

Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines

For A Critical History of the Northern Treasures

Volume II — Lives and Deities

Edited by Jean-Luc Achard, Stéphane Arguillère
and Cécile Ducher



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Introduction — Northern Treasures: Lives and Deities — Fort a
Critical History of the Northern Treasures II pp. 5-13

Jean-Luc Achard

A Brief Note on the Northern Treasures of the Bon Tradition
pp. 16-35

Roberto Vitali

Feats of an eclectic Bon po master: dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal's '*das*
log journey and *gter ma* rediscoveries pp. 36-68

Stéphane Arguillère

A King of Dharma Forgotten on the Jewel Island: Was Me *ban Chos*
rgyal Rin chen gling pa Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's rDzogs chen Master?
(How Half of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* Got Included in the *dGongs pa*
zang thal) pp. 69-147

Jay Holt Valentine

A Preliminary Analysis of the Prophetic Guides and Concealment
Narratives of the Northern Treasure Tradition pp. 148-162

Cécile Ducher

The significance of the Byang *gter* in the Life and Legacy of Thang
stong rgyal po pp. 163-191

Simon Martin

From Rāhula with Love: The Gruesome Liberation of Zhing shag pa
Tshe brtan rdo rje as Told by his Compassionate Executioner
pp. 192-205

Tenpa Tsering Batsang

Reflection on the Dzungar Persecution of the rNying ma School of
Tibetan Buddhism in the 18th Century, Focusing on Its Causes and
the Scale of the Destruction pp. 206-248

Franz-Karl Ehrhard

Biography and Historiography: The Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin sKal
bzang Padma dbang phyug (1720–1771) and His Travels pp. 249-278

Varvara Chatzisaava

'Khor gdong Monastery 'ja' lus pa Lama sGrib bral (1946-2018)
pp. 279-293

Stéphane Arguillère

Yamāntaka Among the Ancients: *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* in Context
pp. 294-380

Amanda Brown

Favorable Ferocity: The Byang gter Rites that Invoke the Wrathful
Deity Khro chu dug sdong pp. 381-404

Katarina Turpeinen

Divine Visions at the Last Breaths: A Creative Teaching on Dying in
Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Anthology pp. 405-425

Kanako Shinga

Section X² of the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*: A Critical Edition and
Annotated Translation of *the bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* pp. 426-453

Yuewei Wang

gNyan chen Thang lha and his Three Vows in Byang gter pp. 454-490

Christopher Bell


The Great Yakṣa of bSam yas: Ngag gi dbang po and the Tsi'u dmar
po Oracle pp. 491-522



Introduction

Northern Treasures: Lives and Deities For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures 2

Stéphane Arguillère, Cécile Ducher, Jean-Luc Achard
(CRCAO & IFRAE)

t is our great pleasure to present this second collection of articles devoted to the Northern Treasures tradition to the readers of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*. All members of the team working on the project “For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures” funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR) have contributed to this volume, not only through their articles, but also by assisting and editing. Thus, a number of articles, while bearing the names of their principal authors, are in fact the product of a cooperation, the scientific value of which it will be up to readers to appreciate, but whose friendly quality we, for our part, can nonetheless salute.

The current publication builds upon our [previous Byang gter special issue in the RET \(No. 62\)](#), and assumes it as a prerequisite. Thus, reiterating all the basic aspects about the Byang gter tradition, its past, and the significance of comprehending it is deemed unnecessary here as this was addressed in the [introduction to the previous special issue](#).

The present volume that has emerged since we unexpectedly received Franz-Karl Ehrhard’s article has taken on the shape of a vast Tibetan *sādhana*. Indeed, in its thematic structure, it begins with a lengthy section about the masters, followed by a discussion of a *yi dam* deity, the internal practices of long life and rDzogs chen, and concludes with the guardian deities of Buddhism.

1. Lives of the Masters

The initial section of this segment focuses on the Bon religion and comprises two articles. The first one, “A Brief Note on the Northern Treasures of the Bon Tradition” is by Jean-Luc Achard, and the second one, “Feats of an Eclectic Bon po Master: dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal’s *’Das log* Journey and *gTer ma* Rediscoveries,” is by Roberto Vitali. The reason for their presence in this volume is twofold.

First, a Bon master, *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*, aka *dByil ston He ru ka*, has often been conflated with *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* (1337–1408/9). It is indeed the case that some *gter ston* discovered both Buddhist and Bon treasures. As regards *Khyung rgod rtsal*, Anne-Marie Blondeau and Samten G. Karmay already doubted this assimilation, which presents numerous chronological difficulties. Although Jean-Luc Achard and Roberto Vitali have not come to a united conclusion regarding the dating of *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*, it is certain from their two articles in this volume that the assimilation of *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal* to *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* is impossible. The matter is now definitively settled.

Jean-Luc Achard's article elucidates another point: the asymmetry between the two traditions—one belonging to the *rNying ma pa*, the other to the *Bon po*, both being referred to as the "Northern Treasures." While the *rNying ma* one started in the 14th century with *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*, the *Bon* tradition is significantly older, prior to *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*. Although this master abundantly contributed to its literature, he did not found the *Bon Byang gter*. And unlike the *rNying ma* version, the *Bon* tradition does not seem to have developed as a distinct school within the *Bon* religion.

All in all, this seems to be a case in which the *rNying ma pas* got inspired more by a *Bon* term than by *Bon* corpora. This was a key point to untangle, considering the intricate connection between the *rNying ma pa* and *Bon po*, which range from almost identical practices, with entire sections of texts borrowed in either direction, to unclear echoes, the use of common names or terms without real link to their meanings on either side. It globally appears to be the case in this instance.

This is not all straightforward, however. We are not in a case of pure and simple homonymy: there must be at least something like an echo of *Khyung rgod rtsal*'s personal reputation shining through in the figure of *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*.

This is the second point: it was deemed necessary to inquire further into the life, work, and revelations of *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*. The two papers admittedly extend beyond an inquiry on a hypothetical connection of some sort of the *rNying ma Northern Treasures* tradition with the *Bon Byang gter*. They nonetheless identify some intriguing convergences between *Khyung rgod rtsal* and *rGod ldem*. While the similarity of their names may have contributed to confusion between the two individuals, it is not the sole factor. Two examples to exemplify the topic, among many possible other ones: the first, most relevantly, are *dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal*'s vast accomplishments in *Zang zang lha brag* and the surrounding area, *Byang Ngam ring in gTsang*, where *rGod ldem* eventually became active. A second aspect would involve the significance of "black leprosy" or more probably "bleeding

leprosy” in both life accounts. Khyung rgod rtsal is briefly killed by the disease but reborn later as a *’das log*. Similarly, rGod ldem protects himself from the same disease in his youth through the practice of a Yamāntaka *tantra* called *mDze nag las kyi ’khor lo*. However, the reason for this protection remains unknown.

While Roberto Vitali provides an in-depth account of *dPon gsas* Khyung rgod rtsal’s biography, Jean-Luc Achard’s article discusses the broader topic of Byang gter and its significance in Bon. Part of the plot, however, is also aimed at understanding *dPon gsas* Khyung rgod rtsal’s significance in the Bon Byang gter, which is crucial, yet not as fundamental as Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s role in the rNying ma Northern Treasures.

After these two contributions, we turn to the Buddhist side where we first have three papers directly relating to Rig ’dzin rGod ldem.

The first paper, “A King of Dharma forgotten on the Jewel Island: Was Me ban *Chos rgyal* Rin chen gling pa Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s rDzogs chen master? (How half of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig* got included in the *dGongs pa zang thal*),” is written by Stéphane Arguillère. It attempts to prove that Rin chen gling pa (1289?–1368?), a *gter ston* whose significance in his era has been underestimated, was Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s rDzogs chen master. The article reads like a philological investigation, reconstructing aspects of the Tibetan spiritual landscape during rGod ldem’s youth. Despite lacking indisputable proof of Rin chen gling pa’s role in rGod ldem’s life, the article sheds some light on the intricate matters of legitimacy during the decades following the demise of Padma las ’brel rtsal (1291–1319?), the revealer of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig*. Large portions of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig* are found amalgamated in the *dGongs pa zang thal*. This paper is an attempt to provide a historical explanation of this fact through the hypothetical role of Rin chen gling pa, in the context of the tensions between the various contenders for legitimacy over the transmission of the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig*—*rGyal sras* Legs pa and Rin chen gling pa on one side, the successors of Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339)—especially g.Yung *ston pa* (1285–1365)—on another, with Klong chen pa (1308–1364) as an outsider.

The next article by Jay Valentine, “A Preliminary Analysis of the Prophetic Guides and Concealment Narratives of the Northern Treasure Tradition,” begins with a summary of the series of events—as presented by Nyi ma bzang po (14th–15th c.) in his biography of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem—that are traditionally understood within the Byang gter to have transpired during the late eight and early ninth centuries in Imperial Tibet. The narrative involves Padmasambhava, King Khri srong lde btsan (c. 742–796), lHa sras Mu khri btsan po (761–815), Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and sNa nam rdo rje bdud ’joms. It focuses on the

concealment of three separate treasuries (once concealed at Zang zang lha brag, a second in Mang yul, and a third at Yang le shod) as well as two groupings of prophetic guides and treasure keys (one concealed in rGyang and another at bKra bzang, both of which are in Western gTsang). Valentine draws attention to the fact that it is completely unclear if Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (or anyone else for that matter) successfully extracted the second or third treasuries, which are believed to have been concealed in Mang yul in Tibet and at Yang le shod in Nepal.

In the remainder of the article, Valentine offers brief summaries of the prophetic guides, which were among those concealed in rGyang and bKra bzang, that Nyi ma bzang po employed as sources while constructing the concealment narrative that would appear in the biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. This exploration allows the reader to appreciate, at the very least, the selective processes and compositional skills that were employed by Nyi ma bzang po as he attempted to extract a succinct concealment narrative from these prophetic treasure texts that contain such a wide range of details about other treasuries and other issues of concern for the treasure revealer (i.e., Rig 'dzin rGod ldem) and his disciples. Lastly, Valentine hypothesizes that the prophetic guides—at least for the Byang gter—may have been decoded from the encrypted treasure scrolls on an *ad hoc* basis as the patriarchs of the tradition sought visionary guidance to help them overcome various obstacles over time. If such a hypothesis is proven to be correct, a judgement that will require additional research, it would surely affect the manner in which prophetic guides are employed as historiographic sources.

Arguillère and Valentine's papers clarify aspects of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's childhood and youth, including information on his masters, and his treasure discovery activities around the age of 30. However, much of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life remains unclear. For instance, it is unknown how Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1364)'s rise to power over Central Tibet could have impacted his career, as in the case of Klong chen pa and a few others: we do not know much of what Rig 'dzin rGod ldem did in the 1350s. Be that as it may, these two papers provide new insight into his timeline and the societal contexts in which he conducted his pursuits.

With Cécile Ducher's article, "The significance of the Byang gter in the Life and Legacy of Thang stong rgyal po," we advance to the next century. Thang stong rgyal po (1385–1464? or 1361–1485?) is a famous character in Tibetan history and much has been written on him; his contribution to the Northern Tradition, however, is not very clear. Although his birth date is somewhat uncertain, he was active in the 15th century. Our previous Byang gter issue discussed Thang stong

rgyal po's involvement in a *dGongs pa zang thal* lineage that expanded to Kaḥ thog in the Far East during the following century, but little was known about Thang stong rgyal po's direct association with the Northern Treasures. Thanks to Cécile Ducher, we now have a better understanding of his role in the early fame and diffusion of the Northern Treasures, especially with regards to two of the treasures revealed by rGod ldem, the *dGongs pa zang thal* and the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*, and his regional interactions with Byang gter specialists in the Byang Ngam ring region, in gTsang, and in dBus, where his two main monasteries, gCung Ri bo che and Chu bo ri respectively, were located.

In the next paper, "From Rāhula with Love: The Gruesome Liberation of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje as Told by his Compassionate Executioner," Simon Martin presents an annotated translation of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603)'s narrative of his magical battle and ultimate triumph over his adversary Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje in the late 16th century. Similar to Cécile Ducher's article, this one showcases the Byang gter masters as formidable miracle workers. While Thang song rgyal po is primarily famous for his long lifespan and other positive marvels, Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal provides a better representation of the more sinister abilities attributed to Northern Treasure ritual specialists, namely the capacity to kill or perform ritual "liberation." Additionally, this event is crucial to the next phase of the history of the Byang gter, which is not covered in this volume: the establishment of this tradition in its current location, E waṃ thub bstan rDo rje brag in Central Tibet.

The article by Tenpa Tsering Batsang that comes next, "Reflection on the Dzungar's Persecution of the rNying ma School of Tibetan Buddhism in the 18th Century, Focusing on Its Cause and Scale of Destruction," discusses the 1717-1718 Dzungar invasion and subsequent civil war, with its consequences for the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism in general and for the Byang gter tradition in particular. The author uses previously untapped sources, including biographies, to shed light on these important events. Through this research, a clearer understanding of the plot and extent of the disaster is established. The article shows that this massive persecution was fueled by sectarianism with political ambition of eliminating rNying ma influence from the dGa' ldan pho brang's political sphere. It also presents the epoch of rise and fall of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling, two major centers of rNying ma studies in central Tibet. Despite traditional understatement in the later rNying ma historiography, the Dzungar persecution definitely caused significant changes in this school of Tibetan Buddhism. An example of such change is the shift of its main center of activity to Khams from the time of 'Jigs med gling pa

(1730–1798)'s disciples onwards.

In the next article, “Biography and Historiography: The Fifth rDo rje brag Rig ’dzin sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug (1720–1771) and His Travels,” Franz-Karl Ehrhard focuses on the restoration of the Byang gter tradition in the 18th century, particularly through the successor of Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las (1641–1717) as the rDo rje brag seat-holder, Rig ’dzin sKal bzang padma dbang phyug. This historical account is crucial to understanding the resurgence of the rNying ma school in a transformed world, as can be observed following mass extinctions where novel life forms dominate. In the modern rNying ma landscape, dominated by ’Jigs med gling pa and his disciples, the Byang gter faced significant challenges in adapting to the new environment, despite receiving some support from the Tibetan state. It is, incidentally, worth noting that Rig ’dzin sKal bzang padma dbang phyug’s autobiography is a remarkable literary work, on par with those of Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las or the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682).

In the last article of the “Lives” part, “Khor gdong Monastery ’ja’ lus pa Lama sGrib bral (1946–2018),” Varvara Chatzisarava brings us to the contemporary era, with her description of the life of a modern Byang gter master, Lama sGrib bral, who, it is said, attained the rainbow body upon dying in the early 21st century. This article is based on a Tibetan biography of this Yamāntaka specialist and on Chatzisarava’s fieldwork in Kham. It describes the biography of Lama sGrib bral and briefly assesses other such cases of rainbow body attainment in Tibet under Chinese rule.

2. Yi dams, Long-life Practices and rDzogs chen

This section has three subgroups. First, two articles discuss Yamāntaka practices among the rNying ma pa in general and in the Byang gter in particular. Second, an article examines the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma* long-life practice, which played a crucial role in spreading the Northern Treasures. The final article explores peculiarities concerning the description of the intermediate post-mortem state in the *dGongs pa zang thal*.

In “Yamāntaka among the Ancients: *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* in context,” Stéphane Arguillère presents a comprehensive review of the Yamāntaka traditions within the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. This study is essential in the critical history of Northern Treasure in order to understand why and how the Byang gter rDo rje brag masters have become experts in Yamāntaka, while Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s *gter chos* does not incorporate any cycle centered around this deity as the principal figure.

Arguillère’s paper takes us through the various strata of the

Yamāntaka corpus within the rNying ma tradition, beginning with the oldest layers found in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and the *rNying ma bka' ma* compilation, followed by the *Rin chen gter mdzod* selections, and concluding with a focus on rGya zhang khrom (11th cent.)'s *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* cycle, which is included in the 63-volume compilation of the Northern Treasures that is the main documentary resource of the FCHNT project, the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* (2015). This article provides insights into overlooked aspects of rNying ma history. Notably, it discusses three versions of a *tantra*, the *Zla gsang nag po*, and their connection to the ongoing translation of Sanskrit (?) texts among adherents of gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes (9th–10th cent.) during the “dark age.”

The precise time when the Byang gter masters began being viewed as the specialists of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* among the rNying ma pa and the specific status it granted them within this school of Tibetan Buddhism would require additional research, especially on the group consisting of 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan (1445–1558) and his two sons mNga' ris *pan chen* (1487–1542) and Legs ldan rje (1452–1565). Indeed, the emergence of rDo rje brag in the late 16th century marks a period of amalgamation for the Byang gter proper with a significant amount of *bka' ma* and other *gter ma* materials. Through this process, the *Byang gter rdo rje brag lugs* attained its nearly final form.

It is indeed noteworthy to remark that there has been no research on the branch of the Byang gter that remained in its original birthplace, around mount bKra bzang. As of yet, it is unclear whether the foundation of rDo rje brag (after Byang bdag bKra shis stobs gyal was expelled from Byang ngam ring) provided an opportunity for a full-scale reformation or recreation for this tradition. It is possible that the Byang gter masters specialized in Yamāntaka materials in this later period only. Stéphane Arguillère suggests, however, that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem may have had some personal interest in Yamāntaka.

Another noteworthy aspect regarding Yamāntaka is the continuous exchanges among the 'Bri gung and Byang gter masters throughout the sixteenth century (and possibly earlier and later), to such extent that the presently existing *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* tradition may be regarded as the outcome of a common 'Bri gung-Byang gter work of elaboration, in which the 5th Dalai Lama played an important role. This 'Bri gung-Byang gter interface is incidentally addressed in the next article, and also deserves further investigation.

In “Favorable Ferocity: The Byang gter Rites that Invoke the Wrathful Deity Khro chu dug sdong,” Amanda Brown provides more information on this form of Yamāntaka which is one of the various aspects of this deity found in rGya zhang khrom's *gter chos* as compiled by the Byang gter (and 'Bri gung) masters. Detailed research on

Yamāntaka corpora, their practices, and present-day preservation and continuation is crucially important not only for the study of Byang gter but also more broadly. These cycles are strongly focused on large-scale offensive magic, including protection of the kingdom against aggression from foreign armies. The 17th century “king-priest association” between the Byang gter masters, the 5th Dalai Lama, and also gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714) and sMin grol gling specifically granted rNying ma masters the task of protecting the country through violent rituals centered, but not exclusively, around the Yamāntaka cycles.

The reorganization of the rNying ma institutions throughout the 18th and 19th centuries coincided with a redistribution of the preferred practices hierarchy. The diminished presence of Yamāntaka in the “new gter ma” (*gter gsar*) and in the updated narratives employed by the rNying ma pa to describe and interpret their tradition may conceal alternative manifestations of the tradition that differ from its present state. From this perspective, the Northern Treasures possess the qualities of a living fossil or an archaic state of the Ancient School, representing an earlier stage of its development. The status of the Yamāntaka practices in this lineage of the rNying ma school may thus give us a hint of the pre-Dzungar invasion state of this branch of Tibetan Buddhism. However, although, out of all the surviving and documented branches of this order, the *Byang gter rdo rje brag lugs* appears to have undergone less evolution since the era of the 5th Dalai Lama, it did not survive out of space and time, but in constant interaction with the other forms of the rNying ma tradition. Maintaining a 17th century style, in which extensive rituals of destructive magic in the service of the dGa’ ldan pho brang played a so central role, may also participate in giving its distinctive flavor or style to the Byang gter in the contemporary rNying ma landscape.

Amanda Brown’s forthcoming research will probably reveal, through anthropological fieldwork, additional information about the present-day application of these practices. However, it is noteworthy that they possess a historical significance since they enable researchers to rebuild the self-perception of rNying ma practitioners from previous eras, some of which might have been subsequently forgotten or repressed. These practitioners’ *ethos* marries profound contemplation, seen in rDzogs chen, with proficiency in magic, even in its most violent forms. Such a reputation of witchcraft was indeed one of the pretexts for the Dzungar persecution.

The next article by Kanako Shinga delves into a practice of the Northern Treasures, the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*, that has gained much popularity and is extensively documented in her previous publications. It is evident to any reader of Tibetan biographies that this

sādhana, or rather the corresponding empowerment ritual linked to the Byang gter *Thugs sgrub* cycle, was widely favored in the centuries following its revelation by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. If a quantitative study of lamas' biographies was conducted—counting all the rituals implemented in order to promote their longevity as children, or that they performed for the welfare of others—it could provide factual records of the relative prosperity of different practices and serve as a noteworthy indication of the increasing or diminishing popularity of the Northern Treasures at various periods. It would definitely demonstrate how well inspired Kanako Shinga is to focus on this specific group of rituals.

Kanako Shinga's approach is, however, strictly philological and focuses on the contents of the texts. With this new piece in the series she has been arranging on the *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*, the text can now be regarded as well-established and its meaning quite clear, especially with regards to the name *lcags sdong ma*, which came to refer to the practice as a whole when it is actually the name of only one of its parts.

In "Divine Visions at the Last Breaths: A Creative Teaching on Dying in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Anthology," Katarina Turpeinen deals with the pinnacle of Byang gter practices and the *bar do* descriptions given in the *dGongs pa zang thal*, the Byang gter's main rDzogs chen cycle.

Indeed, the high reputation of the Northern Treasures masters was not solely built on their abilities as wizards in the fields of war magic or rituals for long life. They were also highly regarded for their contemplative practice of this expansive rDzogs chen cycle, which many considered to be supreme. Unlike the paper about Rin chen gling pa, which sheds light on the genesis of the *dGongs pa zang thal* corpus in relation to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* materials amalgamated in it, Katarina Turpeinen's research is more internal and descriptive: it highlights some unusual aspects in the *dGongs pa zang thal*'s depiction of our post-mortem fate and clearly demonstrates, along with Turpeinen's doctoral dissertation, the anthology-like nature of the collection.

3. Guardian Deities

The present special issue concludes with two articles discussing protector deities associated with the Northern Treasures tradition.

Yuewei Wang's article, "gNyan chen Thang lha and His Three Vows in Byang gter," focuses on a deity closely linked to Tibetan royalty and widely recognized in the pantheon of indigenous deities in Tibet that have been enrolled as protective deities (*chos skyong*, *srung*

ma).

Yuewei Wang's article is an insightful exploration of the Byang gter corpus about gNyan chen Thang lha, which contains various narratives about the deity's oath and "buddhicization." The paper describes in particular 16 texts in the Byang gter collection that provide a detailed map of the evolution of Thang lha's identity, place, rituals, and representation in the Northern Treasures, focusing on Thang lha's "three vows" that define his status in that tradition.

This literature includes materials that come across as quite archaic in both their form and content: for example, the presentation of Pe har as the king of demons and the arch-foe of gNyan chen Thang lha was uncommon in post-Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's Tibet. This must have been even more surprising for readers during the period of the 5th Dalai Lama, when the cult of Pe har was widely promoted.

A significant portion of the *rTen 'brel chos bdun* cycle from the original Byang gter revelations—in which all the gNyan chen Thang lha literature is found—is dedicated to exploring the use of magic in order to control the invisible part of the Tibetan kingdom through Hayagrīva. This cycle serves as a resource intended to be utilized by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his successors to serve the Gung thang kings, descendants of Khri srong lde btsan.

It is a commonplace statement to stress the political aspect of the Byang gter, but it is not devoid of solid foundations: few *gter ston* were so strongly focused on the restoration of legitimate monarchy as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was. It would be no exaggeration to compare the figure of rGod ldem in Tibetan culture to that of the Enchanter Merlin in the legend of King Arthur (with, of course, typically Tibetan features): a magician aiming at the restoration of social order through the empowerment of the one predestined to rule.

For example, some cursive remarks in the Rin chen gling pa paper in this volume dwell on the various behaviors of different *gter ston* regarding the important and dangerous issue of the substitute (*gter tshab*) to be placed in the *gter ma* cache when the treasure is extracted. It is evident that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's attitude, involving the Gung thang kings in the process, is clearly aimed at reinforcing the sacrality and charisma of kingship.

In this context, the worship of gNyan chen Thang lha as the "life-force deity" of Khri srong lde btsan is crucial: what the king is or should be in the visible world, gNyan chen Thang lha is in the invisible world. In order to restore sacred monarchy on the former level, the right deity must be properly propitiated on the other plane; a harmonious human society would ensue from a reinforcement of the "white side" in the invisible world and this is supposed to be achieved, among other means, through the cult of gNyan chen Thang lha.

The last piece in this volume is an article by Christopher Bell about Tsi'u dmar po, a protective deity closely linked with the Byang gter before becoming part of the shared heritage of the rNying ma pa.

In his significant contribution on Pe har,¹ Christopher Bell examined the evolution and dissemination of the deity's cult. This investigation encompasses both synchronic textual analysis and actual social history, aligning with the concerns of the researchers involved in the critical history of the Northern Treasures project.

In the case of Tsi'u dmar po and his entourage, though maybe not completely unknown earlier, the development of this practice appears to have initiated with mNga' ris *pañ chen* and Legs ldan rje around bSam yas during the 16th century. However, the central human figure in Christopher Bell's article is Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639, the incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem between Legs ldan rje and Padma 'phrin las), who was the 5th Dalai Lama's maternal uncle and another significant figure of spiritual master who was also viewed as a wizard.

Christopher Bell's contribution to deity studies always encompass a consideration of the social factors that encouraged the promotion of such and such divinity beyond the context of eternized ritual literature, symbols, and declared purpose. To gain insights into the agendas of the promoters of this cult is indeed fascinating. Here, we discover Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, as portrayed by the 5th Dalai Lama, involved in the context of civil war and Mongol invasions; and here again, as with gNyan chen Thang lha (although with a more violent coloration), the visible and invisible worlds mirror one another and problems that develop on one of these planes can often only be resolved on the other.


In presenting this anthology, our aim is to provide readers with profound insights into the rich tapestry of the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, with a specific focus on the distinctive teachings of Byang gter. Through the collaborative efforts of specialized authors, the present issue thus aspires to unravel the nuanced aspects of this spiritual tradition, offering a fascinating exploration of its history, philosophy and practices.



¹ Christopher Bell 2021: *The Dalai Lama and the Nechung Oracle*. New York: Oxford University Press.

A Brief Note on the Northern Treasures of the Bon Tradition*

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 According to sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po (15th c.) and his *Explanation of the Revelation, known as the Lamp Clarifying its Diffusion and Development* (*bsTan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal sgron*), the Bon tradition describes its Treasure system (*gter ma*) under five headings: the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*), the Southern Treasures (*lho gter*), the Central Treasures (*dbus gter*), the Treasures from Khams (*khams gter*), and the New Treasures (*gter gsar*).¹ In the present paper, I will briefly address the first category—the Northern Treasures—in a very cursory manner, as part of an ongoing project on Byang gter in general.² sPa ston's description of the Northern Treasures revolves around two main topics: the characteristics (*mtshan nyid*) of these Treasures and their actual designation (*btags*). However, he does not describe the specific features of this tradition but rather recalls its history and enumerates the texts that were found during the various revelations of what became the Northern Treasures.³

1. The Lower Transmission (*smad brgyud*)

The Northern Treasures have their source in the 8th century figure of

* I would like to thank Marianne Ginals, Stéphane Arguillère, and Cécile Ducher for their corrections and suggestions on earlier draft of this paper.

¹ sPa ston, *bsTan pa'i rnam bshad dar rgyas gsal sgron*, in *Gangs ti se bon gzhung*, vol. 01, pp. 326-330. This work and sGa ston's *gTer gyi kha byang* are some of the main sources Shar rdza Rinpoche used in the compilation of his *Legs bshad mdzod*. According to Karmay (*A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*, p. 117), the *bsTan pa'i rnam bshad* was: "(w)ritten at the behest of Kyi btsun Kro ta ver zhi and completed in the summer of the year wood-bird which is either 1285 or 1345 at gNas chen bde sgang, the seat of the sPa family in La stod, gTsang." This rather conflicts with Martin ("Unearthing Bon Treasures," p. 622) who dates it to 1477. On sPa ston, see also Blondeau, "Le 'Découvreur' du Mañi bka' 'bum était-il bonpo?," *passim*.

² This paper is a contribution to the study of the Byang gter system as part of the ANR research program co-directed with Stéphane Arguillère and entitled "For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures."

³ The narration is very close, although not identical, to that of sGa ston's *gTer gyi kha byang* and that of Shar rdza's *Legs bshad mdzod*.

Dran pa nam mkha' who is said to have formulated aspiration prayers (*smon lam*) so that Bon would flourish under better circumstances in the future.⁴ According to Bon chronology and in the context of the *Byang gter* revelations, this "future" started with the rediscoveries made by three *atsaras* (*ācāryas*)⁵ from Nepal (Lho bal). sPa ston does not name them in this context but according to Sha rdza Rin po che's *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, p. 118), these were: dKon mchog grags pa, Nya mo mGon po, and Sad ku Ratna.⁶ The three yogis had previously heard that they could retrieve as much gold as they wished in Tibet. Therefore, they decided to travel to the Land of Snow and ended up in the La stod region. However, they were unable to discover any gold. One may imagine that they searched riverbanks or mines or dug the earth wherever they were told gold could be found but they actually did not find any.

While they were apparently still in La stod, they asked someone who told them that they could find a lot of gold in the Scarlet Rock (Brag dmar) in bSam yas monastery.⁷ When they reached the place, they decided to circumambulate the sanctuary at night. Soon, they met the caretaker of the place who addressed them in the following manner: "You, people from Nepal, are indeed devoted, so you should continue with faith and respect!" He invited them into the storeroom (*dkor khang*) of the main temple and shut the door behind them, thus offering the three yogis a safe place for the night.⁸

In the main temple room, the three *atsaras* saw a chest sealed with a bronze seal: they tried to lift it and since it was very heavy, they entertained the thought that it might well be filled with gold. They decided to take the chest with them and fled right away. They ran the entire night and hid in a forest until the day broke.⁹

⁴ This is a reference to what Bon pos style as the "second persecution of Bon" during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan (r. 755-797), the first having supposedly occurred under the mythical king Gri gum btsan po.

⁵ In this context, one has to understand this expression as referring to wandering yogins and not specifically to *slob dpon* (*ācāryas*).

⁶ The first two names are evidently of Tibetan origin or have been reconstructed back into Tibetan language. On Sad ku, see Gurung, "The Emergence of a Myth," p. 49.

⁷ On bSam yas in general, see Chayet, "Le monastère de bSam yas : sources architecturales." Brag dmar was the birthplace of Khri song lde btsan and the place where his father had built a fort (called Brag dmar mgrin bzang).

⁸ The irony is that the caretaker locked the door behind them in order to prevent thieves to enter the temple...

⁹ In the sources available to me, there is no explanation as to how they got out of the temple since, as we have seen, they were locked in by the caretaker. They probably escaped through a window or after having picked the lock of the main entrance door.

Later, they eventually reached the valley of Ngan lam¹⁰ and arrived at a place called Sri¹¹ where they broke the bronze seal and opened the chest, which contained three bags of Bon texts (*bon sgro gsum*), i.e., a tiger-skin bag, a leopard-skin bag, and a bear-skin bag. At that time, having completely run out of provisions, they decided that one of them should stay with the bags while the two others went in search of food.¹² Approaching a village, they heard a drum being beaten and upon inquiring who was playing it, they were told that someone named mTha' bzhi 'khrul (= 'phrul) gsas was performing a Bon ritual practice. Thus, they felt that they should meet with this man and went to his house. Introducing themselves to him, they said that they had Bon texts¹³ and were willing to give them to him in exchange for food. mTha' bzhi was interested by the offer and gave them a lump of kneaded barley flour, as well as some *chang*, a measure of *rtsam pa* and a carcass of meat. Thus, the two *atsaras* returned to their companion together with mTha' bzhi. They showed him the bags but did not let him choose or pick (*bdam du mi 'jug*) texts after examining them. Instead they told him that he could take one volume (*po ti*) of whichever bag he wanted.¹⁴ He said: "If I want a big (volume), the tiger-skin bag is big (so I should go for this one). If I want a nice (volume), then the leopard-skin bag looks beautiful. But I would like to get a Bon (volume) from the bear-skin bag."¹⁵ Thus, he took one volume and upon looking at it, he found out that it contained:

— the root-text (*rtsa*) of the *Sādhana of the Black Furious Dagger* (*dBal Phur nag po'i sgrub thabs*), together with its commentary ('*grel*),¹⁶

¹⁰ Ngan lam is also the name of a clan to which rGyal ba mchog dbyangs, one of the twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava, belonged. I am not sure if the two must be identified since the Ngan lam clan might take its name from its place of origins, although it was later associated with the 'Phan yul valley. Ngan lam is also the clan name of the famed minister sTag ra klu gong (8th c.).

¹¹ Sri bya ba. It is called Sri ba in Karmay, p. 119, but the *Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 393 indeed reads "sri bya bar...".

¹² This shows that these bags and the chest were probably not of small dimensions. If one of them has to guard the whole treasure chest, it implies that it could not be easily carried on oneself. In their flight from bSam yas, they must have carried the box all together.

¹³ The narration does not say that they had opened the bags, but apparently they did.

¹⁴ In all likelihood, mTha' bzhi was shown the bags as they were still closed and could not browse through the volumes and make a choice after examining the texts. He was supposed to pick up a volume at random from one of the bags. One may wonder what prompted the *atsaras* to impose this method of selection.

¹⁵ This last statement suggests that all the volumes were not necessarily connected to the Bon tradition.

¹⁶ In the *Legs bshad mdzod*, this is given as the *Three Black Tantras* (*Nag po rgyud gsum*), to which the *Black Furious Dagger* (*dPal phur nag po*) belongs.

- the practice of the *Twenty Mātṛkās* (*Ma mo nyi shu*),¹⁷
- the short practices (*sgrub chung*) of the Hawk (Khra) and Jackal (sPyang) Protectors,¹⁸ and
- the short practices of the Lords of the Earth (*sa bdag gi sgrub chung*).¹⁹

It is reported that there was a small drawing of a maṇḍala on the wooden cover of the volume (*glegs shing*). There were also numerous magical teachings of Bon (*rdzu 'phrul gyi bon*) but no titles or further indications are given.²⁰

Later, rGya ston Khro 'phen from 'O yug²¹ asked mTha' bzhi for the transmission of these teachings. From rGya ston, it was transmitted to gZugs²² Ra 'phen from Yar 'brog, who gave it to Ra ston Klu rgyal from Shang, who gave it to Lha rje Ra²³ sgom, who gave it to Bru chen Nam mkha' g.yung drung (994–1054),²⁴ an important master of the Great Perfection tradition. This lineage from mTha' bzhi 'phrul gsas is known as the “Lower Transmission” (*smad brgyud*).

2. The Upper Transmission (*stod brgyud*)

Thereafter, leaving mTha' bzhi and the Ngan lam valley, the three *atsaras* moved up from sTod lung and wandered through gNam gong²⁵

¹⁷ There are several lists of these deities but in general they are counted as twenty-seven. For the association between Ma mo and dBal mo, see for instance Blezer, “The ‘Bon’ dBal-mo Nyer-bdun(/brgyad),” p. 145 n. 13.

¹⁸ These are secondary deities associated with the Phur pa cycle. On these, see Cantwell & Mayer, “The Winged and the Fanged,” *passim*.

¹⁹ Except for the root-*sādhana* of dBal phur nag po, it is not easy to sort out the titles that are implied by sPa ston since his wording is rather compact. He merely says: *ma mo nyi shu khra dang sa bdag gi sgrub chung rnams byung*. I wonder if *khra dang* should not be corrected to *khra spyang* or even to *khra spyang dang*. In *Sources for the History of Bön* (sPa ston, p. 710), the whole passage is articulated as follows: *dbal phur nag po'i sgrub thabs/ rtsa 'grel dang bcas pa/ ma mo nyi shu khra dang/ sa bdag gis (=gi) sgrub chung rnams byung/*.

²⁰ According to the '*Dus pa rin po che'i rgyud dri ma med pa rtsa ba'i mdo sangs rgyas kyi rnam thar rin chen 'phreng ba*, p. 122, these magical Bon teachings belong to the third Vehicle, the Vehicle of the gShen of Magical Wonders (*'phrul gshen theg pa*). On the practices and doctrinal contents of this Vehicle, see Snellgrove, *The Nine Ways of Bon*, pp. 98 *et seq.*

²¹ Rendered as 'Ug in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 120). rGya ston's name is spelt rGya ston sgro phan in Klein & Wangyal, *Unbounded Wholeness* (p. 212), in which spelling mistakes are endemic.

²² Spelt Zug in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 120).

²³ Spelt 'Bar in *op. cit.*

²⁴ He was also an important disciple of gShen chen Klu dga' (996–1035).

²⁵ Nam ra in *op. cit.*

in the north. They went further north, up to 'Dog stag ris²⁶ in La stod, where they met with 'Dar ban Śākya Mu ne, mChims Śākya pra ba, and 'O ma kha Byang chub sde²⁷ in Byang 'brog ru thog, as these three travelled with a heavily laden horse. That same night, as the party was resting in an isolated place, the *atsaras* asked the three Buddhists where they were going and those answered that they intended to travel down to bSam yas in order to retrieve Buddhist treasures (*chos gter*), informing also the *atsaras* that the load being carried by their horse was to be given to the caretaker of the monastery as a present.

The *atsaras* said: "We have unearthed Buddhist treasures! Let us take the load and we shall give you the treasure bags!" The three Buddhist discussed the proposal and upon looking at the scattered volumes in the bags, they noticed that they projected lights and sparks. Thinking that this must definitely be signs indicating the books were containing profound teachings (*chos zab mo*), they gave the three *atsaras* their goods from the horse load. After this discussion and exchange, the three Buddhists took the bags and went away. Sometime later in the day, they stopped and opened the bags, only to witness again numerous magical wonders. In a place called mDog gi sna nang in La stod,²⁸ they stayed in the house of one named gZe ban Shes rab rgyal mtshan,²⁹ who is said to have a nephew called gZe sgur who also came from Nepal.³⁰ At midnight, they did a *puja* together, making an offering of seven white grains of barley (*nas dkar mo 'bru bdun*),³¹ reciting numerous prayers and offering divine prostrations before the bags after which they started to open them. Upon looking at the texts, they found out these were all Bon works, so two of the Buddhists proposed to burn them down in a fire, but magical displays occurred again. The third Buddhist, 'Dar ban, declared that they should rather give them to gZe sgur who was himself a Bon po, and they eventually gave him the three bags. Looking at the contents of the bags, gZe sgur saw that

²⁶ The rendering is tentative since 'dog stag ris is totally unknown to me. In the text, it comes with an ergative case ('dog stag ris *kyis*), suggesting it is the name of someone from La stod. In the *Blue Annals* (p. 997), it seems to be a toponym spelt lDog stag ris. In the *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 395), this line is spelt: *la stod kyi mdog sras rong nas* which means "from the valley of mDog sras in La stod."

²⁷ Spelt 'O ma Byang chub seng ge in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 120).

²⁸ It is spelt 'Dog gis snan snang in *Sources for a History of Bon*, p. 711.3, and mDog gi sman gong in *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 396, Karmay, p. 120) which is probably the correct spelling.

²⁹ He is called gZe bon in sPa ston's text, although this is certainly a mistake for gZe ban. gZe ban seems to definitely have been of a Buddhist lineage, but his nephew (see next note) was a follower of Bon.

³⁰ The *Legs bshad mdzod* styles this nephew as being Bon po (p. 396; Karmay, *ib.*). gZe sgur sounds like a nickname ("the crooked one from gZe"). He is named gZe bon sgur po lower in the text.

³¹ So far, I have been unable to identify this ritual.

they indeed contained Bon works.³²

In the tiger-skin bag were three categories of outer, inner and secret texts:

- among the outer ones were *The Six Treatises on Discipline* ('Dul ba rgyud drug),³³ *The Ten Clear Teachings* (Sa le lung bcu),³⁴ and *The Precepts regarding the Rule to Watch Over* (Man ngag lta khrims);³⁵ furthermore, in the same category were *The Bar ti ka Sūtra* (mDo bar ti ka),³⁶ *The Thirty Daily Prostrations* (Tshes phyag sum cu pa), *The Continuous Food Homages* (Za phyag nar ma);
- among the inner ones were *The Seven Tantras* (rGyud bdun),³⁷ and *The Five Integrations to the Path* (Lam khyer lnga);³⁸
- among the secret ones where three “proclamations” (bsgrags pa), starting with the initial one containing *The Great Explanation of the Continuity of the Trichiliocosm, the Description of the Structure of the Tantras* [?] (rGyud kyi dpe'u tse stong gsum rgyud 'chad chen po); in the intermediate proclamation was *The Tantra Explaining Chalices and Elixirs* (sNod bcud bstan pa'i rgyud);³⁹ and in the last proclamation was *The Gathering of the Nine Tree Trunks* (sDong po dgu 'dus).⁴⁰

³² In the brief description of the texts given in the next paragraphs, I have left some sections or titles untranslated in footnotes since it is sometimes difficult to figure out the real meaning of these titles without access to the actual texts themselves.

³³ On these texts, see Roesler, “The Vinaya of the Bon Tradition,” *passim*.

³⁴ The *Legs bshad mdzod* list this as “the Ten Teachings such as the Clear Lamp of the Citadels (gSas mkhar sa le sgron ma la sogs pa'i lung bcu), etc.”

³⁵ These evidently represent a coherent set of teachings organized according to the traditional scheme of *rgyud*, *lung*, and *man ngag*.

³⁶ A sūtra which is apparently the source from which several *dhāraṇīs* have been extracted.

³⁷ The *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 397) lists one of these Tantras as being the *Ye sangs rang 'dul gyi rgyud* (not yet identified).

³⁸ Given as *The Integration of the Five Poisons to the Path* (Dug lnga lam khyer) in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (*ib.*). There are numerous texts with a similar title. In particular, since the one referred to here is supposed to be a sūtra, it should not be confounded with the eponymous work from the *rDzogs chen bsgrags pa skor gsum* (despite the mentions of “proclamations” [bsgrags pa] in the secret category of texts to be listed in the next paragraph).

³⁹ Chalices (*snod*) are universes or worlds, and Elixirs (*bcud*) are the sentient beings living in these worlds. The usual “Containers and contents” is really an uninspired rendering of *snod bcud*.

⁴⁰ This is a canonical Father Tantra (*pha rgyud*) that has also been discovered by rMa lCam me, as well as by gShen chen Klu dga'. It is included under the title *sDong po dgu 'dus lta ba'i rgyud chen zhes bya ba* in *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, vol. 216, pp. 1-100. This is the version discovered by 'Ol (var. 'Od/'Or) sgom phug pa. The Father Tantras are explained in the corpus known as the “Five Supreme Citadels” (gSas mkhar mchog lnga), on which see Ch. Ramble, “Le culte de la divinité Bonpo gTo mchog mkha' 'gying”, p. 476/

In the leopard-skin bag were the outer, inner, and secret categories of the *Myriads* ('Bum):

- among the outer *Myriads* were *The Myriads Defining the Eight Elements, in Eight Parts* (*Khams brgyad gtan la phab pa'i 'bum dum pa brgyad*), and *The Nine Series of the Great Root-Texts and Commentary* (*rTsa 'grel chen mo sde dgu*);
- among the inner *Myriads* were *The Four Series of the Myriads of the Devas* (*Lha 'bum sde bzhi*); *The Four Series of Divine Myriads* (*gSas 'bum sde bzhi*), and *The Two Fragments of the Commentary on the Myriads* ('Bum 'grel dum bu gnyis) which in all makes ten works;
- among the secret *Myriads* were ten works⁴¹ plus one commentary,⁴² as well as *The White and Black Myriads of the Nāgas* (*Klu 'bum dkar nag*) in four parts.⁴³

As to the texts included in the bear-skin bag, there is some confusion in terms of their classification in four categories comprising outer, inner and secret tantric teachings and a special category for Dzogchen. However, there are clearly only three categories: outer tantras, inner tantras, and secret Dzogchen teachings. As will be seen below, the inner category seems to include Dzogchen works, although they are apparently tantric works associated with Dzogchen and not *actual* Dzogchen texts:⁴⁴

- the outer, general category contains three series of works, described as “outer teachings on funerary rituals” (*phyi 'dur bon*),⁴⁵

⁴¹ Due to the spelling variants in between sPa ston's work and Shar rdza's, I will refrain from attempting at translating their titles. In sPa ston's, these texts are: 1. *Lha mo dbyings 'bum*, 2. *rMa 'bum dkar chad*, 3. *gTsug 'bum 'bar ba*, 4. *Theg pa gser 'bum*, 5. *Nyi ma 'od 'bum*, 6. *Rin chen spungs 'bum*, 7. *Nyi khri chu 'bum*, 8. *Thugs rje rgyun 'bum*, 9. *g.Yung drung sems kyi gter 'bum*, and *rDzogs pa lha 'bum dkar po*. In Shar rdza's, they are listed as: 1. *Lha mo dbyings 'bum*, 2. *rMa 'bum gar chad*, 3. *gTsug 'bum 'bar ba*, 4. *Theg pa gser 'bum*, 5. *Nyi ma 'od 'bum*, 6. *Rin chen spungs 'bum*, 7. *Nyi khri chig 'bum*, 8. *Thugs rje rgyun 'bum*, 9. *g.Yung drung ye 'bum*, and *rDzogs pa lha 'bum dkar po*.

⁴² The commentary is entitled *gTo sgrom 'bum tig*.

⁴³ sPa ston and Shar rdza count a total of thirty-four works associated with the *Myriads* while counting carefully the number of texts enumerated above, I found forty-two (8+9+10+10+1+4). They must have a special system of counting these works which eludes me.

⁴⁴ These are styled as “the series of Secret Mantras [associated] with Dzogchen” (*rdzogs chen gsang sngags kyi sde*).

⁴⁵ This first series counts six works dedicated to: 1. *gri 'dur* (funerary rite for the killed), 2. *bitsan 'dur* (funerary rite for a lord or king), 3. *bkra 'dur* (funerary rite aimed at re-installing good auspices after a death), 4. *g.ya' 'dur* (maybe

- “inner rituals for the living” (*nang gson bon*),⁴⁶ and “riddles of the mountain crown” (*gtsug ri lde*);⁴⁷
- the inner category contains *The Five Perfect Series* (*rDzogs pa sde lnga*),⁴⁸ each of these having a tantra; *The Three Tantras of the Black Ones* (*Nag po rgyud gsum*);⁴⁹ *The Dark Red Sharp Dagger* (*gZe phur dmar nag*), *The Black and White Ge khod* (*Ge khod dkar nag*), *The This 'Phen ritual of Zhang zhung Me ri* (*Zhang zhung this 'phen*), *The Distillation Practice of the Golden Arrow* (*gSer mda' tso sgrub*), *The Teaching of the Four Methods* (*Lung thabs bzhi*), *The Great and Small Root-text and Commentary* (*rTsa 'grel che chung*), *The Magical Key of the Seals* (*Phyag rgya 'phrul gyi lde mig*), the root-text and commentary of *The Explanation of the Aggregates* (*Phung po ti ka'i rtsa 'grel*);⁵⁰

corresponding to the *gab 'dur* mentioned in the *Kun 'bum*, 5. *lhe'u 'dur* (maybe for *lde'u 'dur*), and 6. *sman 'dur* (a funerary rite with medical purpose?). I am unsure of the meaning of these rites and how to translate their title correctly. This should be investigated in more details.

⁴⁶ There are five works in this category: 1. *lha snyegs*, 2. *'khon 'don*, 3. *gsas bzhi le brgyad*, 4. *thar glud*, and 5. *tshan bon*.

⁴⁷ There are eleven works (*sPa ston* and *Shar rdza* enumerate only ten) in this last category: 1. *gTsug ri gling grags che chung*, 2. *Na rag gting sbyong*, 3. *Kun rig lha ma srin sde brgyad kyi dkyil 'khor*, 4. *lCug le sgres po'i spur sbyong*, 5. *lCug le tsha tsha*, 6. *gNam gshen gyi me mchod*, 7. *g.Yung drung klong rgyas kyi sbyin sreg*, 8. *Cha gsum che chung bzhi*, 9. *gto bu lag ngan gyi pang skong*, 10. *Phyi nang gsang ba'i dbang mi 'dra ba dgu*, and 11. *dBang gi ye khrid chen mo*. The last one should not be confounded with the *Ye dbang chen mo* which is one of the two empowerment rituals of the *bKa' rgyud skor bzhi*.

⁴⁸ *Shar rdza* lists (p. 398) six texts under this heading: 1. *The Perfect Ambrosial Medicine* (*bDud rtsi sman rdzogs*), 2. *The Perfection Empowerment of the Sky* (*Lha rtse dbang rdzogs*, *lha rtse* being apparently a synonym for “sky”), 3. *The Profound Perfection of Miracles* (*rDzu 'phrul gting rdzogs*), 4. *The Wrathful Eternal Perfection* (*g.Yung drung khro rdzogs*), 5. *The Abyssal Perfection of the Mātṛkāś* (*Ma mo klong rdzogs*), and 6. *The Perfection of Body, Speech, and Mind* (*sKu gsung thugs rdzogs*).

⁴⁹ Listed by *sPa ston* as *Re nag*, *Char nag*, and *Dhi nag*. In *Shar rdza's*, they are enumerated as: *Re nag*, *Phyar nag*, and *lTeng nag*.

⁵⁰ In this same category were also five purses (*khug ma lnga*) with numerous other works, listed as follows in *sPa ston's*: *khug ma lnga la khug sman bcu/ de la rgyud sde chen po gsum/ srid pa des chad kyi rgyud la/ des chad bcu'o/ rnam par ye 'brel gyi rgyud la gnas 'brel bdun no/ bse khog chen mo'i rgyud la/ phyi nang gsang gsum gyi bse khog bco lnga'o/ kun 'dus rin chen rtsa rgyud la/ 'brel ba che chung gsum/ gzhan yang rdo la gser zhun/ yi ge 'bru 'joms/ lha mo dgu/ phreng bsgril rnam gsum/*. In *Shar rdza's*, the list is as follows: *khug ma lnga la khug sde bcu/ de la rgyud chen po gsum/ srid pa das chad kyi rgyud la das chad dgu/ srid pa ye 'grol gyi rgyud la gnas 'grel bdun/ bse khog chen mo'i rgyud la phyi nang gsang ba'i bse khog bco lnga/ kun 'dus rin chen rtsa rgyud la 'grel pa che chung gsum/ gzhan yang mang ngo/*. The two lists are rather close to one another but still there are some significant differences. Maybe some works were difficult to identify, explaining why *Shar rdza* skipped them, starting with the *rDo la gser zhun* (*Refining Gold on a Stone*) which has probably nothing to do with the text

- the secret category of the Supreme Peak (*yang rtse*) or Dzogchen deals with the three series of Tantras belonging to the Mind Class (*Sems phyogs*); this contains *The Great Ultimate Stage of the Mind* (*Sems kyi mtha' rim chen mo*); the series of Treatises associated with the *Cycle of the Nine Arcana* (*Gab pa dgu skor gyi rgyud sde*), including nine other works, starting with *The Pure Treasury of the Sky* (*Nam mkha' byang mdzod*); *The Inner Teaching on Mind* (*Sems kyi khog lung*); *The Tantra of the Eternal Ultimate Cycle* (*g.Yung drung mtha' skor gyi rgyud*), including *The Celestial Peak of the Citadel* (*gSas mkhar dbyings kyi rtse mo*); thirteen ultimate cycles (*mtha' skor bcu gsum*); *The Great Primordial Emptiness of the Mind* (*Sems kyi ye stong chen mo*); *The Primordial Eternal Pervading* (*g.Yung drung ye khyab*), including fourteen minor works on Mind (*sems smad bcu bzhi*).⁵¹

There were no texts in the bear-skin bag which contained seven grains of white barley (*nas dkar mo 'bru bdun*).⁵²

gZe bon⁵³ had four disciples known as the four great pillars (*ka ba chen mo bzhi*), plus a secret one (*gsang ba bo*), making a total of five main disciples. The four pillars were : 1. Sa stong 'brug lha, 2. sNyel byed ne gu, 3. gTsang ba, and 4. Na ro.⁵⁴ The identity of the secret disciple is unclear in sPa ston's narration but according to Shar rdza (*Legs bshad mdzod* p. 400), it was sNyel byed himself.⁵⁵ The latter requested

of the same title authored by Mañjuśrīmitra and included in the *Sems sde* series of works in the rNying ma tradition.

⁵¹ Unfortunately, except for the *Gab pa dgu skor* and the *g.Yung drung ye khyab*, nearly all works belonging to this category do not seem to have survived. On the *Gab pa*, see gShen chen Klu dga', *Byang chub sems gab pa dgu skor*, in *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, vol. 216, pp. 19-192; see also Kapstein, "The Commentaries of the Four Clever Men." On the *g.Yung drung ye khyab*, see Khu tsha zla 'od, *gSas mkhar g.yung drung ye khyabs (=khyab) lta ba'i rgyud*, in *ib.*, pp. 101-194. As can be seen, these texts have individual paginations in vol. 216.

⁵² This is maybe a reference to an offering rite since we have seen this expression above when the three Buddhists arrived in gZe ban Shes rab rgyal mtshan's house at night. We should also remember that it is from this bear-skin bag that mTha' bzhi 'phrul gsas took a volume on the practice of dBal phur nag po. One could venture to say that the bag was empty because mTha' bzhi had already taken its contents.

⁵³ Erroneously named gZi ban in sPa ston's (p. 329).

⁵⁴ Their names are different in Shar rdza's *Legs bshad mdzod* (p. 400): 1. Sa ston 'brug lha, 2. sTong 'byams dgra bla skyabs, 3. dBang, and 4. sNa ro.

⁵⁵ gShen rNel byid gur in Shar rdza. sNyel byed was supposed to be no. 2 among the four pillars. Therefore, the list provided by sPa ston does not sound correct. The narration is even shorter in sGa ston's *gTer gyi kha byang* (p. 80) which does not list any of the four pillars.

numerous teachings from gZe bon⁵⁶ and made donations to him, in particular to receive instructions on the practice of Phur pa. sNyel byed thought that since his master was Buddhist,⁵⁷ he would probably not need the Bon texts. Therefore, he invited gZe sgur, had him drink *chang* in such a quantity that the latter became completely intoxicated. Taking advantage of the situation, he took gZe sgur's walking stick and *mālā* and showing them to gZe's wife, said: "Give me the treasure bags."⁵⁸ The unsuspecting wife brought the bags and handed them to him. Then, sNyel byed made a large offering to gZe sgur and asked to be given all these Bon texts but the master declared: "If you want to copy them, do so and verify your own copy, but I cannot let you keep the original texts." However, unwilling to follow gZe sgur's order, sNyel byed did not return the originals, which greatly displeased the master. This was a bad sign and a negative action in consequence of which sNyel byed was soon stricken with leprosy. However, before he died, he was able to give the transmission to Zhal blo sGom pa ring mo⁵⁹ who then gave it to rMe rig dpa' bo.⁶⁰ The latter gave it to his son, the famed Gur zhog pa Lha ri gNyan po (1024–1091).⁶¹

Another line of transmission went through Sa stong 'Brug lha who gave the teachings to Khu Dro ra bon po.⁶² The latter gave it to dBang ldan Zhu g.yas legs po (b.1002), the famed disciple of gShen chen Klu dga' (996–1035). He gave the transmission to Zug Ra 'phen,⁶³ and this

⁵⁶ sPa ston reads "Sa stong" (the first of the four pillars) but I follow Shar rdza who corrected this reading to gZe bon (i.e., gZe sgur), which actually makes more sense.

⁵⁷ This reflection is surprising since gZe sgur is always presented as being a bon po. There is something unclear in the narrative as it has reached us.

⁵⁸ Showing the master's walking stick and his *mālā* is intended to show that he has the authorization of the master and can therefore ask for the treasure bags.

⁵⁹ Zhang blon sGom ring mo in Shar rdza's *Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 400.

⁶⁰ rMe'u rog dbal po in *id.*, p. 400.

⁶¹ In the colophon to the *Kun 'dus rin chen rtsa rgyud kyi 'grel pa* (which is included in the *gter mas* handed over to gZe sgur, see *supra* note 50), the line of transmission is given as follows (p. 570): 1. a tsa ra mi gsum, 2. ban dhe mi gsum, 3. gZe bon sgur po, 4. rNel byed ne gu (sNyel byed is consistently spelt rNel byed/byid in other sources such as the present text, and the *Legs bshad mdzod*), 5. Zhang mo sgom pa rong mo, 6. rMeng rog dbal po, 7. rje Lha ri gnyen po, 8. Shang pa jo gzhon (Jo bo/sras gzhon nu), 9. gTsang pa dPal shes (dPal ldan shes rab), 10. g.Yo ston Nam mkha' rin chen, 11. Zhang ston Sher gzhon (Shes rab gzhon nu), 12. gTso bon shes rab, and 13. gTso btsun sMon lam blo gros. Zhang ston (Shes rab gzhon nu) also gave the transmission to gShen btsun Ye shes blo gros who was a master of gTso btsun sMon lam blo gros (no. 13). A similar (but not identical) line of transmission is given in the colophon of another version of the same text included in vol. 191 of the *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, pp. 147–148.

⁶² Zhu Drang ra bon po in *Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 401.

⁶³ Zug Ra 'phan in *id.*, p. 401. Shar rdza also notes that Zhu g.yas gave the transmission of the Treasures to sKyid po and sKye se. These two are lineage holders of the Bon po Dzogchen tradition.

constitutes the Upper Lineage (*stod kyi brgyud pa*). As we have seen above Zug/gZugs Ra 'phen also received the Lower Lineage, so that both Upper and Lower lines of transmission merged in him. Zug is also celebrated as an expert in the Phur pa practice.⁶⁴

3. The origin of the designation "Northern Treasures"

Since the three *atsaras* took the Treasure texts from the main storeroom in bSam yas and wandered in the north, diffusing them in northern La stod, this system has become known as the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*). Before that, there were no treasure collections associated with that name. It is reported by both sPa ston and Shar rdza that whoever engages in the practice of these Northern Treasures will encounter only good auspices and become very powerful.

4. Additional Revelations associated with the Northern Treasures

sPa ston explains that there are several other sets of Treasure discoveries associated with the Byang gter system.

[1]. The first among these concerns Nga 'phrang lha'i dbang phyug (d.u.) and his discovery of Treasure texts in Kailash (Gangs Ti se). Among his revelations were:

- *The Ten Perfections of the Nine Excellent Speeches* (gSung rab dgu rdzogs dang bcu),⁶⁵ together with *The Commentary on the Myriads* ('Bum tig);
- texts associated with the Zo bo dbu dgu deity (guardian of the eastern gate in the Phur pa maṇḍalas), starting with *The Spontaneous Perfection of the Primordial Empowerment* (Ye dbang lhun rdzogs), *The Infinite Stream* (Chu bo rab 'byams), and so forth;
- *The Great Cow of the Mother Tantras* (Ma rgyud ba mo che);
- *The One Thousand-Fold Offering of the Five Kinds of Offerings* (mChod pa rnam lnga'i stong mchod);
- *The Gathering of the Nine Trunks* (sDong po dgu 'dus);⁶⁶
- *The Universal Swirling Lotus* (Pad ma spyi 'khyil);

⁶⁴ At this point of the narrative, both sPa ston (p. 330) and Shar rdza (p. 401) recount that the Phur pa system has its own Treasure Protectors (*gter srung*) and does not depend on mundane Treasure Protectors ('jig rten gyi gter srung).

⁶⁵ Shar rdza (*Legs bshad mdzod*, p. 404) gives this title as gSung rab srid pa'i 'bum dgu rdzogs dang bcu, which is a text centered upon *mdos* rituals that was also discovered by Ra lcag mon skyid (see sPrul sku Khyung rgod rtsal, *Khod spungs dran pa nam mkha'i lung bstan lde mig chung ba*, p. 331).

⁶⁶ This is the famed Father Tantra (*pha rgyud*) that had already been found among the texts included in the tiger-skin bag (as seen above).

- the explanation (*bshad*), commentary (*'grel*) and ritual (*cho ga*) concerning the offering of butter-lamps for long life (*tshe'i mar me*), as well as numerous other Bon texts, all belonging to the Northern Treasures.⁶⁷

[2]. Fierce Mantra texts (*drag sngags*) were found in Shel gyi drag ra, in sPu rang.⁶⁸

[3]. In Brag rgya bo,⁶⁹ *The Variegated Myriads of the Nāgas* (*Klu 'bum khra'o [=khra bo]*) was discovered by a hunter (*khyi ra ba*).

[4]. Numerous teachings belonging to the Bon of Cause (*rgyu'i bon*)⁷⁰ such as *The Public Reversal* (*Khrom*⁷¹ *bzlog*), and so forth, were discovered in gSer thang sha ba, in the north.

[5]. In Pha bong g.Yu ris can, numerous texts were found, such as *The Sādhana of the Lord of the gNyan* (*gNyan rje sgrub thabs*), etc., all belonging to the Northern Treasures.

[6]. In Tsha thog ting ding mo, Khro tshang 'Brug lha discovered *The Myriads Discourses of the Loving Compassionate Mother* (*Thugs rje byams ma'i mdo 'bum*), together with its cycle of practice (*sgrub skor*), as well as numerous magical teachings of Bon. He transmitted his revelations to his sister Khro chung ma, after whom the lineage passed through Bla ma gzhon nu, and so on.

[7]. A collection of texts was hidden in La stod gtsang po. According to the history of their revelation, in early times, in order to protect the Revelation of Bon, sTon pa gshen rab taught the cycle of teachings known as *Zhang zhung this*, i.e., tantric teachings and rituals associated with the country of Zhang zhung. These teachings are said to have been transmitted through a lineage of ninety-two masters, starting with Khyung lha dgra 'dul, a Bon po hailing from Zhang zhung. The texts were placed in a copper chest and hidden on the top of Mount Kailash. Later, a *gter ston* named Zhang zhung U gu dgra 'dul is said to have recovered them.⁷² Then the lineage passed through sixty masters down to another Bon po of Zhang zhung, named Lha ro dkar po, who was able to bind gods and demons into servitude. He is said to have hidden the texts in La stod gtsang po.

Centuries later, when the Buddhist master gZe ston sPu gu rgyal mtshan was thirty, one night he dreamt of three individuals dressed in

⁶⁷ Not listed.

⁶⁸ No list is given (p. 330).

⁶⁹ Often associated with the northern direction in the expression *byang phyogs brag rgya bo*. This is a famed Treasure site (*gter gnas*) associated with several *gter ston*, including Khro tshang 'brug lha (956–1077).

⁷⁰ The text erroneously reads *rgyud bon*.

⁷¹ Wrongly spelled *khram*.

⁷² U gu might derive from g.Yung drung.

Bon po attires who told him:

— Ācārya! Wake up! There is a *siddhi* for you!⁷³

— What *siddhi* do you have for me? he asked.

— To the east of this place, there is a rock shaped as a yak. If you dig at its base, you will find numerous texts dealing with killing (*bsad*), curing (*gso*), summoning (*dbab*), and reversing (*bzlog*). Take them!

gZe ston borrowed a pickaxe from his lay donor rNgon⁷⁴ Byang chub rdo rje and having started digging, he first found a human skull. Digging further, he found a copper chest which he opened and took out the texts of the *Zhang zhung this* corpus. There were four categories of works:

- four Tantras (*rgyud*) centered upon curing, associated with the *This dkar* teachings;
- three Tantras centered upon reversing, associated with the *This dmar*;
- two Tantras on killing, associated with the *This nag*; and
- ten works (on summoning?)⁷⁵ associated with the '*Dzab this*.⁷⁶

rNgon Byang chub told gZe ston: "Ācārya! Give us a method of protection against hail!" gZe ston taught him the '*Dzab this* and gave him back the pickaxe. Thereafter, gZe ston travelled to Ba gor⁷⁷ dBen sa kha, showed the texts to Bru sha rJe btsun and eventually gave them to him but he also cleverly asked Zhang grags to make a copy of them. Then, he gave the transmission to Do ri⁷⁸ rgya bon in the form of two small volumes.⁷⁹

[8]. Other collections of texts associated with the Northern Treasures are the revelations made by Go lde 'phags pa under a rock in g.Yung drung seng mchong. These texts were:

⁷³ In the revealed literature, Treasures (*gter ma*) are often presented as *siddhis* (*dnegos grub*) indicating that the one destined to retrieve a Treasure is a fortunate one who has reached accomplishments (*siddhis*).

⁷⁴ Wrongly spelt *rdeg* in sPa ston's work. It is clear that the editor of sPa ston's text used an original in *dbu med* and that he had obvious difficulties in transcribing it back correctly into *dbu chen*.

⁷⁵ There is no explicit indication about the nature of these works but given the list of four topics that were prophesized to be included in the chest, it seems logical to attribute the teachings about summoning to the fourth kind of *This* teachings.

⁷⁶ sPa ston text gives the reading *mdzub this*, but Shar rdza (Karmay, p. 149) reads it correctly as '*dzab this*.

⁷⁷ Bar go in Shar rdza (*op. cit.*).

⁷⁸ Dod ci in Shar rdza (*ib.*).

⁷⁹ Presumably those made by Zhang grags (named Zhang grags bon po in the *Legs bshad mdzod*).

- *The Treatise on the Method of Realization leading to the Unsurpassable State* (*Bla med go 'phang sgrub thabs kyi mdo rgyud*),
- *The Extensive Eternal Expanse* (*g.Yung drung klong rgyas*) in twenty-eight chapters;
- funerary ritual texts on *Kun rig*, as well as instructions on the austerities performed by gShen practitioners, and so forth.

He also received an oral transmission (*snyan brgyud*) which he codified in numerous works, such as *The Golden Instructions of Dran pa about the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs chen dran pa gser gdams*), etc.⁸⁰ He gave the transmission of his revelations to Khyung po Nang chen grags pa, the latter's nephew, and both of them gave the transmission to Khyung po bSod rgyal.

[9]. Eventually, the revelations made by Mar pa 'phen bzang in sPu rangs also belong to the Northern Treasures. Mar pa found wooden boxes in Shel mtsho mu le had and sold them to the master Shu bon dge bsnyen. The contents of the boxes consisted in numerous scrolls (*shog dril*) containing Bon texts including:

- *The White, Black, and Variegated Myriads of Nāgas* (*Klu 'bum dkar nag khra gsum*) in three volumes, and
- *The Myriads Entrusted to Nāgas, gNyan, and Lords of the Earth* (*Klu gnyan sa bdag gtod kyi 'bum*), in four volumes, together with their complementary works.

5. The dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal Revelations

In his *Biographies of a Hundred Treasure Revealers* (*gTer ston brgya rtsa'i rnam thar*, p. 434), Kong sprul suggests several identifications of Bon and rNying ma *gter ston*, among whom he considers dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal (b. 1175)⁸¹ and Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408) to be one and the same person.⁸² It is possible that the existence of the word *rgod* (vulture) and the fact that both *gter ston* have discovered works in Zang zang lha brag prompted Kong sprul to suggest their identification. However, their dates are not compatible,⁸³ nor are their revelations. For instance, given the gigantic importance of the

⁸⁰ On the *rDzogs chen dran pa gser gdams*, see Clemente, *Visionary Encounters*.

⁸¹ See Roberto Vitali's paper in the present issue for another birth date of Khyung rgod rtsal.

⁸² The very same identification is made by the 11th Si tu pa (Padma dBang mchog rgyal po) in his *Rin chen gter gyi chos mdzod chen mo'i rtogs brjod ngo mtshar bdud rtsi'i byung gnas*, p. 541.

⁸³ Khyung rgod rtsal's date of birth (1175) fits relatively well with the dates of one of his disciples, 'A zha Blo gros rgyal mtshan, who lived from 1198 to 1263.

dGongs pa zang thal among rGod ldem's treasure revelations,⁸⁴ if both masters were one and the same person, a mention of this cycle should appear one way or another in the narratives associated with Khyung rgod rtsal. This is not the case.

In general, the discovery of Treasure texts by Khyung rgod rtsal is classified under the heading of the *dPon gsas ma* and not under the Northern Treasures, although he revealed texts in Zang zang lha brag, one of the most important locations for the Bon and rNying ma systems Byang gter, together with Ri bo bkra bzang. His revelation in Zang zang lha brag took place in *1208 (*sa pho 'brug*) when, in the Vermillion Cavern (Brag phug mtshal kha ma) he found the following collections of texts:

- *The Utterly Secret Refutation of Objections* (*Yang gsang rtsod bzlog*),⁸⁵
- *The Six Rituals of the Oral Transmission* (*sNyan brgyud chog drug*),⁸⁶
- *The Secret Dhāraṇīs* (*gSang gzungs*),⁸⁷
- *The Dhāraṇī of Long Life* (*Tshe gzungs*),⁸⁸
- *The Miraculous Birth of Drenpa* (*Dran pa brdzus skyes*),⁸⁹
- *The Zhang zhung Cycle of Tsewang Rigdzin* (*Tshe dbang zhang zhung ma*),⁹⁰
- *The Great Primordial Empowerment* (*Ye dbang chen mo*),⁹¹ as well as
- *The Offering Methods and The Correcting Methods of the Powerful Divine Lord of Treasures* (*gTer bdag lha btsan gyi bcos thabs*)

⁸⁴ On this collection, see Turpeinen, *Visions of Samantabhadra*, *passim*. On the vast corpus of exegetical works associated with this cycle, see Arguillère, "A History of the *dGongs pa zang thal* practice manuals", *passim*.

⁸⁵ On this text, see Karmay, *Catalogue of Bonpo Publications*, p. 42, where it is stated that the text—provided it is identical to the one listed here—was discovered in a Tiger year which is given as 1218.

⁸⁶ An unusual rdzogs chen cycle centered upon Dran pa nam mkha', as well as the various practices of gShen lha 'od dkar. The cycle is also known as *The Six Rituals of Drenpa* (*Dran pa chog drug*). It is included in vol. 268 of the *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*.

⁸⁷ There is a *gSang gzungs* text included in the *sNyan brgyud chog drug*, pp. 469-507. It is presented as a revelation made by Khyung rgod rtsal in Zang zang lha brag, therefore the identification of the text should be correct.

⁸⁸ Not identified yet. Possibly a text similar to the *Tshe dbang bya ri ma*, on which see Achard, "Une *dhāraṇī* Bon po de Longue Vie Associée au Cycle du *Tshe dbang bya ri ma*, selon la tradition de Khod spungs Blo gros thogs med (1280–1337)", *passim*.

⁸⁹ Not identified yet.

⁹⁰ On which see Karmay, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁹¹ Not identified yet but see no. 47 *supra*.

mchod thabs).⁹²

Among his own “Buddhist” (*chos*) *gter ma* revelations, Khyung rgod rtsal is said in the *Legs bshad mdzod* (Karmay, p. 331) to have excavated the following works:

- *The Manifest Realization of Vajrasattva* (*rDo rje sems dpa'i mngon rtogs*),
- *The Practice of Vajrapāṇi* (*Phyag rdor gyi sgrub pa*),
- *The Methods for Curing Leprosy* (*Bro nad gso thabs*), and
- *The Practice of Guru Drakpo* (*Gu ru drag sgrub*).⁹³

It is clear that these revelations do not show up in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *gter ma* and that the latter's numerous *gter ma* cycles do not appear among the collections revealed by dPon gas Khyung rgod rtsal. Therefore, Kong sprul's identification of both masters cannot not be regarded as valid.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that the expression *Byang gter* applies both in Bon and the rNying ma tradition to a large group of individual texts and collections of texts actually revealed in several places. Therefore, in both lineages, it never refers to a single set of revelations but rather covers various textual corpuses and includes multiple Treasure revealers. It might also be noteworthy to highlight the fact that despite being associated with the Northern direction, the Treasures belonging to this system were actually not recovered in the “north” such as in “north of Lhasa” as is sometimes imagined: rather, they were in a large part actually discovered in sTod (i.e., La stod) which is actually west from g'Tsang.⁹⁴

Another common trait between the Bon and the rNying ma *Byang gter* systems is the endemic presence of the *yi dam* Phur pa. It is true that in both traditions the practice of Phur pa has become quite predominant in several lineages (for instance the Shar rdza lineage in Bon and the bDud 'joms lineage among the Nyingmapas) but probably not as widely as in the Northern Treasures.

One notable element of difference between Bon and rNying ma *Byang gter* traditions is, compared to the central role of the *dGongs pa*

⁹² Not identified yet.

⁹³ I have not been able to identify any of these works so far.

⁹⁴ See Valentine, “Introduction to and Translation of *The Garland of Light*,” p. 133 and 135.

zang thal in the rGod ldem revelations, the relatively limited presence of rDzogs chen texts in the Bon po Northern Treasures. This impression might be suggested by the fact that, as we have seen above, most of the Great Perfection textual corpus in the latter has apparently been lost.

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Feats of an eclectic Bon po master: dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal's 'das log journey and gter ma rediscoveries


Roberto Vitali

(Dharamsala)

"I do not doubt that one night a guest carved on the tombstone will come to knock at my door with his fist of marble and will grab the hand I will stretch out to him. He will draw me to the darkness from which no one returns."

Michel Tournier, *Le roi des aulnes*

For Elliot Sperling*

ourneys of Tibetans to the "Western Regions" form a classical piece of indigenous literature. Travel, either to pursue their karma or to undertake pilgrimage to holy places treasured by the school they belonged to, marked the lives of mystics and adepts of the religions of Tibet. Such an enterprise was one of several achievements that concurred to ensure the masters an eminent place in Tibetan history.

Among these journeys one stands out for its peculiarity. The extraordinary exertion of dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal was different from the others since he went to the west still bearing all symptoms of his status as 'das log.¹

* The few pages that follow are based on my presentation "Accounts of the journey to the "Western Regions" with particular reference to Khyung rgod rtsal and his 'das log experience. An historical view" given at the 8th Seminar of IATS, Bloomington July 1998, which I never took out for publication. The congress was organised by my dear old friend Elliot Sperling. The present revision of my Bloomington paper connects me ideally to those days spent together and is conceived with him in mind.

¹ Various aspects of dByil ston's personality have been dealt with in masterful treatments by Anne-Marie Blondeau who worked in particular on his rediscoveries (*Annuaire de l'Ecole Pratiques des Hautes Etudes*, 1984-1985, p. 107-114 and "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrags-pa Bon-lugs," p. 123-143) and Françoise Pommaret in her concern for those who were 'das log (*Les revenants de l'au-delà dans la tradition tibétaine*, p. 100-101).

1. dByil ston's 'das log experience

Khyung rgod rtsal was born at Gres khung of sPyi from dByil rDo rje seng ge, a master of Bon, and rGya gar gsal sgron from the Gu rub, a clan whose history goes back to Zhang zhung and Byang thang in antiquity. He studied Bon and medicine but was trained in Buddhism too.² sPyi, the locality in the area of 'Brong pa where he was born, had a leaning towards a wide-ranging exercise of religion. It was Bon po, as Khyung rgod rtsal and his family prove, but also Buddhist because, after staying in Gung thang, the Tshal pa master Tshang 'dur ba, active in the early 12th century, and thus before dByil ston's birth, founded a monastery there. The *dgon pa* was called Khyu ri and was founded after the Mang dkar ba invited Tshang 'dur ba there.³

Anne-Marie Blondeau has shown that dByil ston's belonging to the line of the eclectic rMa masters influenced his activity as literary treasure finder. In "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrags-pa Bon-lugs" (p. 38), she gives the transmission of the rMa lineage in the period by mentioning first rMa ston Srid 'dzin, then his son rMa ston lCam me, the latter's son rMa ston Shes rab seng ge and finally Khyung rgod rtsal.

Hence lineal transmission and the environment in which he was born and grew up made of dByil ston a master conversant with the two religions.

The biography of Khyung rgod rtsal (*dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*) was dictated by dByil ston to his disciple Dol po Shud kye drang srong rGyal mtshan tshul khirms,⁴ who introduces his 'das log experience

² *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 268,8-p. 269,1): "[dByil ston] was a master of Bon and *tsug lag* (spelled so). A few brothers and sisters were born to his mother Gu rub rGya gar gsal. He was the oldest. The name given to him by his father (p. 249) was rDo rje dpal. Since tender age he had faith and was perceptive, hence he learned Bon, Chos, medicine and astrology in a masterful manner." sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 245,21-p. 246,4): "The history of dByil gter ston. At the locality Gres khung of sPyi, he was born from father (p. 246) dByil Bon rDo rje seng ghe (sic) and mother dGu rib mo rGya kar gsal sgron. His was given the name He ru ka by his father and the name rDo rje dpal by the *slob dpon*. Since young age he had faith and wisdom. He learned Bon, Chos and medicine in a masterful way."

³ *Deb ther dmar po* (p. 144,18-19): "Yon bdag Blo gros invited [Tshang 'dur ba chen po] to gTsang and offered him the estate at sBo khung. There, Tshang 'dur ba introduced sessions of Ma ñi recitation. After the Mang dkar ba invited him to Phyi yul and became his main sponsors, he founded Khyu ri dgon pa. He introduced sessions of Ma ñi recitation."

⁴ The colophon of *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 274,7-p. 275,2) reads: "This *bla ma'i rnam thar* called *Rin chen phreng ba* was written in accordance with the words of sPrul sku dByil ston. Initially, it was composed by sTag lung drang srong lHa rje (a master of the medical science). It was then continued by lHo stod slob dpon

canonically. It says that, when Khyung rgod rtsal was twenty-three years old, as retribution for his previous acts, he was dragged to hell by a black man after experiencing a serious illness which initiated him into a 'das log ordeal.⁵ A judgement of his deeds was performed by the same black man and by a white man.⁶ The white man disap-

Gon ne. Finally, it was completed by sPa btsun. Given that no other account exists except the personal words of this famous *bla ma*, each of these three were accurate [in their work]. Moreover, given that there are texts well known to everyone but not directly referring to him (p. 275) and deviant oral accounts, for the sake of the future generations, I, Dol po'i Shud kye drang srong rGyal mtshan tshul khirms, bowed to the feet of the great benefactor, the *sprul sku* (i.e. dByil ston). I wrote this work according to his words, without exaggerating or omitting [anything].” After a sketchy history of the biography, Drang srong rGyal mtshan tshul khirms says that he based his biography on the master's words. Hence, as is canonical, this *rnam thar* is another case of an autobiography written down by a disciple. This may explain the recurring use of the first-person singular in the narratives referring to dByil ston. However, the author of the *rnam thar* adds that he also used oral accounts and consulted evidence deriving from other material, proving that he accomplished an expansion of the previous works. The *rnam thar* contains many colloquial expressions typical of the dialect of Upper West Tibet.

⁵ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 249,1-3): “In the earlier part of his life, owing to the crucial aspect that he triumphed many times over the Bon [po] and the *ban* [*de-s*], he was the master of the *ban de-s'* power, the protectors of the teachings and gShin rje [who causes] bleeding leprosy (*'dze nag*). This was the account of how these [past events] occurred. Now follows the account illustrating the experiences which were the results of his actions. When he was about twenty-three years old (1257; see below), he became severely ill. After thirty days, he was no more able to swallow normal food.”

⁶ I digress briefly from the main theme of this article to draw the attention of the reader to a few cases which bear similarity to the 'das log experience and the symbolism of black and white outside the typical context of the judgement of the soul, a matter which has been discussed at length in the past especially by Pomaret. I see in the narrative of the transformation of lHa lung dPal gyi rdo rje before and after he murdered Glang dar ma an episode reminiscent of the 'das log scheme. Even though his metamorphosis from a black man to a white man cannot be one of the earliest documented cases of 'das log, in its assonance to the presence of the white and black man in charge of the judgement of the souls, his transformation is an allegory of the forces of death and life. Death, when he is dressed as a black man to assassinate Glang dar ma. Life, when he turns his clothes white to represent the rebirth of the Buddhist teachings. His black to white transformation is found in the literature as early as *Nyang ral chos 'byung* (p. 439,8-11; p. 440,13-15 and p. 441,1-5). A vaguely analogous episode, anchored to a 'das log context, is found in *Srid pa'i rgyud kyi kha byang chen mo* (p. 116,1-p. 120,6) with reference to the well-known competition of magic between Bon po and Buddhists during the reign of Khri srong lde btsan. It ended with the defeat of the Bon po in the Buddhist literature, but with their victory according to Bon po sources. In the episode I wish to introduce, which has been masterly treated by Samten Karmay (“The Soul and the Turquoise: A Ritual for Recalling the *bla*” p. 317-318), the *btsan po* asks the Bon po to impart death to a minister so that Guru Padma can prove his powers by bringing him back to life. The minister, incidentally brought back to life by the Bon po rather than Guru Padma, when asked about his experience, talks like a 'das log. He says he met a black man who

peared and the black man led him to the netherworld via a series of gorges.⁷

A lengthy description of the hells follows. These vicissitudes fall into the typology of the 'das log narratives according to schemes found in the *Abhidharma* literature. It is common knowledge that the 'das log experience of the hell realms is based upon *Abhidharma* cosmogony, which provides its conceptual foundations, and thus it is not by chance that the most detailed descriptions of the hells are found in *Abhidharma*-related works.⁸ The way *Abhidharma* is treated in the biography of dByil ston is no exception to its conceptual paradigm.

One of the primary peculiarities of dByil ston's experience rests upon the fact that, after returning from the hells, he set out on a unique journey that brought him to visit major holy places in Tibet

took him away to the realm of death and a white man who led him back to life. In the case of Khyung rgod rtsal, the reappearance of the white man in the lands of *Abhidharma* cosmology shows that a reversal in the destiny of dByil ston had taken place. dByil ston was no longer bound by the negative consequences of his earlier deeds, symbolised by the black man who dragged him to the hells, but was rather poised to receive important initiations and become a prominent *gter ston*, after the white man led him to higher realms of *Abhidharma*.

⁷ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 249,5-6): "Having opened [the door], there appeared two persons, a handsome looking white man with a short figure and a black man with a tall figure and a dark face. [Khyung rgod rtsal] was taken out of bed and dragged away by the black man." Ibid. (p. 249,7-p. 250,2): "A white (p. 250) felt-like cloth having been spread between the two men who had brought him away, these [two] were counting the white and black pebbles on something like a drawing of a multicoloured diagram, which [was used to] calculate virtue and sin to find out to the smallest detail whether he had earlier committed sins or practised virtue. Upon realising that the sins and virtuous acts that he had performed were being counted, he was stricken with panic. Then, after a while, the white man with a noble complexion disappeared."

⁸ 'Gar Dam pa Chos sdings pa (1180–1240), the beloved spiritual son of sKyob pa 'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217), is credited in the biography of him penned by his nephew U rgyan pa aka Nub gling ston pa, with the feat of taking back his *nye gnas* gZhon nu 'od from death since he was a victim of a smallpox epidemic in Byang Mi nyag. 'Gar Dam pa thus acted as a veritable Bodhisattva, in the best tradition of this deity visiting the hells owing to his compassion. The most salient aspect of the episode is that gZhon nu 'od, after the ordeal, speaks as the 'das log that he was. *Chos sdings pa'i rnam thar* (p. 503,1-4) reads: "gZhon nu 'od said: "I have seen you, [my] *bla ma*. This was a great benefit. I visualised many Buddhist paradises, too. A white man appeared. One Buddhist realm up there is bDe' ba can. Down here, you, the *bla ma*, were rejoicing. There was radiance down here. A red woman appeared. Down there in the west was U rgyan. Down here, you, the *bla ma*, were rejoicing. There was radiance down here. I did not know where to go. [You my] *bla ma* came straight to me." So he reported. The *bla ma* said: "This is extraordinarily good. The route to this very U rgyan is near. Since you had no studies on *sNgags*, the white man who came to assist [you] was Thugs rje chen po. The infection is dealt with. So, your healed winds have removed it."

while moving progressively towards the west.

After fainting in the hells, dByil ston recovered his senses at Sol nag Thang po che. He went to lHa sa 'Phrul snang and then proceeded to g.Yas ru and sPyi rTsang. On the way, he passed through sPyi, his native place in southern Byang thang (Byang), had a detour in 'Bring mtshams, and proceeded to sTag sde, lDong ra and other localities in La stod Byang,⁹ including Bar 'brog rDo rje gling, where he

⁹ To present the travelogue of dByil ston in this note and the next ones I focus on the parts of the biography that tell more about his ordeal. I omit sentences and brief paragraphs so that the narrative flow runs better. *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 256,7-p. 259,7): "Not knowing where he was heading to, [dByil ston] found himself at Sol nang thang po che of dBus. Having heard that bSam yas was [nearby], he thought of going to bSam yas, but was stopped by a huge black bird. He then came upwards (p. 257) and went to lHa sa 'Phrul snang. He first proceeded to 'Phrul [snang]. He was struck by fear that this [area], resplendent with vegetation, could be g.Yas ru or sPyi rTsang (i.e. the ancient spelling of gTsang). He visited both temples (i.e. Ra mo che and Jo khang) [...] Subsequently, having gone upwards (i.e. westwards) to rTsang, he was hungry and thirsty. He went to drink water in g.Yas ru, but there was no water in Dram pa sha re." *Ibid.* (p. 257,3-4): "Then, he came to sPyi, [where] the sPyi river flows with blue water. Having gone to drink its water, he did not like it because it was salty [...] He did not avoid knocking at any door of entire sPyi yul [for food and water] [...] At Bar 'brog, he crossed the peak of the pass and, continuing a while, he came to a cave where there was an old *rnal 'byor pa* wearing a dress made of different pieces of fabric. In front of him was a table with three small *brtor [ma]* (sic for *gtor ma*). Having seen the offering of the three small *brtor ma*, he thought: "I must have been born as a *yi dags*" [...] [dByil ston] spared some food that lasted later until 'Bring 'tshams Gad kha. He went to the right-hand border. Having gone to a red *lha khang*, there was a group of red horsemen [...] This was in Ble 'gong [...] He returned upwards (i.e. westwards). After having reached a big settlement known as Drang so, he proceeded from there. When he arrived in front of Drang se gNyan rtse, he remembered that he was born here as a mule [...] He reached 'Bring 'thams Gad ka (sic), a large territory with many inhabitants. In the great land Gad kha many Bon po (p. 259) were hunting deers with long horns.... After crossing a small pass in the northwest, he arrived at Khro bu. He went to Gab Bya ru, and here he remembered that he was born [here] as an ox. "I (Khyung rgod rtsal) was not happy." Then, he crossed g.Yas ru, and reached La stod Byang. He was without a companion, exhausted, very hungry and thirsty. Here was a rocky mountain known as mDog dbugs which had very scarce vegetation. He remembered that he was born here as a cow and did not feel happy. On the way back, he left sTag sde smad and went to see Jo bo Thugs rje chen po at Rong Byang chub kling (sic)." sTag sde was the locality of the lord, namely Grags pa rgyal mtshan, who received from Guru Hūm 'bar gZa' *Mon pa Ke ta'i gdams skor shin tu zab cing rno myur tshan che'i drag sngags*, the *gter ma* extracted by the latter at Tho ling. This dignitary from sTag sde passed it to Ye shes 'od (*Guru bKra shis chos 'byung* p. 504,24-p. 505,3 and *gTer ston brgya rtsa'i rnam thar* p. 481,3-5). Judging from their descriptions in *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*, sTag sde and sTag sde smad are to be located in La stod Byang. *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 259,8-p. 260,8): "He subsequently arrived at the castle of Rong. He continued upwards (i.e. westwards) and arrived at Brog ra (sic) [...] He then proceeded to the sTag sde valley via some smaller valleys at a higher elevation [...] Following that, he

met rGod tshang pa.¹⁰

Via the southern route that traverses Byang thang, dByil ston entered into other *Abhidharma* experiences upon reaching Upper West Tibet, the quintessential land of Bon.¹¹ Here he came across lakes and

also went to sDong ra Khrim 'khar (sic). He then toured Cung pa lung pa."

¹⁰ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 262,3-5): "[dByil ston] subsequently went downwards (i.e. eastwards) to dGyer chung. He was given something similar to *chang* which was requested by [some] horsemen. He then went to Bar 'brog rDo rje gling, the residence of rGod tshang pa. At the bottom of the valley was a line of huts. Upon a shelter on a rock was a building [like] a black nest. He (rGod tshang pa) resided in a hut higher than any other above this shelter on the rock. He wore on his head a red scarf tied as a turban. He had white hair over his forehead. He wore a red shawl. His face was white and round. [Khyung rgod rtsal] was happy to see him and offered his prostrations. He then went to sPyi."

¹¹ *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 263,2-p. 267,1): "He then arrived at a very clean land, where the confluence of a big river was located. In the centre of a shallow lake formed by this river was a tall tree, and a *lha khang* was in its branches. At that time, the same white man of before appeared nearby it. He said: "Down there [in the *lha khang*] stays gNyan rje Gong sngon. [dByil ston said]: "I am familiar with the experiences [related to] the *gnyan-s*, so I wish [to see him]." He (i.e. the white man) replied: "If you get inside [the lake], you will not come back. Even if you try [hard], you will not succeed" and added: "I will lift the door curtain [for you]." Once he had lifted the door curtain, [Khyung rgod rtsal was able to see] gNyan rje Gong sngon with three heads and six arms, a shining light [emitting] from the upper part of his body and a pair of turquoise horns the size of one 'dom protruding from his head. All kinds of birds were chirping "*ldong ldong*" [around him]. "After a while, a wolf appeared near the river [and] took my (i.e. Khyung rgod rtsal's) intestines out, pulling them away." Here, at the bank of the river, he [tried] to take his intestines back. He was in pains and [his intestines] were torn. The white man said: "Meditate on gNyan rje Khyung rum." Having thus meditated on this *gnyan* to heal [his intestines], he recovered. He then arrived at a large country with elevated settlements, [where] all the mountains touched the sky, with many lakes and cattle, [and where there] was a blue lake. On the nape of this lake was a large settlement. Upon reaching there, [he saw that] all the door decorations were made of gold and turquoise. In this lake, various species of [aquatic] birds were swimming and singing. It was attractive and pleasant. Having asked which land this was, the white man (p. 264) said: "This is the land of the Klu." [Khyung rgod rtsal] said: "If so, I must have been born at some instance in the land of the Klu." The [white] man said: "Which merit did you accumulate to be born in the land of the Klu?" Having concentrated his thoughts [on this question], he was uncertain what [merit] he had accumulated, but he had made many water *rtor [ma]*, *klu rtor [ma]* and *bong ra* (?). [The white man] added: "You were not born like that (i.e. in the land of the Klu)." [Khyung rgod rtsal] asked: "If not, why then did we come here?," [the white man] told him: "We are here to cleanse your defilements." [Khyung rgod rtsal] insisted: "Which negative deeds did I do?" [The white man] replied: "Do you not remember your previous miserable deeds?" He replied: "I do remember." [The white man] concluded: "This is it. This is the effect [descending] from the cause. However, you have meditated on the *yi dam* and *bla ma*, and so all are cleansed." After leaving that place, he came across another land which was almost square. In its centre was a big lake with blue water, where many people were swimming. From here looking [into the distance], he could clearly see many countries. A feeling of happiness and

[sharper] knowledge was produced [in him]. Near the lake, at the foot of a multi-coloured country, people with magnificent costumes were circumambulating a tall tree with many leaves. When he asked them why they were making circumambulations, they said that on the tree was a *bya khyung* and they were prostrating and making circumambulations in order to proceed to a higher realm. After reaching the thickly vegetated tree, [he saw] a *bya khyung* as big as a sheep and wearing something like a turquoise [coat] emitting light. [This bird] had straight horns with sharp tips. "Since I myself (i.e. Khyung rгод rtsal), too, performed prostrations and circumambulations, a stable feeling of happiness was produced [in me]." Then looking [around], there was a similar tree a little farther away, with many people and [several] markets. He asked: "What is over there?" They told him: "This is the wish fulfilling tree" and added: "If one climbs up this tree, one reaches the realm of the *lha-s*." He went to its foot, but [the tree] was too tall for his eyes to see the top. Many people were trying to climb it and some fell down. "As I (i.e. Khyung rгод rtsal) also [began to] climb it, I almost fell down, (p. 265) but I did not." Grabbing its leaves, this impious [man] reached [the tree] top, and [there] was a multicoloured [land] known as the realm of the *lha-s*. In the centre of a lake in front of [the realm of the *lha-s*] was another [tree], taller than the previous tree. On that tree, many birds with bright blue feathers similar to crows were crying *ltong ltong*. When again he experienced a happy realisation [which made him wonder] into which [realm of the] gods he had been born. At that moment something sounding like a loud voice spoke. "Listening to it, I had the impression that it was calling my name." Stricken by panic, he felt uneasy in his heart. Soon after, he climbed down from the tree. He said he descended without stopping and, coming farther and farther down without falling, arrived at the top of a big mountain known as Ri bo Gha dha la (i.e. Ghan dho la, spelled Gha dha la in *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar rgyas pa* p. 51, aka Dril bu ri). From there, he saw a big blue river known as River 'Ghang ga (sic). He descended from the west side of this mountain, and after crossing a big river, arrived at a big blue country. He met a very tall woman who had a blue complexion, with beautiful hair and long eyebrows. She said: "You have missed your way. This succession of desert plains is the land of the *srin po-s*. Escape to the mountain up there!" In sheer terror, he ran away in fear and exhaustion. Long grass grew on this mountain. He ascended from the foot of this mountain and inside a grass hut was a man with hair in tangles (a *sadhu*). [Khyung rгод rtsal] asked him: "Which river is that one?" Pointing a finger, [the *sadhu*] replied: "That is the Ghang ga (sic)." Along its banks (*de'i rtsa na*) were sandy hills, and there was a territory full of rivers. The habitations were made of bent bamboo covered with grass on the outside. This area was densely populated. There were relatives and acquaintances [he recognized]. He said he had the feeling that he had spent thirteen years there. Owing to a famine, everyone lived [at the time] on the boiled juice of wild grass (?) (*rtsa rlong dol ba*). Near this mountain he became intoxicated (*nyod pa* for *myos pa*) with *snyan sa le* berries. At the time, he remembered his births. Later [in his reincarnations as dByil ston], when he went to see Ghu ru Chos dbang, the latter told [dByil ston's father]: "Your son (i.e. Khyung rгод rtsal), who is fourteen years old and is provided with (p. 266) prophetic knowledge, has come on my lap. The two of us were born as *brahmin* brothers on the bank of the river Gha gha (sic)." Then proceeding farther (*phyar* for *phyir*), he arrived at a desertic plain which was easy to cross. After crossing it, he found many white grass huts similar to those [he had seen] before. Inside a small hut covered by grass was a man with a white complexion wearing a long robe and sporting a moustache. The people [there] are said to be inhabiting the barren lands of India. Having crossed them, he arrived at rDo rje gdan, where the temple is built with bricks, with *gan 'dzira* and golden streamers.

trees which mark higher realms of *Abhidharma* cosmogony. It is significant that the white man reappeared at this stage of his journey and accompanied him to these realms, all of them on top of mythical trees and populated by deities and fabulous animals:

- The abode of the *gnyan-s*, with a lake and a tree in its centre, and the *lha khang* of gNyan rje Gong sngon—a wrathful Bon po deity with three heads, six arms and turquoise horns—located in the tree.
- A blue lake, above which is the abode of the *klu-s*, its access doors being adorned with gold and turquoise.
- A square land with a big blue lake and a tree with a *khyung* in it, leading to a realm above it.
- Another lake and another tree, which is the wish-fulfilling tree (dPag bsam shing). Climbing this tree brought Khyung rgod rtсал to the abode of the *lha-s*, with another mythical tree.

Descending from the dPag bsam shing, dByil ston returned from the *Abhidharma* realms to the physical world, specifically at Ri bo Ghan

At its foot, in front of a tree (the Bodhi tree?) is a statue of sGrol ma. While he was offering prostrations and circumambulations, the previous white man appeared from nowhere. He said: "What are you doing here? Let's go." After they left, they arrived at a dark mountain covered in fog. While he was led there, he was in a happy mood and clearly elated. He climbed to the top of that mountain and looked around. To the west was a mountain, half of which was covered in fog, known as the country of dBu rgyan (sic). To the northwest (i.e. looking from the direction of rDo rje gdan) was a flat land where the mountains were snow-capped and whose peaks emerged from the clouds. Having asked which were the snow mountains up there, [the white man] said: "These are the snow mountains of sTag gzic and Zhang chung." He said: "If so, I would be glad to go there since I am a Bon po." He said: "Let's set off and go to these [places]." Hence, they descended from the latter mountain, and he had the feeling that he had travelled for a few days. He did not feel tired nor hungry. He reached a big country, where many deceitful people lived. Looking from the lower part of this land, a white snow mountain with three peaks appeared. Having asked: "Which mountain is that?", [the white man] said: "This is Gangs Ti se, the meditation place of the Bon po." He said: "I would be happy to go there because I am a Bon po." Then [the white man] said: "Let's go, we will reach there tonight." While approaching the mountain, they heard the sound of drums and the tambourine. Hearing this made him feel glad." Unless the statements of the last passage should be treated as a visionary experience, which is improbable given dByil ston's frequentation of the mountain, it is somewhat peculiar to see Ti se as a three-peak mountain like rMa chen sPom ra. It is hardly tenable to consider Phyag na rdo rje and 'Jam pa'i dbyangs as its two minor peaks or to look for Bon po sacred mountains, such as sPos ri ngad ldan, in the vicinities in order to find some coherence in this dialogue with the white man.

dho la in Gar sha. From Ri bo Ghan dho la he saw the Gang ga,¹² and moved to an area of India equated with the land of the *srin po*-s from where he escaped in great hurry.

His biography says that, in the final stage of his journey, he went to rDo rje gdan, U rgyan, sTag gzigs and Zhang zhung by swift walking and then proceeded to Gangs Ti se, where he had extraordinary encounters and the initiation to a major religious system. dByil ston's 'das log experience ends here.

Historical notations on dByil ston

The biography of dByil ston states that Khyung rgod rtsal met rGod tshang pa (1189–1258) at the age of twenty-three and *gter ston 'og* Guru Chos dbang (1212–1271 or 1273)—*gter ston gong* was Nyang ral—when he was a fourteen-year-old boy.

dByil ston being a younger contemporary of rGod tshang pa and Guru Chos dbang is sufficient proof that the wood sheep year—dByil ston's date of birth—given in the *bsTan rtsis* by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin as 1175 and consequently by Kvaerne in his article that provides a translation of the same work,¹³ should be post-dated by a full *rab byung* ("sexagenary cycle") to the wood sheep 1235.¹⁴ Otherwise dByil ston would be too old to meet rGod tshang pa and Guru Chos dbang, given that he met the 'Brug pa master in 1257, who is described in dByil ston's *rnam thar* as an old man with white hair, wearing a red turban and shawl, in a hut at Bar 'brog rDo rje gling (see above n.10). rGod tshang pa died the following year.

When he was fourteen years old, in 1248, dByil ston met a mature Guru Chos dbang who affirmed that Khyung rgod rtsal had prophetic powers (*mngon shes can*). The rNying ma master added that he and

¹² dByil ston's itinerary after crossing Byang thang and leaving the *Abhidharma* realms becomes imprecise. Summarized descriptions of the lands he transited are found in his biography without identification of these territories. Khyung rgod rtsal would have reached Gomukh, described as the mountain where the Gang ga has its sources. The region was dotted with bamboo huts with leaf roofs, which could be present-day Uttarkand. It is thus almost sure that he crossed Gu ge lHo smad to reach the sources of the Gang ga.

¹³ Kvaerne, *Bon po bstan rtsis* (p. 231) reads as follows: "In the wood sheep year, dByil ston dPon sras khyung rgod, called Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru, was born (1175)." This translates the entry concerning him in the *Sangs rgyas kyi bstan rtsis ngo mtshar nor bu phreng ba*, which reads verbatim (p. 32,17-18): *shing lug lor/ rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru zhes/ dbyil ston dpon gsas khyung rgod 'khrungs*. Kvaerne makes the sentence more comprehensible by changing the insignificant 'phru into a sensical 'phrul but not everything is sorted out (see below).

¹⁴ His death date is not recorded in the sources. His demise occurred after the earth monkey 1308, the year in which he had his last *gter ma* rediscovery (see below), the last life event mentioned in the literature.

Khyung rgod rtsal were linked by karmic bonds, because in a previous life they were born as brothers into a *brahmin* family on the bank of the Gang ga (see above n.11).¹⁵ Had dByil ston's birth taken place in 1175, Guru Chos dbang would have not been born at that time.

Evidence to postpone dByil ston's life by sixty years from the date given in Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *bsTan rtsis* is ascertained not just through the lives of Buddhist masters but also through the biography of his disciple Gru chen Tshul khriims rgyal mtshan (b. 1251), a Bon po *gter ston* who belonged to the tradition of the rMa masters like dByil ston.

Gru chen was a reincarnation of Tshe dbang rig 'dzin (*Gru chen rnam thar* p. 451,2), the son of Dran pa nam mkha', and a native of sPyi, the same locality where Khyung rgod rtsal was born.¹⁶ Gru chen returned to sTod from studies in its east sometime in 1284 or soon thereafter,¹⁷ and, a few years later, proceeded on pilgrimage to Gangs Ti se, like his teacher dByil ston. He was at the sacred mountain, aged forty, in iron tiger 1290.¹⁸

¹⁵ Anne-Marie Blondeau and Françoise Pommaret have depicted dByil ston as an eclectic master especially close to the rNying ma pa. Guru Chos dbang was a major proponent of the cult of sPyan ras gzigs, the deity who, in works as early as *Za ma tog bkod pa*, went to the higher realms of *Abhidharma* after descending to its hells. A younger associate of Guru Chos dbang, Khyung rgod rtsal transferred the literary theme to human experience. From the perspective of those who returned from the hells rather than Khyung rgod rtsal exclusively, Pommaret speaks about the diffusion of the 'das log among the rNying ma pa and the bKa' brgyud pa ("Les revenants de l'Au-delà ('das-log)" p. 676-677 and *Les revenants de l'Au-delà dans la tradition tibétaine* p. 100-102), i.e. the religious traditions to which Guru Chos dbang and rGod tshang pa, the Buddhist acquaintances of dByil ston, belonged.

¹⁶ An event in his life proves the eclectic character (Bon po and Buddhist) of Gru chen's activity. He was able to bring under control a white-turbaned being who had appeared to him in a dream. This being made him the protector of the *rang gzhan sde* (*Gru chen gyi rnam thar* p. 445,8-p. 446,2), an expression that implies spiritual authority over both the Bon po (*rang*: "one's own") and Buddhist (*gzhan*: "the other") communities (*sde*). This reading of the term *rang gzhan sde* is confirmed in *rGyal rabs Bon gyi 'byung gnas* among a deluge of other sources. In the chronological tables placed at its end, one finds a set of dates according to the Bon po reckoning and a cross-check based on Buddhist chronology. In several instances the author, Khyung po Blo gros rgyal mtshan, makes use of the expression *gzhan sde* (see, e.g., *ibid.* p. 187,1, p. 188,1 and p. 190, 4). The reference to the Buddhist community ("the other community") is indisputable because the dates and events with which the expression is connected are Buddhist, the calculations being based on Buddha's *nirvāṇa*.

¹⁷ *Gru chen gyi rnam thar* (p. 444,3-5) says that after his return to g.Yas ru dBen sa kha when he was thirty-four years old (1284), Gru chen Tshul khriims rgyal mtshan returned to sTod again. On his way towards the higher lands in the west, Gru chen met his master dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal.

¹⁸ *Gru chen gyi rnam thar* (p. 445,6-7): "When [Gru chen] was forty years of age [in 1290], he made a circumambulation of Gang ri mtsho gsum. He went into mental

Gru chen met dByil ston when he was between eighteen and twenty-five (ibid. respectively p. 440,3 and p. 441,8), hence between 1268 and 1275. Were dByil ston born in 1175, he would have been too old (between 91 and 101) or dead by the time he gave teachings to Gru chen.¹⁹

Revising the period in which dByil ston lived is, thus, not a pedantic historical exercise but an important aspect useful to date the cultural season in which dByil ston operated.

The Treatment of Abhidharma in dByil ston's Travelogue

A feature of *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*, which makes the account charac-

quiescence. He stood in smooth peace. Slob dpon Bu chung from sTod received empowerments, blessings and spiritual liaison [from him]. Then he went to Dol po."

¹⁹ If the *lung bstan*-s of both the Buddhist and Bon po literature are considered works written after the events mentioned in them, further evidence supports the one *rab byung* postponement of dByil ston's birth date. In text number 4 of *Sources for the History of Bon*, several prophecies attributed to Dran pa nam mkha' whose rediscoveries are credited to dByil ston by Samten Karmay (see *A Catalogue of Bonpo Publications* p. 115) and Blondeau ("mKhyen-brce dbang-po: la biographie de Padmasambhava selon la tradition du bsGrags-pa Bon et ses sources" p. 138). The place of extraction—at the foot of Zhal bzang brag—is one basis for such an attribution (see below). *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* says that, in an earth horse year, dByil ston rediscovered a few *lung bstan*-s, including ones by Dran pa nam mkha', Guru Padma 'byung gnas and Pa kor (sic for Pa gor) Bai ro tsa na (ibid. p. 273,3). These Bon po and Buddhist prophecies should be added to those attributed to him by Karmay and Blondeau. If the birth date of Khyung rgod rtsal provided by Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (1175) is accepted, these rediscoveries would date to earth horse 1198. For the revised date of this event based on a sounder chronology, see below in the section "Life after the 'das log phase: dByil ston's gter ma-s." One of the prophecies foretells that the fortunes of Tibet would depend on the Hor, showing that the Mongols had already established their sway over the country. Traditionally the first invasion of Tibet—or more precisely Central Tibet—was the one by Dor rta nag po in iron rat 1240. Even if other earlier but little-known intrusions of the Hor into some specific areas of Tibet are counted, none of them dates to before the earth horse year 1198. Another prophecy concerns the 'Bri gung sgom pa Śākya rin chen, who was involved in stopping the advance of Dor rta nag po in 1240 with meagre results (Che tshang bsTan 'dzin padma'i rgyal mtshan, *'Bri gung gdan rabs gser phreng* p. 112,6-8; also Sperling, "Some Notes on the Early 'Bri-gung-pa *Sgom-pa*" p. 35 and n.23). Another prophecy concerns Shakya bzang po, appointed to the post of Sa skya *dpon chen* in wood dragon 1244 after Sa skya pañdi ta and nephews left for the land of the Hor. Śākya bzang po founded Sa skya lHa khang chen mo in fire dragon 1256 and died some two decades thereafter in 1275 (*rGya Bod yig tshang* p. 357,2-p. 358,10; Ar. Macdonald "Préambule a la lecture d'un rGya-Bod yig-chang" p. 93 etc.). These historical facts show that Khyung rgod rtsal could not have rediscovered those prophecies aged twenty-three in earth horse 1198. He unearthed them in earth horse 1258. This is an indirect confirmation that he was born in wood sheep 1235 unless these premonitions were the outcome of a true prophetic power.

teristic, is that the typical 'das log theme of the hells has been expanded to incorporate a description of the higher realms of *Abhidharma* cosmogony.²⁰ Journeying to paradises after descending to hell for reasons of salvation is a theme encountered in the works dealing with the cult of sPyan ras gzigs as early as *Za ma tog bkod pa*. It is also found in the biographies of other 'das log-s. In dByil ston's account, there is nothing which echoes other descriptions of a descent to hell for the compassionate reason of rescuing souls from damnation and then a journey to higher realms. In his case, he was led to those experiences to cleanse his defilements.

During his journey, hence after returning from death, dByil ston shows the signs typical of a *yi dwags* (*preta*), such as unbearable hunger, thirst and exhaustion, which are recurring features of a 'das log. People did not recognise him or notice his ordeal. He could see people but some of them could not see him. A few of those he tried to approach suddenly fell sick and died.

dByil ston's journey might have been mystical or imaginary, induced by his 'das log state, but the detailed description of his travel—especially into the areas of g.Yas ru Byang and Byang thang—in which he accurately mentions one destination after the other, is far more indicative of a physical journey than the experiences of those religious masters who visited U rgyan, for instance, in dreams or trance flights. A meaningful example of a mystic journey to U rgyan is the one of bla ma Zhang g.Yu brag pa brTson 'grus seng ge (1123-1193 or 1194).²¹ In bla ma Zhang's case, emphasis is accorded to the

²⁰ There are analogies—and dissimilarities—between the almost contemporary Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the ordeal that led dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal to descend to the hells, return to the lands of Tibet, cross them, and ascend to the *Abhidharma* paradises. dByil ston's *Purgatorio* were the lands of Tibet he visited in the 'das log state after his hell experience and on the way to the heavens. The duration of dByil ston's journey is unknown, but it seems that it lasted for a much longer time than the week that was enough for Dante to descend to *Inferno*, cross *Purgatorio* and ascend to *Paradiso*. dByil ston's *Divine Comedy* took place some forty years before Dante's. Khyung rgod rtsal journeyed to the hells and paradises in fire snake 1257; Dante from April 8th to April 14th 1300. Dante was a gifted observer, dByil ston a hard-core adventurer, for he was personally involved in the journey while the one of Dante was an intellectual visitation. Dante left to us a masterpiece, Khyung rgod rtsal an interesting account between reality and fiction. Unlike the *Divine Comedy* in which disease leads to purgatory, the 'das log adventures in hells are presented as being caused by illness. Chants of the *Comedy* came out in bunches, so did the life of dByil ston described in various *rnam thar*-s, unavailable nowadays. The Ravenna mosaics were a source of inspiration to Dante, as is the *srid pa'i 'khor lo* summarising dByil ston's descent to the netherworld described in sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po's *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me*. Dante had a lay approach to theology and paradises; the handling of heavens in dByil ston's travelogue does not depart from an unrealistic religious treatment.

²¹ *Gung thang gi dkar chag* (f.11a,4-f.12a,1): "Performing a ritual to obtain omens, [bla

visions influenced by his yogic practice; they have a cosmic status and an actual journey is not even hinted at. On the contrary, the itinerary of dByil ston's journey towards the west is so rich of precise geographical particulars that one can follow the territories he traversed on a map.

After a journey across Byang thang, dByil ston was led to abandon the physical realm. The circumstances of those *Abhidharma* experiences are described as real events in his life. The mythical realms, lakes and trees of *Abhidharma* cosmology are tangible realms, lakes and trees which dByil ston reaches and climbs. Hence, the main feature of his travel to these *loci mentis* and various holy places is that *Abhidharma* cosmogonic concepts are superimposed on actual experiences.

ma Zhang] concentrated his mind on his *yi dam lha*. When he prayed after meditating, the *rje btsun ma* (i.e. sGrol ma) spoke to him: "Noble boy! If you go to U rgyan in the west, the adamantine holy place, you will attain the ten perfections with the help of your *yi dam*." Having spoken thus, she disappeared. On the night of the ninth, catching hold of a sunray, he proceeded to the *sum bcu rtsa gsum gyi gnas* and to the west. When, in his search for U rgyan, he was left helpless, he had a vision of mGon po Phyag bzhi pa. He made offerings to him and received instructions on how to eliminate suffering. [mGon po] instantly transformed into the three-eyed He ru ka. While wondering whether he had stably occupied the abode of Tshang pa (Brahma), the twenty-eight rGyu skar lha mo ("the goddesses of the constellations") (f.11b) descended upon earth. A little boy wearing a white-scarved turban offered him the *snying po yi ge* ("essential syllables"). On the night of the tenth, with his body decorated with the five bone-ornaments [and] with the cycle of sixteen Rigs ma in the sky, while the miracle occurred that the foundations of the earth shook, he went to U rgyan which he saw as if it was rDo rje gdan. At that time, coinciding with the offering of many *u dum wa ra* flowers by the four great kings, a great ceremony took place. "I too made various kinds of offerings with the eyes of my imagination." Then, seeing that there was something resembling a flaming red light at a distance of an arrow shot in the west of this holy place U rgyan, I went there without hesitation. [Seeing] there the *yi dam* rDo rje phag mo on a swirling *g.yung drung* as a couch, with a pig face [and] ornaments which were not cast, my body originated without effort a red Hum letter which rose from the rectum. As it reached the *dkyil 'khor* of the navel, I clearly saw all the six realms of existence as if [my] body was a mirror. For an instant, I felt as if I were dead. At that time, I had unlimited clairvoyance. I saw the 1,028 *bla ma* of the past, the thirty-one *bla ma* of the present, the *gtsug lag khang*, the various *lha khang-s* and *mchod rten-s* I would myself build later. I saw my own body burning above the third *bang rim* [of the latter], and many *lha, klu, dri za*, men and *mi ma yin* lamenting. The various *mkha' 'gro-s* and *chos skyong-s* did not stay still but moved frantically around (*brel g.yang*). Then, while [the Hum letter] proceeded to the heart, [I saw that] this was 'Dzam gling (f.12a) but, fearing that this would be difficult to put into written form, I do not write any more about it."

*Paradises left behind:
Further Destinations in dByil ston's 'das log Travelogue*

The account of dByil ston's experiences as a 'das log is divided into four parts. They are all different—the descent to hell and his return from death, the journey across lands of the plateau, his ecstatic ascent to paradises. The fourth segment of dByil ston's travelogue stands aside from the previous three. At a first glance, it is a further itinerary to physical lands—at least most of them—after his experiences of paradises. A historical down-to-earth consideration makes this journey fade away from realism, however. Despite this section of the travelogue being described in the *rnam thar* as a swift walking passage from land to land, all events in the four phases of dByil ston's life are crowded together in the single year—fire snake 1257—which leave little space for a journey across many lands that are not contiguous.

To travel through Gar sha, metropolitan India, the sources of the Ganges, an obscure land like that of the *srin po-s*, and then rDo rje gdan, all the way to U rgyan in the Northwest and finally Gangs Ti se covers a vast stretch of territories in northern 'Dzam bu gling. While there is a record of his activity at Gangs Ti se which makes his presence at the mountain a real event (see below), the nature of the reference to the other regions is less actual. It is quite unlikely that he travelled there. The ultimate proof of this implausibility is that he went to the land of the *srin po-s*—unless this stands as an allegorical allusion to a hostile territory.

The last section in his 'das log experience is a celebration of *loci mentis* popular in Tibetan culture, U rgyan and sTag gzig, lands of deep religious significance to a Bon po, but also to rDo rje gdan, a locality sacred to an eclectic master like him who leaned towards Buddhism, too.

Like earlier in the biography, the final part of the journey transfers religious stereotypes to a human experience that is rather a literary treatment than the continuation of dByil ston's journey. Nonetheless, short ethnic details enrich the narrative of lively aspects typical of those lands that are not necessarily mystical.

Overall, the narrative of dByil ston's 'das log ordeal has several points that make of the account a beautiful piece of Tibetan literature:

- Gangs Ti se seen as a three-peak mountain,
- the clear water of the sPyi river turning salty,
- Uttarkand and the lands of metropolitan India,
- *Abhidharma* tenets also found in other cultures of the same period,

- Gang ga and Gomukh, the sources of the river,
- a description of sites on the plateau from La stod Byang to 'Bring mtshams,
- sPyi rTsang, called the same way as the dynastic period's *stong sde* of the same territory,
- the meeting with rGod tshang pa just before the 'Brug pa master died,
- the abodes of the *gnyan-s*, the *klu-s* and the *lha-s*,
- lHa sa 'Phrul snang and Ra mo che associated with g.Yas ru,
- rGod tshang pa living in a hut higher than any of his disciples,
- dByil ston's recollections of previous lives as *yi dags*, mule, ox, cow, and one in India,
- Bon po practitioners hunting deers,
- rGod tshang pa's face like a full moon,
- a famine in India,
- clean, pure lands upon approaching the west,
- a wolf taking dByil ston's intestines out but being healed by meditating on gNyan rje Khyung rum,
- people swimming in a blue lake,
- a *khyung* with a turquoise coat emitting light,
- the dPag bsam shing,
- Ri bo Gan dho la,
- the meeting with a *mkha' 'gro*,
- the land of the *srin po-s*,
- the desertic area of metropolitan India,
- a land with many rivers (Punjab?),
- the vernacular architecture of India: bamboo and leaf roofs,
- intoxicating berries,
- the Do rje gdan Gan dho la built with bricks.

All of them are contained in a few of the fifteen folios that compose dByil ston's *rnam thar*.

*The "opening" of the Gangs Ti se "door":
Bon po contributions to the post-Mi la ras pa phase*

Although peculiar, the life experiences of dByil ston fell during a season of shared cultural focus. Even if dByil ston's journey is considered fanciful due to his visionary '*das log* experience and despite it being a description of the physical places he traversed on the plateau, Khyung rgod rtsal's travelogue witnesses the 13th-century interest for journeys to the West by intrepid Tibetan masters.

If true, dByil ston would have proceeded to Bodhgaya about 1257, a time of great turmoil in the Gangetic plain under Muslim pressure. The appearance of the white man who urged him to move away from the holy place as soon as possible echoes the advice given by a transformation of mGon po phyag bzhi pa to U rgyan pa Seng ge dpal (1238–1309). The wrathful deity told U rgyan pa to visit rDo rje gdan in a hurry, owing to Muslim trouble.²² Another version of the same account concludes that U rgyan pa was instrumental in removing threat.²³

While U rgyan pa was in the “Western Regions” before dByil ston, Khyung rgod rtsal, an older contemporary, would have preceded him at rDo rje gdan if—as said above—his presence at this Gangetic holy site is reliable. U rgyan pa first returned to Mar yul in the same year 1257 in which dByil ston set out for his 'das log journey. He travelled to Bodhgaya only in 1261.²⁴ He returned to rDo rje gdan subsequently and contributed to the restoration of the holy place,²⁵ despite the unsafe conditions faced in Ma ga dha at the time.

Assonances between the two masters forsaken, some major differ-

²² *IHo rong chos 'byung* (p. 732,21-p. 733,3): “Then, when [U rgyan pa] was thirty-two years old in the bird year (1261), he went to rDo rje gdan. (p. 733) On the way, he sent back Nye gnas Sher rin and went on alone. He said he had a notion that a black Newar (Bal mo for Bal po) man smeared with white ashes and with four hands (i.e. mGon po Phyag bzhi pa) pulled him with two hands, saying: “Visit it quickly. The Du ru kha are causing hindrance to rDo rje gdan.”

²³ bSod nams 'od zer, *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar* (p. 133,11-p. 134,5): “Nye gnas Shes rin having gone up [towards Tibet], [U rgyan pa] continued alone. Subsequently, at the palace of Bal po called Tha bga' me there was a black man with four arms and red eyeballs, who said: “The Du ru ka troops will be coming to rDo rje gdan. Go there quickly to repulse them with your prayers. Four rnal 'byor pa-s like you will cooperate unitedly.” He scattered [seeds] from his hand, which appeared to be an auspicious omen. [U rgyan pa] commented: “He is *chos skyong* Ye shes mGon po.” At that time, the head *dkon gnyer* of rDo rje gdan (p. 134) was Dza ya po ga shen, the king of the land of Ma ga ta (sic). U rgyan pa said: “I recited and offered uncountable noble prayers such as those which can help to diffuse the teachings, hence the Du ru ka troops were repulsed from the [Ma ga dha] dominions ('khor).” [U rgyan pa] then went to Bal po thil (sic), one of the twenty-four *yul* (“localities”) [of the cosmic body].”

²⁴ bSod nams 'od zer, *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar* (p. 116,15): “You, [U rgyan pa,] should go to rDo rje gdan in the year of the bird (1261)”; also *ibid.* (p. 121,18): “I, [U rgyan pa,] will go to rDo rje gdan in the year of the bird (1261).”

²⁵ bSod nams 'od zer, *U rgyan pa'i rnam thar* (p. 166,17-p. 167,6): “At that time, the boundary wall having been dismantled by the Sog po troops, and much wealth having been allotted (*skur* for *bkur*) [to repair it], the Zangs ling gi rgyal po, the Ya rtse'i rgyal po and the *rje grub chen* (p. 167) *rin po che* (i.e. U rgyan pa) restored it, one side each. [Hence] rDo rje gdan's northern gate is known as the gate of Tibet. From then on until the end of the world, whatever wealth exists, such as gold and silver, this is used to restore the decay of rDo rje gdan *gtsug lag khang* and its images.”

ences exist as well, the foremost being that the experiences of U rgyan pa in the “Western Regions” and mNga’ ris were real adventures in those lands which his *rnam thar* shows to have been blessed by extraordinarily mystical encounters and troubled by political turmoil.

The historicity of Khyung rgod rtсал’s sojourn at Gangs Ti se is beyond doubt. It is justified by the fact that he was bestowed *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* at the mountain, of which his becoming a master is recorded in Bon po works.

Khyung rgod rtсал’s presence at Gangs Ti se—a must for a Bon po like him—led to empowerments he received from nine *rig ’dzin-s*, among them Dran pa nam mkha’ (*dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* p. 267,4-7), although the latter is assigned in the literature to half a millennium earlier, if ever he was a historical personality. dByil ston’s presence at the sacred mountain left a mark in the subsequent literature.

In his immensely valuable *Ti se’i dkar chag*, dKar ru Bru chen bsTan ’dzin rin chen has a polemical section on the views held by the Buddhists on the “opening”, frequentation and identification of holy places at Gangs Ti se. This section of the text is viewed with suspicion by Tibetologists as this crudely polemical treatment of the role of 12th-13th century Buddhists at the sacred mountain largely departs from a balanced view of facts.

dKar ru bsTan ’dzin rin chen emphatically dismisses the attribution of the “opening” of the “door” of this holy place to rGod tshang pa. He stresses that the sacredness of the mountain goes back to primordial times.²⁶ Earlier in the same section, he enumerates all the Bon

²⁶ dKar ru grub dbang bsTan ’dzin rin chen, *Ti se’i dkar chag* (p. 651,2-p. 652,3): “An assessment of the fact that the one known as rGyal ba rGod tshangs pa (sic) opened the door of the holy place [Ti se] is as follows. This is a statement [reflecting] a selfish and fanciful account by a thoughtless child. In whatever way it may be, this Gangs ri chen po is the self-originated mountain existing primordially. This is the holy place for the liberation of the six classes of sentient beings prophesied by all the Sangs rgyas-s from the earliest times. Concerning its blessing [power], this has been seen by all the *klu-s*, *lha-s* and *mi-s* existing in this illusionary realm but, despite many realising this, the belief that it was rGod tshangs pa (sic) who opened the door of the holy place still exists at present, which is completely false and laughably nonsensical. So it should be said. Moreover, although the holders of the Bon and Chos philosophical systems each hold that they are the ones who distinguished between the *phyi sgor* (sic for *phyi skor*, “external circumambulation”) and the *nang sgor* (sic for *nang skor*, “internal circumambulation”) [of Gangs Ti se], concerning [the difference between] the so called *phyi sgor* (sic) and *nang sgor* (sic), (p. 652) the words of those who [say] that our own *sDe snod* (“basket”) of philosophical system does not differentiate between them are ignorant. However, in whatever way this may be, in all the words of the Victorious Ones and the instructions of Exalted Ones, the *phyi sgor* (sic) circumambulates the boundaries of the area externally and the *nang sgor* (sic) circumambulates the boundaries of [one’s own] mind internally. At present, dissenting opinions are allowed to be voiced, which do not recognise the difference between the

po holy places at Gangs Ti se which the Buddhists and, according to him, rGod tshang pa in particular, assessed differently, substituting Buddhist names to the Bon po ones. At this point of his treatment, dKar ru Bru chen reminds his readers that dByil ston blessed many of them,²⁷ and adds subsequently that all the holy places “opened” by rGod tshang pa were in fact reconnoitered by Khyung rgod rtsal.²⁸

The revised birth year of Khyung rgod rtsal (1235) leaves little reason to accept dKar ru bsTan 'dzin rin chen's assertion that it was dByil ston rather than rGod tshang pa who “opened” several holy places at the mountain. dByil ston was a younger contemporary of the 'Brug pa master and sojourned in the area of the Gangs ri mtsho gsum sensibly after him.²⁹ But whether it was rGod tshang pa who

outer and the inner [*skor lam* of Gangs Ti se].”

²⁷ dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 634,7-p. 635,5): “Likewise, dByil ston chen po Khyung rgod rtsal (p. 635), after taking birth in front and at the foot of 'du gnas Zang zang lHa brag of Byang, mastered (*mnga' brnyes*) the *Byang gter* of the *gshen-s*. In particular, he personally visited Gangs ri chen po and all the holy places in Zhang chung and, as signs of his blessings, there are many traces of his instructions, handprints and footprints. At the gatherings of various classes of indestructible (*zag med*) *rig 'dzin-s* and *mkha' 'gro ma-s* he revealed his method of practising the propitiation, meditation and actualisation of *sPyi spungs bsGrags pa skor gsum*. The very extensive accounts of the Tantric precepts and empowerments he obtained are clearly mentioned in *dByil ston chen po'i rnam thar*.” dKar ru does not clarify to which dByil ston's biography he refers in this passage and transfers his birthplace from sPyi to Zang zang.

²⁸ dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen, *Ti se'i dkar chag* (p. 637,3-4): “All of rGod tshangs pa's (sic) holy places were those of dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal, as shown above.” *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 267,3-4) says that Khyung rgod rtsal discovered a path which brought him to Shel gyi phug. Is this a reason that led dKar ru grub dbang bsTan 'dzin rin chen to attribute the mystical reconnaissance of Gangs Ti se to dByil ston rather than to rGod tshang pa, who is considered, due to a stereotype contradicted by historical evidence (see Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang* p. 371-381), to have been the “opener” of the *skor lam*? dByil ston found many tombs of the *bDe bar gshegs pa-s* in the interior of the cave. Is this a point of contact with the 'Bri gung pa tombs at rGyang grags?

²⁹ Other Bon po masters should be considered as possible actors in the “opening” of the Gangs Ti se “door” during the modern phase that roughly predates the period of dByil ston and rGod tshang pa. Their dates in the Bon po literature and, therefore, the period of their lives are not beyond doubt. One of them was 'Bum rje 'od who had a long life (dPal ldan tshul khriims, *bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 390,17). He may have been born in the first quarter of the 12th century. His sojourn at Gangs Ti se, documented by dKar ru Bru chen, most likely predated the one of rGod tshang pa, otherwise 'Bum rje 'od would have approached one hundred years of age when the 'Brug pa master was at the mountain. dKar ru Bru chen credits 'Bum rje 'od with meditation at Gangs Ti se, at the caves near Gra bcom bzhugs khri and dGu sul phug; and more retreat on the shore of Ma pang g.yu mtsho, at gSer gyi bya skyibs. Gu ru rNon rtse was at Gangs Ti se but his placement into a cultural context provided by *Ma rgyud* is not sufficiently accurate to propose a period for his presence at sacred mountain. Another—equally unlikely—candidate is Klu brag pa bKra shis rgyal mtshan, the younger brother

was responsible for these achievements is still moot and an idea not supported by the history of the mountain since other bKa' brgyud pa were at Gangs Ti se before him and around the same time.

No one can dispute that cultural and religious devotion for the sacredness of Gangs Ti se goes back long before the times of rGod tshang pa and Khyung rgod rtsal. Both the 'Brug pa and the Bon po masters must be associated with the "modern" phase that "opened" the "door" of the holy place and the cultural descendance which still exists at present—e.g. the reconnaissance of the holy geography around the mountain, consequent practices to be performed etc. Moreover, dKar ru Bru chen's own argumentation is contradictory. On the one hand, he bypasses the rGod tshang pa/dByil ston phase in stressing the antiquity of religious practice at Gangs Ti se. On the other, he validates the same phase since dByil ston, rather than rGod tshang pa, should be credited with the "opening" of many holy places at the mountain and the lakes.

A viable assumption is that the presence of Buddhists and Bon po at Gangs Ti se during the prolonged phase that encompassed the residency first of rGod tshang pa and then of dByil ston was more or less contemporaneous. However, one cannot fail to associate the embryonic inception of the modern phase with rje btsun Mid la—a fact acknowledged by his rNying ma detractors too—and afterwards. Several bKa' brgyud pa masters were inspired by his activity and not motivated by proselytism to introduce a devotional circuit. This does not detract an *iota* from Bon po assiduity at the mountain in their practice and reconnaissance.

It is thus disputable that the Buddhist "opening" of the "door" of the Gangs Ti se pilgrimage is to be ascribed to rGod tshang pa alone. It was the result of a collective effort, also characterized by the Bon po activity but with divergences. Although they shared with the Buddhists a similar need for seclusion, the Bon po treated Gangs Ti se and Ma pang/Ma pham g.yu mtsho less as pilgrimage destinations than as localities where to pursue practice permanently, in particular the adepts of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*,³⁰ given that most of

'Bum rje 'od. He was in Pu hrang before his thirty-one years of age (ibid. p. 391,1-3) and thus before 1171 (on him see below more profusely).

³⁰ Meditation at the mountain by masters of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* covered various centuries. One long-term sojourn at the mountain and the region of the lakes—including La ngag mtsho—occurred in the life of Khyung po Legs mgon (*Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* p. 19,3-p. 20,1). A disciple of Ma hor sTag gzig, he spent twelve years in meditation at Gangs Ti se (ibid. p. 19,3-p20,1). Ma hor sTag gzig had sGyer spungs sNang bzher lod po for teacher (ibid. p. 20,1), famous in the Bon po literature for his *mthu* against Khri srong lde btsan (*Bon ma nub pa'i gtan tshigs*). The reliability of this threat forsaken, Khyung po Legs mgon, who belonged to the generation after Khri srong lde btsan's, was ac-

them hailed from Upper West Tibet and nearby territories.

The predilection for Gangs Ti se by various *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* masters during Buddhist *bstan pa snga dar* elicited no equivalent activity among the Tibetan practitioners of the Noble Religion.³¹ The *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma*-s consistently gravitated around the mountain and the lakes for centuries before rje btsun Mid la.³²

In the long run, the journeys to the "Western Regions" should be seen from a comprehensive perspective. The quest for teachings and pilgrimage led Tibetans, especially after the years of rje btsun Mid la's life, to face the perils of travelling to the bounds of the Tibetan world. Given these antecedents in the "Western Regions," the greatness of the exertions of masters should be appraised in terms of the conditions they faced. These daring endeavours were even more forbidding during the period considered here. In addition to the roughness of the journey, these mystics had to contend with war and racial hostility. In the same way as going to rDo rje gdan, a pilgrimage difficult by any standard, had become an even greater challenge owing to the Muslim presence, so too the journey to the "Western Regions" became increasingly daunting, to the point that the mystical experiences to be attained were all the more extraordinary for the concrete possibility of loss of life, such as the risks run by U rgyan pa.

Life after the 'das log phase: dByil ston's gter ma-s

A new beginning in the life of dByil ston occurred after the 'das log journey to the Western Regions which ends in *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* with dByil ston's stay at Gangs Ti se, his final destination.

The sojourn of Khyung rgod rtsal at the sacred mountain lasted only seven days but was of the utmost intensity owing to the em-

tive around the early 9th century. Two generations before Khyung po Legs mgon fell the twenty-one years spent by Khyung po A ba lDong at the sacred mountain (ibid. p. 18,4-6). He belonged to the *Grub thob snyan khungs gyi* (sic) *rgyud* of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*. The succession in this segment of the lineage is Khyung po A ba lDong followed by Khyung po bKra shis rgyal mtshan and Khyung po Legs mgo after the latter.

³¹ *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* (p. 56,6-p. 57,2) says that Gu ge Kun dga' ring mo, a lineage holder of *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud stod lugs*, was active at Gangs ri mtsho gsum presumably during Buddhist *bstan pa phyi dar* (ibid. p. 57,2).

³² One case of a journey to the "Western Regions" by a Buddhist earlier than *bstan pa phyi dar* is sNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes's to Bru zha. *mKhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung* (p. 321,17-20) says: "Then, having heard that rGya gar Chos skyong ba'i rgyal po had gone to Bru sha, after going to Bru sha, he (Sangs rgyas ye shes) met the *chos srid byed pa* (the "one active in religion and secularism") at this locality. It is said that he saw Che rtsan skyes [and] listened to his preaching. He translated *dGongs 'dus* from the Bru sha [language and] brought it back to Tibet."

powerments he received from Dran pa nam mkha' and other *gshen-s*. sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po states in *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* that dByil ston received those crucial empowerments from Dran pa nam mkha' and the other eight masters he calls *rig 'dzin-s* at Ti se Shel phug. They initiated him to *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*, an experience which the biography succinctly describes again at the edge between a mythical and a factual induction into this most important Bon po system (*dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* p. 267,3-7).³³ It was also at Gangs Ti se that he received the name Khyung rgod rtsal.³⁴

The involvement of Dran pa nam mkha' defies any sense of space and time but is the nodal point that marked Khyung rgod rtsal's passage from being a *'das log* to live as a *gter ston*. These empowerments into secret teachings granted him the status of a perfected master able to accomplish important deeds.

After talking about the events at Gangs Ti se, in the section dedicated to dByil ston's new life as a *gter ston*, Dol po Shud kye drang srong combines the vivid simplicity of his writing style that makes his prose a pleasure to read with an epic characterisation, as required by the genre. Nonetheless, his treatment lacks the completeness of sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po. sPa ston's work is more succinct since it is conceived as an outline of dByil ston's treasure findings, but it is also more rigorous. It describes several rediscoveries that Khyung rgod rtsal undertook at various *gter kha-s*. sPa ston has chosen to focus on Khyung rgod rtsal the *gter ston*, hence to approach a somewhat complete notion of the textual treasures he unearthed, this narrative is the main source that describes Khyung rgod rtsal's work as a *gter ston*.

dByil ston's first steps in his new life was the prediction he received in fire snake 1257, which prophesied that he would find works on Bon and Buddhism along with precious items (*ibid.* p. 267,8-p.

³³ Khyung rgod rtsal was linked to *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* before his journey and its transmission at Gangs Ti se. His biography records that he received teachings from 'Phrul med zhig po, a master from Glo bo of the *byang rgyud*—one of its transmission branches—before descending to the hells. *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar* (p. 252,3-4) says that, during his experience of the hells, "He was again and again very frightened and shivering. He remembered the advice earlier [given to him] by slob dpon 'Phrul med [zhig po] of Nyi ma La stod Blo bo'i Sha ri. This *slob dpon* said that in the event that one descends to the hell realms, one must remember the teachings of Bon [and] keep in mind [only] a single thought [which says] that the hells do not exist." These teachings beautifully stress that the hells are just an illusion.

