Eastern Tibet in the 19th century and was extremely influential in the revival of the Kama literature (*bka' ma*) in the rNying ma tradition. According to the colophon, 'Jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtsho prepared the edition of the text in order to fulfill the enlightened activities of his previous incarnation, 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po, who is described in the colophon as “the last student of the rGyal

⁴⁴ In this regard, Donati made a diplomatic edition of the text in her dissertation, and Esler has opted for a critical edition of the text in his unpublished dissertation. Donati makes a mistake in the attribution of the version of the *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation* that she is using for her diplomatic edition, citing the one in the 120 (which in fact is a reproduction of the one published in Leh), instead of the one found in the 110. See Donati 2006.

⁴⁵ Donati 2006, Esler 2018.

⁴⁶ The relevant parts of the Tibetan colophon reads as follow: “smin gling mkhan chen dharma (503.3) shrI'i phyag dpe las shus shing // des kyang jo nang rje btsun kun dga' snying po'i phyag dpe las ma phyi mdzad pa'o //> [...] dengs du su kun mkhyen bla ma kaH tho ga pas // bde ldang zhir nas gting chen 'di mnyed rgyal // (504.4) 5 rdo rje 'chang dbang padma bl dza ya'i // thugs dgongs rdzogs phyir dge legs rgya mtsho ches // gtong ba'i nor gyi sprin chen bres ba dang // zhing skyong lhag bsam dbyar bya mkha' la 'phyo // chos sbyin 'dzad med par gyis 'phrul chen 'dir // brtson pa'i legs byas gangs (504.5) ri'i rjes 'gro ba // sras bcas rgyal ba'i yongs gngos thabs chen gyis // bla ma'i zab dbyings rab tu mnyes phyir bsngo // mkha' mnyam yid can bgrangs las 'das pa rnam // de bzhin gshegs dga'i bsam gtan bde thob nas // nam grol shi ba chos sku'i rgyal khams (504.6) der // bde blag nyid du phyin pa'i mthu thob shog // chos tshul 'di yang nub med dang zhing rgyas // ting 'dzin rcal chen nyi zla'i bgrod pa las // myur ba'i lam mchog bden don mngon gyur te // mchog dngos grub pas nor 'dzin khyab gyur cig // snod bcud chur (505.1) pa'i gdung ba zhi ba dang // chos 'di'i byin rlabs drod kyi legs bsrings pas // bskal bzang rdzogs ldan snye ma gsar pa la // ci dgar spyod pa'i bkra shis nus med shog // ces pa'ang skyabs rje ze chen pa padma'i mtshan (505.2) can gyi gsung 'di bdud rtsis 'tsho zhing / rgyal ba kaH thog pa chen po'i bka' 'bangs kyi tha chung 'jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i phrin las kyi byed par yid dam bca' ba 'jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtshos smon tshig tu bris pa sarba d'a kly'aNaM bha wa tu // // //” See Leh: 503-505.

⁴⁷ He is most famously known as 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse Chos kyi blo gros.

ba kaH thog pa chen po.⁴⁸ 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brte chos kyi blo gros worked on this edition under the guidance of Ze chen mkhan chen padma nam rgyal (1871–1926),⁴⁹ and rDo rje 'chang dbang padma bi dza ya.⁵⁰ The project was sponsored by one dGe legs rgya mtsho. The colophon, finally, traces the original source for the 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros edition to a text belonging to sMin gling lo chen Dharmasīrī (1654–1718) which was, itself, based on a text belonging to Tāranātha (1575–1634).

The colophon, then, traces the oldest extant version of the text, on which the present ones are based, to the famous Jonangpa teacher Tāranātha. There are some references to the *Lamp* in earlier historical sources (the earliest one probably found in the proclamation of Pho brang Zhi ba 'od in the early eleventh century), but they are not of much help tracing the manuscript history of the work from its presumed composition in the tenth century to the time of Tāranātha in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, we have no manuscript witnesses to help us trace its history from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Most importantly, we do not have the immediate source (manuscript or block-print) for the Leh and the Chengdu 110 editions.

These issues have been tackled by Esler in his critical edition of the text, in which he offers a possible stemma of the text, establishing the relationship between Leh and Chengdu 110 as seen in image below. As we can see in Esler's stemma of the text, both Leh (M in his chart) and Chengdu (C) have a common ancestor in Y, the supposed block-print, prepared by 'Jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtsho in Katok, which was based on a manuscript belonging to sMin gling lo chen Dharmasīrī¹ (β), and this one, in turn, was based on a manuscript belonging to Tāranātha (α). While Esler's philological work is remarkable and seems to explain some of the differences between the Leh and the Chengdu-110 edition, the fact that there are no witnesses of either of

⁴⁸ I am unclear as to who this title refers to. Donati identifies this figure as sMin gling lo chen Dharmasīrī, although this attribution is dubious, since he was affiliated with Mindroling Monastery, and not with Kaḥ thog. Esler identifies him with Kaḥ thog Dri med zhing skyong (1899–1939). He was the Fourth Dri med zhing skyong.

⁴⁹ He was the fourth Ze chen rgyal tshab, one of the main teachers of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros.

⁵⁰ This may refer to mKhan chen kun bzang dpal ldan (1862–1943), who was a student of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po and a teacher to his reincarnation, 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse chos kyi blo gros. For a biographical account, see <http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kunzang-Pelden/9593>

⁵¹ He was the younger brother of the famous treasure finder (*gter ton*), gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714). One of his main teachers was Padma 'phrin las, responsible for one of the most famous biographies of gNubs chen. sMin gling lo chen Dharmasīrī is, then, closely connected to the *mdo rgyud sems gsum* which connects him back to the Zur lineage and to gNubs chen himself.

the editions (δ or ε) in his stemma make it difficult to corroborate. While this is very possible, particularly after the dramatic consequences in Tibet wrought by the Cultural Revolution on all aspects of material culture, it still seems rather strange that none of these sources for the current editions have been located.

Searching for the Lost Manuscript

Esler's stemma leaves us with a lost manuscript used for the Indian edition of 1974, and two sets of unallocated block prints (γ and ε) somewhere in Tibet. Esler, following a conversation with mKhan po dPal ldan shes rab (1938–2010), looked into this issue and tried to shed some light on the manuscript on which the Leh edition from 1974 is based:

[The Leh edition] appears to have been copied on the basis of a manuscript which Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche found in the library in Calcutta (δ), this manuscript itself being a copy of γ . This rather vague mention of a library in Calcutta could refer to the library of Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, where Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche was professor, to the library of Calcutta University or to the library of the Asiatic Society. Indeed, according to Lopon P. Ogyan Tanzin, who was working under Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche at that time, Dr. Anukul Chandra Banerjee (Calcutta University) frequently helped Rinpoche to take out books on loan from Calcutta University as well as from the Asiatic Society. In March 2011, I was able, thanks to Prof. Mihir Kumar Chakrabarti (General Secretary, Asiatic Society) and Dr. Bandana Mukherjee (Manuscript Librarian, Asiatic Society), to consult the catalogues of non-canonical Tibetan manuscripts held at the Asiatic Society prepared by Dr. Archana Ray. There is no mention of the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron* therein, and I was assured that all the manuscripts held have been catalogued. Later, in August–September 2012, I was granted permission by Tulku Ugen Chencho Lama, the son and principal regent of Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche, to carefully look through his father's personal collection held in the library of the Khordong Byangter Monastery near Siliguri. I used this opportunity to prepare a catalogue of the Tibetan texts kept in that library, but unfortunately, the manuscript δ is not found there either. It still remains to be seen whether the manuscript can be located in Calcutta University or Visva-Bharati.⁵²

⁵² See Esler's "Critical Edition: Introductory Remarks," p. 324.

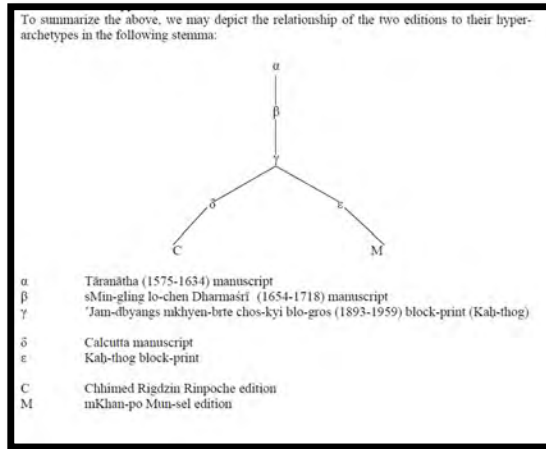


Figure 1. Esler's bSam gtan mig sgron stemma

The Chengdu Edition and the mysterious block-print

A conversation I had with dKar ma bde legs, who was involved in the elaboration of the three different editions of the *Extremely Extensive Spoken Teachings* (*bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa*) in April of 2013, shed some light on this issue. According to dKar ma bde legs, the Chengdu edition is, in fact, based on the Leh edition, which he collected during a trip to India and Nepal during the '90s in search of Tibetan texts and, after some editing, used as the base for all of the Tibetan editions. This version of events, unfortunately, seems to question Esler's analysis of the recension history of the text, and current preference among gNubs chen scholars for the Chengdu edition over the Leh version. Although I had no reason to doubt dKar ma bde legs, there was still the question of how the Leh version could be the source for the Chengdu edition, since the Chengdu edition is based on a block-print. The answer was offered to me by Michael Sheehy at TBRC (Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center Library), who wrote a short study of the history of the various editions of the *Extremely Extensive Oral Teachings* for the TBRC site.⁵³ According to Sheehy, after a close examination of the text, although the Chengdu edition looks like a xylographic edition based on a block-print, it is, in fact, a manuscript made to look like it is based on a block print. This would finally explain why the Leh edition, as dKar ma bde legs already confirmed, can be the source for the Chengdu edition, since this one is also a manuscript.

This also raises the doubt that there was ever a block-print for the

⁵³ See "The Nyingma Kama Collections" by Michael Sheehy in the [Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia](#).

Lamp for the Eye in Meditation, a notion raised by Gene Smith in his introduction to the Indian edition and by Esler regarding the origins of the Chengdu edition. A careful reading of the colophon does not actually mention a block-print,⁵⁴ but only the preparation of an edition of the text. In fact, most of the texts found in the *bKa' ma* edition circulated in the form of manuscripts. These texts never had the appeal, until the late 19th century, with the emergence of the non-sectarian movement (*ris med*), that the treasure tradition (*gter ma*) had for the rNying ma school, and never warranted the enormous expense of producing block-prints. In fact, the *bKa' ma* collection, which collects what are considered to be oral transmission lineages of the rNying ma tradition, is a very recent literary creation (at least in its current size) with the first edition published by bDud 'joms rin po che in 1982.

The fact that the *Lamp* was never printed and only survived in what it seems to be a very small number of manuscripts (if not a single manuscript), also seems to confirm the rare nature of the text in Tibet itself. The *Lamp* became a relevant witness to the developments of Buddhism in the tenth century, but it did not have any relevance for the doctrinal or contemplative debates that took place since the Tibetan Buddhist practices and traditions described in the text lost relevance (Chinese Chan) or dramatically evolved (the Great Perfection tradition). That would also explain why the text was only preserved in the private collections of scholars like Tāranātha, who had a keen interest in the history of Buddhism in Tibet.

This, though, leaves us with the mystery of the original manuscript on which the Leh, and therefore all other editions, are based. During my attempts to locate the manuscript, dKar ma bde legs suggested that I contact Zhe chen Gompa, in Nepal, where he had heard the original manuscript was actually a scroll (not in the traditional *dpe cha* format) and it was part of the estate of the late Dil mgo mKhyen brtse rin po che (1910-1991).⁵⁵ This story was confirmed by Matthieu Ricard, a close disciple of Dil mgo mKhyen brtse and a resident at Zhe chen Monastery since the late '70s, who mentioned that "there was a special, unknown manuscript that a lama brought through some years ago."⁵⁶ It was written on a scroll, not in *dpe cha* format, just a rolled up scroll

⁵⁴ As we saw at the beginning of this article, the notion of a block-print began with the first description of the text offered by Gene Smith in his preface to the 1974 Leh edition.

⁵⁵ This makes sense since he is considered to be one of the reincarnations of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po, whom we have already encountered in the transmission history of the text.

⁵⁶ The connection between Ricard and Dil mgo mKhyen brtse is outlined in Revel and Ricard 1999.

with the entire *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation* on it.”⁵⁷ The scroll, which would seem to indicate a very old version of the text, was not at Zhe chen Monastery anymore, and had probably made its way to India, where it likely became the source for the version copied by 'Chi med rig 'dzin and published in Leh in 1974. Locating the original manuscript would definitely settle some of our current problems with the recension history of the text, particularly if the manuscript is in the form of a scroll, indicating a very old date for the text, maybe even dating back to the Dark Age period. It seems clear to me, though, that the assumptions made in the creation of a diplomatic and a critical edition need to be revisited in light of these new findings. Locating the manuscript would also help solve some of the riddles posed by the many mistakes in the Leh manuscript, probably caused by a hurried copyist,⁵⁸ that dKar ma bde legs and the other editors of the text attempted to correct in the following editions without ever being able to consult the original.

A Manuscript Not Found... Now What?

A legitimate question a reader who is not dedicated to the study of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, the Tibetan Dark Age, Tibetan Buddhism, or even Buddhism in general may ask is, so what? What is the big deal? As a way of concluding this article, let me offer a few possible answers to that question.

First, recalling the warning by Martin West at the beginning of this chapter, “Anyone who wants to make serious use of ancient texts must pay attention to the uncertainties of the transmission [...] if he is not interested in the authenticity and dependability of the details, he may be a true lover of beauty, but he is not a serious student of antiquity.”⁵⁹ Knowing that all current editions of the *Lamp* come, in fact, from the same source (a now lost manuscript) sets the record straight about the recension history of the text, and helps us re-evaluate some of the assumptions that were made in the making of the diplomatic and critical editions of the text. This new evidence presented here does not diminish in any way the impressive work done by Donati and Esler (translating a text like the *Lamp* is no small feat), but I do think it is important from a philological and also from an interpretative standpoint to update our current knowledge on the history of the text.

⁵⁷ I want to thank my friend, Dominic Sur, for asking Matthieu Ricard this question during his field research period in Nepal in 2012. Personal e-mail 11/25/2012.

⁵⁸ On the copyist of the manuscript, see Esler's “Critical Edition: Introductory Remarks.”

⁵⁹ See West 1973: 7.

Second, the fact that the *Lamp* was never printed and only survived in what seems to be a very small number of manuscripts (if not a single manuscript) also seems to confirm the rare nature of the text in Tibet itself. The *Lamp* became a relevant witness to the developments of Buddhism in the tenth century, but it did not have any relevance for the doctrinal or contemplative debates that took place post-tenth century since the Tibetan Buddhist practices and traditions described in the text lost relevance (Chinese Chan) or dramatically evolved (the Mahāyoga and the Great Perfection traditions).

Third, the uncertainty of the transmission also opens up the question regarding the integrity of the text. Although we can be quite certain about gNubs chen's authorship of the *Lamp*,⁶⁰ there are some questions about the copious notes found throughout the text. Were these

⁶⁰ There are several clues that can help us feel comfortable with stating that gNubs chen is the author of the *Lamp*. First, we have the colophon attribution. Although we always must be careful with taking at face value colophon attributions, this is a first step in identifying possible authorship. The colophon, in this case, is pretty clear: "*The Meditation of the Eye of Yoga*, also known as *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*, by gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes." See gNubs chen 1974: 508. Second, we also have a few important self-references within the body of the text, as well as in the interlinear notes, that reinforces the sense that gNubs chen is the author of the text. There are two different instances in the text in which gNubs chen refers to himself as "I, the little monk." "ban chung rang gi 'dod byang kyang yin," 375.6 and "ban chung rang gi 'dod phyi nang gi chos thams cad rang byung gi ye dshes su thag chod pa la," 419.2. An example of this can be found in the dedication chapter, situated just before the final colophon, in which gNubs chen declares: "I, the beggar, Sangs rgyas ye shes Rinpoche, the little monk from gNubs, I have studied with many scholars from different countries, including many scholars from India, the Nepalese king, Vasudhara, and the translator from Brusha Che btsan skyes [among others]. I served and pleased those scholars, and [since they were delighted] they granted me authorization [to study with them]. I opened the door of the treasure of their minds, and I completely understood and obtained the meaning of the [Sutra which Gathers all] Intentions, the King of the Quintessential Precepts, and I myself became a King of Quintessential Precepts." (The Tibetan text says: "bdag sprang po gNubs ban sangs rgyas ye shes (498.1) rin po ches // rgya gar gyi mkhas pa paNDita mang po dang / bal po'i rgyal po ba su dh'a ra dang / gru zhwa'i yul gyi lo ts'a ba che btsan skyes la sogs pa rgyal khams so so'i (498.2) mkhas pa mang po'i zhal brims te // mnyes pa phul bas paNDita rnam dgyes pa skyes te gnang ba thob pas / thugs kyi mdzod sgo phye nas / man ngag gi rgyal po (498.3) dgongs don mthar gtugs pa bdag gis thob ste / bdag man ngag gi rgyal por gyur to." In gNubs chen 1974: 497.6-498.3. As Germano has also argued, one of the aspects that made gNubs chen such a unique individual is that he was one of the first Tibetans to claim authorship of his own texts, instead of simply pretending to use the name of a famous Indian teacher to legitimize his writings. See Germano 2000: 252. Third, as we have mentioned before, the *Lamp* is also attributed to gNubs chen as early as the 11th century by scholars like Pho brang Zhi ba 'od. Fourth, there are many similarities in content and tone between the *Lamp* and gNubs chen's other major surviving work, the *Armor Against Darkness* (*Mun pa'i go*

written by gNubs chen himself? If so, what does this say about the nature of the text? (an auto-commentary? a work in progress?). Could they have been written by his disciples? By someone of the later tradition? And how do the notes affect the meaning of the text? Do the notes tell us anything about how the text was used? (as a meditation textbook in a teaching setting perhaps?). In the final section of this article, let me try to answer some of these questions.

The copious interlinear notes found in the text offer evidence of some heavy editing during the early decades or centuries after its composition, offering some clues as to its early reception history among the early rNying ma and Great Perfection followers. All currently extant manuscripts of the *Lamp* are interspersed with the same interlinear annotations.⁶¹ These annotations reflect the heavy editing that the text underwent during its writing or with most certainty after its completion by gNubs chen, and they expand ideas discussed within the text, offer some insight on obscure passages, and correct textual problems (sometimes a misquoted sutra), but also create textual problems of their own (misattributing a sūtra, for example).⁶² Karmay, in his pioneer study of the early Great Perfection, which was also the first serious study of the *Lamp*, was already skeptical regarding gNubs chen's authorship of the interlinear notes, particularly since they seem to include a few anachronisms, like the use of the name gLang dar ma to refer to King 'U'i dum brtan.⁶³ Meinert⁶⁴ and Esler⁶⁵ have offered other

cha). All of this, then, can help us assert with a certain degree of confidence that gNubs chen is the author of the *Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*.

⁶¹ Tib. *mchan bu* or *mchan 'grel*.

⁶² On p. 38 of the Leh edition an interlinear note attributes a quote to the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras when, indeed, it is from the Ratnakūṭa Sūtra.

⁶³ As Yamaguchi already argued, the use of the derogative name "Langdarma" cannot be found in any of the manuscripts of the Dunhuang cave, which probably indicates a late Dark Age or early Tibetan Renaissance period for the composition of the interlinear notes. See Yamaguchi 1996.

⁶⁴ Meinert offers as an example the following grammatical point: "Der Begriff *bdag* im Grundtext ist in einer Anmerkung durch *nyid chen po* als *bdag nyid chen po* 'große Wesenheit' erweitert. Allerdings ist diese Erklärung an dieser Stelle irreführend. Denn der Grundtext liefert in der Lesung *bdag phyag 'tshal* bereits den traditionellen Vers der Verehrung des Verfassers (*rtsom pa po'i mchod brjod*), so daß *bdag phyag 'tshal* als 'ich verehere' zu übersetzen ist. Die Ergänzung in der Anmerkung ist grammatisch nicht schlüssig. Denn hätte die Bedeutung ausgedrückt werden wollen 'Verehrung eben diesem Zustand, der zur großen Wesenheit geworden ist', müßte die grammatisch korrekte Version folgendermaßen lauten: */bdag nyid chen po'i ngnag du gyur pa de la bdag phyag 'tshal/*. Zumindest diese erste Anmerkung stammt somit ganz eindeutig nicht aus der Feder gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes selbst, sondern ist als eine spätere Hinzufügung zu verstehen." In Meinert 2004: 238 n. 599.

⁶⁵ Esler, in particular, offers interesting insights on the nature and possible origin of these interlinear notes: "One of the glosses in particular (C 15.4) gives a hint about

convincing historical and grammatical arguments that seem to confirm Karmay's early suspicions regarding the authorship of the notes, attributing them to close disciples, or to the later Tibetan tradition.⁶⁶ I agree with the prevalent assessment of the interlinear notes being written not by gNubs chen, but by some close disciples or early custodians of gNubs chen's tradition (probably, early members of the Zur tradition, who upheld gNubs chen's teachings after his passing).

The interlinear notes, while found throughout the text, become particularly copious in the Mahāyoga and, in particular, in the Atiyoga chapter. The use of the interlinear notes is quite inconsistent since they do not simply operate as an auto-commentary (as they do in some of the works of Sakya Paṇḍita, for example). Sometimes the notes clarify an obscure passage, correct a grammatical error, or attribute a quotation to an otherwise unnamed textual source (although sometimes the interlinear notes also make mistakes, like misattributing a quotation to the wrong text). If the interlinear notes were written by gNubs chen

the date of composition of the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron*, since it alludes to Glang-dar-ma's religious persecution: 'At the time of Glang-dar-ma, because of the obstacles which came towards the venerable Ye-shes dbang-po, the lineage of the instructors of dialectics declined.' This gloss occurs in the context of the advice to obtain the lineages of the various approaches (Chapter I, §5.2), where it is explained that the Tibetan branch of the lineage of the simultaneous approach (which had belonged to the [Tibetan] emperor and monks) had declined by gNubs-chen's time. One of the problems with this gloss concerns Ye-shes dbang-po, who is presumably identical to dBa' Ye-shes dbang-po, the first abbot of bSam-yas and successor of Śāntarakṣita; however, dBa' Ye-shes dbang-po (whose secular name was dBa' gSal-snang) is generally believed to have passed away before the death of Khri-srong lde'u-btsan in 797 CE, thus far predating Glang-dar-ma (r. 836-842 CE). A further question arises as to why Ye-shes dbang-po, who is generally referred to as a master of the gradualist approach, should be mentioned in the context of the decline of the simultaneous approach. Of course, the term 'dialectics' (*mtshan-nyid*; Skt. *lakṣaṇa*), which is found in the expression 'vehicle of dialectics' (*mtshan-nyid-kyi theg-pa*; Skt. *lakṣaṇayāna*), can be said to refer to the *sūtra* vehicle in general, and hence to englobe both the gradualist and simultaneous approaches. Nonetheless, it is clear from the context that it is the decline of the simultaneous approach that is being referred to. The impression one gains from all these factors is that the text (or, at the very least, this gloss) was written quite some time after the events here alluded to. That is why Ye-shes dbang-po is mistakenly made a contemporary of Glang-dar-ma, and perhaps also why his death is associated with the decline of the simultaneous approach. Furthermore, the very mention of the sobriquet Glang-dar-ma seems odd, since this nickname is not found in the Dunhuang documents; this would point to the fact that the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron*'s glosses are insertions by a later hand. It is likely that these glosses were written down by a disciple of the author, probably an immediate one. Indeed, several indications point to the fact that the glosses incorporate fragments of an oral commentary to the text." In Esler 2012: 129.

⁶⁶ van Schaik is one of the few scholars who offers some appealing arguments in favor of gNubs chen being the author of the interlinear notes. See van Schaik 2004: 197.

himself, we should read the *Lamp* more as a work-in-progress by the author, a not-very-polished text that gNubs chen may have used more as a teaching manual than as a completed treatise presenting the views of the Atiyoga tradition.

In addition, the last chapter dedicated to the Great Perfection tradition is the most heavily edited, to the point that some pages are difficult to read, which seems to indicate that the text was edited to include some of the later developments within the tradition after gNubs chen's passing. If we accept that the interlinear notes may not have been written by gNubs chen, we can interpret them as offering important clues for our understanding of a Great Perfection tradition that in the *Lamp* can be seen at its very early stages. The interlinear notes contribute to a picture of a text that is both witness to and participant in the emergence of a new tradition, the Great Perfection, that is trying to differentiate itself from other Buddhist contemplative traditions, while arguing for its legitimacy, as well as the continuity of its doctrines and practices with established Buddhist teachings. The interlinear notes do not seem to reflect developments past the eleventh century, since they focus on the early Great Perfection tradition as reflected in the early *Sems sde* literature, without including later texts like the *All Sovereign King* (*Kun byed rgyal po*) or Seminal Heart literature (*sNying thig*). The notes, then, can be read as reflecting the early reception of the text. They highlight the parts that needed clarification, those that were particularly under attack by other traditions, etc.

Finally, Sam van Schaik has pioneered in his study of the Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts an approach that considers the materiality of the texts, as well as the connection between their physical form and their use. While this is not something that is traditionally done in our study of Tibetan texts, where there is a heavy emphasis on the meaning of the text (interpretation/hermeneutical approach to the text), accounting for the materiality of any text, in this case the *Lamp*, can help us approach the text and understand it in new and interesting ways.⁶⁷ In the case of the *Lamp*, as we have seen, we can assume that the text as it arrived to us is probably reproducing a very old version written by gNubs chen in the early tenth century, and with interlinear notes that are no later than the twelfth century. Regardless of whether the notes were written by gNubs chen or not, if we take into account the materiality of the text, what we have here, then, is not simply a treatise in the conventional sense of the term, i.e., a formal and precise discussion on the topic of meditation, but a text that was used in a pedagogical context, by a teacher (gNubs chen initially, his disciples later) explaining to students the diversity of Buddhist contemplative practice,

⁶⁷ See Van Schaik 2015: 21-23.

as well as its intricacies. The interlinear notes reflect the editing the text underwent after its original writing (something that all of the editions with the exception of the electronic ones have tried to preserve) in order to include questions posed by students, refining answers, and to incorporate new developments, which would explain the bulk of the editing takes place in the chapter dedicated to the latest traditions to take root in Tibet (Mahāyoga and Atiyoga), and not so much in the gradual and sudden chapters.

To conclude, then, a detailed analysis of the transmission of the history of a text like the *Lamp*, as well as a careful (even though preliminary) consideration of the physicality of the text becomes much more than a simple exercise in philological analysis, but a new way of approaching and interpreting texts that take into account not only the way in which they might have been read, but the ways in which they may have been used.

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Rethinking Treasure (part one)

Robert Mayer

Dedicated with gratitude to Matthew Kapstein, exemplary scholar and perennial inspiration.

Introduction

In October 2017, Cathy Cantwell and I, with the very welcome contributions of Lopon P. Ogyan Tanzin, and the assistance of Dr Dylan Esler, began a project on Myang ral Nyi ma'i 'od zer and early *gter ma* in Tibet, funded by the German DFG, and based, through the kindness of Carmen Meinert and Volkhard Krech, at the Ruhr University in Bochum (RUB). I am currently contributing to this project part-time, mainly from the UK. Much of the research I did when working on it full time, from October 2017 through June 2018, still remains unpublished, although several of the insights developed in that period are also reflected in this paper.

Earlier, in 2016, I gave a lecture that explored related themes to the Buddhist Studies Graduate Students Seminar in Oxford, and from the resultant discussion, Anna Sehnalova, Yegor Grebnev, and myself, began an ongoing interdisciplinary seminar series at Merton College, Oxford, on treasure discovery across different cultures. From Hilary Term 2019, the seminar continued at Wolfson College.¹ We are exploring the rich and varied Treasure cultures mainly of India, China, Tibet, and the Islamic world, considering them individually and comparatively, as well as contemplating their often complex mutual entanglements. Participants and speakers have included Barend te Haar, Yegor Grebnev, Cathy Cantwell, Rob Mayer, Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, Ulrike Roesler, Anna Sehnalova, Charles Stewart, Catherine Hardie, Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, Piers Kelly, Reinier Langelaar, and others.

Thus the basic outline of this paper is the outcome of work I did in Oxford between 2016 and September 2017, much enriched by subsequent work for RUB, so that earlier versions of it have already been

¹ We are grateful to the Tibetan & Himalayan Studies Centre at Wolfson for supplying us with facilities, and a small grant. Scholars working on Treasure traditions in any culture, and interested in participating, are welcome to contact us.

presented as lectures in the course of 2017 and 2018, at the universities of Oxford, Harvard, and Vienna.²

My preliminary task has been to re-examine and reassess the sources used by previous scholarship for understanding the historical origins of *gter ma* in Tibet, and, if necessary, to seek out further sources too.

In reviewing the existing literature, what I have found most striking is that this topic has so far been approached quite often through what we might call internal evidence, that is, through the testimonies of the *gter ma* literature itself, and the closely related non-*gter ma* writings of famous *gter stons*. Most widely relied upon are the *bKa' chems ka khol ma*, the *Maṅi bka' 'bum*, and Myang ral's works, all from the 12th century; Guru Chos dbang's works from the 13th century; O rgyan gling pa's *gter mas* from the 14th century; and 'Jigs med gling pa's *gTam gyi tshogs thegs pa'i rgya mtsho* from the 18th century. A further Tibetan work by a more recent *gter ma* apologist, the *gTer gyi rnam bshad* of the third rDo grub chen incarnation, 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865-1926), has also been influential upon some Western scholars, not least through Tulku Thondup's 1986 translation of it.

I have attempted to reexamine some of these sources, to see if they are fit for purpose: Can we best understand the origins of the *gter ma* tradition mainly from its own internal evidence? Or might we get a more rounded view by seeking external sources too, that is, sources not directly authored or redacted by active participants in the *gter ma* traditions?

In that spirit, in the first part of this paper, I will reexamine the single most influential example of a *gter ma* text widely believed to offer us crucial insights into the early formation of the *gter ma* traditions, O rgyan gling pa's *rGyal po bka'i thang yig*, and raise a number of questions about its suitability for such an exercise.

After that, in the second part, I will outline twelve alternative historical approaches that we hope might eventually yield broader, sounder, and deeper understandings than are available from a narrower reliance on texts produced by *gter stons* themselves and their

² Many people helped me in various stages of preparing this paper. I would like to thank in particular Daniel Berounsky, Henk Blezer, Cathy Cantwell, Ronald Davidson, Brandon Dotson, Dylan Esler, Rolf Giebel, Yegor Grebnev, Janet Gyatso, Barend te Haar, Cat Hardie, Guntram Hazod, Dan Hirshberg, Matthew Kapstein, Samten Karmay, Piers Kelly, Yury Khokhlov, Per Kvaerne, Reinier Langelaar, Jue Liang, Stefan Mang, Dan Martin, Wiesiek Mical, Charles Ramble, Anna Sehnalova, Sam van Schaik, Henrik Sørensen, Per Sørensen, Charles Stewart, Jeffrey Sundberg, Peter Szanto, Lopon P. Ogyan Tanzin, Ben Williams, Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim. All errors in this sometimes hastily compiled paper are of course my own.

disciples. It is intended that in a series of future publications, separate papers will be produced expanding on these twelve alternative historical approaches in turn. Prominent is a more detailed look at the role in the historical formation of the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition of the widespread indigenous Tibetan cosmologies involving environment and wealth controlling ancestral local deities, and the so far little examined yet closely interrelated indigenous traditions of offering *gter* to such *gzhi bdag* or *yul lha*, in return for worldly prosperity and general environmental enrichment. Equally important are a variety of treasure practices from the cultures surrounding Tibet, that have not yet been properly considered. Fundamental to everything is an appreciation of the growing anthropological literature on treasure discovery, which is now recognised by anthropologists as a widespread phenomenon, occurring in many different cultures across the world. For us, this opens the gate to understanding the emergence of *gter ma*, driven by particular historical conditions in Tibet, through the hybridisation of originally quite separate indigenously Tibetan and imported Buddhist treasure conceptions.

The second half of the present paper is thus intended largely as an advanced notice of a series of further papers, currently in various stages of preparation, while the first part is largely taken up with the critical reexamination of the *rGyal po bka'i thang yig* referred to above.

O rgyan gling pa and his Treasure Chronicles

O rgyan gling pa was born in 1323³ at Ya rje in lHo brag, Southern Tibet, a region from earliest times strongly devoted to Padmasambhava,⁴ the master from Uḍḍiyāna around whose person so much of the later *gter ma* tradition was narrated.

O rgyan gling pa was renowned in his day for ritual and material treasures, but is nowadays best remembered for his historical treasures, the *bka' thang sde lnga*, or *Five Chronicles*. These are [1] *The Chronicles of Gods and Demons (lha 'dre bka'i thang yig)*, [2] *Chronicles of the Kings (rgyal po bka'i thang yig)*, [3] *Chronicles of the Queens (btsun mo bka'i thang yig)*, [4] *Chronicles of the Translators and Scholars (lo pan bka'i*

³ The dates of his death are unclear.

⁴ Padmasambhava's particular association with a number of locations to the south of Tibet, including lHo brag, Bumthang in the modern Bhutan, and Yanglesho in Nepal, is described in the Dunhuang text PT 44. Matthew Kapstein has proposed an interesting hypothesis for a historical Padmasambhava, drawing on all extant early sources, that also links him particularly to these regions (personal communication, 29th June 2015); see also Kapstein 2000, page 159.

thang yig), and [5] *Chronicles of the Ministers (blon po bka'i thang yig)*. In addition, he produced a major hagiography of Padmasambhava called the [6] *Padma bka'i thang*, or *Chronicles of Padma*. Taken together, these provide a comprehensive mythology of the advent of Buddhism in Tibet, narrated from various different perspectives.

The later reception of one of these *Chronicles* was unusual. *gTer ma* was principally the preserve of the culturally more indigenised but often politically more marginalised rNying ma school. *gTer mas* were on the whole less valued by the more powerful dGe lugs and Sa skya schools, who tended (rhetorically at least) towards privileging traditions of proven Indian origins above others, yet who usually carried most weight amongst the Mongol and Chinese forces that were so influential in Tibet for several centuries. But it was precisely within the nexus of dGe lugs canonical orthodoxy and Mongol and Chinese power, that O rgyan gling pa's *Padma bka'i thang*, or *Chronicles of Padma*, found particular favour. Several editions were printed in Beijing and Mongolia for political reasons and promoted there by the very agencies one might otherwise expect to ignore them.⁵

There is some possibility that the reason for this Mongol and Chinese political interest might prove germane to my discussion, so I will return to it below (for although it is not yet clear how strong the possibility might turn out to be, the currently known evidence does seem to warrant further investigation). For now, I will just mention that the prominent state promotion of O rgyan gling pa's chronicles helped bring them to the attention of early western Tibetologists (Laufer 1911, Francke 1927, Tucci 1949), whose interest was further piqued when they found that amongst their highly mythologised narratives, these *Chronicles* also preserved some demonstrably ancient materials of real value to historians.⁶

What early materials do the *Treasure Chronicles* have?

Cathy Cantwell has already shown how, in the case of the ritual or tantric texts that make up such a major part of *gter ma* literature, although a high status lama, whether *gter ston* or editor, can sometimes

⁵ See Kapstein 2015, "*Gter-ma* as Imperial Treasure: The 1755 Beijing Edition of the *Padma bka' thang*", in RET Number 31, Février 2015, *Papers for Elliot Sperling*.

⁶ B. Laufer, 1911. *Der Roman einer tibetische Koenigin (bTsun-mo bka'-thang)*, Leipzig. Francke, A. H., 1927. 'gZer-Myig. A Book of the Tibetan Bompos'. *Asia Major*, Vol. iv, Fasc. 2-3, 1927. Tucci, G., 1949. *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 3 vols., Libreria dello Stato, Roma (see pages 110-111).

change the practices considerably, nevertheless it is commonplace to find older materials recycled within newer *gter ma*. Quite frequently, the later ritual *gter mas* barely change the earlier ritual texts they incorporate.⁷ In a paper inspired by Cantwell's textual findings and also by the methods of literary analysis developed by the Hebrew scholar Peter Schäfer, I have analysed some of the repeated structural patterns that can frequently be seen to govern the construction of new works out of parts of older works.⁸ Cathy Cantwell's forthcoming book, which looks at rNying ma phur pa *gter ma* over the *longue durée* (13th century to 20th century), will present considerably more evidence confirming these processes, and in considerably greater detail. While not in any way denying that *gter ma* literature can sometimes innovate, from the sample she has studied, there seems to be little evidence that *gter ma* is either appreciably more or less innovative than non-*gter ma* literature.⁹

But O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles* are not ritual texts. On the contrary, what makes them so fascinating is their reproduction of lengthy narratives, deployed for the purposes of creating a historiography of the advent of Buddhism in Tibet. No systematic comparison has yet been made between textual reuse in ritual *gter ma* and in historiographical narratives such as these: might such an analysis find, as in Cantwell's study of ritual texts, scant evidence that historical narrative *gter ma* is either appreciably more or less innovative than non-*gter ma* historical narrative? Tantric rituals are conceived of as unchanging and timeless, which tends to put a brake on the degree to which they should change as they cascade down the centuries from one *gter ma* to another; but it is not yet clear if, or to what degree, or in what ways, traditional historiographical or mythic narratives might (or might not) have been considered more malleable.

Nevertheless, five significant examples of O rgyan gling pa's textual reuse have already been analysed by Tucci, Blondeau, Karmay,

⁷ Cathy Cantwell, 2014. "Development of a Tantric Meditation Practice: Three Generations of Tibetan Lamas" In: *Dharma Drum Buddhist College Special Series 2*, ed. Chuang Kuo-pin (莊國彬), Taipei: Shin Wen Feng Print Corporation (新文), pp. 374-403; see also Cathy Cantwell, 2015. "Different Kinds of Composition/Compilation Within the Dudjom Revelatory Tradition", In *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Volume 36/37 2013/2014 (2015)*, pages 243-280.

⁸ Robert Mayer, 2015. "(What's so new about Terma?) Terton and Tradent: Innovation and Conservation in Tibetan Treasure Literature", In *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Volume 36/37 2013/2014 (2015)*, pages 227-242.

⁹ Cantwell, C. in press. *Dudjom Rinpoche's Vajrakilaya Works: A Study in Authoring, Compiling and Editing Texts in the Tibetan Revelatory Tradition*. Equinox, Sheffield.

Kvaerne, Pritzker, and now Esler. From these five examples, we can see that with only one exception, O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles* do not merely reproduce their ancient narrative source texts with little change, or even verbatim, as is not an unknown practice among ritual *gter mas*. The examples so far studied indicate that the newer versions resurfacing in O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles* have in all cases except one been redacted to achieve meanings significantly at variance with their textual predecessors. To what extent this was done by O rgyan gling pa, and to what extent by possible unknown intermediary sources, has not yet been ascertained, but what is clear, and important for my present argument, is that older narratives do reappear within O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles* in a significantly transformed manner.

(i) In 1971, Anne-Marie Blondeau discovered that in his *Chronicles of Gods and Demons* (*lha 'dre bka'i thang*), O rgyan gling pa had adopted an older Bon po text, the *gZer mig*, not merely copying it, but adapting it, to give it a new, changed, Buddhist meaning.¹⁰

(ii) A few years later, Blondeau¹¹ with Per Kvaerne¹² then made a further discovery about O rgyan gling pa's use of the *gZer mig*. Laufer had translated the *Chronicles of the Queens* (*btsun mo bka'i thang*) as early as 1911,¹³ and in 1927, Francke had already observed how it had parallels with the *gZer mig*.¹⁴ Blondeau and Kvaerne could now prove that the Bon text was older, and that once again O rgyan gling pa had redacted it to change the names and the specific episode to suit his Buddhist version of the story.

(iii) In his work of 1988, Samten Karmay describes part of the *Chronicles of the Ministers* (*blon po bka'i thang*) as 'a pell-mell summary of chapter four of the *bSam gtan mig sgron*',¹⁵ a much older work attributed to the possibly 9th or 10th century gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes. Tucci's earlier edition and translation had missed this de-

¹⁰ A-M Blondeau, "Le Lha-'dre bka'-than", in A. Macdonald (ed.), *Études tibétaines à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, Paris, 1971, pp. 29-126.

¹¹ A.-M. Blondeau, *Annuaire de l'E.P.H.E., 5ème section*, 84 (1975-1976), pp. 109-119, 85 (1976-1977), pp. 89-96.

¹² Per Kvaerne, 1980. 'A preliminary study of the *gzer mig*'. In Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (eds.), *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*, Warminster (Aris & Phillips), 1980, pp.185-191.

¹³ B. Laufer, *Der Roman einer tibetische Koenigin* (*bTsun-mo bka'-thang*), Leipzig, 1911.

¹⁴ Francke, A. H., 1927. 'gZer-Myig. A Book of the Tibetan Bompos'. *Asia Major*, Vol. iv, Fasc. 2-3, 1927.

¹⁵ S. Karmay, *The Great Perfection* (*rDzogs chen*) *A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*. Leiden, 1988. See pp. 90ff.

pendency.¹⁶ In several pages of dense analysis, Karmay demonstrated how O rgyan gling pa redacted numerous passages in gNubs chen's original text, to produce meanings often at variance with the original. Here, the material is as much doctrinal as historical.

A few years later, Tanaka and Robertson (1992) returned to this point in more detail, reaffirming Karmay's findings.¹⁷ They describe Chapters 12, 13 and 14 of the *Blon po bka' thang* as a disordered repetition of passages from the *bSam gtan mig sgron* with substantially rearranged meanings.

The same material has now been revisited again by Dylan Esler, this time in much greater detail still, and Esler comes to similar conclusions.¹⁸

(iv) In his Oxford DPhil of 2017, David Pritzker writes that the 12th century Tholing ms. has an account of the pre-Imperial Twelve Minor Kingdoms of Tibet closer to the *Chronicle of the Kings* (*rgyal po*

¹⁶ G. Tucci. *Minor Buddhist Texts, Serie Orientale Roma, IX, Part II*. Rome 1958.

¹⁷ Tanaka, Kenneth K., and Raymond E. Robertson. 1992. 'A Ch'an Text from Tun-huang: Implications for Ch'an Influence on Tibetan Buddhism'. In Steven D. Goodman and Ronald M. Davidson, eds., *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*, pp. 57–78. Albany: SUNY Press.

¹⁸ Dylan Esler, *The Lamp for the Eye of Contemplation. The bSam-gtan mig-sgron by gNubs-chen Sangs-rgyas ye-shes: Hermeneutical Study with English Translation and Critical Edition of a Tibetan Buddhist Text on Contemplation*. PhD thesis. Louvain-la-Neuve, 2018. page 15: "However, this is not to say that the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron* was completely unknown in Tibet: it is mentioned in an official decree (*bka'-shog*) of Pho-brang zhi-ba-'od (11th century). Furthermore, as pointed out by Karmay, extracts from the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron* appear in O-rgyan gling-pa's (1323- ca. 1379) treasure the *Blon-po bka'-thang*. Tanaka and Robertson [Tanaka and Robertson 1992, 'A Ch'an Text from Tun-huang', pp.57-78.] have demonstrated in some detail that Chapters 12, 13 and 14 of the *Blon-po bka'-thang* are in fact a somewhat patchwork rearrangement of verbatim sections of the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron*. Matter which in the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron* occurs in a natural order is rearranged quite artificially in the *Blon-po bka'-thang*. Moreover, O-rgyan gling-pa does not distinguish between main text and quotations as differentiated in the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron*. Finally, the text of the *Blon-po bka'-thang* presents the material in such a way that it appears to be a debate between only the gradual and simultaneous approaches, whereas the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron* has a vaster scope, since it also covers Mahāyoga and rDzogs-chen. O-rgyan gling-pa's motivation would appear to be to defend the rNying-ma school against the polemicists who claim that rDzogs-chen and Chan are identical. However, rather than simply disavowing a doctrinal identity between both traditions (which would have been perhaps more straightforward since this is very much one of the intentions behind the composition of the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron*), the author of the *Blon-po bka'-thang* sets about to prove the superiority of Chan to the gradual approach. In this he can base himself on the *bSam-gtan mig-sgron*, but he seems to bypass the distinction which this text then goes on to draw between Chan on the one hand and rDzogs-chen on the other."

bka'i thang yig) than to any of the other sources that carry this narrative; although it is not by any means identical.¹⁹

(v) Conversely, back in 1950, Tucci had famously demonstrated that O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicle of the Kings* (*rgyal po bka'i thang yig*) included a faithful reproduction of an 8th century pillar inscription that still stood beside the tomb of Emperor Khri lde srong btsan (798/800-815).²⁰ Tucci inspected the pillar when he visited Tibet in 1948, and found the version in the *Chronicle of the Kings* so accurate that he used it to reconstruct words that time had effaced from the pillar. Since O rgyan gling pa had written about the tombs, and knew the region, Tucci concluded he had more likely read directly from the pillar inscription, than from another text. Similarly, Orgyan gling pa's physical descriptions of the tombs might well be accurate.

(vi) It has recently been pointed out to me by Stefan Mang, a graduate student from the Rangjung Yeshe Institute in Boudha, Nepal, that in his *Chronicles of Gods and Demons* (*lha 'dre bka'i thang*), O rgyan gling pa preserves a particular narrative detail in some respects closer to the Dunhuang text PT44 than many other extant versions of this popular narrative.²¹

To what degree can we rely on the Treasure *Chronicles* as historical sources?

In 1969, Tucci's Danish disciple, Erik Haarh, produced a magisterial PhD on the Yar-lung dynasty and its burial traditions, which, despite being notionally a doctoral dissertation, nevertheless deservedly remains a famous classic of Tibetological writing. Perhaps inspired by Tucci's optimistic discoveries of the 1950's, but writing too early to be cautioned by the later caveats of Karmay, Blondeau, Kvaerne, Tanaka and Robertson, Pritzker, and Esler, Haarh repeatedly approached the 6th to 8th century Tibetan Dynasty through the medium of much

¹⁹ D. T. Pritzker. *Canopy of Everlasting Joy: An Early Source in Tibetan Historiography and the History of West Tibet*, Oxford DPhil dissertation, 2017. See p. 83. Other sources that carry versions of this narrative include *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, *Old Tibetan Chronicle* (PT 1286, ll. 22-24), PT 1060, PT 1038, and early *chos 'byung* such as *mKhas pa lDe'u*.

²⁰ G. Tucci. *The Tombs of the Tibetan Kings*. Serie Orientale Roma I Rome 1950. P. 39 ff.

²¹ This is the story of Padmasambhava confining the troublesome goddesses he encountered at Pharping in Nepal within his hat. Both PT44 and the *lHa 'dre bka'i thang* preserve this detail of the hat, while a number of other sources have substituted various other kinds of containers for the hat. See O rgyan gling pa, *Bka' thang sde lnga* (Pe cin: mi rigs dpe skrun khang), 23. Available at BDRC here: <https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=W17319>.

later *gter ma* texts, not least O rgyan gling pa's 14th century *Chronicles*. In fact, he understood O rgyan gling pa's 14th century *Chronicles* quite unquestioningly as later editions of works originally written in the 6th to 8th centuries. Specifying his historical source materials at the beginning of his dissertation, he wrote "By far the largest group of [my] sources is constituted by later editions of documents dating from the time of the Dynasty, the so-called gTer-ma. Among the most important ones for our purposes, are the texts classified as *bKa'i-thaṅ-yig*."²² And a few pages later, he reiterates that he has accepted ten *gter ma* texts, including O rgyan gling pa's *bKa'i thang yig*, as 'texts from the time of the Dynasty in later editions: later Tibetan editions of documents or other texts dating back to the time of the Yar-lung Dynasty'.²³

With hindsight, it now seems reasonable to enquire if Haarh's naively optimistic acceptance, when still a graduate student, of O rgyan gling pa's texts as substantially unmodified sources from the 6th to 8th centuries, might have established a dangerous precedent by which some later authors might have been unwittingly influenced. Thankfully, this has not been the case for Haarh's direct student, the distinguished historian Per Sørensen, nor his equally esteemed collaborator Guntram Hazod, both of whom have been realistic and suitably cautious in their usage of *gter ma* texts as historical sources. But I think there is reason for concern that some others, outside of Haarh's direct intellectual lineage and perhaps less aware of his subsequent intellectual development, might still be in danger of reproducing the mistake of his famous doctoral thesis, in taking much later *gter ma* historical narrative texts too much for granted as reliable or even unmodified historical sources for earlier centuries, even where little or no independent corroborating evidence has yet been found. For it would seem to me that *gter ma* sources are sometimes historically reliable, and sometimes not; so that before accepting their testimony, additional corroborating evidence should wherever possible be sought.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the historical study of the Tibetan *gter ma* system itself. In recent decades, perhaps not least through the persisting influence of Haarh's doctoral thesis, O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles* have widely become accepted as significant sources for proposing a putative indigenous Tibetan precursor of the

²² Erik Haarh. *The Yar-luṅ Dynasty : a study with particular regard to the contribution by myths and legends to the history of ancient Tibet and the origin and nature of its kings*. København, Gad Forlag, 1969. Page 15.

²³ Ibid p. 19.

gter ma tradition that was connected with royal burials, despite the fact that we have virtually no other independent evidence for this, apart from other still later *gter ma*.

Particularly influential in our understanding of the origins of *gter ma* have been three passages from the single 1889 Potala edition of the *Chronicle of the Kings* that Haarh consulted for his PhD (1969: 21). These particular three passages have been cited by subsequent scholars, but so far at least, without very much systematic attention to questions of transmissional and interpretive difficulties. Thus we don't yet know to what extent the transmission of the *Chronicle of the Kings* might have been subjected to textual variations across its different editions, nor how this might impact on Haarh's exploratory readings and translations of the 1889 Potala edition, some of which I suspect might be open to rather different translations or interpretations, with rather different implications.²⁴ But let's leave aside all such possibilities of textual variation and alternative translation and interpretation for the moment, since we cannot sort them all out here, and take Haarh's pioneering readings at face value:

[1] First is a passage describing the tomb of the late 6th or early 7th century king 'Bro gnyan lde'u (*rGyal po bka' thang* 1889 Potala ed., 37.54r-56r). In Haarh's translation, we read how a gold image of the king's corpse, along with other precious things, were buried and sealed up with earth, stones and wood. Thus valuables were hidden for future royal generations (see Haarh 1969: 349).

[2] Second is a passage from Chapter 13 (*rGyal po bka' thang* 1889 Potala ed., 37.39v-40v), describing offerings at the tomb of Srong btsan sgam po. Haarh's translation describes how some of his surviving ministers continued to serve their dead king by living at his tomb whilst segregated from the wider population, and how they should

²⁴ On the one hand, the transmission of the *Chronicle of the Kings* might have been subjected to textual variations across its different editions, yet the extant witnesses have neither been compared, nor subjected to sufficient scholarly editing, so we don't yet know. On the other hand, some scholars might consider some of Haarh's readings and translations of the 1889 Potala edition open to alternative interpretations: for example, to what extent and in which places do they actually describe *gter ma* to be recovered and removed at a later date, as Haarh is seen to be implying? Or might some of these passages simply describe grave goods to remain buried forever, yet these nevertheless for the benefit of later generations of royalty, thereby mirroring some later Tibetan funerary practices as reported independently by two contemporary ethnographers of East Tibet, Sehnalova and Langelaar? It might therefore be wise to look at more Tibetan editions of the *Chronicle of the Kings*, and review Haarh's translations and interpretations, before deciding on the meanings and significance of these passages.

enjoy the ritual offerings left for their dead monarch (see Haarh 1969: 350-2).

[3] The third passage also comes from Chapter 13 (*rGyal po bka' thang* 1889 Potala ed., 37.43v-45r), and describes treasures buried in Srong btsan sgam po's²⁵ 'wealth tomb' (*nor gyi bang mdzod*) for the benefit of future generations, including grave goods like copper vessels and horse-headed jars, heirlooms from previous kings, and the so-called *Thirteen Royal Treasures* (Haarh 1969: 352-355).²⁶ Haarh translates the title of this section as '*The hiding of the inheritance for the future royal generations, directions as to the royal family's offerings, and the sealing (of the tomb)*'.²⁷ Here O rgyan gling pa introduces the words *kha byang* and *lde mig*, words which by his time were well established as technical terms of the *gter ma* tradition, indicating 'address books' or prophetic lists or guides to a Treasure cache (we do not yet know much about any ritual meanings these terms might have had prior to their adoption by the *gter stons*). O rgyan gling pa claims this *kha byang* was first passed down within generations of the royal family, and finally hidden as a *gter ma* by Mu tig btsan po. The royal name Mu tig btsan po is used inconsistently in Tibetan historical literature, but here, as Dotson observes, O rgyan gling pa might indicate the Buddhist monarch Khri lde srong btsan or Sad na legs,²⁸ son and successor to Khri srong lde'u btsan, the famous emperor who promoted Buddhism and was the first to make it a state religion (see Haarh 1969: 352-354).

Emperors, notably Srong btsan sgam po and Khri srong lde'u btsan, along with their families, were central to early and later Treasure myths. In our view, there were a number of reasons for this. More generally, it reflected pre-Buddhist beliefs of reverencing the Emperors, as well as the bodhisattva statuses increasingly ascribed to them

²⁵ Reigned c. 617 - 649/650, and by O rgyan gling pa's time, revered as the founding father of the Tibetan Empire, and introducer of literacy.

²⁶ In relation to O rgyan gling pa's pronounced interests in Imperial-period material royal treasures, it is noteworthy that Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, who was likewise much interested in Imperial-period material royal treasures, including those found in the hidden lands (*sbas yul*), was a near-contemporary, a mere fourteen years younger than O rgyan gling pa (1337-1409).

²⁷ *Ma'ongs rgyal-brgyud nor-skal sbas-po dan : rgyal-brgyud bla-mchod man-ngag rgyas-btab ni*: (Haarh 1969: 352). This section is cited in the slightly later *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, Chapter 4, on burial of treasure. See Sørensen 1994: 307-312, especially note 949. *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* mentions treasures buried in temples, but not in tombs.

²⁸ Dotson, Brandon. "'Emperor' Mu rug btsan and the 'Phang thang ma Catalogue.'" *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 3 (December 2007): 1-25. <http://www.thlib.org?tid=T3105> (accessed May 7, 2017).

over time. But perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this paper, it also owed much to the usefulness of *gter ma* narratives for the invention of traditions of grand Imperial patronage of Buddhist lineages. A particular preoccupation was to displace earlier unwelcome historiographies highlighting the rejection of Padmasambhava by the Empire,²⁹ and the restrictions it placed on esoteric Vajrayāna,³⁰ with an alternative *gter ma* mythology, emphasising the opposites.

So while the founder of the Empire Srong btsan sgam po was recast through *gter ma* narratives as an advanced Avalokiteśvara adept, his descendant Khri srong lde'u btsan was now represented as Padmasambhava's personal patron and closest disciple.³¹ From the 12th century onwards, Treasure Revealers claiming (as was claimed for O rgyan gling pa) to be Khri srong lde'u btsan's rebirths were to reappear repeatedly down the centuries, to rediscover the Treasures given them by Padmasambhava in their previous birth as the Emperor. True to form, O rgyan ling pa was himself deemed the reincarnation of the son of Mu tig btsan po, who was in turn the immediate reincarnation of his own grandfather, Khri srong lde'u btsan. So in revealing this section of the *Chronicle of the Kings* on hidden royal treasures, O rgyan gling pa is in fact presenting us with the *gter ma* guide buried by someone who was both his son and his father in past lives.³² Complex relationships of this type, that seek repeatedly to

²⁹ This is described, for example, in the *dBa' bzhed*. See Wangdu, Pasang and Hildgard Diemberger, 2000. *dBa' bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, pages 52-59.

³⁰ While the Empire officially endorsed exoteric tantras, such as Kriyā tantras and Yoga tantras, a number of which we can see listed in the lHan dkar ma and 'Phang thang ma Catalogues, it did not endorse the open translation of more esoteric tantras. See for example the *sGra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*, as presented in Ishikawa, Mie, 1990, *A Critical Edition of the Sgra Sbyor Bam Po Gnyis Pa. An Old and Basic Commentary on the Mahavyutpatti*. Tokyo, The Toyo Bunko, page 4. Perhaps this is a suitable moment to mention that the historically and politically very significant distinction between different genres of tantra and the related empowerments is sometimes not made sufficiently explicit in some recent writings on the Empire's relation to tantrism.

³¹ While, in the light of recently read *rDzong 'phrang* texts attributable to gNubs and his students, it appears not impossible that Khri srong lde'u btsan did receive some esoteric tantric initiations, alongside his more public engagement with the exoteric tantras, any association he might have had with the former was not made known, and does not appear in extant early sources.

³² The precedent for Treasure Revealers to identify themselves as reincarnations of Emperor Khri srong lde'u btsan and his family was established as early as the 12th and 13th centuries by Myang ral and Guru Chos dbang. I have not yet ascertained exactly how O rgyan gling pa understood himself in his own words, but in later rNying ma tradition, which might well derive in at least some key respects

interweave reincarnation and heredity over many centuries, remain typical of rNying ma Treasure culture to this day.

These three passages of the *Chronicle of the Kings* continue to influence major contemporary academic theories of the origins of the *gter ma* tradition. In them, some scholars have seen evidence for an originally non-Buddhist Treasure cult focused on the Emperors and their tombs, which later flowed into the Buddhist *gter ma* tradition.

One should note however that O rgyan gling pa did not himself intend them to describe the origins of the *gter ma* tradition. To the contrary, he held an altogether Buddhist view of its origins, presented in chapters 91 to 94 of his *Padma bka' thang*, where he describes Padmasambhava as the ultimate source of the vast quantities of *gter ma* now in Tibet, along with their profuse accompanying prophecies and the like.

I will later elaborate on why an over-emphasis on Imperial persons, living or dead, as the foundation of the later *gter ma* tradition, could be problematic. On the one hand, such an emphasis can fail to distinguish Imperial regalia such as the *Can dgu* that should not go into occultation but were openly passed down through generations of royal succession and perhaps ritually transferred at coronation rites,³³ from a separate category of occulted secret items, hidden and unknown for centuries. On the other hand, it can fail adequately to disambiguate the very many items in Tibetan culture that are classified as *gter* and buried forever for the benefit of posterity, from a con-

from O rgyan gling pa himself, he is reported as the seventh reincarnation of rGyal sras lha rje mchog grub rgyal po. rGyal sras lha rje is the son of Mu tig btsan po and the immediate reincarnation of Khri srong le'u btsan. In this slightly convoluted way, O rgyan gling pa too is therefore also deemed a reincarnation of Khri srong le'u btsan, and the guide to the royal family treasures described in this passage of the *Chronicles of the Kings* was thus deemed to have been buried after his death by his own son and heir. See p.775 of Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. Its History and Fundamentals*, trans. Dorje and Kapstein, Boston, 1991.

³³ See the three-part entry on these regalia by Dan Martin on his blog *Tibeto-Logic* with the titles 'Regalia Untranslatable Parts 1-3' (October 9th, 12th, 14th, 2014). Here Dan Martin describes the three inherited from the father, the three inherited from the mother, the one weapon from the brothers, and the two ornaments from the sisters <http://tibeto-logic.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/regalia-untranslatable-part-one.html> and <http://tibeto-logic.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/regalia-untranslatable-part-two.html> and <http://tibeto-logic.blogspot.co.uk/2014/10/regalia-untranslatable-part-three.html>. See also the essay by Guntram Hazod, 'The Plundering of the Royal Tombs, an Analysis of the Event in the Context of the Uprisings in Central Tibet of the 9th/ 10th Century', in Christoph Cüppers, Robert Mayer and Michael Walter (Editors) *Tibet after Empire: Culture, Society and Religion between 850-1000, Proceedings of the Seminar held in Lumbini, Nepal, March 2011*, Zentralasiatische Studien ZAS ZAS 45, 2016, 704 S, pages 113-146.

ceptually different category of *gter ma* that are buried specifically for future recovery. The former includes grave goods, corpses of kings and important persons, and, above all, the commonplace treasure vases and innumerable suchlike *gter* that might win the favour of a *gzhi bdag* and enrich the environment but should not be dug up again. The latter are rarer, and include things like religious texts, religious objects, wealth, medical texts or medicines, that are concealed with a definite view to future recovery.

I will also argue, inspired by clues in Diemberger's work on Khenbalung,³⁴ Mathes's work on Yolmo,³⁵ Terrone and Jacoby's work on modern Golog,³⁶ Martin's work on *gShen chen klu dga'*,³⁷ Hirshberg's work on Myang ral,³⁸ my colleague and collaborator Anna Sehnalova's forthcoming work on contemporary Golog, and many other secondary and primary sources too (such as the autobiographical passages in Guru Chos dbang's *gTer 'byung chen mo*), that it might be misleading to put excessive interpretive emphasis on cults of the Imperial person, whether living or dead, especially if at the expense of paying attention to local deity cults. For local and ancestral deity cults can be seen as presenting the broader cosmological fields within which the Emperor cult was a particular subset; and on existing evidence, local deity cults *per se* seem to offer sounder, richer and deeper perspectives for understanding the many and powerful influences of indigenous culture in the history of *gter ma*. In particular it seems that we might so far have underestimated the relevance to the emergence of the developed *gter ma* tradition of indigenous cults relating to the local *gzhi bdag*; for they have their own rich parallel ritual worlds of *gter* burial, but also play a key role in the Buddhist and Bon *gter ma* traditions. In short, while I am in total agreement with Ronald Davidson and Janet Gyatso that the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition must in-

³⁴ Hildegard Diemberger, 1997. "The Hidden Valley of the Artemisia: On Himalayan Communities and their Sacred Landscape" in A.W. Macdonald (ed.): *Mandala and Landscape*. New-Delhi: D.K. Printworld

³⁵ K-D Mathes, 2013. 'Clouds of Offerings to Lady g.Yang ri. A Protector Practice by the First Yol mo sprul sku Shākya bzang po (15th/16th Cent.)'. In Franz-Karl Ehrhard and Petra Maurer (eds), *Nepalica-Tibetica: Festgabe für Christoph Cippers, Band 2*.

³⁶ Terrone, A, 2010. *Bya rog prog zhu, The Raven Crest. The Life and Teaching of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, Treasure Revealer of Contemporary Tibet*. PhD dissertation, Leiden. Jacoby, S, 2014. *Love and Liberation. Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro*. New York, Columbia University Press.

³⁷ Martin, D., 2001. *Unearthing Bon Treasures. Life and Contested Legacy of a Tibetan Scripture Revealer*. Leiden: Brill (Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, 1).

³⁸ Hirshberg, Daniel. 2016, *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age*. Wisdom Publications, Somerville.

clude a great deal of indigenous Tibetan tradition, I am not entirely confident that Davidson in his important publications of 2005 and 2006 (see note 37 below), and Gyatso too in her more recent one, have been focusing their search for these Tibetan contributions in the most promising place.³⁹

It seems significant that despite the huge advances made over the last fifteen years, little or no evidence has yet been found suggesting an indigenous non-Buddhist (and non g.Yung drung Bon) Tibetan ritual culture of *treasure extraction* (although we have as yet no knowledge of the anthropologically related phenomenon of mining for minerals and metals). So far, it seems that the rich and varied indigenous Tibetan ritual treasure traditions were primarily *donative*, concerned with putting treasures into or upon the ground as offerings: they were less concerned with *extraction*, with taking treasure out of the ground. More specifically, as far as current research is aware, the indigenous non-Buddhist (and non g.Yung drung Bon) Tibetan ritual traditions had no practices of intentionally hiding treasures for future recovery. By contrast, Indian and Chinese Buddhist treasure cults are the reverse: they are more interested in extracting treasures than in inserting them; and in important cases, they are primarily concerned with recovering particular treasures that had been hidden in the past with the intention of later rediscovery. This would suggest that the very idea of recovering treasures (rather than merely burying them) likely owes at least something to Buddhism, as well as to the historical circumstances described by Davidson.

The reception of the *Chronicles of the Kings* within modern scholarship on Treasure

But first let's return to our reassessment of the scholarly mining of the *Chronicles of the Kings* as a historical source for the origins of *gter ma*. Prominent here is Ronald Davidson's book of 2005, *Tibetan Renaissance, Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*, and its follow-up article of 2006.⁴⁰ As far as I am aware, Davidson's writings

³⁹ Janet Gyatso's earlier work does not emphasise the tombs, yet in her 2015 contribution on *gTer ma* to the *Brill Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, she does adopt a focus on the tombs, citing Davidson.

⁴⁰ Davidson R., 2005. *Tibetan Renaissance, Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*. New York, Columbia University Press. See pages 211-213, and 217-224, a section entitled *Guarded by Spirits: The Hidden Imperial Person*. A further work by Davidson (2006) elaborates on the same themes: 'Imperial agency in the Gsar ma treasure texts during the Tibetan Renaissance: The Rgyal po bla gter and related

remain the most comprehensive and sustained attempts so far to account for the origins of *gter ma*. A scholar of exceptional erudition and insight, Davidson's basic understanding is of *gter ma* excavation appearing in Tibet through a conflation of indigenous and Indian sources, and in this respect, I find myself in full agreement with him. His care in balancing both Indian and indigenous Tibetan factors was a marked improvement on Michael Aris's earlier proposal (1989) that *gter ma* excavation owed little to Buddhism but much to Himalayan shamanism, and was equally an improvement on my response to Aris (Mayer 1992), in which I sought only to document the Buddhist sources. His position still compares quite favourably with more recent statements from some other authors, who appear to imply, not altogether dissimilarly to Aris, that Buddhist sources in the construction of the *gter ma* excavation traditions are so slight as not to warrant any further investigation. However, while Davidson acknowledges the important contributions of Indian sources several times (2005 pp. 212, 215, 216, 217, 219), he did not have the opportunity to study them in detail.⁴¹ Likewise, while he very briefly signals important and ground-breaking insights into the importance of ancestral *yul lha* deities in the early historical formation of *gter ma* (2005 p. 218), he was not able to follow through with any sustained discussion of that either. Instead, perhaps in part because his resources of time and research material were limited, Davidson put his focus elsewhere. He proposed we should consider the emergence of *gter ma* excavation primarily as an attempt by Tibetans of the *phyi dar* period to reconnect with relics of their past emperors, as preserved in surviving Imperial period temples and tombs, and devoted the greater part of his analysis to this theme.

After citing Haahr's presentations of passages on the royal tombs from the *Chronicles of the Kings* several times, Davidson sums up thus:

literature', in Davidson R and C Wedemeyer, eds., 2006. *Tibetan Buddhist literature and praxis: studies in its formative period, 900-1400*. PIATS 2003. *Tibetan studies: proceedings of the tenth seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Oxford, 2003. Leiden, Brill. pp.125-147

⁴¹ Another reason Davidson did not pursue these themes might have been scholarly courtesy. He cited my short article in PIATS 1992, written when I was a doctoral student, and evidently left the field open for me to complete. I regret I never did so at the time. See Robert Mayer, 1994. "Scriptural Revelation in India and Tibet. Indian Precursors of the *gTer ma* Tradition". In: *Tibetan Studies, PIATS 6, Vol. 2*. Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Oslo, pp. 533-544. This paper was intended as a response to Michael Aris's earlier proposal that *gter ma* derived predominantly from Himalayan shamanism with little Buddhist content (1989, p. 59ff), and so was limited to listing some Indian sources that had influenced the *gter ma* traditions.

‘When we turn from such descriptions to those of the early Terma, the similarities are palpable. In fact, the ideology of royal sites appears to be the primary source for the early Terma descriptions. These sites, temples and tombs, were the repositories and subsequent sources for treasure, whether precious stones and metals or written texts’ (Davidson 2005: 224).

To elaborate further (pages 217-224), he says that the burial tombs were repositories of the Emperor’s life force or *bla*. The Imperial *bla* had the power to enrich and bless, hence he proposes that there was a pre-Buddhist ritual tradition for blessing the realm, by distributing the Emperor’s *bla* across the Empire via material treasures in which the Imperial *bla* resided. Since Imperial tombs remained repositories of a deceased Emperor’s *bla* long after his death, Davidson proposes that treasures taken out of the tombs and processed across the country could also distribute his *bla* posthumously, and that this practice was an important predecessor of *gter ma* excavation. Davidson thus sees the Tibetan *gter ma* excavation tradition as at root a Buddhist re-expression of putative rituals relating to the Emperor’s *bla* stored in material treasures intended to be excavated from the royal tombs.

Yet an important aspect of Davidson’s hypothesis still lacks any unambiguous support from contemporaneous or early sources. While his understanding of the broader social historical dynamics giving rise to a treasure cult in Renaissance Tibet in many ways impressively anticipated the perspectives of later anthropologists such as Valtchinova (2009), Bernstein (2011), Stewart (2012), and Gazizova (2019), some of his more speculative ideas on cultural specifics are less certain. As far as I am aware, in the intervening years since he proposed them, little new evidence has been discovered to support them. For only some (by no means all) early *gter ma* was discovered in old Buddhist temples, whether Imperial or otherwise. Likewise, we still have scant reliable evidence for early *gter ma* being excavated from Imperial period tombs, whether Royal or not. I hasten to add, that is not to deny that the presence of vast quantities of grave goods in often abandoned tombs in many parts of Tibet, ripe for looting, might have influenced the circumstances of the early *phyi dar*, but that is a different consideration from Davidson’s idea of items buried with the specific intention of their future recovery.

All of the sources Davidson cites for his theory of *bla* come from *gter ma* texts centuries later than the events they describe, but in some instances some scholars question Davidson’s interpretations of these later sources. For example, in relation to the crucial word *bla*, some of his citations occur in *gter ma* passages where the meanings might be

to indicate the emperor's own *personal* treasures, and other times to indicate an *original text* rather than its copies.⁴²

Moreover, as I have already intimated above, recent historical and ethnographic research challenges one of Davidson's fundamental premises, that power objects should be ritually taken out of the tombs after being buried there. Contemporary evidence from East Tibet (Golog and surrounding areas) does indeed support the idea that the buried bodily remains of powerful persons, such as chieftains, can be classified as *gter*. Likewise, Anna Sehnalova believes that the objects buried in Songtsan Gampo's tomb for the benefit of future generations of his lineage, as described above by O rgyan gling pa, would indeed be understood as a *gter* burial, at least in parts of contemporary East Tibet. Similarly, it is quite possible that the ancient Royal Tombs might resemble practices in contemporary Golog, in being situated at the *bla gnas* of the royal family, and thus by extension at the *bla gnas* of their subjects. Yet it is altogether unclear from contemporary ethnography and ancient sources alike, how bodily remains or other items such as grave goods could later be ritually removed from such tombs as Davidson suggests, unless as a hostile act.⁴³

I should make it absolutely clear that I am not suggesting that Davidson would be on the wrong track if he were simply raising the general issue of the burials and *bla* of the imperial forefathers, since these ideas were in all likelihood very significant parts of the general cultural background. It is therefore also credible that early *gter ma* excavation included some items narratively associated with the *bla* of

⁴² I consulted the following scholars: Daniel Berounsky, Henk Blezer, Brandon Dotson, Guntram Hazod, Samten Karmay, Per Kvaerne, Dan Martin, and Charles Ramble. The consensus was still to consider Davidson's hypothesis regarding the Imperial *bla* as a predecessor for *gter ma* excavation, as still open to question, rather than accept it as now proven.

⁴³ My colleague Dr Anna Sehnalova offered me the following additional observation (personal communication, 21st October 2018): "I also have a few examples from Golog where the repositories of bones of ancestors become *bla ri* of related settlements/valleys/lineages/regions (in one case the hill even has the word *gter* in its name, and has turned into a still venerated *gzhi bdag* with a *la btse* on top, who has got his own unwritten *bsang* recital, etc.; the place is one of the most important in the history and identity of all Golog). But these repositories can never be excavated." Dr Sehnalova has been working on these issues for some years, and I will reference her work at greater length below. It might be worth noting that Sehnalova's work was done in the immediate neighbourhood of Dar thang monastery, whose abbot in exile, Tarthang Tulku, resided in Berkeley at exactly the time that Davidson studied there. Might some of Davidson's unattributed reflections on Tibetan burials, which seem so closely to reflect the local practices described by Sehnalova, have been influenced by unreported conversations with Tarthang Tulku?

past royals, and perhaps such references can be found in Guru Chos dbang's *gTer 'byung chen mo*.⁴⁴ For reasons explained below, they might also have taken on an increased importance in treasure discoveries subsequent to the Mongol influence in Tibet, e.g. in O rgyan gling pa and his younger contemporary Rig 'dzin rgod ldem. But I suggest they are best seen as only part of a much wider panoply of excavated *gter ma* items. Until and unless further supporting evidence comes to light, I believe they cannot yet (as Davidson has suggested) be accepted as an inner core or major historical inspiration of the whole *gter ma* excavation phenomenon, nor as significant survivals of a pre-Buddhist proto-*gter ma* cult.

Finally, while it is true, as Davidson points out, that the seminal early *gter ston* Myang ral was much concerned with the Emperors, quite other explanations for Myang Ral's interest in the royalty can be found. On the one hand, some of the Emperors were revered figures, increasingly identified as the incarnations of celestial bodhisattvas, and thus very valuable sources of authority for new *gter ma* revelations. On the other hand, some of the earliest literary sources had described Padmasambhava and his tradition as restricted and marginalised by the Imperial state. In response, Myang ral was much concerned to counter such suggestions by generating alternative interpretations of history that portrayed the Padma tradition as promoted and fêted by the Emperors. Myang ral seems almost as much concerned with using *gter ma* to consolidate this revised perspective on history, as with the discovery of new teachings *per se*. Without the 12th century need to reframe Padmasambhava's relationship with Khri Srong lde btsan, I wonder if the genre we now know as *gter ma* would ever have developed along quite the same trajectory. This is an important reason why early *gter ston* are so preoccupied with the Empire: to help inspire their 12th century program for spiritual renewal, they are promoting a popular historical narrative to show that back in the 8th century, their tradition had never been marginal, underground, or restricted, but had always been glorified by the Imperial family, at the very centre of national culture and power.

But for now I will put the various interpretive and philological issues aside, to focus again on the academic reception of O rgyan gling pa.

Turning to the *Chronicles of the Kings* as a possible source for understanding the origins of *gter ma* is quite usual in contemporary

⁴⁴ See for example page 98, in Guru Chos dbang's *gTer 'byung chen mo*, within *Gu ru chos dbang gi rnam dang zhal gdams, Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos Vols 8-9*, Ugyen Tempa'i Gyaltzen, Paro, 1979. TBRC Work Number 23802.

scholarship, and in particular, Davidson's interpretations are referenced. For example, Janet Gyatso writes in her 2015 entry *gTer ma* for the *Brill Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*:

Some Treasure histories, like the *Bka' thang sde Inga*, describe an old practice of concealing royal treasuries in order to preserve them for future kings and generations, and provide minute details of their contents (O rgyan, 1986, 153–208). R. Davidson proposes that this practice is closely connected to the interment of the Yarlung dynasty kings in tombs inside of large tumuli, the remains of which still stand today [Gyatso 2015:399].

Is there any independent evidence for the Treasure practices described in the *Chronicles of the Kings*?

But what happens if we ask if any further supporting evidence can be found in sources closer to the 8th century than O rgyan gling pa's distance of five hundred years? If such evidence exists, I have never encountered it. Nor, it seems, have any of my colleagues. For example, I consulted Brandon Dotson, an outstanding younger scholar who has dedicated his entire career to the institutions and ritual cultures of the Tibetan emperors. He responded:

"There is no evidence that I know of for concealing relics, regalia, or texts associated with the emperor with the expressed purpose of doing so for future generations to discover, let alone doing so with a table of contents or an instruction manual [*kha byang*]. Other arguments that can be made for various "gter ma like" practices also fall short.... I think you can be confident that in the imperial period there was nothing like [and here he quotes Gyatso's summary of Davidson] 'an old practice of concealing royal treasuries in order to preserve them for future kings and generations, and provide minute details of their contents'. This, was no doubt read back into the imperial period by Tibetans from the late 10th century onward." (Brandon Dotson, personal communication, 8th November 2016)

Guntram Hazod, whose fieldwork in Tibet has so brilliantly transformed our knowledge of the ancient tombs, also knows of no evidence for such practices outside of O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles* or other still later *gter ma* sources from the 18th century.

If we have no evidence from Old Tibetan sources, can we find evidence in *gter ma* literature preceding O rgyan gling pa? The *Bka' chems ka khol ma* mentions temples, but not tombs. Turning to O rgyan gling pa's famous predecessors in his home region of lHo brag, Myang ral (1124-92), and Guru Chos dbang (1212-1270), I found noth-

ing in their works either. So I consulted Daniel Hirshberg, another outstanding younger scholar who knows Myang Ral's biographies better than anyone.⁴⁵ Hirshberg confirms that despite Myang ral's famous claims to be the reincarnation of Khri srong lde'u btsan, his biographies specify *gter ma* recoveries at local mountains, and at old temples, but never at tombs.

If O rgyan gling pa is therefore the earliest evidence that scholars have so far found for linking *gter ma* discovery with the royal tombs, and it looks possible he might be, my instinct is to exercise caution, and await further evidence. Until such further evidence has been presented, it might not be wise to read so much about the 7th and 8th centuries, into so few lines from a 14th century *gter ma*, with no known precedents. Conversely, I would welcome any significant precedents that might eventually come to light, in which case, I would be delighted to review my assessment.

Possible entanglements with the Mongols and China

If O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles of the Kings* is the earliest Treasure text we currently know of to link *gter ma* discovery with the royal tombs, then why? Is it simply because, for whatever reasons, it reproduced certain ancient themes which many earlier extant Treasure texts did not? Or could there be other reasons too?

Earlier I mentioned that O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles of Padma* achieved particular favour with Chinese and Mongol state power. Matthew Kapstein has made a study of this,⁴⁶ informed not least by Anna Seidel's study of the evolving notion of "royal treasure" from early China onwards, and its great political significance.⁴⁷ Seidel wrote: (ibid: 299):

"In the case of the royal family, [Treasure] constituted the sacra or regalia of the dynasty. Their presence testified to the possession of the mandate and to Heaven's continuing support. If the royal treasure-houses originally contained objects like stones, jade pieces,

⁴⁵ See his book on Myang ral: Hirshberg, Daniel. 2106. *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age*. Wisdom Publications, Somerville MA.

⁴⁶ See Kapstein 2015, ibid.

⁴⁷ Seidel, Anna. 1983. "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha," in Michel Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein, vol.2*, pp.291-371. *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques XXI*. Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises.

bronzes and weapons, they in time came to include talismans, magic diagrams, charts, prophetic adages, secret recipes for personal longevity and for the prosperity of the state and, finally, dissertations on moral and political doctrines. These texts soon were valued as more efficacious than the traditional object of the family treasure... In the politico-religious propaganda that brought the first emperor of the Latter Han, Kuang-wu, to power, the written word of Heaven in *ch'an* texts came to be valued and utilized far more than auspicious objects or natural phenomena. [...] The real content of the apocrypha was a collection of ancient legends and omen-lore recorded and elaborated for the legitimation of the Han."

Kapstein observes that O rgyan gling pa's *Chronicles of Padma* seem to achieve the same goal of legitimation, through their numerous prophetic announcements. He writes (*ibid.* p.175),

"As the warrant for imperial prophecies in general, can we imagine a more suitable treasure than that of O-rgyan-gling-pa? What is remarkable in this case is the evident congruence between the Tibetan revelation and Chinese conceptions of imperial treasure. That the prophetic books thought to be in the background of Tibetan and Mongol power were published in their Tibetan and Mongolian versions under the Manchu emperors in Beijing may perhaps be seen, therefore, as part of the ongoing response to the perpetual challenge of renewing the mandate of Heaven."

I posed two further questions to the Sinologists at our Treasure seminar in Oxford: [1] Might the depictions of material treasures in the *Chronicles of the Kings*, match the legends in the *Chronicles of Padma* in also being congruent with Yuan conceptions of Imperial treasure? [2] And if so, were such congruences knowing or accidental?

[1] The answer to the first question was supplied by Barend te Haar and is a clear affirmative. Herbert Franke has already shown that in accord with their own existing Mongolian cultural traditions, it was miraculously rediscovered material palladia,⁴⁸ deemed to have been concealed since the early Chinese emperors, that became of singular importance for the Yuan.⁴⁹ This was despite the increasing tendency over time away from material treasures towards textual treas-

⁴⁸ Palladium: A safeguard or source of protection. via Latin from Greek *palladion*, denoting an image of the goddess Pallas (Athene), on which the safety of Troy was believed to depend.

⁴⁹ Franke, Herbert, 1978. *From tribal chieftain to universal emperor and god: the legitimation of the Yüan dynasty*. München, Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

ures, that Seidel describes in the citation above. Barend te Haar has further clarified Seidel's findings for me by explaining that material royal treasures, such as ancient bronzes, remained highly valued through the Ming era and onwards.⁵⁰

[2] The second question I can frame myself, but not yet answer to my own satisfaction. Almost three centuries separated O rgyan gling pa from the adoption of his *Chronicles of Padma* by the Fifth Dalai Lama's government, while the Imperial Manchu editions were a hundred years later still. At first glance, this might suggest that any similarities between O rgyan gling pa's and Chinese Imperial treasures were accidental.

Yet on closer analysis, it need not be so. We know, for example, that his contemporary Dol po pa wrote the language of Mongol governmental edicts into religious texts.⁵¹ These authors lived in the troubled first half of the 14th century, when Tibet was reorienting its gaze from the South to the East. Earlier cultural, trade, and pilgrimage links with India were dwindling as Buddhism declined there, while political, economic, and cultural links with China had increased, following Yuan involvement in Tibet.

And O rgyan gling pa's lifetime and some previous decades had seen a significant development in Tibetan religious life towards a new Chinese-influenced model that entailed difficult consequences for his rNying ma school. According to Tibetan historians, the orthodox Tibetan canon, the Kangyur, was first initiated at Narthang (Snar thang) by a follower of the New Tantras, Jamyang ('Byams dbyangs), who was at the time serving in China at the court of the Yuan Emperor Renzong (仁宗) a.k.a. Buyantu Khan (r. 1311–1320). Jamyang was evidently impressed by the Chinese model of a state-sponsored closed canon within which, in theory at least, only texts of proven Indian provenance were included, and from which those produced in China, such as Chinese Buddhist Treasure texts, were excluded as apocrypha.⁵² Jamyang sent funds back to Narthang together with

⁵⁰ Haar, B. J. ter, 1998. *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese triads: creating an identity*. Leiden, Brill. See especially, but not only, the chapter on messianic demonology

⁵¹ Leonard van der Kuijp, "Reconsidering the Dates of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan's (1291-1361) *Ri chos nges don rgya mtsho* and the *Bka' bsdu bzhi pa'i don*," 藏族俄学刊 བོད་རིག་པའི་དུས་དེར་ *Journal of Tibetology* 14 (2015/2016), 115-159. See page 118-20

⁵² Strickmann 1990 gives an interesting description of the 5th century Chinese Buddhist treasure text, the *Consecration Sūtra* (T1331), which, as Strickmann and others have noted (Strickmann p.88, and note 38, p. 115), was revealed as a treasure text in a manner resembling that of Tibetan *gter ma*. Although stringent efforts were made to rid the Chinese canon of such indigenously revealed apocrypha,

requests urging such a canon be made for Tibet.⁵³ O rgyan gling pa's 33 years older contemporary, Bu ston (1290-1364), then embarked on a huge bibliographic exercise similar to the state-sponsored one in China, to distinguish translations of Indic texts from the indigenously redacted scriptures favoured by the rNying ma pa. Those established as unredacted pure translations from Indic languages were included in the prestigious new Kangyur, while those redacted in Tibet and favoured by the rNying ma pa, including their Treasures, were excluded as apocrypha.

This challenging context for the rNying ma pa raises the question, might O rgyan gling pa have responded by knowingly portraying his beleaguered *gter ma* tradition as congruent with Yuan Imperial Treasures, and thus endow it with a powerful political symbolism of his era? Right now, I have absolutely no idea, but it seems prudent to pose the question. For if the *Chronicles of the Kings* was, like the Kangyur, contemporaneously influenced by Yuan or Chinese models, it might not simply reflect ancient Tibetan customs, in the uncomplicated manner that some other scholars seem to have assumed.

Summary

To sum up, several questions still remain to be answered about O rgyan gling pa's descriptions of treasures being buried in the royal tombs. Firstly, is he even describing *gter ma* for later recovery, as many scholars have assumed? Or only grave goods to remain buried for posterity? Or some combination of both? And is he creatively adapting older materials to suit his later agenda, or is he faithfully repeating ancient sources verbatim? We have seen how heavily he redacted earlier sources in his *Chronicles of Gods and Demons*, *Chronicles of the Queens*, *Chronicles of the Ministers*, and in other parts of his *Chronicles of the Kings*. Was he doing the same here, tweaking them to assimilate his sources on the 7th and 8th century royal burial cults into his 14th century rNying ma *gter ma* Tradition, perhaps even with an eye to congruence with Chinese expectations? Or was he faithfully

many hundreds nevertheless remained undetected. The *Consecration Sūtra* is one such, a Buddhist treasure text revealed in 5th century China, but passing as a canonical translation from Indian sources. See Strickmann, M., "The Consecration Sutra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in: R. Buswell, Jr. ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*. Honolulu, 1990, pp. 75-118.

⁵³ Harrison, P., "A Brief History of the Tibetan Bka' 'gyur," in: J. Cabezon & R. Jackson, eds., *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, Ithaca NY, 1996, 70-94. See also Gzhon nu dpal 1984-1985: 410-412.

reproducing an entire ancient text with no changes, as with the pillar inscription in the *Chronicles of the Kings*? Or at least reproducing accurately some particulars of an ancient source, as he does with his narrative in the *Chronicles of Gods and Demons*, of Padmasambhava confining the Pharping goddesses within his hat? These questions need further research before we can be sure about anything, so I find it premature to accept the *Chronicles of the Kings* as a substantially unmodified description of ancient proto-*gter ma* practices.

What other sources are available for the origins of the Tibetan Treasure tradition?

This, the second half of the present paper, is intended as an advanced notice of a series of further papers, currently in various stages of preparation.⁵⁴

I mentioned earlier how probably excessive reliance on the internal evidence of the *gter ma* literature itself, as well as on the closely related works of its apologists, might in recent decades have distracted research efforts away from other so far largely unexplored avenues of enquiry, some of which might hopefully prove equally or even more fruitful. As I pointed out above, a few of these have already been briefly signaled by Davidson, but given the major outpouring of work required, he was unable to follow their analysis through in most cases, and instead, concentrated much of his attention on his hypotheses related to the Imperial tombs. But what might we find if all the additional still unexplored avenues are further investigated? Over the next two years, I plan to investigate as many of them as I can, in an attempt to arrive, bit by bit, at a more rounded and complete understanding of the emergence of the complex and heterogeneous practices nowadays known as the *gter ma* traditions of Tibet. Thus it is hoped that in a series of future publications, written by myself and by others, separate papers will be produced expanding on each of the alternative historical approaches outlined below.

Our approach will take account of the entanglements of Tibetan, Indian, Chinese, Mongolian, and Western and Central Asian cultures central to our Oxford seminar, for like Davidson, we see *gter ma* as a complex set of cultural phenomena that reflects both Tibetan and non-Tibetan sources (we can no longer take seriously the proposition that *gter ma* can be wholly and sufficiently accounted for from indig-

⁵⁴ I thought it prudent to commit an outline of my ideas to print as soon as possible, in case I run out of time to complete and publish more developed versions.

enous Tibetan origins alone). This work is also intended to provide the necessary context for understanding the workings of such important early *gter ston* as Myang ral. At the time of writing, I am in all likelihood not yet aware of every avenue of enquiry that needs to be followed. But I can already briefly outline twelve, with the hope that most will prove useful, and some perhaps indispensable, for understanding the origins of *gter ma*.

Alternative source 1: Anthropology of treasure

Over the last decade, an increasing amount of anthropological literature has been devoted to treasure recovery, which is now generally recognised as a phenomenon widely attested across numerous cultures and historical periods. Perhaps best known has been Charles Stewart's well-received book of 2012, *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*, based on prolonged fieldwork on Naxos. In his preface to that work, Stewart presents his key themes, whose resonance with Tibetan *gter ma* is self-evident:

- divinely inspired dreams and visions of sacred objects buried by ancient Egyptian Christians
- their excavation as a religious practice
- the establishment of sacred texts and charismatic religious movements based on these treasures
- the central role of prophecy in all of this
- a cosmology of treasure discovery in which dangerous landscape spirits ('moors', 'arabs', and serpent spirits) guard hidden treasures.⁵⁵
- secrecy associated with treasure retrieval
- struggles to authenticate discovered treasures
- subsequent tensions between believers and sceptics
- an environment in which findable treasures (*vresimata*) do actually exist⁵⁶ but are thought to need the help of divine beings to locate, most often the *Panagia* (Mary, mother of Jesus).

⁵⁵ See especially Stewart 2012 Chapter 5, 'A Cosmology of Discovery'.

⁵⁶ The landscape of Naxos has indeed produced many valuable archaeological finds, including Classical Greek and even Cycladic artefacts of great value, as well as more recent treasures from the Byzantine period and later. In addition, and perhaps more fundamentally, the island's economy has been for many centuries based on the mining of emery (corundite).

Stewart is no Tibetologist. His field is contemporary Christianity on the island of Naxos, although he also refers to treasure beliefs in Bulgaria, Ancient Greece, Bolivia, Mexico, Papua, the USA, Armenia, and Turkey. Other scholars too have documented various treasure recovery practices (which can sometimes be described as indigenous pursuits of archaeology), in medieval Egypt and the Middle East (e.g. Cooperson 2010), medieval Jewish medicine (e.g. Yoeli-Tlalim 2017, 2019),⁵⁷ India (e.g. Hardy 1994), China (e.g. Seidel 1983), SE Asia (e.g. Leider 2009, Oppitz 2006), the Philippines (e.g. Kelly 2016), pre-Buddhist Mongolia (Franke 1978), Zanzibar (e.g. Walsh 2018), Mexico (Foster 1964), and more. Stewart has thus formulated an anthropology of treasure recovery to address a historically and geographically widespread phenomenon. And in many respects, it works excellently with Tibet. His central theme is that, typically in response to a time of crisis, treasure discovery emerges in relation to the production of an affective popular historical consciousness. Thus in economically ravaged Naxos, narratives appeared about ancient Egyptian Christians who had visited to conceal sacred objects for later recovery, that would regenerate Naxos in its future time of need. Treasure discovery thus acted as a temporal rivet, binding together the present (when the treasure is discovered), with an affective popular historical consciousness of the past (visits to the island by ancient Egyptians), to aspirations for the future. And contemporary Greece's largest pilgrimage cult has indeed now developed around the recent Naxos treasure discoveries, allowing devotees to claim their prophecies and its purposes have been fulfilled. Similarly, Galia Valtchinova (2009) describes how interwar Bulgarian national renewal was supported by the widespread excavation of long buried Christian treasures lost in the period of Ottoman domination, now recovered by divinely inspired 20th century visionaries who received prophecies of where to dig. Similar themes of treasure and national renewal can be seen in Bernstein's fieldwork from Buryatia (2011), and in Gazizova's fieldwork in contemporary Kalmykia (2019). In such examples, one is much reminded of the *gter ma* upsurge in renaissance Tibet, where treasure discoveries nailed aspirations for a happier future to a popular historical consciousness of an idealised Imperial past, set within a cosmology of wealth- and treasure-guarding *gzhi bdag*, *klu*, and other landscape deities, and all this against a backdrop of actual Imperial ruins containing lost treasures and texts. I have found that the anthropological literature in general, and Stewart's work in particular,

⁵⁷ Lectures given to Oxford Treasure Seminar, Merton College, 21st November 2017, and Wolfson College, 6th March 2019.

offer valuable insights into the unconscious dimensions of Tibetan treasure discovery, which help illuminate the more conscious dimensions we Tibetologists mainly describe.

From the recent anthropological accounts of diverse treasure beliefs and practices, we can thus see that Tibetan treasure discovery is not the unique peculiarity of a remote and singular civilisation: rather, treasure discovery is something that connects Tibet with the rest of humanity, it's an experience Tibet shares with much of the world, including its immediate neighbours, India, Central Asia, Mongolia, and China. It is rather crucial to bear in mind that treasure cults are not unique to Tibet, because, as Davidson understood so well, the historical construction of Buddhist *gter ma* systems in renaissance Tibet can only properly be understood in terms of the mutual interactions between previously quite separate imported Buddhist, and indigenous Tibetan, treasure cultures.

Alternative source 2: Historical circumstances

Matthew Kapstein (2000) and Ronald Davidson (2005) have already introduced some key ideas to understanding the historical circumstances of the emergence of *gter ma* in the *phyi dar*, but a lot more remains to be done. Anthropologists of treasure recovery in different cultures and historical periods have described historical conditions which typically encourage the emergence of treasure recovery cults. These include periods of crisis, that give birth to affective narratives of popular historical consciousness lending ideological shape to the trajectories of future social renewal; a cosmology that supports the idea of treasure retrieval; and the actual existence of discoverable objects in the landscape. In relation to Tibet, we now know a little more about all of these than we did when Davidson produced his work.

While popular historical consciousness in the form of nostalgia for the lost Empire, as Davidson has mentioned, was undoubtedly a major theme connected with the emergence of *gter ma* discovery during the Tibetan renaissance, it also took additional forms beyond the dominant Buddhist one he describes. The emergent g.Yung drung Bon movement too was faced with the task of creating an entirely new scriptural canon that could enable traditions of non-Buddhist religion to adopt new organisationally lamaistic literary forms, and much of the work of 11th or 12th century Bon *gter ston* such as Khu tsha zla 'od can be seen in this light. In the Tibetan *phyi dar*, we can thus see at least two contrasting sets of explicitly treasure-linked popular historical consciousnesses emerging, one typified by Myang

ral's seminal historical narratives, the other by similarly seminal Bon historical narratives such as the Gling grags text.

Many scholars have remarked that a key component in the proliferation of *gter ma* discoveries through the 11th and 12th century was the simple fact that old texts and suchlike were lying around in abandoned temples and other Imperial period structures, waiting to be found. As Dan Hirshberg (2016) reported, Myang ral described several of his treasure finds in precisely such terms. Cathy Cantwell has confirmed Myang ral's claim in at least one instance, by finding that a substantial text from the *Phur pa* section of his *bDe gshegs 'dus pa* is attested verbatim, with no variation, in the centuries older Dunhuang text IOL Tib J 331.III. Cantwell (forthcoming) has more recently found that further closely connected sections of the *bDe gshegs 'dus pa* are also quite likely verbatim reproductions of much older texts. So here we have convincing proof that some of the early *gter ma* were indeed quite simply older abandoned texts, that Myang ral had rediscovered.

But Buddhist texts and other valuables were not the only discoverables within the landscape of the Tibetan renaissance. In the background were also two further types of discoverable treasures, both potentially of considerable anthropological significance in the shaping of the Tibetan *gter ma* traditions, but neither of which have yet been considered. As *gter ma* discovery itself was later to become, both of these were in all probability from the start fundamentally integrated into the cosmology of Tibetan ancestral regional deities, and it is also possible (we do not yet know many details) both contributed certain items of terminology and technical vocabulary to *gter ma* discovery. These two additional types of discoverables were minerals, such as gold, usually accessible through mining, and grave goods in old burial sites, accessible through plundering.

Virtually no published research is so far available on mining in ancient and pre-modern Tibet, although we do know from archaeological sources of extensive gold mining in ancient Ladakh and West Tibet, and no doubt various other Tibetan regions too (Samten Karmay, for example, confirms a gold mine was located in his home region of Sharkhog).⁵⁸ The existence of mining as a part of the local economy has been understood as a significant factor in a number of ethnographies of treasure recovery across the world, not least in Stewart's descriptions of Naxos. In the case of Tibetan cultures, it is highly probable that mines and mineral deposits of all kinds were believed to come under the jurisdiction and protection of ancestral

⁵⁸ Personal communication, 10th July 2019.

regional deities such as *gzhi bdag*, the same entities who were later said to be tamed by Padmasambhava to function as his *gter srung*. It is also of interest that terms such as *gter kha* can apply to mining and to *gter ma* recovery alike. Further research into the cultural construction and vocabulary of mining in Tibet might prove valuable towards an anthropological understanding of *gter ma* recovery.

Davidson (2005) proposed a hypothetical proto-*gter ma* tradition of burying items within royal tombs with the deliberate intention of later recovering them. This is not a foolish idea, since burials of important bodies and their grave goods can both be referred to as *gter*. But as we have seen above, scant further evidence has since been found to confirm Davidson's idea. On the contrary, as we know from the more recent research of scholars such as Hazod, and also Sehnalova, and Langelaar, the cosmology of Tibetan ancestral regional deity beliefs would deem the removal of valuables from burial sites as an illicit or even hostile act. Yet over and above the royal tombs, we now know that thousands more burial sites covered the Tibetan landscape, and virtually all of them have been looted for their treasures. Hazod has already produced an analysis of the plundering of the royal tombs based on traditional sources (Hazod 2016), which describe how widespread grave-robbing broke out during the civil unrest (*kheng log*), following the collapse of the Empire. But Tibetan historians tended only to provide a snapshot of the plundering of the few nationally significant royal tombs, even though we know that grave-robbing was a much more widespread phenomenon, probably extending over much of the Tibetan cultural region over a period of some centuries at least. What is of particular significance to the emergence of the *gter ma* traditions is that this widespread tomb plundering must have formed a particularly prominent part of the recent or current historical background at precisely the period in which the *gter ma* traditions first became prominent.⁵⁹ Motives for plundering tombs might have been complex. While tumulus burial was not favoured by Buddhist authorities, Langelaar and Sehnalova's recent fieldwork from Golog and other regions of East Tibet would suggest that ancestral burial sites have remained important to the cosmology of ancestral regional deity beliefs, and even with the decline in tumulus burial, important aspects of these traditions did not simply disappear across Tibet when Buddhism became dominant,

⁵⁹ Hazod 2016 describes the plundering of the royal tombs as "the end of the tumulus burial tradition in Tibet". With the breakdown in political authority and their active discrediting by Buddhist authorities, the plundering of tombs probably become more generally widespread following the *kheng log*, in other words, leading up to the period when *gter ma* began to appear.

but continued to flourish in parallel. Tomb plundering could thus have arisen from a complex mix of religious fanaticism, socially sanctioned economic motives, illegitimate criminal motives, and also as an expression of clan or tribal hostilities seeking to destroy the ancestral *bla gnas* of rival groups (see Alternative source 5 below). Whichever way, we know little about tomb plundering. Anthropologically speaking, as Stewart has emphasised, treasure discovery is often associated with covert, semi-legal, illicit, or even criminal behaviour.⁶⁰ What is of particular interest for an understanding of the emergence of the *gter ma* traditions is that as far as we can currently deduce, in terms of traditional cosmology, the wealth plundered from tombs seems to have been under the protection and ownership of precisely the same categories of ancestral local deities that were also appointed by Padmasambhava as his *gter srung*. Hence from an anthropological perspective, it might prove fruitful to understand more about how these contrasting forms of treasure discovery—tomb plundering and *gter ma* recovery—were differentiated and conceptualised.

Alternative source 3: Tibetan local and mountain deity traditions

This topic overlaps with the next one, and my colleague and collaborator, Dr Anna Sehnalova, is focusing on both. The Tibetan local deity traditions might have supplied the crucial context where, to quote Dan Hirshberg, ‘the Buddhist hand entered the Tibetan glove’. Because of its centrality in pre-Buddhist religion, and its ongoing importance in so many Tibetan communities, I currently feel it will become our single most important topic for research.

The works of many scholars, including Diemberger,⁶¹ Pommaret,⁶² Mathes,⁶³ Terrone,⁶⁴ and Jacoby,⁶⁵ offer powerful indications of how

⁶⁰ A recent ethnography focusing on this aspect is Alice von Bierberstein’s (2017) account of illegal treasure hunting for hidden Armenian gold in contemporary Turkish Kurdistan. Stewart (2012) mentions several other examples.

⁶¹ Hildegard Diemberger, 1997. “The Hidden Valley of the Artemisia: On Himalayan Communities and their Sacred Landscape” in A.W. Macdonald (ed.): *Mandala and Landscape*. New-Delhi: D.K. Printworld

⁶² Francoise Pommaret, 1998. “Maîtres des Trésors” (gTer bdag): divinités locales et médiums au Bhoutan” in *PIATS 7, Graz, Tibetan Mountain Deities, Their Cults and Representations*. ed Anne-Marie Blondeau. Vienna 1998. Pommaret shows how *gter ma* protectors can also function as oracle deities who possess local mediums.

⁶³ K-D Mathes, 2013. ‘Clouds of Offerings to Lady g.Yang ri. A Protector Practice by the First Yol mo sprul sku Shākya bzang po (15th/16th Cent.)’. In Franz-Karl

indigenous Tibetan local deity traditions of *gnas bdag*, *gzhi bdag*, *yul lha*, etc., with all their complex regional, social, political, ancestral, and identity implications, intersected historically with the below mentioned imported Buddhist ideas of text and material treasure revelation (see especially Alternative sources 6, 7, 8 and 10 below).

Following suggestions in such sources as gShen chen klu dga's and Myang ral's and Chos dbang's biographies (respectively the earliest Bon and Buddhist *gter stons* for whom we have good documentation), one of our hypotheses to test is if and how indigenous local and mountain deities became identified as treasure guardian spirits corresponding to those mentioned in Buddhist sources such as the *Pratyutpannasūtra* and the Kriyātantras (see below Alternative sources 6 and 7 on Mahāyāna and Early Tantric Buddhism), but without losing their previous ritual, social, and political, functions. Such an identification would allow much of the indigenous Tibetan local deity system to continue unabated, but now enriched with the additional role of guarding and dispensing *gter ma* to predestined *gter stons*. Linked to all of this is the role of such *gzhi bdag* as *gter srung* within tantric and monastic protector rituals, a subject not yet adequately explored.

The many intersections of *gter ma* with the *gzhi bdag* cults throw up numerous interesting questions. For example, duly prophesied *gter stons* can, through the process of treasure withdrawal, enjoy a very direct relation with a regional deity from a region quite other than their own. For ordinary people, this is not so usual, and the symbolic meanings of this exception needs to be considered. For rNying ma *gter stons*, their status as representatives of Padmasambhava might play a key role in enabling it. Padmasambhava is often (and was already in a Dunhuang text) known as Padma rGyal po and is, almost uniquely among Tibetan guru figures, depicted in art with prominent aspects of kingly iconography. He has likewise acquired a prominent mythological dominance over all of Tibet's *gzhi bdag* that replicates significant features of the ancient Emperor's unique power relation with all of Tibet's *gzhi bdag*.⁶⁶

Ehrhard and Petra Maurer (eds), *Nepalica-Tibetica: Festgabe for Christoph Ciippers, Band 2*, Andiast, IITBS.

⁶⁴ Terrone, A, 2010. *Bya rog prog zhu, The Raven Crest. The Life and Teaching of bDe chen 'od gsal rdo rje, Treasure Revealer of Contemporary Tibet*. PhD dissertation, Leiden.

⁶⁵ Jacoby, S, 2014. *Love and Liberation. Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro*. New York, Columbia University Press.

⁶⁶ Political power in Tibet entailed a particular ritual relation with the *gzhi bdag* of the territory controlled. Hence, as Samten Karmay points out (1989, page 438), if

At other times, *gter ma* discovery might remain more local, and more susceptible to being subsumed within the local social and political system connected with a *gzhi bdag* within whose territory the *gter ma* has been buried.

Anna Sehnalova's fieldwork in Golog describes how indigenous notions of local deities can contain an interesting circularity that resonates with Buddhist reincarnation beliefs: certain important local deities are ancestors, whom their human descendants can ascend to re-join post-mortem, but the deities themselves also continue to be reborn amongst their human descendants. Similar beliefs are reported in other regions. Sehnalova points out that these notions may have exerted some sideways influence on the development of the reincarnate lama system in Tibet. To this one must add, they also resonate nicely with the reincarnation model inherent to the *gter ma* tradition described by Myang ral, which, as Dan Hirshberg has pointed out, might have been the first to apply the idea of concatenated reincarnations.⁶⁷

The intersections and interactions of these two traditions—on the one hand, the indigenous local deities with their complex role in local and national politics, ancestry, and clan lineage, and the many types of offerings buried for them as *gter* so that they will grant worldly wishes and enrich the environment—on the other hand, the Buddhist ideas of text and material *gter ma* burial for recovery—offer a rich field for historical analysis.

As Ratna Lingpa is quoted, 'each great land will have a treasure, ...each minor land will have a treasure...' (Dudjom 1991, page 935). We really need to fathom the historical implications of the regionality of *gter mas* and their guardians, something which has not yet been done for the early period of *gter ma* in Tibet.

a chieftain conquered a neighbouring territory, he would also have to begin politically appropriate ritual propitiation of its *gzhi bdag*, to consolidate his control. In this way, the Tibetan Emperor required a politically significant ritual relation with all of Tibet's great *gzhi bdag*, across his entire empire, while by contrast, regional chieftains required such a relation only with the *gzhi bdag* of the territories they directly controlled.

⁶⁷ Hirshberg, Daniel. 2016, *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age*. Wisdom Publications, Somerville. As Dan Martin and I have suggested previously, the complex concatenated reincarnation model introduced by Myang ral for his seminal conceptualisation of the *gter ston* appears highly derivative of the Mahāyāna *Pratyutpannasūtra* (see below). As Kapstein (1989) points out, subsequent *gter ma* commentators made explicit and elaborated on this rNying ma debt to the *Pratyutpannasūtra*.

Alternative source 4: *gTer* burials for worldly needs

Anna Sehnalova's research shows that Tibet has abundant indigenous categories of *gter*, roughly speaking, items buried within the environment to ensure health, prosperity, and the like, usually as offerings to local deities or *gzhi bdag*, or more rarely simply to enrich the environment in some other way. Functionally, this overlaps with the enhancement of *g.yang*, or good fortune, by preserving suitable objects. A widely found basic notion is that whatever inheres to the landscape and is of some value, is the natural property of the *gzhi bdag*; and that making further offerings of valuables (*gter*) into the landscape will please the presiding *gzhi bdag*, who will in exchange ensure economic prosperity and general wellbeing. In this aspect of owning and receiving such offerings, in contemporary usage in Golog the *gzhi bdag* are often referred to as *gter bdag* (see Alternative Source 3 above).

It is important to emphasise that since the required research has not been done so far, there is not yet any evidence indicating when the word *gter* first began to be applied to such buried offerings and items. However, the contemporary dispersal of such ideas across wide areas of the Tibetan cultural regions, seems to indicate that the idea of the *gzhi bdag* owning all the treasures within its territory is an old one.

Across a wide range of the Tibetan cultural zones, *gter* offerings to the *gzhi bdag* can range from the ubiquitous treasure vases (*gter bum*) nowadays produced on an industrial scale, through grains, wool, semi-precious stones and gold, to the bodily remains of important people, and many more things besides. The related term *gter kha* also applies to naturally occurring minerals and the like, which the local deities similarly see as their own property (see Alternative Source 2 above).

gTer practices can acquire a Buddhist aspect and are done by monks and laity alike. For example, *gter bum* can take Buddhist-inspired physical shapes and be associated with Buddhist deities like Jambhala or White Mahākāla, and they can be buried by monks and lamas for the well-being of the world; but much of their underlying rationale is indigenous, linked to the notions of *gzhi bdag*, and the enhancement of personal and environmental wealth. Such *gter* is very rarely (if ever) buried with the idea it should later be dug up, and unlike the Buddhist *nidhi/gter ma* of Harrison's Indian sources (see Alternative source 6 below), there are no prophecies of its future recovery or recoverers.

Anna Sehnalova has made a study of the numerous types of *gter* burials: wool, animal manes, animal body parts, grains, weapons,

jewels, gold, silver, pearls, vases, minerals, medicines, many other worldly offerings, and also religious books and religious objects.⁶⁸

Perhaps then the tradition of Padmasambhava burying caskets containing religious books and objects within the domain of a *gzhi bdag*, and entrusting them to its protection, was developed after the introduction of Buddhism, yet in some way building upon the already existing rich conceptual framework of the indigenous traditions of burying this-worldly *gter* as offerings to the *gzhi bdag* in exchange for worldly benefits. But the Buddhist burials are conceived as removable (although only by a prophesied *gter ston*), to symbolise the transcendent power and superiority of Padmasambhava and his dharmic *gter ma*, over the mundane *gzhi bdag* and the mundane *gter* buried by ordinary persons. This could also invoke at a symbolic but also performative level the prominent Buddhist narratives of Padmasambhava ‘taming’ all of Tibet’s *gzhi bdag*. Yet this system still accords a very high degree of respect and authority to the Padmasambhava-tamed *gzhi bdag*, because only a prophesied *gter ston*, who has the express approval and support of the *gzhi bdag*, and no one else, can remove the treasure that Padmasambhava put there.

Indigenous ideas have thus interacted with Buddhist ideas in many interesting ways. For it is in the nature of local deities, to whom the riches of the earth belong by default, to develop a powerful proprietorial interest in anything buried in their territory. This includes the holy *gter ma* entrusted to them by Padmasambhava, since so long as it remains concealed in their territory within its caskets, it acts as an environmental enrichment par excellence. That is why *gter stons*, when recovering the *gter ma* prophesied for them by Guru Rinpoche, must for reasons of both courtesy and prudence, insert a replacement *gter* (*gter tshab*) of suitable value to compensate for the one they have just taken out.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ According to a small minority of her informants, only, religious books and religious objects are the only *gter* that can ever be removed again after burial, and only in specific and rather rare instances, so that here, as Sehnalova points out, insofar as such occurrences do exist, there might be rare cases where the concepts of *gter* and *gter ma* might blur. But most of her informants had no awareness that any *gter* could ever be removed after offering through burial. However, some *gter bum* are not buried, but remain on domestic or monastic altars, to increase the wellbeing and prosperity of the household or monastery: these, of course, can be respectfully moved, like many other objects on a shrine.

⁶⁹ Some of the earliest work on these topics comes from Antonio Terrone, 2014, “The Earth as a Treasure: Visionary Revelation in Tibetan Buddhism and its Interaction with the Environment”, in *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture Volume 8, Number 4 Special Issue: Religion and Nature in Asia and the Himalayas*. Guest Edited by Georgina Drew and Ashok Gurung.

Our challenge now is to track the development and distribution of such ideas in older sources.

Alternative source 5: Pre-Buddhist / non-Buddhist burial traditions

In addition to the historical context I have already referred to (see Alternative source 2 above), in some regions of contemporary East Tibet, burials in the earth still continue to be used for some important deceased people and are often described as a kind of *gter*. Such burials have particular significance for local ancestor cults. Sehnalova in Golog and also Langelaar in Upper Khams have documented several such cases in their fieldwork, and I have heard possibly similar accounts involving multi-stage burial practices in Pemako.⁷⁰ Langelaar has also studied a group of texts devoted to this topic by the 17th century Khams pa author Karma Chags med, which indicate that in his day, ancestor cult practices of this sort were quite widespread in his region.

Langelaar reports from contemporary Upper Khams that ancestor cults still flourish there. They are centred around vases containing the bones of deceased important persons, together with a *srog shing* and a *bla rdo* to act as the seat for their *bla*, which are interred along with valuable grave goods. The sites of such burials become dwelling places of the spirits of the ancestors (*mtshun*, *pha mtshun*). They are also key residences of the community's life force or *bla*. They are often referred to as treasure (Langelaar notes that terms used include *gter*, *sa gter*, *gter bum*, *dkar rtsi bum gter*, *rin chen gter*, *rin chen gter mdzod*, *yid gzhin gter bum*, *sa yi gter du sbas*, etc.). Like the burials of *gter* vases etc for worldly needs described by Sehnalova (see Alternative source 4 above), they act to enhance life, harvests, fertility, health, and also grant success in warfare. Conversely, as Langelaar points out, their violation by enemies will weaken the tribe.⁷¹ Regular offerings must be made to gratify the *pha mtshun*, to ensure wellbeing and avoid the calamity of their displeasure.

⁷⁰ Reinier Langelaar, lecture, Wolfson College, Oxford, 21st May 2019; A. Sehnalova, lectures, 4th May 2017, Oriental Institute, Oxford, and 21st May 2019, Wolfson College, Oxford; Lopon P Ogyan Tanzin, personal communication, Sarnath, December 2017

⁷¹ Langelaar mentioned that the *Ge sar* epic and also the *rLangs poti bse ru* likewise describe violating the enemy's burial grounds as a way of weakening their communal *bla* to facilitate defeating them in battle

In Golog, Sehnaalova too reports that corpses of important persons are understood as *gter*. Their mode and place of burial plays an important ritual role in the *gzhi bdag* cult (which is in this region also an ancestral cult), and also determines the location of the tribal *bla gnas*. Again, they enhance life, fertility, prosperity, good fortune, etc.

It is not yet clear how such contemporary practices might compare with earlier non-Buddhist tumulus burials from the Imperial period, but Langelaar and Hazod are currently working together on this question. If it transpires that they do resemble ancient practices, and given their explicit association with *gter*, learning more about them might add to our anthropological understanding of the historical context within which *gter ma* evolved.

However, there is no indication from Sehnaalova and Langelaar's fieldwork that anything is normally intended to be removed from such burials: on the contrary, both emphasise it is crucial everything should as far as possible remain hidden, undisturbed, and intact. In this sense, they resemble the offerings of *gter* to the *gzhi bdag* as described by Sehnaalova (Alternative source 4 above). They do not normally resemble the extraction of religious treasures, characteristic of the Buddhist and gYung drung Bon *gter ma* systems. Davidson's hypothesis of 2005 proposed that precious items imbued with royal *bla* were intended for deliberate post-mortem ritual removal, and that such a feature of deliberate removal might have been a predecessor of Buddhist *gter ma*, but this is not so far supported by contemporary ethnographies—quite the opposite.

Alternative source 6: Mahāyāna Buddhism

Thematic parallels between the systems of revelation described in various Mahāyāna texts and the Tibetan *gter ma* systems⁷² have not infrequently been remarked by Tibetan authors, for example, they are cited in the debate between Thu'u bkwan and Sum pa mkhan po as described by Kapstein (1989), and in other sources too. But, as many modern scholars might have wondered, if subjected to detailed ex-

⁷² I already wrote a short paper on this topic when a PhD student. Robert Mayer, 1994. "Scriptural Revelation in India and Tibet. Indian Precursors of the gTer ma Tradition". In: *Tibetan Studies, PIATS 6, Vol. 2*. Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Oslo, pp. 533-544. The paper was intended specifically as a response to Michael Aris's proposal that *gter ma* derived predominantly from Himalayan shamanism with no appreciable Buddhist content (1989, p. 59ff), and so was limited in scope to listing some of the more obvious Buddhist components.

amination, how close are these parallels in actuality, and what might they imply? And a further question: is there any evidence to suggest that the revelatory systems described in these Mahāyāna texts still existed in India by the 10th century, or had they by that time been displaced by other more tantric methods? Is it perhaps more likely that by the 10th century, such Mahāyāna ideas functioned predominantly as literary resources useful for Tibetans as frame narratives in the construction of their own Buddhist revelatory systems? One of my tasks is to assess the evidence systematically and carefully and try to ascertain what we can deduce from it.

The Buddhologist Paul Harrison researched Indian Mahāyāna scriptural revelation for many years. He concluded that its various methods of revelation became summarised from a number of older sources in Śāntideva's late 7th or 8th century *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. This work survives in Sanskrit and was translated into Tibetan in the 9th century. Śāntideva cited a text identified by Jens Uwe Hartmann and Paul Harrison as the *Sarvaṇṇya-samuccaya-samādhi-sūtra* which outlines three broad and inclusive revelatory rubrics.⁷³ The ideas inform-

⁷³ For the three revelatory rubrics outlined in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, citing the *Sarvaṇṇya-samuccaya-samādhi-sūtra*, see Harrison, P. 2005. "Mediums and Messages: Reflections on the Production of Mahāyāna Sūtras", *The Eastern Buddhist* XXXV 1 & 2, pp.124-5; Harrison's translation, my parentheses: "For, Vimalatejas, the Buddhas and Lords resident in other world systems show their faces to reverent and respectful bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas wanting the dharma, and they cause them to hear the dharma [similar to *dag snang*]. Vimalatejas, treasures of the dharma are deposited in the interiors of mountains, caves and trees for bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas wanting the dharma, and endless dharma-teachings in book form come into their hands [*dharmānidhāna, chos kyi gter*, similar to *sa gter*]. Vimalatejas, deities who have seen former Buddhas provide bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas wanting the dharma with the inspired eloquence of Buddhas [*pratibhāna, spobs pa*, similar to some *dgongs gter*, eg. the late bDud 'joms Rinpoche's *Spu gri reg phung*, his *dgongs gter* inspired within his mind by Ye shes mtshad rgyal]." Sanskrit text of *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, in Bendall (1897-1902, p.189): *dharmakāmānāṃ hi vimalatejaḥ bodhisatvānāṃ mahāsatvānāṃ sagauravānāṃ sa-pratīśānāṃ* (sic) *anyalokadhātusthitā api buddhā bhagavanto mukham upadarśayanti dharmāṃ cānuśrāvayanti | dharmakāmānāṃ vimalatejaḥ bodhisatvānāṃ mahāsatvānāṃ parvatakandaravṛkṣamadyeṣu dharmānidhānāni nikṣiptāni | dharmamukhāny anantāni pustakagatāni karatalagatāni bhavanti | dharmakāmānāṃ vimalatejaḥ bodhisatvānāṃ purvabuddhadarśīnyo devatā buddhapratibhānam upasaṃharanti | |*. Tibetan text of the *Sarvaṇṇya-samuccaya-samādhi-sūtra* / 'Phags pa bsod nams thams cad bsod pa'i ting nge 'dzin ces bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo / from Lithang Kanjur, mdo sde, Na 77a1-131a6 (vol. 51, folio 105b): *dri ma med pa'i gzi brjid chos 'dod pa'i byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po bsan pa phun sum tshogs pa gus pa dang bcas pa rnam ni 'jig rten gyi khams gzhan na 'dug kyang sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das rnam zhal ston par mtshad cing chos kyang thos par mtshad do / dri ma med pa'i gzi brjid chos 'dod pa'i byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po rnam kyi chos kyi gter ri dang / ri sul dang / shing dag gi nang du bcug pa dag yod de / gzungs dang / chos kyi sgo mtha' yas pa glegs*

ing these three broad rubrics are quite old in Mahāyāna Buddhism and are also discernible in the works of early text revealers such as Myang ral and Chos dbang, albeit under varying terminologies. It seems to have been only at a much later stage that an exact form of words for these three broad rubrics became terminologically normative for the rNying ma (*dag snang*, *sa gter*, and *dgongs gter*). Śāntideva's three rubrics of revelatory methods are:

1. Firstly, meeting the Buddha face to face in a vision and receiving teachings (reminiscent of the later Tibetan Pure Vision or *dag snang*).
2. Secondly, *dharmanidhāna*, or dharma treasures concealed within the material world (reminiscent of the later Tibetan Earth Treasure or *sa gter*).
3. Thirdly, *pratibhāna* or direct inspiration of mind (*spobs pa*, reminiscent of the later Tibetan Mind Treasure or *dgongs gter*).⁷⁴

The first two are also discussed in detail in the *Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra* (henceforth PraS), a text which Harrison has studied in very great detail, and which was translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit within the same historical period as the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. The title of this sūtra can be translated as 'The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present'. Later Tibetan Treasure conventions show a particularly close and detailed mapping to it at many significant points.

As its name suggests, much of this lengthy text deals with pure vision, but I don't have time or space in this introductory article to compare in detail the slightly amorphous Tibetan category of *dag snang* with the descriptions of scriptural revelation through direct visionary encounter with Amitābha in the PraS.

bam du byas pa dag kyang lag tu 'ong bar 'gyur rol /dri ma med pa'i gzi brjid chos 'dod pa'i byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po rnams la ni sngon sangs rgyas mthong ba'i lha rnams spobs pa sgrub par byed do!

⁷⁴ The Sanskrit term *pratibhāna* is translated into Tibetan as *spobs pa*. The most common application of the term *spobs pa* in later rNying ma thinking was the *spobs pa gter chen bryad*, a Buddhist doctrinal category with which 'Jigs med gling pa became associated, so that he is sometimes styled in inscriptions and so forth as *spobs pa'i gter chen bryad grol 'jigs med gling*. 'Jigs med gling pa is also thought to be among the first major exponents of the term *dgongs gter*, although the concept in a broader sense is very much older, e.g. in Chos dbang's usage of *thugs gter*, and, indeed, in Śāntideva's citation from the *Sarvapuṇya-samuccaya-samādhi-sūtra*. 'Jigs med gling pa's most famous treasure, the *Klong chen snying thig* cycle, is often said to have been revealed through the process of *dgongs gter*. It would be interesting to research these themes further.

However, I should briefly list the following characteristics which are shared polythetically by this probably 1st or 2nd century Indian Mahāyāna text, and the very much later Tibetan category of Earth Treasure (*sa gter*).⁷⁵ The Tibetan Earth Treasure tradition has a very distinctive and highly complex structure, a structure which it shares on most points of detail with the narrative presented in the PraS. We do not yet have any clear understanding of how or why Tibetan *sa gter* seems so closely to follow the precedents presented in the PraS Chapter 13, but what does seem apparent is that their relation is somehow a cognate one (in what follows, all text locations follow Harrison, P. *The Samādhi of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present: An Annotated English Translation of the Tibetan Version of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*, Tokyo, 1990; and *The Tibetan text of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra*, Tokyo, 1978).

1. The rationale for burying teachings, as a hedge against future times of religious decline (13 B-D)
2. Precise prophecies of the future discoverers and of their discoveries (13 K, esp. vv. 3-11, 14-15)
3. The eight future discoverers will be reincarnated direct, named, disciples of the Buddha (13; 13 K vv. 3-11)
4. The Buddha first directly teaches and then entrusts (*gtad*) these named disciples with the teachings they will rediscover again and again in repeated future lives (13, 13 H)
5. White-robed lay status of the eight, future, treasure recoverers (13 C, 13 E; Harrison 1990: xvii)
6. Five hundred prophesied recipients, who also heard the original teaching in their past lives, will repeatedly be reborn to accompany the eight prophesied treasure discoverers, to receive, copy and propagate the newly revealed teachings (13 G-H, 13 K v. 3, 14-15) (cf. *chos bdag* in Tibetan *gter ma*)
7. Treasure texts are stored in caskets (*sgrom bu*) (13K v. 8)
8. Treasure caskets are hidden in such places as caves, stūpas, rocks and mountains (13 K v.9; 13 B)
9. The hidden Treasure is protected during its long concealment by being put in the care of local guardian deities or nāgas (13 K v.9)

⁷⁵ The PraS was translated into Chinese by 178 CE, and seems also to have had an influence upon modes of Buddhist scriptural revelation in China, but that is not my immediate concern here.

10. It is predicted that after revelation, Treasure texts and their discoverers might be seen as controversial, and not readily accepted by the wider Buddhist public (13 F, 13 K vv. 12-13)
11. The Tibetan translation of PraS shares some key technical terms with the rNying ma Treasure tradition: *gtad pa* (13 H), *sgrom bu* (13 K v. 8)
12. There are also verses amenable to interpretation as prophecies of Tibet and its *gter ma* (13 K v.14-15), and of Padmasambhava (13 K v.20, 22)

The above resemblances shared between the Mahāyāna sources researched by Harrison, and the later Tibetan *gter ma* traditions, need to be researched further, not least because several later Tibetan apologists cite these Mahāyāna texts in relation to their own *gter ma* traditions.⁷⁶

Yet rDo grub chen 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma in his influential *gTer gyi rnam bshad* somewhat downplayed the similarities between sūtra texts in general and the later Tibetan *gter ma* tradition.⁷⁷ Perhaps this was quite simply because, unlike *gter ma*, they were not predominantly tantric. But another likely factor is that the PraS, as far as we currently know, is the only sūtra text to quite explicitly describe in any great detail an equivalent to the 'Mind mandate transmission' (*gtad rgya*), a component 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma felt was indispensable to Tibetan *gter ma*; hence, as far as he was concerned, with only one solitary exposition of the important component of *gtad rgya*, sūtra texts as a generality could represent only partial antecedents for Tibetan *gter ma* practices.

Janet Gyatso has possibly over-interpreted 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma on this point, perhaps thinking he is even denying that the PraS describes a 'Mind mandate transmission', and this in turn might have coloured her overall approach to the history of *gter ma*.⁷⁸ My own

⁷⁶ Dan Hirshberg has argued that Myang ral was the first major author in Tibetan Buddhism to describe concatenated reincarnations, and that he did so specifically in relation to *gter ma* recovery. Although I am not aware that Myang ral anywhere refers to the PraS by name, his understanding of the roles of prophecy and reincarnation in *gter ma* recovery closely follows the template outlined in the PraS. We must therefore enquire if Mahāyāna texts such as the PraS might have exerted some indirect influence on the development of the reincarnate lama systems of Tibet.

⁷⁷ 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, *gTer brgyud kyi rnam bshad*. Pages 797-858 of Vol Kha of the Shechen edition of the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*. New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2007-2008. TBRC W1KG14. 2: 813 - 874.

⁷⁸ Gyatso, Janet, 1998. *Apparitions of the Self*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. See page 150, note 24, on page 294, where she writes: 'but note Do Drubchen III's

reading of the Tibetan agrees with Tulku Thondup and Harold Talbott's translation of 1986:⁷⁹ I think 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma is indeed saying that not ALL sūtra sources on *gter ma* have the *gtad rgya*, but he is not specifically denying that the PraS does so.⁸⁰

Either way, in this particular case, modern philology has earned the last word. Paul Harrison's decade-long minutely detailed philological analysis of this text, encompassing all extant versions and fragments in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan, shows that the long and complex narrative within chapter 13 of the Tibetan version of the PraS, does indeed describe an extremely close equivalent to *gtad rgya*. Not only is a similar meaning conveyed, as the Buddha first entrusts the sūtra to certain named disciples before it is buried for hundreds of years for them to recover and propagate, as he prophesies, in their future reincarnations; but even the word *gtad* is used appropriately.⁸¹ Likewise the PraS does the same for most other basic structural features of the complex Tibetan *sa gter* tradition, including the prophetic ones.