³⁴ See, e.g., *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* (p. 267,4) and *sPa ston sgron ma* (p. 763,4-5). The latter reads: "Subsequently, at Ti se Shel phug he received the empowerments of the nine *rigs 'dzin-s* (sic), such as the one by Dran pa, and was given the secret name Khyung rgod rtsal" (see a similar statement in sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me*).

268,3). It also made him aware that he would make his first rediscovery in the next year, earth horse 1258,³⁵ age twenty-four, after the performance of an obscure ritual,³⁶ which would enable him to gain the skill to open *gter kha*-s ("treasure repositories").

The next step was to receive the authorisation to open his first repository from g.Yung drung bkra shis and Me nyag Jo sras. The latter must have been an exile from the Tangut kingdom of Byang Mi nyag that was overtaken by Ginghis Khan in 1227, given the inevitable postponement of dByil ston's life to one *rab byung* later than the date proposed by bsTan 'dzin nyi ma in his *bstan rtsis*.

The biography of dByil ston then relates his meeting at 'Khar lung with a *gter bdag*, a black, fearful giant sent by the *srid pa'i rgyal mo*. The obscure ritual that the *gter bdag* advised him to perform in preparation of his initial *gter ma* "invitation" required to get a whip, make an effigy of a black sheep and offer black cakes. It is at this point in the narrative that Dol po Shud kye *drang srong* rGyal mtshan tshul khrim stresses the involvement of g.Yung drung bkra shis and Me nyag Jo sras, who are defined as *grogs po* ("friends" or "companions") in the approach to open the *gter kha*.

As a consequence, in the years after his sojourn at the mountain, Khyung rgod rtsal accomplished a number of *gter ma* "invitations," an activity that went on for a number of findings, concentrated in the span of little more than a decade in a tight sequence of rediscoveries.

sPa ston's account of Khyung rgod rtsal's *gter ma* rediscoveries is conceived in *bstan rtsis* style, the range and completeness of this literary material being a sign that dByil ston was a rMa master of great religious significance. The text deals with them systematically by introducing:

- the year of the *gter ma* "invitation";
- the location of the *gter kha*;
- the documents rediscovered.

The first unearthing that happened at the foot of the rock of Zhal bzang is described by bsTan rgyal bzang po in the typical manner of the *gter ma* literature as a wondrous event,³⁷ which reads as a resumé

³⁵ Elsewhere, his *rnam thar* confirms that he became a *gter ston* in earth horse 1258 (ibid. p. 270,1).

³⁶ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 763,5-6-p. 764,2): "The prophecy by the *gter bdag* ("guardian of the *gter ma*") bDud btsan in fire female snake 1257 [said]: "Afterwards, in earth male horse 1258 bury an image of a black sheep at the household. Worship with black morsels."

³⁷ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 763,6-p. 764,2): "Following the authorisation of g.Yung drung bkra shis and Me nyag Jo sras, two in all, he went to the foot of Zhal bzangs kyi brag. Located up at one third of the

of *dPon gsas kyi rnam thar*. The bunch of works he found when, one year later (earth sheep 1259), he opened the vase in which the documents were kept, seems Bon po.³⁸

After this point, sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po's treatment of treasure findings becomes typical of the *bstan rtsis* genre. The *gter ma* work led Khyung rgod rtsal to engage in remarkable mobility that brought him to several localities of the Tibetan plateau, but not to Upper West Tibet near Gangs Ti se, the destination of his 'das log travelogue. He was not active in his native sPyi but in other areas of southern Byang thang (Byang). The opening of *gter kha*-s happened in:

- Iron male monkey 1260, age twenty-six, at rGyang lha khang, he found texts both pertaining to Bon and Buddhism.³⁹
- Wood male rat 1264, age thirty, at rGya Yon po lung, the *gter kha* was full of wrathful Tantric works.⁴⁰
- Earth male monkey 1268, age thirty-four, at Zang zang lHa brag phug, he recovered a group of Bon po texts.⁴¹

rock and down at its two thirds, on a square there was a shining crystal *svastika* resembling a female organ. He went there using a rope. He excavated with a chisel and arrived at the door. Inside it, over a square black stone (p. 764) *maṇḍala* with the four sides and the centre, which makes five, appeared a terracotta vase the colour of bluish green zinc. On the fifth (i.e. in the centre) there was a protruding scratched copper mouth. Symbols of his own family were written on it. He opened the *bum pa*'s mouth and scrolls came out. Inside the cavity it was filled with medicines in grains. He stayed on at the external door to arrange [the finding]."

³⁸ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,2-5): "For one year he kept [the finding] secret and [then] opened [the vase]. *rDzogs chen g.yung drung long yang, sGron ma dgu skor, 'Khrid dri med shel gyi snying po, Thig le 'dus pa, Thig le sgron me, g.Yung drung lung bcu, Drang don mdo dgu, Nges don mdo dgu, Phur pa sha 'bal gyi skor, Kun bzang rgyal 'dus kyi skor, Dran pa phyi nang gsang gsum, Tshe dbang phyi nang gsang gsum, bsKal bzang phyi nang gsang gsum; mKha' 'gro rigs lnga'i sgrub pa, Ge khod gsang ba drag chen gyi skor, bsTan srung yum sras lnga'i rkyang sgrub; Dil sgrub and sMan rtsis* came out."

³⁹ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,5-7): "On the thirteenth of the middle summer month of iron male monkey 1260, from the heart of the statue of rTa mgrin at rGyang lha khang, concerning Bon, *Phur pa drag sngags skor, Grub chung nyi shu rtsa lnga, Dran pa'i lung bstan che 'bring chung gsum* [came out]; concerning Buddhism, *rDo rje sems dpa'i mngon rtogs, Phyag rdor gyi sgrub skor, Dro nad gso thabs* and *Gu ru drag sgrub skor* came out."

⁴⁰ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,7): "On the tenth of the summer month of wood male rat 1264, from rGya Yon po lung many wrathful *sngags*-s came out such as *Thog ser ma bu skor*."

⁴¹ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 764,7-p. 765,2): "On the eighth of the winter month of earth male dragon 1268, (p. 765) from Zang zang lHa brag phug with a vermilion opening, *Yang gsang rtsod bzlog, sNyan*

- Iron male horse 1270, age thirty-six, at Bo dong Bya rgod gshongs, he found seemingly Buddhist texts.⁴²
- Water male monkey 1272, age thirty-eight, at Mang mkhar lCags 'phrang, he unearthed Bon po and Buddhist texts.⁴³
- Earth male monkey 1308 (?), age seventy-four (?), at Pra dum he rediscovered Buddhist works.⁴⁴

They all took place during male years in the course of fifteen of them. Then a long gap of thirty-seven years would have intervened before the last treasure finding.

A final stage of rediscoveries, not only textual, took place at Yum bu bla sgang and mKhar mkhar (?) in unspecified years.⁴⁵

In his panegyric of dByil ston and the relegation of rGod tshang pa to an insignificant role at Gangs Ti se, which downgrades the importance of the Buddhists, especially the bKa' brgyud pa, at the sacred mountain, dKar ru grub chen introduces an important religious notion about Khyung rgod rtsal. In a lapidary statement, he says that dByil ston mastered (*mnga' brnyes*) the *Byang gter* of the *gshen-s* (*Ti se'i dkar chag* p. 635,1).

dKar ru grub chen's one line sentence is enough to highlight the part dByil ston played in this branch of the Bon po doctrines. It summarises well his life achievements—*gter ma* rediscoveries and

brgyud mchog drug, Tshe gzungs Dran pa brdzus skyes, Tshe dbang Zhang chung ma and E dbag chen mo, came out by means of deception and by means of worship-ping *gter bdag* lHa btsan."

⁴² sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,2-3): "On the eighth of the last month of summer of iron male horse 1270, from the heart of the rNam sras of Bo dong Bya rgod gshongs came out rNam sras *phyi nang gsang gsum, rGying chen skyes bu'i sgrub skor* and *Gu ru phyag Phur pa*.

⁴³ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,3-5): "On the eighth day of the last summer month of water male monkey 1272, from Mang mkhar lCags 'phrang came out *Kun rig rgyas bsdus 'de thung, Khro bo sGron ma zhi ba, sDe brgyad gzungs ring cha lag, rGyud ting mur g.yu rtse, dPal gas srung zlog gzir gsum, sTong rgyud gi sgrub skor, Mi bdud khrag mgo'i mdos, lHa rgod snying phrom gto de dgu* by means of the worship of the seven *gter bdag-s*, the bDud btsan brothers."

⁴⁴ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,5-7): "On the fourteenth of the autumn month of earth male monkey 1308 (?), from the belly of Pra dum rTa mgrin, came out *rTa mgrin sgrub skor, rGyal po dbyug them che chung, gSo dpyad bdud rtsi bum pa che chung, Padmas mdzad pa'i gza' bcos, Chung dpyad Padma gces phreng*. People say that four *bande-s* took *dByug them che chung men lhag shog ser* which ended up with Gu ru Chos dbang."

⁴⁵ sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po, *bsTan pa'i gsal ba'i sgron me* (p. 765,7-p. 766,2): "From the turquoise and gold door at Yang bu le'i gangs (p. 766) he extracted one Bon *gter*, a turquoise and eggs in gold. A heavy hail shower fell. He took with him silk and a few excellent horses. He suspected [the gift] was due to the local community. It is said that he extracted [a treasure] from mKhar mkhar. These were dPon gsas Khyung rgod rtsal's thirteen *gter kha-s* which he controlled.

fluency in *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*. The assertion, a pronouncement expressed several centuries after dByil ston's life and thus subject to scrutiny, is somewhat reductive of the extent of dByil ston's *gter ma* rediscoveries but dKar ru grub chen has manifestly linked Khyung rgod rtsal's intense sojourn at Gangs Ti se with his long and strenuous search of textual treasures.

Khyung rgod rtsal's eminent role as a Bon po *Byang gter* literary treasure rediscoverer leads to the association with the rNying ma *Byang gter* master, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337-1408), propounded in Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *Sangs rgyas kyi bstan rtsis ngo mtshar nor bu'i phreng ba*. The entry in the *bstan rtsis* can be forced to mean that rGod ldem can was dByil ston's reincarnation,⁴⁶ but its literal formulation reads in the opposite way, that Khyung rgod rtsal was the rebirth of rGod ldem can (see above n.13). One can hypothesise an inclusion of them both in the same *skyes rabs*, a lineage which defies biology and time-related bonds in favour of affinity based on common existential and religious traits, since rGod ldem can is considered to be the rebirth of dByil ston who lived about one century earlier. Even the postponement of the Bon po master's existence by a full *rab byung* (b.1225) does not get him close enough to the *Byang gter* master. The peculiarity of the *skyes rabs* genre can go to the extent of inverting the sequence of births.

Buddhist texts rediscovered by dByil ston are reputed to have reached Guru Chos dbang (see n.44). The new dates of dByil ston's life show that the *gter ma-s* which ended in the hands of Guru Chos dbang could not have been those unearthed by him as late as earth monkey 1308 in view of the great rNying ma master's death, given in the literature in a few different but consecutive years—1269, 1270, 1271, 1272 and also 1273. Hence the date of dByil ston's bestowal of his *gter ma-s* to Guru Chos dbang remains perforce insubstantial given the wavering of the chronology of the rNying ma master's demise. Since he unearthed Buddhist texts, a prudential term for the transfer of literary treasures from dByil ston to Guru Chos dbang is that the hand-over occurred on one of two more realistic occasions.

The *terminus post quem* for this textual transfer is the 1260 rediscovery at rGyang lha khang otherwise upon the 1270 unearthing at Bo dong Bya rgod gshongs. The 1272 "invitation" at Mang mkhar lCags 'phrang is improbable since most sources consider that Gu ru

⁴⁶ The sentence in Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *bstan rtsis* could be improperly read as: "dByil ston dpon gsas Khyung rgod, whose incarnation was known as rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem, was born in the wood sheep year." For the Tibetan text of this passage see above n.13). I do not go for this interpretation which does not respect the formulation of the entry in the chronological table.

Chos dbang died in iron horse in iron horse 1270.

The outcome of dByil ston's achievements is a polyhedric contribution to Tibetan teachings and literature. The biography of Khyung rgod rtsal (p. 272,5-p. 273,4) classifies dByil ston's *gter ma* rediscoveries on the basis of the contributions that those works gave to a wide spectrum of people, followers of different religions and experts of various disciplines, styled as the outcome of his personal graciousness:⁴⁷

- He benefitted the Bon po meditators, since he unearthed cycles such as *rDzogs chen snying gi skor*, *INga sgom gyi skor* and many *gdams pa*-s. He brought to light *dBang bkur byin rlabs* and its *lung* by Tshe dbang rig 'dzin. He had the vision of [his] *yi dam lha* and of his lineage that went back to Kun tu bzang po and it continued without interruption since he had many disciples. The main ones were rDod kyi Yang ngal drang srong, lHo stod slob dpon mGon ne, sTag lung sGom lHa rje and gNyag bseb ston pa Kun dga' phan (ibid. p. 272,1).
- He was useful to Buddhists, for he rediscovered *Thugs rje chen po phyi nang gsang gsum*, slob dpon Pad ma 'byung gnas's *Phyi nang gsang ba'i sgrub pa'i sde*, *Pad 'byung gyi* (i.e. Pad ma 'byung gnas) *zhal gdams gyi sde* and many other works.⁴⁸
- He gave support to the physicians of Tibet since he "invited" *Drang srong bcos* and *Rims nad 'joms pa'i sgron ma*.
- He unearthed great scriptures such as *lTa ba g.yung drung klong yangs* and *Dri med shel skor*, thus being kind to those who focused on *bShad rGyud* (the second part of *rGyud bzhi*);
- He cared for humans (lit. "bipeds") since he found *Thod*

⁴⁷ *Ti se'i dkar chag* adds another text dByil ston mastered: "At the gatherings of various classes of indestructible (*zag med*) *rig 'dzin*-s and *mkha' 'gro ma*-s he revealed his method of practising the propitiation, meditation and actualisation of *sPyi spungs bsGrags pa skor gsum*."

⁴⁸ In her "mKhyen brtce'i dbang po: La biographie de Padmasambhava selon la tradition bsGrags pa Bon, et ses sources," Anne-Marie Blondeau has a summary of the Buddhist texts rediscovered by dByil ston on *dPon gas kyi rnam thar*. They are *rTa mgrin sgrub skor*, *rGyal po g.yug them che chung*; *gSo spyad bdud rtsi bum pa che chung*; *gZa' bcos* and *Chung spyang* written by Padma 'byung gnas along with *dByug them che chung* and *Men lhag gi shog ser* associated with the tradition of Guru Chos dbang since he received several of those *gter ma*-s, and *Bai ro tsa na'i lung bstan*. She mentions major Bon po works dByil ston rediscovered that sum up to *Tshe dbang Zhang chung ma* and *lDe mig 'bring po*, and *Tshe dbang rGya gar ma* (on all this see ibid. p. 123-124 and p. 132 and, in general, please consult her "Identification de la tradition appelée bsGrags-pa Bon-lugs" p. 123-143).

srungs and *Klu gdon srung ba*.

- He gave insight on the future to sentient beings in general owing to his discovery of the *lung bstan-s* prophesied by bla chen Dran pa nam mkha', slob dpon Padma 'byung gnas and Pa kor (sic) Be ro tsa na.

Khyung rgod rtsal had his initiation to *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* in Glo bo (see below), which he brought to completion at Gangs Ti se. The power that Khyung rgod rtsal obtained was by means a sort of *rjes gnang* that made him able of pursuing *gter ma* rediscoveries. The event forged dByil ston's *karma* from an interlocutory phase in his existence to a life-long capacity to open *gter kha-s*. Hence, his life was a continuum which led him to go from episodes in uncommon human conditions, told in the lively prose of his *rnam thar*—a rare biographical specimen of Tibetan literature—to a status of extraordinary mastery that went on for the following decades. From individual experiences in 'das log style to everlasting contributions to the Bon po treasure finding school—the tradition deservedly recognises him as a master of *Byang gter*—along with Buddhist and secular material, the text he rediscovered were in the footsteps of the work of his rMa master predecessors.

In terms of where he stands in the traditions of the highlands, the various *gTer ston brgya rtsa* texts documenting the Noble Religion *gter ma-s* neglect his Buddhist rediscoveries. Whether his finding of literary treasures in the realm of secularism was the outcome of textual archaeology or personal authorship forsaken—a sterile question in absence of validating evidence—the *lung bstan-s* he unearthed are significant *per se*, especially for the Yuan-Sa skya pa period. Nonetheless, dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal has received little space in the literature of any kind.

An additional note on dByil ston

Although not an official transmission holder of the Oral Transmission of Zhang zhung despite the teachings he received at the sacred mountain, *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i ram thar* documents dByil ston's connexion with an exponent of the *lho rgyud* ("southern transmission") of this class of teachings.

This master was Klu brag pa bKra shis rgyal mtshan, the younger son of the great Yang ston Shes rab rgyal mtshan, the establisher of the Oral Transmission's *lho rgyud* lineage. Klu brag pa's most famous feat was his well-known foundation of the homonymous cave monastery at the southern edge of Glo smad. Ahead of its establishment, he decided to abandon the status of householder after his wife died.

Klu brag pa went to sTag gzig where he spent three years. He then proceeded to g.Yas ru dBen sa kha, age thirty-one. Here he received a monastic education which he combined with *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud*.

The modern author dPal ldan Tshul khirms says that he died when he was eighty-five old (*bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 391,12). D. Jackson has reckoned his dates to be 1131-1215.⁴⁹

Klu brag pa's historical placement in the Bon po literature is not unanimous. In the section dedicated to the *lho rgyud*, *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* (p. 88,2-3) says that the existence of Klu brag pa was prophesied by Khyung rgod rtsal. Centuries afterwards, dPal ldan tshul khirms states that Klu brag pa had Khyung rgod rtsal among his disciples (*bsTan 'byung skal bzang mgul rgyan* p. 391,11-12).

I do not favour the assessment in *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar* that Klu brag pa's life was preceded by that of dByil ston even if the wrong notion of Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's birth date of dByil ston is unnecessarily considered, given the dealings that Klu brag pa's father, Yang ston Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1077-1140), entertained with Ba ri lo tsa ba Rin chen grags (1040-1112).⁵⁰ This disproves that Khyung rgod rtsal lived before Klu brag pa. Klu brag pa's life cannot be postdated one sexagenary cycle to match my placement of dByil ston, or else he would have lived much longer than eighty-five years. Khyung rgod rtsal thus was a later exponent of a tradition to which Klu brag pa belonged. Even dPal ldan tshul khirms's notion of a direct teacher-disciple relation between the two is a statement without historical foundations.

dByil ston's life has remained misinterpreted since his *rnam thar* has not been given due consideration in *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud bla ma'i rnam thar*, Nyi ma bstan 'dzin's *bstan rtsis* and dPal ldan tshul khirms's *bstan 'byung*.

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⁴⁹ Jackson David, "Notes on the History of *Se-rib*, and nearby Places in the Upper Kali Gandaki Valley," p. 204-206.

⁵⁰ For Ba ri Lo tsā ba's date of death being 1112 and not 1111 see Vitali, "The transmission of *bsnyung gnas* in India, the Kathmandu Valley and Tibet (10th-12th centuries)."

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**A King of Dharma Forgotten on the Jewel Island:
Was Me *ban Chos rgyal Rin chen gling pa*
Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's rDzogs chen Master?
(How Half of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* Got Included
in the *dGongs pa zang thal*)**

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Introduction

We do not have many clues about the masters who trained Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–1408) in his youth. Gu ru bKra shis's *Chos 'byung*² as well as later literature do not say much on this point. The oldest source about rGod ldem's life, the biography written by his direct disciple Nyi ma bzang po,³ gives us a few of these names, but at first sight these are completely obscure even for a specialist of the rNying ma school in the 14th century—and the same could be said of the few additional names that can be gleaned from

¹ For this article, I owe the greatest gratitude, and I would like to express my very special and very friendly thanks to Dr. Jean-Luc Achard, whose many comments on the draft (and until the very final version) really functioned for me as the key and prophetic guide to the hidden treasure, pushing me much further into verifications and source research that opened up all sorts of unexpected double-bottoms. I would also like to thank for all their precious help in finalizing this paper both Pr. Jay Valentine, who made very valuable corrections and suggestions, and Tenpa Tsering Batsang, who clarified some obscure Tibetan passages and found the largest and oldest available biography of Rin chen gling pa (Sha gzugs pa Nag dbang bKra shis—see bibliography). As this source of all my sources appeared only when this article was already nearly completed, I used it only marginally, for verification; but it would deserve a complete translation.—I would also like to thank Cécile Ducher and Michael Burroughs for their careful review at the end of the edition process.

² Gu ru bkra shis' *bsTan pa'i snying po gsang chen snga 'gyur nges don zab mo'i chos kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad mkhas pa dga' byed ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mtsho*, from here as Gu ru bkra shis 1990. The biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is on pp. 283-488. Same features in Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku* (2011, vol. 13, pp. 452 sq.). In Kong *sprul's gTer ston brgya rtsa* (pp. 532 sq.), it is just vaguely stated that he studied the whole rNying ma tradition, without any indication about who were his teachers.

³ *A.k.a. Suryabhadra*. Quoted here on the basis of the version in vol. 59, pp. 1-75 of the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, as Nyi ma bzang po 2015.

other sources.⁴ Nyi ma bzang po writes that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem got trained in his family circle for the traditions of his clan (*pha chos*), and names the masters who gave him the transmissions of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's⁵ and Gu ru Chos dbang's⁶ *gter ma*; but he also tells us that he was taught rDzogs chen by a master that he calls Brag lung pa *mkhas btsun Rin chen dpal*.⁷ This article is an attempt to identify this figure.

To cut the suspense short, my conclusion is that there is a very high probability that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's rDzogs chen master was in fact Me *ban Rin chen gling pa* (1289–1368),⁸ a *gter ston* nowadays quite

⁴ rGod ldem appears indeed in a few other lineages, e.g., in the *Records of Teachings Received* of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang phyug (1524–1568), the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682) or gTer bdag gling pa (1645–1714). See in the present volume the article "Yamāntaka among the Ancients" for the lineage of 'Jam dpal rdzogs chen and the way in which 'Ju Mi pham assimilates it to a lineage of 'Jam dpal tshé bdag.

⁵ Nyi ma bzang po 2015, p. 16: *lcang ma ba la nyang ral pa'i gter kha gsan l*.

⁶ Nyi ma bzang po 2015, p. 16: *mkhas pa snang ldan rgyal po la gu ru chos dbang gi chos ka rnams gsan l*.

⁷ Nyi ma bzang po 2015, pp. 16–17: *de nas rdzogs pa chen po'i chos rnams brag lung pa mkhas btsun rin chen dpal ba'i drung du gsan te l*.

⁸ These dates, contradictory to those found on BDRC (P1GS124509: 1313–1382), are more probable given his very close interactions with Padma las 'brel rtsal (d. 1319) and the fact that he seems to be mentioned as still active in an episode of Klong chen pa's biographies that can be ascribed to his return from Bhutan in the end of his life (1360s). Me *ban Rin chen gling pa* is conflated by BDRC with the unrelated sMar pa bKa' brgyud master Rin chen gling pa (see sMar pa bKa' brgyud kyi rnam thar phyogs sgrig 2006, pp. 194–241). This figure is difficult to date but nothing matches with Me *ban*: he was from Eastern Tibet, became a purely *bKa' brgyud pa* monk, his parents' names are not the same, etc. Incidentally, Me *ban Rin chen gling pa* should also not be confused with the much later Ratna gling pa (1403–1479), nor with Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396, also sometimes called Rin chen gling pa), and even less with bdr: P5986, a 18th century *gter ston* with the same name. The main available biographies of Me *ban Rin chen gling pa* seem to be, in chronological order:

- (1) Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bkra shis, *Zab khyad gter ma'i lo rgyus gter ston chos 'byung nor bu'i 'phreng ba*, MW1KG15884, *dbu med* manuscript, pp. 34b3–38b8. This "source of sources" (until we find anything older) was spotted by Tenpa Tsering Batsang who describes it (personal communication 10/08/2023) in the following terms: "According to p. 72 of *Po ta la ru bzhugs pa'i rnying ma'i gsung 'bum dkar chag*, Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bkra shis was a disciple of Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639) and was known as the 'third Klong chen pa,' and so he belonged to the early seventeenth century." Tenpa Tsering Batsang procured an (unpublished) tentative transcription of the relevant parts of the *dbu med* manuscript (including the lives of Padma las 'brel rtsal, pp. 28b4–30A7, and rGyal sras Legs pa, pp. 30a7–30b7), which made things easier, as the manuscript is pretty tiring to read.
- (2) Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku* Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775–1837), 2011: pp. 397–804. Rin chen gling pa's biography is pp. 538–551.
- (3) Gu ru bKra shis' *Chos 'byung* (early 19th century), pp. 404–407.
- (4) Kong *sprul* Blo gros mtha' yas' (1813–1899) *gTer ston brgya rtsa*, sTod lung edition, pp. 416–419.

forgotten but definitely very important in his day. He played a decisive role in the transmission, and maybe even in the revelation, of the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī* (*mKha' 'gro'i snying thig*); at least five of his rDzogs chen revelations found their way into the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (in vol. 14 of the mTshams brag edition, but I suspect that there are more)⁹ and two of his *gter ma* cycles are sampled in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. The present article was therefore also an opportunity to rescue from oblivion a figure that must have enjoyed a solid reputation among the rNying ma pa at least up to the time when Ratna gling pa (1403–1479) consolidated the selection of *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* texts.

A biography of Rin chen gling pa (an annotated and completed version of the one found in Gu ru bKra shis' *Chos 'byung*) is given below and can be read beforehand, if one prefers to discover first the result of the inquiry, and only later its—admittedly complicated—details.

What is at stake with the identification of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's masters is to re-place him into concrete history. This has to start with locating him in the various social networks to which he belonged, although the dominant trend in traditional hagiography¹⁰ tends to emphasize only his direct, mystical links to the imperial era. Part at least of the Bon hagiography may insist on the idea that treasure revealers were uneducated people finding materials that they could not have elaborated by themselves.¹¹ But it is not the case that most rNying ma *gter ston* were illiterate folk, suddenly struck by the grace of complex revelations. They were most often well trained in the type of materials that they discovered. Reconstructing their social milieus and identifying their position and role in each of these is the first thing

All these sources also contain biographies of Padma las 'brel rtsal and at least a few lines about his disciple *rGyal sras* Legs pa and about Karmapa III Rang byung rdo rje, in all of which Rin chen gling pa is mentioned.

⁹ Many of Rin chen gling pa's *gter chos* contain, after a colophon that may describe the way in which the treasure was hidden and the prayer for it to be discovered by the predestined individual, a few verses, nearly always beginning with *e ma ho*, which, although they bear *gter ma* marks, sound more as if composed by the *gter ston* commenting on the value and meaning of his discovery. Combined with other clues (e.g., the names of his findings in the short biographical sketches that we have), this might help in the identification of those that are not explicitly connected to Rin chen gling pa.

¹⁰ The *gTer ston brgya rtsa*, for example, omits all of his masters and mentions merely bZang po grags pa, only as the source of the prophetic guides, not as someone who actually trained him. Indeed, they may never have actually met.

¹¹ Khenchen Tenpa Yungdrung, oral communication, July 2023, answering a question about *gShen chen Klu dga'* inspired by Dan Martin's *Unearthing Bon Treasures* (2001).

to aim at if we want to move from dry hagiography to living history.¹²

It is up to the reader to decide whether my arguments regarding the identity of rGod ldem's master, Rin chen dpal, are convincing or not. At most, we have a strong body of converging evidence suggesting the high probability of personal interactions between Rin chen gling pa and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem—but without any source formally asserting this link. However, what is—at the very least—demonstrated in the pages that follow is that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, already in 1337,¹³ was not only familiar with the contents of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, but also aware of the elaborations that had been added to its original core (1313) by both Rin chen gling pa (around 1321?)—which is what I wanted to document—and even by Klong chen pa (1308–1364)—which puzzled me somewhat when I found out about it.

The marginal position of Klong chen pa in the first generations of masters of the mKha' 'gro snying thig, compared to the central status of Rin chen gling pa in that context

Indeed, if we tend to associate the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* with Klong chen rab 'byams and his posterity, it is because this trend *later* became the dominant line. But, in fact, it is barely an exaggeration to say that Klong chen pa somehow *hacked* this transmission on the basis of a personal, inner, re-revelation of it. The *gter ston* Padma las 'brel rtsal (1291–1315/1319)¹⁴ had actually passed it to three¹⁵ main successors:

- Karmapa III Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), who then transmitted it to g.Yung *ston pa* rDo rje dpal (1285–1331);
- *rGyal sras* Legs pa (1290–1366/7), generally regarded as the main heir of Padma las 'brel rtsal's revelations;¹⁶ and

¹² Incidentally, the question of the *revealed character* of a text has been clearly dissociated by theologians (particularly Catholic theologians) from that of the *pre-existence of textual materials* mobilized in the composition of the revealed text. The revealed character of a textual corpus is, in this context, understood as implying not the creation of the text out of nothing, under divine dictation alone, but the motion of the Holy Spirit in the 'sacred author' *while compiling and editing the textual corpus in its final, 'canonized' form*. Perhaps the rNying ma pa clerics could evolve their understanding of the phenomenon of hidden treasures in this direction, so as not to be thwarted by the progress of philological research.

¹³ If we date the whole of the *dGongs pa zang thal* as it stands in recent editions at the ascribed date of the Zang zang lha brag discovery. In fact, we do not know anything about the editing process after the 'yellow scrolls' were found.

¹⁴ See Nyoshul Khenpo 2005, pp. 70-73. Padma las 'brel rtsal's dates remain to some extent a puzzle.

¹⁵ We will see that there was a fourth heir, fallen into complete oblivion: Myang *ston* Śākya byang chub.

¹⁶ See Nyoshul Khenpo 2005, pp. 73-75.

- *Chos rgyal* Rin chen gling pa.

Klong chen pa's tactics regarding these three persons, according to some sources historically quite close to the events, seems to have been to de-legitimize the first (however weird this might sound, as he was reportedly close to Rang byung rdo rje in his youth) and the third, and pick up the second (as it is said that he received the complete transmission from *rGyal sras* Legs pa,¹⁷ but maybe quite late in his life and after having taught the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* himself for years). It did not work quite well with Rang byung rdo rje, but, for any reason, "the King of Dharma from the Jeweled Island" nearly completely vanished from the rNying ma pa's memories.¹⁸

Some sources¹⁹ say that Rin chen gling pa was in fact the one who brought to Padma las 'brel rtsal the prophetic guides (*kha byang*) that allowed him to discover the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* in 1313. Rin chen gling pa was associated with Karmapa III Rang byung rdo rje, whom he chose—Gu ru bKra shis says—as the master of his Dharma (*chos bdag*), that is, as the heir of his own treasures.²⁰

¹⁷ This may have occurred between 1343 (Arguillère 2007: p. 104) and Klong chen pa's exile in Bhutan in the 1350s (op. cit. pp. 120-126). It is not even impossible that it happened in the very last years of Klong chen pa's life after his return from Bhutan (1360/61–64), as *rGyal sras* Legs pa was still alive then.

¹⁸ The transmissions for Rin chen gling pa's main rDzogs chen cycle, the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* or *A ti chig chod kun grol*, were still available in the 17th century, as we find, e.g., complete, continuous lineages down to the 5th Dalai Lama in his *Record of Teachings Received* (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1971: vol. III, pp. 589-595). But although Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku* writes an enthusiastic account of Rin chen gling pa's life in the early 19th century, Rin chen gling pa seems not to appear anywhere in the account of all the transmissions he received. The *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* as it stands in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* is in fact a *yang gter* of mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892), as we can read in the *gTer ston brgya rtsa* (p. 419: *rdzogs chen gcig chod kun grol gyi lung bstan las shin tu gsal ba ltar rje bla ma mdo sngags gling pa'i phyag tu rgyun phebs | gter ston chen pos smin sgröl stsal zhing sgrub thabs dang thugs rje chen po'ang gter gyi tshul du gtan la phab ste bdag cag rnam bka' drin chen pos khyab par mdzad pa yin no |*). This may have been one of the many fragile lineages that got lost because of the 1717–18 Dzungar invasion.

¹⁹ Especially Gu ru bKra shis 1990, p. 400: *dgung lo nyer gcig bzhes pa'i skabs su [1311] bla ma'i gsung gis lho phyogs su 'gro don la rgyug gsungs | de'i lho phyogs lo ro tsheng grong nas byon pa'i sprul sku rin chen gling pas | 'bri thang ko ro brag nas gdan drangs pa [1310?]'i gter chos kyi nang nas khra mo brag gi kha byang dang | gter ston lung gtan (sic) dang bcas pa'i shog ser gnyis phul nas | ...* See discussion on this point below.

²⁰ If I am not mistaken about this connection between Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and Rin chen gling pa, then it becomes even more meaningful to inquire about the links between the (later) "rDo rje brag system" and the heritage of g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpal (1285–1331), as the latter played a key role in the constellation formed by Padma Las 'brel rtsal, Karmapa III Rang byung rdo rje, g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpal himself and Me ban Rin chen gling pa especially around the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī*. g.Yung ston pa actually appears, within the lineages that finally merged

*When did Brag lung pa mkhas btsun Rin chen dpal
teach rDzogs chen to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem?*

In the recent rewriting of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biography by Chos dbyings,²¹ Brag lung pa mkhas btsun Rin chen dpal's teachings about rDzogs chen are placed right after the mention²² of rGod ldem's 13th year (so, in Western style, when he was twelve: 1349), when Rig 'dzin rGod ldem obtained the realizations of Mañjuśrī Nāgarakṣa, and before his 25th year (1361), when he started to have experiences connected to his future activities as a treasure discoverer. This may be due to Chos dbyings' wish to set a *thematic* order in the biography, leading him to gather in one place all information about Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's masters found in Nyi ma bzang po's text. Nyi ma bzang po's original narrative, however, places this episode after (*de nas*, 'then') the events dated to his 25th year (1361) and before his 30th (1366) when Rig 'dzin rGod ldem discovered his treasure in Zang zang lha brag.²³

Nyi ma bzang po's biography of rGod ldem quotes a prophetic text as follows:²⁴

The [one of the] kind that liberates anything (?) will meet with this Dharma in his 25th year; in his 35th [year, 1371], an uncommon realization [of it] will be born [in him].

This might be understood as meaning that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was taught rDzogs chen by Brag lung pa mkhas btsun Rin chen dpal from 1361 on, and would have gained a perfect realization of it in 1371, five years after discovering his own rDzogs chen cycles in Zang zang lha brag.

In any case, we can assume that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was taught some form of rDzogs chen, maybe not unconnected to what he later favored, by this Brag lung pa mkhas btsun Rin chen dpal, at some point

with Byang gter in the 16th century, in two other contexts: that of the uninterrupted oral transmission (*bka' ma*), on the one hand, and that of *Mañjuśrī Master of Life*, on the other hand.

²¹ Chos dbyings (2015), vol. 62, pp. 82-125.

²² Chos dbyings (2015), vol. 62, p. 88: *dgong lo bcu gsum par mdze nag las kyi 'khor lo'i sgo nas khyab bdag ye shes sems dpa' klu'i srin por bsgrub pas grub pa mthar phyin* ।

²³ However, as we will see below, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's practice of Mañjuśrī Nāgarakṣa as early as 1349 is one of the hints that points to a long-lasting association with Rin chen gling pa, who was also a specialist of this rare practice.

²⁴ Nyi ma bzang po (2015), p. 17: *gtad rgya las | gang grol ba'i rigs rtsa lnga la chos 'di dang mjal : sum cu rtsa lnga pa la rtogs pa khyad par can skeyes so* :. Chos dbyings has suppressed this quotation from his biography of rGod ldem, most probably because he could not make sense of it—but it might indeed be meaningful for us, suggesting a strong continuity between his training before he discovered his own treasure and the practice he went on making after.

between 1361 and 1366. If this Rin chen dpal was well-versed in Nāgarakṣa, he could also (though this is much more speculative) be the one who taught it to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as soon as 1349.²⁵ As Rin chen gling pa fits these two requirements, we have a set of clues that allows us, if not to formally conclude, at least to reach a very high level of probability in identifying him as being Brag lung pa Rin chen dpal.

*Summary of the arguments in favor of
Brag lung pa mkhas btsun Rin chen dpal's
identification as Rin chen gling pa*

To make the reading of this article easier, let us start with summarizing all the arguments in favor of this identification of rGod ldem's master as being Rin chen gling pa:

- First, Rin chen gling pa's personal name was Rin chen [rgyal mtshan] dpal [bzang po].²⁶
- His dates are most probably 1289–1368, so there is no chronological inconsistency—he was a reputed old master during Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's youth and passed away soon after rGod ldem opened Zang zang lha brag (1366)
- He was from Southern Tibet and dwelt in various places that may have earned him the surname “Brag lung pa” given to rGod ldem's rDzogs chen master.
- He was (at least in his early life) a well-educated monk, which is precisely what the title *mkhas btsun* means.

This series of points are *negative* arguments—merely establishing that there is *no contradiction* in assuming that he may have been rGod ldem's rDzogs chen teacher. But there are also *positive* reasons that make this hypothesis probable:

- As regards rDzogs chen, he was one of the two (three, if we count Klong chen pa) main lineage holders of the *Heart-Essence of the Ḍākinī* (revealed in 1313) active in the period 1349–1361. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem knew the *Heart-Essence of*

²⁵ He could also, of course, have been taught the practice Nāgarakṣa on the basis of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *gter ma* by the unknown master lCang ma ba who trained him in that tradition, or on the basis of Gu ru Chos dbang's revelation by the equally obscure master sNang ldan rgyal po who transmitted him that lineage.

²⁶ See below the translation of his biography from Gu ru bKra shis (1990). In this source (p. 405), this appears to be his monastic name: *de bas chos sgor bzhuḡs* (sic) | *mtshan rin chen rgyal mtshan dpal bzang por btags* |.

the *Dākinī* very well: it can be proved that he taught it to his disciples, and full sections of it are included in his own main rDzogs chen cycle, the *dGongs pa zang thal* (1366).²⁷ The first point implies that he did not just get a copy of these (then rare) texts but got trained in them by some lineage-holding master.

- In fact, there is an allusion to Padma las 'brel rtsal, Rin chen gling pa and Klong chen pa in the *dGongs pa zang thal* itself, which, however obscure at first, becomes quite transparent if one is well informed of these figures' biographies.²⁸
- Rin chen gling pa also revealed a *gter ma* about Nāgarakṣa, it seems, in 1310 or 1311—so he could have taught it to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem around 1349, when, for an unknown reason, rGod ldem practiced that rare deity, which is mainly an antidote against the illnesses caused by the *nāgas*.²⁹
- This hypothesis also makes good sense with the prophecies that, in Nyi ma bzang po's biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, accompany the mention of *Brag lung pa* Rin chen dpal.
- Another perplexing issue in Nyi ma bzang po's biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is the mention of his father practicing *rDzogs chen bram ze*. This may be alluding to the obscure doxographical category of the *Yang ti bram ze*, for which we have a (problematic) list of *tantras*, but no known system for practice. Now, Rin chen gling pa's rDzogs chen cycle *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, though included (without explanations) by Kong sprul, in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, in the *Padma snying thig* subsection of the *Man ngag sde*, presents itself as a section of the *Yang ti*, the other being the *Yang ti sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor*. This, for many reasons, does not work quite well with the traditional doxographies of rDzogs chen. However, it might mean that rGod ldem's father received a form of rDzogs chen that *he* identified as

²⁷ It is plain to any reader of both corpora, but should be established in detail in further research through a careful comparison of the *dGongs pa zang thal*, not only with the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, but, in fact, with all know earlier *snying thig* literature, including the cycle *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* revealed by Rin chen gling pa. To start with, I have set up a tentative table of comparison as an appendix of the present paper.

²⁸ See below.

²⁹ Incidentally, this is exactly the time of Black Death in Europe. It is believed to have started a few years earlier from the borderlands of Tibet. Europe in the 14th century also saw large-scale persecution of lepers, giving the impression that leprosy had long been widespread. Perhaps this was also the case in Tibet at the same time.

being the *Yang ti bram ze*, and which might have been—though that is, in the present state of research, mere speculation—Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*.

- And, finally, as we will see in the biography translated below, although this is a very minor argument, there is at least one uncanny formal similarity between the narrative of Rin chen gling pa's main treasure discovery and those of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem: the fact that he finds in a cave a treasure box divided into five repositories (*mdzod lnga*). This can maybe be regarded as one further—admittedly not very strong, of course—hint of some degree of closeness between the two figures.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and the Heart-essence of the Ḍākinī

The strongest of all these arguments is definitely the presence of large segments of the *Heart-essence of the Ḍākinī* in rGod ldem's *dGongs pa zang thal*. Of course, the literature of the *rDzogs chen snying thig* is pretty repetitive;³⁰ but the *dGongs pa zang thal* can really, in some regards, be presented as an expanded redaction of the *Heart-essence of the Ḍākinī*,³¹ completed by an important corpus connected to Vimalamitra (which is in many regards a practice-oriented rewriting of texts from the *Heart-essence of Vimalamitra*), to which is added a 'Vairocana corpus' that feels more original (or, rather: the origins of which have not been traced so far). The presence of rewritten elements from the *Heart-essence of Vimalamitra* is, however, much less significant than the borrowings from the *Heart-essence of the Ḍākinī*: the 'Vimalamitra corpus,' although not common knowledge, was more widespread in rGod ldem's time.³² By contrast, it is well-known, especially, that

³⁰ See especially C. Cantwell (2020: e. g. pp. 14-19) about the globally not so creative nature of the *gter ma* literature, even by Tibetan standards. It is not a special feature of the *dGongs pa zang thal* that many of its components are found, with very few variations, in both earlier and later literature. But this does not make rNying ma rDzogs chen literature the outflow of an indistinct pool of shared texts: to the contrary, it is quite possible to retrace threads of borrowings, genealogical lines of derivations.

³¹ This is not merely the philologist's point of view, but is stated in an allusive but indisputable way in the *dGongs pa zang thal* itself (see below).

³² The biographies of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's disciples show evidence that he granted them the transmissions of both *snying thig*. So if the one who trained him in the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* had also been a master of the *Bi ma snying thig*, it would make even more sense. There are no traces, in biographies, of Rin chen gling pa receiving the *Bi ma snying thig*. But we know that Rin chen gling pa was close to Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje to whom, Gu ru bKra shis says, he gave all the transmissions of his own *gter chos*.³² It is not unlikely that Rin chen gling pa received the *Bi ma snying thig* from Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, who was a great specialist of that

Klong chen pa himself had difficulties getting a complete set of the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī* as late as 1339.³³

Thus, if we do not wish to follow a purely supernatural explanation, it seems reasonable to assume that there must have been a human link between the discovery of the treasure by Padma las 'brel rtsal in 1313 and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's own findings 53 years later. And there are not, in fact, many candidates: in the early 14th century, as I already mentioned, there were only two active transmission lines for this corpus—the main one from the actual disciples of Padma las 'brel rtsal (Karmapa III Rang 'byung rdo rje, *rGyal sras legs pa* and Rin chen gling pa) and a secondary one (which later became the mainstream) through a direct revelation to Klong chen pa.

There are two further arguments, other than textual parallelisms, proving that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was a master of the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī* (although this never appears in his own traditional hagiographies, which are so focused on his career as a discoverer of *gter ma* and hidden lands that they ignore that he may also have transmitted teachings received from human masters). One is found in the *Story of g.Yung*.³⁴ This small text is extremely important as it is one of the only contemporary witnesses of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem outside of the Byang gter hagiographic tradition. The second one is found in the *Garland of Light*, a collection of early biographies of rGod ldem's successors.

The Story of g.Yung, its author and date, as a proof of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's mastery of the Heart-essence of the Dākinī

The *Story of g.Yung* is a document appended to the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī*.³⁵ The text, quite allusive, is not easy to understand. Its anonymous author (there is no colophon) says, if I understand well, that he first received all the transmissions from 'the holy lama,' in an

system. There is a quite large practice manual on this cycle by him in the *Bi ma snying thig* corpus as it stands nowadays—the *Nyams len lag khrigs ma'i khrid ngo mtshar can*—e.g., Dri med 'od zer 2009, vol. 4, pp. 9-46. This text, quite original in some regards compared to what later (when Klong chen pa's influence became hegemonic on this tradition) became the mainstream system, would deserve careful scrutiny if we start considering seriously that the *Bi ma snying thig* may have been passed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem by Rin chen gling pa on the basis of this manual, or at least in the spirit of a style or type of understanding of the *Bi ma snying thig* exemplified by this manual. Rin chen gling pa could also have received the *Bi ma snying thig* from any close disciple of Rang byung rdo rje such as g.Yung ston pa, or from *rGyal sras Legs pa*, or even, after all, from Ku ma rā dza (1266–1343), who was the main holder of that lineage before Klong chen pa.

³³ See Arguillère 2007, p. 97.

³⁴ *g.Yung gi lo rgyus*.

³⁵ Dri med 'od zer 2009, vol. 6, pp. 157-160, or pp. 508-514 in the Dar thang edition.

iron-bird year, 48 years after the treasure was originally extracted. This has to be 1361.³⁶ It is not fully clear who is, in this context, the 'holy lama.' The first person to be mentioned next is 'Sho *ban*, the disciple of the treasure discoverer,'³⁷ i.e. *rGyal sras* Legs pa (1290–1365—so, still alive in 1361). But the versified first section is followed by a development in prose, which seems to contain an explanation of this point. The latter says that the author has received the texts (of the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī*) from Chos nyid shes rab,³⁸ who himself got them from Tshul khirms shes rab.³⁹ The 'holy lama' must then be Chos nyid shes rab, since, in both the verse and the prose passages, the transmissions are given in the same place, called 'the Palace of the Black Rock hermitage.'⁴⁰

None of the available sources about *rGyal sras* Legs pa tells us about a disciple called Tshul khirms shes rab, but Jean-Luc Achard's⁴¹

³⁶ Dri med 'od zer 2009, vol. 6, p. 158, l. 3-7: *de'i lung bla ma dam pa las | | bdag cag sprang po ri pas (sic) yis | | dben gnas brag nag pho brang du | | lcags byi zla ba gsum pa ste | | gter nas byon lo zhe bryad la | | dbang khrid lung dpe man ngag rdzogs | | btags grol dran pas grol ba'i chos | | yongs rdzogs zhus nas rang gzhan don | | gnyis ka gyis (sic) kyi rjes gnang thob |*.

³⁷ *gTer ston zhal slob sho ban*.

³⁸ There is no Chos nyid shes rab recorded as a person on BDRC. However, the name appears in the *Record of Teaching Received* of the 5th Dalai Lama (1971: vol. III, p. 175) or in this passage of Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku's gSung 'bum* (2011: vol. 2, p. 392): *phyag rdor gyi skor las | byang gling phyag rdor gtum po'i bryud pa ni | rdo rje 'chang | gsang ba'i bdag po o rgyan chen po | nam mkha'i snying po | byang chub gling pa dpal rgyal mtshan | rgyal mtshan bshes gnyen | bsod nams rgyal mtshan | chos nyid shes rab | nam mkha' grags pa | bde gshegs rgyal mtshan | se rin rgyal | mgon po zla ba | byams pa chos rgyan | etc.* In both cases, we are in the context of lineages connected to *gTer ston* Byang chub gling pa (P7259) and we find Nam mkha' grags pa as the disciple of Chos nyid shes rab. This makes perfect sense because the author of the *Story of g.Yung* is indeed Nam mkha' grags [pa]. The grand-disciple of this Nam mkha' grags pa is clearly *Se ston* Rin chen rgyal mtshan, a late 14th–early 15th century Byang gter figure, which also makes full sense if Nam mkha' grags pa was a direct student of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, at least for the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

³⁹ *dPal ldan bla ma dam pa shes rab tshul khirms de nyid la dben nas brag nag tu dam pa chos nyid shes rab kyi (sic) dbang dang chos skor thams cad yongs su rdzogs par thugs nyams su bzhed shing khyad par khrid kyi don khregs chod kyis yin lugs mngon du gyur pa mdzad nas | thod rgal gyis 'phyugs med gnad kyis mngon sum rang thog tu gtan la phab nas dus de nyid du kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa mngon du mdzad do |*—All my gratitude goes to Jean-Luc Achard who corrected (private communication: 23/07/2023) a misnomer in my original understanding of this text.

⁴⁰ *dBen gnas brag nag pho brang* in the verse passage; *dben nas brag nag* in the prose version.

⁴¹ Achard (private communication, 23/07/2023) comments: "Actually Tshul khirms shes rab was Khro phu *lo tsā ba* and he was a master of *rGyal sras* Legs pa. In this *History of g.Yung*, Tshul khirms shes rab gave the transmission to Chos nyid shes rab who may apparently be the same as 'Prajñā Śrī' (aka Brag nag pa Shes rab dpal [bzang]—this needs further research) who gave it to Nam mkha' grags."

identification of this figure as being Khro phu *lo tsā ba* Byams pa dpal (also called Tshul khrimshes rab and reconned on BDRC⁴² as one of Padma las 'brel rtsal's *masters*) brings up a few steps closer in our inquiry: indeed, on BDRC's fact sheet on Khro phu *lo tsā ba*, one of his disciples is called IHo ba *kun mkhyen* Rin chen dpal. BDRC's identification of this Rin chen dpal as being P5298, a direct student of Sa skya *paṇḍita* (1182–1251) is not quite feasible. All seems to stem from a confusion about Khro phu *lo tsā ba*'s dates—or maybe rather from the conflation of two different 'translators of Khro phu' (as we see here and there allusions to the *earlier* and *later* 'translators of Khro phu').⁴³

IHo ba *kun mkhyen* Rin chen dpal is much more likely to be the one we are looking for here, rGod ldem's rDzogs chen master, whether or not he was the same person as Rin chen gling pa.

If we now get back to the *Story of g.Yung*, admittedly, when an action is described in Tibetan, it is not always easy, for grammatical reasons, to know for sure who is performing it. Thus, in the following passage,⁴⁴ it is impossible to decide with full certainty who, on the one hand, is the one who receives 'the own books of Sho *ban* [*rGyal sras* Legs pa], the disciple of the treasure discoverer,' and whether, on the other hand, the 'fifteen years before' refer to the period when Chos nyid shes rab gave the transmissions to the author of the text, or to the time when the text is written. Thus, there are two possible readings, of which I favor the second one:

What is more, rGyal po smon lam, the patron
Of the supreme holy place of Tsā ri,
Had, fifteen years earlier [1356],
Given [to Tshul khrimshes rab], because of his faith,
The books of Sho *ban* [*rGyal sras* Legs pa], the *gter ston*'s disciple.

This reading, though grammatically possible, makes little sense: *rGyal sras* Legs pa was still alive in 1356 and his books would thus not be scattered in such a way. Thus, I think the passage should be understood as meaning:

⁴² <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/P4007>.

⁴³ I have already discussed elsewhere (Arguillère 2007: pp. 73-75) this issue, as Klong chen pa was also the disciple of a Khro phu pa which I then hypothetically identified as Khro pu ba *sems dpa' chen po* bSod nams seng ge (BDRC: P3098). All this requires further research as it does not seem, in my very provisional understanding of those matters, that Khro pu ba *sems dpa' chen po* bSod nams seng ge is the same person as Khro phu *lo tsā ba* 'the later,' Tshul khrimshes rab, connected to a *Kun mkhyen* Rin chen dpal who must be the same person as 'our' Brag lung pa *mkhas btsun* Rin chen dpal / Rin chen gling pa.

⁴⁴ *gZhan yang gnas mchog tsā ri yi | | yon bdag rgyal po smon lam gyis | | sngar 'das lo ni bco lnga'i gong | | gter ston zhal slob sho ban gyi | | phyag dpe dad pa'i shugs kyi phul |*.

What is more, rGyal po smon lam, the patron
 Of the supreme holy place of Tsā ri,
 Has, fifteen years ago [1366/7, when rGyal sras Legs pa died, at the
 earliest],
 Given [to me], because of [his⁴⁵] faith,
 The books of Sho ban [rGyal sras Legs pa], the *gter ston's* disciple.

As we can imagine that the books would not be given away before their owner's death, this would imply that the text has been written at least fifteen years after rGyal sras Legs pa passed away—i.e., in 1381 at the earliest.

From the way this text is placed in the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* collection, next to writings that are genuinely of g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpal (1284–1365), I originally imagined the 'g.Yung' whose story it tells to be him. But, as we have just seen, this would imply massive chronological difficulties. g.Yung ston pa, although nowadays nearly as forgotten as Rin chen gling pa, was even more of a public figure in his time, as a central disciple of Rang byung rdo rje and the tutor of the fourth Karmapa. So, there cannot be much debate about his chronology.

Other than the conclusion we have just reached about 1381 as a highly probable date for this part of the events reported in this text, its author further explains (p. 159, Tibetan text quoted above) that, though he gained some insight in the nature of Reality (*chos nyid*) through *khregs chod* on the basis of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (as taught, I suppose, by Chos nyid shes rab), he did not obtain the real know-how about *thod rgal* before meeting Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.⁴⁶ This event is dated to a 'wood-female-bird'⁴⁷ year, which, in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's chronology as we understand it, can only be 1384—twenty years, indeed, after g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpal passed away.

⁴⁵ Either 'because of his faith in me,' or 'because of my faith in that tradition.' Both meanings are possible.

⁴⁶ *Dam pa prajñā de nyid las dben gnas brag nag gi pho brang du bdag nam mkha' grags kyis dbang dang lung rnams yongs su rdzogs par zhus kyang | khrid kyi nges pa ma rnyed pa la | dus phyis sprul sku rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can dang mjal dus chos kyi che ba dang | khrid kyi zab pa'i gnad lung bstan pa'i bka' drin la brten nas | dpal ldan bla ma chos nyid mtshan can de nyid dben gnas brag nag pho brang du spyang drangs shing shing mo bya lo'i ston zla 'bring dang ra ba gnyis la dbang lnga yongs su rdzogs pa lung rnams dang bcas pa bskyangs nas zhus te | khyad par khrid kyi skor khregs chod thod rgal rnams nyams khrid lag khrid du rdzogs par zhus shing | nyams gong 'phel gyi snang ba cung zad skyes pa dang | snang bzhi'i 'char tshul rnams go yul du gsal zhing | zab mo'i chos la nges pa'i shes pa dang | brgyud pa gsum gyi bla ma la mi phyed pa'i dad pa thob dus | | bka' rdzogs dpe rdzogs lung rnams yongs su rdzogs par gnang ste rang gzhan gyi don gnyis ka gyis shig pa'i rjes su gnang ba thob ste sa dang po'i dbang rdzogs | [...].*

⁴⁷ *Shing mo bya.*

What is more, the author of this text calls himself (p. 159) “I, Nam mkha’ grags.” This is definitely not one of g.Yung ston pa’s names, but it occurs in a lineage added to a text of the Northern Treasures collection.⁴⁸ In this context, Nam mkha’ grags figures as a disciple of rNam rgyal mgon po (1399–1424),⁴⁹ rGod ldem’s son.⁵⁰ At this stage, it is not yet clear why he is called ‘g.Yung’ and why the text of the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* is called *The Story of g.Yung* and placed next to texts genuinely written by g.Yung ston pa, in such a way that we can suppose the difference of the authors may not have been clear for the Tibetan editors themselves.

Be that as it may, what it proves is that, in 1384, Rig ’dzin rGod ldem was regarded as an eminent specialist of the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī*—which definitely implies that he had received it at some point.

*Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s mastery of the Heart-essence of the Dākinī
further attested by the Garland of Light*

This is further confirmed by elements in the biographies of his disciples. For example, in *The Garland of Light*,⁵¹ in the context of the biography of rGod ldem’s son rNam rgyal mgon po, we read this passage about Rig ’dzin rGod ldem giving transmissions to his son and other disciples, towards the end of his life:⁵²

When the empowerment and guidance instructions were finished, with a single voice, they made the following request in the presence of his father, the Great Lineage Holder:⁵³ “To this son of yours, rNam rgyal mgon po, please give the complete empowerments, reading transmissions, and quintessential teachings, which includes the heart-treasures of Zang zang lha brag, the two *Seminal-Heart* (*sNying*

⁴⁸ In the *gSang ba rmad byung* (the *gCod of dGongs pa zang thal*), in *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* vol. 3, p. 384. This is further confirmed by the 5th Dalai Lama’s *Record of Teachings Received* or the passage quoted in note 38 above from *Brag dkar rta so sprul sku’s gSung ’bum* (2011), in which we saw a lineage with a master called Chos nyid shes rab and his disciple Nam mkha’ grags.

⁴⁹ Valentine 2018: ‘Namgyel Gonpo’ in *The Treasury of Lives*: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Namgyel-Gonpo/1639>.

⁵⁰ This Nam mkha’ grags might in fact even be the disciple of rGod ldem we know as Nam mkha’ dpal, the brother of rDo rje mgon po—but this requires further research. It should also be checked whether this is not the same person as a Nam mkha’i *mtshan can*, disciple of Rin chen gling pa and master of Me’i Śā kya bzang po (see below).

⁵¹ See Valentine 2017 for a general presentation of this text.

⁵² Unpublished translation by Jay Valentine, FCHNT internal working document (2023).

⁵³ ‘Great Lineage Holder’ is Jay Valentine’s understanding based on the spelling *rigs ’dzin*, instead of *rig ’dzin*, in this and some other texts.

tig) [cycles of] the Great Perfection,⁵⁴ *The Secret Net of Magical Illusions* (gSang ba sgyu 'phrul),⁵⁵ the ancestral teachings (known as) the Sūtra tradition of Vajrakīlaya (*Pha chos rdo rje phur pa mdo lugs*) that was revealed by Gu ru Chos dbang, *The Eight Pronouncements* (bKa' brgyad), and all the other cycles of the new and old translations.

This implies (among many other interesting things) that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was not merely *aware* of the contents of the two *sNying thig* collections, but was also *qualified—and perceived as fully legitimate—to grant their full transmission*. In a Tibetan context, this, again, means that he was fully trained in these by one or more masters who were themselves holders of these lineages. Now, if Rin chen gling pa was his master for the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī*, he may as well (though this assumption is more speculative in the present state of research) be the one who taught him the *Bi ma snying thig*. This would match quite well with Nyi ma bzang po's assertion that Brag lung pa Rin chen dpal taught Rig 'dzin rGod ldem “all the Dharmas of rDzogs chen” (*rdzogs pa chen po'i chos rnam*).⁵⁶

As said above, there is no trace in Rin chen gling pa's (sketchy) biographies of him receiving the *Bi ma snying thig*; but this does not prove anything: in his case as in rGod ldem's, there seems to be some reluctance to say whose disciple he was and how he got trained. From the knowledge we are starting to reconstruct of the milieu in which he was trained, it is very likely that he was well-versed in the *Bi ma snying thig* too.

The same idea of rGod ldem as a master of both *sNying thig* systems appears again further in the same source, in the life of another close disciple of his, rDo rje mgon po.⁵⁷

Other than that, [Rig 'dzin rGod ldem] gave [them] completely all the teachings of *The Seminal-Heart of Vimalamitra* and *The Seminal-Heart of the Dākinī*.

Rin chen gling pa and Padma las 'brel rtsal

Neither Padma las 'brel rtsal nor the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* are mentioned in Rin chen gling pa's biography by Gu ru bKras shis (and

⁵⁴ I.e., the *Bi ma snying thig* and the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

⁵⁵ Incidentally, we have no clue either about how rGod ldem became habilitated to teach the *sGyu 'phrul*. Although this is mentioned by Nyi ma bzang po, he does not clearly state who were the masters who trained him in this corpus.

⁵⁶ Nyi ma bzang po 2015, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁷ Jay Valentine's translation, FCHNT internal working document (2023).

only in passing in the version by Kong *sprul*)⁵⁸. We may therefore wonder whether perhaps the Rin chen gling pa mentioned here and there in the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* tradition might be another person—and whether, after all, the whole plot I had envisioned (in my 2002 dissertation—then to understand Klong chen pa's relations with the disciples of Padma las 'brel rtsal, and now extending it to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem) existed only in my imagination, as a perfect case of a self-confirming hypothesis—seeing everywhere in one's materials precisely what one is so eager to see.

But it is enough to read in Gu ru bKras shis' historical compilation Padma las 'brel rtsal's biography (pp. 399-403)⁵⁹ or that of Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku*,⁶⁰ or to return to their supposed common source, Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bKra shis, to dispel that doubt: they all state that the prophetic guide for Pad ma las 'brel rtsal's *gter ma* was granted to him by Rin chen gling pa, who had found it with his other discoveries in Ko ro brag in 'Bri thang. This occurred, they say, close to Pema las 'brel rtsal's 21st year.⁶¹ If we suppose that the 'iron rabbit' year in

⁵⁸ Kong *sprul*, *gTer ston rgya rtsa*, p. 418: *padma las 'brel rtsal gyi zab chos kyi bdag po gnang ba* |.

⁵⁹ One of the oldest sources for the life of Padma las 'brel rtsal is the *Lo rgyus rgyal ba g.yung gi mdzad pa* (in Dri med 'od zer 2009, vol. 6, pp. 142-153), which, unlike the *g.Yung gi lo rgyus*, is actually a writing of *g.Yung ston pa* rDo rje dpal. The author does not mention Rin chen gling pa (nothing is said about who gave to Padma las 'brel rtsal the *kha byang* and the *lde mig*). It is focused on *Lo ston* rDo rje 'bum, an unknown figure said to have been a companion or servant of Padma las 'brel rtsal when he discovered the *gter ma* and to have later given the yellow scrolls to Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje a year *lcags mo lugs* which can only be 1331. Globally, the main concern of this text is to present Rang byung rdo rje as the most legitimate master of the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī*. It also gives the names of Rang byung rdo rje's main disciples for this cycle: 'Bo ru ba *mkhan po* rGyal mtshan, *rTogs ldan* Ye rgyal, *sprul sku dbon po* sMan lung pa, and *g.Yung ston pa* himself (same list in Dudjom 1991: p. 574). The overall impression that emerges from all the historiographical literature on the first generations of *mKha' 'gro snying thig* masters in the 14th century is one of chaos and possibly competition for legitimacy, with Klong chen pa's final triumph (no doubt linked to the undisputable excellence and abundance of his writings on this cycle) perhaps only secured at the time of *gTer bdag gling pa* (1646–1714), or even 'Jigs med gling pa (1729/30–1798).

⁶⁰ Brag dkar rtsa so *sprul sku* (2011, vol. 13, p. 472): *De'i dus su lo ro che grong nas byon pa'i sprul sku rin chen gling pa bya bas ko ro brag nas gdan drangs pa'i gter chos kyi nang nas khra mo brag gi kha byang gter ston gyi lung bstan dang bcas pa'i shog ser 'bul du byung | gter rnam's 'don pa'i lung khyed la bstan 'dug lags | khyed kyi legs par thon la nged la yang thugs la 'dogs par zhu gsungs nas zhu'do* |.

⁶¹ *Loc. cit.*: *lcags mo dung lo nyer gcig bzhes pa'i skabs su bla ma'i gsung gi lho phyogs su 'gro don la rgyug gsungs | de'i lho phyogs lo ro tshe grong nas byon pa'i sprul sku rin chen gling pas | 'bri thang ko ro brag nas gdan drangs pa'i gter chos kyi nang nas khra mo brag gi kha byang dang | gter ston gyi lung bstan dang bcas pa'i shog ser gnyis phul nas* | ... An alternate version of the story, also reported by Gu ru bKras shis, speaks of 'an old monk' who gave Padma las 'brel rtsal the prophetic guide. Rin chen gling pa was indeed a monk, but, even supposing he was not born in 1289, but in the

which Padma las 'brel rtsal was born is 1291, we would be around 1311, which is fine if Rin chen gling pa was born in 1289. This would be a *terminus ad quem* for Rin chen gling pa's findings in Ko ro brag.

Incidentally, in this version of the story, Rin chen gling pa, while giving him the prophetic guide, asks Padma las 'brel rtsal to grant him the Dharma that he would find.

Gu ru bKras shis does not give his sources for these narratives, which are also not backed by the actual *kha byang* of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* in the received edition (which is not very specific) nor by the *mKha' 'gro snying thig gi lo rgyus*⁶² which merely says (p. 46) that the prophetic guide (*kha byang*) and the key (*lde mig*) for his *gter ma* "came into the hands"⁶³ of Padma las 'brel rtsal, without any further indication.

In fact, in another (undescribed) *gter ma* source about the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, quoted e.g. in Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku* (2011: p. 473), four people are named together with Padma las 'brel rtsal as the predestined recipients of this teaching.

They are referred to by their year of birth, but the puzzle is fully explained on the next page (although with notes inserted in the text that express the chronological perplexities of either Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku* himself or his editors; these notes are translated in italics and between brackets):

Five [individuals,] born in the years of the tiger, dog, rabbit, dragon,
and ox
Will be the holders of this lineage and will go to Khecara.
Accordingly,
The one who was the son of the *vajra-dākinīs*,
The reincarnation of princess Padma gsal,
Born in the year of the dragon [*though the biography says: rabbit year*]
Was the treasure discoverer Las 'brel rtsal himself.
The rebirth of the Noble Lady of Shel dkar [Ye shes mtsho rgyal]

previous ox year, 1277 (which, in my opinion, is unlikely), he was not yet forty. If this were to be taken seriously, we might have to shift him to a slightly earlier date (we only have the animal of his birth year, not the element, and as he lived to be quite old, many suppositions are possible). But this would then bring other inconvenience.

In fact, the outcome of the present article is admittedly not a formal proof of its *demonstrandum*—but a tightly-knit network of explanatory hypotheses that are closely coherent with each other and provide a fairly good account of a number of texts that we would not otherwise know what to make of.

⁶² Dri med 'od zer 2009, vol. 5, pp. 46-49.

⁶³ *Lag tu son byung*—the Tibetan phrase used to mean: receiving, e.g., a letter. The source of this formula is the *Lo rgyus rgyal ba g.yung gi mdzad pa* (in Dri med 'od zer 2009, vol. 6, p. 148): *kha byang lde mig kyang lag tu son nas...* The author, g.Yung ston pa, surely knew who brought these elements to Padma las 'brel rtsal and maybe Klong chen pa is not alone to avoid, for any reason, mentioning Rin chen gling pa.

Was the son of the *padma-dākinīs*,
 Born in the tiger year, Se (sic)⁶⁴ *ban rGyal sras* Legs pa.
 As for the emanation of Princess Mandharava,
 The son of the *ratna-dākinīs*
 Was Myos (sic) *ban Rin chen gling pa* of the Ox year.
 The rebirth of the undecieving master Padma [-sambhava]
 Who was the son of the *karma-dākinīs*,
 Was Myang *ston Śākya byang chub* of the dog year.
 As for the emanation of the Abbot Bodhisattva [Śāntarakṣita],
 Who was the son of the *buddha-dākinīs*,
 It was Rang byung rdo rje of the rabbit year [though in his biography he
 is said to be of the monkey year].⁶⁵

The awkwardness of this prophecy was obvious even to the Tibetan pious reader who noticed that the dates did not match. Myang *ston Śākya byang chub*, who is presented as an extremely important person in this prophecy, is unknown to us and to the later tradition. It is also unclear why Rin chen gling pa is called Myos *ban*,⁶⁶ though it is plain from the context that this is the same person. Be it as it may, at some point, Rin chen gling pa was seen as belonging to a group of predestined masters of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

If we now get back to by Gu ru bKras shis' biography of Padma las 'brel rtsal, we read that two years after having received the prophetic guide (1313),⁶⁷ Padma las 'brel rtsal revealed the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* together with many other cycles, including his Rahula (gZa')

⁶⁴ This 'Se' seems to be a spelling mistake for 'Sho,' as *rGyal sras* Legs pa is commonly called Sho *ban rGyal sras* Legs pa. But this might prove, at a later stage of research, to be meaningful: the close association of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his posterity with various masters of the Se clan (Se *ston*) is quite obvious from many biographies. Pr. Jay Valentine drew my attention to an allusion to an unidentified 'Legs pa,' maybe as a master of the Se clan in rGod ldem's earliest biography (Nyi ma bzang po 2015, p. 14: *Se ston dpal chen bum pa dang | legs pa sku mched gnyis kyis | sku'i yon tan slob nyer mdzad pa'i slob dpon mdzad |*). In the context, the event recorded must be understood to happen soon after rGod ldem's father's death (early 1340s). It would then mean that rGod ldem was partly brought up by Padma las 'brel rtsal's closest disciple. But, in the present state of research, this is a pure guesswork.

⁶⁵ *sTag yos khyi 'brug glang gi lo pa lnga : 'di yi brgyud 'dzin mkha' spyod gnas su 'gro : zhes gsungs pa ltar | rdo rje mkha' 'gro'i sras su gyur pa ni : lha lcam padma gsal gyi skye ba ni : 'brug lo [rnam thar las yos lo par gsungs] gter ston las 'brel rtsal dngos yin : jo mo shel dkar bza' yi skye ba ni : padma dākki'i sras su gyur pa ni : stag lo se ban rgyal sras legs pa dang : lha lcam man dha ra ba'i sprul pa ni : rin chen dākki'i sras su gyur pa ni : glang lo myos ban rin chen gling pa dang : zog med padma bla ma'i skye ba ni : las kyi dākki'i sras su gyur pa ni : khyi lo myang ston śākya byang chub dang : mkhan po bo dhi sa twa'i sprul pa ni : sangs rgyas dākki'i sras su gyur pa ni : yos lo [rnam thar las spre'u'i lo yin par gsungs] chos rje rang byung rdo rje ste :...*

⁶⁶ This spelling occurs in some of the oldest sources.

⁶⁷ *Chu mo glang lo*.

cycle that is preserved in the *Northern Treasures Compilation* (vol. 28 & 29).⁶⁸

The next datable figure to be mentioned in this biography comes with the story of how, after finding the treasure, he blessed 'a *tantrika'* with the treasure-box. 'The next morning' (*phyir nang*), that *tantrika's* son—which would be his very important disciple *rGyal sras* Legs pa of Sho (1290–1366/7)—decided to follow him.⁶⁹ This fits chronologically, as *rGyal sras* Legs pa would have been in his early twenties—an age appropriate to follow an unknown charismatic master (though, in this case, the master was himself even younger than the disciple).⁷⁰

It seems that Padma las 'brel rtsal spent some time in his own region, found little faith, then moved to bSam yas where he was prophesied to go to Lhasa in order to meet Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, to whom he gave the transmission of all his *gter ma* on the basis of the yellow scrolls. Now, if Gu ru bKras shis is not mistaken, this allows further chronological hypotheses, as Rang byung rdo rje traveled in Central Tibet between 1308 and 1314 only before he spent ten years in the sTod lung valley,⁷¹ and then again shortly on his way to the Mongol capital in 1332 (which is much too late—Padma las 'brel rtsal was dead already).

An episode quoted by Ruth Gamble (2020: p. 85) in her study of Rang byung rdo rje, though confusing if we take it at face value, might well be connected to this issue in a way that would match what we can

⁶⁸ This cycle, hitherto unavailable, resurfaced with the large compilation *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* (it fills its vol. 28 and 29 under the general title *gZa' rgyud*). But as a collection of very short ritual texts without much narrative passages or even mere lineage prayers, it seems unfortunately poor in information exploitable for the historian.

⁶⁹ *Loc. cit.*, same page: *de nas tshur log nas gnyal gyi stod du slebs | gnyal stod sho yi tsher ma lung du sngags pa zhis gis zhabs tog phul bas | der sngags 'chang de la gter sgrom gyi byin rlabs mdzad | phyir nang sngags pa'i bu'ang rjes su 'brang nas byung ba rgyal sras legs pa'i rgyal mtshan yin |*.

⁷⁰ In *rGyal sras* Legs pa's biography as it appears in Gu ru bKras shis's *History*, however, it is said that he met Pad ma las 'brel rtsal in his 28th year [1317]—*op. cit.*, p. 501: *khyad par du dgung lo nyi shu rtsa brgyad pa la dpa' bo rin chen sgang pa sprul sku tshul khrims rdo rje'am | gter ston padma las 'brel rtsal gyi zhabs la gtugs nas |*. The same information is found in Kong sprul's *gTer ston brgya rtsa* (p. 521), but this does not add much strength to this chronological assumption. All the later authors are dependent upon *mKha' 'gro snying thig* histories in which Klong chen pa's hand is visible. Part of Klong chen pa's tactic (or that of his disciples) to establish his legitimacy was to present himself as the reincarnation of Padma las 'brel rtsal, which may have led to a twisting of the dates. Indeed, whether Padma las 'brel rtsal died in 1315 or in 1319, his death was in any case posterior to Klong chen pa's birth in 1308, and the rNying ma pa's embarrassment about this fact is still palpable nowadays in the tendency to evade the question by means of ready-made and rather vague formulas about Padma las 'brel rtsal's premature death.

⁷¹ See Ruth Gamble 2020: pp. 67–89.

reconstruct of Padma las 'brel rtsal's life:

In the Female Water Ox Year [1313], thanks to his relationship with the Guru [Padmasambhava], Rangjung Dorje retrieved the *Ḍākinī's Heart Essence* Treasure in Lhodrak. It was written on golden paper. He then spent three months at the confluence of the Lungchu River and one of its tributaries in Tsari, praying intensely to Padmasambhava, before meeting him directly and receiving empowerments and transmissions from him.

As Ruth Gamble rightly remarks:

...If he [Rang byung rdo rje] had claimed to have found this treasure himself, it is strange for him not to have written anything about this in his autobiography. Tsewang Gyel acknowledges this and says that Rangjung Dorje purposely did not write about his discovery because it was so secret. But this omission in his work could also be read as evidence for this text's *later* attribution to him.

Indeed, g.Yung ston pa's account of the *Heart-Essence of the Ḍākinī* lineage,⁷² although largely devoted to the glory of his master Rang byung rdo rje, does not go beyond stating that after Karmapa had received the *Heart-Essence of the Ḍākinī* from Padma las 'brel rtsal, he got a direct, visionary transmission of it. In fact, the passage translated by Ruth Gamble seems to be a distortion of the story as found in e.g., the compilation *Karma Kam tshang gi brgyud pa rin po che'i rnam thar*:

In the Female Water Ox Year [1313], Guru Las 'brel rtsal presented [Rang byung rdo rje] with the yellow scrolls of the *rDzogs chen Heart-Essence of the Ḍākinī* which he had extracted as a treasure in lHo brag.⁷³ After he [Rang byung rdo rje] remained [in retreat] for three months

⁷² g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpaI 2009: p. 152.

⁷³ The seeming contradiction between Padma las 'brel rtsal's biography which tells us that he gave the transmissions of the *Heart-Essence of the Ḍākinī* to Rang byung rdo rje in Lhasa, and the mention of lHo brag in Rang byung rdo rje's biography is easy to solve in this way, as the locative *lho brag tu* does not have to be understood as meaning the place where the teaching was given, but can apply just as well to the place where the treasure was found. In Nyoshul Khenpo's life of Padma las 'brel rtsal (2005: pp. 71-72), the *gter ston* does not give the yellow scrolls to the Karmapa, but *shows* them to him and bestows the empowerments and oral transmissions directly on the basis of these scrolls, and not on the basis of transcriptions. This is more coherent with other narratives in which Padma las 'brel rtsal finally gives the scrolls to *rGyal sras* Legs pa. Indeed, Gu ru bKra shis (op. cit., p. 501) says that when Rang byung rdo rje later summoned *rGyal sras* Legs pa to receive again the whole *Heart-Essence of the Ḍākinī* "in his [rGyal sras Legs pa's] 43rd year, that of the water male monkey" (1332), *rGyal sras* Legs pa taught him on the basis of these scrolls (*'di shog ser steng nas phul ba yin zer ba'ang snang* །)—which seems to imply that he had kept them.

in Bon lung in Tsā ri, praying [to Padmasambhava], he actually met the Precious One of Oḍḍyāna who [re-] gave him the empowerments and oral transmissions.⁷⁴

So, this date of 1313 seems worthy of being taken seriously, but as the one in which Padma las 'brel rtsal bestowed the transmissions of the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* to Rang byung rdo rje, very soon after having retrieved the treasure. This would make sense also in case Gu ru bKras shis is right in stating that Padma las 'brel rtsal died in his 25th year, 1315. Gu ru bKras shis says that he gave the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* to Rang byung rdo rje, but the whole of his *gter chos* only to rGyal sras Legs pa of Sho and to Rin chen gling pa.⁷⁵

Nyoshul Khenpo's biography of Padma las 'brel rtsal in *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems* contains interesting information about Rin chen gling pa,⁷⁶ partly borrowed from Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bkra shis, either directly or through Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku*, about the association of Rin chen gling pa with both Padma las 'brel rtsal and rGyal sras Legs pa. I inserted an edition and translation of Nyoshül Khenpo's narrative in the proper place of my translation of Gu ru bKras shis's biography of Rin chen gling pa below. An element appears in this text, the sources of which I have not found: it would be rGyal sras Legs pa, rather than the *gter ston* himself, who gave Rin chen gling pa the full transmission of the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī* while Padma las 'brel rtsal was still alive, but in retreat. Nyoshül Khenpo also states that, later, in the same way as Rin chen gling pa had given Padma las 'brel rtsal the prophetic guide that allowed him to discover the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī*, the latter gave the former the key to the treasures he would extract at the 'rock looking like a black tortoise.'

From this cross-readings of biographies of Padma las 'brel rtsal and

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 245: *Chu mo glang lo la gu ru las 'brel rtsal gyis | lho brag tu rdzogs chen mkha' 'gro snying thig gter nas bton pa'i shog ser phyag tu phul | tsā ri'i bon lung du zla ba gsum der bzhugs nas gsol ba btab pas | o rgyan rin po che dang dngos su mjal nas dbang lung rnam rdzogs par gnang |*. Maybe *phyag tu phul* could be understood literally, as meaning that Padma las 'brel rtsal merely placed the yellow scrolls in Rang byung rdo rje's hands.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 401: *Sho yi rgyal sras legs pa dang | sprul sku rin chen gling pa gnyis la gter chos rnam tshang bar gnang |*. Same idea in gTer bdag gling pa's practice manual for the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, p. 220: *...skal ldan padma las 'brel rtsal gyis gter nas bton pa mkha' 'gro snying thig rtsa ba'i skor rnam sho'i rgyal sras legs pa dang chos rgyal rin chen gling pa sogs la bka' babs pa dang |...* gTer bdag gling pa then explains how Klong chen pa mystically got the lineage. So it is plain that in the 17th century all memory of a rivalry between Klong chen pa and Rin chen gling pa had vanished; it is amusing, however, to note that, in this case, it is Rang byung rdo rje who gets omitted.

⁷⁶ English version (2005): pp. 72-73; French version (Padmakara, 2016, globally better): p. 150.

Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje, we can imagine that Rin chen gling pa's association with Padma las 'brel rtsal started in 1311 (just after Rin chen gling pa found his own first treasure); that it lasted until the latter's death in 1319 (or 1315); and that Rin chen gling pa had full authority on the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī*, even more so after Rang byung rdo rje passed away (1339).

Now, to get back to our inquiry about the master who taught Rig 'dzin rGod ldem the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* during his youth, Rang byung rdo rje died too early to be one of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's teachers, and if he or Klong chen pa had been among rGod ldem's masters, the tradition would most probably have kept record of that. It must therefore be either from rGyal sras Legs pa or Rin chen gling pa, or one of their disciples, that he got the *Heart-essence of the Dākinī*—and, be it only because of the name Rin chen dpal mentioned in rGod ldem's biographies, Rin chen gling pa is definitely the most likely candidate.

Rin chen gling pa as a co-revealer of the mKha' 'gro snying thig?
The puzzling wonders of ms. KN 1984.

So far, our hints about Rin chen gling pa's very close association with the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* lay upon several narratives that seemingly stem from the same source, the 17th century author Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bkra shis.⁷⁷

There is, however, a non-standard edition of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* that is a relic of another tradition of that corpus, in which Rin chen gling pa obviously played a very central role. The Tibetan editors who, in 1984, published a facsimile copy (781 p.) of this corpus under the title: *mKha' 'gro snying thig gi chos skor—reproduced from an ancient but perhaps incomplete and disordered manuscript from the library of bla-ma Ņi-ma of glañ-phran*⁷⁸ were certainly unaware of the important changes this manuscript could bring to our perception of the early history of *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

First, what do we know of the manuscript we call *KN 1984*?

The *mKha' 'gro snying thig gi gsol 'debs* (*KN 1984*, pp. 365-371), one of the only texts in which Klong chen pa's name (Dri med 'od zer) appears, is ascribed to Klong chen pa himself. It does not mention Rin chen gling pa at all. All its interest, however, lies in the later additions to the lineage after Klong chen pa, which allow us to locate the production of this manuscript: the lineage, indeed, ends with "Padma

⁷⁷ The fact that he was a master of this lineage is known from a contemporary source, rGyal sras bZod pa grags pa's history of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (see below). But we cannot trace the source for the detailed narrative earlier than Sha gzugs pa.

⁷⁸ From this point on quoted as *KN 1984*.

'phrin las, Padma klong gsal, and myself" (*bdag*). This probably refers to sGang steng *sprul sku* I Padma 'phrin las (bdr: P2659: ~1565–1642), his disciple (P2729), and a grand-disciple who could be Pha rgod Nam mkha' seng ge (P2730). All these lamas were active in Bhutan and these are the latest figures mentioned in the whole manuscript. All its other contents are much older.

My conclusion is thus that its textual content, with the exception of this extension of a lineage to the 17th century, belongs at the latest to the 15th, but that it must have been copied in the late 17th century in Bhutan, that is to say, in a milieu in which Klong chen pa was the main authority.

Its content, however, reveals an older tradition of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* in which Rin chen gling pa enjoyed the central position—and Klong chen pa none.

Indeed, in this edition, we do not find any of Klong chen pa's additional compositions and complementary revelations. Instead, we find traces of Rin chen gling pa's presence, *which are never found in the colophons of the 'mainstream' edition.*

In some of them, the colophons may mean that he was the main recipient of Padma las 'brel rtsal's revelations. In others, it seems to be presented as the *gter ston*.⁷⁹

In the first category, we find:

- The *Slob dpon padma lha lcam padma gsal lung ston pa* (KN 1984, pp. 51-66), in the colophon of which Rin chen gling pa appears as the one who lent his text after having given the empowerment and the oral transmission.
- The colophon of the *rGyud bcangs pas yon tan 'byung tshul* (KN 1984, pp. 135-143) indicates that it was given (*gnang*) by Padma las 'brel rtsal to *Chos rgyal* Rin chen gling pa in Dam tshang shel phug.
- the *Khrid rgyab lung gi phreng ba* (KN 1984, pp. 463-483) is presented as having been taught on the basis of Rin chen gling pa's own books, which might not imply more than the fact he was a central disciple of Padma las 'brel rtsal.

More ambiguous are the texts strangely presented as *teachings of Rin chen gling pa*:

⁷⁹ The original core of Padma las 'brel rtsal's *mKha' 'gro snying thig* can probably be reconstructed by identifying the texts common to both Klong chen pa's corpus and KN 1984. It is indeed difficult otherwise to spot Klong chen pa's additions, since he often signs, in this context, with the pen name "Padma las 'brel rtsal."

- The *'Bras bu yongs rdzogs btags sgrol snying po* (KN 1984, pp. 145-167)'s colophon calls this text "the holy / authentic Dharma of Chos rgyal Rin chen gling pa" (*chos rgyal rin chen gling pa'i dam chos*). This could either mean that he was the predestined heir of Padma las 'brel rtsal's revelation, or that it was his own hidden treasure.
- The *Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes gsum pa* (KN 1984, pp. 179-182) ends with: *las can gcig dang 'phrad par shog : chos rgyal rin chen gling pa'i gdams ngag go* :. In many *gter ma* texts, the name of the *gter ston* appears directly after a formula of the type *las can gcig dang 'phrad par shog*. This might well be the meaning here.
- the *dBang gi cho ga rim pa* (KN 1984, pp. 193-254) also mentions Rin chen gling pa in its colophon in a way that may mean either that he was the *gter ston* or that he was the predestined *chos bdag*: *u rgyan padma'i bka' babs : chos rgyal rin chen gling pa'i phyag len no* :.

In some other texts, he appears, if not as the *gter ston*, at least as the one who decoded the yellow scrolls (or at least verified Padma las 'brel rtsal's deciphering):

- The *Khyad par gyi rig pa'i rtsal dbang gi gnad* (KN 1984, pp. 291-297) is clearly presented in its colophon as a *gter ma* discovered by Padma las 'brel rtsal together with *Lo ston*, but then edited by *Me ban Chos kyi rgyal po Rin chen gling pa* on the basis of the yellow scrolls. *Lo ston* is *rDo rje 'bum* is mentioned in *g.Yung ston pa's Lo rgyus rgyal ba g.yung gis mdzad pa* as having presented the yellow scrolls to Rang byung rdo rje. Here, Rin chen gling pa is a mystic editor with a superior capacity to read the *dākinī* scripts.
- The *Chags chen lam du 'jug pa'i dbang gi rim pa* (KN 1984, pp. 373-379) has the mention "corrected by Rin chen gling pa upon the yellow scrolls" (*rin chen gling pas shog ser la shus dag go* :).
- the *rTags tshad kyi yi ge* (KN 1984, pp. 485-492) ends with a barely readable formula mentioning *Chos rgyal Rin chen gling pa*.

However, although one could understand the colophons of the following texts as meaning that Rin chen gling pa was the main heir of Padma las 'brel rtsal's *gter ma* revelations, to me they sound as if Rin chen gling pa was their discoverer (they are indeed pretty similar to the colophons of Rin chen gling pa's own *gter chos*):

- The *mKha' 'gro snying thig chen mo'i don gsal me long* (KN 1984,

pp. 493-553) has a colophon that reads: *chos kyi rgyal po rin chen gling pa la : mkha' 'gro snying thig o rgyan bka' babs so* :⁸⁰.

- Another text entitled *sNying po gsal ba zhes bya ba'i khrid gzhung don gsal bla med* (KN 1984, pp. 555-595) finishes with: *o rgyan rjes 'dzin rin chen gling pa la : mkha' 'gro snying thig gsang ba'i bka' 'babs so* :. This text is remarkable because it contains (p. 595) a famous prophecy about Dri med 'od zer (Klong chen pa) *that is clearly not of the same hand as the text in which it has been inserted.*
- In the same way, the *mKha' 'gro snying thig gi rnal 'byor bzhi'i gdams pa* (or *man ngag*—KN 1984, pp. 607-619) ends with: *chos rgyal rin chen gling pa'i bka' babs so* |.

Additionally, as we will see below while editing and translating passages of it, the *Bla ma rgyud pa'i rim pa* (KN 1984, pp. 119-124), despite its *gter ma* mark, was clearly, at least, completed by Rin chen gling pa.

He is also mentioned as the successor of Padma las 'brel rtsal in a *rGyud pa'i gsol 'debs* (KN 1984, pp. 255-257) which, incidentally, does not go any further than him: this might be a sign of the antiquity, if not of the manuscript itself (which I think was produced in the 17th century), at least of most of its contents.

All in all, there are two possible readings of all these colophons: at the very least, Rin chen gling pa is presented as the principal heir of this Dharma, capable of correcting on the basis of the *mkha' 'gro brda yig* the deciphering done by its discoverer. At the maximum, he could, like Klong chen pa, have himself revealed (or re-revealed) parts of it. I tend to favor the second reading, which allows us to make better sense of passages found in Klong chen pa's biographies.⁸¹

As we will see below in the appendix of this article, a comparison of the contents of this edition of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* with what has become the standard version reveals that KN 1984 does not merely contain *less* than the mainstream version (which lead its Tibetan contemporary editors to suspect it to be "incomplete"), but also *more*—extra materials not found in Klong chen pa's edition of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*—and that these are more often than not the texts in which Rin chen gling pa is named. This gives the impression that there was an original core of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* that got expanded in one way by Rin chen gling pa and in another way by Klong chen pa.

We will now see that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *dGongs pa zang thal* actually presents itself as another, more complete version of the *mKha'*

⁸⁰ Plus an *ex libris* that might later prove to be interesting to trace the source of this manuscript: *Byam gling pa Su rya'i dpe'o*.

⁸¹ See below.

'gro snying thig.

*An allusion to the mKha' 'gro snying thig, Padma las 'brel rtsal
and Rin chen gling pa in the dGongs pa zang thal itself*

One of the texts placed at the beginning of A 'dzom 'brug pa's edition of the *dGongs pa zang thal* is the *sNyan brgyud rin po che'i lung byang ye shes thugs kyi lde mig*.⁸² It contains a general description of what the *dGongs pa zang thal* is, a narrative of its concealment and prophecies about its discovery. But the passage that is the most interesting for us is the one that presents this corpus as bringing an especially complete *variant* of something that also exists in other *gter chos*.

It reads:⁸³

The great, vast, fully complete version was hidden at the Lion Rock in Mon Bum thang.

It was abbreviated and its summary is hidden at the Variegated Rock in the country of Dwags [po].

The complete [version] that focusses on the meaning is hidden in Zang zang lha brag.

The one in which contemplation is the main thing, which conforms to the effortless [aspect of the practice] is in the belly of the *nāga* demon the southern rock (*lho brag*).⁸⁴

The complete method for liberating one single individual is hidden in the Bear's Den in Sha'ug.

Everything is interesting in these few obscure lines. First, it is partly identical with a passage quoted in Klong chen pa's *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin* (the great practice manual of the *mKha' 'gro yang tig*) as being from the *Don gsal*.⁸⁵ Klong chen pa's version,⁸⁶ put in simple terms,

⁸² Cited edition (*dGongs pa zang thal* 1973), pp. 37-51.

⁸³ Cited edition (*dGongs pa zang thal* 1973), p. 48: *yongs rdzogs rgyas pa chen po : mon bum thang seng ge'i brag la sbas yod : mdor bsdus te dril ba : dwags lung khra bo'i brag la sbas yod : cha tshang don dril ba zang zang lha brag la sbas yod : dgongs pa gtso che ba rtsol med dang phyogs mthun pa lho brag klu bdud lte ba na yod : gang zag gcig gi grol thabs tshang ba sha 'ug dom tshang la sbas yod :*

⁸⁴ It will be clearer a few lines below why I do not understand this *lho brag* as being the Tibetan province of that name.

⁸⁵ I could not identify this text so far, although the *sNying po gsal ba zhes bya ba'i khrid gzhung don gsal bla med* of KN 1984 would deserve closer scrutiny, as it contains, indeed, similar prophecies. This is all the more interesting as it is a text of the Rin chen gling pa corpus that does not seem to have an exact equivalent in the Klong chen pa corpus—which would then imply that Klong chen pa got copies even of Rin chen gling pa's addition to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and made use of them without mentioning.

⁸⁶ *Bi ma mi tra 'byon dgongs nas | | tshig tsam rlung phyogs tsam du yang | | 'di nyid tshig tsam bshad du med | | phyi rabs skal ldan don byed du | | dwangs lung ldang lha'i*

only mentions three sets of texts: (1) a very extensive version connected to Vimalamitra, hidden in *dwangs lung ldang lha'i brag*—which I understand to be the *Bi ma snying thig*; (2) a version condensed by Ye shes mtsho rgyal, hidden in *dwangs lung khra mo brag* (or, again—which gives the feeling that the text is corrupt or has been clumsily manipulated—in *dwangs lung ldang lha'i brag*). I suppose this is the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* in its original form revealed by Padma las 'brel rtsal; (3) a very extensive version for scholars (*mkhas pa paṇḍita*) who enjoy detailed instructions (*gdams pa spros pa*) hidden in Bum thang. I suppose these are the additional revelations and commentaries by Klong chen pa himself, as the following parts of the text seem to be prophecies about him (Dri med 'od zer) though he is also called Padma las 'brel rtsal.

If we now turn back to the version of this text in the *dGongs pa zang thal*, the meaning is clearly different. First, to start with the simplest, in Rin chen gling pa's biography the "Bear's Den [Ravine] in Sha'ug [sTag mgo]" is the place in which Rin chen gling pa got a direct visionary transmission of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* from Padma las 'brel rtsal, in a bird year that might be 1321. "The complete method for liberating one single individual" might then be understood as being Rin chen gling pa's own additions to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

Second, as for "the [variant of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*] in which contemplation is the main thing, which conforms to the effortless [aspect of the practice]" that is "hidden is in the belly of the *nāga* demon in the southern rock," it is quite reminiscent of "the rock looking like a black tortoise in India" (*rgya gar pha wang rus sbal nag po nas gter nas drangs pa'o*) from which Rin chen gling pa extracted the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*.⁸⁷ This may sound quite speculative, but a close examination of the fragments of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* preserved in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* may show that—despite its self-description as being *Yang ti(g)*—Kong sprul had some good reasons to regard it as belonging to the same family (which he calls *Padma snying thig*, meaning: Padmasambhava's tradition of the *rDzogs chen snying thig*) as the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and the *dGongs pa zang thal*. Indeed, it seems

brag la sbed | | ces so | | gnyis pa mkhar chen mtsho rgyal gyis bsdu ba po byas te | | dwangs lung khra mo brag la gter du sbas pas ni | de nyid las | | mtsho rgyal khyod la gtad pa ni | | ku su lu yi gdams pa'i skor | | dwangs lung ldang lha'i brag la sbos | | da lta bstan pa'i dus ma babs | | zhes so | | mkhas pa paṇḍita gdams pa spros pa gtso che ba bum thang na yod par | de nyid las | bco bryad rgyud dang gdams par bcas | | ma 'ongs skal ldan don du ni | | bum thang seng ge'i brag la sbos | | snyigs mar 'gro don rgya cher 'byung |—The passage ku su lu yi gdams pa'i skor | | dwangs lung ldang lha'i brag la sbos | is explicitly applied by Gu ru bKra shis (op. cit. p. 400) to Padma las 'brel rtsal, but with a curious variant: ku su lu yi gdams pa'i skor | | dpang lung ldang lha'i brag la sbed |.

⁸⁷ See below for this cycle.

that we find in all the cycles included in this category the same deep integration of advanced tantric inner yogas and body techniques within the framework of visionary rDzogs chen.

Third, the line about the *dGongs pa zang thal* does not require any explanation. The only interesting point is to see it presented as a variant of something that also exists in other forms or formats. Its description as “the complete [version] that focusses on the meaning” is quite fit to its content: although it is not as encyclopedic as the fivefold collection known as the *sNying thig ya bzhi*, it is still much more extensive than the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* in any of its versions—also because of its Vimalamitra- and Vairocana-connected corpora—and it is noted for its tendency to go directly to the practical point in a straightforward language without devoting much space to purely speculative questions in “twilight language.”

We are left with the two first variants of the corpus, “the great, vast, fully complete version” and “its summary.”

The second one might correspond to what I supposed to be the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* in Padma las 'brel rtsal's original version; it actually works, because Gu ru bKra shis says, exactly in the same words, that the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* was indeed found “at the Variegated Rock in the country of Dwags [po].”

Now, the allusion to Bum thang is surprising in the context. It never was a place of concealing of the seventeen *tantras* or the *Bi ma snying thig* according to any traditional source. If we let aside rDo rje gling pa, whose links to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* are more problematic, this can only be understood, however strange it may sound, as an allusion to Klong chen pa. Indeed, in the *kha byang* of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (Klong chen pa's edition), we do find the exact same phrase applied to Klong chen pa under one of his many names, Dri med 'od zer (after a previous prophecy about Padma las 'brel rtsal):

Conceal⁸⁸ the *Sun of Kun tu bzang po's bright expanse*⁸⁹ and
The eighteen [other] *tantras*⁹⁰ together with [their] instructions
In the Lion Cave [of] Bum thang.
Dri med 'od zer [will] open the door of this treasure...⁹¹

It is not long before the *dGongs pa zang thal* was revealed (1366) that

⁸⁸ This text is presented as a dialogue between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal.

⁸⁹ The *Klong gsal nyi ma'i rgyud* is the root *tantra* of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

⁹⁰ These are the seventeen *tantras* of the rDzogs chen *snying thig*, plus the *tantra* of E ka dza ti or *Nag mo khros ma*.

⁹¹ Dri med 'od zer 2009, vol. 5, pp. 4-5: *kun tu bzang po klong gsal nyi ma dang : bco bryad rgyud dang gdams par bcas pa rnam : bum thang seng ge'i rdzong la gter bu sbed : dri med 'od zer gter de'i sgo dbye ste ;*, etc.

Klong chen pa stayed for a decade (ca. 1350–ca. 1360) in Bum thang. It may sound surprising that his developments on the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* are mentioned first, as if it were the source of the others or had appeared prior to them. But in fact, the list clearly does not follow the chronological order of the revelations anyway (No. 2: 1313; No. 3: 1366; No. 4: 1311; No. 5: 1321).

We must also remember that the date of the discovery of the *dGongs pa zang thal* should not be regarded as that of the final establishment of its text, as we see Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (and maybe some of his disciples) busy for years deciphering the 'yellow scrolls.'

For various reasons, I concluded twenty years ago⁹² that Klong chen pa's works on the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* may have been completed in 1339. I think that there is no trace of Bum thang in the colophons of the parts of the cycle that may be ascribed to him, either as compositions or as *gter ma*. Be that as it may—whether the cycle was all edited and complemented as early as 1339 or whether it was finished only in the decade 1350–1360—in any case it existed prior to the revelation of the *dGongs pa zang thal*. It seems unlikely that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem got Klong chen pa's complete version of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* / *mKha' 'gro yang tig*. But now we can regard as proved that he was aware not only of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* as a whole, which he knew very well, but also of the fact that there were complementary revelations or exegesis by both Rin chen gling pa and Klong chen pa, whether he had a direct, personal access to one, both or none of them.

It is a fact that the *dGongs pa zang thal* is in some regards a more extended version of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*: the appendix of this article roughly displays the portion of the latter that got absorbed in the former. But in the passage just translated, this is quite openly assumed, in a configuration that brings together Padma las 'brel rtsal, Rin chen gling pa and Klong chen pa with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself. Only further philological investigations—isolating a Rin chen gling pa corpus in the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, combining it with what we have of his other rDzogs chen revelations, and systematically comparing this material with the *dGongs pa zang thal* and maybe the *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*—will establish whether, beyond the common *mKha' 'gro snying thig* legacy, traces of Rin chen gling pa's style or ideas, or event fragments of his revelations, can be found within the rGod ldem corpus.

⁹² In my PhD dissertation defended in 2002. Published version: Arguillère 2007, p. 148.

Rin chen gling pa's other revelations in the Rin chen gter mdzod

Two of Rin chen gling pa's own *gter ma* cycles are preserved (at least in anthology form) in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*: a cycle on Nāgarakṣa⁹³ and the above-mentioned rDzogs chen cycle called *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*.⁹⁴

In the case of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*,⁹⁵ there was no continuous lineage down to Kong *sprul*, and, as noted above, the treasure was re-revealed (*yang gter*) by mKhyen brtse'i dbang po.⁹⁶ Indeed, when Gu ru bKras shis, as an appendix to his biography of Rin chen gling pa, mentions his next rebirths, he explains that the incarnation lineage rapidly became exclusively Karma bKa' brgyud pa, so that after some generations there was no custodian for his *gter chos* any longer. As for the Nāgarakṣa cycle, Gu ru bKras shis writes at the end of his biography of Rin chen gling pa that it had become and remained quite popular among all branches of Tibetan Buddhism.⁹⁷

A thorough scrutiny of all the colophons of those two cycles does not bring any result that would be directly exploitable for historical

⁹³ Known as 'Jam dpal klu bdud nā ga rakṣa, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 29, pp. 5-102. Also called *Mañjuśrī King of [Occult] Science—Nāgarakṣa* ('jam dpal rig pa'i rgyal po nā ga rakṣa). It is interesting to note that the first text of this volume, also connected to Nāgarakṣa, ends (p. 3) with a segment of lineage in which we find Padma las 'brel rtsal, though, it seems, not as a *gter ston*, which is very rare: O rgyan padma; mnga' bdag khri srong lde btsan; jo mo [ye shes] mtsho rgyal; mnga' bdag nyang ral pa can [= Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer]; mnga' bdag 'gro mgon; yar lung sprul sku; slob dpon gnas lugs; sprul sku las 'brel rtsal; bsod nams seng ge. To date, I cannot make any precise sense of this—but we remember that we have met a bSod nams seng ge close to Padma las 'brel rtsal above: Khro phu pa bSod nams seng ge, who was also probably one of Klong chen pa's masters.

⁹⁴ In *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 87, pp. 249-446. Fragments of this cycle are also found in the manuscript bdr MW2KG210268. As was already mentioned, the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* is found in the *Padma snying thig* section of this anthology, which means that 'Jam mgon Kong *sprul* and any of his associates or precursors judged that it belongs to the same family, so to say, as the mKha' 'gro snying thig, the dGongs pa zang thal, and a few other cycles, notably by rDo rje gling pa. The *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* should be included within a general philological comparison of the mKha' 'gro snying thig and the dGongs pa zang thal; this becomes even more necessary now that we are getting more persuaded that Rin chen gling pa was the living link between Padma las 'brel rtsal and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, so that Kong *sprul*'s classification appears not as having a mere *typological* value, but as having a, so to say, *genetic* one too.

⁹⁵ This cycle is not represented only in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*: its main *tantra* is included in vol. 14 (pp. 888-952) of the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud*; but in fact, it seems that pp. 1-560 of this volume (26 *tantras* altogether) are all rDzogs chen revelations of Rin chen gling pa, partly belonging to the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* and maybe partly to other cycles. This would require further investigation.

⁹⁶ See above, note 18.

⁹⁷ Op. cit., p. 407: *gter ston 'di'i gter byon nā ga ra kṣa ni gsar snying kun gyi thun mong du gyur te | tā ra nā tha'i sgrubs thabs rin 'byung du'ang 'dug go |*.

research, except maybe for the mention of a disciple who transmitted Rin chen gling pa's lineage, called 'Having the characteristics of / a name of Space' (Nam mkha'i mtshan can)⁹⁸—possibly the Nam mkha' grags pa of the above-studied *Story of g.Yung*. The bits of lineages found in the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* are not of much help in the present state of research, as all the other mentioned persons are so far quite unknown.⁹⁹

The cycle of *Nāgarakṣa—Mañjuśrī Demon for the Nāgas* was found, as Gu ru bKras shis tells us,¹⁰⁰ in Ko ro brag in 'Bri thang; but none of the colophons give us any date—nearly all texts merely ending up with: "The King of Dharma Rin chen gling pa extracted this from the Dharma repository of Ko ro brag in 'Bri thang."¹⁰¹

In the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, similarly, there are no mention of dates, besides the confirmation of the place where it was found,¹⁰² which matches with the biography composed by Gu ru bKras shis.¹⁰³

Rin chen gling pa's A ti rdzogs pa chig chod,
sNying thig or Yang ti?

This *rDzogs chen* cycle would, as such, deserve a complete study for many reasons. One of these, however, is especially relevant for us here. Indeed, in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biography by Nyi ma bzang po (ed.

⁹⁸ *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, e.g., p. 374. We also find one Nam mkha'i ming can in the *Garland of Light*. In the *gTer mdzod* text, this name occurs in a segment of lineage after the *gter ston*: Me ban Rin chen gling pa (Me sgom chos kyi rgyal po etc.) passes it to the same *Mahāsiddha* Nam mkha'i mtshan can and to Rin chen smon lam, one of which transmits it to *Bla ma* A seng pa and to *Slob dpon* Kun byang, who both pass it to *Ras pa* Kun dga'. A bit further (pp. 379-380), we find another little piece of lineage: from Rin chen gling pa to Nam mkha'i mtshan can and to Rin chen smon lam, then from both to A seng pa called "the Lama of 'Go" ('Go'i bla ma) and *Slob dpon* Kun byang, and then from both to *Ras pa* Kun dga', now called *Ras pa* Kun dga' blo gros.—A prophetic text in the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* (*loc. cit.*, pp. 381-386) seems to be an esoteric biography of Rin chen gling pa, but it is so obscure that no information can be directly derived from it.

⁹⁹ I have compiled below a chart of all I could find as direct and indirect (second generation) disciples of Rin chen gling pa.

¹⁰⁰ See translated biography below.

¹⁰¹ *Chos rgyal rin chen gling pas 'bri thang ko ro brag gi chos mdzod nas gdan drangs pa'o*.

¹⁰² E.g., *loc. cit.*, p. 302: *chos rgyal rin chen gling pas rgya gar pha wang rus sbal nag po nas gter nas drangs pa'o*.

¹⁰³ In this text, we find the interesting mention of a disciple of Rin chen gling pa called 'Sunyaratna,' himself the master of the text's compiler (*des bdag la'o* |). A quick search on BDRC reveals the existence of a 14th century Nyi ma rin chen: *Lo tsā ba* Nyi ma rin chen, master of Mus chen Nam mkha'i rnal 'byor. We do have a long (153 p.) biography of Nam mkha'i rnal 'byor: *Chos rje nam mkha' rnal 'byor gyi rnam thar*: bdr: W1KG15888. This text, despite its more globally *zhi byed* coloration, may be mentioning Rin chen gling pa (Img. 34 of the BDRC pdf document: *thog mar rin chen gling du chos rgyal ba'i drung du byon* |).

cit., p. 9), we find the mention that his father, *Slob dpon* Srid bdud 'dul dpal was well-versed in *rdzogs chen bram ze*.

Let us remind the reader of the complex (and not fully stabilized) doxographies of rDzogs chen.¹⁰⁴ As is well known, a general consensus has been reached centuries ago in the rNying ma school to divide rDzogs chen into three sections (*sde*) called *sems sde*, *klong sde* and *man ngag sde*. There is also a general agreement about the subdivision of the *man ngag sde* into four sub-sections, 'outer,' 'inner,' 'secret' and 'innermost secret.' To make things very clear, the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* as well as the *Bi ma snying thig* will all their complements by Klong chen pa belong to the 'innermost secret' cycle. That is also the case of Rin chen gling pa's additions to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and of his *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*—if Klong sprul is right to put it in the same category as the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

But there exists another division into *A ti*, *sPyi ti* and *Yang ti*, in which the four previous categories are considered subdivisions of the first, *A ti*, class. In that case, the *Yang ti* is understood as a cycle of uttermost depth, incommensurate even to the 'innermost secret' section of the *man ngag sde*. It is then further divided into two (or three) cycles: *Yang ti nag po* and *Yang ti bram ze*.

Now, Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* presents itself, although in a somewhat aberrant way, as a cycle belonging to the *Yang ti*, unambiguously identifiable by the fact that it mentions the *Sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor* as the other main cycle of the same category.¹⁰⁵

Here is what we read in the *Omni-Liberating Frontispiece* (*Kun grol them byang*), a piece placed at the beginning of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*:¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ These subdivisions are common knowledge among the rNying ma pas, although what they actually mean and what corpus of texts and practices they actually correspond to may be nebulous in the mind of most. This summary is a simplified rendering of Jean-Luc Achard 2018.1: "Section des Préceptes" (http://www.wikidz.artremy.com/wiki/Section_des_Préceptes) and Achard (2018.2): "Yangti" (<http://www.wikidz.artremy.com/wiki/Yangti>).

¹⁰⁵ How Gu ru Chos dbang's *Yang ti sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor* is supposed to belong to the same category as the *Yang ti nag po* is pretty obscure; but, while Kong sprul placed Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* in the *Padma snying thig* section, he did not hesitate to place Chos dbang's cycle (vol. 90 of the sTod lung edition) side by side with the *Black Quintessence* (vol. 91). While Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* does not mention the latter, it clearly claims, whatever this all may mean, to belong to the same category as the former.

¹⁰⁶ In *Rin chen gter mdzod* (sTod lung), vol. 88, p. 251: *sems sde klong sde gnad kyi sde : de yang gnad kyi sde ru 'dus : gnad kyi sde la phyi skor dang : nang skor gsang skor bla med skor : yang gsang skor dang lnga ru 'dus : de yang yang gsang skor du 'dus : yang gsang thig le'i skor la ni : yang ti sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor dang : yang ti chig chod skor du 'dus : chig chod kun grol chen po ni : kun gyi snying gi nor bu yin : sa ma ya :*

[In *rDzogs chen*,] There is the mind section, the section of abyssal space and the section of the precepts.

This belongs to the section of the precepts.

The section of the precepts boils down to five [subsections:] outer cycle,

inner cycle, secret cycle, unsurpassable cycle,

And innermost secret cycle.

This belongs to the innermost secret cycle.

As for the [quintessential] drop of the innermost secret cycle,

It consists of the *Quintessence of the Union of Buddhas* and

The Self-Sufficient Quintessence.

The Great Single Self-sufficient and Omni-Liberating [Principle]

Is the jewel at the heart of all [Padmasambhava's teaching].

Samaya!

The *Yang ti nag po* is well-known as it is still flourishing nowadays. The *Yang ti sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor* is supposed to consist of Gu ru Chos dbang's *gter ma* of this name. But the *Yang ti bram ze* exists merely as a series of *tantras* (the precise perimeter of which remains slightly floating)¹⁰⁷ without the equivalent of the *gter ma* section of the *Yang ti nag po* that allows for the actual practice of the *tantras* of this cycle which, by themselves, would be as ungraspable as those of connected to the *Yang ti bram ze*.

Of course, there are many reasons why this categorization sounds weird: indeed, the whole cycle has been ascribed to the *Padma snying thig* branch of rDzogs chen (with the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and the *dGongs pa zang thal*, among a few others) by Kong sprul, and not at all to the *Yang ti* branch. What is more, its practice instructions resemble more those of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and *dGongs pa zang thal* than the very specific system of the *Yang ti nag po*. And, in the 17th century already, when there still existed an uninterrupted transmission from the *gter ston*, the description of this cycle in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* does not categorize it as *Yang ti* (but not otherwise either).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ See Arguillère 2022: "Recovering the *tantras* of the *Brahmin Cycle* of the Dzogchen Yangti (*rDzogs chen Yang ti bram ze'i skor*)," in *Northern Treasures Histories*, 09/12/2022, <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/360>.

¹⁰⁸ This passage of the 5th Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received* (vol. 3, pp. 589-590) is extremely similar to the one just translated. It retains the subdivision of the *man ngag sde* into five sections, but without any mention of the *Yang ti* in general or the *Sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor* in particular. Instead, the fifth section is divided into *thig le* and *yang bcud*. In fact, the 5th Dalai Lama is actually quoting the doxographical passage mentioned above, but, for any reason, he removes the mention of the *Yang ti*: *gter ston rin chen gling pas rgya gar gyi pa bong klu bdud rus sbal nag po'i lto ba nas spyang drangs pa'i lta ba'i yang rtse | sgom pa'i rgyal po | spyod pa'i nying khu | dam tshig gi rtsa ba | 'bras bu'i mthar thug dam chos rdzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol zhes pa yo ga rnam gsum las | a ti | de la rgyud lung man ngag gsum las man ngag | de la sems glong [sic] gnad gsum las gnad sde | de la phyi nang gsang ba*

Given the global obscurity of these “aberrant doxographies” of rDzogs chen, as Jean-Luc Achard called them (1999: pp. 54-56) and the fact that the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* would really deserve an in-depth inquiry, we cannot decide on the substance of the question at this stage. However, the weird passage just quoted may have been enough for practitioners of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* who were not scholars to identify themselves, however disputable this might be, as practitioners of *Yang ti bram ze* (understood as ‘this form of *Yang ti* that is not the *Sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor*’, in a time prior to the flourishing of the *Yang ti nag po* in the 15th century).

If this were to be taken seriously, we would then have to shift one generation earlier in the association with Rin chen gling pa: this would indeed imply that rGod ldem’s father [Srid] bdud ’dul [dpal] was already a disciple of his—which would then in turn explain how rGod ldem could have received teachings and transmissions about Nāgarakṣa coming from Rin chen gling pa even as a child.

Rin chen gling pa, Rig ’dzin rGod ldem and Nāgarakṣa

Rin chen Gling pa revealed a large cycle of practice of Nāgarakṣa deemed important enough to be included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (maybe because, as Gu ru bKras shis says, it had become popular in all branches of Tibetan Buddhism).

Now, it is said in Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s biographies¹⁰⁹ that, in his 13th year (1349), he obtained accomplishments through *The Wheel of Activities of Black Leprosy*. This is a *tantra* that is not unknown, as it figures in the *rNying ma rgyud ’bum*.¹¹⁰ Its colophon marks indicate that it is a hidden treasure, but there are no clues about its discoverer that might help to know more about its lineages of transmission.¹¹¹ This

bla med yang gsang lnga las yang gsang | de la thig le dang yang bcud las yang bcud snying gi nor bu’i skor la | ...

¹⁰⁹ Nyi ma bzang po (2015), p. 15: *de nas dgong lo bcu gsum pa la | mdze nag las kyi ’khor lo’i sgo nas khyab bdag ye shes sems dpa’ klu’i srin por bsgrub pas grub pas | ye shes kyi phyag rgya sku la thebs nas mthar phyin no |*. See Stéphane Arguillère, “The First Practice in which Rigdzin Gödem Obtained Signs of Accomplishment as a Teenager,” in *Northern Treasures Histories*, 03/12/2022, <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/91>. On *mdze nag*, see also Roberto Vitali’s article in this volume: it is said that it was that illness that caused *dPon gsas* Khyung rgod rtsal’s passage through death from which he returned as a ‘*das log*’.

¹¹⁰ *mDze nag las kyi ’khor lo*, mTshams brag edition: vol. 45, pp. 156-196, in 14 chapters.

¹¹¹ In the versified *gsan yig* incorporated in *g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpal’s* biography (Karma tshe dbang kun khyab, 1998, pp. 328-379), the title of this *tantra* appears (p. 346) in a long list of teachings he received from an otherwise unknown Yamāntaka specialist, She’u *ston* Śākya ’phel. In this text, the *mDze nag las ’khor* appears in a group of *sādhana* *tantras* for *tantras* previously listed. Although this section of *g.Yung ston pa’s Record of Teachings Received* would deserve further

tantra is about Yamāntaka in the form Nāgarakṣa—to be understood, in this context as ‘Demon for the Nāgas,’ or ‘Guardian against the Nāgas.’ These chthonian spirits are supposed to cause all sorts of illnesses that are put in the general category of ‘leprosy,’ but in fact include all kinds of diseases affecting body tissues that would range in modern medical science from eczema to cancerous tumors. Nāgarakṣa is described as an “extraordinary wrathful form of the deity Mañjuśrī; he is black, either with ten heads and eighteen arms, the principal face being that of a *rākṣasa* and extremely wrathful—or with nine wrathful faces; either way nine snake’s heads move in the air above; on the crown of the central snake’s head is the conqueror Akṣobhya; [the] eight right hands hold [curved] knives or swords; [the] eight left [ones] serpent nooses, while the first pair are together at his heart; his upper body is that of a *rākṣasa*; his back leaning on Mount Meru; his lower body is the tail of a snake, coiled in the depths of the sea; all his mouths are emitting hissing sounds; trampled beneath him is a black *caṇḍāla* (outcaste). He abides amidst a blazing mass of fire.”¹¹²

This form is also found in the treasures of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer and Gu ru Chos dbang, as attested in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. So it can be from any of these traditions that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem received it. But this is not a deity whose cult was ever widespread; it is seldom mentioned in biographies. Still, in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's times, for whatever reason (plague?), it was brought back to the public attention by Rin chen gling pa's *Mañjuśrī Demon for the Nāgas*.

Though much less decisive than all the argument around the *Heart-essence of the Dakini*, this is one more clue: if Rin chen gling pa was one of rGod ldem's masters, it would be all the most natural that he'd practiced a deity connected to one of Rin chen gling pa's revelations.

This being said, regarding the way in which Rin chen gling pa's *Mañjuśrī Demon for the Nāgas* is connected to older tantric material about Nāgarakṣa such as *The Wheel of Activities of Black Leprosy* and about how Rin chen gling pa himself got trained in those, we have no clue. I might as well say that, as far as connecting Rig 'dzin rGod ldem

investigation, it does not seem to include clear information about the source of this whole cycle. However, it nearly rules out the possibility that this *tantra* could be a *gter ma* of Rin chen gling pa: first, if I am not mistaken, Rin chen gling pa was a few years younger than g.Yung ston pa and it would not make much sense that there is an intermediary link (She'u ston Śākya 'phel) in the lineage; and, what is more, it is clear from this immense list of teachings received by g.Yung ston pa that his tastes leaned more towards the venerable traditions of either *bKa' ma* or the ancient *gter chos* of Nyang ral or Chos dbang, apart from the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* which he received from Rang byung rdo rje.

¹¹² This description is taken from BDRc:

<https://library.bdr.io/show/bdr:T489?s=q%3D%2522nA%2520ga%2520rak%252Bsha%2522~1%26lg%3Dbo-x-ewts%26t%3DTopic%26n%3D1>.

to Rin chen gling pa is concerned, the Nāgarakṣa practice is rather something that would be better explained in rGod ldem's life through the hypothesis of an early association with Rin chen gling pa than a solid argument tending to prove that association. It may only bring a slightly higher degree of probability to the central line of argument of the present article, which rests mainly on the question of the transmission of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and the obvious knowledge of Rin chen gling pa's contribution to it, which appears in the *dGongs pa zang thal*.

*Rin chen gling pa's presence in
Klong chen pa (1308–1364)'s writings*

Rin chen gling pa is mentioned as a living, active person (teaching the *Heart-Essence of the Ḍākinī*) in a prophecy that Klong chen pa received from the *ḍākinī* Vajra Lamp of Turquoise (rDo rje g.yu sgron ma) in a vision that can be dated around 1336–1337.¹¹³

This prophecy does not appear explicitly in what can be regarded as the most trustworthy and authoritative biography of Klong chen pa, authored by his direct disciple Chos grags bzang po (ca. 1300–ca. 1370),¹¹⁴ which merely alludes to the general idea in a verse: "...established by the *Ḍākinīs* as the master of [this] Dharma,"¹¹⁵ *i.e.*, the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*. But we have a more detailed record of the vision in a text of dubious authenticity,¹¹⁶ which is, however, regarded

¹¹³ Arguillère 2007: p. 99.

¹¹⁴ The *Kun mkhyen dri med 'od zer gyi rnam thar mthong ma don ldan*, in *Kun mkhyen klong chen rab 'byams kyi rnam thar* (1994) or in *Dri med 'od zer* 2009, vol. 4, pp. 181–235.

¹¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, in *Kun mkhyen klong chen rab 'byams kyi rnam thar* (1994), p. 184.

¹¹⁶ The *mThong snang 'od kyi drwa ba*, in *Dri med 'od zer* 2009, vol. 8, pp. 155–194. Cf. Arguillère 2007: p. 14, n. 13 and p. 183 n. 507 on the very dubious character of its attribution to Klong chen pa. The prophecy is on p. 178. The recorded event can of course not be posterior to Rang byung rdo rje's death (1339), and the vision alludes to Klong chen pa reaching his 30th year (*gzhan don 'ur 'ur | da lo sun cu thob zer |*), which, by the Tibetan system, would mean 1337. The details of the prophecy may have been made up, but surely by direct disciples on the basis of stories reported to have been told by Klong chen pa himself—hence the ambiguous presentation as an autobiography, but that, in places, shifts to the third person. So, although the *mThong snang 'od kyi drwa ba* cannot be what it pretends to be—a 'secret autobiography' of Klong chen pa—I still believe that it was composed by people close enough to the event that they could not be enormously mistaken about recent chronology. It tells us a lot, at least, about the degree of hostility that developed against Rin chen gling pa among Klong chen pa's followers, probably after both had passed away. Ironically, its words seem to echo two verses by Rin chen gling pa in the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* (*loc. cit.*, p. 317): "If the *ḍākinīs* do not like it, such was not my intention and I beg them to bear with it" (*de la mkha' 'gro ma dges* (sic for *dga'?*) *na | rang 'dod med pas zod par gsol |*).

among the rNying ma pas as a spiritual autobiography of Klong chen pa himself.

Nyoshül Khenpo incorporated this polemical visionary dialogue in his history of rDzogs chen.¹¹⁷

[*Klong chen pa*:] “Well, since there seem to be so many people explaining these [*mKha' 'gro snying thig*] teachings, why should I teach? There are, for instance, teachers such as Karmapa and Rin chen gling pa.”

[*g.Yu sgron ma*:] “The way they are teaching it doesn't suit me. A clay pot also has a handle, but why would that be enough? There absolutely has to be a custodian of the teachings.”

[*Klong chen pa*] then asked: “How about Rin chen gling pa's revelations?”

[*g.Yu sgron ma*:]—“Whatever they are, they are not the pure [*Heart-essence*].”

This final mention of Rin chen gling pa's treasures is quite interesting, insofar as, in context, it sounds pretty incoherent, or motivated by personal hostility alone—unless it alludes to *gter ma* revelations relating to, or inserted into, the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*—which then sheds an interesting light on our perplexities about how to understand *KN 1984's* colophons and the texts of this corpus that seem not to be included in Klong chen pa's edition.

Other than this rather dubious *dākinīs'* prophecy around 1337, there is a mention of Rin chen gling pa elsewhere in this biographical literature—and, this time, it is from a much safer source: the biography authored by Chos grags bzang po. The passage is interesting as the event it reports belongs to the end of Klong chen pa's life (1360 at the earliest¹¹⁸) and because the text seems (though the Tibetan verb forms are not absolutely unequivocal) to refer to Rin chen gling pa as to a

¹¹⁷ Richard Barron's translation (Nyoshul Khenpo 2005, p. 111) is mistaken; Christian Bruyat (Padmakara)'s French version (2016, p. 178) is much better and I have followed his understanding of the text, especially regarding the pun about the double meaning of *lung* (oral transmission of a teaching / handle of a pot). Here is the original text of the *mThong snang 'od kyi drwa ba: 'o na snying tig* (sic) '*di bshad pa mang po 'dug pa ngas bshad ci dgos | lung byed pa karma pa dang | rin chen gling pa la sogs pa 'dug pa la brjod pas | de rnams kyi bshad pa la nged mi dga' | lung dag rdza la yang yod de des gar chog | | bdag po re yod pas de dgos pa yin mod zer ro | rin chen gling pa'i gter rnams ci 'dra yin dris pas | yin pa yin dag po med zer ro |*. Maybe the text would make better sense (and be less insulting) if we corrected *dag po med*, grammatically weird (or dialectal?) in Tibetan, as *bdag po med*, more consistent with the context—meaning that whatever Rin chen gling pa's *gter chos* may be, still the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* lacks a custodian (*bdag po*), a proper lineage holder.

¹¹⁸ See Arguillère (2007): p. 126.

living individual:¹¹⁹

When the Myriarch rDo rje rgyal mtshan told him about receiving the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī*,¹²⁰ [Klong chen pa] answered: “You say that you are going to Kong po to [see] *Chos rgyal Rin chen gling pa*, [please] do so!”—saying that, he sent him [to Rin chen gling pa and later commented]: “The fact that you have received the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* from both Rin chen gling pa of Kong po and from the treasure discoverer’s direct disciple, *sPrul sku Legs ldan pa* [= *rGyal sras Legs pa*] of Dwags po Byar (?) is good. From now on, gossips will not occur about [whether] you received purely or impurely the lineage. But, absolutely [speaking], the master of this Dharma is myself.”

Given that the event recorded cannot be earlier than 1360, if I am not mistaken when I read this text as meaning that Rin chen gling pa is active, knowing that all sources consistently assert that he died in his 80th year, this would then imply that Rin chen gling pa’s ox year of birth is 1289 (and not the previous ox year 1277) and that he thus did not pass away before 1368—four years after Klong chen pa’s death, and even after Rig ’dzin rGod ldem revealed his own treasure.

We can see that the tone in this text is much less childishly hostile than in the imaginary dialogue between Klong chen pa and g.Yu sgron ma. Both texts suggest that although Klong chen pa is now the most famous Nyingma figure of the fourteenth century, the now largely forgotten Rin chen gling pa was considered a much more legitimate

¹¹⁹ Chos grags bzang po (direct disciple and biographer of Klong chen pa), *Kun mkhyen dri med ’od zer gyi rnam thar mthong ba don ldan*, in *Kun mkhyen dri med ’od zer gyi rnam thar* (1994), pp. 194-195: *khri dpon rdo rje rgyal mtshan gyis mkha’ ’gro snying thig* (sic) *gi zhu ba byas pas bshad par byas nas yod | khyod mkha’ ’gro snying thig ’tshol ba la kong por chos rgyal rin chen gling pa’i rtsar ’gro ba yin zer bzhin ’dug pa | de ltar gyis byas nas btang ba yin | kong po rin chen gling pa dang | dwags po byar na gter ston gyi dngos slob sprul sku legs ldan pa gnyis la | mkha’ ’gro snying thig zhus nas ’dug pa legs da gdong rgyud dag ma dag gi gtam mi yong ba yin | don dam par chos ’di’i bdag po nga yin |*, etc. In *Profusion de la vaste sphère* (Arguillère 2007, pp. 126-127), I gave a French translation of a rewritten version from Nyoshül Khenpo’s *History of the rDzogs chen sNying thig* (in English, see Nyoshül Khenpo 2005, p. 117). But Chos grags bzang po’s version, though slightly more difficult to understand, is richer in details.

¹²⁰ Barron (Nyoshül Khenpo 2005, p. 117) understands otherwise, following Nyoshül Khenpo’s reformulation of Chos grags bzang po’s narrative: “On that occasion, Gyalsé Zöpa [*rGyal sras bZod pa grags pa*] was explaining *The Heart Drop of the Dākinī* to Tripön Dorjé Gyaltzen.” In Barron’s understanding, Klong chen pa is congratulating *rGyal sras bZod pa* for having *already* received the *mKha’ ’gro snying thig* from both *rGyal sras Legs pa* and Rin chen gling pa. We know for a fact that he did from his own *mKha’ ’gro snying thig gi lo rgyus rin po che’i phreng ba* (in *Dri med ’od zer* 2009, vol. 6, pp. 188-214). But this text does not allow us to decide whether he received it first from Klong chen pa or from Rin chen gling pa. On *rGyal sras bZod pa grags pa*, see Arguillère 2007: pp. 126, 128, 134 and 184.

authority on the *Heart-Essence of Dākinī*.¹²¹ This may have made him a very natural choice to be Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's rDzogs chen master, sometime between the late 1340s and the mid-1360s.

Incidentally, it would be an exaggeration to say that a purely negative image of Rin chen gling pa was unanimously propagated in Klong chen pa's circle. In the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* there is a text by one of his students, *Bya bral ba bZod pa*—better known as *rGyal sras bZod pa grags pa*—in which the author mentions Rin chen gling pa without any negative comment as one of his masters, with a list of teachings received, including the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.¹²²

Who is 'Legs pa' in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biographies?

This question didn't come to me spontaneously but was suggested by Jay Valentine when he read an early version of this article, and I think it makes perfect sense. In Nyi ma bzang po's biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, a figure named Legs pa appears twice, with no other identifying information. If Rin chen gling pa had a close relationship with rGod ldem, we are naturally inclined to wonder whether there might also have been a connection between rGod ldem and *rGyal sras Legs pa*, to whom everything suggests that Rin chen gling pa was close and who lived to a fairly advanced age (1290–1366/7).

The first occurrence of the name Legs pa comes immediately after the mention of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's father's death when rGod ldem was just a few years old (in the early 1340s, we can presume). Then, Nyi ma bzang po says, his mother taught him reading and writing, while “the brothers *Se ston dPal chen 'bum pa*¹²³ and Legs pa,” or maybe (less likely): “*Se ston dPal chen 'bum* and [rGod ldem's] brother Legs pa” provided him with other forms of education.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Cf. Richard Barron (Nyoshul Khenpo 2005, p. 108), in another visionary dialogue with a *dākinī*: “So won't people think me a charlatan?” ... A not insignificant part of Klong chen pa's biographies seems to have been written with the aim of demonstrating his legitimacy as a master of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, which shows that this was not so obvious in his own time.

¹²² *mKha' 'gro snying thig gi lo rgyus rin po che'i phreng ba*, p. 213: *chos rgyal rin chen gling pa las | mkha' 'gro snying thig gi dbang khrid dang | rādzogs chen chig chod kun grol | phyag rgya chen po ma rig mun sel | bla ma yid bzhin nor bu'i skor | gu ru zhi drag | tshē dpag med la sogs gdams pa mang du zhus |*

¹²³ The name *Se ston dPal chen 'bum* occurs here and there with the mention that he was a powerful *sngags pa*, but without any mention of 'Legs pa.' We also do not know if rGod ldem had siblings who could have helped bringing him up as a child.

¹²⁴ Nyi ma bzang po 2015, p. 14: *Se ston dPal chen 'bum pa dang | legs pa sku mched gnyis kyis | sku'i yon tan slob nyer mdzad pa'i slob dpon mdzad |*. I think that this is more likely to mean “the two *Se ston* brothers, *dPal chen 'bum* and Legs pa,” because the phrase *sku mched gnyis* would be much too ambiguous if it was intended to mean “and his [rGod ldem's] brother.” Hence, if this Legs pa was *rGyal sras Legs*

This passage is of course not very convincing as, here, Legs pa could be anybody. More meaningful (though quite enigmatic) is a passage further in the text (p. 41) in which Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, after having unearthed his *gter ma*, writes a letter to a *Bla ma* Legs pa to ask him what to think of some frightening things that occurred.¹²⁵ Now, this is not simply someone who gives him elementary education, but a master he consults in his thirties, while fully trained himself and having become a *gter ston*. This Legs pa must then be someone regarded as a lama with great competence regarding all the difficulties a *gter ston* may face—which fits quite well with *rGyal sras* Legs pa, who was surely still alive when rGod ldem opened Zang zang lha brag, although he was to die within a few months.

These elements are of course too tenuous to constitute even the beginnings of a presumption. We mention them for the record, however, so as not to lose what could be a clue at the start of an investigation such as the one here on Rin chen gling pa.

As Kong *sprul* says in the *gTer ston brgya rtsa*, in his time, nearly all the lineages of *rGyal sras* Legs pa's own *gter chos* were lost.¹²⁶ As for whatever is available of Rin chen gling pa's discoveries, it would definitely be interesting to compare any surviving portions of these that may be found¹²⁷ to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *gter ma*, in case they might have become absorbed in it in the same way as large sections of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* were included in the *dGongs pa zang thal*.

After all this background research has been presented, let us now shift to Gu ru bKras shis's biography of Rin chen gling pa.¹²⁸

The life of Me ban Rin chen gling pa

After this [gTer ston Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan],¹²⁹ not remaining [in this world], will have passed into *nirvāṇa*,

pa, this would imply that he'd belonged to the Se clan, while he is always said to be of the *rus pa* of Sho. But we remember that we saw him once connected to the Se (see n. 64 above). This all requires further inquiry.

¹²⁵ *Bla ma legs pa ba la zhu yig btang pas 'jur por da dung mdzad par zhu* |...

¹²⁶ *gTer ston brgya rtsa*, p. 522: *Deng sang chos rgyun gzhan bzhugs pa ma mthong | pra 'bebs dang bsang brngan tsam gyi lung rgyun thos shing kam tshang gi bstan srung dpal ldan zhing skyong dbang po'i sgrub skor rnam gtso bor 'di las brgyud par snang ngo* |.

¹²⁷ *gTer ston brgya rtsa* (p. 521) mentions: 1. *rDzogs chen 'khor ba chig chod*; 2. *Phyag chen sangs rgyas gsal 'debs*; 3. *'Khor ba bde chen lam byed*; 4. *sNying thig 'das rjes rnam gsum*; 5. *Thugs sgrub thod phreng rtsa gsum dril sgrub*, all found in 1322 (*chu pho khyi'i lo*); and then 6. *Zhing skyong gi skor*, found in Tsā ri, without any chronological indication.

¹²⁸ Gu ru bkra shis 1990, pp. 404-407.

¹²⁹ *gTer ston* Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan. This prophecy occurs in more or less the same form in O rgyan gling pa's, Ratna gling pa's, and Padma gling pa's revealed biographies of Padmasambhava.

The expectation of the people of Central [Tibet] will unite,¹³⁰ the Earth
[and the] Mongols¹³¹ will be afraid,
The teachings of a demonic emanation with evil behavior will spread
[and last] for a long time.¹³²
Signs having occurred of [the need] not to leave [on the spot], but
[instead] to extract
This treasure of Ko ro brag in 'Bri thang,¹³³
A treasure discoverer called Rin chen gling pa will appear.¹³⁴

As for this treasure discoverer Rin chen gling pa:¹³⁵

This being who has authority on that treasure
Is now the foremost one of my, [Padmasambhava of] Oḍḍyāna's,
retinue.
This Indian scholar Prajñākara¹³⁶ will,
As the final [one] of five rebirths, assume a body in the frontier of rDo
and Tibet,
So as to guide ordinary transmigrating beings

¹³⁰ In Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bkra shis' *Zab khyad gter ma'i lo rgyus gter ston chos 'byung nor bu'i 'phreng ba*, this is explained as referring to the unification of Central Tibet by Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1371). On all this context, see L. W. J. van der Kujip 2003.

¹³¹ According to a very insightful suggestion of Tenpa Tsering Batsang (oral communication, 08/08/2023), this is a play on words: the obscure phrase *sa hor* actually refers to the Sa skya pas (*sa*, "earth" = Sa skya) backed by the Mongols (*hor*).

¹³² Given that the two previous obscure allusions refer to the political situation, this may allude to 'Bri gung *sgom chen* Kun rin, Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan's enemy and Klong chen pa's patron. Indeed, in a prophecy ascribed to Padmasambhava that appears in Klong chen pa's biographies, *sGom chen* Kun rin is called "a son of the demons," but I suspect (Arguillère 2007, pp. 114–120) that this does not at all reflect Klong chen pa's sincere opinion on him: the actual history has surely been rewritten by his biographers to present Klong chen pa's association with *sGom chen* Kun rin as an act of pure charity meant to prevent a genuinely evil person from falling into hell. I for one am convinced that Klong chen pa believed (maybe naively, but philosophers often lack strategic and tactic insight in politics) in *sGom chen* Kun rin's chances of political success. It is difficult, however, to understand how the sentence: "the teachings of an evilly behaving demon emanation will spread [and last] for a long time" could apply to him. Another (maybe more likely) possibility would be for the "demonic emanation with evil behavior" to be Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan himself, and his "teachings... lasting for a long time" to be the Phag mo gru pa tradition.

¹³³ 'Bri thang Ko ro brag.