Davidson seems not to have been very familiar with Harrison's work, because he makes no direct mention of any of it in his account of the origins of *gter ma*. Admitting only the vaguest or most general similarities between Indian and Tibetan revelation, but nothing that is detailed or cognate, Davidson argues there was never anything in India resembling Tibetan *gter ma*, and that the three rubrics of Pure Vision, Earth Treasure and Mind Treasure were late Tibetan inventions with no Indian precedents (Davidson 2005: 213). While I am happy to concur without hesitation that the Tibetan scholastic adoption of the exact terminology *dag snang*, *sa gter*, and *dgongs gter* probably came comparatively late, Harrison and Hartmann's work on the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and the *Sarvapuṇya-samuccaya-samādhi-sūtra* demonstrates that their underlying ideas reflect a much older Buddhist pattern, transmitted to Tibet through these Mahāyāna texts, and which seems to have influenced those who constructed the Tibetan *sa gter*

point that they often lack the distinctive mark of Treasure, namely, the intention of the concealer, who commissions a particular individual to disclose the Treasure at a particular time (Thondup 1986, pp. 109-10).'

⁷⁹ Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, 1986. *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*. Wisdom Publications, London.

⁸⁰ 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, *ibid*, page 806:*mtha' dag gtad rgya sngon song can du 'chad pa'i shes byed dka' 'am snyam mod l;* Thondup and Talbott page 110: "But I think it is difficult to say for all of them [the previously listed sūtras that mention *gter ma*] that there is any proof that those teachings came through a Mind-mandate Transmission".

⁸¹ *bcom ldan 'das/ ting nge 'dzin 'di skyes bu dam pa 'di dag la gtad par gsol/* See Harrison 1978 pp 102-115, and Harrison 1990 pp 96-113.

system, a consideration which Davidson did not discuss. Not only that, but I think one can cogently argue that the PraS does indeed describe something closely resembling the complex and highly distinctive structure of Tibetan *sa gter*. Whether any such system ever existed as an actual practice in India, or only as a literary trope, is currently unknown, and remains to be determined.

Perhaps influenced by Davidson as well as by 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma, it seems to me that Gyatso too has sometimes given Harrison's work insufficient weighting. For while she does seem aware of its existence,⁸² she has not apparently absorbed its implications. Hence she sometimes seems simply unaware of the evidence turned up by Harrison (and Hartmann), the implications of which are that Tibetan conceptualisations of revelation do indeed seem to contain important elements that are directly cognate with older Indian Buddhist literary forms at the least.

Alternative source 7: Early Tantric Buddhism

If a few Mahāyāna sources describe hidden textual treasures, a great many early tantric texts dwell on more material hidden treasures, including riches, magical objects, spells and rituals, and medicines that confer siddhis, immortality, longevity, or health.⁸³ Such treasure cults are very typical of the Purāṇas and early Buddhist tantras, and are often connected with *pātālā*, the sensual underground heaven of *asuras* and *nāgas*, accessible to brave yogis via special Asura caves on the surface.⁸⁴ Consorting with *asura* females can be a key for human yogis to obtain treasures. Chinese Buddhism knows these themes, in

⁸² Gyatso, Janet, 1998. *Apparitions of the Self*. Princeton University Press, Princeton. See pages 147 onwards, especially pages 150 and 152, and note 24 on page 150.

⁸³ There are innumerable rites for finding *nidhi* or *nidhana* within early Buddhist tantric literature. Locations include: *Padmacintāmaṇi-dhāraṇī sūtra* translated into Chinese by Bodhiruci in 709 (Taishō 1080.20, p. 190a.); *Vajrakumāratantra* in Chinese translation (Taishō 1222) (translated excerpts by S. Hodge in Mayer 2007); *Vajrasekhara / Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṅgraha*, Amoghavajra's Chinese translation (Taishō 865); *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa*, especially in its final chapter, the *hemasādhana*; *Amoghapāśakalparāja* Tibetan: sDe dge 686, Vol. 92-1-138a, Sanskrit: Taisho University Mikkyō Seiten Kenkyūkai, codex unicus from China, 73a 5-6; *Vidyottamatantra* sDe dge D746, Volume 95 1a-237b; at least one of the two *Vajrapātālatantras* in the Tibetan canon, sDe dge 744; etc etc.

⁸⁴ See Robert Mayer, 2007. 'The Importance of the Underworlds: Asuras' Caves in Buddhism, and Some Other Themes in Early Buddhist Tantras Reminiscent of the Later Padmasambhava Legends', in *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 3 (December 2007): 1-31.

tantric texts such as the **Kaṅikrodha-vajrakumāra-bodhisattva-sādhana-vidhi* (*Sheng jia ni fen nu jin gang tong zi pu sa cheng jiu yi gui jing*, 聖迦拏忿怒金剛童子菩薩成就儀軌經) (T1222a).⁸⁵ Likewise Xuanzang mentions Bhāviveka gaining entrance to the Asura kingdoms using similar procedures: Vajrapāṇi is invoked, mantras and mustard seeds are thrown at a rock face to make it open, a crowd watches the whole operation, and some of them accompany Bhāviveka into the cave.⁸⁶ Comparable themes are also found in Tibetan *gter ma* narratives, such as Myang ral's biographies,⁸⁷ and in some crowd *gter ma* (*khrom gter*) narratives.

I have for some years suspected that a potentially important resource for understanding the origins of *gter ma* in Tibet lies in the dozens of treasure rites within the Kriyātantras listed in the *lHan dkar ma* catalogue, which were translated into Tibetan in the late eighth century.⁸⁸ Behind these Kriyātantra texts lies a rich hinterland of Purāṇic and other Indian treasure lore, but it is primarily through the translated Kriyātantra texts that such ideas entered Tibet. Thus I have recently begun to browse the Kriyātantra section of the *lHan dkar ma*, starting from the beginning. So far, I have only looked at the first two.

The first Kriyātantra text in the *lHan dkar ma* is the *Amoghapāśa-kalparāja* (*lHan dkar ma* 316, D686, sDe dge 92 1b-316a, 93 1b-57b). Fortunately, a Sanskrit version also survives. The *Amoghapāśakalparāja* has eleven rites for finding *nidhi* / *gter*, including for example, one dedicated to taming the *gter srung* or *nidhipāla* that I present here in this footnote.⁸⁹ All of them, however, are quite brief, and tell us little.

⁸⁵ For some discussion and translations of passages on treasure recovery in this text, see Mayer 2007, *ibid.* A Chinese text is available from CBETA here: <http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T21n1222a>

⁸⁶ Mayer 2007 *ibid.*, page 11, citing Rolf Stein, *Grottes-Matrices et Lieux Saints*, page 26. See also Malcolm David Eckel, 1994. *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness*, Princeton, Princeton University Press. Pages 11-13.

⁸⁷ Hirshberg 2016 *ibid.*, page 115

⁸⁸ Since there is some possibility that some of the tantric texts listed in the extant version of the *'Phang thang ma* might have been added to that catalogue at a later date, initially at least, I am restricting my investigation to texts listed in the *lHan dkar ma*.

⁸⁹ *Amoghapāśakalparāja* (*lHan dkar ma* 316), Tibetan: sDe dge 686, Vol. 92-1-138a, Sanskrit: Taisho University Mikkyō Seiten Kenkyūkai, codex unicus from China, 73a 5-6. "Then, if you wish to dig up some treasure, at the place where you suspect the treasure is, make a maṇḍala of cow dung; strew it with flowers, cense it with guggul incense, offer the three kinds of tormas, that is, offer pure tormas, meat and blood tormas, and dough, fruit and lotus tormas. Offer them to Ārya Avalokiteśvara. Do ten thousand recitations. When the ten thousand recitations

The second Kriyātantra text in the *lHan dkar ma* is the *Vidyottamatantra* (*lHan dkar ma* 317, D 746, sDe dge 95 1a-237b)⁹⁰. I am not aware of any Sanskrit survivals, and its provenance has not yet been subjected to systematic analysis. The text is very long, and I have only browsed a few sections of it, but those I have looked at all appear to be Indian. They do not appear, like the rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum texts I have previously studied, to be Tibetan-composed or compiled in any way. Nor, according to Rolf Giebel, is the existence of this text known from Chinese sources at all.⁹¹

The *Vidyottamatantra* has a greater number of *gter* related rituals than the *Amoghapāśakalparāja*. Fortunately, these include a long and highly informative section in over twenty pages (sDe dge Kangyur vol 95, folio 70b ff), on how to locate the treasure doors (*gter sgo*) behind which *gter* is hidden, and how to open them to extract the treasure, which I will discuss here briefly.

According to this passage, treasure seekers cannot find the *gter sgo* unless deities reveal its location in a dream or vision: one is reminded here of Charles Stewart's anthropological observations (Stewart 2012), and this is also a standard feature in later Tibetan *gter ma* discovery. In the later Tibetan *gter ma* system, the location of the *gter sgo*

are completed, there at the place which has the treasure, the treasure guardian will actually become present, and the treasure will be made to appear. Offer a tormā and drinking water to the treasure protector, and as long as you live, the treasure protector will do work for you. Wherever you send it, whatever work you command it, all will be done." /*de nas gter brko bar 'dod pas gnas gang na gter yod par dogs pa'i gnas der ba'i lci bas maṅdal byas la/ me tog gtor zhing gu gul gyi bdug pas bdug cing / gtor ma gtsang ma dang / sha dang / khrag gi gtor ma dang / phye zan dang 'bras bu dang / pad+ma'i gtor ma dang / gtor ma rnam pa gsum sbyin par bya'o/ /'phags pa spyan ras gziḡs dbang phyug la mchod pa bya'o/ /stong phrag bcu bzlas brjod bya'o/ /stong phrag bcu tshang ba dang gnas gang na gter yod pa'i gnas der gter srung ba mngon du 'byung zhing gter 'byung bar 'gyur ro/ /gter srung ba la gtor ma dang / mchod yon sbyin par byas na gter srung ba de ji srid 'tsho'i bar du las byas pa por 'gyur ro/ /gang du mngags pa dang / gang bsgo ba'i las de thams cad byed par 'gyur ro/ . atha nidhānam utpāyitukāmena yatra sthāne nidhisamkā bhavati / tatra sthāne gomaya-maṅḡalakaṃ kṛtvā puṣpāvākīrṇṇam kṛtvā guḡguladhūpan datvāt tṛvidhibaliṃ dadyāt śuklabali māmsarudhirabaliḡ saktuphalapadmabalin dātavyaṃ / āryāvālokiteśvarapūjāṃ karttavyaḡ / daśasahasrāṇi japatāḡ samāpte daśasahasrāṇi yatra sthāne midhir bhaviṣyati / tatra nidhipālam uttiṣṡhati / nidhānam utpatati / nidhipālā bali.arḡhaṃ nivedayitavyaṃ / sa ca nidhipāla yāvajjīva karmakārakā bhavati yatra preṣayasi yam ājñāpayasi tat sarvāvakarmāṇi kariṣyati /*

⁹⁰ So far, I have largely consulted the sDe dge version, but Hermann-Pfandt (2008) notes that the text also occurs at the following locations: Cone C 407, Phug brag F 531, lHa sa H 691, 'Jang sa tham J 713, London L 576, Mustang M 113, Narthang N 653, Peking Q 402, Stog S 696, Tokyo T 693, Ulan Bator U 766. It is also listed in the *'Phang thang ma* (923).

⁹¹ Rolf Giebel, Personal communication, 1st August, 2019.

and much practical information about it is disclosed through divinely-dispensed *kha byang*, or prophetic guides. It is noteworthy that this passage from the *Vidyottamatantra* addresses many of the practical concerns typical of *kha byang*: where to find, how to make visible, and how to recognise hidden *gter sgo*, when (or when not) to open them, what rituals to do before, while, or after opening them, how to manage their protectors or *gter srung* (the same term is used in both traditions), at what depth behind the *gter sgo* the treasure will be found, how much will be found, how the *gter sgo* should be reclosed after the *gter* is extracted, and so on.

A complex typology of *gter sgo* is described, with different shapes and colours. Equally important of course are the methods to find them and open them. These include the natural arising of specific sounds that will indicate the precise location of the *gter sgo*, the performance of various *homas* in preparation for opening them and for pacifying obstacles, magical methods to make the *gter sgo* door outline and door handles appear, ways of removing the *kāla* or *phur pa* that is keeping a treasure door locked shut, and so forth. Several pages are dedicated to classifying and describing the fearsome protector deities who have been assigned by Brahmā to prevent the treasure doors being improperly opened, and the specific methods by which the treasure seeker can placate them, before they attack him.

As far as Anna Sehnalova is aware, neither the term *gter sgo* nor its underlying concept occur in the indigenous Tibetan traditions of burying *gter* for environmental enhancement or as offerings to the *gzhi bdag*; nor has Reinier Langelaar reported them from the *pha mtshun* burial cults. According to our current knowledge, it actually seems quite difficult to try to account for the origin of the idea of a *gter sgo* from indigenous Tibetan cosmologies alone. Yet several elements concerning treasure doors from this long and complex section of the *Vidyottamatantra* do resonate closely with later Tibetan Buddhist and Bon *gter ma* practices, and the term *gter sgo* and its underlying concept plays an equally fundamental role in them all. Hence a more detailed study of the emergence of the idea of the *gter sgo* within the Tibetan *gter ma* traditions seems desirable, and the *Vidyottamatantra* seems a good place to start.

The *gter sgo* in both traditions can often resemble the portal to another dimension. In Kriyātantras, this frequently pertains to Indian mythology of *biladvāra*, Asura caves, *pātālas*, etc. Thus in the *Vidyottama*, in a description typical of several other Kriyātantra treasure narratives too, once the *gter sgo* is open, *gandharvīs* and *kinnarīs* will appear from the magical realm of Meru, which is just the other side of the *gter sgo*. Similarly, when *gTer bdag gLing pa* enters a *gter sgo*, he finds himself inside a tent-like cave with crystal walls and

bright frescoes, inhabited by supernatural young men and women (Tulku Thondup 1986: 78). When Pema Lingpa enters a *gter sgo*, he finds himself within a large space with thrones and supernatural inhabitants (Aris 1989: 38).⁹²

In the *Vidyottamatantra*, *gter sgo* sometimes open spontaneously, but other times iron bars are needed to smash them open. Similarly, Tibetan *gter sgo* sometimes open spontaneously, for example when Pema Lingpa withdrew his famous lake treasure, but other times, hammers and chisels are needed, for example, when Pema Lingpa withdrew his cliff treasure at Gedo (Aris 1989: 49). Likewise, a *gter sgo* opened spontaneously for Dudjom Lingpa at Ba ter, but he had to smash one open with a chisel in Nga la Tag tse (Tulku Thondup 1986: 78, 79).

I have not yet had time to browse any of the further Kriyātantras listed in the *lHan dkar ma*. But we can see that some Tibetans soon appropriated the various magical rites contained in such Kriyātantra texts, since many are reproduced in a probably tenth century Dunhuang Tibetan compendium of useful magical rituals (IOL Tib J 401), along the lines of the later *be'u 'bum* genre. This text includes a rite to the Indian goddess Bhṛkuṭī for locating a treasure door (*gter sgo*) on the top of a mountain, making the treasure door open up, and inducing its treasure protectors, here called *gter bdag*, to give one the treasure.⁹³ Two aspects are of particular interest here (see Alternative Sources 3 and 4 above): mountain tops are, in indigenous Tibetan thinking, a typical abode of the ubiquitous *gzhi bdag* deities; and as Anna Sehnalova explains,

The term *gter bdag* is commonly given to *gzhi bdag* deities who are believed to have treasures in their territories. In my understanding, these can be both [local deity this-worldly offering] *gter* and/or [Buddhist and

⁹² One is also reminded here, of the slightly later central myth of Buddhist Yogatantra, its key origin narrative of the Iron Stūpa, preserved in the Far East but probably from Indian sources. For after entering the Iron Stūpa, the yogin, who is sometimes nameless and sometimes identified as Nāgārjuna, finds himself within an alternative dimension, a magical space, inhabited by divine beings, who reveal to him the Yogatantra scriptures.

⁹³ See IOL Tib J 401, Section 5, 7r.7. For an additional rite focused on Yamāntaka, which promises the finding of treasure as one of its siddhis, see IOL Tib J 401, 22v-23r. Thanks to Sam van Schaik for this information, described in his Aris Lecture at Wolfson College, Oxford, on 15th November 2018. The goddess Bhṛkuṭī is often associated with Avalokiteśvara, notably in his form of Amoghpaśa, which is often classified as Kriyātantra. Bhṛkuṭī is also identified with Tārā.

Bon religious] *gter ma*⁹⁴ treasures, in both instances the *gzhi bdag* is called *gter bdag* (personal communication, 31st October 2018).

What is of interest here is the Tibetan selection and reception of such Indian treasure rites, and the ways in which Tibetans might have understood them, to appropriate them and their terminology, apparently putting them in some kind of relation to their own indigenous *gter* categories. But assessing how Tibetan *gter ma* practices might have been influenced by Kriyātantra sources is quite complex. Consider, for example, the idea that *gter*-owning indigenous *gzhi bdag* were tamed by Padmasambhava, made into his servants, and appointed as protectors of his Buddhist *gter ma*. The notion of taming a *gzhi bdag* seems alien to pre-Buddhist tradition, where *gzhi bdag* preside as powerful patrons and humans are their respectful clients. It is so alien to indigenous thinking that even today, no lama (however great) would normally treat the still widely revered *gzhi bdag* as mere servants, and their taming to the Buddhist cause is commonly attributed only to such unique figures as Padmasambhava, or Milarepa, in the distant past. But behind the myth of Padmasambhava taming Tibet's *gzhi bdag*, one can perhaps detect the typical Kriyātantra trope of the adept taming the treasure protectors and making them his obedient servants in perpetuity. Binding the treasure protectors into humble servitude is indeed very prominent in Kriyātantras, one of the main benefits of their *nidhi* rites.

Much of the *Vidyottamatantra* does NOT enter the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition: huge bird demons guarding the treasure, a prominent reliance on compounded ointments and power substances to open treasure doors, an exclusive focus on material wealth. And Tibetan *gter ma* has many features NOT found in the *Vidyottamatantra*: symbolic languages, reincarnated *gter stons*, consorts, elaborate treasure caskets, emphasis on religious texts as the found treasure, etc. But as Davidson pointed out, *gter ma* emerged from heterogeneous sources, both indigenous and foreign, fused together in the unique social-historical conditions of renaissance Tibet. Our question is not if Tibetan *gter ma* merely continues Kriyātantra: rather, we are interested in which elements from Kriyātantra might have entered the mix of Tibetan *gter ma*.

⁹⁴ Anna Sehnalova's usage here reflects the colloquial usage of her Golog informants, where *gter* is used as a shorthand to indicate the widespread offerings generally made by local people to their local deities for this-worldly purposes, or other such valuables belonging to the *gzhi bdag*, and *gter ma* is used as a shorthand to indicate the rarer prophesied hidden treasures (sacred texts etc.) pertaining to the wider Buddhist or Bon religions.

Several additional Kriyātantra texts containing treasure finding rites were also translated in the *phyi dar*, for example, the above-mentioned *Vajrapātālatantra* (D 744), or the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* which has fourteen different treasure rites in its final chapter alone,⁹⁵ and some in other chapters too (although Wiesiek Mical advises me that the final chapter, the *hemasādhana*, was not translated into Tibetan), but they too remain to be studied.

The Imperial period Kriyātantra translations, with their numerous passages on *nidhi* or *gter*, seem to have remained until now unexplored by Western scholars of *gter ma*. Yet even the most cursory reading shows that they contain evidence for a highly complex and well-developed Indian cult of treasure discovery, some of which appears familiar to those who study the Tibetan *gter ma* traditions. Quite how these Kriyātantra texts impacted the (probably) 10th century construction of the Tibetan Buddhist and g.Yung drung Bon *gter ma* cultures, remains to be examined. But if we seek a better understanding, we probably don't have the option to simply ignore the testimony of these Kriyātantras, as has largely been done up to now.

Alternative source 8: the Mahāvairocanatantra, the Yogatantras, and Chinese traditions

Also listed in the *IHan dkar ma* are a number of tantric scriptures that are thought to represent the phases in Indian tantric development following after the Kriyātantras. Among these are the *Mahāvairocanābhīṣambodhi* (*IHan dkar ma* 321) and its *piṇḍārtha* (*IHan dkar ma* 322); and the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* (*IHan dkar ma* 323) and its *vārtika* (*IHan dkar ma* 324). Weinberger (2003: 292) believes the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* was also translated in the Imperial period, although it is not listed in the *IHan dkar ma*.

We know several of these texts played a prominent role in the official Buddhist ceremony and doctrine of the Tibetan Empire. What is perhaps less well known is that through the same particular period, these very same originally South Indian traditions were (temporarily) playing an equally or even greater official role within the Chinese

⁹⁵ See Einoo, Shingo, 'From kāmas to siddhis — Tendencies in the Development of Ritual towards Tantrism', in Einoo, Shingo, ed., *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, Tokyo, Institute of Oriental Culture Special Series, 23, University of Tokyo. (see especially pages p. 34-35).

Empire.⁹⁶ Moreover, the Dunhuang region was at the time arguably the major centre for the teaching and practice of these texts within China, since Amoghavajra (705–774), their great Indian-Sogdian translator and master, had been particularly active in the Hexi corridor, at the request of the local military governor, who valued his rituals for their efficacy in battle (Yang 2018: 41 ff.).

But even during Amoghavajra's lifetime, this region began to be progressively overrun by the Tibetans, who remained in control there until 851. It is therefore entirely possible that the early transmission of these traditions into Tibet were influenced by the recently-established and (at the time) hugely prestigious Chinese lineages they found at Dunhuang. In an important forthcoming article, Yury Khokhlov presents new art historical evidence for what he believes is a Chinese background to some of these early teachings in Tibet (Khokhlov forthcoming).

It might take some time before these issues are fully clarified, but if there were indeed such Chinese influences, they might have impacted Tibetan attitudes to scriptural revelation. For central to Amoghavajra's understanding of tantra was an important revelation narrative, describing the first ever transmission of the *Sarvatathāgata-tattovasaṃgraha*, from inside a miraculous Iron Stūpa in South India, to an unnamed sage. In some respects, this Iron Stūpa resembles the *biladvāra* of the Kriyātantras described above. The sage had to open it by reciting mantras, circumambulating, and throwing mustard seeds, but once inside, he found himself within a huge celestial space inhabited by numberless divine beings, who could transmit to him the precious teachings. This myth of scriptural revelation within the Iron Stūpa assumed great significance at that time in some interpretations of Amoghavajra's tradition. The founder of the Shingon school, Kūkai (774-835), for example, made it the central spiritual metaphor of his entire interpretation of Amoghavajra's teachings, and also identified the unnamed sage as Nāgārjuna.⁹⁷

Other Chinese Buddhist texts mention systems of revelation that seem to draw upon such Indian sources as the PraS. Michel Strickmann made a study of an apocryphal 6th century Chinese Buddhist

⁹⁶ Yang, Zeng. (2018). *A Biographical Study on Bukong 不空 (aka. Amoghavajra, 705-774). Networks, Institutions, and Identities*. Unpublished PhD thesis. The University of British Columbia.

⁹⁷ Rambelli, F., "The Myth of the South Indian Iron Stupa (*Nanten tetta*) in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism", in *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* Vol. 27. No. 2 (December 2017): 71–88.

text, the *Consecration Sūtra* (*Kuan-ting ching*, T1331).⁹⁸ It has an origin myth involving the Buddha's prophecy of the rebirth of its future discoverer, who was indeed reborn to find it within a jewelled casket within a cave in China (Strickmann 1990, p. 86). Hence Strickmann long ago suggested it shared some cognate relation with Tibetan *gter ma*. Likewise, as mentioned above, there are several Chinese tantric Buddhist texts believed to be translated from Indian originals, that have sometimes long and detailed rites for finding wealth and magical treasure objects, for example, the **Kaṅikrodha-vajrakumāra-bodhisattova-sādhana-vidhi* (*Sheng jia ni fen nu jin gang tong zi pu sa cheng jiu yi gui jing*, 聖迦拏忿怒金剛童子菩薩成就儀軌經) (T1222a), and the *Padmacintāmaṇi-dhāraṇī sūtra*, translated by Bodhiruci in 709 CE.

But quite independently of any Buddhist influences, China already had its own ancient and much more profuse indigenous traditions of treasure recovery. Seidel focused on some aspects of the written word, starting with inscriptions on rediscovered ancient bronzes, progressing to independent texts on paper, while Franke also discusses non-textual palladia. Barend te Haar has mentioned aspects of both. Several other authors (e.g. Bokenkamp, Campany, Robinet) have discussed further aspects. The bulk of the Taoist tradition, for example, is based on the revelation of sacred texts within caves or grottos, sometimes encoded within magical writing systems that ordinary mortals find difficult or cannot understand (e.g. 'seal' or 'perfected' scripts, *zhuanwen* 篆文 and *zhenshu* 真書).⁹⁹ As I understand from my colleague Yegor Grebnev, very much more indeed about Chinese treasure discovery still awaits to be described. It will take a long time before we can ascertain which, if any, Chinese treasure traditions might help shed light on their Tibetan counterparts.

Alternative source 9: pre-*phyi dar* rNying ma tantric scriptures

Conventionally, it is said that *gter ma* began in the *phyi dar*; yet we have reason to believe that the revelation of indigenous Tibetan tantras had already begun in earlier times. Dunhuang manuscripts, which probably predate the *phyi dar*, attest a vigorous tantric culture prefiguring what is nowadays known as rNying ma. Likewise, we

⁹⁸ Strickmann, M., "The Consecration Sutra: A Buddhist Book of Spells," in: R. Buswell, Jr. ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*. Honolulu, 1990, pp. 75-118.

⁹⁹ Steavu, D., 2009. 'The Many Lives of Lord Wang of the Western Citadel: A Note on the Transmission of the *Sanhuang wen* 三皇文 (*Writ of the Three Sovereigns*), in *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Studies* Vol. XIII, 2009, 109-162.

find reference among the Dunhuang mss to the titles of several root tantras, conceived as scriptural—the utterances of the Buddhas—that to this day remain preserved in the rNying ma tantric canon (NGB). While some were probably of Indic provenance, there are indications that others were redacted or revealed in Tibet. Included, for example, are some Phur pa tantras, with the possible understanding that they were among the corpus redacted by Padmasambhava for his Tibetan and Himalayan disciples at the Asura cave in Nepal, as narrated in the Dunhuang text PT 44. Close philological examination of their extant versions indeed exposes clear signs of being redacted or revealed in a Tibetan and Himalayan cultural context from the outset, rather than translated verbatim from Sanskrit. Another such text, which survived in full at Dunhuang, is the rNying ma *Thabs zhags* tantra with its commentary and marginalia (Dunhuang text IOL Tib J 321). As far as we can tell (see Alternative source 10 below), this seems to describe its own revelation by Padmasambhava, and contains an important iconographical feature typical of indigenous Tibetan culture, but not so far reported from Indian counterparts. By the end of the 11th century, conservative polemicists like Pho brang Shi ba'i 'od felt the need to compile lists of indigenous Tibetan tantric scriptures (some of them still popular among rNying ma pas) that should be shunned, because they were revealed in Tibet, not translated from Sanskrit. But the available evidence indicates that such revelation began before the conventional beginning of the *gter ma* movement in the *phyi dar*. We are not yet sure how much earlier: perhaps somewhere between one or two centuries?

This raises several questions, crucial to the understanding of the historical origins of *gter ma*: (i) What differentiates *gter ma* from the earlier revelation? (ii) What protocols and conventions might the earlier methods of revelation have observed? (iii) Might such methods have flowed into and influenced the development of *gter ma*? (iv) Might aspects of them still continue within *gter ma*? Without addressing such questions, it is unlikely we will be able adequately to understand the historical origins of the *gter ma* traditions; but so far as I am aware, modern scholarship has barely begun to consider them.

(i) My current hypothesis is that the first question will turn out to have two main avenues of enquiry, one reflecting largely internal social-historical developments within Tibet, the other more reflective of a transnational tantric zeitgeist of that period. The first has already been alluded to above (Alternative sources 1 and 2). We have seen how anthropologists propose that under certain circumstances, societies can produce treasure cults formed around popular historical narratives of their past; and how Tibet presented precisely such conditions in the *phyi dar*, when *gter ma* first began to appear. From this

perspective, what differentiated *gter ma* from the previous revelation was the transition from mere religious revelation, to a fully developed treasure cult. The earlier revelations merely produced new scriptures through some kind of visionary process. But *gter ma* was socially and culturally much more complex. It was embedded within historical narratives that melded together idealised remembrances of Buddhism (or Bon) in the ancient Empire with the ubiquitous popular cosmology of treasure-controlling *gzhi bdag*, to provide a literature for spiritual and cultural renewal in the present. And because of its historical consciousness, *gter ma* could also extend into an indigenous archaeology, in which Tibetans of the *phyi dar* searched out and recovered actual physical relics of their lost Empire. However, another less local factor might also have been at work. As I will discuss in Alternative source 10 below, a new tantric zeitgeist seems to have been in evidence nearby, in 10th century Kashmir, in which the act of revealing new non-dual Śaiva tantric scriptures came out from the shadows of mystification and anonymity, into the glare of public view and personal attribution. There are at least some indications, as I will suggest below, that key elements of this development might also be reflected in contemporaneous Bon and Buddhist revelation. Here, the difference between the earlier revelations and *gter ma* is mainly that the latter were no longer anonymous.

(ii) The next question remains difficult to answer. Apart from the Dunhuang *Thabs zhags* manuscript (see Alternative source 10 below), we have little direct evidence for what conventions might have guided the earlier methods of revelation. Our best guess is that they might have followed whatever revelatory conventions were imported into Tibet along with tantric Buddhism, since there can be no doubt that tantric Buddhism in India was a religion of continuous ongoing revelation.

(iii) Even if we don't know what they were, might such methods have flowed into and influenced the development of *gter ma*? So far, this remains a difficult question to answer, but there are some perspectives we can at least start to think about. Tibetologists have not yet explored possible continuities between the earlier genre of indigenously revealed rNying ma tantras now designated as *bka' ma*, with the slightly later genre of *gter ma*.

One early compilation amongst the voluminous *rDzong 'phrang srog* texts now preserved in the *rNying ma bka'ma*,¹⁰⁰ contains several short texts which were written by gNubs chen under his secret name

¹⁰⁰ *rDzong 'phrang srog gsum gyi chings kyi man ngag in bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, TBRC W25983, Volume Ha 29: 15-425.

of Yang dbang gter, or by his student. These raise interesting questions about the existence back in the ninth and tenth centuries, of the later *phyi dar* distinction between *bka' ma* and *gter ma*. For here, among some portions of these texts that Cantwell believes to be genuinely old, we find a number of colophons describing the re-sealing and burying of these *bka' ma* teachings as *gter* for future recovery.¹⁰¹ In this context, mention should also be made of the traditions surrounding the seventeen *Man ngag sde* tantras of rDzogs chen, which likewise were said to have been *bka' ma* texts buried for later recovery as *gter ma*.

Whether one gives any credence to such traditions or not, we need to ask, if and why the 11th century revelation of these *Man ngag sde* tantras will have used a method entirely different to those by which rNying ma tantras were revealed in Tibet over the preceding possibly two hundred years. Similarly, Myang ral's great 12th century treasure discovery, the *bDe gshegs 'dus pa*, included at its core some entirely typical rNying ma tantric scriptures that have ever since remained integral to all collections of canonical rNying ma tantras (NGB). We need to ponder the question, would Myang ral, in the 12th century, opt to produce his own scriptural root tantras by an entirely new method, rather than use at least some of the time-honoured methods already employed for similar rNying ma tantra productions over the preceding two or three hundred years? Of course, the present times still see the production of *gter ma* root tantras, eligible in principle for inclusion into future redactions of the ostensibly *bka' ma* NGB.

Conventionally, scholars say that *gter ma* first appeared in the *phyi dar*. But *gter ma* is not one thing, it is a complex range of phenomena. A new hypothesis to test, is that what happened in the *phyi dar* might not actually have been altogether new, for not even gShen chen klu dga' gives any indication that by finding *gter ma*, he is doing something in his day considered comparatively innovative.¹⁰² Perhaps equally likely is that the *phyi dar* saw a stronger conceptual and narrative separation between the categories of *bka' ma* and *gter ma*, ac-

¹⁰¹ My thanks to Changling Tulku, who drew our attention to this extremely valuable source, and to Lopon Ogyan Tanzin and Cathy Cantwell, for sharing with me their readings of it.

¹⁰² A related but conceptually different issue is that there are no textual survivals from the earliest *gter stons* who are recognised and celebrated by the rNying ma pa, so that modern academic scholars have been inclined to dismiss them, perhaps too hastily, as mythological. But even these earliest named *gter stons*, whose texts no longer survive, are generally situated by the traditional literature in the earlier part of the *phyi dar*. It is not clear to me that we have much evidence for the widespread public identification of a *gter ston* prior to the *phyi dar*.

accompanied by a more public profile for those who discovered *gter ma*; but that at least some of the varied methods of the treasure discoverer were not necessarily entirely discontinuous from those by which rNying ma tantras had already been produced in Tibet for over a century.

(iv) Might aspects of these pre-*gter ma* methods of revelation, some of which might in turn go back to tantric Buddhism in India, still persist within the varied revelatory repertoire of the contemporary *gter ston*? Although the scant surviving historical evidence can at the moment neither definitively prove nor disprove the possibility, on balance, I think the likelihood is that some aspects of them probably do. A stronger case can be made for the alternative revelatory system of Pure Vision (*dag snang*), which is still practiced in ways demonstrably similar to those described in ancient Indian texts. Like some other ritual and religious practices, revelation can be somewhat conservative and slow to change.

Alternative source 10: Contemporaneous Kashmirian Non-Dual Śaivism

There are interesting similarities between the scriptural revelation practices of 9th to 11th century non-dual Kashmiri Śaivism, and *gter stons* in nearby Tibet at a similar or very slightly later period, which I believe have not been previously discussed. Understanding these parallels might prove fruitful to researching the historical roots of *gter ma*, and I plan to research them more fully with Ben Williams.

A recent Phd from Ben Williams has been devoted to the topic of revelation in the traditions of Abhinavagupta.¹⁰³ The revelations of earlier Śaiva traditions were typically attributed to the fabled interactions at mythical locations of intangible supernatural beings such as ṛṣis and devas. But a defining feature of non-dual Kaśmiri Śaivism became its innovative projection of scriptural revelation out of the fantastical domains of myth, into the plain view of recordable history and tangible geography. As Williams has described, this process can already be seen in the *Pratyabhijñāśāstra*, to a small degree with Somānanda (c. 900-950), and much more clearly with Utpaladeva's corpus (c. 925-975). But although already in evidence earlier and elsewhere, notably in Kaula traditions, the description of revelation by named enlightened siddhas, sometimes at specified places and

¹⁰³ Benjamin Luke Williams. PhD dissertation, Harvard University, August 2017. *Abhinavagupta's Portrait of a Guru: Revelation and Religious Authority in Kashmir*.

even at specified times, achieves a kind of crescendo in 10th and 11th century non-dual Śaiva texts from Kashmir, not least with Abhinavagupta (*fl. c. 975-1025*).¹⁰⁴ According to Williams, in 10th and 11th century Kashmir, the power to reveal tantric scriptures came to be seen as an integral aspect or demonstration of the guru's spiritual status or realisation. It is interesting that much the same soon began to become apparent among the Tibetan Bon and rNying ma pa, not very far away from Kashmir.

To give one earlier Śaiva example (see Williams p. 147), the Krama scriptural source, the *Yonigahvaratantra*, claims to have been revealed by the Yoginīs to an actual historical person, the siddha Jñānanetra, alias Śivānanda (circa 850-900, perhaps only one generation after Padmasambhava?).¹⁰⁵ Jñānanetra received his revelation at a tangible geographical location, the Karavīra cremation-ground in Uddiyāna, nowadays Pakistan's Swat Valley, one of the favourite sites for Krama revelations (and rNying ma narratives of Padmasambhava alike). Similar narratives apply to Niṣkriyānanda, Matsyendranātha, and Vasugupta. Revelations of this kind, situated within what we might call recordable history and the geographical landscape, rather than veiled behind myth, was a hallmark innovation of non-dual Kashmiri Śaivism, and, as Williams describes in his PhD, central to its theology of the historically existent enlightened siddha as source of revelation.

If Williams' analysis proves accurate, developments in Tibet only a few decades later bear interesting comparison: the early 11th century Bon *gter ston* and contemporary of Abhinavagupta, gShen chen klu dga' (996-1035), was surely not the first to reveal scriptures in Tibet, since, as mentioned above, we know of several Tibetan-redacted strictly anonymous rNying ma scriptures that preceded him. But he was surely among the first to bring the process of scriptural revelation out into the open field of recordable history, at a real geographical place, which is why he is rightly described as one of Tibet's first *gter ston*.

Equally striking are parallels in the mode of revelation. Although some of gShen chen's revelations resembled *sa gter*,¹⁰⁶ another

¹⁰⁴ Ben Williams, personal communication 3rd December 2018.

¹⁰⁵ For a chronology of Kashmiri Śaivism, see pages 411 ff in Alexis Sanderson, 2007, "The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir." In *Mélanges tantrique à la mémoire d'Helène Brunner*. Edited by Dominic Goodall & André Padoux, pp. 231–442. Pondicherry, India: Institut Français d'Indologie/Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient.

¹⁰⁶ Three other revelations are more like *sa gter*, extracted from a *gter sgo*. Here gShen chen describes the days on which he opened the treasury doors (*gter sgo phyé ba lags so*), and the scribal work of his students in comparing his discoveries with other old texts, and writing them out correctly

seemed to bear closer comparison with the Kashmiri Śaiva model. gShen chen's 10th century colophons describe how his *Gab pa dgu skor* revelation descended on his mind as a result of his realisation or *siddhi* (*dnegos grub*) (Martin 2001: 50-2). This is reminiscent of contemporaneous Kashmiri revelation, where, as Williams has documented, the reception of new scripture was an integral outcome of realisation, or *siddhi*. Thus the speech of the realised Śaiva siddha could be construed as the utterance of new scripture. The 10th century commentator Rājānaka Rāma (c. 950-1000) praises as follows the speech of Vasugupta, who revealed the *Śivasūtra*:¹⁰⁷

"I praise the speech of the guru ..Vasugupta to whom the flow of nectar in the form of the essence of vibration, the secret doctrine of all esoteric [knowledge], was directly transmitted..."(Williams p. 183)

Compare a praise to Padmasambhava from the 10th century Dunhuang text IOLTib J 321, describing him uttering scriptural tantra as an outcome of achieving *siddhi*:

"(When) .. pure awareness (is produced) by any noble being whatever, whatever sound is articulated by (his) speech, all without exception is called, "tantra". In the supreme incomparable place of Akaniṣṭha, the Protector Great Being, turning the vajra wheel, speaks through disseminating the tongue's sense faculty¹⁰⁸.... I prostrate to he who has attained the supreme siddhi, of great wonder, Padma rGyal po [The Lotus King] (who) is not worldly; (he who) unravels from the expanse the tathāgata's great secret pith instructions."¹⁰⁹

A marginal note is added:

¹⁰⁷ These were defined as scriptural by Kṣemarāja (c. 1000-1050), but Sanderson points to earlier sources that already defined the *Śivasūtras* as scriptural. See Williams p. 187.

¹⁰⁸ Cantwell, C., and R. Mayer, 2012. *A Noble Noose of Methods: The Lotus Garland Synopsis: A Mahāyoga Tantra and Its Commentary*. OAW, Vienna. See page 96: / /skyes bu gang gis rig pa de / /ngag gis ci skad brjod pa'i sgra / /thams cad ma lus tan tra zhes / 'og myin bla myed gnas mchog du / /mgon po bdag nyid chen po yis / /rdo rje 'khor lo bskor pa na / /ljags kyi dbang po bkram las gsungs/ /

¹⁰⁹ /dnegos grub mchog brnyes ya mtshan chen po 'i / /'jig rten ngam gyur pad ma rgyal po yis / /de bzhin gshegs pa'i man ngag gsang chen rnam / /klung nas bkrol mdzad de la phyag 'tshal lo / /

"this demonstrates [that it, ie this text] is not created by Padmasambhava idiosyncratically".¹¹⁰

These similarities merit further investigation, not least because of other doctrinal parallels between the two traditions, their sometimes shared veneration of Uḍḍiyāna as a tantric holy site and source of scripture, the linkage of Padmasambhava with both Uḍḍiyāna and the Tibetan *gter ma* tradition, and the contiguous and overlapping borders between the Tibetan and Kashmiri cultural zones. However, it seems to me that the institution of *gter ston* as revealer of scripture in Tibet eventually became even more pronounced, developed, and pervasive, than its Śaiva counterpart.

Alternative source 11: early Bon sources on *gter ma*

The only scholar so far to have published a book on early Bon *gter ma* is Dan Martin. Citing Paul Harrison's work, he suggests *gter ma* was Indian and Buddhist in origins.¹¹¹ Yet it is also possible, as he believes, that the Bon were the first to adopt the system. He sums up his position as follows: "The Bon *gter-ma* phenomenon appears to have been historically initiated prior to that of the Rnying-ma school. Nevertheless it is difficult to imagine where to locate the background for this if not in wider Buddhist history".¹¹² Nevertheless, as I point out above, I think the pre-*phyi dar* rNying ma tantric scriptures are an equally possible starting point for some modes of revelation in Tibet. More work needs to be done, to re-examine the evidence.

As I have mentioned above, the popular historical consciousness informing Bon *gter ma* recovery differs from its Buddhist counterparts. This has already been well documented from a historical perspective by scholars such as Dan Martin and Per Kvaerne, but perhaps yet more insights could possibly be gleaned by revisiting the Bon narratives in an anthropological light.

¹¹⁰ *pad ma sam ba bhas rang gz[or?] byas pa + + ma yin bar ston*

¹¹¹ Martin, D, 2001. *Unearthing Bon treasures: life and contested legacy of a Tibetan scripture revealer, with a general bibliography of Bon*. Brill, Leiden. See pages 21-27.

¹¹² *Ibid*, page 209.

**Alternative source 12:
Tantric Buddhism from the 8th century onwards**

It is frustrating that potentially one of the most valuable source for understanding the historical origins of *gter ma* in Tibet is also the least known, and the least supported in extant sources, so that we cannot be sure of ever knowing very much about it. Nevertheless, I am hopeful that enough sources will eventually be found to advance our knowledge a bit further.

There seems to be no sign that the Indian tantras of this period were revealed by named and publically identifiable revealers, as we find in both Tibetan *gter ma* and non-dual Kashmiri Śaivism especially from the 10th century onwards. On the contrary, the 8th to early 10th century pattern in India seems closer to the obscure anonymous revelation of the contemporaneous *pre-phyi dar pre-gter ma* rNying rgyud tantras in Tibet. Scholars are thus unable to say by whom, where, or when, these influential texts first appeared in India. We can only guess or estimate that the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* might have appeared in the early 8th century; the *Guhyasamāja* perhaps also in the 8th century; the earliest *Cakrasaṃvara* scriptures perhaps some time in the 9th; the *Catuṣpīṭha* perhaps in the late 9th; the *Hevajra* maybe in the early 10th; and the *Abhidhānottara* possibly also in the 10th; etc. It is only with the *Kālacakra*, probably in the early 11th century, that we find an explicit account of by whom, where, and when it was revealed: yet unlike contemporaneous Śaiva revelation in Kashmir, or *gter ma* discovery in Tibet, the *Kālacakra* revelation narrative is clearly still mythological.

From the fact that the production of new esoteric Tantric Buddhist texts was a significant activity among their contemporaries and mentors in India, we can suggest that the earliest disciples of such traditions in Tibet imbibed at least some notions of how such tantras were or should be produced. This suggestion is further supported by the fact that Tibetan tantric masters began to produce their own Tibetan tantric texts at quite an early date, and it would seem reasonable to suppose that Tibetans produced their own tantras according to methods influenced at least to some degree by their Indian mentors.

We get hints of how some new Tibetan tantras could be revealed in the Dunhuang Tibetan version of the *Thabs zhags* (IOLTibJ321) as described above. But we have little direct evidence from Indian sources of the actual mechanics of revelation. David Gray has compiled a range of sources illustrating how tantras were understood to exist in the heavens of Buddhas or *ḍākīnis*, and descend from there to

earth,¹¹³ but he has little or no information describing how, on the ground, a tantric master or siddha would actually concretely reveal a new tantra. It is of course this latter, still largely unknown information that is of more interest for those seeking to understand the historical origins of *gter ma*.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that I do not yet believe we have fully come to understand the historical emergence of the Tibetan Buddhist and Bon *gter ma* traditions. Much of what I have presented consists of research questions that require further investigation, rather than established conclusions. Davidson (2005) rightly emphasised multiple influences in the formation of *gter ma*, and our task is to discover what they were, and how they combined and interacted in the unique circumstances of renaissance Tibet. On the one hand, we still need far better to understand indigenous Tibetan factors, not only Tibetan cultural traditions, but also the social dynamics of *phyi dar* Tibet. On the other hand, we should not vainly imagine 10th century Tibet with its emergent *gter ma* systems as an exceptional and isolated civilisation, divorced from the wider international zeitgeists of its time.

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¹¹³ Gray, David B. 2009. "On the Very Idea of a Tantric Canon: Myth, Politics, and the Formation of the Bka' 'gyur," in *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 5 (December 2009): 1-37.

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'Share the sweets' An introspective analysis of copulas following adjectives in Modern Standard Tibetan

Sonam Dugdak and Nathan W. Hill

Introduction

Modern Standard Tibetan displays a threefold evidential contrast among 'personal', 'testimonial' and 'factual'. These evidential contrasts are found in the copula system (Table 1) and the system of auxiliary verbs (Table 2).¹

	Existential copula	Essential copula
Personal	<i>yod</i>	<i>yin</i>
Factual	<i>yod-pa-red</i>	<i>red</i>
Testimonial	<i>hdug</i>	<i>red-bzag</i>

Table 1: the Tibetan copula system

	Future	Present	Past	Perfect
Personal	<i>V-gi-yin</i>	<i>V-gi-yod</i>	<i>V-pa-yin / byuñ</i>	<i>V-yod</i>
Factual	<i>V-gi-red</i>	<i>V-gi-yod-pa-red</i>	<i>V-pa-red</i>	<i>V-yod-pa-red</i>
Testimonial	---	<i>V-gi-hdug</i>	<i>V-son</i>	<i>V-bzag</i>

Table 2: The Tibetan verbal conjugation system

In general, the existential and essential copulas of a given evidential category (e.g. ཡིན *yin* and ཡོད *yod*) are in complementary distribution, with the essential copula used for equating two noun phrases (e.g. ལྔ

¹ See Tournadre & Dorje 2003 and Hill 2013.

ལྷན་བསྟན་ ཡིན *na thub-bstan yin* 'I am Thuptän')² and the existential copula used for location and possession (རྒྱ་ནག་ལ་ཡོད། *Rgya-nag-la yod* 'I am in China', དེ་མང་པོ་ཡོད། *deb man-po yod* 'I have many books').³ Nonetheless, both existential and essential copulas occur in attributive function (e.g. རབ་དེ་པོ་ཡིན། *na bde-po yin* 'I am fine.' and ཇེ་འདི་ ཞེས་པོ་ ཡོད། *ja hdi zim-po yod* 'This tea is good (in my opinion)').⁴ Thus, in the syntactic context of noun plus adjective, the number of contrasts increases from three to six.⁵

In this article, the lead author, Sonam Dugdak, imagines introspectively how the six Tibetan copulas (Table 1) are used after the same adjective in a very similar way by his mother, and how the context and pragmatics gives the copulas a different meaning subtly. Because "Tibetan is particularly sensitive to situation and environment, as well as the sources of information on which a speaker's assertions are based",⁶ his mother's use of the attributive meanings of copulas are embedded in specific contexts.

2. Imagined use of the six copulas

Scene 1: I have some sweets and my mother wants me to share them with my brother; So she may praise me and ask me to share with my brother: རེ་བུ་ ཡག་པོ་ཡིན། རོ་ རེ་ལ་ལ་ ཉན་པོ་ཡིན། ལྷན་སྐྱུ་ ལུང་ར་ མཉམ་དུ་ བྱེ་རེ་ལ་ བགོ་བཤའ་ རྒྱག་གྱི་ རེད། *naḥi bu yag-po yod/ kho naḥi kha-la ṅan-po yod/ spyun-skya chuñ-ṅa mñam-du bye-ril bgo-bśa rgyag-kyi-red* "My son is a good boy, he listens to me, he will share sweets with his younger brother."

Scene 2: I gave some to my brother but my brother complains to my mother that I only gave him a small piece and my mother may say; རེ་བུ་ ཡག་པོ་ཡིན། རོ་ས་ ལྷན་སྐྱུ་ ལུང་ར་ལ་ བྱམས་པོ་ བྱེད་ནས་ འདྲ་འདྲ་ ལྷན་གྱི་རེད། *naḥi bu yag-po yin / khos spyun-skya chuñ-ṅa byams-po byed-nas ḥdra ḥdra sprad kyi-red* "My son is a good, he treats his brother with love and will share equally (sweets) with his younger brother."

² See Tournadre & Dorje 2003: 119-122.

³ See Tournadre & Dorje 2003: 119-122.

⁴ See Tournadre & Dorje 2003: 119-122.

⁵ See Chang & Chang 1984: 614-616, Garrett 2001: 70, 91, Chonjore 2003: 207, and Tournadre & Dorje 2003: 118-122.

⁶ Tournadre & Dorje 2003: 118.

Scene 3: I gave him little bit more but my brother still complains to my mother and starts crying, I am not sharing equally. My mother is bit annoyed and say; རེ་བུ་ཡག་པོ་རེད། ལོ་མ་སྐྱུ་སྐྱུ་རྩེ་ང་ལ་བྱམས་པོ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་མ་རེད། ཨ་མའི་ལ་ལ་ཡང་ཉན་གྱི་མ་རེད། དེོ་མ་ནས་རེ་བུ་ཡིན་ན་ *nahi bu yag-po red / khos spyun-skya chuñ-ña-la byams-po byed-kyi-ma-red / a-mahi kha-la ñan-gyi-ma-red/ dños-nas nahi bu yin-na* “My son is a good, he doesn’t treats his brother with love and will not listen to mummy. I wonder is he really my son?”

Scene 4: I protest that I gave him enough, so then my mother may pay attention to my brother to console him; རེ་བུ་ཡག་པོ་ཡོད་རེད། ལོ་བུ་གི་མི་འདུག་ཨ་མས་བྱམས་པོ་བྱས་ནས་ཨ་མ་མཉམ་དུ་ཉོག་རེད། *nahi bu yag-po yod-red / kho ñu-gi-ma-red/ a-ma-la sòg* “My son is a good, (he) doesn’t cry. Come to mummy.”

Scene 5: My brother goes to my mother to be consoled. She may console him further by saying; རེ་བུ་ཡག་པོ་འདུག་ལོ་བུ་གི་མི་འདུག་ཨ་མས་བྱམས་པོ་བྱས་ནས་ཨ་མ་མཉམ་དུ་ཉོག་རེད། *nahi bu yag-po hdug kho ñu-gi mi-hdug a-mas byams-po byas-nas a-ma miñam-du ño-gar hgro* “My son is a good, he is not crying, mummy will be nice to him and we will go together to buy sweets.”

Scene 6: I feel left out and feel I am missing more by not sharing the sweets. So I might go and share more with my younger brother. And my mother may say to me: རེ་བུ་ཡག་པོ་རེད་བཞག་ཨ་མའི་བུ་མ་རེད་བསམ་བྱུང། *nahi bu yag-po red-bzag a-mahi bu ma red bsam byuñ* “My son is a good, I thought he is not mummy’s son.”

3. Discussion

In this section we offer a few remarks to further elucidate the meaning of each copula as they occur in the story 'share the sweets'.

ཡོད་ *yod*

Scene1: རེ་བུ་ཡག་པོ་ཡོད། *nahi bu yag-po yod*, here use of ཡོད་ *yod* is to endear me to my mother and feel closeness to her by use of first person possessive. She wants to encourage me to do as she says by praising me and showing her approval of my good behaviours. It often works a charm as kids usually want to impress their mother for her affections.

The copula ཡོད་ *yod* after adjectives occurs naturally in a reminiscence

about something personal, an object or experience or feeling; for example: བོད་ཀྱི་ཀླ་སྤུ་ཞིམ་པོ་ཡོད། *bod-kyi ku-sū zim-po yod* "Tibet's apple are delicious" or དབྱར་ཀར་འབྲོག་ས་རྒྱུད་པོ་ཡོད། དུམ་ཀར་རྒྱུད་པོ་མེད། ཟླ་མ་ཚོ་ཡོད། *dbyar-kar ḥbrog-sa skyid-po yod / dgun-kar skyid-po med/ grañs-po yod/* "Summer at nomad pastures is very pleasant. Winter it is not pleasant, it is cold." In such situations ཡོད་ཟེད *yod-red* may also occur but sounds less personal. The sentence བོད་ཀྱི་ཀླ་སྤུ་ཞིམ་པོ་ཡོད་ཟེད། *bod-kyi ku-sū zim-po yod-red* "Tibet's apple are delicious" is a statement rather than a description from memory.

ཡིན *yin*

Scene 2: In this scene my mother is declaring her support for my reputation as a good boy contrary to my younger's complains by saying; འདི་སུ་ཡག་པོ་ཡིན *ñahi bu yag-po yin*. She also wants me to know that she is still backing me to do the right thing. Here use of ཡིན *yin* is more appropriate as a declarative statement is the strongest support to show that you will not accept other's misrepresentation. Therefore other copulas will not have same connotation of support.

ཟེད *red*

Scene 3: My mother wants to still give me some chance to be good but she is disappointed and being a little sarcastic in saying; འདི་སུ་ཡག་པོ་ཟེད *ñahi bu yag-po red*. She knows I have not been good because I made my younger brother cry and I ought to know that is not good. Her use of ཟེད *red* is opposite to the use of ཡོད *yod*, in that ཟེད *red* seems to distance herself from me and feeling appears neutral rather than endearing.

Therefore ཟེད *red* is "contradictional" because often when Tibetan use ཟེད *red* with adjective a contrary statement may often follow. For example, རྒྱ་གར་གཞུང་ཡག་པོ་ཟེད། ཡིན་ནའང་བོད་རང་བཙན་ལ་ངོས་ལེན་མེད་ཟེད། *rgya-gar gžun yag-po red / yin-naḥaṅ bod ran-btsan la ños len med red /* The government of India is good; however it does not accept Tibetan Independence."

ཡོད་ཟེད། *yod-red*

Scene 4: Now that my mother has distance herself from me, she concentrates on my younger brother. She says འདི་སུ་ཡག་པོ་ཡོད་ཟེད། *ñahi bu yag-po yod-red* to my younger brother, more for my benefit to show a

fact about a good boy, who does what mother, says. If she was saying for my brother's benefit then she would probably use ཡོད་ *yod*, to be more personal.

Thus ཡོད་རེད་ *yod-red* is used for factual statement and it could be factual based on your own knowledge or others. However, when used it appears more like general knowledge rather than something personal. For example; if say: ལོན་ཏོན་སྐྱིད་པོ་ཡོད་རེད། *lon-ṭon skyid-po yod-red* "London is nice", it seems like general fact contrast to ལོན་ཏོན་སྐྱིད་པོ་ཡོད། *lon-ṭon skyid-po yod* "London is nice", it sounds like I have live in London.

འདྲུག་ *hdug*

Scene 5: My mother is now focused on my brother and as he comes into her view; she can testify: རེ་བྱ་ཡག་པོ་འདྲུག་ *nāhi bu yag-po hdug* and also to encourage him to stop crying, if he has not already done so. Also for my benefit, she is testifying to her factual statement in scene 4. Therefore འདྲུག་ *hdug* is testimonial as you confirm a fact by what you see. You can imagine that prior to scene 5, me and my brother are nearby but not within my mother's line of sight. Since, my brother came to my mother, she can testify, he is good and not crying. Prior to seeing him, it would be incorrect to use འདྲུག་ *hdug*.

རེད་བཞག་ *red-bzag*

Scene 6: Now that my mother has got my attention in scene 5 and I want to reveal, I am really a good boy who listens to his mother and share more of my sweet with my brother. My mother is happy to reveal that རེ་བྱ་ཡག་རེད་བཞག་ *nāhi bu yag-po red-bzag*, this to take back what she said earlier about maybe I am not so good. Throughout these dialogues she is speaking indirectly at me, letting me know her thoughts.

Brief Biography of Sonam Dugdak and his family

For the reader to better understand Sonam Dugdak's linguistic background, he provides the following first person narrative of his background.

My mother is from Lingtham, a small village in Sikkim. In Lingtham, they speak a Sikkimese (Dränjong) dialect and the dialect is similar to Tsāngkä (Shigatse area dialect). My father is from

Dromo (Chumbey Valley), Tibet, and Dromo’s dialect is very similar to Sikkimese dialect as it is on the border with Sikkim. My parents probably learnt to speak exile “standard” Tibetan when they moved to Tibetan settlements in South India in 1975.

I was born in a Tibetan settlement in South India. In 1986, I gained a scholarship to study in UK from the age of nine. At school, there were children from a few different nationalities of Africa and Asia and we lived in our own nationality houses. We were looked after by Tibetan ladies, who were our teachers and guardians, thus helping to maintain our language and traditions. I visited my family in India almost every summer holiday and wrote home during the school term. I continue to speak Tibetan actively with members of the Tibetan Community in Britain.

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།། བྱེ་རིལ་བགོ་བཤའ་རྒྱག། “Share the Sweets”

ཁ་མངར་སྐྱགས་པའི་སེམས་ལ་གསལ། བྱམས་ལྷང་བྱིས་པའི་ཡིད་ལ་འཁོར།

Flatteries are clear in fool’s heart. Affections are evoked in child’s mind.

<p>ཉིན་ཅིག་ ང་ཚོའི་ཨ་ཁང་ ནང་ལ་འཆམ་འཆམ་ལ་ སློབས་དུས། ང་གཉིས་ ལམ་ཁ་ལ་ ལྷག་མོང་། ཁོང་གིས་ ང་ལ་ བྱེ་རིལ་ཉོ་ཡག་ དེལ་སློང་ནས། ཁོང་གིས་ ང་ལ་ ལྷན་སྐྱུ་རྒྱུང་ང་ བཅུ་ལ་ བགོ་བཤའ་རྒྱག་ལྷ། ལབ་བྱུང་།</p>	<p>One day, when our uncle (maternal) was leisurely visiting our house, we met on the way. He gave me some money to buy sweets and told me to, “Share with your younger brother.”</p>
<p>ངས་དགའ་དག་བྱུང་ནས། ལགས་སོ། ལྷགས་ཇི་ཆེ་གནང་། ལབ་ནས། ལམ་སང་ ཚོང་ཁང་ལ་ བྱེ་རིལ་ ཉོ་གར་ བྱིན་པ་ཡིན།</p>	<p>I happily said, “la-so, thank you very much.” Then I went</p>

	<p>straight away to the shop to buy sweets.</p>
<p>ང་ནང་ལ་ བྱི་རིལ་ ལག་པར་ འབྱོར་ནས་ རིག་དུས། ཨ་ཞོ་ལགས་ རང་ནང་ལ་ ཨ་མ་ལགས་ མཉམ་དུ་ རྒྱུ་ཚ་ བཤད་ནས་ བསྟན་ འདུག་དང། དེ་ལྟར་སྐྱེ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་དང་ བྱི་རིགས་ལ་ ཁོ་རང་གཅིག་ལུ་ ཚེད་ མོ་ཚེ་ནས་ བསྟན་འདུག་ ཁོས་ ང་ མཚོང་བ་ དང། ཨ་མ་ལགས་ ཨ་ཚོ་ ལ་ བྱི་རིལ་ འདུག་ ང་ལའི་ བྱི་རིལ་ དགོས། ལབ་ནས་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ནས་ ཁོ་རང་གིས་ ཚེད་མོ་བཞག་ནས་ རང་ལ་ འགོ་ཚེས་ བྱིད་དུས།</p>	<p>When I returned home with sweets in my hand. Uncle and mother were talking inside the house and my younger brother was playing outside by himself. Soon as my younger brother saw me he shouted, “Mummy, brother has sweets, I also want sweets.” Then he started leaving his play things to go inside.</p>
<p>དཔེ་ ཨ་མས་ ང་ལ་ རྒྱུ་ཚ་འདོད་ནས། ཨ་ཚོ་འབྲུག་གཤམས་ བྱ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ མཉམ་དུ་ བཞོ་བཤའ་རྒྱག་ཏུ། དཔེ་བུ་ ཡག་པོ་ཡིད། ཁོ་ དཔེ་ཁ་ལ་ ཉན་པོ་ཡིད། བྱ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་དང་ མཉམ་དུ་ བྱི་རིལ་ བཞོ་བཤའ་ རྒྱག་གྱི་ རེད། ལབ་སོང།</p>	<p>My mother called out to me, “Brother Dugdak, please share with Bu Chunchung. My son is a good boy. He listens to me. He will share sweets with his younger brother.”</p>
<p>ངས་ བྱ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་བཏང་ནས་ བྱི་རིལ་ བཞོ་བཤའ་ བརྒྱབ་པ་ཡིན། ཡིན་ནའང་། བྱ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ ཁོ་རང་ལ་ དགོས་ཡག་ ཚང་མ་ མ་རག་ ཅོང། ཨ་མ་ལ་ རྫོག་ལ་ བཤད་ནས། ཨ་མ། ཨ་ཚོ་ ཁོ་རང་ ཞེས་པ་དེ་ ཚོ་ ཉར་གྱི་འདུག་ལབ་ནས་ རྒྱུ་བརྒྱབ་ལྟེ།</p>	<p>I called Bu Chunchung and shared the sweets. However, since he did not get all the ones he wanted, he complained loudly to my mother, “Mummy, brother is keeping the tasty ones to himself.”</p>
<p>ཨ་མས་ང་ལ། དཔེ་ བུ་ཡག་པོ་ ཡིན། ཁོས་ བྱ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་དང་ལ་ བྱ་མས་པོ་ བྱིད་ནས་ འདྲ་འདྲ་ རྒྱུ་གྱི་རེད། ལབ་སོང།</p>	<p>My mother said to me, “My son is a good. He treats his brother with love and will give equally to his younger brother.”</p>
<p>ངས་ བྱ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ མཉམ་དུ་ ང་རང་གི་ དགའ་བ་ འགའ་ཤས་ བཞོ་ བཤའ་ བརྒྱབ་པ་ཡིན། ཡིན་ནའང་ ངས་ ཁོ་ནས་ རྫོན་ལ་སྟོན་པ་ འགས་ཤས་ ཚུར་ལེན་ ཅོང། ཁོ་ཡང་ རྫུང་བར་ མ་འགོ་ཅོང། ཨ་མ་ ཚོར་ལ་ བྱ་ནས། ཨ་ཚོ་ ཁོ་རང་ མང་ང་ ཉར་གྱི་འདུག་ ལབ་ནས་ བྱིན་ མོང།</p>	<p>I shared some of the ones I liked with Bu Chunchung. However, since I took back some of the ones I gave him earlier, he again did not like it went crying to my mother, “Brother is keeping more for himself.”</p>
<p>ཨ་མ་ རྟོག་ཚ་ བསྐྱེད་པོ་ ཚགས་ནས་ ང་ལ། དཔེ་ བུ་ཡག་པོ་ རེད། ཁོས་ བྱ་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་དང་ལ་ བྱ་མས་པོ་ བྱིད་གྱི་མ་རེད། ཨ་མའི་ ཁ་ལ་ཡང་ ཉན་གྱི་མ་རེད། དོས་ནས་ དཔེ་བུ་ ཡིན་ན། ལབ་སོང།</p>	<p>My mother is bit annoyed and said to me; “My son is a good. He doesn’t treat his brother with love and will not listen to his mummy. I wonder is he really my son?”</p>
<p>ངས་ ང་རང་ རྒྱབ་ཚ་ བྱིད་ནས། དཔེ་ ཁོ་ལ་ འདྲ་འདྲ་ རྒྱུ་བ་ཡིན། ཁོས་ མ་རབས་ བྱིད་ནས་ མང་ང་ དགོས་ ལབ་ནས་ ཉན་གྱི་ མི་འདུག།</p>	<p>I defended myself by saying to my mother, “I gave him equal</p>

<p>ངའི་ ཨ་མ་ལ་ ལན་བརྒྱབ་ཤི།</p>	<p>share, but he is being greedy and wants more and would not listen (be reasonable).</p>
<p>ཨ་མས་ ང་ལ་ ཡ་ མ་བྱེད་ནས། བྱ་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུད་ལ། ངའི་ བྱ་ཡག་པོ་ ཡོད་ཅིང། ཁོ་ བྱ་གིན་ མ་ཅིང། ཨ་མ་ལ་ཤོག། རྒྱུད་འབོད་མོང་།</p>	<p>Mother ignored me, and called out to Bu Chunchung by saying, "My son is a good. He doesn't cry. Come to mummy."</p>
<p>ཨ་མ་ལགས་ ཕྱི་ལོགས་ལ་ བྱ་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུད་ལ་ བཞུགས་ སློབས་བྱུང་། ཨ་ ཞང་ལགས་ ཡང་ ཕྱི་ལོགས་ལ་ སློབས་ནས། བྱ་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུད་ལ་ བྱི་ལོ་ ཉི་ ལག་ དངུལ་སྤྲོད་གར་ འགྲོ་དུས་ ཨ་མ་ལགས་ཀྱིས་ཨ་ཞང་ལ། དགོས་ མ་ཅིང་ ཁོ་ལ་ ད་ལྟ་ བྱི་ལོ་ མང་པོ་ འདུག ལབ་སྟེ།</p>	<p>Mother came out to see Bu Chunchung. Uncle came out too and went to give some money to Bu Chunchung to buy sweets. Mother said to Unlce, "There is no need; he has enough sweets at the moment."</p>
<p>དེ་ནས་ བྱ་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུད་ལ། ངའི་བྱ་ཡག་པོ་འདུག ཁོ་བྱ་གི་མི་འདུག ཨ་ མས་ བྱ་མས་པོ་ བྱ་མ་ནས་ ཨ་མ་ མཉམ་དུ་ རྗེའ་ལ་ བྱི་ལོ་ ཉི་གར་ འགྲོ་ལོ།</p>	<p>Then she said to Bu Chunchung, "My son is a good, he is not crying. Mummy will lovingly go later to buy sweets with you."</p>
<p>ངས་ བྱ་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུད་ལ། ཨོའི་ འདིར་ཤོག བྱི་ལོ་ གང་འདི་ དགོས། བྱ་ ཤུར་ ལ་ལྷགས། ལབ་ནས་ རྒྱུད་ བཏང་པ་ཡིན།</p>	<p>I called out to Bu Chunchung, "Oi, come here, which sweets do you want, cry baby!"</p>
<p>ཨ་མས་ ཁོ་ལ་ མགྲོགས་པོ་ ཨ་ཚོ་ ཚར་ལ་རྒྱགས། བྱི་ལོ་ འདམ་གར་ རྒྱགས། ཨ་ནའི་ ཨ་ཚོ་ ལ་ལ་ ཉན་ལྷ། ལབ་མོང་།</p>	<p>Mother said to him, "Quickly, go to your brother and choose the sweets. And listen to your brother."</p>
<p>ངས་ བྱི་ལོ་ མང་ང་ ཁོ་ལ་ སྤྲོད་ཅིང་། ཁོ་ འདོད་པ་ལེངས་པ་ འདུ་པོ་ འདུག ཨ་མས་ ངའི་མགོ་ལ་ བྱ་མས་པོ་ བྱེད་ནས་ ང་ལ། ངའི་ བྱ་ཡག་ པོ་ རེད་བཞག ཨ་མའི་བྱ་ མ་ཅིང་ བསམ་བྱུང་། སྤྲོད་སྤྲོད་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་ མཉམ་དུ་ བྱི་ལོ་ འདུ་འདུ་ བགོ་བཤའ་རྒྱག་ བྱས་ རྗེའ་མོ་ ཅམ་པོ་ བྱེད་ནས་ རྗེའ་ལག་ ལྷ་ལོ། ལབ་ནས། ཨ་ཞང་ མཉམ་དུ་ རྒྱུ་རྗེ་ བཤད་ལག་ འགོ་རྒྱགས་སོ།</p>	<p>Since, I shared more sweets with him, he looks satisfied. Mother patted me on the head and gently said; "My son is good, I thought he is not mummy's son. Share sweets equally with your younger brother and play carefully together." Then she started her conversation with Uncle.</p>



Ippolito Desideri's Tibetan Works and the Problem of ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-92v

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Tibetanists know Ippolito Desideri (1684-1733) chiefly through his *Historical Notices of the Kingdoms of Tibet* (*Notizie istoriche de' Regni del Thibet*), a work often celebrated as the first scientific study of Tibetan religion and culture.¹ The Jesuit's Tibetan works, which were translated into Italian by Giuseppe Toscano, have received less attention.² Even so, most scholars—whether they know it or not—accept Toscano's description and division of Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts. This is nowhere more apparent than in his identification of the manuscripts conserved in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [=ARSI] Goa 74, fols. 47r-92v, the *Sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnams kyi 'byung khungs* and an untitled manuscript he called the *Nges legs*.³ These writings, which represent Desideri's most profound engagement with Tibetan Madhyamaka, have received almost no attention from scholars—not least because the facsimiles published by Toscano make Desideri's tiny *dbu med* quite difficult to read. Indeed, the problems surrounding these still-unstudied manuscripts are compounded by the fact that Desideri, who appears to describe the *Sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnams kyi 'byung khungs* in lists of his Tibetan writings—never mentions the existence of a second work on Madhyamaka. In what follows, I hope to explain how this

¹ Petech 1954-1956. For a new translation with expert critical apparatus, see Sweet and Zwilling 2010. I will follow scholarly convention by citing Desideri's account and letters with the abbreviations established by Petech.

² Toscano 1981-1989. Toscano's translations of the *Tho rangs mun sel nyi ma shar ba'i brda* and *Sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnams kyi 'byung khungs* are the only published translations of these works. (Nancy Moore Gettelman translated the first seven chapters of the *Tho rangs mun sel nyi ma shar ba'i brda*, but they remain in manuscript.) Toscano's translation of the *Ke ri se ste an kyi chos lugs kyi snying po* also predated the existing translations of Robson 2014 and Lopez and Jinpa 2017. Toscano's translation of the *Mgo skar bla ma i po li do zhes bya ba yis phul ba'i bod kyi mkhas pa rnams la skye ba snga ma dang stong pa nyid kyi lta ba'i sgo nas zhu ba*, which he hoped to be the fifth volume, remains in manuscript. It is almost complete, lacking some folios in the Jesuit's arguments against karma.

³ Toscano 1984; Toscano 1989.

curious state of affairs came about and to provide a more thorough account of Desideri's Tibetan writings.

1. *The Problem of Desideri's Tibetan Manuscripts*

Desideri left us two principal descriptions of his Tibetan writings, which can appear confusing if not read carefully. The first description is found in the first book of the *Notizie istoriche*, where the Jesuit mentions writing two Tibetan books, a first book he presented to Lha bzang Khan on January 6, 1717, and a second book that he began to compose later that year, shortly before the Dzungar invasion of Lhasa. Of the first book, Desideri says:

The subject matter of this book was primarily to demonstrate that the maxim that circulates among unbelievers that everyone can be saved through his own law is false, and so establish this most important truth, namely, that there is only one law that leads to heaven and conducts one to eternal salvation. In the second place, I described the nature of the true law of salvation, the gifts one ought to find in it, and the necessity for the man who loves truth and who truly desires his own welfare and eternal happiness to take every opportunity to find it. In the third place, I proposed and explained the signs and distinctive characteristics by which a man might easily discern, among the many and contradictory laws of the world, the true from the false.⁴

Of the second book, the Jesuit says:

This book of mine is divided into three tomes. In the first, I refute the errors that make up the most intricate labyrinth of the opinion of metempsychosis according to the particular system of this people. In the second tome, I reject the other principal error of *stong pa nyid*, which, as I have already mentioned, are treatises profuse and

⁴ DR 1.13 (MITN 5: 193): "La materia di questo libro fu primieramente mostrar ch'è falsa la massima che corre tra gl'infedeli che ciascuno nella sua legge possa salvarsi; e perciò doversi stabilire quest'importantissima verità, che una sola è la legge che conduce al cielo e al conseguimento dell'eterna salute. In secondo luogo dichiaravo le qualità e doti che si devono ritrovar nella vera legge di salute, e che qualsivoglia uomo amante della verità e desideroso del vero suo bene e della sua eterna felicità di deve tutto applicare a rintracciarla. In terzo luogo proponevo e spiegavo vari segni e distintivi per i quali l'uomo può facilmente, fra tante, sì diverse, e sì opposte leggi che son al mondo, discernere la vera dalle false." (All translations in this article are my own. When translating Desideri's account, I always consult Sweet and Zwillig 2010, although I sometimes opt for a more literal translation to highlight the terms that have technical scholastic meanings.)

intricate, in which their Lawgiver, with the finest deceit, under the beautiful mask of spiritual elevations, the eradication of all passions, depuration of the soul, and detachment from oneself and all things, guides them to a total *apatheia*, and leads his followers to atheism, wherein the possibility of an uncreated, self-existing being who is the creator of the world is excluded. In the third and shortest tome, with a method and style adapted to a Christian community that is not yet mature and well-schooled in doctrine, but is new and in formation, I propose the very same teachings contained in our Christian doctrines and standard catechisms, in part proving and in part suggesting them with brief reasons.

The first and second tomes are entirely in an argumentative and disputative style, according to the Tibetans' own form and method. As much in the one as in the other, the arguments and reasons, which are quite numerous, are framed in ordinary language, but almost always from the Tibetans' own principles, opinions, and authors, and from the books they hold to be canonical and irrefutable. The third tome is in the form of a dialogue, but still argumentative in the scattered places where it was necessary.⁵

In the fourth book of the *Notizie istoriche*, however, Desideri mentions four compositions:

For the welfare and establishment of the mission I began in Tibet, I had composed in that language, which I still have with me: 1) a small book on the unity of the true law of salvation in which I demonstrate the falsity of the idea that everyone can find salvation in his own law; 2) a copious tome in confutation of the opinion and intricate system of metempsychosis; 3) another tome meant to demonstrate, against

⁵ DR 1.15 (MITN 5: 201-202): "Questo mio libro lo divisi in tre tomi. Nel primo confuto gli errori che compongono l'intricatissimo laberinto dell'opinione della metempsicosi, secondo il sistema particolare di quella nazione. Nel secondo tomo rigetto l'altro principal errore del Tongbà-gnì, che, come di già ho accennato, son trattati copiosi e assai intrigati, in cui con finissimo inganno il loro legislatore sotto la bella maschera d'elevazioni di spirito, di sradicamento di tutte le passioni, di depurazione dell'anima e staccamento da sè stessa e da tutte le cose, guidando a una total apatia, conduce i suoi seguaci all'ateismo, escludendo la possibilità d'un Ente che da sè stesso esista, increato e creator del mondo. Nel terzo e più breve, con metodo e stile adatto no già a una cristianità adulta e ben addottrinata, ma a una cristianità novella e che sta sul formarsi, propongo e in parte provo e con brevi ragioni insinuo que' medesimi insegnamenti che nelle nostre dottrine cristiane e ricevuti catechismi si contengono. Il primo e secondo tomo son tutt'interamente in istile argomentativo e disputativo, secondo la forma e metodo de' medesimi thibetani. Tanto nell'uno quanto nell'altro gli argomenti e ragioni, che sono in molto numero, son presi dal discorso naturale, e quasi sempre da' medesimi principij, opinioni e autori di che essi si servono, e da' libri da loro tenuti per canonici e irrefragabili. Il terzo tomo è in forma di dialogo e in diversi luoghi, dove la necessità lo richiede, è ancora argomentativo.

the opinions of Tibetans, the existence of a being that is 'of itself' and the first principle of all things, using natural reason and arguments derived from their own principles; and 4) finally, a new catechism adapted to the understanding of those who are hearing about the Christian religion for the first time.⁶

We need not be distracted by the Jesuit's somewhat inconsistent use of *libro*, *libretto*, *tomo*, and so forth. The two lists coincide once you look at their books' contents. The first proclaims the one true law of salvation and refutes religious pluralism; the second refutes rebirth; the third demonstrates the existence of God against the opinions of Tibetans on emptiness (*stong pa nyid*); and the fourth is a catechism adapted to the needs of new converts. The chief difference between the first and second lists is that the former groups the final three writings as tomes or volumes of a single book, whereas the latter separates the books into one small book, two tomes that may or may not form a single book, and a catechism.⁷

Scholars have interpreted these descriptions in a variety of ways. In *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia 1603–1721*, the Dutch Jesuit Cornelius Nicolaas Petrus Wessels (1880-1964) identified four Tibetan manuscripts:

- (1) MS. of 54 pp. dated on the first page July 1, 1717, on the last page and June 29, 1721.
- (2) MS. of 117 large oblong pages, bearing as its date on the first page December 8, 1717, on the last page the words: "B. Aloysii Gonzagae festus dies huic tractatui finem imposuit. 1718", (i.e., June 21).
- (3) MS. of 704 oblong pages, 33,5 × 18,5 cm., having 35 lines to the page. Its opening date is June 24, 1718.

⁶ DR 4.19 (MITN 7: 127): "In bene e stabilimento di quella da me cominciata missione de' regni del Thibet, avevo io in quella lingua composti e qui meco conservo ancora: 1- un piccol libretto intorno all'unità della vera legge di salute e in ordine a mostrar esser falso che ognuno nella sua legge possa salvarsi; 2- un copioso tomo in confutazione dell'opinione e intricato sistema della metempsychosi; 3- un altro tomo in ordine a mostrar contro l'opinione de' Thibetani con ragioni naturali e con argomenti dedotti dai loro principij medesimi, l'esistenza d'un ente a sè e primo principio di tutte le cose; 4 finalmente un nuovo catechismo accomodato all'intelligenza di chi per le prime volte senta parlarsi della Religione Cristiana."

⁷ It bears noting that Desideri's description at DR 1.13-15 was written after the description at DR 4.19, since Desideri abandoned the revision of his account at DR 3.3. For a discussion of the various manuscripts and states of what came to be known as the *Notizie istoriche*, see Sweet and Zwilling 2010: 62-101.

- (4) MS. of 128 narrow strips, 33,5 × 13,5 cm., with 7 lines to the page, undated.⁸

Not knowing Tibetan, Wessels was content to remark that the manuscripts “very probably contain Desideri’s refutation of Buddhistic doctrine and his defense of the Catholic Religion, which writings he is known to have carried away with him from Tibet.”⁹ He did, however, publish the title pages of his third and fourth manuscripts, which show them to be the *Mgo skar bla ma i po li do zhes bya ba yis phul ba’i bod kyi mkhas pa rnam la skye ba snga ma dang stong pa nyid kyi lta ba’i sgo nas zhu ba* (ARSI Goa 75, fols. 1r-232v) and the *Tho rangs mun sel nyi ma shar ba’i brda* (ARSI 76, fols. 1-128). Let us abbreviate these henceforth as *I po li do’i zhu ba* and *Tho rangs*. From Wessels’s dates and page counts, we can see that Wessels’s first manuscript is Desideri’s notebook (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 2r-34r). Wessels’s page count for this first manuscript is correct. The discrepancy between his number and the number of folio sides is due to the fact that Desideri left several pages blank, and Wessels counted only those pages upon which Desideri had written. (This will prove to be significant later.) Wessels’s second manuscript consists in the remaining fascicles of ARSI Goa 74, namely, fols. 35r-92v. Wessels dated this manuscript to December 8, 1717 because its first page, the title page of the *Bod kyi chos la mkhas pa rnam la skye ba snga phyi’i sgo nas mgo kar gyis zhu pa*, bears that date. Wessels missed the earlier date of November 28, 1717, found on the title page of the *Sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnam kyi ’byung khungs* (ARSI Goa 74, fol. 47r). Let us abbreviate these as *Mgo kar gyis zhu* and *’Byung khungs*. If we assume that Wessels included the three pages in ARSI Goa 74 upon which Desideri copied various Christian prayers, Wessels’s page count for this manuscript is correct as well.¹⁰ Wessels counted 704 pages in the *I po li do’i zhu ba* (or ARSI Goa 75), although the codex now has only 232 folios, or 464 pages. (This number is also significant.)

The Belgian Jesuit Henri Hosten (1873-1935) provided additional details about the manuscripts on Wessels’s list.¹¹ Hosten, like Wessels, knew no Tibetan. He was, however, an historian with keen insight into the inner workings of the Jesuit missions. Basing himself on Wessels’s description, Desideri’s description in DR 1.15, and his own newly-expanded collection of Desideri’s letters, Hosten tentatively identified the *Tho rangs* with the book Desideri presented to Lha bzang Khan on

⁸ Wessels 1924: 274-275.

⁹ Wessels 1924: 275.

¹⁰ On these three pages, see Toscano 1981: 53-54.

¹¹ Hosten 1938: 657-658.

January 6, 1717. Hosten then identified the *I po li do'i zhu ba* with the book of "three tomes" that Desideri describes in DR 1.15. Hosten showed that Desideri's letters indicate that he wrote two early Italian booklets on the single law of salvation and the problem of metempsychosis between June and August 1716. Hosten also knew that Desideri had completed both booklets by September 8, 1716, and had begun to translate the first into Tibetan.¹² What is more, the Dutch Jesuit knew that Desideri desired to write a dictionary, a grammar, and a catechism.¹³ Assuming the *Tho rangs* to be the Tibetan translation of the first Italian booklet, Hosten guessed that Wessels's first manuscript was either the translation of the second Italian booklet or Desideri's catechism. Although he did not attempt to identify Wessels's second manuscript, Hosten correctly noted that it was begun in Lhasa and completed in Dwags po.

Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts soon came to the attention of Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984), who expressed his intention in 1943 to publish a large volume of Desideri's written in flawless Tibetan.¹⁴ In 1947, Tucci planned to translate it:

We know that Father Desideri undertook a translation of [Tsongkhapa's *Lam rim chen mo*]: the translation was most probably handed over to the Capuchin Father Felice da Morro, but now seems to be lost. That he knows this famous text and that this was the chief book to which, aware of its importance, he referred, is shown by the refutation which he wrote in Tibetan. This refutation is called *mGo skar bla ma i po li do žes bya ba yis p'ul bai Bod kyi mk'as pa rnam la skye pa sna ma dan ston pa nid kyi lta bai sgo nas žu ba bžugs so* and it is a very bulky work. I possess a copy of this book and intend to publish a translation of it as a striking document of the meeting in the Country of Snows of Lamaic Theology with Saint Thomas.¹⁵

Tucci continued to affirm the importance of the *I po li do'i zhu ba*, but neither translated the manuscript nor published a study of it.¹⁶ The

¹² On Desideri's early works, compare DL 8 (MITN 5: 42), DL 10 (MITN 5: 48), and DL 18 (MITN 5: 83).

¹³ DL 8 (MITN 5: 43), DL 10 (MITN 5: 52). In the latter letter, Desideri indicates his intention to translate the second of his two *libretti* into Tibetan.

¹⁴ Tucci 1943: 226.

¹⁵ Tucci 1947: 248-249.

¹⁶ For later descriptions, see Tucci, 1952: 5: "Alla conoscenza del Tibet gli italiani hanno contribuito in maniera notevole. Odorico da Pordenone e Marco Polo, sebbene non vi siano mai penetrati, sono stati fra i primi a darne notizie. Poi nel XVIII secolo i cappuccini e i gesuiti poterono dimorare nel paese proibito per vari decenni. Durevole ricordo essi hanno di sè lasciato nelle relazioni di viaggio e specialmente nel libro che il gesuita Ippolito Desideri scrisse sulle sue esperienze tibetane e sulla religione tibetana. Egli poi tradusse per la prima volta la *summa*

first real progress on Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts was made by his student Luciano Petech (1914-2010), who critically edited Desideri's letters and the account of his travels in Tibet. Basing himself on DR 4.19, Petech identified Desideri's "small book on the unity of the true law of salvation" with the early work that Desideri presented to Lha bzang Lhan.¹⁷ He identified Desideri's "copious tome in confutation of the opinion and intricate system of metempsychosis" with the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* (which he described as "un breve opuscolo") and the *I po li do'i zhu ba*. Petech speculated that the tome in which Desideri attempted to "demonstrate, against the opinions of Tibetans, the existence of a being that is 'of itself' and the first principle of all things," could be (*potrebbe*) the *'Byung khungs* and identified Desideri's "new catechism" with the *Tho rangs*. Petech also noted the correct number of folios in the *I po li do'i zhu ba*, corrected Wessels's dates from ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-92v, and distinguished the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* and the *'Byung khungs*. He neglected to mention, however, that the *Tho rangs* has none of the defining features of a Christian doctrine or the standard catechisms of Desideri's day. Petech thus eliminated the notes and quotations collected in ARSI Goa 74, fols. 2r-34v from consideration as one of Desideri's books and retained Wessels's second, third, and fourth manuscripts, but—lacking a plausible candidate for the catechism—was forced to distinguish the book Desideri presented to Lha bzang Khan from the *Tho rangs*.

This last problem was solved by Edmond Lamalle (1900-1989), the chief archivist of the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, who in February 1978 discovered three of Desideri's manuscripts misfiled in the Japonica-Sinica codices.¹⁸ Reclassified as ARSI Goa 76a upon their discovery, the files included a second, rewritten copy of a portion of Desideri's first Italian booklet, which served as the foundation of the first seven chapters of the *Tho rangs* (fols. 1-11), a (nearly completed) copy of the *Ke ri se ste an kyi chos lugs kyi snying po* (fols. 12r-61v), and what appeared to be a *'khyug yig* draft of the same work (fols. 62r-86v).

theologica di un grande pensatore tibetano e quindi la confutò in una vasta opera polemica scritta in tibetano: incontro mirabile avvenuto sul Tetto del mondo della dommatica buddhistica e di S. Tommaso d'Aquino." Compare Tucci 1981: 7: "Il Desideri soprattutto cercò di intendere la dommatica tibetana così contesta di filosofia da renderne qualche volta difficile la comprensione. In tal modo accadde sul Tetto del mondo un fatto mai più rinnovatosi: l'incontro fra San Tommaso e Tsoṅg k'a pa che scrissero, entrambi, una *Summa* delle basi teologiche della propria fede. Infatti il Desideri subito comprese che per svolgere con successo un'opera di valido apostolato del cattolicesimo, occorreva anzitutto che egli studiasse i principi essenziali della dommatica lamaista che non poteva non essere quella della 'setta gialla' al potere in Lhasa."

¹⁷ Petech 1954-1956, 5: xx-xxiv.

¹⁸ On the discovery of these manuscripts, see Toscano 1982: 43-45.

We shall refer to this last work as Desideri's *Chos lugs kyi snying po*. Lamalle's discovery allowed the American Jesuit Richard Sherburne (1926-2013) to argue that Desideri wrote not four, but five, Tibetan manuscripts.¹⁹ According to Sherburne, the first manuscript was "a compilation of quotations from Buddhist logic texts, from Tsong-kha-pa's *Lam rim chen mo*, and from the Mahāyāna sūtras ... rough and irregularly written in all three styles of Tibetan script: capitals, cursive, shorthand, which the Jesuit collected at Se ra and carried to Dwags po to write his "masterpiece."²⁰ Sherburne described the second manuscript as "117 oblong pages in a more consistent cursive script (*dbu-med*), which contains the first and second outlines of what was to be his final great work."²¹ We can see in his account of the first two manuscripts that Sherburne followed Wessels, but supplemented him with his own analysis of the manuscripts. Sherburne's identification of ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-92v as the "first and second outlines" of the *I po li do'i zhu ba* is unclear. He appears to suggest that one can separate ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-92v in light of the *sa bcad* of Desideri's magnum opus, which divides the unfinished text neatly into the views of rebirth and emptiness. In other words, it seems that Sherburne believed the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* (fols. 35r-46v) to be an outline of the first section of the *I po li do'i zhu ba* and the *'Byung khungs* (fols. 47r-92v) to be an outline of its second section. He might have thought, however, that the *'Byung khungs* was a revision of the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa*. At any rate, Sherburne does not appear to have read the manuscripts closely, as he repeats Wessels's mistaken notion that the manuscript was begun in December 1717. If we grant this to be a simple oversight, Sherburne might be read to claim that the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* is a revision of the *'Byung khungs*. Whatever the case, ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-92v are, for Sherburne, preparatory outlines for the *I po li do'i zhu ba*. Like Petech, Sherburne described the *Tho rangs* as a "catechism" but speculated that it was "perhaps a rough writing" of the book Desideri presented to Lha bzang Khan because of the "beginner's difficulty" with Tibetan.²² The new "fifth" manuscript, consisting of the *Chos lugs kyi snying po* and its *'khyug yig* draft, he argued, "point to it being the material of what would have been the second half of his unfinished masterpiece."²³ Here, Sherburne almost certainly refers to the sections of the *Chos lugs kyi snying po* and its draft on emptiness.

¹⁹ Sherburne 1990: 298-299.

²⁰ Sherburne 1990: 298.

²¹ Sherburne 1990: 298.

²² Sherburne 1990: 298.

²³ Sherburne 1990: 305.

Unbeknownst to Sherburne, the Xaverian priest Giuseppe Toscano (1911-2003) had already proposed a new division of Desideri's Tibetan writings:

- 1) *Tho rangs mun sel nyi ma shar ba'i brda*
- 2) *Mgo skar bla ma i po li do zhes bya ba yis phul ba'i bod kyi mkhas pa rnam la skye ba snga ma dang stong pa nyid kyi lta ba'i sgo nas zhu ba*
- 3) *Sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnam kyi 'byung khungs*
- 4) *Ke ri se ste an kyi chos lugs kyi snying po*
- 5) *Nges legs* (untitled manuscript)
- 6) *Bod kyi chos la mkhas pa rnam la skye ba snga phyi'i sgo nas mgo kar gyis zhu pa*
- 7) Outlines of various works (*abbozzi di varie opere*)
- 8) Logical exercises (*esercitazioni di logica*)
- 9) Christian prayers (*preghiere cristiane*)
- 10) Miscellany of lines copied from Tibetan works (*Zibaldone di brani ricopiati da opere tibetane*)
- 11) Translation of the Letter of Pope Clement XI to Lha bzang Khan
- 12) Various fragments

With Toscano, we see a genuine advance in the division and description of Desideri's Tibetan texts.²⁴ After weighing the merits of Petech's and Lamalle's contributions—and carefully comparing them with Desideri's own descriptions—Toscano identified the books enumerated by Desideri in DR 4.19 as the *Tho rangs*, *I po li do'i zhu ba*, *'Byung khungs*, and *Chos lugs kyi snying po*. Toscano rightly noted that the *Chos lugs kyi snying po*—containing explanations of the sign of the cross, the Creed, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Ten Commandments, the seven sacraments, and so forth—was a far better candidate for Desideri's "new catechism" than the *Tho rangs*. Freed by Lamalle's discovery, Toscano thus identified the *Tho rangs* with the book Desideri presented to Lha bzang Khan, noting Desideri's difficulty with Tibetan in it as Sherburne was soon to do. Toscano also attempted a far more thorough delineation of ARSI Goa 74 and ARSI Goa 76a. Rightly seeing the notes in ARSI Goa 74, fols. 2r-5v as exercises in *bsdus grwa*, he set them aside as an independent work. Toscano then isolated the material collected in folios ARSI Goa 74, fols. 6r-34v as a miscellany of quotations and annotations, even identifying several quotations that Petech had missed. Toscano also described the relationship between ARSI Goa 76a, fols. 12r-61v and fols. 62r-86v,

²⁴ Toscano 1981: 39-61.

identifying those parts of the elegant *'khyug yig* notes that correspond to the *Chos lugs kyi snying po*, but also noting those portions that did not find their way into the later revision. We need not worry about the prayers, fragments, and Desideri's translation of Clement XI's letter for the purposes of this paper, except to note their identification by Toscano.

Toscano's real contribution to the debate over Desideri's Tibetan writings was his division of the remaining folios of ARSI Goa 74. Following the suggestions of Wessels and Petech, Toscano identified the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-46v) as the Tibetan elaboration of his second Italian booklet, which then served as a partial draft for Desideri's larger *I po li do'i zhu ba*.²⁵ What is more important, Toscano divided ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-92v into the already-identified *'Byung khungs* (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-67v) and an untitled manuscript he called the *Nges legs* (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-92v), which he translated and published as an entirely separate work. Toscano's primary reason for separating the manuscripts was simple: ARSI Goa 74, fol. 47r is the first page of the *'Byung khungs*, and ARSI Goa 74, fol. 67v is its last. Toscano simply followed the fascicles as he found them in the archives. Toscano had a second reason, too. The colophon of the *'Byung khungs* appears to promise another, second work:

*gnyis pa de'i zhar la bod kyi mkhas pa rnams la rang gi ngo bo dang rang gi mtshan nyid dang rang bzhin gyis grub shing de kho na nyid yin pa'i don mchog dam pa 'gran 'dra dpe zla med par gcig bu rje bod skad du zhes par bya 'os mtshan zhig zhu ba'o!.*²⁶

Here is Toscano's translation:

In una seconda opera, a parte, ai Saggi Tibetani, in lingua tibetana, illustro la dottrina intorno al Signore unico, incomparabile, supremo, degno di ogni rispetto; rivelo il vero significato della sua caratteristica natura propria; spiego in che modo egli esista causato da se stesso e cioè la sua vera condizione.²⁷

We shall return to this colophon in good time; for now, we need only note that Toscano identified the *Nges legs* as this "seconda opera."

No scholar of Desideri has proposed a significant challenge to Toscano's identification and division of Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts in over forty years. Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling

²⁵ Toscano 1981: 45-50; Toscano 1984: 49-50; Toscano 1989: 40-41.

²⁶ Toscano 1984: 134.

²⁷ Toscano 1984: 321.

accept it in their monumental translation of Desideri's *Notizie storiche*.²⁸ Donald S. Lopez and Thupten Jinpa hedge their bets, interpreting DR 4.19 so that the first manuscript may or may not be the *Tho rangs*, the second is the *I po li do'i zhu ba*, the third is likely the *'Byung khungs*, and the fourth is clearly the *Chos lugs kyi snying po*. Concerning the *Nges legs*, they say simply, "It is noteworthy that in neither description does Desideri mention his fifth Tibetan work, the unfinished Definite Goodness (*Nges legs*)."²⁹ Assuming with Toscano that the *Nges legs* was an independent work, I myself hazarded the guess that it was more likely a draft of which the *'Byung khungs* was the first revised part.³⁰ I believed the second work described in the colophon of the *'Byung khungs* to be the *I po li do'i zhu ba*, but—truth be told—it is hardly a better candidate for the supposed second work. In fact, given the description in the colophon, it is decidedly inferior. My chief reason for rejecting Toscano's attribution was that there seemed to have been no reason for Desideri to repeat similar arguments in a second treatise so soon after finishing the *'Byung khungs*. That is hardly an argument, however. Untangling the folios of ARSI Goa 74 requires a more thorough textual analysis.

2. Reconstructing the *Sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnams kyi 'byung khungs*

ARSI Goa 74 contains 92 folios. Its manuscripts consist of simple unbound four-page signatures folded together to make fascicles of various lengths. Unlike the *Tho rangs*, *I po li do'i zhu ba*, and *Chos lugs kyi snying po*, the folios of ARSI Goa 74 are unnumbered. Many, though, are dated. The dates found in ARSI Goa 74, fols. 2r-34v allow us to set them aside immediately.³¹ Most of the remaining folios of

²⁸ Sweet and Zwilling 2010: 44-45, 751. In personal conversation (August 18, 2018), Sweet and Zwilling urged caution in too quickly accepting Toscano's revisions of Petech. Whether or not one may identify the *Tho rangs* as the book Desideri presented to Lha bzang Khan, one need not identify it as Desideri's "un piccolo libretto intorno all'unità della vera legge di salute e in ordine a mostrar esser falso che ognuno nella sua legge possa salvarsi." *Un piccolo libretto*, they reason, suggests a pamphlet, not a Tibetan *dpe cha* of 128 pages.

²⁹ Lopez 2017: 18.

³⁰ Pomplun 2011: 398.

³¹ The first folio is not one of Desideri's writings, but rather a single sheet of paper upon which is written "Polemica contra Idolatrij Thibetanij lingua Thibetana conscripta a P. Hippolito Desideri circa ann. 1717-1718." ARSI Goa 74, fols. 2r-5v, which comprise Desideri's exercises in *bsdus grwa*, are a single fascicle formed from two four-page signatures, one folio of which is blank. It is dated July 1, 1717. ARSI Goa 74, fols. 6r-34v are out of order in the archives, but we can see from

ARSI Goa 74 consist of unbound four-page signatures folded together in fours to make fascicles of eight folios, or sixteen pages. The fascicle ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-42v, for example, contains sixteen pages of the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa*, many of whose folios are struck with a vertical mark from top to bottom. We shall return to this presently. Half of the next fascicle, ARSI Goa 74, fols. 43r-50v, contains the remaining eight pages of the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa*. Let us set aside ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-46v in order to concentrate on the remaining folios.

ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-50v are the first eight pages of the '*Byung khungs*. ARSI Goa 74, fols. 51r-58v, 59r-66v, 77r-84v, and 85r-92v are four equal length fascicles of eight folios, or sixteen pages each. As outliers, we find a single four-page signature (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 67r-68v), some loose pages that appear to have been separated from their original fascicle (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-70v), and a six-folio fascicle of twelve pages (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 71r-76v). Desideri added catchwords to the bottoms of folios 66v, 69r-69v, 70r-70v, 71r-71v, 72r, 73v, 74v, 75v, and 76v.³² From these we can see that the catchword *khyed cag gi* of ARSI Goa 74, fol. 70v matches the first line of ARSI Goa 74, fol. 71r, which begins "*khyed cag gi gzhung lugs la sangs rgyas dkon mchog ces bya ba gang yang yon tan thams cad ldan pa nyid du grub dgos te.*"³³ ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v therefore make a fifth fascicle of eight folios like ARSI Goa 74, fols. 51r-58v, 59r-66v, 77r-84v, and 85r-92v. Our remaining outlier is the signature ARSI Goa 74, fols. 67r-68v, the final folio of which is blank.

We can place this signature in its proper place by analyzing the dates of four fascicles. The title page of the manuscript is dated November 28, 1717 (ARSI Goa 74, fol. 47r).³⁴ The first page of the fascicle ARSI Goa 74, fols. 51r-58v, is dated December 8, 1717.³⁵ I think it safe to assume that this second fascicle then follows the first, uniting folios 47r-58v.³⁶ ARSI Goa 74, fol. 66r—the last page of its own

ARSI Goa, fol. 26r that Desideri began a long series of notes on June 6, 1717 (before he took his notes on *bsdus grwa*) and completed them sometime after September 14, 1717. Desideri's record of his expenditures at ARSI Goa 73, fol. 156v indicates that he purchased one book that Fall, which was almost certainly the *Lam rim chen mo*, thereby obviating the need for such notetaking. We can see from ARSI Goa 74, fol. 30v, however, that Desideri used the same notebook again between June 24 and June 29, 1721.

³² Toscano 1984: 131; Toscano 1989: 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 63, 67, 71, 75.

³³ Toscano 1989: 51, 52.

³⁴ Toscano 1984: 52.

³⁵ Toscano 1984: 68.

³⁶ This date also indicates that Desideri worked on the '*Byung khungs* and *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* simultaneously, as the first page of the fascicle beginning at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 35r has the same date.

fascicle—bears the date June 12, 1718.³⁷ The second page of ARSI Goa 74, fol. 67v—Toscano's final fascicle—is dated to the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, that is, June 21, 1718.³⁸ The proximity of these last two dates give us good reason to connect the fascicles ARSI Goa 74, fols. 59r-66v and ARSI Goa 74, fols. 67r-68v.³⁹ Since these four dates are found in four consecutive fascicles (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-50v, 51r-58v, 59r-66v, and 67r-67v), Toscano quite reasonably concluded that the *'Byung khungs* was complete as he found it.

Toscano therefore believed the subsequent fascicles (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v, 77r-84v, and 85r-92v) to be an independent manuscript—the mysterious “fifth” work mentioned by Lopez and Jinpa. None of the fascicles of Toscano's so-called *Nges legs* are dated. The manuscript has neither title page nor conclusion, beginning and ending *in medias res*. The catchword *bltos pa* at the bottom of ARSI Goa 74, fol. 76v—the final page in the first fascicle of Toscano's *Nges legs*—does not anticipate the first word of the second fascicle beginning at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 77r.⁴⁰ It is continued rather by the first word of ARSI Goa 74, fol. 59r—the third fascicle of the *'Byung khungs*.⁴¹ In this case, we do not need to rely on the catchword to establish the link between these two fascicles. ARSI Goa 74, fol. 76v begins a quotation of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 15.1-2 that is completed on ARSI Goa 74, fol. 59r: “*dbu ma'i rtsa ba las kyang/ rang bzhin rgyu dang rkyen las ni/ 'byung bar rigs pa min no/ rgyu dang rkyen las byung na ni/ rang bzhin byas pa can du 'gyur/ rang bzhin byas pa can zhes bya bar/ ji lta bur na rang bar 'gyur/ rang bzhin dag ni bcos min dang/ gzhan la [new page] bltos pa med pa yin/ zhes gsungs so.*”⁴²

It appears, then, that either the pages or the fascicles of Goa 74 are out of order—or both. We already have good reason to think that the first fascicle of the *'Byung khungs* (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-50v) connects with the second (fols. 51r-58v), just as we have similarly good reasons to think that the third (fols. 59r-66v) connects with the fourth (fols. 67r-68v). If the three fascicles of the so-called *Nges legs* (ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v, 77r-84v, and 85r-92v) can be integrated into the *'Byung khungs*, they will likely fit between what Toscano believed to be its second and third fascicles. If the first *Nges legs* fascicle (fols. 69r-76v) connects with the third fascicle of the *'Byung khungs* (fols. 59r-66v), we can set aside

³⁷ Toscano 1984: 128.

³⁸ Toscano 1984: 134.

³⁹ Desideri placed a catchword at the bottom of ARSI Goa 74, fol. 66v, but the top left corner of ARSI Goa 74, fol. 67r has been damaged.

⁴⁰ Toscano 1989: 75-76.

⁴¹ Toscano 1984: 100.

⁴² Toscano 1989: 75-Toscano 1984: 100.

ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-50v, 51r-58v as the beginning of the 'Byung khungs and group the three fascicles that comprise ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v, 59r-66v, and 67r-68v as the end of an hypothetically reconstructed text. We exhaust, however, what one can accomplish by matching dates and catchwords: One *Nges legs* fascicle (fols. 69r-76v) appears to fit into the 'Byung khungs, but two fascicles (fols. 77r-84v and 85r-92v) remain to be integrated.

Fortunately, Desideri's 'Byung khungs begins with a *sa bcad*:

skyes pa la sogs pa rnam ki 'byung khungs dang de dag thog ma'i mtha' dang bral ba yin par khyod ki lugs ltar bzhag pa ni 'gal 'du sna tshogs ki sgo nas mi rigs par rags tsam bshad la/ de ltar sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnam ki 'byung khungs ngos dang thog ma'i mtha' ngos bstan pa ni gsum las/ sems can dang chos lhag la sogs pa rnam ki 'byung khungs bstan pa dang/ de dag gi thog ma'i mtha' bstan pa dang/ skyes pa so so'i skye ba'i grangs nges bstan pa'o/ dang po la drug/ sems can dang chos la sogs pa rnam ki 'byung khungs des rgyu rkyen gang la bltos pa min bar bstan pa dang/ de la thog ma'i mtha' dang phyi ma'i mtha' med par bstan pa dang/ de'i mtshan nyid bstan pa dang/ de la dpe zla med par gcig kho na yin par bstan pa dang/ de la dpe zla med par gcig kho na yin kyang gnyis su med pa'i yin lugs gcig kho na'i mtshon bya ni gsum yin par bstan pa dang/ sems can thams cad dang chos lhag la sogs pa rnam ki 'byung khungs de la yongs su rag las par bstan pa'o'.⁴³

If we follow Desideri's *sa bcad*, we find the Jesuits's second section of the first part at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 53r: "gnyis pa rgyu rkyen gang la yang ma bltos ma brten par rang nyid rang grub khyod dang tha dad du yod pa thams cad ki 'byung khungs mchog tu mtho zhing thun mong ba de la thog ma'i mtha' dang phyi ma'i mtha' med par bstan pa."⁴⁴ We find Desideri's third section at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 54v: "gsum pa rgyu rkyen gang la yang ma bltos ma brten cing khyod dang tha dad du yod pa thams cad ki 'byung khungs rab tu mtho zhing thun mong de'i mtshan nyid bstan pa."⁴⁵ The entirety of the treatise will continue under this heading without reaching the fourth section of the first part of the *sa bcad*—to say nothing of the second and third parts. This all-consuming third section, however, is governed by an additional *sa bcad*. At ARSI Goa 74, fol. 54v, Desideri announces that he will engage Tibetans according to their own scholastic method:

bzhed pa dang po de mtha' dpyad pa la/ dgag gzhas spang gsum las/ kha cig/ rang bzhin gyis rang nyid rang grub de'i lta ba la dgag bya med la/

⁴³ Toscano 1984: 52.

⁴⁴ Toscano 1984: 76.

⁴⁵ Toscano 1984: 82.

dgag par byed pa'i don med de/ rang bzhin gyis rang nyid rang grub kyi lta ba des/ khyod dgag yin ba'i phyir/ der thal/ spyir dgag bya la lam gyi dgag bya dang rigs pa'i dgag bya gnyis yod pa'i phyir/ lan gyi dgag bya ni/ dbus mtha' las/ nyon mongs pa yi sgrib pa dang/ shes bya'i sgrib pa nyid du bstan/ der ni sgrib pa thams cad do/ ces gsungs pa ltar nyon mongs pa dang shes bya'i sgrib pa gnyis sol 'di shes byal yod pa'i dgag bya yin no/ rigs pa'i dgag bya ni/ rtsod bzlog las/ yang na kha cig sprul pa yi bud med la ni bud med snyams/ log 'dzin 'byung ba sprul pa yis/ 'gog byed 'di ni de lta yin/ zhes pa'i rang 'grol las/ yang na skyes bu kha cig sprul pa'i bud med rang bzhin gyis stongs pa yin la don dam par bud med do snyam du log par 'dzin par 'gyur ro/ de'i phyir de log par 'dzin pa des 'dod chags bskyed pa la/ des de'i log par pa de zlog par byed do!'⁴⁶

I have provided a longer quotation to show that the *sa bcad* does not follow immediately. There is no *dang po ni* after the *gsum las*, and Desideri begins his argument with a *kha cig*. One can, however, find the *gzhas* and *spong* that follow Desideri's *dgag*. Since we are nearing the end of what Toscano believed to be the second fascicle of the *'Byung khungs* and thus approaching the place where we might be able to integrate one or more *Nges legs* fascicles, let us note how Desideri proceeds with his refutation:

'on kyang dgag bya'i gtso bo ni phyi ma yin tel/ yul can phyin ci log pa la des bzung ba'i yul thog mar dgag dgos pas sol 'di yang rten 'brel gyis gang zag dang chos kyi steng du rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i rang bzhin yod pa 'gog pa lta bu rnam yin no/ de ltar na rang bzhin gyis rang nyid rang grub des kyang/ yul de'i lta ba 'dis rigs pa'i dgag bya yin no/ de'i len du/ yod pa la sogs gcig kyang ma lus par rnam la rang bzhin med pa'i lta ba de rigs pa'i dgag bya ngos 'dzin ha cang khyab ches pa'i sgo nas khyod nyid dgag bya yin par bstan pa dang/ rang bzhin gyis rang nyid rang grub kyi lta ba 'di stong pa nyid kyi lta ba log lta ma byed cing gnod ma byed par bstan pa dang/ stong pa nyid kyi lta ba dang rab tu mthun zhing de la je rgyas su btang bar bstan pa'o!'⁴⁷

Desideri's three topics or teaching on emptiness are followed by a *dang po ni*, so we begin another *sa bcad*. We find the second section of Desideri's presentation of emptiness at what is now ARSI Goa 74, fol. 84r: "*gnyis pa rang bzhin gyis rang nyid rang grub kyi lta ba 'di stong pa nyid kyi lta ba log lta ma byed cing gnod ma byed par bstan pa.*"⁴⁸ We find

⁴⁶ Toscano 1984: 82-83. As one sees, Desideri frames his rejection of the Tibetans' Madhyamaka in terms of the object of negation found in Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanīkārikā* (P5228: 14.5.8) and *Vigrahavyāvartanīṭṭi* (P5232: 60.4.1-4.) He has taken the quotations—in fact the *kha cig* itself—from Tsong kha pa 2004: 605-606.

⁴⁷ Toscano 1984: 83.

⁴⁸ Toscano 1989: 105.

the third section of Desideri's presentation of emptiness at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 78v: "*gsum pa rang bzhin khyim par rang nyid rang grub kyi lta ba 'dis stong pa nyid kyi lta ba dang rab tu mthun zhing de la je rgyas su btang bar bstan pa.*"⁴⁹ Note that we find the second and third of Desideri's three teachings on emptiness not in the *'Byung khungs*, but in ARSI Goa 74, fols. 77r-84v, which Toscano believed to be the second *Nges legs* fascicle. Presumably, we can attach this fascicle to the first two *'Byung khungs* fascicles, but the folios of ARSI Goa 74, fols. 77r-84v appear to be out of order. We find the beginning of Desideri's *gzhaḡ* at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 83r: "*gnyis pa rang gi lugs gzhaḡ pa la gnyis/ rang lugs dgag bya ngos bzung ba dang/ rang bzhin yod kyi lta ba gtan la 'bebs pa'i tshul lo.*"⁵⁰ Here we encounter a snag: Desideri's third teaching on emptiness comes before the presentation of his own system, which itself precedes the Jesuit's second teaching on emptiness. This problem is easily solved, however. At some point the simple signature with what are now folios 77r, 77v, 84r, and 84v appears to have been folded wrongly—likely having been dropped and replaced by someone who did not know Tibetan. When folded properly, so that fols. 84r-84v appear at the front of the fascicle and fols. 77r-77v appear at the end, Desideri's proper order is restored. We may now return to Desideri's *sa bcad*.

We find the second part of Desideri's presentation of his own system at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 75v, inside what Toscano believed to be the first *Nges legs* fascicle: "*gnyis pa rang bzhin yod pa yin pa'i lta bar gtan la 'bebs pa'i tshul la bzhi/ rang bzhin yod bzhin du bdag nyid yin pa nyid kyi lta ba'i tshogs bsten pa dang/ lta ba de la 'jug pa'i rin pa dang/ rang bzhin yod bzhin du bdag nyid yin pa de gtan la dbab pa dngos dang/ lta ba de dag goms pas sgrub pa thams cad spong ba'i tshul lo.*"⁵¹ This outline takes us somewhat far afield. We need not follow it in its entirety. As we have already seen, the *Nges legs* fascicle ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v connects to ARSI Goa 74, fols. 59r-66v, which connects to fols. 67r-68v. We have leapt a whole fascicle! Additional evidence, however, allows us to place fascicle ARSI Goa 74, fols. 85r-92v between ARSI Goa 74, fols. 77r-84v and ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v. At ARSI, Goa 74, fol. 87v, Desideri announces that he will argue for a Christian conception of the highest good (*nges legs*) in six sections:

gzhan yang byas pa can nam gzhan dbang min zhing rang bzhin yod la de kho na nyid yin pa'i rang dbang 'ga' yang med do snyam du log par 'dzin zhing nges shes kyi yul de la 'khrul pa'i log shes byas pa can nam gzhan

⁴⁹ Toscano 1989: 82.

⁵⁰ Toscano 1989: 100.

⁵¹ Toscano 1989: 70.

*dbang la rang bzhin sgro 'dogs pa'i sgro 'dogs dbang med du 'dren par mthar thug gi 'brel bur gyur pa'i nges legs kyi sgo nas bstan par bya'o/ 'di la drug/ tshul bzhin du byas pa'i dge ba'i las chud mi zos par mthar thug gi 'brel bur gyur pa'i nges legs shig ni dge ba'i las tshul bzhin du byed po dag gis 'thob dgos par bstan pa dang/ de la rab tu shin tu che bar bstan pa dang/ de la brjod las bsam las 'das par tshad mtha' med cing kun tu mchog rab bstan pa dang/ de la dge ba'i las tshul bzhin du byed po dag gi steng du tha dad med cing gnyis su med par gcig kho na yin par bstan pa dang/ de rgyu rkyen gang la yang pa nyid du rag ma las zhing ma bltos ma brten par bstan pa dang/ de yang dag par dang bden par don dam par yod cing de kho na nyid yin par bstan pa'o/.*⁵²

We find Desideri's fourth argument on the final page of the *Nges legs* fascicle ARSI Goa 74, fols. 85r-92v: "bzhi pa de la dge ba rnam dag gi las byed po rnam kyi steng du tha mi dad cing phyogs su med par gcig kho na yin par bstan pa."⁵³ We find the fifth argument at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 72v: "lnga pa ni/ de rgyu rkyen gang la yang ma bltos ma brten par bstan pa."⁵⁴ The sixth we find at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 73v: "drug pa de la don dam par dang bden par dang yang dag par yod cing de kho na nyid yin par bstan pa."⁵⁵ We have now found ourselves in what Toscano believed to be the first *Nges legs* fascicle, ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v.

Let us look at one final example to complete our journey through the fascicles. At ARSI Goa 74, fol. 76v, Desideri presents yet another outline:

*des na kun gyis rnam par dag par shes par bya ba'i yul mchog dam la rang bzhin med pa'i rgyu mtshan log pa gnyis/ rang bzhin med pa'i rgyu mtshan ngos bzung ba dang/ rgyu mtshan de kun gyis shes par bya ba'i yul mchog dam pa de la gtan nas med par bstan pa'o/ dang po la lnga/ rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba nyid rang bzhin med pa'i rgyu mtshan du bstan pa dang/ rang dbang med pa nyid rang bzhin med pa'i rgyu mtshan du bstan pa dang/ don dam par med cing rigs pas dpyad mi bzod pa nyid rang bzhin med pa'i rgyu mtshan du bstan pa dang/ gcig dang tha dad la sogs pa'i brtag pa byas nas mi rnyed pa ni rang bzhin med pa'i rgyu mstan du bstan pa dang/ mu bzhi'i skye ba gang du yang ma skyes pa nyid rang bzhin med pa'i rgyu mtshan du bstan pa'o/.*⁵⁶

Here we arrive at the final page of the *Nges legs* fascicle ARSI Goa 74, fols. 69r-76v. The discussion continues on ARSI Goa 74, fol. 59r, where we find Desideri's "gnyis pa rang dbang med pa nyid rang bzhin med pa'i

⁵² Toscano 1989: 119.

⁵³ Toscano 1989: 138.

⁵⁴ Toscano 1989: 58.

⁵⁵ Toscano 1989: 63.

⁵⁶ Toscano 1989: 75.

rgyu mtshan du bstan pa" and the following headings.⁵⁷ We have now arrived back in the *'Byung khungs*. Indeed, we find Desideri's *spong* on ARSI Goa 74, fol. 66r, the page dated June 12, 1717: "*gsum pa rtsod pa spong ba la gnyis/ dnod byed brjod pa la sogs sun 'byin mi nus par bstan pa dang/ de'i zhar la bod kyi mkhas pa rnams la bod kyi skad du rang bzhin gyis yod pa dang bdag nyid dang de kho na nyid yin pa'i yul mchog dam pa gcig pu rje de zhes par 'os mtshan zhig zhu ba'o.*"⁵⁸ The remainder of the *'Byung khungs* is devoted to the first demonstration of Desideri's *spong*.

We can now see that Desideri did not complete *'Byung khungs* as planned. In fact, he did not even make it halfway through the first of its three parts. Toscano therefore correctly noted that Desideri had completed only three of the six sections promised in the initial *sa bcad*.⁵⁹ Toscano did not, however, suspect that anything was missing from the *'Byung khungs*. This initial misstep—when combined with his belief that the *Nges legs* was an independent, but incomplete, work—led Toscano to assume that he need not follow *sa bcad* through the *Nges legs*. When faced with the colophon, Toscano thus thought the pronoun *de* in the phrase *gnyis pa de'i zhar la* to be apposite to *gnyis pa*. On Toscano's interpretation, then, *gnyis pa de'i zhar la* meant something like "following that, a second," which he then glossed as "in una seconda opera." When we return the colophon to the *sa bcad*, however, we see that *gnyis pa de'i zhar la* means "second, following that," namely, following the "*dnod byed brjod pa la sogs sun 'byin mi nus par bstan pa*" at ARSI Goa 74, fol. 66r. The *gnyis pa* in the colophon promises no more than the continuation of Desideri's *spong*.

Now that we see that Desideri did not reach the end of his *sa bcad*, we can place the fascicles of ARSI Goa 74 in their proper order: ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-50v, 51r-58v, 77r-84v, 85r-92v, 69r-76v, 59r-66v, and 67r-68v (with the proviso that we need to also switch ARSI Goa 74, fols. 77r-77v and 84r-84v). Once placed in this order, the fascicles of ARSI Goa 74, fols. 47r-92v very much appear to be a single work unified by a single *sa bcad*. Once we take into account the size of the writing and the number of lines per page, the *'Byung khungs* so restored is a significant work. It is, in fact, approximately fifty to sixty percent of the size of the *I po li do'i zhu ba*. That said, I offer this reconstruction tentatively. Barring a complete edition—if not translation—of the entire manuscript, one can always argue that the continuity of the *sa bcad* is consistent with two independent works or

⁵⁷ Toscano 1984: 100.

⁵⁸ Toscano 1984: 128.

⁵⁹ Toscano 1984: 139: "Il testo pone la divisione della Prima Parte in sei punti; di fatto ne vengono trattati solo tre. Altri sono trattati quando si presenta l'occasione, ma non come parti a sé stanti."

two drafts of a single work, one or both of which is incomplete. Even the quotation of Nāgārjuna that continues across the two fascicles might be a coincidence. Even so, it appears the evidence is strong enough at present to consider the *'Byung khungs* a complete work. Should this reconstruction prove correct, though, Desideri's "fifth" work will vanish like the reflection of the moon on a lake.

3. *Final Reflections on Desideri's Tibetan Manuscripts*

We are now, I think, in a better position to address the problem of Desideri's description of his manuscripts. We may excuse Petech for resisting Hosten's suggestion that Desideri presented the *Tho rangs* to Lha bzang Khan. Having Desideri's description, but not knowing of the existence of Desideri's *Chos lugs kyi snying po*, Petech simply did not have enough information to arrive at a proper interpretation of DR 4.19. Besides, Petech was not exactly wrong. Although the evidence for identifying the *Tho rangs* with Desideri's first book appears strong, we must remember that Desideri had the manuscript copied, counts its revision among his expenditures, and mentions in several places that Lha bzang Khan read the encomium that began the book he presented. The *Tho rangs* has no such encomium. Besides, one would hardly expect a monarch or a Mongol chieftain to return a gift given in tribute. The truth is found in the middle: Richard Sherburne is almost certainly right that the existing manuscript represents an earlier state of the book presented to Lha bzang Khan.

No one has doubted the identification of Desideri's second book, nor has anyone questioned the identity of the fourth book after the discovery of ARSI Goa 76a. If we identify the third book as the restored *'Byung khungs*, there remains the problem of how Desideri composed his books—and how he conceived them in relation to one another. If one looks more closely at the manuscript evidence, one cannot escape the impression that the Jesuit was an inveterate drafter of manuscripts. In fact, he appears to have followed a rather strict program of writing and revising his manuscripts. As Henri Hosten noted, Desideri began his mission with what Desideri himself describes as two Italian booklets, one on the unity of the true law and another on metempsychosis, which were clearly written in some haste. (Incidentally, these two "booklets" very much appear to be one "book." Their chapters are numbered consecutively.) Desideri then used his first Italian booklet as the basis for a substantially revised Italian text that he copied very neatly, which in turn served as the basis for the first seven chapters of the *Tho rangs*, which itself we know to have been revised, rewritten, and presented to Lha bzang Khan. We know

Desideri's first book, then, to have been revised at least three times, with both the initial Italian and initial Tibetan versions being themselves revised.

The *Tho rangs*, *I po li do'i zhu ba*, and *Chos lugs kyi snying po* were each written in *dbu can*, as are almost all the notes taken by Desideri in the Summer and Fall of 1717. (The lone exception—the collection of the *bsdus grwa* exercises in ARSI Goa 74, fols. 2r-5v—appears to have been written in (perhaps) three different hands, none of which seem the same as the later manuscripts.) When we look at Desideri's later writing, however, especially in the notes in ARSI Goa 74, fols. 30v-34v and the draft and notes for the *Chos lugs kyi snying po* in ARSI Goa 76a, fols. 62r-86v, we can see that he had progressed to the point of writing a fluid *'khyug yig*. In between we have the rough-and-ready *dbu med* of the manuscripts written from late November 1717 to late June 1718, the *'Byung khungs* and *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa*, after which we find the inexplicably polished *dbu can* manuscript of the *I po li do'i zhu ba*, which Desideri began on June 24, 1718—only three days after having completed the *'Byung khungs*. The *I po li do'i zhu ba*, written with thirty-five lines of clean and uniform *dbu can* on each page, makes a decided contrast to the *'Byung khungs*, whose final fascicles fairly burst with ninety, a hundred, and even 110 lines on pages of the same size as his later, polished magnum opus. The *I po li do'i zhu ba*, which appears to have been written in Desideri's own hand, also has very few strikethroughs. With one or two exceptions, its annotations are written in same neat *dbu can* as the body of the text. Upon comparison, the *I po li do'i zhu ba* seems to be related to the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* much as Desideri's second Italian booklet on the unity of the true law is related to the first. The *I po li do'i zhu ba* thus appears to be a neatly rewritten and revised version of the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa*. (Recall that many of the folios in ARSI Goa 74, fols. 35r-46v have been struck through.) Indeed, the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa* appears to be a reworking of Desideri's second Italian booklet on metempsychosis. We have, then, at least in part, earlier drafts of the *Tho rangs*, the *I po li do'i zhu ba*, and the *Chos lugs kyi snying po*—all of Desideri's *dbu can* manuscripts. If we can trust this pattern, it would appear that the *'Byung khungs*, the only major work for which we have neither a previous draft nor a later revision, is itself the draft of a work Desideri hoped to revise. Looking at Desideri's manuscripts *in toto*—both Italian and Tibetan—it also seems unlikely, if not impossible, that Desideri wrote his magnum opus without a prior draft.

Recall that in both of Desideri's descriptions, he places the tome in which he attempts to refute the intricate labyrinth of metempsychosis before the tome in which he rejects emptiness and attempts to demonstrate the existence of an uncreated being. Recall also that

Desideri's *I po li do'i zhu ba*—as its title indicates—was intended to address emptiness in addition to rebirth. Like the *'Byung khungs*, the *I po li do'i zhu ba* is unfinished. As it so happens, Desideri organized his magnum opus around the same triad that allowed us to restore the complete *'Byung khungs*, the *dgag gzhaḡ spong gsum*. When one traces the *sa bcad* in the *I po li do'i zhu ba*, one sees that Desideri abandoned the revision of his questions about rebirth as he approached the end of his *dgag* and thus did not write the *gzhaḡ* and *spong*. In other words, the Jesuit stopped approximately one third of the way through the first term of the triad. If we assume that Desideri wished to follow the same pattern in his questions about emptiness, once restored, the *'Byung khungs* could very well be the draft of the second part of Desideri's magnum opus. If we take Desideri at his word, either at DR 1.15 or DR 4.19, the *'Byung khungs* would be the second tome or volume of a single book that began with the *I po li do'i zhu ba*. Even though Richard Sherburne provided no evidence to support his claims, it appears the Jesuit's intuitions were spot on.

If the *'Byung khungs* is the draft of the *I po li do'i zhu ba*'s second, unfinished part on emptiness, what became of the folios, beyond the twelve we have of the *Mgo kar gyis zhu pa*, that served as the draft of its first part on rebirth? Let us return to the very discovery of Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts. Given the exactitude we have already seen in his descriptions, it seems unlikely that Cornelius Wessels would have miscounted the number of pages in what he believed to be Desideri's second manuscript. Why might he report that the manuscript had 704 rather than 464 pages? (Recall that Petech reported the correct number of the existing manuscript in 1954.) Might there be 240 pages—fifteen full fascicles—of Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts yet to be discovered in Europe? And, if so, might these fascicles be the missing draft of the *I po li do'i zhu ba* or—a more tantalizing possibility—its promised second half, a polished revision of Desideri's *'Byung khungs*? Given what we know about Desideri's processes of revising and rewriting manuscripts, the number of folios is about right for either possibility. In fact, if the missing folios had thirty-five lines to the page as Wessels reports, they are more likely to be a polished revision, like the *I po li do'i zhu ba*.