¹³⁴ *De nyid mi gnas mya ngan 'das 'og tu : dbus pa'i 'dun ma gcig dril sa hor skrag : sdig spyod bdud sprul bstan pa rgyas yun ring : 'bri thang ko ro brag gi gter kha 'di : mi bzhag 'don pa'i rtags de bstan nas 'byung : gter ston rin chen gling pa zhes bya 'byung .:*

¹³⁵ This prophecy is found in the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, p. 381.

¹³⁶ Shes rab 'byung gnas: I suppose this is Prajñākaragupta, a.k.a. Alaṅkāra Upādhyāya, the logician. Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bkra shis is very rich in details about Rin chen gling pa's past lives.

[As] the great *bodhisattva*, the final rebirth of Handsome.¹³⁷
 Then when he will pass away, and as the sign that he will not return
 [to this world],
 At the end of his life, all [his] faculties will be obscured,¹³⁸
 He will not take a rebirth but will enjoy Sukhāvātī above.¹³⁹

And:

If my—[Padmasambhava of] Oḍḍyāna's—son with the name Ratna¹⁴⁰
 Spends a long time (*bskyangs*) studying, reflecting and memorizing, it
 will be beneficial.¹⁴¹
 This emanated son will be like a flower born from a lake
 And [his] predestined disciples will be like bees looking for the nectar
 [of this flower].
 It will be [for them] like escaping from the veil of *samaya* violation
 [and the] stain of broken *samayas*.
 He will be like the powerful ink-pestle (?) that invites the *dākinīs*.
 He will be like a storm that sweeps away the dust of those with
 erroneous views.
 So inasmuch as one makes a connection with him, for the tasks that
 one has to complete,
 Whatever prayer one makes, he will accomplish all aims.
 The son of Oḍḍyāna with such and other characteristics and qualities
 That are beyond what can be written down
 Will be famous under [the name] Rin chen gling pa.
 May predestined beings meet him!¹⁴²
 This prophesied mind-emanation of [Padmasambhava of] Oḍḍyāna

¹³⁷ This is a female figure occurring in the *sTag rna'i rtogs pa brjod pa* or '*Phags pa stag rna'i mdo* (*Sārdūlakarṇa-avadāna*, a section of the *Divyāvadāna*)—in *sDe dge bKa' 'gyur*, vol. 76, BDRC: img. 469 | 1—img. 559. See Andy Rotman 2017.

¹³⁸ This might mean that he became deaf and / or blind by the end of his long life.

¹³⁹ *gTer ston rin chen gling pa ni | gter 'di dbang ba'i las can skyes bu de : da lta o rgyan nga yi 'khor gyi mchog : rgya gar mkhas pa shes rab 'byung gnas 'di : skye ba lnga yi mtha' ma rdo bod mtshams : tha mal 'gro ba 'dren phyir mi lus len : gzugs bzang skyes mtha'i byang chub sems dpa' che : de nas tshes 'phos phyir mi ldog pa'i rtags : tshes yi mjug la dbang po gang rung 'grib : skye ba mi len bde ba can tu ya spyod : ces dang...*

¹⁴⁰ I.e., rin chen.

¹⁴¹ Rin chen gling pa was a scholarly monk, at least during the first part of his life.

¹⁴² *O rgyan nga yi thugs sras ratna'i mtshan : thos bsam 'dzin pa bskyangs na don ldan 'gyur : sprul pa'i sras ni mtsho skyes me tog 'dra : skal ldan bu slob bung ba rtsi 'tshol 'dra : nyams grib dam sel dus min sad dang 'dra : mkha' 'gro'i gdan 'dren dbang chen snag rgyug 'dra : log lta can rnam rlung nag 'tshub ma 'dra : de phyir 'brel tshad 'phrin las rdzogs bya'i don : gsol ba gang bltab de yis don kun 'grub : de la sogs pa'i mtshan nyid yon tan rnam : yi ger bkod pas mi langs o rgyan sras : rin chen gling pa zhes su grags pa yi : las can skyes bu de dang 'di phrad shog : .*

was born after five rebirths of the divine son.¹⁴³ His place of birth was Tshe grong in Lo ro dkar po.¹⁴⁴ His father was the physician (*lha rje*) dGos rdor 'bum and his mother was the Nepalese g.Yang bum pa. His birth year was that of the ox.¹⁴⁵

Brag dkar rtsa so *sprul sku* adds that it is said he was mute during his first three years because of some undescribed defilement.¹⁴⁶ Then he adds that he received such things as the *Yang grol phur pa* from his grandfather.¹⁴⁷

When he was playing as a child, on a rock, he produced a complete imprint of his body. Then having entered the door of Dharma,¹⁴⁸ he received the name Rin chen rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po. Having gone to the seat (*gdan sa*, monastery) of sTeng pa [rTing pa?] *lo tsā ba*, the holy place of dGe ri in Lower gNyal, he made a thorough study of all that concerns philosophy. From a lama in Drug dril Monastery in Lo ro, he received all the instructions from Ras chung pa, practiced them and had infinite pure visions.¹⁴⁹

Then at some point he went on pilgrimage to Lhasa and one night, in a dream, he saw a white man telling him: "Next morning there is something important to do." That morning, a crippled *yogi* called *Byang sems Kun dga'*, saying that he was from Ding ri in La stod, asked a lot of questions to him: "[Are you from] this Lo ro that is beyond Dwags po to the East?" In the same way, he asked him about such things as Ko ro brag in 'Bri thang, about his father's clan being

¹⁴³ In the *lo rgyus* of his preserved treasures, it is plain that Rin chen gling pa was supposed to be an incarnation of King Khri srong lde'u btsan. This is probably what is meant by "divine son."

¹⁴⁴ "A place in the East of g.Yu ru called rDo" (*g.yu ru smad kyi sa cha rdo*) according to Brag dkar rtsa so *sprul sku* (2011, vol. 13, p. 538).

¹⁴⁵ *Ces lung bstan pa'i o rgyan thugs sprul lha sras skye ba lnga mthar sku 'khrungs pa ste | 'khrungs yul lo ro dkar po'i tshe grong yab lha rje dgos rdor 'bum | yum bal mo g.yang 'bum pa'i sras su 'khrungs | dgung snying glang yin |*

¹⁴⁶ *Loc. cit.*: *De 'phral gsung byon yang grib kyis lo gsum zhal lkugs |*

¹⁴⁷ *Loc. cit.*: *Yang grol phur pa sogs rang gi mes po la gsan |*. I could not identify what is Yang grol phur pa. *Yang phur* normally means "Yang dag He ru ka and Vajrakīla," but I cannot make sense of *grol* in that context.

¹⁴⁸ Rin chen gling pa was a monk at least in some part of his life: the prophecy in the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* (*loc. cit.*, p. 382) also describes him as such: *Sākya'i bstan pa skyong phyir rab 'byung nas | ...* But further passages seem to suggest that his later behavior was more open (*ma nges*) and even alludes women (*skye ba dman pa'i bud med*).

¹⁴⁹ *Byis pa'i dus sku rtsed mdzad pas | pha bong [Kong sprul : pha wang] la sku yongs rdzogs kyi rjes gsal bar byung | de nas chos sgor zhugs | mtshan rin chen rgyal mtshan dpal bzang por btags | steng pa [Kong sprul : rting pa] lo tstsha ba'i gdan sa gnyal smad dge ri'i gnas su [Kong sprul : dmyal smad bai ro'i chos grwar] byon nas | mtshan nyid kyi phyogs la gsan pa mthar phyin mdzad | lo ro drug dril dgon par bla ma zhig las | ras chung pa'i gdams pa yongs rdzogs zhus nas | sgrub pa mdzad pas dag snang dpag med shar |*

[from] Mi nyag,¹⁵⁰ their [original] region being Tshe las 'gras and whether his name was Rin chen rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po.¹⁵¹

As he happened to match with what was asked, this *yogi* told him: "I have the prophetic guide for Padmasambhava of Oḍḍyāna's profound mind-treasure [to be] extracted from the top of the red rock of sPa sgro btsal, hidden in Ko ro brag of 'Bri thang. But I [can] not get there. You are the man that fits the treasure prophecy, and as this is so, I offer you [the prophetic guide]." Then he offered him a paper scroll wrapped into silk from under his armpit. It happened to be the prophetic guide.¹⁵²

[Rin chen gling pa] went to Ko ro brag¹⁵³ and in a cave there was a rock in which copper nails were embedded as signs of the hidden treasure. There was a slightly protruding triangular part of the rock¹⁵⁴ and from it he extracted a dark red chest of rigid leather. In this leather chest were five compartments (*mdzod lnga*),¹⁵⁵ [each of] which had five divisions,¹⁵⁶ among which in the east was the cycle endowed

¹⁵⁰ The more standard spelling *me ban* "literally means me-nyag ban-chung, the little monk of the Menyak/Minyak" (Jean-Luc Achard, personal communication, 11/08/2023).

¹⁵¹ *De nas skabs shig lha sa skor du byon pas | nub gcig mnal lam du | mi dkar po gcig gis nang bar don grub par yod zer ba rnis | sang zhogs pa der | la stod ding ri nas yin zer ba'i rnal 'byor ba 'theng po byang sems kun dga' zer ba zhig gis | dri ba rgyas par byas te | dwags po'i smad nas phar lo ro zer ba e yod dang | de bzhin du de nas 'bri thang ko ro brag dang | rus mi nyag lung pa tshe las gras pa | mtshan rin chen rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po sogs | ...* The story is a bit clearer in *Brag dkar sprul sku* (2011, vol. 13, p. 538): *lha sar byon nas thugs rje chen po'i drung du bzhugs skabs la stod ding ri nas 'ong zer ba'i rnal 'byor pa rkang pa 'theng po | byang sems kun dga' bya ba yin zer nas... Byang sems Kun dga' is a figure associated with the beginnings of the Zhi byed tradition in the 12th century (see e.g. Davidson 2005, pp. 151, 248, 330). This is why Brag dkar rta so sprul sku writes: "saying he was..." (yin zer).*

¹⁵² *Ji ltar dris pa bzhin byung bas | rnal 'byor pa des nga la spa gro btsal gyi brag dmar steng nas byung ba'i o rgyan padma'i dgongs gter zab mo 'bri thang ko ro brag la sbas yod pa'i kha byang nga la yod kyang | nga der ma slebs | khyed gter lung dang mthun pa'i mi de yin 'dug pas 'bul zer nas | mchan khung nas dar gyis dril ba'i shog ril cig phul ba | gter gyi kha byang du byung |.* *Brag dkar sprul sku* (2011, vol. 13, p. 539) adds a confirmation to these prophetic indications: *gzigs pas thugs tshom | nangs par don 'grub ces de'i sngon gong thugs rje chen po byi dkar gzugs kyis lung bstan rnam dang yang mthun |.*

¹⁵³ As we will see below, this has to be in 1310 or 1311.

¹⁵⁴ *Ko ro brag tu byon brag phug nang na gter rtags zangs gzer btab pa'i pha bong la | brag chol gru gsum pa zhig 'dug pa byas pa'i nang nas | bse sgrom smug po gdan drangs | bse sgrom nang du mdzod lnga mtshon phyir ral mig lnga yod pa [Kong sprul: re'u mig lnga yod pa]'i shar nas khyad par lnga ldan gyi skor |.* I thank Tenpa Tsering Batsang for his suggestion about the meaning of *brag chol gru gsum pa zhig 'dug pa* as meaning that something was slightly protruding (as in a relief).

¹⁵⁵ Does it not sound as the prototype of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's findings in Zang zang lha brag?

¹⁵⁶ *Brag dkar sprul sku* (2011, vol. 13, pp. 539 sq.) provides the most complete description of the *gter ma* with its 25 subdivisions. But a large part of the texts seems to be lost and the list is as such not of any help for our inquiry about possible connections with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

with the five special qualities; in the south, the cycle of the five jewel [-like] *sādhana*s; in the west, the fivefold cycle of the wish-fulfilling auspicious connections; in the north, the fivefold cycle of the fierce *mantras*; and in the center, the fivefold jewel [-like] cycle of the prophecies. Else there were self-multiplying relics of the Sugata and pearl-like relics, as well as nectar from Guru [Padmasambhava], *rakta* and *amṛta* from [Ye shes] mtsho rgyal and [other] blessed substances, plus a catalog [of all this]. He took [from the cache] infinitely many blessed treasures.¹⁵⁷

Also, from the rock that looks like a *dharmodaya*¹⁵⁸ in Ko ro brag in 'Bri thang, [it is then that] he extracted the *dharmas* of *Mañjuśrī King of [Occult] Science—Nāgarakṣa*.

On his way back, the lords of the treasure [displayed] storms and [other] wonders [that] he subdued through [his] ungrasping View, after what they spontaneously vanished. Then, having sealed [himself into a retreat cell] in the Eastern Monastery (*shar dgon*) of his homeland (*'khrungs yul*), he planted the victory banner of single-focused practice. Experiences and realizations flourished increasingly and infinite pure visions arose."¹⁵⁹

Here is where we should insert the narrative of his interactions with Padma las 'brel rtsal, if Gu ru bKra shis and Brag dkar rta so *sprul sku* are right to assume that it was Rin chen gling pa who gave Padma las 'brel rtsal the prophetic guide to his treasures around 1311. This, indeed, does not appear in any of the biographic accounts of Rin chen gling pa himself, but only in some of those of Padma las 'brel rtsal. If this is right, these figures, that we may tend to imagine as dignified old masters, were in fact in the prime of youth: Rin chen gling pa, Padma las 'brel rtsal, and *rGyal sras* Legs pa (here called Legs pa rgyal

¹⁵⁷ *IHo nas sgrub thabs nor bu skor lnga | nub nas rten 'brel yid bzhin nor bu'i skor lnga | byang nas drag sngags nor bu'i skor lnga | dbus nas kha byang lung bstan nor bu'i skor lnga | gzhan yang bde bar gshegs pa'i 'phel gdung dang | ring bsrel rnam pa gsum | gu ru'i bdud rtsi | mtsho rgyal gyi rakta amṛta dang dam rdzas dkar chag dang bcas pa spyang drangs shing byin rlabs kyi gter dpag tu med pa bzhes |.*

¹⁵⁸ A triangle or a pair of interlocking triangles forming a figure similar to the Star of David. KN 1984 mentions (p. 122) 'Bri ldang (*sic*) chos 'byung as being the birthplace of Padma las 'brel rtsal (see below for an edition and a translation of the text), so chos 'byung could merely be a toponym here also. Brag chos 'byung 'dra ba nas would then mean: "from such places as Chos 'byung in Brag [lung]". This "Brag" is also of great interest to us, as we remember that rGod ldem's rDzogs chen teacher is called Brag lung pa mkhas btsun Rin chen dpal. Where actually is Brag lung is unclear to us, but it seems to be somewhere between Tibet and Bhutan.

¹⁵⁹ *Yang 'bri thang ko ro brag gi brag chos 'byung 'dra ba nas 'jam dpal rig pa'i rgyal po nā ga ra kṣa'i chos rnam spyang drangs | tshur byon pa'i lam khar | gter bdag rnam kyi 'tshub dang cho 'phrul byung ba rnam 'dzin med kyi lta bas zil gyis mnan pas rang zhi la song | de nas 'khrungs yul gyi shar dgon par 'dag sbyar byas nas rtse gcig tu bsgrubs pa'i rgyal mtshan btsugs pas | nyams rtogs gong 'phel du rgyas shing | dag pa'i snang ba dpag med shar |.*

mtshan) were in their early twenties. Remembering this gives us more of the adventurous flavor of these treasure-hunting lives and also explains why they were not always regarded as trustworthy—as in the case of Padma las 'brel rtsal, who seems not to have met with unanimous approval and whose life is said to have been shortened by adverse circumstances.

Nyoshül Khenpo offers additional pieces of information on events that took place right after Padma las 'brel rtsal discovered his treasure (1313):¹⁶⁰

[Padma las 'brel rtsal] then returned to the cliff of Ko ro brag on [the plateau of] 'Bri thang and spent seven months in [meditation] practice. He actually met the Guru [Padmasambhava] and his consort [Ye shes mtsho rgyal], who bestowed their blessings by [granting him] the realization of the mind-transmission (*dgongs brgyud*). During that time, he conferred on Legs pa rgyal mtshan all the oral transmissions for his spiritual instructions.¹⁶¹

[Padma las 'brel rtsal then went on to a site in front of the cliff of] mChod rten brag and spent three months [practicing there] while Legs pa rgyal mtshan stayed below [the cliff]. Then the Dharma king Rin chen gling pa came to see [Padma las 'brel rtsal]. Legs pa rgyal mtshan responded to Rin chen gling pa: “As the precious *gter ston* is currently in retreat, there is no chance of having an audience with him.”¹⁶²

“In that case,” Rin chen gling pa immediately replied, “you must transmit to me all the oral transmissions you have received from him.” Thus, *rGyal sras* Legs pa rgyal mtshan gave the entire body of oral transmissions for the *Heart Essence of the Dākinī* to Rin chen gling pa.¹⁶³

Once *sPrul sku* Las 'brel rtsal had finished his retreat at mChod rten brag, he journeyed to lower gNyal and they¹⁶⁴ met near Se chen 'bum pa. *sPrul sku* Las 'brel rtsal asked, “Where are you two headed?”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ This is Richard Barron's translation (Nyoshül Khenpo 2005, pp. 72-73), emended for the sake of consistency on the basis of the Tibetan text (Nyoshul Khenpo 1996, pp. 195-197).

¹⁶¹ *De nas log ste 'brin (sic) thang ko ro brag la sgrub pa yang zla ba bdun byas | gu ru yab yum dngos su mjal te | dgongs rgyud rtogs pas byin gyis brlabs par mdzad do | | de dus legs pa rgyal mtshan la bka' lung thams cad yongs su rdzogs par gnanng |*

¹⁶² *Yang mchod rten brag mdun du sgrub pa la byon nas zla ba gsum bzhugs pa'i dus | legs pa rgyal mtshan shod na yod dus | chos rgyal [196] rin chen gling pa mjal du byon te | de dus rin chen gling pa la | legs pa rgyal mtshan gyis gsungs pa | da lta gter ston rin po che sku mtshams la bzhugs 'dug pas mjal kha meā gsungs pa dang | ...*

¹⁶³ *'O na khyod kyis bka' lung rnams gang thob pa nga la byed dgos zhus pas | rgyal sras legs pas rin chen gling pa la mkha' 'gro snying thig gi bka' lung rnams rdzogs par byas so |*

¹⁶⁴ Padma las 'brel rtsal, Rin chen gling pa and *rGyal sras* Legs pa.

¹⁶⁵ *De nas sprul sku las 'brel rtsal sku mtshams grol nas | gnyal smad se chen 'bum pa'i drung du 'phrad byung nas | sprul sku las 'brel rtsal gyi zhal nas | khyed gnyis gar 'gro ba yin gsungs pa dang | ...*

"We have come to meet [you,] Lord of the Dharma," they replied.¹⁶⁶ "Well, then, come [with me.] I'm going to 'Bri thang."¹⁶⁷ The teacher and students then journeyed towards the plateau. [On the way,] they stayed at Chos gling Monastery, where [Padma las 'brel rtsal] gave Rin chen gling pa the key to *gter mas* concealed within a black boulder shaped like a tortoise on a mountain path on the road to China.¹⁶⁸ He said: "My son, take this key and retrieve the *gter mas* concealed in that boulder. [Use them to] ensure benefit for beings."¹⁶⁹

Although Nyoshul Khenpo does not give his sources, we have a completely different—and much older—version of the association between Padma las 'brel rtsal and Rin chen gling pa in a text of KN 1984, the *Bla ma rgyud pa'i rim pa* (pp. 119-124). After a narrative about the origins of this cycle and the way it was hidden as a treasure, here is the way it recounts its discovery:

Then the emanation-body endowed with the [proper] karma and predestinate [was] Rin chen tshul rdor [= Padma las 'brel rtsal], who was born [1291] in Chos 'byung in 'Bri thang.¹⁷⁰ In his 16th year [1306], after this was prophesied [by] *Bla ma mkha' 'gro*,¹⁷¹ the karma of [his past] training [or: purification] was revived and he realized all phenomena to be the *dharmakāya*—his own mind.¹⁷² As the masters of the place, the *dākinīs*, the *mātrkas* and the [guardian] lords of the treasure had prophesied to this master, the prophetic guide and the key befell to him.¹⁷³ In the water-female-ox year [1313], in the night of

¹⁶⁶ *Nged gnyis chos rje mjal du yong ba yin zhus pas* | ...

¹⁶⁷ Nyoshul Khenpo writes 'Brin thang, but I have modified the spelling to be consistent with what has been used in the rest of this paper (we have already found also the spelling: 'Bri ldang).

¹⁶⁸ Sic. India, not China, everywhere in all other sources.

¹⁶⁹ 'O na 'deng zhig nged rang 'brin (sic) thang du 'gro ba yin gsungs nas | dpon slob rnam rim gyis 'brin thang du byon | | chos gling dgon par bzhugs pa'i dus | rin chen gling pa la | rgya nag (sic) la kha'i pha wang rus sbal nag po'i gter gyi lde'u mig yang gtad nas | 'o bu khyod kyis lde mig [197] | 'di khyer la | pha wang rus sbal nag po'i gter rnam thon la | sems can gyi don gyis shig ces gsungs so | |.

¹⁷⁰ *De nas sprul pa'i sku las dang bskal pa ldan pa* : 'bri ldang (sic) chos 'byung du sku 'khrungs pa'i : rin chen tshul dor zhes bya ba de :.

¹⁷¹ This seems to be the name of a (female?) lama, as in the next sentence we read: *bla ma de la*.

¹⁷² *dGung lo bcu drug la bla (?) ma mkha' 'gro lung stan* (sic) nas : sbyangs pa'i las sad : 'khor 'das kyi chos thams cad rang sems chos skur rtogs pa'i... I read *rtogs pa'i*, of which I cannot make clear sense otherwise, as *rtogs pas*. This manuscript is full of spelling mistakes and the meaning often needs to be conjectured.

¹⁷³ *Bla ma de la* : gzhi bdag mkha' 'gro ma mongs (ma mo?) gter bdag rnam kyi (sic for kyis?) lung stan (sic) nas : kha byang lde mig phyag tu son :. It is difficult to guess whether *bla ma de la* refers to Padma las 'brel rtsal or to the *bla ma mkha' 'gro* of the previous sentence. Be that as it may, as the author / discoverer of the text that we are now reading is clearly Rin chen gling pa, it is curious that he does not mention himself

27th of the last autumn month, having offered a *gaṇacakra* to the master, the tutelary deity and the *dākinīs* [and another one] to the lords of the treasure and made supplication prayers, he extracted the treasure.¹⁷⁴ It was prophesied by Padmasambhava of Oḍḍyāna that this emanated master would have twenty-one disciples.¹⁷⁵ Among them, one was called the Dharma King Rin chen gling pa.¹⁷⁶

From this point, we can shift back to Gu ru bKras shis's narrative. With this complementary piece of information, we have the feeling that Rin chen gling pa then left Padma las 'brel rtsal, maybe never to see him again, and went on to discover further *gter ma*. It must have been between 1313 (discovery of the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī*) and the death of Padma Las 'brel rtsal¹⁷⁷ that Rin chen gling pa unearthed his next treasures:

Then he went to extract the treasure from the rock looking like a black tortoise in India, enduring infinite hardships [on the way, in places] such as steep-sided gorges.
According to the prophetic guide:¹⁷⁸

May this be found by an emanation of the Noble One, endowed
with courage,
[Born in] the year of the ox or that of the dragon, named *ratna*,
The predestined one.
Let the non-predestined ones not get this [treasure].
That which was hidden [on the] eighth [month of] the horse year,
Extracted [on the] eighth [month of] the horse year,
Should be spread [on the] eighth [month of] the dog year.¹⁷⁹

in case in was really the one who handed the prophetic guide and the key to Padma las 'brel rtsal.

¹⁷⁴ *Chu mo glang gi lo : ston zla mtha' chung gi nyi shu bdun gyi mtshan mo : bla ma yi dam mkha' 'gro'i tshogs : gter bdag la tshogs mchod 'phul (sic) nas : gsol 'debs zhu ba byas nas gter nas gdan 'drangs so :*

¹⁷⁵ *Bla ma sprul sku de la dad pa can gyi slob ma nyi shu rtsa gcig 'byung bar : u rgyan padmas lung bstan pa las :...*

¹⁷⁶ *Chos kyi rgyal po rin chen gling pa zhes bya ba la...* The next sentence in the text would hardly be intelligible at all, if we did not have Gu ru bKra shis' biography of Rin chen gling pa, in which the toponym *sha 'ug stag sgo*, etc., later appears in connection with other discoveries of his, after Padma las 'brel rtsal's death. I have thus inserted the passage in the relevant place of Rin chen gling pa's life.

¹⁷⁷ Brag dkar rtsa so *sprul sku* and Sha gzugs pa Ngag dbang bkra shis both have Padma las 'brel rtsal die in his 29th year, which would be 1319.

¹⁷⁸ *Slar rgya gar gyi pha bong rus sbal nag po nas gter bzhes par lam 'phrang sogs dka' ba dpag med spyad nas byon | lung bstan kha byang las |...*

¹⁷⁹ *'Phags pa'i sprul pa snying stobs can | | glang ngam 'brug lo ratna'i ming | | skal ldan gcig gis rnyed par shog | skal med rnams dang ma phrad cig | rta'i lo brgyad la sbas pa | rta'i lo brgyad la thon | khyi'i lo brgyad la spel |* The translation is very hypothetical (based on a suggestion of Jean-Luc Achard, confirmed by Tenpa Tsering Batsang).

Accordingly, he went to India. From under a rock surrounded by venomous snakes¹⁸⁰ which looked like a frog,¹⁸¹ marked with the sign of the treasure—a crossed *vajra*—there was, as the outer recipient, a two-headed frog [made out of] sealing wax, one of the heads of which was on its back.¹⁸² In this head there was a copper vase from which he extracted five things: *The Heart-Essence (thugs bcud) of Oḍḍyāna [Padmasambhava], the Master's Blissful Three Kāyas*,¹⁸³ *The Great [Cycle] of rDzogs chen, the Single [principle] that Liberates All*,¹⁸⁴ *The Great [Cycle] of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities in which Great Bliss is Fully Complete; The Dharma Cycle of the Great Array of Sacred Substances*; plus a silver *vajra* the size of a nail.¹⁸⁵

As a trace [of his passage], he put five treasure books of profound Dharma. In this regard, in this treasure prophecy [we read]:

As a substitute for these treasures that [you] will extract,
 Insert¹⁸⁶ five old treasure books about five topics
 And [the other] appropriate treasure-substitutes.
 At the time when the old and new treasures will come in contact,
 Move [in] (*spos*) the old treasure-books of the five cycles
 afterwards.¹⁸⁷
 [Thanks to this], obstacles will be removed and realizations will
 come.
 If those treasure books of mine were divulged,
 This would spell disaster for the unholy (*dam med*) treasure-
 revealer.
 So do not spread the treasure texts [but] hide them.

¹⁸⁰ Another element also found with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem—there is a lot of reptilian symbolism around Zang zang lha brag.

¹⁸¹ In the longer versions (Sha gzugs pa and Brag dkar rtso so *sprul sku*), the *gter ma* found under a rock looking like a black tortoise and the one discovered in a rock looking like a frog or toad are more distinct.

¹⁸² I thank Tenpa Tsering Batsang for helping me to understand what the creature looked like.

¹⁸³ The *Bla ma sku gsum bde ba chen po'i gsang rgyud*, root *tantra* of this cycle, is found in vol. 14 of the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud*, pp. 534-560. The discovery is ascribed to "Rad na gling pa," but, in this case, it is clearly Rin chen gling pa and this text must be counted among his revelations.

¹⁸⁴ This is the *A ti [rdzogs pa] chig chod kun grol*. It must be noted that it is revealed *after* the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* and at a time when Rin chen gling pa has already received it fully.

¹⁸⁵ *Zhes gsungs pa dang mthun par rgya gar du phebs | dug sbrul gyis bskor ba'i pha bong sbal ba 'dra ba la gter mtshan rdo rje rgya gram gyis mtshan pa'i 'og nas | phyi snod la cha'i sbal pa mgo gnyis pa mgo gcig 'phongs la yod pa zhig gi mgo rang las zang bum nang nas | o rgyan thugs bcud bla ma sku [gsum] bde ba chen po rdzogs chen chig chod kun grol chen mo zhi khro bde chen kun rdzogs chen mo dam rdzas rol pa chen po'i chos skor dngul gyi rdo rje sen gang pa gcig dang lnga 'dug pa bton nas | ...*

¹⁸⁶ *bZhugs*, in the Tibetan text, is a misnomer for *bcug*.

¹⁸⁷ I.e., replace the new ones by them as soon as you can.

Keep fast to the treasure, *sa mā yā* (sic).¹⁸⁸

So did he accordingly. On his way back, he made a retreat (*sgrub pa mdzad*) in the *ḍākinī*'s cave of the Bear's Den Ravine in Sha'ug sTag mgo.

In this treasure cache of Sha'ug sTag mgo—a very pleasant great forest at the border between Tibet and the Himalayan regions (*Mon*)—there was a rock looking like a five-pointed *vajra* with a protruding *svāstika* drawing as a *gter ma* mark. Within a *vajra* [made of] sealing wax, one cubit long, and a rock-crystal spiral, [there was] a yellow scroll, luminous and perfumed, in which there was what is called *The Three Sealed [Cycles]*.¹⁸⁹

[These are:] the *Three Sādhanas* [marked] with the Seal [of secrecy], that is, the *sādhanas* for the master, the deity (*yi dam*) and the *ḍākinī*, with their [ritual] texts and the practical know-how (*lag len*); *The Completion Phase with the Seal* [of secrecy], with the practice manual and instructions for their gradual, simultaneous and non-dual¹⁹⁰ implementation; and *The [Book of] Prophecies Marked by the Seal* [of Secrecy], with its general, special and specific (*spyi bye brag khyad par gsum*) predictions. He extracted all these that were [there] and inserted [in their concealment place], as treasure-substitutes, the paper scrolls of the black tortoise,¹⁹¹ also writing [a text] such as the one above.¹⁹²

Then, according to Ye shes mtsho rgyal's prophecies and because he was invited by Kong btsun de mo,¹⁹³ he went to Kong po, and rDo rje legs pa in person presented him with a treasure-key—so he

¹⁸⁸ *Shul du zab chos lnga'i gter dpe bcug ste | de yang gter lung de nyid las | gter 'di phyung ba'i gter tshab tu | | skor lnga'i gter dpe rnying pa dang | | gter tshab ji ltar rigs par bzhugs | | gter kha gsar rnying phrad dus su | | dpe rnying slad kyi gter du spos | | bar chad sel zhing dngos grub 'byung | | nga yi gter dpe 'chol ba na | | gter ston dam med 'phung bar 'gyur | | de bas gter yig ma spel sbos | | gter chos 'chongs shig sa mā yā |*

¹⁸⁹ *Zhes gsungs pa ltar mdzad | tshur byon sha 'ug stag sgo'i dom tshang rong gi mkha' 'gro phug tu sgrub pa mdzad | mon bod gnyis kyi sa mtshams nags khrod chen po shin tu gnyen pa sha 'ug stag sgo zhes pa'i gter nas rdo rje rtse lnga 'dra ba'i brag la gter mtshan g.yung drung ris yod pa chol bur bton nas | la cha'i rdo rje rtse lnga 'dom gang pa dang shel rdo'i gril shing la dar gyis dkris pa'i shog ser dri 'od dang ldan pa la bka' rgya ma rnam gsum zhes pa...*

¹⁹⁰ *gNyis med*, i.e., in the context, neither simultaneous nor gradual.

¹⁹¹ It seems that in each new treasure-cache, he re-hides the original 'yellow scrolls' of his previous findings, instead of keeping them in a way that would allow him to show them, as Padma las 'brel rtsal did to Karmapa Rang byung rdo rje. The text may mean that re-concealing the *gter chos* after having copied / deciphered them is a protection against obstacles; maybe this is intended as an explanation of Padma las 'brel rtsal's short life. Be that as it may, we remember how important is this issue of the *gter tshab* in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biographies, even when it is not about re-hiding *gter ma* material.

¹⁹² *sGrub thabs bka' rgya ma | bla ma yi dam mkha' 'gro'i sgrub thabs yi ge lag len dang bcas pa | rdzogs rim bka' rgya ma la | rim gyis cig car gnyis med gsum gyi khrid yig zhal gdams dang bcas pa | lung bstan bka' rgya ma las | spyi dang bye brag khyad par gsum gyis lung bstan dang bcas pa | thun mong lo rgyus dang bcas pa rnam 'dug pa bton | gter tshab tu rus sbal nag po'i shog ser dang | gzhan yang sngar 'dra bar bris nas bcug.*

¹⁹³ Kong btsun de mo is rDo rje legs pa's consort.

discovered¹⁹⁴ many *gter ma*.¹⁹⁵

Here we meet with an event that is alluded to (pp. 122 *sq.*) in the *Bla ma brgyud pa'i lo rgyus* of KN 1984 (pp. 119-124), at the point at which we dropped it:

When The Dharma King Rin chen gling pa was [making a retreat] in the Crystal Cave—the abode of Padmasambhava—of the Bear's Den Ravine in Sha'ug sTag mgo, in a bird year [1321?¹⁹⁶], on the full moon of the month of lesser miracles (*cho 'phrul chung ngu*), the son of [Padmasambhava of] Odḍyāna, Padma las 'brel rtsal, came from Khecara in Odḍyāna. He bestowed [to Rin chen gling pa] the transmission of the meaning of the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* with oral transmission (*bka' lung*), the empowerments [and the] scriptures (*bka'*). As for the transmission of the words, taking [in his hands the texts of] the peaceful *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* and the wrathful *gNod sbyin dmar nag*, [he said:] “The books will come from the region (*phyogs*) of Dwags po.¹⁹⁷ When you will practice them, practice this long-life *sādhana* in order to dispel the obstacles. It is of utmost importance as a *samaya* between you and me. I think that each of these will come [into your possession] from the three sacred abodes of the Vidyādhara in Khecara within twenty-three [days?] from now. If [you] think thus, you [are] the son of Odḍyāna [Padmasambhava, your] father.” Having said so, he went [back] to Odḍyāna. Then later in this year [or: in the next year?], though I¹⁹⁸ had no plan of going to

¹⁹⁴ *sPyan drangs*, literally: ‘invited.’

¹⁹⁵ *gZhan yang mtsho rgyal gyi lung bstan dang | kong btsun de mo'i spyan drangs pa la brten nas | kong por phebs rdo rje legs pas gter gyi lde mig mngon sum du phul bas zab gter mang po spyan drangs |.*

¹⁹⁶ There are some more bird years to come in Rin chen gling pa's long life, but 1321 would be quite natural: Padma las 'brel rtsal had passed away not long before.

¹⁹⁷ As we have seen in Klong chen pa's biography, it is *rGyal sras* Legs pa is associated with Dwags po, so it makes sense that the texts of which Rin chen gling pa receives a visionary transmission were kept in Dwags po. This detail in the biography corroborates my feeling that the text of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* were so rare that even the closest disciples of Padma las 'brel rtsal did not have a (complete) set of them. This further reinforces the need for a personal, human link between the *gter ston* and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. It is difficult to say when the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* became more available: of course, it is very often mentioned in biographies of *rnying ma* masters; but even nowadays, its root-*tantra*, the *Klong gsal 'bar ba nyi ma'i rgyud* (in *mKhan po Mun sel's bKa ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 110, pp. 3-349), is not very well established: Tulku Thondup himself, working (2001) on *sPrul sku Tshul lo's* practice manual for the *dGongs pa zang thal*, was unable to spot in the published version of the *tantra* about 30% of the quotations found in that manual—quotations actually all borrowed from Klong chen pa's *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin*, which itself copies them from various texts of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*. The version of the *Klong gsal 'bar ba* that was available to Padma las 'brel rtsal (and to Klong chen pa—if any) was clearly somewhat different from the text we have.

¹⁹⁸ It is clearly Rin chen gling pa speaking now.

Dwags po, *Slob dpon* bSod nams having invited me, I went to Dwags po, and in accordance with the prophecy we [just] mentioned, Se skya'o bla ma Tshar steng pa and *dBon po* Tshul dbang came carrying the two volumes of *rDzogs chen* [the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*] and *gNod sbyin*. As they had requested it, I corrected [the deciphering of the *dākinī* scripts]. This was [an account] of the succession of the lineage masters. *lthih*. Triple seal.¹⁹⁹

Let us now return to Gu ru bKra shis' biography of Rin chen gling pa:

He erected the victory banner of practice in Brag nang of Kong po, in Tsa ri gsar ma and in the Sky Fortress of Brag dmar ze chung and brought his practice to completion. Then he came back to Lo ro and took possession of some monasteries such as Rin chen lding. He took broad responsibility for the welfare of beings. Then, he moved to Tsa ri and Kong po, in which he extracted profound treasures, practiced meditation, and took care of beings. Thus did he increase his benefits to beings.²⁰⁰

'Jam mgon Kong *sprul* rephrases Gu ru bKras shis at this point, saying that "in Tsa ri and Kong po, he extracted profound treasures, practiced meditation, and was [chosen] by Padma las 'brel rtsal as the master of his Dharma (*chos bdag*)."²⁰¹ But this would mean that he did all his travels and further discoveries (the black tortoise rock, etc.) just between 1313 and 1319. 'Jam mgon Kong *sprul* may be right as regards Rin chen gling pa being one of Padma las 'brel rtsal's *chos bdag*, but it seems that this detail is misplaced in the storyline.

¹⁹⁹ *Chos kyi rgyal po rin chen gling pa zhes bya ba la sha 'ug stag sgo dom tshang rong u rgyan gzhugs gnas shel gyi phug tu : bya'i lo chu (sic) 'phrul chung ngu'i nya zla'i mtshan mo : u rgyan thugs sras padma las 'brel rtsal dbu (sic) rgyan mkha' spyod nas byon nas : mKha' 'gro snying thig gi don [b]rgyud ka (sic) lung dbang bka' dang bcas pa gnang : tshigs rgyud du zhi ba rdzogs chen mkha' 'gro snying thig dang drag po gnod sbyin dmar nag gi bsgrub bkor (sic) longs pa : dpe dwags po'i phyogs nas 'ong ngo : de gnyis nyams su len pa'i tshe : bar chad sel phyir tshe bsgrub 'di nyams su long cig : khyed rang dang nga gnyis... (?) g.yar dam du rdeng du cig : de re u rgyan nam mkha' spyod rig 'dzin gnas gsum yul nas : mi'i lo ga 'dir lo ni nyi shu [rtsa] gsum nas 'ong ngo sems : de bzhin dgongs na u rgyan pha yi bu : gsungs nas u rgyan du gshegs so : de nas phyi'i de'i lo la : bdag dags por 'gro rtsis med pa gcig la : slob dpon bsod nams gyis gdan drangs nas dags por byon nas : sngar gyi lung bstan dang mthun par : rdzogs chen dang gnod sbyin gyi dpe gnyis : se [?] skya'o bla ma tshar steng pa dang : dpon po tshul dbang gis 'khyer byung ba la : zhal zhus nas zhu dag byas so : bla ma rgyud pa'i rim pa'o : lthih : rgya rgya rgya .:*

²⁰⁰ *Kong po brag nang | tsa ri gsar ma | brag dmar ze chung nam mkha' rdzong rnams su sgrub pa'i rgyal mtshan btsugs te nyams len mthar phyin par mdzad | slar lo ror byon | rin chen lding sogs dgon gnas 'ga' re bzung | 'gro don rgya cher bskyangs | de nas tsa ri dang gong phyogs [Kong sprul: kong po] la byon | zab gter bzhes pa | sgrub pa mdzad pa | 'gro don skyong ba sogs zung 'brel du mdzad | 'gro phan kyang che bar byung |.*

²⁰¹ *gZhan yang tsa ri dang kong po sogs su byon nas zab gter bzhes pa | sgrub pa mdzad pa | padma las 'brel rtsal gyi zab chos kyi bdag po gnang ba |.*

Here is the end of Gu ru bKras shis's narrative:

He was said to be the rebirth of *paṇḍita* Prajñākara²⁰² and was someone who, besides revealing profound treasures, was also a scholar and [not merely] a practitioner. There is also a vast and profound story of his travel to Zangs mdog dpal ri [in a] pure vision. In bSam yas, he made prophecies to the Dharma Lord Rang byung rdo rje, offered him all his teachings and made him the master of his Dharma (*chos bdag*).²⁰³ He passed away in his eightieth year [1368] in Lo ro.²⁰⁴

Gu ru bKras shis then proceeds with the next two incarnations of Rin chen gling pa, explaining how his treasures, except for the Nāgarakṣa cycle, fell into disuse.

Rin chen gling pa's disciples: the colophons in ms. bdr:MW2KG210268, in Rin chen gter mdzod, and in the 5th Dalai Lama's gSan yig

All sources pertaining to Rin chen gling pa's life would not have been fully explored if we do not consider the documents available regarding his successors. I have found, so far, three main sources: the texts preserved in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*; the 5th Dalai Lama's *Record of Teaching Received* and a manuscript (bdr:MW2KG210268) which I have not yet described.

Compiling the information scattered in those three sources brings interesting results: although many figures are indeed obscure in the present state of research, some of them are not unknown to us from our research on Byang gter, as very similar names or sequences of names occur among the successors of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem: Nam mkha'i mtshan can (who could possibly be the same person as the Nam mkha' grags pa of the *g.Yung gi lo rgyus* explored above), 'Vajraśrī'i mtshan can' who could be sNgags 'chang rDo rje dpal—these two figures possibly being the same person under two names. As an indirect disciple of Rin chen gling pa, we also find *gSang bdag dDe chen lhun grub* (bdr:P10106) who seems to be an important figure—one of the first early masters to be found not only in Byang gter lineages, but also in other lineages (for example, according to the 5th Dalai Lama's

²⁰² See note 136 above.

²⁰³ This might require further inquiry, as, if I am not mistaken, Rin chen gling pa outlived Rang byung rdo rje by nearly thirty years.

²⁰⁴ *Di paṇḍita shes rab 'byung gnas kyi skye bar grags shing | zab gter bzhes pa gcig pur ma zad mkhas grub gnyis ka 'dzoms pa zhiḡ yin te | zangs mdog dpal rir byon pa'i dag snang gi lo rgyus kyang zab cing rgya che bar yod | bSam yas su chos rje rang byung rdo rje la lung bstan dang chos ka rnam phul zhiḡ chos bdag tu mnga' gsol | dgung lo brgyad cu pa la lo ror sku gshegs so | |.*

Record of Teachings Received). Me'i Śā kya bzang po (bdr: P1698) may be the first Yol mo *sprul sku*, well-known in the Northern Treasures lineages, although this is less likely, because he seems to be a bit late to be associated with a direct disciple of Rin chen gling pa. All of this will require further investigation, but overall this lends further support to the idea of a close connection between the milieu of which Rin chen gling pa was a central figure and that which later gravitated around Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.²⁰⁵

MW2KG210268 is a manuscript containing selections of the two aforementioned cycles found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, without much additional material. It must be ancient, as in the few elements of lineages found in some of the colophons, there is rarely more than one person, called *rtsa ba'i bla ma*, after Rin chen gling pa. A careful examination of these colophons, however, provides us with a series of personal and close disciples which, strangely, are not mentioned in any of the available biographies.

The six texts selected from the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* present a coherent picture, with the same names coming over and over again. A first text²⁰⁶ mentions Nam mkha' mtshan can as the successor of Rin chen gling pa,²⁰⁷ and then *bdag*, copyist or commissioner of the manuscript. A colophon added to the second text,²⁰⁸ tells us that the *tantra* was transmitted to *sPrul sku* Nam mkha' mtshan can and then to *sGrub rgyud* Śā kya bzang po who seems to be the copyist or the commissioner of the manuscript. Then come two more texts²⁰⁹ that display exactly the same information.

The fifth text²¹⁰ is, however, different, as here, Rin chen gling pa's successor in the lineage is "Vajraśrī'i *mtshan can*" (rDo rje dpal) and then "myself" (*bdag*). Some more words in cursive script show that this "myself" is Me'i Śā kya bzang po, but the intermediary link (Vajraśrī) is unclear. Either Śā kya bzang po was a student of two different

²⁰⁵ The inclusion of Zur haṃ Śā kya 'byung gnas as an indirect disciple of Rin chen gling pa for the Nāgarakṣa cycle is noteworthy, given his significant role within the rNying ma lineage during his lifetime (refer to Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: pp. 669-672). However, information about his birth and death dates remain unknown. But this is less relevant to us here as there is no known connection of this master with the Northern Treasures.

²⁰⁶ *Khog dbub stong thun* (pp. 3-24).

²⁰⁷ It would be important to verify whether Nam mkha' grags pa, the author of the *g.Yung gi lo rgyus*, is the same person as this Nam mkha'i mtshan can / ming can. This would further confirm the idea of an association between Rin chen gling pa and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem; but we could then wonder why Rin chen gling pa is not mentioned (at least under a recognizable name) in the *g.Yung gi lo rgyus*.

²⁰⁸ The first *rDzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol chen po'i rgyud* (pp. 25-107).

²⁰⁹ The second *Khog dbub stong thun* (pp. 109-130) and the second *rDzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol chen po'i rgyud* (pp. 131-213).

²¹⁰ *Dug lnga lam 'khyer* (pp. 215-233).

disciples of Rin chen gling pa, or Nam mkha' mtshan can be the same person as Vajraśrī.

In the sixth text,²¹¹ Rin chen gling pa's successor in the colophon calls himself *Ri khrod* Nam mkha' 'od.

If now we shift to the Nāgarakṣa cycle, its colophons bring different, but also very interesting, information: the colophon of the first text²¹² mentions a person called bsTan 'dzin 'gyur med. The second²¹³ and third²¹⁴ texts in this section do not provide any lineage information. The fourth²¹⁵ inform us that it was transmitted by Rin chen gling pa to bsTan 'dzin 'gyur med, with this additional precision: Zur *ban*. The fifth²¹⁶ was transmitted to *Shanting pha and from him to Zur haṃ Śā kya 'byung gnas. The sixth text²¹⁷ does not convey further historical indications.²¹⁸

The third series of texts included in ms. MW2KG210268 does not seem to be connected to Rin chen gling pa and I will not describe it here.²¹⁹

The *Rin chen gter mdzod* (sTod lung edition, p. 273) version of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* also has a colophon with an unknown disciple of Rin chen gling pa: "Su rya ratna,"²²⁰ followed by an unknown "myself" (*bdag*—Mus chen Nam mkha' rnal 'byor?). Su rya ratna must be *Lo tsā ba Nyi ma rin chen* (bdr: PORK684).

In the same edition, on p. 299, we read a segment of a lineage prayer in which we find, after *Chos rgyal* Rin chen gling pa, Nam mkha'

²¹¹ *Bar do sku gsum me long* (pp. 235-248).

²¹² *Klu bdud 'bum gyi ti ta* (?) *gsang ba'i rgyud* | *bsrung zlog gsang ba'i rgyud* (pp. 249-266), concluded by a strange eye-shaped amulet drawing.

²¹³ *Klu'i srin po nā ga rakṣa'i bsnyen sgrub gdon pa sum 'joms byed gnam lcags gter zhes rgyud man ngag gsal* (pp. 267-288).

²¹⁴ *Khyab bdag na ga rag sha* (sic) *las* | *khyung nag me'i 'khor lo* (pp. 289-309).

²¹⁵ *Khyab bdag nā ga rakṣa'i nor sgrub* (pp. 311-315), which ends with very beautiful line drawings of elephants carrying a magical jewel on their back.

²¹⁶ This text (pp. 316-317) does not have a clear title but is concluded by a fine line-drawing representing Nāgarakṣa in an unusual form that is identified as an illustration of the *Klu'i nor sgrub rin chen gter bum*, which I think can be regarded as the title of this text.

²¹⁷ *'Jam dpal nā ga rakṣa'i lo brgyus* (sic—pp. 319-320), without *gter ma* marks, but is presented in its colophon as having been discovered by Rin chen gling pa.

²¹⁸ Except for the mention that the book belongs to *rGyal sras* 'Jigs med, an indication that also occurs in the final group of texts of this manuscript, and which may in fact be the only reason why the last group of texts have been bound with Rin chen gling pa materials.

²¹⁹ The pp. 327-420 contain a cycle connected to Mahākāla. The connection with Rin chen gling pa is not obvious; he seems to be mentioned, however, in a barely readable colophon on p. 389. The name that appears more often is that of an unknown *sNgags 'chang* Rin chen 'bum; that of Rin chen gling pa does not show up at all in the short lineage account for that cycle (p. 332).

²²⁰ See note 103 above.

mtshan can and then *rtsa ba'i bla ma* (Me'i Śā kya bzang po?).

In the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* (vol. 3, pp. 590-595) we find three lineages stemming from Rin chen gling pa. Here is the first one, for the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*:²²¹

1. *Me ban gTer ston* Rin chen gling pa |
2. *Bla ma* bSod nams rgyal ba |
3. *Chos rje* bDe chen lhun grub |
4. *rTogs ldan* Nyi ma'i mtshan |
5. *rJe btsun* Surya Candra |
6. *mTshungs med* Sangs rgyas 'od zer |

Then comes one for a *Guru drag dmar cycle* (which seems to be lost):

1. *gTer ston* Rin chen gling pa |
2. *mKhas grub* Byang 'dzin pa |
3. *rJe dKon mchog* rgyal mtshan |
4. *mKhas grub* bSod nams bzang po |
5. *dPang ston* Chos kyi rgyal po |
6. *dPang ston* bSod nams rgyal mtshan |

Then we have one lineage for Nāgarakṣa:

1. *gTer ston* Rin chen gling pa |
2. *Bla ma* Nam mkha' 'od zer |
3. *rJe* Chos dbyings pa |
4. *Bla ma* dPal bzang pa |
5. *Rin po che* Nam mkha' legs pa |
6. *Slob dpon* Phun tshogs |

Though some of these figures could be the same persons with different names, we thus reach the following global result:

	His Disciples	His grand-disciples
Rin chen gling pa		Rin chen smon lam
	<i>sPrul sku</i> Nam mkha' mtshan can	
	Vajraśīr'i <i>mtshan can</i> (rDo rje dpal)	Me'i Śā kya bzang po

²²¹ In all these lineages, I have removed everything that comes before Rin chen gling pa, which has no useful historical value, and have kept only the first five generations after him, because whatever comes after that cannot lead us to any useful information about the *gter ston*.

	<i>bla ma</i> Nam mkha' 'od zer	<i>rJe</i> Chos dbyings pa
	Zur <i>ban</i> bsTan 'dzin 'gyur med	?
	Shanting pha	Zur ham Śā kya 'byung gnas
	Su nya ratna (<i>Lo tsā ba</i> Nyi ma rin chen?)	<i>bDag</i> (?)
	<i>Bla ma</i> bSod nams rgyal ba	<i>Chos rje</i> bDe chen lhun grub
	<i>mKhas grub</i> Byang 'dzin pa	<i>rJe</i> dKon chog rgyal mtshan
	<i>Ri khrod</i> Nam mkha' 'od	?

sPrul sku Nam mkha' mtshan can have a name that is very similar to that of the author of the *g.Yung gi lo rgyus*.

Perhaps it is not entirely extravagant to speculate that Vajraśrī may be *sNgags 'chang* rDo rje dpal, a direct disciple of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

If then (1) Nam mkha'i mtshan can be the same person as Nam mkha' grags pa (the author of the *g.Yung gi lo rgyus* explored above) and if (2) rDo rje dpal was another of his names, this might explain the title of the *g.Yung gi lo rgyus* and the fact that this text is placed next to writings by *g.Yung ston pa* in the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*: both being called rDo rje dpal and being connected to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, the editors may easily have conflated the earlier (*g.Yung ston pa*) and later (Nam mkha' grags pa) rDo rje dpal.

It is very likely that the successor of *Bla ma* bSod nams rgyal ba, *bDe chen lhun grub*, is *gSang bdag* bDe chen lhun grub, recorded as a disciple of rGod ldem's son rNam rgyal mgon po (1399–1424).

I am not convinced that Me'i Śā kya bzang po is the first Yol mo *sprul sku*, well-known in the Northern Treasures lineages, because this all seems to be too early (he was a direct master to the two mNga' ris brothers).

But if this were the case, then our Nam mkha' mtshan could be one of his two recorded masters "having space in their name:" Kong chen Nam mkha' dpal ldan or *Thugs sras* Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. The second one is clearly connected to the Byang gter circles.

Conclusion

In this article I hope to have shown, if not formally proven, that there are strong reasons to believe that Rin chen gling pa was Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's rDzogs chen master. This in itself, although it may sound rather microscopic to non-specialists, is a point of great importance for 'jangterology,' insofar as it helps to tear rGod ldem away from the traditional portrayal of him as an autonomous genius, completely

isolated from any context, or at least one whose connections with his surrounding social and religious world (except for the Gung Thang royalty) were unknown and presumably insignificant.

But the more general issue is also to present, in the spirit of Cathy Cantwell's remarkable work on the liturgical compositions of Dūdjom Rinpoche (2020), or of Jean-Luc Achard (1999)'s pioneering remarks on textual borrowing in rDzogs chen literature, the idea that the *gter ston*, however their revelations come to them, must also somehow receive, through ordinary human channels, most of the components of the texts they are called upon to unearth. This encompasses not solely a question of spiritual transmission as explicitly recognized in Tibetan tradition, but also the genesis of *gter ma* literature itself, which, in many cases, can only be comprehended as a reiteration of pre-existing texts, albeit with subtle variations, suggesting that in numerous instances, an individual corpus was handed down and underwent a gradual organic evolution over time. This is distant from our notion of 'revelation,' which typically evokes the notion of *absolute novelty*.

In this sense, establishing the filiation between Padma las 'brel rtsal, Rin chen gling pa, Klong chen pa and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem means first and foremost giving a historical, human meaning to the evidence that strikes every reader of the texts without quite explaining why: The *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī*, the *dGongs pa zang thal*, maybe Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, and no doubt many other texts more or less belonging to the same family (here, what 'Jam mgon Kong sprul refers to as the *Padma snying thig*; but of course the *bKa' brgyad* literature, etc., could be approached in the same manner), could be perceived more accurately as *diverse states or versions of the same text or corpus, revealed and deciphered by distinct individuals*, instead of being considered as entirely separate works (as we tend to understand traditional assumptions).

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Writings and Revelations of Rin chen gling pa

I. The *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*—in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 249-446 (fourteen texts); in ms. bdr: W2KG210268: pp. 3-248 (six texts). The root *tantra* is also found in the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud*.

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— *bKa' srung* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 375-380.

— *sNgon 'gro* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 295-302.

— *rJes kyi la bzla ba* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 360-363.

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— *Dug lnga lam khyer* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 330-344. In ms. bdr: W2KG210268: *rDzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol chen po'i dug lnga lam 'khyer*, pp. 215-233.

- *brDa don gsang ba'i snying tig* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 334-360.
- *Bar do sku gsum me long*, in ms. bdr: W2KG210268, pp. 235-248.
- *dBang bzhi'i brda khrid* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 278-295.
- *Tshig khrid gnad kyi sgron me* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 302-317.
- *rDzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol* or *Theg pa thams cad kyi snying po bsdu pa'i yang thig yang gsang chig chod kun grol*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (mTshams brag), vol. 14, pp. 888-952. In ms. bdr: W2KG210268: *rDzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol chen po'i rgyud*, pp. 25-107. See also ms. bdr: W2KG210268, pp. 131-213: *rDzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol chen po'i rgyud*.
- *rDzogs pa chen po chig chod kun grol chen po'i khog dbub stong thun*, in ms. bdr: W2KG210268, pp. 109-130.
- *Lung bstan sgo 'byed* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 253-255.
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- *gSang chen gnad kyi don khrid* [of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*], in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 88, pp. 317-330.

II. Other rDzogs chen tantras from Rin chen gling pa's gter chos in the the mTshams brag rnying rgyud.

The status of these four texts is so far unknown, as we do not know to what cycle (definitely rDzogs chen) they belong. They are found in the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud* in the same volume as the root *tantra* of the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, without any further explanation.

- Rin chen gling pa, *Theg pa chen po mngon par rtogs pa byang chub lam gyi rgyud nam mkha' dang mnyam pa*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (mTshams brag), vol. 14, pp. 104-246.
- *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs kyi snying po de kho na nyid nges pa ye shes mchog gi rgyud chen gsang ba yongs rdzogs*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (mTshams brag), vol. 14, pp. 390-494.
- *Bla ma sku gsum bde ba chen po'i gsang rgyud*, in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (mTshams brag), vol. 14, pp. 534-560.
This *gter ma* is ascribed to a "Rad na gling pa" which is in fact Rin chen gling pa.
- *'Bras bu gsang ba bla na med pa'i rgyud chen po dri ma med pa'i snying po* [*Byin gyis brlab pa'i yi ge klad du smos pa*], in *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (mTshams brag), vol. 14, pp. 246-390.

III. The 'Jam dpal klu bdud nāgarakṣa cycle—in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 29, pp. 5-102; in ms. bdr: W2KG210268: pp. 249-320.²²²

Rin chen gling pa, *Klu bdud 'bum gyi ti ka gsang ba'i rgyud | bsrung zlog gsang ba'i rgyud*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 29, pp. 12-33; in ms. bdr: W2KG210268, pp. 249-266.

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— *'Jam dpal nāgarakṣa'i sgrub thabs*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 29, pp. 67-75.

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— *'Jam dpal klu bdud nāgarakṣa'i brtag pa'i rin chen nyi ma'i sgron me*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 29, pp. 33-58.

— *'Jam dpal klu bdud nāgarakṣa'i byugs pa rgyan gyi 'khor lo*, in *Rin chen*

²²² As for the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, the two selections are not completely redundant and the one complete the other. I have not spotted any text belonging to this cycle in the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud* so far; but it is not unlikely that some could be found among the Nāgarakṣa *tantras* listed in the article "Yamāntaka among the Ancients" in this volume.

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IV. Rin chen gling pa's additions to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* in KN 1984²²³

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- *Khrid yig nor bu'i phreng ba*, in KN 1984, pp. 419-461.
- *rGyud pa'i gsol 'debs*, in KN 1984, pp. 255-257.
- *rGyud rtags bcang pa'i 'bras bu thob tshul*, in KN 1984, pp. 129-134.
- *'Chi med tshe'i bsrub pa*, in KN 1984, pp. 751-764.²²⁴
- *sNying po gsal ba zhes bya ba'i khrid gzhung don gsal bla med*, in KN 1984, pp. 119-124.
- *sNying po gsal ba zhes bya ba'i khrid gzhung don gsal me long*, in KN 1984, pp. 555-595.²²⁵
- *rTags tshad kyi yi ge*, in KN 1984, pp. 485-492.²²⁶
- *Thod rgal lam gyi don khrid nor bu*, in KN 1984, pp. 409-417.
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- *'Bras bu yongs rdzogs btags grol rgyud kyi ti ka*, in KN 1984, pp. 7-14.
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- *gZhan don bsgrub pa'i lag len*, in KN 1984, pp. 125-127.
- *Rang byung rgyud kyi sa bcad*, in KN 1984, pp. 75-77.

²²³ As no careful comparative research has been conducted yet, it is presumed that all the texts found in KN 1984 that do not appear in the standard (Klong chen pa's) edition are additions by Rin chen gling pa. In some cases, identical texts may not have been recognized under different titles, while in others, similar titles may have been assigned to texts that were more or less heavily edited or even rewritten by Klong chen pa, or by both Rin chen gling pa and Klong *Chen Pa* based on Padma las 'brel rtsal's original core text. This would admittedly reduce the size of the original core of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (from Padma las 'brel rtsal) to a much smaller corpus than what is generally believed.

²²⁴ Surprisingly enough, this text is clearly ascribed, in its colophon, to Padma las 'brel rtsal, but it does not seem to be found in the version I use as a reference edition for the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (something more or less similar, however, is found in the sDe dge edition under the letter *te*).

²²⁵ This text should be carefully examined in comparison with its parallels in the "standard" *mKha' 'gro snying thig*: its colophon explicitly connects it with Rin chen gling pa, but the text has been falsified (visibly rewritten, p. 595, l. 3) in order to insert the name of Dri med 'od zer (Klong chen pa) as being the *gter ston*.

²²⁶ This text has equivalents in the "standard" *mKha' 'gro snying thig*; but its colophon explicitly connects it with Rin chen gling pa.

- *Rigs lnga mtshan du ngo sprod gdams pa*, in KN 1984, pp. 597-606.
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²²⁷ This source has not been fully exploited. It contains a large narrative framework explaining what are the various versions of the corpus, where they were hidden, and who is predestined to find them, which might well be the source of the narrative found in the *dGongs pa zang thal*.

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²²⁸ This is obviously not the most complete edition; this reference is given here only because it is this selection that is mentioned in the article.

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²²⁹ It is in fact the study of this text that was one of the starting points of the research presented in this article: indeed, without ever mentioning it, in this practice manual, *sPrul sku* Tshul lo—one of the most remarkable post-Mi pham rnying ma scholars—merges the *dGongs pa zang thal* with the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* through abundant quotes of the *Klong gsal 'bar ba nyi ma'i rgyud* (the root *tantra* of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*), all borrowed from Klong chen pa's *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin*, the main practice manual for the *mKha' 'gro yang tig*. *sPrul sku* Tshul lo was clearly aware of the deep affinity, to say the least, of the *dGongs pa zang thal* with the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, and this lead me to further investigate the connections between Padma las 'brel rtsal and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

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²³⁰ His versified *gsan yig* (from his autobiography—bdr:MW26463) has been incorporated in his biography in Karma tshe dbang kun khyab, 1998, which is the intermediary source that I have used in this article.

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Appendix

A comparative table of the two versions of the mKha' 'gro snying thig with an indication of the parallel texts in the dGongs pa zang thal

This table must be understood properly so as not to mislead the reader: while the two versions of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (the mainstream one included in Klong chen pa's complete works and KN 1984) are integrally described, so that researchers can spot the differences easily, the third column includes only the portion of the *dGongs pa zang thal* that seems to be comparable to a greater or lesser extent to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*.

Regarding the two versions of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, globally, the Klong chen pa version (column 1) is richer than the Rin chen gling pa one (column 2). However, it can be observed, even before any careful philological comparison of the individual texts has been done, that the texts of column 2 in the colophons of which Rin chen gling pa appears are most often not found in column 1.

We can, as a very provisional hypothesis, assume that what is common between the two versions of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* has a good chance to be more or less the original core from Padma las 'brel rtsal, and that the additional elements are revelations either by Klong chen pa (in column 1) or by Rin chen gling pa (in column 2).

Indeed, we must not be confused by the presence of the name Padma las 'brel rtsal in some of the additional texts of column 1: obviously, Klong chen pa made use of this as a pen-name for his *mKha' 'gro snying thig*-related writings, at least when he did not want to assume openly an author's position.²³¹

Now, as for the comparison between column 2 and column 3, there are 33 texts in the latter which may be regarded (but this requires further philological research) as possible or probable borrowings from the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*. In some case the analogy is merely superficial—that of the ordering of the materials, such as starting with the *kha byang / them byang*, then a *lo rgyus*, then empowerment rituals, or ending with rituals for protective deities. But in other cases, the texts are virtually identical—and I did not spot *all* the parallels, but only those that were strongly indicated by similar titles.

Be that as it may, if we take as a basis the shorter (Rin chen gling pa) version of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* rather than the longer one

²³¹ Cf. Arguillère (2007): pp. 7, 9, 180. Now that thanks to this table of comparison of these two editions of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, we have a rough criterion to discern what part of the corpus may come from Klong chen pa rather than from Padma las 'brel rtsal, many puzzles with the dates in the colophons, when they are not compatible with Padma las 'brel rtsal's short lifespan, might be solved easily.

(Klong chen pa), it is about half of that cycle that has become integrated in the *dGongs pa zang thal*.

However, to be fair, this half constitutes only a small (if not at all insignificant) portion of the *dGongs pa zang thal* as a whole. In the A 'dzom 'brug pa edition, it contains 107 texts, if we let aside the unconnected 5th volume of the *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*; the sections from the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* that became absorbed in the *dGongs pa zang thal* would then constitute between 25 and 30% of it. The main differences may be:

- The long *tantras* that the *dGongs pa zang thal* contains (while the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* merely has six small *btags grol tantras*, the *Klong gsal*, upon which it is grounded, not being included on the collection),
- The large sections connected either to Vimalamitra or Vairocana,
- And the rather large *gcod* cycle *gSang ba rmad byung* (whether this cycle actually belongs to the *dGongs pa zang thal* or is something separate remains to be discussed, but A 'dzom 'brug pa included it in his edition).

The deepest similarity between the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and the *dGongs pa zang thal* is certainly the way these two rDzogs chen cycles include the exact same type of tantric practices, each connected to the corresponding empowerment (*zhi khro* deities corresponding to the first empowerment and *bskyed rim*, and then a series of practices connected to Vajravārāhī and Hayagrīva corresponding to the next two empowerments and *rdzogs rim*, before reaching *khregs chod* and *thod rgal* corresponding to the 4th and 5th empowerment, in a system with five consecrations in the empowerment ritual).

The *dGongs pa zang thal* is however much more extensive regarding rDzogs chen proper and much less obviously connected to the *Klong gsal tantra*, which it barely quotes a few times in texts that may not belong to its *gter ma* core (while this *tantra* is absolutely central to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*). The connection of *gCod* and rDzogs chen in the *gSang ba rmad byung*, which became something quite normal in the later rNying ma school (as in the very famous *Khros ma nag mo* cycle of bDud 'joms gling pa) may actually be an innovation of the *dGongs pa zang thal*.

The comparison would have been richer—but definitely more complicated—if another column had been devoted to Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, which might be another variation on the same structure. But the cycle as we have it is scattered between three

partly, but not fully, redundant collections: the *Rin chen gter mdzod* selection, the contents of manuscript bdr:W2KG210268 and the selection from the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud*. It would thus first require editing efforts before any comparison with the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* and the *dGongs pa zang thal* may be conducted.

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>
1. <i>mKha' 'gro snying tig gi kha byang</i>	1. <i>mKha' 'gro snying tig gi kha byang</i>	1.1. ²³² <i>Them byang</i>
2. <i>rDzogs pa chen po mkha' 'gro snying tig gi bla ma brgyud pa'i lo rgyus</i>	See n. 11 below.	1.2. <i>Yid ches brgyud pa'i lo rgyus stong thun spyi chings chen mo</i>
3. <i>bTags grol stong gsal ti ka mtha' dbus bral</i>	2. <i>'Bras bu yongs rdzogs btags grol rgyud kyi ti ka</i>	
	3. <i>Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa rgyal ba'i bka'</i>	
	4. <i>Slob dpon padmas lha lcam padma gsal la lung bstan pa</i>	
	5. <i>'Bras bu yongs rdzogs dri med snying po mthar thug yang gsang (or 'Bras bu yongs rdzogs btags grol dri med snying po)</i>	
	6. <i>Rang byung rgyud kyi sa bcad</i>	
4. <i>gCig shes kun grol gyi rgyud</i>		
5. <i>Yang ti gser gyi 'bru gcig pa'i rgyud</i>	8. <i>'Bras bu yongs rdzogs yang ti gser gyi 'bru gcig</i>	
6. <i>Sras gcig sa bon gyi rgyud</i>		3.9. <i>rDzogs pa chen po'i man ngag sangs rgyas kyi dgongs pa rang chas su bstan pa'i rgyud</i>
		3.12. <i>Sangs rgyas thams cad kyi sras gcig pu'i rgyud</i>
7. <i>Rang byung rig pa'i rgyud</i>		3.11. <i>dPal kun tu bzang po'i man ngag btags</i>

²³² The two reference numbers for the *dGongs pa zang thal* should be understood as (1) the volume number (1973 edition) and (2) the rank of the text in the volume.

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>
8. 'Bras bu yongs rdzogs chen po'i rgyud		grol byon tshul ²³³ 3.15. Yang gsang bla ma med pa'i rdzogs pa chen po'i btags grol rgyab yig gsang ba'i gnad bkrol gnad kyi yi ge'i them yig kun mkhyen thugs rje 3.19. bTags grol gyi dbang 3.16. Rig pa gnad dgu'i btags grol shin tu zab pa 3.17. bTags grol nyams su len tshul
9. bTags grol rgyud kyi ti ka bTags grol gyi snying po'i ti ka		
10. gCig shes kun grol gyi ti ka	7. Kun grol rgyud kyi ti ka	
11. Yang ti gser gyi 'bru gcig ti ka		
12. Sras gcig sa bon gyi rgyud kyi ti ka nor bu'i phreng ba		
13. Rang byung rig pa'i rgyud kyi ti ka gsal byed dung kyi spar khab	10. Rang byung rig pa'i rgyud ti ka dung gi spar khab	
14. 'Bras bu yongs rdzogs chen po'i rgyud kyi ti ka gsal byed dri med snying po	9. Sras gcig rgyud kyi ti ka gsal byed	
19. bTags grol don khrid	16. 'Bras bu yongs rdzogs btags grol snying po	
20. bTags grol snying po'i don khrid mngon sum snying thig gi man ngag		
	11. sMin byed rig pa'i rtsal dbang	
15. mKha' 'gro snying thig gi lo rgyus		
	12. Bla ma brgyud pa'i rim pa	
	13. gZhan don bsgrub pa'i lag len	
	14. rGyud rtags bcang pa'i 'bras bu thob tshul	
	15. rGyud bcangs pas yon tan 'byung tshul	
16. Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes dang po	17. Sangs rgyas kyi zhal chems dang po	3.10. Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes dang po bar pa gsum pa
17. Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes gnyis pa	18. Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes gnyis pa	

²³³ The *bTags grol* cycle obviously has a very different structure in the *dGongs pa zang thal* compared to the two versions of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, as if it were more concerned by practical issues than by the *tantras* which are their sources or with commenting these *tantras*. But this should be researched, as the *tantras* may in fact be grouped in another part of the corpus under different titles and include their own exegesis.

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>
18. <i>Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes gsum pa</i>	19. <i>Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes gsum pa</i>	
21. <i>bDe gshegs rigs lnga'i phyi sgrub</i>	20. <i>bDe gshegs rigs lnga'i phyi bsgrub</i>	1.14.a. <i>Rigs lnga'i phyi sgrub</i>
22. <i>Rigs lnga nang gi sgrub pa</i>	21. <i>Rigs lnga nang bsgrub</i>	1.14.b. <i>Rigs lnga'i nang sgrub dngos grub rgya mtsho</i>
	22. <i>dBang gi cho ga'i rim pa</i>	1.7. <i>Zab mo dbang lnga'i dbye ba</i>
23. <i>sMin byed don gsal sgron me zhes bya ba spros bcas bum pa'i dbang</i>		1.8. <i>sPros bcas bum pa'i dbang</i>
	23. <i>rGyud pa'i gsol 'debs</i>	1.13. <i>rGyud pa'i gsol 'debs</i>
24. <i>dBang khrid nor bu sgron gsal bzhugs pa lags so gsang dbang</i>	24. <i>gSang dbang bskur ba'i rim pa</i>	1.9. <i>sPros med gsang ba'i dbang</i>
25. <i>Shes rab ye shes kyi dbang</i>	25. <i>Shes rab ye shes kyi dbang</i>	1.10. <i>Shin tu spros med shes rab ye shes dbang</i>
26. <i>Tshig dbang rin po che</i>		1.11. <i>Rab tu spros med de kho na nyid kyi dbang</i>
27. <i>gSang dbang lus kyi ngo sprod</i>		
28. <i>Shes rab yum gyi mkha' ngo sprod</i>		
29. <i>dBang gi rgyab yig</i>		
30. <i>dBang gong ma gsum gyi sa ma 'grel—dang po gsang dbang gi sa ma 'grel</i>	26. <i>gSang dbang gnad kyi sa ma 'grel</i>	
31. <i>Shes rab ye shes kyi sa ma 'grel</i>	27. <i>Shes rab ye shes kyi sa ma 'brel</i>	
32. <i>Tshig dbang gi sa ma 'grel</i>		
	28. <i>Khyad par gyi rig pa'i rtsal dbang gi gnad</i>	
33. <i>bDe gshegs rigs lnga'i mchod 'bul</i>	29. <i>bDe gshegs rigs lnga'i mchod 'bul</i>	1.16. <i>rGyal ba rigs lnga'i mchod 'bul</i>
34. <i>Rigs lnga'i gtor ma'i lag len</i>	34. <i>Rigs lnga'i gtor ma bkod pa</i>	
35. <i>Rigs lnga'i tshogs mchod</i>	33. <i>Rigs lnga'i tshogs mchod</i>	1.17. <i>Rigs lnga'i tshogs mchod</i>
36. <i>mKha' 'gro'i las byang tshogs mchod rtsar phreng</i>	30. <i>mKha' 'gro'i las byang tshogs mchod kyi rim pa</i>	1.18. <i>Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i mkha' 'gro'i las byang mchod phreng</i>

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>
37. <i>dBang sgrub dang bum pa sgrub thabs</i>	31. <i>Bum bsgrub</i>	
38. <i>dKyil 'khor rnam dag</i>	32. <i>dKyil 'khor rnam dag</i>	
39. <i>sNying thig gsang ba bla med kyi dbang don gsal ba'i rgyab yig gsang ba + texte complémentaire sans titre</i>		
40. <i>dBang bzhi'i go rim tho yig</i>		
41. <i>dBang gi rim pa khrid du bskur lugs</i>		
42. <i>rTsal dbang ti ka rig pa'i sgron ma</i>		
43. <i>Thod rgal khyad par dbang lnga</i>		
44. <i>Ngo 'phrod nas spro ba bskyed pa'i chos bshad</i>		
45. <i>Pra khrid chos thun khrid kyi zhag grangs</i>		
46. <i>Ḍākki'i gtor ma'i rim pa</i>		
47. <i>Ḍākki'i tshogs mchod</i>	35. <i>Ḍākki'i tshogs mchod</i>	
	36. <i>mKha' 'gro snying thig gi gsol 'debs²³⁴</i>	
48. <i>dBang gi rgyab yig</i>		
49. <i>dBang gi tho yig</i>		
50. <i>mKha' 'gro snying thig gsang dbang gi lhan thabs</i>		
	37. <i>Chags chen lam du 'jug pa'i dbang gi rim pa</i>	
	38. <i>Ḍākki thod rgal du bsgrub pa</i>	
51. <i>Ḍākki'i dus gnad gnad 'debs shis spyi gnad bla rdo</i>	39. <i>mKha' 'gro snying thig las : Ḍākki'i gnad kyi gdams pa dus gnad dang bcas pa</i>	1.14.i. <i>Ḍā ki'i dus gnad 'bebs shis spyi gnad bla rdo</i>
52. <i>mKha' 'gro ma'i nor</i>	40. <i>Ḍākki'i nor</i>	1.14.h. <i>mKha' 'gro gsang</i>

²³⁴ This text clearly does not belong to the original corpus of KN 1984, as it exhibits completely different features—a “longchenpist” Bhutanese lineage extending to the 17th century—whereas the bulk of the other texts show a strong presence of Rin chen gling pa and nothing later than the 14th century.

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>	
<i>sgrub gter gyi bum pa</i>	<i>bsgrub gter bum</i>	<i>sgrub dngos grub gter gyi bum pa (mkha' 'gro ma'i nor sgrub rin chen gter gyi bum pa)</i>	
53. <i>Thod rgal gyi don khrid nor bu'i snying po</i>	41. <i>Thod rgal lam gyi don khrid nor bu</i>		
	42. <i>Khrid yig nor bu'i phreng ba</i>		
54. <i>sNying po gsal ba'i me long zhes bya ba'i khrid, or mKha' 'gro snying thig gsal ba'i yang bcud – gter ma of Dri med 'od zer</i>			
55. <i>Khrid rgyab lung gi phreng ba</i>	43. <i>Khrid rgyab lung gi phreng ba</i>		
56. <i>Lag khrid gnad kyi man ngag pra khrid du bstan pa</i>			
57. <i>rTags yig tshad yig</i>	44. <i>rTags tshad kyi yi ge</i>		
58. <i>Tshad kyi yi ge</i>			3.30. <i>rDzogs pa chen po'i tshad kyi yi ge</i>
59. <i>sNying thig chen mo'i rgyab chos kyi rtsa ba</i>			
60. <i>sNying thig gsang ba'i yang bcud snying po gsal ba'i me long</i>	45. <i>mKha' 'gro snying thig chen mo don gsal me long</i>		
	46. <i>sNying po gsal ba zhes bya ba'i khrid gzhung don gsal me long</i>		
	47. <i>Rigs lnga mtshan du ngo sprod gdams pa</i>		
	48. <i>rNal 'byor bzhi'i gdams pa</i>		
61. <i>rNal 'byor bzhi las lta ba'i rnal 'byor</i>			
62. <i>rNal 'byor bzhi las sgom pa'i rnal 'byor</i>			
63. <i>rNal 'byor bzhi las spyod pa'i rnal 'byor dang 'bras bu'i rnal 'byor gnyis</i>			
64. <i>Zhus len bdud rtsi gser phreng</i>	49. <i>Zhus len bdud rtsi gser phreng</i> ²³⁵		
65. <i>mKha' 'gro snying gi ti ka las zhal gdams gsang</i>			

²³⁵ Although this text is present in the “standard” edition, in KN 1984, it has a colophon by Rin chen gling pa.

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>
<i>ba'i dum bu</i>		
66. <i>gNad kyi gdams pa lnga pa</i>		
67. <i>Ḍākki'i lam 'bras kyi skor</i>		
68. <i>mKha' 'gro snying tig lag 'grig</i>		
69. <i>Ḍākki gnad thig</i>		
70. <i>rDo rje chu 'thung ba</i>		
71. <i>Zhi ba bar do lam gyi mtshan nyid</i>	51. <i>Bar do las kyi mtshan nyid zhi ba'i bar do</i>	
72. <i>Khro bo bar do gnad kyi sgron ma</i>	53. <i>Khro bo'i bar do'i gdams pa</i>	
73. <i>Bar do'i gdams pa 'byung ba 'dus pa 'bral ba rtsags kyi rim pa</i>	52. <i>Bar do'i zhal gdams</i>	3.34. <i>Bar do 'od gsal sgron ma</i>
74. <i>'Chi ka bar do'i gsal 'debs bar do gnad dum</i>	54. <i>Bar do'i zhal gdams gnad kyi dum bu</i>	
75. <i>Chos nyid bar do'i yon tan</i>		
76. <i>Bar do ngo sprod bzhugs pa'i dbu</i>		
77. <i>'Od gsal</i>	59. <i>'Od gsal</i>	
78. <i>mKha' 'gro'i gtum mo khyad par can</i>	55. <i>mKha' 'gro ma'i gtum mo</i>	
79. <i>'Byung ba rdo'i bcud len</i>	56. <i>rDo'i bcud len man ngag</i>	4.8. <i>bcud len khyad par can bdud rtsi'i phreng ba</i> ²³⁶
	57. <i>'Chi med tshe'i bsrub pa</i>	4.7. <i>Bi ma la'i tshe khrid zab mo bla ma'i zhal lung</i>
80. <i>Dhākki snying tig gi bka' srung dpal srog sgrub</i>	²³⁷	4.15. <i>rDzogs chen dgongs pa zang thal gyi</i>

²³⁶ In this case as in many others, the texts of the *dGongs pa zang thal* are set aside of those of the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* only because the topic and the general structure are similar, although the content is clearly different: the *bcud len* practice in the *dGongs pa zang thal* is based on water, not stones.

²³⁷ It is a very unusual feature of KN 1984 that the cycle as it stands contains no ritual for the guardian deities. A detail in the vision of Padma las 'brel rtsal that Rin chen gling pa had in 1321 (?) may however give us a clue as to how this was understood in the original *mKha' 'gro snying thig* system: Indeed, Padma las 'brel rtsal speaks in the vision of the "peaceful *mKha' 'gro snying thig*" and the "wrathful *gNod sbyin dmar nag*," which I take to be the Rahula system known as *gZa' rgyud* in the Byang gter context (vol. 28 & 29 of the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*). This would require further research.

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>
<i>nag mo'i srog len spu gri or gSod byed lha mo'i srog sgrub nag mo'i rgyud</i>		<i>bka' srung mchod pa'i phrin las kyi rim pa</i>
81. <i>Srog sgrub nag mo'i sgrub thabs</i>		
82. <i>'Gyu dus thun drug</i>		
83. <i>'Gyu dus thun drug</i>		
84. <i>bKa' srung srog sgrub nag mo'i srog dbang</i>		
85. <i>sNying tig bla ma'i rnal 'byor</i> ²³⁸		2.16. <i>Bla ma'i sgrub thabs</i>
86. <i>Bla ma'i rnal 'byor phyi nang gsang gsum.</i>		
87. <i>Khregs chod ngo sprod mtha' grol klong yangs</i>	50. <i>Khregs chod kyi ngo sprod mtha' bral klong yangs</i>	
88. <i>rTsal dbang</i>		
89. <i>rGyud kyi bcangs thabs</i>		
90. <i>gZhan don</i> ²³⁹		
91. <i>rTags bstan</i>		
92. <i>Yon tan 'byung tshul</i>		
93. <i>Che ba bstan pa</i>		
94. <i>rTa mgrin yab yum lus dkyil</i>	58. <i>rTa mgrin yab yum lus dkyil</i>	1.14.e. <i>rTa mgrin lus dkyil dbang rnam gsum gyi bdag bskyed</i>
95. <i>Ḍakki rkyang sgrub bzhugs pa lags pas gzigs mdzod</i>		1.14.f. <i>Ḍā ki'i mngon rtogs yid bzhin nor bu</i>
96. <i>mKha' 'gro sngags kyi lde mig</i>		1.14.g. <i>Ḍā ki'i sngags kyi lde mig</i>
97. <i>sNying thig gi bdud rts'i phyag mchod</i>		
98. <i>Ḍakki dril sgrub gsang ba snying gi dum bu</i>		
95. <i>Thig le dwangs snyigs 'byed pa dang Rigs rgyud gzhag thabs lag len</i>		
95. <i>gZhan don sprul sku gzhag thabs</i> ²⁴⁰		

²³⁸ This text is remarkable, although its study would take us far from Rin chen gling pa, for it is a witness to another lineage which goes after Padma las 'brel rtsal: Rang byung rdo rje (Karmapa III); Legs ldan pa; Śākya gzhon nu; g.Yung ston pa; Rol pa'i rdo rje (Karmapa IV), etc. The same applies, with some variations, to the next text.

²³⁹ To be compared to n.12 of KN 1984.

²⁴⁰ To be compared to n.12 of KN 1984.

<i>KN Klong chen pa</i>	<i>KN 1984</i>	<i>dGongs pa zang thal</i>
96. <i>Bar do'i ngo sprod</i>		
97. <i>mNgon sum ngo sprod</i>		
98. <i>Bar do'i mtshan nyid bshad pa dang skye gnas rnams kyi bstan pa</i>		
99. <i>bTags grol phran drug gi ti ka</i>		3.14. <i>bTags grol rgyud drug dus gnad zhal chems</i>
100. <i>bTags grol bcangs thabs</i>		
101. <i>Lo rgyus</i>		
102. <i>rDzas</i>		
103. <i>Dākki'i lus dkyil chen mo</i>		
104. <i>Padma las 'brel rtsal gyi skyes rabs dang lung bstan</i>		
105. <i>gter gyi kha byang</i>		
106. <i>rGyal sras legs pa'i lung bstan</i>		
107. <i>'Pho ba</i>		
108. <i>gTer srung ldang ba'i sgrub thabs</i>		



A Preliminary Analysis of the Prophetic Guides and Concealment Narratives of the Northern Treasure Tradition

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Within the pages of the biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (c. 1337–1408) entitled *The Ray of Sunlight*, the author, Nyi ma bzang po (14th–15th c.), presents a succinct “concealment narrative” that explains how Padmasambhava and his disciples concealed the collection of scrolls, ritual artifacts, and relics that would later be extracted by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and come to be known as the Northern Treasures.¹ Nyi ma bzang po's narrative, however, is largely synthetic in that it draws heavily upon the content of various subsidiary treasures, which herein will be referred to in general terms as “prophetic guides,” that were revealed by either bZang po grags pa (14th c.) or Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself.² These documents contain accounts of conversations between Padmasambhava and his disciples in the late-8th or early-9th century wherein they discuss a wide range of subjects, including—but certainly not limited to—the contents, purpose, and location of the concealed treasures as well as the circumstances of their extraction in the distant future, the degenerate age of the 14th century.

While each prophetic guide contains a different set of conversations between Padmasambhava and his disciples, it does not appear that there is an intended reading order to the collection that would result in a unified and coherent narrative. That is to say, the various prophetic guides are not sequential installments of a gradually unfolding chronicle. Despite the similarity to epic literature, the primary purpose of this genre of scripture is not to relate an important series of mythic

¹ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 70-84.

² In this article, “prophetic guides,” or at times simply “guides,” is used to refer to a varied sub-genre of treasure literature that employs titles containing the term *byang*, such as entrance guide (*kha byang*), path guide (*lam byang*), and essential guide (*snying byang*). For a general emic introduction to prophetic guides, see Tulku Thondup 1986, pp. 72-76. For insightful, academic discussions of prophetic guides, which she refers to as “certificates,” as well as related *byang* terminology, see the two articles by Janet Gyatso (1993 & Unpublished) listed in the bibliography.

or legendary events to future readers. As suggested by the name of this genre of literature, prophetic guides are meant to give “prophetic guidance” to a treasure revealer.³ In the case of the tradition of the Northern Treasures, the very first treasure texts to be unearthed were scrolls discovered by bZang po grags pa and Rig ’dzin rGod ldem that contained prophetic guides. In particular, the scrolls were inscribed with a relatively small amount of encoded treasure script (or *dākinī* script), which is still preserved in the published texts today. Then, at a later date, a treasure revealer—not necessarily the treasure revealer who discovered the scroll in question—was able to receive guidance through a visionary process of decoding that allows lengthy prophetic guides to be yielded from these relatively short, encrypted passages.⁴ Then, presumably, one would use these revealed scriptures—discovering and decoding additional scrolls as needed—to help navigate the challenges that arise throughout one’s career as a treasure revealer. A “proper” reading order, if one were to be conceived, might be one that places passages of advice alongside the specific challenges they were meant to address in the order that the events occurred throughout the life of the treasure revealer. Such an order, however, would not yield a coherent, straight-forward concealment narrative, which is why Nyi ma bzang po could not simply copy the information from one or another of the prophetic guides, but had to knit together passages from various sources, making editorial decisions as he went along, to produce a synthesized concealment narrative.

The analytical goal of this article is to draw further attention to the composite nature of the concealment narrative in *The Ray of Sunlight*. Thus, this presentation will begin with a summary of how the Northern Treasures were concealed according to Nyi ma bzang po, before turning to an overview of three prophetic guides that were among Nyi ma bzang po’s sources for that part of the biography.⁵ This exercise will, at the very least, allow the reader to more easily appreciate the compositional efforts that resulted in the easily digestible tale of

³ Of course, authors—secular or visionary—rarely compose their works for such straightforward and single-minded purposes, and so prophetic guides are not unique in their ability to serve multiple purposes.

⁴ Evidently, there are encoded treasure scriptures that are of equal length to their decoded prophecies. The preserved encoded script of the *Byang gter*, however, tends to be relatively short in comparison to their corresponding, decoded scriptures. For examples, see bZang po grags pa 1983a, p. 366.1, 267.4.

⁵ One reason this article is “preliminary” in nature is that it is grounded in an analysis of only the three available prophetic guides that were used as sources for the concealment narrative in Nyi ma bzang po’s biography of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem. There are many other prophetic guides within the tradition of the Northern Treasures. While some of them were consulted in the preparation of this article, still others are yet to be explored.

concealment in *The Ray of Sunlight*. At the same time, however, the following investigation illuminates interesting “problems” or “puzzles” regarding the details of the concealment narrative of the Northern Treasure Tradition and draws attention to the limitations of our knowledge regarding the usage of prophetic guides by treasure revealers while building their institutions.

The Concealment Narrative of The Ray of Sunlight

The concealment narrative in *The Ray of Sunlight* begins with a brief summary of exploits of King Khri srong lde btsan (c. 742–796), who is described as the one responsible for bringing the light of the Dharma to Tibet.⁶ The section ends by declaring that Khri srong lde btsan’s life would have ended by his 56th year if Padmasambhava hadn’t interceded ritually to extend his life for an extra 13 years.⁷ Here, Nyi ma bzang po has succinctly presented the foundation stone—in terms of religious historical precedence—upon which Rig ’dzin rGod ldem has positioned himself as the most important potential religious ally for the royal line of Mang yul Gung thang, which is no small feat considering he is attempting to pull them away from Sa skya pa influence and power.⁸ Just as Padmasambhava himself was able to wield the Dharma to extend the life—and therefore also the reign—of Khri srong lde btsan, Rig ’dzin rGod ldem will be able to—if the proper relationships are established—wield the Northern Treasures to extend the lives and reigns of the Kings of Mang yul Gung thang, who are the only remaining descendants of Khri srong lde btsan.

The concealment narrative next focuses on Khri srong lde btsan’s son, lHa sras Mu khri btsan po (761–815). Herein one learns that it is in response to the petitions of Mu khri btsan po that Padmasambhava traverses the Tibetan landscape planting treasures for future generations of Tibetans. The focus of the narrative then turns towards prophecies regarding the age of degeneration. The discussion begins in general terms, describing four great spirit-hindrances (*bdud kyi bar chad*) that are to be deflected by four great emanations before turning to the predictions that are specifically relevant for Rig ’dzin rGod ldem:

During the final [days of] the teachings in the future, various vices will emerge through the power of [various] demons’ curses. It is said that

⁶ For the specific pages containing the concealment narrative, see Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 70–84.

⁷ This claim is difficult to harmonize with the traditional dates of King Khri srong lde btsan (c. 742–796), which suggest that he died at the age of 54 rather than 69.

⁸ For a lengthy discussion of the relationship between Rig ’dzin rGod ldem and the Kings of Gung thang, see Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 103–108.

regent-emanations⁹ (*rgyal tshab sprul pa'i sku*) will arise to subdue each of those [demons and their curses] and that after those [regent-emanations] meet with their respective treasures, [the longevity of] the precious teachings will be prolonged. In particular, as we approach the time when [the average] lifespan is exhausted at fifty during the 500 [years] of the dark age, a spirit-hindrance (*bdud kyi bar chad*) will manifest for the father—known as bKra shis lde—and his son of the pure royal lineage of Mang yul Gung thang. [Padmasambhava] has stated that if [the royal family] is subjugated by that [spirit-hindrance], then [the people] in Tibet will have to experience intolerable suffering. [However, he] also stated that a bodhisattva who attained the sixth *bhūmi* will appear before Mt. bKra bzang as a counteragent who can vanquish their hindrances.¹⁰

At this point, the narrative begins to focus explicitly on the concealment of the Northern Treasures. While residing together at bSam yas Monastery, Mu khri btsan po asks Padmasambhava a series of questions regarding the remnants of his own family lineage, which are predicted to face extinction during the degenerate times of the 14th century. He wants to know where the treasures that will help them will be concealed and who will extract and wield them. Padmasambhava responds by transporting himself and his three faithful retainers—Mu khri btsan po, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and sNa nam rdo rje bdud 'joms—to the top of Mt. bKra bzang in Western gTsang. He summons a *ḍākinī* who delivers to his hand three whetstones containing a series of prophetic guide scrolls that will act as the keys for three great treasuries that have the potential to preserve the Mang yul Gung thang Dynasty. He then describes the contents and locations of the three treasuries,¹¹ each of which includes a mix of treasure scrolls, ritual artifacts, and relics.

1. The first treasury is concealed in a “mountain that resembles a heap of poisonous snakes,” which is Zang zang lha brag. This is the most well-known treasury, and Nyi ma bzang po spends two pages describing its contents.¹²
2. The second treasury is concealed in Mang yul, where there is a mountain that looks like a heap of precious jewels. This is most likely Ri bo dpal 'bar, the location that later becomes the southern hub of the tradition in Mang yul.

⁹ Here the phrase “*rgyal tshab sprul pa'i sku*” has the sense of an emanated representative of Padmasambhava who will act on his behalf in the future.

¹⁰ For the source of this translated passage, see Nyi ma bZang po 1983, p. 72.

¹¹ As will be discussed below, it appears that the second and third treasures listed here were ultimately left undiscovered.

¹² Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 76-77.

3. The third treasury is concealed in Padmasambhava's meditation cave in Nepal, which is known as Yang le shod.

Padmasambhava then explains that the three whetstone keys are concealed at Mt. bKra bzang and protected by a guardian spirit known as Bu le Nor bu bzang po. He also offers a series of prophecies that make it clear that they are intended for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, who is explicitly named. As his work is now complete, Padmasambhava returns to bSam yas with his entourage. Later, after Padmasambhava has departed, Mu khri btsan po authors and then conceals additional prophetic guides in a temple in rGyang in Western gTsang, where they are protected by the guardian spirits Bu le nor bu bzang po and Dril zhon ma.

The conclusion of the narrative is constituted by prophecies that foretell the historical events beginning with the final good days of the reign of Mu khri btsan po, through the disastrous reign of Glang dar ma (r. 838–842), through the rekindling of the teachings in Tibet, the apparent demise of the royal line and its reemergence in mNga' ris, the fragmentation of Tibet, and finally the rise of the spirit-hindrances and the invasion of foreign armies (13th c.) that set the stage for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem to extract the Northern Treasures.

In summary, Padmasambhava is reported to have concealed three separate treasuries of teachings at three separate sacred mountains as well as a set of three treasure keys at a fourth sacred mountain, all of which are to be revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Then, Mu khri btsan po conceals another set of subsidiary treasures intended to identify Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as the future treasure revealer and guide him to the treasure keys at Mt. bKra bzang.

Sources of the Concealment Narrative: The Prophetic Guides

1. The Noble One's Advice:

Seven Profound and Noble Statements Regarding Sikkin

('Bras mo gshongs kyi 'phags pa zab mo lung bdun gyi 'phags pa bka'i lung)

Unfortunately, at present there does not appear to be an extant copy of this text. Nevertheless, the preserved passage is worth a brief examination:

In particular, to the northeast of Mt. sKu lha in Mang yul,
 There will be an earthen castle that resembles a comb [made] from a
 conch shell.
 At the periphery [of the castle], a bodhisattva of the royal lineage
 Will be conquered by six monstrous emanations and [the king's own]
 subjects.

[Then,] the son of that [king], endowed with rosy [skin] and a round head,
 Will appear [and] be endowed with an expansive disposition and a virtuous mind.
 [Then,] six black executioners (*shan pa*) [will arise from] the curses (*byin brlabs*) of those
 Monstrous emanations, who had hawk faces on human bodies.
 [They] will come together because of the power of bad karma, [and] in Gung thang,
 The compassionate king, together with his entourage
 Will expel a cry of woe [as they] are stabbed to death.¹³

It is clear from the subject matter that this is a prophetic account of the fate of the Gung thang Dynasty, not long after Rig 'dzin rGod ldem reveals the Northern Treasures. Although we do not have the rest of this prophetic guide, it is very likely, given its title, that this passage was followed by instructions to depart for the hidden land of Sikkim when these predicted events come to pass. In *The Ray of Sunlight*, however, this passage is employed as part of the more general description of the impending age of decline, the knowledge of which is what leads Padmasambhava to conceal the Northern Treasures.

2. *The Entrance Guide for the Treasury of Treasures* (*Kha byang gter gyi bang mdzod*)

The Entrance Guide for the Treasury of Treasures was extracted by bZang po grags pa (14th c.) at the Drom pa Temple of rGyang and transferred indirectly to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem around 1365.¹⁴ The colophon suggests that the person who performed the task of decoding this treasure scroll, presumably Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, only transcribed the summaries—eight in total—of the treasure caches that are described at the very beginning of the scroll.¹⁵ The concluding narrative reports that after Padmasambhava left Tibet, Mu khri btsan po wrote this index (*dkar chag*) for the treasuries and concealed it in rGyang.

Regarding the text's contents, it begins with four similarly structured indices describing the contents and locations of four separate treasuries that will be revealed by individuals born in the years of the: 1) pig (*phag*), 2) sheep (*lug*), 3) ox (*glang*), and 4) fire (*me*). Then, there are four more vignettes that each describe the relevant end-time circumstances for the treasure revealers born in the years of: 5) fire (*me*), 6) ox (*glang*), 7) sheep (*lug*), and 8) pig (*phag*).¹⁶ It is, however, unclear

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁴ To view the entirety of the short text, see bZang po grags pa 1983a.

¹⁵ bZang po grags pa 1983, p. 272.

¹⁶ Notice the nearly palindromic nature of the sequence: a-b-c-d-d-c-b-a.

if these are eight separate indices or, rather, four pairs of indices offering two sets of prophecies for each of four treasuries.

It is also difficult to determine which—or how many—of these prophecies are meant to refer to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. While it is now common to designate his year of birth as 1337 (Year of the Fire-Ox), this date is far from certain.¹⁷ Regardless, unless he was somehow born in two different years, which is impossible, then at most, four of these indices—most likely the third through the sixth—could be prophecies regarding Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The only excerpt from *The Entrance Guide for the Treasury of Treasures* to appear in *The Ray of Sunlight* was drawn from the fifth index of the series. One can conclude that in the mind of the biographer, at least this index, which indicates that the decline of the royal lineage of Gung thang will set the stage for the arrival of a person born in a fire-year near Mt. bKra bzang in Tho yor nag po, accurately describes Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Nyi ma bzang po thereby suggests that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was born in a fire year. While the mystery of the identities of the other personages mentioned in this prophetic guide will be left unresolved herein, it is worth mentioning two possible candidates.¹⁸ First, it would not be entirely unexpected if one or more of these prophecies describes bZang po grags pa since it is quite common for treasure revealers to reveal prophecies about one's own actions.¹⁹ Another likely candidate is Sangs rgyas bstan pa, who was Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's uncle. He is presented as a prophesied master; this hypothesis is supported by the pair of excerpts from other prophetic guides that are recorded in *The Ray of Sunlight*.²⁰

It is abundantly clear, however, that this prophetic guide includes much information that did not make it into the concealment narrative in Nyi ma bzang po's composition. At least half of the indices in this collection refer to unidentified individuals and thus are more or less irrelevant within the context of *The Ray of Sunlight*. While it is beyond the scope of the current investigation to discuss all the excluded information, the following passage is offered as an example of the materials found in this prophetic guide. This is the first index, which discusses a treasury of weapons that is to be revealed by a person born in a year

¹⁷ For a discussion of the various possible dates of birth for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, see Herweg 1994, pp. 161-165.

¹⁸ One untested theory is that the eight indices are meant to describe the treasure activities of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his seven innermost disciples.

¹⁹ bZang po grags pa is generally thought to have been born in a tiger year. So, theoretically, he could have been born in a year of the fire-tiger, which would allow the fourth index to be about him. However, based on the content of that index, it appears to describe the treasure revealing activities of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. If one of these indexes is meant to refer to bZang po grags pa, then perhaps he was born in a different year.

²⁰ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 90-91.

of the pig.

During the [year] of the pig (*phag gi dus*), [which is during] the convergence of the Aśvinī constellation and the planet Jupiter, at the midpoint of a rocky mountain that resembles a heap of serpents [in] the northern land [called] Tho yor nag po, [I] concealed twenty robes, forty shields, and sixty-two knives. That is a treasury of weapons. If that [treasure] is to be extracted, it must be extracted at the hour of the pig, within a month of the pig, within a year of the pig, by a man [born in] a pig year. *De kha th[a]m!*²¹

Even though this text is not heavily quoted in *The Ray of Sunlight*, its impact on Nyi ma bzang po's concealment narrative is evident, particularly regarding the activities of Mu khri btsan po at the end of the sequence of events. Generally speaking, the treasure narrative of the biography mirrors the order of events expressed in this *kha byang*: 1) *great* treasures are concealed throughout the land while Padmasambhava, the *great* master, is in residence in Tibet, but 2) the *kha byang*, *lam byang*, and *snying byang*—arguably *lesser* treasures—are written down and concealed by lHa sras Mu khri btsan po (who is *lesser* with respect to Padmasambhava) after his departure, then 3) the *lesser* treasures are extracted first by bZang po grags pa (arguably the *lesser* treasure revealer), before 4) the *greater* treasures are extracted by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (the *greater* treasure revealer). Despite the similarities, it should be noted that this prophetic guide does not refer to the treasure keys at bKra bzang as would be expected from reading the narrative in the biography.

3. *The Lamp that Illuminates the Way* (*Lam byang gsal ba'i sgron me*)

The Lamp that Illuminates the Way was also revealed by Zang po grags pa in rGyang and then later delivered to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.²² The narrative tunes into the exploits of Padmasambhava as he travels toward Oḍḍiyāna, presumably near the end of his tenure in Tibet. He passes through what will later be Mang yul and recognizes it to be a very unstable region and knows that the future descendants of Mu khri btsan po will face serious obstacles there in the future. He

²¹ bZang po grags pa 1983a, p. 266. This last phrase essentially means, “This [prophecy] is sealed [and secret]!”

²² bZang po grags pa (Unpublished). This text can be found at the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives: D18407. I must express my gratitude to Sonam Topgyal, a librarian at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, who agreed to send me a digital copy of this text that is not included in the 63-volume collection of Byang gter literature that was published in 2015.

therefore conceals the treasury at Zang zang lha brag for their benefit and predicts that the one who will reveal them will come from Mt. bKra bzang, a clear reference to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

At this point, Mu khri btsan po requests additional information regarding the treasures and their future treasure revealer, and this is how we are given important information regarding two specific locations. He describes in detail the mountains of Zang zang lha brag, where the treasures are concealed, and Mt. bKra bzang, which will yield the treasure revealer. Padmasambhava then goes on to describe the calamities that will help one determine that it is time to reveal the treasures at Zang zang lha brag and offers advice regarding how Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his disciples should comport themselves internally and externally as to avoid coming under the control of various obstacles while they attempt to following the instructions in the prophetic guides:

[Mu khri btsan po] beseeched [Padmasambhava] again, saying: "O Honorable and Great Acarya! Will anything hinder that person who is supposed to reveal the treasures? Are there any methods or connections [that he will need]? [...]"

[Padmasambhava] responded saying: "Listen, faithful Tibetan! There will be many hindrances for that fortunate one who will extract these treasures. My compassion will protect him. If he accomplishes what I have explained and is not hindered by laziness or neglect when he meets with the *kha byang*, *lam byang*, and *snying byang* for these treasures, then hindrances will not arise for this diligent person. [Those who claim that they] will practice the holy Dharma after finishing their [mundane] activities [are essentially] admitting that they will not practice it. Abruptly cease all mundane worldly obligations. Pray to me continually [because it is] important [to forge] a connection (*rten 'brel*) [with me]. At that time, the populace (*mi'i rigs*) of ordinary (*tha mal pa*) outcasts (*gdol pa can*) and all those afflicted with wrong views, *māras* (*bdud*), samaya violators (*dam sri*), and *gongpo* spirits ('*gong po*) spirits will hinder the dharma. Therefore, [they] will approach [you] congenially and be respectful, engaging you into conversations that will bring something other than merit and the distracting bustle of worldly affairs. Through their evil deeds, [they] will cause you and [people] around [you] corporeal sickness and mental suffering. All of these will come as hindrances for [your] practice of the secret mantra teachings. Generate enthusiasm and on holy days, during the waxing moon, and auspicious days, do often your ablutions, maintain your vows, and perform your confessions many [times]. Outwardly, in accordance with the Vinaya, you should take on the appearances of [those of] the four-fold retinue²³ and take up precepts (*bslab pa*). Inwardly, you should not

²³ The four-fold retinue is the community of monks, nuns, male lay practitioners, and female lay practitioners.

contradict the words of the texts of the secret mantra. As for the search for the treasures that contain my teachings, act unerringly in accordance with [the instructions] that emerge from the *kha byang*, *lam byang*, and *snying byang*.”²⁴

The above is a wonderfully self-referential passage as it appears within one of the prophetic guides, in this case a *lam byang*, that it is instructing Rig 'dzin rGod ldem to heed. It is also an excellent example of how the advice that appears in the prophetic guides extends well beyond the identification of treasure revealers and treasure caches. The section that follows is very important for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's treasure career, for it is the source of the notion mentioned above that if the king is of faith and joins fast to the wielder of these treasures, his life and reign will be extended for thirteen years. Toward the end of this *lam byang*, Mu khri btsan po expresses concern because the predicted state of affairs seems so awful, and Padmasambhava instructs him to have faith in the power of the treasures and in he who will wield them.

As with the previous prophetic guide discussed above, *The Lamp that Illuminates the Way* is only referenced once—in this case it is a description of the specific calamities that will precede the extraction of the treasures at Zang zang lha brag—and there is also a wealth of information that did not make it into *The Ray of Sunlight*. Nevertheless, here too the influence of this prophetic guide on the concealment narrative of the biography is far more significant than the single acknowledged quotation. Still, there is important information from that concealment narrative, such as the idea that there are supposed to be three treasure keys concealed at Mt. bKra bzang, that is not mentioned in this prophetic guide.

4. *The [Cycle of Prophetic Guide] Scrolls from the White Whetstone Keys* (*lDe mig 'dzeng rdo dkar po'i nang nas byung ba'i shog dril*)

Finally, there is the collection of six prophetic guide scrolls that were concealed inside of three whetstone keys at Mt. bKra bzang by Padmasambhava and revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem around 1366.²⁵ While Nyi ma bzang po refers to two such scrolls in the biography, everything that finds its way into *The Ray of Sunlight* is now contained

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 5a-6a.

²⁵ bZang po grags pa 1983b. The title of this text varies widely. *The [Cycle of Prophetic Guide] Scrolls from the White Whetstone Keys* (*lDe mig 'dzeng rdo dkar po'i nang nas byung ba'i shog dril*) is a synthetic title constructed from various references to the text. The version cited in the bibliography is entitled: 'Dzeng rdo dkar po nas byon pa.

on the first of the six scrolls.²⁶ It consists of a conversation between Padmasambhava and Mu khri btsan po and would sound very familiar to anyone who has read rGod ldem's biography as Nyi ma bzang po obviously relied most heavily on this prophetic guide—both in the form of acknowledged quotations and unacknowledged borrowings. It is the source for 1) the narrative involving the visionary journey to Mt. bKra bzang by Padmasambhava and his retinue 2) the notion that there are in fact three treasuries that were concealed at Zang zang lha brag, Mang yul gung thang, and Yang le shod, and 3) the idea that there are three corresponding treasure keys that are concealed at Mt. bKra bzang.

The second scroll contains a conversation involving Ye she mtsho rgyal, who would like for some important issues to be clarified regarding Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and the three sets of treasures that he is supposed to extract:

Lady Ye shes mtsho rgyal petitioned Ācārya Padmasambhava, saying: "Kye! O great ācārya! Since these three noble treasuries are [intended] for a single destined person, will they be revealed during the lifetime of a single embodiment? Or will [they] be revealed through a series of rebirths?"

[Ācārya Padmasambhava] uttered the following: "Listen, Noble Lady, [my] secret consort (*gsang ba'i gzungs*). My three innermost secret treasures, at a time when the merit of sentient beings has been exhausted, will be extracted by one secret yogin. Depending in particular on [his] degree of effort. [If it is] superb, [then all three] will be revealed in a single lifetime. [If his efforts are] middling, they will be revealed [over] a series of lives. In the worst [case], [they] will be revealed by my [other] emanations. Regardless, practicing those treasures themselves will bring about karmic connections with happiness and well-being for all sentient, migratory beings."²⁷

Presumably, this passage reflects what must have been a growing concern regarding Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's incomplete treasure career activities, for it appears that he has only revealed the first of the three prophesied treasuries. While it is abundantly clear in his biography and from a multitude of colophons that the treasury at Zang zang lha brag was revealed, there isn't any evidence that he successfully

²⁶ It seems rather unlikely that Nyi ma bzang po had access to the entirety of this prophetic guide as it exists today, for if he had, he would have very likely included a quotation from more than just what is not preserved as the first of the six scrolls. This situation concerning the use and contents of this collection of scrolls further adds to my growing hypothesis that the prophetic guides, at least within the tradition of the Northern Treasures, were decoded on an *ad hoc* basis over an extended period by more than one individual.

²⁷ bZang po grags pa 1983b, pp. 329-330.

revealed the treasures in Mang yul Gung thang or at Yang le shod. This passage above may be one of the only passages preserved by the tradition that implies that the founding patriarch might have been in any way less than perfect. For certainly it suggests that if one or more of these treasures were not extracted during his lifetime, then it is a result of his deficient effort. It may also be one of the only passages within this early layer of literature to imply that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem may be required to return, specifically to complete the process of revelation.

The remaining scrolls all contain additional information not reported in the biography. The third and fourth scrolls are the prophetic guides required to discover the treasures in Mang yul Gung thang and Yang le shod in Nepal. The fifth scroll reiterates the necessity of linking together the three treasures of teachings with the King of Gung thang for the good of Tibet. The sixth scroll is reported as being blank.

General Conclusions

In her discussion of prophetic guides, Janet Gyatso emphasizes their authority-granting nature, further noting that it is important to demonstrate that the fulfillment of the injunctive prophecies necessarily required struggle, which one can often find detailed in the biographies.²⁸ In this regard, the revelation narrative of *The Ray of Sunlight* is rather forthcoming: 1) bZang po grags pa receives the spiritual injunction to reveal the texts at rGyang multiple times before realizing he should take the order seriously, 2) after receiving the scrolls from bZang po grags pa, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem struggles to gain the support of the king, 3) he also struggles to find the keys at Mt. bKra bzang, and 4) he then struggles to find the treasures at Zang zang lha brag. Nevertheless, while understanding the importance of the prophetic guides certainly requires attention to the subject of legitimization, it is also valuable to recognize what one might consider the surface-level of intentionality of these texts: to provide prophetic guidance to a treasure revealer for a large variety of difficulties that are encountered in one's career as a treasure revealer. That being said, the problem of establishing one's legitimacy—both in one's own time and for future readers—is certainly addressed in the prophetic guides.

Reviewing the revelation narrative and the prophetic guides has also revealed that the biography is unclear regarding two specific injunctive prophecies. In particular, it is not clear from the biography if Rig 'dzin rGod ldem did or did not extract the second and third treasures at Mang yul and Yang le shod, despite the fact that the whetstone

²⁸ Janet Gyatso 1993, pp. 119-120.

guides provide the necessary information for their retrieval and suggest that all three will be revealed by the same person, though perhaps not in a single lifetime.²⁹ In an autobiographical text by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem entitled *History of Treasure Revelation*, he appears to confirm that there are treasuries at both Mang yul and Yang le shod, but that they have not yet been extracted.³⁰ In particular, he explains that while the teachings that have already been revealed will cause some benefit for the people of Tibet, greater benefits will result from the arrival of the treasures from Mang yul and Yang le shod.³¹ Unfortunately, while we know this text was written at sNa mo lung, we do not know when it was authored. So, while it is possible that he revealed these other two treasures later in his life, one would expect such important events to have been recorded somewhere, and as of yet, no trace has been found. Similarly, while there are other treasure revealers within the tradition of the Northern Treasures—some of which are understood as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's subsequent incarnations—I have not yet seen any indication within the tradition that they are thought to have discovered the treasures that were left unrevealed in Mang yul gung thang or Yang le shod.

Lastly, as a final, generalized reflection upon these and the other prophetic guides that were revealed by Zang po grags pa and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, it is worth noting that while there are records of how they were revealed and how some of them were transferred between the two treasure revealers, we have very little knowledge about how Rig 'dzin rGod ldem used the scrolls and the prophetic guides they contained. One may be able to gain some insight into these processes by examining their apparent *ad hoc* nature. That is to say, the prophetic guides appear to offer advice that is specifically tailored to address each of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's major challenges as they arise. While the

²⁹ As an aside that provides an interesting reversal of what is expected, Martin Boord reports that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is believed to have concealed treasures at Ri bo dpal 'bar in Mang yul, which were later extracted as *yang gter* by bsTan gnyis gling pa (c. 1480–1535; Boord 2013, p. 74).

³⁰ There are two versions of this text: Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 1983 and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 2015. The first of these is somewhat difficult to find because its title only appears in its colophon and the text is included in the collection as if it were the second half of another text. For a summary of the 2015 edition, see Achard 2023.

³¹ In a later publication of the same text, one of the sentences in question is significantly different. While the earlier publication reads *mang yul skyid grong dang bal yul yang le shod nas gsung dang thugs kyi gter byon nas* (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 1983, p. 262), the latter reads "*mang yul skyid rong du | bal yul yang le shod nas gsung dang thugs kyi sprul pa byon nas*" (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 2015, p. 6). While I cannot know which of these readings is closer to the original, it seems to me that the earlier publication makes much more sense in the context of thinking about the three treasures. Perhaps the version in the newer publication is a result of editing performed by someone unaware of the prophecies regarding the other two treasures.

early prophetic guides help establish his general legitimacy as a treasure revealer, they also offer much needed scriptural support in his mission to acquire the patronage of the king. After a series of murders, however, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem changes his focus away from the Gung thang Dynasty toward opening and escaping to hidden lands, concerns that are clearly reflected in *Outer Passkey to the Hidden Lands*, which is available in translation by Sardar-Afkhami, and a collection of other prophetic guides.³² Perhaps we are to understand the second, third, and fourth whetstone scrolls as reflecting Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's concerns after returning to gTsang and finally receiving the patronage of the King of Gung thang or perhaps as reflecting the concerns of his disciples after his passing. If the prophetic guides do in fact reflect *ad hoc* concerns, then one may be able to read them as commentary on events that occurred during the lives of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his immediate successors and thus gain additional insights into the early history of the tradition.

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³² Sardar-Afkhami 2001, pp. 40-65.

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The significance of the Byang gter in the Life and Legacy of Thang stong rgyal po

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Introduction

Thang stong rgyal po (1361–1485) is a towering figure of Tibetan Buddhism. He was born some decades after Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337–1408) but enjoyed a very long life. He was active for almost all the 15th century and played an important role for early members of the Northern Treasures. It is said in his biographies that he lived for 125 years and had over 500 masters. He is traditionally considered one of the most widely traveled persons in Tibetan history, although many of his travels were visionary. Often regarded as a non-sectarian master, he did not belong to any specific order and his legacy is preserved in many lineages of Tibetan Buddhism and on Tibetan soil in general. The 15th century was a time of effervescence in Tibet, but also a moment of consolidation of traditions. Although the 14th century witnessed a lot of cross-fertilization in lineages, with towering figures such as the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje, (1284–1339), the great scholar Bu ston Rin chen grub, (1290–1364), the rNying ma exegete and philosopher Klong chen rab 'byams (1308–1364), and the Jo nang master Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan (1292–1361), in the 15th century, sectarian affiliations became somewhat more rigid, especially with the establishment of the dGe lugs pa order stemming from Tsong kha pa's (1357–1419) teaching. Thang stong rgyal po's tradition, for its part, cannot be classified as belonging to any specific order. He gave rise to his own tradition, the Iron Bridge Tradition (*lcags zam lugs*), a reference to his activity as a builder of iron bridges and other means of crossing rivers. It was maintained in his monasteries and infused in all other lineages, although he is also particularly associated with the gCod and Shangs pa bka' brgyud lineages. Just to give an example of his fame in Tibet from an unrelated context, Thang stong rgyal po is mentioned by name in Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas's (1812–1899) *Calling the Guru from Afar* on a par

¹ This research is part of the ANR Project "[For a Critical History of Northern Treasures](#)." I thank my colleagues and senior researchers Stéphane Arguillère, Jay Valentine and Jean-Luc Achard for their expert corrections and discussions on many important points of this article.

with lineage founders such as Atiśa (982–1054), Mar pa (1000–1081), and the first Karma pa (1110–1193), as well as Khyung po rnal 'byor (990/1050–1127), Pa dam pa Sangs rgyas (11th c.–1117), and Ma gcig lab sgron (1055–1149).² He became a cultural hero in Tibet for his building of bridges and his association with the welfare of the population, be it through medicine or theater. He was an active inspiration for the spread in Tibet of the *maṇi* practice of Avalokiteśvara, the main *yi dam* of Tibet.

The importance of Thang stong rgyal po within the Northern Treasures today is reflected in Chos dbyings's treatment of this saint in *The History of the Northern Treasures*, where his biography is nearly as long as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's.³ The goal of this article is to describe and assess his place in the history of the Northern Treasures Tradition. Although the main reason may be the high social and symbolic capital he enjoyed in Tibet, it is likely that the geographical and spiritual proximity he had with the early Byang gter tradition played a decisive role for his importance in the Northern Treasures tradition. Thang stong rgyal po was born in the same region as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and received his treasures from the latter's direct disciples such as Renunciate (Kun spangs) Don yod rgyal mtshan (14th c.) and lHa gdong pa bSod nams mchog pa (14-15th c.). Thang stong rgyal po also founded one of the important monasteries of the region, gCung Ri bo che (gCung Ri bo che), which often had close ties with the Byang gter lineage and was visited by many of the early masters of that lineage. Above all, he was famous for his exceptional longevity, prophesied by Padmasambhava. It is claimed that it was achieved through his practice of the *Iron Stalk* (*lcags kyi sdong po*), a longevity practice (*tshe sgrub*) belonging to the Heart Practice (*thugs sgrub*) of rGod ldem's revelations.⁴ His biography also states that he obtained a high level of realization by following the *Direct Revelation* (*dGongs pa zang thal*), rGod ldem's rDzogs chen revelation.

Thang stong rgyal po's significance within the tradition of the Northern Treasures is deeply integrated into the way that the tradition presents its own history. For example, the Northern Treasures are often said to have been transmitted from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem in three separate lineages. While the first two are clearly important because they began with his consort and biological son and later included

² Kongtrül Lodrö Thayé 2021.

³ Chos dbyings 2015. This *History of the Northern Treasures* (*Byang gter chos 'byung*) is in vol. 62 of the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*. The biography of Thang stong rgyal po is located on pp. 133-171.

⁴ This is the *Nang sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 279-285). For more information on this transmission and its larger textual formation, see Shinga 2024 (in this volume).

many patriarchs of the tradition, the third lineage seems to be significant primarily because it verifies the connections between Rig 'dzin rgod ldem and Thang stong rgyal po.

Biographical sources and Existing Literature on Thang stong rgyal po



Himalayanart item 65773. Lo chen 'Gyur med bde chen Collected Works, vol. 3, p. 453

Given Thang stong rgyal po's importance in Tibetan religious history, there is a substantial quantity of Tibetan biographies and Western studies on him.

Regarding English-language sources, early tibetologists such as Rolf Stein and Giuseppe Tucci mention this figure. Stein introduced his legacy in Tibetan performing arts, and especially Ache Lhamo, and Tucci proposed a first assessment of his biography.⁵ From the 1980s onward, two American scholars, Janet Gyatso and Cyrus Stearns, devoted considerable work on this figure. The former wrote her PhD dissertation and several articles on Thang stong rgyal po's teach-

ings, characterizing them as "visionary."⁶ Cyrus Stearns made his master thesis on the topic of the saint's biographies, and published in 2007 a monograph containing a study and translation of the main biography, with detailed references to most of the predating works on the Saint. Stearns' book is to date the main source of knowledge about Thang stong rgyal po's life and teaching.⁷ He studied the more than 1800 Tibetan pages describing the Mahāsiddha's activity to give a comprehensive presentation of his life and tradition and fully translated one of the longest biographies, which was composed by Thang

⁵ Stein 1959, pp. 32, 238; Stein 1962, pp. 79, 276-277; Tucci 1949, p. 162. For a further presentation of the origins of Ache Lhamo, see rDo rjee 1984.

⁶ Gyatso 1981, Gyatso 1992.

⁷ Stearns 2007. For more references on Thang stong rgyal po by Shambhala, see their [Guide for Readers](#) (accessed 10.10.2023)

stong's descendant Lo chen 'Gyur med bde chen (1540–1615), the abbot of the Ri bo che Monastery in Thang stong's native region of Byang Ngam ring. This biography includes and synthesizes most earlier sources and is the text that became standard in Tibet, as it circulated on woodblocks from the time of its publication in 1609. In this monograph, Stearns also presents in notes the alternative versions of Thang stong's life. It is one of these earlier biographies that constitutes the main source of Chos dbyings's biography in the Byang gter compilation. It was composed by the Mahāsiddha's direct disciple, Shes rab dpal ldan, and is entitled *Ocean of Marvels* (*Ngo mtshar rgya mtsho*).⁸

The research by Gyatso and Stearns provides good access to Thang stong rgyal po's life and teaching, but his role in the Northern Treasures Tradition is somewhat left in the background. More recently, Kanako Shinga wrote several articles and her dissertation on Thang stong's practice of rGod ldem's revelations, especially the longevity practice of the *Iron Stalk*.⁹ The present work is based mostly on the studies by Gyatso, Stearns and Shinga, as well as the translation of Chos dbyings's biography. Its aim is to give a description of Thang stong rgyal po's life and teaching with a specific emphasis on his role in the Northern Treasures history.

Dates

According to Stearns,¹⁰ there is some uncertainty on the lifespan of Thang stong rgyal po. One of the main reasons for this uncertainty is that Thang stong rgyal po himself declared at the end of his life that he was both young and old and that the number of years elapsed since he had been born did not matter. This promoted the idea that he had gained control over his life and was immortal, and this in turn legitimized his tradition of longevity practices.

Although the earliest biography—authored by his direct disciple Shes rab dpal ldan (the only one who witnessed his death)—does not indicate Thang stong rgyal po's age when he passed on, it states twice that Thang stong rgyal po's final accomplishments occurred in 1484. Shes rab dpal ldan's son, Kun dga' bsod nams grags pa dpal bzang, declares that the Saint died when he was 128, in a snake year after the Nya mgo bridge was constructed. 'Gyur med bde chen, the biographer who compiled the life translated by Stearns, says, like Shes rab dpal ldan's son, that the Mahāsiddha died in 1485 and that he lived up to 125 years, thus was born in 1361. Padmasambhava's prophecy

⁸ Shes rab dpal ldan 1985.

⁹ Shinga 2016; 2017a; 2017b; 2020, 2024.

¹⁰ Stearns 2007, p. 11-12.

revealed by Thang stong rgyal po considers that he was born in an ox year. Hence, if he was 125 when he died, that would fit with the Iron Female Ox Year 1361.¹¹

The dates 1361–1485 are therefore the ones generally accepted in Tibetan historiography, and these are also the ones accepted by the rNying ma historian Gu ru bkra shis (18th c.).¹² bDud 'joms Rin po che maintains in *The rNying ma School of Tibetan Buddhism* that he was born in 1385 and lived for 125 years (i.e. died in 1509),¹³ and one finds other hypotheses in early Western historiography (Stein, Tucci, Gene Smith). The explanations provided by Stearns, however, tend to prove that, as far as we can know based on biographies and outer events, the most likely lifespan of Thang stong rgyal po is indeed 1361–1485. The main points justifying 1361 as his date of birth are that Thang stong said that he was a reincarnation of Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan, who died in 1361, and his alleged lifespan of 125 years. Regarding the year proposed for his death, it is supported both by the date of the construction of the Nya mgo bridge and the fact that no event post-dating 1484 is related by Thang stong's direct disciples.

If the iron-bridge builder was born in 1361, it means that he could have met Rig 'dzin rgod ldem in person, as the treasure revealer was born in 1337 and is said to have died in 1408. None of the biographies of either figure mentions this, however. Thang stong rgyal po received Northern Treasures traditions, not from rGod ldem himself, but from one of his disciples, Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan, a hermit living in rGod ldem's and Thang stong's birth region, Byang Ngam ring. He also attended Don yod rgyal mtshan's nephew, lHa gdong pa bSod nams mchog pa.

Regarding the first encounter between Thang stong rgyal po and Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan, the latter is said to have come and visited Thang stong rgyal po's mother shortly after his birth:¹⁴

Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan came to meet him [after his birth]. The previous night he had a wonderful dream where he was told, among other things, that O rgyan Padma[sambhava] would come to the world from the land of the *rākṣasas* in the south-west to accomplish

¹¹ For more details on the question, see *Ibid.*, pp. 11-14, and notes 44 and 45, p. 470.

¹² Gu ru bkra shis 1990, pp. 507-511.

¹³ bDud 'joms 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje et al. 2002, pp. 802-803.

¹⁴ Chos dbyings 2015, p. 135: *kun spangs don yod rgyal mtshan dang mjal bas | khong gis mdang nga'i rmi lam du lho nub srin po'i yul nas o rgyan pad+ma 'dzam bu'i gling du sems can gyi don la 'byon gyi yod zer ba sogs rmi lam ngo mtshar can byung tshul dang | gnyid sad pa na dang sngar dang mi 'dra ba'i sems la dga' ba dang | lus la bde ba'i snang ba dpag tu med pa byung bas bu chung 'di 'gro don nus pa zhig yong bar 'dug gsungs | mtshan khro bo dpal 'bar du btags | tshe dpag med kyi dbang dang | rnam joms kyi khrus chog shes rab blo 'phel gyi thabs sogs mang du gngang.*

the benefit of beings. Upon waking up, he felt an immense mental joy and physical pleasure unlike ever before and said that this baby would become someone with the capacity to accomplish the benefit of beings. He named him Khro bo dpal 'bar (Wrathful Blazing Glory) and performed many [rites] such as the Amitāyus empowerment, the purification ritual of Vajravīdāraṇa and a method for increasing his intelligence towards wisdom and so on.

Thus, if Thang stong rgyal po was born in 1361, Don yod rgyal mtshan met him for the first time before rGod ldem discovered the Northern Treasures of Zang zang lha brag in 1366. It seems that at that time Don yod rgyal mtshan was recognized as a local master, but not yet a hermit as he had some interaction with the local population. The next time the two are said to meet, Thang stong rgyal po is 14, so it could have been 1375. At that time, biographies describe that he received from Don yod rgyal mtshan the main Great Perfection teaching of the Northern Treasures Tradition, the *Direct Revelation*, and that this was instrumental in actualizing his realization of the true nature:¹⁵

When he reached his fifteenth year, he received from Don yod rgyal mtshan, the renunciate hermit, the *Great Perfection's Direct Revelation of Absolute Good's Contemplation*, the [Vision] of Manifest Reality, the cycle of the *Seminal Heart of Dākinīs* as well as the cycle of *Severance of Equal Taste*. He also received the empowerment of the peaceful and wrathful [deities] of the *Net of Magical Illusions* and of Amitāyus, etc., as well the *sādhana*s and authorizations for [Paṇḍita]śavarī, Vasudhārā and so on. It is said that, since this day, there was no [way of] going any further in his realization.

Although Rig 'dzin rGod ldem left Ngam ring shortly after discovering the treasures in 1366, he returned there on several occasions. He was at Mount bKra bzang between 1384 and 1389, when he was offered land at Mount dPal 'bar by the king of Gung thang. At that time Thang stong rgyal po was already in his twenties and allegedly traveling around. It is therefore possible that although the two men lived at the same time in the same region, they did not meet. It may also be possible that Thang stong rgyal po was born later than 1361, maybe in 1373 or 1385, and therefore did not meet rGod ldem as he was much younger than him. A hint of this possibility is a lineage of transmission described in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received* with

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136: [...] *dgung lo bco lnga par | kun spangs ri khrod pa don yod rgyal mtshan las | rdzogs chen dgongs pa zang thal | chos nyid mngon sum | mkha' 'gro snying thig la sogs pa'i chos skor | ro snyom gcod skor | sgyu 'phrul zhi khro | tshé dpag med la sogs pa'i dbang | [136] ri khrod ma | nor rgyun ma la sogs pa'i sgrub thabs rjes gnang mang po gsan | skabs de dus las rtogs pa mtho ru 'gro rgyu ma byung bar gsungs.*

two masters between rGod ldem's son and Thang stong rgyal po (see below for more detail on this). As there are no clear information allowing us to decide anything in that regard, it is therefore preferable to stick with the generally recognized year of birth of 1361, while keeping in mind that Thang stong rgyal po does not have clearly datable interactions with other masters in his youth: it may therefore never be possible to conclusively settle the matter.

Thang stong rgyal po's training in the Northern Treasures Traditions

As described above, the training of Thang stong rgyal po in the Northern Treasures started with his practice of the *Direct Revelation* that he received from Don yod rgyal mtshan in his teens. At this time, he focused more particularly on the *Vision of Manifest Reality* and presumably attained a realization of it. This term is an allusion to the first of the four visions (*snang ba bzhi*) of *thod rgal*, described in a text that is part of the *Direct Revelation* cycle, the *Ultra-secret and Unsurpassable Great Perfection, Manual of Instructions on the [Vision] of Manifest Reality*.¹⁶

Thang stong rgyal po is said to meet Don yod rgyal mtshan a third time, when he received all the other Northern Treasures and attained realization by practicing the longevity practice of the *Iron Stalk*:¹⁷

When he went to request teachings from the hermit Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan, each treasure guardian (*gter bdag*) appeared to the great renunciate to exhort him. In particular, Padmasambhava came with a retinue of *dākinīs* and told [Don yod rgyal mtshan], "I am the one who concealed as treasures the dharma teachings you possess. As I will stay in this land of Tibet to protect disciples for up to 180 years, give these treasure teachings to me!"

The great renunciate then told his monks, "The fully consecrated

¹⁶ "rDzogs pa chen po yang gsang bla na med pa chod nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig," In *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* 2015, vol. 1, pp. 531-562.

¹⁷ Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 138-139: *kun spangs ri khrod pa don yod rgyal mtshan gyi drung du chos zhu bar byon pa'i dus kun spangs chen po la gter bdag so sos mngon sum du skul ma byung zhing | khyad par o rgyan chen po 'khor mkha' 'gro dang bcas pa byon nas | khyod la yod pa'i chos rnams gter du sba mkhan nga rang yin | nga bod yul 'dir lo grangs | [139] brgya dang brgyad cu tshun gdul bya skyong ba la sdod rgyu yin pas gter chos rnams nga rang la thong gsungs pa byung nas | kun spangs chen pos grwa pa rnams la dge slong brtson 'grus 'dir byon pa 'dug khong gter kha 'di'i tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma la brten nas tshe yi rig 'dzin brnyes pa zhid 'ong bar 'dug 'o skol gyis sne len bzang po dgos gsungs nas bsnyen bkur phun sum tshogs pa mdzad | kun spangs chen po de nyid las rig 'dzin chen po rgod ldem can gyi gter chos thams cad gsan | gzhan yang brgyud 'dzin bsod nams mchog bzang las kyang byang gter gts'o bor gyur pa'i gter chos mang du gsan. This part corresponds to Stearns 2007, pp. 130-131.*

monk named Perseverance (brTson 'grus, Thang stong rgyal po's consecration's name) is coming. He will, on the basis of our *Longevity Practice Iron Stalk* from [rGod ldem's] treasures, attain the *vidyādhara* level of longevity. We should extend him a good welcome!" Thus, [Don yod rgyal mtshan] treated [Thang stong rgyal po] with utmost respect. [Thang stong rgyal po] received all the treasure teachings of the great Rig 'dzin rGod ldem from the great renunciate himself. In addition, he received again from Lineage Holder bSod nams mchog bzang many treasure teachings hailing mostly from the Northern Treasures.

The Northern Treasures teachings that Thang stong rgyal po received from Don yod rgyal mtshan's nephew, bSod nams mchog bzang, are described further on in the text:¹⁸

From lHa gdong pa bSod nams mchog pa, he completely received the treasure cycles on rDzogs chen from the lineage of sPrul sku Rig 'dzin chen po [rGod ldem] as well as the *Seminal Heart of the Dākinīs*, the *A ro Cycle on rDzogs chen*, the *Cycle on Vajrapāṇi*, the *sādhana* and authorization of the Great King Vaiśravaṇa, and many others.

Regarding the teaching cycles Thang stong rgyal po received from Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan and bSod nams mchog bzang, it is interesting to note that they are not exclusively Northern Treasures, but also other rDzogs chen cycles of the period. As shown by Stéphane Arguillère in the present volume,¹⁹ there is a literary and spiritual proximity between on the one hand the rDzogs chen teachings of rGod ldem (here the *dGongs pa zang thal*) and on the other hand the *bKa' 'gro snying thig* revealed by Padma las 'bral rtsal (1291–1315/19), developed by his disciples and, later, expanded by Klong chen rab 'jams (1308–1364). As he argues, it is very likely that Me *ban* Rin chen gling pa (1289–1368), one of Padma las 'bral rtsal's disciples, taught rGod ldem; one generation after rGod ldem, Don yod rgyal mtshan continued to teach both cycles to the same disciples, which shows that even close to Ngam ring there was a great fluidity in teachings shared and practiced. Regarding the *A ro Cycle*, this refers to rDzogs chen teachings of the Sems sde class revealed by A ro Ye shes 'byung gnas,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142: *lha gdong pa bsod nams mchog pa las | sprul sku rig 'dzin chen po las brgyud pa'i rdzogs chen gter ma'i skor yongs rdzogs | mkha' 'gro snying tig | rdzogs a ro'i skor | phyag rdor skor | rgyal chen rnam sras kyi sgrub thabs [142] rjes gnang sogs mang po gsan.*

¹⁹ Arguillère 2024. See in particular the biography of Rin chen gling pa and Arguillère's conclusion that "the *Heart-Essence of the Dākinī* and the *dGongs pa zang thal*, and why not Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod* [...] might be better regarded, so to speak, as *various states of one and the same text or corpus revealed and decoded by different individuals* rather than as altogether completely different works (as the tradition tends to have it)."

a 13th-century master.²⁰

Outside of Thang stong rgyal po's biography, what is known about Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan and his nephew comes from a history of the *Direct Revelation* compiled by A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan (15-16th c.) and published in a 13-volume collection of texts from Kaḥ thog Monastery.²¹ dKon mchog rgyal mtshan may have lived at the turn of the 16th century and was a student of Thang stong rgyal po's disciple named Kun dga' Nyi ma (see below for more on this lineage).

As mentioned earlier, some of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biographies consider that Don yod rgyal mtshan gave rise to one of the three Northern Treasures lineages:²²

Northern Treasures Dharma lineages are generally known to be three, the son lineage, the consort lineage, and the disciple lineage. The lineage starting with Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan is known as the disciple lineage, thus he is considered one of the sources of [later] lineages.