Wessels did not look at Desideri's manuscripts in Rome; he looked at them at Exaeten, the House of the German Jesuits in the Netherlands, close to the German border near Roermond. By the time Wessels examined Desideri's manuscripts, the codices of the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu had not been in Rome for three decades. In fact, they had not been in a single place for almost half a century. After the Piedmontese armies occupied the Gesù and the Jesuit houses of Rome in 1872, the Jesuits hastily moved as many of

the codices as they could, first to the basement of the Palazzo Torlonia and then to the attic of the Collegio Germanico.⁶⁰ The archives of the Procurator General, which dealt chiefly with the Jesuits' relations with the Vatican, were confiscated and transferred to the new State Archives. In their desire to protect the remaining archives, the Jesuits in 1893 mailed the codices, box by box, to Exaeten—among other places, it is rumored, now unknown. Since Wessels completed his monograph in 1924, he would probably have seen Desideri's manuscripts at Exaeten House. The Jesuit residence, however, was ceded to the Franciscans in 1927, and the Roman archives were soon moved to Valkenberg, near Maastricht. As German armies approached in 1939, the Jesuits again moved the codices, this time posting them by sea to Rome. From Amsterdam, the boxes sailed to the Civitavecchia to be deposited finally in 1940 in the new curial headquarters at Borgo Santo Spirito, shortly before Tucci announced his intention to translate the *I po li do'i zhu ba*.

We do not know when the Tibetan manuscripts that became ARSI Goa 76a were misplaced. Since Wessels did not describe them, we may presume they were misplaced earlier. The mere fact that they were misplaced is instructive. The turmoil underwent by the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was nothing compared to the chaos that followed the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773. We know that large numbers of the Japonica-Sinica codices were lost at this time. The manuscripts we now know to be ARSI Goa 76a could have been misplaced any time between the suppression of the Society in 1773 and the Jesuits' first attempts to protect the archives two centuries later. In fact, the disorder in which we find the codices today—with existing signatures folded wrongly, fascicles placed in the wrong order, and everything being mis-numbered during re-cataloguing—strongly suggests that Desideri's Tibetan manuscripts have been disturbed, perhaps more than once, over the years. We do know this: The codices observed by Wessels were moved at least twice—once by land and once by sea—between the time that the Dutch Jesuit examined them and the time that Tucci and Petech described them. If Wessels was not simply wrong, we cannot discount the possibility that additional Desideri manuscripts might yet be discovered in some dusty attic or archive.

⁶⁰ For the following account, see Chan 2002: xiii-xv. The exodus of the archives also explains why Pietro Tacchi Venturi (1861-1956) told Filippo de Filippi (1869-1938) that none of Desideri's manuscripts could be found in the Roman Archives when Filippi contacted him in 1922. On this chapter in the discovery of Desideri's texts, see Bargiacchi 2010.

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When Fools Cannot Win: Social Determinism and Political Pragmatism in Bodong's Reception of *Sakya Legshe*¹

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1. Introduction

In her influential dissertation on the Kingdom of Derge in the late 19th century discussing religious-political alliances in peripheral Tibet, Luran R. Hartley brought a *nītiśāstra* work by Mipham Rinpoche ('ju mi pham rgya mtsho, 1846–1912) to the attention of Western academia.² Commissioned by the local king in a moment when the royal succession was uncertain, it attests to the late cultivation of the *specula principis* genre not only as a compilation of beautifully versed worldly wisdom but also as a tool legitimizing regal power. In Hartley's consideration of native Tibetan *nīti*, we find a much less well-known reference she takes from Puma Bhum: the existence of a *rājanītiśāstra* (*rgyal po'i lugs kyi btan bchos*) in the works of Bodong Pañchen (Bo dong pañ chen Phyogs las nam rgyal, 1375/6–1451), attested by his biographer Amoghasiddhi Jigme Bang ('jigs med 'bang, unknown dates).³

Considered the most prolific scholar in Tibetan history, Bodong created an impressive encyclopaedic production: his *Collected Works* comprised of 137 volumes and almost a thousand texts.⁴ His *nītiśāstra* represents a marginal role in this mammoth corpus, which has mostly

¹ This paper has benefitted from the generous assistance and insights from various scholars. I would like to express my gratitude to Sangs rgya skid, Snying byams rgyal, and Maria Coma for their help locating texts and manuscripts, to Geshe Thupten Gawa for his philological comments, and to Chok Tenzin Monlam for sharing his knowledge on Bodong. I am also grateful to professors Andrey Klebanov and José Cabezón for their critical feedback. Needless to say, any possible inaccuracies and shortcomings remain my sole responsibility.

² For a recent translation and study see Cabezón 2017.

³ Hartley 1997: 69.

⁴ Maher 2017: 106.

remain unstudied.⁵ A great deal of Bodong's gnomic composition directly borrows from Sakya Paṇḍita's (sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182–1251) *Sakya Legshe* (*Legs par bshad pa rin po che'i gter*),⁶ the Tibetan *nīti* par excellence up to that point in time. For this reason, Bodong's work has been dismissed as just "a copy".⁷ Even so, there are still good reasons to conduct an academic study of Bodong's text. First of all, it is the first *nītiśāstra* to actually use the Tibetan equivalent (*lugs kyi btan bchos*) in its title, which, as we shall see, is relevant in better comprehending a genre often deemed ambiguous. Secondly, dismissing a text merely for supposed plagiarism seems at least a rushed judgement considering the complex notions of authorship, tradition, and knowledge in the Indo-Tibetan context. In this regard, Bodong's work may provide valuable information concerning the uses and adaptations of varied previous sources. Also, there is a whole chapter in Bodong's *nītiśāstra* with no parallels in *Sakya Legshe* which is dedicated to rulers and officials. Finally, the epigrammatic character of these gnomic compositions often makes it difficult to explore a systematic reading of the normative social model they intend to endorse. It is therefore a good opportunity to ponder how the anthropological characterizations and social structures within the Tibetan aphoristic tradition relate to the social order at their time of composition, in this case, the 15th century. Far from purely consisting of a collection of charming and innocuous maxims, I argue that Bodong's *nītiśāstra* legitimizes a caste-like social structure and a pragmatic approach to government.

2. Bodong Pañchen: life and context

A descendant of scholars, yogis and translators both on his paternal and maternal sides, as well as the son of a self-taught craftsman poet and a pious woman, Bodong Chokle Namgyal is said to have been born in the year of the Fire Dragon (1376) according to his biography,⁸

⁵ Besides the extension of his works, a commonly alleged reason of this academic neglect is the confusion of Bodong with Jonang Chokley Namgyal (1306-1386), according to Smith 2001: 179.

⁶ Davenport 2000 provides an English translation including the commentary of contemporary Sakya scholar Khenpo Sangye Tenzin; Kajihama 2017 offers a Japanese version along with a thorough study of sources and references.

⁷ Jinpa 2018: 465.

⁸ This was in the year of the Wood Hare (1375) according to the *Blue Annals*. Diemberger et al. 1997a: 37. References to Bodong's life are taken from the already mentioned biography written by Amoghasiddhi Jigme Bang in 1453 *Bo dong pan chen gyi rnam thar* = *dpal ldan bla ma dan pa thams cad mkhyen a phyogs las rnan par rgyal ba'i zhabs kyi rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston zhes bya ba* (translated as *Feast of Miracles* in Diemberger et al. 1997b), as well as from a 16th century account of

in a place called Yigu (*dbyi gu*) in Southern Latö (*la stod lho*), Southwest Tibet.⁹ He was ordained at the age of seven by his uncle, and is said to have had varied mystical experiences (for example, Saraswati is said to have appeared to him frequently and revealed prophecies to him) and scholarly prowesses during his formative years, such as the full comprehension of *pramāṇa* (*tshad ma*) in his pre-adolescence, the ability to memorize complex Sanskrit texts in a single morning at age sixteen, and the mastery of epistemological treatises and commentaries in his early twenties. This solid academic background at such a young age earned him the title of “young *paṇḍita*” from his delighted uncle.¹⁰

Known as a prolific polymath, his works encompass all subjects and topics of the scholastic curriculum, from Abidharma and Vinaya to embryology, mathematics, and astrology. In particular, he is considered a specialist in tantra and an invincible debater (hence *phyogs las rnam rgyal*, “victorious in all directions”). Anecdotes of his prolixity picture him lecturing to twenty scribes on different matters “like a great river flowing,” or enabling even the slowest amanuenses to complete thirty pages a day thanks to his blessing.¹¹ Having become the 23rd Abbot of Bodong E (Nyingtri, founded in 1049), he managed to spread his influence and his tradition became a school unto itself: the Bodongpa¹². He retired to Pemo Chöding monastery (Porong)¹³ in his seventies and passed away in the year of the Iron Sheep (1451) at the age of seventy-six¹⁴.

The figure of Bodong has lately attracted scholarly attention due to his illustrious disciples, and to the history of the decline and revival of his tradition. Among Bodong’s students, not only do we find the 1st Dalai Lama, but the fascinating character of Chokyi Drönma (*chos kyi sgron ma*, 1422–1455), “princess of Gungthang, fully ordained nun, and incarnated deity”, who established the most important and arguably the first female incarnation lineage in Tibet: that of Samding Dorje

the Bodongpa tradition called *bo dong chos 'byung* = *dpal de kho na nyid dus pa las bo dong chos 'byung gsal byed sgron me zhes bya ba dpal thams cad mkhyen pa 'chi med 'od zer gyis mdzad pa* (translated as *The Lamp Illuminating the History of Bodong* in Diemberger et al. 1997c). For a summarized version of Bodong’s biography, see Rechung 1984, and Monlam 2005.

⁹ Diemberger et al. 1997b 42-43. Diemberger et al. 1997c 108.

¹⁰ Diemberger et al. 1997b: 46-49.

¹¹ Diemberger et al. 1997b, 73, 86. Monlam 2005: 98.

¹² Maher 2017: 106; Monlam 2005: 94-95.

¹³ The monastery is in Nyalam county, Shigatse Prefecture. For a historical and contemporary geographical description, see Bauer 2009. Diemberger (2013: 107- 113) addresses the current situation of this pastoralist enclave.

¹⁴ Diemberger et al. 1997b, 88.

Phagmo.¹⁵

The Bodongpa's decline is commonly associated with the rise of the Gelugpa and the gradual marginalization of minority schools, so that by the time of the 5th Dalai Lama, the tradition was already in dire straits.¹⁶ During the Cultural Revolution that followed the Chinese occupation, the two main monasteries of the tradition, Bodong E and Pemo Chöding, were turned into storehouses and later destroyed, but were partially rebuilt in the 1980s.¹⁷ From the 1960s onwards, efforts were made to preserve relics and texts by smuggling them into India and Nepal.¹⁸ The exile community of Porongwas in Kathmandu led the revitalization of the Bodong tradition. They constructed a small monastery in Boudhanath, and had the son of a local merchant recognized as the reincarnation of Lama Dampa Sonam Gyaltzen (bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan, 1312-1375), a famous Sakya scholar ordained in Bodong E monastery and mostly known for his *Clear Mirror of Royal Genealogies* (*rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*). The recognition of the tulku was confirmed by the Dalai Lama in 1996.¹⁹

According to native chronology, Bodong's time roughly corresponds with the 7th cycle (*rab 'byung*) of the Tibetan history (1387-1447), and is inserted in what Venturi calls the "long" 15th century (1361-1517)²⁰, a period described as a time of "cultural blossoming and political unrest."²¹ According to Venturi, following the end of the Yuan-Sakya rule, neither the regime established by Phagmodrupa Changchub Gyaltshen (byang chub rgyal mtshan, 1302-1364) in 1352 nor the ensuing lords of Rinpung were able to exert an effective control over Tibet in its entirety, despite their efforts to revive the empire. And

¹⁵ Diemberger et al. 1997b: 78. Chökyi Dronma also helped compile and edit his corpus of writings. Bodong is considered a pioneer in his defense of female monasticism and of women's practice and study in general. Diemberger 2007: 27, 133, 252.

¹⁶ Significantly, some of the most important Bodong monasteries were transformed into Gelug centers. Diemberger, 2007: 266, 280.

¹⁷ Sudbury 2002: 205-209.

¹⁸ Maher 2017: 109.

¹⁹ After the enthronement in 1997 of Tenzin Thutop Jikdrel Rinpoche (b. 1992), the Porongwa exile community has been very active, under the guidance of Geshe Pema Dorjee, in creating the Bodong Research and Publication Centre (Dharsamsala, 2003), investing in the education of monks in Kathmandu's Porong Gampa and aiding in the recovery of the Bodong curriculum. The academic results of such endeavors may be observed in a PhD dissertation on Bodong's Biography (*An Analytical Study on the Life and Works of Bodong Chokley Namgyal*; unpublished) defended in 2005 by Chok Tenzin Monlam, a student of Geshe Pema Dorjee. Maher 2017: 110-116.

²⁰ Venturi justifies her choice on the significant impact of two events: the dissolution of the Sakya-Mongol alliance (1361) and the expulsion of the Karmapa school from Lhasa by the Gelugpas (1517). Venturi 2017: 98.

²¹ Caumanns and Sernesi 2017.

so, opposing a somewhat dated thesis that defended a proto-nationalist centralizing period,²² she depicts a decentralized scenario with power shifting among polities and increased political rivalry and turmoil.²³ Paradoxically, this instability seemed to favor great cultural achievements thanks to local lords seeking religious legitimation through sponsorship of different scholars and religious projects.²⁴ Bodong was thus exposed to the complex political tensions among highly autonomous neighboring kingdoms and lordships, namely Southern and Northern Latö, Sakya, Porong, and Mangyul Gungthang²⁵. In this regard, Shaeffer eloquently refers to the relationship between the rulers of Gungthang and Bodongpa religious leaders as “a multigenerational affair”.²⁶ It is probably no accident that Bodong's biographer, the aforementioned Amoghasiddhi Jigme Bang, belonged to the ruling family of the Yamdrog region.²⁷

When describing the social structure of the time, it is common to resort to general references to “traditional” or “premodern” Tibet, partially due to the scarce availability of sources and to scholarly research choices. Most approaches to this subject focus on the late Gelugpa period, or rely on anthropological research conducted in specific enclaves or among exiles. This means that the characterization presented here is necessarily “broad”, though hopefully representative enough to understand the type of society with which the studied text deals.²⁸ Leaving aside the potential inaccuracies of projecting Western categories onto a distant reality, as well as the unavoidable political discourse

²² This is the thesis classically defended by Tucci in the late 40s (Tucci 1999 [1949]:23, 38). See also Dreyfus 1994.

²³ Venturi, 2017:100 ff. Also, Diemberger et al. 1997a: 25.

²⁴ Diemberger et al. 1997a: 25 ff.

²⁵ Petech, 1990: 53 ff refers to the autonomy of these polities, also addressed in Diemberger, 2007: 30. For a historical approach specifically to Southern Latö and Mangyul Gungthang, see Everding 1997 & 2000; Everding and Dzungphugpa 2006. In the *History the of Bodong* there are references to the thirteen myriarchies and the reluctance of Bodong to meet local rulers when retired for meditation. Diemberger et al. 1997c 109, 119. As Chok Tenzin Monlam summarizes, his biography, though, describes numerous encounters with “the rulers of Tibet Wang Drakpa Gyaltsen (1374-1432) and Wang Drakpa Jungney (1414- 1445), and many other regional lords such as Trigyal Sonamde (1371-1404) and Tri Lhawang Gyaltsen (1404-1464) of Gungthang, Situ Rabten Kunsang Phag (1389-1442) of Gyalkhartse, Situ Choekyi Rinchen (?-1402) and Situ Lhatsun Kyab of Southern Latoe, Jangpa Namgyal Drakzang (1395-1475) of Northern Latoe, Drungchen Norbu Zangpo of Rinpung, Jigme Bang of Nakartse, Taglung Ngawang Drakpa (1418-1496) of Taglung and many other monastic leaders.” Monlam 2005: 92.

²⁶ Schaeffer 2009: 135.

²⁷ Diemberger, 2007: 80, 334.

²⁸ For a fairly recent overview comparing social classifications for traditional Tibet in contemporary literature, see Fjeld 2005: esp. 22-34.

associated with the post-1959 Chinese regime (“serfdom” and “feudalism” have become terminological mine-fields),²⁹ it seems fair to accept the description of the socio-political structure as an estate-based society typically marked by hereditary membership to superordinate and subordinate groups, an aristocratic control over power and land, households bearing tax and corvée obligations, seignorial jurisdiction, and strong social and political presence of monastic institutions.³⁰ It has been argued that local hereditary lords of fiefdoms (*rdzong*) find their origin precisely in this age, overlapping and finally substituting Mongol-established myriarchs.³¹

Social mobility seems to have been reduced, and in any case, Goldstein argues, to have been more flexible among the status of commoners (*mi ser*) than among the aristocracy (*sger pa*), who monopolized ruling positions as estate lords, ecclesiastical leaders or officials.³² Despite the possibility of commoners and even nomads becoming wealthy, their accession to a high ruling position appears to have been rare, and mostly occurred in the case of successful monastics.³³ Even in this context, chances for social accession were limited, considering that the majority of monks had no access to education, and that hereditary class was still relevant both inside and outside monasteries.³⁴ In this scenario, the uncle-nephew (*khu dbon*) succession lineage played an important role in legitimizing high lamas.³⁵ Bodong Pañchen was no

²⁹ Samuel has argued that the well-known dispute between Goldstein and Miller in the 80s over these terms “refers more to nomenclature than to substance” (Samuel 1995: 117). For a deconstruction attempt, see Monroe Coleman 1998.

³⁰ See extensively: Goldstein, 1971a, 1971b, 1986: 94. See also Saklani 1978.

³¹ Petech 1990: 120.

³² Goldstein 1971a: 524. In general terms, later developments do not seem to offer a more flexible context. Travers’ work on the last period of the Ganden Phodrang administration (1895-1959) still depicts official positions being monopolized by the aristocracy, with a strong hereditary component and overrepresentation of rich high-rank noble families in the highest positions (see Travers 2011: esp. 155-157, 172). Cassinelli and Eckvall do refer to some participation of commoners in certain governmental positions in Sakya for the same period, but mainly due to a conjunctural the scarcity of nobles (Cassinelli and Eckvall 1969: 146-150). For a comparative chart of social hierarchies according to what the author identifies as the Tsang code (first half of the 17th century) and the Dalai lama code (second half of the 17th century), see French 1995: 114.

³³ This seems to have been the case for Sakya, as reported by Cassinelli and Eckvall 1969: 300, 308. For a more general approach, see Jansen 2013.

³⁴ Goldstein 2010: 9; Dreyfus 2003: 51ff; Jansen 2015: 70ff.

³⁵ Monastic succession in the case of celibate practitioners was solved by resorting to a nephew. Dreyfus, 1995: 128. In the words of Caumanns and Sernes: “The fifteenth century marks the transition from transmission based on blood genealogy to one based primarily on religious genealogy of reincarnation. Prior to this date, reincarnated lamas had been rare. Political power had been mostly in the hands of a religious aristocracy ruling over familial and monastic domains” (2017: xiii.). On

exception.³⁶

3. *Bodong's Examination of Fools: accommodating the Sakya Legshe*

Bodong's *nītīśāstra* appears in his encyclopedic opera magna *Dpal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*, commonly known as *De nyid 'dus pa* (*A Compendium of Suchness*), structured along the lines of "Four Entry Gates" (*'jug pa'i sgo bzhi*). The first gate is dedicated to unlearned people (*byis pa*), and is divided into three sections covering body, speech, and mind. According to Bodong's biography, in the section on the mind we find a treatise on worldly affairs (*'jig rten lugs kyi bstan bcos*) addressed to kings, ministers, and common people. Laurant R. Hartley and Chok Tenzin Monlam seem to suggest the existence of a specific *śāstra* for each of these three types of people, which is possible considering that the extant versions of *De nyid 'dus pa* are deemed incomplete, yet the literal wording of the *rnam thar* also allows for the interpretation of a common treatment in a single treatise.³⁷ In any case, the only surviving Bodong *nītīśāstra* today is entitled *Byis pa 'jug pa'i sems kyi bslab pa bstan par lugs kyi bstan bcos blun po brtag pa*, which could be translated as *An Examination of Fools: Nītīśāstra on the Higher Mind Training to Initiate Unlearned [or Immature] People*. The text is preserved in *kham* script in a xylographic reproduction of Bodong's *Collected Works*, published by Tibet House in Delhi (1969-1981) and edited by S.T. Kazi.³⁸ There is

the origins and development of the reincarnation tradition with special reference to the Karmapa, see: Gamble 2018: 50 ff; for a focus on the Dalai Lamas, Van der Kuijp 2005.

³⁶ His uncle-nephew lineage is identified as running from Pang Lotsawa Lodoe Tenpa (1276-1342) to Lochen Jangchub Tsemo (1303-1380) to Lochen Drakpa Gyaltzen (1352-1405) to Bodong Chokley Namgyal (1376-1451). Monlam 2005: 94.

³⁷ Monlam 2005: 97; Hartley, 1997: 69-70. Hartley specifically cites a work entitled *Rgyal po la gtam tu bya ba*, but provides no exact bibliographical reference. The only instance of such wording I could find was a generic allusion to the composition of works of advice to kings along with other genres in folio 88 of the *rnam thar*: "rgyal po la gtam du bya ba la sogs pa'i gzhung du ma dang / rgyal bu dge don gyi rtogs brjod thar lam gsal ba la sogs pa phra rgyas kyi rtson pa yang du ma mdzad (...)." In any case, a work with such a title is not found in the available editions of Bodong's collected works. Remarkably, a legal treatise from Bodong's time (*Khrims yig zhal lce bco lnga pa*, see the conclusion section below) presents three *śāstras* attributed to Nāgārjuna (*Ratnāvalī*, *Rin chen 'phreng ba*; *Prajñāśataka*, *Shes rab brgya pa*; and *Jantupoṣaṇabīṇḍu*, *Skye bo gso ba'i thigs pa*) as being respectively addressed to kings, ministers, and ordinary people, but there seems to be no basis in these texts for such distinctions. The threefold reference might therefore be nothing more than a nominal one, reflecting a common classification scheme of that time.

³⁸ *Encyclopedia Tibetica. The Collected Works of Bo-don Pan-chen Phyogs-las-Rnam-Rgyal*, Volume 9, folios 132-188, edited by S. T. Kazi, Reproduced by Photographic Process by Tibet House, New Delhi, 1970.

also a recent *dbu can* edition published in Beijing (2014-2015), which unfortunately is neither critical nor accurate.³⁹

Bodong's *Examination of Fools* consists of ten chapters (484 verses) preceded by an introductory stanza. Verses are presented in the form of sententiae or aphorisms called *subhāṣita*, "well-said" or "beautifully expressed" maxims. Most are constructed as typical 4-line stanzas (a Tibetan adaptation of Sanskrit *anuṣṭubh* into 7-syllable lines),⁴⁰ in which one or two lines contain the moral or truth, while the other lines illustrate that truth with relevant references.⁴¹ As stated before, it heavily borrows from the *Sakya Legshe*. The relationship between these two texts is complex. It would not be fair to claim that Bodong just "copies" Sakya Paṇḍita's composition and rearranges the headings of the chapters; yet presenting his *nīti* as an inventive reappraisal of the most relevant previous sources would probably be an overstatement. The following chart compares the chapter structure of the two texts, showing Bodong's preference for a dual exposition of opposing elements (learned vs fools, noble vs low, etc).

Chapter Structure Comparison	
<i>An Examination of Fools</i>	<i>Sakya Legshe</i>
1. mkhas pa brtag pa (On learned people)	1. mkhas pa brtag pa (On learned people)
2. blun po brtag pa: (On fools)	2. ya rabs brtag pa (On noble people)
3. ya rabs brtag pa (On noble people)	3. blun po brtag pa: (On fools)
4. ma rabs brtag pa (On vile people)	4. spel ma brtag pa (On opposing characters)
5. spel ma brtag pa (On opposing characters)	5. ngan spyod brtag pa (On bad conduct)
6. rang bzhin brtags pa (On inner nature)	6. rang bzhin brtags pa (On inner nature)

³⁹ Also, the introduction states that the collection is based on the manuscripts preserved in India. Bo dong Paṇ chen Phyogs las rnam rgyal. 2014-2015. byis pa 'jug pa'i sgo las sems kyi bslab pa bstan pa lugs kyi bstan bcos blun po brtag . In *Byis pa 'jug pa'i sgo. Bo dong paṇ chen gyi gsung 'bum chen mo bzhugs so*, Volume ka; pages: 98-137. Hi mā la ya'i Rig mdzod 'tshol bsdu phyogs sgrig khang, Mi rigs dpe skrun khang (民族出版社), Beijing.

⁴⁰ For a detailed philological explanation of this Sanskrit meter see Steiner 1996. The Tibetan adaptation typically uses a "metrical line of three feet with a single synalepha in the last foot," as explained in Beyer 1992: 410.

⁴¹ Sternbach 1981: 99.

7. mi bya brtag pa (On things to be avoided)	7. mi rigs pa'i tshul dpyad pa (Examination of inappropriate conduct)
8. bya bar 'os pa brtag pa (On appropriate behavior)	8. bya ba brtag pa (On appropriate behavior)
9. khyad par gyi lugs bshad pa (Explanation of special principles)	9. chos brtag pa (On Dharma)
10. mthar thug brtag pa (On the final goal)	

Bodong's *rnam thar* indicates that he relied on nine Indian treatises translated in the Tengyur⁴²:

- Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* (*rgyal po la gtam bya ba rin po che'i phreng ba*)⁴³
- Nāgārjuna's *Prajñāsataka*, (*Shes rab brgya pa*)⁴⁴
- Nāgārjuna's *Jantupoṣaṇabindu*, (*Skye bo gso ba'i thigs pa*)⁴⁵
- Nāgārjuna's *Prajñādaṇḍa* (*Shes rab dong bu*)⁴⁶
- Ravigupta's *Gāthakośa* (*Tshigs su bcad pa'i mdzod*)⁴⁷
- Vararuci's *Śatagāthā* (*Tshigs bcad brgya pa*)⁴⁸
- Amoghavarṣa's *Vimalaprasnottara Ratnamālā* (*Dri ma med pa'i dris lan rin po che'i phreng ba*)⁴⁹
- Cāṇakya's *Rājanītiśāstra* (*Tsa na ka'i rgyal po'i lugs kyi bstan bcos*)⁵⁰ and
- Masūrākṣa's *Nītiśāstra* (*Lugs kyi bstan bcos*).⁵¹

However, in the existing version, less than roughly 10% of the verses correlate to just five of the mentioned Indian treatises, while more than 85% of the verses clearly parallel *Sakya Legshe*. The rest (17 stanzas) appear to have no parallels to previous works. Correlations by chapter can be seen in this table (for a detailed, verse-by-verse analysis, see

⁴² *Bo dong pan chen gyi rnam thar*, folio 103. Tengyur texts are referred according to the Derge edition.

⁴³ Toh. no. 4159. English translation in Hopkins 2007.

⁴⁴ Toh. no. 4328. German version and study in Hahn 1990.

⁴⁵ Toh. no. 4330. For a translation from Mongolian into English, Frye 1994.

⁴⁶ Toh. no. 4329. English translation and study in Hahn 2009, 2010, & 2011.

⁴⁷ Toh. no. 4331. See Sternbach 1968; Hahn 2007 & 2008.

⁴⁸ Toh. no. 4332, English version in Norbu 2001.

⁴⁹ Toh. no. 4333, translated in Schiefner 1858.

⁵⁰ Toh. no. 4334. See the philological analysis in Sternbach 1969. See also Hahn 1985: 4.

⁵¹ Toh. no. 4335. English version in Flick 1996.

Appendix 1 below):

<p>Chapter 1 (On learned people): 41 verses</p> <p><i>Shes rab brgya pa (Prajñāśataka):</i> 14 verses <i>Sakya Legshed :</i> 20 verses <i>Skye bo gso ba'i thigs pa (Jantu-poṣaṇabindu):</i> 6 verses No matches: 1</p>	<p>Chapter 6 (On inner nature): 64 verses</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshe :</i> 63 verses No matches: 1</p>
<p>Chapter 2 (On fools): 35 verses</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshe :</i> 35 verses</p>	<p>Chapter 7 (On things to be avoided): 53 verses</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshe :</i> 49 verses <i>Shes rab sdong bu (Prajnādaṇḍa):</i> 1 verse <i>Tshigs su bcad pa brgya pa (Gāthāśataka):</i> 3 verses</p>
<p>Chapter 3 (On gentle people): 41 verses</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshe :</i> 26, verses <i>Shes rab brgya pa (Prajñāśataka):</i> 13 verses <i>Shes rab sdong bu (Prajnādaṇḍa):</i> 1 verse No matches: 1</p>	<p>Chapter 8 (On appropriate behaviour): 91 verses</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshe :</i> 91 verses</p>
<p>Chapter 4 (On low people): 51 verses</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshed:</i> 47 verses <i>Tshigs su bcad pa brgya pa Gāthāśataka (tib):</i> 2 verses No matches: 2</p>	<p>Chapter 9 (special principles/officials): 23 verses</p> <p>Masūrākṣa's <i>Nītiśāstra</i> :11 verses No matches: 12 verses</p>
<p>Chapter 5 (On opposing characters): 43</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshe :</i> 43 verses</p>	<p>Chapter 10 (on the final goal): 41</p> <p><i>Sakya Legshe :</i> 40 verses <i>Shes rab brgya pa (Prajñāśataka):</i> 1 verse</p>

The integration and articulation of verses does not follow a consistent pattern, and greatly varies from chapter to chapter. For example, in chapters 1 and 3 we find verses from different sources interwoven in a balanced fashion, while chapters 5 and 8 contain nothing but *Sakya Legshe* material. Some verses are ordered in the same manner as the parallel source, while other verses are omitted from a certain sequence, or the original order is altered. Regarding the fidelity to the Indic texts or to the *Sakya Legshe*, some verses simply duplicate these sources verbatim. Other verses have missing lines and/or contain small spelling variations and mistakes; or borrow from different prior sources. And of course, there are verses that contain “original” lines and/or slight rephrasing.

In assessing Bodong's work, we must take into account that Indian *nītiśāstra* works are themselves heterogenous amalgams of varied material drawn from multiple sources, some identifiable in other works and some pertaining (sometimes at the same time) to what Sternbach calls “the floating mass of the oral tradition”. Thus, we find elements occurring in epics, *kāvya*s, *purāṇa*s and different *śāstra*s (namely the *Arthaśāstra*). This does not necessarily equate to direct borrowing. And then, of course, there are elements composed by the alleged author and or successively added by different editors or compilers in different collections.⁵² Their authorship is prompted by the ambivalence of both conforming to this alluded “floating” oral lore, and relying on the true or imputed original creation of noted writers. In this regard, a great deal of the critical study of the aforementioned Indian *nīti*s translated into Tibetan has focused on the search of its sources and parallels. And so, dedicated German philologists Anton Schiefner, Ludwik Sternbach and Michael Hahn—the latter went so far as to publish a paper titled “Cry for Help”⁵³ asking others to help him find sources—established many correlations between the verses in these Tibetan translations and different Indian texts, pointing to *Cāṇakya's Sayings* (*Cāṇakyaśāstra*, 10th century) as their leading source.⁵⁴ Following this method, the same hunt for correlations was applied to *Sakya Legshe*. Although the composition has been fiercely defended as “ein überwiegend selbständiges und originelles Werk der tibetischen Literatur”,⁵⁵ scholars have so far identified 43 parallels and assume an overall Indian influence in

⁵² Sternbach 1974:4-7.

⁵³ Hahn 2003.

⁵⁴ See Sternbach 1966, along with the references provided above for the studies on Indian *nīti*s contained in the Tengyur. For an overview, see Pathak 1974 and Hahn 1985.

⁵⁵ Hahn 1984: 60.

themes, metaphors, analogies, and stories.⁵⁶

Contextually, it is important to note that during the 15th century, block printing spread across Tibet⁵⁷ and initiated a key age in the process of textual canonization. In this regard, Smith and Schaeffer attribute Bodong's oeuvre with the quality and significance of a canonical compilation conceived and arranged with pedagogical purposes.⁵⁸ Cabezón points out in one the few works dedicated to this issue that the notion of authorship in such (and any other) cultural and historical context appears as a construct. In classical Tibet, he states, authorship was a collective enterprise involving multiple agents as well as "extreme intertextuality", "a kind of 'promiscuity' that to the modern mind would seem to border plagiarism."⁵⁹

Bodong's *Examination of Fools*, lacking a colophon and preserved in an incomplete and damaged manuscript, leaves room to speculate about the intentions, flaws, and means of the different actors responsible for its creation. Its sheer existence and position within such a body of work shows that *nītiśāstra* was an important part of an ideal educational curriculum, while its choice of sources point to the relevance of various Indic works and of the *Sakya Legshe* to Tibetan culture. Bodong's compositional intent is not only expressed in the complex and heterogeneous correlations mapped above. While Sakya Paṇḍita preferred the label *subhāṣita* (*legs par bshad pa*), Bodong is the first Tibetan author to employ *nītiśāstra* (*lugs kyi bstan bcos*) in its title. Even though both notions tended to converge historically, they refer to different dimensions. *Nītiśāstra* alludes to a treatise on proper behavior often aimed at rulers (regardless of the explicit mention of *rāja*)⁶⁰, common throughout the Indo-European milieu.⁶¹ *Subhāṣitas*, on the other hand, are well-said maxims that are not restricted to matters of proper or moral behavior, potentially including topics as varied as gardening

⁵⁶ Sternbach 1980, 251. There is still controversy over which exact sources were used, namely if the animal stories are borrowed from the *Pañcatantra* or from Buddhist Jatakas and tales found in the Vinayas. Sternbach, 1980: 252; Davenport 2000: 13-17; Jinpa 2018: 9-11. For a theoretical distinction between direct and re-elaborated Indian influence on Tibetan culture, see Seyfort 2004: 328.

⁵⁷ Jackson 1990: 114

⁵⁸ Schaeffer writes of "an alternative Tengyur, containing much of the same material found in the 'orthodox' Tibetan canons yet organized into a coherent course of education" (Schaeffer 2009: 136). Similarly, Smith situates the *De nyid 'dus pa* in the context of canonical compilations, highlighting the fact that it preserves translations purged by Buton (bu ston rin chen) from the *snar thang* Tengyur as one the values of the text (Smith 2001: 181-183).

⁵⁹ Cabezón 2001: 251. See also Steinkellner 2006: 194.

⁶⁰ Cabezón 2017: 244.

⁶¹ See e.g. West 2007: 442- 423; Forstson: 2010, 51-52.

or archery.⁶² In this sense, Bodong's labelling seems to be a conscious choice of genre disambiguation, which is also confirmed by the inclusion of a specific chapter on rulers and officials with no parallels in *Sakya Legshe*, and by his preference for socio-politically loaded terms for the chapter headings. This also jibes with the idea that the author was a competent Sanskritist looking to the ancient Indian tradition of paṇḍits and siddhas as a model.⁶³

If the contemporaneous *Ganden Wise Sayings: A Bouquet of White Lotuses* (*Dge ldan legs bshad padma dkar po'i chun po*), composed by Pañchen Sönam Drakpa (pañ chen bsod nams grags pa, 1478–1554), has been characterized as an “important supplement” to *Sakya Legshe*,⁶⁴ it is probably fair to describe Bodong's *Examination of Fools* as a reception of Sapeñ's text that emphasized its socio-political dimensions.

4. Characters, Rulers, and Qualities: A Socio-political Narrative

As already stated Bodong's text is meant as a pedagogical composition aimed at *byis pa* (immature or unlearned) people. Specifically, the author explains that it is a treatise on worldly affairs (*'jig rten*) covering both the religious and secular systems (*chos dang 'jig rten gyi tshul lugs*).⁶⁵ This characterization, common in Tibetan gnomic texts, here entails the definition of a frame within which advice is given mainly to help individuals pursue their earthly goals, but always in accordance with Dharma, and with the understanding that complete liberation only comes through ultimate spiritual realization.

The structure of the work requires consideration, since one of the defining features of the genre is its compilatory character as a collection of maxims (*saṃgraha*), which entails a complex relationship between the meaning and power of the individual stanzas and the systematizing purposes of the author/compiler. Considering stanzas as discrete units has encouraged both traditional and modern commentarial scholarship to take a correspondingly atomistic approach, providing lengthy philosophical explanations and cultural, historical, and religious references for verses constrained by a defined number of

⁶² Ali 2010: 24; Sternbach 1974: 5.

⁶³ Maher 2017: 106; Monlam 2005: 95.

⁶⁴ Jinpa 2018: 14.

⁶⁵ 1.39. Stanzas shall be quoted referring chapter and number. Jinpa explains the concept as an evolution of the old distinction between *mi chos* (human law) and *lha chos* (divine law) dating to the times of Songsten Gampo (2018: 7-8). A similar duality is found in the reference to the “two laws” (*khriṃs gnyis*), a common way to allude respectively to the secular and ecclesiastical normative domains. See extensively Pirie 2018a.

syllables and often containing obscure references. Systematic readings, though, are much less frequent and present their own challenges. The titles of the chapters do not always reflect their heterogeneous content (e.g. the chapter "On Things to be Avoided" is hardly a list of things to be avoided), and different topics are addressed in a scattered fashion throughout the text. Even more important, it is not unusual to find seemingly contradictory advice on the same issue. For example, should one be kind and help one's enemies, or avoid them at all costs? Both answers seem to be defensible by appeal to different stanzas:

*When people undeceivably provide
All sorts of kind help to their enemies,
These foes will reciprocate undeceivably
And a great bond will be established.⁶⁶*

*With long- time resentful enemies
One must not mingle, even if they turn out friendly.
Even if water itself is boiling so hot,
Does it not put a fire out upon contact?⁶⁷*

In this regard, Sternbach has pointed out that since *subhāṣitas* were intended to be used as witty responses in cultivated conversation, the repertoire needed to make opposing views available according to the context and position of the speaker.⁶⁸ It also needs to be noted that Buddhist normative discourse seems to prefer contextual responses rather than a rigid taxonomy.⁶⁹ The overall picture, when presented as an acritical horizontal sequence lacking an explicit hierarchical structure, may appear to contain all the ingredients for an apprentice lawyer's or ethicist's nightmare. However, a more comprehensive hermeneutic may be attempted. In the first place, instead of sticking to a linear or sequential reading, it seems more fruitful to identify recurring focal topics. In the second place, rather than assuming that apparent contradictions are in principle unsolvable, the analysis of the frequency and strength of certain positions seems to allow the

⁶⁶ 6.37: *mi gang dgra la g.yo med pas// rnam pa kun tu phan btags na// dgra yang de la g.yo med pas// mdud pa dngos po'i che ba yin//.*

⁶⁷ 8.62: *yun ring 'khon pa'i dgra bo dang// mdza' ba byed kyang bsre ma bya// shin tu khol ba'i chu nyid kyang// me dang phrad na mi gsod dam//.*

⁶⁸ Sternbach 1974: 1, 5.

⁶⁹ For "gradualism" (the relevance of social position, capacities, compromise, intention, etc. in moral assessment) and contextualism in Buddhist Ethics, see, e.g., Harvey 2000: 51ff; for the flexibility, temporal adaptability, and casuistic origin of monastic regulations, see Perret 1987, 78; Prebish 2003, 45-74; Gombrich 2009, 173; among others.

identification of some views as general rules and other views as exceptions. This approach permits engaging in the quest for the underlying socio-political discourse of the text, even if it cannot totally exclude diverging readings to the one I shall try to defend. In what follows, Bodong's reception of *Sakya Legshe* is analyzed through four general themes: 1) Qualities and Characters; 2) Merit, Karma, and Wealth; 3) Rulers and Officials; and 4) Soteriology.

4-1. Qualities and Characters

Generally avoiding abstraction and theoretical speculation, the *nīti* is built upon the archetype of exemplary individuals endowed with particular qualities that define them as a "group". Significantly, a work attributed to Sakya Paṇḍita is entitled *A Classification of People*.⁷⁰ As Daub Ali points out for the Indian context, the discourse centers upon the identification and cultivation of virtues (*guṇa* in Skt.; *yon tan* in Tib.), and the avoidance of faults and vices⁷¹. In Bodong's *Examination of Fools*, this dichotomy is framed around the characters of the learned and the noble, on the one hand, and the fool and the vile, on the other hand.⁷²

The learned (*mkhas pa*)⁷³ are those endowed with wisdom (*shes rab*), the highest virtue of all, which brings happiness.⁷⁴ They put a lot of time and effort into their studies, focus only on what is relevant to master, and take good advice from whomever it is offered.⁷⁵ They need not be coerced into acting properly.⁷⁶ They cautiously pursue their goals, think before they act, and work hard on their foundations to benefit themselves and others.⁷⁷ Learned people have the insight to identify and put an end to their own faults and defects, as well as to tell right from wrong in grey situations.⁷⁸ When they are in trouble, they neither go astray nor are deluded, and instead become even sharper.⁷⁹ However, they are able to effectively deceive when

⁷⁰ *skyes bu rnam 'byed bshad pa gzhon nu'I mgul rgyan*, translated and introduced by Cüppers 2004.

⁷¹ Ali 2010: 24-25.

⁷² A collection of verses depicting "good men" vs "villains" in Sanskrit court poetry may be found in sections 37 and 38 respectively of Ingalls 1965.

⁷³ *Mkhas pa* is most frequently used, but other terms include: *blo gros chen po*; *blo dang ldan pa*, or *shes ldan*.

⁷⁴ 1.1, 1.2, 1.20.

⁷⁵ 1.22, 6.24; 1.39; 1.41; 10.22.

⁷⁶ 1.34.

⁷⁷ 1.16, 1.17, 1.8; 1.38, 1.18, 1.19; 1.37.

⁷⁸ 1.23, 1.5, 1.21.

⁷⁹ 1.30, 1.31, 1.24.

necessary, and their wisdom allows them to defeat strong enemies.⁸⁰

A lack of wisdom makes persons similar to ignorant beasts who are subject to other peoples' will and cannot tell right from wrong.⁸¹ These individuals are called fools (*blun po*).⁸² Constantly compared to animals, fools act unreflectively, selfishly, and avariciously.⁸³ They do not develop any understanding or erudition, so giving them Dharma teachings is as pointless as anointing pigs with perfume.⁸⁴ Fools hardly ever succeed, and if they do, it is only by chance; their actions cause only suffering, even when they are trying to help.⁸⁵ They also show a special disregard and unease towards the wise, particularly if they are poor.⁸⁶ Even if they are dependent and needy, they mistreat the very people on whom they depend, and cannot be trusted to comply with responsibilities or to keep their word.⁸⁷

The other positive character is mostly referred as *dam pa* (superior, holy, excellent), although the corresponding chapter heading revealingly uses the term *ya rabs*, meaning "noble" in a socio-political sense.⁸⁸ The virtues of such individuals are appreciated wherever they go in most circumstances.⁸⁹ They always act properly, even in tough contexts, and avoid even the smallest misdeeds.⁹⁰ Noble people look after their peers and others in general, including those who have wronged them and low people who do not reciprocate;⁹¹ so they treat all beings as if they were alike.⁹² Despite their knowledge and insight, they are not arrogant, showing a calm, stable, peaceful, and decorous demeanor.⁹³ These excellent beings are generous and grateful. If they suffer decline, it is just momentary, and they do not lower themselves or retaliate, remaining incorruptible no matter the circumstances.⁹⁴ In

⁸⁰ 1.32, 1.33; 1.3, 1.4, 5.32.

⁸¹ 1.5, 1.11, 2.32

⁸² *blo chung* and *mi mkhas pa* are also used.

⁸³ 2.11, 2.5, 2.8, 2.12.

⁸⁴ 6.52. They will not understand treatises even if they are elegant (10.31). They also follow others with no reason (2.32, 5.17).

⁸⁵ 2.22; 2.25, 2.1, 2.23; 2.3, 2.33, 5.19.

⁸⁶ 2.13, 2.15, 2.16, 2.17; 2,27, 5.15; 2.18; 2.7, 2.21; 2.29.

⁸⁷ 2.31, 5.35; 2.2, 2.10.

⁸⁸ According to the Jäschke dictionary: "*ya rabs*: the higher class of people, noblemen" (1881: 534). Actually, *ya rabs* is only used in two stanzas. Other terms employed are: *che rtags*, *chen po*, and *skye mchog*.

⁸⁹ 3.1, 3.11, 3.12, 3.38.

⁹⁰ 3.6, 3.5.

⁹¹ 3.7, 5.8; 5.12, 5.19, 5.3.

⁹² 3.32, 5.13.

⁹³ 3.34, 3.35; 5.7, 5.43, 3.30, 5.22.

⁹⁴ 3. 17, 5.31; 3. 19, 3.20, 3.23, 3.21.

essence, they are trustworthy people who follow the Dharma.⁹⁵

The character opposed to *ya rabs* is *ma rabs*, a term describing vile and vulgar people but also connoting a low-class status, so much so that Jäschke translates it as “plebeian”.⁹⁶ The description offered in the corresponding chapter centers much upon their cowardice in the battlefield and their deceitful nature and speech.⁹⁷ If they ever show proper behavior, it is either artificial or instigated by harsh treatment (literally by being beaten).⁹⁸ Their rare accomplishments are swiftly destroyed by their own behavior, and yet they blame others for their own faults.⁹⁹ Unlike the noble, vile people are selfish, ungrateful, and regarded as harmful both for themselves and others.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it is pointless and dangerous to offer them help, and one should avoid relying on them at all costs.¹⁰¹

At other times the text takes a less character-based approach and discusses virtues and features in a general fashion. Possessing virtues and doing good deeds is not “all or nothing”; people are endowed with different skills, and it is rare to possess either all or none.¹⁰² In principle, virtues are deemed more important than other social assets like lineage (lineage without proper behavior is meaningless), but they need to be complemented by proper external appearance (proper attire) to garner respect.¹⁰³ There is also an emphasis on the need of exertion, cultivation, and study,¹⁰⁴ along with references to the same virtues characterizing the wise and the noble without making them their exclusive domain.¹⁰⁵ It would then be fair to wonder about the static or dynamic nature of these social characters.

Some stanzas appear to endorse the possibility of prosperity and redemption for vile and low-class individuals. Verse 3.8 reads:

⁹⁵ 3.28.

⁹⁶ Jäschke 1881: 649. Also called: *ngan pa*, *dman pa*, *blo chung*, *g.yo can*, *gzhung ngan*.

⁹⁷ They are characterized as boastful, cowardly, lazy and untrustworthy in battle (4.5, 4.8, 4.9, 4.6, 4.7, 5.37). They use sweet talk for self-interest and their way of speaking is deemed cunning, deceptive, and vulgar (4.13, 4.14, 4.16, 4.18, 4.19, 4.20, 4.41).

⁹⁸ 4.2, 4.11, 4.24.

⁹⁹ 4.3, 4.46, 4.4.

¹⁰⁰ 4.44, 4.47, 7.12.

¹⁰¹ 4.4, 4.38, 8.83.

¹⁰² 6.20, 6.40.

¹⁰³ 3.16; 7.22, 7.26, 6.26.

¹⁰⁴ 3.80, 8.3, 8.73, 7.14., 7.49. *Those intelligent and wealthy, if lazy, / It is hard for them to be prominent* (6.51).

¹⁰⁵ For example, the importance of being calm, modest, and discreet (8.26, 8.27, 8.28, 8.47, 8.48, 8.49) or of examining and removing one’s faults and shortcomings (8.50, 8.51, 8.52) are addressed in the chapter on proper behavior.

*Those who see far into the future,
And have great conscientiousness and patience,
Notable perseverance and diligence,
Can become masters even if they are servants.¹⁰⁶*

However, the best opportunity for improvement relates to associating with the wise and the noble (“*Properly instructed by intelligent people / Even coarse people can excel*”; “*Even the low and weak / Succeed when relying on the great*”),¹⁰⁷ which correspondingly entails the possibility of the virtuous person degenerating when befriending evil people¹⁰⁸. This idea is quickly compromised in verses touting the impossibility of such an ascent or reform¹⁰⁹. It is, in fact, this last notion which prevails in the text. Revealingly, the features of social characters are considered primarily a question of their inner nature or natural tendencies:

*The conduct of both the noble and the ignoble
is different through habituation.
There is no need for bees to be trained
To seek flowers, or for waterfowls to enter the water.¹¹⁰*

So, the noble, like a flame that always blazes upward, and the wise, like a lion that becomes more dangerous when hungry, will not decline regardless of the circumstances¹¹¹. Meanwhile, the ignoble are overwhelmingly represented as helpless; just as charcoal cannot be turned into white no matter how diligently washed, they cannot become wholesome or remedied¹¹². Their nature is such that even if they

¹⁰⁶ *phyi rjes ring du lta ba dang// bag yod pa la bzod sran che// brtson 'grus che zhing brtan la grim// bran g.yog yin yang dpon du gyur//.*

¹⁰⁷ *blo gros ldan pas legs bskyangs nas// skye bo dman pa'ang mchog tu 'gyur//* (8.7); *nyam stobs chung ba'i skye bo yang// chen po gzhan la brten na 'grub//* 8.8.

¹⁰⁸ 8.8; 5.42, 8.88; 5.41. Interaction with friends, enemies, noble, and ignoble people is a recurring theme in the *nīti*, which faces the challenge of reconciling the ideals of the “omnipotence” of the wise and the noble and the Buddhist value of altruism, on one hand, with the apparently equally strong evil nature of low people and contextual pragmatism, on the other.

¹⁰⁹ 4.39, 4.42, 4.35, 4.38. In a commentary to *Sakya Legshe* 178, Khenpo Sangye Tenzin writes: “Evil people, whose nature is dark as coal, may try every way, direct and indirect, to mix with and serve good people, whose nature is fair as a conch shell. How can they can ever succeed? It is impossible because their qualities are totally opposite! No matter how much every sort of transient material means is used to cure death, the type of impermanence unique to living beings, it is never possible to abide carefree, eluding death's inevitability.” Davenport 2010: 131.

¹¹⁰ 5.38: *dam pa dang ni dman pa yi// spyod pa gnyis ka goms pa'i shugs// bung ba me tog 'tshol ba dang// ngang ba chur 'jug bslab mi dgos//.*

¹¹¹ 3.6, 3.20, 1.23.

¹¹² 4.34, 4.46.

possess virtues or knowledge, there are very few chances that these attributes will be beneficial, and so it is pointless to treat these individuals properly.¹¹³

The social model endorsed in the text therefore takes a static stance, nuanced and complemented by the need for cultivation, so mobility and change appear as liminal exceptions. The notion of a clear endorsement of aristocracy, which by now seems more than a suspicion, is further confirmed in the stanza opening chapter 5:

*Even if low-status (dman pa) individuals acquire great wealth
They are still outshined by the [destitute] members of a noble family.
[Just like] the roar of a hungry lion
Makes a monkey fall from the treetop.¹¹⁴*

4-2. Merit, Karma, and Wealth

Virtues are not the only defining elements in the socio-ethical position of individuals. Other factors—like karma, merit, and wealth—also play a role. In effect, a treatise dedicated to worldly affairs and success (*'jig rten*) understandably dedicates much space to riches and resources.

The image of affluence is generally very positive, a clear sign of good karma¹¹⁵. The power that people have depends proportionally, among other things, on their wealth, which also makes their talk sound beautiful and attracts those seeking to prosper.¹¹⁶ The core idea here refers to the need to share and put resources into use. Generosity is both a valued virtue beneficial for oneself and others, and an economic instrument that brings more prosperity.¹¹⁷ Then again, it makes a big difference for such purposes whether the individual is a great being, a low person, or a fool. Wealth in the hands of the latter two only makes them meaner, profits no one, and is bound to lead to their decline.¹¹⁸ In order for resources to be valuable and useful, they need to be properly

¹¹³ 4.51, 4.27, 4.43, 4.12.

¹¹⁴ 5.1: *dman pa longs spyod che na yang// rigs ldan rgud pas zil gyis mnon// bkres pa'i stag gi ngar sgra yis// spre'u shing gi rtse las llung//*

¹¹⁵ Goldstein has pointed out how power and, indirectly, authority were a by-product of wealth, which was directly linked to the hereditary possession of land. Goldstein 1971: 74.

¹¹⁶ 5.29, 6.23, 6.35.

¹¹⁷ 6.36, 6.42, 6.69, 6.64, 8.56, 10.4, 10.5, 10.6, 10.9, 10.12. Correspondingly, sheer accumulation is harmful (7.24), a sign of madness (7.17, 7.28), and leads to ruin (7.37, 7.52, 10.7).

¹¹⁸ See 5.36, 4.1, 6.15 for the low, and 2.26, 5.17, 6.33 for the fool, who is also accused of neglecting his kin (2.28, 2.35).

obtained and utilized by people with merit and good karma.¹¹⁹

In general, merit stands as a necessary element for virtues to display their whole potential and for wealth to abound. What is more,

*Wealth, wisdom, power and such
Aid those with merit.
Yet for those who lack merit,
They act as a cause of destruction.*¹²⁰

This explains why learned people strive to accumulate merit, “the sole cause of prosperity,” and consider their stores of merit before acting.¹²¹ Interestingly, in line with the aristocratic reading proposed above, the text deems accomplishments achieved by the power of merit to be somehow superior to those obtained by perseverance, since the former depends on nothing else.¹²²

The importance of karma in social configuration is also crucial, since “*Any relationship between sentient beings / Is determined by the karma of past deeds*”.¹²³ Although the text states that being rich or poor are contextual dynamic states linked to the far-reaching effects of karma, it swiftly clarifies that those who cannot enjoy their wealth (or profit from teachings) are affected by bad karma, seen as intrinsic to fools.¹²⁴ In the case of the wise, however, karma appears to function mainly as an excuse for their rare deviations from proper conduct.¹²⁵

4-3. Rulers and Officials

Bodong explains that his *nīti* is “specially aimed at kings, ministers and so forths”. Along with profuse references throughout the text (about 30 stanzas), it includes a specific chapter (number nine), dedicated to laying out “special principles” (*khyad par gyi lugs*) for rulers and officials.¹²⁶

The accession to kingship, like any other high position, assumes that the appointee is most probably not ready and therefore is encouraged to perform a self-assessment before undertaking his or her

¹¹⁹ 7.25, 7.36, 5.30, 7.19.

¹²⁰ 7.40: *'byor dang shes rab stobs la sogs// bsod nams ldan la grogs su 'gyur// bsod nams med na de dag kun//bdag nyid brlag pa'i rgyu ru 'gyur//*. Similarly, the very virtues one may possess may ruin oneself if lacking merit (6.4).

¹²¹ 7.41, 7.44.

¹²² 6.43.

¹²³ 6.63.

¹²⁴ 8.91; 7.19, 7.16; 2.30. Also 10.24.

¹²⁵ 7.34.

¹²⁶ 9.1.

duties.¹²⁷ This does not mean that the figure of the ruler completely escapes the rigid subject-based dichotomies seen so far, concretized in the characters of the bad (*ngan pa*)¹²⁸ king and the *dharmarāja* (*chos rgyal*).¹²⁹ Many considerations are also expressed as abstract desirable or undesirable features and attitudes of those in power.

Kings who speak deceitfully, indulge lasciviously in sexual misconduct, oppress and harm their subjects and retinue, and do not generally rule in accordance with Dharma, create fear and mistrust among their subjects as well as the conditions of their own decline¹³⁰. Their misrule is considered a matter of character, which is shown, for example, in the consideration of their benevolence just as likely to benefit others as the knowledge of a charlatan.¹³¹

Just rulers, those who act in accordance with Dharma, are considered rare.¹³² They are endowed with multiple virtues, such as being knowledgeable, powerful before their enemies, respectful, considerate, able to attract wealth and subjects, perseverant, unshakable, and resourceful.¹³³ Above all, they are devoted to compassionately protecting people and clearing away their suffering. This creates a fruitful reciprocal relationship in which subjects fulfil their goals and attain happiness, and kings are granted respect, obedience, and prosperity¹³⁴. This seems to be especially true in the case of the retinue:

*To the extent that the ruler
Governs his retinue with kindness,
To that extent will his retinue and servants [act accordingly];
And so, his glory will constantly be known,
And his very tasks accomplished [by those surrounding him].*¹³⁵

The king's retinue, for their part, are expected to be hard-working, discreet, and pleasant in their speech, and follow instructions diligently¹³⁶.

Allusions to other official positions and roles are scattered

¹²⁷ 6.1.

¹²⁸ Also referred as "evil" (*sdig spyod*).

¹²⁹ The expression, however, is hardly used. See, e.g., 3.3, 3.4.

¹³⁰ 7.4, 7.6; 3.3, 3.4, 4.29, 5.39; 7.1, 4.25.

¹³¹ 4.51.

¹³² 6.7.

¹³³ 6.7, 9.2, 6.30, 3.32.

¹³⁴ 3.32, 3.2, 3.24.

¹³⁵ 3.25: *ji lta ji ltar rje dpon gyis// 'khor la drin gyis bskyangs gyur pa// de lta de ltar 'khor g.yog rnams// de la rtag tu dpal grags rnams// rje dpon nyid kyi bya ba sgrub//*. Also 5.40 explains that Dharma-kings are even kinder to their retinue when encountering enemies.

¹³⁶ 9.20, 9.21, 9.21 or 9.22.

throughout the text, though most are concentrated in chapter nine, starting with ministers (*blon po*): “Intelligent and righteous ministers/ can accomplish all the aims of the king and his people.”¹³⁷ Perfecting the three doors (body, speech, and mind), they impress everyone while staying respectful to the king, and are extremely diligent and skillful in all tasks.¹³⁸ The description of other roles is more succinct, sharing royal trust and respect, and competence in their duties as common features. Bodong considers the figures of battle-wise generals (*dmag dpon*), royal treasurers (*mdzod pa*), assistants (*'dren byed*), seat keepers (*gdan gnyer*), and receivers (*mjal sna*)¹³⁹. Spiritual¹⁴⁰ and intellectual professions, such as scribes (*yi ge pa*), scholars (*klog khan*), or doctors (*sman pa*) are also referred to,¹⁴¹ finally followed by manual laborers like keepers (*srung mkhan*), lady’s guards (*btsun mo'i srung ma*) and, more generally, workers (*las mi*).¹⁴²

Along with this personal quality-based approach, it is interesting to notice more objective descriptions of what fairness represents. In this regard, Bodong’s *Examination of Fools* not only emphasizes the importance of moderate and fair taxation,¹⁴³ it also proposes arguably the first description of ideal adjudication (*yls khrims*) in a Tibetan *nīti*:

*Solid, based upon evidence and then reasonable,
[Decided] with great wisdom, understanding what is right and wrong,
And with proportion and moral determination:
Thus are the rulings to be rendered by the king.*¹⁴⁴

Besides this static picture of evil and just rulers, the fluctuations in power, and the responses to that fluctuation are important for understanding the logic of the social dynamics supported by the treatise. Though evil kings appear irredeemable, just kings may decline when their rule no longer follows the Dharma.¹⁴⁵ Does that entail a breach of

¹³⁷ 6.9.

¹³⁸ 9.3, 9.4.

¹³⁹ 9.11. The stanza is based on *Masūrākṣa* 115, which refers to *pho nya*, “messenger” or “ambassador”, who are “Mentally sharp, speak clearly and are smart,/ Capable of fully gleaning the ideas of others,/ And speak with self-confidence and in accordance with their orders” (*ylid gzhung tshig gsal shes rab ldan// gzhān sems nye bar mtshon nus dang// brtan cing ji skad bsgo bzhin smra// rgyal po'i mjal sna de 'dras bya//*).

¹⁴⁰ 9.6, 9.7, 9.9, 9.10, 9.11.

¹⁴¹ 9.13, 9.14, 9.16.

¹⁴² 9.18, 9.17, 9.19.

¹⁴³ 8.19, 8.20.

¹⁴⁴ 9.15: *brtan cing dpang por rjes su 'os// shes rab che zhing legs nyes rtogs// rgyal pos tshod mkhas snying stobs can//de 'dra ba yis khrims gcod bya//*. The stanza is based upon *Masūrākṣa* 199, which addresses punishment (*chad pa*).

¹⁴⁵ 4.25.

the reciprocal duties between lords and subjects? It certainly does not. There is an unconditional defense of compliance with the law and obedience to the ruler, no matter how aggressive and hostile he may be.¹⁴⁶ The only real consequences derive from cultivating bad karma,¹⁴⁷ but no single passage allows for some sort of criticism or *ius resistendi*, common in Western medieval literature.¹⁴⁸ Revolts, of course, may be a (karmic) result of misrule but never encouraged or justified. Quite the contrary, there is a permeating sense of realism which glorifies strength and effectiveness. Just like a strong man has the capacity of both harming and helping, the text tells us that kings capable of harsh punishments are able to practice generosity too; but should they be determined to harm someone, there is no possible protection.¹⁴⁹ Since kings and subjects need each other to prosper, reciprocal cooperation is in everyone's best interest for practical reasons. This is a pragmatism that values, à la Hobbes, efficacy and presumably stability over other possible considerations.

4-4. Soteriology: the ultimate goal

The last chapter of the treatise is dedicated to *mthar thug* (the ultimate goal, the end of the journey). It revisits the topics of wealth and lineage, and insists that even if one pursues worldly goals, the wise succeed by following the Dharma.¹⁵⁰ Such goals are not, of course, the final end of the Buddhist path, complete liberation. The reader is reminded of the ephemeral nature of life stricken by suffering, and is urged to enter the path as soon as possible and to practice as diligently as possible.¹⁵¹ In this regard, though meditation is deemed an important tool, it needs to be complemented by studying (namely the present treatise itself)

¹⁴⁶ 8.15: *Even if your country's ruler is hostile/ Serve him graciously and stay there.* Also 8.27 discourages people from leaving their dwelling place, which may as well be interpreted as an advice for commoners to stay with their lord.

¹⁴⁷ This is the notion of decline mentioned above. Related to this issue, verse 7.35 (*Sakya Legshe* 304) tells the Puranic story of how the almighty and cruel Asura Valāka (usually referred to as Hiraṇyakaśipu in the *Purāṇas*; see Mani 1975: 314), disrespectful of the law and persecutor of Vishnu's devotees, was finally killed by Vishnu in a man-lion form. This story has been interpreted by the traditional Tibetan commentarial literature as an example of the unavoidable karmic retribution of those who "employ cunning and deceit to disrespectfully violate the two excellent traditions of law in spiritual and worldly affairs." Davenport 2000: 287. See also Jinpa 2018: 171.

¹⁴⁸ For a brief overview of Western philosophical literature, from Ancient Greece to the Enlightenment, defining the tyrant and the legitimate responses to their rule, see Turchetti 2006. The *ius resistendi* is extensively treated in Zancarini & Biet 1999.

¹⁴⁹ 6.8, 7.10.

¹⁵⁰ 10.3 to 10.13; 10.14.

¹⁵¹ 10.15 to 10.18.

and receiving teachings, the contents of which must be implemented, as well as by mastering skillful methods (completion of cause and effect).¹⁵²

And so, drawing from the *Prajñāsataka*, the composition concludes:

*Having resorted to “humanist” dharma (mi yi chos lugs)
The celestial realm is not a long-distance away.
If one climbs the stairway of gods and men,
One will be close to liberation.*¹⁵³

5. Conclusion: Fools and Jackals

Even though it is known that Buddhist literature, namely sutras, presents seemingly political elements, the study of their intent and historical significance is polarized. Interpretations range from parody, humor, and exaltation of monastic renunciation on one hand¹⁵⁴, to enthusiastic readings in democratic terms on the other¹⁵⁵. Although not every scholar defending the political relevance of Buddhism has such a utopian take, many tend to agree that Buddhism stands in opposition to the Brahmanical world. The Buddhist ruler then is as a benevolent king, compassionately governing alleged “equal” subjects, while the cruel Brahmanical king is expected to maintain social class divisions based on divine distinctions and the use of force¹⁵⁶. How do Tibetan Buddhist gnomic compositions fit within this framework?