This distinction seems to derive from the *Dharma History of Treasure Revealers* of Karma Mi 'gyur dbang rgyal (17th c.) although the number "three" does not appear in that text.²³ It lists the lineage of the son (*sras*), that of the authentic emanation's great consort (*mtshan ldan sprul pa'i yum chen*), and that of Don yod rgyal mtshan, without labeling it a disciple lineage, although it clearly is a lineage that begins with a non-familial disciple. Rather than being followed by the number "three," the list is followed by the word "etc." (*sogs*), signifying that this is just the beginning of a larger list.²⁴ The main Northern Treasures lineage is the one also named the "son lineage," that is to say the one that first circulated locally in rGod ldem's family, and especially in the person of his son rNam rgyal mgon po, as well as in the Se and Me

²⁰ There are two volumes of his teachings in vols. 94-95 of the Sems sde section of the *rNying ma bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* (bDud 'joms Edition of 982-1987, <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW19229>). For a biography, see Gu ru bkra shis 1990, pp. 199-200.

²¹ A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan 2004, vol. 5, pp. 76-79. This is reproduced in the Byang gter Compilation, vol. 2, pp. 957-1012. See below for details.

²² Chos dbyings 2015, p. 127: *byang gter gyi chos brgyud 'di la sras brgyud | yum brgyud | slob brgyud gsium du grags pa las | kun spangs don yod rgyal mtshan las brgyud pa la slob brgyud ces grags pas brgyud pa'i chu mgo gcig tu brtsi.*

²³ Zab bu lung Karma Mi 'gyur dbang rgyal 1978, p. 72: *de nas sras rnam rgyal mgon po nas rim par brgyud pa dang | mtshan ldan sprul pa'i yum chen nas brgyud pa dang | kun spang don yod rgyal mtshan nas brgyud pa la sogs yod pad pa la [...]*

²⁴ Another way to describe the early Byang gter tradition (in A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan 2004, p. 73.) is to distinguish between the seven heart-sons and the three thousand karmically fortunate disciples, etc.

families, and continued with the “Northern Lords”—bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603)²⁵ and the seat-holders of rDo rje brag.

As nothing indicates that Don yod rgyal mtshan was seen as a particularly important disciple of rGod ldem for his contemporaries, it is not clear why this threefold presentation emphasizing him was chosen by some later historians and why it was repeated. One of the possibilities is that Don yod rgyal mtshan was a particularly accomplished practitioner, a siddha, and, although a hermit, had many disciples who displayed siddhis. An example of such an accomplished disciple given by Karma Mi 'gyur dbang rgyal and Gu ru bkra shis is that of Lord of Secrets (gSang bdag) bDe chen lhun grub, a disciple of Don yod rgyal mtshan who attained the rainbow body with his practice of the *Direct Revelation*.²⁶ This man, who was also a disciple of rGod ldem's son rNam rgyal mgon po (1399–1424) and held other rDzogs chen teachings, was such a source of inspiration that his life story is narrated at length just after that of rGod ldem in Chos dbyings's biography.²⁷ What these narratives emphasize, more than deeds of bDe chen lhun grub himself, is that his relics as well as his manuscript of the *Direct Revelation* carried blessings that induced others who came into contact with them to experience the natural state. This shows that Don yod rgyal mtshan's transmission of the *Direct Revelation* was seen as legitimate and endowed with blessing.

Another, perhaps more compelling, reason for Don yod rgyal mtshan's *a posteriori* importance is Thang stong rgyal po himself, who became an important figure for Tibet at large and a well-known representative of the potency of rGod ldem's revelations, especially the *Direct Revelation* and the *Iron Stalk* (see below for details). It is interesting to note that Don yod rgyal mtshan and Thang stong rgyal po were born in the same region as rGod ldem, Byang Ngam ring. This was where rGod ldem revealed his treasures, where his disciples settled and where Thang stong rgyal po founded an important monastery, Ri bo che. Perhaps the “disciple lineage” is, therefore, to be distinguished from the other two by the fact that it is completely unrelated to any of rGod ldem's family members, be it his son, nephews, wife, etc., while being a local power with significant effects on the transmission of rGod ldem's treasures outside of the Northern Treasures tradition itself. Don yod rgyal mtshan was “just” a disciple, as were bDe chen

²⁵ See n. 33 below for details on this title and Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal.

²⁶ Zab bu lung Karma Mi 'gyur dbang rgyal 1978, pp. 72-75; Gu ru bkra shis 1990, pp. 488-489. Arguillère 2024 (in this volume) shows that bDe chen lhun grub was also a disciple of Rin chen gling pa's disciple bSod nams rgyal ba (based on one of the three lineages of Rin chen gling pa's rDzogs chen teaching, the *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, received by the Fifth Dalai Lama (*Thob yig*, vol. 3, pp. 590-595).

²⁷ Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 129-131.

lhun grub and Thang stong rgyal po. What made them great was their realization of rGod ldem's treasures. In other lineages where simple master to disciple lineage is the norm rather than the exception, this may be obvious; by contrast, the "disciple lineage" emphasizes the prime importance in rNying ma traditions of blood as the main justification of authority.

Regarding the way Don yod rgyal mtshan received rGod ldem's revelations and transmitted them to Thang stong rgyal po, the hagiographical narrative by A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan first declares that Don yod rgyal mtshan was predicted by Padmasambhava. He was born at the foot of Mount bKra bzang in Byang, at the summit of which rGod ldem found his main treasure in 1366²⁸ and where he founded in 1370 a practice center that remained the epicenter of the Northern Treasures for several generations.²⁹ Don yod rgyal mtshan initially practiced Mahāmudrā, which awakened his habitual patterns and led him to request the transmission of all precepts and oral instructions of the *Direct Revelation* from rGod ldem. The transmission began in the 1370s, when rGod ldem was in Mount bKra bzang, and lasted for three years. Don yod rgyal mtshan was given the entrustment seal of the cycle by rGod ldem and the seal of protectors—which shows that he was already at the time considered by rGod ldem as an important, and probably gifted, disciple. He remained in retreat in Mount bKra bzang after that and it is said that he was constantly abiding in a state of luminosity, had visions of the *yi dam*, prophecies from *ḍākinīs*, etc. He remained day and night in the state of luminosity, enjoyed the pure fields of the five Buddha families, and was going along with oath-bound protectors as if with human beings. Thus, he was an accomplished master possessing the innumerable qualities of the supreme and common siddhis.

Thang stong rgyal po also learned rGod ldem's revelations from Don yod rgyal mtshan's nephew, lHa gdong pa bSod nams mchog pa, also called Lineage-holder (brGyud 'dzin) bSod nams mchog bzang. He came from the same area as Don yod rgyal mtshan.³⁰ bSod nams mchog bzang was probably his uncle's assistant and the main teacher at his hermitage at the end of Don yod rgyal mtshan's life. He trained

²⁸ Valentine 2013, p. 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ For a biography see A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mTshan 2004, vol. 5, pp. 79-81. bSod nams mchog bzang is only mentioned *passim* in Thang stong rgyal po's biographies. Note that the text calls him dPon po mChog bzang, which must be emended to *dbon po* mChog bzang, this meditator being Don yod rgyal mtshan's nephew (*dbon po*) rather than a "leader" (*dpon po*). Both men are from the lHa gdong pa family. See e.g. Stearns 2007, n. 310, p. 493 for details. This text quotes the same prophecy found in A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan 2004, pp. 81-83.

intensively in the two processes of the Mantrayāna associated with various treasures found by rGod ldem (the golden yellow treasury in the south, the copper red treasury in the west, the iron black treasury in the north) until he had visions of the *yi dams*, *dākinīs* and protectors and could request empowerments and instructions from them. He then obtained from his uncle instructions on the conch white treasury in the east, the rDzogs chen cycle of the *Self-Emergent Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* (*Ka dag rang byung rang shar*), and finally received instructions of the central, brown agate treasury—the *Direct Revelation*. He actualized them and was given the seal of entrustment by Don yod rgyal mtshan.

Thang stong rgyal po received instructions from him and from Don yod rgyal mtshan. A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan's narrative says that the incentive for receiving the transmission of the *Direct Revelation* was a twelve-year retreat Thang stong rgyal po completed in lCags phur can, the "Iron Dagger Cave" in lHo brag, where he reached ordinary and supreme siddhis.³¹ After this retreat, he started to engage in the four types of activities for the benefit of beings and had a vision of Padmasambhava, who predicted that he would reach Buddhahood in one life, enjoy the *Direct Revelation of Absolute Good's Contemplation*, and accomplish the benefit of beings with it. Padmasambhava granted him the four empowerments and Thang stong rgyal po went in search of a master that would grant him the transmission of the *Direct Revelation*. He met Don yod rgyal mtshan from whom he received again the four empowerments³² and most oral instructions. To perfect them, he also requested instructions from the Renunciate's nephew, mChog bzang, who also gave him the seal of protectors and taught cycles revealed by other *gter ston*. Thang stong rgyal po then became a great accomplished one benefitting being through this teaching. It is said that he had eight disciples who held the maṇḍala, fifty who were realized (*rtogs ldan*), and an infinity of karmically fortunate ones who received his teaching.

*Byang in the 15th century: Encounters between
Thang stong rgyal po and Early Byang gter Masters*

After this initial training, Thang stong rgyal po traveled extensively. In the later part of his life, he settled in Byang Ngam ring and founded the monastery of gCung Ri bo che near his birthplace of 'O ba lha rtse

³¹ According to Stearns 2007, p. 288, Thang stong rgyal po went to this cave associated with treasures of Gu ru Chos dbang but did not stay in long retreat there.

³² According to Arguillère 2024, it is strange that four empowerments are mentioned in this text as the *dGongs pa zang thal* (like the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*) have five empowerments.

along the gTsang po River. Construction was allowed and sponsored by Byang bdag³³ rNam rgyal grags bzang in 1449 and lasted several years.³⁴ A nine-storied stūpa of many doors of blessing (*bkra shis sgo mang*) was built there, and the nearby bridge became an important structure in the region.³⁵ Thang stong rgyal po lived in closed retreat at the peak of the mountain overlooking the monastery and died there in 1485. His death was kept secret and revealed only in 1514, when a stūpa was built to enshrine his body.

During Thang stong rgyal po's tenure at gCung Ri bo che, many regional masters associated with the Northern Treasures came to visit him to receive not only his Iron Bridge Tradition, but also his teachings of the *Direct Revelation* and other Byang gter specialties. One significant visitor was 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan (1445–1558), the father of mNga' ris Pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542) and Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1580, considered to be rGod ldem reincarnation and the second Rig 'dzin chen po). The history of the *Gathering of Intentions* (*mDo dgongs 'dus*) composed by the 4th Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) describes how Rin chen rgyal mtshan went to Ri bo che, where he received from Thang stong rgyal po Iron Bridge Traditions such as the Six Dharma of Niguma, Mahāmudrā, and Avalokiteśvara practices, alongside the two central traditions of the Byang gter that had become central in his monastery, the long-life practice of the *Iron Stalk* and the *Direct Revelation*. He stayed in Ri bo che for two weeks and before he left, was blessed by Thang stong rgyal po, who prophesied that he would have a very long life and that “father and son” would meet in Akaniṣṭha.³⁶ This transmission is reflected in a lineage for a practice pacifying vampires (*sri*) outlined in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* and whose manual was composed by Rig 'dzin

³³ The title “Northern Lord” or Byang bdag may be a generic name for rulers of that region. As Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603, for more on this character, see Martin 2024 in the present volume) was both a secular ruler and a religious master, the title then came to refer to the Northern Treasures religious leaders, although they did not lead Byang Ngam ring anymore. It must be noted also that this title does not refer to rGod ldem and his reincarnations, called Rig 'dzin chen pos, but to the ones leading the Northern Treasures Tradition in their interim. Further research is needed to clarify when the title was institutionalized. It is clear, however, that it was not so during the time of rGod ldem or shortly thereafter, and therefore that Byang bdag rNam rgyal grags bzang is not to be particularly considered a Byang gter master, although he might of course be related to one of the family lineages who inherited rGod ldem's transmission.

³⁴ See descriptions in Stearns 2007, p. 363 *passim*. This is described in Chos dbyings 2015, 163-164.

³⁵ See Akester 2016, pp. 653-656 for a presentation of the history of gCung Ri bo che with some pictures.

³⁶ Stearns 2007, pp. 25-26. This description relies on the *mDo dgongs 'dus* history of Padma 'phrin las, in *Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung* 2015, vol. 41, pp. 307-308.

Padma 'phrin las and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen rtse dbang po.³⁷

Another example is that of Mes Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541), the patriarch of the estate of bDe grol in Ngam ring, whose three meetings with Thang stong rgyal po are emphasized in his biography.³⁸ The first took place in 1454/1455, when Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan was an infant and was granted his name by the great siddha. Later on, he mostly received from him teachings of the Iron Bridge tradition, and it is clear in the biography that the most powerful authority in Ngam ring in the mid-15th century was Thang stong rgyal po. Among Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan's disciples, there are also important disciples of Thang stong rgyal po, such as his nephew, the Tsa gong abbot Nyi ma dbang po and other lamas of Ri bo che.

It thus appears that in the second half of the 15th century, Thang stong rgyal po was an important figure in Ngam ring, and his authority often mingled with that of political and spiritual leaders of the early local Byang gter tradition.

Monasteries

gCung Ri bo che

In his older years, Thang stong rgyal po was very active in construction work. Although his bridges are the most enduring and remembered trace of his activity in Tibet, he also established several monasteries in the places where he taught and converted disciples and they later became seats of his Iron Bridge tradition. The three main sites are ICags zam Chu bo ri in Central Tibet, seat of the ICags zam tulkus,³⁹ gCung Ri bo che in Tsang, seat of his descendants and stronghold of his influence in Ngam ring, and rTsa gong in Kong po (South-West Tibet).

³⁷ Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 2007, p. 375-376: *lha sras rnam rol mang lam ri khrod pa bzang po grags pas rgyang yon po lung nas spyang drangs pa sri zlog 'khor lo 'bar ba'i gzhung* | *de'i lag len dang ngag 'don padma phrin las dang rje mkhyen brtse gnyis kyis mdzad pa* | *brgyud pa ni* | *shākya'i tog* | *rig 'dzin byang sems* | *o rgyan chen po* | *lha sras* | *bzang po grags pa* | *rgod ldem* | *ri pa sangs rgyas* | *nam mkha' mchog bzang* | *thang stong rgyal po* | *rin chen rgyal mtshan* | *legs ldan rje* | *byang bdag yab sras* | *chos dbyings rang grol* | *rdo rje thogs med* | *pad+ma phrin las* | *kun bzang rgya mtsho* | *chos nyid rang grol* | *pad+ma bshes gnyen* | *ngag dbang kun bzang* | *kun bzang gsang sngags bstan 'dzin* | *rje mkhyen brtse'i dbang pos bstsal pa'o*. In this lineage, the identity of Thang stong rgyal po's teacher, Nam mkha' mchog bzang, is not clear. It may refer to bSod nams mchog bzang.

³⁸ Valentine 2018, pp. 107-109; translation pp.117-133, with mentions of Thang stong rgyal po p. 118. See Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 207-208 pp. 207-208.

³⁹ Akester 2016, pp. 242-246.



Figure 1 - Extract from a YouTube video on Thang stong rgyal po, view of the renovated gCung Ri bo che Stūpa and the iron bridge

As just mentioned, the monastery located in Thang stong rgyal po's home country was gCung Ri bo che. According to *Gu ru bkra shis's History*,⁴⁰ after Thang stong rgyal po's death, the monastery was kept by his family lineage (*dbon brgyud*) until Lo chen 'Gyur med rdo rje, the author of the standard biography translated by Stearns. One of Lo chen's disciples was Yol mo ba bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644),⁴¹ the third incarnation of the Yol mo *sprul sku* and an important Northern Treasures master. The first Yol mo *sprul sku* was Śākya bzang po (16th c.), a teacher of both mNga' ris Paṅ chen and Legs ldan rje, and bsTan 'dzin nor bu was himself a disciple of the third rDo rje Brag Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639). bsTan 'dzin nor bu studied as a youth with Lo chen in Ri bo che, and Lo chen handed over the leadership of the monastery to him. The next abbot was Yol mo ba's brother sGam smyon Phyag rdo nor bu (d. 1663),⁴² who was obviously an important Northern Treasures master as he authored a series of biographies of representatives of that tradition.⁴³ Sometime afterwards, the abbacy came back to Thang stong rgyal po's descendants, as the Sa skya master Kun dga' legs pa'i 'byung gnas (1704–1760) shared teachings there

⁴⁰ Gu ru bkra shis 1990, p. 664; also translated in Stearns 2007, p. 17.

⁴¹ For a short biography see Bogin 2014. A longer work is Bogin 2013.

⁴² Although *Gu ru bkra shis's History* has the spelling sGom smyon, the spelling should be sGam smyon, the "madman from sGam po dar," as in bsTan 'dzin nor bu's autobiography, a spelling that also reflects the fact that he was considered an emanation of sGam po pa (see also Stearns 2007, p. 17 and n. 71, p. 472).

⁴³ Bya gtang Phyag rdor nor bu, 2015, *Byang gter bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar bsam 'phel ma ni ka'i 'phreng ba*, in *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 59, 457-546.

with Ngag dbang yongs grags, the monastery's abbot and paternal descendant of Thang stong rgyal po. The fact that the leadership of gCung Ri bo che oscillated back and forth between Thang stong rgyal po's descendants and prominent patriarchs of the Northern Treasures further demonstrates the close relationship between these two lineages.

Chu bo ri

Another monastery where the interaction between Thang stong rgyal po and the Byang gter Tradition is clear is that of Chu bo ri, a mountain located at the confluence of the gTsang po and the sKyid chu, the river that flows through Lhasa, where hermitages associated with Padmasambhava have been in existence since the 9th century.⁴⁴ In 1433, Thang stong laid the foundation of a temple and stūpa on Chu bo ri and started the project of a bridge on the gTsang po. After gathering iron for the bridge in Bhutan, he started work in 1438, and the bridge and monastery were concluded after much difficulty in 1445.⁴⁵ The monastery became the seat of the lCags zam mChog sprul ("Supreme Incarnations of the Iron Bridge Tradition") after Thang stong rgyal po's passing, the mChog sprul being considered the incarnations of the disciple sKyob pa bzang po.⁴⁶ In addition to the monastery built at the southern extremity of the bridge, another important building was lCags zam rtse at the peak of the mountain.

In the 16th century, Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rje, the second Rig 'dzin chen po, became the main master in charge of lCags zam rtse and spread the *Direct Revelation* there.⁴⁷ His biography describes how he often visited the monastery while traveling in Central Tibet. He practiced there a Northern Treasures protector ritual after which he had visions of many protectors of the rNying ma and gSar ma traditions.⁴⁸ Although he died in Byang Ngam ring where he had gone to give teachings to the Northern Lord bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603), Legs ldan rje's body was taken to lCags zam rtse where it was enshrined.

⁴⁴ See a full description in Akester 2016, pp. 242-248.

⁴⁵ Stearns 2007, p. 250, 292, 298-300. See also Akester 2016, pp. 242-243.

⁴⁶ Akester 2016, n. 70, p. 244, based on Gu ru bkra shis 1990, p. 667.

⁴⁷ Akester 2016, n. 74, p. 245. See also Legs ldan rje's life in Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 344-345: *de nas chu bo ri lcags zam rtse'i dgon bdag mdzad cing zang thal gyi khrid ka btsugs pas gzigs snang lung bstan dpag med byung*.

⁴⁸ Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 350-351: *chu bo rir byang gter mgon po bstan srung yongs rdzogs kyi ljags bsnyen mdzad pas gsar rnying gi chos skyong rnam ki zhal cig char du bstan pa dang*. This text, whose short title is *bsTan srung yongs rdzogs* belongs to the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle. It is a ritual dedicated to all rNying ma protectors with a specific form of mGon po phyag drug pa at the center of the maṇḍala. Thanks to Stéphane Arguillère for this reference.

When the 4th rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las visited the place in 1669, he describes that it was filled with Northern Treasures relics, statues and paintings.⁴⁹

Thang stong rgyal po's Teaching Legacy

Thang stong rgyal po's tradition is characterized by its visionary nature. As pointed out by Janet Gyatso,⁵⁰ Tibetan Buddhist teachings can be divided along three main lines: they can be transmitted by master to disciple in a lineage; this is the case for most traditions coming from India during the Later Spread of the Doctrine in Tibet as well as the *bka' ma* teachings in the rNying ma school. Secondly, they can be treasure, that is to say teachings concealed at a point in time, either in a material form (*sa gter*, "earth treasure") or within the mind (*dgongs gter*, "mind treasure") in order to be revealed later by specific individuals. Thirdly, they can also be visionary in nature (*dag snang*, often translated as "pure vision") when the teachings transmitted are originally received by a realized master from a buddha, deity, or accomplished master of the past who is encountered in a visionary experience. Although Thang stong rgyal po received all kinds of transmissions from masters of the gSar ma and rNying ma schools,⁵¹ most of the teachings making up the Iron Bridge Tradition goes back to visions he had of enlightened beings such as Avalokiteśvara or Tarā, or Indian masters such as Niguma or Virūpa. According to Janet Gyatso, Thang stong rgyal po's most important writings are the cycle called the *Glorious Giver of Immortality* (*Chi med dpal ster*), a long-life practice of Amitāyus; the *Benefit of Beings as Vast as the Sky* ('Gro don mkha' khyab ma), an Avalokiteśvara *sādhana*; a version of the Shangs pa teachings of Niguma; the *Aural Transmission of the Secret Conduct* (*gSang spyod snyan brgyud*), a version of the gCod meditation; the *sPrin gseb ma*, a *sādhana* for Pañjara Mahākāla; a *guru-yoga* on Vajradhara; and a meditative rite on the Dākinī Siṃhamukhā. Related to his teachings are also cycles revealed by later masters, such as the *Heart Essence of the Mahāsiddhas* (*Grub thob thugs tig*) revealed by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po (1820–1892) or cycles revealed by 'Jigs med gling pa

⁴⁹ Rig 'dzin 04 Padma 'phrin las 2015, p. 250: *lcags zam rtse mjal bar phyin | gnas 'dir rig 'dzin legs ldan zhabs kyi gdung khang gser zangs kyi mchod rten nang du rGod ldem can gyi ring bsrel sran rdog tsam bzhugs pa'i rdo rje drag po rtsal gyi sku dang | rig 'dzin rje'i gter gsar rta mgrin pad phrin dregs pa srog 'phrog gi sgrub rten rta phur sogs byin rten mang du bzhugs nges pa dang | rig 'dzin rje'i zhabs phyags | mdo phugs steng 'og kun tu byang gter kho na gtso bor gyur pa'i logs bris rig 'dzin yab pa sras kyi sku sogs mjal spro bar 'aug pa legs par mjal |*

⁵⁰ Gyatso 1992.

⁵¹ See a summary of his masters according to the various lineages in Shinga 2017b, pp. 43-46.

(1729–1798) and brTul zhugs gling pa (1916–1965).⁵²

*Northern Treasures Lineages Tracing to Thang stong rgyal po:
The Direct Revelation of Absolute Good's Contemplation*

The most central and respected teaching among Northern Treasures is the rDzogs chen cycle called the *Direct Revelation of Absolute Good's Contemplation* (*Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal*). As described above, traditional sources maintain that Thang stong rgyal po received this cycle from both Renunciate Don yod rgyal mtshan and his nephew mChog bzang, and that with those teachings he attained the level of supreme *vidyādhara*.⁵³ Thang stong rgyal po probably taught the *Direct Revelation* to many students, but the one presented as a lineage holder in later narratives was called Bodhisattva Kun dga' Nyi ma. This individual is mentioned several times in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received* but what we know about him comes from A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan's narrative in the *Rosary of Jewels: A History of the Direct Revelation*.⁵⁴ As explained earlier, this narrative is different from Thang stong rgyal po's translated biography (Stearns 2007) and from the one composed by Chos dbyings for the *Northern Treasures Compilation*.

According to the *Rosary of Jewels*, the disciple who received Thang

⁵² Gyatso 1992, pp. 95-96 summarizes the writings of the Iron Bridge Tradition attributed to either Thang stong rgyal po or his disciples (as he himself passed on the teaching but did not write it down).

⁵³ Chos dbyings 2015, p. 133 and 136. According to the *Records of Teachings Received* by the Fifth Dalai Lama, there were several other lineages that Don yod rgyal mtshan gave to Thang stong rgyal po: *The Supplication in Seven Chapters* (gSol 'debs le'u bdun ma, vol. 2, p. 385), the *Outer Practice of White Jambhala* (Dzam la dkar po phyi sgrub, vol. 3, p. 144a), and *Mahākārunika* (Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol, vol. 3, p. 65a.). This lineage is also outlined by Kong sprul in his index of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 2007, pp. 43-44): *chos sku kun bzang yab yum | longs sku zhi khro rab 'byams | sprul sku ston pa bcu gnyis | rgyal sras rigs gsun mgon po | bka' babs rig 'dzin grub thob | kun 'dus pad+ma 'byung gnas | zhu mdzad las can rnam lnga | gter ston bzang po grags pa | rig 'dzin dngos grub rgyal mtshan | kun spangs don yod rgyal mtshan | brgyud 'dzin bsod nams mchog bzang | grub thob thang stong rgyal po | byang sems kun dga' nyi ma | sngags 'chang shākya bzang po | pañ chen padma dbang rgyal | gtsang ston ngag gi dbang po | zhiḡ gling 'od gsal sgyu ma | 'khrul zhiḡ bkra shis tshe brtan | bdud 'dul seng ge rtsal rdzogs | 'gro 'dul padma nor bu | padma bde chen gling pa | rig 'dzin tshe dbang nor bu | dam chos bsam rdzogs rgyal po | rdo rje gtsug lag dga' ba | rgyal dbang bdud 'dul rdo rje | rje bla ma padma nyin byed dbang po | [kong sprul]. It is interesting to note that this lineage passing through Thang stong rgyal po reenters the classical Northern Treasures lineage two generations after him in the person of Śākya bzang po, and then mNga' ris Pañ chen, etc.*

⁵⁴ Arguillère 2022a, pp. 243-250 gives an account of the various *Direct Revelation* practice manuals, several of which come from Kaḡ thog.

stong rgyal po's transmission and taught it to A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mtshan was Bodhisattva Kun dga' nyi ma, a native of Kyi mo gzhung in Central Tibet.⁵⁵ He first studied various treasures transmissions and traveled throughout dBus gtsang, meeting with realized and learned masters of all lineages and receiving all kinds of transmissions (Madhyamaka, Kālacakra, gCod, Zhi byed, Dwags po, Karma, 'Brug pa and Shangs pa bKa' brgyud cycles, rNying ma traditions, etc.). He trained in these instructions and progressively obtained signs of realization. He stayed in retreat in Zab bu lung for seventeen years. At that time, he received teachings on the *Direct Revelation* from a realized yogi, but because of the behavior of some disciples, the yogi stopped teaching. He received, however, a prophecy from the teaching guardian and various signs indicating that he should teach Kun dga' nyi ma. He therefore gave Kun dga' nyi ma all empowerments and instructions but ordered him not to pass a word on to anyone else. The yogi entrusted him with the seal of the teaching guardians. After that, Kun dga' nyi ma practiced and had experiences, but could not get further instructions. He went to Byang to meet Thang stong rgyal po and received again empowerments and instructions on the *Direct Revelation* from him. When asked about key instructions, the Mahāsiddha looked in the sky, unlocked essential key points, and taught them in detail to Kun dga' nyi ma, saying that he was only repeating the transmission of Padmasambhava who was constantly staying in front of him. Thus, he said, although that teaching was very restricted, Padmasambhava had unlocked the restriction for him, and Kun dga' nyi ma should benefit beings through it, as it was a transmission with a particularly high blessing and activity. Thang stong rgyal po added that he had received many teachings of both the Old and New Traditions, but the *Direct Revelation* was the one people were requesting the most and which had the most benefit.⁵⁶

Thus, Thang stong rgyal po is said to have had visions of Padmasambhava related to the *Direct Revelation* before he received it from Don yod rgyal mtshan, and he continued to receive further instructions from Padmasambhava during his whole life. This is why his teaching of this cycle is sometimes called a "re-revelation" (*yang gter*).⁵⁷ It is likely that his realization, his fame, and this short lineage

⁵⁵ This paragraph is a summary of A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mTshan 2004, pp. 83-89. See also the version in the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 2, pp. 1007-1012.

⁵⁶ A rdo dKon mchog rgyal mTshan 2004, p.88.

⁵⁷ Arguillère 2022b, p. 16 states: "A phenomenon that is perhaps almost unparalleled in the history of religions is the extraordinarily amazing system of 're-revelations,' or *yang gter*: a second (or third, etc.) revelation of the exact same body of texts by a later 'treasure discoverer.' Apart from emic justifications, retreasures most often

from Padmasambhava all contributed to the success of his lineage and a justification of Thang stong's spreading the lineage although the transmission may have been restricted in other circles. His transmission circulated quite widely, reaching Kaḥ thog with A rdo dKön mchog rgyal mtshan, but also Kong sprul who included it into the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.⁵⁸ Bodhisattva Kun dga' nyi ma also gave it to another disciple, Sangs rgyas brtson 'grus (called either Dran mchog or mTshungs med Sangs rgyas brtson 'grus), whose lineage eventually reached the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁵⁹

The Fifth Dalai Lama describes an alternative lineage passing through Thang stong rgyal po but not Don yod rgyal mtshan:⁶⁰ from rGod ldem, it goes to his son rNam rgyal mgon po (1399–1424), and then to bDe chen lhun grub (also Don yod rgyal mtshan's disciple), who transmits it to a realized yogi called Grags pa (rTogs ldan grags

occur when a high-ranking rNying ma lama cannot properly obtain the transmissions of a given tantric cycle, especially [...] because it is jealously guarded by an institution as one of its specialties. This idea can only be understood if one considers the crucial character of proper transmission from master to disciple in the tantric systems: no one can improvise himself or herself as a teacher of a corpus that he or she has not properly received; and if its legitimate custodians do not want to entrust it to him or her, his or her only resource is to receive a direct revelation of it, which adds nothing to its content, but confers the legitimacy to teach it. Besides Thang stong rgyal po's 're-treasures' that have already been mentioned, certain cycles of the Northern Treasures have thus gained new popularity thanks to the enormous number of 're-treasures' found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. [...]

⁵⁸ Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 2007, pp. 499-500: 'dir dgongs pa zang thal gyi gnad thams cad bsdus pa'i don khrid bu 'bor ba bkra shis rgya mtshos mdzad pa tsam bzhugs | bryud pa ni | kun tu bzang po | rgyal ba rigs lnga | rdo rje sems dpa' | dga' rab rdo rje | 'jam dpal bshes gnyen | shrī singha | des padma 'byung gnas dang | bi ma la mi tra | bai ro tsa na gsum la ngang | de gsum kas khri srong lde'u btsan | ye shes mtsho rgyal | rdo rje bdud 'joms rnam la bshad | slob dpon gsun ka'i dgongs nyams gcig dril gter du sbas pa rig 'dzin chen po dngos grub rgyal mtshan gyis bton | de nas rim [500] bzhin kun spang don yod rgyal mtshan | rgyud 'dzin bsod nams mchog bzang | grub thob thang stong rgyal po | byang sems kun dga' nyi ma | 'khrul zhig dkon mchog rgyal mtshan | dkon mchog rdo rje | shākya rgyal mtshan | byang chub seng ge | bkra shis rgya mtsho | he pa chos 'byung | ston pa rgyal mtshan | kun bzang shes rab | padma lhun grub rgya mtsho | padma nor bu | karma bkra shis | karma lha dbang | karma 'gyur med | karma kun bzang bstan 'dzin gyi zhal snga nas bka' drin du btsal pa'o.

⁵⁹ Dalai Lama 05 Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991, vol. 3, p. 126a: grub thob thang stong rgyal po | byang sems kun dga' nyi ma | dran mchog sangs rgyas brtson 'grus | bye tshang pa rin chen dpal 'byor | rgyal sras sangs rgyas bde chen | rje btsun nyi zla sangs rgyas | rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa dpal 'byor lhun grub | des bdag la'o.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 125b-126a: yang lugs gcig la | sras mchog rnam rgyal mgon po yan gong ltar nas | gsang bdag bde chen lhun grub | rtogs ldan grags pa'i mtshan can | grub pa'i dbang phyug thang stong rgyal po | sprul sku bde ba [126a] bzang po | dran mchog rigs 'dzin chos rdor | sprul sku tshe ring rdo rje | mtshungs med kun grol rdo rje | bla ma chos dbang grags pa | rang grol chos dbang lhun grub | lha btsun kun bzang rnam rgyal man gong ltar ro.

pa'i mtshan can), and from him to Thang stong rgyal po. Then the lineage continues through Thang stong's disciples, either bDe ba bzang po or Byang sems Kun dga' nyi ma. This transmission is peculiar inasmuch as it has three masters between rGod ldem and Thang stong rgyal po. Interestingly, it does not appear in Thang stong rgyal po's biography translated by Stearns, which does not mention bDe chen lhun grub either. A reason for this may be its apparent discrepancy in terms of dates; it is possible, however, that Thang stong rgyal po received the *Direct Revelation* from Don yod rgyal mtshan early in his life, and received it again much later from a master called Grags pa. It could probably be dated to 1450s or 1460s, after Ri bo che was founded.

The Iron Stalk (lcags sdong ma)



Himalayanart item 66254, Modern representation of Thang stong rgyal po

Another Byang gter practice that was very important for Thang stong rgyal po was that of the *Iron Stalk*,⁶¹ a longevity practice that is part of the Heart Practice (*thugs sgrub*)⁶² of rGod ldem and on the basis of which Thang stong rgyal po is said to have reached the *vidyādhara* level of longevity.⁶³ The best sign of success and accomplishment of Thang stong rgyal po's practice was his very long life. His traditional representation with a longevity vase in the left hand and an iron chain symbolizing his achievement as civil engineer and bridge builder in the right portray him as the embodiment of longevity and

constructions for the benefit of beings.

⁶¹ The name of the practice, "iron stalk" (*lcags kyi sdong po*) is translated according to Shinga 2017a, pp. 53-58. Stearns calls it the "iron tree." Shinga 2020 (in Japanese) is a dissertation on the topic of that practice.

⁶² The "Heart" or "Essence Practice" (*Thugs sgrub*) is a cycle belonging to rGod ldem's treasures and containing practices related to *yi dam* practice (*lha*), Avalokiteśvara in particular (*thugs*), and rDzogs chen (*rdzogs: lha rdzogs thugs gsum*). The cycle fills three volumes (6-8) in the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*. The texts associated with the longevity practice called *Iron Stalk* are in vol. 7, pp. 273-354. Tulku Thondup 1986, p. 120 states that what is generically called a "Heart Practice" is a category of treasures made up of three types of practice, on the guru (i.e. the peaceful and wrathful forms of Padmasambhava), on *yi dams*, especially Avalokiteśvara, and on rDzogs chen.

⁶³ Chos dbyings 2015, p. 133.

In addition to the *Iron Stalk* that Thang stong rgyal po received and practiced, there are several other longevity practices revealed by rGod ldem that are part of other cycles. One is the *Longevity Practice of Vajrakīla* (*rDo rje phur pa'i tshe sgrub*),⁶⁴ which belongs to the *Vajrakīla* cycle (vol. 13, pp. 139-154) and another is the *Tshe sgrub yongs rdzogs* that is part of the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* Cycle (vol. 11, pp. 459-508). These cycles are not particularly related to Thang stong rgyal po, although he may have received them. He for his part revealed and spread another longevity practice, called *Glorious Bestower of Immortality* (*'Chi med dpal ster*), which is based on a treasure he revealed at bSam yas mchims phu and on visions he had of Padmasambhava.⁶⁵ Both the *Iron Stalk* and the *Glorious Bestower of Immortality* gained their success and fame with Thang stong rgyal po and his disciples' longevity:⁶⁶

A direct disciple of this Mahāsiddha, Dharma Lord from Mang yul 'Phag pa blo gros, lived until he was 120 years of age. A natural *yoginī* living near rDo khog in Kham, the Mahāsiddha's direct disciple, lived up to 130. A master from 'Tsho sgo ba lived for 112 years. Also in Kham, a disciple of the Mahāsiddha lived for 100 years, living in various places. It is said that it was because the Mahāsiddha himself had gained power over life that many of his disciples too had power over life.

In terms of the content of the practices, these various cycles differ from each other and do not seem to be related, except for the obvious common presence of Amitāyus and Amitābha.⁶⁷ The *Iron Stalk* is more complex than the *Glorious Bestower of Immortality* and contains outer, inner, secret and ultra-secret levels of practice.⁶⁸ Most of this cycle's texts were extracted by rGod ldem from the southern, yellow side of the treasure chest he revealed in Zang zang Lha brag, but some were also found in the central chest.⁶⁹ In the main text of the cycle, the one

⁶⁴ Shinga 2022 proposes an edition and translation of this practice.

⁶⁵ See a description of the practice's history and examples of recensions in Gyatso 1981, pp. 142-159; Stearns 2007, pp. 28-30. As Thang stong rgyal po's *'Chi med dpal ster* was particularly well-spread, there are many versions of the practice. See *Ibid.*, n. 116, p. 477 for some examples.

⁶⁶ Chos dbyings 2015, p. 170: The list is based on Gu ru bkra shis 1990, p. 511.

⁶⁷ See below for details. This is also stated by Stearns 2007, n. 119, p. 477.

⁶⁸ For more details on this practice and its various phases, see Shinga in the present volume.

⁶⁹ Collective 2015, vol. 7, pp. 269-354. The [*Instruction for the*] *Outer Practice* [*of Making the*] *Vase of Jewels* (*Phyi sgrub rin chen bum pa*), the [*Actual*] *Inner Practice* [*Called*] *Iron Stalk together with the Empowerment* (*Nang sgrub lcags kyi sdong po dang | dbang yig bcas la*), the *Secret Practice Space Vajra* (*gSang sgrub nam mkha'i rdo rje*), and the

properly called *Iron Stalk*, the practitioner appears as Amitābha holding a longevity vase in two hands in the meditation posture, which is filled by the nectar of longevity.⁷⁰ He focuses on the central channel that is seen like an iron bamboo stalk, straight, hollow and robust like a pillar, hence the name of the practice.

Regarding the *Glorious Bestower of Immortality*, the practice was codified and written down by Thang stong rgyal po's disciple's Nyi zla bzang po, and later expanded by bsTan 'dzin ye shes lhun grub (1739–1795), the seventh lCags zam *sprul sku* of Chu bo ri.⁷¹ In that cycle, the practitioner appears as Aparamitāyurjñāna, with his lama and the lineage above his head, including Thang stong rgyal po, Padmasambhava, Amitāyus, Hayagrīva and Amitābha. Their qualities enter the longevity vase held by Aparamitāyurjñāna and spread into the practitioner's body. The same elements are found in later re-revelations of Chos rje gling pa⁷² and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen rtse dbang po.⁷³ In Chos rje gling pa's cycle, the practitioner visualizes him or herself as the four-handed Avalokiteśvara. On the practitioner's crown sits Amitābha and a red *hrīḥ* is envisioned in the heart. From Amitābha's longevity vase, nectar drips into the central channel. In front of the practitioner, Thang stong rgyal po appears, also holding a longevity vase. Dwelling at his head, throat, and heart are manifestations of Amitāyus, Red Hayagrīva, and Padmasambhava. In the end, Thang stong rgyal po's vase overflows into the practitioner's central channel. The treasure revealed by mkHyen rtse dbang po is part of a larger cycle, the *Mahāsiddha Heart Essence*, aimed at revitalizing Thang stong rgyal po's teachings. In that cycle, one appears as Amitāyus, with

Ultra-secret Single Hrīḥ (Yang gsang hrīḥ gcig ma) were in the southern box (although this is explicit only for the outer and secret *sādhana*). The auxiliary practices *Inner Longevity Practice based on the Saṃbhogakāya (Nang longs spyod rāzogs sku la brten nas tshes sgrub pa)* and the *Longevity Essence Extraction of Nectar (Tshe sgrub bdud rtsi bcud len)* were found in the central box. No detail is provided for the *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs*. Note that the prophetic guide states that the cycle contains eleven texts divided into outer, inner and secret practice, but the categories do not fit the texts actually present in the collection (*tshe bsgrub lcags kyi sdong po la: phyi nang gsang ba'i bsgrub thabs gsum: dbye na chos tshan bcu gcig yod: phyi bsgrub rin chen bun pa la: bdud rtsi bcud kyi snying po yod: kha rgyan dpag bsam sdong po yod: nang bsgrub lcags kyi sdong po la: 'od lnga bcud kyi yal ga yod: 'chi med rdo rje'i 'bras bu yod: gsang bsgrub nam mkha'i rdo rje la: rang gsal 'od kyi sgron me yod: rgyun chad med pa'i chu bo yod: dmus long mig 'byed lde mig yod: las tshogs rin chen char 'bebs yod:).*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 281. See Shinga 2017a for a study of this text and Shinga 2024 (in this volume) for the various levels of development of this text in an early manuscript and in later Byang gter compilations.

⁷¹ Gyatso 1981, p. 151 for the codification, p. 143 for lCags zam versions.

⁷² Chos rje gling pa 1976, vol. 1, pp. 489-498. For a translation, see <https://www.lot-sawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/choje-lingpa/chime-palter>.

⁷³ 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po 1976, vol. 1, pp. 431-473.

Amitābha, Hayagrīva, Padmasambhava and Thang stong rgyal po above one's head. They then dissolve into light and into the practitioner's heart. There are yet other systems inspired by Thang stong rgyal po, for example in the Sa skya lineage. They too are related to Thang stong's *Glorious Bestower of Immortality* and not to the *Iron Stalk*.⁷⁴

If we return now to the Northern Treasures practice of the *Iron Stalk*, this is how Cyrus Stearns describes it:⁷⁵

[...] The practice of the *Iron Tree* [= Stalk] [is] a section of Gökyi Demtruchen's hidden treasure teachings. The *Iron Tree* is the section in the Heart Practice cycle of Gökyi Demtruchen's treasures for sustaining the essence of life through meditation on Amitābha, Amitāyus, and Hayagrīva. This treasure text is believed to have been written in the symbolic language of the *ḍākinīs* by Padmasambhava's secret consort, the goddess Caṇḍālī, and hidden in a casket of maroon rhinoceros hide until rediscovered by Gökyi Demtruchen. The Sakya master Ngawang Kunga Tashi, in his explanatory text for bestowing initiation into these teachings, says Thang stong perfected the attainment of immortality through practice of the *Iron Tree*. The *Iron Tree* is believed to be the specific technique that Padmasambhava himself used to achieve immortality. It is said that Amitāyus actually appeared to Padmasambhava when he was in Maratika Cave meditating with his consort, the Indian princess Mandarava. Padmasambhava requested many teachings from Amitāyus, including the *Iron Tree*, which both he and Mandarava used to achieve the immortal, indestructible, vajra body.

It is not exactly clear when Thang stong rgyal po received that important Byang gter practice from Don yod rgyal mtshan as it is not mentioned explicitly as a transmission he received when he was fourteen. It might be during their third encounter as Don yod rgyal mtshan tells his monks before Thang stong rgyal po's arrival that he would reach immortality with the *Iron Stalk*.⁷⁶

From these short descriptions of the *Iron Stalk* and the *Glorious Bestower of Immortality*, we can deduce that the two are unrelated, but

⁷⁴ Contemporary masters of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the 41st Sa skya khri 'dzin or the 17th Karma pa O rgyan phrin las give longevity empowerment according to Thang stong rgyal po's lineage. See <https://aribhod.org/events/lhh-the-sakya-trizin-rinpoche-longevity-empowerments-1> and "Long Life empowerment (lineage of Thang stong rgyal po)" for the Sa skya event, and "Thang stong rgyal po Longevity Empowerment" for the Karma bka' brgyud transmission. The Sa skya transmission is based on a text composed by the 30th Sa skya Throne-Holder Kun dga' bkra shis (1654–1711) and kept in the *sGrub thabs kun btus* (Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po 1976, vol. 1, pp. 427-470). See Stearns 2007, n. 116, p. 477.

⁷⁵ Stearns 2007, pp. 26-27.

⁷⁶ Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 138-139.

both gained their success because of Thang stong rgyal po's longevity and fame. It is not known whether he continued to transmit the *Iron Stalk* as no lineage with his name appears in the Northern Treasures corpus or in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*. That narrative, however, states that Thang stong rgyal po's teaching was transmitted in the Byang gter lineage. An alternative lineage tracing from Thang stong rgyal po's disciple Nyi zla bzang po passed on to the Northern Lord bKra shis stobs rgyal, and on to the Fifth Dalai Lama through sMan lung pa Blo mchog rdo rje (1595–1671).⁷⁷

Conclusion

From this presentation of the interrelation between Thang stong rgyal po and the Northern Treasures' masters and teachings it can be deduced that although the Mahāsiddha cannot be considered a Northern Treasures lord as he was himself a phenomenon of his own and the founder of the Iron Bridge tradition, rGod ldem's treasures were instrumental on his path towards enlightenment and he probably had a particular liking for the rDzogs chen cycle of the *Direct Revelation* and the longevity practice of the *Iron Stalk*. His transmission of these practices can be considered to be both Byang gter and lCags zam—Thang stong rgyal po received them from human sources, the 'long lineage,' and from Padmasambhava himself, the 'short lineage.' In some ways there is a close parallel between Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and Thang stong rgyal po, a proximity expressed by the fact that both were considered mind emanations of Padmasambhava. Another resemblance is that they both discovered hidden lands, Sikkim and six others for rGod ldem, Glo and other southern lands for Thang stong rgyal po.⁷⁸ Above all, their proximity can be explained geographically: they both came from Byang Ngam ring and lived at the same period. Many of later masters from both traditions were therefore familiar with both traditions and had fluid relationships with either institutions, be it at Ri bo che in Byang, or later in Chu bo ri in Central Tibet, which continued to be closely related to the neighboring Byang gter institution of rDo rje brag.

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⁷⁷ Dalai Lama 05 Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1991, vol. 3, f. 242b.

⁷⁸ See Heckman 2020 for more details on Thang stong rgyal po and hidden lands.

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From Rāhula with Love: The Gruesome Liberation of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje as Told by his Compassionate Executioner

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*stobs zhes bya ba'i stobs med 'khyams po khyod//
kho bos pre ta pu ri'i 'gram du bskrad//
Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje*

*zhing zhes bya ba'i zhing bcu tshang ba khyod//
bdag gis rā hu la yi zhal du gdab//
Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal¹*

Whether apocryphal or not, the witty exchange of poetic insults between Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje (†1599) and Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal dbang po'i sde (1550–1603) is not merely concerned with derogatory puns involving each other's names.² Though Zhing shag pa did not literally expel bKra shis stobs rgyal to the shores of Pretapurī, he did banish him from Byang and turned him into a wanderer. As for bKra shis stobs rgyal, he is indeed credited (at least among his supporters) for the death, or rather "liberation," of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje. In the wake of his expulsion from Byang ngam ring (and of the aforementioned poetic exchange), bKra shis stobs rgyal performed a tantric rite of liberation (*sgrol ba*) called *Rāhula's Razor* (*Khyab 'jug gza' yi spu gri'i las sbyor*).³ The depiction of the rite and of Zhing shag pa's gruesome agony were subsequently the object of a letter by Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal to Rig 'dzin rGyal ba'i sras po Padma chos

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¹ These two quotes are from the text presented in translation in part three of this paper.

² The "poetic insults" episode is, for example, mentioned in bDud 'joms 'jigs bral ye shes rdo rje's *Bod chen po'i rgyal rabs dwangs shel 'phrul gyi me long*, p. 493. Jacob Dalton translated it in *The Gathering of Intentions*, p. 93. It is also mentioned in Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa, *One hundred Thousand moons*, pp. 281-282.

³ This ritual most probably comes from the *gZa' rgod dug gi spu gri'i skor la pod gnyis* by Padma las 'brel rtsal (1291–1315/1319) that can be found in volumes 28-29 of the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*.

From Rāhula with Love

rgyal (d. u.).⁴ It is this letter, which will be presented in translation below, that is the centre of our attention in this paper. But first, let us briefly introduce the actors involved in this drama and review what is known about their altercation.

1. Enter the protagonists

Based on the available sources, we know that Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje originally served as a retainer for the Rin spungs pa in gTsang and owned only a small estate. An ambitious man, he was appointed as commander of the bSam grub rtse castle in gZhis ka rtse in 1548. Some sources say that he led a rebellion along with other dissatisfied vassals in 1557, but according to the 4th 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592), this rebellion did not take place until 1565. As a consequence of these events, Zhing shag pa emerged as "the new strongman of gTsang"⁵ and managed to maintain strong ties with the bKa' brgyud school.⁶ Along with precipitating the demise of the Rin spungs pa dynasty in its own rise, the gTsang pa dynasty founded by Zhing shag pa lasted until 1642, when it was eventually swept away by Gu shri bstan 'dzin during his conquest of Tibet.

As for Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal, he was born as the son of the Byang bdag Nam mkha' rin chen, whose lineage is said to go as far back as the Mi nyag emperor Si'u rgyal po, while his mother, Chos skyong 'dzom chen, was the daughter of a Lha sa rdzong pa. He was recognized by the second rDo rje brag rig 'dzin Legs ldan rdo rje as the reincarnation of his brother, mNga' ris pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal. Though Legs ldan rdo rje was his main master, he grew up receiving teachings from many famous masters of the time such as Lo chen Ratna bha dra. According to his biography as found in the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, he ruled from 1574 until about 1580 and the controversy with Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje that led to his exile. The importance of this exile for the future of

⁴ Though Shakabpa identifies this Rig 'dzin rGyal ba'i sras po Padma chos rgyal as bKra shis stobs rgyal's master Byams pa Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (One hundred thousand moons, p. 282), I think it is in fact Legs ldan rdo rje's son, Byang pa rgyal sras Padma chos rgyal.

⁵ Olaf Czaja, *Medieval rule in Tibet*, p. 281.

⁶ Czaja (ibid) also suggests that: "Apparently, [Zhing shag pa] had a serious interest in staying on good terms with the Karma pa and, in fact, in becoming heir to the Rin spungs pa also in the religious sphere of politics and power." And on p. 279, Czaja evokes his relation with Padma dkar po: "Not much later, Padma dkar po, having become something like the *bla ma* of the new strongman Tshe brtan rdo rje, came to dBus." For a more detailed account of Zhing shag pa's rise to power, see Czaja, *Medieval rule in Tibet*, pp. 278-281, and Shakabpa, *One hundred thousand moons*, pp. 279-280.

the Byang gter tradition cannot be overstated: it led to the relocation of its headquarters from Ri bo bKra bzang to the monastery of Thub bstan rdo rje brag and "incidentally" to the fact that his son, the third rDo rje brag rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), counted the 5th Dalai-lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682) among his students. As for bKra shis stobs rgyal, though he does not stand among the most prominent *gter ston* of the Byang gter tradition, he nevertheless remains famous for the composition of the prayer to the *gter ston* called *sPrul sku gter ston grangs nges kyi gsol 'debs thugs rje'i nyin 'byed*.⁷ Furthermore, during his lifetime, he was an essential link in the lineage, receiving (and thus preserving) a great amount of teachings in perilous times and as such was held in high esteem by Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho himself.

While the scientific literature has yet to entirely clarify the context of the feud between our two protagonists, the scarcity of available sources cannot solely be blamed. The one-sidedness of the accounts, along with variations in the retellings certainly contribute to the confusion.⁸ Yet, the most frequently repeated canvas of the story is the following: a quarrel arose between bKra shis stobs rgyal and his brother Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, maybe about some family estate business, and then Kun spangs lHa dbang rdo rje, one of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje's nine sons, favoured Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan over bKra shis stobs rgyal, resulting in the latter's expulsion from Byang ngam ring.⁹ bKra shis stobs rgyal then wandered for some time before finding refuge in Phyong rgyas stag rtse, where he became close to the ruling family in which the 5th Dalai was born a few years later.¹⁰ It is also in Phyong rgyas (and other places such as 'Bri gung) where the ritual described in the text that will interest us below is said to have been performed. As for the shroud of uncertainties surrounding Zhing shag pa's death, the issue of the

⁷ This prayer can be found in *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 61, pp. 90-94.

⁸ See, for example, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa, *One hundred Thousand moons*, pp. 281-282 and Jacob Dalton, *The Gathering of Intentions*, pp. 92-93.

⁹ In some accounts, the feud was sparked directly by Kun spangs lHa dbang rdo rje. Additionally, the uncertainty about the identity of bKra shis stobs rgyal's father contributes to the overall lack of clarity surrounding the whole affair (on this, see Dalton, *The Gathering of intentions*, p. 196 n. 34).

¹⁰ In Jay Valentine's *Lords of the Northern treasures* (p. 172) we find a translation of a passage from the *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* (p. 674) saying that even the tribulations of this banishment are a mere "trick" of enlightened activity: "For the sake of public appearance, [Trashi Topgyel] was disgraced by [the regional leader and his own confession] and forced to move to Central [Tibet]. Although this is how it looked publicly, the real purpose of the move was to open the way for his enlightened activity in the central region [of Tibet]."

From Rāhula with Love

compatibility between the different dates that have reached us is not the least of them. The most commonly accepted date of death for Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje is 1599.¹¹ As for bKra shis stobs rgyal, his banishment from Byang ngam ring is usually considered to have occurred when he was thirty or so (which would bring us around 1580), and we also know that he died in 1603, just four years after Zhing shag pa's alleged death.¹² Yet, in his biography, the performing of *Rāhula's Razor* is rather presented as a middle life feat, occurring more or less as he had just arrived in dBus, thus giving him time afterwards to raise and teach his son, Ngag gi dbang po, as well as travel with him and discover several *gter ma*. Though the agony of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje appears to have lasted rather long in the letter translated below, an agony persisting for almost twenty years can be somewhat perplexing for researchers, and some claims are certainly to be reconsidered in this story. I do hope we will be able to put in order all these intricate events in the years to come.

2. The violent liberation of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje

It goes without saying that the use of a wrathful ritual had nothing to do with personal revenge on the side of bKra shis stobs rgyal, but everything to do with Zhing shag pa's evil deeds and the way he governed his lands. Because of these, he ticked all the boxes in the tenfold list of "fields" (*zhing bcu*, variously translated as "ten fields", "ten conditions", "tenfold guilt", "tenfold heinous crimes", etc.) that make one a proper candidate to be (unwillingly) liberated. According to Jacob Dalton, this type of tenfold lists became popular in later Tibet, replacing a previously fivefold one,¹³ and the items in the list

¹¹ See for example, Benjamin Bogin, *The Red and Yellow war: Dispatches from the field*, p. 258: "Karma Tseten Dorjé ruled until his death in 1599, when he died in suspicious circumstances that will be considered shortly. He was succeeded by his son, Karma Tensung Wangpo (Karma bstan srung dbang po), who maintained his father's patronage of the Karma Kagyü school and, through the Karma hierarchs, an alliance with the Chogthu tribes of Mongols." See also James Gentry, *Substance and sense*, p. 138: "In 1599, upon the death of the first gTsang pa sde srid Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje, his son Karma bstan srung dbang po took possession of 'U yug's gLing mkhar fortress."

¹² Yet even the dates of bKra shis stobs rgyal's birth and death are disputed since the recently published *gTsang la stod byang ngam ring gi rig gnas lo rgyus* by Gung thang bstan 'dzin nor bu still gives the (unlikely) dates of 1540–1578, while maintaining 1580 as the date of birth of his son Ngag gi dbang po (cf. pp. 204–205).

¹³ See Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons*, p. 87: "The fivefold list is reminiscent of the earlier nontantric set of "five sins of immediate retribution" (*pañcānantaryāni*), five sins said to send the offender straight to hell at death. The five crimes for liberation may represent a tantric response to these earlier five sins, though it

can vary, though the general tone of the faults in it is hostility towards the Dharma and its upholders. In *The "Calf's nipple" (Be'u bum) of Ju Mipam ('Ju Mi pham) – A handbook of Tibetan ritual Magic*, Bryan Cuevas gives the following tenfold list:

The ten fields are listed by Klong rdol Ngag dbang blo bzang (1719–94) in his *gSang sngags rig pa 'dzin pa'i sde snod las byung ba'i rgyud sde bzhi'i ming gi rnam grangs* as follows [...]: [1] those who subvert the teachings of the Buddha; [2] those who blaspheme the Three Jewels; [3] those who rob the goods of the monastic assembly; [4] those who slander and condemn the Mahāyāna; [5] those who attack the guru/lama; [6] those who slander their tantric brothers; [7] those who hinder an evocation;¹⁴ [8] those who have neither love nor compassion; [9] those who break their vows and pledges; and [10] those who hold wrong views about karma and its effects."¹⁵

But even if someone is a suitable target for such violent liberation, these rituals require skills, and bKra shis stobs rgyal happened to possess them, and this fact is certainly not unrelated to the later specialization of Byang gter in fierce magic.¹⁶ After the events, he wrote a letter to Padma chos rgyal in which he describes what happened to Zhing shag pa when he accomplished the *Khyab 'jug gza' yi spu gri* ritual and justified its use. From an etic point of view, the strangest aspect of the affair is not so much that a death sentence can somewhat be justified when it is imposed and executed by an individual and not by some legal authority, but the fact that the first beneficiary is not so much "society" as the offender himself. And indeed, a little further in bKra shis stobs rgyal's biography, it is said that the enemies whose lives he had taken, instead of going into bad destinies, had the joy to be directly promoted to abide in the *dharmadhātu*.¹⁷

To this day, this letter has never been translated except for the first

should be noted that enumerations of seven or ten crimes are also seen in the earliest stratum of Mahāyoga materials. Having been identified as guilty of one of the five crimes, the victim is determined to be a "field" for liberation."

¹⁴ *sgrub la bar chad byed pa bdun*.

¹⁵ Cuevas, "The 'calf's nipple' (Be'u bum) of Ju Mipam ('Ju Mi pham)", p. 186, n. 37.

¹⁶ The object of this paper being merely the translation of bKra shis stobs rgyal's letter, I refer anyone interested in this type of liberation rite to Jacob Dalton's *The Taming of the Demon*, *passim*.

¹⁷ "rnam shes ngan 'gror mi gtong bar mdzad de chos kyi dbyings su gnas spar bar mdzad", *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, Vol. 62, p. 373.

From Rāhula with Love

few verses.¹⁸ Yet, its depiction of the episode is so graphic, with such an uncanny blend of tragic, comic, and ironic traits, the sufferings of Zhing shag pa being described with a dark humor that makes one laugh while reading the most horrible things, that we deemed its publication worthwhile. The core of the text is made up of enneasyllabic verses. I adopted a stanzaic grouping for these verses, and retained it even in the two instances where it was not the most obvious solution, because it had proved effective the rest of the time. The style is rather difficult, very elliptical and even grammatically confusing at times, so that the translation is in many places tentative, to say the least. My lack of firsthand experience in wrathful magic did not help, but I hope this translation will arouse the curiosity of researchers about a figure who deserves to be better known.

3. *The translation*

The following passage is part of the biography of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal dbang po'i sde compiled/composed by Chos dbyings, located in Volume 62 of the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*.¹⁹ The page numbers between brackets are from this edition, but its probable source is the 5th Dalai lama's biography of Ngag gi dbang po, entitled *Byang pa rig 'dzin chen po ngag gi dbang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho*,²⁰ where the text is almost identical, with just a few cuts made by the author of the *Ngo mtshar gtam gyi phreng ba*.

[368]

When [bKra shis stobs rgyal] arrived in dBus, to Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje's letter full of maligned joy saying:
 "You! the powerless wanderer²¹ named "Power",
 I expel you to the shores of Pretapurī!"²²

¹⁸ By Shakabpa, *One hundred thousand moons*, p. 282.

¹⁹ The biography of bKra shis stobs rgyal occupies pp. 357-393 of volume 62 and is part of *The Garland of Wondrous Tales (Nga mtshar gtam gyi phreng ba)*, and the passage translated here runs from p. 368, line 5, to p. 372, line 5.

²⁰ It runs from p. 708, line 6, to p. 711, line 6, of the 5th Dalai lama's *Nga mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho*.

²¹ An alternate version of the verse has *kham pa khyod* instead of *'khyams po khyod*, in which case it should be interpreted as a reference to the Mi nyag family roots of bKra shis stobs rgyal and not to the fact that he is now homeless.

²² The name Pretapurī meaning "City of the hungry ghosts", the threat in Zhing shag pa's verse is obvious. For Pretapurī as a *gnas yig*, see Federica Venturi, "A *gnas yig* to the holy place of Pretapurī," *passim*.

[he] replied:

"You! The one called "Field" with the ten fields²³ complete,
I send you into the mouth of Rāhula!"²⁴

[369]

And in accordance with that saying, Zhing shag pa was annihilated along with seven descendants through a wrathful action relying on the ritual [called] *Rāhula's Razor*. About the justification for this [action], [bKra shis stobs rgyal wrote in a letter accompanying] an offering sent to Rig 'dzin rGyal ba'i sras po Padma chos rgyal:²⁵

"At the feet of Zhabs drung rGyal ba'i sras po,

Thus I say: today again, having come and standing in the direct presence of your precious body, [I thank] your great kindness.

Thanks to the infallible care of Padmasambhava, the Lord of the Victorious Ones,

And the final adamantine words of the great Rig 'dzin [Legs ldan rdo rje],²⁶

Owing to the fact that he has been totally bound under oath, Rāhula has become like a servant of mine.²⁷

[His] former non-virtuous latent tendencies having fully developed,
[The] hater of the virtuous ones, engaged in immoral misbehavior,
The one called "Field," with the heart's blood of a Ten-fielder,
May he be instantly devoured by the powerful Rāhula!

At the centre of a large retinue behaving with conceit²⁸

²³ For more information on the subject, see Dalton, *The Taming of the demons*, Chapter 3, and especially, p. 87 and note 49.

²⁴ For more information on Rāhula in the violent liberation practices, see Sørensen and Hazod, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham-po*, pp. 167-73. For general information about Rāhula, see Bell, *Tibetan Demonology*, pp. 38-41.

²⁵ Most probably Legs ldan rdo rje's son Byang pa rgyal sras Padma chos rgyal.

²⁶ The allusion is not transparent. All we know is that the tradition says that when Legs ldan rdo rje was about to die, upon seeing the tremendous devotion of bKra shis stobs rgyal who was begging him to lengthen his life, he is said to have promised him to be reborn as his son, the future Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po. On this, see Jay Valentine, *Lords of the Northern Treasure*, pp. 158-159, and for the doubts about the authenticity of the episode, see pp. 162-165.

²⁷ The translation is tentative. In *One hundred thousand moons*, Shakabpa quotes the first verses of the letter, thus rendered in English by Derek F. Maher: "I faithfully practice Padmasambhava's reliable perception and the vajra words, difficult to transgress, which have been spoken by you, the supreme Rikdzin. As a result, I have command over Rāhula." Shakabpa, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

²⁸ This verse seems to refer to Zhing shag pa and his retinue rather than Rāhula and his retinue, though one could argue that it describes the latter, considering the positive connotation *khengs pa* can have when it refers to demons and rituals.

From Rāhula with Love

And at a time of equilibrium between waxing and waning moon,
Rāhula, along with his father, mother, sons, retinue and messengers,
Swiftly came in that direction²⁹ under the impetus of a wrathful
appetite.

Instantly, because of the pain caused by a resplendent poisonous
spike,³⁰
[Zhing shag pa displayed] various signs of paralysis and confusion,
[370]
[Letting out] moans of unbearable torment from his mouth.
[He found himself] in a situation like [that of someone] rushing to the
hell realms.

[As for] the people surrounding him, behaving as enemies, friends or
in between,
Such a situation is pretty much like the proverb that says:
“To buy at the cost of one’s own insincerity.”³¹
“Now, this is indeed the magic power of the black mantras!”

Thus they whispered to one another...
His distressed sons, wife, his entire entourage,
Behaving with startled confusion and experiencing misery,³²
Began to emit violent lamentations whilst embracing [him].

As his torment made him wail moans of lamentations,³³
Of the entire assembly of people residing in that region,
Every one of them, witnessing this situation, was freed from doubt:
“Here’s what happens when one makes an enemy of a tantric
practitioner!”

Then, his close relatives, out of affection, [summoned]

²⁹ *I.e.* where Zhing shag pa stood at that time.

³⁰ The phrase *gzi brjid dug gzer* may be intended to refer both to an actual “resplendent poisonous spike” and also to an arrow nocked in the bow that Rāhula carries in most representations.

³¹ These verses are rather obscure, and I could not find the referenced *gtam dpe*. It seems to imply that the people surrounding him are all he could get with the “counterfeit money,” which was his lack of faithfulness.

³² The 5th Dalai lama’s *Ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho* has *stab por spyod pas* instead of *stab por spyod te*. Here, I take *stab po* as synonymous with *rtab pa* and *rtab rtab po*. Jäschke has the example “*stab stab por song nas*” translated as “having become quite startled and confounded” under the *rtab pa* entry.

³³ Following Jean-Luc Achard’s suggestion, I emend *dung* (present in both versions) to *gdung*, which is more natural. Otherwise, the verse should be rendered by something like: “This sound of lamentation was like the cry of a conch shell.”

Through the [officers] in charge and according to the extent of their knowledge,
 People expert in medicine and in this type of situation.³⁴
 [But this] small gathering of timely fools,

It was as if [they] taught him the sufferings experienced in the lower realms.

[As they repeated] the ferocious sounds "*hūṃ phaṭ*" and [used] all kinds of power-ingredients,³⁵

He experienced heat and cold, and as if with a fatal arrow,
 They exerted themselves to strike again and again with the whip of fire and water.³⁶

Then, thanks to a follower of our own tradition from Zha lu,³⁷

Through the profound connections of various magical rites,

[Zhing shag pa] could now and then utter a few words

[371]

And was able to experience [his] sufferings for a few days.³⁸

At that time, in his mind was a mass of stirring thoughts:

He was so attached to mundane happiness that

Its associated sufferings, if given a material form,

Would undoubtedly rival even with [the size of] a mountain!

At that time, along with his relatives and friends,

He remembered all his previous transgressive actions.

As he repented, he was like one who craves [to get] ambrosia from a poison,

[and] I've heard it said that he begged me to save him.

Then, later in that day of [mental] agitation,

He was reduced to a mere name by the Lord of the three worlds.³⁹

³⁴ This *tshul 'di'i rig byed mkhan* seems to designate people expert in the art of saving individuals in a situation similar to the one of Zhing shag pa, so probably experts in divination, sorcery or even the Tibetan equivalent of exorcism.

³⁵ *Thun* might also refer to ritual blades used by his physicians in order to cure him or to some specific practice sessions.

³⁶ This metaphor probably refers to moxibustion.

³⁷ I could not identify this person yet.

³⁸ The meaning seems to be that he had passed out, but that thanks to the Zha lu pa in question, he was conscious again so that he could at last taste the sufferings he was missing while unconscious.

³⁹ It seems peculiar to refer to Rāhula as the "Lord of the Three Worlds." It is unclear if this is a longstanding tradition or neologism unique to this letter.

From Rāhula with Love

At the time of revealing the unfailing truth,⁴⁰
The actual situation was clearly manifested.

In the pit where the fierce magic had been practised,
The *liṅga* split into pieces because of the increasing heat,
The *ba ling*⁴¹ burst into flames and [there was] another sign.⁴²
I saw many visions, so I then offered a torma of gratitude.

After that, I heard with pleasure the garland of good news
From the messengers⁴³ and about this affair, even nowadays,
Please be so kind as to take a look at the other [effects]
Of my own powerful invocation of truth within that year.

In the region of Byang, homeland of the men of perverted conduct,
Although the time to enjoy the cold, springtime, was near,
[They were] struck by thundering fierce lightnings,
[And] in the temples, magical fires were spreading.
[372]

Also, the military forces that tried to harm me,
When going back home, had close to thirty
Accidents, etc. and there are many more details.
Did the noble master hear anything about these?

How could these [feats be achieved] by my own power?
[It was through] Padmasambhava's compassionate deeds and in
particular
[Through] the supreme *rig 'dzin*'s unequalled kindness,⁴⁴
[Who], knowing the future, blessed my commitment.⁴⁵

I kept the cherished promise [to my Master] unstained as my own
heart,
Without regret, I carried the mountain of truth on my back,
Without transgressing [my oath], I worshipped diligently the

Regardless, he may have received this name as a result of the rather common confusion between Rāhula and Viṣṇu, the latter being also called khyab 'jug.

⁴⁰ This might refer to the moment when one invokes the truth during protectors' rituals.

⁴¹ The *ba ling* is a torma that represents meat in the ritual.

⁴² *I.e.* another sign of the ritual's success.

⁴³ Here, the messengers are probably ordinary travellers bringing news about Zhing shag pa's fate.

⁴⁴ This is likely to refer to his beloved master Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rdo rje.

⁴⁵ The *bzhal* from the *Byang gter phyogs bsgribs* is obviously faulty, so I follow the *Ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho* and emend it to *gzhal*.

protectors and guardians of the Dharma,
Aspiring to quickly lay hold of the [state of] inwardly abiding
without foes.

Thus, through my supreme faith in the regent of my kind and noble
teacher whose kindness from [this] existence and in all future lives is
hard to fathom, may you consider [this letter] as a cloud of offering in
which you may rejoice. Whatever pleases [you], I joyfully offer!

Appendix

Wylie transcription of the text

*dbus su phebs skabs zhing shag pa tshe brtan rdo rjes snying tshim gyi yi
ger/ stobs zhes bya ba'i stobs med 'khyams po khyod/ /kho bos pre ta pu ri'i
'gram du bskrad/ /ces bskur ba'i lan du/ zhing zhes bya ba'i zhing bcu
tshang ba khyod/ /bdag gis rā hu la yi zhal du gdab/ /ces gsungs 'dugs pas
ltar/ zhing shag pa bdun brgyud dang bcas pa khyab 'jug gza' yi spu gri'i
las sbyor la brtan nas drag po mngon spyod kyis tshar bcad pa yin te/ de'i
rgyu mtshan skor rig 'dzin rgyal ba'i sras po padma chos rgyal la 'bul ba
gnang 'dug pa 'di lta stel/ zhabs drung rgyal ba'i sras po gang gi zhabs
drung du/ zhu ba/ deng dus kyang sku rin po che mchog tu dangs ngos de
gar phebs yod 'dug pa bka' drin che/ rgyal dbang padma'i gzigs pas bslu med
cing/ /rig 'dzin mchog gi 'da' ka rdo rje'i gsung/ /ches cher dam la bzhag pa'i
rten 'brel gyis/ /rā hu la de bdag gi bran ltar gyur/ /snga nas mi dge'i bag
chags yongs brtas pas/ /dge byed la sdang tshul min log spyod mkhan/
/zhing shes zhing bcu tshang ba'i snying khrag de/ /mthu ldan gza' mchog
chen pos mod la bzhes/ /khengs par spyod pa'i 'khor tshogs mang po'i dbus/
/dkar nag phyogs kyis mnyam 'jug dus kyis tshel/ /khyab 'jug yab yum sras
'khor pho nyar bcas/ /phyogs der rngam stabs shugs kyis myur bar 'ongs/
/de yi mod la gzi brjid dug gzer gyis/ /rengs dang rmongs pa'i rnam 'gyur
du ma dang/ /kha nas mi bzad [370] gdung ba'i skad dang bcas/ /dmnyal bar
rings pa bzhin du dus la lhung/ /dgra gnyen bar mar spyod pa'i 'khor de dag
'di lta'i tshul ni rang gi bden med kyis/ /rin du byas te nyos pa'i dpe bzhin
no/ /da ni sngags nag de yi mthu yin no/ /zhes zer la la yid dga' zhub bur
smra/ /bu dang chung ma mya ngan 'khor tshogs rnames/ /stabs por spyod de
sdug bsngal myong de la/ /'khyud bzhin cho nge drag po 'debs par gyur/
/cho nge'i sgra ni 'bod pa'i gdung⁴⁶ bzhin du/ /yul der gnas pa'i mtha' dag
skye bo'i tshogs/ /kun kyang tshul de mthong bas som nyi bral/ /sngags par
dgra bslang 'di ltar yong zhes smras/ /de nas gnyen grogs rnames kyis brtse
sems kyis/ /gso rig pa dang tshul 'di' rig byed mkhan/ /khur 'dzin de dag*

⁴⁶ Following Jean-Luc Achard's suggestion, I emend *dung* (present in both versions) to *gdung*.

rnams kyis shes⁴⁷ bya'i khyon/ /dus der 'os pa'i blun rmongs 'ga' tshogs nas/ /ngan 'gror spyod pa'i sdug bsngal slob pa bzhin/ /hūm phat drag po'i sgra dang thun sna tshogs/ /tsha grang myong la gsod mda' ji bzhin du/ /me chu'i lcag gis yang yang 'debs la brtson/ /yang der rang rigs rjes 'jug zha lu pas/ /sna tshogs rten 'brel zab mo'i cho ga yis/ /skabs skabs cung zad smra dang sdug bsngal dag /myong bar shes pa [371]zhag 'ga'i bar du byung/ /de dus de yi sems la 'gyu ba'i tshogs/ /srid pa'i bde bar zhen dang de 'brel ba'i/ /sdug bsngal dag la gzugs su byas pa na/ /lhun po la yang 'gran par gdon mi za/ /skabs der nye grogs rnams dang lhan cig par/ /sngon du thal ba'i las tshogs rnams dran tel/ /'khyod bzhin dug las bdud rtsi 'dod pa ltar/ /bdag la srung ba slong zer gleng ba thos/ /de nas 'gyus ba'i tshes la slad nas kyang/ /srid gsum bdag pos ming gi lhag mar mdzad/ /bden pa bslu med ston pa'i dus de'i tshel/ /ji lta'i tshul ltar 'dir ni mngon sum gsal/ /rig sngags drag po sgrub pa'i sa khung du/ /ling ga dag la drod phebs tshal bar gas/ /ba ling me 'bar gzhan yang mtshan ma ni/ /dngos nyams ji snyed mthong nas gtang rag phul/ /de rjes pho nya'i gtam snyan phreng ba dag /legs thos 'di lta'i tshul ni da dung yang/ /bdag nyid bden tshig ches btsan lo khongs su/ /gzhan dag la yang gzigs pa gnang tshal lo/ /byang phyogs log spyod skye bo'i yul dag tu/ /dpyid dus grang reg spyod la nye skabs kyang/ /gnam lcags drag po'i thog gis bsnun pa dang/ /gtsug la khang la rdzu 'phrul me 'bar zhing/ /bdag la mtho[372]'tsham dpung tshogs rnams la yang/ /phyir log dus su sum cur nye ba'i grangs/ /gdong thug brgyab sogs zhib cha mang mchis pa/ /yongs 'dzin dam pa'i snyan du gsan nges sam/ /'di dag rang stobs ji zhig o rgyan rje'i/ /thugs rje'i 'jug pa dag dang khyad par du/ /bka' drin mnyam med rig 'dzin mchog de yis/ /ma 'ongs dus mkhyen dam bzhag byin rlabs dang/ /sel med dam tshig gces spras snying ltar bcang/ /'khyod med bden pa'i ri bo rgyab tu khur/ /g.yel med chos skyong srung ma mchod la brtson/ /dgra med nang gnas myur du 'dzin par smon/ /shes skye ba nas tshe rabs thams cad du bka' drin gzhal⁴⁸ bar dka' ba'i yongs 'dzin dam pa bka' drin can gyi zhal skyin gang der dad pa mchog gis khyed nyid dgyes pa'i mchod sprin du dgongs/ ci bder nyams dgar phul/

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⁴⁷ I follow the *Ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho* and emend *byes bya* to *shes bya*.

⁴⁸ I follow the *Ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho* and emend *bzhal* to *gzhal*.

Compassion]: *sPrul sku gter bkra shis grangs nges kyi mtshan bsdoms gsol 'debs thugs rje'i nyin byed*, in *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, s.l., Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung, bdr:MW2PD17457_C9E8B2, vol. 61, pp. 90-94.
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Reflection on the Dzungar Persecution of the rNying ma School of Tibetan Buddhism in the 18th Century, Focusing on Its Causes and the Scale of the Destruction

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Introduction

After the dissolution of Imperial Tibet² in the middle of the 9th century, unlike the Sa skya and bKa' brgyud schools, the rNying ma school did not play any dominant role in the consecutive political hegemonies of the Sa skya pa (r. 1253–1358),³ Phag mo gru pa (r. 1358–1538),⁴ sDe pa Rin spungs pa,⁵ and sDe pa gTsang pa (r. 1618–1642)⁶ regimes. Apart from “Mongol-Repelling” (*sog zlog*) war magic, rituals performed by some rNying ma *gter ston*⁷ for the governments mentioned above or their protectorate princely states, for the most part, the rNying ma tradition and its lineage holders were either apolitical or sidelined by these respective

¹ In the process of writing this paper, my colleagues contributed significantly to enhancing its content and style. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Stéphane Arguillère for his encouragement in selecting this topic and for guiding me to valuable resources for my research. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Cécile Ducher, Dr. Jay Valentine, and Dr. Jean-Luc Achard for their invaluable constructive feedback and meticulous review of subsequent drafts. I would also like to thank my friend, Dr. Dylan T. Lott, for proofreading the initial draft and providing insightful comments.

² In this article, I will use the phrase “Imperial Tibet” to refer to what is known as *Bod chen po* (“Greater Tibet”), which existed between A.D. 627 and 842. During this period, ten Tibetan kings, also known as *btsan po*, starting with Srong btsan sgam po (617–650) and ending with Glang Dar ma (803–842), ruled the entirety of Tibet and many of its neighboring regions. For more information, see Beckwith 1988, pp. 19-37 and 143-172. See also Shakabpa 2010, pp. 161-164.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-239.

⁴ For more information regarding the Phag mo gru pa reign, see Petech 2013, pp. 249-261 and also see Cha spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs and Nor brang O rgyan 2016, pp. 159-243.

⁵ The Rin spungs pa-s were an inner circle of the Phag mo gru pa government and ruled the dBus gtsang regions in the shadow of the Phag mo gru pa dynasty (*Ibid.*, pp. 275-280). Also see Cha spel and Nor brang, pp. 525-535.

⁶ Shakabpa 2010, pp. 161-164.

⁷ bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1537) and mChog ldan mgon po (1497–1531) performed “Mongol Repelling” war magic rituals at the court of Mang yul gung thang. Similarly, Zhig po Gling pa (1524–1583) and his disciple Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624) performed similar rituals against the Mongols at the court of gTsang kings. For more, see Cuevas 2019, pp. 177-182.

governments. However, things changed for some branches of the rNying ma school with the founding of the dGa' ldan pho brang⁸ government of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682) by the Khoshot (Qoshot) Mongol king Gushri Khan⁹ (1582–1655) in 1642. The Fifth Dalai Lama exercised tolerant religious policy towards most branches of Tibetan Buddhism. The majority of the rNying ma traditions received great support from the hegemony of the dGe lugs dGa' ldan pho brang and its leadership. The Fifth Dalai Lama institutionalized rNying ma rituals in the dGa' ldan pho brang state ritual practices.¹⁰ During his reign, major transformations, a “renaissance” of sorts, occurred within the rNying ma tradition in Tibet—many monasteries, including rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling, were built directly or indirectly funded by the dGa' ldan pho brang government. He established a priest-patron (*mchod yon*) relationship with rNying masters Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las (1641–1717)¹¹ and gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur me rdo rje, (1646–1714)¹² and employed them as prestigious masters for elaborative dGa' ldan pho brang state rituals. Even after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1682, they carried the

⁸ According to Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, p. 596), the dGa' ldan pho brang (the “Palace of dGa' ldan”) was formerly known as rDo Khang sngon mo (the “Blue Stone Building”) or 'Bras spungs dpon khang (residence of officials in 'Bras spungs). It was used as residence when sNe gdong officials of the Phag mo gru pa government visited 'Bras spungs monastery. Later, the Eleventh Phag mo gru pa throne-holder Ngag dbang bkra shis grags pa (1499–1560) offered it to the second Dalai Lama dGe 'dun rgya mtsho in 1518 and the name was changed to dGa' ldan Pho brang. Since then, it became the estate (*bla brang*) of the successive Dalai Lamas when they visited 'Bras spung monastery. In 1642, the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho became sovereign of Tibet and the government he formed came to be named after the estate. The dGa' ldan pho brang regime ruled Tibet from 1642–1959. For more about dGa' ldan pho brang, see Robert Buswell and Donald Lopez 2002, p. 997.

⁹ He was a Mongol prince from the Khoshot tribe who migrated from Mongolia to Kokonor along with his tribesmen. He helped the Fifth Dalai Lama's former treasurer and future sDe srid, bSod nams chos 'phel (1595–1658) to establish dGa' ldan pho brang for the Dalai Lama in 1642 after defeating the gTsang pa king. See Samten G. Karmay 2014, p. 4. For more about Gushri Khan and the patron-priest relationship between him and the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Shakabpa 2010, pp. 161–164.

¹⁰ See Karmay 2014, p. 8.

¹¹ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las was the Fourth Rig 'dzin Chen mo of the Northern Treasure lineage started by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. He was born to the influential gNam sras gling family and became the second throne holder of rDo rje brag monastery. For more, see Valentine 2013, pp. 247–305. Also see Samten Chhosphel, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Fourth-Dorje-Drak-Rigdzin,-Pema-Trinle/TBRC_P657.

¹² For more about this figure, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, pp. 823–834.

role under sDe srid¹³ (regent) Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705),¹⁴ who continued the legacies of the Fifth Dalai Lama, including the inclusive and tolerant religious policy. However, due to sectarianism, the priest-patron relationship between rNying ma lamas and the dGa' ldan pho brang leadership set up by the Fifth Dalai Lama failed under sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. The ensuing period was marked with the murder of the sDe srid and the expulsion of the Sixth Dalai Lama Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho. Because of the turbulent political situation in Tibet during the reign of King Lha bzang Khan and because of the influence of the Qing emperor Kangxi in Tibetan politics, the Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan¹⁵ sent a cavalry of 6000 men to Tibet under General Tshe ring don grub.¹⁶ They reached 'Dam gzung in the north of Lhasa in August 1717 and toppled Khoshot Mongol rule in Tibet with the elimination of the King Lha bzang Khan on December 3, 1717. The Dzungar's short occupation of Tibet between 1717 and 1720 did not bring any positive changes to Tibet and its society other than ransacking Lhasa city, looting valuable religious objects and persecuting non-dGe lugs (notably rNying ma) schools.

Although the Dzungar's sectarian-driven persecution of the rNying ma school was historic and massive in its scale of destruction of human lives, monasteries and religious objects, including scriptures and artifacts, the research articles, books, and monographs written by Tibetologists over the years on the subject of the Dzungar's invasion of Tibet have failed to give sufficient insight into the persecution of the rNying ma school and the extensive destruction it endured. This paper is therefore an attempt to present a detailed background of this

¹³ In *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (1985, pp. 1474-1475), the term "sDe srid" is defined as the highest political authority (prime minister) of the Tibetan government.

¹⁴ Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1643–1705) was from the influential Drong smad noble family. When he was young, he lived with his maternal uncle Grong smad 'Phrin las rgya mtsho who served as sDe srid for the dGa' ldan pho brang between 1660–1668. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho became the Fifth sDe srid of the dGa' ldan pho brang and held the post from 1679 to 1702. He is credited for the construction of the Red Palace (Pho brang dmar po), a section of the Potala palace complex and the Golden Reliquary (gSer gdung 'dzam gling rgyan gcig) of the Fifth Dalai Lama. For more about his contributions to literary works including Tibetan medicines, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, pp. 1183-1185.

¹⁵ Tshe dbang rab brtan (1663–1727) was a son of Sengge, the elder brother of dGa' ldan Bogshutu Khan. He ruled the Dzungar empire from 1697 to 1727 and invaded Tibet for three years (1717–1720). Pretexting the protection of dGe lugs order and the purification of the Buddha's teachings, he persecuted the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism. For more about this figure, see Seng chen Blo bzang bstan 'dzin dpal 'byor 1977, pp. 2-4. Also, see Hummel 2010, p. 759.

¹⁶ He was a cousin of Tshe dbang rab brtan and a former monk from bKra shis lhun po monastery. For more about Tshe ring don grub, see Perdue 2005, pp. 234.

persecution, by whom it was instigated, its motives, and the scale of the persecution.

The assessment of the Tibetan literature sources

Since the root cause of the Dzungar persecution of the rNying ma school is to be found in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the sources for the first three parts of this paper—which discusses the Fifth Dalai Lama’s relationship with rNying ma masters and their role in dGa’ ldan pho brang government and ensuing sectarianism—are mainly the autobiographies of the Fifth Dalai Lama and *Rig ’dzin Pad ma ’phrin las*, the “outer” and “inner” biographies of gTer bdag gling pa (written by Lo chen Dharmaśrī at the turn of 18th century) and the two biographies of ’Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson ’grus (written in the 18th century). Regarding the sources for the last two parts (which present the actual persecution of the rNying ma school), apart from Sum pa mKhan po’s works such as *mTsho sngon lo rgyus* and *Chos ’byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*, the majority of the dGe lugs sources that I referred to are clearly biased. For example, Paṅ chen Blo bzang ye shes (1663–1737), who was the most important dGe lugs figure of the century and a witness to the historic and far-reaching Dzungar persecution of rNying ma, does not mention the destruction of rNying ma monasteries and the killing of rNying ma luminaries of the century in his autobiography, *Śākya’i dge slong blo bzang ye shes kyi spyod tshul gsal bar byed pa ’od dkar can gyi phreng ba*. On the contrary, the same autobiography gives a detailed account of Dzungar activity, including the expulsion of people living nearby bKra shis lhun po monastery.

On the other hand, I suppose the earliest rNying ma sources regarding this persecution are: *Chos ’byung bstan pa’i nyi ma*¹⁷ by Rab ’byams pa O rgyan chos grags (b.1676–?).¹⁸ Khri chen Rin chen rnam rgyal’s (1694–1758) biography known as *sKal bzang gdung sel*¹⁹ written by ’Bar bla bKra shis rgya mtsho (b.1714–?) in the year of Wood Monkey [1764]; followed by Khyung po *ras pa* ’Gyur med ’od gsal’s (b. 1715–?) biography of *rJe btsun Mi ’gyur dpal sgron* (1699–1769) entitled as *Dad pa’i gdung sel*.²⁰ According to Alison Melnick Dyer,²¹ It was completed around 1799. Despite the fact that these figures surely knew many of the details regarding the persecution, few of them ended up

¹⁷ O rgyan chos grags 2013, p. 266.

¹⁸ According to the colophon of this text, it was finished in the year of Iron Pig, [1731].

¹⁹ sPrang btsun mang ga la 2013, p. 199.

²⁰ Khyung po *ras pa* ’Gyur med ’od gsal 2013, p. 202.

²¹ See Alison Melnick Dyer 2022, p. 4.

in these sources.

Nevertheless, as far as I know, *Mi dbang rtogs brjod* (written by mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal in 1733) and *Rig pa 'dzin pa blo bzang 'phrin las kyi rtogs pa brjod pa skal bzang dga' ston*, the autobiography of Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje (1697–1740), written in 1725, are the most informative and earliest sources on this subject. Reading these two works comparatively gave me a clear picture of the Dzungar campaign against the rNying ma school and its impact, detailing the key Dzungar generals, and what roles they played in the campaign.

Every action depends on causes and conditions, and the root cause of this sectarian persecution of the rNying ma school lies in the relationship between the Fifth Dalai Lama and rNying ma lamas. I present this paper through five sub-topics that show the sequence of events that led to the persecution:

1. The Rise of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling: 17th-Century rNying ma reformation under the auspices of the Fifth Dalai Lama;
2. The pivotal role of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling masters in the protection of the dGa' ldan pho brang and its leaders from the menace of gods and demons, and other obstacles;
3. rNying ma and dGe lugs sectarianism amidst intense power struggles between sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Lha bzang Khan;
4. The Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan's conquest of Tibet and the sGo mang²² abbot Blo bzang phun tshogs' role in the systematic campaign of rNying ma persecution; and
5. How the campaign of rNying ma persecution unfolded and the scale of its destruction.

The Rise of rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling: 17th-Century rNying ma reformation under the auspices of the Fifth Dalai Lama

In defense of the dGe lugs pa, Gushri Khan overthrew in 1642 the gTsang pa sDe srid Karma bsTan skyong dbang po (r. 1621–1642),²³ the last king of the gTsang pa dynasty, after a prolonged and difficult

²² 'Bras spungs monastery has two colleges (*grwa tshang*), sGo mang and Blo gsal gling.

²³ He was the son of Karma Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (r. 1611–1620) and the great-grandson of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje, the founding father of the gTsang pa dynasty. He ruled the entirety of dBus gtsang from 1621 to 1642. For more about the gTsang pa dynasty, its allegiance to Karma bka' brgyud branch of the bKa' brgyud school, and Karma bsTan skyong dbang po's reign, See Cha spel tshe brtan Phun tshogs and Nor brang O rgyan 2016, vol. 2, pp. 535–548.

battle.²⁴ Afterwards, he invited the Fifth Dalai Lama to gZhis ka rtse and proclaimed him sovereign of the whole of Tibet, from Dar rtse mdo in the east to the borders of Ladakh in the west.²⁵ We see here how the dGe lugs hegemony of the dGa' ldan pho brang government was founded on the backbone of the Priest-Patron (*mchod gnas dang yon bdag*) relationship between the Fifth Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan. In post-imperial Tibet, the Fifth Dalai Lama was the only ruler able to reign over the entirety of Tibet,²⁶ and he was only able to accomplish this feat with the help of Gushri Khan's army. He claims that his intention to become a temporal leader of Tibet was to protect the Sa skya, bKa' brgyud and rNying ma schools from completely disappearing.²⁷

Having witnessed the ills of sectarianism, religious fanaticism, and regionalism during the reign of the gTsang pa kings, the Fifth Dalai Lama adopted a more tolerant and inclusive religious policy,²⁸ which later proved to be a great problem for dGa' ldan pho brang leadership. In his effort to bring dGa' ldan pho brang closer to Imperial Tibet, he solidified his power base by building the White Palace (Pho drang dkar po), a section of the Potala Palace on the ruins of Khri rtse dmar po²⁹ and reintroduced imperial costumes.³⁰ Most importantly, as a grand strategist and great believer in symbolism, he favored the rNying ma school over all other non-dGe lugs sects. Perhaps in response to the Fifth Dalai Lama's affections, many rNying ma treasure teachings (*gter ma*) predicted³¹ him to be an emanation of the enlightened activities (*'phrin las*) of King Khri srong lde' btsan (742–797). Most of his inner circles, including his tutors (*yongs 'dzin*), were

²⁴ Shakabpa 2010, p. 340-346.

²⁵ For more about the Fifth Dalai Lama's enthronement as the sovereign of Tibet, see K. Dhundup, pp. 23-24.

²⁶ See Karmay 2006, https://info-buddhism.com/The_Great_5th-Dalai_Lama_Ngagwang_Lobzang_Gyatso_Samten_Karmay.html

²⁷ Karmay 2014, pp. 167.

²⁸ Karmay 2014, pp. 6-9. For more about the Fifth Dalai Lama's treatment of Lamas from other traditions, see 'Jigs med bsam grub 2000, pp. 237-239.

²⁹ According to Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, pp. 1034, 1331–1332), with the help of his Nepali queen, King Srong btsan sgam po built the Potala palace known then as Khri rtse dmar po, but it is said that it was destroyed by the Chinese troops at the time of the Tibetan King Mang srong mang btsan (r.655–676). For more about the evolution of the Potala palace and its significance for the dGa' ldan pho brang regime, see Anne Chayet 2003, pp. 39-52.

³⁰ 'Jigs med bsam grub 2000, pp. 229–232.

³¹ On the predictions of the Fifth Dalai Lama by different rNying ma treasure revealers, see *Compilation of Northern Treasures Texts (sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs)* 2015, vol. 62, pp. 507-512.

reincarnations of imperial era figures.³²

The Fifth Dalai Lama's connection with the rNying ma school started with his family members, who were rNying ma adherents and patrons of the Northern Treasure master Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (ca.1550–1603).³³ When he was an infant, he was given a blessing and a rNying ma empowerment by the scions of the Northern Treasure lineage. As his regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho recounted:

Wön Trashi Namgyel, the lord of Northern Latö, formed the protective circle and [offered] service and blessings. The Master of the Northern Treasure, the Knowledge-Holder Ngakgi Wangpo offered first of all the empowerment of long life “at the iron sacrificial post,” the empowerment of the fierce and red gods of death according to the school of [the teacher] Nyangrel and other empowerments and precepts which remove impediments.³⁴

When he was nineteen years old, he secretly began to receive Dzogchen teachings from 'Khon ston dPal 'byor lhun grub (1561–1637)³⁵ and later received many rNying ma teachings, particularly rituals of the Northern Treasure teachings, from Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669). According to Samten Karmay,³⁶ the aforementioned rNying ma masters opened the Fifth Dalai Lama's eyes on a more tolerant and inclusive position towards other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. He took particular interest in the Northern Treasure teachings and their rituals, which he found very efficacious for the protection of the dGa' ldan pho brang and its leaders, and beneficial for the welfare of Tibet. Therefore, he instituted the Northern Treasure rituals in the core of the grand program of state liturgy.³⁷ He was convinced by their effectiveness during Asarlang's³⁸ expedition to Tibet and Gushri Khan's campaign against the gTsang

³² See Townsend 2012, pp. 71-72.

³³ For more information regarding this figure, see Jay Valentine, *The Lords of the Northern Treasures*, pp. 154-158.

³⁴ Kurtis R. Schaeffer *et al.* 2013, p. 536. *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum* (2015), Vol. 8, p. 240: *byang bdag dbon bkra shis rnam rgyal gyis srung 'khor sku rim byin rlabs dang l byang pa rig 'dzin ngag gi dbang pos tshe dbang lcags sdong ma dang nyang lugs drag dmar gyi dbang sogs bar chad sel ba'i dbang bka' thog mar phul l.*

³⁵ For more about the Fifth Dalai Lama's connection with 'Khon ston dPal 'byor lhun grub, see Karmay, 2014, pp. 119-120.

³⁶ See Karmay 2014, pp. 7-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁸ According to the Fifth Dalai Lama, Asarlang's troops were stopped when they reached the Yam 'brog region due to the war magic ritual performed by *Rigs 'dzin Yol mo sprul sku* (1589–1644). See *Rgyal dbang lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 12, p. 37.

pa kings, as mentioned before.

Although some called the Fifth Dalai Lama a crypto-rNying ma pa (Hugh Richardson and Snellgrove 1968: 196), his connections to rNying ma school can best be summarized by the following words of the 18th century dGe lugs master Klong rdol Ngag dbang blo bzang (1719–1794):

The great omniscient Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang was the leader and the teacher of Tibet. Therefore, he received all of the teachings of the Nyingma school and composed a volume on these. He received all the teachings of the Sakya and the Gelukpa schools, combined them, and wrote three volumes. In general, outwardly, he acted as the caretaker of Gelukpas. Internally, he did practices relating to the Sakyapa tutelary deities. Secretly from the depth of his heart, he respected the secret Nyingma tantras. Consequently, he was skilled in guiding innumerable monks and lay people.³⁹

Thanks to the patronage of the Fifth Dalai Lama, a “renaissance” of sorts began with the founding of four major monasteries during his reign (these were the first of what came to be known as the “Six Mother Monasteries”).⁴⁰

In 1666, in the year of the Fire-Horse, thanks to the support⁴¹ of the Fifth Dalai Lama, *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las restored and expanded rDo rje brag Monastery to become a major center of Buddhist studies, specializing in the Northern Treasure (*Byang gter*) teaching and its rituals. Similarly, with direct funding from the dGa' ldan pho brang government, gTer bdag gling pa⁴² established sMin grol gling monastery in 1676. Concerning the support for sMin grol gling and gTer bdag ling pa's family, the Fifth Dalai Lama himself stated:

For the great Awareness Holder *gTer ston*, moderate [offerings], which include Thar pa gling monastery and subjects of Gra phyi [region] were already given as religious estate (*chos gzhis*) for sMin

³⁹ Quoted in Shakabpa 2010, p. 372.

⁴⁰ The six mother monasteries (*ma dgon drug*) are: rDo rje brag, sMin grol gling, Kaḥ thog, dPal yul, rDzogs chen, and Zhe chen. According to Samuel Geoffrey (1993, pp. 529-533), sMin grol gling, Kaḥ thog, dPal yul, and rDzogs chen were established between 1656 and 1685 thanks to the Fifth Dalai Lama's assistance.

⁴¹ See Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rdo rje 2004, p. 9.

⁴² Although he is not regarded as a *Byang gter* lineage master, he had a deep connection with the tradition. In his *gSan yig* (record of teaching received), over 24 pages have been dedicated to the *Byang gter* treasure circles that he had received from 'Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las, Fifth Dalai Lama, Zur chen Chos dbyangs rang grol and others. For further details, see 'Gyur med rdo rje 1974, pp. 284-307.

grol gling monastery. However, *The Chronicles of Padma* prophesied him as the [treasure revealer] 'Gro 'dul gTer bdag gling pa, and also the Great Awareness Holder, (gTer bdag ling pa), an emanation of the great translator Vairocana had revealed a few profound treasure teachings. Through these [revelations of treasures], he became a teacher for the Tibetans, [teaching them] correctly which negatives to abandon and which positives to adopt. [Therefore], he is worthy of [these offerings].

Furthermore, in general, all the treasure revealers have to rely on *vidyādhara* family lineage for immediate benefit and ultimate benefits, including efficacy to overcome the obstacle on the generation phase (mahāyoga) and completion phase (anuyoga) and the Great Perfection (rdzogs' chen). Regarding the future *vidyādhara* family [of gTer bdag gling pa], *The Chronicles of Padma* extensively addressed Sangs rgyas ling pa in such [phrases] as "from you, through hundred or twenty-one generations" and so forth. In particular, as mentioned before, for the sake of the unpolluted divine lineage and teachings [of gTer bdag gling pa], Dar rgyas khang gsar [estate], rGyal po nag ga'i chu skor [estate], ownership of surrounding mountains, valleys, twenty-seven households, and 2400 taels of grains were offered for the expanses of his wife and family.⁴³

The above statement lucidly shows that the Fifth Dalai Lama funded the establishment of sMin grol gling monastery and allotted further estates and funds for gTer bdag gling pa's family. He was also deeply involved in the creation of curricula and enrolment of monks at the two monasteries.⁴⁴ At that time, rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling became major hubs for those seeking rNying ma studies from all over Tibet, and their branches spread to Ladakh in the northwest, neighboring trans-Himalayan regions such as Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and to Dar rtse mdo to the east. It is evident that the Fifth Dalai Lama's

⁴³ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum (2015), Vol. 7, p. 288: *gter ston rigs 'dzin chen por grwa tshang smin grol gling gi mchod gzhis sogs la gra phyi thar pa gling dgon gnas mi ser dang bcas tshang ma rgya khyon mi chung tsam snga sor nas song yang | thang yig nas 'gro 'dul gter bdag gling par lung bstan pa dang | lo chen bee ro ro tsa na'i rnam sprul rigs 'dzin chen pos zab gter kha shas kyi sgo 'byed par mdzad de bod 'bangs skye 'gro'i 'gal spong mthun grub kyi blang dor ji bzhin ston pa po 'bul 'os kyi yul dam pa yin par ma zad | spyir gter ston thams cad bskyed rdzogs rdzogs pa chen chen po'i gegs sel bogs 'don gyis mtshon gnas skabs mthar thug gi sman yon yin phyir bsten dgos pa rigs 'dzin gyi gdung brgyud sogs 'byung ba thang yig tu 'ang sangs rgyas gling par khyod nas mi rabs brgya'am nyer gcig par sogs rgya cher gsungs pa dang | bye brag gong smros ltar phugs rigs smin grol gling gi lha chos dang 'brel ba bslad med par gdung brgyud gsang yum bcas pa'i skal skyil ru | dar rgyas khang gsar | rgyal po na ga'i chu skor sogs ri rlungs kyi bdag thob dud che chung nyer bdun | 'bab 'bru khal gnyis stong bzhi brgya skor |.*

⁴⁴ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las (2017, vol. 1 p. 153, p. 131), and Dharmaśrī (1999, vol. ka, p. 66.).

unprecedented support for these rNying ma monasteries and their leaders was not purely out of personal interest, but rather partly due to a political purpose. Indeed, he employed these monasteries and their leaders—*Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag gling pa—as sophisticated and elaborative state ritual performers for the dGa' ldan pho brang.

As the Fifth Dalai Lama was considered an emanation of the enlightened activity of King Khri srong lde btsan, his relationship with *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las from rDo rje brag and gTer bdag gling pa from sMin grol gling was mutually beneficial, quite similar to King Khri srong lde btsan's relationship with Śāntarakṣita, and Padmasambhava. It is commonly believed that Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava established Buddhism in the Land of Snows thanks to the royal patronage extended by King Khri srong lde btsan. In return, they performed various rites and prayers for the long life of the king and for the welfare of Tibet. Regarding sitting arrangements at major secular or religious events, the Fifth Dalai Lama observed tension and discord among different Tibetan Buddhist clergy. Therefore, he enacted a protocol⁴⁵ for sitting arrangements in which he gave *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag gling pa higher seats than the abbots of the Three Great Seats (*gdan sa gsum*) of the dGe lugs school. Spiritually, *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag gling pa were the primary lineage holders of his secret teaching known as *Sealed Secret Vision* (*gSang ba rgya can*).⁴⁶

Unfortunately, purist dGe lugs partisans, including his first sDe srid (regent) bSod nams chos 'phel,⁴⁷ did not understand the Dalai Lama's broad approach toward other Tibetan religious traditions and thought that the sole purpose of founding dGa' ldan pho brang government was to serve the teachings of Tsong kha pa (1357–1419).⁴⁸ Hence, for them, the goal was for the Three Great Seats to reign supreme. When the Fifth Dalai Lama showed his interest in the rNying ma teachings, they strongly expressed their disagreement, and his

⁴⁵ 'Jigs med bsam grub 2000, pp. 233–237.

⁴⁶ According to *mKhan sprul* dKon mchog bsTan 'dzin (2005, p. 454), Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal prophesied that the Fifth Dalai Lama would reveal twenty-five circles of the *Sealed Secret Vision* Teachings (*gsang ba rgya can gyi chos skor*).

⁴⁷ He was one of the two influential men who helped the Fifth Dalai Lama found the dGa' ldan pho brang government. According to *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las (2017, vol. 1, pp. 89), bSod nams chos 'phel was his (*Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las') relative from his mother's side. For more about this figure, his regentship, and relationship with the Fifth Dalai Lama and Gushri Khan, see Karmay 2014, pp. 3–4 and Jones 2017, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Sonam-Chopel/6874>.

⁴⁸ See Repo 2011: https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Tsongkhapa/TBRC_p64.

request for building a chapel for Vajrakīla was rejected by sDe srid bSod nam chos 'phel on these grounds. As his autobiography recounted:

In the previous year (1643), the construction work of two storeys at the eastern part of the Gaden Palace was incomplete. When the work resumed, I asked Depa to have a chapel built where one could perform rituals for wellbeing, such as the rite of Phurpa. On the excuse of the Nyingma teachings given by Nenyng and Dorje brag po, he resorted to many tactics in order not to have the chapel built. I had to remain quiet without being able to give him any response.⁴⁹

This passage demonstrates that the Fifth Dalai Lama was not free in his choice of religious studies in the early part of his life. He expressed the sensitivity and difficulty of practicing rNying ma teaching in his early life in his *Secret Visions* thus:

Legs ldan rdo rje begins to perform the ceremony, but the Dalai Lama is unable to recognize its deity. dBang-po-sde then performs the empowerment ceremony of the divinity of *Karmaguru* and gives him a ritual dagger (*phur-pa*). At that moment, he feels that the Treasurer bSod-nams rab-brtan and others (*dGe lugs pa*) monks are looking at him through the window at the eastern side of the Chapel of *Mahākāla*, giving the impression that they do not approve of this participating in the ceremony, which is performed by the rNying-ma-lamas. He thinks that they, the *Dge-lugs-pa* monks, criticize him, he will hit them with a ritual dagger and rushes out, but the monks look very subdued. He then awakes feeling totally recovered from his illnesses.⁵⁰

The dGe lugs pa themselves were divided in their approach to the Fifth Dalai Lama, particularly his relationship with *sprul sku* Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1619-1656).⁵¹ Nevertheless, due to his charisma, his contribution to Tsong kha pa's teaching, and, most of all, for keeping the Mongols who were the backbone of dGe lugs pa rise under his reign, the dGe lugs pa purists and partisans, despite their disagreement with the Fifth Dalai Lama, did not pose any significant challenge to his reign during his lifetime. Yet his generous support for the rNying ma school and his interest in practicing rNying ma teachings planted the seed for the future persecution of the rNying ma pa by the Dzungar Mongols.

⁴⁹ Karmay 2002, pp. 226. For Tibetan text, *rGyal dbang lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 5, p. 221.

⁵⁰ Karmay 1988, p. 30.

⁵¹ Tsyrempilov 2003, pp. 54-55. For more about the controversy of *sprul sku* Grags pa rgyal mtshan, see Dreyfus 1998. pp. 227-270.

The pivotal role of the rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling masters in the protection of the dGa' ldan pho brag and its leaders from the menace of gods and demons, and other obstacles

Being a government fully dominated by religious concerns, the dGa' ldan pho brag's physical territories were guarded by Gushri Khan and his hordes while rNying ma Lamas protected the realm of other-worldly beings through their sophisticated and efficacious tantric rituals. For the wellbeing and protection of Tibet, the dGa' ldan pho brag and particularly its leadership, many rNying ma-themed rituals of the Northern Treasures were performed at holy places⁵² that had been consecrated as worship sites during Imperial Tibet, such as bSam yas Monastery. For this and other purposes, the Fifth Dalai Lama relied on many rNying ma masters, including Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol,⁵³ who performed war magic rituals for the Fifth Dalai Lama's cause when Gushri Khan was struggling to topple the gTsang pa king. As a personal tutor to the Fifth Dalai Lama and a state ritual performer, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol served the dGa' ldan pho brag until he died in 1669. He was one of the most influential teachers in the early part of the Fifth Dalai Lama's life, and many of the decisions that the Fifth Dalai Lama or the dGa' ldan pho brag carried out were in direct consultation with him. In the post-Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol period, Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las and gTer bdag ling pa were the most prominent ritual masters of the dGa' ldan pho brag state, which employed them as state ritual performers in 1659 and in 1669, respectively.

Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las's first official participation in a dGa' ldan pho brag-related function occurred when he was 18. He was invited as one of the high religious dignitaries participating in the coronation ceremony of bsTan 'dzin Dāyen Khan⁵⁴ as the protector king of Tibet in 1658.

At the request of the Fifth Dalai Lama, his regents, and some influential governors, the two masters performed innumerable rituals of rNying ma treasure teachings in general and the Northern Treasure rituals in particular. Certain sophisticated rituals required the two masters to go on a dark retreat. As for the venue for these rituals, Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las mostly carried out his ritual performance

⁵² See *rJe btsun bla ma dam pa gter chen chos kyi rgyal po'i nang gi rtogs pa brjod pa yon tan mtha' yas rnam par bkod pa'i rol mo* p. 172.

⁵³ For more regarding the rituals of war magic, their significance and applications, see Fitz Herbert 2018, pp. 88-108.

⁵⁴ According to Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002, p. 1026), bsTan 'dzin Dāyen Khan, also known by bsTan 'dzin rdo rje (r.1654–1668) was the eldest of the ten sons of Gushri Khan. He succeeded Gushri Khan as the protector king of Tibet.

at Gong dkar, Brag yang rdzong, Bla brang 'og, rDo rje brag, bSam yas, and the Potala palace, while gTer bdag gling pa performed the rituals mostly at bSam yas, Khra 'brug, the Potala palace, and sMin grol ling. Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las did many "repelling [foreign] armies" (*dmag zlog*) rituals in his later life.⁵⁵ Sometimes, they performed the rituals together⁵⁶ in liaison with Phan bde legs bshad gling, the Fifth Dalai Lama's private college.⁵⁷ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las's career as a prominent state ritual master began when he was 19 years old, the same year he was consecrated as a *bhikṣu* by the Fifth Dalai Lama. The first edict he received from the Fifth Dalai Lama was regarding the revolt staged by sDe pa Nor bu⁵⁸ in 1659. Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las recounts:

I was in an intense sadness over the passing of [my] Supreme Guide, eye of Dharma. At that time, *Grub chen* Rang rig also came. I gave the empowerment of Avalokiteśvara to him and my younger brother rNam gling *paṅ chen* together. While the [empowerment] was going on, [I] received the edict of the Supreme Lord, which said, 'though it may act as an obstacle to [your] strict retreat at Brag yang rdzong, there is a conflict involving sDe pa Nor bu, therefore, [I] instruct that [you] must to go to Gong dkar to be the vajra master of the *sku rim*⁵⁹ [for the Dalai Lama].⁶⁰

⁵⁵ According to Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las (2017, vol. 2. pp. 293-294), at the request of the dGa' ldan pho brang, he performed the "repelling [foreign] armies" rituals for *bstan srid spyi rim*, and also in consideration of the Mongol and Chinese conflict. As it was performed in 1697, it seems that sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho asked Rig 'dzin Pad ma phrin las to carry out the ritual in support of his ally dGa' ldan Boshugtu Khan. For more about the conflict between Dzungar and Qing powers while dGa' ldan Boshugtu Khan was the king of the Dzungars, see Zahiruddin Ahmad 1970, pp. 281-324.

⁵⁶ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017, vol. 1, pp. 187.

⁵⁷ It is known by different names such as sKu zhabs grwa tshang, rNam rgyal grwa tshang, and Phan bde legs bshad gling. I stick to rNam rgyal grwa tshang in this paper. For more about the origin of rNam rgyal grwa tshang and its function, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 1230.

⁵⁸ See, Venturis YEAR, pp.30-48. For more about sDe pa Nor bu, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 1212.

⁵⁹ A religious service which involves prayers and rituals aimed for the long life and wellbeing of important persons.

⁶⁰ Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017 vol. 1, p. 92. 'dren mchog chos kyi spyian ldan de yang dag pa'i zhing du gshegs pas yid shin tu nges par 'byung ba zhing byung kyang | 'di skabs grub chen rang rig pa yang byon byung bar nu bo rnam gling paṅ chen dang lhan du byang gter spyian ras gzigs kyi dbang zhig phul | dus rim skabs rgyal dbang mchog gi bka' shog spyi bor phebs pa'i don | yang rdzong gi bcad rgya'i gegs su cung zad 'gro ba 'dug kyang nor bu sde gzar gyi gnas tshul 'di ltar 'dug pas gong dkar du sku rim gyi rdo rje slob dpon la du 'gro dgos tshul phebs |.

The Fifth Dalai Lama himself acknowledged this ritual service performed by Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las in the following words:

I made the *trulku* of Dorjedrag Rigdzin, with about 30 attendants, to go to Gongkar to perform a ritual for accomplishing the strategic policy. They performed the rite of suppression and the destructive rite of the wind wheel. It was reported that the wind wheel rapidly produced flames. Before they went back, I gave them instructions and paid them for their services, which were a necessity when there was a conflict. At Chonggye the men of Palri also performed destructive rites of suppression for the strategic policy to run smoothly, and I received a letter from the *trulku* (of Dorjedrag Rigdzin) which stated that good signs had occurred.⁶¹

Again, following that year, he received another edict from the Fifth Dalai Lama that urged him to perform rituals for the welfare of the Tibetan people. According to Padma 'phrin las's autobiography, which records 61 years of his life (i.e., up to 1702), he performed peaceful and wrathful rituals for the dGa' ldan pho brang state almost every year, perhaps as late as 1704, as he was killed in 1717. In 1672, together with gTer bdag gling pa, he performed the most crucial *sku rim* ritual for the Fifth Dalai Lama. At that time, the Fifth Dalai Lama was suffering from hand pain:

At that time, [I] received an edict from [my] ultimate refuge, the All-knowing Supreme Lord of the Potala. [...] That night, I reached Drags and then [my] monastery and prepared. Thereafter, I left for the Potala. I offered my prostration to the lotus feet of the Supreme Victor. At that time, he was somewhat in pain in his hands and instructed [us] to repel Yamarāja (the lord of death). Accordingly, we prepared the [rituals]. In the audience hall (*tshoms chen*) of the Potala Palace, [monks] from the sKu zhabs grwa tshang arranged a hundred offering cakes, a hundred amendment materials, and made a long-life ritual as supportive service for the ritual. We, master and disciples (*dpon slob*), performed an effective and extensive *sku rim* for [the Dalai Lama]. He immediately showed signs of recovery. At that time, as a sign of connection, the main beam of the black stūpa of bSam yas [Monastery] shook and cracked. I became a fortunate disciple of rGyal dbang rDo rje 'chang Zil gnon drag rtsal rdo rje (the Fifth Dalai Lama) when he gave his profound teaching of the *Sealed Vision* for the first time.⁶²

⁶¹ Karmay 2002, pp. 6-9.

⁶² Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017 vol. 1, pp. 186-187: *de skabs po ta la nas gtan gyi skyabs mgon rgyal dbang thams cad mkhyen pa chen po'i sku zhabs nas bka' shog spyi bor phebs zhes dang | de nub sgrags dang de nas dgon par sleb nas grabs yul bgyis te po ta lar phyin | rgyal dbang mchog gi zhabs kyi pad mor 'du phyag bgyis | de skabs phyag cung*

In the entire career of Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las as a state ritual master, the most elaborate ritual⁶³ that he performed was at bSam yas for the general good of the Buddhist teaching and secular affairs (*bstan srid spyi rim*) of the dGa' ldan pho brang, in 1687. It was a colossal rite involving many spectacular cross-threats and other articles. The dGa' ldan pho brang state ordered many districts located around Lhasa to facilitate the liturgical articles and bear its expenses. On the whole, not only Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las, but his monastery was also deeply involved in protecting dGa' ldan pho brang government and its leaders:

As knowledge of the Byang-gter spread throughout Tibet, it gradually became established as a major religious system with over fifty monasteries propagating its teachings, chief among which was the mother monastery of rDo-rje-brag. Monks of this seminary, properly trained in its rituals, have always been highly prized for their religious expertise. One such monk, for example, was invariably required in the *sku lnga* shrine in Jo-khang in Lhasa, another at the *lHa mo Khang* and eight in the *mGon khang* at the base of the Potala palace engaged in the worship of Mahākāla. Four monks from rDo-rje-brag annually performed the 'Gong po ar gtad ritual for the suppression of demons at the Lhasa *Rigs gsum* shrine and the oracle of dGa'-gdong was regularly consulted to divine the whereabouts of deceased Lamas.⁶⁴

gTer bdag gling pa became one of the most influential masters in the Fifth Dalai Lama's inner circles in the later part of the latter's life. He entered the official ritual service for the dGa' ldan pho brang state in 1669 when he was 23. The Fifth Dalai Lama often consulted him regarding state affairs. In the beginning of 1679, he received the edict from the Dalai Lama seeking his advice on who was suitable for sDe srid candidature, and he recommended Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. Accordingly, the Fifth Dalai Lama appointed Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as sDe srid in the same year. In 1695, sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho honored gTer bdag gling pa as his *ti shri*, and gave him title, "Great Treasure Revealer, Preceptor, Dharma King (*gter chen ti shri chos kyi*

zad ltem tshul 'dug pas 'chi bdag bzlog pa zhig byed dgos tshul gyi bslab ston byung ba ltar gra sgrig zhus | pho brang chen po po ta la'i tshoms du cho ga gtong ba'i cha lag gi rgyab chos gtor ma brgya rtsa | bskang brgya rtsa | tsho chog sogs grwa gtsang nas gnang | nged dpon slob chabs gcig par sku rim smin rgyas zhus pa'i de 'phral sku khams dwangs tshul bstan | bsam yas kyi mchod rten nag po srog shing g.yo ba dang gas pa'i dus rtags sogs 'grig par brten rgyal dbang rdo rje 'chang zil gnon drag rtsal rdo rje'i thugs dam gzigs snang rgya can skor gyi zab chos thog mar spel ba'i skal ldan gyi slob bur gyur |.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-318.

⁶⁴ Boord 2013, p. 3.

rgyal po) and a seal at the Potala palace.⁶⁵ Concerning some of the most significant rituals and religious services he carried out for the Fifth Dalai Lama and the sDe srid, his outer biography states:

When he returned to Thar pa ling, he received an invitation edict from His Highness (*gong zhabs*, i.e., fifth Dalai lama) and left for the Potala, the great palace via boat at 'Bri'u sna'. As for the *sku rim* for His Highness, he performed [rituals] of demon liberation, curse liberation, death ransom, purification of *dākinīs* and the eight classes of spirits, and exorcist rites of the red wrathful Guru (Padmasambhava). Because of this, soon after, His Highness recovered from his sickness. At that time, Zangs ri sDe srid also came to Lhasa, and [gTer bdag gling pa] gave him empowerment of eliminating obstacles (*rkyen sel*), purification [rituals], and others.⁶⁶

In 1679, gTer bdag gling pa was 34 years old and led the ritual for the coronation of Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as sDe srid. Dharmasri recounted the event as follows:

In the mansion of Khams gsum rnam rgyal, His Supreme Highness sat on [his] throne and let the Lord (gTer bdag ling pa) sit on an unusually high throne arranged there. Then, sDe srid Rin po che sat on a lower seat first, and [gTer bdag ling pa] performed obstacle elimination and ablution rites and others for the sDe srid. After that, the sDe srid sat on the throne and [gTer bdag ling pa coronated] him by giving him empowerment called "the *mNga' dbang rin chen 'bar ba*," which is far superior to the *Royal Vase Coronation* known to Brahmins and others. At the same time, as a token of auspiciousness and positive connection, he offered [the sDe srid] some presents, including a crown jewel of snakes. While his highness, the supreme Lord, together with all victors and his sons [offered] sDe srid auspicious words [as profuse as] rain of flowers. In this way, [Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho] was crowned as sDe srid.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *rJe btsun bla ma dam pa gter chen chos kyi rgyal po'i nang gi rtogs pa brjod pa yon tan mtha' yas rnam par bkod pa'i rol mo*, pp. 149-153.

⁶⁶ See *gTer chen chos kyi rgyal po'i rnam thar dad pa'i shing rta*, p. 93: *de nas thar pa gling du phyir phebs mtshams gong nas spyan 'dren gyi bka' shog 'byor ba ltar 'bri'u sna'i gru brgyud pho brang chen por thebs te | gong zhabs kyi sku rim du | gdon 'grol | byad 'grol | 'chi slu | mkha' 'gro dang sde brgyad grib sel | drag dmar gyi gtor bzlog rnams mdzad pas gong zhabs sku cad ltems pa'ang mi ring bar dangs | zangs ri sde srid kyang lha ldan du phebs pa dang 'grig der yang rkyen sel gyi dbang dang grib sel sogs 'ga' zhig mdzad |*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116: *gzims chung khams gsum rnam rgyal du gong zhabs mchog kyang bzhugs khrir phebs | rje nyid la'ang khri rgyun las ches mtho ba zhig bshams pa la bzhugs su gsol zhing | de nas thog mar sde srid rin po che stan dma' ba la bzhugs par bgegs sprod khros sol sogs mdzad rjes | bzhugs khri'i steng du phebs | de la mnga' dbang rin chen 'bar ba zhes bya rgyal po rgyal rigs spyi bo nas dbang bskur ba'i cho ga bram ze sogs la grags pa*

The above passage shows how much gTer bdag gling pa was involved in the highest level of the dGa' ldan pho brang state affairs. He was a state chaplain carrying out official rituals and religious services for the dGa' ldan pho brang state every year from 1669 to 1704, ahead of the sDe srid's assassination. He even warned⁶⁸ the sDe srid about his behavior and the turbulence of their period of history. After the sDe srid's death, according to Lo chen Dharmaśrī, at the instigation of bKa' bcu Blo bzang phun tshogs,⁶⁹ the king Lha bzang Khan⁷⁰ banned the rNying ma wrathful rituals of "throwing, burning, hitting, and so forth" that had been performed for the dGa' ldan pho brang and the Kokonor Mongol chieftains. A similarly tense situation regarding rNying ma rituals is reported in the autobiography of *Grub thob* Blo bzang Lha mchog⁷¹ (1672–1742):

[Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las told me], "This year, King Lha bzang Khan started reprimanding me [rDo rje brag] and sMin grol Ling. Those [spirits] who had been suppressed [by us] for the wellbeing of Tibet were taken out. He [Lha bzang Khan] expelled the Supreme Victor [Tsangs dbyangs rgya mtsho] to China and murdered sDe srid." [While he said these words], he shed tears and wiped it with his fingers. [He further said], the occasion of the rising up the 'gong po and taking out the *dam sri* [from the suppression ground] has arrived.⁷²

It is clear that some form of rNying ma ritual activities performed for the dGa' ldan pho brang were the subject of argument during the tussle between the sDe srid and Lha bzang Khan. After the elimination

las khyad par du gyur pa'i dbang bka' dang gdengs can gyi gtsug gi nor bu sogs rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i skyes cung zad kyang 'bul bar mdzad cing | sras dang bcas pa'i rgyal ba thams cad dang phyogs gcig par gong ma rgyal ba'i dbang pos kyang shis brjod kyi me tog char du 'bebs pa sogs bkra shis pa'i tshogs mnga' gsol bar mdzad do |.

⁶⁸ See 'Ol kha rje drung 03 bZhad pa'i rdo rje, pp. 40-41.

⁶⁹ There is a slim chance that this figure might be Dzungar bla ma Blo bzang phun tshogs who I have covered in detail in the later part of this article.

⁷⁰ *rJe btsun bla ma dam pa gter chen chos kyi rgyal po'i nang gi rtogs pa brjod pa yon tan mtha' yas rnam par bkod pa'i rol mo*, pp. 172–174.

⁷¹ He was a disciple of Ngag dbang nor bu who was appointed by the Fifth Dalai Lama to perform rituals for dGa' ldan pho brang at dGa' ldan bdud 'jom ling monastery. Grub thob Blo bzang lha mchog was also a disciple of Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las, and in the later part of his life, he had a close association with Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje. For more see Ehrhard 2002, pp. 241-243.

⁷² Blo bzang lha mchog 1989, pp. 37-38: *'di lo rgyal po lha bzang khang gis nged dang smin grol gling gnyis la bka' skyon gyi mgo btsugs | bod khams bde thabs kyi mnan pa yang bton | rgyal dbang rgya nag la skyungs | sde srid yang bkrongs song gsung spyen chab gnang ba phyag gis 'thor mdzad cing | 'gong po langs nas dam sri 'don gsung pa'i dus la 'babs song ang gsungs |.*

of the sDe srid, Lha bzang Khan banned some of these ritual activities. It seems that from that date onwards, there were no further rNying ma lamas' ritual activities in the dGa' ldan pho brang. A key instigator behind these bans was *bKa' bcu* Blo bzang phun tshogs, who seems to be none other than the sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs, a protégé of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa. Therefore, one can postulate that, during the king Lha bzang Khan's rule, the dGe lug purists had a fair degree of control over his religious policy, such that the proscription of some form of rNying ma rituals already started.

rNying ma and dGe lugs sectarianism in the midst of the intense power struggle between sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Lha bzang Khan

As mentioned before, sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's relationship with the leaders of rDo rje brag and sMin grol ling was so close that when the Fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682, he informed them,⁷³ while keeping prominent figures such as Paṅ chen Blo bzang ye shes,⁷⁴ the Khoshot king⁷⁵ [bsTan 'dzin Dalai Khan], and even the Qing emperor Khangxi in darkness for 14 years.⁷⁶ According to Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal,⁷⁷ when the Fifth Dalai Lama's double, sDe pa brTas rab pa, who the sDe srid used to cover the Dalai Lama's absence, was complaining and shouting for being kept like a prisoner, his behavior almost exposed the secret. At such a critical period, a solution proposed by gTer bdag gling pa helped the sDe srid to maintain the secrecy of the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁷⁸ At that time, gTer bdag gling pa was the right-hand man of the sDe srid in state affairs and in charge of finding the reincarnation of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Around that period, a charismatic dGe lugs scholar, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus (1648–1721), was quite famous and became a root teacher⁷⁹ of King bsTan 'dzin Dalai Khan in 1697. In 1700, he became an abbot

⁷³ See 'Ol kha rje drung 03 bZhad pa'i rdo rje, pp. 12-13. Also, see Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las 2017, vol. 2. pp. 323-334.

⁷⁴ See Ya Hanzhang 1994, p. 68.

⁷⁵ See Peter Schwieger 2015, p. 157.

⁷⁶ On sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's letters sent to Paṅ chen Rin po che and Khangxi informing them the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Ya Hanzhang 1994, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁷ According to Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (1992, p. 82), he is an 18th-century rNying ma master. His actual name was Blo gsal rgya mtsho. He studied under gTer bdag ling pa at sMin grol ling and served as a Tibetan teacher at rTse slob grwa, a school established by the Seventh Dalai Lama for training and recruiting government officials.

⁷⁸ Shakabpa 2010, p. 384.

⁷⁹ See Darig Thokmay 2023, pp. 510-511.

of sGo mang College, and his religious and political sphere of influence in the dGa' ldan pho brang state expanded. In 1703, Lha bzang Khan was crowned as protector king of Tibet. For the dGe lugs purists, Lha bzang Khan's ascension to power gave them an excellent opportunity to advance their agenda. Soon after, Lha bzang Khan and sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho fell into blame and discord, which further fueled the intensity of their power struggle. The dGe lugs purists led by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa stood by Lha bzang Khan wholeheartedly during these struggles. 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa even targeted the inclusive religious policy of the Fifth Dalai Lama that the sDe srid was continuing as he could not tolerate dGe lugs monastics⁸⁰ practicing rNying ma teachings or mixing rNying ma teachings with Tsong kha pa's teaching. He warned them in the following manner:

You should not think negatively about Tsong kha pa's teachings, [otherwise] you will face self-destruction. Either the high or the low, whoever should not change [Tsong kha pa's teaching] to other traditions or [let] other branches [of Buddhism] adopt it, or mix it with other teachings. My words hold truth as proved⁸¹ earlier.⁸²

According to his biography, even in his first encounter with the Sixth Dalai Lama Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa had a negative view about him:

There occurred a bad apparition during the welcoming event. [He was] asked about the apparition and responded that he saw the reincarnation (*sku skye*) without his head for a long time. Even though he watched him closely again and again, [the head] did not appear for some time. This was, indeed, a sign that [the reincarnation] is a fake one.⁸³

When the king Lha bzang Khan wanted to expel Tshangs dbyangs rgya tsho to China, he was the foremost dGe lugs figure to support the

⁸⁰ There were some dGe lugs teachers such as Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje practicing rNying ma teachings.

⁸¹ It seems he was referring to sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's death.

⁸² dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po 1987, p. 195: *yang nyin gcig rje tsong kha ba'i bstan pa 'di la khyed tsho sus kyang log pa dran mi nyan | rang 'phung yong | 'di la mtho dman sus kyang phar 'gyur tshur 'gyur dang | phar bsre tshur bse byed mi rung | nga'i tshig bden mi bden snga sor mthong ba de yin |*.

⁸³ Darig Thokmay 2023, p. 507. For the Tibetan text, see dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po 1987, pp. 107-108.

idea.⁸⁴ In *The Religious History of Bhairava* (*'Jigs byed chos 'byung*),⁸⁵ he considered Pad dkar 'dzin pa Ye shes rgya mtsho⁸⁶ as the Sixth Dalai Lama. While many of the dGe lugs Lamas were forced to accept Ye shes rgya mtsho as the Sixth Dalai Lama, for 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, he was a true Sixth Dalai Lama. Around that time, he had a weird dream related to sDe srid and Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho as follows:

At one time, he dreamt that a giant yak came to dBus from gTsang. [It] was so huge that it could barely fit in the sKyid Shod valley. It played a lot, and then [at one point] two people were stuck on its horn. [They] were like butter put on the horn. When [he] woke up, [he] thought that as Tshangs dbyangs and the sDe pa did not like dGe lugs. It seemed that the Dharma protectors would destroy them.

His resentment against the rNying ma was so strong that at one point, when *Rab 'byams pa* Ngag dbang, his treasurer, became sick and could not be cured, he thought that the rNying ma pa-s had cursed him and wanted to retaliate by wiping them out entirely by way of violent magic ritual.⁸⁷ 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's disciple Ngag dbang bkra shi's biography clearly mentions the discord between gTer bdag ling pa and 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa over their allegiance to the governing figures (i.e., sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and Lha bzang Khan) of the dGa' ldan pho brang.⁸⁸

According to 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's biography, he blamed the sDe srid for giving excessive favor to the rNying ma pa. He thinks that this became the cause for the persecution of the rNying ma school later. Thus, he asserts:

Basically, he [sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho] should have looked after the dGe lugs [faith] with unlimited kindness. However, what he did was the opposite. He haughtily gave excessive reward and honor to the rNying ma pa. If [one] investigates [the sDe srid's actions], temporarily it appears like leaving a stūpa (which needs to be white washed) in black (i.e., leaving it without whitewash), while offering whitewash to the rock which does not need it. Ultimately, it seemed like [the sDe srid] was very actively bringing about a cause for the

⁸⁴ His disciple sGo mang bla ma Blo bzang phun tshogs also welcomed the expulsion of the sixth Dalai lama Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho to China. See Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 109a.

⁸⁵ See 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa 2015, p. 338.

⁸⁶ Shakabpa 2010, p. 409. According to Dudjom (2002, p. 516), Pad dkar 'dzin pa Ye shes rgya mtsho was Lha bzang Khan's biological son.

⁸⁷ See Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 120 a.

⁸⁸ See bSe tshang 05 Blo bzang bkra shis 'phrin las rgya mtsho, p. 16b.

destruction of the old rNying ma monasteries in the future.⁸⁹

By comparing 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's two biographies,⁹⁰ one can notice the level of rNying ma influence at that time both in the general populace and in the dGa' ldan pho brang government as well as 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's frustration with the sDe srid for supporting the rNying ma pa. Even the Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (1684–1733) who befriended King Lha bzung Khan and witnessed the Dzungar invasion of Tibet, observed the high tension of jealousy and hatred that existed between what he calls the “yellow cap” and the “red cap”⁹¹ (referring to dGe lugs and rNying ma and other schools). In short, Lha bzung Khan and the dGe lugs purists had benefited each other. The former achieved his goal of becoming the absolute king of Tibet, and his swift victory over the sDe srid and Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho paved the way for the latter to present their agenda and started taking actions against the rNying ma influence in the dGa' ldan pho brang. These actions are described in the following sections.

*The Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan's conquest of Tibet
and sGo mang bla ma Blo bzang phun tshogs' role
in the systematic campaign of rNying ma persecution*

When Lha bzung Khan became an absolute monarch in Tibet in 1705,

⁸⁹ dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po 1987, p. 85: *lar khong gis ri bo dge ldan pa rnams bka' drin tshad med pas bskyang dgos rgyu yin pa la | blang dor go bzlog nas rnying ma ngos la bdag rkyen gzengs bstod dpal thal ba mdzad pa ni | 'phral du brtag tshe dgos pa'i mchod rten nag por bzhag nas mi dgos pa'i brag la dbu dkar gsol zhes pa'i dper snang yang | phugs rnying dgon gog po rnams mi dmigs pa'i dbyings su rgyas 'debs pa'i rkyen drag shos shig 'bad pa'i sgo nas sgrub pa ltar 'dug go |.*

⁹⁰ As far as the two biographies of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa Ngag dbang brtson 'grus are concerned, the first is entitled as 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam par thar pa yongs su brjod pa'i gtam du bya ba dad pa'i sgo 'byed ke ta ka'i 'phreng ba (also known as rNam thar btsan mo ma), written between 1722 and 1738 by his direct disciple Ngag dbang bkra shis (1678–1738). The second is entitled as Kun mkhyen 'jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i rnam thar bskal bzang 'jug ngog, written approximately in 1758 by the second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa dKon mchog 'jig med dbang po (1728–1791). The narration of the first biography is far more explicit regarding controversial issues including sectarianism compared to the second biography. For more about the two biographies and their differences, see sNyan bzang g. Yung drung tshe ring 2022, <https://bodrigpa.org/archives/2130>.

⁹¹ Desideri 2014, p. 334. He also says: “While there are fewer red-cap monks than yellow caps, they are rather more esteemed and held in greater reverence everywhere in Tibet, perhaps because they are less worldly or because their behavior seems more edifying.”

in Dzungaria,⁹² Tshe dbang rab brtan had already become the king⁹³ in 1698. His connection with the Three Great Seats and with bKra shis lhun po was very close.⁹⁴ He was a conservative dGe lugs idealist who did not like sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho and his association with the rNying ma school. Being surrounded by dGe lugs purists, he warned sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho to remove rNying ma practices from the rNam rgyal grwa tshang. As the rNying ma master Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal says:

Hong Taiji from the Dzungar sent a letter with the monk Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan as envoy: "For a lay leader (*mi nag dpon po*) like you [sDe srid], it is not appropriate to offer hand blessing to other Lamas. Do not do this. Do not sit above lamas, do not set up a rNying ma college in the Potala. If you listen to me, we will be on good terms. But if you do not, I will launch a military campaign [against you]. I [Che mchog 'dus pa rtsal] heard that Chos 'phel ja sang said: '[The Dzungars] prepared for a military expedition [to Tibet] and discussed the matter many times because the sDe srid did not listen [to them. However,] due to the excellence of the government's ritual, except on the King [Lha bzang Khang in 1717], they could not wage war [against the sDe srid].'⁹⁵

He was a patron of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and revered him. In 1705, sometime after the sDe srid was murdered and Lha bzang Khan raised the issue of whether or not Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was a true incarnation of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Tshe dbang rab brtan's envoy came to meet 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and handed him the former's message, which agreed that Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho was not a real incarnation. Through sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs as an interpreter, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa sent many oral messages to King Tshe dbang rab brtan regarding loyalty to and protection of the teachings of Tsong kha pa, maintaining some level of secrecy.⁹⁶ Even ahead of the Dzungar's invasion of Tibet, Tshe dbang rab brtan's messenger came to see him in Amdo. Again, he sent a message to King Tshe dbang rab brtan concerning the allegiance to and safeguard of Tsong kha pa's teachings thus:

⁹² This place is located in today's Xinjiang.

⁹³ He became the King of Dzungars after the death of dGa' ldan Boshugtu Khan in 1698. For more about how Tshe dbang rab brtan became the King of Dzungar, see Perdue 2005, p. 210.

⁹⁴ bsTan 'dzin nyi ma 1977, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Darig Thokmay 2023, pp. 519-520.