The interpretation of Tibetan *nītis* often evince an intriguing paradoxical ambivalence. Gnostic compositions are described as a minor genre, as compendia of folk wisdom aimed at uneducated individuals which lack the depth, systematization and sophistication of proper philosophical treatises. These compositions should, it is somehow implied, be taken with a grain of salt, or, in any case, be given marginal value within the vast context of Tibetan scholarly literature. At the same time, their influence on and presence in such socially relevant sources as legal texts has been noted by diverse specialists¹⁵⁷. For

¹⁵² 10.20, 10.21, 10.25; 10.22 to 10.27, 10.33, 10.40; 10.32, 10.34 to 10.36; 10.29.

¹⁵³ 10.41: *mi yi chos lugs longs spyad nas// lha yul bgrad pa thag mi ring// lha dang mi yi them skas la// 'dzeg na thar pa gam na 'dug//*. For an analysis of the isolated character of the expression *mi yi chos lugs*, see Jinpa 2018: 464, note 14.

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Collins is a well-known advocate of this approach. Collins 1993: 317 ff; Collins 1998: 419–423, 480–496.

¹⁵⁵ See, among others, Gokhale 1969: 733; Sharma, 1996: 49ff; Rogers Macy 2010: 38–52; Samdhong Rinpoche 2014.

¹⁵⁶ E.g.: Ghoshal 1968: 62; Tambiah 1976: 20–22; Chakravarti 1996: 152.

¹⁵⁷ This ambivalence may be observed in Van der Kuijp, who has claimed that: “Though the *subhāṣita*, *legs-bshad*, *geyen* or *gnome* cannot be said to belong to the most inspiring genre of the literature of India and Central Asia, it does have a use

example, in the *khirms yig zhal lce bco lnga pa*, a law treatise contemporaneous with Bodong which contains edicts and guidelines for judges, the origin of the laws covering the ten non-virtuous actions (*mi dge ba bcu*) draws from Nāgārjuna's *nītiśāstra* works. And so, some passages clearly coincide with *An Examination of Fools* both in their formal structure and content¹⁵⁸. Although the precise juridical and institutional impact of these legal texts is still not fully understood, *subhāṣitas* are quoted to articulate normative stances along with other Buddhist elements, whose purpose has been described in terms of political legitimacy.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the educational importance and popularity of texts such as *Sakya Legshe* is evident. Therefore, it seems reasonable to accept a *prima facie* case for the socio-political relevance of *nīti* material.

The systematic reading proposed in this paper has shown the social discourse endorsed and legitimized in Bodong's reception of *Sakya Legshe*; both texts were authored by members of the ecclesiastical aristocracy of their time. Far from merely compiling agreeable items of popular wisdom, the narrative of *An Examination of Fools* builds upon the sharp distinction of types of individuals whose prosperity, social position, and value is determined by group membership and (hereditary) wealth, only marginally allowing for ascending social mobility. In this regard, the composition mirrors the social description of pre-modern Tibet, rather than pointing to an emancipatory horizontal model. It deploys a conservative defense of the status quo with, one may even infer, an emphasis on monastic hegemony by monopolization of knowledge, and a pragmatic approach to kingship. It is therefore in line with the anthropological studies that characterize that society in terms of casteism, and that point to the use of karma as a

apart from giving a glimpse of the folk wisdom which it compactly expresses;" their main utility being a suitable material for teaching Classical Tibetan (1986: 620-621). At the same time, he has referred to the presence of such proverbial verses in legal documents (1999: 279-280).

¹⁵⁸ To provide just an example, we may compare the treatment of wealth seen in Bodong with the explanation of the origin of law on covetousness:

*chog shes med pa'i nor 'dod ni/ Those with an insatiable desire of wealth
'dir sdug phyi ma ngan song lhung / Suffer in this life and will fall into a lower realm in the next life.*

chags zhen med pa'i li tsa byi/ Lacking desire and clinging, the licchavī (a devout clan from Vesālī) [nobleman]

bde la phyug pa ngo mtshar che / Was wealthy in happiness. How marvelous!

zhes pa la brten nas/ Relying on such advice,

brnab sems spangs nas chags pa skyung ba'i khirms bcas so/ giving up covetousness, the law on abandoning attachment was defined.

Khirms yig zhal lce bco lnga pa, folio 10. The circumstances and reasons of the creation of this legal treatise are addressed in Pirie 2018b. The author also offers an online translation of fragments of the text at: <http://tibetanlaw.org/texts/mirror>

¹⁵⁹ See Pirie 2017.

deterministic instrument that legitimates the social hierarchy¹⁶⁰.

The social landscape depicted in the text is thus very much in tune with non-Buddhist collections such as the famous *Pañcatantra*, whose animal fables endorse castes and have social determinism as a running theme.¹⁶¹ So even if these Tibetan *nītis* present original elements, like the “dual system”—religious and worldly—they seem to represent more of a continuation of Hindu socio-political ideas than a clear break from them.¹⁶² Bodong’s fools, the claimed target of his treatise, like the jackal who famously tried to pass himself off as a king after acquiring an indigo coating, will eventually reveal their true nature and fail. They cannot win.



Appendix 1

The following chart presents the concordances with *Sakya Lesghe* and Indian *nītiśāstras* translated in the Tengyur. SL: *Sakya Legshe*; PS: *Prajñāśataka*; JP: *Jantupoṣaṇabiṇḍu*; GS: *Gāthāśataka*; PD: *Prajnādaṇḍa*; MS: *Masūrākṣa*. N.M.: no match.

Concordances for Bodong Pañchen’s an <i>Examination of Fools</i>	
Chapter 1 (Learned)	Chapter 6 (Inner nature)
1.1. = PS (4, 5)	6.1 - 6.21= SL (193-213)
1.2. = PS (5, 6)	6.22 = N.M.
1.3. = SL (25)	6.23- 6.27 = SL (214-2.18)
1.4-1.9 = PS (7-12)	6.28 - 6.29 = SL (222-223)
1.10-1.15 = JP (16-21)	6.30 = SL (219)
1.16-1.19 = PS (14-18)	6.31 =SL (221)
1.20 = SL (18)	6.32 = SL (220)
1.21 = SL (20)	6.33- 6.34 = SL (224-225)
1.22= SL (2 lin.24)	6.35 -6.53= SL (227-245)
1.23-1.28= SL (4-9)	6.54- 6.57 = SL (246-249)
1.29 -1.31= SL (12-14)	6.58 -6.64 = SL (250-256)
1.32 = SL (17)	
1.33 = SL (150)	
1.34-1.36= SL (21-23)	
1.37= PS (92, 93)	

¹⁶⁰ E.g. Aziz 1978: esp.53-57; Allen 1978; Gombo 1983, Gombo 1985; and Obeyesekere 2003: 75 ff.

¹⁶¹ See Olivelle 1999: xxxvi-xxxvi and extensively Taylor 2007.

¹⁶² A recent questioning of the Brahmanism /Buddhism dichotomy is developed in McGovern 2018.

1.38-1.39 = SL (27-28) 1.40= N.M. 1.41=SL (30)	
Chapter 2 (Fools) 2.1 = SL (61) 2.2-2.32 = SL (64-94) 2.33 = SL (156) 2.34 = SL (158-159)	Chapter 7 (Inner nature) 7.1 - 7.3= SL (257-259) 7.4 = PD (93) 7.5 - 7.6 = GS (71-72) 7.7 = GS (89) 7.8 - 7.37 = SL (260-289) 7.38 = SL (303) 7.39 - 7.43 = SL (290-294) 7.44 - 7.51= SL (295 -302) 7.53 = SL (319)
Chapter 3 (Nobles) 3.1-3.7= SL (31-37) 3.8- 3.23 = SL (39-54) 3.24 - 3.26= SL (56-58) 3.27 = PS (50) 3.28 = PS (18) 3.29 = PS (26) 3.30 = PS (65) 3.31-3.33 = PS (95-97) 3.34 = PD (91) 3.35 = N.M. 3.36 - 3.40 = PS (38-42) 3.41 = PS (19)	Chapter 8 (Appropriate behavior) 8.1 - 8.15= SL (304-318) 8.16 - 8.39 = SL (320 - 334) 8.17-8.42 = SL (335- 346) 8. 43 = SL (348) 8. 44 = SL (347) 8.45-8.52 = SL (349-356) 8.53-8.58 = SL (358- 3.63) 8.59= SL (366) 8.60 - 8.76 = SL (365 -3.81) 8.77- 8.81 = SL (383-386) 8.82-8.88 = SL (389 - 395) 8.89- 8.91= SL (396- 398)
Chapter 4 (Vile people) 4.1-4.2= SL (59-60) 4.3 -4.4= SL (62-63) 4.5 - 4.9 = SL (95-99) 4.10 = GS (52) 4.11-4.12 = GS (58-59) 4.13 -4.17= SL (145-149) 4.18- 4.22 = SL (151-155) 4.23 -4.24= SL (161-162) 4.25 - 4.27 = SL (163- 165) 4.28 - 4.43 = SL (167-182) 4.44-4.48= SL (187-191) 4.49 = N.M. 4.50 = N. M. 4.51 = SL (226)	Chapter 9 (Special Principles) 9.1-9.4 = N. M. 9.5 = MS (122) 9.6 -9.7= N. M. 9.8= MS (123) 9.9-9.10= N.N. 9.11-9.15= MS (115-119) 9.16= N.M. 9.17-9.18= MS (125-126) 9.19= N.M. 9.20-9.21= MS (100-101) 9.22-9.23= N.M.
Chapter 5 (Opposing characters) 5.1-5.41= SL (102-141)	Chapter 10 (Final goal) 10.1-10.8 = SL (399-406)

5.42- 5.43 = SL (143-144)	10.9-10.12 = SL (408-411) 10.13 - 10.40 = SL (429- 456) 10.41 = PS (98)
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The Body of Skyid shod sprul sku: The Mid-Seventeenth Century Ties between Central Tibet, the Oirat Mongols, and Dgon lung Monastery in Amdo

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he earliest Tibetan history of Amdo¹ that we have—Skal ldan rgya mtsho's 1652 *A mdo'i chos 'byung* (History of the Dharma in Amdo)²—begins with mention of eminent lamas from Central Tibet and, in particular, the visits to Amdo by the Third and Fifth Dalai Lamas. The history of Buddhism in Amdo, at least according to Dge lugs scholars, is deeply indebted to its spiritual exchanges with Central Tibet. This article reveals one of the most important connections between Central Tibet and Amdo in the years immediately preceding and concurrent with the establishment of the Dga' ldan pho brang government in Lhasa: that between the Skyid shod polity of the Lhasa Valley and the influential Monguor monastery of Dgon lung byams pa gling. In the process we will encounter some answers to why Dgon lung became the recipient of so much Oirat Mongol largess and why the Qing emperors, too, gave so much attention to Dgon lung and adjacent monasteries in Amdo.

Dgon lung byams pa gling, or Youning si 佑寧寺

Dgon lung was the largest monastery in Amdo in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, housing 1500 monks in

¹ T. A mdo; sometimes referred to in scholarly literature as “northeastern Tibet,” although the region was and is as much or even more the homeland of various Mongolic groups, not to mention several other ethnic groups.

² Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, “Rje skal ldan rgya mtsho'i gsung las mdo smad a mdo'i phyogs su bstan pa dar tshul gi lo rgyus mdo' bsdus (A Concise History of the Manner in Which the Teachings Arose in the Land of Domé),” in *Mdo smad sgrub brgyud bstan pa'i shing rta ba chen po phyag na pad+mo yab rje bla ma Skal ldan rgya mtho'i gsung 'bum* (Collected Works of Kelden Gyatso), vol. 1, 4 vols., Gangs can skal bzang dpe tshogs 1 ([Lanzhou]: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999), 341–55. A translation of the verse section of this history is found in Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew T. Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds., *Sources of Tibetan Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 587–91.

the 1690s³ and as many as 2400 on the eve of its destruction in 1724.⁴ It grew to this size from its founding in 1604 by a Central Tibetan lama,⁵ when it consisted only of small huts for a hundred monks or so.⁶ By 1644 it was already being referred to as “the foremost among all the commentarial schools in Mdo smad, the Great Monastery of Dgon lung.”⁷ However, its most significant growth in size and influence likely took place in the latter half of the seventeenth century after it received the generous attention of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Gūūshi Khan (the leader of the Khoshud, one of the four “tribes” of the Oirat confederation), and, eventually, the Manchu Qing emperors.

As is now well known, Dgon lung's first homegrown incarnate lama (T. *sprul sku*), the Second Lcang skya Khutugtu (1642-1714),⁸ became the intimate preceptor to the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722) and spent the last two decades of his life serving the imperial Court in Beijing and Dolonnuur.⁹ Lcang skya II's successor, the Third Lcang

³ Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Dga' ldan chos 'byung baiDUrya ser po* (Yellow Beryl History of the Ganden School), ed. Rdo rje rgyal po ([Beijing]: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1998), 340.25.

⁴ A brief note in the *Deb ther rgya mtsho* (*Mdo smad chos 'byung*) recalls how an important lama from Dpa' ris gave extensive offerings to the “more than 2400 monks” at Dgon lung. Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung* [*Deb ther rgya mtsho = Ocean Annals*] (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1982), 117.8. Schram, who may be relying upon Chinese sources, says that Dgon lung had 2500 monks in the lead-up to the Lubsang-Danzin Rebellion. *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Border*, ed. Charles Kevin Stuart (Xining: Plateau Publications, 2006), 283 and 323.

⁵ This was 'On Rgyal sras Chos kyi rgya mtsho (*fl.* 1603-1625).

⁶ Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, “Bshad sgrub bstan pa'i byung gnas chos sde chen po dgon lung byams pa gling gi dkar chag dpyod ldan yid dbang 'gugs pa'i pho nya (The Monastic Chronicle of Gönlung Monastery),” in *Gsung 'bum* (Collected Works), vol. 2 (Lhasa: Zhol New Printery Block, 2000), 646/7b.4-5.

⁷ Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, “Sde ba chos rje Bstan 'dzin blo bzang rgya mtsho'i nram thar dad pa'i sgo 'byed (Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso, 1593-1638),” in *Mdo smad sgrub bryud bstan pa'i shing rta ba chen po phyag na pad+mo yab rje bla ma Skal ldan rgya mtho'i gsung 'bum* (Collected Works of Kelden Gyatso), vol. 1, Gangs can skal bzang dpe tshogs 1 ([Lanzhou]: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999), 248.

⁸ Ngag dbang blo bzan chos ldan.

⁹ Shes rab dar rgyas, *Rje ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan dpal bzang po'i nram par thar pa mu tig 'phreng ba* (Biography of the Glorious Lord Ngakwang Lozang Chöden: A Rosary of Pearls), 1729, 59a.1-2; Klaus Sagaster, *Subud erike. “Ein Rosenkranz aus Perlen.” Die Biographie des 1. Pekinger lCañ skya Khutukhtu Nag dbaṅ blo bzaṅ č'os ldan, verfasst von Nag dbaṅ č'os ldan alias Śes rab dar rgyas* (Subud erike: “A Rosary of Pearls,” [Being] the Biography of the First Beijinger Lcang skya Khutukhtu Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan, written by Ngag dbang chos ldan, alias Shes rab dar rgyas) (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967); Brenton Sullivan,

ska Khutugtu, is even better known and served as the preceptor to the Kangxi Emperor's grandson, the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736-1795). Other lamas of Dgon lung served at the Qing court,¹⁰ served as the personal tutors to the Dalai Lamas,¹¹ and made lasting impacts on Mongolian culture.¹²

The explanation of this rise to what became arguably the most important Dge lugs base outside of Central Tibet¹³ is the wealth and support given to it by the Oirat, that is, those "Western Mongols" who followed Gūūshi Khan to the Tibetan Plateau in 1637 and who aided the Dalai Lama and his school in eliminating its religious and political rivals.¹⁴ The Oirat, and among them the Khoshud in particular, were the dominant power on the Tibetan Plateau up until 1723 when the Qing empire irrevocably changed the power dynamic there. In the eighteenth-century chronicle of Dgon lung by the Third Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802) we read of the patronage conferred upon Dgon lung after the Oirat conquered Tibet:

"Convincing the Mongols to Join Mañjuśrī's Realm: The Diplomacy of the Second Changkya Ngawang Lozang Chöden (1642-1714)," in *Sino-Tibetan Buddhism: Essays in Memory of Monica Esposito*, ed. Ester Bianchi and Weirong Shen, forthcoming.

¹⁰ In particular, Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma.

¹¹ Chu bzang II Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1652-1723) served as the tutor to the Seventh Dalai Lama. Chu bzang III Ngag dbang thub bstan dbang phyug (1725-1796) was asked to be the tutor to the Eighth Dalai Lama, although it appears that he did not actually serve in this position. E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 164; Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 86.24 and 92.26.

¹² This refers to Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor (1704-1788, "Sumba Kanbo"), who is well-known in Mongolia for his works on medicine and astrology, the latter being the basis for the Mongolian calendar. Rachael Griffiths, personal communication, 29 July 2017. Regarding Sumba Kanbo's "New Garden" calendar see Lobsang Yongdan, "A Scholarly Imprint: How Tibetan Astronomers Brought Jesuit Astronomy to Tibet," *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine*, no. 45 (September 11, 2017): 91-117; Svante Janson, "Tibetan Calendar Mathematics" (2007), 41 n. 53, <http://www2.math.uu.se/~svante/papers/calendars/tibet.pdf>.

¹³ Sku 'bum byams pa gling is another contender for this status. Ban Shinichiro makes a strong case for the importance of Rong bo dgon chen for the propagation of the Dge lugs school. BAN Shinichiro, "Darai rama seiken seiritsu zen'ya ni okeru geruku-ha no amudo fukyō: Geruku-ha sōryo depa choje no katsudō o chūshin ni mita (Propagation of Buddhism in Amdo by the dGe lugs pa Sect just before the Establishment of the Dalai-Lama Administration: with Special Reference to the Activities of sDe pa chos rje)," *Nihon chibetto gakkai kaihō* (Report of the Japanese Association for Tibetan Studies) 62 (March 2017): 1-11.

¹⁴ Uyunbili Borjigidai, "The Hoshuud Polity in Khökhnuur (Kokonor)," *Inner Asia* 4 (2002): 181-96.

Long ago the Oirat Zünghar King Baatur Khung-taiji,¹⁵ the Queen Anu,¹⁶ and others were the principal patrons of this great monastery. All the estates up to Ko phu se,¹⁷ or Stag rna Monastery, which was below Ejena,¹⁸ were donated to Dgon lung.¹⁹ Up until the Sino-Oirat conflict of the Water-Hare year [1723], the Zünghar kings repeatedly sent envoys²⁰ and made donations of tea, cash disbursements, horses, salaries, and so on.

After the Holder of the Teachings Dharma-King Güüshi Khan conquered Khalkha Tsogtu, the King of Beri, and so on, from among the communities he brought together under his control he donated as estates of Dgon lung the Monguor²¹ nomadic communities of Dpa' ris, Tsong kha, and the 'Ju lag [River area], up to De Lake of Stong shags and down to the Zhwa khog River. From the Water-Horse year of the eleventh *rab byung* [1642], eight nomadic communities sponsored the Summer Retreat and the Great Prayer Festival of Magical Displays, and the farming communities provided a permanent offering of bread.²² Corvé,²³ taxes,²⁴ and any other needs were met [by them]. In the Fire-Pig year [1647] the Panchen Lama, the Fifth Dalai Lama, and the Holder of the Teachings Dharma-King issued an order making [them] subjects²⁵ [of the monastery] in perpetuity.²⁶

The primary "basin" of Dgon lung's economic capacity thus included the extensive swathe of land stretching from, at a minimum, present-

¹⁵ T. O rod jun gar gyi rgyal po BA thur hung thas ji.

¹⁶ T. Dpon mo A nu. Queen Anu (Mon. Anu-Dara) was the granddaughter of the Khoshud ruler Ochirtu Tsetsen Khan (fl. 1639-1676) and wife to the Zünghar ruler Galdan (b. 1644, r. 1678-1697). Christopher P. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 193.

¹⁷ Tuttle has suggested a very plausible back-transliteration of this monastery: "Gepu si." Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle, *Sources of Tibetan Tradition*, 593.

¹⁸ T. E je na. Tuttle has identified this as Kharakhoto and Etzina.

¹⁹ The *Ocean Annals* gives different spellings for these places, explaining that these Mongol patrons donated "everything above God bu se, also known as Stag rna dgon, which was below E je na." Elsewhere in the *Ocean Annals*, reference is made to a "stag sna dgon," which is probably the same monastery in question. Brag dgon zhabs drung Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 76 and 41.

²⁰ T. *el chi*.

²¹ T. Hor.

²² T. *tsha ra*.

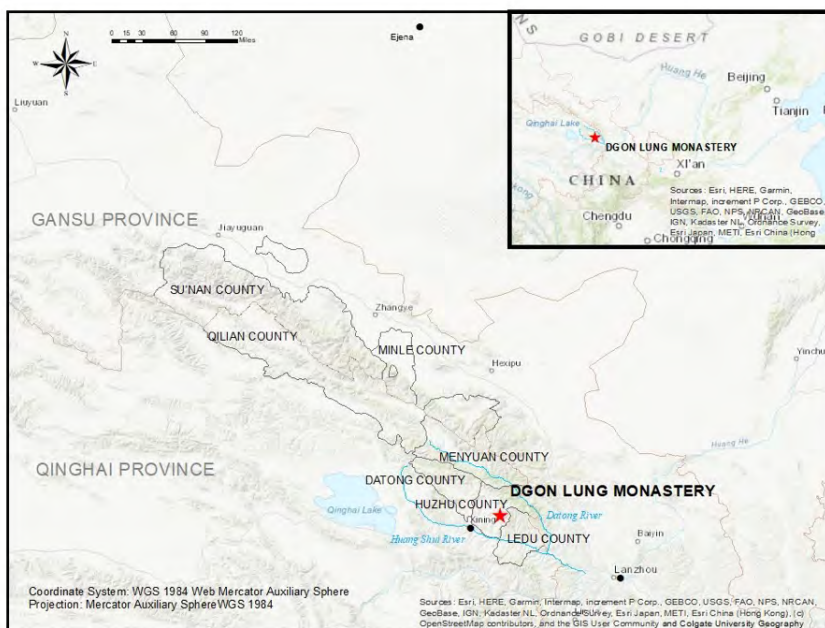
²³ T. *rkang 'gro*.

²⁴ T. *lag 'don gyi khral*.

²⁵ T. *mi ser*.

²⁶ Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, "Dgon lung gi dkar chag," 779/69a.5-779/69b.4.

day Datong County 大通县 (where the Zhwa khog River is located)²⁷ to present-day Ledu County 乐都县 (where Stong shags is located).²⁸ These details give substance to the claim that G \ddot{u} ishi Khan made “all of Dpa’ ris”—the Tibetan name for the region in question—into an estate of Dgon lung.²⁹



This map shows the area around Dgon lung Monastery. Dgon lung probably collected taxes and rents and commanded religious donations from many of the communities in Su'nan, Minle, Qilian, Menyuan, and, especially, Datong, Huzhu, and Ledu Counties. My thanks to Danielle Zarnick (Colgate University) for her help in preparing this map.

- ²⁷ Thu'u bkwan III writes of “the three monasteries of Zhwa bo khog,” Bo khog corresponding to the area of present-day Baoku Township 宝库乡 and the Baoku River 宝库河 in Datong County. Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 734/46b.4. Sum pa mkhan po had several monasteries in “Zhwa Bo khog,” including 'Dul ba bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling of Zhwa khog, Te yan chi dga' ldan rin chen gling of Bo khog, and Bo khog gi lung dkar gyi bkra shis rtse.
- ²⁸ I have not been able to identify the De Lake of Stong shags (Stong shags kyi de'i mtsho), but “Stong shags” corresponds to the area around Stong shags brka shis chos gling, also known as Yangguan si 羊官寺, a major branch monastery of Dgon lung in Shoule Township 寿乐乡, Ledu County.
- ²⁹ Thu'u bkwan III Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, “Dgon lung gi dkar chag,” 687/28a.3.



The main assembly hall and debate courtyard of Stong shags bkra shis chos gling, a branch monastery of Dgon lung's located several valleys to the east from Dgon lung in north-central Ledu County.

Dgon lung's territory of subjects and estates may have stretched even farther to the west and north. As we read above, Dgon lung was also given "all the estates up to Ko phu se, or Stag rna Monastery, which was below Ejena."³⁰ Another sources tells us that a Stag sna

³⁰ Another eighteenth-century source likewise pegs the west-northwestern extent of Dgon lung's territory around what is today the Qinghai-Gansu where Qilian and Su'nan Counties meet. Sum pa mkhan po writes, "a great monastic estate (from Lab tshe kha mang downwards as far as Te [Lake]) was granted to Dgon lung byam pa gling, a great monastery in the center of Dpa' ri." The parentheses indicate marginalia in the blockprint. "Lab tshe kha mang" is said to be the mountain shrine that separates Kökenuur (mtsho sngon) from Amdo. The text is somewhat illegible at this point, so my rendering of "Lake" (mtsho ba) is tentative. Te Lake could refer to the area around Te thung / Ta'i thung (present-day Liancheng 连城), in Yongdeng County 永登县, Gansu Province. Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, "Mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus sogs bkod pa'i tshangs glu gsar snyan," in *Gsung 'bum (Collected Works)*, vol. 2, Sata-pitaka (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975), 983/6a.1. See also Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, *The Annals of Kokonor* [Being a partial translation of the Mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus sogs bkod pa'i tshangs glu gsar snyan zhes bya ba], trans. Ho-Chin Yang, Uralic and Altaic Series 106 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 17 and 38; Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, *Mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus sogs bkod pa'i tshangs glu gsar snyan* (Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982), 14. On Lha tshe kha mang see Ye shes dpal 'byor, Sum pa mkhan po, *PaN+Di ta sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor mchog gi spyod tshul brjod pa sgra*

Monastery belonged to “a land at the confluence of the Shug sha pad stong River and the Upper ‘Ju lag River, the latter river more commonly known today by its Chinese name, Datong River 大通河.³¹ Thus, this monastery was probably located somewhere along the northern border of Qinghai with Gansu Province, perhaps near the county-seat of present-day Qilian County 祁连县, Qinghai.³² The Yugur people who live in the area are said to have been particularly devout, and many of the monasteries there came to be devoted to Dgon lung or its incarnate lama lineages.³³

Dgon lung was not the only controller of properties and peoples in the region. The Monguor “indigenous headman” (Ch. *tusi* 土司) also commanded taxes and labor from certain communities, and some of Dgon lung’s own satellite monasteries grew in size and influence to the point that they even wrested from Dgon lung some of its erstwhile communities.³⁴ Indeed, by the time Thu’u bkwan and others were writing their eighteenth-century histories that tell us about Dgon lung’s estates, Qing authorities had confiscated many of them as punishment for Dgon lung’s participation in the 1723 uprising of Kökenuur Khoshud.³⁵ Nonetheless, it is clear that Dgon

‘dzin bcud len (Autobiography of Sumba Kanbo Yeshé Peljor), Mtsho sngon bod yig gna’ gzhung (Beijing: Krung go’i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 2001), 590–91.

³¹ Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal ‘byor, *The Annals of Kokonor*; Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal ‘byor, *Mtsho sngon gyi lo rgyus sogs bkod pa’i tshangs glu gsar snyan*, 18.

³² Sum pa mkhan po visited Sta rna Monastery on his way to what is today Su’nan County 肃南县, Gansu Province from his hermitage of Lung dkar in present-day Datong County. Along the way, he passed by Lung skya ri khrod and a number of other Yugur monasteries. Ye shes dpal ‘byor, Sum pa mkhan po, *Autobiography of Sumba Kanbo*, 330. On Lung skya Hermitage see Rdor phrug et al., *Krung go’i bod brgyud nang dgon dkar chag las kan su’u glegs bam* (Chronicle of the Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries of China: Kansu Volume), 711–12.

³³ On the Yugur people’s religiosity, see Ye shes dpal ‘byor, Sum pa mkhan po, *Autobiography of Sumba Kanbo*, 332. For an example of Dgon lung’s ties to the region, see Rdor phrug et al., *Krung go’i bod brgyud nang dgon dkar chag las kan su’u glegs bam* (Chronicle of the Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries of China: Kansu Volume), 694.

³⁴ Thu’u bkwan III accuses Btsan po Don grub rgya mtsho (1613-1665) of stealing resources from Dgon lung to fund his own new monastery, Gser khog dga’ ldan dam chos gling. Thu’u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, “Dgon lung gi dkar chag,” 69b.6. This would explain why the *bca’ yig* of Dgon lung’s supposed branch monastery known as Kan chen dgon (a manuscript held at today’s Kan chen dgon) was in fact composed by the high lama of Gser khog rather than a lama from Dgon lung. Ngag dbang ‘phrin las rgya mtsho, Smin grol III, “Theg chen thar pa gling gi bca’ yig mu tig gi phreng mdzes (The Charter of [Kanchen] Thekchen Tharpa Ling: the Beautiful Pearl Necklace)” (1758).

³⁵ Thu’u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, “Dgon lung gi dkar chag,” 70a.6. Kökenuur is the Mongolian name for the giant lake on the northeastern corner of

lung was a great beneficiary of much Oirat largess, making it one of the most powerful monastic institutions in Amdo in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Why was this the case?

There are a number of factors that may have contributed to Dgon lung's position on the receiving end of Oirat patronage.

1. Location: Dgon lung is strategically located along one of the two principal routes for lamas and envoys traveling between the Tibetan Plateau and Inner Mongolia and Beijing farther east: the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Third Pañchen Lama (1738-1780), and several other lamas followed the Huangshui 湟水 (also known as the Tsong chu, or Tsong River) and peregrinated north through Dpa' ris en route to or upon returning from Beijing.

2. The legacy of Mongol empire in Dpa' ris and at Dgon lung: the Monguor people (Ch. Tuzu 土族; T. Hor) identify themselves as descendants of Mongols who initially settled the region in the thirteenth-century as part of or in the wake of Köden Khan's (fl. 1235-1247; second son of Ögedei Khan) army and the establishment of the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). Köden, of course, is famously remembered for having invited the scholar-monk Sa skya Pañḍita (1182-1251) to Liangzhou 涼州 (present-day Wuwei 武威, Gansu Province) and establishing a priest-patron (*mchod yon*) relationship with him. This relationship was continued and sanctified by Sa skya Pañḍita's nephew, 'Phags pa Lama (1235-1280), and Qubilai Khan (r. 1260-1294), giving rise to the iconic priest-patron relationship against which later figures would measure themselves. Stories still abound today regarding the role played by these figures in establishing new monasteries throughout what is today Gansu Province and far northeastern Qinghai.

One such monastery is Dgon lung. To be exact, it is the legendary predecessor to Dgon lung that is said to have been built in connection with Köden.³⁶ Moreover, Köden or some other Mongol ruler from this period is believed to be the protector deity of Dgon lung Monastery.³⁷ Thus, the location of the later Dgon lung Monastery has intimate connections with the early Mongol settlers of the region. The Tibetan scholar Rin chen bkra shis, has even made the interesting observation that the location of the Yuan Western Pacification Prince 西平王, whose feudal investment included Tibet and the Tibetan

the Tibetan Plateau, referred to in Chinese as Qinghai or Qinghai hu 青海湖 and in Tibetan as Mtsho sngon po. In Tibetan sources, the region surrounding the lake where many of the Oirat had settled is also referred to as "Kökenuur."

³⁶ Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 643/6a.5 and 645/7a.5-646/7b.2.

³⁷ Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 645/7a.5-646/7b.2.

borderlands, was Gsum mdo (松多), which may correspond to the Gsum mdo that is just a half-day's walk away from Dgon lung.³⁸ Thus, it might very well have been the Western Pacification Prince A'urughchi (Qubilai's son) who is apotheosized as Dgon lung's protector.³⁹ Such historical evidence⁴⁰ as well as linguistic analysis (the Monguor of Dpa' ris is a Mongolic language)⁴¹ all point to considerable connections between thirteenth-century Mongols and the later Monguors who lived in Dpa'ris.

3. Polylinguism: Situated as they were between Tibet, Mongolia, China, as well as various ethnic groups (such as the Turkic Salars), Monguors were multilingual. Indeed, as Gerald Roche has argued, "the most multilingual people in Tibet would ... have been monks from farming regions whose first language was a minority language, whereas those with the least broad repertoire would have been pastoralist women [due, of course, to the limited economic opportunities afforded them] who spoke a Tibetic language as their first language." Perhaps the most famous Monguor, Lcang skya III Rol pa'i rdo rje,⁴² helped to oversee the translation of the Buddhist canon into both Mongolian and Manchu.⁴³ Forced, as they were, into

³⁸ Renqingzhaxi, "Xiping wangfu jindi kao 西平王府今地考 (Investigation of the Present-day Site of the Palace of the Western Pacification Prince)," in *Renqingzhaxi Zangxue yanjiu wenji* 仁庆扎西藏学研究文集 (Collected Writings of Research in Tibetan Studies by Rinchen Trashi) (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1989), 74–80. Originally published in *Qinghai shehui kexue* (1986), no. 6. I would like to sincerely thank Li Shenghua for introducing me to this work and for taking the time to talk with me about these issues. Gsum mdo is also the site of Chos bzang Hermitage, a branch of Dgon lung's Thu'u bkwan lama.

³⁹ This, anyway, is the conjecture of the Monguor scholar Li Keyu 李克郁. Personal communication May 11 and May 12, 2011. For more on A'urughchi see also Herbert Franke and John D. Langlois, "Tibetans in Yüan China," in *China under Mongol Rule* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 300.

⁴⁰ Extant genealogies of the ruling Monguor clans (*jiapu* 家譜) and historical records of the *tusi* of Amdo also claim Monguor-Mongol connections.

⁴¹ Keith W. Slater, *A Grammar of Mangghuer: A Mongolic Language of China's Qinghai-Gansu Sprachbund* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 9–10.

⁴² Lcang skya's father was a nobleman in the Chi kya Monguor clan. Ngag dbang thub bstan dbang phyug, chu bzang 03 (1725-1796), *Ñi ma'i 'od zer / Naran-u gerel: Die Biographie des 2. Pekinger Lañ skya-Qutuqtu Rol pa'i rdo rje (1717-1786). Herausgegeben, eingeleitet und zusammengefaßt* (The Sun's Rays of Light: The Biography of the Second Beijing Changkya Khutugtu Rolpé Dorjé, Edited, Introduced, and Summarized), ed. and trans. Hans-Rainer Kämpfe, *Monumenta Tibetica historica*, 2 (1) (Sankt Augustin: Wissenschaftsverlag, 1976), 17. The Western Qi Tusi line was descended directly from Chinggis Khan. The Eastern Qi Tusi is descended from a decorated Mongol commander who submitted to the Ming.

⁴³ Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 134.

being conversant in other languages and dialects, the educated, Monguor lamas were well positioned to act as middlemen between the various political actors in Inner Asia.

3. The presence of Central Tibetan incarnate lamas at Dgon lung: in particular, the Skyid shod polity of the Lhasa valley and one of its representatives, the Skyid shod sprul sku Bstan 'dzin blo bzang rgya mtsho (1593-1638), played an important role in connecting Dgon lung to the important affairs of Central Tibet and thus to the Oirat. This shall be the focus of this paper.

4. The possible contribution of Monguor troops of Dpa' ris to Gūüshi Khan's conquest of Tibet. More shall be said about this below.

The Pivot between Central Tibet, Amdo, and the Oirats: Sde ba chos rje and Chu bzang Lama

Thu'u bkwan III's eighteenth-century chronicle of Dgon lung portrays the monastery as belonging to an elite group of monasteries founded by the Dalai Lamas:

The Victor Dge 'dun grub [the First Dalai Lama] established Bkra shis lhun po. The [Second Dalai Lama] Omniscient One Dge 'dun rgya mtsho established Chos 'khor rgyal [i.e. Rgyal me tog]. The [Third Dalai Lama] Victor Bsod nams rgya mtsho established Li thang thub chen byams pa gling. The Great Fifth established over thirteen monasteries. The [Seventh Dalai Lama] King of Victors Skal bzang rgya mtsho established Mgar thar Monastery. Apart from these, the fourth King of Victors, Yon tan rgya mtsho, is the one who laid the foundation for this great monastery of Dgon lung byams pa gling.

In addition, lamas representing Dgon lung—such as the First Lcang skya Grags pa 'od zer (d. 1641), 'Dan ma grub chen Tshul khrim rgya mtsho (1587-1664), and Ka ring dka' bcu Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (Dgon lung's abbot from 1612-1617)—would make their way to Central Tibet where they earned outstanding reputations.⁴⁴ Perhaps for these reasons or for the factors mentioned above (such as the

⁴⁴ Per Nyi ma 'dzin Ngag dbang legs bshad rgya mtsho, *Bshad sgrub bstan pa'i 'byung gnas chos sde chen po dgon lung byams pa gling gi gdan rabs zur rgyan g.yas 'khyil dung gi sgra dbyangs* (The Place Where Originated Expounding on and Practicing the Dharma: An Addition to the [Record of] the Succession of Abbots of the Great Religious Establishment Gönlung Jampa Ling, the Sound of the Clockwise-turning Conch Shell) (n.p.: s.n., n.d.), 137–39. For a study of 'Dan ma grub chen, see Brenton Sullivan, "The First Generation of Dge Lugs Evangelists in Amdo: The Case of 'Dan Ma Tshul Khriims Rgya Mtsho (1578-1663/65)," *Zentralasiatische Studien*, Under review.

monastery's Mongolic pedigree), Dgon lung soon attracted the attention of other major Geluk hierarchs from Central Tibet.⁴⁵ These connections would prove to be decisive for Tibet's future in general and Dgon lung's future in particular. Chief among the Central Tibetan hierarchs who visited and later officiated at Dgon lung are Chu bzang Rnam rgyal dpal 'byor (1578-1651) and the aforementioned Skyid shod sprul sku, otherwise known as Sde ba chos rje ("Governor Dharma Lord").

Chu bzang Lama would serve as the abbot of Dgon lung from 1639 to 1648, and he became the first generation of the important Chu bzang incarnation lineage based at Dgon lung.⁴⁶ Years earlier, however, he first attained recognition when his teacher, the Fourth Pañchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal tshan (1567-1662) sent him to debate against Sa skya and Bka' brgyud monks before the King of Gtsang. He soundly defeated them, we are told, for which the Fifth Dalai Lama's regent, Sde srid Bsod rnam chos 'phel (1595-1657), as well as Sde ba chos rje's brother, Yid bzhin nor bu (1589-after 1647), rewarded him.⁴⁷ Around that same time, two figures from the vicinity of Dgon lung came before the Fourth Dalai Lama to request a suitable lama to provide teachings for their monastery back in northeastern Tibet.⁴⁸ The first individual chosen by the Dalai Lama was unable to go,⁴⁹ and so Chu bzang was sent.⁵⁰ Chu bzang, moreover, had

⁴⁵ In a recent article IKEJIRI Yōko argues that Gro tshang dgon (Ch. Qutan si 瞿曇寺) and Thang ring dgon were networked with Dgon lung and actually provided Dgon lung with its first generation of administrative and scholastic leadership. IKEJIRI Yōko, "Nai-hisho-in Mongoru-bun Tou-an ni miru 17 seiki amudo tōbu no geruku-ha sho jīn to shinchō (Early contacts between the Gelug monasteries in eastern Amdo and the Qing dynasty from the perspective of *Čing ulus-un dotuyadu narin bicig-un yamun-u mongyul dangsa*," Chibetto Himaraya bunmei no rekishiteki tenkai (The Historical Development of Tibeto-Himalayan Civilization), 2018, 55–56.

⁴⁶ His successor, Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan was the teacher to the Seventh Dalai Lama, who returned the favor by bestowing gifts, titles, and teachings on the third Chu bzang bla ma.

⁴⁷ Thu'u bkwan III Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, "Dgon lung gi dkar chag," 685/27a.3-4.

⁴⁸ The figures are said to come from Han bstag lung. This might be the practice center near Sku 'bum that the Fifth Dalai Lama names Dga' ldan skyed. Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 86.5 and 169. Cf. Zhiguanba•Gongquehudanbaraoji, *Anduo zhengjiao shi* <i>安多政教史 (Political and Religious History of Amdo; Mdo smad chos 'byung)</i>, trans. Wu Jun, Mao Jizu, and Ma Shilin, Gansu sheng shaoshu minzu guji congshu (Lanzhou: Gansu minzu chubanshe, 1989), 88 n. 2.

⁴⁹ The other individual was Lam pa rab 'byams pa Bsod nams grags pa. For a brief biography of this figure, see Bstan pa bstan 'dzin, ed., *Chos sde chen po dpal ldan 'bras spungs sgo mang grwa tshang gi chos 'byung dung g.yas su 'khyil ba'i sgra dbyangs* (History of the Dharma at Gomang College of Drepung Monastery, the

attained the rank of *gling bsre*⁵¹ at 'Bras spungs Monastery's Sgo Gomang College. Chu bzang also served as the highest ranking disciplinarian at Sgo mang College, and he furthered his studies at Lhasa's Lower Tantric College.

Sde ba chos rje, or Skyid shod sprul sku, was a scion of the Skyid shod family, one of the most powerful and important families in Central Tibet in the seventeenth century. The connections that Dgon lung shared with the Skyid shod have been occluded by the fact that the Skyid shod polity itself has been overlooked in most accounts of Tibetan history.⁵² Four recent studies have corrected this and revealed the crucial historical roles played by this family.⁵³ It is said that the Skyid shod Lord (*nang so*) Don grub rgyal po (ca. 1525-68) "was the principal patron of the Dge lugs generally and specifically of the Second Lord of Victors [i.e. the Second Dalai Lama]. Not only that, but he also venerated the Third Lord of Victors [i.e. the Third Dalai Lama] as his root lama."⁵⁴ His younger brother, Bkra shis rab brtan (1531-89), was the primary patron for the new Dga' ldan pho brang palace built at 'Bras spungs Monastery after the Third Dalai Lama had departed for Mongolia.⁵⁵ Bkra shis rab brtan's son (or, perhaps, nephew) was G.yul rgyal nor bu (d. 1607), the father of Sde ba chos rje. Altogether, the Skyid shod governors are said to have ruled over the holy land of Skyid shod and its subjects for ninety-four or ninety-

Rightward-Turning Sound), vol. 1 (Karnataka, India: Dpal ldan 'bras spungs bkra shis sgo mang dpe mdzod khang, 2003), 566–70.

⁵⁰ Incidentally, this is a common trope in the *Deb ther rgya mtsho* (the *Mdo smad chos 'byung*) and other histories from Amdo: an envoy travels to Central Tibet to request a lama to help back in Amdo. Such a lama is then dispatched and helps to spur the development of Buddhism in Amdo.

⁵¹ A monastery-wide scholastic rank.

⁵² Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor (On the Kyishö Governors)," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 2 (August 2006): 1–48.

⁵³ Per K. Sørensen and Guntram Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain: Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet: A Study of Tshal Gung-Thang* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007); Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor"; Peter Schwiieger, "A Nearly-Forgotten Dge lugs pa Incarnation Line as Manorial Lord in Bkra shis ljongs, Central Tibet," in *Tibetans Who Escaped the Historian's Net: Studies in the Social History of Tibetan Societies*, ed. Charles Ramble, Peter Schwiieger, and Alice Travers (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2013), 89–109; BAN Shinichiro, "Darai rama seiken seiritsu zen'ya ni okeru geruku-ha no amudo fukyō: Geruku-ha sōryo depa choje no katsudō o chūshin ni mita."

⁵⁴ Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor," 15.

⁵⁵ Yon tan rgya mtsho, 4 and 18; Sørensen and Hazod give most of the credit instead to the consort of the Phag gru gong ma, Sangs rgyas dpal 'dzom ma (ca. 1485-1555/61?). Sørensen and Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, 53.

five years, from 1518-1612.⁵⁶ Dgon lung's ties with this family leant it a degree of legitimacy that was recognized by Güüshi Khan and the Khoshud of Kökenuur. And when the fortunes of the Skyid shod governors waned, so faded the history of Dgon lung's ties to the family.

Sde ba chos rje was born in 1593, the fourth son of the Kyid shod Governor G.yul rgyal nor bu. From an early age he was said to have been the rebirth of Sgom sde thams cad mkhyen pa Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1532-92). The retainers of the late Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan began to send invitations to the young boy, which infuriated his father, the governor. The governor then issued a law prohibiting anyone from proclaiming that his son was the rebirth of Nam mkha' rgya mtshan. Apparently he intended for his second son, Yid bzhin nor bu, to renounce and not his youngest.⁵⁷

Eventually, however, his father relented, and Sde ba chos rje renounced at the Second Dalai Lama's monastery of Chos 'khor rgyal. This signals a fortuitous connection with the future Dgon lung Monastery, since both monasteries are said to be located in a "White Hidden Land" (*sba yul dkar po'i ljongs*),⁵⁸ and also because Dgon lung's founder studied at and served as the abbot of one of Chos 'khor rgyal colleges.⁵⁹ Having fully embraced his youngest son's renunciation, Sde ba chos rje's father even built a seminary (*chos grwa*) for his son to pursue his monastic studies.⁶⁰ Sde ba chos rje's primary teacher throughout his lifetime was the Fourth Pañchen

⁵⁶ Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor," 5-6; Sørensen and Hazod put the outright hegemony of the Skyid shod governors from the 1550s to 1620/25. Sørensen and Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, 49.

⁵⁷ Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor," 181.

⁵⁸ Rgyal sras Blo bzang bstan 'dzin, "Sbas yul dkar po'i ljongs kyi gnas bstod ka la ping ka'i sgra dbyangs (Praises of the Place of the Hidden White Land: The Song of the Cuckoo)," in *Bshad sgrub bstan pa'i byung gnas chos sde chen po dgon lung byams pa gling gi dkar chag dpyod ldan yid dbang 'gugs pa'i pho nya* (Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1988), 157-73; Franz-Karl Ehrhard, "A 'Hidden Land' at the Border of 'Ol-Kha and Dvags-Po," ed. Roberto Vitali, *The Tibet Journal: The Earth Ox Papers: Proceedings of the International Seminar on Tibetan and Himalayan Studies, Dharamsala, 2009* 34-35, no. 3-4 and 1-2 (Autumn through Summer 2010 2009): 493-522.

⁵⁹ This is Dwags po grwa tshang. Yon tan rgya mtsho, *Dge ldan chos 'byung gser gyi mchod sdong 'bar ba* (The History of the Dharma of the Virtuous Ones [i.e. the Gelukpa]: The Radiant Golden Stupa) (Paris: Yonten Gyatso, 1994), 639; Bstan pa bstan 'dzin, *'Bras spungs sgo mang chos 'byung*, 1:518 and 519; The Second Dalai Lama is said to have invited the Dwags po College to settle at Chos 'khor rgyal in 1509. Nawang L. Nornang, "Monastic Organization and Economy at Dwags-Po Bshad-Grub-Gling," in *Reflections on Tibetan Culture: Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie*, ed. Lawrence Epstein and Richard F. Sherburne, vol. 12, *Studies in Asian Thought and Religion* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 249.

⁶⁰ Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor," 38.

Lama, and it was under him that he took his full monastic vows at the age of twenty-three.⁶¹ He also received teachings from the Fourth Dalai Lama on numerous occasions. Sde ba chos rje's scholastic abilities were well-regarded, we are told, so much so that he was placed on a throne equal in height to the abbot (*mkhan chen pa*) of the important monastic center of Ngam ring dga' ldan byams pa gling. He performed in the "debate circuit" (*grwa skor*) at the monastery and further secured his status as an able philosopher and debater.⁶²

The fortunes of the Skyid shod governors and the Dge lugs school that they supported took a fateful turn in 1618. Violence between Dbus and Gtsang began to escalate in 1605, and in 1618 warfare broke out, leading Sde ba chos rje to flee northward along with his oldest brother, the Governor Bsod nam rgyal mtshan. They took with them on their northward journey the statue known as the Ārya Lokeśvara (T. 'phags pa lo ke shwa ra, "Noble Lord of the World"), one of the most important and venerated icons in Tibet.⁶³ Sde ba chos rje would spend the last twenty years of his life in Amdo.

Upon arriving in Amdo, both Sde ba chos rje and Chu bzang Lama played similar roles: they served as the lamas to successive Mongol rulers of the region. Sde ba chos rje was well received by the leader of the Tümed Mongols, Kholoche, and his royal retainers, to whom he gave numerous teachings.⁶⁴ He also exchanged teachings and empowerments with the important Stong 'khor III Rgyal ba rgya mtsho (1588-1639) from Khams.⁶⁵ Later, when Kholoche passed away, these two presided together over the funeral.⁶⁶ Later, in 1632 or 1634,

⁶¹ Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, "Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso," 192; 182, 188, 191, 193, 195, *passim*.

⁶² Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, 192-93.

⁶³ Per K. Sørensen, "Restless Relic: The Ārya Lokeśvara Icon in Tibet: Symbol of Power, Legitimacy and pawn for Patronage," in *Pramāṇakṛtiḥ. Papers Dedicated to Ernst Steinkellner on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday.*, ed. B. Kellner et al., Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde, 70.2, 2007, 869 and 871 n. 25.

⁶⁴ A biography of Kholoche can be found in Qiu Jiushi 瞿九思, *Wanli wu gong lu* 萬曆武功錄 (Record of Military Activities Published in the Wanli Era), Shiliao si bian 史料四編 17, 1972. Cited in OTOSAKA Tomoko 乙坂智子, "A Study of Hong-Hua-Si Temple Regarding the Relationship between the Dge-lugs-pa and the Ming Dynasty," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 52 (1994): 88.

⁶⁵ His predecessor played a crucial role in the early transmission of the Dge lugs school to Inner Mongolia. Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp and Gray Tuttle, "Altan Qayan (1507-1582) of the Tümed Mongols and the Stag lung Abbot Kun dga' bkra shis rgyal mtshan (1575-1635)," ed. Roberto Vitali, *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, Trails of the Tibetan Tradition: Papers for Elliot Sperling, 31 (February 2015): 471.

⁶⁶ Many sources talk of the defeat of Kholoche at the hands of Tsogtu Khan. The context of Sde ba chos rje's biography, however, suggests that Kholoche died much earlier, in 1621. More research is needed. Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, "Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso," 200. Sde ba

the Khalkha Mongol Tsogtu Taiji (d. 1637) arrived in Kökenuur with his army and soundly defeated the Tümed.⁶⁷ Sde ba chos rje was in Kökenuur at the time, and he fled in fear back east to Bya khyung Monastery. It was known that Tsogtu hated “the Teachings and the followers” of the Dge lugs school,⁶⁸ and Sde ba chos rje and company are said to have escaped the violence thanks to Sde ba chos rje’s spiritual powers.

Sde ba chos rje’s reputation preceded him, however, and Tsogtu Taiji soon invited the master to return to Kökenuur.

... When this Great Lord was residing upon the throne [arranged for him by Tsogtu Taiji], he was wearing atop his head a yellow hat. It is said that Tsogtu remarked, “Lama, seeing you my faith grows. However, seeing this hat I am angry [lit. the mind is sick].” Even though he did not ask for a dharma connection,⁶⁹ he asked numerous religious questions. [Sde ba chos rje] answered them without difficulty. Because [Dewa Chöjé] was without partiality for different religious tenets [*grub mtha’*] and so forth, [Tsogtu’s] faith [in him] grew, and he gave [him] immense offerings and service. In addition, the renunciants of the Sa skya, ‘Brug pa, and Karma also came to have great faith [in Sde ba chos rje]. In particular, the follower of the Karma pa called Zhwa dmar rab ‘byams pa discreetly listened to profound teachings from this Lord, and he also presented [Sde ba chos rje] with a Cornucopia of material offerings. He also asked Tsogtu for numerous famous Tibetan and Oirat patrons, which he thoroughly provided. Also, Tsogtu’s younger son⁷⁰ asked for a dharma connection.⁷¹

chos rje also officiated at the funeral of Kholoche’s son, Lhatsün the Elder (lha btsun che ba) Bstan skyong blo bzang rgya mtsho, in 1631.

⁶⁷ Various sources give either 1632 or 1634. Bilig says Tsogtu Khan arrived in Qinghai in 1634. Oyunbilig Borjigidai 乌云毕力格, “Zhuoketu taiji de lishi yu lishi jiyi 绰克图台吉的历史与历史记忆 (History and Historical Reflections on Tsogtu Taiji),” in *Shiqi shiji Menggu shilun kao* 十七世纪蒙古史论考 (Research on Mongols of the Seventeenth Century), ed. Oyunbilig Borjigidai 乌云毕力格 (Huhehaote shi 呼和浩特市: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe 内蒙古人民出版社, 2009), 243.

⁶⁸ For more on Tsogtu Khan see Oyunbilig Borjigidai 乌云毕力格, “Zhuoketu taiji de lishi yu lishi jiyi.”

⁶⁹ T. chos ‘brel.

⁷⁰ BAN suggests that this might be Asaral erke dayičin. “Darai rama seiken seiritsu zen’ya ni okeru geruku-ha no amudo fukyō: Geruku-ha sōryo depa choje no katsudō o chūshin ni mita,” 5.

⁷¹ Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, “Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso,” 222.

Chu bzang Lama's story is bizarrely similar (so similar, in fact, that it's likely a case of conflation or plagiarism): he fled the violence by heading eastward; while serving as abbot of Skum 'bum Monastery (r. 1630-1638), he was invited by Tsogtu back to Kōkenuur; the same kind of exchange took place between Tsogtu and Chu bzang, including the reference to the color of the lama's hat. This time the khan lauds *both* Chu bzang *and* Sde ba chos rje: "aside from [your] hat, both Sde ba chos rje and you are worthy to be my lamas."⁷²

All during this time (that is, from the time these lamas left Central Tibet up to the time they served as Kholoche's and later Tsogtu's lamas) both Sde ba chos rje and Chu bzang Lama were making visits to important Dge lugs monasteries, including Thang ring Monastery,⁷³ the famous Qutan 瞿曇寺 (or Gro tshang) Monastery, Dgon lung Monastery.⁷⁴ Important Monguors, such as the Li Family Master (Li kya slob dpon pa) Shes rab seng ge (fl. 1630s), whose title ("Li Family") indicates his connection with the Li clan under the supervision of the Li *tusi*,⁷⁵ sought out Sde ba chos rje, becoming his intimate disciples.

It was perhaps the relationships struck between these lamas (Sde ba chos rje and Chu bzang) and Dgon lung and the Monguors more generally that may account for what happened next. According to Sum pa mkhan po's eighteenth-century *Mtsho sngon kyi lo rgyus* (Annals of Kōkenuur), sometime after the year 1634 a decision was reached to invite to Tibet a group of Oirat from Zungharia to help settle the ongoing conflict in Central Tibet. As the eighteenth-century history of Kōkenuur by Sum pa mkhan po puts it:

⁷² Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 86.7-86.11. This reproduces nearly verbatim the account found in Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, "Dgon lung gi dkar chag."

⁷³ The full name is Thang ring bshad sgrub gling or Thang ring dga' ldan bshad sgrub gling.

⁷⁴ The full name is Gro tshang lha khang ko taM sde or Gro tshang lha khang gau dam sde. The biography of Sde ba chos rje mentions these places and several others, which he visited several times during his peregrinations. The details of Chu bzang's life and travels are less clear. On the importance of these earlier, more eastern Dge lugs monasteries see IKEJIRI Yōko, "Nai-hisho-in Mongorubun Tou-an ni miru 17 seiki amudo tōbu no geruku-ha sho jin to shinchō (Early contacts between the Gelug monasteries in eastern Amdo and the Qing dynasty from the perspective of *Čing ulus-un dotuyadu narin bicig-un yamun-u mongyul dangsa*."

⁷⁵ Actually, there were three different Li *tusis*. That this figure was ethnically Monguor is not certain. It is possible he is of another ethnicity (Mongol, Tibet, or even Chinese). However, given that his title is named after one of the ennobled Li *tusi*, and given the likely location of his monastery (Lcang skya brag) in the vicinity of Dgon lung, it is more likely than not that he was Monguor.

At that time, the Tibetan leader [*bod pa dpon*] Bsod nam chos 'phel, along with two bright monks who had gone to Tibet--the Official-Translator 'Ga' ru,⁷⁶ who was a monk from the great monastery of Dgon lung of Amdo, and the one called Sems nyid kha che--had faith in the Dge ldan pa [i.e., Dge lugs pa] but were powerless, and they had to serve as officials to the Gtsang King. At that time, they came to an agreement with the patron of Dga' ldan Monastery in Skyid shod--the governor of Stag rtse Fortress,⁷⁷ Mtsho skye rdo rje [i.e., the nephew of Sde ba chos rje]⁷⁸--after which they requested a prophecy from the La mo Dharma Protector. [The oracle] said, "a leader from the North whose sash has an image of a snake on it [will] be able to quell the enemy." Based on this, either Sems nyid or Translator 'Ga' ru was secretly sent to the land of the Zunghar. At that time, he went to his homeland, whereupon he led a few allied troops from Dpa' ris and arrived in Zungharia.⁷⁹

The messenger is said to have explained to the Zunghars the dire situation of the Geluk school in Tibet, after which Gūūshi Khan made a pilgrimage to Tibet to scout things out.

The reliability of this passage is questionable: it is a late source, and it is written by one closely connected with Dgon lung (Sum pa mkhan po's base monastery is Dgon lung). Moreover, I have not yet been able to identify an earlier attestation.⁸⁰ Were it true, however,

⁷⁶ T. 'Ga' ru *lo tsA ba sna che*.

⁷⁷ T. Stag rtse rdzong.

⁷⁸ This appears to be the Dharma King Mtsho skye rdo rje, the son of the Skyid shod Governor Bsod nam rgya mtshan and thus the nephew of the Governor Dharma King. Sørensen refers to the "*sde pa mTsho-skyes*" as the nephew of Yid bzhin nor bu. Sørensen, "Restless Relic," 873 n. 27. Confusingly, elsewhere he and Hazod write of the son of Bsod nam rgyal mtshan (i.e. a nephew of Yid bzhin nor bu) as having played a major role in Tibetan politics in the mid-1700s, too late to be the same individual. Sørensen and Hazod, *Rulers on the Celestial Plain*, 245 n. 699. Yang has added to the confusion by misquoting Luciano Petech. Petech mentions a Zhabs drung Rdo rje rnam rgyal, a late-seventeenth-century descendant of the Skyid shod governors and the father of the Stag rtse sde pa Lha rgyal rab brtan (d. 1720). Yang, however, misquotes Petech as having said Mtsho skye rdo rje is Lha rgyal rab brtan's father. Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, *The Annals of Kokonor*, 69 nn. 76 and 88 192.

⁷⁹ Translation is my own. Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal 'byor, *The Annals of Kokonor*, 33–34. Both Yang and Ahmad have translated this passage. Yang identifies both Translator 'Ga' ru and Sems nyid Kha che as being monks of Dgon lung proper. This is a plausible but unlikely reading of the text. *Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, Serie Orientale Roma, XL (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970), 111–12. I have not yet been able to locate an earlier, seventeenth-century source that corroborates the role of these two monks in inviting Gūūshi Khan from Zungharia.

⁸⁰ Schwieger has summarized the early interactions between the Dge lugs pa and the Oirat in *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the*

the passage would reveal two figures associated with Dgon lung—one from Dgon lung itself, the other from Dgon lung's neighbor and branch monastery, Sems nyid—along with Monguor troops (“from Dpa' ris”) playing a rather significant role in Inner Asian history.

A few years later, in 1637, Gūüshi Khan returned to Amdo with his ally, Baatur Khung-taiji (d. 1653), this time with an army in tow. The combined forces crushed Tsogtu Khan's forces, and these Oirat (principally Khoshud and Zünghar) settled the region. Chinese records indicate that at this point Gūüshi Khan captured cattle and people in Dpa' ris (specifically in Zhuanglang 莊浪) in the sixth month of 1637.⁸¹ Thus, additional Monguor troops likely joined (were conscripted into) Gūüshi Khan army. The twentieth-century historian Tsepon Wangchuk Shakabpa adds that,

In the fifth month of that year [1640], Gushri Khan together with the Mongolian army and the forces of Amdo Parik [a mdo'i dpa' rigs] moved into the Beri [Be ri] region in Dotö [Mdo stod], and without needing to wage a large war, many divisions of Beri's forces surrendered.⁸²

The name “Parik” is said to derive from “*dpa' bo'i rus*,” i.e. “lineage of heroes, and refers to the people of Dpa' ris where Dgon lung is located.⁸³ Thus, it appears that the Monguors lent an assist to Gūüshi Khan's conquest of the enemies of the Dge lugs school.

When Gūüshi Khan and his army settled on the Tibetan Plateau, Sde ba chos rje and Chu bzang Lama—who had proved to be dependable lamas to the two previous Mongol rulers of Kökenuur—were once again called upon for counsel. Sde ba chos rje advised both

Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 46–49.

⁸¹ Sui Hao-min 隋皓昀, “Wang tu yu wang chen: Qingchao zhili qinghai Meng Zang liang bu zhi yanjiu 王土與王臣——清朝治理青海蒙藏兩部之研究 (The King's Land and the King's Subjects: Research on Administering the Mongols and the Tibetans of Qinghai)” (Ph.D., National Chung Cheng University, 2011), 55, citing the *Pingding shuomo fanglüe* 平定朔漠方略. My thanks to Professor Sui for sharing this information with me.

⁸² Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons: An Advanced Political History of Tibet (bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs)*, trans. Derek F. Maher, Tibetan Studies Library 23 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 340; Shakabpa [Zhwa sgab pa], *Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs* (Political History of Tibet), vol. 1 (n.p.: Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa Memorial Foundation, 2007), 414. I have not yet been able to locate the source of Shakabpa's claim.

⁸³ 'Brug thar, *Mdo smad byang shar gyi bod kyi tsho ba shog pa'i lo rgyus dang rig gnas bcas par dpyad pa* (An Investigation of the Culture and History of the Tibetan “Villages” (tsho ba) and “Federations” (shog pa) in Northeastern Amdo), Par thens 1. (Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002), 254.

Baatur Khung-taiji and Gūūshi Khan on the importance of non-violence and religious tolerance, and he gave religious teachings and empowerments.⁸⁴ Indeed, the scholar Yon tan rgya mtsho has gone as far as to suggest that the primary reason Gūūshi Khan had for coming to Tibet was the Gtsang King's refusal to return lands to the Skyid shod family.⁸⁵ However, Sde ba chos rje cautioned against using military force to retrieve his estates: "If you are able to retrieve my estates with propriety [*gzhung mthun po*], do that. Otherwise, to use military force to retrieve them does not abide by the dharma relationship [I have]."⁸⁶ Yon tan rgya mtsho also suggests that Gūūshi Khan's failure to follow through with his promise to return the Skyid shod lands may be due to death of Sde ba chos rje in 1638, after which point Gūūshi Khan lost interest in the family.⁸⁷

Chu bzang, too, is said to have given many teachings to Gūūshi Khan, although he apparently lacked the restraint of his colleague, instructing Gūūshi Khan to "tame [the king of] Be ri, the Gtsang pa, and such enemies of the Dge lugs pa."⁸⁸ Sometime shortly thereafter he was invited to serve as abbot of Dgon lung, a position he held from 1639 to 1648. Significantly, we read in the eighteenth-century chronicle of Dgon lung that,

Previously, when he received the invitation to assume the throne of Dgon lung, Gūūshi Khan said to him, "after you go to serve as abbot, do great acts of the dharma. I too will try my best to help."

⁸⁴ Schwieger, citing an archival document from Kun bde gling, explains that Sde ba chos rje was the chief lama (*dbu bla ma*) of Gūūshi Khan. Schwieger, "A Nearly-Forgotten Dge lugs pa Incarnation Line as Manorial Lord in Bkra shis ljongs, Central Tibet," 99.

⁸⁵ Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor," 33. Yon tan rgya mtsho's source for this is the eighteenth-century *Deb ther rgya mtsho* (i.e., the *Mdo smad chos 'byung*). He recognizes other competing narratives, too, particularly Gūūshi Khan's concern for the attacks on the Dge lugs school by the Gtsang King. As I note below, the 1644 biography of Sde ba chos rje also alludes to the importance for Gūūshi Khan of recovering Sde ba chos rje's estates.

⁸⁶ Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, "Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso," 242. The dharma connection (*chos 'brel*) to which Sde ba chos rje refers may be one between him and the object of Gūūshi's ire: the ruler of Tsang. Nothing is said of such a relationship in Sde ba chos rje's biography, although we might surmise that such a relationship emerged during an eight-month period he spent as a captive in Gzhis ka rtse. Recall, too, that Sde ba chos rje had been lauded by Tsogtu Khan for his non-sectarian approach to the dharma.

⁸⁷ Yon tan rgya mtsho, *Dge ldan chos 'byung gser gyi mchod sdong 'bar ba*, 34. The other reasons Yon tan rgya mtsho gives are laid out on pp. 31-2.

⁸⁸ Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, "Dgon lung gi dkar chag," 687/28a.1; Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 86.12-13.

Accordingly, he gave all of *Dpa' ris* as an estate for *Dgon lung*.⁸⁹

As abbot, Chu bzang gave significantly to the monastery, donating statues, stūpas, infrastructure, salaries, food, and, of course, teachings to the congregation of the monastery.⁹⁰ Chu bzang is portrayed as a conduit for wealth that contributed greatly to the growth of this monastery.

Long ago, the scholar Zahiruddin Ahmad noticed this succession of relationships that were maintained between Central Tibet and whatever Mongol force occupied the Kökenuur region:

From this time onwards [i.e. after 1579, when Kholoche became ruler of Kökenuur], a very close connection was maintained between Tibet and the Valley of the Blue Lake (*mtsho kha*). 'Kho lo che's son, Guru Khung-taiji, fought the Ruler of Gtsang at Rkyang thang sgang in 1621. In c. 1634, the Valley was occupied by the Khalkha prince, Chog-thu Taiji. In 1637, Chog-thu was defeated, and his territory seized by Guši Khan (1582-1655), the Khan of a branch of the Western Mongols, coming from the Valley of the Ili river. Neither the removal of 'Kho lo che in c. 1634, nor that of Chog-thu in 1637, seems to have meant the end of their lines in Koko-nor. For, we hear of messengers from Chog-thu Tha'i ji of Koko-nor at the Court of the Dalai Lama on 24 August 1671; and of one Da'i ching Ko lo che on 15 April 1677. But their rule over the Valley of the Blue Lake, no doubt, ended in c. 1634 and 1637 respectively. ...⁹¹

He did not, however, identify Chu bzang Lama and especially Sde ba chos rje and his brothers as the lynchpin to this connection. Sde ba chos rje's presence in Amdo was constant, and we find him in Kökenuur in 1626 giving empowerments to a gathering of *dge bshes* and other scholars as well as Mongol royalty.⁹² He was there again in 1627 or 1628, whereupon he made a vow not to accept that emblem of wealth and gratitude among the Mongols, namely meat, thereby taking part in the "civilizing" project initiated by the Third Dalai Lama just forty years earlier.⁹³ Likewise, Sde ba chos rje's brothers,

⁸⁹ Thu'u bkwan III Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, "Dgon lung gi dkar chag," 687/28a.3-4. Emphasis added.

⁹⁰ Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 28a.4-28b.1.

⁹¹ Zahiruddhin Ahmad, *Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, Serie Orientale Roma XL (Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970), 65.

⁹² Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, "Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso," 211.

⁹³ On the Third Dalai Lama's missionizing in Mongolia see Johan Elverskog, *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra: Altan Khan and the Mongols in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden;

the exiled Skyid shod Governor Bsod nam rgyal mtshan and his brother Yid bzhin nor bu, both spent a great deal of time in Kökenuur. The relationships established and maintained by the Skyid shod family and by Chu bzang were to prove crucial to the success of the Dge lugs school.

The Afterlife of Sde ba chos rje

Shortly after meeting Güüshi Khan and Baatur Khung-taiji, in 1638, the abbot and former abbots of Dgon lung along with local patrons and meditators all invited Sde ba chos rje back to Dgon lung, asking him to officiate at the upcoming New Year's ceremonies, an invitation he accepted.⁹⁴ At that time he also lectured on some of the details of the rebirth process, telling the origins of the seven generations of the Karma pa lineage and also explaining that, in some miraculous cases of the rebirth of holy persons, the child does not have to be in the mother's womb for a full term.⁹⁵ This sermon may have been the catalyst for identifying Dgon lung's first incarnate lama, Lcang skya II, just a few years later.⁹⁶

Sde ba chos rje passed away the very next month. Based on his own earlier request, Chu bzang Lama officiated at the funeral. The consequence of having Sde ba chos rje perspire at Dgon lung was that the monastery was suddenly on the receiving end of much largess. Not long thereafter, Sde ba chos rje's brother, Governor Yid bzhin nor bu, came to Dgon lung to pay his respects and made donations to all the monasteries of Amdo. "In particular," we read,

he venerated the ocean-like assembly of Dgon lung and so on by giving "mass teas" [*mang ja*] and bread⁹⁷ night and day, each day,

Boston: Brill, 2003), 158–59. Significantly, after Sde ba chos rje passed away, all of those influenced by his teachings—including Chinese, Tibetans, Mongols, and Oirat—are said to have forsaken the taking of life (i.e. butchering). Rong po grub chen I Skal Idan rgya mtsho, "Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso," 215 and 252.

⁹⁴ Officials (*drung 'khor*) from the Skyid shod polity are also said to have urged him to go to Dgon lung. Rong po grub chen I Skal Idan rgya mtsho, "Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso," 247–48.

⁹⁵ Rong po grub chen I Skal Idan rgya mtsho, 249. I do not know the context or specific referent of this statement, although the implication seems to be that a boy who is born less than nine months after the death of a holy person can still be considered as the rebirth of the deceased holy person.

⁹⁶ This happened before 1646.

⁹⁷ T. *tsha bra*. I am taking this to be an alternative spelling of *'tshab ra*, which is used in various texts from A mdo (such as Thu'u bkwan III's chronicle of Dgon lung and the *bca' yig* of Dgon lung and that of Kan chen Monasteries) to refer to bread.

thereby accomplishing a lavish memorial service [for Sde ba chos rje.]⁹⁸

Also around this time Sde ba chos rje's nephew⁹⁹ was invited to Dgon lung, where he built a shrine hall and reliquary and established a fund for making continual offerings to the deceased lama.

The presence of this reliquary at Dgon lung was a boon for the monastery for decades to come. We read in the chronicle of the monastery:

formerly, when the Skyid shod sprul sku Bstan 'dzin blo bzang rgya mtsho came to Kökenuur, the Queen Anu, as an offering for having listened to the dharma, gave [him] some five hundred households of communities¹⁰⁰ from the Shar drang Ruler along the banks of the Yellow River. Skyid shod pa made this an estate endowment of Dgon lung. Up until the time of unrest [i.e. 1723] [the monastery] would annually collect taxes from these divine communities,¹⁰¹ and they would be offered to the reliquary of Skyid shod at Dgon lung, and so on.¹⁰²

This three-way relationship struck between Skyid shod sprul sku, the Oirat, and Dgon lung Monastery would have repercussions that lasted well into the eighteenth century. For instance, Yon tan rgya mtsho has surmised that one of the main reasons for the major 1723 rebellion of Gūūshi's grandson Lubsang-Danzin (which included monks from Dgon lung and neighboring monasteries), was the Manchu killing of Lubsang-Danzin's close ally and descendant of the Skyid shod ruling family, Sde pa stag rtse Lha rgyal rab brtan in 1720.¹⁰³

See also the use in note 22 above. For a more specialized use of the term see Zhang Yisun 张怡菽, ed., *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (The Great Chinese-Tibetan Dictionary) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2008), 2242.

⁹⁸ Rong po grub chen I Skal ldan rgya mtsho, "Biography of Dewa Chöjé Tendzin Lozang Gyatso," 250.

⁹⁹ *sku'i dbon po*.

¹⁰⁰ *T. mi sde*.

¹⁰¹ *T. lha sde*.

¹⁰² Thu'u bkwan III Thu'u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, "Dgon lung gi dkar chag," 770/69b.4-770/69b.6.

¹⁰³ Yon tan rgya mtsho, "Skyid shod sde pa'i skor," 37. However, see also Paul Nietupski, "The 'Reverend Chinese' (Gyanakapa Tsang)," in *Buddhism Between Tibet and China*, ed. Matthew Kapstein (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 185; and, see especially KATŌ Naoto, "Accession to the Throne of Yung-Cheng and Lobdzang Danjin's Rebellion," in *Proceedings of the 35th Permanent International Altaistic Conference, September 12-17, 1992, Taipei, China* (Di 35 jie shijie

The historic ties between Dgon lung and their Oirat patrons are further reflected by the fact that the monastery housed the remains of Dashibaatar (1632-1714), the ruler of Kökenuur, Gūūshi's youngest son and father to Lubsang-Danzin. The Franciscan missionary Giovanni Battista (1669-1725)¹⁰⁴ composed a map and report of his activity in 1714 or 1715, and there he notes that “days ago the cremated bones of the above-mentioned Khan were carried for burial to the tomb of the Tatar Kings, a tomb situated on the borders of his kingdom between Chuang-lang 莊浪 and Xining in the midst of the high and steep mountains.”¹⁰⁵ The map drawn by Battista indicates the general area where his remains were interred (denoted as “sepolcri dei Re Tartari ne monti,” “tombs of the Tartar kings in the mountains”),¹⁰⁶ namely Dpa'i ris.



Detail of a part of Battista's map. Chuang-lang (Pinyin: Zhuanglang) is present-day Yongdeng County, Gansu Province. The map, with south on top and north on bottom, shows the Mongol tombs to be in the mountains of the Dpa' ris region to the northeast of Xining garrison ("Sining wei") across the Xining River (Huangshui 湟水).

a'ertai xuehui huiyi jilu), ed. Ch'ieh Hsien Ch'en (Taipei: Center for Chinese Studies Materials, United Daily News Cultural Foundation, 1993), 192.

¹⁰⁴ He was active in Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ili for about fifteen years. B. Szcześniak, "The Description and Map of Kansu by Giovanni Battista Maoletti de Serravalle," *Monumenta Serica* 18 (1959): 294–95.

¹⁰⁵ Szcześniak, 302–3. This map was brought to my attention by Rachael Griffiths (Oxford University) during her presentation at the 2016 IATS conference in Bergen, Norway. I would also like to thank Max Oidtmann (Georgetown University) for sharing with me this article in particular.

¹⁰⁶ Translation by Szcześniak. Szcześniak, 298.

A memorial from the Qing general Nian Gengyao 年羹堯 (d. 1726) explains that “Dgon lung ... formerly established good relations with [Dashibaatar’s son] Lubsang-Danzin[,] Arabten Ombu [Alabudanemubu 阿拉布坦俄木布], and so forth. The corpse of Lubsang-Danzin’s father, Dashibaatar, is placed inside the monastery.”¹⁰⁷ Nian further notes that, in the lead-up to the Lubsang-Danzin rebellion or shortly after it began, the remains of Dashibaatar were carried away from Dgon lung lest they be destroyed during the ensuing violence between Qing troops and the locals (both monks and non-monks) who fought against the Qing.

As we read in Nian Gengyao’s memorial to the Qianlong emperor, it is the very fact that Dgon lung held and protected the corpse of this Oirat ruler that caused the Qianlong emperor so much fury:

Dgon lung is very large, and since former times it harbored the bandit masses. Moreover, the corpse of Dashibaatar had previously been carried away. Seeing this it is clear that from early on [it] shared intentions with the rebelling bandit Lubsang-Danzin. (Vermillion rescript: This is most clear! They attacked us. What more is there to say?) Therefore, fire was set to Dgon lung, and it burned to the ground. (Vermillion rescript: Most reasonable! There still could be evil, disorderly people who take shelter there in the future. Just kill the monks and burn down the temples. Eliminate [any] talk of the Mongols that resides in the minds [of the people]. If something needs to be rectified then rectify it.)¹⁰⁸

Dgon lung never recovered from this devastation. When it did rebuild, it did so with a new, imperially prescribed name: Youning si, “the Monastery that Protects the Peace,” clearly indicating its position vis-à-vis the Qing.¹⁰⁹ Even though the monastery would regrow its population, boasting as many as 3,000 monks at the end of

¹⁰⁷ Nian Gengyao, *Nian Gengyao Man Han zouzhe yi bian* 年羹堯滿漢奏折譯編 (Collected and Translated Manchu and Chinese Memorials of Nian Gengyao), trans. Ji Yonghai, Li Pansheng, and Xie Zhining (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1995), 69. My thanks to Wu Lan (Mount Holyoke) for bringing this source to my attention. Katō, working from the Manchu materials, has previously written about this. KATŌ Naoto, “Warrior Lamas: The Role of Lamas in Lobjang Danjin’s Uprising in Kokonor, 1723-1724,” *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, no. 62 (2004): 29–43.

¹⁰⁸ Nian, *Nian Gengyao Man Han zou zhe yi bian*. See also KATŌ Naoto, “Warrior Lamas.”

¹⁰⁹ Chab ’gag rta mgrin, *Bod yig rdo ring zhib ’jug: Zangwen beiwen yanjiu* 藏文碑文研究 (Research on Tibetan-language Steles) (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2012), 297–98.

the nineteenth century, and even though its lamas in the eighteenth century—Sum pa mkhan po, Thu'u bkwan III, and Lcang skya III—were extremely prolific and renowned throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world, the monastery itself was eclipsed by other monasteries, such as the young Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil, which had escaped the destruction of Nian Gengyao and yet retained as its principle patron a descendant of Gūūshi Khan.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

In a recent, long and detailed article based on Mongolian and Manchu routine memorials of the Court of Colonial Affairs (Ch. Lifanyuan 理藩院), Kung Ling-wei describes the process by which the most important Dge lugs monasteries ceased to be those dominated by Tibetans in Taozhou 洮州 and Minzhou 岷州 close to China Proper (near Co ne) and became instead those dominated by a mixture of Monguors, Mongols, and Tibetans farther to the west in what is today Qinghai Province. He asks,

why, after all, did the Qing court depreciate the Tibetan monasteries of Taozhou and Minzhou, which held an illustrious status during the Ming dynasty, and instead contribute to the fame and power of Qinghai monasteries? The answer clearly has to do with the rise in the seventeenth century of Khoshud Mongols who were faithful to the Dge lugs school of Tibetan Buddhism.¹¹¹

In other words, the reason for the switch from enfeebling Tibetan lamas and militarizing Tibetan monasteries¹¹² in what is today south-central Gansu Province to patronizing the monasteries located in the vicinity of Xining is that the Qing court's main Inner Asian nemesis—the Oirat—had established a presence in the latter location. By the

¹¹⁰ Nietupski, "The 'Reverend Chinese' (Gyanakapa Tsang)," 186.

¹¹¹ Kung Ling-wei 孔令偉, "Tao Min Zangchuan fo si ru Qing zhi xingshuai ji qi baihou de Menggu yinsu--yi 'Neige daku dang' yu 'Lifanyuan Man-Mengwen tiben' wei hexin 洮岷藏傳佛寺入清之興衰及其背後的蒙古因素--以《內閣大庫檔》與《理藩院滿蒙文題本》為核心 (The Development of Tibetan Monasteries in Amdo and the Mongolian Factors during Ming-Qing Dynasties: Study on Tibetan Monks in the Manchu-Mongolian Routine Memorials of Lifanyuan)," *Zhongyang yanyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研院歷史語言研究所集刊 86, no. 4 (February 2015): 883–84. My thanks to Kung for sharing with me this tremendous piece of scholarship.

¹¹² OTOSAKA Tomoko 乙坂智子, "A Study of Hong-hua-si Temple Regarding the Relationship between the dGe-lugs-pa and the Ming Dynasty."

eighteenth century the Qing court had even institutionalized a hierarchy of twelve influential “Peking Lamas” (Beijing-based lamas who served the court), at the top of which we find the Lcang skya Khutugtu, and among which we find as many as seven lamas who are based in what is today Qinghai Province.¹¹³ As many as six of these lamas hailed from monasteries in Dpa’ ris in particular.¹¹⁴

This article reveals some of the details of this process and period of transition. The Qing was drawn to the area in question (Dpa’ ris and Kökennur) because the Oirats were drawn there. The Oirats were drawn there because of the roles played by Central Tibetan lamas, particularly Sde ba chos rje, in Amdo who had important connections to Dgon lung Monastery in Dpa’ ris. Thus an important, historical network was established that connected the Oirats from the Ili Valley, the Skyid shod family from the Lhasa valley, and Dgon lung Monastery and its own network of related monasteries in Amdo. Moreover, what the above history shows us is how the Monguors and Dgon lung Monastery—in the first fifty years of the monastery’s existence alone—made themselves instrumental nodes in the developing network of Inner Asian affairs.

Dgon lung Monastery began when local religious and political leaders took advantage of the visit to the region in 1584 of the Third

¹¹³ One of the first scholars to discuss the system of “Peking Lamas” is Robert James Miller, *Monasteries and Culture Change in Inner Mongolia* (Wiesbaden, O. Harrassowitz, 1959), 26 and 160; See also Xiangyun Wang, “Tibetan Buddhism at the Court of Qing: The Life and Work of lCang-skya Rol-pa’i-rdo-rje (1717-1786)” (Harvard University, 1995), 160. Wang identifies his source for understanding the system: *Jiaqing Da Qing huidian* as compiled in the book *Qingdai lifanyuan ziliao jilu* (Collected Materials Concerning the Department of Colonial Affairs of the Qing Dynasty). See also Kung Ling-wei 孔令偉, “Tao Min Zangchuan fo si ru Qing zhi xingshuai ji qi baihou de Menggu yinsu,” 882–83. The system also listed two other lamas who were stationed in Dolonnuur. The seven Peking lamas hailing from Qinghai are Lcang skya, Smin grol Nomun-qan, Galdan Shiretu (Gser khri), Stong ’khor, ’Od gser, A gya, and Thu’u bkwan. It is not exactly clear where the ’Od gser lineage was based. However, Sum pa mkhan po appears to include a “’od ser” among a list of “great lamas of Dgon lung.” See Sum pa mkhan po’s autobiography: *Gsung ’bum* (Collected Works), Sata-pitaka (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1975), vol. 8, p. 483/57a.4.

¹¹⁴ This is the aforementioned seven minus Galdan Shiretu. He came to be installed as a lama at Bla brang bkra shis ’khyil, although this lineage also has historical contacts with and influence throughout the Kökenuur region and Dpa’ ris, too. By the mid-Qing the main monastery of Stong ’khor was Stong ’khor dga’ ldan chos ’khor gling in what is today Huangyuan County; however, this lineage also was very active at Mchod rten thang and at other monasteries in Dpa’ ris. I also count A kya of Sku ’bum among the six because of the plausible connection between this incarnation lineage and the Monguor A kya clan. However, see Joachim Günter Karsten, “A Study on the Sku-’bum/T’a-Erh Ssu Monastery in Ching-Hai” (Thesis, University of Auckland, 1996), 107 n. 8.

Dalai Lama:¹¹⁵ a dozen of them arrived in Lhasa in 1603 to beseech the Dalai Lama's successor to establish the monastery that would become Dgon lung.¹¹⁶ Monks from Dgon lung began making their way to Central Tibet where they earned reputations as scholars and spiritual adepts.¹¹⁷ From this point on, important hierarchs from Central Tibet, such as Chu bzang Lama and Sde ba chos rje, would pay visits to Dgon lung among other places in Amdo.

As such, it is not implausible that a monk from Dgon lung or from one of Dgon lung's child monasteries was designated to lead Dpa' ris troops to Züngharia to ask for assistance from Gūūshi Khan—after all, Dgon lung was a Dge lugs outpost with legendary ties to Chinggis Khan.¹¹⁸ We have also seen that the Monguors were not shy about lending their military might to the major conflicts of Inner Asia, as when troops from Dpa' ris participated in Gūūshi Khan's conquest of the King of Be ri in Khams. Such Monguor participation in the military conflicts of Inner Asian history would continue throughout the Ming and Qing Dynasties.¹¹⁹

Finally, that Dgon lung developed such strong relations with two of the leading hierarchs from Central Tibet—Chu bzang, who served as the monastery's abbot for a decade, and Sde ba chos rje, who passed away there and whose relics were enshrined there—hierarchs who, moreover, had given religious teachings and political counsel to Gūūshi Khan and Baatur Khung-taiji, meant that Dgon lung rose in status especially in the eyes of the new Oirat rulers of Kökenuur and Tibet. It is at least partially due to this that Dgon lung as well as its branch monasteries of Chu bzang and Gser khog are almost always included in lists of “the three great monasteries of Mdo smad” or the

¹¹⁵ Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Dga' ldan chos 'byung baiDUrya ser po*, 340; Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Vaidūrya-ser-po* (A History of the Dge-lugs-pa Monasteries of Tibet), ed. Lokesh Chandra, Śata-pitaka, 12 (1, 2) (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1960), 266.

¹¹⁶ Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos byung*, 54.28. The chronicle of Dgon lung says the year was 1602.

¹¹⁷ One of the earliest examples of this is that of 'Dan ma Tshul khrim rgya mtsho (1578-1663/1665), on which see Sullivan, “The First Generation of Dge lugs Evangelists in Amdo: The Case of 'Dan ma Tshul khrim rgya mtsho (1578-1663/65),” under review.

¹¹⁸ The Monguor rulers also would have been increasingly concerned about the anti-Ming uprising led by Li Zicheng 李自成. Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, 57.27; Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Border*, 132; Yang Yingju, *Xining fu xin zhi* 西宁府新志 (New Gazetteer of Xining Prefecture), (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1988), 24.

¹¹⁹ Louis Schram's three-volume study of the Monguors cites many of these instances.

“four great monasteries of the north.”¹²⁰ This also helps to explain why today Dgon lung is relatively unknown apart from its association with its incarnate lamas, particularly Lcang skya: after the demise of the Skyid shod family and the repression and incorporation of Oirat power into the Qing, Dgon lung’s own unique position as intermediary between these mid-seventeenth century powers was overshadowed by a new story, that of the expanding dominion of the Dge lugs school and its relationship with the Qing Empire.

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¹²⁰ On the “three great monasteries of Mdo smad” see Shes rab dar rgyas, *Rje ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan Biography*, 76b.1; Thu’u bkwan III Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, “Dgon lung gi dkar chag,” 717/38a.3. On the “four great monasteries of the North” see Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dpal ’byor, *Autobiography of Sumba Kanbo*, 205–6; Françoise Robin, “A Brief History of Amdo,” trans. Nigel Ritchie (n.d.). Gser khog Monastery is occasionally dropped from the list of four to be replaced with either Bya khyung or Sku ’bum.

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In his Name: The Fake Royal Biography—Fabricated Prophecy and Literary Imposture

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“But what my power might else exact—like one
Who having into truth, by telling of it,
Made such a sinner of his memory,
To credit his own lie, he did believe
He was, indeed, the Duke, out o’th’ substitution
And executing th’ outward face of royalty
With all prerogative. Hence his ambition growing—
Dost thou hear?”
“Your tale, Sir, would cure deafness.”

W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

It should not come as a surprise when we observe that among documents from ancient medieval cultures, not least among those boasting a rich and diversified written or scriptural tradition, we far too often encounter writings ascribed to a celebrated person when in fact it is not the case. The degree of forgery and manipulation involved naturally varies from case to case, the camouflage, intended and not seldom unintended, being enacted more or less openly or indeed covertly, so also the degree with which the issue was addressed or queried, not to mention being tacitly accepted at face value within the milieu that fostered it. The phenomenon nevertheless is ubiquitous and now well documented across many cultures (Seidel 1983, Rosenblum 2000, Ehrman 2012 and Farrer 2012). In the present case we shall investigate a unique and, fortunately, quite verifiable case of forgery, a case in point prestigiously associated with the unsurpassed national icon and historical figure in Tibet, and a forgery that proved to be accepted in wide circles in Tibet. The paper is an elaboration of a former essay by the same author (Sørensen 2000a), yet this time preceded by a general, albeit brief discussion on forgery and specifically offering an outline of the cultural ambience within which it proved possible to manufacture such a hoax.

“Among the Tibetans, grapholatry is more real than idolatry.”
Robert Ekvall, *Religious Observances in Tibet*

A Phenomenon of Trite Ubiquity: Spurious Scriptures

Within most of Buddhist hermeneutical traditions, not least where textual and stammatic transmissions constituted a formative element, the dilemma surrounding spurious scriptures was not only constantly negotiated but also richly documented. No doubt, over the course of time, the orthodoxy and time-tested dependency on scriptural—mostly canonical—authority (*āgama*—the all-out criteria for scriptural veracity and authenticity not least in India and Tibet)¹ played a decisive role and proved consensually mandatory. This circumstance prompted the compilation of texts and writings manufactured in order to tinge otherwise anonymous or dubious texts and entire corpora with the nimbus or aura of authorial or scriptural authenticity in order to meet the criteria of scriptural legitimacy and common approval. To meet these ends, not few works invariably were ascribed or attributed to a legitimizing source: mostly to a great pioneer—divine or human, to a founding figure of a particular school, or to a reputed master of yore. The nature and variety of forgeries conducted in this context lays bare a broad and complex picture of textual manipulation and it is beyond the pale of this small paper to address the many variant forms of attempted or intended forgery as well as the theoretical issues that accompanied this process.

Doubtless as philologist one encounters the phenomenon from time to time not only within strictly religious and scholastic literature where it is richly documented but also in secular literature—to complicate matters in assessing the degree of fraudulence, not seldom cases of false identity or dubious attribution were perpetrated with-

¹ The concept *āgama* (Ch. 阿含, Tib. *lung*) in Buddhism commonly refers to a collection of discourses (*sūtra*) of the early Mahāyāna Buddhist schools, by extension in a Tibetan context it generally acquired the overall significance of alluding to authoritative canonicity. The issue whether texts and scriptures embodied (transmissional) authenticity proved to have a long history in Tibet. In scholastic, commentarial and hermeneutic writings among Tibetan masters, it was obligatory when propounding a theory, a thesis or a doctrine to provide convincing validation by way of two criteria: the argumentative strength of logic (*rigs*, *yukti*) and reference to scriptural authority (*lung*, *āgama*), in the latter case a scholastic argument or thesis required the canonicity-proven reference to substantiate the thesis or claim, by referring to authoritative (often canonical) sources as validation or proof. Yet in Tibet the reference to “writings” allegedly penned, transmitted through, or originating with pioneer masters and sages like Guru Rinpoche held the same authority, at least within one’s own tradition. This principle of providing authority to a claim also proved relevant in the present case of a faked royal biography.

out any intention of committing a hoax, or deliberate deceit. To varying degrees, and in different contexts we encounter attempts at what we shall call pious or sacred plagiarism, not just a simple act of duplication but as a sort of mechanical and non-committal process not driven by personal or self-promotional concerns, but rather guided by humility (bereft of any immoral stance) and religious motives to promote a certain doctrinal position or scholastic tradition. A large amount of so-called apocryphal writings was motivated by such rather unintentional or unwitting motives (see Ehrman 2011: p. 130ff.).

In Tibet, and this might be the case in other Buddhist countries as well with a huge scriptural production, it is not impertinent to note the incentive and vivid interest behind such proliferation and reproductions, the blessing power stemming from the pen. As noted by R. Ekvall, when it comes to the crucial merit-building, it may wonder but acts of grapholatry not seldom outnumber that of idolatry (Ekvall 1964, p. 114). The result was a unending engagement and commitment to text production (*gsung rten*, the 'verbal support,' sacred scriptures) as a gateway to a better and swifter rebirth, a cornerstone or rather stepping-stone within the Buddhist soteriological program.

Incidences of what we shall characterize as intentional or personally motivated "pseudonymity" (i.e. a state of disguised identity) nevertheless abound in Tibet too. We here come across writings of dubious provenance with no clear or identifiable (original) author, or—as in the present case with the fake royal biography, an obvious enactment of regular imposture, perhaps even a case of conscious impersonation. Samples of mechanical but clearly false ascriptions are legion: During the most part of the medieval period, Guru Rinpoche, addressed and hailed as a Second Buddha throughout the Tibetan religious universe, served either as the "original author" or "spiritual inspirer or ultimate source" behind countless texts and teaching cycles, when the very texts in question in fact had been penned by his adherents, not seldom confusingly claiming themselves to be embodiments or spiritual incarnations of the Indian master and not least his disciples—a circumstance that makes it (ontologically?) problematic, at least ambiguous to question the nature of genuine "authorship" in each case.² Tellingly, the assumption or

² The number of studies on Padmasambhava of Uddiyāna is now sizable; see most recently Hirshberg (2016), Mayer (2013), and lately Doney (2014, 2018) on the text transmissions and artistic representations associated with the figure. The extent of his historicity remains shaky and inconclusive. What one so far can assume, prior to the mid-13th century, narrative elements found in Dunhuang and other Guru Rinpoche narrative vignettes f.ex. traced in *Sba/Dbā' bzhed* proved the existence of an increasingly strong cultic undercurrent around his figure, yet Padmasambhava remained at best an Indian master of some note, before a row of

claim that these teachings and texts—in one way or another—originated with the 8th century Indian thaumaturge was roundly mooted but never fundamentally disputed at least not among his most pious followers, the enormous prestige and unchallenged repute enjoyed by the Indian master invalidated and blocked any serious critique that might have questioned the inadequacies of authorship, it did however fuel heated polemics when rarely within the inner circles of his followers. This culturally sensitive conundrum remains a phenomenon that is richly documented in Tibetan religious literature as it will be addressed below. Nevertheless, these later authors evidently were no more than compilers (others denote them successive tradents,³ when referring to those who later transmitted these teachings whether in text-form or oral) who here served as a sort of “porte parole” or purveyors of the “original author” allowing them to claim that these writings—uniformly considered the very words or *ipsissima verba* of the original source or author—transmitted or channelled from him to them through dreams, revelations, visitations (or *dag snang* i.e. “pure display and appearance”) or through sheer inspiration, a circumstance that in medieval Tibet alone would meant to serve as incontestable proof. A large bulk of esoteric texts transmitted within the Old School in Tibet hence is often displaying a spurious provenance.⁴ The quest and urge to provide authenticity

“hagio-/biographies” dedicated to him eventually turned him into a mythological figure of quite staggering dimensions. Here again one can pose the same question: How much of the writings and rituals ascribed to him (or “originating with him” as it is often phrased) are actually the product of his pen. We have little or almost no way to prove it.

³ As suggested by R. Mayer, we may talk about “tradents” instead, resembling what we know from a Rabbinic Jewish context: a person who hands down or transmits (especially an oral, as much as, we should add a literary) tradition. Yet they remain essentially apocryphal. An added complication, treasure texts often display a fluid transmission, being the object of emendation and interpolations through many hands, thus producing a veil over any original format.

⁴ Cases involving different forms of fraudulence are legion and diverse. In a Tibetan context, texts and writings classified as the “ancient or early mantric/esoteric Rnying ma translation tradition” (*snga 'gyur rnying ma*)—were throughout the early post-imperial epoch as well as throughout most of the ensuing medieval period by Indophile purists and doctrinal opponents alike deemed to lack validity, and not few writings being dubbed “self-fabricated” (*rang bzo*) by their purist opponents, in other words it often represented works produced in Tibet and penned by Tibetans. In order to enhance their scriptural validity, they were claimed to be of Indian origin, originally translated from Sanskrit—the litmus test and hallmark of authenticity and originality in an overly Indophile society such as the Tibetan. Hermeneutically well-documented and authoritative teachings and cycles verifiably of indisputable Indian origin (reflecting Buddha’s *ipsissima verba* or that of an Indian scholar saint) usually were transmitted and blue-printed through an Indian Paṇḍit and a Tibetan *lotsāwa* at an early point increas-

was imperative, the one crucial criteria for acquiring universal approval and scholarly or doctrinal compliance. Indeed, searching for dubiously ascribed writings amounts to opening up Pandora's Box, the textual profusion unquestionably indicates that it is an integral part of the entire literary production in Tibet (doubtlessly as much as in other Buddhist traditions) and hence in no way unknown to the development of Tibetan literature. As said, it is documented both in secular, but by far most often in religious and post-canonical writings.

Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Apocrypha or spurious writings have long vexed philologists, historians of literature and of religion alike. Apocrypha according to the general definition has as a concept been borrowed from Biblical studies, being used there to designate a class of literature which albeit not necessarily considered heretical, were not included into the biblical canon during its formation at the time of the first few centuries after Christ, usually excluded on account of doubts concerning authorship or questions of doctrine.⁵ Similar to the cases in Tibet with a large number of texts within the Rnying ma pa corpus and the large number of texts ascribed to their founder, here also numerous texts are classified as apocrypha. The entire gamut of *gter ma* treasure texts, a prolific and unique genre of its own, may be considered apocrypha in one way or another but where the term "mythographa" possibly would be more precise, albeit this genre in no way contained "canonical material i.e. (Kanjur/Tenjur)." This or these sorts of compilation and writing proved to be popular and were produced in a great number for centuries.⁶

The term apocrypha is largely used as a specific category of its own in China. An increasing number of Sinological researchers have dedicated their study to this particular genre. In a Buddhist context such scriptures were composed in China and Central Asia and contain elements peculiar to Chinese Buddhism or met particular Chinese cultural sensibilities; in the same category of apocrypha, we find a considerable number of indigenous works composed for over a

ingly competed with teaching systems and text transmissions of more spurious or apocryphal origin. It gave rise to disputes and ingrained polemics over this heated topic and over the normative standards of veracity, a dispute that continued to mar Tibetan hermeneutic discourses for centuries.

⁵ *Op. cit.* Muller (1998), p. 63.

⁶ The issue of authenticity concerning the *gter ma* or treasure literature has been vividly discussed in numerous studies, see most conveniently the discussion in Hirshberg (2016).

millennium and beyond, penned by Chinese masters and scholars who deliberately made exclusive use of Indian elements.⁷ The indigenisation of Indian Buddhism exported and transposed onto Chinese soil, contrary to Tibet, went hand in hand with a row of significant cultural compromises that Indian Buddhism had to strike with a strong and culturally autarchic Chinese civilization. In other words, only by absorbing and channelling concepts and words through a Chinese filter—a complex conceptual process of Sinification—was it possible for Buddhism to gain a firm foothold there.

Returning again to our discussion concerning the written legacy in Tibet, the transmission of Buddhist scriptures and teachings early proved to be very far more conscient and resilient in its “canonical” orthodoxy vis-à-vis the Chinese adaptation and reception of Buddhism. It may not surprise, since early on attempts to achieve linguistic uniformity held high priority in Tibet not least in order to develop a normative “canonical language.” Already in the late 8th century, a committee by royal decree revised and regularized the Tibetan language by introducing new standards or rules for orthography and terminology, an enterprise prompted by the needs required when converting the first huge backlog of Buddhist writings into the newly invented Tibetan language, mainly transposed from Sanskrit with its complex and foreign stock of doctrinal, ethical and philosophical concepts as well as complicated grammatical and syntactic rules. To meet this end, major changes in the Tibetan language were exacted (see Scherrer-Schaub 2002). The outcome of this thorough linguistic reorientation—in syntax and vocabulary itself largely an artificial construct—eventually came to be known in general as the vehicle or medium—*chos skad*—and propagated with unparalleled consistency. Throughout the ensuing centuries, the new language was used to render the huge Buddhist canonical corpus into Tibetan, and not least the numerous correlative tracts within Buddhist hermeneutical literature as well as within countless indigenous writings inspired by this huge corpus. The attempt to retain the “noble or sacred nature” of the source language from the outset prevented any excessive proliferation of apocryphal writings to the same extent as we witness with Sinitic Buddhism, still cases of pseudepigrapha in Tibet were never absent—due also here to the relative “openness” in the redactional process and for a general lack of critical censorship when assembling the canonical writings, or “sacred writings,” the Kanjur but especially the Tenjur proved more vulnerable to redactional manipulations. As

⁷ The topic has been studied by an increasing number of researchers initially by a host of Japanese Sinologists, later by Sinological scholars like (Buswell 1990), Teiser (1994), Muller (1998), Seidel (1983) among others.

said, the exclusion over time of certain Rnying ma scriptures from the Kanjur were conducted due to considerable lack of trust in their Indian pedigree.

For the scriptural door-keepers, cases where texts passed through the eye of a needle of censorship did happen. A canonical case in point among others may here be illustrative: The commentary on Āryadeva's *Lamp that Integrates the Practices* (*Caryāmelāpakapradīpa*) attributed to Sākyamitra, a highly influential scholastic work in the "Esoteric Community" (*Guhyasamāja*) tradition of the Noble Nāgārjuna,⁸ was penned by a Tibetan pseudegraph, still it was included among the Tantric Commentaries (*rGyud 'grel*) and hence a part of the Canon. Other spectacular canonical cases could be broached: the Bengali Master Atiśa—probably the single most important figure in the indigenisation of exoteric Buddhism onto Tibetan soil in the crucial 11th century—along with his team of devout Tibetan translators, during his stay in Tibet, produced works of dubious attributions or they invented treatises under a new title by re-assembling fragments from other works. Here as elsewhere the end often would tend to justify the means, in the sense the message of the contents of a treatise often outweigh the significance of the contents' origin. It was arguably due to careless redactional procedures or in order to provide new texts, so for example the text *Madhyamaka-Ratnapradīpa*, an independent anthology which over long stretches consists of lengthy extracts derived from the *Madhyamakahrdayakārikā* and its commentary *Tarkajvālā*. Many works ascribed to the father of Madhyamaka, the 2nd century Nāgārjuna, are spurious, a number of these works are of a relative or demonstrably later date wherefore their authorship is attributed to an otherwise still unidentified Deutero-Nāgārjuna. The list could be prolonged.

Naturally, to raise the issue of the authenticity of a work is already to be begging the question, the issue of authorial attribution must be solved in each case, since every case is unique. In the canonical field, a role for the production and influx of this sort of literature was naturally the very structure of the canons, in China as well as later in Tibet, the steady editorial improvements and retranslations or the sheer production of later scriptures that in language and style resembled many of the traditional canonical writings paved the way for the inclusion of new scriptures that often slipped beyond the porous walls of censorship. In fact, each editor of the numerous canonical editions in Tibet were to take responsibility for removing texts he considered spurious or to replace them with a new or variant translation. In the end, we are faced with a genre that easily could be dubbed "Canoni-

⁸ See the details and analysis in Wedemeyer (2009).

cal Apocrypha." In China, the number amounts to several hundred. In Tibet, particularly the Tenjur collection of the Sacred Writings, itself the signifier *par excellence* of authenticity, the "Translated śāstras or Commentatorial Treatises" (both of Māhayāna and Non-Māhayāna treatises) were often awash with works of more dubious origin, at best they were redactionally reassembled, partly with authentic material, to constitute a genuine source ascribable to a renowned former Indian Buddhist author that in Tibet served as the litmus test of authenticity.

Turning now our attention to Tibet's autochthonous or non-canonical literature—our main concern in this paper—the situation is no less complicated. In the sphere of proper biographies, Tibetan literature abounds in false attributions, mentioned can be the biography of Klong chen rab 'byams, the biography Sixth Dalai Lama among other life-stories that proved to be falsely attributed. In case of the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683–1706) in this fictional after-life biography called the Secret Biography written 1757—recounting his life after 1706, the year of his death, it is recounted how he lived on as an *Doppelgänger* or impersonator in Alashan of today's Inner Mongolia, experiencing a life of peregrination until his passing 1746. This fictional text and the institution it established (Baruun Heid monastery) to this very day prompted the creation or establishment of two incarnation lines stemming from the Sixth Dalai Lama and his erstwhile Regent who once had identified him (Aris 1989; Jalsan 2002, p. 34). Fictional literature does have some impact in shaping history.

Moving further into the aberrations of Tibetan literature, and employing the term *pseudepigrapha* broadly, the huge *gter ma* production, as indicated above, alone can be considered a native format or genre of religious and historical narrative literature, most of which were consciously antedated by several centuries, arguing that the actual authors were pioneers or historical figures active during the heydays of the Tibetan empire (7–8th century). Our present interest here is limited to an ensemble of so-called testaments or biographies (*bka' chems*, *zhal chems*, *nam thar*, *bka' thang*) that were all discovered—*gter ma*-style—but more likely compiled and composed by a number of 11–14th treasure-finders since indisputable evidence (or proof) of their putative origin during imperial time is uniformly absent.

Among these historically problematic sources, a number of post-imperial texts were attributed or dedicated to two key figures in Tibet's founding period, individuals that were later massively and quite hyperbolically promoted and championed as cultural and national heroes: the aforementioned 8th century thaumaturge Padmasambhava and the 7th century founding monarch Srong btsan sgam po. For our present purposes we shall pay particular attention

to the last one. Still, these texts served to highlight their larger-than-life stories, being idealized narratives that recount how they—almost singlehandedly—were responsible at different stages and in different capacities for Tibet's conversion to Buddhism during the golden heyday in the 7th and 8th century. Their ubiquitous presence in this capacity as national heroes would not only permeate but also be widely and uniformly acknowledged in all historiographical sources throughout the coming centuries.

Who were the authors behind the number of “treasure texts” related to these cultural heroes—we shall meet two or three of the most prominent ones—if they were not actual authors then at least compilers or tradents of a number of biography-style narratives. In order to approach these biographical text cycles we shall look behind the curtain. The topic however is well known, having been broached several times, and only the sketchiest outline is offered here (Sørensen 1994; 2000a; 2018; Hirshberg 2016; Kapstein 1992).

The National Foundation Charter

It may prove instructive and conducive to a proper appreciation of the textual basis and ideological context behind the formation of the spurious biographies, if we briefly address the presuppositions and cultural milieu that led to the gestation of the fake royal biography. It is in particular instructive to introduce a few points relevant to the core narratives behind this document. Needless to say, the protagonist in this tale is known to everybody. Tibet's key or towering historical figure embodies in many ways the national history and allegory of Tibet in his very person: the 7th century Khri Srong brtsan, i.e. Srong b(r)tsan sgam po (605?–649/50) was ancestral sacral ruler, monarchic founder, Buddhist Saviour Saint and the cultural hero *par excellence*. He indeed was the recipient of multiple projected and layered identities assembled in one person, identities ascribed to him when seen in a *longue durée* perspective. His legacy (*phyag rjes*), whether assumed or real, both in a literary and material context, is enormous, despite the circumstance that we know relatively little about his real mundane and historically verifiable life. Still, he was subject to a number of permutations in terms of identity, possessing a number of *aliases*—as said only surpassed in this capacity perhaps by another, far more nebulous figure to whom many embodiments similarly were projected, all largely fictitious: the omnipresent thaumaturge Guru Rinpoche to whom a large number of larger-than-life identities and timeless roles were ascribed by his most ardent followers. At places it turned into a veritable Guru-mania in the ensuing centuries giving birth to countless real life persons proudly claiming

to be mundane embodiments or manifestations of the thaumaturge and not least his most prominent disciples,⁹ an embodiment industry that would run into the thousands.

Like the successive rulers of the erstwhile Tibetan dynasty that followed the founding figure, Srong btsan sgam po was regarded as an embodiment or manifestation of a *bodhisattva* already during late dynastic times, but in particular from the very outset of the post-dynastic spell (11th century) where he was consistently identified with and transfigured into the “Lord of the World,” Lokeśvara or Avalokiteśvara, alternatively known as Mahākāruṇika, the paramount Bodhisattva Lord and Saint of Compassion. The *bodhisattva* deity’s immense role in the dissemination and popularization of Buddhism in most countries is witnessed and documented in numerous instances following in the trail of its proliferation.¹⁰ It was not much different in Tibet. It is a fascinating tale how this figure in particular was conducive to making Buddhism in Tibet endemic, indeed a major reason for its relatively smooth indigenisation on the soil and tracts of the “Roof of the World.” Not only the massive popularization of the Lokeśvara cult in the Licchavi period of the present-day Kathmandu valley served, together with Khotan, as the initial gateway for the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, also the prevailing Māhāyāna Buddhist literature exerted decisive and formative influence in this regard, opening up for the concept repeatedly addressed in the literature that Buddha’s lifespan and eventually his bodily manifestations and transfigurations were hyperbolic and sheerly endless. This sort of corporeal hyperbolism literally accounts for the polytheistic invasion of deities in a multitude of forms in the ever-expanding pantheon throughout these countries. Anyhow, a veritable multitude of human epiphanies, as said, was transformed into “saintly embodied beings” that invaded even remote corners of the Tibetan society.

In the early post-imperial era following the collapse of the Tibetan dynasty, a period steeped in chaos and civil war, local historians (followed later by a row of peregrinating esoteric ascetics) gradually attempted to retell the drama of the country’s early history, to some extent also competing in “reconstructing” the past in tune with their ideological sensibilities and preferences. This all-out reconstruction proved necessary, since the country at that point was facing a dearth of texts and documents that stemmed from the imperial period, doc-

⁹ The literature on the unique phenomenon, incarnation and their proliferation is now appreciable, see conveniently Hirshberg *et al.* (2017); Gamble (2018).

¹⁰ The development resembles the role of the deity that took place in Śrī Laṅka, cf. Holt (1991).

uments lost in the throes of warfare and turmoil. They instead took recourse to what amounts to a pious reconstruction in their ideological emulation of Tibet's glorious past, the remoulded portraiture and narrative amplification of the country's history soon became entirely wrapped up in a wholly new Buddhist visionary attire.¹¹ Historical figures became Buddhist figures with corresponding identities. The hazy beginning of Tibet was rewritten into resembling the beginning or introduction of Buddhism in Tibet. Avalokiteśvara soon was staged as Buddhism's principal tutelary deity, or Saviour Saint, doctrinally propped and inspired by a row of cosmomagic (importantly canonical) narratives, in the first place the seminal 5th century *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* ("Basket's Display") that recounted the virtually endless virtues and cosmomagic feats of the *bodhisattva* saint. It here also prominently introduced the famous six-syllable formula (*Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*), described as the quintessence (*paramahṛdaya*, also called *mahāvīdyā*) of the deity (Sørensen 1994 pp. 96-108 ; Sørensen 2018; Studholme 2002; van Schaik 2006).

The popularity of the deity cult soon led to the composition or rather compilation of number of Vita narratives attuned to this sutric rendition, notably, as commonly known, *Bka' chems Ka khol ma* (the *Pillar Testament*) and *Ma ṅi bka' 'bum* (i.e. *Jewel Collection*) both considered early *gter ma* or *gter chos* texts)¹² followed by later historiographical treatises that were to draw extensively and almost authoritatively on this corpus of indigenous narratives, notably what should become the Tibetan master narrative *par excellence*: *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, that in many ways should set the standard for how to depict Tibet's early royal history and its pioneering heroes of yore. This particular depiction of the king should become standard and surprisingly authoritative too, also for lack of assertive alternative portraitures. Indeed, the transmitted depiction of the king in these "biographies" paints the picture of a pious and divine soul, a worthy Buddhist saint. It generally lacks any substantial reference to verifiable historical events, aside from the mere names of the *dramatis personae* (kings, queens, ministers or councilors in the narratives, amid a number of

¹¹ Parts of the formation of a national consciousness, not seldom involved a territorial dimension to the ethnic one, a memorizable and sacralized territorialisation of history, the concepts merging to become a so-called 'ethnoscape', see Anthony D. Smith (1999, 2000).

¹² Cf. Sørensen (1994) *passim*; Sørensen and Hazod (2007): pp. 467-69; van der Kuijp (2013) pp. 124-25. The latter text is laced with esoterica and lore of Rnying ma and Rdzogs chen origin. Their status as *gter ma* text is still an open issue in some corners. Modern Tibetan authors are at variance as to its "authenticity"; *Dung dkar Tshig mdzod chen mo* pp. 1-2; Rdo sbis Tshe ring rdo rje (2015) *Bka' chems bKa' (sic: Ka) khol ma chen mo* Intro. Whereas others express their doubts, see rGya ye bkra lo (2012): pp. 326ff.

semi-historical figures) commonly known to us from more reliable sources. And the tales, highly fictitious (mythopoetical would probably be the better word) were to a large scale constructed or aligned as 'Life Stories' of the king, here the protagonist was perpetually committed to liberate living beings and bring them onto the Buddhist path, the historical figure now towering as a worldly Avalokiteśvara in person. Contemporary emic hermeneutics consistently claimed that the 11th-12th century basic texts stemmed from, that is were written by the king himself, which here meant that they at least were ideologically ascribed to the king personally—allowing for the last, the putative ascription to the erstwhile king is ironically another early case of false or problematic ascription if not plain pious forgery that is commonly observed in religious writings, not least those that were categorized as *gter ma* literature. Signally, Avalokiteśvara in these tales was championed as the "Father," the very genitor, of all Tibetans. It culminated in the widely celebrated, and no less fanciful, legend of the origin of all Tibetans from the union of a rock-demoness and a *bodhisattva*-monkey, a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara—as part of an envisaged commitment of his to take upon himself the task of "converting" (i.e. civilizing) Tibet. The goal was to turn Tibet into a vibrant Buddhist stronghold and haven, a country that long since had been predestined to be his *buddhakṣētra*, his "field of conversion."¹³

One site, intimately associated with the king as its founder, was held in common awe and exuded adequate cultural prestige to become a national centre, and thus contribute to the centrality of the king in the mind and memory of the Tibetans. Over the coming centuries with the political situation in medieval Tibet still marked by decentralisation, it not least was the enduring struggle for supremacy over the central Lhasa area as home of Tibet's true *sanctum sanctorum*, namely Ra sa 'Phrul snang (and its core part Jo khang) that governed and shaped medieval Tibetan politics. This special legacy of the imperial period would eventually become a prestigious (and in due course national) commitment for all denominations in Tibet, associated from the very start with this key site and national shrine that ultimately turned Lhasa into the most sacred pilgrimage site throughout

¹³ A number of the narrative tropes found in the popular retelling of the mythic origin of Tibet (including aspects of the king's remote past) prove to have been derived or adapted from canonical sources, but in a revised or altered form. For example, the origin of the Tibetans from a rock-demoness and a bodhisattva-monkey displays narrative elements from the Sanskrit epic *Rāmāyaṇa* (other historical vignettes again with borrowings from *Mahābhārata*) and the narrative about the meeting of the king with two Khotanese monks seems to have been ultimately adapted from the canonical *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*.

Central Asia (Sørensen and Hazod 2007, App. II; Vitali 1990, Gyurme Dorje *et al.* 2010). Taken together and considering the impact and influence these ideological and legendary narratives enjoyed—a standard *topoi* in all subsequent historical writings in Tibet—it is not amiss to consider these tales part and parcel of the country's national foundation myth, or its towering master narrative.



Fig. 1 Chos rgyal Srong btsan sgam po in Avalokiteśvara-style posture crowned by Amitabha.



Fig. 2 G.ya' bzang pa Chos kyi sMon lam. Local Yar stod ruler that claimed to be a Reborn Srong btsan sgam po.



Fig. 3 The Yar klung Valley. Corona Satellite.

The Popularization and Esoterization of the Cult

Who were the masterminds that were to vigorously promote the cult around Avalokiteśvara and the king in the first post-imperial centuries, almost a millennium ago—the divine-human salvific pair now being considered and treated as an inseparable unity, associated with his edifice erected in mid-7th century, the central *sanctum* in the heart of Lhasa? We know who these compilers (or, as in most cases, assumed treasure-finders as they are called), at least the most prominent ones, were: The Bengali master Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982–1054), assisted by a number of successors and followers (some of the leading Bka' gdams pa were in fact scions and descendants of the erstwhile dynastic rulers),¹⁴ forcefully promoted the cult of Srong btsan sgam po as a manifestation of Lokeśvara/Avalokita and not least the meditational precepts associated with the deity. It is recounted that it was the authoritative Atiśa who stood behind the “detection” (i.e. provided the impetus for its compilation) of the exoteric Pillar Testament, *Bka' chems Ka khol ma*, the earliest, mid-11th century, “biography” or “manifesto” (ideologically) ascribed to the founding king. The document was envisaged to serve as a sort of voiced or written will of the king, composed for the sake of perpetuating his counselling legacy to his descendants and for posterity. However, whatever its ultimate provenance, the text was copied several times, experiencing interpolations, and its oldest, currently extant exemplar may have originated in the early 13th century.

A little over one hundred years later another anthology of similar largely “biography-styled” material was compiled, this time expanded and supplemented with esoteric material ascribed to the king, centered around the king and his national mission for converting both country and people to Buddhism. The figures behind this text corpus, which was promoted or propagated as the “king’s own biography,”—similarly a fraudulent ascription—were a circle of actors for the promotion and ideological fixation on Avalokiteśvara (and, equally important, on Padmasambhava). The central figure here was the mentor and esoteric master Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192), a Rnying ma pa master who here was assisted by his disciples

¹⁴ A large number of scions of the erstwhile dynasty known as the *Yar lung jo bo* lineage were throne-holders in a number of monastic seats adhering to the Bka' gdams pa and hence displayed a vested interest in the enterprise; cf. Sørensen and Hazod (2005): pp. 314–19; Sørensen (1994): pp. 465–480. Adding to the emanational nexus Avalokiteśvara and Srong btsan sgam po, Atiśa too ingeniously included his principal pupil 'Brom ston rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas who conveniently was considered an embodiment of both (the divine-human pair) and a manifest instantiation of royalty.

when they detected (*gter ma*), i.e. compiled the *Ma ṅi bka' 'bum* (i.e. so-called *Jewel Collection*, ca. 1160?–1200). The biographical and saintly portraiture of him experienced in the non-sūtric section of this corpus a remarkable esoterization both in language and content, wrapped up in Rnying ma and Rdzogs chen lore. In the biographical section, these treasure-finders evidently had been inspired by the narrative strategies implemented by Atiśa and the Bka' gdams pa in disseminating and personalising the Avalokiteśvara cult centered around the role of the king in this narrative. Equally important, Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer also revealed (i.e. compiled or rather authored) the pioneering Padmasambhava hagiography *Zangs gling ma* (i.e. *Copper Island*), the first of a number of myth-laden, yet celebrated and widely disseminated biographies dedicated to the esoteric thaumaturge. A closer look at both hagiographical corpora unfolds a number of striking similarities, no wonder when the creator behind both documents is the same. Padmasambhava was regarded as a child or “son” incarnation of Amitābha just like Avalokiteśvara was depicted as a filial incarnation or manifestation of the same (Doney 2019: p. 39; Sørensen 1994: pp. 576–77). He went a step further and attempted to integrate and adopt the role and essential teachings of the king as delineated in *Ma ṅi bka' 'bum* to be part of a larger religious legacy left behind by the former, in other words, the afore-mentioned Rnying ma esoterization of the royal legacy; as its key architect, it was Myang ral's deliberate and grand project conceived as a soteriological scheme, but now to stage Padmasambhava at the centre of this overall legacy, not least through the esoteric-ritual triad *bla rdzogs thugs*, “Guru-rDzogs chen/Atiyoga-Mahākāruṅika, a meditative scheme as a means that enabled practitioners to attain swifter enlightenment. This reading of the overall national religious legacy conducive to liberation and national happiness was in fact a hybridization of the two above projects engineered and adapted by Myang ral. A project that thus staged the thaumaturge as the central figure, and equipped with the same salvific commitment as the king, and who in the national drama and foundation charter now was seen to be the decisive catalyst or its ultimate *porte-parole*. This Rnying ma initiated project, a retelling or re-evaluation of the national legacy going back to the founding king would prove successful, and at least popular in some corners of the society, whereas in bKa' gdams pa and Dge lugs pa circles and later the Dalai Lama court, heading the Dga' ldan pho brang government, still remained focussed on the original monarchic legacy, centre-staging the king as the original and sole national progenitor,¹⁵ with-

¹⁵ Sørensen (1994): pp. 7-8; Sørensen in Sørensen and Hazod (2007), pp. 463–71; Davidson (2019): p. 64; Kapstein (2000): pp. 141-62; Hirshberg (2016): pp. 3-5;

out, incidentally, belittling the subsequent role of Padmasambhava in the introduction of Buddhism, whether real or fictitious. As it seems, the national charter issue, central to the cultural memory of Tibet, in the coming centuries reflected an ongoing and often subtle controversy, in part ideologically framed, that was fought between factions from different denominations, the *Bka' gdams pa* and *Dge lugs pa* versus the *Rnying ma pa* in gaining pre-eminence in the battle, as it seems, for holding interpretive sovereignty in this matter.

Returning to the two major “royal narratives”—as said both ascribed to the king and representing his “word” (*bka'*) as it is claimed—allow us, at least in the case of the *gter ma* literature, to see authorial ascription to include cases where a work is seen or deemed to be written in the envisaged and incontestable “spirit” or “ultimate intent” of a postulated “author,” solely on the grounds that a narrative either displayed strong similarities to or involved descriptions commonly associated with the person in question or that an early ascription, standing untested, already had corroborated this “authorship.” The last assumption is noteworthy: A peculiar circumstance often seems to be operating, the longer back in time an authorial ascription held currency and authority, or the text’s celebrity (i.e. fame) and singularity often warranted its time-tested uniqueness, all the easier was the posthumous readiness to uncritically accept its authorial claim, almost as if time itself and the appealing aura of antiquity alone claimed to yield and guarantee particular validity. Admittedly, authorial attributions, rightly or wrongly, seldom were a direct object of reflection and scrutiny, it all the more was effectuated when in former times either an authority mechanically had indicated some form of approval of its “authorship,” or, in contrast, the legitimacy of a treatise or work would be dramatically invalidated when the ideological ascription to the celebrated author was not kept intact. From a modern viewpoint, any critique raised on that score would easily prove futile, a circumstance alone that opens up for new, almost impenetrable perspectives in handling and evaluating authorial ascription.

Latest Avatar—National or Ethnic Hero

Looking into the most recent times, the literary, biographical and later physical and material legacy associated with the king and his edifices (prominently centered around a number of early imperial temples such as *Ra sa 'Phrul snang*, *Ra mo che* and *Khra 'brug*) indeed paved the path for *Srong btsan sgam po* to become the nation’s

primary unifying icon or figure in the memory of the Tibetans. In the course of time, the king's legacy and status was prolonged or propped by his prominent inclusion into the incarnation succession lineage of the Dalai Lama (as a former rebirth) in which the king towered prominently, a lineage configured by the 5th Dalai Lama (and the Potala court), who in his writings incessantly stipulated his identity with and indebtedness to the king's pioneering role during the initial phase of imperial-era nation-building. The 5th Dalai Lama and the Potala court at the core of their incarnational template on their side had tapped into the 11-12th cent. 'Brom ston legacy that essentially was built around the same Avalokiteśvara-Srong btsan sgam po nexus, to the extent that the Dalai Lama lineage must be deemed to be nothing but a seamless extension of the 'Brom ston lineage (Sørensen 2005). The 5th Dalai Lama saw himself or was regarded as a natural successor to the king as the central figure and "the National-Spiritual Father of the Tibetans," basically continuing the original mission and time-honoured commitment of Avalokiteśvara in safeguarding and converting people to Buddhism. In the ongoing permutations the omnipresent king underwent, the most recent development taking place in Tibet, now part of China and actively furthered by the regime, includes his recent status as an Ethnic or National Hero (*mi rigs dpa' bo*, 民族英雄). In his birthplace alone, the Rgya ma Valley, tourists and visitors are now welcomed to the "Birthplace of Srong btsan sgam po" (*srong btsan sgam po'i 'khrungs yul*, 松赞干布出生地), a small cairn marking the birth site now accommodates a huge Srong btsan sgam po Memorial Hall (*dran gso khang*, 纪念馆) (Sørensen 2018). In the wider political development not least among Tibetans in Diaspora, the king all the more is called upon as a sort of "homme providentiel" exuding the nimbus of a national redeemer during the recent woeful political crisis.

*Mangled Literature and Imperial Legacy:
Bka' chems Mtho mthing ma*

The Impersonator: G.ya' bzang pa Chos rje Chos kyi smon lam

It was in this hazy physical and ideological atmosphere of "royal presence," teeming with its powerful and persistent royal-imperial *imaginaire* (Kapstein 2000: pp. 141-62), spurred by the author's hegemonic ambition that was paired with a habitual ease in identity-shifting by way of re-embodiment and the deity's purported salvific agenda and mission that both nurtured or paved the way for the cre-

ation of the fake biography. The text in question is called *Bka' chems Mtho mthing ma* ("Sapphire or Dark Blue Testament;" compiled around 1210–30?),¹⁶ and in this case we have an identifiable imposter or impersonator (Sørensen 1994: p. 21; 2000a; Ehrhard 2013: p. 147). Tapping into this national charter and celebrated founding tale delineated above was a local religious ruler of considerable repute, G.ya' bzang *chos rje* Chos kyi smon lam (*Dharmapraṇi[dha]) (1169–1233), in short G.ya' bzang pa. The Dharmasvāmin descended from the celebrated Snubs clan.¹⁷ He was considered the founder of a local seat called G.ya' bzang. His career was groomed by a circle of disciples that had followed in the wake of the illustrious Phag mo gru pa Rdo rje rgyal po (1110–1170). From his foremost teacher Skal ldan Ye shes seng ge (d. 1207), he received the essence of the Bka' brgyud pa tradition, not least the Māhamudrā and the Six Yogas of Nāropa. In addition to various teaching cycles related to Avalokiteśvara, Zhi byed and Gcod, these teachings formed the basis of the G.ya' bzang esoteric lore and creed. G.ya' bzang pa had also during his ecclesiastic socialisation and career studied Vinaya extensively, to the extent that he eventually held the title Vinayadhara. Most interesting was an idiosyncratic cycle stemming from the pen of G.ya' bzang pa personally, it adhered to a set of medical and esoteric cycles dealing with the diagnosis and therapy of illnesses caused by the planetary deity *gza' bdud* Rāhula, a cycle known as *Nyi ma mdung gang ma* stemmed from his pen. The therapy of these apotropaic *gza'* text cycles would eventually reach beyond the boundaries of G.ya' bzang, being regularly studied in Rnying ma pa circles and aroused the particular interest of the 5th Dalai Lama (Sørensen 2000b).