⁹⁶ 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ordered other monks to leave the room and had a secret discussion with the Dzungar messenger through *Bla ma* Blo bzang as his interpreter. See Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 103a.

In the end of that autumn, [when] Dzungar El chi [Tshe dbang rab brtan's messenger] was returning to [Dzungaria], he [‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa] dispatched *Rab ‘byams pa* Blo bzang mkhas mchog [together] to greet Jo rug thu Hung tha’i thu [Tshe dbang rab brtan] with a message [which said:] “Great Ruler, you should think about the ways to promote the teachings of Lord Tsong kha pa as [you did] before. As an old *śramaṇa* (*dge sbyong*), I am also very eager to see you, the Noble Ruler. However, due to the unfinished works of the new monastery [establishment], I could not come this time. In the future, I will see if I can come as you wished.”⁹⁷

Considering the close connection between ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa and Tshe dbang rab brtan, it is likely that ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa, despite being a root teacher to Lha bzang Khan, was in the forefront of those monastics who ushered the Dzungar troops to Tibet.⁹⁸

Somehow responding to the new level of Chinese support for Lha bzang Khan and the aforementioned appeals from the dGe lugs clergy and sDe srid loyalists,⁹⁹ Tshe dbang rab brtan initiated a cunning strategy of marriage alliance between his daughter and Lha bzang Khan’s son¹⁰⁰ and then sent 6,000 cavalry under general Tshe ring don grub to Central Tibet and another 300 cavalry to Xining. The idea behind sending two groups of troops to two different locations was that the 300 cavalry men sent to Xining were to bring sKal bzang rgya mtsho, the claimant of the reincarnation of the Sixth Dalai Lama, from Amdo and then get together with the 6,000 troops at ‘Dam gzhung, to the north of Lhasa.

Thereafter, they planned to march to Lhasa with the Dalai Lama under their escort to show that they were the true protectors of the dGe

⁹⁷ Ngag dbang bkra shis, p. 167b: *ston mjug jun gar gyi el chi phyir ‘gro ba dang mnyam du rab ‘byams pa blo bzang mkhas mchog jo rug thu hung tha’i ji’i mdun du ‘tshams ‘dri zhu bar rdzongs sta mdzad de | sa skyong chen po nyid kyis sngar bzhin rje tsong kha pa’i bstan pa ‘phel rgyas kyi thabs thugs la ‘dogs dgos | dge sbyong rgan po bdag kyang sa skyong dam pa pa’i zhal dngos su mjal ‘dod che yang | dgon pa gsar ‘dzin gyi las ‘phro ma grub pas da lam yong ma thub kyang | slad nas thugs bzhed ltar yongs e thub lta zhes pa’i chab shog stsal |.*

⁹⁸ ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa might have lost faith in Lha bzang Khan because, according to Sum pa *mkhan po* (1982, pp. 45-46), he was secretly practicing rNying ma teachings. Furthermore, the way his biography narrated his regrets when he heard about the death of King Lha bzang Khan and his rejection of the troop support for Lhazang by the Kokonor chieftain Erdini Taiji, it is quite clear that ‘Jam dbyangs bzhad pa played a significant role in ushering Dzungar troops to Tibet. See dKon mchog ‘jigs med dbang po 1987, pp. 201, 206.

⁹⁹ According to Ha Zhang (1994, p. 88), the Dzungars invaded Tibet in order to take revenge for sDe srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. However, Shakabpa does not agree with that: he points out that the Dzungar King Tshe dbang rab brtan never liked the sDe srid and criticized him many times. See Shakabpa 2010, p. 414.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 414-415.

lugs and its leaders.¹⁰¹ The 6,000 cavalry reached 'Dam gzhung on August 10th 1717, and faced off with Lha bzang Khan's force. At that time Tshe ring don grub heard that the mission sent to Xining was ambushed by the Qing force, but he kept it secret and spread the rumor that 300 troops had rescued the proclaimed reincarnation of the Sixth Dalai Lama.¹⁰²

After failing negotiations and indecisive battles for more than two months, Lha bzang Khan fled to Lhasa. The Dzungar force then marched on Lhasa in November 1717, capturing the city overnight with much destruction.¹⁰³

On December 3, 1717, Lha bzang Khan was killed, and Tshe ring don grub became the new master of the Tibetan people in dBus gtsang. To assert his authority, he commissioned several campaigns of a religious nature,¹⁰⁴ but the most significant was his systematic and nationwide attack on non-dGe lugs schools, primarily the rNying ma school. In communication with Khangxi, Tshe dbang rab brtan himself acknowledged the reason for his actions as follows:

Tsewang Rabdan himself, in letters written to the Qing emperor, claimed to share many of the same ideals. He too favoured peace in Tibet, and he had intervened in order to prevent heretical and immoral activities by the monks who were rivals to the Yellow Sect and to stop the oppressive actions of Lazang Khan. He had "destroyed the Red Sect, which deviated from the Way," and seized Lazang Khan's wife and children.¹⁰⁵

This indicates that it was a sectarian-driven persecution that targeted one particular denomination. But the key figure behind this campaign was a prominent dGe lugs purist and Dzungar ethnic sGo mang *Bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs. Sum pa *mkhan po* Ye shes dpal 'byor gives

¹⁰¹ Petech 1972, p. 35.

¹⁰² See. K. Dhondup 1984, p. 61.

¹⁰³ According to Petech (1972, pp. 35), the Dzungar General Tshe ring Don grub was devastated with the news of the failed mission to sKu 'bum to bring the claimant of the Seventh Dalai Lama to Lhasa. Hence without the Dalai Lama (the pawn they wanted to use as a justification for their invasion of Tibet), he could not count on the dGe lugs clergy and, out of the frustration, subjected Lhasa city to ransacking and fear. For more about the destruction and lootings that took place, see Desideri 2014, pp. 249.

¹⁰⁴ Apart from persecuting the rNying ma school, the Dzungars also destroyed some monasteries belonging to other schools, including Bon. See Petech 1972, p. 54. They also demanded the removal of the villages situated around the major dGe lugs monasteries such as bKra shis lhun po, Se ra, 'Bras spungs and dGa' ldan and proposed a single monastic code (*bca' yig*) for these monasteries. See Pañ chen Blo bzang ye shes 2014, Vol. 2, p. 50.

¹⁰⁵ Perdue 2005, p. 237.

us more details as follows:

Dzungar troops broke into Lhasa and defeated Lha bzang [Khan] and showed him the impermanent nature of life [i.e., they killed him]. The governor of sTag rtse named mTsho skyes rdo rje was appointed as the regent. Thereafter, following the oral order of the Dzungarian *Lha btsun, Bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs, the high rNying ma bla ma rDo rje brag *sprul sku* (*Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las) and others were killed in the year of Earth-Dog (1718) and in the year of Earth-Pig (1719). The Monastic College sKu zhabs grwa tshang rnam rgyal ling, rDo rje brag in the bSam yas Valley, sMin grol ling, and others were destroyed.¹⁰⁶

Relying on the statement of Sum pa *mkhan po*, Luciano Petech says:

He sent out summons to all provinces requesting the whole realm to pay homage to him. dBus seems to have been soon cowed into submission by systematic raids of Dzungar troops starting from Lhasa. The general policy that lay at the background of these raids was inspired by the sGo mang *Bla ma* Blo-bzan pun-tsoqs, it was a clear-cut programme of persecution of the Nying-ma-pa school of Lamaism.¹⁰⁷

These statements point out that the Dzungar general Tshe ring don grub was merely acting on the order of the high-ranking dGe lugs clergy and the sGo mang Seat Holder Blo bzang phun tshogs, whose immediate motive was to drive the influence of rNying ma out of the dGa' ldan pho brang political sphere. Ultimately, in ordering the assassination of important lineage holding rNying ma masters and the destruction of its prominent monasteries, he sought to obliterate the rNying ma.

It was a sectarian-driven persecution in the service of political ambition. In *Chos 'byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*, Sum pa *mkhan po* frankly states that the Dzungars purified and rectified the teachings of the Buddha and uplifted the teachings of Tsong kha pa.¹⁰⁸ Since sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs was a key person concerning the

¹⁰⁶ Ye shes dpal 'byor 1982, pp. 21-22: *jo'un gwar gyi dmag lha sar shor nas lha sar lha bzang pham par bgyis nas rgyal po la mi rtag pa'i rang bzhin bstan te | tag rtse'i sde ba mtsho skye rdo rje sde srid du bskos | de nas jo'un gwar pa lha btsun sgo mang bla ma blo bzang phun tshogs kyi ngag bkod ltar du | sa khyi dang sa phag lor rnying ma'i bla chen rdo rje brag sprul sku sogs bkrongs | dgal ldan pho brang gi sku phyogs grwa tshang rnam rgyal gling dang dang bsam yas gzhung gi rdo rje brag dang | smin grol gling sogs bshig_bstan pa dag ther byas nas dri ma can bsal |.*

¹⁰⁷ Petech 1972, p. 53.

¹⁰⁸ Ye shes dpal 'byor 1992, p. 904.

Dzungar's persecution of the rNying ma school, his actions and views (regarding rNying ma and the Fifth Dalai Lama) were implicated in several works of that century. Therefore, he is a person of interest in the scope of this paper.

According to Lkhagvasuren Dorji¹⁰⁹ and *The History of the sGo mang Seat Holders (sGo mang gdan rabs)*, he was a son of Puntasgraash (Phun tshogs bKra shis), the seventh son of Erdeni Batur Khuntaiji.¹¹⁰ Since he was from a royal family, he was called "Noyon Khamba" in Mongolian and *Lha btsun* (divine monk) in Tibetan. He was sent to Tibet as a young man and studied under 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa at sGo mang College. He became one of what is known as the "six *mktan po* prophesied by the All-knowing 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa."¹¹¹ Throughout his stay in Tibet (until 1719), he was one of the foremost disciples of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa who praised his strict observance of vows. It seems he became radicalized under the tutelage of 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa at sGo mang College, becoming the Seat Holder of sGo mang College not long after 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa left for Amdo. In 1716, he represented Lha bzung Khan in a meeting at Kokonor and met again 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa there, ahead of the Dzungar invasion of Tibet. When the Dzungar troops arrived in Lhasa in late 1717, he was holding the sGo mang College seat.

Pho lha nas bSod nam stobs rgyas (1689–1747) referred to him as "sGo mang *bla ma*,"¹¹² the one who helped him to hide from the Dzungars invaders. According to his biography, Pho lha nas had two meetings with the sGo mang *bla ma* during the Dzungar occupation of Tibet. The subject of the conversation and tone of the first and second meetings were quite different. The first meeting took place in late 1717 and was more about personal relations, including friendship and care. However, in the second meeting, which happened in the middle or late 1719, Pho lha nas, perhaps knowing the influence of sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzung phun tshogs in connection to his role in the rNying ma persecution and his influence over the Dzungar generals, repeatedly appealed to him to treat all the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism equally. Pho lha nas enlightened him on the Fifth Dalai Lama's reasons to promote the rNying ma teachings as follows:

¹⁰⁹ Lkhagvasuren Dorji 2020, pp. 57-58.

¹¹⁰ He was a son of Khara Khula (d. 1634) and founder of the Dzungar empire. For more on Erdeni Batur Khuntaiji, see Lkhagvasuren Dorji 2020, pp. 24-37.

¹¹¹ Blo bzung shes rab, Blo bzung phun tshogs, Ngag dbang, Blo bzung dam chos, Blo bzung chos grags and Sangs rgyas rdo rje are known as the *Kun mkhyen 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa'i lung gis zin pai' mktan po drug*. See bsTan pa bstan 'dzin 2003, p. 86.

¹¹² Mdo mkhar ba Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 303 and 333.

In order not to let the questioner's [i.e., *Bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs] mind fall into meaningless partialism, [Pho lha nas] told him beneficial and meaningful things for the sake of the teaching and for the benefit of migratory beings. Particularly, the Fifth [Dalai Lama], embodiment of the Noble Padmapāṇi who appeared in maroon robe and illuminated the essential teachings of the Great Secret Mantra [of the rNying ma school] for the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings. He understood the importance of this teaching. [He] should not view [him] negatively, or else many past noble [masters] would also be at fault and the All-knowing great scholar Blo bzang Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, who he considered and authentic [teacher] and his [spiritual] activities would also become unreliable.¹¹³

He further told him that if the Dzungars were to destroy the monasteries known as the Gling bcu gsum,¹¹⁴ then it would ruin the name and fame of the Dzungar king Tshe dbang rab brtan because those monasteries were established for the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings and were the ways for sentient beings to enter the stainless teachings of Tsong kha pa.¹¹⁵ Even if sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs was good to Pho lha nas personally, the latter knew, having witnessed the assassination of many rNying ma Lamas and the destruction of many monasteries at his order, that he was against the rNying ma teachings. But Pho lha nas still appealed to him to protect the Gling bcu gsum and remaining rNying ma monasteries if there were any.

Another piece of evidence of sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs's radical view of the rNying ma school is found in the statement of Rig 'dzin dPal ldan bkra shis (1688–1743),¹¹⁶ which gives the reason and circumstance under which he left sGo mang College and fled to

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 334: *dri ba pa'i blo'i 'dzin stangs don med pa'i phyogs ma lhung ba | bstan pa dang 'gro ba'i don du sman pa'i snying po can gyi gtam dag gsol zhing | khyad par yang 'phags pa lag na pad mo ngu smig gar gyis rnam par rol pa skyes pa rabs kyi phreng ba lnga par bstan pa de nyid kyis sems can thams cad la phan pa dang | bde legs su bya ba'i phyir gsang chen snying po'i bstan pa gsal bar mdzad cing | bstan pa'i gnad rnams kyang thugs su chud par mdzad pa la log par rtog pa mi rigs te | de ltar na sngon byon dam pa du ma nongs par 'gyur zhing | khyed cag gis tshad mar 'dzin pa'i gtso bo thams cad mkhyen pa mahā paṇḍita blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan de'i rnam par thar pa la'ang yid brton du mi rung bar 'gyur ro |.*

¹¹⁴ The Thirteen Monasteries (Gling bcu gsum), which include ten dGe lugs monasteries and three rNying ma monasteries, were established by the Fifth Dalai Lama between 1654–1682. For more on the Gling bcu gsum, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 580.

¹¹⁵ Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 335.

¹¹⁶ He was one of the disciples of Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las. For more, See Yangdon Dhondup, <https://treasuryoflives.org/bo/biographies/view/Pelden-Tashi/9254>.

Kham from central Tibet:

The external cause was that in the year of Fire-Bird [1717], harmful to both the teaching and the government, armies from the borderland came to [Lhasa] and destroyed the happiness of the entire Tibet. The internal cause was that the sGo mang Seat Holder (*sgo mang khri pa*), the Dzungar Blo bzang phun tshogs and the disciplinarian (*dge skos*) Klu bum bsTan pa yar 'phel not only held me as [their] foe, but they also perceived the supreme victor Padmasambhava and Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the refuge of the snow land, all-knowing and supreme victor, as their enemy. The secret cause was that [I] had many disturbing dreams and signs. Therefore, in the end of the year of the Fire-Bird and at the beginning of the Earth-Dog year, [I] escaped from dBus to Khams.¹¹⁷

Likewise, 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa predicted that sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs would have two dangers in his life. The first would not harm him, but he should flee when the second danger arose. The two dangers described in 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa's biography refer to the Chinese expeditions sent to Tibet in 1718 and in 1720 to drive the Dzungars out. sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs said that he stayed in Lhasa during the first Chinese expedition, but fled to Dzungaria in 1719, ahead of the second expedition to Tibet led by Kangxi's son Yunti. Had he stayed in Lhasa then, he could have been one of those ethnic Dzungar monastics who were executed by the Qing force for their involvement in the Dzungar's invasion of Tibet and pillaging monasteries and the destruction of Lhasa city. Considering the above pieces of evidence, one can conclude that sGo mang *bla ma* Blo bzang phun tshogs was radicalized by 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ahead of Dzungar invasion and that like his master, he played a central role during the Dzungar invasion of Tibet, including instructing the Dzungar generals on what to do to protect Tsong kha pa's teaching.

¹¹⁷ lCe nag tsang Hum chen and Ye shes 'od zer sgröl ma 2002, pp. 13-14: *phyi rkyen me bya'i lor la bstan srid spyi la gnod pa'i mtha' dmag lud cing bod khams yongs kyi bde skyid bcom pa dang | nang rkyen sgo mang khri pa cung gar blo bzang phun tshogs dang dge skos klu 'bun bstan pa yar 'phel gnyis ni | nyams chung gyi na ba bdag gi dgra zlar mthong ba ci smos te rgyal dbang pad ma 'byung gnas dang gangs can mgon po rgyal dbang thams cad mkhyen pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho gnyis dgra zlar mthong drags pa dang | gsang rkyen rmi lam gyi 'tshub gyur sogs rkyen du mas lhongs pa la brten nas | gser 'phyang lo yi mjug ma dang | | sa khyi'i lo 'gor dgra byung ste | | dbus nas khams kyi phyogs su bros | | srin mo rdzong gi gnas su slebs | |.*

How the campaign of rNying ma persecution unfolded and the scale of its destruction

According to Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje, on the twenty-first day of the eleventh month of the year of Fire-Bird [1717], Tshe ring don grub sent out a notice calling all Lamas and high-ranking officials to gather in Lhasa to hear Tshe dbang rab brtan's edict.¹¹⁸ Hence, Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje came to Lhasa and witnessed the activities of the Dzungar generals and their armies, which included their plan to destroy rDo rje brag, sMin grol ling, and rNam rgyal grwa tshang. Many groups of Mongol armies led by generals such Chos 'phel Ja'i sang¹¹⁹ and others left Lhasa¹²⁰ venturing in different directions to bring rNying ma Lamas back to Lhasa. Concerning these dispatches of troops to different places, mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal (1697–1763)¹²¹ mentions who were sent to bring back rNying ma Lamas as follows:

Not long after, the Dzungar chieftains (generals) had a discussion and engaged in the action of harming the Essential Teachings (*snying po'i bstan pa*). They sent out Lha bzang Khan's minister Pak shi, together with some Mongols to bring the tutors (*yongs 'dzin*) from sMin grol ling. [At the same time] the noble lord Tha'i ji [Pho lha nas] and a Mongolian called Thos pa dga' were sent to [rDo rje brag] to bring the *vajra* holder [i.e., *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las*]. Likewise, the [Dzungar generals] sent messengers to every rNying ma monastery, wherever they were located.¹²²

¹¹⁸ bZhad pa'i rdo rje 2009, pp. 267-268.

¹¹⁹ According to bsTan pa'i sgron me (1992, pp. 2-6), previously gTer bdag gling pa was said to have given Chos 'phel Ja'i sang a "blessed pill" and told him that one day he will help his small monastery. Hence, though he was assigned to lead the Mongol party to destroy rDo rje brag, he chose to lead the party going to destroy sMin grol ling instead and did not come directly to the monastery. Instead, they put a tent outside the sMin grol ling monastery. At that time, a local chieftain deceived them with bears. This gave enough time for *rJe btsun Mi 'gyur* and others to flee from the monastery. The Mongols destroyed all the complex of the monastery except the gSang sngags pho brang complex.

¹²⁰ bZhad pa'i rdo rje mentions that all the Dzungar generals were in a happy mood for the imminent destruction of rDo rje brag and sMin grol ling. The Mongol parties sent out later proved to be those who brought rNying ma masters from the above monasteries. See bZhad pa'i rdo rje 2009, p. 268.

¹²¹ He was the author of acclaimed works such as *Mi dbang rtogs brjod*, *gZhon nu zla med kyi gtam rgyud* and *bKa' blon rtogs brjod*. As he was from an influential mDo mkhar family, he studied at sMin grol ling under Lo chen Dharmaśrī, and became the governor (*rdzong dpon*) of Zhi ka rtse. He served as a cabinet minister for over thirty-four years in the dGa' ldan pho brang during different regimes. For more about this figure, see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las 2002, p. 1137.

¹²² Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, pp. 299-300: *ji tsam na jun gar pa'i gtso bo de dag bgros te snying po'i bstan pa la rma 'byin par byed pa'i sbyor ba la zhugs nas | lha bzang khang gi*

Pho lha nas knew that if they took the rDo rje brag *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las* to Lhasa, the Dzungars would harm him. Hence, he bribed the Mongol *Thos pa dga'*, who agreed to tell the General *Tshe ring don grub* that *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las* was sick and too old to come to Lhasa. When they returned to Lhasa without *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las*, *Tshe ring don grub* violently blamed Pho lha nas with harsh words.¹²³ On the sixteenth day of the eleventh month, *gDugs dkar ja'i sang* along with one hundred troops went to the Potala Palace and brought the monks of *rNam rgyal grwa tshang* to the river bank of *sKyid chu*, stripped them from their monastic robes and instructed them to stay at their respective villages. On the twenty-second day of the eleventh month, [the Dzungars] brought the head Lamas of *sMin grol ling*, *rDo rje brag*, many of the ministers of *Lha bzang Khan*, and monastics to Lhasa and imprisoned them at the *Phun tshogs rab brtan dpal 'jor* residence.¹²⁴

Pho lha nas was also imprisoned there and saw the lamas, monks, officials, and Mongols with hands and feet tied with ropes. *Lha bzang Khan* 's puppet, *Pad dkar 'dzin pa Ye she rgya mtsho* was also removed from the Sixth Dalai Lama's throne. Around that time, *Tshe ring don grub* and *Chos 'phel Ja'i sang* summoned *Sle lung bzhad pa'i rdo rje* and asked him many questions, such as whether *Padmasambhava* was an authentic teacher, and whether *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho* was a true incarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama *Yon tan rgya mtsho* (1589–1617) or not. They told him that *sPrul sku Grags pa rgyal mtshan* was the true incarnation of the Fourth Dalai Lama in their country. In short, they tested the loyalty of *Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje* to the teachings¹²⁵ of *Tsong kha pa*. Meanwhile Pho lha nas witnessed that the Dzungar prison guards were terrorizing *Lo chen Dharmaśrī* and his nephews¹²⁶ with harsh words and actions. At that time, *mNga' bdag Myang ston Rig 'dzin rgya mtsho*¹²⁷ defended them by stating that he oversaw and executed all those violent rituals

mdun na 'don pak+shi dang | mon gol kha cig 'og min smin grol gling gi yongs 'dzin rnam spyan 'dren par mngags | rje bo dam pa tha'i ji dang | mon gol thos pa dgar grags pa thub bstan rdo rje brag rdzong gi rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po spyan 'dren par mngags | gzhan yang snying po'i bstan pa gang dang gang du gnas pa de dang der mngags gzhus pa dag mngags par byas so | | .

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹²⁴ It was the residence of King *Lha bzang Khan*. For more, see *Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las* 2002, p. 1327.

¹²⁵ Bailey 2017, p. 51.

¹²⁶ *Pad ma 'gyur med rGya mtsho* and *Zhabs drung Yid bzhin legs grub* who were the eldest and youngest of the three sons of *gTer bdag gling pa*.

¹²⁷ He was one of the disciples of the *gTer bdag ling pa* who later became *ti shri* when Pho lha nas became the ruler of Tibet. See *Tshe ring dbang rgyal* 1981, p. 312.

against those who harmed the teachings and that all the Lamas were innocent because they only gave teaching transmissions and did not participate in the violent rituals.¹²⁸

As mentioned before, Dzungars were wary about the violent rNying ma rituals, and this was the reason or excuse for their persecution of the rNying ma school. At the meeting of all high-ranking Lamas and officials of dBus gtsang at the Potala on December 24, 1717, General Tshe ring don grub and others declared a law of nationwide ban of rNying ma teachings. They gave orders to the monasteries and the public to discard all rNying ma religious objects or symbols. Hence, the systematic persecution of the rNying ma was officially launched. In this campaign, they focused on the expulsion of the rNying ma pa from the dBus gtsang soil by executing the lineage-holding masters who were the backbone of rNying ma teachings, disrobing all the rNying ma monks and destroying the rNying ma monasteries, which were the center of rNying ma studies as shown by the following sequence of actions they took.

On the evening of December 24, 2017, they started the execution of rNying ma Lama Lo chen Dharmaśrī, *rDo rje 'dzin pa* Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, sMin grol gling scion Pad ma 'gyur med rgya mtsho,¹²⁹ bKra shis lhun po'i *gDung rgyud rin po che*, and others at the nearby Kyid chu river. Not long after, they executed some of Lha bzang Khan's prominent officials¹³⁰ and rNying ma masters such as rDo rje brag *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las*, gNam ling *paṅ chen* dKon mchog chos grags (1646–1717),¹³¹ *gDung sras* Yid bzhin legs grub,¹³² treasurer Kun dga' tshul khrim. Following these executions of rNying ma masters, they kicked out rNying ma monks from their monasteries and destroyed the rNying ma monasteries located in dBus gtsang, starting with rDo rje brag, sMin grol ling,¹³³ dPal ri theg chen ling¹³⁴ Chu shul thar pa ling, and gSang sngags byang chub ling, and they

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹²⁹ He was born in 1686 and killed by Dzungars in 1718. For more information regarding his life and writings, see Thub bstan rgyal mtshan 1992, p. 310.

¹³⁰ Bu chung, dNgos gzhi ba, Pad ma tshe ring, rGyal rtse lchang lo can pa and others.

¹³¹ He was the younger brother of *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las* and became a close attendant to the Fifth Dalai Lama. See *Rig 'dzin Pad ma 'phrin las* 2017, vol. 1, p. 212. For more about this figure see, Byams pa 'phrin las 2000, pp. 320–322.

¹³² Youngest son of gTer bdag ling pa.

¹³³ See bsTan pa'i sgron me 1992, pp. 5–6.

¹³⁴ It was established by *gTer ston* Shes rab 'od zer (1518–1584) with the support of 'Phyongs rgyas ruler *Hor bSod nams stobs rgyal*. It used to be the largest rNying ma monastery in central Tibet predating rDo rje brag and sMin grol ling. For more regarding the Dzungar's destruction of this monastery, see Kun mkhyen 'Jigs med ling pa 1970, pp. 268–282.

closed the caves attributed to Padmasambhava.¹³⁵ They tried to destroy bSam yas Monastery and the Gling bcu gsum. mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal summarized the Dzungar's action in Tibet in the following words:

In the land of Tibet, the Dzungar military force harmed the teachings of [the Buddha] and killed many masters. They also took the lives of many individuals, who were the descendants of the kings in dBus and gTsang without any fault. Their food and beverage were [snatched]. In short, they levied many extra, new taxes which include horses and good grass [food for horse]; they tormented the public and did not allow them to have a happy [life for] even a moment.¹³⁶

Concerning the persecution of the rNying ma school by the Dzungars, Ippolito Desideri captured the status of this persecution in the followings passage:

They shed the blood of a great number of lamas and monks of the second order together with their richest and more powerful relations, their supporters, and those who had protected their goods. They confiscated all their wealth, seized their manors, sacked their palaces, destroyed many of their monasteries and temples, totally demolishing some of them, converting others into stables, stripping others bare. They broke all of the statues and most assiduously sought and burned all of the images and books of Urgyen and strictly forbade the Tibetans under penalty of death from keeping or preserving any of his statues, books, or image, reciting any prayers to him, or invoking him in any way, or even to merely pronounce his name.¹³⁷

The above passage gives a rough sketch of the scale of the destructions that the Dzungars brought on the rNying ma school, but there are no reliable government statistics or figures indicating how many monks were killed, how many monasteries were destroyed, how many

¹³⁵ According to mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal (1981, p. 324), when Pho lha nas left Lhasa and visited Padmasambhava's cave situated at Chu bo ri in Lho kha region, workers were closing the cave.

¹³⁶ Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, pp. 379: *Bod yul 'dir jun gar pa'i dpung tshogs kyis bstan pa la rma 'byin par byas shing | yongs kyi dge ba'i bshes gnyen du ma'ang ming gi lhag mar byas | yul dbus dang gtsang ljongs kyi rje bo'i rigs las byung ba'i skye bo nyes med du ma srog dang phral | de dag gi bza' ba dang btung ba dang mdor na bzhon pa'i rta dang zas rtswa' jam bsdu ba yan chad kyi dpya khral gzar bu du mas gtse te 'bangs rnams skad gcig kyang bde ba'i go skabs bral bar byas |.*

¹³⁷ Ippolito Desideri 2014, p. 337.

religious articles such as scriptures¹³⁸ and artefacts were destroyed, or how much wealth was looted from rNying ma monasteries and transported to Dzungaria or donated to dGe lugs monasteries. As an example indicating the scale of the destruction of rNying ma monasteries, rDo rje brag monastery was said to have over 2500 monks in its heyday. It had many temples¹³⁹ within the monastery compound with lavish murals and many scriptures, including the *bKa' 'gyur* and *bsTan 'gyur* as well as the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* collections and treasure teachings. Similarly, sMin grol ling, at the time of the Dzungar invasion, had over 300 monks¹⁴⁰ residing at the monastery, as well as many temples¹⁴¹ and an 84-column prayer hall.

According to mDo mkhar Tshe ring dbang rgyal, the Dzungars destroyed or disbanded over 550 rNying ma monasteries during their three-year occupation of Tibet.¹⁴² Around the middle of 1719, Pho lha nas and Khang chen nas bSod nams rgyal po¹⁴³ led a resistance movement against the Dzungar occupation of Tibet. They gained full control over the gTsang region up to the Gam pa mountain pass. During this period, over 250 rNying ma monasteries and lay practitioners' communities were restored in gTsang. The monks and lay practitioners could gather at their former monasteries and continue their Dharma activities like before.¹⁴⁴ However, according to *Rab 'byams pa* O rgyan chos grags¹⁴⁵ and *gDung sras* Rin chen nam rgyal,¹⁴⁶ who were the witnesses and the survivors of the persecution, all the rNying ma monasteries of dBus gtsang were destroyed. Similarly, the dGe lugs scholar Sum pa *mkhan po* also mentioned that the Dzungars honored the dGe lugs teachings by destroying all the

¹³⁸ According to Brag mkhar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyugs (2011, Vol. *da*, p. 481), rDo rje brag *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las created a *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. However, it was destroyed during the Dzungar's destruction of rDo rje brag monastery.

¹³⁹ Rig dzin lha khang, Nyi 'od lha khang, Bla ma lha khang, mTshan brgyad lha khang, gZim chung chos dbyings pho brang, Rag sku lha khang, gTsang khang chen mo and mGon khang srid gsum rnam rgyal. See Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rdo rje 2004, p. 11-13.

¹⁴⁰ Rab byams pa O rgyan chos grags 2013, p. 226.

¹⁴¹ gTsug lag khang, gSang sngags pho brang, Bla brang chos 'khor lhun po, rNam rgyal pho brang, dPal chen lha khang, gZhal yas lha khang, Bla ma lha khang and monk's quarters and many stūpas.

¹⁴² Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 400.

¹⁴³ J. Arya Moallem, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kangchenne-Sonam-Gyelpo/TBRC_P2LS185.

¹⁴⁴ Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981, p. 380.

¹⁴⁵ *Rab 'byams pa* O rgyan chos grags 2013, p. 229.

¹⁴⁶ sPrang btsun mang ga la 2013, p. 16.

rNying ma monasteries.¹⁴⁷ Supposing that the figures regarding the Dzungar destruction of rNying ma monasteries, which was given by mDo mkhar Tshering dbang rgyal, is factual, then we can assume that they there were roughly 550 rNying ma monasteries in dBus gtsang at that time. It can therefore be considered that the Dzungar's persecution was an attempt to eradicate rNying ma culture.

The Dzungars also imposed strict laws that restricted monks' gatherings and movement. We can notice the dire situations of rNying ma monastics in the following words of *gDung sras* Rin chen rnam rgyal:

From now onward [you] shall not assemble more than two,
 Except for indulging in non-religious things [such as] women
 and beer,
 If you do anything that is virtuous and for [your] teachings,
 [Your] life will be harmed, [thus they] declared the law.
 Pointing [their] fearsome swords and spears,
 [They] scattered the three-vow-observing monastic communities
 resembling a maroon horizon descended on the earth,
 in all directions.¹⁴⁸

In connection to the above lines, Sle lung bZhad pa'i rdo rje observes:

As soon as the Dzungar troops broke into Lhasa, the lay people cut their hair and took refuge in lay attire. But since the destruction of monastic colleges (*grwa tshang*), even the monastics took refuge in lay attire because monastics who wore good robes were stopped and frisked. Such paradoxical situations occurred.¹⁴⁹

When *gDung sras* Rin chen rnam rgyal fled to Khams through the border regions of Bhutan and Kong po in 1717, he witnessed the high level of restriction in the rNying ma monasteries in the bordering regions. Many of the monks were in lay clothes. The officials from the Lhasa government led by the Dzungars were inspecting rNying ma monasteries. The commoners he met on the way spoke of disowning

¹⁴⁷ Ye shes dpal 'byor 1992, p. 904.

¹⁴⁸ sPrang btsun mang ga la 2013, p. 16: *phyin chad khyod rnams gnyis tshun sdebs mi rung | | chos min bya ba nag chang bag med las | | bstan la dge ba'i bya ba byas srid tshe | | rang rang srog la rgol ba'i lung bsgrags te | | mda' mdung mtshon cha 'jigs pa'i 'phang brteg gis | | ngur smig mtshams sprin sa la lhung 'dra ba'i | | gsum ldan 'dus pa'i tshogs rnams phyogs su gtor | |*

¹⁴⁹ bZhad pa'i rdo rje 2009, p. 273: *sbyong dmag rnams lha sar shor ma thag pa'i skabs su mi nag rnams kyang skra bregs te ban chas la skyabs su re ba dang | grwa tshang gtor dus nas bzung ste zhag shas kyi bar du grwa chas legs pa gang yin la bzung 'chang dang bkag sdom byas par brten grwa pa rnams kyang mi nag gi chas la re dgos pa sogs go ldog gi 'gyur dul shin tu che ba'i skabs su 'dug |*

sMin grol ling for fear of the Dzungar's persecution. Likewise, far-reaching control of rNying ma monasteries and search parties dispatched by the Dzungar-led government in Lhasa are reported in *rJe btsun Mi 'gyur dPal sgron's* biography.¹⁵⁰ Thus, due to the Dzungar's regime and its persecution of the rNying ma school in central Tibet, many prominent rNying ma Lamas from Central Tibet, which include *gDung sras* Rin chen rnam rgyal, *rJe btsun Mi 'gyur dPal sgron*, *Rig 'dzin* Ngag dbang bkra shis, and Chos rje gling pa fled to bordering regions such as Sikkim, Khams, and Pad ma bkod.

Conclusion

The root cause of Dzungar's persecution of the rNying ma school lies in the zealous support for this school by the highest authority of the dGa' ldan pho brang governments—the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. The two figures uplifted the rNying ma school with their material support for the monasteries, notably sMin grol ling and rDo rje brag and their seat holders—gTer bdag ling pa and *Rig 'dzin* Pad ma 'phrin las. However, their personal interest in the rNying ma teachings and support for the monasteries also planted the seed for the future Dzungar's persecution of the entire rNying ma school and its adherents in dBus and gTsang. The Dzungar generals and their king Tshe dbang rab brtan, ostensibly claimed that their mission to Tibet was to rectify the impure teachings (non-dGe lugs schools) and safeguard the teachings of Tsong kha pa. Yet, their real motive and goal was political—conquering new territories and expanding their sphere of influence in Tibet against the ever-expanding Qing empire and its influence in Tibet.

The success of Dzungar's mission to Tibet depended solely on the dGe lugs clergy of the Three Great Seats. Without their assistance, the Dzungars, first of all, would not have come to Tibet, less likely to conquer it. Among this dGe lugs clergy, there were a few fundamentalists who wanted to drive out the rNying ma influence from the dGa' ldan pho brang's political sphere and assert their dominance and authority. Therefore, the imperialist Dzungars and the dGe lugs purists were in mutual dependency in their quest for political gains, which means that the Dzungar generals had no choice but to listen and act on the orders of those purist dGe lugs partisans. In short, the Dzungar's campaign against the rNying ma school was an act of religious sectarianism combined with political ambition.

Even after the Dzungar's exit from Tibet, many rNying ma monasteries such as sMin grol ling and rDo rje brag, though restored

¹⁵⁰ 'Khyung po ras pa 'Gyur med 'od gsal 2013, pp. 229-231.

modestly, could not revive to their former glories due to the continued political repression of this school by Khang chen nas bSod nams rgyal po's (r. 1721–1727) regime.

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Biography and Historiography: The Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug (1720–1771) and His Travels

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*In commemoration of Ladakh Am-
chi Tashi Yangphel Tashigang
(1938–2021), physician, scholar
and friend.*

1. Introduction

The *Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod* series, published in Leh and Delhi since 1969, contains many works of Tibetan medical literature and has been of great influence in the study of Tibetan medicine (*gso ba rig pa*) in the difficult situation of exile. Among the works are also various rare volumes from all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, thus allowing access to monastic chronicles, lineage histories, biographical works and religious texts, including the Great Perfection (*rdzogs pa chen po*) and the Aural Transmission of Cakrasaṃvara (*bde mchog snyan brgyud*). These volumes contain prefaces and appendices that introduce individual traditions, including their monastic seats and doctrines.

Two volumes dedicated to the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*) of the rNying ma pa school were issued in the year 1973: the *rdzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal* and *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* collections of the treasure teachings of Thub bstan rDo rje brag, the main seat of the tradition in Central Tibet. In an appendix to the first volume, one finds lists of the embodiments of the rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin, the residences of the chief incarnation lineages (*bla brang*) of the monastery together with the names of some of the affiliates of Thub bstan rDo rje brag in Central Tibet, Eastern Tibet and Ladakh. These were followed in 1975 by a collection of manuscripts and block prints explaining the rites and ceremonies of Thub bstan rDo rje brag and its affiliated monasteries, and in 1976 by a descriptive collection of the Vajrakīla rituals performed at these places. Earlier, in 1972, an account of the main masters in the transmission of the Anuyoga's 'Dus pa'i mdo tantra by the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las

(1640–1718) had been released. It was accompanied by a biography of the Third rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639) written by the Fifth Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682).

In the year 1973, the autobiography of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug (1720–1771) also became available. In the introduction to this volume, it is stated that at the time of his recognition as the embodiment of Padma 'phrin las the site of Thub bstan rDo rje brag was in ruins following the Dsungar persecutions of the rNying ma pa school. Slowly the great monastery of the Byang gter tradition was rebuilt. The author further notes that the reader will find much in his autobiography about the religious and social conditions of Tibet during the 18th century.¹

2. *The autobiography and the historiographical work*

The table of contents of the autobiography presents three individual xylographs, bearing the margins *ka* (185 fols.), *kha* (104 fols.), and *ga* (104 fols.). The entries of all three personal records are arranged chronologically and the Tibetan years are given, followed by their Western equivalents and the corresponding page numbers. It is further noted up to which year and month the three texts cover events in the life of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug: vol. *ka* ends abruptly, about the 4th month of *lcags rta*, i.e. 1750–1751; vol. *kha* ends during the second half of *me glang*, i.e. 1757–1758; and vol. *ga* ends about the 4th month of *lcags stag*, i.e. 1770–1771. Between the first and second text, a short untitled xylograph is inserted and identified as a “prayer to the lines of rebirth” (*skyes rabs gsol 'debs*), that is, more literally, “a reverential petition to the previous embodiments of the author.” It bears no margins and should be placed at the end of the three autobiographical texts.²

¹ For the preface and the appendix relating to the Byang gter tradition in the first volume of the *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal* cycle, see Choden (1973b: 1-3). The introduction and contents of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug's autobiography can be found in Choden (1973a: 1-7). The account of the masters in the transmission of the '*Dus pa'i mdo* tantra and the biography of Ngag gi dbang po were published as vol. 37 of the series, the four volumes of the Great Perfection treasure teachings (from the A 'dzom Chos sgar blocks) as vols. 60-64, and the two volumes of the rites performed at rDo rje brag and its affiliated monasteries, as vols. 65-66. The collection of Vajrakīla rituals counts as vol. 75.

² The three autobiographical segments are contained in sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug: *rTogs brjod*, pp. 1-370, 379-585 & 587-793. For the prayer to the lines of rebirth Id., *sKyes rabs gsol 'debs*, pp. 372-377. In a catalogue of the works of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin stored in the Potala Palace, this work is placed after the three autobiographical segments; see Thub bstan rgyal mtshan: *Po ta la bzhugs pa'i*

Although the years 1751 to 1752 and 1757 to 1759 are not treated in the autobiography, these works offer a full and rich account of the various events in the life of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug, including his recognition as an incarnation and the renewal of the monastery of Thub bstan rDo rje brag, originally founded right on the shore of the gTsang po in Central Tibet in the fourth decade of the 17th century. These activities started soon after the instalment of the new rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin with the state support of Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas (1689–1747) and the Seventh Dalai Bla ma sKal bzang rgya mtsho (1708–1757). Detailed accounts of the religious training of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug are supplied, and one finds descriptions of various rituals performed for the dGa' ldan pho brag government performed up to the period of the Eighth Dalai Bla ma 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758–1804) and the regency of the Sixth De mo sprul sku Ngag dbang 'Jam dpal bde legs rgya mtsho (1723–1777). The monthly entries document these events in detail, sometimes day by day, providing, for example, references to the personal spiritual retreats, to the different teachers' and donors' visits to Thub bstan rDo rje brag or to the teachings given to the monastic communities in the main monastery and its branches. sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug is known for his opening of various sacred sites, especially the Padmasambhava cave complex in sGrags Yang rdzong, which had been linked with Thub bstan rDo rje brag since the time of the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin. Special attention is also paid in these texts to his journeys to the border-taming temples of Tibet, such as Bu chu gSer gyi lha khang in Kong po and mDung chu lha khang in sPo bo. The main purpose of these travels was to perform rituals for the government and the welfare of Tibet. The Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin also revealed his own visionary teachings, including the cycle *bDe gshegs bka' 'dus rgya mtsho*.³

rnying ma'i gsung 'bum, p. 261. The untitled work contains a printing colophon, stating that it was written at the behest of the ruler of lCags la in Dar rtse mdo county in the tenth Tibetan month of the year 1769; see sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug: *sKyes rabs gsol 'debs*, p. 377.3-6. On the petty state of lCags la, a region in eastern Khams centred on the trade mart of Dar rtse mdo (Kangding), see Gruschke (2004: 21-22).

³ For the location of rDo rje brag, the flourishing of the site under the early Pho brag government and the rebuilding starting in the 1730s under the young incarnation, see Akester (2016: 354-355). For the cave complex of sGrags Yang rdzong and its affiliation with the monastery as a retreat centre, see Akester (2016: 346). A modern sketch of the life of the Fifth rDo rje Brag Rig 'dzin can be found at [Treasury of Lives](#); it is mainly based on Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rDo rje: *Thub bstan rdo rje brag dgon gyi byung ba mdo tsam brjod pa ngo mtshar baidūrya'i phreng ba*, pp. 55.15-58.13. A longevity practice from the visionary teachings known as *Dag snang mkha' 'gro chos skor* is contained in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, compiled by

The first autobiographical segment has a final remark: “may the carving of the wood blocks be propitious” (*par skos [= rkos] bkra shis*), while the second text offers no concluding statement. It is only the third text which contains a detailed “printing colophon” (*par byang*), even though it seems that all three works were xylographed at the same time. The place of production is given as Grub dgon O rgyan theg mchog gling, a Byang gter affiliate located in ‘Ba’ thang in Khams. The project was finalized in the year 1774 by Rig ‘dzin dBang rgyal (18th cent.), a disciple of both sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug and the Second Grub dgon sprul sku sKal bzang ‘phrin las rgya mtsho (18th cent). The latter was a close associate of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig ‘dzin and had, together with a nephew called Chos sbyin, previously asked the master for permission to execute the full autobiography as a xylographic print. This request was made at Mi nyag dPal lha sgang, regarded as the last of the border-taming temples ascribed to Srong btsan sgam po and located in the direction of China. sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug had stayed in this temple during his sojourn in the realm of the ruler of lCags la in Dar rtse mdo county in the years 1769 and 1770. The Second Grub dgon sprul sku was early on involved in the composition of the autobiography, as it is known that at the end of 1760, he had sent back a first version to sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug with suggested changes; this version is obviously reflected in the first two segments of the autobiography.⁴

Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas (1811–1899); see *Tshe sgrub rdo rje rgya mdud* [= No. 2076] in Schwieger (2009: 341). The table of contents of a manuscript edition of the collected writings of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug stored in the Potala Palace lists further works from this cycle and a full set of the cycle *bDe gshegs bka’ ‘dus rgya mtsho*; see Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (as in note 1), pp. 256–261. In addition to the mentioned cycles, the texts of the wrathful Padmasambhava and further works are now available in the edition of his collected writings; see *Rig ‘dzin skal bzang Padma dbang phyug ‘jigs med grub pa’i sde chen po’i gsung ‘bum*, vol. 4, pp. 1–557.

⁴ The full printing colophon at the end of the third text is contained in *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 789.2–793.6. Rig ‘dzin dBang rgyal states that he relied on the “written notes” (*zin bris*) of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug and added necessary corrections. The autobiographies of the Fifth Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682) and the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig ‘dzin are referred to as ideal compositional models. The reception of a first draft of the autobiography, forwarded from Grub dgon to Thub bstan rDo rje brag, is the last event mentioned in the twelfth Tibetan month of the year 1760; *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, p. 605.1–2 (*grub dgon sprul skus phyag bris zhib gsal dar tshon sna lnga gser srang gsum shel dam cha sngon phul gyi nged rang gi rtogs brjod zhus dag gnang rgyu phul ba’i po ti dang gos chen khug ma mu tig gi hor yig can sbus legs sogs ‘byor*). For the stay of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig ‘dzin at Mi nyag dPal lha sgang and in Dar rtse mdo county in 1769 and 1770, see note 26.

The three texts must have circulated quite broadly, having been used as literary sources in historiographical writings of the rNying ma pa school when dealing with the “abbatial succession” (*gdan rabs*) of Thub bstan rDo rje brag. A case in point is the work of Guru bkra shis (18th/19th cent.), completed in 1813 and executed as a xylographic print between the years 1863 and 1871; it makes full use of all three texts and incorporates verbatim quoted passages from the autobiography. The short narrative of the life of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug contained in it presents not only events up to the year 1770 but also provides some details on his last activities after he returned from a journey to Khams and while he was sojourning in Dar rtse mdo county.⁵

In the following I take the short narrative of Guru bkra shis as a blueprint for looking into some of the main events in the life of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin, in particular his travels. References to the fuller accounts in the autobiography will be made when adding further details (for example, the teachings received) that are not fully covered in the historiographical work. The events will be presented according to the timeline furnished by the three texts.

3. The years 1720 to 1750

Guru bkra shis's History follows the first autobiographical segment when portraying the home region of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin, his birth and the circumstances of his recognition as a reincarnation. His native region was Nyag rong in western Khams, described as having earlier been visited by previous Byang gter masters, including the “Northern lords, father [and] son” (*byang pa yab sras*); this refers to Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1607) and his son Ngag gi dbang po, the Third rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin. His family claimed descent from the ancient lHa dynasty of Tibetan monarchs in lCags bdud sPo 'bor sngang, one of the six mountain ranges of Eastern Tibet. The area is called a “hidden sacred site” (*sbas gnas*) in a quotation from the *Blon po bka' thang* listing four valleys and their natural quali-

⁵ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 688.12–697.16. Consult Ehrhard (2007: 166) for this work the association of Guru bkra shis with sTag [mo] sngang monastery in the vicinity of sDe dge. The account by Guru bkra shis served as the main source for the life of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin in the recent history of the Byang gter tradition; see Chos dbying: *Byang gter thub bstan rdo rje brag gi chos 'byung*. pp. 607–619. This section in the work of Guru bkra shis is preceded by the life of the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin; Id. pp. 682.5–688.11. It should be noted that in the latter case, the reader is referred to the “great biography” (*rnam thar chen mo*) of that master, namely *Padma 'phrin las kyi rang nyid kyi rtogs brjod rab dkar shel gyi me long*, of which two unedited versions are available; on this work, see Valentine (2022: 217, n. 5).

ties. The involvement of the ICags la ruler of Dar rtse mdo county at the time of the young boy's recognition as a reincarnation is mentioned, whereafter the latter was first taken to Li thang.⁶

Soon afterwards he was escorted to Mi nyag dPal lha sngang, and it was there that the first initiations were received. The teacher responsible for this was Theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1685–1727), a disciple of Padma 'phrin las, who can be counted as the First Grub dgon sprul sku:

Then, in accordance with the prophecies of the Dharmapāla gNod sbyin chen po, he was met and brought on horseback by the king and the ministers of ICags la to Mi nyag dPal lha sngang, known as a border taming temple, where in early times many great beings including Thang stong [rgyal po] (1361–1485) had stayed, and in later times also [the Third rDo rje brag] Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, and where there are such distinctive sacred objects as a Jo bo [Śākyamuni]. After arriving with the whole retinue, he remained there for some time. Once, when he had learned to read and was ready to obtain the teaching from the primer, there was no need [to spell for him words like] “dragon” and “lion,” and all were filled with amazement. At that time Theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, the master from Grub dgon, he who had been a spiritual son of the precious [Fourth rDo rje brag] Rig 'dzin and was of great learning in the Buddhist doctrine and of incomparable knowledge, arrived as the teacher of the encampment [cloister] of Dar [rtse] mdo. Later he had gone to China, and was [now,] after one year, welcomed back to Dar [rtse] mdo, and so immediately went to meet the reincarnation. As an initial auspicious connection, he offered to him an extensive Phur ba initiation by way of a maṇḍala painted on cloth and based on the initiation manual *Rin chen bum bzang*.⁷

⁶ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 688.12–690.6, on the home region, the birth and recognition as a reincarnation; the detailed account in the autobiography can be found in *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 19.3–23.3. The quotation is not, as claimed, from chapter 29 but from chapter 28 of the mentioned text, and the region of gNyal rong has been replaced by Nyag rong. For the original, see O rgyan gling pa: *bKa' thang sde lnga*, p. 402.10–13 (*gtsang rong gnyal rong lho rong dang: kong po rong ste las sgo bzhi: ri ni mtshon cha gnam gzings 'dra: chu ni rba klong ral nag gcig: zas su sngo sad shing tog za: gos su me rlung sbyor ba gyon: gnas sa brag dang chu yod der*). Compare the four hidden sacred sites according to the oral tradition of Nyag rong in Rab brtan rdo rje: *Nyag rong gtam rgan ma*, p. 53.13–16 (*da dung spo bo rong / tsha ba rong / nyag a 'dzi rong / rgyal mo rong bcas sbas gnas rong chen khag bzhi red lags*). According to this source, the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin is remembered as one of the outstanding masters born in the region; *Ibid.* p. 65.2–3 (*skal bzang padma dbang phyug zhing 'dir khrungs / bka' 'dus chos dang byang gter bstan pa bskyangs*).

⁷ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 690.6–15 (*de nas chos skyong gnod sbyin chen po'i lung bzhin mtha' 'dul gyi gtsug lag khang du grags pa'i sngar grub chen thang stong sogs skyes chen du ma dang phyis rig 'dzin ngag gi dbang pos kyang zhabs kyis bcags shing jo bo*

The next event mentioned in the historiographical work is the departure from the temple of Mi nyag dPal lha sgang. On that occasion the young reincarnation was sent off to Central Tibet by the teacher from Grub dgon and the family of the lCags la ruler:

In the early morning of the ninth day of the first month of the horse year (i.e. 1726), [escorted] by the noble [Theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan], the lady A dga' and an entourage of a hundred servants, and accompanied by a combination of numerous good, auspicious things, including a horse escort, a parasol, a victory banner and musical instruments, he set off from dPal lha sgang. In the plain of bZhag [b]ra, the noble teacher and the lady ruler requested [for themselves] the auspicious connection of an extensive long-life ceremony and proper instruction in the present and the future. From the lady A dga' and the [other members of the] A kya [family] came the promise that an invitation would be issued [to return to Dar rtse mdo] after the age of twenty years had been completed.⁸

*sogs rten mchog khyad par can yod pa'i mi nyag dpal lha sgang du lcags la rgyal blon gyis chihs bsu dang bcas phebs nas / re zhid der bzhugs / ljags klog phul dus ka dpe nas chos bsus gtong ba las / 'brug seng sogs dgos pa ma byung bas / kun gyis ya mtshan du 'dzin / 'di skabs rig 'dzin gong ma'i thugs sras su gyur pa'i bka' chos gsan rgya che la mkhyen dpyod mtshungs zla med pa grub dgon bla ma theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan nyid der [=dar] mdo sgar bla mar phebs rjes rgya nag tu phebs pa yin 'dug pas lo 'khor nas phyir dar mdor 'byor 'phral du / sprul pa'i sku mjal bar phebs / thog ma'i rten 'brel du phur ba'i dbang rgyas pa ras bris kyi dkyil 'khor du dbang chog rin chen bum bzang gi steng nas phul). Compare rTogs brjod, vol. ka, pp. 23.3-29.3, for the first stay at Mi nyag dPal lha sgang and the arrival of Theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan. A biographical sketch of this master is contained in Chos dbyings (as in note 5), pp. 597-606. His incarnation was the above-mentioned sKal bzang 'phrin las rgya mtsho from Grub dgon, who received his religious name in Thub bstan rDo rje brag in 1737 from sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug; *Ibid.*, p. 221.4. The initiation manual, bearing the full title *Byang gter phur ba spu gri'i dkyil 'khor du dbang bskur ba'i cho ga rin chen bum bzang*, is a work of the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin.*

⁸ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 692.4-9 (*rta lo zla ba dang po'i tshes dgu'i snga char grub dgon bla ma dang a dga' lcam dpon g.yog brgya skor gyis rta skyel gdugs rgyal mtshan rgya gling sogs rten 'brel gyi legs tshogs su du ma dang bcas dpal lha sgang nas btegs bzhag bra'i thang du bla ma dam pa dang sa dbang chen mo bcas nas brtan bzhugs rgyas pa zhid gi rten 'brel dang 'phral phugs gi bslab bya yang dag snyan 'bul zhus / a dga' lha lcam dang a kya rnams nas dgung lo nyi shu thugs rdzogs bzhes grub nas gdan 'dren la yong zer bar khas len kyang zhus). The whole passage is lifted verbatim from rTogs brjod, vol. ka, pp. 40.6-41.3. For Mi nyag dPal lha sgang (north-west of Dar rtse mdo) as a modern pilgrimage centre known especially for a statue of the Jo bo Śākyamuni (a replica left by Chinese princess Kong jo on her way to Lhasa), see Epstein & Wenbin (1999: 334-336 & 340, nn. 16 & 17). The temple is described as "well guarded on its east by grasslands and a mountain range which includes the great guardian *gzhi bdag* mountain Mi nyag Bzhag ra." Consult Warner (2011: 252-256) for the local legends in Eastern Tibetan historiography concerning the journey of the Chinese princess and the Jo bo Śākyamuni.*

The journey to Thub bstan rDo rje brag took nearly one year, the historiographical work summarizing the various places and individuals encountered on the way. Stops were made at sDe dge and rDzogs chen monasteries, and the young incarnation was introduced to the sDe dge king bsTan pa tshe ring (1678–1738) and the Second rDzogs chen 'Gyur med Theg mchog bstan 'dzin (1699–1758). In the eighth month of the trip the boy encountered also the Third Khams sprul Kun dga' bstan 'dzin (1680–1729) and spent three days in his presence. In Chab mdo he was welcomed by the Sixth 'Phags pa lha 'Jigs med bstan pa'i rgya mtsho (1714–1754). Afterwards the journey continued to sPang leb (a Byang gter affiliate located in lHo rong) and Kong po, whence the delegation finally reached Central Tibet. Although unable to visit 'Bri gung mThil, the party encountered the Second 'Bri gung Chung tshang Chos kyi rgyal po (1704–1754) at his residence called rDzong gсар. In the tenth Tibetan month of 1726 the young reincarnation arrived at Thub bstan rDo rje brag. Soon afterwards, on the first day of the first Tibetan month of 1727, he left for Lhasa in order to obtain his first ordination from the Seventh Dalai Bla ma. On the tenth day he received the religious name sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug from sKal bzang rgya mtsho in the Potala Palace; it was also on that occasion that a first meeting with Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas was held.⁹

For the year 1727, the historiographical works mentions two teachers, both disciples of Padma 'phrin las, who transmitted initiations of the Byang gter tradition to sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug:

At that time, when he was staying at Shel grong, Chu bzang sprul sku [Kun bzang rgya mtsho] (17th/18th cent.) and gNyags ston, the teacher from Kham[s] lung [called] Rig 'dzin dBang [gi] rgyal [po] (1657–1731), arrived [there]. As they were disciples of the precious teacher who had not acted counter to their sacred vows [to their master], he listened to most of the initiations and reading authorizations of the Northern Treasures, and especially to the great *mDo dbang* [cycle].¹⁰

⁹ For the journey to Central Tibet, the arrival in Thub bstan rDo rje brag and the first ordination under the Seventh Dalai Bla ma, see *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 692.9–694.11. Compare the detailed account in *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 42.5–57.4. It should be noted that according to the latter source a visit to Shel grong was planned before the actual arrival in Thub bstan rDo rje brag, but it was finally only after the initial reception at the monastery that the young incarnation visited that place; *Ibid.*, pp. 51.4–52.4. Shel grong was known as the “manorial estate” (*gzhis kha*) of the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin and later served his reincarnation as a place for longer sojourns; see, for example, the stay in the seventh month of the year 1731, *ibid.*, pp. 107.4–109.6.

¹⁰ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 694.11–14 (*de skabs shel brang [= grong] du bzhugs / chu bzang sprul sku dang gnyags ston kam lung bla ma rig 'dzin dbang rgyal byon gyur bar*

Chu bzang sprul sku, who arrived from his monastery in gTsang and returned there afterwards, only stayed a short time.¹¹ The visit of Rig 'dzin dBang gi rgyal po, who had arrived from South-Western Tibet, lasted longer and included a month-long initiation into the *mDo dbang* cycle.¹² He also transmitted to his young disciple a text of Long Life practice according to the treasure cycle *Rig 'dzin yongs 'dus* of mNga ris Paṅ chen Padma dBang rgyal (1487–1542).¹³

Soon afterwards the vows of a Buddhist novice were obtained from a Sa skya pa teacher named rMor chen Ngag dbang Kun dga' lhun grub (d. 1728). This is said to happen when Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas had successfully ended the civil war of the years 1727/28:

At this time, when he had reached the age of ten years, he obtained in the presence of rMor chen Ngag dbang Kun dga' lhun grub the *śramanera* [vows]; he listened, further, to some doctrines [from this master]. During this time the army of gTsang had emerged victorious in the dispute between dBus [and] gTsang, and the great ruler arrived at Lhasa.¹⁴

During this period the young reincarnation undertook various travels with Rig 'dzin dBang gi rgyal po to sites like 'On-phu sTag-tshang, sGrag Yang rdzong and mChims-phu. The teacher was in Lhasa when the new ruler of Tibet arrived, and afterwards preparations were made in Thub bstan rDo rje brag for his return to Nub-dgon.

gong ma'i bu slob dam tshig sel med yin pas / byang gter dbang lung phal cher dang / khyad par mdo dbang chen mo sogs gsan). The account in the autobiography separates the two meetings.

¹¹ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 59.3-60.6. Kun bzang rgya mtsho was the first member of the Chu bzang incarnation lineage, named after its monastic seat in the s/dPa[l] nam[s] region in Nyang; see Akester (2016: 355, n. 42).

¹² *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 60.6-64.2. Concerning this master, his monastic seat (the Byang gter affiliate Nub dgon in La stod Byang) and his activities in transmitting the *mDo dbang* cycle in Mang yul, see Ehrhard (2008: 81, n. 34). Consult Dalton (2016: 79-88) on the formation of a new lineage of this root tantra of the Anuyoga class in Thub bstan rDo rje brag by Padma 'phrin las.

¹³ The text is contained in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. *Rig 'dzin tshé yi sgrub pa yang gsang bla na med pa'i snying thig ye shes 'od mchog* [= no. 706] in Schwieger (1995: 168-169).

¹⁴ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 694.14-16 ('*di skabs dgung lo bcu par smor* [= *rmor*] *chen ngag dbang kun dga' lhun grub drung nas dge tshul bzhes / gzhan yang bka' chos kha shas gsan / 'di skabs gtsang dbus 'khrugs pa gtsang dpung g.yul las rgyal / mi dbang chen mo* [= *chen po*] *lha sar phebs*). Thanks to Dr. Jörg Heimbels for providing details concerning the ordination teacher. The two events of the ordination and the arrival of Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas in Lhasa are referred to in the autobiography at the beginning and end of the year 1728, respectively.

sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug for his part was present in Lhasa at the end of the same year when the Seventh Dalai Bla ma was sent off to exile. On that occasion he met both sKal bzang rgya mtsho and the new ruler.¹⁵

The next event mentioned in the historiographical work is an invitation to the young incarnation to visit the Byang gter affiliate gSang sngags Chos 'khor gling in sNa dkar rtse. This was followed by studies under the Third Khri chen Rin chen rnam rgyal (1694–1758) at the newly rebuilt O rgyan sMin grol gling monastery and under the Fifth sLe lung bZhad pa'i rDo rje (1697–1740) at the latter's monastic seat of rNam grol gling in 'Ol kha. The short narrative of this journey has the following wording:

At the age of twelve years, in the iron [dog] year (i.e. 1730), he was invited by the monastic community of gSang sngags chos 'khor gling in Yar 'brog sTag lung, and accordingly he travelled to the sTag lung Brag ra sprul sku's (17th/18th cent.) monastery. On the way back he went to O rgyan sMin grol gling and listened to many teachings, mainly the treasure teachings of gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1719) from the [latter's] victorious son Rin chen rnam rgyal. On the day of the initiation of the Long-Life practice 'Chi med yang snying kun 'dus he suddenly saw the Guru [as] a red Amitāyus, holding a vajra and a flask; the minds [of teacher and disciple] merged together well, [reflective] of [their] earlier mutual relationship. In the same vein he was also invited to rNam sras gling, and after a consecration at Khra 'brug he made pilgrimages [to] [Yar klungs] Shel-brag and other [sites].

Afterwards he travelled by stages to ['Ol kha] sLe lung, and in the presence of the precious rJe drung [bZhad pa'i rDo rje] [listened to treasure cycles] of gTer bdag gling pa including the *Thugs rje chen po [bde gshegs kun 'dus]*, the root tantra *gSang [ba] ye [shes] bde mchog* and so forth, the *rGya can* cycle of the Fifth Dalai Bla ma [Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho], and the cycle of the visionary teaching of the rJe drung himself. It is said that a clear knowledge came forth in the [same] manner as when they were master and disciple in some previous life. On the return trip he travelled [again] to 'On phu [sTag tshang].¹⁶

¹⁵ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 64.2-3 & 72.2. *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp.73.5-75.1. For the civil war in the years 1727/28, the instalment of Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas as the undisputed leader of Tibetan political affairs and the exile of the Seventh Dalai Bla ma, see Schwieger (2015: 141-145).

¹⁶ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 697.16-695.1 (*dgung lo bcu gnyis pa lcags kyi lor yar 'brog stag lung gsang sngags chos 'khor gling pas gdan 'dren byung ba dang bstun stag lung brag ra sprul sku'i dgon par phebs / phyir lam o rgyan smin grol gling du phebs / rgyal sras rin che rnam rgyal drung nas gter bdag gling pa'i gter chos gtso bor gyur pa'i chos bka' mang du gsan / tshe sgrub 'chi med yang snying kun 'dus dbang gi nyin bla ma tshe dpag med dmar po rdo rje dang bum pa 'dzin pa zhig tug zigs / phan tshun sngar nas lugs legs pa'i thugs yid gcig 'dres su gyur / zhar la rnam sras gling du gdan zhus dang /*

According to the autobiography, this journey lasted from the first day of the seventh Tibetan month up to the tenth day of the tenth Tibetan month. The request to undertake studies at O rgyan sMin grol gling and rNam grol gling, together with the mentioned pilgrimage, had been forwarded to Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas prior to the actual journey. Afterwards permission was granted and the necessary travel documents issued.¹⁷

The contact with sLe lung bZhad pa'i rDo rje continued after the stay in rNam grol gling, a visit of the teacher to Thub bstan rDo rje brag being dated to the sixth Tibetan month of the year 1731. It is also said that a special document was given during this period to the young incarnation:

Afterwards, when he performed a retreat at the [Thub bstan rDo rje brag] residence, the precious rJe drung [bZhad pa'i rDo rje] met [him] at the retreat house as he was travelling to sNye mo. At that time the ruler, the great Mi dbang [bSod nams stobs rgyas], conferred a succession of written judgements from the Great Fifth Dalai Bla ma, [each] bearing a golden seal and indicating approval for the imposition of various taxes, great and small.¹⁸

*khra 'brug tu rab gnas dang shel brag sogs gnas gzigs rnames mdzad / de nas rim par sle lung du phebs / rje drung rin po che drung nas / gter bdag gling pa'i thugs rje chen po / gsang ye bde mchog rtsa rgyud sogs dang / gong sa lnga'i rgya can skor dang rje drung nyid kyi dag snang skor sogs / gnas skabs skye ba 'ga' zhig dpon slob du gyur tshul sogs gsal por shes byung gsungs / yar lam 'on du phebs). Concerning the foundation of gSang sngags Chos 'khor gling in sTag lung rdzong in the year 1660 by Zil gnon dBang rgyal rDo rje (17th cent.) of sNa dkar rtse, maternal uncle of the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Akester (2016: 355, n. 43). Consult Greensmith (2020: 186-188) for a short sketch of the life of the Fifth sLe lung, his studies of the *Thugs rje chen po bde gshegs kun 'dus* cycle in the sMin grol gling tradition and his later activities. The collected works of sLe lung bZhad pa'i rDo rje, including his visionary teachings dedicated to the *gSang ba ye shes* cycle, have been published (from the 'Ol kha blocks) as vols. 115-127 of the Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod series.*

¹⁷ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 84.2-102.2. *ibid.*, p. 83.1-2: *sa skyong mi dbang chen por de kha'i gnas tshul dang dgongs khrol gyi zhu yig phul bar de bzhin legs tshul gyi bka'i gnang ba legs par stsal [= bstsal] zhing lam yig bka' 'dzin kyang brtse ba chen por bskyangs pa ltar mdzad pas grabs yul byas so.*

¹⁸ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 694.16-695.1 (*de nas gdan sar sku mtshams gnang bar rje drung rin po che snye mor phebs zhor la mtshams khang du mjal 'phrad mdzad / 'di skabs sa skyong mi dbang chen pos gong sa lnga pa chen po nas rim gyis bka' khra gtan tshigs khral rigs che phra chag pa'i [= chags pa'i] rgyab gnon gser tham bstsal*). Compare the description of the retreat, dedicated to the *gSang ba ye shes* cycle, which started during the first Tibetan month of the year 1731, and the visit of bZhad pa'i rDo rje in the sixth month of the same year in *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 104.6-107.3. The approval of the tax documents for Thub bstan rDo rje brag was issued later, at the end of the year 1732; *ibid.*, p. 131.3-4. sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug encountered the Fifth sLe lung on two further occasions: first, in the seventh Tibetan month of the year 1735 when the Seventh Dalai Bla ma returned to Lhasa from

Special gifts were also forwarded to the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin from the Qing court in Beijing, and one of these episodes, dated two years later, is selected by the historiographical work:

In the water ox year (i.e. 1733), a very excellent ceremonial scarf and ten bolts of brocade of the great emperor of China together with a ceremonial scarf and two bolts of brocade were given by the respectable son. From then onwards there appeared successively presents from the emperors, father [and] son. Also, when from the respectable son of the emperor the request arrived that a teacher from [Thub bstan] rDo rje brag should be dispatched [to the Qing court], Bla ma bDe-mchog was sent [there].¹⁹

According to the autobiography, the first presents from the Qing court arrived on the third day of the tenth month of the year 1731, when the young incarnation was in Lhasa at the invitation of Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas.²⁰ Gifts were received on that occasion from the Yong zhen emperor (r. 1723–1735) and also from the seventeenth son of the Kan xi emperor (r. 1661–1722).

After details of the activities of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug in renewing Thub bstan rDo rje brag, including the erection of a new assembly hall, the last year recorded in that part of the historiographical work which corresponds to the first segment of the autobiography is 1739. The ordination as a Buddhist monk was obtained from the Seventh Dalai Bla ma in the Potala Palace at that time. The final statement concerning his spiritual practice is that the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin realized the Great Perfection doctrine, verses from the autobiography being quoted to that effect.²¹

exile and they were both present for his reception; and, second, during a common sojourn at bSam-yas in the fourth Tibetan month of the year 1737; *Ibid*, pp. 183.4 & 212.4.

¹⁹ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p.693.4-8 (*chu glang lor rgya nag gong ma chen po nas mdzod btags che legs gos yug bcu dang sras btsun pa nas mdzod btags gos yug yug gnyis bcas gtang ste / 'di nas bzung lo ltar bzhin du gong ma yab sras nas gnang skyes rim par byung / yang gong ma'i sras btsun pas rdo rje brag nas bla ma zhig gtong dgos pa'i phebs byung bar bla ma bde mchog rdzong bar byas*).

²⁰ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, p.111.2-4. Kan xi's son, Keng ze Chin wang a.k.a. Yin lu (1697–1738), was a great patron of the rNying ma pa and bKa' brgyud pa schools; see Smith (2001: 136-137). He is mentioned again at the beginning of the year 1734 when the request arrived, via Mi dbang bSod nams stobs rgyas, to send a teacher from Thub bstan rDo rje brag to the Qing court; further gifts are also recorded in the year 1737. *rTogs brjod*, pp. 153.5-6 & 217.1-2.

²¹ For the renovation of the assembly hall, its consecration at the beginning of the year 1739 and the ordination in the Potala Palace, see *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 696.8-15. The corresponding sections in the autobiography can be found in *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 241.2-243.2 & 233.3-254.6. The ordination was received together with the Third Zur-chen sprul sku (d. 1754), a close associate of sKal bzang Pad-

In the first autobiographical segment, these verses summarize the period of studies under another master from Nub dgon in La stod Byang called Kham[s] lung pa gSang sngags bstan 'dzin (d. 1749). sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug became first acquainted with this teacher in the year 1731 when the latter arrived at Thub bstan rDo rje brag for the performance of rituals after the death of his uncle Kham[s] lung pa Rig 'dzin dBang gi rgyal po, who had passed away in Mang yul. This figure is described in the autobiography as the main “mentor” (*yongs 'dzin*) of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug, but it was only at the end of 1743 that the master embarked on a longer period of stay in the monastery. Soon after his arrival he began the reading authorization of the “Collected Tantras of the Early Translation Period” (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*), and in the following months also transmitted Byang gter teachings, including the cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba dbyings sgröl* of the Second rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Legs ldan bdud 'joms rDo rje (1488–1596). On the tenth day of the first Tibetan month of the year 1745, the transmission of the *dGongs pa zang thal* cycle started, while the last teachings given at Thub bstan rDo rje brag date to the eighth month of the same year. Kham[s] lung pa gSang sngags bstan 'dzin is mentioned again at the end of 1749 when the news arrived that the master had passed away; the description of the rituals performed afterwards is one of the last events contained in the first segment of the autobiography for the year 1750.²²

Another teacher, finally, recorded not in the historiographical work but in the first autobiographical text should be mentioned. This is Blo bzang bla mchog (1672–1747), another disciple of the Fourth

ma dbang phyug from his arrival at Thub bstan rDo rje brag on. The closing lines of this section in the short narrative are lifted from the intermediary verses summarizing events from the eleventh Tibetan month of the year 1743 up to the beginning of the year 1745; *Ibid.*, pp. 307.1-3 (*kho bos rdzogs pa chen grol brtson byed kyi / nyams len snying la rus pa nyer bcug ste / brtson bas sngon med ngo mtshar ltas mo'i rigs / mthong yang gzhan la 'chad na zog por blta / rtsa gsum rgyal ba rgya mtshos rjes bzung ba'i / dus gsum bgyi ba'i blang dor mang mchis kyang / rang blor rang gis bgyis pa las / mi 'chab kha mang bgyis pa'i gnas ma yin*).

²² *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 131.5-132.5 & 295.2-310.5, for the two sojourns of Kham[s] lung pa gSang sngags bstan 'dzin at Thub bstan rDo rje brag. For the news of his death and the special kindness he had showed to his disciple, *Ibid.*, p. 309.1-5. In 1742 the master from Nub-dgon had also given the reading authorization for the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* in the region of Mang yul, where his residence, dNgos grub phug, was located; see Ehrhard (2013: 401-402). Consult Schiller (2021: 851-855) for a detailed list of the Byang gter teachings transmitted by the master according to the “record of teachings received” (*gsan yig*) of the Fifth Yol mo ba sprul sku 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789); these transmissions took place in Mang yul in the year 1747. The first volume of the collected writings of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug stored in the Potala Palace contains a total of 34 individual lists of teachings received; see Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (as in note 2), pp. 254-256.

rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin and a monk formerly associated with the monastery dGa' ldan bDud 'joms gling in lHo brag. In the latter part of his life, he resided in a "Hidden Land" (*sbas yul*) called Sengge ri in lHo brag and is known for having opened another sacred site in the region in the year 1733. In the ninth Tibetan month of 1733, he arrived in Thub bstan rDo rje brag to meet the reincarnation of his teacher. The many teachings transmitted on that occasion included various treasure cycles and the collected writings of the Fifth Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho. In 1735, Blo bzang bla mchog returned once more to Thub bstan rDo rje brag, and during this sojourn sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug received for the first time the cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'khor ba dbyings sgrol*.²³

The final entry in the historiographical work located in the first segment of the autobiography concerns the opening of sacred sites by the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin. The first mention of such activities can be dated to the beginning of the year 1748, when several sites related to the cave complex of sGrags Yang rdzong are mentioned:

During that time, he also performed on manifold occasions the new opening of doors to sacred sites in dBus: lHa rtse brag, Yang rdzong and so forth.²⁴

²³ An initial letter and gifts had already been sent from Sengge ri in lHo brag to the young reincarnation in 1732; *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp.121.6-122.2. For the two encounters in Thub bstan rDo rje brag *Ibid.* pp. 148.4-150.3 & 187.2-188.1. The religious career of Blo bzang bla mchog, his residence at Sengge ri and his opening of the sacred site 'Or mo lha sa in 1733 are described in Ehrhard (2013: 365-368); the latter act took place upon instructions from the Fifth sLe lung bZhad pa'i rDo rje, who had been acquainted with Blo bzang bla mchog since his own travels in lHo brag in 1722. For the journey of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug to both Sengge ri and 'Or mo lha sa in 1762, see note 40.

²⁴ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 695.23-24 ('*di skabs dbus phyogs lha brag [= lha rtse brag] yongs rdzogs [= yang rdzong] sogs nas gnas sgo yang gsar 'byed mang du mdzad*). According to the autobiography, the journey to lHa rtse brag started on the tenth day of the second Tibetan month of the year 1748 and lasted up to the eighteenth day of the third Tibetan month; *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 349.6-355.3. During the initial part of this trip the various caves visited are successively identified as sPyi bo bDe chen phug, lTe ba sPrul pa'i 'khor lo and gSang gnas bDe skyong 'khor lo, it being noted that literary genres such as *lam byang* and *lung byang* were used to obtain this information; *Ibid.*, pp. 349.6-351.3. The designation of the sites corresponds to a topographical scheme relating to "Vajravarahī, Tamer of the Nāgas" (*rdo rje phag mo klu 'dul ma*); see Ehrhard (2013: 357 & 361). The following section of this trip describes the opening of further sites located in the vicinity of lHa rtse brag; *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 351.3-354.6. A separate text exists for this latter section; see Appendix no. 6. There are other texts available concerning lHa-rtse brag, one of them describing its "southern door" (*lho sgo*), identified in the year 1751; see Appendix no. 4. This year is not covered by the autobiography. The opening of sacred sites in Yang rdzong can be dated to the tenth month of the year 1753;

4. The years 1753 to 1757

As already noted above, no personal records exist for the years 1751 and 1752, the second text starting from the year 1753 with a trip that lasted from the end of the sixth to the end of the seventh Tibetan month of 1753. The trip begins with a journey to the three-peaked mountain dPal chen Chu bo ri in Gong dkar county and a description of the “circumambulation of the summit” (*rtse skor*). sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug visited Nam mkha' lding, the mountain plateau just below the central peak, and went on to the region of Kha rag, west of dPal chen Chu bo ri. After crossing a snow-covered pass, he reached a place called gNas gsar, and from there made an excursion to another cave complex, identifying successively various sacred sites. This activity can be seen as related to that in the quotation mentioned above, since the mountain range of Kha rag marks the border between dBus and gTsang. On the return journey he paused at Chos bzang, an affiliate of rDo rje brag, and from there reached the monastery Chu bo ri lCags zam, founded by Thang stong rgyal po.²⁵

The historiographical work recommences with the next year and provides a short résumé of the first journey of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin to Kong po and the border-taming temple Bu chu gSer gyi lha khang, as contained in the second text:

In the wood dog year (i.e. 1754) he went to Bu chu in Kong po in order to fulfil a prophecy relating to Tibet's welfare. From then onwards, following prophetic injunctions, wherever he directed his steps, he brought about such [benefits] as understanding and medicine. He was thus well received and sent off [by his hosts]. He also performed the offering of nectar and so forth for persons of higher class. In Dwags po, he made a pilgrimage to places like Rol phu, the treasure site of the treasure discoverer Nyi zla sangs rgyas (14th cent.). [There] he visited the temple where a Vajrapāṇi statue extracted from a treasure was kept.

Via western Kong po he arrived at rTse la sgang and Bu chu. Without much effort he fulfilled the prophecy relating to the welfare

rTogs brjod, vol. kha, pp. 392.1-395.1. These activities are recorded in two separate texts; see Appendix nos. 7 & 8.

²⁵ For the initial section of the second text, the journey to dPal Chu bo ri and Kha rag, followed by the arrival at Chu bo ri lCags zam, *rTogs brjod*, vol. kha, pp. 380.2-389.6. Akester (2016: 242-248) on dPal chen Chu bo ri and its sacred sites, including Nam mkha' lding. The various caves along the Kha rag mountain range were also opened in topographical succession: sPyi bo bDe chen 'khor lo, mGrin pa Longs spyod 'khor lo, sNying kha Chos kyi 'khor lo, lTe ba sPrul pa'i 'khor lo and gSang gnas bDe chen 'khor lo (the full set is mentioned in this case). Appendix, no. 2 for a text devoted to the opening of the sacred sites at Kha rag.

of Tibet, including [the performance of the] *bKa' nan rab brjid* [ritual] (i.e the firm order to the local deities) and the binding of the eight classes of demons to oaths. He proceeded to sPo bo and then, due to a change in prophecy, returned to his residence [of Thub bstan rDo rje brag].²⁶

According to the autobiography, the journey to Kong po lasted nearly one year, from the twenty-seventh day of the second Tibetan month of 1754 up to the fifteenth day of the first Tibetan month of 1755.²⁷ During the first leg of the journey sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug stayed at Dwags lha sgam po, where he met the Fourth sGam po sprul sku Kun bzang Nges don dbang po (1702–1754) and received from the latter one treasure cycle of Rig 'dzin Chos rje gling pa (1682–1720). After this sojourn he travelled on to the former residence of Nyi zla sangs rgyas and saw in a nearby temple the statue of Vajrapāṇi from the latter's treasures. On the first day of the fourth Tibetan month, he began the pilgrimage to Rol phu, described as a "subsidiary sacred site" (*gnas lag*) of Tsā ri. He again identified various caves in this region: sKu'i gnas, gSung gi gnas, Thugs kyi gnas, Yon tan gyi gnas and 'Phrin las kyi gnas.²⁸ Soon after his arrival in rTse la sgang he opened sacred sites in the vicinity of the Bu chu gSer gyi lha khang. The scheme applied was the same as the one just mentioned.²⁹ The activities at the border-taming temple (dated to the sixth Tibetan month) included the restoration of its murals and the embellishment of the main statue, the so-called Bu chu Jo bo.³⁰ After further travels in Kong po he reached the monastery of sPang leb, the Byang gter affiliate located in lHo rong, on the third day of the tenth Tibetan month. There existed two incarnation lineages at this monastery, both known as sPang leb sku skye, and both of the young incarnations received their religious names from sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug

²⁶ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 695.24-696.4 (*shing khyi lor bod yul bde thabs lung don bsgrub phyir kong po bu chur chibs bskyod gnang / 'di tsam nas bzung phebs bskyod gar gnang sar gsang lung bzhin go sman sogs bkod pas skyel bsu dang / rigs ldan dang bdud rtsi'i mchod pa sogs kyang mdzad / dwags por gter ston nyi zla sangs rgyas kyi gter gnas rol phu sogs la gnas gzigs dang / gter nas bton pa'i phyag rdor gyi sku bzhugs pa'i lha khang sogs gzigs / kong stod brgyud rtse sgang [= rtse la sgang] dang bu chur phebs bka' nan rab brjid dang / sde brgyad dam 'dogs sogs bod yul bde thabs kyi lung don rnam tshogs med du bsgrub par gnang / spu bor [= spo bor] phebs mdzad dang lung don 'gyur bas gdan sa phebs).*

²⁷ *rTogs brjod*, vol. kha, pp. 418.3-472.4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 424.2-430.1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 432.6-436.6. Concerning this topographical scheme, associated with Padmasambhava and the latter's sojourns at five "solitary places" (*dben gnas*), consult Ehrhard (2013: 363-364, n. 2).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. kha, pp. 440.6-443.1.

soon after his arrival.³¹ He remained in sPang leb up to the third day of the twelfth Tibetan month of 1754, when the return trip to Central Tibet started; during that time two texts concerning sacred sites in lHa rtse brag and Yang rdzong were composed (see Appendix, no. 7). Before arriving in Thub bstan rDo rje brag he stayed at the beginning of the year 1755 in 'Bri gung mThil, where he met the Third Chung tshang dKon mchog bstan 'dzin rDo rje (1724–1766).³²

After the narrative of this trip, only three more events were selected in the historiographical work from the detailed personal records in the second text; they can be dated to the years 1755, 1756 and 1757. The first one happened during a visit to Lhasa when rituals for the long life of the Seventh Dalai Bla ma were conducted in the Potala Palace and the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin had an audience with sKal bzang rgya mtsho. Some time after the audience, in the sixth month of the year 1755, special gifts were received from the abbot of the Sa skya pa monastery Ngor E vaṃ chos ldan:

On that occasion the offering of special gifts from the great Ngor scholar dPal ldan chos skyong (1702–1760) occurred.³³

In the following year, Sa chen Kun dga' blo gros (1729–1783), the thirty-first throne holder of Sa skya, and his brother mThu thob dbang phyug (18th cent.) visited Lhasa and travelled to further places in dBus; during this journey they encountered the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin in Thub bstan rDo rje brag. The visit of Sa chen Kun dga' blo gros and his brother, during the second month of the year 1756, is described in great detail in the autobiography, which lists the gifts and teachings exchanged on that occasion:

The precious Sa skya hierarchs, the pair of brothers, arrived and met [sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug] at his retreat house.³⁴

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 458.1-459.2.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 466.5-469.4.

³³ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 696.4-696.5 (*de skabs shig ngor mkhan chen dpal ldan chos skyong gi ched gnang gi 'bul zhabs 'bul bar byung*). also *rTogs brjod*, vol. kha, pp. 505.6-506.1 (*ngor mkhan po dpal ldan chos skyong gi zhabs phyi zhig ched rdzong kyis mtshan grags ja 'khor bcas gdogs pa'i gnang skyes bstar*).). dPal ldan chos skyong was the thirty-fourth abbot of Ngor; see Heimbel (2017: 529). He served from 1740 until his death as court chaplain of the royal family of sDe dge. In between, from 1754 to 1758, he travelled back to Ngor and central Tibet and reached Lhasa in the tenth Tibetan month of 1754 in order to pay his respects to the Seventh Dalai Bla ma; see Heimbel and Caumanns (2022: 258-260).

³⁴ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 696.7-8 (*sa skya gong ma rin po che sku mched phebs pa mtshams khang du mjal*). The account ends with a personal note about this meeting. also *rTogs brjod*, vol kha, pp. 531.3-5 (*sa skya 'di sngar rig 'dzin gong ma'i dus thugs 'brel shin tu che bas dbang chos phar 'bul tshur gnang sogs thugs nang gtsang*

The last series of events selected by the historiographical work from the second autobiography are the transmissions of teachings received from the Seventh Dre'u lhas sprul sku g.Yung mgon rDo rje (1721–1769), who had stayed in Thub bstan rDo rje brag for some time after his first arrival at the beginning of the ninth Tibetan month of 1756; after further travels g.Yung mgon rDo rje returned to the monastery for the new year festivities of the year 1757:

From the Dre'u lhas sprul sku he received, among other things, the initiation and reading authorization of the *Zab lam bde chen rgya mtsho* of the Northern Treasures and the pure vision teachings of lJon dbyug [pa] rDo rje [called] *Grib nyes ba kun sel*.³⁵

The next event described in the autobiography is the news that the Seventh Dalai Bla ma had passed away at the time of the Great Prayer festival in Lhasa; this is followed by a description of the related rituals performed at Thub bstan rDo rje brag. The second text ends with another journey, this time to sNa dkar rtse and to the monastic

bar 'dug kyang / nged rang gdan sar slebs nas yang yang mjal thub pa zhid ma byung bar da lam 'di 'khor shangs len zhabs tog rgya khyon che bar mi 'dug kyang mjal 'dod kyi 'dun ma shin tu che bar yod pas re 'bras don smin gyi 'dod pa rdzogs par byung). Sa chen Kun dga' blo gros together with his brother had been enthroned as the thirty-first Sa-skya gong-ma in the year 1740; see Caumanns (2021: 151).

³⁵ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 696.8-9 (*dre'u lhas sprul sku las / byang gter zab lam bde chen rgya mtsho'i dbang lung dang / ljon dbyug pa rdo rjes [= rdo rje'i] dag snang grib nyes ba kun sel sogs gsan*). This transmission of teachings started at the beginning of the first Tibetan month of the year 1757 and ended at the end of the same month; *rTogs brjod*, vol. kha, pp. 560.5-565.5. The mentioned cycle of the Northern Treasures was a rare transmission, which g.Yung-mgon rDo rje had obtained previously from Kah-thog Rig 'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698–1755); *Ibid.*, pp. 564.6-565.1 (*sku zhabs sprul pa'i skur gsung 'phros zhus par kah thog rig 'dzin chen po tshe dbang nor bu brgyud nas gsan yong tshul byung bas / da lam cis kyang nas bka' 'drin che dgos zhus par zhal byung bar*). The pure vision teaching was the last one given prior to g.Yung-mgon rDo rje's departure from Thub bstan rDo rje brag; *Ibid.*, p. 565.4-5 (*yang dre'u lhas sku zhabs su ljon dbyug pa rdo rje'i dag snang dam grib nyes pa kun sel dang tsha [= tshe] sgrub bcas zhus sang nyin snga bar bdud rtsi mchod pa khyug tsam gyi thog mjal phrad zhus te phebs rdzongs zhus*). sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug had been acquainted since 1735 with the Seventh Dre'u lhas sprul sku, the son of sLe lung bZhad pa'i rDo rje, they both having been present in Lhasa then during the arrival of the Seventh Dalai Bla ma; see note 18. They remained in close contact, as is documented by a visit of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug to rNam grol gling, the monastic seat of sLe lung bZhad pa'i rDo rje, where he met g.Yung mgon rDo rje in the fourth Tibetan month of the year 1765. This was followed by another sojourn of the latter in Thub bstan rDo rje brag in the eighth Tibetan month of the same year; *Ibid.*, pp. 664.4-665.4 & 669.3-671.2. On this occasion the full transmission of the visionary teachings of the Seventh Dre'u lhas sprul sku were received in exchange for ones of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin.

community of gSang sngags Chos 'khor gling; it breaks off during the sojourn at the latter monastery during the sixth Tibetan month of the year 1757. Rituals were also performed there for the deceased Seventh Dalai Bla ma, and it is noted that a prayer for the swift rebirth was composed at that time.³⁶

5. The years 1760 to 1770

The third part of the autobiography covers a full decade in the life of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug and contains a wealth of information on his activities in Thub bstan rDo rje brag and further travels. One finds, for example, such details as the death of the Second Chu bzang sprul sku sKal bzang Kun dga' bstan 'dzin (d. 1760), who passed away at the end of the second Tibetan month at the monastery, and once again the rituals performed are described. It is also possible to see how the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin made efforts to assiduously read the "Collected Tantras of the Early Translation Period" (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*) at the end of 1760 and the beginning of 1761. Soon afterwards followed the production of a manuscript edition of this collection. By the tenth day of the first Tibetan month of the year 1761 the things required for such an undertaking (in the end provided by sDe pa rnam rgyal from Yar 'brog) were being considered. The writing out of the individual volumes of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* began in the fifth Tibetan month and ended with a Long Life initiation and a Byang gter reading authorization for the artists and craftsmen before they left Thub bstan rDo rje brag; it is stated in the autobiography that this manuscript edition of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* was realized within a period of one month and twenty-seven days.³⁷

³⁶ For the news about the death of the Seventh Dalai Bla ma, the rituals in Thub bstan rDo rje brag and the journey to gSang sngags Chos 'khor gling, *rTogs brjod*, vol. kha, pp. 565.4-585.2. The final event recorded in the second text is the arrival of the reincarnation of the teacher Blo bzang bla mchog from lHo brag. The so-called Sengge ri pa'i sku skeyes received his first ordination and a religious name on that occasion; *Ibid.*, pp. 583.5-585.2.

³⁷ For the death of the Second Chu bzang sprul sku at Thub bstan rDo rje brag and the following rituals, *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 593.6-597.4. sKal bzang Kun dga' bstan 'dzin had received his religious name in the year 1739 from the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin when he first arrived at Thub bstan rDo rje brag; *rTogs brjod*, vol. ka, pp. 261.6-263.1. For the initial effort to read the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* collection, *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, p. 665.1 (*lung don du rnying rgyud sgrogs babs par gang thub bklags*). The goal was achieved during a retreat at the beginning of the first Tibetan month of the year 1761; *Ibid.*, p. 605.4 (*tshé bzhi nas bcad mtshams sngar bzhin byas te rnying rgyud 'phros rnam rim par bklags*). For the assistance of the official from Yar-'brog in the production of the collection, *Ibid.*, pp. 606.6-607.1

The historiographical work presents for this period first the journey to lHo brag, which took sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug up to [s]Ne'u ring in Mon, located near the border of present-day Bhutan:

At the age of forty-four, in the water horse year (i.e. 1762), he travelled to lHo brag. He walked up to Mon kha Ne'u ring, where he also opened the door of a sacred site anew and revealed some treasure caches [there].³⁸

The journey to lHo brag began on the thirteenth day of the third Tibetan month in the year 1762, and the monastery of dGa' ldan bDud 'joms gling was reached on the eighth day of the sixth Tibetan month.³⁹ In the following month, he visited both Sengge ri Me tog gling and sBas gnas 'Or mo lha sa, located nearby. It is mentioned that both sites had been opened by dGe slong Blo bzang bla mchog, while sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug later identified further sites in the region, according to a "location list [of treasures]" (*kha byang*).⁴⁰ The journey continued to Mon kha [s]Ne'u ring, where he was welcomed at a temple called mTshan brgyad lha khang. The site which was reopened is called sBas gnas Rong mo steng, and he restored an old temple there called Sengge'i rdzong; his sojourn there lasted from the third day of the eighth Tibetan month up to the twenty-third day of the ninth Tibetan month.⁴¹ The return journey passed again through lHo brag, and this time mKho mthing lha khang, another border-taming temple, was reached on the first day of the tenth Tibetan month.⁴² After a stay in Sras mkhar he proceeded to lHa lung, where he met the Sixth Pad gling Thugs sras sprul sku (18th cent.).

(*yar 'brog zhal ngo rnam rgyal nas rnying rgyud bzhengs grogs gsungs pa'i dgos cha 'byor bar dang len gyis bkod par byas*). The account of the actual writing out of the volumes and the duration of the project can be found *ibid.*, pp. 609.2-611.5. The *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* collection is mentioned a last time on the third day of the second Tibetan month when a reading authorization began for an assembly of one hundred individuals at Thub bstan rDo rje brag; *ibid.*, p. 616.4-5. A modern guidebook to Thub bstan rDo rje brag lists a high-quality edition of the collection among the library holdings of the monastery; see Chos-'phel: *Gangs can bod kyi gnas bshad lam yig gsar ma las / lho kha khul gyi gnas yig*, p. 11.24 (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum nag bris spus ldan*).

³⁸ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 696.9-10 (*dgung lo zhe bzhi pa chu rta lor lho brag tu chibs bsgyur ghang / mno [= mon] kha ne [= ne'u] ring tshun zhabs kyis bcags gnas sgo gsar 'byed dang gter kha 'ga' yang bzhes*).

³⁹ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 619.3-622.6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 624.3-626.4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 626.4-629.4. Consult Akester (2016: 455-458) concerning Mon-kha [s]Ne'u ring, its various Padmasambhava caves and the reopening of sBas gnas Rong mo steng by the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin.

⁴² On this temple, see Sørensen & Hazod (2005: 52, n. 52).

sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug arrived back at Thub bstan rDo rje brag on the nineteenth day of the eleventh Tibetan month of the year 1762.⁴³

The next reference in *Guru bKra shis' History* is to a second journey of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin to Kong po and the Bu chu gSer gyi lha khang. This time he performed at the temple rituals especially for the young Eighth Dalai Bla ma and the regent, the Sixth De mo sprul sku:

In the wood monkey year (i.e. 1764) he went one more time to Bu chu in Kong po.⁴⁴

This second journey to Kong po began on the eighteenth day of the eighth Tibetan month after a corresponding letter had been received from the regent. The Bu chu gSer gyi lha khang was reached on the first day of the tenth Tibetan month; after offerings to the Bu chu Jo bo the first rituals performed were those of Guru Drag po in accordance with his own visionary cycle. sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug interrupted these rituals with a month-long retreat at a nearby site called Bu chu rDzong dkar, and afterwards stayed at the temple until the end of the twelfth Tibetan month.⁴⁵ The rituals for the Sixth De mo sprul sku were performed there at the beginning of the first Tibetan month of the year 1765; after further peregrinations in Kong po he departed from Bu chu gSer gyi lha khang on the twelfth day of the third Tibetan month. During the return journey further places in Kong po were visited before travelling back to Thub bstan rDo rje brag via 'Ol kha and rNam grol gling.⁴⁶

The following narrative taken from the autobiography relates to the years 1767 to 1769. During this period the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin undertook another journey to Kong po and sPo bo; this time he continued on via sMar khams and Li thang to Dar rtse mdo and the residence of the lCags la ruler:

Afterwards, in the fire female sow year (i.e. 1767), when he had reached his forty-ninth year, he directed his lotus feet to Khams. Via the northern route [and] many encampments, [and accompanied by] a small entourage—twenty individuals [counting both] master [and] servants—he passed through Kong po and sPo bo. By stages, via Chab mdo, 'lDan Chos 'khor, Phyag rtsa, rDzogs chen and other [monasteries], he arrived at Me ling in sDe dge; [there]

⁴³ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, 629.4-634.5.

⁴⁴ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 696.10-11 (*shing sprel lor slar yang kong po bu chur lan gcig phebs*).

⁴⁵ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 647.5-655.1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 661.3-665.6. For the visit to the latter monastery in the eighth Tibetan month of 1765, see note 35.

he met the Dharmarāja, the Cakravartin, the lord (i.e. the sDe dge king Blo gros rgya mtsho (1722–1774)), together with the latter's royal consorts. Following an invitation from the governor of Go 'jo he travelled on to the region of sMar khams, and then, by stages, on to Grub [pa] dgon in 'Ba' [thang]; and via Li thang [he came] to Dar rtse mdo, where the ruler, the lord am ong men, the great Brahma, the king of lCags la, rode out to greet him. Accompanied by a religious procession of [members of] Sa [skya pa], dGe [lugs pa] [and] rNying [ma pa] monastic colleges, he directed his lotus feet to the great royal palace and took up afterwards his residence in the encampment monastery of [Dar rtse] mdo.⁴⁷

This extended journey to Khams started on the sixth day of the tenth Tibetan month of the year 1767. sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug travelled first, once again, to the Bu chu gSer gyi lha khang in Kong po, and reached the temple on the twelfth day of the eleventh Tibetan month.⁴⁸ This time he continued on to the mDung chu lha khang in sPo bo, arriving there on the sixth day of the first Tibetan month of 1768. During the sojourn at the Byang gter affiliate sPang leb, as during the previous stay in 1754, several members of incarnation lineages received their religious names. Afterwards he proceeded to Byams pa gling in Chab mdo, where he arrived on the fourth day of the fourth Tibetan month. A week-long Phur ba ritual was performed at the monastery, where he met both the Fourth Zhi ba lha 'Phags pa dge legs dpa'l bzang (1720–1799) and the Seventh 'Phags pa lha 'Jigs med bstan pa'i rgya mtsho (1755–1794).⁴⁹ Chos 'khor dgon in the 'lDan ma district of north-western Khams was reached at the beginning of the fifth Tibetan month. He also stayed at the sGrol ma lha khang, another of the border-taming temples ascribed to Srong btsan sgam po.⁵⁰ At the beginning of the sixth Tibetan month, sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug arrived in sDe dge and there, among other things, performed a week-long Phur ba ritual.⁵¹ The arrival of

⁴⁷ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 696.11-18 (*de nas dgung lo zhes dgu bzhes pa me mo phag gi lor khams su zhabs pad bskyod pa'i sgar mang byang lam dang sku 'khor nyung bsdu dpon g.yog nyi shu skor kong po dang spo bo bryud rim gyis chab mdo dang ldan [= 'dan] chos skor phyag rtsa rdzogs chen sogs nas sde dge me ling du phebs / chos kyi rgyal po stobs kyi 'khor lo bsgyur ba sa dbang lcam dral dang mjal 'phrad mdzad / go 'jo sde pa'i gdan zhu byung ba bzhin smar khams phyogs su 'phebs shing / de nas rim par 'ba' grub pa dgon pa nas li thang bryud dar rtse mdor sa skyong mi rje tshangs pa chen po lcags la rgyal pos chibs bsu dang / sa dge rnying gsum gyi grva tshang gis ser sbreng dang bcas rgyal khab chen por zhabs kyi padmo dgod par mdzad nas mdo sgar bla brang du bzhugs stan chags).*

⁴⁸ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 699.4-701.4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 705.3-713.1.

⁵⁰ On this region and the mentioned temple, see Sørensen & Hazod (2005: 53-54, n. 55)

⁵¹ For this stay in the sDe dge kingdom, *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, 713.1-717.4.

the sMar khams Tha'i ji⁵² on the first day of the seventh Tibetan month is recorded during the part of the trip that passed through the county of Go 'jo in eastern Tibet. The Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin remained until the beginning of 1769 in sMar khams, long enough to celebrate the new year's festivities at the governor's estate. The region of 'Ba' thang and Grub dgon monastery were reached during the next leg of the journey, the latter on the sixteenth day of the first Tibetan month, when he was welcomed by 180 monks; specifically mentioned are the Second Grub dgon sprul sku sKal bzang 'Phrin las rgya mtsho and the latter's nephew. After a week, he continued on to Li thang, where he stayed until the end of the first Tibetan month.⁵³ The first encounter with the lCags la ruler and his family took place at Mi nyag dPal lha sgang on the tenth day of the second Tibetan month of 1769. On the fifteenth day, he was welcomed to the royal palace, gSer thog Pho brang, by the members of the monastic colleges before proceeding immediately to the Byang gter encampment monastery in Dar rtse mdo.⁵⁴

The historiographical work provides in a closing statement the length of the sojourn in Khams and highlights the role of the lCags la ruler as the main host and donor:

For a period of three to four years he remained [in Khams], and then, having fully completed everything that needed to be achieved [both] generally and specifically according to the [earlier] secret prophecy for the benefit of the doctrine, the high-ranking family of lCags la, [both] king and ministers, offered many times their reverence and presents which a mind cannot fathom. [In the end] they saw him off with extensive parting gifts, and he left. Starting in the third Mongolian month of the iron tiger year (i.e. 1770), he travelled back to Central Tibet.⁵⁵

During the sojourn in Dar rtse mdo county sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug remained for longer periods in Mi nyag dPal lha sgang and carried out a renovation of the temple during one stay which lasted from the first day of the sixth Tibetan month up to the twenty-

⁵² This official, appointed by the Lhasa government, was the most important governor in Khams; see Gruschke (2004: 152).

⁵³ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 717.4-731.1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 731.1-736.6.

⁵⁵ *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, p. 696.18-22 (*lo ngo gsum bzhi'i bar du bzhugs nas gsang lung bzhin bstan pa don spyi bye brag bsgrub dgos thams cad legs par grub nas lcags la mi chen si rgyal blon gyis gus 'dud dang bsnyen bkur blos mi 'khyud pa len du mar bstabs shing phebs rdzong rgya chen chibs skyel dang zhabs bteg [= btegs] ste / lcags stag hor zla gsum pa nas dbus su chibs kha bsgyur ro*). The secret prophecy related to the encounter with the lCags la ruler occurred during the stay in sMar khams, the verses being quoted at the time of his arrival at Mi nyag dPal lha sgang; *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 731.6-732.6.

seventh day of the seventh month of 1769.⁵⁶ After his departure from Dar rtse mdo, he visited the temple one more time and concluded the renovation by providing the statue of the Jo bo Śākyamuni with a new head ornament.⁵⁷ It must have been during one of these sojourns that sKal bzang 'phrin las rgya mtsho and his nephew asked for permission to execute the autobiography as a xylographic print. The final event in the third text is dated to the twenty-first day of the fourth Tibetan month of 1770, when the “acting ruler” (*dpon sku zhabs*) of lCags la went to Mi nyag dPal lha sgang one more time to meet the master.

6. Conclusion

It is only the historiographical work which provides us with details of the final phase in the life of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin. It states that he was present during a restoration of the bSam yas vihāra which was being conducted at the behest of the Sixth De mo sprul sku Ngag dbang 'Jam dpal bde legs rgya mtsho. sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug was invited to the consecration ceremony and received on that occasion the title of “royal preceptor” (*ti śri*) from the regent. The Fourth Zhi ba lha 'Phags pa dGe legs dpal bzang likewise received various teaching transmissions at that time. Without having mentioned when he died, the narrative continues with a description of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug's death rituals, which were supported by the acting ruler of the lCags la family. The instalment of the reincarnation of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug was mainly in the hands of this ruler family. The chapter on the abbatial history of Thub bstan rDo rje brag closes with the remark that the Sixth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin was active and alive at the time of the composition of the work.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *rTogs brjod*, vol. ga, pp. 744.3-748.3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 780.6-789.2

⁵⁸ For this last section in the historiographical work, see *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung*, pp. 696.23-697.16. According to the entry in [Treasury of Lives.org](http://TreasuryofLives.org), the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin passed away in the eighth Tibetan month of the year 1771, and his entire body was mummified and installed in a two-story reliquary at Thub bstan rDo rje brag. A sketch of the life of the Sixth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Kun bzang 'gyur-med lhun grub (b. 1775?-d. 1810?) can be found in [The Treasury of Lives](http://TheTreasuryofLives.org); it is based on Kun bzang 'gro-'dul rDo rje (as in note 3), pp. 58.13-60.1. According to the latter source, the reincarnation was born in the vicinity of the royal palace of the lCags la rulers at a place called gSer tog. The latter toponym evidently is meant for the palace itself (gSer thog Pho brang); see note 54. On the birth of the Sixth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin as a son of the lCags la rgyal po of Dar rtse mdo, consult Smith (2001: 19).

The biographies of sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug are indeed a rich source documenting the religious and social conditions of Tibet during the 18th century. They can be characterized as very detailed personal records of an influential master who restored Thub bstan rDo rje brag in Central Tibet and steadfastly maintained the teaching traditions of the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin. He spread, in addition, his own visionary cycles and was doing the same for those of sLe lung bZhad pa'i rDo rje and g.Yung mgon rDo rje. By reading the three sections of the autobiography through the lense of the historiographical work, it is possible to get a clearer picture of which regions were visited by the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin during his travels and how he went about identifying sacred sites. One can also get a sense of just how much individuals and monastic institutions of the Northern Treasures were spreading their influence in the western and eastern parts of Tibet at a time when the main seat in Central Tibet was being renewed.

Appendix

The works of the Fifth rDo rje brag Rig' dzin cover four volumes in the complete collection of Byang gter texts published in 2015. In vol. 54 one finds eight individual texts which describe sacred sites and their opening by sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug; see sKal bzang Padma dbang phyug, *Rig 'dzin skal bzang Padma dbang phyug 'jigs med grub pa'i sde chen po'i gsung 'bum* (vol. 54), pp. 547-566 & 583-615. Five texts deal with lHa rtse brag, two with Yang rdzong, and one text is devoted to the sacred sites of the Kha rag mountain range.

1. *dBus gnas su grags pa padma tshal gyi gnas lag / rang byung sgrub gnas phye tshul ngo mtshar snang ba'i rgyan*, 5 fols., pp. 547-555.
No colophon.
2. *Kha rag gsang ba'i brag phug gi lho nub gu ru'i sgrub gnas kyi rang zhal gsar du phye ba'i lo rgyus bkra shis 'od 'bar*, 5 fols., pp. 557-566.
Written in the tenth Tibetan month of the year 1754 in sPang leb Monastery.
3. *Byang phyogs sbas phug gi gnas nyid gtan la phebs pa ngo mtshar rol pa'i rgyan*, 2 fols., pp. 583-586.
No colophon.
4. *lHo sgo me long can gyi gnas yig ngo mtshar 'dod steng*, 3 fols., pp. 587-592.
No colophon.

5. *Nub phyogs mtsho nag gi gnas yig padma'i do ra*, 2 fols., pp. 593-596.
6. *Gu ru'i sgrub gnas lha rtse brag gi rgyab ri padma'i sgrub phug brag phug brag ngo'i ljongs phye ba'i lo rgyus bkra shis 'bum phrag gsar bris*, 4 fols., pp. 597-604.
No colophon.
7. *Yang rdzong gnas lag gsar du phye tshul phan bde'i dpag bsam*. 3 fols., pp. 605-610.
Written in the tenth month of the year 1754 in sPang-leb monastery.
8. *Shar sgo yang rdzong gsar gtan la phab tshul rdzong bshad rin chen spungs pa*, 3 fols., pp. 611-615.

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— *Rig 'dzin skal bzang Padma dbang phyug 'jigs med grub pa'i sde chen po'i gsung 'bum*, vol. 4, 384 fols. In *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos 'khor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 54, 768 pp. No place: Byang gter dpe-sgrigs tshogs-chung, 2015 [= BDRC W2PD17457].
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'Khor gdong Monastery 'ja' lus pa Lama sGrib bral (1946-2018)

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n December 18, 2018, on a cold and snowy winter morning in Yangzhou, Jiangsu, China, the first post on my Facebook newsfeed was about an “unnamed monk” and “simple Dzogchen practitioner” who attained the Rainbow Body somewhere in Eastern Tibet two days earlier. Little did I know that day that Lama sGrib bral was not that “simple” after all. Son of 'Khor gdong sprul sku 'Gyur med rdo rje (1887–1966)² —who was one of lamas of 'Khor gdong gter sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin (1922–2002), the traditional holder of the 'Khor gdong lineage of the Byang gter tradition known in the West as C.R. Lama³—Lama sGrib bral spent nearly his entire life as a wandering ascetic or in retreat, and in 2018 he passed away attaining the rainbow body ('ja' lus bsgrub pa). This article is a translation of Lama sGrib bral's biography included in the recently published *sNga 'gyur byang gter 'khor gdong dgon gyi lo rgyus rgyas par bkod pa* supplemented with further information from other sources in order to

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² The younger brother of *sprul sku* Tshul lo (1884–c.1957) who resided at Shugs 'byung Monastery, in the rDo yul region of mGo log, which also belongs to the Byang gter tradition (<https://www.wandel-verlag.de/en/tulku-tsulo-tsultrim-zangpo-1884-c-1957>, accessed 30.10.2023). It is worth mentioning here that 'Khor gdong *sprul sku* 'Gyur med rdo rje was the lama of Chos dbyings khyab brdal (1920- 1997) who is well known for attaining the Rainbow Body with his body shrinking at death to the size of a two-year old child: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Choying-Khyabdel/9945> (accessed 10.10.2023). For 'Khor gdong *sprul sku* 'Gyur med rdo rje, see also, <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/535> (accessed 24.11.2023).

³ See Ritiman Das 2021: 'The Third Khordong Tertrul, Chime Rigdzin,' in *The Treasury of Lives*: <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Third-Khordong-Tertrul-Chime-Rigdzin/13689> (accessed 23.10.2023).

present a fuller account of his life and tradition as well as the process of the so-called “rainbow body” (*ja' lus*).



Figure 1 — Lama sGrib bral (photo Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018).

Lama sGrib bral was born in the Tibetan year of the Fire Dog (1946) in gSer rta,⁴ Khams, in a place called dBu chags near 'Khor gdong dgon,⁵ a rNying ma monastery belonging to the Byang gter tradition located in Tre hor, Khams.⁶ His father was the 'Khor gdong *sprul sku* 'Gyur med rdo rje, with whom he had a father-and-son and master-and-disciple relationship, and his mother was Ha bza' 'dzom lu. He had two brothers, called Kun bzang and gDugs dkar (?), and two sisters, Tsha phrug and Pug skyi — all of them passed away now. There is a photograph of 'Gyur med rdo rje, but none of Lama sGrib bral's mother.

According to his official *rnam thar*,⁷ Lama sGrib bral, as a child, was well-behaved and immediately took up to his studies of reading, making recitation, chanting, sounding the conch, and so on, without much effort. He then perfected his reading and other skills together with his father with the guidance of whom he also completed the

⁴ It has also been said that he was from sKye rgu mdo or Mi nyag or rGyal rong. See Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018 (2, 3).

⁵ Alternative names of this monastery are 'Khor lo gdong, bDe chen gsang sngags, 'Khor lo gdong gi dgon pa.

⁶ The region of Tre hor is now part of the northern Brag 'go county (Ch. *Lúhuò Xiàn*), under the administration of the Garzê (dKar mdzes) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in the Chinese Sichuan province. It belongs to the traditional region of Khams.

⁷ 'Chi med nor bu, 2023.

preliminaries practices (*sngon 'gro*).

During the unrest and religious persecution at the time of the Cultural Revolution, he was imprisoned for three years in Brag 'go and one year in gSer rta, and spent 15 years in a labour camp in mDa' mdos in Hor khog. While in prison, he completed the 'Jam dpal bla sgrub – a 'Khor gdong bla sgrub – as well as Vajrakīlaya and Yamāntaka (*gshin phur*) and so on. He was then transferred to a prison in gSer rta, where he stayed for one year. During that time, according to some monks from 'Khor gdong, he recited the *Mañjuśrī-Nāma-Saṃgīti* ('Jam dpal mtshan brjod) ten thousand times. It is said that despite all the hardships and beatings he suffered, Lama sGrib bral always insisted on wearing his monk robes.⁸

After the Cultural Revolution was over, he went into a 15-year solitary retreat at the meditation cave called A tsa ri sgrub phug, near lHa khang dkar po, in mDa' mdo, Hor khog, not far from Brag 'go. It is said that once, when he arrived in Hor khog during the "barley begging" (*nas bsod*),⁹ a family in gNas nang¹⁰ had lost a sheep. He then did a *mo* divination saying that the sheep was together with another sheep, and afterwards the sheep was found in Brag 'go.

In the year of the Wood Ox (1984–1985), he received from 'Chi med rig 'dzin (1922–2002), the *gter ston* from 'Khor gdong and *sprul sku* of the 'Khor dong *gTer chen* Nus ldan 'gro phan gling pa (1802–1864),¹¹ the empowerments for the *gter gsar*, that is to say, the treasures revealed by 'Khor dong *gTer chen* Nus ldan 'gro phan gling pa and his successor *gSang 'dzin* mGon po dbang rgyal, as well as 'Khor gdong 'Gyur med rdo rje rje, and g.Yu *sprul sKal* ldan gling pa (1868–1914), etc. 'Chi med rig 'dzin advised him to recite the prayer of Yamāntaka using a big prayer wheel. He went on to practice in rNga ba, in gNam mtsho and other places, and for several years kept on travelling and practicing.

Later on, he went to rMa stod, where, at the invitation of Lama Thub bstan tshe ring (20th c.), he entered into a one-year solitary retreat in A mye ltsags¹² where he found a treasure casket with *sgrom bu* (relics) that can still be seen today. After that, he returned to 'Khor gdong and stayed in solitary retreat for several years. In a prophecy of brDa tshang *gter ston* bSam rgyas (20th c.), he remembered the birth of the

⁸ Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018 (3).

⁹ When monks go begging for barley from the laymen in autumn.

¹⁰ gNas nang is a village about an hour away from Brag 'go. This is referring to a rNying ma monastery that is not to be confused with the Kar ma bKa 'brgyud gNas nang monastery near lHa sa that is the seat of dPa' bo Rin po che.

¹¹ <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Khordong-Terchen-Nuden-Dorje/13617> (accessed 21.10.2023).

¹² A small mountain in Golog.

elder monk Bakula during the time of the Buddha, and that of 'Brog mi dPal gyi ye shes (8th c.), one of the nine spiritual heart-sons of Guru Padmasambhava.¹³ With the advice of the 'Khor gdong *dbon po* bSod nams 'od gsal (1928–2001),¹⁴ and according to the Lama 'Chi med tshe ring (b.1974), after Lama sGrib bral became a monk, he acquired and brought to 'Khor gdong a big Yamāntaka prayer wheel, the bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur, masks, brocade for the thrones, and plenty other precious things.



Figure 2 — Yamāntaka Drupchen in 'Khor gdong
(photo Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018).

Figure 3 — The *rwa zor* (photo sNga 'gyur Byang gter 'Khor gdong dgon gyi lo rgyus rgyas par bkod pa bzhugs so, 2023).

After he was appointed Vajra Master of the Yamāntaka *sgrub chen*, he stayed at 'Khor gdong for several years (fig. 2). Once, while performing the Yamāntaka prayers, the *razor* (*rwa zor*¹⁵—fig.3) started bleeding — this is just one of the many miraculous deeds symbolic of his accomplishment (*grub pa*), according to many monks who witnessed them at 'Khor gdong. Furthermore, after brDa tshang *gter ston* bSam rgyas became a Dharma Master, Lama sGrib bral wrote down many of the dharma teachings the *gter ston* transmitted orally. Lama sGrib bral stayed in brDa tshang¹⁶ for 3 years.

¹³ <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Drokmi-Pelgyi-Yeshe/11117> (accessed 15.10.2023).

¹⁴ His full name is *mKhas btsun Grub pa'i dbang phyug* dBon tsen Dam pa bsod nams 'od gsal.

¹⁵ According to rNying ma lamas, it is a horn used in the Yamāntaka *sgrub pa* as a samaya offering. The performance of the Yamāntaka *rwa zor* puja requires a powerful lama that has done at least 1 or 2 years of retreat (Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018, 3).

¹⁶ brDa tshang is in gSer rta.



Figure 4 – The house at 'Khor gdong where lama sGrib bral used to live
(photo Varvara Chatzisavva, 2023)

After arriving in lHa sa, he stayed several years in retreat in bSam yas mchims pu, in Yar klung shel brag in lHo kha, in lHo brag mkhar chu, and other places.¹⁷

He then returned to 'Khor gdong. Following the advice of the gNas nang *sprul sku* Chos kyi nyi ma (b.1954) he stayed in retreat at the meditation cave O rgyan for several years. Then he went to Li mdo chos sgar¹⁸ where he was fully ordained by Hor shul *mkhan po* She rab (1920–1997).¹⁹ Arriving at Khrom thar²⁰ (around the year 2000 according to some unverified sources), he received instructions on the *Klong chen snying thig* of 'Jigs med gling pa by the Second A 'dzom 'brug pa Thub bstan padma 'phrin las (1926–2001). Henceforth he completely abandoned the eight worldly concerns and took up asceticism.²¹

¹⁷ mChims pu is one of the five sacred places blessed by Padmasambhava related to his speech, Yar klung shel brag is related to the aspect of qualities, and mKhar chu to the mind. The latter is situated one day's walk from Mar pa's house in lHo brag.

¹⁸ The monastery and residence of *mKhan chen* Chos dbyings khyab brdal (1920-1997) in gSer rta county, a little further north from what is called today Huoxi township (Chinese: Huoxixiang).

¹⁹ Hor shul *mkhan po* She rab was the then regent of Bya bral *bla ma* Padma chos dbyings khyab brdal. His current regent is *mKhan chen* Zla dbang, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Choying-Khyabdel/9945> (accessed 20.10.2023).

²⁰ The area in Kham where A 'dzom sgar is located, near Ya chen sgar, not far from Nyag rong.

²¹ Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018 (1, 3).

Lama sGrib bral then stayed in A 'dzom sgar for three years. He was a religious friend of Mi nyag *bla ma* Blo gros rab gsal (1970-2020) from the monastery rGyal 'phags, who was the regent of A 'dzom 'brug pa.²² He received an empowerment from *mKhan po* 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933–2004) at a public teaching but did not study with him. He received transmissions and instructions for the *lCe btsun snying thig* of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po (1820–1892), the revelations of the First A 'dzom 'brug pa, 'Gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje (1842–1924)²³ and is said to have relied upon many other teachers too.

Finally, he went to the valley of g.Yu khog,²⁴ Khams, where he stayed in retreat for five years in Chu dbar tā re (*fig.5-6*), the birthplace of g.Yu khog Bya bral Chos dbyings rang grol (1872–1952).²⁵ It is said²⁶ that during the many years he resided at 'Khor gdong, he was in charge of the Yamāntaka (*gshin rje*) *rwa zor* and *bgegs gtor* (torma offered to avert dangers caused by evil and negative forces) protector practices of averting negativities related to death. He is said to have used the donations received for such practices to restore the houses and statues at the monastery and also to contribute for the dharma activities of g.Yu khog Bya bral Chos dbyings rang grol who established Yag ye sgar in Lower gSer rta and who was a direct disciple of the First A 'dzom 'brug pa. It is commonly said that he finally managed to meet g.Yu khog Bya bral Chos dbyings rang grol and received Dzogchen teachings from him but the currently accepted dates make this implausible.



Figure 5 — The hamlet of Chu dbar tā re (photo Varvara Chatzisavva, 2019)

²² Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018 (3).

²³ Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018 (3); Naldjor, 2020.

²⁴ Chinese: Yuke Grassland.

²⁵ Nyoshul, 2005, p. 316-318.

²⁶ See Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018 (1); Naldjor, 2020.



Figure 6 —Lama sGrib bral's hermitage in Chu dbar tā re (photo Varvara Chatzisavva, 2019)

In Chu dmar 'ug chang sde ba²⁷ and at the hermitage of rDo lho dung dkar ri khrod²⁸ in rGyal mo dmu rdo,²⁹ both located in the sacred pilgrimage route in the blessed land Bee ro³⁰—also known as rGyal rong³¹—he stayed in retreat for 14 years (fig. 7-9).

²⁷ The area surrounding the hermitage rDo lho dung dkar is called Chu dmar 'ug tshang sde ba and is located in a large remote expanse called Dem kog within rGyal mo tsha ba rong. Under Chinese administration, Dem kog is part of Chu dmar yul shog in rTa'u county (Ch. Dawu).

²⁸ Not to be confused with the other famous mountain called Shar dung ri ("Eastern Conch Mountain") in the Shar kong region of southern A mdo. I was told that there used to be a rNying ma monastery in rDo lho dung dkar but the lama who told me that did not provide further details. Another lama said there never was a monastery over there.

²⁹ Also called Shar rGyal mo dmu rdo (Eastern Mount Murdo). Under Chinese administration, the mountain is located near the town of Danba, known as Rong brag county in Tibetan, under the jurisdiction of Garzê Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Danba borders Xiaojin to the east, Kangding (Tib. Dar rtse mdo) to the south and southeast, Dawu County to west, and Jinchuan County (Tib. Tsu tsen) to the north and northeast.

³⁰ Owing to the fact that the great *lo tsā ba* Vairocana lived there, thus blessing the land as a holy place with his presence. See Yudra Nyingpo, 2004, pp.179-192.

³¹ Or rGyal mo rong, or Tsha ba rong or rGyal mo tshza ba rong or more fully Shar rGyal mo tsha ba rong, meaning the "Eastern Queen's hot valleys" or "Queen's River valley", with "queen" referring to Mount dMu rdo, the seat of the rGyal rong Bon protector deity, Tsha ba rong meaning the river valley, and with rGyal rong itself being a queendom in ancient times (See Prins, 2011, p.18; Burnett, 2014, p.24). The Chinese name Jiarong is a transcription of the Tibetan name Gyalrong. During



Figures 7 (left) — Lama sGrib bral at rDo lho dung dkar ri khrod (photo Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018).

Figures 8-9 (right) — A view of Chu dmar 'ug chang sde ba and the retreat cabins at rDo lho dung dkar ri khrod (photo Varvara Chatzisavva, 2023).

The day before his passing, he told his patrons:³² “I am going to die now. I am thanking you very much. If I have ever spoken harsh words to you, please forgive me.”

On the 6th day of the 11th month of the Earth Dog year (December 2018), he asked to have his breakfast, and then required to have his religious robes put on. He then sat upright and crossed-legged in the vajra position, and passed away like this. He was 73. In the sky there appeared many signs and rainbow lights.

The Mi nyag *bla ma* Blo gros rab gsal (fig. 11) confirmed that the death signs were extremely auspicious and that he had never before seen such a variety of signs in other people. Although the last wish of Lama sGrib bral was to be taken to the burial ground in Bla rung sgar when he died, since his body started the shrinking dissolution process, the Mi nyag lama Blo gros rab gsal advised that, on the 18th day, the *sku dung* (the corpse of a person who is considered to be a saint) should be concealed as an “earth treasure” (*sa gter*) in rDo lho dung dkar.

According to reports by witnesses, Lama sGrib bral's physical body

the Qing dynasty the region itself was called *Jinchuan* (literally “Gold River”). Under Chinese administration, rGyal rong is cut in two, a northern part under the administrative unity of rNga ba (Ch. Aba) whose center is 'Bar khams (Ch. Maerkam); and a southern part which begins just after the Tsu tsen county (Ch. Jinchuan) and comes under the jurisdiction of Garzê whose capital is Dar rtse mdo (Ch. Kangding). See Karmay, 1996, p.1, 3.

³² It is said that he had many patrons, some from 'Khor gdong.

gradually shrank down from the height of about 1.70m down to the size of a 1-year-old toddler³³ and many local people in Chu dmar 'ug chang sde ba saw it. This phenomenon is known as attaining the "small rainbow body" or 'ja' lus chung ngu, a mark of supreme accomplishment in Dzogchen practice.

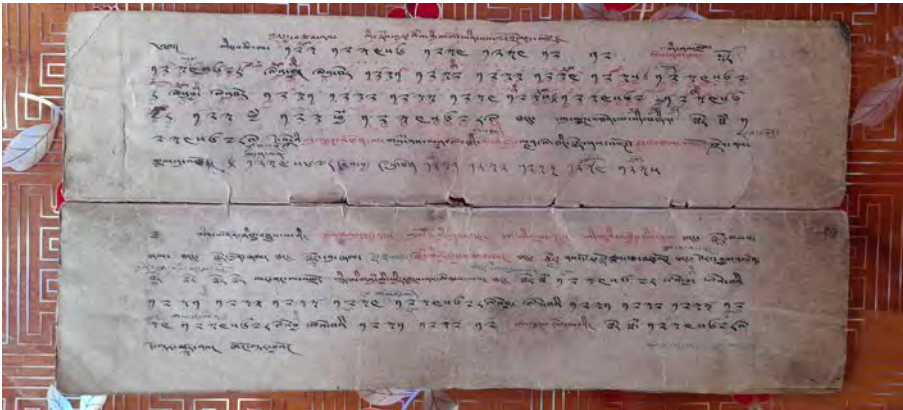
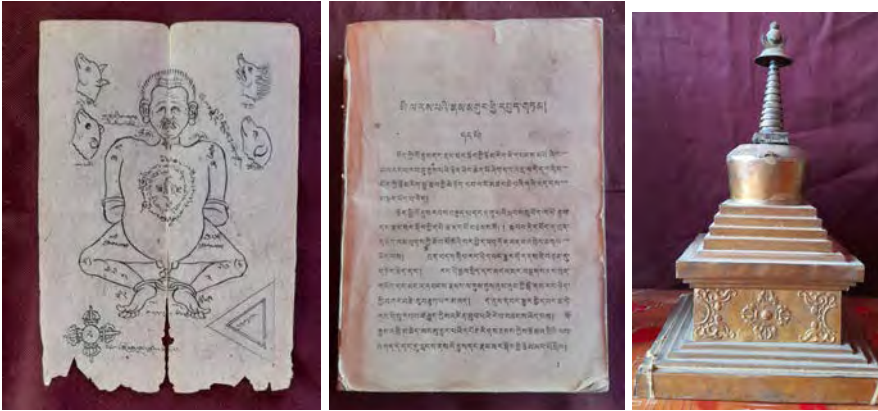


Fig. 10 (left)—Monks and laymen arriving at rDo lho dung dkar ri khrod when Lama sGrib bral passed away (photo: photographer unknown; various monks and laymen at 'Khor gdong sent me this photo in 2019).

Fig. 11 — The Mi nyag bla ma Blo gros rab gsal at rDo lho dung dkar ri khrod with the sku dung of Lama sGrib bral (photo Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018).

As was his wish, there were offerings (*phud kong*), Dharmapāla petition offerings (*gsol kha*) and mantrayāna teachings at 'Khor gdong conferred by the head of the monastery, *sPrul sku 'Chi med rgyal mtshan*. Lama sGrib bral was known as a man with no material possessions, his only belongings were 700 RMB, a couple of books, a few butter lamp vessels (*dkong bu*), and some cooking utensils for the stove (fig. 13-16). He did not have a mobile phone. As he was a meditator, he was not into books, study, and scholarship. He was not married and did not have children. He was in good health until his passing.

³³ A measure known as *khru gang tsam*, the Tibetan equivalent of a cubit, or about 40cm.



Figures 12-15 — Personal items of Lama sGrib bral and his handwriting of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag gshin rjea'i 'cham gdag (photo Varoara Chatzisava, 2023).

For the people who knew him, his attainment of the Rainbow Body is regarded as a natural result of his lifetime dedicated to Dzogchen practice and living a simple life mostly as a Hidden Dzogchen Yogi (*rdzogs chen sbas pa'i rnal 'byor pa*).



The Rainbow Body and the Chinese Communist Party

In his articles in *Tricycle*, Sheehy wrote that “The CCP has declared going rainbow to be illegal.”³⁴ But this is not news. Since the annexation of Tibet and the Cultural Revolution, the CCP has

³⁴ Sheehy, 2018, 2019.

persecuted people involved with anything in relation with the Rainbow Body, censored and discouraged discussions about this phenomenon. When Dzogchen 'Jigs bral byang chub rdo rje (1935–1959) dissolved his body, Pad ma bskal bzang (b. 1943) kept hold of his holy relics throughout the Cultural Revolution and had them enshrined at the main temple in Dzogchen Lotus Ground Retreat Centre.³⁵ The shrunken bodily remains of Nyag bla Rig 'dzin Byang chub rdo rje (1863–1963) were kept hidden from the Chinese authorities for years until proper ceremonies could be openly performed. When the Chinese heard about Yid lhung pa bSod nams rnam rgyal (d.1952), Ma ni gang ngo, Khams, leaving only hair and nails behind at death, they discouraged discussions about it.³⁶ The uncle of Nam mkha'i nor bu (2010, pp.67-69), *rTogs ldan* O rgyan bstan 'dzin (1888–1962), was arrested and underwent *thamzing* (struggle session); when he dissolved his body while in custody, the inspecting CCP officials and policemen were baffled to see only hair and nails inside his sheepskin robe. Tapontsang (1997, p.109) speaks of seven Rinpoches consciously dying on the same day at lNga mchod monastery-prison, Dar rtse mdo, Khams, puzzling the Chinese officials. Tshe dbang bde chen nor bu passed away while hidden by villagers during the Cultural Revolution; his Small Rainbow Body was kept hidden in a basin—a considerable danger to the villagers—and only displayed in 1984. The Small Rainbow Body of gTsong phud 'od zer (d.1983) was kept for two months along with Tshe dbang's.³⁷ The Small Rainbow Body of the Bon monk Rag shi *rTogs ldan* (d.2002), in Ba chen, Nag chu, was cremated in secret after the alerted Chinese police arrested his nephew.³⁸

Considering the importance of death in the context of Buddhist soteriology, i.e. it being the very problem to overcome, then “the most pervasive index of spiritual power and authority throughout the Buddhist world and legitimation of enlightenment lies in the perceived mastery and control over death.”³⁹ This clarity of death and power over death was in fact a major factor in the successful transmission of Buddhism from its original Indian cultural context and up to our times.⁴⁰ Finally, realizing that Tibetans maintain since antiquity a great funerary tradition with a panoply of means to deal with death (i.e. predicting it, ransoming it, navigating and guiding through it, returning from it, transcending it altogether), a tradition

³⁵ Kalsang, 2011, p.185.

³⁶ Trungpa, 1966, pp.95-96; Kapstein, 2004, p.120.

³⁷ Gyaltzen 2002, pp.135, 137.

³⁸ Tiso 2016:16.

³⁹ Stone in Lopez, 2005, p.57, 59, 60.

⁴⁰ Williams & Ladwig, 2012, loc.177-189/9,426.

which has been brutally violated and oppressed by the CCP since the 1950s, we can appreciate better the phenomenon of the Rainbow Body and the attainment of Lama sGrib bral and their significance.

With the above as the wider background and against a backdrop of rapid and widespread sinicisation,⁴¹ the fact that the pictures of Lama sGrib bral's 'ja' lus appeared online in Chinese media in 2018⁴² and even a prayer allegedly composed by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche published in an individual article on WeChat,⁴³ can be seen as a change in the policy of Chinese media. And that is simply because the news about other Tibetan 'ja' lus pa and 'ja' lus ma and following appraisals by Tibetan Rinpoches, are not aired on Chinese media.⁴⁴ It should be noted here that the Tibetan sense of normality may be stretched enough to include human beings dissolving their physical body into thin air, but the phenomenon of the Rainbow Body is not so commonplace as to not be worthy enough to make a headline or two in the daily news.

⁴¹ To the point that, in the aftermath of Lama sGrib bral's passing, it was even claimed, according to a lama from 'Khor gdong, that Lama sGrib bral was Chinese. A crucial comment reflecting the current state of affairs including the accelerated sinicisation of Tibetan Buddhism, the so-called "integration of cultures" policy, as well as the ever-increasing influx (or infiltration, one may ask) of Chinese converts into Tibetan Buddhist institutions (e.g. see Shmushko, 2022, p.17; Roche et al., 2020, p.4). At this point and under this kind of circumstances when all things Tibetan are claimed as Chinese, such a cultural appropriation and even claiming the 'ja' lus pa Lama sGrib bral as Chinese, shouldn't surprise.

⁴² And these articles remain up to present describing him variously as "Dzogchen yogin", "Dzogchen lama", "'Khor gdong lama Dripta".

⁴³ "In all my [future] rebirths, | [As long as ordinary] things are not exhausted, as long as [the ordinary mind] has not vanished | Let me hear again [and again] the names | of both Dri med 'od zer [Klong chen pa] | and mKhyen brte'i 'od zer [Jigs med gling pa] | and with [whichever] faith, blind, | limpid or subtle that I may obtain, | as long as I have not got rid of the garland of [successive] rebirths, | there is nothing higher than that to what I aspire." (*bdag ni skye ba thams cad du/ chos ma zad cing blo ma zad/ 'on kyang dri med 'od zer dang/ mkhyen brtse'i 'od zer rnam gnyis kyil/ mtshan yang thos shing blun po yi/ dwangs dad phra mo gang thob pa/ tshe rabs phreng bar ma bor na/ 'di las lhag pa smon rgyu med.* Bonza Buddhist and Cultural Exhibition Center, 2018 (4).

⁴⁴ For example, that same year, a woman called bKra shis lha mo, said to be the mother of a certain Lokgar Rinpoche from Ka thog monastery, sDe rge, Khams, was reported to have attained the small rainbow body (Naldjor 2018/2020, https://www.facebook.com/280100425371178/posts/pfbid02W2VhDjh7cjTiviH_WukbfgXnozeBPPcsUgJbMLExmKFEpVA8RC6fZaSagrTGcHbhpl/?app=fbl, accessed 2018/2020) and since then there have been several other reports on Facebook, but none of these appeared on WeChat.

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Yamāntaka Among the Ancients: *Mañjuśrī Master of Life in Context*

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The purpose of the present paper is merely descriptive: having noted the inclusion of a very large collection of Yamāntaka-related materials originating from an ancient and originally unconnected *gter chos*—rGya Zhang khrom (11th cent.)’s *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* (*’Jam dpal tshe bdag*)¹—in the 63-volume collection of Northern Treasure materials that is the main basis of our research,² we felt the need of a better understanding of this corpus within the context of the—insofar poorly researched—Yamāntaka traditions in the rNying ma school.

After an introduction precisizing what is at stake in this research (and discussing whether Yamāntaka in the rNying ma tradition should be treated in connection with the *bKa’ brgyad* overarching structure), this article contains: 1. An overview of the Yamāntaka literature in the *rNying ma rgyud ’bum* and 2. in the *rNying ma bka’ ma shin tu rgyas pa*; 3. A preliminary survey of the various Yamāntaka cycles included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*; and 4. An introductory presentation of the *’Jam dpal tshe bdag* collection included in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*.

Appendices contain 1. a catalogue of the Yamāntaka *tantras* in the *mTshams brag rNying rgyud* with elements of comparison with the 5th Dalai Lama’s *gSan yig*; 2. a chart of the lineages reconstructed from the volumes of the *bKa’ ma shin tu rgyas pa*; 3. one of those that can be retraced on the basis of the 5th Dalai Lama’s *gSan yig*, and 4. one of those which can be set up from elements scattered in the ten volumes of the *’Jam dpal tshe bdag* collection. Links to the FCHNT blog *Northern Treasure Histories* provide more background material: 1. A catalogue of the volumes devoted to Yamāntaka in the *bKa’ ma shin tu rgyas pa* and 2. a complete catalogue of the *’Jam dpal tshe bdag* collection.