While approaching G.ya' bzang pa's religious background and orientation we should not ignore to emphasize once again the physical surroundings that he held sway over in the core area of Southern Central Tibet. The geo-historical and cultural ambience had a tremendous impact on his personality and, we are convinced, his sense of self-perception. At the heart of the uphill district of G.ya' bzang (lit. "Solid Slate Stones") stood its religious center or abbatial seat, Dpal G.ya' bzang kyi chos sde chen mo (est. 1206), the precinct also accommodated the throne that housed G.ya' bzang's local political institution that would soon play a role in Tibetan politics. It was (and still is) situated deep to the south in the Yar klung Valley (i.e. Yar

¹⁶ The term *mtho(n) mthing*, Skt. **abhinīla*, is a deep blue colour, commonly used for the colour of eyes, hair but also a colour of pillar and beams; Sørensen (1994): p. 21. The title of the work no doubt was an attempt to resemble the 11th century *Pillar Testament*, that served as *Vorlage*.

¹⁷ The following section draws heavily on the study in Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen (2000); Sørensen and Hazod (2005).

stod, Upper Yar klung) in Central Tibet, in other words, in the region that constitutes no less than the cradle and home of the erstwhile Tibetan dynasty. His institution and adjacent school, the G.ya' bzung bKa' brgyud pa moreover should soon gain a name. It paved the way for its rise as a regional religious and political entity that reached its zenith in the tumultuous 14th century during the Yüan Mongol supremacy in Tibet where they played a major role as an important and influential myriarchy (*khri skor*) approved by the Yüan court. His biography lists the area of his domain, specifying the areas of g.Ye/E, gNyal and Yar (stod), which covers a major part of present-day southern lHo kha (i.e. Shannan), with the Yar lha Sham po mountain massif towering in its midst.

In this milieu, the *chos rje* (alt. *rgyal ba*) G.ya' bzung pa's repute and influence grew dramatically following the establishment of his see in 1206, to the extent that a large amount of local donors from all over Southern Central Tibet, including the entire area of Yar klung treated him as a Dharma-king (*chos rgyal*) of supra-regional stature (cf. *Blue Annals* 770–71, Roerich tr. 656–67; Tucci 1971, pp. 193–94). It is recorded that he ruled according to the conceptual dyad, the dual “religious-secular” system (*lugs gnyis*)—in other words served in his dual function both as a religious ruling prelate and as a secular lord (*Gu bkra chos 'byung*, p. 968). He must have propagated his claim of being a genuine embodiment of the erstwhile dynastic founder from early on. Small wonder as we have noted, the area under his control and the wider Yar klung area and its environs are verily steeped in the country's royal and mythic history, it certainly can pride itself on being “Tibet's core royal landscape” that accommodated many “historical and civilizatory beginnings,” such as the allegorical anthropogenesis (union of a bodhisattva-monkey and a female demoness; cf. Sørensen 1994: pp. 125–34) of the Tibetan people, but also the many royal seats and the ancestral mountains (prominently Yar lha Sham po, home of the pre-Buddhist ancestor gods), the four towering castles of the early pre-historic kings, as well as the “royal necropolis,” the large burial ground or tumuli of the royal lineage—these monuments and cultural hallmarks are all situated in a bewildering number in the core area, known as “the Emperor's Valley” (Tucci (1987) under G.ya' bzung pa's sway. In dynastic time the area was part of the province of G.yo ru (with Khra 'brug defined as its centre, Tibet's “first” temple, the erection of which is ascribed to Srong btsan sgam po (Sørensen and Hazod 2005: p. 22ff. *et passim*; Hazod 2009: pp. 197–198). Finally, in terms of further royal legacies, the area under his sway was the area where two competing royal lineages met, respectively stemming from Yum brtan and 'Od srung lineage, the last true direct scions of the erstwhile dynasty (cf. Sørensen and Hazod 2000,

p. 14ff.).

Whether concrete or visionary: The density and strategic locations in this area therefore suggest a culturally and historically territorialized landscape. Surrounded by these ancestral monuments and celebrated sites and no doubt a still-vibrant tradition of nostalgia reverberating with Tibet's glorious past, this historically rich *terra sacra* was to have a tremendous, perhaps decisive impact on the G.ya' bzang pa, our impersonator.

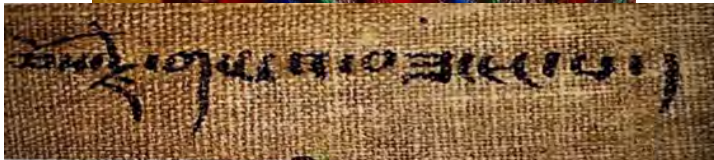




Fig 4 G.ya' bzang Monastery.

We are fortunate enough to have at our disposal a small number of early contemporary sources (14th–15th century) that offer some telling clues as to G.ya' bzang pa's motives, and, as we have seen, to the cultural ambience that gave rise to the document. In addition to the currently sole surviving (manuscript) exemplar of the Testament [*Bka' chems*] *Mtho mthing ma*, we have access to a bundle of highly informative medieval manuscripts from G.ya' bzang himself and his surroundings that reiterate the assertion and claim laid down in the Testament. Studying the texts from G.ya' bzang and a number of art works traced in the local monastery (Gyalbo *et. al.* 2000: pp. 243-258; Mignucci 2001) highlighting the ideology, the prevailing cult and legacy of the Saviour Saint, it becomes very clear to what extent the cult of Avalokiteśvara and of the king suffused and dominated the doctrinal and intellectual tradition of G.ya' bzang and its lore. His spirituality was wholly anchored in this tradition. It permeates all available documents, being evident on every page. G.ya' bzang pa clearly was obsessed with his royal identity and the latter's historical role. Text-cycles related to Avalokiteśvara dominated the pillar in G.ya' bzang's religious curricula. It was crowned with the claim, vigorously repeated in numerous texts by the founder G.ya' bzang pa

himself, that he was nothing but the very embodiment and living manifestation of the king. A lot of energy must have been invested in this claim. Its rigidity, its espousal, perhaps unsurprisingly in a medieval Tibetan context, was to be roundly accepted in all corners of the society.



Fig 5 *The Testament: bKa' chems Mtho mthing ma.*



Fig 6 *The Bundle Containing Medieval G.ya' bzang Manuscripts, the Dharma History of G.ya' bzang including the Biography of Chos kyi Simon lam.*

The King's Sainly Portrait in Text and Art: The Biographical Wall Paintings in his Tomb

The text in question,¹⁸ the *Mtho mthing ma* consists of three sections: the first introductory part constitutes a cosmographical exposé in which is mainly enumerated a list of the names of Buddha-fields and *lokadhātu*, a visionary exposition of cosmic interpenetration that has been drawn, at least in part, from the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* and a still non-extant, but evidently cognate text known as *Me tog brgyan*

¹⁸ Cf. Sørensen (2000a) for details.

pa'i zhing bkod.¹⁹ The second, major part contains a 15-chapter *Jātaka* collection dedicated to Mahākāruṇika, which finds a striking and verbatim parallel in a similar collection of brief rebirth-stories found in the King's standard Vita, the popular and often reprinted *Ma ṅi bka' 'bum*.²⁰ Finally, as the climax and evidently as the clue to the entire narrative, the text contains a brief or contracted narrative dedicated to the saintly or pious life of Srong btsan sgam po, here composed as a sort of brief autobiography, the voice in this section introduces the king himself as a first-person speaker.

This text's concluding section or sketch, which closes the book, includes all the standard scenes found in the biographical recast of the king, culminating in the king's "last act," akin to the Buddha's *nirvāṇa*, i.e. the well-known scene with the ritual absorption or apotheosis of this king and his two principal consorts (*rgyal po yab yum thugs kar thim lugs*) into his tutelary statue of the Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara Ekadaśamukha (see Fig 9, 10, 11 for the royal triad), accompanied by the enumeration of a number of well-known future prophesies (*ma 'ong lung bstan*) purportedly proclaimed by the king on this occasion (Sørensen 1994, pp. 330ff. for the lengthy section; Dotson 2019: pp. 68-69).

A Literary Pastiche

The section is well-known, and is almost verbatim gleaned from the identical passages found in *Ka khol ma* and *Ma ṅi bka' 'bum*. There can be little doubt that the *Bka' chems Mtho mthing ma* here, as in the other parts of the work, must be considered a replica or literary clone, indeed a cento, of the above Vita collections. His approach is also evident: The work is not an individual piece of writing but consists almost exclusively of long verbatim excerpts skilfully compiled (*sgrigs*) and excerpted by using the traditional scissor-and-paste method (Sørensen 2000a: pp. 152-54, 166). As can be gleaned from the closing lines of the text, it is purported that the "life-story scenes" of the king,

¹⁹ I.e. **Puṣpālankara(kṣetra)vyūha*. Cf. Sørensen (1994): pp. 21, 345; Davidson (2003): pp. 67-69; Ehrhard (2013): p. 146. The cosmic panoramic scenario depicts the realm of Vairocana, i.e. the (all-embracing) cosmo-deitic origin of all: Vairocana Great Glacial Lake (of Gnosis), *[Jñāna-]Mahāhīmasāgara, i.e. rNam snang (Ye shes) Gangs chen mtsho. Cf. Sørensen (1994): pp. 494-97 for the background. For similar scenes, *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra*; see Cleary (1993): pp. 203ff. To what extent *Me tog brgyan pa'i zhing bkod* reflects a lengthy excerpt from the latter sūtra, or a Tibetan adaptation of the same, is still not clarified in detail.

²⁰ Cf. Sørensen and Hazod (2007): pp. 467-69; Ehrhard (2013): 146f. The first xylographic version of the text was printed in 1521 under the auspices of the Mang yul Gung thang royal court, scions of the erstwhile Yarlung kings and ultimately related by blood to Srong btsan sgam po.

including the crucial “last act,” had been painted as murals (*rgyud ris*), paintings executed evidently in the early phase of the post-dynastic period, or during one of its ensuing renovations of the adjacent temple atop his royal tomb in the Yar lung valley.²¹ The same feats of the king had already been painted on the walls of the Ra sa 'Phrul snang raised in the 640's (Sørensen 1994: p. 291), paintings that might have served as model for the tomb paintings.²² It is revealing—and anticipating the unravelling of the story below—that *Ka khol ma* (possibly in a later, interpolated edition of this text, post 14th century?) similarly claims that *Ka khol ma* and *Mtho mthing ma* were painted on the walls of the king's tomb, i.e. as life story murals or wall paintings. This was evidently the case, and in particular what concerns the scenes depicting the celebrated saintly version of the king's life delineated above that illuminates the king's magic feats and faculties worthy of a true Avalokiteśvara, where the paintings were seen to constitute a visual reification of a textual tradition. Does this imply that the (deplorably non-extant) paintings were based upon or followed the narrative in *Ka khol ma* and in *Mtho mthing ma*,²³ or alternatively this text (or these texts) was composed, following existing paintings already executed, from murals that inspired the Testament to be written down? Both options represent an exciting and feasible assumption and taken at face value, we assume with the statement that the *Mtho mthing ma* Testament (or at least some of the crucial saintly scenes and acts described, such as his “last will”) by G.ya'

²¹ Sørensen (1994), pp. 21, 345–46. The tomb was called sKu ri smug po, i.e. “the Maroon-coloured Mount Entombing the (King's) Body.” Akester (2016), pp. 436–37 offers us some insights into the history of the king's colossal Red Tomb or Bang so dmar po located in 'Phyongs rgyas Valley. The Gtsang khang dmar po on the top of the tomb was equipped with 12 pillars founded in late 13th century. It is to be assumed that the tomb accommodated an even earlier temple that was replaced by the 13th century construction. A point that is not fully clarified: the wall-paintings were either executed inside the tomb itself, or more likely, in the adjacent temple atop the tomb. See also 'Jigs med gling pa, *Bkra shis srong btsan bang so'i dkar chag*; Deroche (2013): p. 98ff.

²² There is little room to believe that these wall-paintings of king's wondrous feats, depicting him with a strong Buddhist profile, were part of the artistic programme in the 7th century, following the king's sepulchral interment. These paintings in Ra sa 'Phrul snang were obviously painted in the 11th century at the earliest since we have grounds to believe that they represent an artistic reproduction based upon a written template, most likely the *Bka' chems Ka khol ma*.

²³ In other words, either the biographical scenes in these texts served as *Vorlage* for executing the wall-paintings of the king's life or, alternatively, the paintings, assuming they were executed early on and prior to the existence of both *Ka khol ma* and *Mtho mthing ma* (resp. 11–12th and 13th century) served as artistic matrix for the texts. We shall opt for the first explanation, since we cannot conclusively clarify when the wall-paintings were executed, probably not prior to the 11th century, when *Ka khol ma* was compiled.

bzang pa came into existence following renovation work at the tomb of Srong btsan sgam po is plausible, a tomb, as indicated above, that was under his jurisdiction between 1206 and 1233, the year he passed away.



Fig 7 Srong btsan sgam po's Tomb in Yar lung Valley.

Amalgamating Divine Command and Worldly Demands

Borrowed Feathers

Now the scene is set to approach the crux behind the unique case of forgery. Our reflection in the sequel attempts to look at the case from a number of angles. How did G.ya' bzang pa go about to underpin or promote his personal agenda by claiming an all-out identity with the king? In fact, he took recourse to a time-honoured literary and rhetorical tool that proved to be probably by far the widest used tactical and political device in medieval literature: prophecy (*lung bstan*). Employing predictions or issuing (consciously post-executed but predated) *ex eventu* foretellings are a very common, almost compulsory instrument in the ritual and political discourse in Tibet (and its extensive employment or deployment in literature). Strangely enough, they seem in theory and in a temporal sense to have been operational progressively as well as regressively: the operability of temporality hence allows us to depict and envision the future of the past.

The passage occurs in the concluding sentences of the last part of the text when the king in a valedictory note responds to the question as to where he was now heading for after his passing?—a statement proclaimed just before he immersed himself into his Tutelary Deity. The choice is crucial in the entire narrative. The scenario alone would amount to the Māhayāna ideal of a dynamic (*apraṭiṣṭhita*) *nirvāṇa* bound by an Avalokiteśvara-style commitment driven by altruism,

i.e. to return into this world to work tirelessly for the welfare of the living beings in the future.

The prophetic passage in the *Mtho mthing ma* (283b3–b5) reads:

The King spoke: “Listen! You Domestic Ministers headed by Minister (mGar), after passing away in the Iron-Male-Dog year (i.e. 650 AD), I (*bdag*) will be (re)born (*’khrungs*) 525 years later counting year by year in the Great Golden Ox year (i.e. 1169 AD) in the mountainous region of the Kingdom of G.yor (ru, District = Yar klung) as Bhiksu “Dharma Resolve” Dharma-praṇi (i.e. Chos kyi sMon lam). Seven domestic ministers (of mine), headed by you (mGar) (listen carefully!), you too shall (at that point) be born as (my) son(s), and we shall meet the other (i.e. remaining ministers) again. Speaking thus, and grasping two lotus flowers in his hands, the King himself was absorbed into the heart of (the statue of) Mahākāruṅika.”

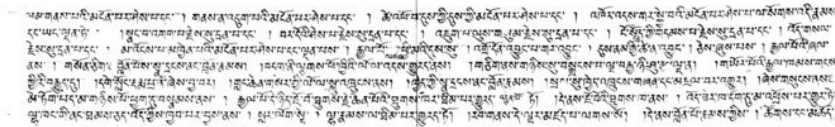


Fig 8 *The Passage in the Testament with the Prophecy.*

The Dialectics of Prophecies, G.ya’ bzang pa’s Hegemonic Strategy and Salvific Ideology

Modelling Kingship: Real cum Performative Lives

Notable here firstly is the faulty calculation, due to the notorious sloppiness in numerical calculation among Tibetans as documented in numerous cases when works are copied and recopied. It should be 520 years had passed, a simple typo and the correct calculation and figure is confirmed in G.ya’ bzang pa’s biography where the same passage is quoted almost verbatim.²⁴ If nothing else, it indicates that

²⁴ Cf. g.Ya’ bzang chos ’byung 17b4–18a1: *rgyal po’i zhal nas / gson cig blon po mgar gyis sna drangs blon po bdun / bdag ni lcags pho khyi’i lo la ’das na(s) / gcig nas gnyis su bgrang pa’i lnga brgya nyi s(h)u na / g.yor po’i rgyal khams gangs gi ri rgyud du dge slong dharma pra ni zhes grags pa / glang chen gser gyi lo la ’khrungs nas / khyod kyis sna drangs nang blon bdun po rnams / sras su khyed ’khrungs gzhan rnams mjal bar ’gyur / zhes gsungs nas me tog utpala gnyis phyag tu bsnams te / rgyal po jo bo thugs rje chen po’i thugs kar thim par gyur to*, see Gyalbo et al. (2000), pp. 67, 123. The last G.ya’ bzang text (*ibid.* pp. 105, 141), similarly a brief biography of G.ya’ bzang pa again cites the relevant passage (for the first time surely documented in the Testament) above wherefrom it is almost verbatim copied by Gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po* (pp. 770–71), but the latter author adds some interesting comments

our currently sole surviving exemplar of the *Mtho mthing ma* Testament is an apograph. The importance of the prophetic statement is corroborated in his biography where it towers prominently at the very beginning of the text (Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: pp. 66-68, 105) as if to corroborate and foreground its valued significance for his entire life. The centrality of the prophecy to the entire text is also indicated by Kaḥ thog Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755), who labels the document *gYam bzang lung bstan Tho ling* (*sic* = *mTho mthing*) *ma* in his oft-quoted *Bod rje btsan po'i gdung rabs* (Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: pp. 19-20).

In this statement that is tarnished as a personal prophetic passage—a genuine *vaticinium ex eventu*—in other words a post-diction here heralding a future birth, we revealingly observe that the compiler of the Testament, G.ya' bzang pa himself (or some scribe in his service putting pen to the paper what his master dictates) designates his district as the “Kingdom of G.yor ru,” the imperial time designation of the district, clearly an attempt to heighten and add the notion of a royal realm to the status of his regime. Further, in this very passage choreographed by G.ya' bzang pa, as mentioned above, he introduces a royal setting with the protagonists involved in this “farewell or departure scene” where the King and his two consorts (here turned into lotus flowers) were ritually absorbed into the statue (cf. also Dotson 2019: pp. 69, 72). The scene reproduced in *Mtho mthing ma* is a dramatically reduced version compared to the lengthy version found in the corresponding Vita-narratives (cf. Sørensen 1994: pp. 330-39 for the original versions) that served as his source. To reduce this celebrated and crucial royal farewell scene to merely consist of the final prophetic words of the king that heralds the king's future rebirth as G.ya' bzang pa allow us to see the extent of a calculated manipulation conducted by the author.

Equipped with the two major royal testaments that served as textual basis or *Vorlage* for his own work, these proved to be a useful and rich template that reduced the need to conduct major changes or offering alternative narratives in the text. In order to maintain and

on G.ya' bzang pa, stating that he regularly claims to be Srong btsan sgam po in person as well as recounting many stories such as the history of the erection of Khra 'brug and how precious objects and sacred books were concealed there ... *rang nyid srong btsan sgam po yin pa dang / khra 'brug rtsigs lugs / nor dang chos kyi gter sbas lugs la sogs mang po yang gsungs / nga nyid lnga brgya tha ma tshe / bzhi brgya nyi shu rtsa lnga na / lho phyogs g.yor po'i rgyal khams su / glang chen gser gyi lo la 'khrungs / mtshan ni dharma pra ni zhes / rgyal po 'di skad gsung zhes par / dam pa'i chos rnams 'chad par byed*. The *Blue Annals* adds in the following that G.ya' bzang pa, the Dharma-King, after he had erected his monastery (i.e. 1206 AD), was invited by alm-givers and donors all over Southern Central Tibet. See Roerich (tr.), *Blue Annals* 656–657; Tucci (1971), pp. 193–94. See also sDe srid Sangs rgya mtsho, *Drin can rtsa ba'i bla ma* 110a2-112a2; Ahmad (1999): pp. 188-90.

preserve the authenticity of the biographical legacy, G.ya' bzang pa's hands in this matter evidently were bound, an entire new retelling of the King's life would probably have jeopardized the effect and significance of his own retelling, risking him to bring a lot of new material that had no parallel in the literary transmission related to the king.

Indeed, the *Mtho mthing ma's* mangled version of Srong btsan sgam po's valedictory must have exerted a sizeable impact on contemporary readers and audience once it became known. As can be gleaned from the note in *Blue Annals*, G.ya' bzang pa was in this period addressed as a Dharmarāja (Chos rgyal), in itself not an overly important epithet. In due course, he was able to gather around him enough donors and adherents, suggesting to us that his "new identity" seemed to work at least within the larger area he controlled. In fact, it suggests to us that G.ya' bzang pa in his heydays saw his "small kingdom" located in the very heartland of the former kings—the cradle of the Tibetan Empire—as a revival attempt to duplicate, on a small level, Tibet's glorious imperial past, centre-staging himself as the one-time ruler and with this written document re-enacting the latter's pioneering salvific mission, and thereby with the local retinue under his tutelage staging a royal scenario. In any case, G.ya' bzang pa with his rule and supra-regional ambitions, laid the foundation for the ensuing rise of G.ya' bzang as a major player as an influential myriarchy in the struggle for power in the ensuing Mongol-Yüan period and thus helped shape and influence Central Tibetan policy.²⁵ What we still cannot answer is to what extent G.ya' bzang pa foremostly was inspired or motivated through spiritual visions, revelations or visitations of the ruler.²⁶ Illuminating in this respect is a case in point, as his biography recounts, once when asked: "Are you (really) Srong btsan sgam po?" As answer, G.ya' bzang pa merely stared directly into the sky and did not respond in any other way. But since numerous instructions based upon [gestures like] this were given [i.e. displayed] [everyone] were [anyway able] to understand their meaning."²⁷ Again this scenario is adopted from the celebrated biography preserved in *Ma ñi bka' 'bum*. Beyond that, the response implies consent through sheer silence. The passage nevertheless might be taken

²⁵ See Petech (1990) drawing mainly on the key source for the period *Rlangs*.

²⁶ Detailed information is missing whether G.ya' bzang pa, similar to some of his contemporaries, entertained more elaborate *guru yoga*-style mnemonic and inspirational visualizations of Avalokitesvara through the king, that again served as a gateway or impetus for his assumed identity; see Hirshberg (2016); p. 188f.

²⁷ *chos rje la khyed srong btsan sgam po lags sam zer bas spyan nam mkha' la gcer gzigs nas yan man gang yang mi gsung bar de la brten pa'i gdams pa mang po gcig gsung pas don go bar gda'*. This scene resembles or is inspired from a passage from *Ma ñi bka' 'bum*; see Sørensen (1994): p. 327f.

to indicate that some sort of scepticism reigned about his status as a kingly manifestation, a suspicion that he here encountered with a tellingly voiceless gesture, true, by the way, to nature's ultimate reality that is and remains indescribable or unspeakable. Another telling case in point, in his private chamber, on its inner walls inspirational murals (*rgyud ris*) had been drawn with scenes from the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* and *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* (Gyalbo *et al.* 2000: pp. 71, 85, 125, 129). All in all, whether seen as an expression of corporeal duality in unity or unity in duality, Chos kyi smon lam, as it seems, at one and the same time evidently not only *lived a [factual] life* as G.ya' bzang pa but also *performed a [royal] life*—as an assumed divine being.



Fig. 9 Mask of the King Srong btsan sgam po manifested as Avalokiteśvara crowned by Amitābha.
Emanational Mask Play: One Body, Many Identities – One Identity, Many Bodies.



Fig. 10 *Bodhistava Avalokiteśvara in the Tradition of King Songtsen Gampo* — Central Tibet; 13th century. Pigment on cloth. Rubin Museum of Art. Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin. C2003.50.5 (HAR 271).



Fig. 11 The Thousand-armed, Eleven-Headed (Ekadaśamukha) Avalokiteśvara. Thangka from G.ya' bzang. The King and his two Queens seated in the upper register right.



Fig. 12 The King and his two Queens aligned in the Departure Scene to be absorbed into the Eleven-Headed Avalokiteśvara Statue. Detail from previous Thangka.

What had happened? Was the “testament,” a literary document, the culmination or the beginning of his assumed additional or extra identity? What was in his mind when this document *Mtho mthing ma* was drafted? Was there a particular need on the side of Chos kyi sMon lam for this manifestation? On a personal level, this much seems warranted, its gestation evidently mirrored an insatiable wish to underpin his status as a truly rightful royal manifestation and from the scattered references available, he must have firmly believed in this identity-shift or identity-amplification, a case of corporeal or embedded alterity, evidently stated with conviction by a charismatic person craving to assemble ample authority. G.ya’ bzang pa was enacting Srong btsan sgam po in life and writing, (ab)using history to his own ends. An important step in this direction was effectuated by him within the territory he controlled, as one of the first in Tibetan history—here arguably inspired by Bla ma Zhang (Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 37-38, 88, 615; Yamamoto 2012: pp. 202-03; see below)—G.ya’ bzang pa sealed off his territory by way of *ri rgya lung rgya lam rgya* rituals, “sealing off (*rgya sdom pa*) the mountains, valleys and roads,” no doubt a political step to demarcate his territory and as such it marks him as the local ruler of a district that was not crossable without a travel-permit, and in a wider sense implemented in order to introduce the rule of law by establishing “protective zones” in the area, a demarcation that later played a role in the Yüan time local skirmishes and feuds among disputing myriarchies, due to their ar-

chipelagic and territorially overlapping structure that fuelled countless conflicts.²⁸

The identity process itself obviously proved less difficult for him: “Borrowing identity,” as noted above, indeed was a common phenomenon when seen on its idiosyncratic Tibetan background. In due course, up through the following centuries, all hierarchs in Tibet claimed to be embodiments, either referring to the body of their predecessors or promising to re-appear in form of a successor in entire catenating lineages. It was a regulatory system that at one point turned into an ecclesiastical industry of clerical and hierarchic promotion by way of the “rebirth” principle (*yang srid*). Adding to this was the quality of an assumed “divine profile,” where (often the self-same) hierarchs, proclaimed (or: were proclaimed) to be embodiments of a saint or a divine being. It is worth reiterating that this was a natural development, from the 11th century onwards, to proliferate the bodhisattva concept that had been introduced and anchored in the bygone imperial period where kings were considered embodiments of Buddhist deities. G.ya’ bzang pa was in this role not a pioneer, among spectacular predecessors counted Lama Zhang G.yu brag pa (1123–93), who similarly—as an embodiment of the founding king—nurtured hegemonic ambitions that involved the seizure of territory, military battle, as well as enforcing secular laws in the role as a local *cakravartin*-styled ruler.²⁹ As discussed above, countless ascetics and religious masters now claimed or were being claimed to be manifestations—not rarely of Avalokiteśvara, this proved to be a favourite choice or call due to the latter’s appealing salvific profile—the sole proof underpinning their assertion or claim often rested upon the accompanying or confirming availability of prophecies. It is an important point to broach. The discursive dynamics of such often strictly (self-)promotional and, as it seems, self-operating prophecies ensured that the individual in question was capable of assuming an appropriate identity tailored to his specific needs and missions, as in this case. Not seldom, the tactic seemed to reflect a tenacious inclination for a complacent *Selbstinszenierung*.³⁰

Prophecies nevertheless are a phenomenon of trite occurrence in Tibetan ecclesiastic and historical literature concerning Tibetan masters, often appropriately underscored by citing allegedly authorita-

²⁸ Gyalbo *et al.* (2000): pp. 19-20; App. VII. It originally indicated a hunting ban, yet in a wider sense *ri rgya lung rgya* involved two different but parallel traditions: The first is tantamount to ‘monastic codes of rights and regulations’, and the second is public decrees or laws enacted by a ruler. See Huber (2004): p. 133. For the Yüan time myriarchic skirmishes and ensuing court cases, see Petech (1990).

²⁹ See Sørensen and Hazod (2007): pp. 30-39; Yamamoto (2015).

³⁰ See Sørensen and Hazod (2007): pp. 486–94 for this phenomenon.

tive canonical sources (*lung*) where for instance their birth or imminent coming are hinted at. We find them in most biographical narratives, quoted to provide “canonical” confirmation of a person’s unusual origin or miraculous coming. Most notably, such divine or canonical approval was deemed absolutely indispensable to ensure wider public acceptance. For the person in question being raised to the status of an incarnate, the prophetic certificate (*lung bstan*), written or spoken, was essential and when reading numerous reports and biographies, it appears to have been a treasured commodity. It is not much amiss to maintain that Tibetan history (and indeed Buddhist history) over long stretches often was formed and accompanied by prophecy-laden narratives (at least as they are deployed and recounted in historical and religious literature), since as a rhetoric tool their repercussions were conducive to impact and alter the resultant course of action. The prophetic message delivered—the voice of the Gods or as here of the Avalokiteśvara-manifested king of yore—served as a final verdict, the outcome of which changed both plot and narrative, becoming thereby a game changer. Prophetic literature and medieval historical writing in Tibet in many cases prove to be nothing but a form of historiographical providentialism, a genre trafficked in narratives replete with prophecies and prodigies. Abolishing, so prophecies seem to operate, the porous barriers between past and present, the past in such statements serves as a prerequisite, in fact a mirror to the present and the future. As it seems, the issue of temporality hence is being staged as the observer’s or protagonist’s individual “timescape.”

Embodiment and Incarnation as Sainthood and Social Vocation

Where prophecies served as a verbal catalyst paving the way for the legitimation and recognition of an embodiment, the very concept of embodiment itself remained a decisive socio-religious hallmark emblematic to Tibetan religious culture: the virtuosity, flexibility and convenience with which in Tibet the production of “other/extrabodiness” took place, and to this must be added the general acceptance of such staked claims. In the larger perspective, their modus operandi concerns the core issue of heritage or inheritance. It can be described as an inventive and resourceful industry and regulatory principle that eventually produced an endless flow of “borrowed and constructed identities,” in other words the conscious manifestation of embodiments/re-embodiments by way of incarnation (*sprul sku, skye ba*). It proved to be socially acceptable and successful: The proliferation of successive and catenating lineages of incarnations in number literally exploded in the 17th century. Evidently, it was a phenome-

non that was deemed culturally legitimate, even endorsed, perhaps in some corners badly required, as a means to further an ecclesiastic career or construct a saintly profile as basis for an incarnation line. If not representing or shaping a double life, at least it was considered to be an extended accretion to earthly life and profane identity. Encountering such incarnation-shifts in countless sources, and how they took form, it appears that there are not seldom grounds to suspect that an ascetic's or hierarch's intense meditative or spiritual visions of or contact with a certain deity proved sufficient enough to lay claim of being a manifestation of that very deity in question. It was to become the cornerstone for ensuring and perpetuating spiritual and abbatial regulation, for the ascent to seats and thrones, and, in short, for acquiring social prestige and for upholding and legitimising hard-won spiritual and secular prerogatives. In the present case it provided the ideological stepping-stone for a local monk-ruler equipped with adequate religious and secular ambitions. The spiritual capital won through his exalted position and hegemonic aspirations were to galvanize political power and repute, both within and beyond his own realm.

*Scriptural and Personal Ennoblement:
Avalokiteśvara in Human Form*

The Person Who Would be King

The vicissitude and actual diffusion of the *Mtho mthing ma* document itself in the following centuries is difficult to trace. What we can note is that nonetheless in due course the document was in wide circles accepted as the words and text of Srong btsan sgam po. Accepting this meant accepting Chos kyi smon lam as his embodiment, a cakravartin-styled ruler. *Mtho mthing ma* was authoritatively listed as a part of the king's "written legacy" in later editions of the more universally accepted *Ka khol ma* and *Ma ñi bka' 'bum*, thus entering the mainstream text-tradition related to the king, studied and read within all denominations in Tibet irrespective of credal affiliation and preferences, ranging from the Dge lugs pa to the Rnying ma pa. A number of Mss of *Ma ñi bka' 'bum* was in circulation until it was first printed, as a Royal Print of 1521 AD at the ruling court of Mang yul Gung thang, a ruling house boasting descent from the erstwhile Yarlung Dynasty, and hence their heads ambitious descendants and scions of the founder king. To be true, *Mtho mthing ma* is listed in *Ma ñi bka' 'bum* in an interlinear scholium, a sort of scholarly comment to the transmission of the latter text, just as it being mentioned in *Ka khol*

ma,³¹ which, oddly enough, however was never printed or xylographed. A crucial question remains as to at what point or when this mentioning of *Mtho mthing ma* was inserted into these texts. A fair guess is somewhere in the 14-15th century.

Nowhere, so far, has any serious critical comment been mooted that questioned its claim for authenticity. True, G.ya' bzung pa's Testament was never, as far as we know, transmitted down through generations of masters (*gsan yig*-style) as we can document for the other two major "biographies" (Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 463–70), it must have circulated in a few copies only, accounting for the stray quotations found so far. Nevertheless, the "success" of G.ya' bzung pa in embodying the king went further: Assisted by his resourceful Regent, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, with his own status as a genuine manifestation of Avalokiteśvara and of the king at the centre of his own claim for authority, ennobled G.ya' bzung pa by including him into an extended but authoritative lineage of previous incarnations behind the Dalai Lama institution in the 17th century, G.ya' bzung pa—by then widely recognized as a prominent manifestation of the king—now was enrolled and lauded as a virtual pre-incarnate of the Dalai Lama by the Potala court, a late or posthumous gratification.³² Why was he included into the Dalai Lama prestigious pre-incarnate gallery? No doubt the 5th Dalai Lama, in this process most ingeniously aided by his Regent, had scrutinized Tibetan history in search for eligible candidates and forerunners from the past that ei-

³¹ The *Mtho mthing ma* is already mentioned in *Bka' chems Ka khol ma* (fx. 2015 ed. 197-98) and a scholium (*mchan*) in the dKar chag of the *Ma ni bka' 'bum* (6a2 in the Punaka printed ed.) where it is claimed with certainty that it is part of bKa' of the king and therefore suitable to be included in the Mdo section of the latter text, an inclusion that apparently never took place. See also Sørensen (1994): pp. 21, 345; Ehrhard (2013). At the core of this claim rests the crucial issue what the Tibetans actually meant with *bka'*? The *ipsissima verba*, i.e. true words of the king or words that approximate or convey the sense in tune with or resembling what one assumed to reflect the king's ultimate intent. The Tibetans would probably endorse the first option.

³² Lin (2017): p. 150; see sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Drin can rtsa ba'i bla ma* 110a2-112a2, 137b2; Ahmad (1999): pp. 188-90. The tutor of the 5th Dalai Lama, Gter bdag gling pa, who regularly advised the Great Fifth on doctrinal matters, acknowledged G.ya' bzung pa among many predecessors as an genuine embodiment of Avalokiteśvara due to the capability of simultaneous and successive multi-bodging; cf. *Rin chen phreng ba*, 243-44: ...*bod kyi rgyal rabs lta bu yab sras 'khrungs rabs su byung ba dang / bla ma zhang dang g.ya' bzung pa chos rgyal 'phags pa dang gu ru chos dbang mnga' ris pañ chen byang bdag gnyis po thams cad mkhyen pa sku na rim 'ga' dang thog mtshungs pa sogs byung yang 'gal char mi 'gyur ba 'dra lags te.....'dir 'phags pa'i rnam sprul tshad med pas dus gcig la sku'i bkod pa du ma ston pa mi 'gal pa yin te / 'phags pa'i mdzad pa gdul bya'i snang ba la go mi 'gag par thugs rje'i 'brel bas snang bar sgrub pa'i phyir /*.

ther were regarded as manifestations of the Saviour Saint themselves (and the number of candidates here proved to be quite staggering, albeit only the most celebrated or the most politically acceptable figures were chosen) or otherwise had served as protector of the physical or spiritual legacy of the erstwhile king. In a few cases, even candidates who only remotely contributed to the legacy or perpetuation of teachings and cycles associated with him, found their way into the pre-incarnate lineage.

Indeed, among these, G.ya' bzang pa proved a suitable candidate, the very existence and circulation of the Testament surely here also carried more than ordinary weight, albeit it apparently nowhere turns up in the extensive writings of the 5th Dalai Lama and the Regent. The Great 5th had otherwise distinguished himself as an astute, self-assured and overly sensitive historian, a circumstance witnessed among others in his comments throughout the popular *Bod kyi deb ther*, contrary to the issues and the stance taken by him regarding his own incarnation lineage. G.ya' bzang pa's narrative is nevertheless a minor contribution to Tibetan (proto-)nationalism, a set of stories on which, in particular during the Ganden Phodrang era, the emergent Tibetan nation-state was to be founded.

"The Wheel of the World swings through
the same phases again and again."

Rudyard Kipling (1888),
The Man Who Would be King

A Narrative Analogization and Figural Interpretation

Within Western historiographical research, the typological concept of figural interpretation and fulfilment interlinking temporally disparate historical sequences has recently been broached as useful analytical instrument, based upon ideas originally inspired by E. Auerbach. The concept is useful and conducive to explicate the narrative strategy of G.ya' bzang pa and his life. Instead of seeing personal events as individual or separate destinies (or timescapes), the concept offers an explanation how antecedent incidences and foregone events, including persons of the past foreshadow and predestine (or: re-embodiment, as in this case) a contextually similar event/person of the present, thereby become prophecies of later ones in which they find their fulfilment. At the core of the analysis rests our understanding of the relationship between persons or events by way of comparison or semblance. In the binary structure of the relationship between the king of the past and G.ya' bzang pa of the present both seem equally interdependent to the narrative. In the figural typology, the signifi-

cance of the past is helping to (re)affirm the present, the old, so to say, becomes a prophecy of the new by functioning as its pre-determinant. Serving as a providential scheme, dissolving the distinction or barriers between past and present, the past here becomes an explanatory principle. A telling example is Christian medieval chroniclers who in their historical comparative construction drew analogies of the lives and roles between their rulers and that of bygone rulers like King David, Alexander the Great, or Constantine, not only by listing the ideal or positive attributes of such erstwhile rulers, but also by narratively establishing a casual relationship between what these rulers once had achieved and that of a new ruler.³³ The *Mtho mthing ma* Testament in question is a case in point, suggesting a set of common properties. This analogous narrative mode and typological interpretation by way of comparing a ruler (in casu G.ya' bzang pa) in the self-staging narrative championed by him with an ideal figure means that the barrier between the past and the present is abolished, the temporal interdependence in the emplotted narrative entails that the historical significance of the past only can be validated by an instantiation in/of the present. This kind of typology is often used when the narrative concerns issues such as genealogy and descent, i.e. the genealogical model. The interlinkage between the former king and G.ya' bzang pa can be regarded as a relational form of genealogy—and formally genealogy, as defined by G. Spiegel, deploys history as a series of biographies (or, we can add, a case of extended biography) linked by the principle of succession, again whether factual or merely ideological-symbolic.³⁴ In Tibet, such purely ancestral kinship or pedigree types of genealogical models also included non-human content—yet transmitted by successive lines of religious masters—found other expressions too, the same genealogical terminology (*brgyud*, etc.) was also used for transfers of wholly spiritual “genealogies” of religious and esoteric text cycles. In the Srong btsan sgam po G.ya' bzang pa “genealogy,” a conflation of these modes would seem to merge, it is as much a proper “incarnational-divine genealogy” of an anthropomorphized Avalokiteśvara as much as a transmission of Avalokiteśvara-related spiritual text material embodied and transmitted through these figures.

³³ See G. Spiegel (2002): pp. 83-85. Spiegel (2007): p. 4; Spiegel (1997): pp. 91-92.

³⁴ G. Spiegel (1997): pp. 106, 108.

*Forgery: The Ethical and Epistemic Question,
and the Justification of Rule*

Evidently, Umberto Eco (Eco 1979: pp. 224-26) here would talk about a case of ostension (or even pseudo-ostension), where factual events parallel pre-existing legends, and where *narratives become facts*. But assessing the issue and case of forgery within or between different cultures is often problematic, albeit the concept of an absolute universal has long held sway, opening up for attempts to apply functional and valid global comparisons between distinct entities. Recent theories have argued for a universal application of a historical consciousness, universal to all cultures, allowing us to deal with comparable historical processes. It is argued that a shared historical consciousness does prevail, defined as an anthropological universal and allegedly common/universal to all cultures, as said, that allow us to draw a certain amount of viable and valid comparisons of historical processes across different cultures.³⁵ Yet, the constraints of conducting theory-based global comparisons of historical (or here writing or literary) processes, however appealing and occasionally viable, involve an appreciable amount of both latent or open individualized presuppositions fraught with dissimilar conceptual, ethical, logical, epistemic and not least linguistic differences that render any cultural analogy risky, inconclusive and at best inchoate.

Whether seen from a modern or a historical perspective in a Western context, the *mTho mthing ma* case is regarded as a forgery. By contrast, in a medieval Tibetan context, the entire issue of forgery may surely be seen and evaluated differently.³⁶ The emic cultural context must here never be left out of sight: The medieval world (and here an Oriental or Occidental perspective may not differ much)—contrary to the modern world, generally had no or little conceptual alternative to the belief in wonder and miracles, saints or the inexplicable *modus*

³⁵ J. Rüsen (2017): pp. 41-42, 110ff.

³⁶ To the medieval mindset, supernatural or otherworldly agencies, or as here agential divine beings, regularly intervened through signs (or voices) in order to indicate their approval or rejection of human endeavour. It was wholly rational. Dreams, mnemonic visions and miraculous manifestations, and prophetic voices could here be included, were significant components in the political and ritual discourse, and signs and visions considered perfectly sensible elements in such narratives. The *modus operandi* chosen therefore often remained obscure or vaguely understood to outsiders. Tibetan historical narratives truly abound in numerous samples of the transformative power of rituals interacting with politics within a historical context. It often implied the involvement of cultural symbols and signs—in other words the language of rituals essential for the creation and formation of hegemonic order.

operandi of the supernatural,³⁷ whether in popular or scholastic circles. Also in the present context with G.ya' bzang pa, people were reared in an environment where the supernatural regularly intervened in order to solve any quandary of human nature or, as here, to provide a viable justification or functional verdict to mundane or human problems. The fundamental distinction in speech and thought that characterized Greek literature moving from *mythos* to *logos*, i.e. from symbolic to rational discourse (Lincoln 1999: pp. 3-4) never was fully implemented in Tibet up to most recent times. The production of this document was fostered within a religious culture where the soteriological authority and salvific ends, i.e. the ultimate message of liberation conveyed in the document, generally justified both means and modalities of its production when contemporary needs and claims were relegated by being grounded in verdicts of yore.

Whatever guided G.ya' bzang pa's motives, a closer look reveals that the author, at least outwardly, with this action was breaking any normative code prescribing modesty within his own ethical codex. A Buddhist author usually needs four prerequisites for composing or drafting treatises:

- Expressing respect (*mchod par brjod pa*),
- Pledging to compose (*rtsom par dam bca' ba*),
- Casting away pride, i.e. displaying humility (*khengs pa bskyungs pa*), and
- Generating Joy (*spro ba bskyed pa*).

Although the text in question in no way falls within the category of claiming to be a traditional piece of scholastic literature—we recall it falls within the category of the less authorized and often most dubiously deemed “treasure literature”³⁸—the prescriptive codes would apply. Here, the third clause to float arrogance or haughtiness (Skt. *samunnata*), in other words to display humbleness—including refraining from attempts of conscious manipulation, no doubt—remained a prescribed attitude expected by all monks, Buddhist writers and practitioners. But any criticism raised, again, seems nullified when the author or compiler has no sense of having committed a hoax!

On the one side, the case remains unique because it is a document allegedly ascribed to a national founder and hero of Tibet. We safely

³⁷ See Goodich (2007) for a thorough study of medieval miracle stories.

³⁸ Nowhere is it indicated that *Mtho mthing ma* is to be classified as a *gter ma*, yet due to its genre affiliation in form and content to the other Vita collections, the assumption is warranted.

suspect a suitable amount of “brazenness,” or audacity displayed by the compiler in what we see as forging or manipulating this document, yet the assumption of foul play carries little weight when it is seen as a process that was considered to be natural and legitimate in the eyes of the Tibetans. Why? Because the rhetorical vehicle had been embedded and framed within a story deployed to substantiate the claim, referring to an authority or to a tradition that stands incontestable: The source and authority (*lung*) of the prophetic claim that is demonstrated (*bstan*) is the king himself, the king’s statement moreover is tantamount to a sort of *vox Dei*. In this process, like in most cases of prophetic utterances, it is non-committal for the one reinstating it, here the compiler. G.ya’ bzang pa, the claimant, by placing his own words under the authority of someone else—disregarding any amount of manipulation exercised—was merely masquerading “the truth” and thus eschewed or withdrew himself from any “personal authorship” and responsibility by referring to the king as the final, validating source.

Looking behind the screen: Far from committing any *dolus malus*, is G.ya’ bzang pa nevertheless *consciously* or just *routinely* manufacturing a scribal fabrication, above and beyond a very personal level, to fake a biography when he truly believes he is the king, and to an appreciable degree internalized this identity and his surroundings and court in addition (were made to) believe it? The question might sound irrelevant, not least in a Tibetan context, where any search for the “real or original” author far too rarely was questioned. Is it deceit?—if the entire community, surroundings and oneself believe that it is not deceit or did not pose any question! In that context, issues of morals and principles arguably are irrelevant to moot. Perceiving his own actions, there clearly was not the slightest sense of self-deprecation. It is tempting to see this as an incidence of a charter myth at work as suggested by B. Malinowski (Malinowski 1926), where the underlying “national myth” (i.e. the Avalokiteśvara-*cum*-Srong btsan sgam po nexus and its etiological narrative) here authoritatively served to justify and underpin the purported or real prerogatives and status quo of a local ruler. In other words, here the function of a myth serving as a sanction of culture, with the added note that this nexus was operating within a living culture, in a vibrant society dominated by a mythical ambience with its idiosyncratic presuppositions. It is again worth reiterating that the issue boils down to the delicate question of cultural norms and sensibilities that naturally differ from society to society. “Reality” or rather the representation of the same are perceived differently, contemporary Western concepts demanding, when possible, the explicit identity of a concrete authorship in no way correlate with medieval concepts in Tibet, where ab-

stract or fluid concepts regarding authorship reigned, allowing it to be seen as the product (or byproduct) of spiritual or corporeal transmission.

What nevertheless makes the case remarkable: Where we have a large number of textual witnesses and documentation in Tibet's past of persons identifying themselves as manifestations or incarnations, most of the cases render spiritual or otherwise unverifiable references as validating argument for their incarnation status, rarely do we encounter, like in the case of G.ya' bzang pa, it repeatedly underpinned and spectacularly enacted—even when taking into consideration the cultural sensibilities outlined above—his claim must have been guided by an exceptional sort of the aforementioned identity-obsession, in our eyes a narcissistic? craving for social and spiritual recognition to underpin his hegemonic ambitions. Albeit his identity-amplification had proven to be culturally legitimate, still his justification and authority was surely paving the way for a swifter, more efficient and obviously popular and overall acceptance of this initiative. A widespread definition of upholding and ensuring hegemony that was part and parcel of this endeavour—contrary to what one would expect, namely involving acts and concepts of brute coercion and rigid force—suggests that in order to function more efficiently, it involves the development of a sense of shared “consent” that again generates a common will for shared values (Gramsci 1971: pp. 57-58),³⁹ on the basis of which an undisputed claim to authority is staked. A parallel example and a role-model for Chos kyi smon lam during this early period would be the charismatic Lama Zhang (1123-93) whose eccentric life and personal identity-shifts were equally remarkable, if not more spectacular. In many corners of a fragmented medieval Tibetan society, it would, to varying degrees, serve as a model for a local rule. Lama Zhang, who claimed to be multi-embodying (or multi-manifesting) both Guru Rinpoche, Amitābha and indeed Srong btsan sgam po too—whether simultaneously, successively and possibly opportunely—at one point served as a guru for G.ya' bzang pa.⁴⁰ As already indicated, like in the case of Zhang, G.ya' bzang pa's „double

³⁹ Cf. Laclau and Mouffe (2001): p. 105f. and Yamamoto (2012): pp. 25-26. The more benign forms of hegemony in this context aims at generating and ensuring rule by way of controlling the cultural or ideological sphere with its symbolic realms.

⁴⁰ Sørensen and Hazod (2007), pp. 36-39; Yamamoto (2012). In case of his manifestation as Guru Rinpoche, it is said he is of one nature with the thaumaturge, which might vaguely indicate being or sharing either a spiritual nature or a physical identity with one another. The biography of the 'Bri gung founder 'Jig rten mgon po too, regarded as a manifestation of Khri Ral pa can, resembles the procedure that Chos kyi smon lam experienced; Gyalbo *et al.* (2000): p. 19.

life" as noted above, integrated both an undisputed life as a *real, identifiable individual* as well as one as a constructed *performative, if divine individual*.

Summing up, the incidents and episodes listed so far, speaks for a strong personal involvement from the side of G.ya' bzang pa, nevertheless in his case it remains problematic to outright and unconditionally apply the definition of literary forgery even on our terms, namely a writing whose author falsely claims to be another person with the intent to *deceive* readers, or to concoct mendacities and dishonesty. Such a query might be begging the question. The focus here is both on the author, his motivation and the degree of deception involved (Ehrman 2012, p. 97; p. 128). G.ya' bzang pa's deeper agenda, as far as we can infer, has already been broached above, and to consider it a telling case of conscious or misleading deception at face value is equally difficult to evaluate exhaustively, albeit the elegant concoction of the sources contrived (by him or a scribe commissioned to conduct it in his name) in the document speaks for itself, since it presupposes a proper assessment as to what extent he consciously was guided by a need or will to deceive, for which we as argument "only" have the textual manipulation registered and his undeniably obsessive preoccupation with the Patron Saint and the king's towering physical and written legacy. One could argue that the manipulation "only" concerns the last biographical scene with the king's prophesizing valedictory, yet it constitutes the narrative's climax and turning point, the rest of the text represents lengthy borrowings or parallel renditions from the kindred testaments as discussed above. Yet, exactly this farewell scene, kept in first-person narration, is the turning point in the narrative. Behind it all, what was G.ya' bzang pa's relation to truth or untruth, did he have a tactical relationship to truth? reassuring himself that the authoritative validity of the *ex eventu* prophecy alone remained unquestioned or unchallenged.⁴¹

Despite the above theoretical ruminations, to pass a verdict nevertheless is possible: By all counts we are here naturally dealing with a case of blatant scriptural forgery. But then what kind of forgery? It seems to be what is called a case of so-called redactional or embedded forgery. Plainly told, with a small variety in the definition, we might have a case of a particular kind of forgery, namely some writings, or as here embedded text passage(s), that make the explicit claim to be authored by a well-known person, with a first-person

⁴¹ Tradition commonly lends credence to authority, what is known as "the authority bias," a phenomenon within psychology that tells us that "authority" (in a Tibetan context, galvanized through the prophecy-carried *lung*-status of authenticity hailing from the past) *per se* holds and guarantees a high(er) level of veracity and hence common approval.

narrative without differentiating the first person from the author (Ehrman 2012, pp. 34–35). G.ya' bzang pa did not add a colophon where he revealingly claims to be the author or compiler, so no smoking gun here. To his defence and in his own understanding, as we have now seen, there was no need, if we follow its own logic: The “authorship” of the text, the protagonist of the narrative *is* the king and the latter *is* staged as having re-embodied himself as Chos kyi smon lam, eliminating all need for further scrutiny, a convenient epiphenomenon of a personal drama, making the latter a mere extended *porte parole* of the first.

In the end, in search for the most obvious or simple clue to this idiosyncratic identity-conundrum or rather to the degree of forgery involved, we may conclude—revealingly perhaps—with the stance held by Tāranātha (1575–1634), the great historian:

Here in Tibet, whatever account, no matter whether correct or not, is acceptable: if there is something widespread among all people, due to its great fame, even though something else absolutely true is said, it does not come to the ear (i.e. is not believed, remains unheard).⁴²

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⁴² *Bod 'dir dag rung mi dag rung gtam gang yang rung ba grags chen pos skye bo kun la yongs su khyab ba zhig yod na shin tu bden pa'i don can gzhan zhig smras kyang rna bar mi yong // Tāranātha, rGya gar chos 'byung, see Torricelli (2018), p. XVII.*

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Photo and Illustration credits

- Fig. 1. Statue metal (22 cm.). Pritzker Collection, Chicago.
- Fig. 2. G.ya bzang. 13th century. Thangka (49.1 x 35 cm). Aldo Mignucci Private Collection.
- Fig. 3, 4, 6, 7. Guntram Hazod.
- Fig 9. Mask. Paper-mâché (Polychrome) (39.1 x24.9 x 14.3 cm). Bruce Miller Collection.
- Fig. 10. Central Tibet. 12th century. Thangka (50.8 x 45.1 cm). Rubin Museum of Art. HAR 271.
- Fig. 11 and 12. G.ya bzang. 12th century. Thangka (38.1 x 29.5 cm). Aldo Mignucci Private Collection.
- Remaining illustrations the author.



Compte-rendu

Rossi, Donatella (ed.), *Fili di seta. Introduzione al pensiero filosofico e religioso dell'Asia*, Rome (Ubalдини Editore), 2018. 692 pp. EAN 988-88-340-1747-0.

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The present volume, *Fili di seta* ("Silk Threads", perhaps alluding to the classical Silk Road and its cultural continuity), edited by Donatella Rossi, Professor at the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Rome, is an introduction to "Asian philosophical and religious thought",¹ primarily intended for university students, but also, of course, for a broader audience. As a general introduction to the field, the volume opens with a chapter on Buddhism in India, followed by chapters focusing on Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan. Two chapters are devoted to each country, one chapter dealing with a non-Buddhist tradition in the country in question – Bön, Taoism, Korean shamanism, and Shintō respectively – followed by a chapter on Buddhism in each country. Islam is not dealt with, nor Hinduism, even in a wide sense, such as non-Buddhist Indian philosophical schools including logic or yoga. It would therefore have been a more accurate description of the contents of the volume if the title had specified that its scope is not "Asia", but "Central and East Asia". Having said that, however, the book provides overviews that are useful introductions to the topics dealt with, each chapter being accompanied by a bibliography and indices/glossaries in transcription as well as in the relevant script (except the opening chapter, where the Sanskrit and Pāli terms are in transcription only). *Fili di seta* will be an excellent resource for university teachers and the general public in Italy and beyond.

The present review will, however, concern only one chapter in the book, viz. the one entitled "Il bon", i.e. the Tibetan Bön religion (pp. 111-206), written by Francesco Maniscalco. I am not aware of an essay in any other language that provides a similar introduction to Bön in the context of a multi-author volume such as *Fili di seta*. In my opinion, it is entirely justified to devote a separate chapter to this tradition, in spite of the many fundamental elements it shares with Bud-

¹ All translations of titles and quotes from Italian are those of the reviewer.

dhism in Tibet, such as monastic organization, categorization of sacred texts (sutras, tantras, vinaya texts, philosophy etc.), ritual and meditational practices, cosmological and philosophical concepts, and pilgrimages to holy mountains. This chapter is therefore a welcome contribution to the existing literature on Bön.

It is, nevertheless, necessary to offer some critical remarks. To mention a few details first, the author refers to Anne-Marie Blondeau's article of 1971² when stating that a "conspicuous number of Tibetan Buddhist texts are the result of an adaptation of Bön texts, and not the other way round" (p. 111). In fact, Blondeau's article only deals with a single Buddhist text, the *Lha 'dre bka' thang*. It is very likely that other Buddhist texts are also based on Bön texts, but this question is not further discussed by Blondeau.

On p. 116 the author claims that one of the three Bön monks invited to England by Professor David Snellgrove in 1961, was Sangs-rgyas bsTan-'dzin, "the then abbot of the monastery of sMan-ri". Here a clarification is in order: sMan-ri Monastery was not re-established in exile until 1967, and Shes-rab Blo-gros (1935-1963), the abbot of sMan-ri, living in exile in India, retained the title of abbot until he passed away. Thereafter Sangs-rgyas bsTan-'dzin (1927-2017) was elected abbot in 1968 of the newly founded sMan-ri in exile, receiving the name Lung-rtogs bsTan-pa'i Nyi-ma. He should be clearly distinguished from the former head teacher (*slob-dpon*) of sMan-ri Monastery in Tibet, likewise bearing the name Sangs-rgyas bsTan-'dzin (1917-1978), who, having escaped from Tibet, taught at the newly re-established sMan-ri for a few years (p. 171).

A correction is needed as to the year of birth of the present reviewer, which is not, as claimed on p. 117, line 17, "1937", but 1945. A spelling error on p. 172, line 2 should be noted: "rGyal btsan" should be corrected to "rGyal mtshan". On p. 122, lines 11 and 12, "Alex Mackay" should be "Alex McKay" (as correctly given in the Bibliography). The noted Czech/Austrian ethnologist spelt his name "René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz", not "De Nebesky Wojkowitz" (p. 146). In the bibliography the mistakes, though small, are numerous: on p. 174, line 7 from the bottom, "381, band" should be "381. Band"; p. 175, line 6 from the bottom, "Untersuchungen" (plural) should be "Untersuchung" (singular) and "Morgenländische" should be "Morgenländische"; p. 176 line 13 from the bottom, "Denkschriften, 254 Bd." should be "Denkschriften, 254. Band", and so on. In a work intended

² "Le Lha-'dre bka'-than" in: M[acdonald], A[riane], ed., *Études tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, Paris (Adrien Maisonneuve), 1971, pp. 49-126. The chapter under review wrongly has "136". "Adriene" should also be corrected to "Adrien".

for the use of students, even details of spelling should be correct, so as to instil the habit of accuracy in readers who are in a formative phase of their academic life.

While these are relatively trivial points, there is a more fundamental issue regarding the entire chapter which needs to be addressed in a review. In academic research, the concept of "Bön" can be studied in four different contexts, each having its own range of textual sources: (1) religion in Tibet during the period of the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th centuries CE); (2) the post-10th century religion styling itself *g.yung drung bon*, "Eternal Bön", which still exists as an organised monastic tradition today; (3) various Tibetan texts from the 10th-11th century which seem to preserve elements of 'imperial religion', but are not necessarily incorporated in the standard textual corpus of "Eternal Bön"; (4) contemporary religious beliefs and practices from the Himalayan margins of the Tibetan cultural area referred to locally as "Bön", sometimes including short ritual texts, more or less influenced by the first three categories. It is crucial not only to distinguish these four contexts – which seem to be related to each other, but in ways which are as yet far from clear – and to realize that we have no sources whatsoever that can be identified as related to Bön in any form, or any other religion in Tibet, before the 7th century CE. The crucial issue – for historians, archaeologists or anyone engaged in research – is that of *reliable* sources, which almost always means contemporary *textual sources*; and there simply is not a single Tibetan text available that can dated before the 7th century CE, at the very earliest.

The chapter under review relies heavily – although of course not exclusively – on the works of the late Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche (1938-2018). No one would contest that the latter was a remarkable scholar – but a scholar in the traditional Tibetan sense, which means that while his familiarity with a wide range of texts was exceptional, his approach to textual sources was not that of critical historical research, which, as its basic premise, endeavours to exercise textual criticism in the sense of distinguishing between sources that are contemporary (or nearly so) with the events in question, and historical *narratives* composed at a later date. Namkhai Norbu does not make this distinction, and hence does not hesitate to project the contents of texts belonging to contexts 2 and 3 above back to the period of the Tibetan Empire, for which only texts belonging to category 1 can be regarded as valid historical sources.

The author of the chapter under review does not explicitly endorse Namkhai Norbu's view of Tibetan history and his use of textual sources, but neither does he explicitly and clearly subject the Tibetan scholar's view of history to a critical scrutiny. The result is a lack of clarity; thus, when the author entitles a section of the chapter, "The

Origins of Bön in Tibet" (pp. 123-136), it is not clear whether it is to be understood that the origins are described according to Namkhai Norbu's view of history, and of Bön in particular, or whether the intention is to present the *actual* origins of Bön. If the latter is the case, the reader is led down a dangerous path, as we have no means at all of saying anything about the origins of Bön; in fact, whether there was a religious system called Bön in the Imperial Period (as opposed to priests whose designation included the word *bon*), is far from certain.

In the same way it becomes misleading to speak of "Bön Before sTon pa gshen rab mi bo che", unless one wishes to present the historical *narrative* of "Eternal Bön" as elaborated from the 11th century onwards. Tönpa Shenrab, regarded by adherents of Bön as the enlightened Teacher of our world age, is, as has been conclusively shown by Kalsang Norbu Gurung in his doctoral dissertation from 2011 (University of Leiden), a literary construction, not a historical person, only emerging in texts of "Eternal Bön" from the 11th century onwards. Accordingly, to place texts before or after "the coming of gShen rab" (p. 160), is, historically speaking, meaningless, although it fits the historical scheme propounded by Namkhai Norbu, to whom the author refers.

This reliance on the writings of Namkhai Norbu gives rise to a further series of assumptions that do not withstand the scrutiny of historical textual criticism. Thus, the realm of Zhangzhung, a real polity located in what today is, in a general way, western Tibet, is attested in viable sources from the Imperial Period, but only in the form of a few personal names and other scattered references. To extrapolate a "Zhangzhung civilisation" from this, or from texts that came into being several centuries later, is to enter the realm of fantasy, from which the path is short to promoting the idea, as Namkhai Norbu does, of Zhangzhung as a vast and ancient realm and the fountain of Tibetan civilization. The author accordingly does not seem to have any second thoughts about quoting Namkha'i Norbu to the effect that, "Traditionally the origin of the teachings of Bön known as 'Eternal Bön' coincides with the birth of gShen rab Mi bo che in 'Ol mo lung ring, in Zhangzhung, c. 3.908 years ago" (p. 128). The word "traditionally" is somewhat misleading, as the sacred texts of "Eternal Bön" do not support the idea that Tönpa Shenrab ("gShen rab Mi bo che") was born in Zhangzhung, nor do they place his birth "c. 3.908 years ago"; usually they place his birth much further back in time, in fact, completely outside any conceivable historical context.

It could be argued that it is valid to give centre stage to a traditional Tibetan scholar. Namkhai Norbu was, however, a scholar who had a particular agenda – to uncover what he regarded as the authen-

tic sources of Tibetan civilisation through a study of carefully chosen texts that he believed reflected truly ancient sources. It is perhaps easy to forget that Namkhai Norbu himself was not a follower of what, over the last thousand years, has constituted Bön ("Eternal Bön"), a religion that has had a large number of great scholars, and still has its own deeply learned scholars today. If the present chapter had built on this tradition of learning, a different picture of Bön might have emerged. In particular, the importance of the monastic tradition of scholastic learning, in its essentials not much different from Buddhism, would have necessarily been accorded far greater importance than taxonomies of rituals, gods and other spiritual beings that form a considerable part of the chapter under review. Such non-human beings and rituals are certainly present in Bön, whether the focus is on popular beliefs or textual sources from various periods of time, but not to a significantly greater extent than in the various schools or traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

In spite of a somewhat one-sided approach to Bön (always in the sense of the post-11th century "Eternal Bön" – the only variety of Bön that can be studied on the basis both of textual sources and a living, contemporary tradition), Maniscalco's presentation of this religious tradition has the great merit of placing it where it belongs in the context of university teaching and hence in the minds of future researchers, namely as a separate religious tradition with a considerable number of adherents in Tibet itself and as an important element in Tibet's religious history. Without paying serious attention to this religion, which Maniscalco to his great credit certainly does, any account of Tibetan religion will remain incomplete.