¹ *’Jam dpal tshe bdag* is the generic name for the whole, made of large sub-cycles, as we will see below. The main deity (Kṛṣṇayāmāri in the Heruka form—three faces, six arms and four legs) is properly called *Phyag rgya zil gnon* rather than *’Jam dpal tshe bdag*, although these two names, and many others, may occur.

² ANR-funded project “For a Critical History of the Norther Treasures” (2022–2026).

Mañjuśrī Master of Life is a cycle that should interest Tibetologists for three main groups of reasons:

- Firstly, we have no reason to doubt the attribution of the discovery of the bulk of its materials to rGya Zhang khrom, a *gter ston* born in the early 11th century,³ making it arguably the most massive and best-preserved *gter ma* from such an early period in the rNying ma school.
- Secondly, although this enormous corpus is almost entirely devoted to complex ritual prescriptions of destructive magic—and thus fairly sparse in narrative or doctrinal passages—a global vision emerges from it that doesn't fit neatly into the framework of the great “Padmasambhava-centric” narrative subsequently developed, particularly in the 12th (Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer) and 13th (*Gu ru* Chos dbang) centuries. This *gter ma* is reputed to have been hidden by gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes (804–914?)⁴ and its main section, the *Iron Scorpion* (*lCags sdig*), is not presented as having any connection whatsoever with Padmasambhava (even though a secondary cycle, known as *Similar to Iron* (*lCags 'dra*), is supposed to have originated from Padmasambhava's teachings).
- Thirdly, we find in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* collection a whole corpus of works by authors spanning at least from the 14th to the 19th centuries, attesting to the subterranean but constant favor this cycle may have enjoyed—culminating in several remarkable writings by the 5th Dalai Lama.

Mañjuśrī Master of Life seems to have become the most classical system for ‘war magic,’⁵ although maybe only until the complete destruction of rDo rje brag by the Dzungars in 1717–1718, an event that might not be utterly unconnected to the later decline of this cycle's fame.⁶

³ See Esler 2022a, “Yamāntaka's Wrathful Magic: An Instance of the Ritual Legacy of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes on the Byang gter tradition via the figure of rGya Zhang khrom,” pp. 190-215.

⁴ To date the most consistent attempt to date gNubs chen Sang rgyas ye shes is Esler 2022b: p. 88, which decides 844 for his birth date and suggests (op. cit., p. 92) that, “It seems quite possible, (...) that Sangs rgyas ye shes witnessed the first five, perhaps six, decades of the 10th century.” Thus (op. cit., pp. 88-89), “gNubs chen's association with the reign of Khri srong lde'u btsan cannot be considered historical but, rather, serves the purpose of making him a direct disciple of Padmasambhava and Śāntarakṣita, the illustrious masters responsible for the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet.”

⁵ See especially FitzHerbert 2018.

⁶ For more on this event, see Batsang 2023 in the present volume.

What is at Stake in this Research

Bryan J. Cuevas rightly remarks:⁷

With the noted exception of Bulcu Siklós' translations of the main *tantras* of Vajrabhairava, now over thirty years ago, and a scattering of more recent contributions on some of the manuscripts of the Yamāntaka *tantras* and their Indian exegetes, the important Tibetan texts and traditions of Vajrabhairava and Yamāri / Yamāntaka have been generally neglected as subjects of sustained scholarly focus.

However, even such a fine specialized scholar deals with the matter as if everything had begun with the 'later diffusion' of Buddhism in Tibet, ignoring the tradition that stems from gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.

The relevant Tibetan literature is admittedly so plethoric that it is bound to discourage scholars. The present article will only provide an introductory overview, aimed primarily at laying down some milestones for future research, in the hope that studies of the 'modern' (*gsar ma*) Yamāri / Yamāntaka traditions will no longer ignore this corpus. This would be all the more necessary as this is a field in which reciprocal borrowings between rNying ma pa and gSar ma pa must have been particularly abundant, as early as the time of Rwa lo tsā ba (who can be found in one of the lineages detailed below) and throughout Tibetan history, in which many masters of the 'Jam dpal tshé bdag system among the gSar ma schools may also have been Vajrabhairava scholars: indeed, many 'Bri gung pa, especially Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), as well as the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682) were perfectly well-versed in *Mañjuśrī Master of Life*.

Returning for a moment to the *Byang gter rDo rje brag lugs*, at first glance one gets the feeling that the adoption of this system of practice by rGod ldem's successors did not predate the 16th century, when the sons of 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan (1445?–1558), mNga' ris pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542) and Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rje (1512?–1625?), followed by Byang bdag bKras shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603), brought into what would become the rDo rje brag legacy the rich contribution of the traditions their father had compiled.⁸

⁷ Cuevas 2021: *The Rwa Pod and Other 'Lost' Works of Rwa Lo tsā ba's Vajrabhairava Tradition*, p. 13.

⁸ Even if the association of the *Byang gter* with Yamāntaka lineages stemming from rGya Zhang khrom did not predate the 16th century (which I think is not the case: the "official" account of the lineage seems to be the fruit of a process of normalization that may not predate the foundation of rDo rje brag), the main lineage of 'Jam dpal tshé bdag, in its earlier part, is identical with that of the *Gathering of Intentions*, as described in *Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las' mDo dbang* history. Part of my intention in the present research was thus also to trace, through an analysis of

But a closer examination of the available sources connects Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself, if not to *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* proper, at least to these Yamāntaka traditions, through the Nāgarakṣa practice he is reputed to have performed during his adolescence.⁹ His name appears, for somewhat unclear reasons, in a prayer to the lineage of the masters of the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* system, composed by 'Ju Mi pham (1846–1912).¹⁰ This lineage prayer is slightly disconcerting, as Mi pham, for some unknown reason but surely purposefully, is conflating two things that seem to us to be different. Indeed, all this lineage is apparently borrowed from the 5th Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*,¹¹ where it is presented in connection with the tradition known as *Mañjuśrī's Dzogchen* (*'Jam dpal rdzogs chen*), linked to Sar ban Phyogs med's *gter chos*,¹² about which we know little—and not at all in connection with *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*.

However, Mi pham is not an author known for haphazard, pseudo-historical inventiveness, especially regarding these traditions, of which he was evidently a committed specialist. The inclusion of rGod ldem may be significant, although it is rather puzzling given the current state of research.

rGod ldem's biographies do not say anything of his association with *'Jam dpal rdzogs chen* or about the master rGa ston dpal ba, from whom he is said to have received it. But there is in the Northern Treasures compilation a solid rDzogs chen-style commentary to the *Mañjuśrī-Nāma-Saṃgīti* attributed to him.¹³ A preliminary survey of this text has not revealed anything to corroborate or invalidate this traditional attribution, nor to prove any connection of its author with any specific system of Yamāntaka practice. But there seems to exist a cluster of converging clues suggesting that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was perceived as a Yamāntaka specialist, albeit certainly to a less central degree than the competence tradition recognizes him for Vajrakīla, the *bKa' brgyad* systems or visionary rDzogs chen. Be that as it may, the question remains open as to the status of *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* among Byang

the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* documents, some of the 'prehistory' of the Byang gter rDo rje brag lugs (i.e., the heritage of the pre-rGod ldem period) as a whole.

⁹ See, on this point my paper about Rin chen gling pa in this volume.

¹⁰ 'Ju Mi pham 1984–93: vol. 5, pp. 79–83, beginning: *om āḥ hūm | chos kyi dbying kyi zhing khams na |* (the same text is found in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 22, pp. 447–453). Between *gTer ston Sar ban Phyogs med* and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the lineage goes: (1) Sar ban Nyi ma'i snying po; (2) sNgags 'chang dBang dar; (3) 'Gar ston Rin chen 'bum; (4) Ri pa Sangs rgyas; (4) Byams pa dpal; (5) rGyal ban bla ma; (6) rGa ston dpal ba.

¹¹ See Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1970–1971, vol. 3, p. 182.

¹² An anthology of this cycle can be found in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. See in the bibliography Sar ban Phyogs med 1976.

¹³ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem pas mdzad pa'i 'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi 'grel pa zab mo, in *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 14, pp. 271–362.

gter masters in his own time and in the first generations of his disciples.

The 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* states, although in a quite imprecise way, that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was the holder of a lineage stemming from rGya Zhang khrom for the practice of the deity Yab shud dmar po, presented as a mundane spirit (*btsan rgod srog bdag*) but also connected to Raktayamāri (*'jam dpal dmar po*), as it is said to be "Red Mañjuśrī practiced in the form of a *btsan* [spirit]" (*'jam dpal dmar po drag po btsan du sgrub pa*).¹⁴

This deity, normally rather called Yam shud dmar po, with the epithet *srog gi bdag po*, was documented by Nebesky-Wojkowitz,¹⁵ but rather as a *rgyal po* spirit belonging to Pe har's circle as the guardian of the western or southern door of his palace, without obvious connection with any form of Yamāntaka. He is also understood as being a *btsan* spirit, and even "the king of the *btsan*," and, Nebesky says, "many Tibetans believe that the *dharmapāla* Yam shud dmar po (...) is one of the forms of Tsi'u dmar po, while others are inclined to regard him as an aspect of rDo rje grags ldan. (...) Yam shud dmar po is supposed to have sprung from the union of Kubera with the goddess Ekajāti"—which seems to be his only link with Yamāntaka, as Ekajāti has a central role in the *maṇḍala* of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* (described at the end of this article).

It is very unfortunate that the precise master from whom rGod ldem received this lineage is not named,¹⁶ as it would be likely to confirm or infirm my speculations about Rin chen gling pa in the article devoted to him below in this volume. The description of this lineage¹⁷ is

¹⁴ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1970–1971, vol. 3, p. 98: | *sprul sku rgya zhang khrom gyis phung po ri bo che nas spyang drangs pa'i btsan rgod srog bdag yab shud dmar po'i skor la* | *srog bdag dmar po'i drag sngags kyi lo rgyus khas nyen stobs chung zhid dang phrad shog gi mtha' can* | [*'di lha rje gnubs chung gis skyer chu mgon po'i dbu nas bton zer ba 'dug*] | *yab shud dmar po'i gsang sgrub ma ra khrag skyug gi drag sngags 'jam dpal drag sgrub rdzogs so'i mtha' can* | *btsan yab shud srog bdag dmar po'i drag sngags spu gri dmar po'i las tshogs tshad ldan rdzogs so'i mtha' can* | *'jam dpal dmar po zer ba spu gri'i rgyud las phyung ba'i 'jam dpal dmar po drag po btsan du sgrub pa rdzogs byang gi mtha' can* | *'jam dpal dmar po btsan du sgrub pa gsang ba gri rgod kyi las* | *srog bdag dmar po'i bskang bshags bdag ni rig 'dzin ma* | *bskul srog gi mnga' bdag ma rnams...*

¹⁵ 1956: pp. 119, 122, 128, 168, 169, 253, 284, 300, 333. See also Christopher Bell 2021, p. 27 and n. 60.

¹⁶ Indeed, we read in the relevant part of the lineage account: *gnubs chen sku sprul rgya zhang khrom nas rim par bryud de rig 'dzin rgod ldem yab sras...*, a phrase leaving completely unclear the long section of the lineage between rGya Zhang khrom and rGod ldem. But this occurs in the context of a whole series of teachings and lineages connected to rGya Zhang khrom, so it is quite possible that a closer examination of the context will allow researchers to find what precisely the 5th Dalai Lama is alluding to.

¹⁷ *Thob pa'i bryud pa ni* | *gshin rje gshed* | *gtsug lag dpal dge* | *o rgyan chen po* | *bha su dha ra* | *gnubs chen sku sprul rgya zhang* <98> *khrom nas rim par bryud de rig 'dzin*

otherwise interesting as it confirms the role of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem not merely as a *gter ston*, but also as someone who transmitted tantric lineages he had received from the previous generations.

Be that as it may, the idea, expressed by the 5th Dalai Lama, of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem inclusion in a lineage stemming from rGya Zhang khrom, although through undefined links, may have been what inspired Mi pham.

Be it not about the *rDo rje brag lugs*, in which the practice of 'Jam dpal tshé bdag is very much a living tradition, the idea of studying Yamāntaka among the rNying ma pa may sound awkward as this deity seems to have fallen into nearly complete disuse in the other branches of that school of Tibetan Buddhism. Indeed, we see only very few mentions of its practice in the biographies of rNying ma masters from at least the 18th century onwards.¹⁸ But the point is not merely that the rDo rje brag masters have, to this day, treasured *Mañjuśrī Master of Life*, but also that the huge corpus of Yamāntaka literature the rNying ma pa have preserved—about 5500 pages of *tantras* in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, three volumes of the *rNying ma bka' ma*, ten volumes in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* and a 4-vol. anthology of relevant *gter ma* cycles in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*¹⁹—shows that the

rgod ldem yab sras nas se nyi bzang | se mgon bzang | se rin chen rgyal mtshan | spyan tshab rje | nub dgon rje | dbang po'i sde | ngag gi dbang po | sngags 'chang don grub bkra shis | zur thams cad mkhyen pa | des bdag za hor bande la'o | | .

¹⁸ With the notable exception of 'Ju Mi pham rNam rgyal rgya mtsho, who seems to have started a "Mañjuśrī revival" among the rNying ma pa, which flourished with Dil mgo mkhyen brtse and other contemporary masters. See e.g. Dilgo Khyentsé 2020, p. 63: "It was also at Karmo Taktsang that he [Mi pham] composed the *sādhana* of Yamāntaka called *The Secret Moon*, which unites the traditions of Padmasambhava and Nubchen Sangye Yeshe and is like the quintessence of the three inner *tantras* of the great secret, the Vajrayāna." This alludes to the *lCags 'dra* cycle ascribed to Padmasambhava and the *lCags sdig* cycle ascribed to Sangs rgyas ye shes—both being subdivisions of the 'Jam dpal tshé bdag, as we will see below. Mi Pham's writings about 'Jam dpal tshé bdag are found in both the compilation of his complete writings (1984–1993: in vol. 5, fully devoted to Mañjuśrī) and the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* (vol. 22, pp. 277–504).

¹⁹ The 'Jam dpal sku section of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* starts in vol. 25 of the sTod lung edition with the peaceful forms of Mañjuśrī. Yamāntaka is found in vol. 26–29. The following rough catalogue does not follow the actual order of the texts in the volumes, but the chronological order of the *gter ston*:

- rGya Zhang khrom (11th century: vol. 26, pp. 1–418 and vol. 28, pp. 299–461): 581 pages.
- *lHa rje gNubs chung* (d. u., Mi la ras pa's destructive magic teacher in the 11th century; vol. 26, pp. 417–621): 205 pages.
- Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192: vol. 29, pp. 1–3): 3 pages.
- *Gu ru Chos dbang* (1212–1270: vol. 27, pp. 319–434): 116 pages.
- Rin chen gling pa (1289–1368: vol. 29, pp. 5–123): 119 pages.

present lack of interest for this deity is rather a feature of the post-'Jigs med gling pa reconstruction of the rNying ma school than an inherent characteristic of the 'Ancient Order.'

This literature is interesting for several reasons. First, Yamāntaka is one of the very few deities shared by the pantheons of the older (rNying ma) and later (gSar ma) higher *tantras*, with quite similar features (common *mantras*, same association with destructive magic, a partly similar iconography, no elaborate *rdzogs rim* at least in the original texts...). Yamāntaka is a unique deity in that he is worshipped by both the 'Ancients' (*rNying ma pa*) and the 'Moderns' (*gSar ma pa*), albeit in different forms and with distinctive iconography. This continuity is remarkable and deserves emphasis. Legends of borrowing between the two traditions probably originated here.²⁰

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- Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396: vol. 27, pp. 435-554, and vol. 28, pp. 1-89): 209 pages.
 - Ratna gling pa (1403–1478: vol. 28, pp. 91-138): 48 pages.
 - Zur mkhar mNyam nyid rdo rje (1439–1475) and Karma chags med (1613–1678: vol. 28, pp. 149-297): 149 pages.
 - gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714: vol. 27, pp. 1-85): 85 pages.
 - gNam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje (1645–1667: vol. 28, pp. 149-297 and vol. 29, pp. 125-133): 157 pages.
 - Thugs mchog rdo rje (18th cent.: vol. 29, pp. 135-193): 59 pages.
 - mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892: vol. 27, pp. 87-163): 77 pages.
 - mChog 'gyur gling pa (1829–1970: vol. 27, pp. 165-318): 154 pages.

These represent 786 pages for the 11th century (40% of the whole corpus), 3 for the 12th (close to 0%), 116 for the 13th (around 6%), 328 for the 14th (17,5%); 197 for the 15th (10%); 157 for the 16th (8%); 85 for the 17th (4%); 59 for the 18th (3%); 231 for the 19th (11,5%). Of course, these figures are given as a mere indication, as, to some extent, the selection may reflect personal preferences of the compiler rather than the objective contribution of each century in this literature. What is more, the *Zur mkhar lugs* literature (149 pages in vol. 28) has been included in the 15th century, but we cannot tell what are the parts respectively coming from the 11th or 12th century (rGya Zhang khrom and Gru gu Yang dbang gter, whoever this figure may be), the contribution of Zur mkhar mNyam nyid rdo rje in the 15th century, and of that of Karma chags med in the 17th century. Be that as it may, the enormous disproportion in favor of 11th century materials is significant, especially when compared to other sections of the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. In the new Zhe chen prints of the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, the Yamāntaka cycles of the 'Jam dpal sku category start at the end of vol. 16 and extend to the 192 first pages of vol. 19; the corpus seems to be the same. Although in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, discussed below, a complete catalog of the Yamāntaka texts must also include those in the *dMod pa drag sngags* section, this is not the case in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* which does not single any Yamāntaka cycle as belonging to anything else than the 'Jam dpal sku section of the Mahāyoga.

²⁰ On the rNying ma side, see e.g. Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, p. 713: "A whole clay barrel, containing a *Yamāntaka* cycle, had been discovered as treasure by one Tumpa Gya Zhangtrom. Having copied out about half of the *Lord of Life, Evil and*

These similarities might, however, be better explained by the fact that they had a common origin: most of the rNying ma Yamāntaka traditions, which seem to have been introduced in Tibet by gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes (so not much more than one century before Rwa lo tsā ba's time) mostly originate from Nepal also.²¹

A large majority of the *tantras* were translated, according to their colophon, by gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, often in collaboration with the Nepalese master *Vasudhara (Bha su dha ra or Ba su dha ra, called a “Nepalese king,” *bal po'i rgyal po*), in the same way as most of Rwa lo tsā ba's materials originated from Nepal. In the vast corpus of rGya Zhang khrom's revelations, we even find a mention of the *tantras* being translated from “the language of Nepal” (*bal po'i skad*, Newari?).²² This connection with Nepal might lead to interesting discoveries, both regarding the history of the specifically Nepalese contributions to Tibetan Buddhism and as regards some uncommon features of the Yamāntaka *mantras*: after all, when formulas do not make sense in either Sanskrit or Tibetan, we might be better inspired not to decide too quickly that they are mere magical gibberish. It cannot be ruled out

Mean-hearted (tshe bdag sdig pa snying 'dzings), he went before Ra Lotsāwa, who appended [that teaching] to his own *Yamāntaka* cycle and invented an Indian origin, with the pretense that he had translated it [from Sanskrit]. Similarly, from among the many treasure troves of Bhumthang, he discovered numerous esoteric instructions about sorcery, exorcism, and hail, Vaiśravaṇa, Jambhala, Gaṇapati, and so forth. So it was that the *Yamāntaka* cycles of the new translation schools came to have many efficacious rites.” For a symmetrically inverted story of this meeting, see Cuevas 2015, pp. 163 sq. Esler 2022a, p. 191 confirms that rGya Zhang khrom must have been born in 1016, which is also the date commonly accepted for Rwa lo tsā ba's birth. But then it is difficult to make sense of traditional ideas about Rwa lo's death in 1128 or even 1198. Davidson 2005, p. 130, with his solid and vast knowledge of the Indian and Tibetan context, seems to admit this date as probable, although he mentions in passing (*ibid.*, n. 32 to this chapter) that Decler 1992 “considered some of the problems of this document.” The biography of Rwa lo tsā ba, ascribed to Rwa Ye shes seng ge and translated in Cuevas 2015, is heavily edited and contains enormous anachronisms. To take only examples relevant to our study of Northern Treasures, this text depicts him encountering both bZang po grags pa (p. 160) and even Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (pp. 99-100). The story recounted by Dudjom Rinpoche is not better grounded. In conclusion, Rwa lo and rGya Zhang khrom may actually have been contemporaries, and may, why not, have met—but we do not have any trustworthy source attesting it.

²¹ After Dylan Esler's careful scrutiny of the hagiographical materials in the context of his study on the *bSam gtan mig sgron* (2022b), it appears that it is mainly the large commentary on the *mDo dgongs 'dus* ascribed to Sangs rgyas ye shes (KSG: vol. 50 & 51) that remains to be examined in order to search for more historically exploitable clues about gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.

²² *lCags sdig lta ba'i mig gnyis las : bka' byed gser gyi lde mig las byung ba ur mo las sgrub* (in *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 18, pp. 335-349) p. 339 (it is gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes speaking): *bal yul yam bu'i tshal du ni : bha su dha ra nyid dang mjal : gshin rje zla gsang chos sde bsgyur : bal po'i skad las bod skad bsgyur ., etc.*

without further inquiry that these may be Tibetan phonetizations of languages other than Sanskrit.²³

Another topic for further researches is the inclusion in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* of three versions of what might be the main Yamāntaka *tantra* in the rNying ma tradition, the *Zla gsang nag po*—of which *only* the oldest one is presented as the work of gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.²⁴ This opens a new perspective about the so-called 'dark age' inasmuch as it implies an *ongoing* work of translation among Sangs rgyas ye shes' followers during the 10th and maybe the 11th century—which in turn seems to mean that the source of this distinct form of *Mahāyoga*, the heritage of which the rNying ma school has preserved, had not fully dried up in Nepal at the time of the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet.

Furthermore, the fact that those who became specialists of this frightening literature regarded themselves as *bodhisattvas* and were often rDzogs chen masters forces us to consider seriously the hypothesis of a form of spirituality that, however unfamiliar it may be to us, is central to the rNying ma *ethos* in general and that of the Byang gter tradition in particular: the idea of a meditator whose altruist duty is to deal, not occasionally, but systematically, with negativities—both human (invading armies, impious kings...) and non-human—by violent and complex ritual means in order to protect society from destructive forces.²⁵

²³ Kapstein, in his review (2017, pp. 559-560) of Dalton's *The Gathering of Intentions* (2016) may be right to reproach Jacob Dalton for merely assuming "that certain non-Tibetan vocabulary occurring in a part of the text [of the *mDo dgongs 'dus*] is 'Burushaski' without ever rigorously assessing whether or not there is any plausible relationship between the words in question and this language." But this should not be taken as blame for having *envisioned this possibility* and I for one have always been persuaded that a systematic analysis of the *mantras* in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* could tell us a lot about the origins of this vast corpus. A lot of them may belong to the category of 'elfic languages,' but maybe not all.

²⁴ See below for comparative tables of the three *Zla gsang nag po*.

²⁵ There is nothing new here about the idea of ritual violence in tantric Buddhism, which has been fully described and analyzed as a whole (e.g. Dalton 2011). But the fact that here we are dealing with something that made even a fully trained Tibetan tantric adept feel uncomfortable is salient in Benjamin Bogin's (2013) book, *The Illuminated Life of the Great Yolmowa*. It shows the gradual conversion of Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644) into a magical assassin of sorcerers and demons and it displays his reluctance, at first, for that specific career. It seems to me that the question of this kind of vocation, and of who is called to embrace it, is of the utmost importance from the point of view of religious anthropology—no less so than, for example, the question of the shamanic calling or that to become a treasure revealer, and that this goes beyond the mere understanding of this aspect of ritual violence in Buddhist texts. In most of the illustrations concerned, in Bogin's book, the main visual reference to these frightening practices that he is slowly led to implement is the typical *zor* of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* is clearly recognizable (n° 33 and 36a), although there are also allusions to Vajrakīla. And,

After an admittedly preliminary, rough, and tentative presentation of these issues related to the rNying ma pa's Yamāntaka literature as a whole ²⁶—rather intended to set questions clearly for further researchers than to solve any of them—we will shift to an overview of the contents of *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* and an attempt to retrace some of its history until it was inherited by the Northern Treasures masters.

Yamāntaka, Old and New

The pantheon of the rNying ma pa's superior *tantras*, except for Yamāntaka and a few other deities, is so significantly different from those that were spread during the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet that it may convey the feeling of a totally different brand of esoteric Buddhism. It is clearly not merely a question of 'earlier' and 'later' translations—even with an admittedly large part of Tibetan apocrypha among the former—but also of *completely different Indic corpora* as sources of these literatures, however 'gray'²⁷ they may be.

Of course, the impression we get from the various versions of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* is undoubtedly amplified by the fact that the common texts—those that were translated a first time during the early spread of Buddhism in Tibet, and later retranslated—may have been so perfectly replaced in common use by the new versions elaborated by the translators of the second spread that we are not always aware that these texts already circulated, maybe in a different form, before the 11th century. It may be because the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* retains mostly what was rejected from the common canon that our feeling of entering into an altogether different universe is so strong, compared to what it would be if it had preserved the whole bulk of the translations made before the second spread of Buddhism in Tibet: it is indeed impossible to get a complete picture of what Buddhism was before the later propagation of the Dharma, precisely because the

incidentally, it is also not mere coincidence that the main bulk of translations and studies of Vajrakīla texts that do not ignore this aspect of its practice (Boord 1992, 1993, 2002, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2020) are also connected to the Byang gter: if the magical war against evil is admittedly important in all forms of Buddhist tantrism and even more so in the rNying ma tradition, it is no exaggeration to say that this aspect was seen as even more central to the Byang gter branch of this school.

²⁶ For this paper, I have ignored the Dunhuang documents, which should also be researched in order to get a fuller picture. The reason for this blind spot in my analysis is not merely my lack of specialized competence in this field: I was keen to consider the corpus in relation to the Northern Treasures, and therefore from the emic point of view of the texts and traditions accessible to the protagonists in the field under consideration, particularly from the 14th to the 17th century.

²⁷ I borrow this term from Davidson 2005, meaning texts partly fabricated *ad hoc* by Indian *paṇḍitas* and partly completed by the Tibetans.

rNying ma pa may not have insisted on keeping all of their older versions of common material. They may, in many cases, have accepted the revised versions and preserved in a separate tantric canon of their own only the aspects of their traditions that had no equivalent among the Moderns.

The idiosyncratic coloration of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* may also be amplified by the inclusion of a lot of *gter ma* materials, preventing us from getting a clear picture of whatever may have been transmitted to Tibet prior to the 11th century.²⁸

It was, as we know, the general Tibetan practice to keep only one version of a given scripture that was regarded as the best, final one and not to archive those regarded as incomplete or provisional, though we accidentally find traces of alternative versions, especially in the forms of quotations that do not match the 'standard' or mainstream one.

The *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, however, partly follows different standards than the *bKa' 'gyur* and *bsTan 'gyur*: we sometimes find in it, as in the Chinese Canon, several successive versions, more or less 'corrected,' of the same text, as we shall see in this article in relation to the *Zla gsang nag po*.

It would be beyond the scope of the present paper to proceed to a serious comparison of the Yamāntaka *tantras* in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and those that found their way into the *bKa' 'gyur*; I can only point to this as a necessary task for future researchers. I will, here, merely provide a short description of the Yamāntaka *tantras* in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* with some cursive remarks.

Though the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism calls itself 'Ancient,' we can roughly consider that it reached its full blossoming only around the 13th or even the 14th century, when all the materials it had developed since the first introduction of Buddhism in Tibet got organized into a doctrinal, doxographic and narrative overarching framework that did not, from then on, undergo further substantial alterations,²⁹ except for the construction of a distinctive form of

²⁸ It is preferable to phrase things this way as we will see that the close examination of the Yamāntaka literature gives the feeling of ongoing exchanges with the Indo-Nepalese world even during what is commonly depicted as a 'dark age.'

²⁹ It could be argued that the 17th century saw another important turn, not merely on the social / institutional level with the foundation of large monasteries (rDo rje brag, sMin sgrol gling, etc.), but also with the final touch put to the constitution of great, complete liturgical systems. This is an aspect that has not yet been researched in-depth, but the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism had in fact quite few of those liturgical systems (e.g., for the dGe lugs pa, mostly rGyud stod and rGyud smad—independently of other differences regarding the *yig cha* for philosophical studies, etc.). Nowadays, the sMin sgrol gling liturgical system has become quite hegemonic among the rNying ma monasteries, even when they do not identify themselves as branches of sMin sgrol gling; however, rDo rje brag

scholasticism with Mi pham in the turn of the 19th and 20th century.

**1. Should the bKa' brgyad Overarching Structure
Be Presumed as a Background Frame of Interpretation
of all Yamāntaka Practices in the rNying ma Tradition?**

In the rNying ma tradition Yamāntaka occurs in two contexts: as the object of a separate practice, or as a subsection of the *bKa' brgyad* systems. Both of these are said to have 'uninterrupted oral transmission' (*bka' ma*) and 'hidden treasures' (*gter ma*) forms. We focus here on the *bka' ma* tradition of the *bKa' brgyad*—or, at least, on what is not explicitly assumed to be later revelations, but presented as materials imported from the Indian world.

The oldest version of the *bKa' brgyad* system, which does not present itself as a *gter ma*, is the *bKa' brgyad bka' ma rdzong 'phrang*, the vestiges of which are preserved mainly in vol. 67 of the *rNying ma bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, with some elements in vol. 13.³⁰

It is not the purpose of the present paper to give an overview of the *bKa' brgyad* systems as a context in which Yamāntaka occurs as 'Mañjuśrī, the Body [aspect]' (*'Jam dpal sku*); let us simply summarize the overall impressions that we get from scrolling through the colophons of the 78 texts of the *bKa' brgyad bka' ma rdzong 'phrang*:

- (1) Firstly, although this corpus is considered to be of uninterrupted oral tradition (*bka' ma*), it seems that it is a *gter chos* of Grub thob dngos grub, the 12th-century revealer of the *Ma ñi bka' 'bum*, who passed it to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192).
- (2) Secondly, it is gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and his disciple gNubs Khu lung pa Yon tan rgya mtsho (a.k.a. gTer bzhad rtsal, who appears to be the one who hid the corpus as a treasure) that have a central role, and not Padmasambhava, as in later *gter ma bKa' brgyad* cycles.³¹ The very central position of

retained its own, idiosyncratic liturgical system—and there were surely a few other ones).

³⁰ For a table of this volume of the *rNying ma bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, see <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/table-of-contents-of-the-three-volumes-of-jam-dpal-gshin-rje-in-the-mying-ma-bka-ma> on the FCHNT blog *Northern Treasures Histories*. My attention was originally drawn to this cycle through discussion with Robert Mayer, alluding to a forthcoming paper by Cathy Cantwell. I hope not to deflate the subject too much before this long-awaited article is finally published; I stick here to what is strictly necessary to my subject.

³¹ In the later rNying ma tradition, gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes is always presented as one of Padmasambhava's twenty-five disciples, and, more specifically, as the one who was the heir of the *'Jam dpal sku* traditions. It is now plain that he is a

gNubs chen, as in all the oldest Yamāntaka literature, is striking: as if in the early 12th century, it was at least as important to capture the reputation of this figure as that of Padmasambhava, etc.

- (3) Despite the centrality of Sangs rgyas ye shes, the text bears witness to a state of things in which some at least of the narrative framework about Padmasambhava's 'twenty-five disciples' is apparent. It seems that in the *rDzong 'phrang*, the general representation of the imperial time is already close to what would be found in Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's revelations (in terms of including Bai to tsa na, gNubs chen, etc., in a circle with, at its center, Padmasambhava and Khri srong lde btsan).
- (4) An element less relevant for our present concern but very much so for the later history of the Northern Treasures is that the collection seems to have been compiled by mNga' ris pañ chen (1487–1542) and (again?) by gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714) before it was finally edited by his son Padma 'gyur med rgya mtsho (1686–1718), thus passing to the sMin sgrol gling tradition.

My provisional conclusion is that the materials of unknown provenance compiled by Grub thob dngos grub in the 12th century appeared *later* than the bulk of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag and show rather less archaic features than this cycle (despite some ancient spellings that have survived what I suppose to have been quite a lot of editing by the 16th-17th centuries masters).

This implies, to start with, that we should not bother with the *bKa' brgyad* cycles as if they were *independent* sources of Yamāntaka materials. It sounds more reasonable to regard them as the fruits of efforts starting maybe in the 11th century, but reaching fruition in the 12th, to make a global sense of disparate *Mahāyoga* practice cycles that may have been first introduced separately and without any sense of a systematic, overarching unity. I did not derive, from scrolling through the *bKa' brgyad bka' ma rdzong 'phrang*, the sense of an *original* inclusion of the abundant Yamāntaka materials found in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* into a perfectly well-structured overarching whole, together with all the other *Mahāyoga tantras*, at a very early date.

'Jam dpal tshe bdag and other Yamāntaka cycles may thus be studied without always presuming their status as the 'Body' (*sku*) aspect of the *bKa' brgyad*.

figure belonging to the late 9th and maybe early 10th centuries. Although he may have been indirectly connected to Padmasambhava's teachings, he mostly appears as a disciple of the—undocumented—Nepalese "king" Vasudhara, in the Yamāntaka context, and of other masters for the *mDo dgongs 'dus*.

The *bKa' brgyad bka' ma rdzong 'phrang* collection contains lists of *tantras*, doxographies, etc., which convey the feeling of a unified rNying ma school in the making, of which we hardly find any traces in the *gter chos* ascribed to rGya Zhang khrom.³² Thus, I think it is methodologically reasonable, at this stage and for the reasons alleged, to provisionally leave out the *bKa' brgyad* cycles in the general interpretation of Yamāntaka in the early rNying ma traditions.

2. Yamāntaka in the rNying ma rgyud 'bum

In this vast collection,³³ vol. 25 (*Ra*, 803 pages), 26 (*La*, 1081 pages), 27 (*Sha*, 1179 pages), 28 (*Sa*, 899 pages), and 29 (*Ha*, 1023 pages) are fully devoted to Yamāntaka. Part of vol. 44 (*Phi*, 1061 pages) and 45 (*Bi*, 977 pages) are also made up of Yamāntaka *tantras*. This division of the main bulk into two groups seems to be governed by the *bKa' brgyad* scheme that presided upon the classification of the *Mahāyoga tantras* in all the editions of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*: the *tantras* in vol. *Ra–Ha* belong to the '*Jam dpal sku* category, while those in vol. *Phi–Bi* belong to one of the three last sections, especially the *dMod pa drag sngags* family.

In the first group, there is no hesitation about whether a *tantra* is connected to Yamāntaka or not: he is clearly the main deity in the center of a recognizable *maṇḍala*. In those *tantras*, he generally appears into roughly two forms, corresponding to the two sections found in the *rNying ma bka' ma* and not unfamiliar in the general Yamāntaka tradition (except for iconographical and ritual details):³⁴ Black Yamāntaka (Kṛṣṇayamāri) and Red Yamāntaka (Raktayamāri).³⁵ The second form is even more disconcerting than the first, in the sense that it contains *even more* (if possible) Tibetan elements, with a *more* unusual vocabulary. In the *bKa' ma*, it also contains more elements that are not so obviously purely magical, insofar as they combine considerations of inner yogas, 'channels, winds, and drops' (*rtsa rlung thig le*) with rites of destructive magic. Raktayamāri, incidentally, is also even more

³² I am aware that my argument is not above all criticism: it could admittedly be objected that '*Jam dpal tshe bdag* is mostly focused on practical issues of destructive magic and that if few or even no doctrinal explanations are found in it, it is not a question of *antiquity*, but of *literary genre*.

³³ All reference below is given in the Bhutanese edition based on the mTshams brag manuscript.

³⁴ See below for a description of the Kṛṣṇayamāri *maṇḍala* in '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*.

³⁵ See Wentz 2022c p. 188 *sq.* about "the classification of the discrete *tantras* of Vajrabhairava and Yamāri/Yamāntaka in Tibet into the tripart division as *Nag 'jigs skor gsum* or *Dgra gdong 'jigs gsum*" in the gSar ma traditions and the way it is dealt with in Cuevas 2021, p. 15. In the present state of research, nothing is known of this classification and its history in the rNying ma traditions.

than Kṛṣṇayamāri a figure that seems to combine Yamāntaka and Vajrapāṇi.

In the second group, it is more difficult to decide whether a text is or not to be regarded as a Yamāntaka *tantra*, as, quite often, Yamāntaka appears as the tutelary deity of all wrathful magic and can be invoked at the beginning of grimoires³⁶ in which he later plays little or no role. What is more, the *tantras* in the final sections of the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud* seem to be grouped mainly on the basis of their purposes, typically the type of spirits they are meant to control. However, I tried, in an admittedly tentative way, to spot those in which Yamāntaka is more central. A typical figure of these *tantras* is Nāgarakṣa³⁷ (especially at the end of the corpus), a form of Yamāntaka meant to grant control over the *nāgas*.

One more *tantra* is found in another part of the collection: the Yamāntaka *tantra* from Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*. The other *bKa' brgyad* systems are not documented in the *mTshams brag* collection. However, for example, rGod ldem's *bKa' brgyad rang shar*³⁸ does not have a Yamāntaka *tantra*.

I have not attempted to decide whether some of the “root” or “common” *tantras* of *Mahāyoga* and *Anuyoga* should also be regarded as Yamāntaka *tantras* in some sense. This remains to be researched.

In all, we can safely say that the rNying ma Yamāntaka corpus of tantric scriptures, leaving aside commentaries, practice manuals, and ritual texts proper, consists of at least 108 *tantras*, totaling over 5500 pages. None of them ever seems to have been properly compared to what is found in the *bKa' 'gyur*, or even merely described.

The overall impression one derives from leafing through the whole collection is that Ronald Davidson's general description of the rNying ma *tantras* in *Tibetan Renaissance*, when he insists on the more *philosophical* and less *ritual* character of the rNying ma *tantras*,³⁹ may

³⁶ I use this term as Sam van Schaik does in his book *Buddhist Magic* (van Schaik 2020), when a text seems to be a collection of ritual recipes that displays so little narrative, thematic or doctrinal consistency that they may just have been originally distinct texts, or fragments gathered from various sources and bound together by a magician for his practical use. Some of the Yamāntaka *tantras*, especially those in vol. 44 and 45, may be regarded as grimoires in that sense, though in general they start and end with some narrative elements that set up a sketchy common frame—the situation in which the series of recipes is supposed to have been taught by some form of Yamāntaka.

³⁷ See below in this volume, in the paper about Rin chen gling pa.

³⁸ *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 9-12.

³⁹ Davidson 2005, p. 74: “Even though their titles contained the word *tantra*, the Nyingma *tantras* seem unconventional and are much more philosophical and abstract than their Indian prototypes, which tend to emphasize rituals, *mantras*, painting, the ingestion of unattractive substances, and *materia medica*. By contrast, many Kahma [*i.e.*, *bKa' ma*] *tantras* positively revealed in new philosophical ideas

have been misled by the dominant interest of Tibetologists in rDzogs chen literature.⁴⁰ In fact, these Yamāntaka *tantras* are globally poor in concepts or contemplative insights; one will not even find there much development either on inner *yogas* involving body techniques: these are mostly thousands of pages of rituals of destructive magic.

Davidson is however globally right (though not systematically) when he says that rNying ma *tantras* tend to be long, with elaborate narrative frames somewhat reminiscent of Mahāyāna *sūtras*. And yet, many of the texts listed below feel like magical grimoires of ritual recipes barely pasted into sketchy narratives.

Further study will categorize these *tantras* in coherent families—the ones being variants of others, as the three *Zla gsang nag po tantras* studied below, or being complements and appendices of other ones (of the *rgyud phyi ma* or *bshad rgyud* type). It will also bring more clarity on issues of attribution, or at least provenance: many of the texts listed appear as *gter ma*, but without any indication about who is the *gter ston* in the colophon. I am confident that the *gter ston* will be recognized by future researchers.⁴¹

Another already spotted interesting feature of the corpus is the very central role gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes plays (or was made to play) in it. He appears twenty-eight times in the colophons of these *tantras* as the Tibetan translator, most commonly with “the Nepalese king Vasudhara” (twenty-two mentions). By comparison, Padmasambhava appears only in eight colophons; Krag ’thung nag po is mentioned three times. Other recurring figures are *Dhanadala and *Shan ting garbha.⁴²

Studying this literature gives the impression of a tradition that originated with gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes, with a later narrative that more or less artificially connected it to Padmasambhava. In the *gter ma* tradition, as early as the time of rGya Zhang khrom, things gradually got more balanced between Sangs rgyas ye shes and

and meditative practices, culminating in the very diffuse doctrines of Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*).” The same idea is also found on p. 228. This is absolutely not the case with the bulky corpus we are now dealing with.

⁴⁰ Indeed, the only example he analyzes is the *Rig pa rang shar chen po'i rgyud*, a very large *tantra* of the *rDzogs chen snying thig*. What he says is absolutely correct in this case. But maybe the main special feature of the rNying ma branch of Tibetan Buddhism is to combine “very diffuse doctrines,” as he phrases it, with a strong interest in magical techniques for the struggle against all forms of evil.

⁴¹ See for example my article about Rin chen gling pa in this volume, which singles some texts of the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud* as being from his *gter chos*.— In the list found as appendix 1 below, I have added in footnotes some of the elements of identification I could find from other sources, especially the 5th Dalai Lama’s *Record of Teachings Received*.

⁴² I have not made any effort to standardize the spelling of this figure’s name, which appears as *Śāntingarbha, *Shing ting gar bha, and in many other variants.

Padmasambhava, with the ideal, in the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* system, of combining a tradition from gNubs chen Sangs rgyas (gNubs lugs, often called *lCags sdig*) with one said to come from Padmasambhava (*Pad lugs*, often called *lCags 'dra*). Incidentally, rGya Zhang khrom is alluded to in five colophons of the collection and no other *gter ston* is explicitly mentioned, except in the *tantra* from the *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* that is obviously connected to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer.

One will find at the end of this article (appendix 1) a provisional⁴³ list of the 108 *tantras* connected to Yamāntaka in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, divided into those three categories—*'Jam dpal sku* of the Mahāyoga (80 *tantras*; 65 for Kṛṣṇayamāri and 15 for Raktayamāri); *dMod pa drag sngags* etc. (27 *tantras*); and *bKa' brgyad* (1 *tantra*)—with a few cursive remarks on each.

The Mysterious Black Companion and its Three Translations

Vol. *Ra* contains three large *tantras* that all bear, with small variants, the title *Zla gsang nag po*, quite poetically translated by Gustave-Charles Toussaint (1933) as “le *Mystérieux compagnon noir*.”⁴⁴

The first *Zla gsang nag po* (pp. 2-283) bears a (surely reconstructed) Sanskrit title: **Guhyacandraśrī kālasprahari kalitantra* (sic). The Tibetan title is given as merely *dPal zla gsang nag po'i rgyud* or *Zla gsang nag po'i rtsa ba'i rgyud chen po*. It has 283 pages and 75 chapters. The colophon states that the text was translated three times, or rather, corrected by three different translators (*lo tsa ba gsum gyis lan grangs gsum du bcos shing gtan la phab pa'o*), but it does not name any of them. In some of the conclusions of its chapters, this *tantra* is also called *dPal zla gsang nag po me lce 'phreng ba'i rgyud*.

This first *Zla gsang nag po*, said by the 5th Dalai Lama to have 74 chapters, ranks third in the list of rNying ma *tantras* in his *gSan yig*.⁴⁵

⁴³ Indeed, I have followed only two criteria: the structure of the collection (which gathers texts on the basis of tantric stratigraphy / doxography—all the listed Yamāntaka *tantras* are set in the Mahāyoga section—and then according to the main deity) and the titles of the texts. It is likely that further explorations of this immense collection will reveal that more *tantras* feature Yamāntaka as a central figure, maybe under other names or in unexpected sections.

⁴⁴ Toussaint appears to have confused different ‘Mysterious Companions’ as there are multiple *tantras* called *Zla gsang* in the rNying ma tantric canons. However, these ghoulish verses specifically mention the *Zla gsang nag po*:

“[Ils] traduisirent les *Tantra* de Mañjuśrī, du Dieu des Morts, du *Mystérieux Compagnon Noir*,

Le sūr contrat noir, les neuf fils, la cire magique et autres,

La nécromancie de la mère morte et maintes Formules redoutables.”

⁴⁵ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1970–71, vol. 4, pp. 522-523 : | *dpal zla gsang nag po me lce 'phreng ba'i rgyud la* | 'di skad bdag gis <523> | | *thos pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs kyi bdag nyid 'jigs byed kyi*

The second *Zla gsang nag po* (pp. 283-591) also has a Sanskrit title: **Guhyacandraśrī-kāla-aprahari-kalatantra*. The colophon does not contain any indication about its translation, but merely about its transmission. This text is also described in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*.⁴⁶ The book contains 74 chapters and 308 pages. There is a noticeable similarity to the previous edition, as if one was an emended version of the other but upon closer examination, it becomes clear that these two first *Zla gsang nag po* are in fact different expansions of the third one. The colophons tell yet another story: they present, indeed, the first text as a corrected version of the third one, but do not give any indication about how the second text was produced. We find in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* the idea that this text is a translation by Nam mkha'i snying po and not by gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.

The third *Zla gsang nag po* (pp. 591-803, 212 pages, shorter than the two previous ones) has only 58 chapters and the translation is clearly ascribed to Sangs rgyas ye shes. It also has an Indic title: **Guhyacandraśrī-kāla-aphrarikalatantra*. It is not described in the 5th Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*. The colophon bears a note *gnyis zhus*, "twice corrected," and this is most probably the oldest version. After comparison, the other two texts (*Zla gsang nag po* 1 and 2) appear to be independent revisions or expansions of the oldest text. Each of the two contains full sections that are not present in the other.

The mere fact that translation work continued in Tibet between gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes' time⁴⁷ and the second diffusion of Buddhism in the 11th century is quite remarkable. This also seems to

rgyal po che ba kun gyi bdag nyid zab mo'i gsung brjod du med pa'i sgra skad sna tshogs su gsung ba phrin rtoḡ thams cad ye nas lhun gyis grub pa'i dḡongs pa las mi g.yeng ba zhes sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | gleng bslang ba dang gsal byed lta ba bstan pa gnyis pa | gnas gzhi'i 'khor lo dang drag po gnad kyi 'khor lo mdor bstan pa gsum pa | 'bru shag grong khyer so brgyad pa | gsang ba thun sngags so dḡu pa | ngan sngags sngags rḡod bzhi bcu pa | gnod sbyin zla gsang gsang ba ltar sgrub pa don gnyis pa | mdze nad dzwa la dḡud pa klu'i zla gsang don gsum pa | 'jigs byed chen pos ḡdams pa dang 'khor rnam rjes su yi rang nas dam bcas pa'i le'u don bzhi pa'o | | lo tsā ba gsum gyis lan grangs gsum du bcos shing ḡtan la phab pa'o |.

⁴⁶ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1970–71, vol. 4, pp. 521-522 : *dPal zla gsang nag po ngan sngags thams cad kyi rtsa ba'i rgyud la | <522> 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus ḡcig na bcom ldan 'das 'jam dpal gshin rje'i ḡshed po lha mchog ya manta ka lho phyogs gshin rje'i gnas dur khrod chen po ḡtum drag tshal zhes bya ba na zhes sogs gleng gzhi byung khungs kyi le'u dang po | gleng bslang ba gnyis pa | thams cad zhi bar sgrub pa gsum pa | las kyi mdo byang chen po bstan pa so brgyad pa | pho mo lto dkrugs pa sogs pa so dḡu pa | gnam lcags thog 'bebs me lce'i 'phreng ba bzhi bcu pa | gang ba bzang po nang ltar sgrub pa don gnyis pa | sroḡ ḡcod spu gri gnod sbyin zla gsang gang ba bzang po gsang bar sgrub pa don gsum pa | man ngag rtsa ba'i thabs bstan pa don bzhi pa'o | | 'jam dpal bshes gnyen gyis changs pa klu gnod kyi bse'i ka ba la sbas | jñā na garbhas rnyed | nam mkha'i snying po la sindhu'i nags tshal du brgyud do |.*

⁴⁷ Which Dylan Esler 2022b, p. 88, after a few other scholars, has proved to be much later than what was commonly believed in Tibet.

be a rare case of a scripture being preserved in three successive Tibetan translations, its gradual expansion being perhaps better explained by the growth of the original Sanskrit (?) than by gradual Tibetan additions to it or rewritings of it. This remains to be researched.⁴⁸

A comparative table of the three versions will be found below as **appendix 2** of this article.

3. *Yamāntaka in the rNying ma bka' ma*

The Yamāntaka corpus in the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* has a simpler and better ordered structure than the collection in the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud*. It has three parts:

1. Three-faced Kṛṣṇayamāri in the form called 'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed kha thun nag po (vol. 4), very similar to the main form of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag with its surrounding maṇḍala;
2. Raktayamāri (vol. 5-6); and
3. Six-faced Kṛṣṇayamāri in the form 'Jam dpal gshin rje gdong drug nag po.

Other forms like Nāgarakṣa seem not to be present in the *bKa' ma* collection.

The volumes, despite their pretty simple and logical structure,⁴⁹ are somewhat chaotic insofar as they contain mostly undescribed, anonymous, and undated literature, except what has been added in the time of gTer bdag gling pa and his immediate successors. Thus, I

⁴⁸ The fourth *Zla gsang nag po* (the one contained in vol. *La*, p. 1-259) is a *gter ma*. However, no relevant information can be found in its colophon. Its volume is comparable to the three other ones, but it has 88 chapters. It seems to be an altogether different work and not another version of the same. The 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* (vol. 4, p. 522-523) also describes another, much shorter *Zla gsang nag po* in 8 chapters. | *dPal zla gsang nag po dregs pa tshar gcod kyi rgyud la* | 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na 'jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed po lha inchog ya manta ka lho phyogs gshin rje'i gnas (chen po'i) dur khrod gtum drag tshal zhes bya ba na zhes sogs gleng gzhi'i skabs dang po | ('di dang gong gi zla gsang rtsa rgyud gnyis le'u gnyis pa yan phyogs mtshungs tsam yod kyang le grangs la mang nyung yod do | |) gleng bslang ba gnyis pa | thams cad zhi bar sgrub pa gsum pa | 'bru shag gi skabs nyer bdun pa | nag po gsal byed sgron ma nyer brgyad pa | gdug pa klu nang ltar sgrub pa nga drug pa | mdze nad dzwa la gdug pa klu'i zla gsang ba bdun pa | rgyud gtad par brgyad pa'o | —In fact, there are many (approximately ten) *Zla gsang nag po* in the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud*.

⁴⁹ Each volume of the original *bKa' ma* compilation (i.e., the one bDud 'joms rin po che reedited, in which gTer bdag gling pa is omnipresent—not the later additions by *mKhan po* Mun sel and others, which do not exhibit the same systematic structure) contains, roughly: first the root texts of the cycle, sometimes even the *tantras*; then a selection of texts necessary for its transmission and for its practice.

have chosen not to include my very provisional catalogue here,⁵⁰ but merely to extract the materials most useful for historians, i.e., lineages. The details can be found below as **Appendix 3** of this article.

The Yamāntaka literature in the *rNying ma bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* is difficult to describe because of the proportion of anonymous texts which makes it difficult to classify and analyze on sound philological bases, which is true too for the corpus of *tantras* found in the various editions of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. In both cases, future researchers will have to select very limited portions and start with minute descriptions before any type of global, thematic and/or historical understanding may arise.

In the *Kha thun nag po* collections, very few texts can be traced or compared to anything else. The *gDong drug* section is actually full of Kong *sprul's* writings—but this is not the case with the *gShed mar* sections.

One more interesting point is that Vol. 5 of the *bKa' ma* collection contains four Raktayamāri *tantras*⁵¹ which should be compared with n°72-76 in Appendix 1.

In the same volume (pp. 269-334), we also find a very interesting text of which I made an extensive use in the table of lineages below: the *sNyan brgyud rin chen phreng ba* by gNubs Seng ge rgyal mtshan who presents himself as a student of Rwa Lo tsā ba and must therefore have been active in the early 12th century. This also makes him an important figure at the crossroads of the *rNying ma* and early *gSar ma* Yamāntaka traditions.⁵² It would be interesting to inquire in gNubs

⁵⁰ See: <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/table-of-contents-of-the-three-volumes-of-jam-dpal-gshin-rje-in-the-mying-ma-bka-ma>.

⁵¹ 1. *Srog bdag spu gri reg chod gsang ba'i rgyud*—pp. 24-50. In ten chapters, with *gter ma* marks and some *dākinī* scripts at the end, but no indication of a *gter ston* or a lineage.

2. *dPal gshin rje'i gshed dmar po'i bshad rgyud 'jigs rten las 'das pa'i mdo rgyud* or *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed dmar po'i 'jigs rten las 'das pa'i mdo rgyud*—pp. 50-94. In 25 chapters, plus a small appendix in verse. Ends with a small segment of lineage: *rDo rje thod phreng rtsal*; *rDo rje gser 'phreng rtsal*; *rDo rje yang dbang gter* (gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes); *rDo rje gter bzhad rtsal* (gNubs Yon tan rgya mtsho).

3. *gShin rje dmar mo gshan pa las kyi rgyud spu gri reg chod ru mtshon dmar po'i drag sngags*—pp. 94-105. In 9 chapters with a short epilogue in prose about Padmasambhava.

4. *dPal gshin rje dmar po mā ra ya gsang ba'i rgyud*—pp. 105-115. In seven chapters plus a small prose conclusion including a segment of lineage: 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen, Śrī Sīṅha, Padmasambhava, Khri srong lde'u btsan, *Sras* (?) *ston Dharmakīrti, rlung ston brgyud pa zam ma chad pa'o* |.

⁵² The following text in the same volume (pp. 334-350), the *bCom ldan 'das 'jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed dmar po'i rnam bshad nyer mkho bsdu pa*, is an appendix of the previous text but strangely seems to allude to it as a *lHa rje bkra shis dar gyis mdzad pa'i snyan brgyud rin po che'i phreng ba*. It unfortunately ends up abruptly without a proper colophon.

Seng ge rgyal mtshan and whether this is the same person as gNubs *kyi gdung brgyud lHa rje* Hūṃ chen, himself probably the same person as Hūṃ chen bKra shis dar, which, according to the chart above, must have been roughly contemporary and is found on the side of the Kṛṣṇayamāri lineages.

In vol. 6 (pp. 5-32), we find another interesting writing by the same gNubs Seng ge rgyal mtshan, the '*Jam dpal dmar po'i dbang gi rim pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*'.

Although he does not show up in the Yamāntaka corpus of the *rNying ma bka' ma*, mention should be made, in passing, of Rong zom *paṇḍita* Chos kyi bzang po (1040–1159):⁵³ his presence was spotted by Aleksandra Wenta (2022c: p. 189) in the lineages of the 'Zhang system' of Vajrabhairava.

The role that Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po actually played in the rNying ma tantric traditions is not entirely clear. Although he is credited with many points in Klong chen pa's interpretation of the *gSang ba snying po*, which later became the dominant reading of this *tantra* among the rNying ma pa, his name does not appear in the lineages to which Klong chen pa refers. Nor is he frequently mentioned in other known transmission lines of rNying ma tantrism. The doctrines that later tradition attributes to him are not clearly present in the preserved parts of his writings. Therefore, his high reputation among contemporary rNying ma pa is not fully understood. Further research is necessary to clarify this matter.

4. *Yamāntaka in the Rin chen gter mdzod*

The Yamāntaka literature in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* has been superficially alluded to above in order to document the fact that Yamāntaka is essentially, in the rNying ma traditions, an 11th-century deity, or rather a deity whose canon was fixed in the earliest centuries and was not as substantially enriched later on as it would be the case for, e.g., Vajrakīla or, to a lesser degree, Hayagrīva.

The *Rin chen gter mdzod* cannot always be regarded as a fair and well-balanced testimony of the whole *gter ma* phenomenon among the rNying ma pa. Admittedly, Kong *sprul* and the other masters associated with its compilation and production of materials (mKhyen brtse'i dbang po and mChog 'gyur gling pa, whose revelations are over-represented in the corpus) had their own complex agendas which will not be discussed here.

Their erudition in the field of *gter ma* literature, however, was immense and in many cases, they seem to have included materials

⁵³ On Rong zom, see Köppl 2008 or Sur 2017.

according to their view of the intrinsic (or historical) importance of the chosen cycles, despite the fact that, in their time, nobody may have been interested in them.⁵⁴

Hence, setting up a list of the main cycles in the sTod lung collection while replacing them in the historical order (as I have done already in note 19 above) and spotting a few interesting texts may provide some background for *Mañjuśrī Master of Life*, although nearly everything is in fact posterior to rGya Zhang khrom.

This is the occasion for the introduction of an interesting issue: why, in this case, did the oldest *gter chos* remain dominant, while the normal situation in the rNying ma school is to regard more recent revelations as more loaded with blessings, and, sometimes, more “advanced” (inasmuch as later strata of revelations may include the most up to date tantric or rDzogs chen technologies)? *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* is indeed very archaic in many ways, and it is curious that in this case the rNying ma pa preserved so carefully their old heritage—in a much more efficient way indeed that what they achieved with, e.g., Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer’s *gter chos*, a large part of which seems to be lost.

From a typological point of view, the cycles described can be classified according to the main deity: most of them feature the dark blue, three-headed, Heruka, with a white face on the right and a red one on the left, with six arms and four legs, in union with Vetālī. This is the case, with more or less significant variants, for rGya Zhang khrom, *lHa rje* gNubs chung, Zur mkhar mNyam nyid rdo rje, gTer bdag gling pa, mKhyen brtse dbang po and mChog ’gyur gling pa.

Another form that can be regarded as classical is Nāgarakṣa, instantiated by the discoveries of Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer, Rin chen gling pa, gNam chos Mi ’gyur rdo rje and Thugs mchog rdo rje.

The complete absence of Raktayamāri in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* must be noted. It thus seems that this deity fell into some degree of disuse sometime during the 13th century—that of the latest texts that can be spotted in the *bKa’ ma* collection.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ A good example would be Rin chen gling pa’s *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*, which was “retreasured” (*yang gter*) by mKhyen brtse’i dbang po, it seems, just because he believed it was too important for the rNying ma school to be without, even though the lineage had been lost. This is discussed in my article about Rin chen gling pa in this volume.

⁵⁵ There are however in Kong *sprul*’s anthology texts from the *gter ma* of *Gu ru* Chos dbang and of Sangs rgyas gling pa that feature a form of Kṛṣṇayamāri which, to some degree, is reminiscent of Raktayamāri as found in the *bKa’ ma*. It has a very different iconography with one face, two arms and two legs and very specific *mantras*. This form of Yamāntaka flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries, precisely when Raktayamāri practices seemed to become rarer and one can wonder if some of the legacy of the Raktayamāri tradition has not passed into these cycles.

Finally, the *Rin chen gter mdzod* bears witness to the appearance in the 15th century (Ratna gling pa) and survival at least until the 17th century (gNam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje) of a more or less synthetic deity combining attributes of the rNying ma Kṛṣṇayamāri with the Vajrabhairava specific to gSar ma traditions.

A. *rGya Zhang khrom (11th century)'s 'Jam dpal tshe bdag*
(vol. 26, pp. 1-418 and vol. 28, pp. 299-461)

rGya Zhang khrom's revelations will not be described in this part of the article, as they will be addressed in its final section. An interesting point however, compared to the 10-vol. collection in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, is the division of the corpus into two different cycles, which is not easy to spot in the larger, more encyclopedic *Byang gter* compilation.

The cycle found in vol. 26 is called *gShin rje gshed phyag rgya zil gnon tshe bdag lcags 'dra*. As described in the final section of this article, the curious phrase *lcags 'dra*, "iron-like," alludes to the traditions of that deity said to be connected with Padmasambhava, by contrast with those from gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, called *The Iron Scorpion (lCags sdig)* because the instructions are given with reference to parts of the body of a monstrous scorpion which serves as mnemonic tools to remember them all.

The other *gter chos* of rGya Zhang khrom found in vol. 28 is not presented as the *lCags sdig* as such, but as *The Black Poisonous Bronze Tree (gShin rje khro chu dug dgong nag po)* as transmitted in the 'Bri gung bka' bgyud tradition.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ For more on this deity and its presence in the *Byang gter* compilation, see Brown 2023 in this volume. I have chosen other translations than Amanda Brown for the two parts of that deity's name, *khro chu* and *dug sdong*.

1. *Khro chu* does not always mean "molten bronze." It can also mean melt-purified bronze, with the connotation of an extremely hard substance (oral information from *Slob dpon bsTan 'dzin nam dag* while interpreting for him on the occasion of teachings on one of the *Nyams rgyud* of the *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* around 2005).

2. The term *dug sdong* has been translated as 'poisonous tree' based on a passage in the English-language prefaces added by Chimed Rigdzin Rinpoche to his editions of the *mKha' 'gro gsang mdzod* (W1KG9670) and the *mKha' 'gro dgongs 'dus* (W1KG10777) from the *gter chos* of 'Khor gdong *gter chen* Nus ldan rdo rje (1802–1864). These three volumes contain a biographical sketch of Khams *sprul* Shes rab me 'bar (1742–1815), who transformed 'Khor gdong into a *Byang gter* institution in the 18th century. These biographies include a prophetic letter attributed (despite the chronological inconsistency) to the 5th Dalai Lama, addressed to Khams *sprul* Shes rab me 'bar (pp. 10-11 of these three volumes), which mentions "Yamantaka Visavrksa," which is *viṣavrksa*, C. R. Lama's Sanskrit reconstruction of *gShin rje dug sdong*. This at least proves that such a scholarly *Byang gter* master understood *dug sdong* to mean "poisonous tree."

As for the first of the two cycles, *The Iron-like Master of Life*, it is interesting to note, for our Byang gter-centered research, that the lineage (vol. 26, p. 1) passes through Byang *bdag* bKras shis stobs rgyal. However, the large *sādhana* text with which it begins (pp. 3-23) is a writing of gTer *bdag* gling pa. Another interesting fact is that Kong *sprul* sampled texts from both the *Pad lugs* (the *lCags 'dra* proper) and the *gNubs lugs* (the *lCags sdi*g), as he states that the text p. 61-69, ascribed to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, belongs to the *gNubs lugs*.

The contents of the selection will not be further described as they are all included also in the Byang gter compilation, with maybe the exception of a large empowerment text by 'Jam mgon Kong *sprul*,⁵⁷ which is very rich in various information.

B. *lHa rje gNubs chung's Yang bzlog me'i spu gri*
(vol. 26, pp. 417-621)

lHa rje gNubs chung is known as a disciple of rGya Zhang khrom and as Mi la ras pa's (1040–1123) teacher for “black” magic. We can thus presume that he was active in the 11th century.

The main deity for this cycle is the same Heruka as in *'Jam dpal tshé bdag*, the only iconographic difference being that he holds a golden hook in the first left hand, “in order to bring [capture] the hearts of the enemies of the doctrine to whom we send their spells back”.⁵⁸ It can surely be regarded as an appendix of *'Jam dpal tshé bdag* rather than a fully independent cycle.

The *Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'* (pp. 433-465) composed for this cycle by the 5th Dalai Lama (Zil gnon drag po rtsal) in 1665 (*shing sbrul*) describes a lineage (pp. 434-436):

gShin rje gshed; rDo rje rnon po; dGa' rab rdo rje; 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen; Sāntimgarbha; Ye shes snying po; Nam mkha' snying po; Khrag 'thung nag po; gTsug lag dpal dge; Padmasambhava; Vasudhara; gNubs *chen* Sangs rgyas ye shes; Yon tan rgya mtsho; Ye shes rgya mtsho; rDo *ston* lCags spe ba;⁵⁹ Me *ston* Dran chung; Dran *ston* mTha' bral; dKon mchog rin chen; bKra shis rgyal mtshan; Gangs pa Śākya 'bum; Gra phyi g.Yung *ston pa*; rGyal ba rDo rje; Rig 'dzin Dar ma; rNal 'byor dbang phyug; Phyang *ston* Sangs rgyas mgon; *Bla chen* Khams *ston*...

⁵⁷ The *bCom ldan 'das 'jam dpal phyag rgya zil gnon gyi dbang chog pad gnubs chu bo gcig 'dres smin byed ye shes 'khor lo*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 26, pp. 333-416.

⁵⁸ P. 429: *g.yon gyi dang po lCags kyu yis: sngags zlog bstan dgra'i snying nas 'gugs:*.

⁵⁹ This may be the “lCags spyil ba” of the lineage chart in appendix 3 below.

From this point on, the *gter ma* lineage begins. The idea seems to be that *lHa rje gNubs chung* obtained the lineage from the above masters and had a personal revelation of the same materials as a complement, although we do not have a clear narrative:

...*lHa rje gNubs chung*; *mTshur ston* [Rin rdor⁶⁰]; *sKu Zhang* [dpal]; *Tshul khirms rin chen*; *Byang mgon Nam mkha' mtshan*; *Tshul khirms rgya mtsho*.

The next figure is said to have combined the *bKa' ma* and *gTer ma* teachings, so maybe this is actually with him only that the two lineages merged, which might mean that he was a direct student of both *Bla chen Khams ston* and *Tshul khirms rgya mtsho*:

rGya ston nam mkha' dpal; *gNam lcags me 'bar*;⁶¹ *Chos rgyal Phun tshogs rje*;⁶² *bTsan yag sprul sku bKra shis rdo rje*; *lHa sras dBur smyon*;⁶³ *bSod [nams] rin [chen]*; *Phrin las mtshan*;⁶⁴ *Kun mkhyen Nyang ston*;⁶⁵ *rGyal sras rje*;⁶⁶ *Byang bdag yab sras*;⁶⁷ *Grang so gter ston*.⁶⁸

I do not follow this lineage any further as the later masters are less obscure and as information about them belonging to this lineage is consequently less relevant here.

This cycle contains two other compositions by the 5th Dalai Lama:

- The *Yang zlog las byang rdo rje thog mda'i stan thabs rig 'dzin zhal gyi drod rlangs* (same volume, pp. 471-489), an appendix of the previous one, which proves the Dalai-Lama's deep interest in this sub-cycle as well as in *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* as a whole.
- The *Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i las sbyor gyi sngon 'gro bsnyen yig vaidūrya'i do shal* (pp. 491-513).

⁶⁰ Precision found in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gsan yig* which mentions him and the following people in a lineage stemming directly from *rGya Zhang khrom* through *Ye shes gzungs*.

⁶¹ *'Bri gung rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs* (1509–1557).

⁶² Seems to be the same person as the previous.

⁶³ *'Bri gung chung tshang 01 Chos kyi grags pa* (1595–1659, a key figure in the *rNying ma Yamāntaka* systems in the 16th century).

⁶⁴ Could be *'Bri gung che tshang 02 dKon mchog 'phrin las bzang po* (1656–1718).

⁶⁵ Probably *Nyang ston O rgyan don grub* (bdrc: P5603).

⁶⁶ *Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rje*? The name seems to allude more to *'Bri gung nobility*.

⁶⁷ *Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal* and *Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po* (1580–1639).

⁶⁸ In this case: *Yol mo sprul sku 03 bsTan 'dzin nor bu* (1589–1644).

C. *Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer* (1124–1192—vol. 29, pp. 1-3)

The complete cycle, if there ever was such a thing, seems to have been called *Srin po nāgarakṣa ti pa tsa shin tu drag po*. Only one very short text stands for the whole in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. It appears as placed where it is merely as an introduction to Rin chen gling pa's Nāgarakṣa cycle. The text presents a lineage for Nyang ral's Nāgarakṣa cycle (not found, for whatever reason in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*), on page 3.⁶⁹ The lineage is notable because it goes through Padma las 'brel rtsal. This is noteworthy for three reasons: (1) It gives us a clue about a master who trained Padma las 'brel rtsal in the Nyang gter; (2) because of Padma las 'brel rtsal's ties with Rin chen gling pa,⁷⁰ that might be a hint about who may have trained the latter also in the *Nyang gter* and especially in the practice of Nāgarakṣa. This could then help us to further reconstruct the lineage through which rGod ldem received it;⁷¹ (3) the identification of Padma las 'brel rtsal's disciple as bSod nams seng ge is an important clue for the identification of Klong chen pa's master Khro phu pa as Khro phu pa bSod nams seng ge.⁷²

D. *Gu ru Chos dbang's* (1212–1270) gShin rje char kha nag po
(vol. 27, pp. 319-434)

The main aspect of Yamāntaka in this cycle seems to be different from anything we have met so far: it is a one-faced, two-armed dark blue deity, holding a staff and a war-axe in his right hand and making the conjuration *mudrā* with the left. The main *mantra* is apparently the *om hrīḥ ṣṭi*, etc. also found in gSar ma traditions. Unfortunately, the selection in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* does not seem to present a lineage for this practice.

E. *Rin chen gling pa's* (1289–1368) 'Jam dpal klu bdud Nāgarakṣa
(vol. 29, pp. 5-123)

Information regarding this cycle can be found in the article about this *gter ston* in the present volume.

⁶⁹ Padmasambhava; mNga' bdag Khri srong lde btsan; Jo mo mTsho rgyal; mNga' bdag Nyang ral pa can; mNga' bdag 'Gro mgon (1184–1221); Yar lung sprul sku;⁶⁹ Slob dpon gNas lugs; sPrul sku Las 'brel rtsal (1291–1319); [Khro phu pa?] bSod nams seng ge.

⁷⁰ See in the present volume the article on this *gter ston*.

⁷¹ It is a pity that we have no clue about who is Slob dpon gNas lugs; but at least we know that he was a grand-disciple of Gu ru Chos dbang through Yar lung sprul sku, active at the turn of the 13th and 14th century.

⁷² A.k.a. Khro phu ba sems dpa' chen po, b. 13th c. (bdrP3098). On this identification, see Arguillère 2007: pp. 73-75.

F. *Sangs rgyas gling pa* (1340–1396)'s
 'Jam dpal nag po thugs kyi yang zhun
 (vol. 27, pp. 435-554, and vol. 28, pp. 1-89)

This might correspond to what is called *gShin rje tshe bdag* in the *gTer ston brgya rtsa*.⁷³ The main deity, as with *Gu ru Chos dbang*, seems to be a one-faced, two-armed dark blue figure, with a club ending in a skull in his right hand and a skull-cup in the left. The *mantras* are specific and no *bKa' ma tantra* seems to be quoted in Kong *sprul's* selection. A *sādhana* composed by Kong *sprul* (the *Zab rgya gsum pa 'jam dpal nag po yang dag thugs kyi tshal pa'i phrin las rjes gnang dang bcas pa mthu stobs mchog tu rgyas pa*, vol. 28, pp. 53-89) presents a lineage prayer; but none of the named figures seem to be known in the context of either the Northern Treasures or the general Yamāntaka tradition.

G. *Ratna gling pa's* (1403–1478) dPal rdo rje 'jigs rje me'i spu gri
 (vol. 28, pp. 91-138)

The second text in Kong *sprul's* selection (the '*Jigs rje me'i spu gri dbang skur ba'i cho ga gsang bar bkod ba 'gyur med snying po*) strangely presents this cycle as a sub-section of a cycle devoted to Hayagrīva (according to its title *rTa mgrin gsang ba 'dus pa*). The main *yi dam* of this cycle is a typical rNying ma *heruka*—three-faced, six-armed, and four-legged—but with the central face being that of a buffalo, as in the *gSar ma Vajrabhairava*. As we will soon see, a buffalo-faced deity already occurs in the '*Jam dpal tshe bdag* cycle (prior to *Rwa lo tsā ba's* Vajrabhairava translations and teachings) as the "mind emanation" of Yamāntaka (and not the central deity itself). The one described here looks like a synthesis of Vajrabhairava and the more standard rNying ma Kṛṣṇayamāri. Of Vajrabhairava, he does not only have the buffalo face, but also the first right and left hands holding a *gri gug* and a skull cup on his heart. But, of the central deity of '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*, he does not merely have the typical Heruka-structure, but also the sword and the wheel (weapon) in his other right hands, for example (the left ones display a club or stick and an axe, only the first of which is common with '*Jam dpal tshe bdag*). The main *mantra* is the *om hrīḥ ṣṭi*, etc.—the main Vajrabhairava *mantra*. This cycle would deserve deeper investigation, but it looks like a synthesis of *gSar ma* and rNying ma

⁷³ See e.g. Dargyay 1977, p. 135. But Kong *sprul* also alludes to '*Jam dpal dkar dmar nag gsum* (ibid. p. 138) as to something he personally received. This may be a generic designation meaning a peaceful Mañjuśrī cycle (the "white" one) plus two Yamāntaka cycles—Kṛṣṇayamāri and Raktayamāri. However, only Kṛṣṇayamāri is sampled in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.

traditions, which might be related to the rising popularity of Vajrabhairava in the 15th century among the dGe lugs pa and Sa skya pa.⁷⁴

H. *Zur mkhar mNyam nyid rdo rje (1439–1475) and Karma chags med (1613–1678)’s Synthesis: ‘Jam dpal gshin rje ki kang nag po (vol. 28, pp. 149–297)*

Zur mkhar mNyam nyid rdo rje (Bdr:P3016) is better known as a physician, but is clearly pointed to as the one who made up this tradition from a combination of *bka’ ma* and *gter ma* sources, according to the English introduction of the volume in the sTod lung *Rin chen gter mdzod*. An explanation—which would itself require many clarifications, as it alludes to information that we do not currently possess—is found in Kong sprul’s *‘Jam dpal gshin rje gshed pha rol rgod ‘joms kyi dbang chog bdud bzhi g.yul ‘joms* (vol. 28, pp. 249–280):

The ultimate [summits] of the nine vehicles are the three great *yogas*. [Among them,] the Dharma section of the *Mahāyoga* [of the] creation [phase] has two parts: *tantra* and *sādhana*. Here [we are dealing with] the first of the eight great sections of the *sādhana* [part], the category of the Body, [that of] Mañjuśrī. It is subdivided according to the [Buddha] families: Phyag rgya zil gnon is the *tathāgata-kūla* [aspect of Yamāntaka]; ‘Joms byed nag po is [that of] the *vajra-kūla*; Ka thun is [that of] the *ratna-kūla*; ‘Jigs byed ru mtshon dmar po is [that of] the *padma-kūla*; Shor sang nyi ma is [that of] the *karma-kūla*.⁷⁵ In this way, there is a fivefold division according to the families. Within the *tathāgata[-kūla]* itself, [this] belongs to the *karma-kūla*. Now if one divides Yamāntaka into the three [aspects]—of primordial wisdom, activity and mundane [achievements—this] is on the side of primordial wisdom.⁷⁶

Among the eight aspects of the common *Master of Life* [system from] the ancient *bka’ ma* and *gter ma* traditions, this is the branch known as *Ki kang mnan pa*. [In this branch, Yamāntaka is] also

⁷⁴ Ratna gling pa is of interest also for research on the Northern Treasures, because it seems to be him who, while compiling the *rNying ma rgyud ‘bum* and including in it a lot of *gter ma* materials, did not, for whatever reason, pick any of rGod ldem’s revelations.

⁷⁵ The quoted passage is in pp. 251–253: *De la theg dgu’i mthar thug yo ga chen po gsum gyi bskyed pa ma hā yo ga’i chos sde las rgyud sde dang sgrub sde gnyis las | ‘dir sgrub pa chen po sde bryad kyi thog ma ‘jam dpal sku’i rigs la nang gses su | phyag rgya zil gnon de bzhin gshegs pa’i rigs | ‘joms byed nag po rdo rje’i rigs | kha thun rin po che’i rigs | ‘jigs byed ru mtshon dmar po padma’i rigs | shor sang nyi ma las kyi rigs te rigs lngar dbye ba’i...*

⁷⁶ *De bzhin gshegs pa’am las kyi rigs su gtogs shing | ye shes dang | las dang | ‘jig rten pa’i gshin rje gshed po gsum du dbye ba’i tshe ye shes pa’i phyogs yin la | ...*

presented as being substantially identical with the great wrathful Acala.⁷⁷

On the basis of the *Shor sang nyi ma khros pa* and the *Tantra of the Dark Red Magic Bomb*, there is the Indian system exposed by the master Mañjuśrīmitra. [Other than that,] among the astrological *tantras* [classified?] according to the five elements, there was such [texts as] the *Iron Tantra of Pā la pa tra*, which Bee ro tsa na translated from the Chinese. [Then] the intention of various *tantras* was expounded by the second Buddha, the great master Padmasambhava. The stream of the instructions [from these three sources] was inherited by gNubs *chen Sangs rgyas ye shes rin po che* [who transmitted it] to his supreme son Khu lung pa Yon tan rgya mtsho and this was [then] passed from generation to generation (*rim par*). [These three are the] uninterrupted oral transmission.⁷⁸

What had been hidden as profound treasures was discovered by the great emanated treasure discoverers such as Gru gu Yang dbang [gter],⁷⁹ rGya Zhang khrom rDo rje 'od 'bar, Gu ru Chos kyi dbang phyug, Padma las 'brel rtsal, Nyi zla sangs rgyas, etc. All these empowerments and instructions without exception were inherited (*bka' babs pa*) by Zur mkhar ba A bo chos rje. Himself [253] had obtained the *siddhis* of Nāgarakṣa, Mañjuśrī of the family of the Master of Death, prophesied in the great prophecy sealed [with the seal of secrecy] as one of the 'six eyes of the Dharma,' whose actual name was *Chos rgyal dPal bzang po*, and whose secret name was mNyam nyid rdo rje.⁸⁰

He condensed the substance of many [teachings] from the uninterrupted oral transmission and the hidden treasures into what is called the Zur mkhar tradition [of] Ki kang, a tradition [well-

⁷⁷ sNgon gyi bka' gter thun mong pa'i gshin rje tshe bdag rna cha brgyad du bgrangs pa'i ya gyal ki kang mnan pa'i rna char grags pa 'di nyid khro bo chen po mi g.yo ba dang ngo bo gcig par yang bshad cing | ...

⁷⁸ Shor sang nyi ma khros pa dang zor ba dmar nag gi rgyud sogs la brten nas slob dpon 'jam dpal bshes gnyen gyis bkral ba'i lugs rgya gar nas 'gyur ba dang | rtsis rgyud 'byung ba lnga'i ya gyal pā la pa tra lcags kyi rgyud sogs la brten nas bkral ba lo chen bai ro tsa nas rgya nag nas bsgyur ba dang | rgyud du ma'i dgongs pa sangs rgyas gnyis pa slob dpon chen po padma sam bha was bkral ba sogs gdams ngag gi chu bo ma lus pa gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes rin po che la babs te sras mchog khu lung pa yon tan rgya mtsho sogs nas rim par brgyud pa'i bKa' ma dang | ...

⁷⁹ Gru gu Yang dbang gter is a completely obscure figure. rDo rje yang dbang gter is the secret initiatory name of gNubs *chen Sangs rgyas ye shes*, but, in the context, this does not seem to be him.

⁸⁰ Zab mo'i gter du sbas pa rnam sprul pa'i gter ston chen po gru gu yang dbang | rgya zhang khrom rdo rje 'od 'bar | gu ru chos kyi dbang phyug | padma las 'brel rtsal | nyi zla sangs rgyas sogs kyi spyang drangs pa lugs srol tha dad pa'i dbang dang gdams ngag ma lus pa zur mkhar a bo chos rje la bka' babs pa ste | de'ang | lung bstan chen po bka' rgya ma las chos kyi spyang can drug gi nang tshan du lung bstan par grags pa'i mtshan dngos chos rgyal dpal bzang po | gsang ba'i mtshan mnyam nyid rdo rje zhes bya ba 'jam dpal 'chi bdag gi rigs nā ga rakṣa la grub thob des...

grounded in] authoritative Scripture, [providing] maturation and liberation [and] endowed with the warmth of blessings [...]⁸¹

The next lines of this fascinating but obscure text⁸² are about the way in which Karma chags med inherited this tradition, combined it with others and made it his main practice, so that, we can suppose, it became part of the legacy of what later known as the dPal yul tradition.⁸³ It should therefore be considered together with the next two cycles, since their transmission channels were probably the same after Karma chags med.

The main deity of this cycle is a form of Kṛṣṇayamāri that is much less surprising in a rNying ma context: dark blue, with three faces, the central one being blue, the right one white and the left red, with six hands holding, on the right, a sword, a hammer, and an impaling stake and, on the left, an iron hook, a lasso made of a snake and a plough. He is in union with a red Vetālī holding a *kīla* and an iron net. In his heart, inside a golden *stūpa* is a four-armed peaceful Mañjuśrī (see, e.g., *bCom ldan 'das 'jam dpal zhi khro'i nyam len rgyun khyer mchog thun gyi dngos grub myur du thob par byed pa'i rdo rje go cha*, vol. 28, pp. 182-183). The main *mantra* is specific, beginning with *om mañjuśrī yamāntaka yamarāja*, etc., and another one, which seems quite unique to this cycle, begins *om ki kang*, etc. (the word *ki kang* is often found in rNying ma Yamāntaka *mantras*).

I. *gNam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje (1645–1667)'s
rDo rje 'jigs byed Sādhana
(vol. 28, pp. 139-147)*

The main deity is Vajrabhairava, with one buffalo face and four arms, the first two holding a *gri gug* and a skull-cup on his heart, while the other right arm holds a spear and the other left one a *vajra*. The *mantras* are the usual ones for Vajrabhairava in the gSar ma traditions, *om hrīḥ ṣṭi*, etc. and *om yamarāja sadomeya* etc.

⁸¹ ...*bKa' gter mang po'i bcud gcig tu bsdus pa'i king kang zur mkhar lugs zhes khungs btsun cing byin rlabs kyi drod dang ldan pa'i smin byed tshad ma bka' gzhung dang bcas pa'i rgyun dang* | ...

⁸² *gZhan yang brgyud pa mang po las 'ongs pa'i smin grol gyi gdams pa mang po'i rgyun grub chen karma chags med la 'dus shing* | *de nyid kyis kyang thugs dam gyi gtso bor mdzad pa'i brgyud pa sel med las byung ba 'di lta bu'i dbang bskur bsgrub par byed pa* | ...

⁸³ There are many allusions to Yamāntaka in his biography of *gNam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje* (see *Khenpo Sonam Tsewang & Judith Amtzis* 2022).

J. *gNam chos Mi 'gyur rdo rje (1645–1667)'s Nāgarakṣa Sādhana*
(vol. 29, pp. 125-133)

This text presents an unusual form of the deity with only one face (maybe topped by seven snake heads and a *garuḍa* head, although the text is not absolutely clear) and four arms, the two main first ones holding a *gri gug* and a skull-cup on his heart, while the other right arm holds a sword and the other left a snake-lasso. He has *garuḍa* wings and his body is “of the color of the sky.” The legs, as usual, are two snake tails. The *mantra* also is slightly original.

K. *gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714)'s gShin rje dregs 'joms*
(vol. 27, pp. 1-85)

This cycle features a variant of the standard rNying ma Kṛṣṇayamāri, very similar to the main deity of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag, except for his third right hand holding a curved knife instead of a *vajra*, and the two first left hand, with a skull-cup in the first and a club (or staff) in the second, instead of a club (or staff) in the first and a pestle in the second (vol. 27, pp. 11-12 for a description). The *yum* also has slightly different manual attributes—a curved knife in the right hand and a skull-cup in the left instead of a human heart in the right hand and a skull-cup in the left. These two main deities are, as in 'Jam dpal tshe bdag, inside a triangle inscribed within a disc, with the three emanations of body, speech, and mind in the three portions of the disc not included in the triangle, as in 'Jam dpal tshe bdag, although the details are different, including the respective positions of these three emanations in the three places. The *mantras* are classical for a rNying ma Kṛṣṇayamāri, without the “long E” *mantra* that seems to be found only in 'Jam dpal tshe bdag.

L. *Thugs mchog rdo rje (18th cent.)'s*
Dregs 'dul drag po gnam lcags 'khor lo
(vol. 29, pp. 135-193)

This is also a Nāgarakṣa cycle. Thugs mchog rdo rje (bdr:P682, d.u.) was one of Rig 'dzin 'Jigs med gling pa's masters. Nāgarakṣa has nine heads and eighteen arms, and as usual the lower part of his body is made of twisted serpents. The nine right hands hold curved knives, a standard for that deity, unlike the other elements: the nine left hands “spin the planet mars” (*rtsibs ldan bskor*). The main face is that of a scorpion (*sdig pa*) and the other ones are ogre (*srin po*) faces.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Rin chen gter mdzod, p. 143.

L. *mKhyen brtse'i dbang po* (1820–1892)'s
 'Jam dpal gshin rje'i thugs tig
 (vol. 27, pp. 87-163)

In a way that is not very surprising from mKhyen brtse dbang po's somewhat antiquarian tastes (or desire to revive older rNying ma traditions), the main deity is extremely similar to the central Heruka of the 'Jam dpal tshé bdag cycle—same colors and body structure, same hand attributes, etc. The difference is that it has a peaceful, orange Mañjuśrī in his heart (description in vol. 27, pp. 88-90).

M. *mChog 'gyur gling pa* (1829–1970)'s
 gShin rje gshed tshé bdag nag po
 (vol. 27, pp. 165-318)

The main deity is again a variant of the main rNying ma Kṛṣṇayamāri: in its outer aspect (description pp. 169-170), there are tiny differences with the central *yi dam* of 'Jam dpal tshé bdag, as with the inversion of the sword and the *vajra* in the right hands. He is said to have eight wings (*gshog brgyad*) instead of the four that are more commonly found in those Yamāntaka traditions. The *yum* and the three deities in the heart are exactly as described below in the context of 'Jam dpal tshé bdag. The main *mantra* is a variant of the *om a kro te ka yamāntaka*, etc. The *maṇḍala* in its more complete version (e.g., pp. 177-179) is also very similar. This cycle is the only one (p. 185), out of 'Jam dpal tshé bdag, which has the "long E" *mantra*, albeit with some differences. Despite its recent origin, this cycle is rich and deserves a detailed comparison with 'Jam dpal tshé bdag.

5. Mañjuśrī Master of Life

After this long overview of the general context of the Yamāntaka literature among the rNying ma pa, we can now move to the last points of this study: 'Jam dpal tshé bdag. A complete catalogue of the ten volumes of this cycle can be found on the FCHNT website,⁸⁵ with, when possible, an identification of the authors of the texts, or parallels in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*.

⁸⁵ On this link: <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/manjusri-master-of-life-a-table-of-the-4-first-volumes-of-the-jam-dpal-tshe-bdag-cycle-included-in-the-byang-gter-phyogs-bsgrigs>.

A. *The Textual Content: the Structure of the Collection and the Authors*

It would be difficult to provide a comprehensive overview of the corpus of 427 texts, spanning nearly 1,000 years, and comprising around 5,800 pages of modern, dense typography. The oldest texts date back to at least rGya Zhang khrom, and some must genuinely be from gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes and his Indic sources. The works of 'Ju Mi pham, possibly written in the early 20th century, mark the latest additions to the corpus.

The global architecture of the collection is as follows:

- (1) The two first volumes contain the *Iron Scorpion (lCags sdig)*,⁸⁶ i.e., the system ascribed to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes;
- (2) The third volume contains the *lCags 'dra*, the similar system connected to Padmasambhava;
- (3) The fourth volume contains the combined practice of both (*dril sgrub*). The fifth volume contains many commentaries, especially by the 5th Dalai Lama and Mi pham, also uniting *lCags sdig* and *lCags 'dra*;
- (4) The sixth and seventh volumes contain a sub-cycle called *The Poisonous Bronze Tree (Khro chu dug sdong)*;⁸⁷
- (5) The eighth and ninth volumes contains the *Flaming Razor of Ultimate Repelling (Yang zlog me'i spu gri, or Yang zlog nag po)*;⁸⁸
- (6) The tenth volume contain ancillary ritual literature, including practices connected to various secondary forms, including Raktayamāri, a black form called 'Char kha nag po (as in *Gu ru Chos dbang's gter ma* but said to be a *gter chos* of rGya Zhang khrom), etc.

Overall, there are thus two major twin cycles (*lCags sdig* and *lCags 'dra*); two cycles with somewhat more differences (*Khro chu dug sdong* and *Yang zlog me'i spu gri*); and a series of secondary Yamāntaka-connected practices not clearly belonging to any cycle.

A large part of the corpus is made of rGya Zhang khrom's discoveries⁸⁹ but other authors can be identified, although, in some

⁸⁶ The explanation of this name is that each group of instructions is connected to one part of the body (or mind, etc.) of a monstrous iron scorpion.

⁸⁷ About this cycle, see, in the present volume, Amanda Brown's article.

⁸⁸ This is the *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri* which we have seen above ascribed to lHa rje gNubs chung in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.

⁸⁹ It appears that some of the texts that are obviously *gter ma* are discoveries of other *gter ston*—certainly lHa rje gNubs chung, but also especially 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs, 'Bri gung rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa and mNga' ris pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal. Many texts lack a colophon naming their discoverer. Things would get clearer when the two 'Bri gung masters' works will have been compared to the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* anthology.

cases, the two categories can overlap (writings ascribed to an author prior to rGya Zhang khrom may actually belong to the latter's' *gter chos*).⁹⁰

Here is a rough list of the authors represented in the collection, when they were well identified in the colophons, in presumed chronological order.

For the 9th-10th centuries, one composition ascribed to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes is preserved in vol. 2, plus his apocryphal autobiography *bKa' shog rgya bo che*⁹¹ in vol. 4. gNubs Ye shes rgya mtsho (one of the sons of Sangs rgyas ye shes' disciple Yon tan rgya mtsho) is supposed to be the author of two texts: one in vol. 1,⁹² one in vol. 3.

For the 11th century, there is the massive bulk of rGya Zhang khrom's revelations, the precise quantity of which cannot be told, at least in the present state of research, because of the imprecision of the colophons. The 11th century master *lHa rje* gNubs chung is also certainly well represented, because, although all the volumes of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* begin with a short account of rGya Zhang khrom, the cycle *Yang zlog me'i spu gri* is said in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* to be a *gter ma* of *lHa rje* gNubs chung. However, his name is not found in any colophon in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*.

One text by bSam 'grub rdo rje (sGrol ma ba, 1295–1334) is found in vol. 6. This is an important figure, the author of a commentary of the *gSang ba snying po*, the *Khog dbub sgrol ma ba*, included in vol. 28 of the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa*. There exists a so-called *gSung 'bum* of that author (bdr: WA3CN17890), but it does not include that text.

From the 14th century, the collection also includes writings of two of g.Yung ston pa: one in vol. 3 by Phag ston Śākyanātha (i.e., g.Yung ston pa's disciple Śā kya mgon po) and one in vol. 8 by dGe 'dun bzang po. Phag ston Śā kya mgon po appears in many lineages of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* synthesized in charts below (Appendix 4); dGe 'dun bzang po is more obscure. Volume 4 contains one text composed by an anonymous disciple of bSod nams rgya mtsho, himself a disciple of g.Yung ston pa.

Volume 8 contains a text by lDom bu ba Mi bskyod rdo rje, and volume 9 contains another text by the same author. It is possible that this author is the same person as *rNal 'byor pa* Mi bskyod rdo rje, the author of a text in volume 7. He may also be mentioned in the fifth

⁹⁰ In the following list, I have not mentioned the texts ascribed to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes' direct or indirect Indian or Nepalese masters, as it is, in the present state of research, impossible to decide how seriously to take such attributions.

⁹¹ On this text, see Jacob Dalton 2014 and Esler 2022b, p. 4-6

⁹² The *lCags sdig kham's kyi dwangs ma zil gnon dbang chog mu tig phreng ba gsal ba'i sgron me*, pp. 11-62.

Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* in a lineage for the practice of Māhakāla, as this mentions some other figures also found in 'Jam dpal tshé bdag lineages. It can be inferred from this that he lived during the same time period as Yol mo Śākya bzang po in the 15th century.⁹³

The collection also contains, in vol. 3, one text by Brag ston so rigs Legs ldan rdo rje (different from Legs ldan rje, according to the colophon, which includes a lineage through rGya Zhang khrom and g.Yung ston pa). From the context, we can conclude that he was also active in the 15th century.

For the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the collection also includes five texts attributed to Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, recorded on BDRC as P8343 and presented as a 14th century figure, which is impossible. In lineage accounts, he appears five generations after g.Yung ston pa (d. 1365) and only three generations before Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (d. 1603). It is probable that Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan is in fact 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan (P1700: 1445?–1558?), the father of mNga' ris pañ chen and Legs ldan rje.

Two texts by this author are found in vol. 3, one in vol. 4, one in vol. 5 and one in vol 10.

As Rin chen rgyal mtshan is often mentioned by later authors of the 'Jam dpal tshé bdag tradition as having the greatest authority, I have chosen him for the description of the *maṇḍala* below.

One text in vol. 2⁹⁴ seems to be authored by 'Brug chen Padma dkar po (1527–1592). This author is attacked, in a violent and humorous way, in one of the writings of the 5th Dalai Lama included in the collection.

Also for the 16th century, vol. 9 (pp. 41-63) contains a composition by a *rJe Ratna* that may be either Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan (1445?–1558?) or 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1557 or 1547–1602).

⁹³ *Yang na mthing gi bla ma grags 'od nas | rdo rje rgyal po | dharma ke tu | bral bam mkhar ba chos kyi blo gros | kong chen pa | bla ma mi bskyod rdo rje | rnal 'byor bsod nams bzang po | sngags 'chang skyabs sbyin | lha bro karma gu ru | nyang bstan 'dzin chos rgyal | sngags 'chang karma gsang sngags | dar sdings rig 'dzin 'phrin las lhun grub | zur thams cad mkhyen pa |*, etc. The first person in this chain is Myon mthing ma ba Sangs rgyas grags 'od, who was one of Klong chen pa's masters (see Arguillère 2007: pp. 79 sq.)—hence active in the early 14th century. His disciple 'Dharmaketu' (Chos kyi rgyal mtshan) is said in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSang yig* to be a *sprul sku* of g.Yung ston pa (d. 1365), so he must have been active at the very end of the 14th century and in the early 15th century. Kong chen pa must be Kong chen Nam mkha' dpal ldan, master of Yol mo *sprul sku* 1 Śākya bzang po. If this is our Mi bskyod rdo rje, then belongs to the 15th century—There is a rNgog ston Mi bskyod rdo rje, author of a text about Raktayamāri in the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* (vol. 5, pp. 203-268). It is not impossible that these two are in fact the same person, although most of the *gShin rje'i gshed dmar* literature in the *bKa' ma* seems to be prior to the 13th century.

⁹⁴ *Pad dkar gyi tshé bdag dbang chog las byung ba*, pp. 591-601.

One text is ascribed to 'Broḡ nag Sangs rgyas rgyal po in vol. 4. This must be *dGe slong Sangs rgyas rgyal po*, a disciple of 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs.⁹⁵ A text entitled *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lag len dngos gzhi*, also in vol. 9, contains a small historical part p. 62-63 ending with *sPrul sku Gar gyi dbang phyug*—surely the author of the text—ten generations after rGya Zhang khrom, preceded by *rJe btsun Ratna*. This must be another disciple of Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan or of 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs.

The collection contains 3 texts by Byang *bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal (*sNgags 'chang dBang po'i sde*), two in vol. 3 and one in vol. 6.

A text in vol. 4 could be by his disciple Nub dgon pa Byams pa bsam gtan. These are instructions transmitted from the deity to Śrī Siṃha, then Padmasambhava, Bha su dha ra, gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, rGya Zhang khrom, then gradually to Rig 'dzin dBang po'i sde, and Nub dgon pa Byams pa bsam gtan. This allows us to identify him as one of bKra shis stobs rgyal's disciples.

Vol. 3 contains one text ascribed to Legs ldan rje.

Vol. 2 contain one *gter ma* and one composition of mNga' ris *pañ chen* Padma dbang rgyal.

For the 17th century, 'Bri gung rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659) is very well represented in the collection with altogether twenty-seven clearly identifiable compositions or *gter ma* (more, especially *gter chos*, could surely be identified through a comparison with his *gSung 'bum*). Of this author, we find five texts in the 1st volume,⁹⁶ one in vol. 4, one *gter ma* in vol. 6, four writings in vol. 7, nine in vol. 8, one said to be “in conformity with his practice” in vol. 9, five more in vol. 9 and one in vol. 10.

There is also one text by *sNgags 'chang* dKon mchog lhun grub (bdr:P5414), presenting himself as a direct disciple of 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa, in vol. 8. It seems that it was written at the behest of “gNubs Zil gnon rdo rje”—the 5th Dalai Lama.

⁹⁵ Cf. Table of bdr:IE3JT13349: Rin chen phun tshogs chos kyi rgyal po, *gSung 'bum*, vol. 1: text *ba*, entitled *Cham kha dge slong sangs rgyas rgyal po la gdams pa*.

⁹⁶ 1. 'Jam dpal gshin rje tshes bdag sdig gnam thog ma'i skor gyi 'phrin las snying po bsduḡ pa zhes bya ba zab pa'i mthar thug, pp. 149-202; 2. lCag sdig nag po'i bcas gzhi rgyas bsduḡ gnyis ka'i mchod rten gyi las byang ngag bsgrigs, pp. 203-220; 3. *Lag len tikka rin chen phreng ba'i gsal byed rdo rje 'bar ba'i mtshon rnon*, pp. 221-302 (this text contains all a discussion about gNubs lugs and *Pad lugs*—p. 224-225—and the difference between lCags sdig and lCags 'dra, the author being strongly in favor of the first. It also mentions in a critical way other similar systems by 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen, Śrī Siṃha, Zla ba mngon dag, gTsang pa 'Dzam gling and Bon po Kun dags); 4. 'Jam dpal tshes bdag lcags sdig gnam thog me'i skor gnubs lugs kyi dbang bskur bsduḡ pa snying po don gyi smin lam, pp. 303-320; 'Jam dpal gshin rje tshes bdag lcag sdig nag po gnam thog me'i skor gnubs lugs kyi las kyi mtha' sdud drag po'i sbyin gi cho gag gduḡ pa kun sgröl zhes bya ba, pp. 335-350.

The 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682) authors around twenty texts, making him one of the main contributors to the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* anthology, alongside *gter ston* rGya Zhang khrom and 'Bri gung rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa. His *gsan yig*, quoted at the beginning of vol. 2, grants the whole collection its architecture. It includes: one text in vol. 2; one text in vol. 3; three texts in vol. 4; four texts in vol. 5; one text in vol. 6; two texts in vol. 8; and six or seven texts in vol. 9; and one text in vol. 10. Many of these texts are long and rich in content, and they are precise even on points of history. In addition to the general intellectual qualities of their author, they bear witness to a genuine personal interest in *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*.

The collection also contains (in vol. 4) one composition by gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714), with Dharmasrī (1654–1718) as a scribe. Two more texts (in vol. 10) are said to be composed in sMin sgrol gling by sNgags ban O rgyan skal bzang, in a time that is just post gTer bdag gling pa. Another text (in vol. 3) belonging to the same milieu is a work of Padma 'gyur med rgya mtsho–sMin gling khri chen II (1686–1718). The text says it was composed in the 31st year of the author, which would be 1716.

For the 19th century, we find one text by Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) in vol. 4: through the colophon does not contain a clear author name, it is said that the text was composed according to the “root text-treasure of *Mang du thos pa'i sngags rig 'dzin* Padma gar dbang phrin las 'gro 'dul rtsal” (Kong sprul's *gter ston* name).

There are also ten texts by Mi pham ('Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho, 1846–1912) in vol. 5.

Many more texts are by authors or *gter ston* that cannot be clearly identified and dated.

B. Fabricating a Stūpa for Destructive Magic and Drawing Talismans

A large part of the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* literature is devoted to all sorts of magical rites, among which the two most recurrent ones seem to be the drawing of a large number of pentacles (*'khor lo*) for various purposes, and a less common activity: the fabrication of a *stūpa* entirely devoted to destructive magic.

It seems to be a central achievement for a specialist of this tradition, especially of the *Iron Scorpion* (*lCags sdig*) connected to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes (*gnubs lugs*), to build and to own such a *stūpa*, which, opposite to standard Buddhist *stūpas*, is to be filled with all sorts of unholy and frightening items (such as a sword that has been used for a murder, a shroud, a leper's skull, etc.). The preparation is described in great detail in texts such as the *lCags sdig chos sde dril ba las mchod*

*rten sgron ma bsdu pa gnam lcags 'phrul gyi lde'u mig*⁹⁷ or the *'Jam dpal gshin rje tshe bdag nag po'i las tshogs mchod rten gyi thig rtsa gsal ba'i sgron ma*,⁹⁸ and endlessly commented upon by the masters whose writings are compiled in this corpus.

However, it is presented as both desirable to triumph over enemies and evils and dangerous if its construction is not properly conducted.

The present article is already much too long for a description of this item to be undertaken here, but this should be remembered for further research, as one can find allusions to such a *stūpa* in biographical accounts of the Byang gter masters. It would also surely be an interesting topic of research as an anti-type for the cult of relics in Tibet, for this *stūpa* is filled not with the blessed remains of saintly beings, but with cursed and macabre things, the negative power of which is channeled to achieve destructive effects.

C. Remarks About the Chart of the Lineages of Mañjuśrī Master of Life

The chart in **Appendix 4** was compiled on the basis of various texts scattered in the whole collection, in a way that does not allow me, for each information, to trace it clearly to its source(s). The chart is barely readable as it stands, and I had to limit the footnotes in order to avoid making the situation even worse. I present it with the same intention that inspired all this article: to give a general overview of the Yamāntaka traditions in the rNying ma branch of Tibetan Buddhism, confining myself to the idea of marking out the terrain as a whole, in order to provide a schematic map that can serve as a background for future research (and be corrected whenever it will be necessary).

The first salient aspect, after the compilation of this chart, is, however, that the account of the first generations is confused.

There is always a segment that is a lineage “in heaven,” be it with somewhat metaphysical figures (rDo rje 'chang or Kun tu bzang po, then Vajrapāṇi, Vajrasattva or Yamāntaka Phyag rgya zil gnon) or with celestial beings (the series *lHa'i bu* Tshangs pa, *lHa'i bu* Nyi ma, *lHa'i bu* bDe ba mchog ldan and *mKha' 'gro ma* Zla ba'i 'od zer).

Even when we reach the human realm, there is some confusion about the ancient Indian or Nepalese masters (dGa' rab rdo rje, 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen, Śiṅtam / Śāntiṅgarbha (?), Khrag 'thung nag po, gTsong lag dpal dge, Da na dha la, sometimes Rom bu guhya or

⁹⁷ *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 18, pp. 125-138; a *gter ma* of rGya Zhang khrom.

⁹⁸ *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 18, pp. 221-302: *lCag sdig na po'i bcas gzhi rgyas bsdu gnyis ka'i mchod rten gyi las byang ngag bsgrigs* by 'Bri gung chos kyi grags pa.

Devacandra): in the various lines, those figures either occur or not, and in varying orders.

The consensus among the texts is more stable about “the Nepalese king” Vasudhara said to have taught gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes. The overall impression is, again, that Sangs rgyas ye shes was the source of nearly all the early Yamāntaka literature in Tibet and that, although he studied from various master in Nepal and maybe India, the key one for these traditions was Vasudhara—who is, so far, barely more than a name.

Following gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, there are two main lineages: an oral, uninterrupted lineage through which rGya Zhang khrom inherited gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes’ traditions *via* gNubs Yon tan rgya mtsho and So Ye shes dbang phyug, who both taught Yon tan rgya mtsho’s son, Padma dbang rgyal; and a direct, *gter ma*, line.

Incidentally, on the last column on the right of the chart, we also see rGya Zhang khrom discovering treasures hidden by ’Jam dpal bshes gnyen (Mañjuśrimitra) and not by the gNubs masters.

The chart is more consistent *after* rGya Zhang khrom, although it is filled with obscure figures down to g.Yung *ston pa* rDo rje dpal⁹⁹ in the 14th century. I have clarified what could easily be so in the footnotes of the chart, mainly on the basis of the 5th Dalai Lama’s *Record of Teachings Received* and BDRC.

Another interesting element is the existence of a fully ’Bri gung lineage for this practice, with two prominent figures: ’Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs (1547?–1602?) and ’Bri gung *rig ’dzin* Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659). For whatever reason, these figures do not appear in the later “standard” account for this lineage in the Byang gter rDo rje brag tradition, although it could easily be shown that there were close interactions during the 16th century between the ’Bri gung pa and the early rDo rje brag masters, especially around this Yamāntaka system.

D. Lineages of Mañjuśrī Master of Life in the 5th Dalai Lama’s Record of Teachings Received

The 5th Dalai Lama’s *Record of Teachings Received*¹⁰⁰ provides us with a synthetic view of these lineages down to the 17th century in the same

⁹⁹ There is no proof of any direct connection between g.Yung *ston pa* rDo rje dpal (1285–1365) and Rig ’dzin rGod ldem (1337–1408). But as shown in Arguillère 2023 (in this volume), Rig ’dzin rGod ldem was most probably a student of Rin chen gling pa (1289–1368) who, like g.Yung *ston pa* rDo rje dpal, was close to Karmapa III Rang byung rdo rje and Padma las ’brel rtsal. They may have met, though there is no record of it. Be that as it may, many tantric (*bKa’ ma*, mostly) lineages that *later* melted in the rDo rje brag mainstream passed through g.Yung *ston pa*.

¹⁰⁰ As for the chart of the lineages found in the 10-vol. collection of ’Jam dpal *tshe bdag* in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, this is a synthesis of many passages found in vol.

milieu in which rDo rje brag flourished. It appears that¹⁰¹ all of the lineages he received for these Yamāntaka practices pass through Phag ston Śākya mgon po, a direct disciple of g.Yung ston pa. In the following chart, information directly relevant to 'Jam dpal tshe bdag only¹⁰² is found in the column on the left (rGya Zhang khrom, then Bral te Sambho ṭa and what follows) and it is fully confirmed by a text¹⁰³ that can be regarded as an expression of the “official” rDo rje brag point of view about this lineage.

<i>Chos sku Kun tu bzang po.</i>	
'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed / Phyag rgya zil gnon tshe bdag nag po	
Vajrapāṇi	
<i>lHa'i bu Tshangs pa</i>	
<i>lHa'i bu Nyi ma</i>	
<i>lHa'i bu bDe ba mchog ldan</i>	
<i>mKha' 'gro ma Zla ba'i 'od zer</i>	
<i>Slob dpon 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen</i>	
<i>Padmasambhava (O rgyan Sangs rgyas gnyis pa)</i>	
<i>Slob dpon gTsug lag dpal dge</i> ¹⁰⁴	
<i>Bal po Bha su dha ra.</i>	
<i>lHa rje gNubs chen Sangs rgyas.</i>	
	<i>lHa rje gNubs khu lung pa</i> Yon tan rgya mtsho
	<i>De sras lHa rje Ye shes rgya mtsho</i>
	<i>lHa rje gNubs Padma dbang rgyal</i>
<i>gTer ston rGya Zhang khrom</i>	<i>lHa rje gNubs bla chen 'jam dpal</i>

3 and 4 of the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*. Tracing each information to its source would have made the footnotes extremely cumbersome. So, I present this chart for what it is: provisional notes from my reading of the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, which has become a central document in our researches about the Byang gter / rDo rje brag lineages. Full-fledged research focusing only on the lineages stemming from rGya Zhang khrom in this *Record of Teaching Received* could be the topic of another article.

¹⁰¹ For whatever reason, all traces of the 'Bri gung specialists of that system are erased in the 5th Dalai Lama's account of the lineage, although he quotes them with respect in his writings (contrary to the treatment inflicted to 'Brug chen Padma dkar po, to whom he devoted an entire text (the *Tshe bdag 'khrul spong*, *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* vol. 22, pp. 229-275) ridiculing his interpretations of the history and contents of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag).

¹⁰² I have gathered it here with other elements of information about Yamāntaka lineages stemming from gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes found in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, because this shows that all these lineages merged in one single transmission with Phag ston Śākya mgon po, himself a disciple of g.Yung ston pa.

¹⁰³ The 'Jam dpal tshe bdag nag po'i gter brgyud las gsol 'debs kyi rin pa dang las byang se ston rin rgyal gyi ljags 'khrigs ma, in *Byang gter 'don cha'i legs bam*, vol. ga, pp. 253-303. In this document, the lineage continues after the 5th Dalai Lama with Padma 'phrin las and then in a purely Byang gter line.

¹⁰⁴ Not in all the versions of the lineage narrative.

		<i>lHa rje gNubs rGya gar rdo rje</i>
		<i>lHa rje gNubs Chos kyi ye shes</i>
Bral te Sambho ṭa	gNubs lCags gtun nag po	<i>sNgags 'chang Khro bo 'bar ba</i>
Gangs <i>ban</i> bKra shis dar	gNubs <i>ston</i> Chos grags	
Gangs pa Ri dkar ba	gNubs <i>bya bral</i> <i>ba</i> sKal ldan rdo rje rgyal po	
		<i>mThu chen</i> Dar ma rgyal mtshan
		<i>Bla ma</i> Yang dag rdo rje
		<i>Rig 'dzin</i> Phug pa sher rgyal
		Gro <i>ston</i> bSod nams 'bum [legs]
Gangs pa Śāk 'bum		<i>Bla chen</i> Blo gros rgyal mtshan ¹⁰⁵
g.Yung <i>ston pa</i> rDo rje dpal (1284–1365)		
Phag <i>ston</i> Śākya mgon po (late 14th century) ¹⁰⁶		
sPug <i>ston chen po</i> dPal ldan mgon po (turn of the 14th and 15th century) ¹⁰⁷		
<i>mKhas grub</i> rDo rje gling pa Chos kyi rgyal mtshan (15th century) ¹⁰⁸		
sPang <i>ston 'Jam</i> dpal dbyangs dge legs rgyal mtshan (15th century) ¹⁰⁹		
Se <i>ston chen po</i> sNgags 'chang Rin chen rgyal mtshan (turn of 15th and 16th century) ¹¹⁰		
<i>sPyan tshab chos rje</i> mGon po zla ba (16th century) ¹¹¹		
<i>mNyam med</i> Nub dgon pa Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan (16th century) ¹¹²		
Khri srong <i>rnam sprul chos rgyal</i> bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603)		
<i>Byang bdag rig 'dzin chen po</i> Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639)		
<i>Zur chen rdo rje 'chang</i> Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669?)		
The 5th Dalai Lama		

¹⁰⁵ This might be Sa bzang ma ti paṅ chen (1294–1376).

¹⁰⁶ Bdr:P0RK1142. BDRRC does not provide any information on this figure and the two next ones, but has spotted them in a lineage called *Phur pa srog gi spu gril phur pa'i bstod pa khrag 'thung ma sogs* (bdr:L1RKL2451).

¹⁰⁷ Bdr:P0RK1143. In *Byang gter 'don cha'i legs bam*, vol. ga, pp. 253, he is called *m khas grub sbrug zhes mkhyen rab dpal ldan mgon*.

¹⁰⁸ Bdr:P0RK1144.

¹⁰⁹ Could it be bdr:P1570, Glo bo *mkhan chen* (1456–1532)'s disciple?

¹¹⁰ Bdr:P8343—but, as we have seen above, the indication “14th century” has to be wrong as this chart shows that we are five generations after g.Yung *ston pa* who died in 1365 and three generations before *Byang dag* bKra shis stobs rgyal who, whatever his date of birth, passed away in 1603. My hypothesis is that P8343 is in fact the same person as P1700, 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan.

¹¹¹ Bdr:P10128. The indication “15th century” is maybe unlikely for someone who is just two generations distant from bKra shis stobs rgyal.

¹¹² Bdr:P6105.

E. A Description of the Maṅḍala

There would of course be much more to say about the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* cycle and its presence in the biographies of Byang gter masters and beyond.¹¹³

But, for the present article, I will confine myself to a description of the *maṅḍala*, with the idea to facilitate the task of future Tibetologists (at least by compiling the names of all the deities in a searchable format). This might also be of service to the art historians: A reproduction of a beautiful painting¹¹⁴ depicting the main deities of this cycle is available in Nathalie Bazin's catalogue (2002: p. 103) of an exhibition at the Musée Guimet.

¹¹³ Cf. Arguillère 2007, pp. 78 sq., for an earlier stage of this research. This is about the identification of one of Klong chen pa's masters, "Khang dmar pa," as actually being Zhwa dmar I Grags pa seng ge. As the knowledge of French language is becoming a rarity among younger Tibetologists, a translation of the relevant passage from an older stage of my research about Yamāntaka among the Ancients may not be useless:

"This master ["Khang dmar pa"] is even more obscure than the previous one, and the very names of the teachings he gave to Klong chen rab 'byams are totally unknown to us. They must be texts of magic: *Tshe bdag pā la pa tra* (certainly a text relating to Yamāntaka), *Tsha tsha smyon pa*, *Tsitta dmar po*, *Ma mo dug gi spu gri*, *Du ba rlung zhon*, *'Bum pa nag po*, *Mu stegs lha bdun*, *Ser ba bsrung 'bebs*, etc.

As we have seen, it is highly probable that Klong chen rab 'byams was associated with Grags pa seng ge (1283–1349?), later considered to be the first Zhwa dmar pa. For anyone familiar with the Tibetan *dbu med* script, it is clear that the difference between *kha* and *zhwa* can be barely perceptible; as for the *nga* in *khang*, it can easily be confused with the syllable separator, which in this form of writing closely resembles the letter *nga*.

This would still only be a tenuous conjecture if (1) Grags pa seng ge hadn't been versed in destructive magic rites linked to Yamāntaka (*Ka thun*); (2) if it wasn't precisely a magic rite linked to this deity that he performed with "Tshul blo' (Klong chen rab 'byams) at Tshur phu in the years 1326–1327."

Here is the footnote appended to the word *pā la pa tra*:

"This is indeed an epithet of Yamāntaka in the form *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*. Cf. texts no. 5 and no. 6 in vol. *Sa* (XXVIII) of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, for example. No other deity is commonly called *Tshe bdag*, at least in the rNying ma tradition. The magical and somewhat disquieting context of the teachings received by Klong chen pa from 'Khang dmar pa' would in any case quite naturally direct us to this deity, proverbially associated with destructive magic. Yet this is indeed what the obscure term *pā la pa tra* connotes, for example in the title of *Pa la pa tra gsang ba'i rgyud*, whose other, highly eloquent title is *sNying zor nag po'i rgyud* (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, vol. *Bi*, p. 20–33), and is, moreover, found in a section devoted to *dMod pa drag sngags*. There is no evidence that this is the correct text; it does not appear in sDe dge *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, and its colophon is not very informative. At least it gives some clues as to the nature of the teachings received from this Khang dmar pa."

¹¹⁴ Credit is given in the catalogue to Carlton Rochell Ltd, New York for this painting.

Here I will follow a text by Se *ston* Rin chen rgyal mtshan, who is probably 'Jam dbyangs rin chen rgyal mtshan (bdr: P1700), father of mNga' ris *paṇ chen* Padma dbang rgyal and Legs ldan rje. This text, the *Zil gnon phrin las kyi rnam nges gsal sgron*,¹¹⁵ will be considerably simplified, ignoring its discussion of sources and of all the various interpretations. This author is quoted with respect by the later figures in the lineage, especially the 5th Dalai Lama.

Since I am simply paraphrasing the *rNam nges gsal sgron*, I did not feel the need to edit the text. It is easily accessible in the *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* collection and does not contain any challenging vocabulary.

Many details are unusual, even in a rNying ma context—such as the main deity standing in a triangle with three deities on each side of the triangle, rather than a structure based on the cardinal and intermediary directions; or the fact that the main deity stands on a sun disk placed *above* a moon disk, and not the contrary. We are also not used to see three “layers” of deities (Yamarāja, Vajrapāṇi and Mahābhairava) embedded the one in the other, like Russian dolls, in the main deity's heart before we reach the seed-syllable and the *mantra*. It is also not so common that all the description is to be understood with the main deity facing south, and not east. Compared to later rNying ma ritual texts, it is also extremely uncommon that there is nothing above Yamāntaka's head, except a white *garuḍa*. The posture of the consort, embracing the male deity from the left and not in full union with him, is also unusual. Among other surprising things in the quite unusual pantheon of this *maṇḍala*, the “mind emanation,” at the back of the main deity—the one called “the Master of Life”—is quite reminiscent of Vajrabhairava in the gSar ma traditions with his main buffalo face and his many heads and numerous arms.

I have not discussed the very long (153 syllables) main *mantra*, all the parts of which correspond to deities or group of deities in the *maṇḍala*. This *mantra* is interesting for many reasons, but especially because it contains things that do not make sense as transliterations from the Sanskrit, and that even educated lamas cannot pronounce without further instructions.

Globally, compared to the mainstream contemporary rNying ma liturgies, this text is full of surprises and gives the impression that it is much prior to what has become standard much later, maybe under the influence of gTer bdag gling pa.

There are many more elements that would deserve further analysis in Se *ston* Rin chen rgyal mtshan's writing, from which I am merely extracting a rough description of the *maṇḍala*. It includes, for example,

¹¹⁵ *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 22 (5th vol. of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag), p. 1-56.

a precise discussion of various opinions on all sorts of points, or differences between various sources, which I have completely omitted to maintain clarity. Further research is necessary to fully understand these aspects and to better identify the author.

The Outer Structure and the Throne

The *maṇḍala*-palace (p. 11) is a dark-blue triangle (with, at its periphery, lines of human skulls) embedded within a red disk. It is surrounded by four skull-fortresses, around which are the eight points of a (weapon) wheel, surrounded by twelve iron castles. The whole device is further surrounded by four encircling rims enclosed within a square wall with four doors. This palace (p. 12) is replete with the usual macabre ornaments of wrathful *maṇḍalas*, and surrounded by the eight great graveyards and sixteen brasiers, with, at its periphery, a huge mass of fire.

The text then (p. 13) proceeds to describe the throne of the main deity. It is made of one hundred thousand *nāgas* (in the form of snakes), ten thousand *gnyan* (visualized as scorpions) and one thousand local spirits (visualized as black frogs). These also represent both the three poisons and the eight categories of gods and demons. Upon the protectors of the directions (*phyogs skyong*—p. 14) and male and female *ru tra* trampled by eight furious buffalos or bulls, there is a lotus, a moon and a sun disks, supporting the main deity.¹¹⁶

This text (p. 14) insists, which is a general feature of *'Jam dpal tshé bdag*, on the fact that the visualization should not be produced gradually, from “triple *samādhi*” or the “quintuple *abhisambodhi*,” but all at once, “like a fish jumping out of water.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ The text specifies that surrounding deities will be visualized upon the sun standing on fresh corpses whose head is turned to the right. But, in the version described, there are no more deities in his entourage. However, in older versions (or variants more purely connected to the *lCag sdig / gNubs lugs*), Yamāntaka has two consorts: the one described below embracing him from the left, plus Ekajāti standing on his right.

¹¹⁷ This is worth noting, as it is a commonplace statement in the rNying ma tradition that this “all at once” visualization is typical of the *Anuyoga*, while we are here very clearly in a *Mahāyoga* context. The text also insists here, in a way that is found everywhere in the *'Jam dpal tshé bdag* tradition, but without naming precise texts, on the existence of three systems, all stemming from Vasudhara, called *lCags 'dra*, *Thog 'dra*, and *gNam thog chen po*. Here, says the author, we follow the last one, the *gNam thog chen po*.

*Yamāntaka, His Consort, the Three Deities
in his Heart and the Garuḍa Above*

There are (p. 15) six main deities, eight 'ornamental deities,'¹¹⁸ then the eleven 'armor deities.' The six main deities are Yamāntaka, his consort, plus the three deities enclosed in his heart and the *garuḍa* over his head.

Yamāntaka is described as having three faces, six arms and four legs. His right face is white, the left one is red, the central one is dark blue. His right hands hold a (weapon-) wheel, a sword and a *vajra*; the two first left ones hold a club (or scepter) and a pestle, while the third displays the conjuring *mudrā*. The text further (p. 16) adds more details about Yamāntaka: his *vajra* wings pervading space, his widely opened mouth with sharp teeth and a convulsed tongue; his nine eyes blazing like fire, his flaming hair and beard. Less common is the explanation of the five skulls of the crown adorning each head as those of five types of evil beings (*bdud*, *srin po*, *btsan*, *rgyal po*, and *mu stegs*)—not the five wisdoms as usual.

His necklace is not made entirely of the ordinary severed human heads, but of a mixture of these and *nāga* heads. His upper body is clothed in a cape of human and elephant skin, the lower in a skirt of tiger skin. His heart is sprinkled with human fat, his forehead with ashes from a charnel ground, and so on.

Each of the five other deities of this first group corresponds to one of the five *jñāna*, while Yamāntaka is the synthesis of all (*drug pa rdo rje 'chang*).

The main female deity (p. 15), called the Queen of Assassins (gSod byed kyi rgyal mo), corresponds to the *dharmadhātu-jñāna*. She is blue-black. In her left hand, there is a blood-filled skull-cup, which she presents to the male deity for a drink. She is further (p. 17) described in more details: she embraces Yamāntaka from his left side, her hair is as thick as darkness, its locks adorned with gold and pearls. With her right hand, she holds a heart and embraces the neck of the male deity.

All these elements are faithfully depicted on the painting reproduced in Bazin 2002: p. 103. Under Yamāntaka's feet, on this painting, there is a confused mass of human and animal bodies, but, upon careful examination, we can distinguish two human couples in sexual union—the *ru tra*—and two groups of four black buffaloes, one of these groups under each of his feet. Other creatures—twisted snakes and maybe frogs—can be seen under his feet; no scorpions, however, at least insofar as we can discern the tiny details of the painting on a small photograph. This clarifies Se *ston's* text, in which these beings

¹¹⁸ The four pairs of animals emanating from Yamāntaka's flanks.

seem to be below the lotus, moon and sun, as, here, they appear between the sun and the main deity's feet.

The uncommon detail of the sun placed above the moon in the throne can also be seen on the *thang kha*.

The female deity is indeed not depicted in full union with the male deity as in the iconography of other similar deities (Vajrakīla, etc.), but much smaller than Yamāntaka and as if standing on his left thigh, holding his neck. The heart in her right hand is not visible (probably because it would be at the back of the male deity's head), but the skull-cup can be seen, close to Yamāntaka's mouth.

Invisible on the painting are the three deities enclosed within Yamāntaka's heart (p. 15), each one in the previous one's heart, called the three primordial wisdom emanations (*ye shes kyi sprul pa*): Yamarāja, Vajrapāṇi and Mahābhairava. According to a text quoted on p. 20, Yamarāja is standing on a sun disk, Vajrapāṇi on a moon disk, while the turtle is placed upside down on a lotus seat.

The Killer (*gsod byed*) Yamarāja, corresponding to the *ādarśajñāna*, is dark brown, holding a golden, ten-spoked (p. 17) weapon-wheel in his right hand and the torn-out heart of the enemies and obstruction-makers. He is proudly standing on a corpse and displays all the macabre ornaments.

In Yamarāja's heart is (p. 15) dark green Vajrapāṇi, the Master of the Arrogant Spirits (*dregs pa'i bdag*), corresponding to the *samatājñāna*. He has (p. 18) one face and two arms. His right hand holds a nine-pronged *vajra*, while the left holds a garland of hearts. He is proudly standing on a corpse representing the enemies and obstacle-makers.

Then (p. 15) in Vajrapāṇi's heart is Mahābhairava ('Jigs byed chen po) in the form of a turtle turned upside down (face in the direction of the ground), corresponding to the *kṛtyanuṣṭhānājñāna*, with the essential *mantra* in its heart (three *E* syllables, etc.).

Above the head of the main deity, the white *garuḍa*, of the nature of *pratyavekṣā-jñāna*, devours a corpse (that of a *nāga*?). It has (p. 17) sword-like wings; its beak is made of meteoritic iron; it is horned, with a wish-fulfilling jewel on its head.

This *garuḍa* is visible on the painting, though barely distinguishable on the reproduction in the mass of flames and fire-like hair above Yamāntaka's head. But, rather than white, it seems to be dark blue—which might mean that the painting is in fact not connected to the main cycle of 'Jam dpal *tshé bdag*, but to a secondary one or to another, slightly different system.¹¹⁹

Eight Animals Surging from Yamāntaka's Flanks

¹¹⁹ mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892)'s 'Jam dpal *gshin rje'i thugs tig?*

And the Eleven Armor Deities

A further group of nineteen deities is also in direct contact with Yamāntaka's body.

First are (p. 18) the eight emanated deities called the 'gods of strong oppression' (? *gyad gnon gyi lha*): two brown *garuḍas* at the level of Yamāntaka's shoulders (one on each side); then, below, two corpse-devouring tigresses; then, at the level of his breast, two lions shaking their manes; and then, at the level of his hips, two venomous snakes ready to bite.

Then come (p. 19) the armor deities, which are the "ten wrathful ones" plus peaceful Uṣṇīṣacakra (Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya?): 1. at the top of the head, Huṃkāra; 2. in the throat, Hayagrīva; 3. on the nape, Vijaya; 4. at the right shoulder, Yamāntaka; 5. At the left shoulder, Amṛtakuṇḍalin.

These five, from the top of the head down to the shoulders, are dark blue with one face and two arms holding a wheel and doing the *mudrā* of subjugation, looking inwards, like guardians.

Then we find, at the thighs: 6. Nīladaṇḍa and 7. Aparājita; 8. in the belly, Acala; 9. at the waist (*dpyi mtshams*), Trailokyavijaya; and 10. in the secret place, Mahābala.

Those five, in the lower part of the torso (p. 20) are dark green with one face and two arms with the same manual attributes as those of the upper part of the body, but facing outwards, in order to destroy others' sorcery.

In the heart, there is gTug tor 'khor lo (Uṣṇīṣacakra), dark yellow, peaceful in appearance, holding a wheel and lotus, blessing body, speech, and mind with indestructibility.

There are (p. 22) further undescribed small wrathful deities filling Yamāntaka's body.

None of these nineteen deities is visible on the painting we are comparing with this ritual text. But this is not the case with the three next ones, depicted forming a triangle at Yamāntaka's feet.

The Three Emanations of Body, Speech, and Mind

As we saw above, the center of the *maṇḍala* consists of a dark blue triangle set in a red disk. These three emanations (p. 23) of body (the 'Master of Death,' *'chi bdag*), speech (the 'Master of Life Force,' *srog bdag*) and mind (the 'Master of Life,' *tshe bdag*) stand in the three red 'crescent moons' (*zla gam*), i.e., the three parts of the central disc outside the dark-blue triangle.

The body emanation (p. 24), the Master of Death, is red and stands "in the south-east." In the common tradition, in which the deity is always understood as facing east, this would be to the right at the front

of Yamāntaka. But Yamāntaka is turned towards the south—so, this actually means: to the *left* in front. This why on the painting this is the figure down to the right (i.e., to the left of the deity) at the feet of Yamāntaka.

All the attributes on the painting seem to match with the description in the ritual text, as far as we can discern the tiny details on the reproduction: he has four arms; the two right ones hold a club (*be con*) and a lasso made of intestines (*rgyu zhags*), while the two left ones wave an iron hook and a *bse* spear. He is dressed in the skin (perhaps the shell, as an armor?) of a turtle (*rus sbal gyi g.yang gzhi*). His consort is the ogress Vetālī (Ro lang ma) holding a razor and a skull-cup filled with blood. He is riding a steed of *bse* demons (*bse'i gyi ling*).

The “speech emanation,” the Master of the Life-force, also called Bye ba dgu rings, is standing “to the southwest,” which in fact means, in this case, at the front of Yamāntaka on the right (hence, on the left side of the painting)—as seen above. Bye ba dgu rings has three faces, six arms and four legs like the main deity. The right face is yellow, the left one red, the central one and the whole body is blue-black. His three right hands hold a skull-cup, a stick ending with a human skull, and a battle axe; the three left ones, a skull-cup, a short spear and an iron axial mountain, or (variant) a mass of fire. He wears a metallic armor. His consort (p. 25) is the Assassin Ogress (*Srin mo gSod byed*), holding a trident and a skull-cup, and they are standing on a dark-blue buffalo. Here again, as far as we can see, all the details match the described painting.

The ‘mind emanation,’ (p. 25) “to the north” (i.e., at the back of the main deity) is called the “Lord of Life.” On the painting, he is the deity at the front, right under Yamāntaka. He has nine heads: first a row three bird heads (peacock, vulture and *garuḍa*), then a row of three human faces (the same colors as the main deity), and finally a row of tiger, lion, and buffalo heads. On the painting, this is understood as meaning that the first row (birds) is above, the second (human faces) in the middle, and the main (lower) faces are: tiger to the right, lion to the left, and buffalo at the center. Indeed, though the order in which they are described is uncommon (it is more usual to describe series of piled heads from the lower row upwards), these last three animal faces are called *rtsa ba'i zhal* in the text. This makes this deity somewhat similar to the *gSar ma pa's* Vajrabhairava.

He has eighteen arms holding, to the right: 1. a *vajra*; 2. a corpse-staff; 3. an arrow-lance; 4. a wheel; 5. a sword; 6. a battle-axe; (p. 26) 7. a *khaṭvāṅga*; 8. a cleaver; 9. a *vajra* hammer. To the left: 1. a skull-cup; 2. a staff; 3. a club; 4. an impaling stake; 5. the *mudrā* of conjuration; 6. an iron hook; 7. a lasso; 8. a human heart, and 9. a child's flayed skin.

He is adorned with macabre ornaments and his consort is called the Female Demon Assassin (*bDud mo gSod byed ma*). On the painting, they are standing upon something black that I cannot identify, which is not described either in the text.

The Next Circle of the Maṇḍala: the Four Great Executioners

Then comes the description of the four great executioners (*gshed chen bzhi*), located in the four “skull fortresses” (*thod mkhar*) of the cardinal directions. It seems that these are the last deities to be depicted on the described *thang kha*, as four dancing figures around the “three emanations.” Though it is difficult to see clearly their hand attributes and their mounts, everything matches: these are standing one-faced, two-handed, and two-legged figures, in union with their consorts, standing on animals. It seems to me that, on the painting, they are depicted in the following order: the first one (*gShin rje Ya ma ra dza*) is above the ‘Speech Emanation’ on the left of the painting (close to Yamāntaka’s last right hand); the second one (*Srin po Myos byed ’bar ba*) is between the Speech Emanation and the Mind Emanation, down to the left; the third one (*Klu bdud A rya dmar po*) is between the Mind and the Body Emanations, down to the right; and the fourth (*gNod sbyin Ral ba tshar dgu*) is above the Body Emanation, close to Yamāntaka’s last left hand.

In the text, from this point on, the description follows the usual order (east, south, west, north) and it is not clear whether this *conventionally* means front, right, back, and left, or if the author remembers that Yamāntaka is facing south (which is more likely, as we have just seen him reasoning in that framework), in which case it would mean: left, front, right and back of the main deity.

Be that as it may, in the skull palace to the east, there is *gShin rje Ya ma ra dza* dark brown, with sword and lasso, mounted on a “small bear with human hands” (? *dred mo lag sdebs*).

To the south, we find the dark yellow *Srin po Myos byed ’bar ba* holding a sword and battle-axe (or hook and lasso), riding a furious black bear.

To the west (p. 28) is *Klu bdud A rya dmar po*, dark red, holding an iron hook and lasso, riding a mule.

To the north is the dark green *gNod sbyin Ral ba tshar dgu* holding a staff (*dbyug to*) and a lasso, riding a yellow-faced camel.

Although our text says that the consorts are not described in all sources, they appear on the painting. These are: *Srin mo Nag po*, *E ka dza ti*, *bDud mo Nag mo* and *gNod sbyin Nag mo*, embracing the respective male deity and holding a skull-cup close to their companion’s mouth.

The Four 'Savages' and the Four Demons

We then move to the next circle, corresponding to the eight spokes of the underlying wheel, with the “savages” (*mon pa*) and the “demons” (*bdud*). These deities do not appear on the *thang kha*.

The four savages are abiding in the four cardinal directions, while the four demons are in the intermediary directions. I will confine myself to their names: to the East, the Conch-shell Lion-Faced Savage (*dung gi mon pa sengge'i gdong can*) and his consort, the Frightening Soul-Stealer Female Savage (*mon mo bla rkun rnam pa*); to the east, the Iron Tiger-Faced Savage (*lcags kyi mon pa stag gi gdong can*), with his consort the Female Savage with a Turquoise Lion Mane (*mon mo g.yu'i ral pa can*); to the west, the Leather Savage with a Small Bear Face (*bse'i mon pa dred kyi mgo can*) with his consort the Female Life-Force Robbing Savage With a Mane of Blood (*mon mo tshe srog 'phrog byed khrag gi ral pa can*); then (p. 28), to the north, the Gold Savage With the Face of a *Garuḍa* (*gser gyi mon pa khyung gi mdo can*) embracing his consort The Soul-Stealing Female Savage Planting a Nail in [One's] Heart (*mon mo bla rkun rnying la gzer 'debs*). All of the males hold a weapon-wheel (or Mount Sumeru) in their right hand and a lasso in the left, while the females hold a heart in their right hand and a skull-cup in the left. The colors are not described but can surely be inferred from the material element ascribed to each of them (conch-shell meaning white, etc.).

As for the four “demons,” in the southeast is the dark-blue He le khyab pa with the Man-Eating-Heart-Stealing demoness (*bdud mo mi zan snying rkun*); in the southwest is the dark-red Nag po 'dzum med (Black-Unsmiling?) with his consort, the Blood-Vomiting-Planting-Nails-in-Hearts demoness (*bdud mo khrag skyug snying la gzer 'debs*); in the northwest, the dark-red So 'dar 'khrig pa with his consort, the Fire-Grabbing-Heart-Ripping demoness (*bdud mo me thogs snying 'byin*); and in the northeast, the dark greed demon Topknot (*ral pa spyi bcings*) with his consort, the Black One Who Drives Mad and Gathers (i. e., steals the breath (*nag mo myos byed dbugs sdud*)). All male demons hold a cross (*kham bam?*), while the female demons hold a heart in the right hand and a skull cup in the left.

The Twelve Iron Fortresses, the External Wall, and the Outer Landscape

Then come, in a further circle, the twelve “masters of death” (*'chi bdag*) in their iron castles: to the east, 1. Be wa sa twa and 2. Nor bu dge 'phel; to the southeast, 3. Ser nag 'joms byed; to the south, 4. Bye ba dgu khri and 5. Ra ksha glog phreng; to the southwest, 6. Ya ksha za byed; to the west, 7. gTum po dud kha and 8. Gang ba kun 'joms; to the

northwest, 9. Kha 'bar rab gcig; (p. 29) to the north, 10. sBrul mgo and 11. Ngad pa stobs ldan; and to the northeast, 12. Hoṃ 'phan srog 'dzin.

All of them hold a *kīla* in their right hand and a blood-filled skull-cup in the left—or, in some traditions, Se *ston* says, each of them has distinctive attributes.

In the further circles, there are more undescribed monstrous beings (*pho gshed*, *mo gshed*, *las kyi gshin rje*, *ki kang*, *ma mo...*) in crowds, and then the four gate-keepers: in the east, (p. 30) a white *rgyal po*, Heart Ripper (dKar po snying 'byin); to the south the black *mgon po* (*mgon po nag po*); to the west, the *bdud* Black Father Lord (Yab rje nag po); and to the north, the *gnod sbyin* Red Supreme Body (sKu mchog dmar po).

Finally, we come to what lies outside the *maṅḍala* enclosure: sixteen great braziers with their sixteen guardians, who are of various colors and hold various weapons.

They are not described for a reason the explanation of which is subtle and interesting: their appearance varies according to the tasks entrusted to them, but as we are at the accumulation stage at the moment (which means, not in a position to give them orders), they do not have a definite form yet.

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Appendix 1:
108 Tantras of Yamāntaka

A. *The Seventy-Nine 'Jam dpal sku Tantras*
(vol. 25-29 of the mTshams brag rNying rgyud)

Kṛṣṇayamāri

1. *dPal zla gsang nag po'i rgyud*—in 75 chapters, vol. 25, pp. 2-283;
2. *dPal zla gsang nag po'i rtsa ba'i rgyud chen po*—in 74 chapters, vol. 25, pp. 283-591;¹²⁰
3. *dPal zla gsang nag po'i rgyud*—in 58 chapters, vol. 25, pp. 591-803. See Appendix 2 below.
4. *dPal zla gsang nag po'i rgyud*—in 108 chapters, vol. 26, pp. 2-259. Despite the very similar title, this *tantra* is not another variant of the three previous ones. It does not have a proper colophon; the editors have added remarks about its rarity, etc.¹²¹
5. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed po'i gsang ba drug cu pa ces bya ba'i rgyud*—in 61 chapters, vol. 26, pp. 259-412, without a proper

¹²⁰ This is the third *tantra* in the list of 34 Yamāntaka *tantras* in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* (interestingly, the two other versions are not mentioned), described in these terms: | *dpal zla gsang nag po me lce 'phreng ba'i rgyud la* | *'di skad bdag gis <262a>* | | *thos pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs kyi bdag nyid 'jigs byed kyi rgyal po che ba kun gyi bdag nyid zab mo'i gsung brjod du med pa'i sgra skad sna tshogs su gsung ba phrin rtog thams cad ye nas lhun gyis grub pa'i dgongs pa las mi g.yeng ba zhes sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po* | *gleng bslang ba dang gsal byed lta ba bstan pa gnyis pa* | *gnas gzhi'i 'khor lo dang drag po gnad kyi 'khor lo mdor bstan pa gsum pa* | *'bru shag grong khyer so brgyad pa* | *gsang ba thun sngags so dgu pa* | *ngan sngags sngags rgod bzhi bcu pa* | *gnod sbyin zla gsang gsang ba ltar sgrub pa don gnyis pa* | *mdze nad dzwa la gdug pa klu'i zla gsang don gsum pa* | *'jigs byed chen pos gdams pa dang 'khor rnam rjes su yi rang nas dam bcas pa'i le'u don bzhi pa'o* | | *lo tsā ba gsum gyis lan grangs gsum du bcos shing gtan la phab pa'o* |.

¹²¹ This seems to be the 4th *tantra* in the list of 34 Yamāntaka *tantras* in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, despite the slight discrepancy in the number of chapters—described in these terms: | *zla gsang drag sngags nag po bshan pa spu gri'i rgyud la* | *'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na lho phyogs gshin yul ro myags chen po'i tshal dur khrod lcags kyi khang rom 'bar ba rmang gser gyi gdan la logs lcags snang ba thod pa'i 'bur la rakta'i chu rgyun 'bab pa zhes sogs gzhi dang 'khor bstan pa'i le'u dang po* | *dregs pa rnam srog snying phrogs te las la mngags pa gnyis pa* | *gleng bslang ba gsum pa* | *gnas btsal ba bzhi pa* | *drag sngags lnga bcu pa* | *chu 'khyags sgrub pa nga gcig pa* | *srog gcod spu gri'i le'u gya gcig pa* | (*bar 'dir le grangs gsum ma 'grig pa chad dam brtag* |) *klu <262b> gdug pa'i ngan sngags gya lnga pa* | *srog rten bca' ba go dgu pa* | *dus gar dar dang lha srin la bka' bsgo ba brgya pa* | *rgyud gtad cing rjes su yi rang ba'i le'u brgya gcig pa'o* | | (*gsung sprul gyi gsan yig na le'u go bdun las med tshul 'dug pa gong gi le mchongs ma brtsis pa 'dra zhing lung yang go bdun las ma byung* |) *bal po'i rgyal po ba su dha ra dang* | *gnubs kyi ban chung yang dbang gter gyis bal yul gyi gnas bha ra sa'i brag phug tu bsgyur te gtan la phab pa* | *rna rgyud bdun las bshan pa spu gri dregs pa sna tshogs zla gsang dmod pa dam pa yin no* |.

- colophon.¹²²
6. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed man ngag gsang ba sum cu pa zhes bya ba'i rgyud*—in 32 chapters, vol. 26, pp. 412-477. Said to be translated by the Indian *tantrika* Khrag 'thung nag po and *bod kyi lo tsha* (sic) ba gNubs Sangs rgyas.
 7. *Seng ge 'o ma'i rgyud*—in six chapters; vol. 26, pp. 477-481. No colophon. It is concluded by the mention *rgyud lnga pa rdzogs so*, which may imply that it belongs to a group—maybe found in the same *gter chos*, although it is not mentioned by the editors.
 8. *Seng ge 'o ma'i rgyud phyi ma*—in sixteen chapters; vol. 26, pp. 481-492. No proper colophon; finishes with the curious mention: *de gnas rnying rgyud 'bum na med*.
 9. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed zla gsang nag po'i rgyud phyi ma*—in 45 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 492-526. Said to be translated by Khrag 'thung nag po and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.
 10. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed nag po chen po gsang ba'i rgyud*—in 32 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 526-639. Very unusual colophon, saying that this was translated by *Slob dpon chen po Ma hā ni pi śu* (sic) and *Lo tstsha* (sic) ba Dharma sin nga.
 11. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal rin po che gsang ba'i rgyud ('jam dpal gshin rje gsang ba'i rgyud)*—in 11 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 639-669. Said to be translated by *Vasudhara (Bha su dha ra) and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.
 12. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal khro bo rin chen gsang ba'i rgyud ('jam dpal zla gsang nag po yan lag gi rgyud)*—in 18 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 669-723. Said to be translated by *Vasudhara (Ba su dha ra) and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.
 13. *gShin rje nag po'i sngags rgyud nag po*—in 15 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 724-749. No translator's colophon, other than a strange allusion to gNubs rDo rje dbang phyug (?) 'reducing mind and body to mere atoms.'
 14. *dPal gshin rje dmar nag 'bar ba'i rme rgyud*—in 58 chapters with a short epilogue; vol. 26, pp. 749-869. The narrative conclusion features Padmasambhava as its main figure and implies that this *tantra* was somehow made use of in order to tame the unruly spirits for the consecration of bSam yas. gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes is mentioned together with other figures under their initiatory names and the text appears to be a *gter ma*, though without any allusion to the *gter ston*.
 15. *gShin rje'i rgyal po las sna tshogs pa'i rgyud (ngan sngags bkol ba'i las rgyud or gShin rje nag po ya ma rā dza khros pa'i rgyud)*—in 11

¹²² This *tantra* is mentioned in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as the source of sets of instructions, but not in the lists of *rnying ma tantras*.

- chapters; vol. 26, pp. 869-912. No translator's colophon.
16. *rDo rje 'khor lo drag po* (*rDo rje ur mo; rTog pa bsdus pa'i rgyud thams cad kyi yang snying*)—in eighteen chapters (*rtog pa*); vol. 26, pp. 912-932. This *tantra* contains (pp. 924-925) a version of the long *mantra* (said to be 'of 157 syllables' or called *E ring gi sngags*) that is central to the practice of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*. No proper colophon.
 17. *rDo rje nyi ma khrag 'thung gi rgyud*—in 4 chapters, vol. 26, pp. 932-942. No colophon.
 18. *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba gshin rje gshed po'i rgyud* (*'Phags pa'i rgyal po gshin rje gshed khro bo ta ki rā dza'i rgyud tshogs*)—in 10 chapters, vol. 26, pp. 942-947. No colophon.
 19. *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba gshin rje gshed po'i rgyud*—in 3 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 947-952. No colophon.
 20. *gShin rje nag po'i rgyud*—one chapter (divided into various rites, *las*); vol. 26, in one chapter, pp. 953-967. Translated by the Indian masters *Can tra kir ti and *Bo de ku ta and the *lo ccha ba dge slong Blo gros dbang phyug*.
 21. *Thod pa brtag pa 'jigs byed chen po'i rgyud*—in 10 chapters with a short epilogue; vol. 26, pp. 967-993. No colophon.
 22. *gShin rje zlog byed 'char ka nag po rtsa ba'i rgyud*—in 13 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 993-1009. No colophon; full of very Tibetan elements.¹²³
 23. *Srin po sgo brdungs kyi rgyud chen po*—in 10 chapters with a short epilogue; vol. 26, pp. 1009-1025. No colophon.¹²⁴
 24. *dPal gshin rje gshed po yamarāja sku khros pa'i rgyud*—in 9 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 1025-1053. The colophon says it was translated by *Vasudhara and Sangs rgyas ye shes, who then hid it (as a *gter ma*), but there is no indication about its later re-discovery.
 25. *dPal gshin rje 'jom byed 'bar ba zhes bya ba'i rgyud*—in 21 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 1053-1068. The colophon says it was translated by gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.¹²⁵
 26. *Mon pa nag po khros pa'i rgyud*—in 14 chapters; vol. 26, pp. 1068-1081. Said to be translated by the *A cā rya dmar po* and *Lo cchā ba mGos* ('Gos).¹²⁶
 27. *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi sku gsung thugs gsang ba'i ye shes | 'jam dpal gshin rje nag po gsang ba de kho na nyid kyi snying po 'khrul*

¹²³ This seems to be a *gter ma* of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer: cf. 5th Dalai Lama, *gSan yig* 298b: *bla ma mnga' bdag chen pos brag srin mo sbar rjes nas gdan drangs pa'i 'jam dpal 'char ka nag po'i chos skor thob tshul la | ...*

¹²⁴ Text 28 in the Dalai Lama's list, presented in these terms: *Srin po sgo brdung gi rgyud le'u bcu pa |*.

¹²⁵ Text 30 in the Dalai Lama's list, presented in these terms: *'joms byed 'bar ba'i rgyud le'u nyi shu pa gnubs <267a> | | kyis bsgyur ba |*.

¹²⁶ Text 27 in the Dalai Lama's list, presented in these terms: *mon pa nag po sku khros pa'i rgyud le'u bcu bzhi pa rgyal bu sprin gyi shugs can gyis bsname byon pa pañḍi ta a tsa rya dang lo tsā ba 'gos kyis bsgyur ba |*.

- 'khor rin po che'i rgyal mtshan 'phrul gyi me long khri drug stong pa zhes bya ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in 1000 chapters; vol. 27, pp. 2-606. No colophon.¹²⁷
28. *dPal gshin rje nag po 'khrul 'khor rgyal mtshan gyi me long gi rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in 127 chapters; vol. 27, in 127 chapters, pp. 606-1179. No colophon.
29. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal dri ma med pa'i gsang ba'i rgyud*—in 26 chapters, vol. 28, pp. 2-43. No colophon. This *tantra* is less purely magical than many in the corpus and includes meditation instructions for *bskyed rim*, *rdzogs rim* and *rdzogs pa chen po*.
30. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed nag chen po'i rgyud (gShin rje nag po'i tantra)*—in 34 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 44-140. No colophon.¹²⁸
31. *gShin rje nag po gsang ba de kho na nyid rgyud kha thun ('Jam dpal kha thun gyi rgyud)*—in 8 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 140-151. Transmitted by *Vasudhara to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.
32. *gShin rje nag po kha thun gsang ba de kho na nyid phyi ma'i rgyud*—in 5 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 151-156. Transmitted by *Vasudhara to gNubs chen who hid it as a *gter ma*, the *gter ston* is not named but must be rGya Zhang khrom.¹²⁹
33. *dPal tshe bdag nag po drag sngags kyi mngon du phyung ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* or *sNying po man ngag gi rgyud*—in 21 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 156-273. This presents Yamāntaka exactly in the form that is common in the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* and seems to be the basis of many

¹²⁷ Text 16 in the Dalai Lama's list, presented in these terms: | *gshin rje nag po gsang ba de kho na nyid kha mthun* (sic everywhere in this edition) *gyi rgyud la | 'di skad bshad pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das 'jam dpal ya manta ka nyid chos sku'i ngang las gzugs sku zhal gsum phyag drug par bzhengs te 'phrin las rnam bzhi lhun gyis grub pa zhes gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | khyad par las la bkol te gsad pa lnga pa | rgyud yongs su bzung ba'i le'u ste brgyad pa'o | rgyud 'di 'jam dpal gyis 'og min du gsungs nas rgyal po dza la babs | bkra shis bde ldan gyi dga' rab rdo rje | des 'jam dpal bshes gnyen | gtsug lag dpal dge ba su dha ra | yang dbang gter la rim bzhin bka' babs so |.*

¹²⁸ This must be the 9th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list of Yamāntaka *tantras*, described in these terms: | *gshin rje nag po'i tantra la | de nas de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi dgyes pa chen po phul du phyin te phyogs bcu dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad tshogs nas zhes sogs rgyud bka' stsal pa'i le'u dang po | ye shes mchog gi mchod pa brgyad pa | dgyes pa chen po 'phrin las kyi le'u dgu pa | (rgyud 'di gnyis bsdoms te le'u so gsum byas pa dang so sor dbye ba sngon mā la gsang ba man ngag gi le'u bsnan pa'i bcu zhes pa sogs brgyud pa 'di la gnyis ka bsdoms pa'i le'u so gsum pa yin no | |) ka la ru pa gsang ba'i las la | las gsang ba'i man ngag bstan pa bcu pa | kā la rā pa'i le'u gnyis <263b> byung ba las bcu gcig pa | gsang ba'i las gnyis dang ting nge 'dzin gyi le'u bcu gnyis pa | man ngag gsang ba'i las dgu pa'i le'u bcu gsum pa | 'khor gyis bstod pa so gsum pa | dbu zhabs su don bsdu pa dang dam bcas pa'i le'u so bzhi pa'o |.*

¹²⁹ Text 17 in the Dalai Lama's list, presented in these terms: | *kha mthun gsang ba de kho na nyid phyi ma'i rgyud la | 'di skad bstan pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das gshin rje gshed po nyid rang bzhin gyi gnas na bzhugs pa la thugs mchog ya ma rā dzas gsol ba sogs 'khor lo'i dbye ba skyon yon bsdu thabs bstan pa'i le'u dang po | rgyud gzung zhing bcang ba lnga pa'o | | ba su dha ra dang sangs rgyas ye shes kyi 'gyur |.*

of the magical instructions taught in the rGya Zhang khrom corpus, but does not present the typical “mantra of the long E” in 153 syllables. No colophon.

34. *dPal tshe bdag nag po'i 'phrin las kyi dgongs pa thams cad rdzogs pa'i rgyud chen po*—vol. 28, pp. 272-383. The main deity is also the Heruka of the 'Jam *dpal tshe bdag* cycle, and the *maṇḍala* also seems to be identical. No colophon.¹³⁰
35. *dPal gshin rje nag po me rlung skyin thang 'khrugs pa rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in 53 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 383-509. No colophon.¹³¹
36. *dPal drag sngags zla gsang nag po'i rgyud*—in 14 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 509-522. Translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.¹³²
37. 'Jam *dpal khro bo snying gzer gsang ba'i rgyud*—in 5 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 522-536. Translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.¹³³
38. *dPal zla gsang drag sngags nag po gshan pa spu gri'i rgyud*—in 97 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 536-612. Translated by *Vasudhara and

¹³⁰ 11th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *dpal tshe bdag nag po 'phrin las kyi dgongs pa thams cad rdzogs pa'i rgyud chen po la* | (se ston chen pos | dgongs rgyud mngon phyungs dngos grub nyer bsdus pa | | smin byed dbang gi sgron ma padma'i gzhung | | dpang du sor bzhas 'khrul med phyag len gyis | | legs par brgyan byas nges don bde 'jug bkod | | ces pa'i rgyud kyang 'di nyid do | |) 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das chos thams cad lhun gyis rdzogs pa'i rang bzhin rdo rje yongs su bkod pa'i snying po 'og min gyi gnas mkha' dbyings rnam par dag pa'i klong rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pa'i gzhal yas khang | zhes sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | chos nyid kyi don gtan la dbab pa gnyis pa | drag po hom gyi le'u bco lnga pa | lhun gyis grub pa'i le'u bcu drug pa | thog ser sbyor ba nyer dgu pa | rgyud gtad pa'i le'u sum cu pa'o |.

¹³¹ This is surely the 8th term in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *dpal gshin rje nag po me rlung skyin thang 'khrug pa'i rgyud la* | thams cad gsum ldan bde ba gcig | zung thub mtshan ma kun spangs pa'i | | Lyon tan ma lus kun ldan pa'i | | rdo rje 'chang la phyag 'tshal lo | | zhes sogs khro bo gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | | khro bo lhun gyis grub pa gnyis pa | | mtshon cha'i rgyal po dmar len gzhan gyi lus sreg 'grel ba nyer drug pa | | khyad par dmar len gyi sbyor ba nyer bdun pa | | btsan gyi drag ser nga gnyis pa | | 'khor la gtad pa nga gsum pa | | rgyud kyi yang snying zhes bya ba don rgyas pa sangs rgyas thams cad kyi dmod pas bsgral ba lha'i yul du grags pa'o |.

¹³² This seems to be the 5th text of the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, described in these terms: *drag sngags zla gsang nag po'i rgyud la* | 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na | | lho phyogs dur khrod chen po gtum drag tshal | | ro myags dur khrod stong gi gnas | | rgya khyon dpag tu med pa ste | | gser dang g.yu las grub pa ste | | zhes sogs glang gzhi'i le'u dang po | | dkyil 'khor bstan pa drug pa | | zab mo rnam grangs bsrung zlog bdun pa | | rgyud gtad pa'i le'u bcu bzhi pa'o | | bal po'i rgyal po ba su dha ra dang yang dbang gter gyi 'gyur |.

¹³³ 19th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *'jam dpal khro bo snying gzer gsang ba'i rgyud la* | de nas rdo rje snying po yis | | rdo rje khro bo 'jigs pa'i tshogs | | kun nas gus pas thal sbyar te | | bde chen yab la 'di skad gsol | | zhes sogs sa yams kyi nad brtag pa'i skabs dang po | | bkru ba dang bsreg pa'i sbyor ba bstan pa lnga pa'o | | phra rgyud re gcig rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud 'jam dpal gshin rje 'bum sde rnam par bkod pa las | | gdug pa klu 'dul byed le'u bkod pa'o | | ba su dha ra dang gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes kyis 'gyur |.

- gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.
39. *Jig rten gsum gyi shes pa bsgral ba'i rgyud*—vol. 28, pp. 613-647. This *tantra* is quite peculiar: it includes various teachings not found in most of the others, like a section on the qualities required of the masters and the disciples or chapters on the other Herukas of the *bKa' brgyad*. No colophon, continues without interruption with the next text—but the numbering of chapters restarts.¹³⁴ The 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* presents it as translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.
40. *Ngan sngags gtsug lag gi rgyud* (appendix / commentary of the previous one?)—in 8 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 647-691. No colophon.¹³⁵
41. *dPal gshin rje 'khrul 'khor nag po sdig pa snying 'dzings gsang ba'i rgyud*—in 15 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 691-720. This *tantra* is the first in the collection in which the characteristic *mantra* (*E ring gi sngags*) appears. The whole *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* cycle seems to be an enormous development mainly based on this sole *tantra*. Translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes. This is clearly a *gter ma*, but in the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud* the name of the discoverer is not clear, although it is plain from the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* corpus that it was revealed by rGya Zhang khrom.¹³⁶
42. *Drag po sngags rgod sdig pa snying 'dzings kyi rgyud*—in 7 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 720-730. This also exhibits the characteristic *mantra* of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*. It is called *ma tshang kha skong ba'i rgyud* and is clearly complementary to the previous one. Translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes. The colophon has a curious note, found here and there in the *mTshams brag rnying rgyud*: *gnas snying na med | gling phub kun bzang gi dpe bzhengs | |*,

¹³⁴ 22nd text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *| 'jig rten gsum gyi shes pa bsgral ba'i rgyud la | ('di sgrub sde spyi rgyud 'dra ba zhig 'dug kyang pañ chen sku mched kyi gsan yig na mi gsal la | ratna'i gsan yig na gshin rje'i skor du snang ngo | |) 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das gsang ba gsum gyi bdag po gnyis su med pa'i thig le 'od zer kha dog sna tshogs pa 'khrigs pa sku rdo rje phyogs bcu'i de bzhin gshegs pa'i sku rnam par dag pa'i bdag nyid sogs mi rgya chen po'i gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | padma dbang chen gyi le'u lnga pa | bse dung lcags dang gsum gyi le'u brgyad pa'i | | bal po ba su dha ra dang gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes kyi 'gyur |*

¹³⁵ 21st text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *| ngan sngags gtsug lag gi rgyud phyi ma'i yang phyi ma la | de nas 'phags pa 'jam dpal gyis bcom ldan 'das kun tu bzang po la 'di skad ces gsol to | | e ma ho bde gshegs bcom ldan 'das | | ma 'ongs rnams kyi don phyr du | | sngags kyi de nyid bshad par zhu | | zhes sogs sngags kyi de kho na <266a> | | nyid bshad pa'i le'u dang po | 'jig rten pa'i sngags kyi 'phreng ba bstan pa bzhi pa | 'phrin las nyams su blang ba'i le'u brgyad pa'o |*

¹³⁶ 12th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *tshe bdag sdig pa snying 'dzings gsang ba'i rgyud le'u bco lnga'o | | slob dpon ba su dha ra dang gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes kyi 'gyur rgya zhang gi gter byon | drag po <264b> sngags rgod sdig pa snying 'dzings kyi rgyud dam ma tshang ba kha skong ba snying po don gyi gsang rgyud bsam gtan lha yul du grags pa 'gyur gong 'dra |*

which seems to mean that this *tantra* is absent in another compilation of the rNying ma tantric canon.

43. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje'i rgyal po sdig pa stobs chen gsang ba'i rgyud*; alternate title in the colophon: *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje zla gsang nag po'i rgyud | mchog tu gsang ba'i sdig pa stobs chen bya ba lha yul du grags pa.*—in 21 chapters, vol. 28, pp. 730-796. This *tantra* contains a variant of the myth of the liberation of Rudra. Translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes. Some elements of a lineage in the colophon: gTsug lag dpal dge, Shan ting gar ba, Danadhala, Vasudhara, gNubs Sangs rgyas yes shes who hid it as a *gter ma*—later found by rGya Zhang khrom.¹³⁷
44. *gNod sbyin gdong gsum pa'i rgyud [Char ka nag po'i rgyud]*—in 18 chapters, vol. 28, pp. 796-825. Said in the colophon to be a composite work. It presents a segment of lineage: *Slob dpon* Padma; *rJe bla ma* sPrin gyi shugs can; mGos lha btsan (sic); *dGe bshes* Zangs dkar [ba]; *Slob dpon* sTon chung, etc.¹³⁸
45. *gShin rje nag po ngan sngags phyir bzlog pa'i rgyud [chu tig sngon mo'i phyi ma'i rgyud]*—in 7 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 825-839. Said to be translated “with difficulty” (*dka' ba spyad nas*) by gNubs ban rDo rje khri gtsug.¹³⁹
46. *Drag po phur byed kyi rgyud [Mun tsa nub tra pa la pa tra mchod rten nag po'i rgyud las | rtoq pa phyi ma drag po phung byed kyi rgyud]*—in

¹³⁷ 14th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *'phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje'i rgyal po sdig pa stobs chen gsang ba'i rgyud la | 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das chos thams cad lhun gyis rdzogs pa'i rang bzhin yongs su bkod pa'i snying po mkha' dbyings rnam par dag pa'i klong rgya yongs su ma chad pa rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pa'i gzhal yas khang zhes sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | dmar len yang gsang mchog gi le'u bcu pa | bsrung ba khyad par gyi le'u bcu gcig pa | gtad cing rjes su yi rang ba'i le'u nyer gcig pa'o | | rdo rje khri gtsug gis bsgyur zer |.*

¹³⁸ 24th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *gnod sbyin gdong gsum pa chu thig sngon mo'i rgyud la | (rin po che sman lung pa sogs kyi gsan yig na chu tig sngon po le'u bco brgyad pa de 'di'i gong du 'os zhes mi gcig pa'i phyogs mdzad | gsung sprul gyi gsan yig na gcig pa'i <266b> phyogs dang le'u bco brgyad snang | pañ chen sku mched kyi gsan yig na gnod sbyin gdong gsum pa'i rgyud le'u bco brgyad pa zhes snang bas gcig pa 'dra'o | |) 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na sngon gyi dus na byang chub sems dpa'i shing drung rab tu dga' ba'i gnas na bcom ldan 'das mi g.yo ba'i ting nge 'dzin la snyoms par zhugs te bdud dang lha sbyin gyis mu stegs log lta'i sbyor ba byas pa'i tshe bcom ldan 'das kyi thugs kyi 'od zer las sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | bsrung ba'i le'u brgyad pa | zlog pa'i le'u dgu pa | bskul ba pho nya'i le'u bco brgyad pa'o | | 'jam dpal nag po bzlog pa'i rgyud las 'char ka nag po bzlog pa'i rgyud dang | 'chi bdag be wa sa to'i rgyud dang | rā hu nag po rngams byed kyi rgyud dang | gshin rje 'char ka nag po gnod sbyin gdong gsum pa'i rgyud rnams rgyal po sprin gyi shugs can dang 'gos lhas bcas kyis bsgyur zhes snang ngo | | (zur gyi mthu byung nas 'gos dpon slob bshal rims kyi bsnayun par bzlog pa'i ched du slar 'di bsgyur skad do | |).*

¹³⁹ 25th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *de'i rgyud [i.e., the 24th above] phyi ma'am 'dus rgyud du grags pa ngan sngags phyir bzlog gi rgyud le'u bdun pa |.*

- 21 chapters; vol. 28, p. 840-858. No colophon.¹⁴⁰
47. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal las bzhi'i 'khor lo'i gsang ba'i rgyud*—in 13 chapters; vol. 28, pp. 858-899. No real colophon, but a puzzling quatrain at the end (p. 899).¹⁴¹
48. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gsang ba'i rgyud kyi rgyal po | pra khog bslang gi brtag pa | phyi ma'i rgyal po sgrub pa'i lung | khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyud phyi ma yang phyi ma* (or *Khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyud*; also said to be “from the *Zla gsang nag po*”)—in 88 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 2-259. Colophon insisting on the rarity of that *tantra*.¹⁴²
49. *Sha ba ru 'dzings kyi rgyud* [or *gShin rje char ka nag po ru 'dzings kyi rgyud*]*—*in 11 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 259-272. No colophon. The 10th chapter contains a narrative about the history of this *tantra* in India.
50. *rGyud kyi rgyal po chen po thams cad 'joms byed 'bar ba*—in 9 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 272-343. This is quite different from many *tantras* of the

¹⁴⁰ 20th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *drag po phung byed mchod rten nag po'i rgyud la | 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na ri ka ri ka bya rkang phug ron zangs phug ces bya ba na dregs pa lha'i bdag po kha the nag po zhes bya ba mu stegs rnam pa bzhi 'dul ba'i don ched du dka' thub sbyin spong mdzad pa sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | drag po hom gyi le'u bcu gcig pa | rdzas chen sgrub pa dang srid btsal ba nyi shu pa | yongs su gtad pa'i le'u nyer gcig pa | mchod rten nag po'i rgyud las rtog pa phyi ma drag po phung byed kyi rgyu ces bya ba'o |*

¹⁴¹ 15th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *'phags pa 'jam dpal las bzhi 'khor lo gsang ba'i rgyud la | 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na bcom ldan 'das dgyes pa chen por gyur te yum chen mo dang gnyis su med pa'i mkha' la bzhugs pa la 'di lta ste zhes sogs gleng gzhi rtsa ba'i rgyud sde dang po | 'jam dpal tshe sgrub brgyad pa mjug bskul dang mnan pa bcu <265a> | | gsum pa | phyi ma'i le'u bzhi ste kun dril bas bcu bdun yod do |*

¹⁴² This must be text no. 10 in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, despite the discrepancy in the number of chapters, which is to some extent explained in the *gSan yig*: *'phags pa 'jam dpal gsang ba rgyud kyi rgyal po pra khog snang [sic] ba'i rgyud phyi ma'i rgyal po sgrub pa'i lung khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyud phyi ma'i yang phyi ma la | (gsung sprul gyi gsan yig na bar le rnam ma tshang bas nor ram brtag ces pa 'dug kyang | pan chen sku mched kyi gsan yig na le grangs kyi gsal kha ma mdzad cang sngags gsar rnying gi rgyud 'ga' zhig tu 'di rigs yong 'dug pas mtha' gcig tu ma nges | pra khog bslang ba slad pa snang ba sogs zer kyang kun mkhyen dga' gdong ba'i bka' 'gyur gyi gsan yig na snang ba 'dug cing rang lugs bka' shog rgya bo chen yod |) de nas 'jam dpal dbyangs kyiis ni | | khro bo'i ming ni gshin rje'i gshed | | mtshon cha me ltar 'bar ba 'khrigs | | drag la mthu rtsal drag ldan pa | | de mthong nas ni khro bo gzhan | | thams cad kun gyi lag cha shor | | zhes sogs 'jam dpal gyi rtsa ba'i rtog pa khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rgyud 'byung zhes bya ba'i skabs te le'u dang po | yi dags phal ba'i dkyil 'khor du gtogs pa gnyis pa | khro bo brtol zhugs su gtogs pa bdun pa | 'di nas le'u'i nges bzung med pa la | phyi ma'i yang phyi ma las gshin rje rab tu 'joms pa'i yi ge 'bru gcig pa rgyal po'i dkyil 'khor dgod pa'i rtog par gtogs pa dang po | de nas rtog pa bzhi pa'i bar mthar chags la | de nas rtog pa bco lnga par mchongs | de rjes rtog pa bcu drug pa dang sngags dang sngags kyi phan yon las tshogs phyag rgya <264a> | | bstan pa'i mthar thug pa le grangs ma byas pa rdzogs tshig can | khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rtsa ba'i rtog pa las | gsang ba'i rtog pa gtogs pa dang po | de rjes khro bo rnam par rgyal ba'i rtog pa las gsang ba'i rtog par gtogs pa bcu dgu pa | 'di'i mjug tu rtog pa nyi shu pa | de rjes rtog pa bzhi pa byas pa | khro bo khams gsum rnam par rgyal ba'i rtog pa'i le'u nyi shu rtsa gnyis pa'o'i mtha' can |*

corpus as it contains a complete empowerment ritual, a chapter about *samaya* vows, one on the "View," etc. Its colophon mentions that it was translated by *Bram ze mChog sred zla ba* and *Lo tsā ba U nan dga' ba*.

51. *Drag po sngags rgod de kho na nyid rgya sdebs rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in 11 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 343-372. This *tantra* develops very detailed considerations about the letters / syllables and their powers, isolated or in combinations. Ends abruptly without colophon.
52. *dPal gshin rje drag sngags 'khor lo gsang ba sdebs kyi rgyud*—in 13 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 372-393. This *tantra* contains one of the variants of the typical *E ring mantra* (pp. 380-381) and long developments about "magic wheels" (*'khrul 'khor*). No colophon.
53. *Drag po sngags rgod dmod pa drag sngags gsang ba mchog gi spyi rgyud kyi rgyal po (dmod pa ngan sngags kyi spyi rgyud)*—in 9 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 393-406. No colophon.
54. *Drag po sngags rgod de kho na nyid phyir bzlog pa'i sngags sdebs kyi rgyal po*—in 7 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 407-416. No colophon.
55. *gSang sngags rigs lnga thams cad 'khrul 'khor rgya sdebs pa'i rgyud*—in 15 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 416-455. This *tantra* is also rich in speculation about letters / syllables and their powers and magical wheels. Said to be translated by Vairocana (Bee ro tsa na).
56. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi las sna tshogs dngos grub rlung las byed 'khor lo'i rgyud*—in 12 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 455-485. Beautiful chapter about the View, complete empowerment ritual, explanation of the *samayās*. The practice seems to consist merely in identifying oneself with the deity; there are all sorts of long and complicated *mantras*; explanations about "wheels" and various activities. Said to be translated by Padmasambhava and Vairocana (Bee ro tsa na). This is a *gter ma* of *Gu ru Chos dbang*.
57. *'Byung ba rlung nag 'khrugs pa zhes bya ba'i rgyud*—in 10 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 485-500. This is clearly a *gter ma*, but no *gter ston* name can be found in the colophon.
58. *Rlung nag 'khrugs pa'i rgyud*—in 15 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 500-520. No colophon.
59. *Drag sngags thams cad 'dus pa'i 'khor lo drag sngags gcod pa'i rgyud*—no clear subdivision in chapters; vol. 29, pp. 520-536. No colophon.
60. *rNam gsum drag po gshin rje drag sngags gcod pa'i rgyud* [or *Ma rgyud don gyi man sngags bstan pa'i rgyud*]—in 7 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 536-578. This *tantra* combines the practices of Yamāntaka, Vajrapāṇi and Vajrakūmara (Vajrakīla) and contains chapters for these three deities. No colophon.
61. *'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed po yid bzhin nor bu'i rgyud*—in 10 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 578-588. Translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, who later hid it as a treasure. No indication of a

- discoverer.
62. *'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed po yid bzhin nor bu'i las sna tshogs bsgrub pa'i rgyud*—in chapters plus a short conclusion; vol. 29, pp. 588-596. Translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes, who later hid it as a treasure. No indication of a discoverer. This is again a mostly magical text.
63. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed kyi sngags rgyud 'khrul 'khor nag po zhes bya ba rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in 19 (15+4) chapters; vol. 29, pp. 596-683. This *tantra* has as its main deity a quite unusual form of Yamāntaka, with six human faces of various colors, twelve arms and eight legs. The *tantra* is well-developed, with a narrative introduction; a long description of its *maṇḍala*; an empowerment ritual (merely alluded to); precise instructions for the *bsnyen sgrub*; various *mantras* (but not the *E ring*); chapter 8 is about the subjugation of the arch-demon called Ru tra nag po 'chi bdag; then we find more common Yamāntaka materials—magical wheels to kill, drive mad, etc. It is only in chapter 16 (pp. 673-674) that the *E ring mantra* appears, called *stong srog 'khor lo*. No colophon.
64. The text pp. 683-694 is called *gShin rje 'khrul 'khor nag po'i rgyud phyi ma yang snying*; it is not clearly distinct from the previous (the numeration of the chapters seems to be continuing from it), but the deity is a three-faced Yamāntaka. Seems to be made up of originally separate texts that have been bound together.
65. *dKa' ba gcod pa yang snying gi rgyud phyi ma'i yang phyi ma*—vol. 29, pp. 694-703. Like the previous one, this *tantra* does not start with a proper presentation of its title in pseudo-Sanskrit and in Tibetan and is not clearly distinct from the two previous ones. It appears as a 20th chapter of this whole. No colophon.

Raktayamāri

66. *dPal gnod sbyin zla gsang dmar po'i rgyud*—in 69 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 703-834. This long *tantra* is the first in the series to be devoted to Red Yamāntaka. It is extremely rich in uncommon Tibetan, material, with expressions like *bse mkhar*, reminiscent of the Bon *gsas mkhar (maṇḍala)*. It seems not to contain any of the *rdzogs rim* materials found in the *gShed dmar* section of the *rNying ma bka' ma*, however. It is presented as translated by Shang ting gar bha and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes.
67. *dPal gnod sbyin dmar po mar khrag skyug gi rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in 6 chapters followed by a small conclusion; vol. 29, pp. 834-840. No proper colophon but concluded by a few verses ascribed to Khrag 'thung nag po, strangely counted as a 7th chapter.

68. *gNod sbyin ging dmar po sgrol ba bsrin po'i rgyud*—in 11 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 840-850. This Red Yamāntaka *tantra*, clearly a *gter ma* (no colophon indicating the *gter ston*), is a grimoire of destructive and defensive magic. It shares with the previous one the formal awkward feature of a quasi-colophon counted as a last chapter.
69. *rDo rje srin po bse yi skyes bu gnod sbyin dmar po'i rgyud* [*rDo rje srin po'i rtsa ba'i rgyud*]*—*in 21 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 850-879. Said to have been taught by Padmasambhava and translated by *Lo tsā ba Ca ndra ku tra*. The connection with Red Yamāntaka, and even with Yamāntaka as a main figure is not obvious at first glance.
70. *'Jam dpal gshin rje dmar po shan pa srog gi 'khor lo'i rgyud*—in 7 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 879-897. This *tantra* begins with a narration about the narration of a primordial evil called *sGrol ging bdag po Ma ru tse*. Said to be translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. It is clearly a *gter ma*, but no discoverer is indicated in the colophon.
71. *dPal gshin rje dmar po ma ra ya khrag skyug gsang ba'i rgyud*—in 7 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 897-904. “Given by the Indian abbot Dha na da la to the little monk Khri btsug” (gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes).
72. *'Jam dpal dmar po'i sngags rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in 10 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 904-918. Translated by Shang ting gar bha and gNubs dBang phyug dpal.
73. *gShin rje dmar po shan pa las kyi rgyud* [*sPru gri reg chod gsang ba'i rgyud*]*—*vol. 29, pp. 918-927. “Entrusted as important” (*gtsas su gzhang*) by the Indian Dha na da la to [gNubs] Yon tan rgya mtsho.
74. *gNod sbyin gar mkhan mchog gi rgyud* [*gNod sbyin zla gsang dmar po'i rgyud* or *dMar po srog gi rgyud* or *Ma ru tse gsung gi rgyud* or *gNod sbyin zla gsang dmar po'i dgra bo'i rgyud* or *dPa' bar 'gro ba gar mkhan mchog gi rgyud phran le'u mdor bsdus pa*]*—*in 18 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 927-939. No colophon indicating either a translator or a *gter ston*.
75. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal mched bzhi'i sngags rgyud* [or *Ma ru tse mched bzhi'i rtsa ba'i rgyud*]*—*vol. 29, pp. 939-954. This *tantra*, as many in this corpus, directly alludes to Tibetan situations (protecting Buddhism when it will spread in Tibet, etc.). No colophon.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ 31st text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *'phags pa 'jam dpal ma ru tse mched bzhi rtsa ba'i sngags rgyud la* | *'di skad bdag gis thos pa dus gcig na 'og min gyi gnas rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pa'i gnas mchog na bcom ldan 'das dpal kun tu bzang po 'gro ba rnams ji ltar 'dul ba bzhin dgongs nas zhes sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | rgyal ba rnams kyis gsungs shing byin gyis brlabs pa sngags kyi le'u lnga pa | rjes su yi rang ba'i le'u dgu pa'o |.*

76. *'Jam dpal gsang ba'i rgyud phyi ma* ('*Jam dpal ma ru tse'i sngags rgyud phyi ma*)—in 7 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 954-965. No colophon.¹⁴⁴
77. *'Jam dpal ma ru tse'i sngags rgyud las | phyi ma'i phyi ma*—no divisions in chapters; vol. 29, pp. 965-968. This is an appendix of the previous one. It does not start with a pseudo-Sanskrit or Tibetan title. Contains allusions to sexual practices. No colophon.
78. *'Jam dpal dmar po zor ba dmar nag gi rgyud* ('*Jam dpal ma ru tse'i sngags rgyud*)—in 6 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 968-1005. No colophon.
79. *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gshin rje'i rgyal po ma ru tse thugs kyi rgyud*—in 6 chapters; vol. 29, pp. 1005-1014. No colophon.
gNod sbyin ma ru tse ro langs gsang ba'i rgyud—in 8 chapters, plus a short conclusion; vol. 29, pp. 1014-1023. Colophon: *gNubs kyi man ngag... Padma dbang rgyal gyi bka'*.¹⁴⁵

*The 28 Yamāntaka Tantras of the dMod pa drag sngags
 or Ma mo rbod gtong categories
 (vol. 44-45 of the mTshams brag rnying rgyud)*

80. *Srog ti nag mo srin mo khros pa'i rgyud [dpal lha mo ma mo'i srog di 'khor lo sdom pa'i rgyud]*—in 11 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 10-25. This *tantra* is about Yamāntaka subduing the *snang srid ma mo*, who then plays a role in liberating the *ru tra* (p. 16: *ru tra sgröl byed srin moi'i dmod pa*, etc.). This is clearly a *gter ma*, but the text does not have a colophon.
81. *Shi sa bstan pa dpal srog gi 'khor lo'i sdom pa'i rgyud*—in 7 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 25-35. Like the previous one, this *tantra* is rather focused on the Goddess, but Yamāntaka is the teaching Buddha and is instrumental, it seems, in controlling her.¹⁴⁶ In a long appended colophon (pp. 33-35), Sangs rgyas ye shes prophesies against the new translations. He is said to have hidden the text as a *gter ma*, but there is no indication about who revealed it.

¹⁴⁴ 32nd text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *| de'i rgyud phyi ma la | de nas de'i tshe de'i dus na lha ma yin g.yog 'khor dang bcas nas bcom ldan 'das ya manta ka'i thad du 'dus te de dag gi nang du gshin rje'i rgyal pos 'di skad ces gsungs so sogs dbang bskur ba dang 'khor lo'i le'u dang po | smon lam dang thun dang rjes su yi rang ba bdun pa | mjug tu dbang phyug chen po yi rangs te bstod pa phyi ma'i phyi ma dang bcas yod pa |*.

¹⁴⁵ 33rd text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *ma ru rtse ro langs gsang ba'i rgyud dpa' bo gar mkhan mchog gi rgyud la | 'di skad bdag gis thos pa'i dus gcig na ri bdun gyi byang phyogs kyi ngos la gnod sbyin gyi rgyal po ma ru rtse zhes bya ba gnas te lha dang lha ma yin la sogs pa thams cad g.yul 'gyed pa sogs gleng gzhi'i le'u dang po | sgrub pa dang srog sngags bstan pa bzhi pa | 'khor lo dkrug pa brgyad pa'o | | mjug tu bstod pa dang dmyal ba'i las rdzogs so'i mtha' can |*.

¹⁴⁶ Colophon p. 34: *'di dpal ya man ta ka gnod sbyin stobs ldan 'bur khung nag por sprul pa'i sgrub thabs yin te | 'di la brten pa'i sgrub thabs ltar bsnyen pa zhag nyi shu rtsa gcig byas nas | ma mo thams cad dbang med du bran du 'khol bar 'gyur ro |*.

82. *Ku ma ra dza mngon du dbyung ba che mchog 'jigs byed ngan sngags kyi rgyud (dMar po lcam dral gyi rgyud)*—in 4 sections (*skabs*); vol. 44, pp. 35-44. Like the previous one, this *tantra* has a long colophon, in which it is presented as translated by *Gu ru 'phrul gyi Shog rgod rtsal* and *gNubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes* who later hid it as a *gter ma*. There is no indication about the *gter ston*, but this *tantra* is said to be “the weapon of *gZus ston Rin chen rgyal po*.”
83. *gShin rje gtsug lag gi 'khor lo'i rgyud*—in 4 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 240-248. No colophon; belongs to a long series of *gTsug lag 'khor lo'i rgyud*, of which the others are not connected to Yamāntaka. This short *tantra* is interesting insofar as it contains something like a typological categorization of the Yamāntaka literature.
84. *Drag po ngan sngags kyi rtsa rgyud*—in 109 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 423-525. Although Yamāntaka is the main figure in the framework narrative of this *tantra*, it contains magical practices associated with numerous deities of the type found in a complete *bKa' brgyad maṇḍala*. No colophon.
85. *Drag po ngan sngags kyi bshad rgyud*—in 174 short chapters; vol. 44, pp. 525-584. This *tantra* is quite similar to the previous one, although shorter. Said to be translated by *Shang ting ga rbha* and *rDo rje thogs med rtsal*. No indication about the *gter ston*.
86. *Ngan sngags gtsug lag gi rgyud* [or *Ngan sngags gtsug lag gi rgyud phyi ma | phyi ma'i yang phyi ma shin tu gsang ba*]—in 8 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 584-628. This *tantra*—clearly a *gter ma* with some *dākinī* scripts—is a dialogue between the primordial Buddha *Kun tu bzang po* and *Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka*, here in the position of the disciple / the one who asks questions. It contains long explanations about letters. Like the two previous ones, it has chapters about all sorts of other deities that do not belong to the Yamāntaka *maṇḍala* in the broadest sense. The colophon indicates that it has been hidden as a *gter ma*, but without further information.
87. *Drag sngags mtshon cha nag po'i rgyud*—in 9 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 628-641. This one is really a Yamāntaka *tantra*, the main deity having exactly the aspect described in *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*, except for the permutation of the *vajra* and the sword in the right hands (p. 630) and a few other tiny details. Translated by **Vasudhara* and *gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes*.¹⁴⁷
88. *Ngan sngags gtsug lag gi rgyud kyi rgyal po*—in six chapters; vol. 44, pp. 641-673. This *tantra* does not have a proper title statement at it

¹⁴⁷ 13th text in the 5th Dalai Lama's list, described in these terms: *drag sngags mtshon cha nag po'i rgyud dam rdo rje thog 'bebs sku'i rgyud le'u dgu pa lha yul du grags pa 'gyur gong 'dra | dpal tshe bdag nag po'i rgyud drag sngags kyi de kho na srog dmar len gyi spu gri zhes bya ba le'u bcu gnyis pa 'gyur gong 'dra |*.

begins and starts abruptly with *de nas dpal kun tu bzang po'i sprul pa...* Yamāntaka asks questions to the primordial buddha Kun tu bzang po. This seems to be mostly a grimoire of destructive magic in which Yamāntaka is not absolutely central, so it is not a Yamāntaka *tantra* in the fullest sense.

89. *Srog las kyi rgyal bu srog bdag gser gyi ga phur*—in 28 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 673-756. In this *tantra* again, Yamāntaka is more central in the framework narrative than in the bulk of the content. In the last chapter, Padmasambhava explains that it was hidden as a *gter ma*, but there is no information about who revealed it.
90. *Mon pa phung byed nor srungs kyi rgyud*—in 8 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 815-823. This *tantra* seems to be about the “savages” (*mon pa*) that belong to Yamāntaka’s retinue.
91. *'Khor lo nag po (spu gri 'bar ba) 'i rgyud*—in 29 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 824-847. This is not properly a *tantra* about Yamāntaka, but some parts are about Nāgarakṣa (and leprosy). No colophon.
92. *sNying zor nag po'i rgyud*—in 9 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 858-871. No real colophon except a quatrain about the fact that this *tantra* can be taught only to the royalty.
93. *Drag po sngags rgod chen po zhes bya ba'i rgyud* [or *'Phags pa 'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed kyi rgyud | rus sbal khra bo'i rtogs pa zhes bya ba rtog pa bcu gsum pa | gdug pa gsum 'dul gyi rgyud*—in 12 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 906-927. Though explicitly presented as a *tantra* connected to Yamāntaka, its content does not seem to be focused on that deity. It is rather a grimoire of magic.
94. *Mu stegs drag sngags nag po'i rgyud*—in 11 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 927-951. The main deity of this *tantra* is a form of black Yamāntaka in union with E ka dza ti, used to control all sorts of spirits for magical purposes. No colophon.
95. *Srog bdag gser gyi rta pa'i rgyud*—in 11 chapters; vol. 44, pp. 1007-1016. No colophon. Here again, Yamāntaka is rather utilized to control spirits than worshipped.
96. *Pa la pa tra gsang ba'i rgyud* (*sNying zor nag po'i rgyud* or *Pa la pa tra gsang ba'i snying zor gyi rgyud*)—in 9 chapters; vol. 45, pp. 20-33. This is clearly a *gter ma*, but the *gter ston* is not identified.¹⁴⁸
97. *dPal zla gsang nag po rgya mtsho dug ri kha yakṣa 'khor lo nag po gsang ba'i rgyud*—vol. 45, pp. 59-134. This is a *tantra* of Yamāntaka in the Nāgarakṣa form, though other forms of Yamāntaka may occur, but always as antidotes against the *nāgas* and the illnesses they cause. A chapter bears the title *mdzes nag las kyi 'khor lo* (chap. 6, pp. 70-74). Said to be translated by *Vasudhara and gNubs Sangs rgyas ye

¹⁴⁸ This must be the 29th text in the 5th Dalai Lama’s list: *gdong zor nag po'am gshin rje sngags bzlog gi rgyud le'u bdun pa |*.

- shes. This is clearly a *gter ma*, but without indication of the *gter ston*. However, in the 12th chapter, *gtad pa'i le'u*, there are unclear indications about where and how it was hidden.
98. *dPal yakṣa nag po gsang ba'i dug | rgya mtsho dug ri nag po*—in 9 sections (*rtogs pa*); vol. 45, pp. 134-156. Seems to be an appendix of the previous and clearly a *gter ma*. No *gter ston* name, but allusion to a black frog (*sbal nag po*) in the colophon.¹⁴⁹ The phrase *mdze nag las kyi 'khor lo* occurs in the conclusion, p. 156.
99. *mDze nag las kyi 'khor lo'i rgyud*—in 14 chapters; vol. 45, pp. 156–198. Said to be translated by Khrag 'thung nag po and Vairocana. The colophon clearly shows that it is a *gter ma* but does not give any hint about the *gter ston*. Seems to belong to the same group as the two previous texts.
100. *Klu dam tshig gi rgyud phyi ma'i las su phyung ba'i ti ka*—in 3 chapters; vol. 45, pp. 349-370. No colophon; this is a *gter ma*.
101. *sBal nag 'khor lo zhes bya ba klu nag po'i rgyud*—not subdivided in chapters; vol. 45, pp. 370-376. No colophon.
102. *Dam tshig las kyi rgyal po'i rgyud*—in 30 chapters; vol. 45, pp. 376-458. In the colophon, gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes describes how he received this *tantra* from *rGyal po Vasudhara* and later hid it as a *gter ma* because he could not find any suitable disciple. No indication about who later revealed it.
103. *Klu'i rgyal po mchod rten gyi rgyud thugs yang dag pa (rTog pa'i rgyal po mchod rten gyi rgyud or 'Phags pa rtog pa'i rgyud)*—in 100 chapters; vol. 45, pp. 458-724. It has a narrative conclusion pp. 722-724 in which it is presented as taught by Buddha Śākyamuni and compiled by Vajrapāṇi and later, after a series of intermediary lings, brought to Tibet by *Leng ston lo tsā ba* who hid it as a *gter ma*. It was later discovered by *Shangs kyi jo sras Dar grags*, who passed it to *dGe bshes Khyung po rdo gsher*, who taught to *Khun ston Dar snying*, who taught it to *Mar ston*, who passed it to *mDa' mi Dar ma 'bar*.
104. *Klu'i 'khor lo nag po'i rgyud*—in 7 sections (*rtog pa*); vol. 45, pp. 724-753. The colophon says it was transmitted from *Mañjuśrī[mitra]* and *Kamala[śīla]*, then translated by *Vasudhara* and *gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes*.
105. *Klu'i 'khor lo nag po 'phrin las thams cad rdzogs pa zhes bya ba rgyud kyi rgyal po chen po*—in 52 chapters, plus an epilogue; vol. 45, pp. 753-878. Note the phrase *mdze nag las kyi 'khor lo* pp. 759, 790, 865, 877, 878. Strange transmission lineage (p. 876) with Chinese

¹⁴⁹ See the article on *Rin chen gling pa* in this volume: this may be a strong indication that this *tantra* is a revelation of this *gter ston*. The *mDze nag las kyi 'khor lo* mentioned in the biography of *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* may then allude to this text.

masters passing this *tantra* to Padmasambhava. There seems to be an allusion to rGya Zhang khrom as the treasure discoverer.

106. *Klu nag po'i rgyud sdig pa phung shig*—in 7 chapters; vol. 45, pp. 958-969. A text connected to Nāgarakṣa as *klu'i rgyal po*. At the end, a short segment of lineage is presented: Kamalaśīla, Hūṃkāra, Vasudhara. This is clearly a *gter ma*, but without clear indications about the *gter ston*.
107. *Klu'i 'khor lo nag po | mā ra ya bsad pa'i 'phrin las | gshin rje nag po'i 'khrul 'khor | dug sprul nag po lto dkrug gsang ba yang snying nag po | klu'i srog tig nag po*—in 8 sections (*rtog pa*); vol. 45, pp. 969-977. This is again a Nāgarakṣa *tantra*. The colophon identifies it as “Vasudhara’s precepts extracted from Bodhgaya.”

A Yamāntaka Tantra in the bKa' brgyad Category
(vol. 24 of the mTshams brag rnying rgyud)

108. *gShin rje gshed rab tu 'dus pa rtsa ba'i rgyud*—vol. 24, pp. 664-712. This is a *gter ma* of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od-zer, a fundamental text of the *bDe gshegs bsdus pa*.

Appendix 2:
Comparative Chart of the Three Versions of the *Zla gsang nag po*

<i>Zla gsang nag po</i> 1: the “thrice revised” version	<i>Zla gsang nag po</i> 2: another later version, revised and completed	<i>Zla gsang nag po</i> 3: gNubs chen’s translation (oldest version)
1. <i>Gleng gzhi'i le'u</i> —p. 2-18	1. <i>Gleng gzhi'i byung khungs kyi le'u</i> —p. 283-290	1. <i>Gleng gzhi'i skabs</i> —p. 591-598
2. <i>Gleng bslang ba dang gsal byed lta ba bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 18-22	2. <i>Gleng bslang ba'i le'u</i> —p. 290-296	2. <i>Gleng bslang ba'i skabs</i> —p. 598-603
3. <i>gNas bzhi 'khor lo dang drag po gnad kyi 'khor lo mdor bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 22-30	∅	∅
4. <i>Drag po sngags rgod 'jig rten rlag byed kyi le'u</i> —p. 30-41.	∅	∅
5. <i>mDor bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 41-49	∅	∅
6. <i>'Bras bu mngon du gyur pa'i dbang gi le'u</i> —p. 49-58	∅	∅
7. <i>Yab yum spyang drangs pa'i le'u</i> —p. 58-59	∅	∅
8. <i>mChod bstod kyi le'u</i> —p. 59-61	∅	∅
9. <i>bsTan pa bzhuḡs shing phyag 'tshal ba'i le'u</i> —p. 61-62	∅	∅

<i>Zla gsang nag po 1: the "thrice revised" version</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 2: another later version, revised and completed</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 3: gNubs chen's translation (oldest version)</i>
10. <i>gDul bya dug gsum gyi las kyi le'u</i> —p. 62-64	∅	∅
11. <i>Phyag rgya bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 64-66	∅	∅
12. <i>Yab yum 'phrin las bcol ba'i le'u</i> —p. 66-71	∅	∅
13. <i>Thar byed kyi le'u</i> —p. 71-73	∅	∅
14. <i>Thams cad zhi bar bsgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 73-75	3. <i>Thams cad zhi bar sgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 296-298	3. <i>Thams cad zhi bar sgrub pa'i skabs</i> —p. 603-605
15. <i>Thams cad rgyas par bsgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 75-77	4. <i>Thams cad rgyas par sgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 298-300	4. <i>Thams cad rgyas par sgrub pa'i skabs</i> —p. 605-607
16. <i>Thams cad dbang du bya ba'i le'u</i> —p. 77-79	5. <i>Thams cad dbang du bya ba'i le'u</i> —p. 300-303	5. <i>Thams cad dbang du sdud pa'i skabs</i> —p. 607-609
17. <i>Drag po'i sgrub thabs thams cad 'dul ba nas cho 'phrul bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 79-81	6. <i>Drag por sgrubs pa te thams cad 'dul ba nas cho 'phrul bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 303-305	6. <i>Drag por bsgrubs te thams cad btul nas cho 'phrul bstan pa'i skabs</i> —p. 609-611
∅	7. <i>gNas bzhi'i dkyil 'khor gnyis bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 305-306.	∅
∅	8. <i>Lus srog 'byed pa'i 'khor lo bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 306-308	∅
∅	9. <i>Mos pa'i 'khor lo bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 308-309	∅
∅	10. <i>'Khor lo dbye ba rgyas par bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 309-310	∅
∅	11. <i>bsNyen grub kyi rim par phye ba'i le'u</i> —p. 310-312	∅
18. <i>Drag po'i le'u</i> —p. 81-82	12. <i>Ga'u drag po'i las bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 312-313	7. <i>Drag po'i skabs</i> —p. 611-612
19. <i>Drag po bca' bzhi'i le'u</i> —p. 82-87	13. <i>Yang gsang drag po'i bca' gzhi'i le'u</i> —p. 313-319	8. <i>Drag po bca' bzhi'i skabs</i> —p. 612-618
∅	14. <i>rTsa ba'i 'khrul 'khor chen po bkod pa'i le'u</i> —p. 319-323	∅
∅	15. <i>Nyams su blang ba'i tshad ma bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 323-327	∅
∅	16. <i>Drag po'i 'khor lo bsgrub pa'i rim pa thugs kyi tsa kra bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 327-331	∅
∅	17. <i>Las tshogs bsdu pa'i le'u</i> —p. 331-334	∅
∅	18. <i>gCod byed spu gri las sna tshogs bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 334-337	∅
∅	19. <i>Drag sngags btu ba bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 337-345	∅
∅	20. <i>Drag po rdo rje rme thabs kyi le'u</i> —p. 345-349	∅
∅	21. <i>Ma grub na spogs pa thams cad kyi rim pa bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 349-353	∅
20. <i>dKyil 'khor bca' gzhi'i le'u</i> —p. 87-90	22. <i>dKyil 'khor bca' gzhi'i le'u</i> —p. 353-356	9. <i>Dal bca' bzhi'i skabs</i> —p. 618-623
21. <i>Drag po 'phrin las kyi le'u</i> —p. 90-96	23. <i>Drag po 'phrin las kyi le'u</i> —p. 356-362	10. <i>Drag po 'phrin las kyi skabs</i> —p. 623-627

<i>Zla gsang nag po 1: the "thrice revised" version</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 2: another later version, revised and completed</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 3: gNubs chen's translation (oldest version)</i>
22. 'Khor lo bca' thabs kyi le'u—p. 96-98	24. 'Khor lo bca ba'i le'u—p. 362-365	11. 'Khor lo bcas kyi skabs—p. 627-629
∅	25. gSang ba las kyi bsnyen pa'i le'u—p. 365-371	∅
23. sGom khog rtsa ba'i le'u—p. 98-101	26. sGom khog rtsa ba'i le'u—p. 371-373	12. sGom khog tsam po'i skabs—p. 629-632
24. bSod nams kyi tshogs kyi yan lag gi le'u—p. 101-102	maybe No. 17 above: Las tshogs bsdus pa'i le'u—p. 331-334?	13. bSod nams kyi tshogs kyi skabs—p. 632-633
25. lHa'i bsnyen pa bgyi ba'i le'u—p. 102-104	27. lHa bsgrub bdud sgrub kyi rim pa bsnyen bsgrub bstan pa'i le'u—p. 373-378	14. lHa'i bsnyed pa'i skabs—p. 633-635
26. Nye ba'i bsnye ba'i le'u—p. 104	∅	15. Nye ba'i bsnyen pa'i skabs—p. 635
27. sGrub pa chen po'i le'u—p. 104-105	∅	16. sGrub pa chen po'i skabs—p. 635-636
28. 'Chi bdag bdud dang gshin rje'i bsnyen pa ste le'u rta brgyad pa—p. 105-106	∅	17. 'Chi bdag bdud dang gshin rje'i bsnyen pa'i skabs—p. 636-637
29. bSad pa las kyi bsnyen pa ste le'u...—p. 106-111	∅	18. gSang ba las kyi bsnyen pa'i skabs—p. 637-642
30. 'Khor lo thub bsdebs kyi le'u—p. 111-119	28. 'Khor lo thub bsdebs man ngag gi le'u—p. 378-384	19. 'Khor lo thun 'debs kyi skabs—p. 642-649
31. mTshon gyi gru gu sngon dmar gyi le'u—p. 119-123	29. mTshon gyi rde'u sngon dmar 'khor lo byad stems kyi le'u—p. 384-390	20. Tshon gyi gru bu sngon dmar 'khor lo byad sdebs kyi skabs—p. 649-655
32. 'Khor lo mnan pa'i le'u—p. 123-126	∅	21. 'Khor lo mnan pa'i skabs—p. 655-658
33. 'Khor lo ho sbrel gyi le'u—p. 126-129	∅	22. 'Khor lo ho ma bsregs pa'i skabs—p. 658-662
34. sNgags kyi yang snying 'khrul 'khor gyi le'u—p. 129-135	30. sNgags kyi yang snying 'khrul 'khor gyi le'u—p. 390-394	23. sNgags kyi yang snying 'khrul 'khor gyi le'u—p. 662-667
35. Yang snying gsang ba'i le'u—p. 135-136	31. Yang snying bsad pa'i le'u—p. 394-396	24. Yang snying gsang ba'i skabs—p. 667-668
36. 'Khrul 'khor man ngag gi le'u—p. 136-141	32. 'Khrul 'khor man ngag gi le'u—p. 396-401	25. 'Khrul 'khor man ngag skabs—p. 668-673
37. Ka bzhi gdung brgyad kyi le'u—p. 141-142	33. Thugs kyi ka bzhi dang gdung brgyad bstan pa'i le'u—p. 401-402	26. Ka bzhi gdung brgyud [sic] kyi skabs—p. 673-675
38. 'Bu shag grong khyer gyi le'u—p. 142-143	34. 'Bu shag gi grong khyer bstan pa'i le'u—p. 402-403	27. 'Bu shag gi skabs—p. 675
39. gSang ba thun sngags kyi le'u—p. 143-145	∅	∅
40. Ngan sngags rgod kyi le'u—p. 145-153	∅	∅
41. Dam tshig mdor bstan pa'i le'u—p. 153-154	∅	∅
42. Nag po gsal byed sgron me'i le'u—p. 154-155	35. Nag po gsal byed sgron me'i le'u—p. 403-405	28. Nag po gsal byed sgron ma'i skabs—p. 675-677
∅	36. Thig le gdab pa dang gsang ba'i brda dgod pa'i le'u—p. 405-410	∅
∅	37. bDud mo'i snying po sbyar ba dang dgog pa'i le'u—p. 410-413	∅

<i>Zla gsang nag po 1: the "thrice revised" version</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 2: another later version, revised and completed</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 3: gNubs chen's translation (oldest version)</i>
∅	38. <i>Las kyi mdo byang chen po bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 413-414	29. <i>Las sbyor gyi mdo byang skabs</i> —p. 677-678
∅	39. <i>Pho mo sto dkrugs rtogs pa'i rim pa'i le'u</i> —p. 414-417	∅
∅	40. <i>gNam lcags thog 'bebs me lce 'phreng ba'i le'u</i> —p. 417-423 [seems to contain explanations about <i>rtsa rlung</i> practices, unexpected in this context.]	∅
∅	41. <i>Ra ksha 'bar ba khros pa gza' mchog ming sring sgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 423-439	∅
∅	42. <i>Ra ksha 'bar ba gza' mchog gi sngags kyi rim gyi le'u</i> —p. 439-443	∅
∅	43. <i>gZa' mchog bsrgub pa'i las kyi rim pa dang thun gyi thus ka ces pa bsdus pa'i le'u</i> —p. 443-449	∅
∅	44. <i>dMag dpon chen po brgyad kyi thog ser skyin thang dbab pa'i le'u</i> —p. 449-457	∅
∅	45. <i>gZa' mchog ming sring gi thun gyi bskul ba las kyi le'u</i> —p. 457-460	∅
∅	46. <i>gZa' mchog gi phur pa bsgrub pa dang las rim bsdus pa'i le'u</i> —p. 460-463	∅
43. <i>Las kyi mdo byang</i> —p. 155-156	47. <i>Las kyi mdo byang</i> —p. 463-464	∅
44. <i>Bya thabs lag len nying khu'i le'u</i> —p. 156-161	48. <i>Bya thabs nyams len nying khu'i le'u</i> —p. 464-470	30. <i>Bya thabs lag len nying khu'i skabs</i> —p. 678-683
45. <i>Phyogs skyong gshin rje bskul ba'i le'u</i> —p. 161-168	49. <i>Phyogs skyong gi gshed bsko ba'i le'u</i> —p. 470-474	31. <i>Phyogs skyong gi gshed bsko ba'i skabs</i> —p. 683-690
46. <i>Nyi ma bzhi lha bzhi ging bzhi la 'phrin las bcol ba'i le'u</i> —p. 168-170	50. <i>Nyi ma bzhi'i lha'i ging bzhi la 'phrin las bcol ba'i le'u</i> —p. 474-476	32. <i>Nyin bzhi lha'i ging bzhi la 'phrin las shin tu dbyed pa'i skabs</i> —p. 673-692
47. <i>gTum chen la bstod pa'i le'u</i> —p. 170-172	51. <i>gTum chen la bstod pa'i le'u</i> —p. 476-479	33. <i>gTum chen la bstod pa'i skabs</i> —p. 692-695
48. <i>'Gyur med tshe'i le'u</i> —p. 172-174	∅	∅
49. <i>Thun mong yon tan bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 174-176	∅	∅
∅	52. <i>gDug pa klu'i zla gsang mdze nad dzwa li 'khor lo'i le'u</i> —p. 479-493	∅
50. <i>sTong gsum mun par gtong ba bdud phyi ltar bsgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 176-186	53. <i>bdud kyi zla gsang stong gsum mun par gtong ba'i le'u dang bdud phyi ltar bsgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 493-504	34. <i>sTong gsum mun par gtong ba bdud phyi ltar bsgrub pa'i skabs</i> —p. 695-705
51. <i>bdud nang ltar sgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 186-190	54. <i>bdud nang ltar sgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 504-507	35. <i>bdud nang ltar sgrub pa'i skabs</i> —p. 705-709
52. <i>bdud gsang ba ltar sgrub pa'i le'u</i> —p. 190-192	55. <i>bdud kyi zla ba gsang bar bstan pa'i le'u</i> —p. 507-510	36. <i>bdud gsang ba ltar sgrub pa'i skabs</i> —p. 709-711
53. Missing?	∅	∅

Zla gsang nag po 1: the "thrice revised" version	Zla gsang nag po 2: another later version, revised and completed	Zla gsang nag po 3: gNubs chen's translation (oldest version)
54. 'Jig rten mes sreg par byed pa btsan gyi zla gsang gi le'u — p. 192-194	56. 'Jig rten mes sreg par byed pa btsan gyi zla gsang gi le'u — p. 510-513	37. 'Jig rten gyi khams mes bsreg pa btsan gyi zla gsang skabs — p. 711-715
55. 'Jig rten khams mes bsreg pa btsan nang ltar sgrub pa'i le'u — p. 194-196	57. 'Jig rten gyi khams mes bsreg pa btsan gyi zla gsang gi le'u — p. 513-515	38. 'Jig rten gyi khams mes bsreg pa btsan gyi zla gsang skabs — p. 715-717
56. 'Jig rten gyi khams mes bsreg pa btsan gyi zla gsang gi le'u — p. 196-198	58. 'Jig rten gyi khams mes bsreg pa btsan gyi zla gsang gi le'u — p. 515-516	39. 'Jig rten gyi khams mes bsreg pa btsan gyi zla gsang skabs — p. 717-718
57. Chu 'khyags khrag tu dbab pa khyab 'jug gza'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 198-206	59. Chu 'khyags khrag tu dbab pa khyab 'jug gza'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 516-527	40. Chu 'khyags drag tu dbab pa gza'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 718-728
58. Chu 'khyags khrag tu dbab pa l gza' nang ltar sgrub pa'i le'u — p. 206-207	60. Chu 'khyags khrag tu dbab pa khyab 'jug gza'i zla gsang — p. 527-528	41. gZa' nang ltar bsgrub pa'i le'u — p. 728-729
59. Chu 'khyags khrag tu dbab pa gza' gsang ba ltar sgrub pa'i le'u — p. 207-212	61. Chu 'khyags khrag tu dbab pa khyab 'jug gza'i zla gsang — p. 528-533	42. Chu 'khyags drag tu dbab pa gza'i zla gsang skabs — p. 729-734
60. gNam lcags thog 'bebs kyi le'u — p. 212-218	62. 'Jig rten du thog dbab lha'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 533-539	43. 'Jig rten du thog dbab lha'i zla gsang skabs — p. 734-741
61. Drag po las rgod kyi le'u — p. 218-221	∅	∅
62. 'Jig rten du thog dbab lha'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 221-225	63. Thog dbab lha'i zla gsang nang du sgrub pa'i le'u — p. 339-547	44. Thog dbab lha'i zla gsang skabs — p. 741-749
63. Thog dbab lha'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 225-234	∅	∅
64. 'Jig rten gyi khams su thog dbab pa lha'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 234-236	64. 'Jig rten khams su thog dbab zla gsang las gsang bar sgrub pa'i le'u — p. 547-550	45. 'Jig rten du thog dbab lha'i zla gsang skabs — p. 749-751
65. Nad ngan dbab pa ma mo'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 236-242	65. Ngan sngags sna tshogs dbab pa ma mo'i zla gsang bstan pa'i le'u — p. 550-557	46. Nad ngan dbab pa ma mo'i zla gsang skabs — p. 751-758
66. Yams nad kyi bdag mo ma mo'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 242-248	66. Yams nad kyi bdag mo ma mo'i zla gsang bstan pa'i le'u — p. 557-564	47. Yams kyi bdag mo ma mo zla gsang skabs — p. 758-766
67. Nad ngan sna tshogs gtong ba ma mo'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 248-250	67. Nad ngan sna tshogs btang ba'i ma mo'i zla gsang gi le'u — p. 564-566	48. Nad ngan sna tshogs gtong ba ma mo'i zla gsang skabs — p. 766-768
68. rGyal po phyi ltar bsgrubs te smyo 'bog btang ba'i le'u — p. 250-254	68. rGyal po phyi ltar bsgrubs te l smyo 'bog btang ba'i le'u — p. 566-571	49. rGyal po phyi ltar sgrub pa'i skabs — p. 768-772
69. sMyo 'bog gi zla gsang rgyal po nang ltar bsgrub pa'i le'u — p. 254-258	69. rGyal po nang du bsgrub te smyo 'bog btang ba'i le'u — p. 571-576	50. sMyo 'bog zla gsang rgyal po nang du bsgrub pa'i skabs — p. 772-777
70. rGyal po gsang ba ltar bsgrubs pa l smyo 'bog tu gtang ba'i le'u — p. 258-263	70. rGyal po zla gsang nag po gsang ba ltar bsgrubs te l smyo 'bog btang ba'i le'u — p. 576-582	51. sMyo 'bogs btang ba'i skabs — p. 777-783
71. Srog gcod spu gri gnod sbyin gyi zla gsang gang ba bzang po phyi ltar bsgrub pa'i le'u — p. 263-265	71. Srog gcod spu gri gnod sbyin gyi zla gsang l gang ba bzang po phyi ltar bsgrub pa'i le'u — p. 582-584	52. Gang ba bzang po phyi ltar bsgrub pa'i skabs — p. 783-785
72. Gang ba bzang po nang ltar sgrub pa'i le'u — p. 265-267	72. Srog gcod spu gri gnod sbyin gyi zla gsang l gang ba	53. Gang ba bzang po nang du bsgrub pa'i skabs — p. 785-787

<i>Zla gsang nag po 1: the "thrice revised" version</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 2: another later version, revised and completed</i>	<i>Zla gsang nag po 3: gNubs chen's translation (oldest version)</i>
	<i>bzang po nang du sgrub pa'i le'u—p. 584-586</i>	
73. <i>Srog gcod spu gri gnod sbyin gyi zla gsang l gsang ba ltar sgrub pa'i le'u—p. 267-268</i>	73. <i>Srog gcod spu gri gnod sbyin gyi zla gsang l gang ba bzang po gsang bar bsgrub pa'i le'u—p. 586-588</i>	54. <i>Gang ba bzang po gsang bar bsgrub pa'i skabs—p. 787-789</i>
∅	see above: 52. <i>gDug pa klu'i zla gsang mdze nad dzwa li 'khor lo'i le'u—p. 479-493</i>	55. <i>gDug pa klu'i skabs—p. 789-795</i> 56. <i>gDug pa klu'i nang ltar bsgrub pa'i skabs—p. 795-801</i>
74. <i>mDze nad dzwa la gdug pa'i klu'i zla gsang gi le'u—p. 268-282</i>		57. <i>mDze nad dzwa la gdug pa'i klu'i zla gsang skabs—p. 801-802</i>
75. <i>'Jigs byed chen pos gdams dang l 'khor rnams rjes su yi rangs nas l dam bcas pa'i le'u—p. 282-283¹⁵⁰</i>	74. <i>'Khor phun sum tshogs pa'i don bstod pa dang l man ngag rtsa ba'i thabs bstan pa'i le'u—p. 588-591¹⁵¹</i>	58. <i>rGyud gtad pa'i skabs—p. 802-803</i>

Appendix 3 *bKa' ma Yamāntaka Lineages*

The chart below is a synthesis of the lineages found in the following eight texts, from the beginning to the time of gTer bdag gling pa. The latter may not have been more central than, e.g., *Byang bdag* bKras shis stobs rgyal, but we are better informed on the *bKa' ma* lineages that he gathered as they are the basis for bDud 'joms rin po che's later *bKa' ma* compilation.

1. gZhan phan mtha' yas¹⁵² (completed by bDud 'joms rin po che), *Jam dpal gshin rje gshed kha thun gyi dbang brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs*: KSG, vol 4, pp. 657-659. Contains a complete line of masters through gTer bdag gling pa down to *Khyab bdag 'Gyur med phan bde'i 'od zer*, and then *rtsa ba'i bla ma* (bDud 'joms rin po che).
2. rNgog gi ston pa bSod nam shes rab, *gShin rje dmar po'i bla ma brgyud pa'i lo rgyus* vol. 5, pp. 7-23.
3. dKon mchog rdo rje, disciple of Kumāravajra (gZhon nu rdo rje), *Jam dpal gzhon nur rol pa'i sgom byang*. Vol. 5, pp. 115-122.

¹⁵⁰ Colophon: triple revision of the translation. Obscure formula about the way it was hidden because it is secret and dangerous.

¹⁵¹ Colophon: a little conclusion telling how the *tantra* was hidden 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen and later found by Jñanagarbha, then passed to Nam mkha' snying po. No indication of a translator, etc. The 5th Dalai Lama's opinion that this *tantra* was translated by gNubs Nam mkha' snying po seems to be inspired by this colophon in which he is the first named Tibetan master.

¹⁵² *rGyal sras* gZhan phan mtha' yas, bdr P697 (1800–1855).

4. gNubs Seng ge rgyal mtshan,¹⁵³ *sNyan brgyud rin chen phreng ba*. Vol. 5, pp. 269-334.
5. gNubs Seng ge rgyal mtshan, *'Jam dpal dmar po'i dbang gi rim pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga*. Vol. 6, pp. 5-32.
6. gNubs ston Ratna, *bCom ldan 'das dpal gshin rje'i gshed dmar po'i rig 'dzin bskul ba*. Vol. 6, pp. 71-80.
7. gZhan phan mtha' yas (completed by bDud 'joms rin po che), *Jam dpal gshin rje gshed dmar po'i brgyud 'debs*. Vol. 6, pp. 317-319.
8. *gShin rje gdong drug gi brgyud 'debs*. Vol. 6, p. 467-468.

<i>'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed kha thun nag po</i>	<i>gShin rje gshed dmar</i>		<i>gShin rje gdong drug</i>
			Kun tu bzang po
			rDo rje 'chang
	Ma ru rtse (=Raktayamāri)		'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed
	<i>gSang bdag Zla 'od</i>		<i>gSang bdag</i>
	Mañjuśrimitra or Sāntimgharba		Mañjuśrimitra
	Dhanadala ¹⁵⁴	Padmasambhava, (+ Srī Siṅha, Khri srong lde'u btsan...)	Padma-sambhava
Vasudhara	Vasudhara	<i>Bal mo bZa' gSer phreng and gNubs Nam mkha'i snying po</i>	Bal po Nor 'dzin bzang [Vasudhara]
gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes (804–914?)¹⁵⁵			
gNubs Khu lung pa Yon tan rgya mtsho¹⁵⁶			
Padma dbang rgyal (son of Khu lung pa Yon tan rgya mtsho)			
His other son Ye shes rgya mtsho, presented as the one who was instructed by Yon tan rgya mtsho about where to find the casket with Dhanadala's teachings. But Padma dbang rgyal hears the instruction, steals the casket, and goes.			
<i>Chos kyi dbon rtsa Khro 'bar chos kyi rgyal</i>	'Jam dpal, son of Padma dbang rgyal. Also called <i>Chen po 'Jam dpal</i>		
	<i>alternative lineage for gShin rje gshed dmar</i>		

¹⁵³ A student of Rwa lo tsā ba, so, active in the early 12th century.

¹⁵⁴ Sometimes presented as receiving teachings from Padmasambhava.

¹⁵⁵ Sometimes gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes and gNubs khu lung pa Yon tan rgya mtsho are inverted in the *gShed dmar* lineages.

¹⁵⁶ In the *gShin rje'i gshed dmar* narrative, it is not only Sangs rgyas ye shes, but also Yon tan rgya mtsho that goes to India / Nepal and received teaching from Vasudhara, Khrag 'thung nag po and gTsug las dpal dge.

'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed kha thun nag po		gShin rje gshed dmar		gShin rje gdong drug	
Hūm chen bKra shis dar	Hūm chen ¹⁵⁷	Jo mo so gad Rag shi ston pa, or Jo mo So gad bza' rgan ne, or Jo mo So rgad bza'			
Dar ma seng	De sras Hūm grags	Ye shes gzungs, son of Chen po 'Jam dpal. ¹⁵⁸			
	sKye bu 'bar	According to a description of a lineage found in the 5th Dalai Lama's gSan yig, ¹⁵⁹ he was a direct disciple of rGya Zhang khrom.			
	rDo rje bdud 'dul				
rDo rje dpal	His sons: Kun dga' rdo rje snying po (also called Jo rdor Kun dga' rdo rje)	Sa 'dzin Dharmarāja (or Re Dharmarāja); bSam gtan. One of these is also called lHa rje gNubs chung, ¹⁶⁰ Mi la ras pa's master for destructive magic.	Lo tsā ba rMa ban chos 'bar	Zhang btsun 'Khor 'bar	
dKon mchog seng ge	Seng ge rgyal mtshan, son of Kun dga' rdo rje snying po (lHa rje—, Jo rdor gyi sras Seng ge rgyal mtshan).	lHa rje dBang gzhon		rTse'u sa pa	Rig 'dzin Zhang rgyal mtshan
		lHa rje rGyal hor	Seng ge bkra shis	Ras pa dBu yu ba	
lHa rje Hūm chen	lHa rje Chos dbang, son of Seng ge rgyal mtshan and sras lHa rje Chos seng	Bla ma Dar ma seng ge [see also column on the left]		Rwa lo tsā ba rDo rje grags pa (1016?-1128?)	lCags spyil ba ¹⁶¹
lHa rje bKra shis dar	Bla ma chen po bKra shis dar ¹⁶²				dKon mchog bzang po
	Dharmarāja, son of Ye shes gzungs				

¹⁵⁷ gNubs kyi gdung brgyud lHa rje Hūm chen, probably the same person as Hūm chen bKra shis dar.

¹⁵⁸ In some versions, Ye shes gzungs appear before Jo mo So gad bza' rgan ne (maybe his mother).

¹⁵⁹ gTer ston rgya | lha rje ye shes gzungs | mtshur ston rin rdor | sku Zhang dpal ldan | rje tshul rin | sngags 'chang byang mgon nam mkha'i mtshan can | tshul khrims zhabs | rgya rigs 'dzin gsang ba |, etc.

¹⁶⁰ lHa rje gNubs chung was himself a gter ston, source of the Yang zlog me'i spru gri cycle preserved in the Rin chen gter mdzod. He was a disciple of rGya Zhang khrom.

¹⁶¹ Maybe the figure mentioned below under the name rDo ston lCags spe ba as a direct disciple of gNubs Ye shes rgya mtsho. It is plain that in the first generations of these lineages, figures that actually belong to the same generations are presented as masters and disciples; hence, probably, the fact that in some lines, we get many more intermediary links than in others.

¹⁶² Also, a direct teacher to Bla ma Dar ma seng ge—the figure appearing in the box to his right, but also below.

'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed kha thun nag po		gShin rje gshed dmar		gShin rje gdong drug	
		His son lHa rje dBang gzhon			sGrol chen bSam rdo ¹⁶³
		His son lHa rje rGya hor			
		His son lHa rje Chos seng and his brother lHa rje Chos dbang			
		The son of Chos seng, <i>Bla ma chen po</i> bKra shis dar. He was invited in the country of the Mongols who made him a <i>ti shri</i> .			rNam rgyal bzang po
	<i>Bla ma Dar ma seng ge</i>				
lHa rje Seng dar		lHa rje Seng ge dar, elder son of the previous. He has two other ones, 'Jam dpal rgyal and 'Jam pa'i dpal; all receive the complete transmissions.			Nam mkha' dpal ldan
gNubs nag Ye rgyal		<i>Bla ma Ye shes rgyal mtshan</i>	<i>Bla ma Ye shes rgya mtsho</i> ¹⁶⁴		<i>Chos rgyal dPal bzang po</i>
		Ye shes seng ge, son of Seng ge dar			
Grags rgyal		lHa rje Ye shes dpal, Ye shes seng ge's brother		gNubs <i>kyi ban dhe</i> Seng ge rgyal mtshan. He clearly presents himself as a direct disciple of <i>Rwa lo tsā ba</i> .	
Thar pa rgyal mtshan		lHa rje Blo gros [disciple of lHa rje Ye shes dpal]	Glan ston chen po		Kun bzang ba
'Dzam gling nag po		Glan ston 'Jam dpal seng ge			
Chos grags rgya mtsho ¹⁶⁵	Kumāravajra (gzhon nu rdo rje)	gNubs Kun dga' bkra shis		Kun dga' bkra shis	Ngag dbang rdo rje
		<i>mKhas grub rGyal sras chos rje</i>			

¹⁶³ sGrol ma bSam 'grub rdo rje (1295–1334); bdr:P5234.

¹⁶⁴ It is not unlikely that the three figures I have set on this line, gNubs nag Ye rgyal, *Bla ma Ye she rgyal mtshan* and *Bla ma Ye she rgya mtsho*, are one and the same.

¹⁶⁵ Could be 'Bri gung chung tshang 01 Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659).

'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed kha thun nag po		gShin rje gshed dmar		gShin rje gdong drug	
rDo rje dpal 'bar	dKon mchog rdo rje	rNgog gi ston pa bSod nam shes rab			rNam rgyal rdo rje
'Jam dbyangs mtshan ¹⁶⁶		?	sNgags 'chang Legs pa dpal bzang		
Nam mkha' thog thug			bSod nams dbang rgyal	gNubs ston Ratna	dPal ldan bkra shis
rDo rje stobs ldan			rDo rje rgyal po		
Khro rgyal rdo rje			mThu chen nyi ma		Se ston Legs grub
rNam rgyal rdo rje			Karma phrin las		
			Kun dga' bstan 'dzin		
Chos dbyings (Zur chen rang grol, 1604–1669)			rDo rje tshe rab		rGya ston Chos dbyings [=Zur Chos dbyings rang grol]
			rNam rgyal bzang po		
gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714)					

Appendix 4 Lineages of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag

This is compiled on the basis of all the segments of lineage that appear here and there in the ten volumes. As the result is barely readable as such, it was not possible to give full reference for the source of each information, which would have filled the pages with footnotes. I have, however, added information, especially from the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, whenever I felt it was required.

A Chart of the transmission lineages of 'Jam dpal tshe bdag						
['Jam dpal] rDo rje 'chang ou Kun tu bzang po					Kun tu bzang po Phyag rgya zil gnon	
'Jam dpal bshes gnyen	gSang ba'i bdag po Phyag na rdo rje		dGa' rab rdo rje	Phyag na rdo rje	rDo rje sems dpa'	Phyag na rdo rje
	dGa' rab rdo rje	'Jam dpal bshes gnyen	lHa'i bu Tshangs pa		rje	lHa'i bu Tshangs pa
	'Jam dpal gshin rje		Nyi ma			lHa'i bu Nyi ma
	Siñ tam gar bha			lHa'i bu Dhe wa mchog ldan		lHa'i bu bDe ba mchog ldan
Khrag 'thung nag po			mKha' 'gro ma Zla ba'i 'od zer		mKha' 'gro ma Zla ba'i 'od zer	

¹⁶⁶ 'Jam dbyangs chos rje in gTer bdag gling pa's *Thob yig rin chen 'byung gnas*.

gTsug lag dpal dge			gTsug lag dpal dge		'Jam dpal bshes gnyen				
	Da na dha la	Padma-sambhava	Sīntam-garbha	Padma-sambhava	Da na dha la	Padmasambhava	gTsug lag dpal dge		Padma-sambhava
			Dana-dhala				Rombuguhya		
Gu ya de va tsan ta	Khrag 'thung nag po						Devacandra	Khrag 'thung nag po	
							Sāntimgarbha		
							Da na dha la		
							Khrag 'thung nag po		
Vasudhara (Bā / Bha / Ba su dha ra—Slob dpon Nor 'dzin)									
				gTsug lag dpal dge					gTsug lag dpal dge
				dPal gyi seng ge	Sīntam-garbha	Da na dha la			
				Khrag 'thung nag po					
				Phung byed Sīntam garbha					
				Bal po Ba su dha ra					
gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes									
	Yon tan rgya mtsho						gNubs Yon tan rgya mtsho		
	Ye shes rgya mtsho						So Ye shes dbang phyug		
	Mi ston Dran chung ¹⁶⁷						Padma dbang rgyal		
rGya Zhang khrom	Dran ston mtha' bral	gTer ston rGya Zhang khrom							
gNubs lCags gtum nag po	Me ston Kun rin ¹⁶⁸	Bral te Sambo ta						gNubs ston Dar dbang	
gNubs ston Chos grags	bKra shis rgyal mtshan	Gangs pa (or Gang ban) bKras shis [dar]			'Bro ldog tshang ba'i Ye shes bla ma		gNubs chen Gu ru mchog ldan	gNubs chu ng ¹⁶⁹	
		Slob dpon lHa bsgom, or Bla ma Gang pa,			Rong jo sras Yang rtse stag		mThu can rGyal mtshan lhun grub		

¹⁶⁷ Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as Me ston Dran chung.

¹⁶⁸ Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as Me ston dKon mchog rin chen.

¹⁶⁹ Son of Padma dbang rgyal.

	or Gang(s) pa Ri dkar ¹⁷⁰							
gNubs Bya bral ¹⁷¹			mThun Gang[s pa] Śā kya 'bum ¹⁷²		Zhang Ge god dar			
					<i>dGe bshes</i> Songs ston			
rDo rje rgyal po ¹⁷³	rGyal ba g.Yung ston rDo rje dpal (1284–1365) ¹⁷⁴				Dam pa Rog chung ba			
	'Brom ston Tshe'i rgyal mtshan ¹⁷⁵		Sāk mgon ¹⁷⁶	Bal po sMon lam seng ge	Phag ston Śā kya mgon po	rGya bran smyon pa		
	A yu śa rā ja ¹⁷⁷	sGo m gra rtag pa	'Od zer seng ge ¹⁷⁸	sPug ston dPal mgon ¹⁷⁹	Grag stag sgom rgan	rDzas sgom nag po		

¹⁷⁰ In the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, the link between bKra shis rgyal mtshan and Śā kya 'bum is called *Bla ma mThar phyin lha sgom*, but this is clearly the same person under so many names.

¹⁷¹ Identified in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *gNubs bya bral ba skal ldan rDo rje rgyal po*. In other sources, *gNubs bya bral ba* and *rDo rje rgyal po* seem to be two different persons. This is more likely: we have very few names in this column to connect *rGya Zhang khrom* to *rDo rje rgyal po*, a contemporary of *Klong chen pa*.

¹⁷² Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *mThu chen Gangs pa Śāk 'bum*. So, it is quite possible that "mThun," here, is a mis-development of an abbreviation meaning *mthu chen*.

¹⁷³ Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *mChims rDo rje spre chung gi skye ba bskal ldan rDo rje rgyal po*. We have seen above that he is mentioned as a disciple of *Myon mthing ma ba Sangs rgyas grags 'od*; hence, he must be a contemporary of *Klong chen pa*, in the first half of the 14th century. *rDo rje rgyal po* is also found (*Byang gter 'don cha'i legs bam*, vol. *nga*, p. 143) in a lineage of the Rāhula system from *Padma las 'brel rtsal*, in which he appears as a disciple of *Grag pa 'od zer*, himself disciple of *Lo ston rDo rje 'bum*, who was an assistant of *Padma las 'brel rtsal* in discovering the treasure in 1313 (see in this volume in the article about *Rin chen gling pa*). *rDo rje rgyal po* should then belong to the late 14th and maybe early 15th centuries. The next figures of the same lineage, *Dharmaketu*, *Chos kyi blo gros*, etc., are also mentioned in the same order in this prayer.

¹⁷⁴ *g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpal* obviously plays an important role in the transmission of the *Yamāntaka* lineages that ultimately befell to the *Byang gter rDo rje brag lugs*.

¹⁷⁵ Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *'Gro mgon Tshe bdag pa*.

¹⁷⁶ Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *Bag ston Śāk mgon*

¹⁷⁷ This is in fact *Tshe dbang rgyal po*, a.k.a. *bsTan gnyis gling pa* (1480–1535). *Tshe dbang rgyal po* was also a direct master to *Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rje* according to the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*.

¹⁷⁸ Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as a disciple of *sMon lam seng ge*.

¹⁷⁹ A grand-disciple of *g.Yung ston pa* by this name (*dPal ldan mgon po*) appears in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, but as disciple of another disciple of *g.Yung ston pa*: *Phag ston Śāk mgon*. Interestingly, his disciple is then *Chos kyi rgyal mtshan*—most probably the *Dharmaketu* / [*rDor gling*] *Chos kyi rgyal mtshan* below.

Dhar ma- ketu ¹⁸⁰	gDar <i>ban</i> Kun dga' bkra shis	Zil gnon rdo rje	<i>Chos rje</i> dPal ba ¹⁸¹	
		Brag <i>ston</i> gso rigs Legs ldan rdo rje	dNgos grub sding pa ¹⁸²	
			<i>rje btsun</i> rin po che ¹⁸³	<i>mKhas grub</i> Chos kyi rgyal mtshan ¹⁸⁴
			Rin chen chos kyi blo gros ¹⁸⁶	Gung ru <i>gdung</i> 'dzin
			Kong chen Nam mkha' dpal ldan rgya mtsho ¹⁸⁸	<i>sGrub pa</i> mo lHa mo
Rig 'dzin bDud 'joms rdo rje ¹⁸⁹		dBang po sde ¹⁹⁰	<i>Grub chen</i> Byang rgyal ba ¹⁹¹	
<i>rGyal</i> <i>dbang</i> Rin chen phun		Zhang <i>ston</i> Tshe bdag rnam rgyal	Phag <i>ston</i> rNal 'byor mgon po	

¹⁸⁰ Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *rGyal ba g.Yung gi skye ba* Dharma ketu. This is coherent with his master rDo rje rgyal po being a contemporary of Klong chen pa, as g.Yung *ston pa* died one year after Klong chen pa, in 1365. Must be the same person as [rDor gling] Chos kyi rgyal mtshan in the box on the right.

¹⁸¹ Appears in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *mKhas grub* Chos rje dpal and as a disciple of 'Od zer seng ge.

¹⁸² Known in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* as *Bla ma* dNgos grub sdings pa.

¹⁸³ Most probably the same person as Dharmaketu / [rDor gling] Chos kyi rgyal mtshan.

¹⁸⁴ rDor gling Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, according to the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*. Must be the same person as Dharmaketu in the box on the left.

¹⁸⁵ In the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*: Kong long ral *gsum gyi bla ma rin po che* Chos kyi blo gros.

¹⁸⁶ *Rin po che* Chos kyi blo gros in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*.

¹⁸⁷ Bdr:P5596, master of Yol mo *sprul sku* I Śākya bzang po (same information in *Khyab 'jug gi brgyud 'debs*, in *Byang gter 'don cha'i legs bam*, vol. nga, p. 144). In the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*: Kong chen Nam mkha' dpal ldan, master of both mNga' ris *pan chen* (1487–1542) and Legs ldan rje. In the parallel passage of the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, mNga' ris *pan chen* is indeed inserted between Nam mkha' dpal ldan and Legs ldan rje.

¹⁸⁸ Bdr:P5596, master of Yol mo *sprul sku* I Śākya bzang po. In the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*, he passes this lineage not to *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal, but to mNga' ris *pan chen*.

¹⁸⁹ Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rje (1512 or 1542–1564 or 1625?).

¹⁹⁰ *Byang bdag* bKras shis stobs rgyal.

¹⁹¹ *Byang chub* rgyal mtshan, according to the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*.

tshogs 192					
Yongs 'dzin Rin chen dpal ¹⁹³			bSe ban 'Dzam gling	sGom pa grag stag pa ¹⁹⁴	
Sangs rgyas rin chen					
'Bri gung rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa ¹⁹⁵					



¹⁹² 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1557 or more probably 1547–1602)

¹⁹³ This is the author of the complement to Rin chen phun tshogs' autobiography in bdr:MW23169.

¹⁹⁴ Brag ltag pa rDo rje rin chen in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*.

¹⁹⁵ 1595–1659.

Favorable Ferocity: The Byang gter Rites that Invoke the Wrathful Deity Khro chu dug sdong

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Introduction

In tantric Buddhist ritual, practitioners invoke wrathful (*khro bo*) deities to quell internal afflictions and eradicate external enemies. These deities display a ferocious exterior— faces grimacing, hands wielding weapons, and feet trampling victims. They inspire fear in all beholders; yet, like their peaceful counterparts these deities are fully enlightened buddhas and thus possess ultimate compassion toward all sentient beings. In fact, the very wisdom that is a product of the enlightened mind radiates from their bodies causing nearby enemies to faint and die. One of the fiercest deities of the wrathful Buddhist pantheon is Yamāntaka/Yamāri (Tib. gShin rje gshed; “The Ender of Death”).¹ Several forms of Yamāntaka exist in the Tibetan Buddhist ritual program, including a unique form called Khro chu dug sdong (“The Poisonous Bronze Tree”).² This form is found in

¹ Tibetan sources often use the name gShin rje gshed to refer to a variety of deities who are wrathful versions of Mañjuśrī including Yamāntaka, Yamāri, and sometimes Vajrabhairava. For the remainder of this article, I will simply use Yamāntaka as a deity type which reflects the ambiguity in the Tibetan sources.

² This phrase is clearly a name of a distinct textual cycle in the Byang gter collection. Here I follow previously published English sources such as Jackson 2015 that have understood this to denote the deity’s name as well. Several Khro chu texts support this reading. For example, the text entitled *Khro chu’i mar me khrag gsod* (vol. 24, pp. 329-32) begins with an homage to Las kyi gshin rje khro chu dug gdong nag po. Furthermore, mTshan nyid sPrul sku ’Jam dpal nor bu’s (1892–1960) descriptions of the deity use “khro chu” as part of a proper name, for example gShin rje khro chu dug gdong and Las kyi gshin rje gshed khro chu dug gdong (pp. 200; 202). The English translation of the name is based on a Sanskrit rendering (*viṣaṃkṣa*) of Byang gter master C.R. Lama (1922–2002) written in the preface to his edition of the *Zab gsang mkha’ ’gro gsang mdzod* (p. 11). This reading fits well with the cited *tantra* in the Khro chu texts called the *Sman sdong rgyud*, perhaps as a medicinal tree. However, the deity’s name appears in other textual collections consistently as Khro chu dug gdong (rather than “sdong”), for example in ’Jam dpal nor bu’s

the Tibetan Buddhist revealed textual tradition of the enigmatic, eleventh-century sorcerer rGya Zhang khrom.³ This article examines the ritual program of the mighty Khro chu as it appears in the recent Byang gter anthology, *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*.⁴ This compilation contains a variety of texts dedicated to the three main aims of Khro chu—protecting (*bsrung*), repelling (*bzlog*), and killing (*bsad*). These aims are accomplished by a combination of visualization sequences and manipulation of tangible, material ritual objects. Characteristic of Buddhist texts that invoke wrathful deities, these texts employ the horrific and macabre to signal and activate the power of this deity, and hence his practitioners, to conquer any obstructions that hinder Buddhist teachings. The texts that invoke Khro chu's sequential three aims (protecting, repelling, and killing) exhibit an escalation of brutality and directed action toward enemies. Thus, this group of texts unveils the distinctions in the Buddhist ritual repertoire between protection and destruction; that is, between defensive and offensive aims.

1. *Khro chu dug sdong*: a subcategory of Yamāntaka-type deities

Yamāntaka-type deities (including Yamāri, Vajrabhairava, etc.) are wrathful versions of the peaceful Buddhist deity Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom. Practitioners invoke these deities to eliminate internal afflictions such as those arising from the three poisons (greed, hatred, delusion). For example, one Khro chu text in this collection instructs practitioners to visualize a peacock, snake, and pig (representations of the three poisons) on top of a lotus and sun at the center of one's heart. Then, the text directs the practitioner to visualize a white *hūṃ* in the middle. From this important seed syllable, light rays

forementioned collection of rites propitiating this deity and the texts in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos*. Thus, another possible translation of this name would be "Visage of Molten Poison." A third possibility is reading "sdong" as a verb, meaning to join together. Indeed, Khro chu is described as the accumulation of three entities and in at least one text is called Gnam lcags khro chu dug sdong (*gShin rje'i bsrung ba'i man ngag gab yig*, vol. 24, p. 232). These three substances (*gnam lcags*, *khro chu*, and *dug*) are elsewhere described as the materials of each *mchod rten* that is atop each of his three heads (*Las kyi gshin rje khro chu dug sdong gi rtsa ba'i sgrub thabs 'grel pa lag len gsal sgron*, vol. 24, p. 92). Thus, this practice/deity might be better understood as the joining of the three: meteoric metal, bronze, and poison. Further research must be conducted to clarify these differences and related meanings. For the sake of consistency and reflection of the Byang gter compilation, I will use the "sdong" spelling throughout this article.

³ See Esler 2022 for an introduction to this figure and his ritual program.

⁴ A 63-volume collection of the revealed texts and their commentaries compiled under the auspices of the current Rig 'dzin chen mo and completed in 2015. For an introduction to this expansive volume, see Arguillère 2022.

arise and scorch the three poisons.⁵ Thus, one main aim of fierce deity practice is to tame one's own mind, further ripening it toward the ultimate Buddhist soteriological goal of enlightenment. Yet, Yamāntaka-type deities like Khro chu are also called upon to destroy external, rival enemies. These enemies are manifold; many are entities of the unseen realm. In this collection, those enemies include earth spirits (*sa bdag*), king spirits (*rgyal po*), and several other demonic entities (*'dre*). Furthermore, these rites are often aimed at human enemies, including non-Buddhists (*mu stegs pa*) and rival sorcerers (*byad ma*) from both the Buddhist and Bon po varieties.⁶ The ability to overcome both these internal and external hindrances directly arises from the ferocity of the meditational deity (*yi dam*).

This logic of the tradition is homeopathic in nature—"like" conquers "like." In order to vanquish enemies, one must become equally terrifying and savage. Yamāntaka, as his name implies, appropriates the image of his ghastly foe to slay the personification of death in the Buddhist world—King Yama. Of course, this points to a more profound meaning of overcoming death in the sense of escaping the realm of *saṃsāra*. The prominent tantric Buddhist myth of the taming of Maheśvara/Rudra exemplifies the concept of appropriating fierce traits to subjugate enemies. Briefly recounted here in the most general form: a pre-demonic Rudra becomes angered by misunderstanding the Buddhist teachings. In response, he lives a life of indulgence, falls to hell, and eventually is born on earth where he must be subjugated by a collective effort of buddhas. He is finally conquered by the pinnacle of wrathful power exuded by a Heruka buddha ("a blood-drinker"; *khrag 'thung*).⁷ Thus, the rise of the wrathful deity, and hence the *raison d'être* of the tantric ritual program, stems from the necessity to overpower an awful demon, Rudra. Rudra is the personification of ignorance in regard to the Buddhist teachings and, by extrapolation, any force or entity forming a blockade to the Dharma. In the case of Khro chu dug sdong, I suggest his name signifies that he is a poison, a toxin meant to obliterate opponents and

⁵ *sMan sdong gi zin bris | Khro chu dug sdong gi bdud bzhi gshed dbab shog dril*, vol. 24, pp. 208–9: *dang po stong pa'i ngang las | rang gi snying gar padma dang nyi ma'i steng du | rma bya tshon gang pa gcig | sprul tshon gang gcig | phan tshon gang pa gcig dang gsum bsam | dbus su hūṃ dkar po gcig bsam | hūṃ de las 'od zer byung bas | dug gsum po de bsreg par bsam*.

⁶ The eclectic mix of enemies in this compilation supports Aleksandra Wenta's claim that tantric Buddhist texts aimed at enemies include a multitude of "others" not exclusive to non-Buddhists, i.e., Śaiva tantrists (Wenta 2022).

⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of various textual traditions that contain this myth, its content, themes, and various permutations see Davidson 1991, Dalton 2011, and Bailey 2022. The retelling here is based on Jacob Dalton's translation of the tale from the *Compendium of Intentions Sutra* (Dalton 2011: 159–206 [see esp. 159–164]).

the inner poisons of the mind; in other words, his poison cures poison. Indeed, allusions to the Rudra myth itself appear in the Khro chu rites, reinforcing the importance of this basic tantric mythology and foe typology. For example, in this collection, a Khro chu rite to suppress demonic enemies (*dgra sri*) is further described in the text as a weapon which liberates vow-breaking *rudras*.⁸

Thus, the ritual program of Yamāntaka-type deities (including Khro chu) exemplifies the seemingly oxymoronic *compassionate violence*. Here, the ferocious is favorable as it aligns with the ultimate goal of Buddhism. In this way, the wrathful that conquers demonic foes is used as a religious mechanism of righteousness. And thus, as it is written in the texts themselves, these acts must only be performed with the proper intent to protect and uphold the Dharma, that is, with complete and utter compassion aimed at the liberation of all sentient beings from the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Several rites in the Khro chu collection reflect this necessity of correct intention and orientation to the world with the phrasing *snying rje dang mi dmigs pa gal che*,⁹ which could be translated as “compassion without reference to the object is essential.” Non-reference to the object in this sense is to be devoid of clinging to conventional discursive thinking, desires, or aversions toward an object, such as a victim of the rite. The tradition is acutely aware that these conditions may not be met, and that it is possible to perform these rituals without a pure compassionate intent. This is especially the case in the age of the degeneration of the Dharma, a time described in Yamāntaka-deity texts as rampant with evil sorcerers. As such, elements of apocalyptic narratives are prominent in the Khro chu texts; they create a sense of urgency in protecting the Buddhist teachings lest they disappear from the world. For example, the same text mentioned above which liberates vow-breakers, also describes the rite as a “life pillar which protects the Buddhist teachings in the end-age.”¹⁰

Since these texts contain such fierce, formidable power, Yamāntaka-invoking rituals are a double-edged sword. Of course, they can overcome the pitfalls of *saṃsāric* existence, but they can just as likely exact destruction upon the world. Considering these rituals could be used to harm others or denigrate the Dharma (by those with

⁸ *Jam dpal gshin rje gshed khro chu dug sdong gi las mtha' dgra sri mnan pa'i gdams ngag*, vol. 24, p. 177: *dam nyams ru tra bsgral ba'i mtshon char shog*. As Bailey points out, it is not uncommon to see *rudra* in this context as a “species or epithet that seems to indicate a demonic moral character...corresponding to the classic type of encosmic daemons in Buddhism” (Bailey 2022, p. 102).

⁹ See, for example, *bSrung zlog bsad gsum gyi zhal gdams*, vol. 24, p. 250.

¹⁰ *Jam dpal gshin rje gshed khro chu dug sdong gi las mtha' dgra sri mnan pa'i gdams ngag*, vol. 24, p. 177: *dus kyi mtha' mar sangs rgyas bstan pa bsrung ba'i srog shing*.

the incorrect intent and orientation as described above), the tradition warns that the texts describing the details of practice should not be disseminated. In fact, out of the approximately 100 texts in the Khro chu sections of the Byang gter collection, at least 13 of them contain explicit warnings not to disseminate this material. Most of these 13 contain a more generalized warning not to spread this teaching, yet others relay more direct consequences. For example, the text entitled “The Secret Manual of Pith Instructions for Yama’s Protection” warns that if one disseminates this text, one’s life force will meet an untimely end.¹¹ Similarly, a text that gives instructions on conducting a fire ritual (Skt. *homa*) notes that if these sealed words are spread to those who are not worthy recipients, obstacles will arise.¹² Generally, as an esoteric modality, the tradition controls tantric knowledge by requiring a special initiation or empowerment (*dbang*) into a particular deity’s ritual program. Although in practice, initiations are often given in public on wide scale (and even online, especially in a post-Covid world), in theory, access to these teachings are purportedly highly guarded. Regardless of wider access afforded by modern technologies and the impetus toward digital preservation, there remains a strong emphasis on secrecy, especially in the context of the wrathful deities. The textual traditions here reflect those concerns. Suffice to say, then, that Khro chu’s ritual program as found in the Byang gter collection follows the common tropes of Yamāntaka-type deity ritual program. He serves as an archetypal Heruka, a formidable foe to the enemies of the Dharma in all their forms.

2. Khro chu dug sdong as a distinct deity in the Byang gter and beyond

In the Byang gter compilation, the Khro chu dug sdong cycle appears in the section dedicated to Yamāntaka Master of Life (gShin rje tshe bdag); thus, we can surmise that the tradition considers Khro chu as a subcategory of this particular Yamāntaka deity. The compilation contains a total of ten volumes dedicated to Yamāntaka Master of Life (volume 18–27), two of which are dedicated to Khro chu (volumes 23 and 24);¹³ however, a few texts affiliated with Khro chu can be found

¹¹ gShin rje’i bsrung ba’i man ngag gab yig, vol. 24, p. 234: *spel na tshe srog dus mtha’ bsdus*.

¹² Khro chu’i ‘phrin las kun ‘dus sbyin sreg cho ga, vol. 23, p. 57: *gnod (=snod) med la spel na bar chad ‘byung zer*.

¹³ Some texts in these volumes invoke other deity types from Zhang khrom’s treasures, including the Blazing Razor (Me’i spu gri) Yamāntaka and Vajroṣṇīṣa (rDo rje gtsug tor). These deities boast a variant iconography compared to the main descriptions of Khro chu. It is unclear why these texts are included in these volumes, but the content and intent of the rites are similar to Khro chu’s ritual

outside these two volumes in volume 26 and 27. These sections of the compilation (which include Khro chu) fall into the category of what Stéphane Arguillère has described as the Byang gter in the “broadest sense,” meaning that they are not part of the core of treasures as revealed by main Byang gter treasure revealer Rig ’dzin rGod ldem (1337–1409) but are part of the larger system as collated under the collective auspices of the Byang gter masters over time.¹⁴ Indeed, tradition says that the Khro chu texts are the treasure discoveries of rGya Zhang khrom (eleventh century). Furthermore, many of the texts in this volume (in all their forms, including various manuals and instructions, summarizing, narrating, or commenting upon the core treasures) are attributed to Byang gter lineage holders with diverse affiliations. In fact, the colophons of these materials reflect the transmission activities of this cycle within both the bKa’ brgyud and dGe lugs pa sects. For example, the bKa’ brgyud tradition is cited in an inventory of the treasures (*kha byang*).¹⁵ In some cases, bKa’ brgyud patriarchs such as *gter ston* Rig ’dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), the first Chung tshang throne holder and an important figure in the various Yamāntaka lineages of the ’Bri gung bKa’ brgyud, are mentioned.¹⁶ Chos kyi grags pa is specifically cited in the text expounding Khro chu’s powerful razor practice (*spu gri ngar ma*), a practice scroll that describes the ritual preparations of Khro chu for the approach, accomplishment, and activities (*bsnyen sgrub las*), and a practice manual that liberates all poisons (*gdug pa kun sgröl*).¹⁷ Notably, the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) also received the Khro chu teachings,¹⁸ and he is thus cited as an important figure in this collection. Indeed, the Khro chu and other Yamāntaka cycles of the Byang gter may prove to be an important link elucidating the sharing of ritual knowledge between the rNying ma, ’Bri gung, and dGe lugs pa despite the intense political struggles between the dGge lugs pa and the gTsang pas (who were allied with ’Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa via

program. See Arguillère’s article in this publication for an overview of these ten volumes.

¹⁴ Arguillère 2022, pp. 9–10.

¹⁵ *gShin rje khro chu dug sdong nag po’i kha byang gdug pa kun sgröl gyi don gsal bar byed pa las rab ’byams rgya mtsho*, vol. 24, pp. 501-29.

¹⁶ See Arguillère’s article in this publication for more information on the appearance of ’Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa in the various Yamāntaka volumes in the collection.

¹⁷ *Jam dpal gshin rje khro chu dug sdong nag po’i las mtha’ spu gri ngar ma*, vol. 23, pp. 113–83; *gShin rje khro chu dug sdong nag po’i bsnyen sgrub las gsum gyi bca’ gzhi lag len gyi shog dril*, vol. 24, pp. 61-87; *Jam dpal gshin rje gshed khro chu dug sdong nag po’i las byang gdug pa kun sgröl*, vol. 24, pp. 453-99. The middle text also appears in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol.18, pp. 707-33.

¹⁸ The Khro chu received teachings appear in the third volume of his *gSung ’bum* (pp. 44–53).

marriage) during the seventeenth century.¹⁹

That is not to say that the rNying ma Byang gter masters are absent from the tradition's attribution in the collection. It is clear in the colophons that rNying ma Byang gter masters were also active in creating content for this cycle as it is presented here. For example, a text that describes the method of offering *gtor ma* to Khro chu as a daily practice is said to be a decree of Blo bzang padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), the emanation of Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang bo (1580–1639), and written by Byang gter patriarch Zur gyi jo sras rig pa in accordance with the sayings of Rig 'dzin mnga' ris chen.²⁰ More research must be conducted to determine exactly how these texts as a given cycle have circulated and been presented in the various collections across sectarian boundaries. Both Blo bzang padma 'phrin las and Chos kyi grags pa had close ties to the Fifth Dalai Lama. Prior to this, the 'Bri gung pa had a special relationship with the Byang gter tradition via the relationship of Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1557) and Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (1512?–1625?).²¹ So, it is not surprising that this core of treasures was practiced by each, crossing sectarian boundaries.

The lineage supplication found in this compilation gives the following sequence leading to Rin chen phun tshogs: Khro chu; Śākyamuni Buddha; dGe slong 'char ka (a chief disciple of the Buddha); 'Jam dpal gshin rje (= 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen; Mañjuśrīmitra);²² Padmasambhava; Khrag 'thung nag po; Nor bu 'dzin (Vasudhara); gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes; rGya Zhang khrom; Don yod rdo rje; Rol pa'i rdo rje; sNgags 'chang Karma siddhi; dKa' bzhi'i mtshan ldan; Nyi ma bcu drug pa; Kun dga' rgyal mtshan; Byang chub dpal mo (15th century); Tshul khrims rgya mtsho (15th century); 'Bri gung gNam lcags me 'bar (aka Rin chen phun tshogs). After Rin chen phun tshogs, the next name in the lineage is bKra shis rgya mtsho, then Kun dga' tshe mchog, followed by rJe btsun Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa (16th century) whose student was Padma 'phrin

¹⁹ See FitzHerbert 2018, pp. 65–66, Sobisch 2020, pp. 16–20, and Batsang's article in this publication.

²⁰ This attribution is found in *'Jam dpal khro chu'i nyams bzhes rgyun khyer*, vol. 23, pp. 385–89. Perhaps Zur gyi jo sras rig pa is Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1657) and Rig 'dzin mnga' ris chen is Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (1512?–1625?); however, further research must be conducted to confirm this speculation. Indeed, given the context as a decree from Blo bzang padma 'phrin las, the Zur mentioned here may be a later patriarch. It is also plausible that Rig 'dzin mnga' ris chen is Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje's brother Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542).

²¹ See Valentine 2013 for a robust study on the incarnations of the Lords of the Northern Treasure, including these prominent figures.

²² In the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gSung 'bum*, this name reads 'Jam dpal bshes gnyen (Vol. 23, p. 736, MW2CZ5990). 'Jam dpal gshin rje as it is written in the Byang gter compilation is most likely an error.

las' teacher, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1657).²³ Without further research it is still unclear exactly who received what teachings from whom in regard to the more prominent figures of the Byang gter, but based on this lineage supplication it very well may be the case that the Khro chu teachings came down from 'Bri gung Rin chen phun tshogs (at least in some capacity).²⁴

Nonetheless, based on these lineage inclusions and various citations, it is clear that this deity's cycle is important to an array of great Buddhist masters from the past, but it is also worth mentioning that Khro chu is present in the Bon treasures as well.²⁵ It has been noted by several scholars that there has been mutual borrowing and influence between Buddhist practices and Bon practices, particularly in the sense of the g.Yung drung Bon religious system. However, that is not to say with certainty that these two traditions of Khro chu parallel one another. In studying a similar phenomenon in the context of Vajrakīla texts, Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer found differentiations between the two cycles, Buddhist and Bon.²⁶ More research is required to determine if there are similarities amongst the Khro chu Buddhist texts and the Bon treasure repositories.

In his study of 'Bri gung paintings, David Jackson discusses the interesting iconographic elements of the Khro chu form of Yamāntaka, highlighting that his retinue deities are zoomorphic, a trait he claims is indicative of Bon po deity iconography.²⁷ Animal-headed entities are

²³ Vol. 26, pp. 413–18. Note, this lineage list mostly mirrors David Jackson's list (citing Olaf Czaja) in regard to the Khro chu painting he discusses (p. 160). However, after Rin chen phun tshogs, this lineage list reads, *Bla ma Rin chen dpal ba, mKhas grub Sangs rgyas rin chen, and Chos kyi grags pa.*

²⁴ The compilation is multilayered. There is not a clear core, and it is a product of various creative hands. For example, one text identifies Chos kyi grags pa as the creator of practice manuals, including a set of illustrations (vol. 23, p. 14-15). Thus, as the teachings have flowed from master to disciple, at times with the creation of new materials along the way, the textual tradition becomes a veritable web of texts simply pointing to a core cycle lineage. Furthermore, it is equally unclear whether or not the larger cycle of Byang gter Yamāntaka teachings (as Tshe bdag nag po) is transmitted as a complete unit. Esler mentions three distinct lineages of transmission related to this cycle as enumerated in an empowerment transmission (2022, p. 197-99), which deviate from the Khro chu lineage here. But importantly, as Esler notes, these lineages seem to coalesce toward Legs ldan rdo rje as the prominent Byang gter transmitter with the main 'Bri gung connection through Rin chen phun tshogs.

²⁵ Khro chu appears in *gTer ston bDe chen gling pa's* (1833–1893) treasures as described and catalogued by Jean-Luc Achard (pp. 3-17). Further investigation is required to compare these two cycles in content and transmission.

²⁶ Cantwell and Mayer 2013.

²⁷ Jackson 2015, p. 159. I take Jackson's use of Bon po in this context as generally pre-Buddhist and not later institutionalized forms of Bon as a distinct tradition. Indeed,

present in illustrations appended to the Khro chu cycle in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos*, which mirrors most of the content presented here in the Byang gter volume. For example, the illustration of a killing circle that enrages the three poisons (*gdug gsum 'khros pa'i gsad 'khor*) displays an entity with three animal heads and six arms, similar to the general iconography of Khro chu himself that is described below (three heads, six arms).²⁸ The traits of these Khro chu entities may be inspired by archaic deities that represent a general pre-Buddhist pantheon.

Lastly, to further emphasize the importance of Yamāntaka practices and their histories, it would be remiss not to mention current practices that stem from these cycles. Yamāntaka practices in general are still important to a variety of contemporary communities.²⁹ They are considered to provide protection for the community, particularly in clearing out negative forces at the beginning of the new year. The rituals invoking the specific Khro chu form of Yamāntaka are still practiced at the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud Khams pa sgar Monastery in Himachal Pradesh, India. These rituals were recorded during the 1990s by David Lewiston.³⁰

The Khro chu transmission is a power-invoking tradition that spans a multitude of textual forms and it is clearly shared throughout various Tibetan Buddhist traditions. It is not surprising the Khro chu cycle comprises a significant portion of the Yamāntaka texts within the Byang gter collection. He serves as an important means to conquer afflictions and enemies even in modern ritual programs. The remaining sections of this article will be dedicated to a more specific introduction to Khro chu's history and practice as they appear in the texts collected in the Byang gter compilation.

3. The traditional story of Khro chu's rise and his subsequent textual tradition as presented in the Byang gter

Parallel to the aforementioned tales of the subjugation of Rudra, the rise of Khro chu begins with the need to overpower the enemies of the Buddhist Dharma.³¹ This particular narrative harkens back to the time

given the purported Nepali provenance of these texts, these interesting traits might stem from outside the immediate Tibetan cultural sphere altogether.

²⁸ *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos*, vol. 19, pp. 473-75.

²⁹ See Sihlé 2010, Low 2013, and Gentry 2017.

³⁰ Lewiston 1998. Based on social media presence, this group practiced the Khro chu sgrub chen at the beginning of the New Year in 2023.

³¹ The summary of the story here is based on *Rigs gsum 'dus pa 'jam dpal khro chu dug sdong nag po'i bsnen pa'i ye ge rin chen ke ta ka* in the Byang gter collection (vol. 23, p. 1-44) and 'Jam dpal nor bu's *bCom ldan 'das 'jam dpal las kyi gshin rje khro chu dug*

of Śākyamuni Buddha and his encounters with the six non-Buddhists (*mu stegs pa*). In this version of the tale, all of the non-Buddhist teachings are gathered together, and due to that, all the teachings of the Buddha, his temples and so forth are destroyed. In response, Mañjuśrī is thrown into despair and becomes enraged. He emanates as Yamarāja, Las kyi gshin rje (i.e., Khro chu dug sdong). In a ferocious display of power, all the non-Buddhists faint and die. It is said that their textbooks burst into flames, and not a single one of their teachings survive. In the end, of course, the teachings of the Buddha flourish.

In the context of this tale and the general history of the deity, the texts describe specificities of Khro chu that distinguish him from other types of Yamāntaka. Most prominently, he is described as a trinity of sorts, the aggregation of 'Chi bdag, Srog bdag, and Tshe bdag. These three Tibetan terms are all generally alternative names for Yamarāja, the Lord of Life/Death. 'Chi bdag literally means "lord of death," *srog bdag* "lord of the lifeforce" and *tshe bdag* "lord of life." In Yamāntaka text cycles, these names specifically designate types of emanations visualized during practice. As described in these Khro chu texts, 'Chi bdag is the body emanation (*sku sprul*), Srog bdag is the mind emanation (*thugs sprul*), and Tshe bdag is the speech emanation (*gsung sprul*).³² Some texts in this collection elaborate on his tripartite nature and differentiate between an outer, inner, and secret characteristic (*mtshan*).³³ The outer is as just described, the aggregation of 'Chi bdag, Srog bdag, and Tshe bdag. The inner is the aggregation of 'Jam dbyangs (Mañjughoṣa), rTa mgrin (Hayagrīva), and Phyag rdor (Vajrapāṇi). In this sense, as the title of the first text in the Khro chu section implies, he is the amalgam of the Buddhas of the three families. Interestingly, this also parallels the coming together of the three buddha types in the Rudra subjugation myth—the common *buddha*, *padma*, and *vajra* distinction. In regard to the secret, the Byang gter compilation texts and 'Jam dpal nor bu describe him as the *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and the *nirmāṇakāya*.³⁴ However, 'Jam dpal nor bu's text also describes Khro chu specifically as the *nirmāṇakāya* aspect. It is unclear whether Khro chu is simply this first trinity or ought to be

gdong gi lo rgyus zin bris mdor bsdus rab tu gsal ba (vol. 1, pp. 199-215) in his Khro chu cycle.

³² There are variations in these distinctions across different cycles in the Byang gter compilation. For example, sometimes Tshe bdag is described as the mind emanation and Srog bdag as the speech emanation.

³³ *Rigs gsum 'dus pa 'jam dpal khro chu dug sdong nag po'i bsnyen pa'i ye ge rin chen ke ta ka*, vol. 23, p. 6.

³⁴ *Bcom ldan 'das 'jam dpal las kyi gshin rje khro chu dug gdong gi lo rgyus zin bris mdor bsdus rab tu gsal ba*, vol. 1, p. 202.

understood as all three of these trinities. Indeed, most texts that describe him simply list that he is the aggregation of the three emanations of *yamas*, and these latter distinctions are common to buddhas more generally. Furthermore, the first text of the compilation cites a *tantra* that relates these three characteristics to the three *samādhis* (*ting nge 'dzin rnam pa gsum*). This relegates the accomplishment of Khro chu to the first *samādhi*, simply the outer. Whereas the second is the combination of Mañjuḥṣa, Hayagrīva, and Vajrapāṇi, described as the accomplishment which is the protector of the three families (*rigs gsum mgon po*). The third is the three bodies of the buddha, as the accomplishment of the ground, path, and fruit (*gzhi lam 'bras*). This text also delineates Khro chu as the front generation (*mdun bskyed*), whereas 'Jam dpal tshe bdag nag po (Black Mañjuśrī Master of Life) is described as the self-generation (*bdag bskyed*).³⁵ However, these differentiations are not clear in other texts in the collection. More research must be conducted in order to further unravel these peculiar distinctions.

Nonetheless, existing as the amalgam of these three ('Chi bdag, Srog bdag, and Tshe bdag) is the main distinguishing feature of this meditational deity across most of the Byang gter Khro chu texts. The texts describe this grouping as extremely powerful; the targets in these rites are said to be crushed to dust in a single moment. The destruction is swift, and there is no antidote. Furthermore, Khro chu's ritual program is described as a fearsome practice, for if a practitioner is not careful, he surely can bring about his own demise (*rang gshed rang la dbab pa*). Because these rites are so treacherous for the practitioner himself, the texts warn that they should not be carried out in one's own home; more suitable places include the top of mountains or any location that is terrifying.³⁶

In addition to his mythology and the distinct features of Khro chu himself, the texts present a traditional history of the transmission, most notable as outlined in the first text in volume 24.³⁷ This text cites the

³⁵ *Rigs gsum 'dus pa 'jam dpal khro chu dug sdong nag po'i bsnyen pa'i ye ge rin chen ke ta ka*, vol. 23, pp. 18-19.

³⁶ *Khro chu dug sdong gi lo rgyus*, vol. 24, pp. 1-6.

³⁷ *Khro chu dug sdong gi lo rgyus*, vol. 24, pp. 1-6. Interestingly, another compilation of Khro chu texts, the 'Jam dpal khro chu dug gdong nag po'i sgrub skor of the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos*, that is almost identical to the texts compiled here in the Byang gter tradition, places this history in the first volume of the Khro chu materials (Vol. 18). The first text that appears in Vol. 23 of the Byang gter collection contains much of the same information; however, it is not specifically identified as a history (*lo rgyus*). Another significant difference between these two compilations is the inclusion in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos* of a variety of illustrations of the deity and various magical devices that are absent in the Byang gter compilation. Rather, the Byang gter compilation appends various other rites

Zla gsang nag po rgyud (“Mysterious Black Companion Tantra”), a *tantra* in the Mañjuśrī body section in the Mahāyoga portion of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*.³⁸ The history as relayed here focuses on the exploits of the three main figures of the lineage supplication described above: Vasudhara, gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes,³⁹ and the treasure-revealer rGya Zhang khrom. For example, the text claims that the deity's main *sādhana* was composed by Vasudhara. Vasudhara is said to have placed his compositions in an iron vessel and hid them as a *gter ma*. The text specifies a root commentary of the *gShin rje nag po* and also claims it was composed by Vasudhara and subsequently entrusted to gNubs chen. These teachings were then hidden by gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye she in Bal yul Bum thang ke ru, to be revealed by his later incarnation rGya Zhang khrom. As in the previous sections of mythologies, this history emphasizes the destructive possibilities of these teachings, particularly in outlining the movements of Zhang khrom as he travels between Nepal and the western part of gTsang “liberating” (*bsgral*)⁴⁰ many Bon pos along the way.

4. *Khro chu's ritual program in the Byang gter: elements of horror and brutality in the aims of protecting, repelling, and killing*

The ritual program of Khro chu is accomplished via a combination of visualization practices and physical ritual actions. The three central aims in the Khro chu ritual program are protecting, repelling, and killing. The latter two, I argue here, display an escalation of brutality within their descriptions and a more overt direction toward a specified target. The texts of the Khro chu cycle (like Buddhist deity yoga texts in general) explicate detailed visualization sequences of the deity, his consort, and his retinue. Thus, the proper description of the deity is quite important to the practice and often appears at the beginning of

that invoke different deities such as Vajroṣṇīṣa in the section in which the images appear in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos*.

³⁸ See Trautz 2019 for a discussion on the history of the bKa' brgyad deities in the treasures of mNga' bdag Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192) and how this distinction became a common doxographical schema for rNying ma *tantras*. Also see Arguillère's article in this publication which discusses the development of this *tantra* prior to this designation within the bKa' brgyad schema. Note that *zla gsang* in this *tantra* appears in Sanskrit as *guhyaçandra*. Elsewhere (Brown 2024), I have followed the Sanskrit as meaning *Moon's Mystery*, but this of course could be a later addition. Indeed, the Sanskrit *candra* as moon connotes the moon as a companion to the sun. Further research focused on the rNying ma Yamāntaka *tantras* in the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* may reveal a better understanding of the title's meaning.

³⁹ For more information about the figure of gNubs chen, see Esler 2014 and Dalton 2014.

⁴⁰ A euphemism for killing.

the texts in this compilation. The texts describe Khro chu dug sdong as a deity with three heads and six hands. In his right hands he wields battle axes, and in his left hands he holds the hearts of his enemies. His lower body is a three-sided iron (or bronze in some texts) dagger. Images of Khro chu show this dagger piercing the bodies of his victims.⁴¹ As he rises up in this form, his body produces a formidable blazing fire of pristine wisdom which causes all the non-Buddhists (*mu stegs pa*) to faint and die.⁴²



Fig. 1 — Khro chu dug sdong. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress (LCCN-81-901844)

⁴¹ The image here is a magical device (*'khor lo*) depicted in the illustrations appended to the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen po'i rgyab chos*, vol. 19, pp. 523-26. Also see Jackson 2015, p. 160.

⁴² *Rigs gsum 'dus pa 'jam dpal khro chu dug sdong nag po'i bsnyen pa'i ye ge rin chen ke ta ka*, in *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgribs*, vol. 23, p. 5.

Khro chu is described by the texts to have a consort rivaling his own ferocity. One text in this collection, appearing in volume 24, introduces her *sādhana* and is dedicated solely to her description.⁴³ The text is attributed to gNubs Sangs rgyas ye shes and is said to have been discovered by rGya Zhang khrom. The text describes her as his secret consort, named Dun tig nag mo. Unlike her three-faced, six-handed partner, she has only one face and four hands. Her body is hued dark blue, and she boasts four protruding fangs jutting from her gaping mouth. She has three eyes that are spread wide apart. Her dark brown mane blazes upward to the sky, and in accordance with her wrathful countenance, each of her hands brandish frightening accoutrements. In her upper right hand, she wields a sword and in her lower right hand, an iron hook. In her upper left hand, she holds a skull filled with blood (*thod khrag*) and in the lower hand, a chain. Although her body is coiled around the male, and thus inextricably linked to him, the ritual prescriptions call for special offerings and *mantra* recitations specifically directed toward her. The text describes the *vāyu* (*rlung*) of fire becoming turbulent from her center. Furthermore, the text designates her a veritable butcher (*bshan pa mo*), an executioner of enemies. She uses her sword to behead the bodies of the enemies and her iron hook to grasp the hearts of vow-breakers and sorcerers. She binds their extremities and feasts on their hearts and blood. After such an overtly violent, macabre scene, the text concludes that this is an act

⁴³ *Khro chu sdong gi yum gsang ba dun tig gi sgrub thabs*, vol. 24 pp. 156-158: *Khro chu'i man ngag tu* | (note: *yang gsang rmad du byung ba*) | *yum gsang ba dun tig nag mo khro chu dang sbyor ba ni* | *gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes kyis mdzad pa'i* | *yum gsang ba dun tig nag mo zhal gcig phyag bzhi ma* | *'jigs pa'i cha byad can* | *mche ba bzhi rab tu rtsigs pa* | *spyang gsum rab tu bsgrad pa* | *ral pa kham nag gyen du 'bar ba* | *phyag g.yas kyi dang po na ral gri* | *'og ma na lcags kyu* | *g.yon gyi dang po na thod khrag* | *'og ma na lcags sgrogs bsnams pa* | *zhabs gnyis yab kyi lte bar 'khril ba'o* | *yab sngags kyi sham du 'di sbyar* | *ru rag mo raksha ma bhyo bhyo dzah dzah* | *zhes bsrung ba'i dus su sbyar* | *yum sngags thun mgor brgya re yan mi 'dogs pa man ngag yin* | *rgyun du yum la'ang gtor ma 'bul* | *bstod pa 'di yang bya* | *bhyo me rlung 'tshub ma'i klong dkyil nas* | *'jam dpal gshin rje'i bka' bsgrub ma* | *drag po'i las rnams sgrub pa'i bshan pa mo* | *sku mdog mthing nag zhal gcig phyag bzhi ma* | *'jigs pa'i zhal gdangs mche ba rab tu rtsigs* | *spyang gsum rab bsgrad dbu skra gyen la 'bar* | *phyag g.yas dang po gnam lcags ral gri 'phyar* | *dam nyams byad ma'i mgo lus tshal par gtong* | *'og ma lcags kyu nag po bsnams pa ni* | *dam nyams dgra bo byad ma'i snying nas 'dzin* | *g.yon gyi dang po thod khrag bsnams pa ni* | *dam nyams byad ma'i snying khrag zhal du gsol* | *'og ma lcags sgrogs nag po bsnams pa yis* | *dam nyams byad ma'i yan lag gru gur sdoms* | *drag po'i las mkhan bshan pa mo la bstod* | *dam rdzas rgyan gyi gtor ma 'di bshes la* | *thugs dam rgyud bskul bcol ba'i 'phrin las mdzod* | *zhes bstod do* | *sa ma ya* | *rgya rgya rgya* | *gter rgya* | *sbas rgya* | *gab rgya* | *dun tig ma'i yum sgrub 'di* | *gnubs sangs rgyas ye shes kyis mdzad nas* | *bum thang ke rur sbas pa* | *rgya zhang khrom gyis gter nas gdan drangs pa'o* | *sa ma ya* | *rgya rgya rgya* | *gcig rgyud ma gtogs spel mi rung ngo* | *spel na gshin rje'i chad ma 'ong ngo* | *sa ma ya* | *rgya rgya* | *gter rgya* | *sbas rgya* | *gsang rgya*.

of exalted enlightened activity (*'phrin las*) that activates the deity (*thugs dam rgyud bskul bcol ba*). Again, the correct understanding and orientation to the world is emphasized as required for this practice. It is worth noting that in this text, rather than a focus on her as a conduit for Khro chu's own practice, she is described (although physically joined to Khro chu in a *yab yum* formation) as having a power of her own. Indeed, this text stands alone, and it is not connected directly to the description of Khro chu himself and his specific visualization sequence. Nonetheless, these ferocious details of both deities transmute into a power that is capable of crushing enemies.

Once the Khro chu deity is visualized correctly, the practitioner creates an entire universe that is also filled with treacherous, horrific objects to either protect or destroy. The Khro chu visualization sequences specifically describe eight protective *vajra* domes (*gur khang*) made of various materials including fire, molten iron, and a myriad of weapons. Another prominent structure in these visualization sequences is the "palace" (*gzhal yas khang*), again linked to horrific scenes. One particularly gruesome scene depicts a charnel ground with human flesh, the smell of rotten decomposing corpses, corpses burning with raging flames, all described as leftovers to be devoured by carnivorous animals.⁴⁴ Each detail serves as another layer to create a visualized world suitable for the wrath of Khro chu dug sdong. To be sure, these domes and palaces serve as the building blocks to construct an effective world in a three-dimensional universe to exact power over one's own created domain.

The three main aims of Khro chu (protecting, repelling, and killing) are accomplished through these visualization sequences and reciting *mantras* that are particular to each aim. In what follows, I will briefly describe two texts that jointly contain all three aims of Khro chu in order to compare how each aim is narrated. The first text is from a work in volume 24 entitled *Poisonous Bronze Tree's Instructions of the Three: Protecting, Repelling, Killing, and a Few Others*.⁴⁵ The instructions in this text begin with visualizing Khro chu and his retinue. After this initial sequence, special instructions in regard to the three aims follow. The first outlines the method of protection. This method includes the series of *vajra* domes mentioned above, weapons, fire, and other dangers. There is, however, no explicit victim mentioned here. In contrast, the instructions for the repelling sequence require self-visualization as Yamāntaka and a visualization sequence of several objects inside one another: a 'Chi bdag, a fierce *vajra*, a nine-headed

⁴⁴ *Rigs gsum 'dus pa 'jam dpal khro chu dug sdong nag po'i bsnen pa'i ye ge rin chen ke ta ka*, vol. 23, pp. 20-23.

⁴⁵ *Khro chu dug sdong gi bsrung bzlog bsad gsum gyi zhal gdams dang gzhan yang kha shas*, vol. 24, pp. 39-56.

scorpion of iron, a vow-breaker, and within the latter, a wheel of razors. Notably, this sequence explicitly names a vow-breaker as the target. The rite continues with particularly violent imagery as the practitioner must imagine casting the victim in brass to burn. The text explicitly states that the root of life (*srog rtsa*) of the enemy is violently cut (*dmar myal=dmyal*). Likewise, the killing visualizations require the practitioner to imagine an enemy shaking spontaneously in a triangular demon box (*thun khung*). Moreover, the text outlines a color sequence corresponding to each aim, in typical fashion. The protective aim is white, while the repelling and killing aim visualizations are both black. Thus, it is apparent that the tradition, through the descriptions of visualizations, makes a distinction between protection on one hand, and the more destructive and offensive aims of repelling and killing on the other.

This escalation of brutality and the targeting of a particular enemy is further demonstrated in a rite in another text of volume 24 similarly entitled *Instructions on Protecting, Repelling, and Killing*.⁴⁶ The sequence for the protecting aim includes visualizing buddhas and manipulating light rays (particularly to burn the three poisons). In contrast to the protective sequence above, this aim includes a target; however, the description of attacking that victim is not as extremely violent compared to the other two aims. In this protective visualization, one simply draws all maleficent beings on the tip of the light rays. In the following repelling sequence, in contrast, the maleficent beings are beaten to death in a much more visceral feat. The killing sequence instructs the following: imagine the form of a terrifying male *yama* wielding a slaughtering knife, and behind that, envision that he carries a butcher's bag. With the knife, the flesh and bone of the sorcerers and maleficent beings (*byad ma gnod byed*) are cut and then put into the butcher's black bag.

As evidenced in both rites, there is clearly a dichotomy created here between protective and destructive aims, even though the tradition specifies a tripartite schema for Khro chu.

*5. Two Khro chu rites: gruesome ritual materiality,
connecting the mundane world to the visualized world*

One unique aspect of the practice of Yamāntaka-type deities that is also apparent in the ritual program of the Khro chu dug sdong is the emphasis on fierce magic⁴⁷ allowing practitioners to conquer mundane

⁴⁶ *bSrung zlog bsad gsum gyi zhal gdams*, vol. 24, pp. 245-50.

⁴⁷ Elsewhere I have outlined a tentative definition of magic, briefly defined as any act (in the larger umbrella category of religion) that aims to manipulate a specified

concerns in addition to eradicating negative emotions. To be sure, practitioners utilize the ritual program of Khro chu to approach both pragmatic and soteriological goals. Many ritual texts in the Khro chu volumes include magical recipes to attack enemies and at least one serves the function to heal. I will give a tentative translation for two rites that demonstrate these types of practice:

The Killing-blood Butter Lamp of Khro chu:⁴⁸

Homage to Las kyi gshin rje, the Black Poisonous Bronze Tree! [This is] gShin rje khro chu's method of the killing-blood butter lamp. Set up a four finger-length wick in a sacrificial pit, in the center, the heart of all effigies (*nya'o=nya bo*). All the effigies, the sorcerers along with their gods are greedy and weak with no refuge. Their form is black in color, repulsive, their bodies emaciated. From their eyes, chest, and the nine orifices [of their bodies], blood and pus leak. From collecting that, the wick is formed. As for the blood [to be used] for the killing butter lamp:

target with the activation of power, employing sympathetic means to mitigate and/or intensify risk (Brown 2024).

⁴⁸ *Khro chu'i mar me khrag gsod*, vol. 24, pp. 329–32: *Las kyi gshin rje khro chu dug gdong nag po la phyag 'tshal lo | gshin rje khro chu'i mar me khrag gsod byed thabs la | nya'o dgu'i snying dkyil du 'brub khung la sdong bu sor bzhi pa btsugs | nya'o thams cad byad ma lha dang bcas | ham pa rid pa skyabs dang bral ba mdog nag pa gzugs mi gdug {corr. sdug} pa lus rid pa mig dang brang dang bu ga dgu nas khrag dang rnag 'dzag pa | de 'dus pa las sdong bu la skyed | mar me bsad pa'i khrag ni | gri khrag la sogs khrag sna yod tshad bsdus mar me bsad pa'o | kho'i srog rtsa snying rtsa khrag rtsa lus ngag yid gsum dang bcas pa | nag gis skems dug khrag gis bsad par bsam la mar me bsad pa'o | (note: gnad nas bskul ba ni) | hūṃ | las kyi gshin rje khro chu dug gdong nag po'i sku | zhal gsum phyag drug 'jigs pa'i sku | phyag na dgra sta tsitta bsnams | sku la dur khrod chos kyiis brgyan | rked pa chu srin brngam zhal can | sku smad khro chu'i phur pa yis | byad ma 'bum gyi srog snying gzer | 'khor du gshin rje bye ba dang | las gshin sa ya 'bum gyis skor | khyed kyi thugs dam dus la babs | yid la gnag pa'i byad ma lha dang bcas | zhal du btap po kha ram khā hi | myur du sgrol cig a ra li | nya bo byad ma lha dang bcas pa | phyed ma (note: brlag) la stang bar bsam | hūṃ | sku las sprul pa'i bya khyung rgyal po ni | khyod kyi thugs dam dus la babs | yid la gnag pa'i dgra bo byad ma lha dang bcas | zhal du 'bul lo kha ram khā hi | myur du sgrol cig a ra li | (note: rta mgrin bskul ba ni) | hūṃ | gsung gi sprul ba rta mgrin rgyal po ni | khyed kyi thugs dam... yid la gnag pa'i dgra bo... zhal du 'bul lo... myur du sgrol cig... (note: phyag rdor bskul ba ni) | hūṃ thugs kyi sprul pa phyag na rdo rje ni | khyed kyi thugs dam... yid la gnad pa'i... zhal du 'bul lo... myur du sgrol cig... (note: 'chi bdag nag po bskul ba ni) | hūṃ | 'chi bdag nag po'i thugs dam dus la babs | yid la gnag pa'i... zhal du 'bul lo... myur du sgrol cig... (note: tshe bdag nag mo bskul ba ni) | hūṃ | tshe bdag nag po'i thugs dam dus la bab | yid la gnag pa'i dgra bo byad ma lha dang bcas | zhal du 'bul lo kha ram khā hi | myur du sgrol cig a ra li | (C: zhes gsungs so sngags logs na yod | mar me khrag gsod rdzogs so | dge'o | rje btsun dam pa kun dga'i mtshan can gyi phyag dpe ngos nas bshus so | sngags ni bla ma'i zhal las shes).*

various types of blood, for example, the blood [from a person killed with] a knife, are collected all together [and] and the butter lamp is extinguished. Visualize that the root of his life-force, the root of his heart, and the root of his blood, along with his body, speech, and mind, all three, are dried up by the darkness, killed with the poison blood, and [while visualizing] extinguish the lamp.

(*Regarding exhortation from the heart*): *hūṃ*, the terrifying body of Las kyi gshin rje, the Black Poisonous Bronze Tree, with three faces and six hands. In his hands, he brandishes the hearts of his enemies. His body is adorned by charnel ground ornaments. On his waist he has the face of a raging water dragon. Because his lower half is a bronze dagger, it is a nail in the vital heart of a hundred thousand sorcerers. He is surrounded by ten million *yamas* (*gshin rje*), and millions of *karmayamas* (*las gshin*). At the time your *yidam* descends, the sorcerers, which have hostility in the mind, along with their gods, are offered to the mouth of the deity; *kha ram khā hi*: liberate quickly, *a ra li*. Visualize as the effigies, the sorcerers along with their gods are emptied (*crushed*) to dust.

Hūṃ. Regarding the King Garuḍa which emanates from the body: at the time your *yidam* descends, the enemies, which have hostility in the mind, the sorcerers along with their gods, are offered to the mouth of the deity; *kha raṃ khā hi*; liberate quickly, *a ra li*.

(*Regarding the entreaty of Hayagrīva*): *hūṃ*. Regarding the King Hayagrīva, emanation of speech: at the time your *yidam* descends, the enemies which have hostility in the mind, the sorcerers along with their gods, are offered to the mouth of the deity; *kha raṃ khā hi*; liberate quickly, *a ra li*.

(*Regarding the entreaty of Vajrapāṇi*): *hūṃ*. Regarding Vajrapāṇi, the emanation of mind, at the time your *yidam* descends, the enemies which have hostility in the mind, the sorcerers along with their gods, are offered to the mouth of the deity; *kha raṃ khā hi*; liberate quickly, *a ra li*.

(*Regarding the entreaty of 'Chi bdag nag po*): *hūṃ*. At the time the *yidam* descends, which is 'Chi bdag nag po, the enemies which have hostility in the mind, the sorcerers along with their gods,

are offered to the mouth of the deity; *kha raṃ khā hi*; liberate quickly, *a ra li*.

(Regarding the entreaty of *Tshe bdag nag mo*[=po?]): *hūṃ*. At the time the *yidam* descends, which is *Tshe bdag nag po*, the sorcerers along with their gods, are offered to the mouth of the deity; *kha raṃ khā hi*; liberate quickly, *a ra li*.

(Thus, it is said, the separate mantras, completing the killing-blood butter lamp. Blessed. Transcribed from the point of view of the book of *rJe btsun dam pa* named *Kun dga*. Regarding the mantras, one can learn them from the mouth of the lama.)

It is unclear whether or not this practice is to be carried out in real, tangible space. The text uses the word to visualize (*bsam*). Elsewhere I have argued that similar ritual recipes often contain clues of actual practice (beyond the imagination of visualization sequences) as there are mentions of alternative objects that one can replace if the main object is unavailable to the practitioner for one reason or the other.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, there are no such clues here. It seems likely, however, that this ritual is taking place in one's own mind as well as in material reality since the ritual instructs the practitioner to visualize and to extinguish the lamp. It is certainly in the realm of possibilities that this is a visualization sequence augmented by ritual objects, with a more brutal lamp imagined while the practitioner works with a tangible butter lamp in front of him. In fact, the visualized sequences might be the conduit to form the sympathetic connections of magical aims to the material world. If this is not the case, perhaps this provokes the question of whether or not we can speak of a materiality without tangible material objects. I would argue that we must consider a materiality in visualizations since these visualizations point to actual objects, and especially objects that signify certain behaviors. In this example, the lamp is implemented in an inversion to its normal purpose of offering and bringing auspiciousness. Here, it is used to extinguish and bring darkness. These inversions are common in magical recipes particularly in regard to sorcery, or fierce aims.

The following rite is more obviously an example of a ritual that employs actual material substances, and of course in the case of *Khro chu*, stained, impure, substances.

⁴⁹ Brown 2024.

From the general gShin dug sdong nag po: the Female Beneficial Remedy and the Female Footprint Offering Mantras.⁵⁰

Homage to Yamarāja! In a stove,⁵¹ mix together the dirt of a woman's footprint and the urine of a donkey, the dung of a bearded goat, Guinea pepper, and dried ginger. Having mixed those, offer the three hundred mantras. Regarding the mantras: *gu gu ra tsa ti khug ti khug | shag shag | rgob rgob*. When releasing, recite twenty-one mantras in the dirt of the *zhi dha* foot print. And if scattered, release [from the ailment] will occur: *gu gu ra tsa gtor gtor ab che ag che*. This is the method of casting down the female illness [a list of various ingredients follows].

Not only is this ritual a good example of mundane magic activated by impure, potent ritual substances, it does so by forming a sympathetic link to a specific person via contagion. An object the female subject has touched, in this case dirt left behind from a footprint, is used to affect the subject from afar.

Conclusion

The ritual practice of Khro chu dug sdong is a fascinating form of Yamāntaka practice, characterized by ferocious imagery and gruesome recipes to conquer the most formidable of dharmic foes. His

⁵⁰ *sPyi gshin dug sdong nag po las bud med sman phan dang mo rjes 'bul sngags*, vol. 23, pp. 273–75: *Ya ma ra tsa la na mo | na ri la khyis rashtsātaba'i thab la | bud med kyi rkang rjes kyi sa dang | bung bu'i gcin dang ra rgya bo'i ril ma | g.yer ma | bca' sga | de rnams bsres nas sngags sum brgya btab nas | sngags ni | gu gu ra tsa ti khug ti khug | shag shag | rgob rgob | 'grol na | zhi dha rkang rjes kyi sa la sngags 'di nyi shu rtsa cig bzlas la gtor na grol lo | gu gu ra tsa gtor gtor ab che ag che | bud med cham la 'bebs thabs so | om̐ (note: mar khu) agne ye swahā | om̐ bho dhe (note: yam shing) bhi kṣa ye swahā | om̐ (note: til) sarba pā paṃ ha na badzra ye swahā | om̐ badzra (note: 'bras) rgyu sha ye swahā | om̐ a (note: ku sha) pra ti ha ta badzra ye swahā | om̐ ma hā badzra a (note: phye mar) kṣa ye swahā | om̐ badzra (note: gro) gha ma ri ye swahā | om̐ sarba (note: ku sha) artha siddhi ye swahā | om̐ badzra a (note: dur ba) yu she swahā | om̐ (note: zho zan) badzra sa ma de swahā | om̐ badzra mahā (note: nas) bhe ga ye swahā | om̐ badzra (note: 'bras) gha ma ri swahā | om̐ badzra bhi dza ye (note: so ba) swahā | om̐ sarba pa (note: sran ma) rang ye swahā | om̐ badzra dam (note: so rtsi) bu la ye sāhā | om̐ ma hā shrī pha ma dha ni (note: 'bru sna) swahā | om̐ ma hā ba (note: zho zan) la ye swahā | om̐ teng ga ga ni (note: shing thog) ga ga ni bhi lo ki ti hūṃ phaṭ swahā | om̐ badzra (note: gos bzung) wa ḍa ye swahā | om̐ (note: kun las 'gre'o) a ni dza la ram haṃ.*

⁵¹ The Sanskrit rendering (*rasācāṭava*) in this sentence is unclear. Perhaps this is a misrendering of a Sanskrit compound beginning with *rasa* as an elixir or flavoring (a stove flavored by [the fluids of] a woman and dog). Another possibility is describing the *thab* as a *cātvala* (hole for sacrificial fire) but misspelled and part of an unknown compound.

ritual program reveals how the Tibetan Buddhist tradition delineates protective and destructive aims since it exhibits increasingly brutal means to subdue one's enemies. This cycle is important as a component of the Byang gter Tradition and appears in the collected works of many important Buddhist masters past and present. It is my hope that further investigation of the Byang gter materials, along with comparisons to various other compilations such as those in 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's collected works will unveil the intricacies of this shared practice as it has been developed by multiple hands across time and sectarian boundaries.

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Divine Visions at the Last Breaths: A Creative Teaching on Dying in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Anthology

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The most stunning Buddhist teachings on death and intermediate processes (*bar do*) were produced in the Tibetan Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*) tradition. Especially the Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*) strand contains a marked emphasis on death, as the authors of the tradition creatively elaborated on the Indian Buddhist bardo (*antarabhāva*) theory over several centuries. By the 14th century, the descriptions of death and post-death bardos had become relatively standard with detailed accounts of the elemental dissolution at death and the full-blown manifestation of the peaceful and wrathful deities in the bardo of *dharmatā* (reality-as-it-is). However, despite the systematization of the bardo teachings in the 14th century, the creativity of the earlier centuries was still moistening the ground of literary production at this time. A testimony of this is Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *Oral Instructions on the Five Rounds* (*Khug pa lnga'i gdams ngag*),¹ a distinctive text on the dying process that mingles the luminous wisdom (*ye shes*) of the deities with the karmic aspects of the elemental dissolution occurring in the last five rounds of breathing. I shall first discuss the general landscape of death-related literature in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *rDzogs chen* anthology, and then focus on the teaching of the last five rounds of breathing, followed by a translation of *The Oral Instructions on the Five Rounds*.

Teachings on Death and Bardos in rGod ldem's Anthology

The Oral Instructions on the Five Rounds is contained in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection anthology, *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*) revealed in 1366. The anthology's texts on death and bardos present a variety of

¹ *Khug pa lnga'i gdams ngag*, in *The Unimpeded Realization* (abbreviated from here on as UR) III:541-548.

approaches on the topic. Some texts contain relatively standard descriptions, while others, such as *The Five Rounds*, are dominated by heterodox explanations on the dying process that are unique to the anthology and more central in the given text than the classic presentation on the death process found for example in Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*) or Karma gling pa's *Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate Process* (*Bar do thos grol*).

The classic presentation refers to the unfolding events in the well-known triad of death-related bardos. (1) In the bardo of the moment of death (*chi kha'i bar do*), the elements (*bhūta*, 'byung ba), subtle winds (*prāṇa*, *rlung*), and psycho-physical components (*skandha*, *phung po*) dissolve, from coarse to increasingly subtle, culminating in the manifestation of the most subtle awareness, the clear light of death. Recognizing the clear light of death as one's own essence results in enlightenment. (2) In the bardo of *dharmatā* (*chos nyid bar do*), the dying person perceives gnostic visions of rainbow lights and deities, which result in enlightenment upon recognition. (3) Those who did not recognize wander into the bardo of becoming (*srid pa'i bar do*) which entails chaotic, karmic visions and the process of approaching rebirth.²

Death and bardos are discussed quite frequently in *The Unimpeded Realization*, as the anthology contains four texts that focus on the topic exclusively³ and 22 texts that examine it among other subjects.

Death appears across many genres of literature, for example eleven of these texts that discuss death are tantras,⁴ two are empowerment

² See translations of the *Bar do thos grol* (Dorje, 2007, Thurman, 1993 and Trungpa and Fremantle, 1988)

³ *The Pith Instruction Advice on the Five Rounds* (*Man ngag khug pa lnga'i gdams pa*), UR III: 533-540, *Oral Instructions on the Five Rounds: Pith Instructions of the Great Perfection Seminal Heart* (*rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi man ngag khug pa lnga'i gdams ngag*), UR III:541-548 (translated below), *The Lamp of the Clear Light of Bardo* (*Bar do 'od gsal sgron ma*), UR III:549-554, and *The Tantra on the Self-Display of the Bardo from the Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgong pa zang thal gyi bar do rang snang gi rgyud*), UR III:565-598.

⁴ In addition to what was mentioned above, these passages from tantras in *The Unimpeded Realization* discuss death and bardos: *The Tantra of the Great Intrinsic Buddha* (*Sangs rgyas rang chas chen po'i rgyud*), UR III:315-318, *The Tantra of the Self-Arisen Primordial Wisdom of the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (*Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po ye shes rang shar gyi rgyud*), UR III:341-343, *The Tantra of the Intrinsic Clarity of Awareness's Primordial Wisdom from the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (*Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po rig pa ye shes rang gsal ba'i rgyud*), UR III:397-407, *Supplementary cycles: The Teaching on the Essence and Expanse which are the Root of the Lamps of the Unimpeded Realization: Also Entitled The Root Tantra of the Unimpeded Realization* (*Kha skong skor: dgongs pa zang thal gyi sgron ma'i rtsa ba ngo bo dang dbyings bstan pa: dgongs pa zang thal rtsa ba'i*

texts,⁵ and in addition we have one narrative text,⁶ one text from the Liberation Through Wearing cycle,⁷ and one text from each of the Oral Transmission (*snyan brgyud*) cycles attributed to Padmasambhava,⁸ Vairocana,⁹ and Vimalamitra.¹⁰ *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* outlines the classic presentation of the dying process and post-death bardos.¹¹ In addition, seven texts of the anthology discuss the post-death bardos similarly to the classic presentation involving the bardo of *dharmatā* and bardo of becoming, although there is much internal variation in these texts. For example, *The Tantra of the Quintessential Realization of the Pith Instructions Taught by Vajrasattva* describes the bardo deities in detail,¹² while many of the texts just refer to the visions of deities in passing.

rgyud kyang zer), UR III:467-473, *The Tantra of the Self-Arisen Realization of the Buddha Vajrasattva from the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* (Yang gsang bla na med pa'i rdzogs pa chen po sangs rgyas rdo rje sems dpa'i dgongs pa rang shar gyi rgyud), UR III:486-492, *The Tantra of the Quintessential Realization of the Pith Instructions taught by Vajrasattva: the Oral Transmission Cycle* (Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud rdo rje sems dpas gsungs pa: snyan brgyud skor), UR IV:17-25, *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to this Great Tantra* (rGyud chen mthong ba dang thos pa dang btags pa dang smon lam btob pa tsam gyis sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud), UR IV:147-154, *The Root Tantra of the Self-Emergent and Self-Arisen* (Rang byung rang shar rtsa ba'i rgyud), UR V:125-127, and *The Tantra of Vajrasattva that Liberates All Beings* (Kun grol rdo rje sems dpa'i rgyud), UR V:146-147.

- ⁵ *The Empowerment of the Gnostic Crown Ablution* (Ye shes spyi blugs kyi dbang), UR II:69-71 and *The Commentary on the Empowerment to Awareness Creativity* (Rig pa rtsal gyi dbang gi 'grel pa), UR II:321-322.
- ⁶ *The Treasury of Precious Gems Eradicating Obstructions: The Dialogues of Tsogyel* (Gegs sel nor bu rin po che'i mdzod: mtsho rgyal zhus lan), UR V:286-291.
- ⁷ *The First, Middle, and Third Testaments of the Buddha* (Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes dang po bar pa gsum pa rnams), UR II:196, 199.
- ⁸ *The Second Root Pith Instruction on the Precious Oral Transmission on the Authentic Meaning* (Yang dag don gyi snyan brgyud rin po che rtsa ba'i man ngag gnyis pa), UR II:407-420.
- ⁹ *The Exceedingly Secret, Unsurpassed Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud phyi ma), UR II:551-552.
- ¹⁰ *Intrinsically Clear Primordial Wisdom - A Commentary on the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection of the Great Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra Transmitted to the King* (Bi ma mi tra'i snyan brgyud chen mo rgyal po la gdams pa yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po'i 'grel pa ye shes rang gsal), UR IV:351-381.
- ¹¹ *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*, although presented as part of rGod ldem's revelation, is almost identical to a 12th century composition, *Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, authored Nyi ma 'bum (1158-1213). Klong chen pa also used this text as a template to compose his *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*). For a translation of *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra*, see Smith, 2016, and for a study of *Rdzogs pa chen po tshig don bcu gcig pa*, see Yeshe, 2017.
- ¹² *Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud rdo rje sems dpas gsungs pa*, UR IV:17-21.

However, most of the texts do not follow the classic presentation of the post-death bardos that contains both the wisdom bardo of *dharmatā* and the karmic bardo of becoming but focus only on a particular bardo state or present an altogether different view. For example, *The First, Middle and Third Testaments of the Buddha* discuss how practicing direct transcendence enables one to see the visions of wisdom in the bardo of *dharmatā* and attain enlightenment.¹³ *The Tantra of the Self-Arisen Primordial Wisdom of the Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Great Perfection* describes only the *dharmatā* visions of lights, sounds and rays,¹⁴ and three texts discuss only the bardo of becoming.

In addition, *The Introduction to the Five Intermediate States* presents a discussion on the five bardos: the bardo of natural abiding (i.e., this life), bardo of meditative absorption (*samādhi*, *ting nge 'dzin*), bardo of dreaming, bardo of birth and death, and bardo of becoming. The bardo of *dharmatā* is altogether missing from this presentation, although there is a mention of the arising of *dharmatā* after dying in the context of the bardo of birth and death, but this seems to refer to the clear light of death.¹⁵ *The Tantra of the Intrinsic Clarity of Awareness's Primordial Wisdom* discusses only the bardo of *dharmatā* in its short bardo section, but contains the dualism of the wisdom and karmic lights common in the Tibetan bardo literature. The text relates that if one is afraid of the bright lights of *dharmatā*, they become the dim lights of the six realms.¹⁶

One of the unique bardo teachings in rGod ldem's anthology is contained in *The Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana*. This teaching, entitled *Wandering in the Eight Consecutive Cycles* (*'Khor lo brgyad la rim gyis 'grim pa*), presents a different conceptual framework to organize the bardos of the moment of death and *dharmatā*. The eight cycles are listed as:

1. The cycle of earth: the body becomes heavy (occurs one day before dying).
2. The cycle of water: the external breath stops, one suffers from cold, and there is a visual appearance of blue.
3. The cycle of fire: one suffers from heat and there is a visual appearance of red.
4. The cycle of air: one is blown helplessly by the wind of karma and perceives green appearances.

¹³ *Sangs rgyas kyi 'das rjes dang po bar pa gsum pa rnams*, UR III:194-196.

¹⁴ *Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po ye shes rang shar gyi rgyud*, UR III:347-350.

¹⁵ *Bar do lnga'i ngo sprod*, UR V:411.

¹⁶ *Yang gsang bla na med pa rdzogs pa chen po rig pa ye shes rang gsal ba'i rgyud*, UR III:402.

5. The cycle of appearances: one's cognition is blissful and there is an appearance like daybreak.
6. The cycle of touching appearances: one becomes nervous, thinks that one is dead and suffers, and there is an appearance like dusk.
7. The cycle of increasing appearances: one's cognition becomes clear and blissful and there is an appearance like the rising sun.
8. The cycle of luminous deities: ordinary people with bad karma perceive the Lord of Death and masses of weapons, while yogis perceive luminous appearances and deities.

The explanations above apply mostly to ordinary people who have obscurations and negative karma. It is said that a yogi will remain in a non-conceptual state up to the seventh cycle, during which he experiences non-conceptual bliss. In the eighth cycle, he perceives all appearances as unconstrained light, sees visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities, and hears the intrinsic sound of *dharmatā* roaring like a thousand dragons.¹⁷

Even though the eight cycles employ different concepts, they nevertheless present a very similar progression to the classical bardo doctrine, as found for example in Karma gling pa's *Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate Process*. It is curious, however, that most of the elemental cycles occur after breathing stops and the person is dead, and only the cycle of earth matches the classical presentation of the dissolution of the elements. It is also unusual that one is blown by the wind of karma in the cycle of air before the luminosity of death manifests, because this is regularly a feature associated with the bardo of becoming (*srid pa bar do*).

This brief overview on the death-related literature in rGod ldem's anthology illustrates the variety of texts and approaches on the topic. Death and bardos appear in tantras, oral transmissions, empowerment texts, a scholastic text, a narrative, and a liberation through wearing text. They are discussed as parallel with direct transcendence meditation and in connection with the rubric of the five bardos that span across all existence. Some texts follow the classic presentation, although from different angles and focusing on different parts of the process, while others, such as wandering in the eight cycles, present unique frameworks and concepts to describe the formidable transition to either enlightenment or the next life.

¹⁷ *The Exceedingly Secret, Unsurpassed Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud phyi ma)*, UIR II:557-560.

The Five Rounds

The most distinctive bardo teachings in the anthology are contained in three texts that discuss the dying person's last five rounds of breath. Two of these focus exclusively on the five rounds, namely, *The Oral Instructions on the Five Rounds: Pith Instructions of the Great Perfection Seminal Heart* (translated below) and *The Pith Instruction Advice on the Five Rounds*. These two texts are unique in their presentation of the bardo of the moment of death because they mingle the karmic aspects of the elemental dissolution process with the wisdom aspects of the lights and deities usually associated with the bardo of *dharmatā*.

The five rounds of breathing (*khug pa lnga*) are the dying person's last four rounds of exhalation and inhalation, and the fifth one is a long exhalation. During these five rounds, the five elements and five sensory faculties dissolve one by one, but surprisingly, it is said that a practitioner who obtained the pith instructions on the five rounds will perceive the five lights of wisdom during these five rounds. If he recognizes the lights as his own radiance, he will become enlightened as one of the five Buddhas without having to go to the post-death bardos. For example, when the wind element and auditory consciousness dissolve, the yogi perceives the green light of accomplishing wisdom, and if he recognizes it, he attains enlightenment as the Buddha Amoghasiddhi.¹⁸ *The Pith Instruction Advice on the Five Rounds* describes the process:

During each round of respiration, one element escapes, one sensory faculty ceases, and one wisdom dawns. Then, the vibrant clear energy and the sediment of the elements are differentiated. The sediment remains in the material body, and the five clear vibrant energies, the five-colored lights of the self-arisen wisdom of awareness manifest in the space of the empty, clear *dharmatā*. By recognizing them by yourself as the supreme clear light, you will become enlightened in the state of the five families of the Blissful Ones (*sugata*). At that point, the six higher knowledges (*abhijñā*, *mngon shes*) manifest naturally. The higher knowledge of hearing arises, so you will hear the unwavering speech of the *dharmakāya* above, the echo-like speech of the *sambhogakāya* at your level, and the various sounds of the *nirmāṇakāya* below.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Man ngag khug pa lnga'i gdams pa*, UR III:534-535, and *Oral Instructions on the Five Rounds: Pith Instructions of the Great Perfection Seminal Heart* (*rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi man ngag khug pa lnga'i gdams ngag*), UR III:541-543.

¹⁹ *Man ngag khug pa lnga'i gdams pa*, UR III:535: *dbugs khug pa re la 'byung ba re 'bros: dbang po re 'gag: ye shes re 'char ro: de nas 'byung ba dangs snyig 'byed: snyigs ma phung por lus: dangs ma lnga rang byung rig pa'i ye shes kyi 'od kha dog lnga chos nyid stong*

All these aspects—the five lights of wisdom, the space of *dharmatā*, and the six higher knowledges—are usually associated with the bardo of *dharmatā*, but here they manifest in the bardo of the moment of death during the last five rounds of breathing.

In addition to the two main texts on the five rounds, rGod ldem's anthology contains a third text, *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to This Great Tantra*, that has a short, but very interesting passage on the five rounds. This passage focuses on the subtle connection between the heart, eyes, and the visionary field of perception or expanse (*dbyings*). The Buddhas travel via the subtle channel from the heart to the eyes to be perceived by the dying person during the five rounds, and he should direct his focus on the process. The passage reads:

The individuals of average diligence will get enlightened when the breath is about to be severed. At present, you should practice continuously. Inside your heart, in the body of five lights, there reside five and three Buddha bodies as the five bodies of wisdom. Thus, when the breath is about to be severed, their appearances come out from your eyes and manifest as the radiance of the five wisdom lights in the space in front of you during the five rounds of breath. In the first round of breath, the blue light will manifest. The white light will manifest during the second, yellow during the third, red during the fourth, and green during the fifth round. At that point, from the arising of the blue light until the green one arises, focus the awareness on the eyes and the eyes on the lights. Let be in the matrix of unwavering *dharmatā* without getting distracted even for a moment. Thus, the mental consciousness is subsumed in the blue light, visual consciousness in the white light, olfactory consciousness in the yellow light, gustatory consciousness in the red light, and auditory consciousness in the green light. This is also called the secret path of Vajrasattva from the expanse of reality (*dharmadhātu*) of Akaniṣṭhā as well as the continuous rope of compassion. It resembles an extended rope of the five lights twisted together and piercing your eyes.

By focusing your eyes and awareness on this rope one-pointedly without distractions, you will go to the expanse of reality on the third instant. The blue light dissolves to Vairocana's enlightened mind at the

gsal gyi nam mkha' la 'char ro: de rang gis mchog gi 'od gsal du ngo shes pas rang rigs lnga'i bde bar gshegs pa'i ngang du sangs rgya'o: de'i dus su mngon par shes pa drug rang bzhin gyis 'char ro: snyan gyi mngon par shes pa 'char pas: yar chos sku'i gsung mi g.yo bar yod pa yang gsan: thad kar longs sku'i gsung brag ca lta bu yang gsan: mar sprul sku'i gsung sgra sna tshogs yod pa yang gsan no:

heart, white to Vajrasattva's heart, yellow to Ratnasambhava's heart, red to Amitabha's heart, green to Amogasiddhi's heart, and you will attain Buddhahood. The enlightened mind of the five Buddhas is liberated as the five wisdoms. The five wisdoms are liberated as Samantabhadra in union with Samantabhadri, and they abide in the state of the three bodies. Therefore, by focusing the awareness on the eyes and the eyes in the expanse, you will attain the five wisdoms and go to the expanse of reality.²⁰

In the Seminal Heart theory of the subtle body, the channel connecting the heart to the eyes is known as the hollow crystal tube (*shel gyi sbu gu can*) or the golden *kati* channel (*ka ti gser gyi rtsa*). In the practice of direct transcendence (*thod rgal*), the Buddhas travel via this channel from the palace of the exalted mind (*tsitta*) at the heart to the eyes and out into the expanse (*dbyings*) to be perceived in the visionary encounter with one's own essence. It is interesting that during the five rounds, the visions of the Buddhas also travel via this same passage into the field of vision. This is because the dying person is still inhabiting his body. In contrast, in the classical presentation of the bardos, the visions of the Buddha deities are perceived in the bardo of *dharmatā*, at which point the dying person no longer inhabits his body.

²⁰ *rGyud chen mthong ba dang thos pa dang btags pa dang smon lam btab pa tsam gyis sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud*, UR IV:133-135: gang zag brtson 'grus 'bring du gyur ba rnam dbugs ma chad pa la sangs rgya'o: da lta nyams len rgyun mi 'chad du byas pas: dbugs ma chad tsam la rang gi snying gi nang na ye shes 'od lnga'i lus su sangs rgyas sku lnga sku gsum ye shes lnga'i sku ru bzhugs pas: de'i snang ba rang gi mig gi nang nas thon te: dbugs khug pa lnga la mdun gyi nam mkha' la ye shes 'od lnga'i gdangs su 'char ro: de yang dbugs khug pa dang po la 'od mthing ga 'char: gnyis pa la dkar po: gsum pa la gser po: bzhi pa la dmar po: lnga pa la ljang gu 'char ro: de'i tshe 'od mthing ga shar nas ljang gu ma shar gi bar: rig pa mig la gtad: mig 'od la gtad: chos nyid g.yo ba med pa ma'i klong du skad cig kyang ma yengs bar bzhag pas yid kyi rnam par shes pa 'od mthing ga la 'du: mig gi rnam par shes pa 'od dkar po la 'du: sna'i rnam par shes pa 'od gser po la 'du: lce'i rnam par shes pa 'od dmar po la 'du: rna'i rnam par shes pa 'od ljang gu la 'dus pa dang: 'og min chos kyi dbyings nas rdo rje sems dpa'i gsang lam zhes kyang bya: thugs rje rgyun gyi thag pa zhes kyang bya ba kha dog dkar po'am: dmar po'am: 'od lnga ga sgril ma thag pa brkyang pa'am dkris pa lta bu gcig rang gi mig la zug yod: de la 'dun pa drag pos skad cig kyang ma yengs par mig dang rig pa rtse gcig gtad pas skad cig ma gsum la chos kyi dbyings su gshegs te: 'od mthing ga rnam par snang mdzad la thim ste grol: dkar po rdo rje sems dpa'i thugs kar thim ste grol: ser po rin chen 'byung ldan gyi thugs kar thim ste grol: dmar po snang ba mtha' yas kyi thugs kar thim ste grol: ljang gu don yod grub pa'i thugs kar thim ste grol: rigs lnga'i thugs ye shes lnga ru grol: ye shes lnga kun bzang yab yum du grol: kun bzang yab yum sku gsum gyi ngang la bzhugs so: de ltar rig pa mig la gtad: mig dbyings la gtad pas ye shes lnga dang bcas te chos kyi dbyings su gshegs so:

All the psycho-physical and elemental energies (*rlung*) have dissolved into their subtle essences and gathered at the heart in the indestructible seminal nucleus (*mi shig pa'i thig le*), which has left the body. Free from the coarse layers of corporeality and ordinary mind, the dying person perceives his subtlest, enlightened essence in the form of the divine *dharmatā* visions.

During the five rounds, the Buddha deities must travel via the subtle *kati* channel, as the dying person is not free from the body yet. This connects the teaching of the five rounds intimately with direct transcendence and emphasizes its meditative character. Even if the luminous visions arise initially to an ordinary person, they will not progress automatically but require familiarization through visionary practice in this life. As the text explains, the practitioner must “let be in the matrix of unwavering *dharmatā* without getting distracted even for a moment,” as a result of which the mental and sensory consciousnesses dissolve in the five lights and the secret path of Vajrasattva manifests in the form of the luminous rainbow rope. Then, the dying person has to apply his meditative abilities again and focus on the luminous rope without distractions, which causes the lights to dissolve at the hearts of the five Buddhas.

However, a powerful element of compassion or mercy is there, as the splendid rainbow lights that manifest during the five rounds and coil together like a rope are called the continuous rope of compassion (*thugs rje rgyun gyi thag pa*). It is the compassion of Vajrasattva extending from Akaniṣṭhā and welcoming the dying person home to his inherently awakened nature. It is a reflection of the Buddhist idea that the compassion of the Buddhas is always there to receive practitioners if they can open themselves to it. The continuous rope of compassion is also called the secret path of Vajrasattva (*rdo rje sems dpa'i gsang lam*) because it is a subtle, esoteric passage to Akaniṣṭhā manifesting upon cultivating the abilities of subtle vision.

Connecting the manifestation of the wisdom lights of the bardo of *dharmatā* to the dissolution of the elements and sensory consciousnesses that are factors of karmic existence in *saṃsāra* not only emphasizes the connection of the five rounds with direct transcendence, but also curiously mingles the karmic and wisdom aspects of the dying process that in the classic presentation manifest at different times. Notably, it underlines the inherent divinity of the karmic aspects: the five elements in their purified form are the five female Buddhas, the five aggregates of psychophysical being (*skandha*) are the five Buddhas, and the sensory consciousnesses are the Bodhisattvas. From the point of view of ultimate reality, there is no

separation of pure and impure, but *saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*, living beings are Buddhas, and the world is a pure land. The ultimate unity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* both in tantric theory and Middle Way philosophy renders credibility to the merging of the karmic and wisdom aspects in the teaching of the five rounds.

Even though the teaching of the five rounds accords with tantric theory, it is markedly different from the classical presentation of the process of death. These differences reflect the creativity in yogic techniques and literary production in 14th century Tibet. The incredible transformations and innovations of the earlier centuries of Tibetan Renaissance were still influencing the religious arena and its protagonists. The Buddhist teachings on death and bardo went through extensive evolution and reworking during the Renaissance. Even though these developments were consolidated in the works of Klong chen pa, Karma gling pa, and others, the teaching of the five rounds illustrates the fluid way the bardo teachings were understood among at least some of the yogic practitioners and authors of the Seminal Heart.

The unique character of the five rounds also speaks for the freedom of expression exercised by the non-scholastically oriented authors of *The Unimpeded Realization* not bound by the aim to compose a strictly orthodox, philosophical treatise like Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings*. Furthermore, this freedom of expression evident in the texts on the five rounds suggests that rGod ldem recycled or rewrote more archaic Seminal Heart materials that did not make it to the classical synthesis of writers like Klong chen pa, because they presented philosophical ideas and practices that were too creative or divergent. The five rounds also illustrate the general disposition of *The Unimpeded Realization*, which is not an airtight, systematic composition intended to convince scholastics, but has a sprawling, heterodox character designed to inspire practitioners with the unimaginable power and possibilities of spiritual practice.

*Oral Instructions on the Five Rounds:**Pith Instructions of the Great Perfection Seminal Heart -*

Translation of *rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi man ngag khug pa lnga'i gdams ngag*, in *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*, III:541-548)²¹

Homage to the Glorious Vajrasattva. I will teach the pith instructions on the five rounds to attain enlightenment before the breath is severed. To expand on that, having previously relied on the analogies, meanings, and signs, the lama introduces the meaning of the five bodies and five types of wisdom that abides within yourself as your natural possession, and the yogi practices it. Upon that, there is the teaching of the pith instructions on the five rounds.

Vajrasattva said: "If you know the meaning of the five rounds, you will attain enlightenment before you stop breathing." This means that when a living being is about to stop breathing but matter and awareness have not yet separated and the external breath is not cut off, he will breathe four rounds of breathing and the fifth one is an extended exhalation. These inhalations and exhalations last for a short while. If you recognize this, you will get enlightened before the breath is severed.

Vajrasattva also said: "O, Lord of Secrets, when you are dying but have not stopped breathing yet, the mirage-like enlightened bodies of wisdom dawn in the space of *dharmatā*'s self-display. It is enough just to recognize them."

These visions that appear are enumerated in terms of the five rounds as well as three sets and fifteen aspects. If you wonder what they are, the duration is the five rounds of breath, the radiance is the five-colored lights, and there are the five kinds of wisdom that realize the meaning, making a total of fifteen. The duration, or the five rounds of breathing, means that when the breathing is about to cease, it is impossible for the five-colored light of awareness not to appear for all living beings during these five rounds of breath. Thus, the measure of the duration is the five rounds of breath. However, the temporal measure is indefinite. For some living beings, it lasts for a very long time. Nevertheless, even though the temporal length of that duration is generally indefinite, predominantly, the duration of the manifestations in the five rounds of breath is considered to be intense.

Then, I will differentiate the five rounds in detail. A round of breath is when you breathe out with the sound *Ha* and breathe in with the sound *Hu*. Blue luminous radiance will manifest. You should vividly

²¹ The pagination refers to the A' dzom edition. In the gNas chung edition, the text is in IV:383-392. For the Tibetan transliteration, see the appendix below.

realize the meaning of that very radiance to be the primordially pure wisdom of reality's expanse. This is counted as the first round of breath.

Again, as above you breathe a round of breath and white luminous radiance will manifest. You should instantly realize the meaning of the white radiance to be the primordially pure mirror-like wisdom. This is counted as the second round of breath.

Again, you breathe a round of breath and yellow luminous radiance will manifest. You should instantly realize the meaning of the yellow radiance to be the primordially pure wisdom of equality. This is counted as the third round of breath.

Again, you breathe a round of breath and red luminous radiance will manifest. You should instantly realize the meaning of the red radiance to be the primordially pure wisdom of discerning. This is counted as the fourth round of breath.

Again, you breathe out an extended breath with the sound *Ha* unable to breath in. Green luminous radiance will manifest. You should vividly realize the meaning of the green luminous radiance to be the primordially pure wisdom of accomplishing. This is counted as the fifth round of breath.

These are the four rounds of breath, and the fifth one is an extended exhalation. The five lights are comprised of the four colors and blue. Their meaning is the four wisdoms and the fifth is the wisdom of reality's expanse. The lama distinguishes these in detail to the individuals on the path. Just by being introduced to the levels of the five rounds and knowing them, you will get enlightened before the breath is severed.

Vajrasattva described this topic: "O, Lord of Secrets, when you die but the external breath is not yet severed, five-colored lights will manifest in the space in front of you. These five brilliant, beautiful lights will manifest to you with the clusters of five kinds of Buddha bodies filling their center. At that time, the five Buddha clusters that arise are the nature of wisdom of your own awareness that abides within you. By knowing it to be your own appearance, you will dissolve non-dually into the appearances of the five clusters and become enlightened. O, son of a noble family, there is nothing to meditate on beyond this topic. It is enough to recognize them to be your own appearances. This reality devoid of meditation manifests to all sentient beings unobstructedly before the external breath is severed. It is enough to recognize it."

To summarize the topic, I have explained above the progression of the moments when matter and awareness are about to separate, and breathing is about to stop but the external breath is not yet severed. During the duration of the five rounds which consist of the four rounds

and an extended exhalation before the external breath is cut off, it is impossible for the clusters of the enlightened bodies and *maṇḍalas* not to fully arise in front of all sentient beings within the luminous, five-colored radiance of their own awareness. When they arise, it is impossible not to recognize the intrinsic, five-colored luminosity of awareness as the nature of the five wisdoms due to the power of earlier practice. By apprehending them in this manner, the awareness will not proliferate or whirl elsewhere. Your own awareness is introduced as the *dharmatā*, so it fully dissolves in the matrix of the five-colored radiant light that arises within yourself together with the realization of unimpeded wisdom. When this occurs, it is impossible not to attain enlightenment. This is called attaining enlightenment before the breath is severed.

At that time, the view of deathless abiding reality will also support the yogi from behind, and the *maṇḍala* of the clear light of intrinsic radiance will meet him in the front. The realization of unimpeded wisdom will bridge the boundaries, and the mind that has no attachment to anything at all is produced. It is completely blended with the radiant light of awareness. It is intensely focused and becomes expansively vast.

At this point, an important key point is that you do not generate obstacles by lamenting about adverse conditions and so forth. You have not yet obtained the vajra-like meditative absorption (*samādhi*), the realization of the dynamism of *dharmatā* that is not destroyed by adverse conditions, so if you lament about adversities and so forth, the awareness will become confused from the depths to the surface. Thus, do not lament about conditions and so forth with respect to what is close to you or beyond you. Moreover, even though the yogis of superior realization are not tainted by this flaw, the *samādhi* and realization of pith instructions of the average people on the path can be robbed away and their one-pointed mind can be destroyed, so do not wail, lament, or the like. If you do, they will become obstacles on the path, so do not engage in them.

Regarding this process, those of superior faculties who practice this teaching will attain enlightenment without a remainder of their physical bodies. The average will realize the five rounds before the breath is severed and thus attain enlightenment. The inferior will attain enlightenment during the three moments. In this way, by knowing the meaning of the five rounds, those of average capabilities will have an unimpeded ascent to enlightenment without the bardo and attain Buddhahood before the breath is severed. Abandoning the body and enlightenment are simultaneous. It is like when a baby *garuda* extends his wings inside the egg, the external seal of the egg is broken, and the baby *garuda* flies in the sky. Similarly, when a person has trained in

many paths, he does not have to meditate for a long time. Now that he has encountered a lama who has the pith instructions and has faith in them, he will know the five rounds on the verge of matter and awareness separating and will attain enlightenment through the key points of the pith instructions.

Attaining enlightenment in this way entails that the result, the limitless pure lands of the three bodies will manifest and the condition of benefiting beings will naturally emerge. For example, it is like a precious wish-fulfilling jewel that has no basis for effort or conceptuality of thinking that there is a need for sublime necessities, but nevertheless all the necessities emerge spontaneously. Similarly, you will have all the great, spontaneously accomplished virtues of a Buddha without effort. That depends only on this path to enlightenment through the key points of the pith instructions. Therefore, protect these pith instructions like your eyes or heart! These words were spoken by the emanation body dGa' rab rDo rje.

This completes the handful of letters of the pith instructions that involve little effort but are very meaningful and enlighten before the breath severed.

Samaya, seal seal seal. Do not transgress the handful of letters of the treasure! This contains fine and small letters as if written with a thorn. Blessings to all.

*rDzogs pa chen po snying tig gi man ngag khug pa lnga'i
gdams ngag bzhugs so:*

dpal rdo rje sems dpa' la phyag tshal lo: dbugs ma chad pa la sang rgya ba'i man ngag khug pa lnga bstan par bya ste: de yang sngon du dpe don rtags dang gsum la brten nas: sku lnga ye shes lnga'i don rang la rang chas su gnas pa de nyid bla mas ngo sprad de rnal 'byor pas nyams su blang ngo: de la khug pa lnga'i man ngag bstan pa ni: rdo rje sems dpa'i zhal nas: khug pa lnga'i don shes na: dbugs pa ma chad pa la sangs rgya'o gsungs so: de'i don sems can thams cad la dbugs sdud khar bem rig gnyis ma bral: phyi dbugs ma chad pa la dbugs khug pa bzhi: rkyang pa gcig dang lnga: phar 'gro tshur 'gro byed pa'i yun tsam gcig 'char ba'o: de ngo shes na dbugs ma chad pa la sangs rgya'o:

de yang rdo rje sems dpas gsungs pa: kye gsang ba'i bdag po rang nam 'chi ba'i dus su dbugs ma chad pa la chos nyid rang snang gi nam mkha' la ye shes sgyu ma lta bu'i [542] sku 'char ro: de ngo shes pas chog go: zhes gsungs so:

de ltar 'char ba de la khug pa lnga gsum bco lnga rtsi ste: gang zhe

na: yun dbugs khug pa lnga: gdangs 'od kha dog lnga: don rtogs pa'i
 ye shes lnga ste bco lnga'o: yun dbugs khug pa lnga zhes bya ba ni:
 dbugs sdud khar rig pa'i 'od kha dog lnga dbugs khug pa lnga'i yun
 tsam gcig sems can thams cad la mi 'char mi srid pas: yun ring thung
 gi tshad dbugs khug pa lnga: zhag gi tshad la nges pa med: sems can
 'ga' zhig la ni yun ches shin tu ring ba 'ong bas na: spyir yun ring
 thung la 'di kho na ltar nges pa med kyang: 'di ni yun khug pa lnga la
 'char ba shas che ba dbang btsan du bzhag pa'o:
 de la khug pa lnga bye brag tu phyen te bstan na: yun dbugs phar la
 ha zer nas: phyir thon pa de tshur la hu zer nas nang du log pa'i bar
 la dbugs khug pa gcig: gdangs 'od mthing ga 'char: don gdangs de
 nyid ka dag chos kyi dbyings kyi ye shes su lhag gis rtogs pa de:
 grangs dbugs khug pa [543] gcig go:
 yang yun gong ltar du dbugs khug pa gcig: gdangs 'od dkar po 'char:
 don gdangs dkar po de nyid ka dag me long lta bu'i ye shes su car
 gyis rtogs pa de: grangs dbugs khug pa gnyis so:
 yang yun dbugs khug pa gcig: gdangs 'od ser po 'char: don gdangs
 ser po de ka dag mnyam pa nyid kyi ye shes su car gyis rtogs pa de:
 grangs dbugs khug pa gsum mo:
 yang yun dbugs khug pa gcig: gdangs 'od dmar po 'char: don gdangs
 dmar po de nyid ka dag so sor rtog pa'i ye shes su car gyis rtogs pa
 de: grangs dbugs khug pa bzhi'o:
 yang dbugs phar la ha zer nas tshur sdud ma shes pa'i rkyang pa
 gcig: gdang 'od ljang gu 'char: don gdangs 'od ljang gu de nyid ka
 dag bya ba grub pa'i ye shes su lhangs kyi rtogs pa de: grangs dbugs
 khug pa lnga'o:
 de rnam ni dbugs khug pa bzhi: rkyang pa gcig dang lnga'o: 'od kha
 dog bzhi: mthing kha gcig dang lnga: [544] don ye shes bzhi: chos kyi
 dbyings kyi ye shes dang lnga zhes bya ste: de rnam ni gang zag
 lam pa ba rnam la bla mas bye brag tu phye ste: khug pa lnga'i rim
 pa ngo sprod pa tsam yin te: khug pa lnga shes na dbugs ma chad
 par sangs rgya'o:
 zhes pa'i don ni rdo rje sems dpas gsungs pa: kye gsang ba'i bdag po
 rang 'chi ba'i tshe phyi'i dbugs ma chad pa la rang gi mdun gyi nam
 mkhar 'od kha do lnga 'char ro: 'od lnga bkra yal le ba'i dkyil du:
 sangs rgyas kyi sku tshom bu lnga ldan du khengs nas rang la 'char
 ro: de'i tshe sangs rgyas kyi sku tshom bu lnga ldan du shar ba ste:
 rang gi rig pa'i ye shes kyi rang bzhin rang la yod pa de: rang gi
 snang ba yin par shes pas: rang tshom bu lnga'i snang ba la gnyis su
 med par thim nas sangs rgya'o: rigs kyi bu don de lta bu las sgom du
 med do: rang gi snang ba yin par ngo shes pas chog go: sgom med
 kyi don de sems can thams cad la phyi dbugs ma chad pa la ma 'gags

par 'char ro: de ngo shes pas chog go: zhes rdo rje [545] sems dpas
gsungs so:

de'i don hril gyis dril na: bem rig gnyis ma bral ba'i dbugs sdud khar:
phyi dbugs ma chad pa la: yun ring thung gi tshad ni gong ltar du'o:
dbugs khug pa bzhi rkyang pa gcig dang lnga'i yun tsam gcig la:
rang gi mdun kyis nam mkha' la: rang gi rig pa'i gdangs 'od kha dog
lnga'i klong du: sku tshom bu'i dkyil 'khor dang bcas pa mer gyis
phyi dbugs ma chad pa la sems can thams cad la mi 'char mi srid do:
de ltar shar ba la sngar nas nyams su blangs pa'i stobs kyis: rig pa'i
rang 'od kha dog lnga po de nyid ye shes lnga'i rang bzhin du ngos
tsir gyis mi zin mi srid do: de ltar zin pas rig pa gzhan du 'tshub pa
dang 'phro rgyu med de: rang gi rig pa chos nyis du ngo sprad pas:
ye shes zang thal gyi dgongs pa bcas te rang la shar ba'i gdangs 'od
kha dog lnga'i klong du ltem gyis thim nas sangs mi rgya mi srid do:
dbugs ma chad pa la sangs rgya ba zhes bya'o:

de'i dus su rnal 'byor pas kyang gnas lugs [546] 'chi rgyu med pa'i lta
ba la rgyab brten: rang gdangs 'od gsal kyis dkyil 'khor gyis mdun
bsus: ye shes zang thal gyi dgongs pas mtshams sbyar la: ci la yang
chags pa med pa'i sems bskyed: rig pa'i gdangs 'od du hril gyis dril:
cher gyis gtad: rgyangs kyis 'phangs la 'gro'o:

de'i dus su rkyen ngu 'bod la sogs pas bar mi bcad pa ni gnad che ste:
da dung de'i dus su chos nyid kyis rtsal dgongs pa rkyen kyis mi shig
pa'i rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin ma thob pas ngu 'bod la sogs pa
byas na rig pa gting thob nas 'chug nas phyi na yod pa dang rtsa na
yod pa rnam kyis ngu 'bod la sogs pa mi bya'o: de yang rnal 'byor
pa dgongs pa yang rab tu gyur pa rnam la de'i skyon gyis gos pa
med kyang: gang zag lam pa blo 'bring man chad kyis dgongs pa
dang ting nge 'dzin 'phro gcig: rtse gcig gi shes pa bshig pas: du co
dang smre sngags la songs pa mi bya: byas na lam gyi gegs su 'gyur
bas mi bya'o:

[547] de yang chos di'i lugs kyis dbang po rab phung po lhag ma med
par sangs rgya'o: 'bring dbugs ma chad pa la khug pa lnga shes pas
sangs rgya'o: tha ma ni skad cig ma gsum la sangs rgya'o: de ltar
dbang po 'bring po rnam kyis khug pa lnga'i don shes pas: bar do
med par yar gyi zang thal chen por sangs rgyas pas na: dbugs ma
chad pa la sangs rgya ba yin te: lus bor ba dang sangs rgya ba dus
mnyam mo: de yang khyung phrug sgo nga'i nang du gshog pa rgyas
pas: phyi sgo nga'i rgya zhig pa dang: nang gi khyung phrug nam
mkha' la 'phur 'gro ba dang 'dra'o: de bzhin du 'di ni lam mang po la
sbyangs pa dang: yun ring du sgom mi dgos te: da lta bla ma man
ngag can dang 'phrad de: man ngag la yid ches pas: bem rig 'bral
khar khug pa lnga shes nas: man ngag can gnad kyis sangs rgya ba

yin no:

de ltar sangs rgya nas 'bras bu sku gsum gyi zhing khams dpag tu
 med pa 'char: 'gro ba'i don ngang ngam shugs kyis 'byung ste: dper
 na yid bzhin gyi [548] nor bu rin po che la dgos 'dod phun sum
 tshogs pa dgos snyam pa'i rtog pa dang rtsol gzhi med kyang: dgos
 'dod thams cad lhun grub tu 'byung ba dang 'dra ste: sangs rgyas kyi
 yon tan thams cad rtsol ba med par lhun gyis grub pa'i che ba dang
 ldan pa yin no: de ni man ngag can gnad kyis sangs rgya pa'i lam 'di
 kho na la rag las pa'o: de'i phyir na man ngag 'di ni rang gi mig gam
 snying ltar chongs shig: ces sprul pa'i sku dga' rab rdo rjes gsungs so:
 tshegs chung la don che ba'i man ngag dbugs ma chad par sangs rgya
 ba'i man ngag yi ge mkhyid gang ba rdzogs so:
 samaya: rgya rgya rgya: gter gyi yi ge mkhyid gang ba las mi gda'o:
 yi ge phra la chung ba tsher mas bris pa 'dra ba gcig dga'o //
 //sar+ba mang+ga laM// //

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Section X² of the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of *the bsKul zhing gsol 'debs**

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0. Preamble

During the time I was engaged in making a critical edition of a longevity *sādhana* called the *Outer, Inner and Secret Longevity Practice* (*Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*, PNST), to my delight and astonishment, my consultation of the twelve-folio *dbu med* manuscript proved to me that it is almost identical to the *Longevity Practice of the Iron-Stalk* (*Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po*, CD), a magnificent example of *tshe sgrub* literature revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can (1337?–1408. BDRC#P5254). The striking difference between the PNST manuscript and the four recensions of the CD lies in their chapter structure. As showed in detail later, a unique section tentatively titled *Invocation and Prayer* (*bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*) that has not been retained in the CD is the most significant divergence between the PNST and the CD. This means that the PNST is a record of this practice deserving serious consideration, including the fact that the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* found in the *Byang gter thugs sgrub kyi skor* may preserve unique features lost in the other renowned compilations of *gter ma* such as the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*. The presence of the chapter *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* is in itself useful for examining the common archetype to the PNST and the CD.

In the following discussion, I will delineate the key features of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* by referring to a critical edition and annotated translation of it. As this edition is based merely on one single *dbu med* manuscript, it still of course needs a lot of woodshedding. As Isaacson

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rightly remarked, 'we should remember not to accord the editions we have more authority than they deserve. Chance has played too great a rôle in determining which texts are now available to us as printed books' (Isaacson 1995: 777).¹ This does not mean, however, that the present study is not worthy of our attention; it sheds a dim but valuable light on hitherto unknown aspects relating to the critical interpretation of the contents of the longevity *sādhana* called *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub* (PNST)/*Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (CD).

1. The Edition and Its Basis²

Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub

(PNST) Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can. 12 folios; 8 lines per folio. 9 x 28 cm. In: *Byang gter thugs sgrub kyi skor: A Collection of Texts from the Revelations of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi-ldem-'phru-can Concerned with the gSañ sgrub Practice*, pp. 247–270. Darjeeling: Lama Dawa And Chopal Lama, 1984. 1 vol. (656 p.) 'Reproduced from an ancient manuscript belonging to Yol-mo Bla-ma Rdo-rje' (t.p.). [BDR#W27870]

*Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po*³

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can.

(CD_A) 17 folios. 5/6 lines per folio. 8 x 37 cm. In: *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal gyi chos skor: A Cycle of Practice Focussing upon the Esoteric Form of the Guru from the Byañ gter Revelations of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi-ldem-'phru-can*, vol. 2, pp. 511–543. Gangtok: Bari Longsal Lama, 1980. 4 vols. 'Reproduced from tracings of prints from the Gnas-chuñ blocks' (t.p.). [BDR#W23453]

(CD_B) 10 folios. 6 lines per folio. 8.3 x 36 cm. In: *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 29, pp. 249–268. Paro: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976–1980. 111 vols. 'A reproduction of the Stod-luñ Mtshur-phu redaction of 'Jam-mgon Koñ-sprul's great work on the unity of the great gter-ma traditions of Tibet. With supplemental texts from the Dpal-spuñs redaction and other manuscripts. Reproduced at the order of the Ven. Dingo Chhentse Rimpoche under the esteemed patronage of H.M.

¹ For more of his words on the work of revision, which are always thought-provoking, see Isaacson 1995: 777: 'With this in our minds, we would do well to be humble about the reconstructions we may arrive at of the thought of writers separated from us by so many centuries and the work of so many scribes'.

² Note that the below mentioned size criteria are chiefly given according to the reproduction (e.g. *Byang gter thugs sgrub kyi skor* [BDR#W27870]).

³ For a critical edition and annotated Japanese translation of the CD, see Shinga (信賀) 2020. In it, I have collated the three xylographic recensions (CD_A, B, C) which were available to me at that time.

Ashé Kesang, Queen Mother of Bhutan, and H.R.H. Ashé Phuntsho Choedron, Senior Royal Grandmother' (t.p.). [BDRC#W20578].

(CD_C) 10 folios. 6 lines per folio. Unknown size. In: *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 19, pp. [197]–216. [Chengdu]: [IHo nub mi rigs dpar khang], [199?]. 63 vols. [BDRC#W1PD96185]

(CD_D) 17 folios. 4 lines per folio. 9 x 44 cm. In: *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 7, pp. 269–302. [S.l.]: Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung, 2015. 63 vols. [BDRC#W2PD17457]

Orthographically speaking, the *dbu med* manuscript of the PNST shows a basic genealogical relation with the gNas chung xylographic redaction (CD_A). The *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (CD_D), the most recent Byang gter compilation completed in 2015, seems to derive from a common ancestor of this gNas chung redaction (for a brief comparison, see Table 1 below).⁴ As for both the dPal spungs (CD_C) and mTshur phu (CD_B) redactions, I have not succeeded in disentangling any relationship between the PNST manuscript and the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*. However, possible relations of collateral influence could have occurred to a certain degree.

As for the inner-gloss (*mchan 'grel*) found in the CD, but not in the PNST, as my critical edition shows (see §1.5.2), this later addition apparently extended the original verse form as seen in the PNST manuscript and thus changed it into a prose form.⁵ The origin of the gloss is unknown; it is probable, however, that the gloss simply indicated that these additions and explanations were inserted by the editors during the compilation of the CD. Chronologically speaking, of course one cannot be sure that such an estimate is always a trustworthy guide, as it is also possible that the scribe ignored the lore

⁴ Table 1 - Some examples of the word form compared between PNST and CD
(adopted readings are in grey)

No.	PNST	§	CD	
			CD_A, D	CD_B, C
1.	2a8: ཟུང	1.4.2	ཟུང	བཟུང
2.	4b2: ར་ག	2.3.2	ར་ག	རྩ་ག
3.	5b3: བཀང	2.7.2	བཀང	དཀང
4.	8b3: ལྷིང་པ་	3.5.2	ལྷིགས་མ་	ལྷིང་པ་
5.	9a2: འཆིན་པའི་	3.9.1	CD_A འཆིན་པའི་	CD_B, C, D འཆིན་པའི་
6.	11a3: བཞག	4.6.3	གཞོག	འཇོག

⁵ PNST 2b3: *bshug pa ba lu mkhan pa tshe dang 4*:
CD §1.5.2: *shug pa 'dab ma rgyas dus ba lu me tog rgyas dus mkhan pa 'dab ma rgyas dus mtshe ngo gzhi thim dus dang bzhi: de rnam rang gi khan da 'don pa yin no*.

of the inner-gloss.

2. Comparative Section Structure

As Figure 1 below shows, none of the *phyogs bsgrigs* compilations (e.g. the *Byang gter thugs sgrub kyi skor*) at my disposal provide the *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* (§X¹) nor the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* (§X²) with a title page. This fact suggests that every compilation posits each section (§X¹ and §X²) as a subdivision of one contiguous longevity practice.

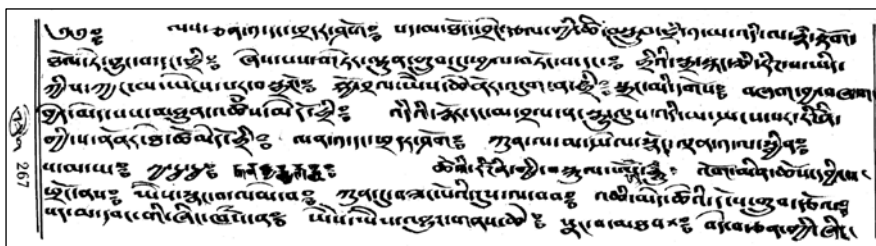


Fig. 1 - Opening page of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* (PNST, 11a6f. Original size 28 cm)

To facilitate comparison between (1.) the *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* (§X¹) of the CD, and (2.) the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* (§X²) of the PNST, Table 2 below provides a comprehensive overview of their section structures.

Table 2 - Structure and divisions of the CD and the PNST

CD_A	CD			PNST
	CD_D	CD_B	CD_C	
1a1–2a6	§0. Them byang (§§0.1.1–0.3.1.3) 1a1–2a4 (pp. 269–271)	1a1–2a2	1a1–2a2	≈CD §§0.1.1/1.1.2 [1b1–1b4]
3a1–6a1	§1. Phyi sgrub: <i>Rin chen bum pa</i> (§§1.1.1–1.8.1) 1a1–3b1 (pp. 273–278)	2a2–3b6	2a2–3b6	Phyi'i sgrub ≈CD §§1.2.1–1.8.1/2.6.1 1b4–3b8
6a1–8a6	§2. Nang sgrub: <i>lCags kyi sdong po</i> (§§2.1.1–2.9.1) 1a1–4a1 (pp. 279–285)	3b6–6a2	3b6–6a2	<i>lCags kyi sdong po</i> ≈CD §§2.1.1–2.9.1 3b8–6b5
	§3. gSang sgrub: <i>Nam kha'i rdo rje</i> (§§3.1.1–3.9.1)	gSang sgrub: <i>Hriḥ gcig ma</i> (§§4.1.1–4.7.1)		gSang sgrub: <i>Nam kha'i rdo rje</i> ⁶ ≈CD §§3.1.1–3.9.1

⁶ Note that this section title is written in *dbu can* script connected by the dotted line (*mchan rtags*), see PNST 6b5.

9a1–11b6	1a1–3b1 (pp. 287–292)	6a3–7b4	6a3–7b4 ⁷	6b5–9a2
§4. Yang gsang: <i>Hrīḥ gcig ma</i> (§§4.1.1–4.7.1)		Yang gsang: <i>Nam kha'i rdo rje</i> (§§3.1.1–3.9.1)		gSang sgrub: <i>Hrīḥ gcig ma</i> ≈CD §§4.1.1–4.6.3
12a1–14b3	1a1–3a6 (pp. 293–297)	7b5–9b2	7b5–9b2	9a2–11a6
	§5/§X ¹ . <i>Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs</i>			§X ² . <i>bsKul zhing</i> <i>gsol 'debs</i>
15a1–17a1	1a1–2b6 (pp. 299–302)	9b2–10b3	9b2–10b3	11a6–12a8

Table 2 shows that the CD and the PNST roughly share the same structure from Section 0 to Section 4 (§§0–4). The substantial difference between the two (coloured in grey) is determined by the names of Section 3 (gSang sgrub) as *Nam kha'i rdo rje* or *Hrīḥ gcig ma* resulting in the sequence of Section 3 and Section 4 (Yang gsang). This difference between the CD and the PNST in their chapter structure appears as a discrepancy between the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* and the rest of the *phyogs bsgrigs* corpus. Referring to each of the tables of contents (*dkar chag*), the consecutive double gSang sgrub shown in the PNST does not seem to make sense. This is perhaps a contributing factor to the confusion, at least in part, amongst the widely circulated recension of the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*.⁸

The Them byang schema (§0), the traditional ‘lists of contents’ (Almogi 2005: 37)⁹ given at the beginning, labels the main components of the CD as *phyi nang gsang ba'i sgrub thabs gsum*,¹⁰ i.e. §§1–3. This phrase is not found in the PNST and is considered to be a later ancillary addition. However, the phrase can be adduced as evidence suggesting that the tripartite schema of outer, inner and secret (*phyi/nang/gsang*) is an essential element that was part of a common archetype. An

⁷ Technically speaking, the section title of CD_C reads *nang sgrub hrīḥ gcig ma* (6a3). However, as the content is identical to CD_B, it may be regarded as an error of *gsang sgrub hrīḥ gcig ma*. As for the term *hrīḥ*, the variant *hri* amongst recensions is not likely to be of textual significance.

⁸ Curiously, all the tables of contents at my disposal, including the *RT gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, indicate the order “gSang sgrub→Yang gsang *hrīḥ gcig ma*”. See *RT gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, 202,1; *Drag po rtsal gyi dkar chag*, 23,1; *Drag po rtsal gyi pod gnyis pa'i dkar chag*, [9],4.

⁹ To quote Almogi's remarks in more detail: ‘The genre category of lists of contents should thus include, in addition to *dkar chag*, the Tibetan terms *them byang* and *tho yig*; bibliographical lists should also include *mtshan tho* or *mtshan byang*, perhaps also *spar tho* and even *gsan yig* or *thob yig* and *lung thob pa'i yi ge*; and inventories or registers of various kinds should also include *tho yig*, *them byang* and *bem(s) chag(s)*’ (Almogi 2005: 37).

¹⁰ See CD §0.3.1: *tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po la: phyi nang gsang ba'i sgrub thabs gsum: dbye na chos tshan bcu gcig yod.*

important question therefore is to know when did the *tshe sgrub* consisting of these three elements come to be universally renowned and referred to in various *thob yig* and catalogues as the *lCags kyi sdong po / lCags sdong ma*, which was the name given to the *nang sgrub* section only?¹¹

This is a question which any scholar undertaking the collation of multiple recensions would be expected to ask. It surely is a difficult task, and I shall attempt to answer with reservations: the designation *lCags kyi sdong po* must have played a role in identifying this longevity practice more than the mere commonplace *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*. It thus would not be implausible to suspect that the connotation of the term *lcags kyi sdong po* (tentatively proposed as “iron-like robust life channel”) could shed light on historical developments in the *tshe sgrub* literature.¹² This enigmatic jargon influenced the later (or perhaps coeval) trend of *tshe sgrub* current, i.e. the so-called “lCags lugs” initiated by Grub chen lcags zam pa Thang stong rgyal po (1361–1485? BDR#P2778).¹³ According to his hagiographico-biographical literature, Thang stong rgyal po was said to become *tshe'i rig 'dzin* as a result of his mastery of the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (CD).

3. *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* (§X¹)

Before delineating the key features of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* (§X²) of the PNST, to compare the characteristics projecting on this longevity *sādhana*, it is perhaps desirable to provide a brief overview of the *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* (*How to Draw the Longevity Amulet*), §X¹ of the CD.

The significance of *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* is found as one of the threefold quintessential instructions (*man ngag*) of the CD, namely, (1.)

¹¹ Neither of the terms *phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub* nor *tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po / lcags sdong ma* are attested in the *gSal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*, a pithy hagiography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can written by his direct disciple *Sūryabhadra (BDR#P8839). The term *phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub* is, as far as I can tell at this point, likely to be secondary, as the term *tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po / lcags sdong ma* is universally used in various *gsan / thob yig* literature and catalogues, and so forth. The *Thob yig gangga'i chu rgyun*, for instance, is a testimony to the fact that the Great Fifth Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682; BDR#P37) used the term *lcags sdong ma*. See *Thob yig gangga'i chu rgyun*, vol. 3, 287,5f. As is to be expected, the same designation can be found about the gNas bcu lha khang, see '*Bras spungs dkar chag*, #010168 (p. 904): '*tshe bsgrub lcags sdong ma bzhugs so*. Author unknown'.

¹² For a detailed discussion of the term *lcags kyi sdong po*, see Shinga 2017: 53–78. It can be metaphorically summarised as follows: 'the “*lcags kyi sdong po*” acts as a metaphor for the “iron-like robust life channel” to lead the *siddhi* from Amitāyus to the initiate' (p. 78).

¹³ There are several discussions of Thang stong rgyal po's mastery of the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po*, e.g. Shinga (信賀) 2020. For a recent contribution to this topic, see Ducher's paper elsewhere in this issue.

tshe gzungs (longevity *dhāraṇī*), (2.) *tshe 'khor* (longevity amulet) and (3.) *tshe sgrub* (longevity *sādhana*).¹⁴ First, regarding the *tshe gzungs* (1.), it probably refers to the *dhāraṇī* which I have argued is quoted from the *Aparimitāyuhṣūtra*.¹⁵ The *dhāraṇī* recitation ('*dzab*) is introduced in the Nang sgrub: *lCags kyi sdong po* (§2.4.2), so the *tshe sgrub* (3.) here might be intended for the main part (*gzhung bsrang*) of this longevity practice, i.e. Nang sgrub (§2.) rather than for the whole *sādhana* procedures (§§1–4).¹⁶

The *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* specifically describes visual imagery, so the benefits that practitioners gain from this should not be overlooked. For instance, the detailed instructions on how to draw a vase (*bum pa*) in the dead centre of this longevity amulet is one example. According to the instructions,¹⁷ the vase must be drawn surrounded by a circle (*mu khyud*) with ten tree leaves (*shing lo*) that increase good fortune, with the letter *hūm* written on each of them. This presentation (*ris*) agrees well with the descriptions of the “long-life vase” (*tshe bum*) “adorned with a wish-fulfilling divine tree” (*dpag bsam sdong pos brgyan*) recounted in the Nang sgrub (§2.7.2).

4. *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* (§X²)

In the following paragraphs I shall attempt to discuss two unique qualities of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* as they are germane to the Byang gter tradition.

¹⁴ CD §5/§X¹ (A 15b4; B 9b4; C 9b4; D 1b3 (p. 300):

de yang tshe gzungs tshe 'khor dang:
tshe sgrub gsum du bstan par bya:
'di gsum ldan na bdud bzhi grol:.

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion of this matter, see Shinga 2023.

¹⁶ CD §5/§X¹ (A 16b3; B 10a6; C 10a6; D 2b3 (p. 302):

de steng rten [rten D] bstan A, B, C] gtso 'jam dpal dang:
padma 'byung gnas gnyis kyi [gnyis kyi D] gsum gyi A, B, C] sku:
[...] phrin las gzhung bsrang 'dzab ['dzab A, D] dzab B, C] bstod dbul:

The text is somewhat suspect here. I think that the number of *rten gtsos* (holy images), i.e. the object of salutation (*phyag 'tshal*) and offerings (*mchod pa 'bul ba*), is literally two: Mañjuśrī and Padmasambhava. However, if one takes into account the main lore of all three, the third figure could be Tshe dpag med.

¹⁷ CD §5/§X¹ (A 16a2; B 9b6; C 9b6; D 2a1 (p. 301):

de yi [yi B, C, D] yis A] phyi rim [rim B, C, D] rims A] mu khyud la:
rgyas byed shing lo ris [ris A, B, C] rim D] kyis bskor: [kyis bskor: B, C] kyi skor: A; gyis skor:]

shing lo 'i nang du hūm [hūm B, C] hūm A, D] bcu bri:

Regarding the term *shing lo*, as I have briefly discussed in Shinga 2022 (see pp. 77–78, fn. 192), I believe there is a possible connection with the Chinese term 骨屢草 (*gu lu cao*) functioning for long-life. For example, 聖迦柁忿怒金剛童子菩薩成就儀軌經 (T 1222), *passim*, e.g. 21.109b14.

4.1. *Twenty-Three Pādas Attested in the Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*

First, one significant point of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* which should be mentioned is that 23 textual passages (*pāda*) of the main prayers (fol. 11a6f) can be attested in the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* (Tib. 'Jam dpal mtshan brjod). The canonical version (D 360/P 2) is known to have been translated by Rin chen bzang po (958–1051) and later extensively revised by Shong lo tsā ba Blo gros brtan pa (b. 13th c. BDRC#P1052) in the late 13th century.¹⁸ According to Davidson 1981, this 'new translation' (p. 13) could have leaned on the paracanonical source, i.e. *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* version (Ng.529), which is assumed to retain the early (*snga dar*) translation.¹⁹

Regarding Ng.529, the recensions we have been able to procure so far do not reveal the translator's name.²⁰ However, as Orofino 2007 has noted,²¹ when we shed light on the *rNying ma bka' ma* (NK), another mainstream of independent *rNying ma* redactions, the name of hitherto unknown translators of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* are unequivocally stated in the colophon as follows:

Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti, NK 25,6:²²

Indian *ācārya* Padmasambhava worked alongside two native Tibetan translators, namely sKa ba dpal brtsegs (8c. BDRC#P8182) and Cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan (8c. BDRC#P8183) to translate [this text into Tibetan from Sanskrit], and Vairocana (8c. BDRC#P5013) settled the translation at the request [of Chos rgyal Khri srong lde bstan].

It might come as a surprise that these translator's names are found only in the *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* (NK). As for attributing authority to "*sngon gyi sgra sgyur chen po de dag*" (MS D 5b6; P 15b5) and/or the *snga dar*, it would be a worthwhile project to investigate all such statements of responsibility (e.g. *bsgyur*, *gtan la phab pa*) to confirm

¹⁸ The diachronic development of the Tibetan text of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* was outlined in Orofino 2007: 6. I am grateful to Nicola Bajetta for drawing my attention to this contribution. As for the Tibetan translators of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, see also Tribe 2016: 212–213.

¹⁹ Turning to Dunhuang manuscripts, we find at least four manuscripts attested as the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* (IOL Tib J 112/2, 381, 382 and Pelliot tibétain 99/2). In general, as discussed in recent textual scholarship, these Dunhuang finds approximate NG more than the canonical version. See Davidson 1981: 13n36 and Dalton & van Schaik 2006: 115. In terms of Vimalamitra's *vr̥tti* (D2092/P2941), see also Tribe 2016: 213, where the author has argued that 'it is unlikely that this would occur without the NS itself being translated, especially given the popularity it seems to have been enjoying at that time in India'.

²⁰ For discussions of the matter, see Davidson 1981: 13 and Orofino 2007: 93.

²¹ See Orofino 2007: 93n26.

²² NK, 25,6: *rgya gar gyi slob dpon padma 'byung gnas dang/ bod kyi lo tsā ba ska cog zung gis bsgyur cing bai ro tsa nas zhus chen gyis gtan la phab pa'ol/||*.

whether some of them may be reasonably taken to be later additions.²³

As the variant readings in the present edition show, on the whole, the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* agrees more closely to both NG and NK than the canonical version (D 360/P 2).²⁴ In trying to discuss literary quotations of 23 *pādas* from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*,²⁵ it is thus essential not only to juggle the Indic-authored canonical materials (e.g. *Vimalaprabhā*. D 1398/P 2114) but also to consult the exegetical literature preserved in the rNying ma heritage.²⁶ The *Nyi zla 'bar ba'i sgron ma*, for instance, which is ascribed to Padmasambhava and translated by sKa ba dpal brtsegs,²⁷ bears no doubt testimony to their deep involvement in the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*.

In the style of supplication, these 23 stanzas, which contain 23 names of lineage masters,²⁸ extoll their qualities. Regarding the “names” (*nāman*; *mtshan*), there is evidence suggesting that the names entail numerous benefits of its recitation.²⁹ As Tribe 2016 argues, the “names” of the *Nāmasaṃgīti* are not names as generally understood.³⁰ Rather, these names allow themselves most tellingly to be understood that Mañjuśrī cum meditator / practitioner transforms him / herself into multiple forms with diverse appellations for the sake of the liberation of all sentient beings.

²³ Again, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Nicola Bajetta for his helpful criticism and suggestions on the matter of attributing authority.

²⁴ Between the NG and NK, technically speaking, this NK counterpart is generally similar to that of NG, but often diverges considerably in wording.

²⁵ The quotation from this tantra is, of course, by no means unique. The *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* is known to accommodate a range of exegeses. As Togano (榎尾) 1983 has pointed out, the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* became a foundational text of *Kālacakra-tantra* which highlighted the term *ādibuddha* (MS, v. 100: *dang po'i sangs rgyas*). See Togano (榎尾) 1983: 227. See also Tribe 2016: 4. The exegetes such as the *Vimalaprabhā* (D1347/P2064), according to Wallace 2001, ‘altogether cites sixty-five verses from the *Nāmasaṃgīti* in order to explain or substantiate the *Kālacakratāntra*'s views of Buddhahood and the path of actualizing it’ (p. 19).

²⁶ Chinese translations also deserve attention. For these three translations, mainly from the Song period, namely, (1.) 佛說最勝妙吉祥根本智最上祕密一切名義三摩地分 (T1187), (2.) 佛說文殊所說最勝名義經 (T1188), (3.) 佛說文殊菩薩最勝真實名義經 (T1189) as well as the Sanskrit parallel, see Togano (榎尾) 1983: 225–350.

²⁷ See *Nyi zla 'bar ba'i sgron ma*, 282,1: *o rgyan gyi slob dpon padmas bshad cing/ lo tsā ba ska ba dpal brtsegs kyis bod skad du bsgyur ba'o/* .

Regarding the indigenous commentaries on the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, i.a. in the context of Byang gter tradition, I hope to have the chance of offering another contribution in the very near future.

²⁸ Note that this total number of “23” names can include duplicates. Pad ma 'byung gnas (4) and Blo ldan mchog sred (6) are all possibly identifiable to Padmasambhava (5) but are counted as independent names.

²⁹ As for chanting the 108 names of Tathāgata in the *tshe sgrub* practice, see Shinga 2023: 178–181.

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of this matter, see Tribe 2016, part I, chapter 3.2 (The ‘Names’ of the *Nāmasaṃgīti*), pp. 36–38.

As for the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*, allied with its pithy appeal, all interweaving of the laudation beginning with the Vidyādhara of Longevity (fol. 11a6: *tshe'i rig 'dzin*) and the eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche (*gu ru mtshan brgyad*, see fol. 11b1f.) belong together quite naturally. This textual identification, which might be inspired by the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, might represent an ideal basis for a textual analysis which would contribute to the historical investigation of the Byang gter literature.

4.2. Transmission Lineage: Basis for the Chronology

The third but most striking feature of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* is that it concludes with the transmission lineage (fol. 12a5f). In this so-called *bla brgyud gsol 'debs* ('the reverential petition to the successive gurus in a transmission lineage of an esoteric teaching', Smith 2001: 39) beginning from the incarnate great Vidyādhara (*sprul sku rig 'dzin chen po*), i.e. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, eight names of successive teachers transmitted down to Nam mkha'i ming can (ca. 16c) are given (see Table 3 below).³¹ Except for (#5.) sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams and (#6.) Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa, six names can be found in the Eight Byang gter masters (see the text edition 4, fol. 11b6f). There, these two names (highlighted in grey in table 3) are simply replaced by Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541),³² son of (#3.) Byams pa bshes gnyen.

Table 3 - Transmission Lineage of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*

No.	Name	Dates
#1.	Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can	1337?–1408. BDRC#P5254
#2.	Dran mchog rDo rje dpal	b. 14c. BDRC#P10115?
#3.	mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen	b. 14–15c. BDRC#P10116
#4.	Drin can Sangs rgyas dpal bzang	b. 15c. BDRC#P10117
#5.	sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams	b. 15c. BDRC#P10121
#6.	Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa	b. 15c. BDRC#P5598
#7.	sNgags 'chang Śākya bzang po	b. 15c. BDRC#P1698
#8.	Drin can Che mchog rdo rje	b. 16c. BDRC#P2734?
→ #9.	Nam mkha'i ming can	b. 16c. BDRC#P2735?

Upon the examination of the age of the PNST manuscript, the dating of (#9.) Nam mkha'i ming can (literally, Person with the Name of

³¹ Regarding invocation (*bskul ba*) and supplication (*gsol ba*) as a repository of oral lineage, see Smith 2001: 39: '[In the case of] the reverential petition to the successive gurus in a transmission lineage of an esoteric teaching, such collections of hagiographic writing often enshrine some of the most cherished instructions (*man ngag*) of a tradition. [...] like biographies (*rnam thar*) of individual lamas, [It] can also serve as some of our most reliable sources of historical data'.

³² The dates (1454–1541) of this Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan are based on Valentine 2018: 96, 118, 127.

“Nam mkha'”) is in fact a key observation we could explore. Details about this figure are, needless to say, in need of a critical study which I cannot offer here. Indeed, the pseudonymised rendering of “Nam mkha'i ming” is a factor that makes it more difficult to identify him as involved in the successive lineage of PNST.³³ Consequently, the line of consecutive lamas (e.g. BDR#P2735?) as the textual witness can only be the subject of a genealogical hypothesis.

Although the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* is an uncertain basis for dating, if the above chronology is valid, I would hazard that the scribe-cum-editor of this PNST manuscript combined the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* (§X²) into the preceding coherent synthesis (§§0–4) by the end of the 16th century at the latest. In the same vein, should we apply this synthesis scheme to *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* (§X¹~§5) due to the scribe-cum-editor, or should this be ascribed to authorial, i.e. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can? The CD (§§0–5) is known to belong to the *gter ma* literature for the simple reason that, at least according to the autobiographical and rhetorical colophon itself, it apparently originated in Zang zang lha brag.³⁴ While the PNST manuscript at my disposal does not transmit *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* (§X¹~§5) to us today, if we consider only the *phyi nang gsang ba'i sgrub thabs gsum* as the main core feature of the archetypal strata, in other words, if we treat *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs* (§X¹~§5) as a later addition, we are in danger of missing out on what the archetype could be.

To clarify this still all too sketchy picture, a great deal more

³³ No one would dispute that the phraseology “Nam mkha'i ming” sounds ambiguous. For example, lHo brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1326–1401. BDR#P1317) called himself “Nam mkha'i ming can, aka, Las kyi rdo rje” in the colophon of the *Chi med tshe sgrub dbang chog don gsal sgron me*. See *ibid.* 386,7: *dge slong nam mkha'i ming can/ ming gzhan las kyi rdo rjes/ chos grwa chen po dpal gyi thig phyir/*. Note that lHo brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, who was coeval with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, quoted the prominent *dhāraṇī* from the *Aparimitāyuhṣūtra*. See *ibid.* 377,2 (as quantity is an issue, I underlined the term *om*): *Chi med tshe sgrub dbang chog don gsal sgron me*, 6a2: om na mo bha ga wa te/ a pa ri mi ta a ya/ dznyā na su bi ni shtsi ta te dzwo rā dzā ya/ ta thā ga tā ya/ arha te samyaksain bud dha ya/ tadya thā/ om pu nye pu nye mahā pu nye/ a pa ri mi ta pu nye/ a pa ri mi ta pu nye dznyā na sam bha ro pa tsi te/ om sarbasain skā ri pa ri shung dhe: dharmā te ga ga na sa mud ga te swa bhā wa ni shud dhe mahā na ya pa ri wa re sbāhā/. lHo brag grub chen Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan received this longevity *sādhana* from Lord Vajrapāṇi (*ibid.* 387,2: *yi dam phyag na rdo rje*), and such an instance of a *dhāraṇī* being cited in the context of *dag snang* is, as far as I am aware, extremely rare. An enlarged focus on this study is currently under preparation for one of my publications in the near future.

³⁴ As for the established Zang zang lha brag origin, see the colophon of the *Tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs*: *ces gsungs so: tshe'i 'khor lo bri thabs rim pa rdzogs so: byang zang zang lha brag nas rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can gyis gter nas spyang drangs pa'ol/ /*. Note that the above text does not list the variant readings. Detailed loci are as follows: CD_A 16b6; CD_B 10b2; CD_C 10b2, CD_D 2b5.

authorship relating to the early lineages will need to be located.³⁵ It should be stressed that I have by no means made an exhaustive search for the corpus of *tshe sgrub* literature to which the title *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub* and *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* have been assigned. Hence a really dedicated effort to find such materials could turn up many more, and it is quite likely that some of these will prove to be the archetypal evidence which can be codified within the mythical Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's age during the 14th century.

5. *Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of
the bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*

The detailed descriptions of my conventions are left out due to the limited number of pages. In presenting this text edition I have conformed to the usages established in Shinga 2022. This is an edition of the *rDo rje phur pa'i tshe bsgrub*, another *tshe sgrub* text also attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can.

Regarding the '*Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo* (JD), I became aware of this valuable resource after my peer review.³⁶ My future research might therefore involve an attempt to follow-up on this commentary of the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* in detail.

[0. Vidyādhara of Longevity] ^[11a6]

ཚེདི་རིག་འཛིན་བསྐྱལ་བ་ཙྰ་ཨྲ་རྡྱེ་³⁷

[Prayer] to invoke the Vidyādhara of Longevity, *om āḥ hūm!*

[1. Three Buddhas]

[1.1. Samantabhadra] ^[11a6]

འོག་མེན་ཚེས་དབྱིངས་པོ་བྲང་ནུ་³⁸

ཡེ་ཤེས་སྣང་བ་ལམ་མེ་བུ་³⁹ [MS 62]

³⁵ It would be a worthwhile project to explore the *Tshe bsgrub lcags sdong ma* held in the gNas bcu lha khang (see fn. 11), which is desideratum for future work.

³⁶ I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Prof. Dr. Stéphane Arguillère for helping me access the '*Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo*.

³⁷ འོག་མེན་བོ་em.] འོག་མེན་བོ་

³⁸ འོག་མེན་em.] འོག་མེན་

³⁹ MS D 4b1; P 4b3; NK 10,6; NTB 334,7: འོག་མེན་; NTK 104,6.

JD 305,1: ཡེ་ཤེས་སྣང་བ་ལམ་མེ་བུ་ཅེས་པ་ནི། སྐུ་ལ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྡི་སྣང་བ་ལམ་མེ་བུ་བཞུགས་ཏེ། ལས་ཅན་གྱི་གང་ཟག་གྲང་བར་དོར་ལྡོ་ལ་འཛིན་པ་མེད་པར་རང་གྲོལ་བའོ།

ཀྱན་དུ་བཟང་པོའི་དུས་ལ་བབ།
འཆི་མེད་ཆེདི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོལ་ལྷོ་⁴⁰

Within the palace of *dharmadhātu*, [the Ultimate] Akaniṣṭha,
[You] are the brilliant light of gnosis. [MS 62]
Samantabhadra, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[1.2. Amitābha] ^[11a8]

པད་མ་དབང་གི་ཞིང་ཁམས་ན།
ཡེ་ཤེས་ཡེ་ཤེས་འབྱུང་གནས་ཆེ།⁴¹ [MS 57]
སྣང་བ་མཐའ་ཡས་དུས་ལ་བབ།
འཆི་མེད་ཆེདི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོལ་ལྷོ་⁴²

⁴⁰ སྣོལ་ལྷོ་ *em.*] འཆི་མེད་

As for the term *stsol* (see Jäschke, s.v. *stsol ba* (p. 441): ‘to give, bestow, grant’), it seems a fitting one for the context. Indeed, a search for the phrase *dnegos grub stsol* on BuddhaNexus returns more hits than *dnegos grub rtsol*. In the matter of variant readings, my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Dr. Stéphane Arguillère and Sonam Jamtsho, from whose erudition I have richly benefitted.

⁴¹ ཡེ་ཤེས་ འཆི་མེད་ *em.*] འཆི་མེད་

MS D 4a5; P 4a8; NK 10,2; NTB 334,2; NTK 104,2.
JD 301,2: ཡེ་ཤེས་ཡེ་ཤེས་འབྱུང་གནས་ཆེ། | ཅེས་པ་ནི། ཐེག་པའི་ཁྱད་ [ཁྱད་ *em.*] ཁྱད་] པར་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་བརྟན་
བའོ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྷ་ལྷན་གྱི་དུས་སྟེ། རིག་པའི་ལམ་ལྷ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དོ་བོ་ལྷ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་ལྷ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཚོས་ལྷ། ཡེ་
ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱེ་ལྷ། ཡེ་ཤེས་སྐྱབས་ [སྐྱབས་ *em.*] སྐྱབས་] འཇུག་གི་དུས་སྟེ། སྐྱབས་རེ་སྐྱད་ཅིག་མ་རེ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྟོགས་
ཚད་རེ་དུས་མཉམ་དུ་འབྱུང་བས། ད་ལྟའི་དུས་སྟེ། ཚད་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། དང་པོ་ཚོས་ཉིད་མ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་དུས་སྟེ།
རྣམ་རྟོག་འབྱུང་བའི་སྐྱབས་མེད་དེ། འབྱུང་བ་བག་ལ་ཞུ་མན་དག། རྒྱ་གཉིས་པ་ལ་མེ་ལོང་ལྷ་བྱས་ཡེ་ཤེས་འཆར་
བས། ཡེ་ཤེས་མི་འཆར་བའི་དབང་མེད་དེ། རང་སྣང་གི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལས་གཞན་སྣང་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། རྒྱ་གསུམ་པ་ལ་
ཚོས་མམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་དེ་བཞིན་ [བཞིན་ *em.*] བཞིན་] ཉིད་གཅིག་སྟེ། རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལྷ་བྱའི་དོན་ལྷགས་སྟེ། རྒྱ་
གསུམ་དབྱེར་མེད་པའོ། རྒྱ་བཞི་པ་ལ་མོ་མོར་རྟོག་པའི་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱིས་ [ཀྱིས་ *em.*] ཀྱི་] ཚོས་མ་འདྲེས་པར་ཡོངས་
སུ་རྟོགས་པར་མཁྱེན་པས། སྐྱུ་ལ་པའི་སྐྱེ་མ་སྐྱེན་པ་སྐྱེན་པར་བྱེད་པའོ། རྒྱ་ལྷ་པ་ལ། བྱ་བ་གྲུབ་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་མཐར་
ཕྱིན་ཏེ། སྐྱུ་ལ་པའི་སྐྱེད་དོན་བྱེད་ཅུས་པའོ། དེས་ན་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཡེ་ཤེས་འབྱུང་གནས་ཆེ། | ཅེས་པའོ། ཕྱི་འབྱུང་བ་ལྷ་ཕྱོགས་
ལྷ། དབྱིབས་ལྷ། ལ་དོག་ལྷ། དུག་ལྷ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྷ། སྐྱེ་ལྷ། ལམ་བརྟུན་ལྷ། ཤ་ཁྲག་བྱོད་དབྱུག་མདངས་རྣམ་པ་ལྷ། ཡན་
ལག་རྣམ་པ་ལྷ། དོན་སྟོང་རྣམ་པ་ལྷ། དབང་པོ་ལྷ། དུས་ད་ལྟའི་དུས་སྟེ། ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ། ཐེག་ཚོད་པར་བྱའོ། |

⁴² སྣོལ་ལྷོ་ *em.*] འཆི་མེད་

Within the realm of Mighty Padma (Pad ma dbang),⁴³
 [You] are the gnosis, the great source of gnosis. [MS 57]
 Amitābha, your time has come,
 Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[1.3. Amitāyus] ^[11a8]

བདེ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་ཞིང་ཁམས་ནུ།
 འཆི་མེད་དབང་པོ་ལྷ་ཡི་ལྷུ་ལྷ།⁴⁴ [MS 148]
 ཆེ་དཔག་མེད་གྱི་དུས་ལ་བབུ།
 འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོན་ལུ།⁴⁵

Within the Sukhāvātī realm,
 [You] are god of the gods of might immortality. [MS 148]
 Amitāyus, your time has come,
 Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[2. Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche]⁴⁶

[2.1. Pad ma 'byung gnas] ^[11b1]

འཇམ་བུ་སྒྲིང་གི་གནས་བརྒྱད་ནུ།

From here Amitābha (1.2.) to Many Messengers (5.2.), the phrase “... དུས་ལ་བབུ་འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོན་ལུ” substituted by *ku ru kha* sign (x), is not specifically mentioned as emendation.

⁴³ The term *pad ma dbang* can be related to Hayagrīva (Tib. *rta mgrin*). As is well known, Hayagrīva is associated with the *padma gsung gi sgrub skor* together with the *zhi ba* Amitābha/ Amitāyus. For further references to the topic, see Shinga (信賀) 2020: 49–50. I have not yet been able to find the specific physical appearances (e.g. colour) used to picture the deity Pad ma dbang in this *sādhana*.

⁴⁴ ལྷ་ཡི་^o *em.*] ལྷའི་^o

MS D 8a2: ལྷ་ཡི་སྐྱམ་འཆི་མེད་དབང་། །; P 8b5 ལྷ་ཡི་སྐྱམ་འཆི་མེད་དབང་། །; NK 22,5: ལྷ་ཡི་སྐྱམ་། །; NTB 346,3: ལྷ་ཡི་སྐྱམ་། །, NTK 115,1: ལྷའི་སྐྱམ་། །

JD 351,3: འཆི་མེད་དབང་པོ་ལྷའི་སྐྱམ་། ཅེས་པ་ནི། ལྷ་དབང་བརྒྱུན་གྱིས་གཟུགས་ཁམས་གྱི་སྐྱམ་། <<སྐྱེལ་གྱོང་རྒྱུ་ཡི་ [ཡི་ *em.*] གྱི་། གཏམ་རྒྱུད་བཤད་དོ།>> དབང་པོ་ཡང་རབ་ལམ་ དོན་ཚོས་སྐྱོད་དུ་སྣོན་ཏེ། ལྷའི་ནང་ནས་སྐྱམ་མེད་པའི་གོ་འཕང་ཐོབ་པའོ། །

⁴⁵ ལྷུ་ལྷུ་ *em.*] ལྷུ་ལྷུ་

⁴⁶ The line-up of *gu ru mtshan bryad* is not necessarily fixed. For instance, the Fourth Zhe chen rgyal tshab, 'Gyur med padma rnam rgyal's (1871–1926, BDRC#P235) *Gu ru mtshan bryad kyi gsol 'debs* lists them as follows: (1.) Padma 'byung gnas, (2.) Śākya seng ge, (3.) Padmasaṃbha, (4.) Blo ldan mchog sred, (5.) Padma rgyal po, (6.) Nyi ma 'od zer, (7.) Seng ge sgra sgrog, (8.) rDo rje gro lod. See *ibid.* 513,1f.

དཔལ་ལྡན་སངས་རྒྱལ་པད་མ་སྐྱེས་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་⁴⁷ [MS 110]

པད་མ་འབྱུང་གནས་དུས་ལ་བབ་ལྷོ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྐྱོད་ལྷོ་⁴⁸

Within the Eight sacred *pīthas* in Jambudvīpa,
[You] are the glorious Buddha, born from a lotus. [MS 110]
Pad ma 'byung gnas, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[2.2. Padmasambhava] ^[11b2]

གསུམ་རིག་གཙང་མ་དག་པ་སྐྱེས་ལྷོ་⁴⁹ [MS 153]

པད་མ་སྐྱེད་དུས་ལ་བབ་ལྷོ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྐྱོད་ལྷོ་⁵⁰

[When you realise how] three [forms (*trikāya*) are present, the
defilements] are purified and clean.⁵¹ [MS 153]
Padmasambhava, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

⁴⁷ MS D 6a7: འབྲུ་ལྷོ་; P 6b8; NK 17,3: འབྲུ་ལྷོ་, NTB 341,2: འབྲུ་སངས་རྒྱལ་སྐྱེས་།, NTK 110,4:

འབྲུ་སངས་རྒྱལ་སྐྱེས་།

JD 330,5: དཔལ་ལྡན་སངས་རྒྱལ་པད་མ་སྐྱེས་། ཅེས་པ་ནི། སྐྱལ་པའི་སྐྱེད་པ་དང་མའི་འདུ་འཕྲོ་ལ་མ་བརྟེན་
བས། བསྐྱེད་ལས་རྒྱལ་ཏེ་སྐྱེ་འབྱུངས་སོ། ། ཤར་ཕྱོགས་གུད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ། ཤིང་སྐྱེ་ལའི་དུང་དུ་བསྐྱེད་ལ་བྱུང་བ་ཚང་འཆའ་
བའི་ཚུལ་དུ་བྱོན་པ། སྐྱལ་པའི་སྐྱེད་པ་ལམ་དུ་མན་ངག་བརྒྱད་ཤར་ཏེ། ཐམས་ཅད་མཁྱེན་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཤར་བའོ། །

⁴⁸ འབྲུ་ལྷོ་ *em.* འབྲུ་ལྷོ་

⁴⁹ གསུམ་འགཙང་ལྷོ་ *em.* འགཙང་ལྷོ་

MS D 8a5: གསུམ་འགཙང་ལྷོ་; P 8b8: གསུམ་འགཙང་ལྷོ་; NK 23,3: གསུམ་འགཙང་ལྷོ་; NTB 346,7: གསུམ་
འགཙང་ལྷོ་; NTK 115,6: གསུམ་འགཙང་ལྷོ་

JD 355,2: གསུམ་རིག་གཙང་མ་དག་པ་སྐྱེ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། སྐྱེད་པ་གསུམ་གྱི་བཞུགས་ཚུལ་རིག་པའི་དུས་ན། ཉན་
མོངས་པ་དག་སྐྱེ། གཟུང་འཛིན་གྱི་སྐྱེད་བ་གྲོལ་བའོ། །

Note that until 2.1. (Pad ma 'byung gnas), the whole consists of four verses, whereas from here in 2.2. (Padmasambhava) it consists of three. In this regard, there may be an oral tradition in which the verse on the Eight sacred *pīthas* in Jambudvīpa (see 2.1.) could be supplemented and recited (at present I lack any information to confirm this).

⁵⁰ འབྲུ་ལྷོ་ *em.* འབྲུ་ལྷོ་

⁵¹ These supplements are made with reference to JD 355,2f.

[2.3. Blo ldan mchog sred] ^[11b3]མཁས་པ་སྐྱེ་འབྲུལ་སྣ་ཚོགས་འཆང་ལྷོ་⁵² [MS 35]

སློ་ལྷན་མཚོག་སྲིད་དུས་ལ་བབུ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེདི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོལ་ལྷོ་⁵³

[You] are skilful and well-versed in various illusions. [MS 35]
 Blo ldan mchog sred (Learned Brahmin), your time has come,
 Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[2.4. Pad ma rgyal po] ^[11b3]འཁོར་ལོ་སྐྱུར་བ་སྟོབས་པོ་ཆེ་⁵⁴ [MS 48]

པད་མ་རྒྱལ་པོདི་དུས་ལ་བབུ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེདི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོལ་ལྷོ་⁵⁵

[You] are the wheel-turning king (Cakravartin) with great strength
 (Mahābala). [MS 48]
 Pad ma rgyal po, your time has come,
 Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[2.5. Śākyasiṃha] ^[11b4]ཐུབ་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ཐུབ་ཆེན་ལྷན་⁵⁶ [MS 42]

⁵² MS D 3a6; P 3a7; NK 7,2; NTB 331,3; NTK 101,4.

JD 289,2: མཁས་པ་སྐྱེ་འབྲུལ་ཆེན་པོདི་དོན་གྲུབ་པ། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། འཁོར་བའི་ཚོས་ཐམས་ཅད་སྐྱེ་མ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་།
 ལྷན་ལྷན་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། ལྷོག་སྐྱེ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། བཀ་ཆ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། མི་ལམ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། སྤྱི་ཟུང་གོང་
 བྱིར་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། མིག་ཡོར་ལྟ་བུ་དང་། མི་རྟག་པ་མི་བརྟན་པ་འགྱུར་བའི་ཚོས་ཅན། ལྷན་བསྐྱེ་མ་རུ་ཤེས་པ་ས། དོན་
 མཁས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྐྱང་བ་སྐྱེ་མ་རུ་ཤེས་པ་ས་དོན་ཐམས་ཅད་གྲུབ་པའོ། ། <<སྐྱེ་འབྲུལ་ཆེན་པོདི་གཏམ་རྒྱུད་བཤད་
 རོ།>>

⁵³ སྣོལ་ལྷོ་ *em.* སྣོལ་ལྷོ་

⁵⁴ MS D 3b7: འོས་པོ་; P 4a1; NK 9,1: འོས་པོ་; NTB 333,2: འོས་པོ་བའི་པོ་; NTK 103,2: འོས་པོ་བའི་
 པོ་

JD 297,4: འཁོར་ལོ་བསྐྱུར་ <<བཤམ་རའི་གཏམ་ངག་དང་འཇུག་པའི་གཏམ་རྒྱུད་བཤད་རོ།>> བའི་སྟོབས་པོ་
 ཆེ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཤྲུག་ཐུབ་པས་མཛད་པ་དང་ནམ་ཐར་བཤད་རོ། །

⁵⁵ སྣོལ་ལྷོ་ *em.* སྣོལ་ལྷོ་

⁵⁶ MS D 3b3; P 3b5; NK 8,2; NTB 332,3; NTK 102,3.

JD 293,6: ཐུབ་པ་ཆེན་པོ་ཐུབ་ཆེན་ལྷན། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། རྒྱལ་པོ་ཤྲུག་པའི་གཏམ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ནང་ནས་ཐུབ་པ་
 ཆེའོ། །

Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[2.8. rDo rje gro lod] ^[11b5]

རྡོ་རྗེ་འཇིགས་བྱེད་འཇིགས་པར་བྱེད།⁶² [MS 66]

རྡོ་རྗེ་གྲོ་ལོད་དུས་ལ་བབ།

འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོལ་ལྷ།⁶³

[You] are *vajra* [as immutable as emptiness], and thus the destroyer to destroy [obstacles and conceptual thought]. [MS 66]

rDo rje gro lod, your time has come,

Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[3. Dākinī [Ye shes] mtsho rgyal] ^[11b6]

གྲོ་ལ་བ་མཐར་བྱིན་རྣམ་གྲོ་ལ་ལུས།⁶⁴ [MS 95]

མཁའ་འགོ་མཚོ་རྒྱལ་དུས་ལ་བབ།

འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོལ་ལྷ།⁶⁵

[You] are completely liberated, and thus have the form of full liberation. [MS 95]

Dākinī [Ye shes] mtsho rgyal, your time has come,

Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4. Eight Byang gter masters]

[4.1. (#1). The Great Treasure Revealer] ^[11b6]

སྣོན་ལམ་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་སྣོལ་ལྷ།⁶⁶ [MS 37]

⁶² MS D 4b4; P 4b8; NTB 335,5; NTK 105,4; NK 11,4.

JD 307,6: རྡོ་རྗེ་འཇིགས་བྱེད་འཇིགས་པར་བྱེད། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། རོ་བོ་མི་འགྱུར་བ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུ། བགེགས་དང་
རྣམ་པར་རྟོག་པས་མི་རྒྱུགས་པའི་བར་གཅོད་པའོ། ། རྡོ་རྗེ་ནི་སྣོད་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་འགྱུར་བ་མེད་པའོ། །

⁶³ སྣོལ་ལྷ་em.] སྣོལ་ལྷ།

⁶⁴ བྱིན་པ་em.] བྱིན་པ་

MS D 5b6; P 6a5; NTB 339,3; NTK 108,6; NK 15,3: འཇིགས་པར་བྱེད་པའོ།

JD 322,4: གྲོ་ལ་བ་མཐར་བ་རྣམ་གྲོ་ལ་ལུས། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། སྐྱུ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུ་རུ་གྲོ་ལ། འཁོར་བའི་གནས་ནས་ཡེ་ཤེས་
ཀྱི་གཞུང་ལས་ཁང་དུ་ཐར། རྣམ་པར་གྲོ་ལ། ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུ་རུ་སངས་རྒྱལ་པའོ། །

⁶⁵ སྣོལ་ལྷ་em.] སྣོལ་ལྷ།

⁶⁶ MS D 3b1; P 3b1; NTB 331,5: བསམ་པའི་ལྷ་; NTK 101,6; NK 7,4.

JD 291,2: སྣོན་ལམ་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྒྱ་མཚོ་སྣོལ་ལྷ། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། གཟུང་འཇིག་དང་མ་བུལ་བའི་དུས་ན། སེམས་ཅན་སྣོ་བུར་
ཀྱི་རྟོག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་སྟེ། འགོ་བའི་དོན་བྱེད་ཀྱང་ཆ་ཅམ་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་རེ་ཅམ་ལས་མི་རུས་ཏེ། རང་རྒྱུད་མ་དག་པའོ། །

གཏེར་སྟོན་ཚེན་པོ་དུས་ལ་བབ།⁶⁷

འཆི་མེད་ཚེདི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྟོང་ལུ།⁶⁸

[You] are the ocean of aspirational prayer and gnosis. [MS 37]
Great Treasure Revealer (i.e. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can), your time has
come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4.2. rNam rgyal mgon po] ^[11b7]

གཙོ་བོ་དགོན་མཚོག་གསུམ་འཛིན་པུ།⁶⁹ [MS 65]

རྣམ་རྒྱལ་མགོན་པོའི་དུས་ལ་བབ།

འཆི་མེད་ཚེདི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྟོང་ལུ།⁷⁰

[You] are the most predominant, and the holder of the Three Jewels.
[MS 65]
rNam rgyal mgon po, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4.3. (#2). Dran mchog rDo rje dpal] ^[11b7]

ཐེག་པ་མཚོག་གསུམ་སྟོན་པ་པོ།⁷¹ [MS 65]

རྡོ་རྗེ་མཚན་ཅན་དུས་ལ་བབ།

འཆི་མེད་ཚེདི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྟོང་ལུ།⁷²

འཁོར་བའི་གཞི་མེད་དུ་ཤེས་པའི་དུས་ན། རང་རྒྱུད་དག་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། ཡེ་ཤེས་རང་ལ་ཤར་བ་ཞེས་བྲ། འགོ་བའི་དོན་
ཡང་དཔག་ཏུ་མེད་པ་རྣམས་སོ། །

⁶⁷ སྟོན་པོ་དུས་ལ་བབ། *em.*] འགོན་པོ་སྟོང་ལུ།

⁶⁸ སྟོང་ལུ། *em.*] སྟོང་ལུ།

⁶⁹ MS D 4b3; P 4b6; NTB 335,3; NTK 105,2; NK 11,3.

JD 306,6: གཙོ་བོ་དགོན་མཚོག་གསུམ་འཛིན་པ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། ཚེས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འཇུག་སྟོ་སྐབས་འགྲོའི་མན་
ངག་སྟོན་ཏེ། འོག་མའི་ཐེག་པ་གསུམ་མོད། སངས་རྒྱལ་ཚོས་དང་དགེ་འདུན་གསུམ་ལ་སྐབས་འགྲོའོ། ། བར་མའི་
ཐེག་པ་གསུམ་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་དམ་ཚིག་གི་ལྷ་ལ་སྐབས་སུ་འགྲོ་བའོ། ། གོང་མའི་ཐེག་པ་གསུམ། ལྷ་མ་ཡི་དམ་མཁའ་
འགོ་གསུམ་ལ་སྐབས་སུ་འགྲོ་བའོ།

⁷⁰ སྟོང་ལུ། *em.*] སྟོང་ལུ།

⁷¹ MS D 4b3: འགསུམ་མཚོག་པོ།; P 4b6; NTB 335,3; NTK 105,2; NK 11,3.

JD 307,2: ཐེག་པ་མཚོག་གསུམ་སྟོན་པ་པོ། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། རྒྱུད་པ་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ། ཕྱི་ཐུབ་པ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་
པ། རང་ཐབས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པའོ།

⁷² སྟོང་ལུ། *em.*] སྟོང་ལུ།

[You] are the teacher of the three supreme vehicles. [MS 65]
 You with the name Vajra (i.e. *Dran mchog rDo rje dpal*), your time has
 come,
 Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4.4. (#3). *mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen*] ^[11b8]
 བྱམས་ཚེན་རང་བཞིན་དཔག་ཏུ་མེད་ཅུ་⁷³ [MS 38]

མཚན་ལྡན་བྱམས་བཤེས་ཀྱི་དུས་ལ་བབ་ཅུ་⁷⁴

འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོན་ལུ་⁷⁵

[You show] unmeasurable great benevolence [for all sentient beings]
 as their own nature. [MS 38]

mTshan ldan Byams [pa] *bshes* [gnyen], your time has come,
 Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4.5. (#4). *Sangs rgyas dpal bzang*] ^[11b8]
 སངས་རྒྱས་ལྡེ་ལཱི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་ཅུ་⁷⁶ [MS 59]

སངས་རྒྱས་དཔལ་བཟང་དུས་ལ་བབ་ཅུ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེད་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོན་ལུ་⁷⁷

[You] are the embodiment of Five Buddha Bodies. [MS 59]
Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, your time has come,
 Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4.6. *Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan*] ^[12a1]

⁷³ འབཞིན་ཏུ་^o *em.*] འཇ་ཏུ་^o

MS D 3b1; P 3b1; NTB 331,5; NTK 101,6; NK 7,5.

JD 291,4: བྱམས་ཚེན་རང་བཞིན་དཔག་ཏུ་མེད། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། རང་གི་ཚོས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་དོན་རྟོགས་པའི་དུས་ན།
 སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་བུ་གཅིག་སུའི་མ་ལྟར་བྱམས་པ་གཅིག་འོང་སྟེ། འགོ་དོན་དཔག་ཏུ་མེད་པ་རྣམས་ལ།
 <<ལྷ་ཤི་བུ་བའི་གཏམ་རྒྱུད་བཤད་དོ།>>

⁷⁴ འཤེས་ཀྱི་^o *em.*] འཤེད་འོ་^o

⁷⁵ འཇོན་ལུ་^o *em.*] འཇོན་ལུ་

⁷⁶ MS D 4a6; P 4b1; NTB 334,4; NTK 104,3; NK 10,4.

JD 303,1: སངས་རྒྱས་ལྡེ་ལཱི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། རོ་བོ་གསལ་བ། རང་བཞིན་སྣོད་པ་ཡོན་ཏན་འཇུག་པ་
 མེད་པ། ལྷགས་རྗེ་འགག་པ་མེད་པ། སྤིན་ལས་ཐོགས་པ་མེད་པའོ། ། དེ་ལ་མཚན་ལྡན་ཅེས་བྱའོ།

⁷⁷ འཇོན་ལུ་^o *em.*] འཇོན་ལུ་

གསང་སྐྱགས་མངའ་བདག་རིག་སྐྱགས་རྒྱལ་ལྷོ་⁷⁸ [MS 23?]

ནམ་མཁའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན་དུས་ལ་བབ་ལྷོ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེའི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོན་ལྷོ་⁷⁹

[You] are lord of the secret *mantras* and king of *vidyā*. [MS 23?]
Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4.7. (#7). Śākya bzang po] ^[12a1]

རིགས་གསུམ་འཆང་བ་གསང་སྐྱགས་འཆང་ལྷོ་⁸⁰ [MS 65]

ཤུ་བཟང་པོའི་དུས་ལ་བབ་ལྷོ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེའི་དངོས་གྲུབ་སྣོན་ལྷོ་⁸¹

[You] are the holder of the three families (Vairocana/body, Padma/speech, Vajra/mind) and of the secret *mantras*. [MS 65]
Śākya bzang po, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[4.8. (#8). Che mchog rdo rje] ^[12a2]

གསང་སྐྱགས་རྒྱལ་པོ་དོན་ཆེན་བྱེད་ལྷོ་⁸² [MS 63]

⁷⁸ གསང་སྐྱགས་མངའ་བདག་རིག་སྐྱགས་*em.*] སྐྱགས་རྣམས་ལྷོ་རིགས་

MS D 2b6, P 2b6: གསང་སྐྱགས་མངའ་བདག་རིགས་ཆེན་པོ།

NTB 329,6, NTK 100,1, NK 5,5: གསང་སྐྱགས་རིགས་ཆེན་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་།

JD 283,4: གསང་སྐྱགས་རིགས་ཆེན་ཐམས་ཅད་དང་། ཅེས་པ་ནི། གསང་སྐྱབས་དང་། རིགས་སྐྱགས་དང་། གཟུང་སྐྱགས་དང་གསུམ་ཆོས་འདི་ལ་འབྱུང་བའི་དོན་ནོ།

⁷⁹ ལྷོ་ལྷོ་*em.*] ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

⁸⁰ གསུམ་ལྷོ་*em.*] ལྷོ་

MS D 4b2, P 4b5: གསུམ་ལྷོ་ན། །; NTB 335,2; NTK 105,1: གསུང་ལྷོ་ན། །; NK 11,3: གསུམ་ལྷོ་ན། །

JD 306,4: རིགས་གསུམ་འཆང་བ་གསང་སྐྱགས་འཆང་བ། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། རྣམ་སྣང་སྐྱའི་རིགས། པདྨ་གསུང་གི་རིགས། རྡོ་རྗེ་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་རིགས་གསུམ་ནི། གསང་སྐྱགས་ཀྱི་སྐྱབ་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོའོ།

⁸¹ ལྷོ་ལྷོ་*em.*] ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

⁸² MS D 4b1; P 4b4; NTB 335,1; NTK 104,7; NK 11,1.

JD 305,4: གསང་སྐྱགས་རྒྱལ་པོ་དོན་ཆེན་བྱེད། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་གསང་སྐྱགས་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྐྱལ་པོའི་སྐྱེ་དེ་བསྟན་ནས་འགོ་བ་སེམས་ཅན་གྱི་དོན་མཛད་པའོ།

འཆི་མེད་ཆེན་དངོས་གྲུབ་རྫོགས་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་⁸⁸

[You have] great strength and great speed. [MS 39]
Many messengers, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[5.3. Longevity Deities] ^[12a4]

དགྲིལ་འཁོར་ཆེན་པོ་ཡངས་པ་ཡིན་ལྷོ་⁸⁹ [MS 33]

ཆེ་ལྷ་མང་པོའི་དུས་ལ་བབ་ལྷོ་

འཆི་མེད་ཆེན་དངོས་གྲུབ་རྫོགས་ལྷོ་⁹⁰

[You] are the great and extensive maṇḍala circle [and encompass all phenomena]. [MS 33]
Many Longevity Deities, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

[6. Seal of Commitment] ^[12a5]

ཅེས་བར་དུ་འབྲུ་གསུམ་སྟེལ་བའམ་གང་བདེ་བྱའོ་ཆེན་རིག་འཛིན་བསྐྱེལ་ཞིང་གསོལ་བ་བཏབ་
བ་ས་མ་ཡ་རྒྱ་རྒྱ་རྒྱ་

During the above [recitations], increase [the blessings of] the three syllables (i.e. *om aḥ hūm*) or perform whatever is good [for that aim]. The invocation and prayer to the Vidyādhara of Longevity [is stated]. The seal of commitment, *rgya rgya rgya!*

[7. Transmission Lineage] ^[12a5]

སྐྱེལ་སྐྱེ་རིག་འཛིན་ཆེན་པོ་ལྷོ་ [#1]

དྲན་མཚོག་རྩོ་རྩོ་དཔལ་ལྷོ་ [#2]

མཚན་ལྡན་བྱམས་པ་བཤེས་གཉེན་ལྷོ་⁹¹ [#3]

དྲིན་ཅན་སངས་རྒྱལ་དཔལ་བཟང་ལྷོ་ [#4]

ལྷགས་འཚང་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་བསོད་ནམས་ལྷོ་ [#5]

⁸⁸ ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ *em.*] ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

⁸⁹ MS D 3a5; P 3a6; NTB 331,2; NTK 101,3; NK 7,1.

JD 288,4: དགྲིལ་འཁོར་ཆེན་པོ་ཡངས་པ་ཡིན། ། ཅེས་པ་ནི། འདིའི་དོན་པས་རྒྱུད་ཡངས་ཏེ། ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་
དང་མཐུན་པའོ། །

⁹⁰ ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ *em.*] ལྷོ་ལྷོ་

⁹¹ བཤེས་གཉེན། *em.*] བཤེས་གཉེན།

རིག་འཛིན་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྟན་པུ། [#6]

ལྷགས་འཆང་གྲུ་བཟང་པོ། [#7]

འིན་ཅན་མཆེ་མཆོག་དོ་རྗེ། [#8]

དེས་བདག་ནམ་མཁའི་མིང་ཅན་ལ་གནང་བའོ།⁹² [#9]

ལུས་དག ཅེ

[#1.] The great incarnate Vidyādhara (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can) [gave this to]

[#2.] Dran mchog rDo rje dpal and [then on to]

[#3.] mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen,

[#4.] Drin can Sangs rgyas dpal bzang,

[#5.] sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams,

[#6.] Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa,

[#7.] sNgags 'chang Śākya bzang po, and

[#8.] Drin can Che mchog rdo rje.

[#9.] He (i.e. Che mchog rdo rje) gave it to me, the one with the name Nam mkha'.

Thus proofreaded.

Abbreviations and Bibliography

BDRC Buddhist Digital Resource Center.

<https://www.bdrc.io>

BuddhaNexus

<https://buddhanexus.net/>

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ICPBS International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies.

Jäschke Heinrich August Jäschke. *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*. 1881. (Reprint. Kyoto: Rinsen Book, 1985)

NG *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. Numbers according to THDL.

NK Tshe ring rgya mtsho. *sNga 'gyur bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*. 133 vols. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2009.

⁹² གནང་འོ་em.] བསྟན་པོ་

- [BDRC#W1PD100944]
- NTB *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. mTshams brag dgon pa'i bris ma. 46 vols. Thimphu: National Library, Royal Government Of Bhutan, 1982. [BDRC#W21521] Numbers according to THDL.
- NTK *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. gTing skyes dgon pa'i bris ma. 36 vols. Thimbu: Dingo Khyentse Rimpoche, 1975. [BDRC#W21518] Numbers according to THDL.
- P Peking edition of bKa' 'gyur and bsTan 'gyur. Numbers according to the catalogue published in: Daisetz T. Suzuki (ed.), *The Tibetan Tripitaka Peking Edition Kept in The Library of the Otani University, Kyoto: Catalogue & Index*. Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1962.
- T Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō. Numbers according to SAT Daizōkyō Text Database.
https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/index_en.html
- TD *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal gyi chos skor*. Gangtok: Bari Longsal Lama, 1980. 4 vols. [BDRC#W23453]
- THDL Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library.
<https://www.thlib.org/>

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(JD) Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can (ascribed), *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo*. In: *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 14, pp. 271–362. [S.l.]: Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung, 2015. 63 vols. [BDRC#W2PD17457]

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(MS) Verse Numbers according to Davidson 1981.

(D) Kamalagupta, Rin chen bzang po (tr.), *Shong Blo gros brtan pa* (rev.). *'Jam dpal ye shes sems dpa'i don dam pa'i mtshan yang dag par brjod pa*. D 360, rGyud, ka 1b1–13b7.

(NK) *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa*. In: NK, vol. 6, pp. 1–25.

(NTB) *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa*. Tb.424. In: NTB, vol. 21, pp. 326–349.

(NTK) *'Phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa*. Tk.227 In: NTK, vol. 15, pp. 97–118.

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RT gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig

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gNyan chen Thang lha and His Three Vows in Byang gter

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Introduction

During March 2019, I attended the conference “Recherches en cours sur les religions Bon et non-bouddhistes au Tibet,” where I discussed with Stéphane Arguillère the chapter on *gNyan chen Thang lha*, the theme of my Ph.D. thesis, in Nebesky-Wojkowitz’s book *Oracle and Demons of Tibet* and mentioned my concern about some texts lacking clear references. In that conference, Stéphane Arguillère provided me with important information: Lama ‘Khor gdong gter sprul rin po che ‘Chi med rig ‘dzin, also known as C.R. Lama, one of the lineage masters of the rNying ma Byang gter tradition, was an important informant providing Nebesky-Wojkowitz with resources on the rNying ma tradition. Since, however, many of the Byang gter writings now available were not published when Nebesky-Wojkowitz wrote his book, the provenance of some of the information on Thang lha in his book was not given. With this in mind, I explored the 63 volumes of the Byang gter collection published in 2015 in order to find more references to *gNyan chen Thang lha*.

The 63-volume Byang gter compilation includes a large amount of previously unknown material from the 10th century to the most recent years of the 21st century.¹ It is in volume 15 that sixteen important texts wholly devoted to Thang lha can be found. These texts provide a detailed map of Thang lha’s identity, title, power, image, history, and ritual. The titles of the sixteen texts on Thang lha in Volume 15 of Byang gter are:

1. *gNyan chen Thang lha’i phyi nang gsang gsum gyi sgrub pa las lo rgyus* (*History of the Inner, Outer and Secret Sādhanas of gNyan chen Thang lha*). Vol. 15, pp. 321-324.
2. *lHa chen thang lha’i phyi sgrub* (*Outer Sādhana of lHa chen thang lha*). Vol. 15, pp. 325-333.

¹ *sNga ’gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*. Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung, 2015. The collection is quoted as “Byang gter” in this article.

3. *lHa chen thang lha'i gsang sgrub* (Secret Sādhana of lHa chen thang lha). Vol. 15, pp. 335-345.
4. *lHa chen thang lha'i las tshogs gsang sgrub shog dril* (Scrolls on the Secret Sādhana for the Activities of the Great God Thang lha). Vol.15, pp. 347-367.
5. *gNyan chen Thang lha'i mchod phreng las bzhi lhun grub* (Rosary of Worship to gNyan chen thang lha: Spontaneous Peaceful Activity). Vol. 15, pp. 369-374.
6. *sNgags 'chang yol mo bas mdzad pa'i lha chen 'bar ba rtsal gyi mnga' gsol yid bzhin rgyal mtshan* (Wish-fulfilling Victory Banner of the Enthronement of lHa chen 'Bar ba rtsal, Written by the 3rd Yol mo ba sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu). Vol. 15, pp. 525-529.
7. *rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi srog gtad kyī rjes gnang mu ti la'i 'phreng ba* (Rosary of Pearls, Authorization of the Life force Entrustment of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal). Vol. 15, pp. 531-543.
8. *lHa chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi gser skyems sogs* (Libation Ritual and so on of lHa chen rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal). Vol. 15, pp. 545-547.
9. *Zangs mdzod gter bsrung rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi mchod sprin yid bzhin sprin phung* (Banks of Wish-fulfilling Offering Clouds to the Guardian of the Copper Treasury rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal). Vol. 15, pp. 549-560.
10. *rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi rten 'dzugs kyī rim pa gsal bar byed pa dwangs shel me long* (Mirror of Limpid Crystal: Clarification of the Gradual [Actions] for Building the Object of Veneration of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal). Vol. 15, pp. 561-581.
11. *gNyan chen Thang lha'i bstod bskul mu tig phreng ba bzhugs pa'i dbu phyogs lags mdzad byang med pa* (The Body Position Practice: Rosary of Pearls, Praise and Exhortation to gNyan chen Thang lha). Vol. 15, pp. 583-595.
12. *rGyal dbang lnga pa rin po ches mdzad pa'i lha mchog 'bar ba rtsal gyi phrin las brgya phrag nyi ngos 'dzin pa'i snang gsal* (Lamp Catching the Orb of the Sun, the Hundredfold Enlightened Activity of the Supreme Deity 'Bar ba rtsal, written by the Fifth Dalai Lama). Vol. 15, pp. 597-645.
13. *Thang lha'i phyi rten 'bul thabs* (Offering Method of Outer Ritual Objects to Thang lha). Vol. 15, pp. 647-650.
14. *Thang lha'i bka' gtad smyo 'dre rgod kyī 'grim shul* (Thang lha's Entrustment Ritual: Wandering Traces of the Passage of Demons who Cause Madness and rGod Demons). Vol. 15, pp. 651-660.
15. *Dam can 'bar ba rtsal gyi rgyun khyer* (Daily Practice of Dam can 'Bar ba rtsal). Vol. 15, pp. 661-662.
16. *rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi rten mdos bzlog mdos kyī rim pa rgya 'bag mig gi rnam 'phrul* (Stages of the mDos Rituals of Support and Reversal of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal: Chinese Masks and Visual Illusions).

Vol.15, pp. 663-696.

The Byang gter text no. 5 provides the crucial piece of information that Thang lha and Padmasambhava met three times, and that Thang lha took three vows in front of the Master. Each vow is distinct in content and brings a new identity to Thang lha as a Buddhist god.

1. **First vow:** becoming a *srung ma* and obtaining a secret name (*gsang mtshan*): Thang lha takes the first vow in front of Padmasambhava in the area of Byang lam bar ba. There, his life force (*srog snying*) is crushed, and he becomes a protector (*srung ma*) of Buddhism. Padmasambhava gives him the secret name rDo rje mchog rab rtsal. One must note that in the Byang gter texts, Thang lha's secret name is rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal. This variation is significant, and its implications for Thang lha's identity are explored below.²
2. **Second vow:** becoming a *sku lha* and a *srog gi lha*: the second encounter between Thang lha and Padmasambhava takes place on the mountain of Has po ri at bSam yas Monastery. At this meeting, Padmasambhava, Khri srong lde btsan, and Thang lha meet, and Thang lha is designated as the body god (*sku lha*) and life-force god (*srog gi lha*) of the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan.³
3. **Third vow:** becoming a *gter bdag* of the Copper Red Treasury (*Zangs mdzod dmar po*): the third meeting between Thang lha and Padmasambhava takes place on the summit of Mount bKra bzang, where Thang lha is given a *sādhana* by Padmasambhava and becomes the guardian (*gter srung*, *gter bdag*) of the Copper Red Treasury⁴ in the divine cave called Zang zang lha brag [to the west of bKra bzang].⁵

² See Byang gter, vol. 15, no. 5 (*Rosary of Worship to gNyan chen thang lha: Spontaneous Peaceful Activity*), p. 370: l. 1-p. 372: l. 2 ; no.7 (*Rosary of Pearls, Authorization of the Life force Entrustment of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal*), p. 534: l. 3-p. 535: l. 1.

³ See Byang gter, vol. 15, no.1 (*History of the Inner, Outer and Secret Sādhana of gNyan chen Thang lha*), p. 322: l. 1-p. 324: l. 3; no. 3 (*Secret Sādhana of lHa chen thang lha*), p. 336: l. 2-p. 338: l. 1; no.14 (*Thang lha's Entrustment Ritual: Wandering Traces of the Passage of Demons who Cause Madness and rGod Demons*), p.653: l.3-p. 655: l.2; no.7 (*Rosary of Pearls, Authorization of the Life force Entrustment of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal*), p. 535: l.1-p. 537: l.5.

⁴ In the fivefold repository of hidden treasures found by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem in Zang zang lha brag, *Zangs mdzod dmar po* is the western compartment, essentially containing the *gter chos* connected to the Lotus family (Avalokiteśvara, peaceful Padmasambhava and the Hayagrīva cycle that includes all this literature connected to gNyan chen Thang lha).

⁵ See Byang gter, vol. 15, no. 2 (*Outer Sādhana of lHa chen thang lha*), p. 331: l. 4-p. 332: l. 3; no. 4 (*Scrolls on the Secret Sādhana for the Activities of the Great God Thang lha*),

Thang lha's identity and his three vows

The general identity and the three vows of Thang lha are summarized towards the end of the invocation in text no. 5. This text is well-known and commonly recited in the Byang gter tradition. It could be considered the main Byang gter invocation of gNyan chen Thang lha:⁶

Then the master took the little crystal drum in his hand, and said: "Hūṃ, may the extent of the citadel that I have generated not be small! May the throne decorated with lion and elephant not be low! May the brightness above the seat of the sun, moon and lotus not be weak! May the supreme gods of wisdom be steadfast and not distant! May the power of achievement of the worldly protectors not be small! Now you please come here and sit on the sun and moon seat!

rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal sa ma yā a dza dza! Hūṃ!

The name of the *sku lha's* father is 'O de gung rgyal; the name of the *sku lha's* mother is g.Yu bya zhog gcig⁷. The name of the *sku lha* himself is Yar zhud gnyan gyi lha. The name of the place where he abides is 'Dam shod snar mo; khri rgod g.yu ljang 'khril (?)⁸; and full of delight is this abode, [in which] not only green are the summers, but winters too. Happy is the country where this god resides!

The name by which you are known according to the custom of humans is Thang lha yar zhud; the name by which you are known according to divine convention is King of the Gandharvas, Zur phud lnga pa! The secret name by which you are known is rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal!

What do you wear on your body? You wear white silks and white cotton clothing. What do you ride as your mount? You ride a pale horse of the *lha*. You roam through the three worlds, and your white color is of a radiating brilliancy. With your right hand you lift a cane

p. 365: l. 1-1. 2; no. 7 (*Rosary of Pearls, Authorization of the Life force Entrustment of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal*), p. 536: l. 5; no. 10 (*Mirror of Limpid Crystal: Clarification of the Gradual [Actions] for Building the Object of Veneration of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal*), p. 562: l. 4-p. 563: l. 2; no. 11 (*The Body Position Practice: Rosary of Pearls, Praise and Exhortation to gNyan chen Thang lha*), p. 592: l. 2-1. 3; no. 12 (*Lamp Catching the Orb of the Sun, the Hundredfold Enlightened Activity of the Supreme Deity 'Bar ba rtsal*, written by the Fifth Dalai Lama), p. 635: l. 3-1. 4.

⁶ Byang gter, text no. 5, pp. 371.4-374.6.

⁷ In A 'dzom 'brug pa's edition of the *dGongs pa zang thal* (1973, vol. 4, p. 601: l. 3), the mother is clearly called g.Yu bya gshog gcig, "one-winged turquoise bird": *rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal...../ sku lha'I yum smos pa/ g.yu bya gshog gcig lags/[...]*

⁸ Another spelling in the *dGongs pa zang thal* is khri rgod g.yu ljang ldem (1973, vol. 4, p. 601: l. 4). This can be translated as "ferocious throne [made of] green turquoise [that] protrudes."

whip and send forth the seven mother-goddesses to perform tasks. With your left hand you count the beads of a crystal-rosary. You recite the mantra of your sworn deity in absolute space. Which emanations are you sending forth? A regiment of a hundred thousand divine soldiers. Together with your servants and your retinue, come today to this place and carry out your work!⁹

You are the god for all those faithful to their sacred oath, you are the killer for all those who betray the master to whom they have sworn faithful obedience, you are a demon for all traitors, you are the protector for all yogis, you are a friend to me, the excellent practitioner! The share of virtuous deeds that falls to you is to subdue the demons who cause madness,¹⁰ and to cut off the life of hate-filled enemies! Quickly tether your horse, heavy is the auspicious lightning of the hooves! Sharpen my weapons so that they are keen, and let the points not be blunt! With whomsoever I compete, let me dominate, for sure!

As for the competition of speed and distance, you have the capacity to surpass others in a horse race! You have the capacity to catch the hate-filled enemies and the ability to provide protection with your compassion! Time has come, samaya!¹¹

Please follow after what you remember. It is time for you to act—you are the ruler of the obstructive demons. Perform the virtuous deeds that have been apportioned to you. You are the *yul lha* of the four districts of dBus gtsang! You are the *sku lha* of Khri srong lde'u btsan who is the divine son, the protector of the Dharma! You, who have been oath-bound by Padmasambhava, listen in order to obey your general instructions: for future generations, at the end of the Dharma, the secret mantras of the followers of O rgyan Pad ma 'byung gnas; the descendants of the divine lineage of the *dharmarāja* Khri srong lde'u btsan; those whose power touches the sky, and also the lowest of the low—these you shall protect as if there were your own children. You will protect the four districts of Tibet as if they were your cattle and protect the bSam yas temple as your treasure.

If you do not provide protection for all sentient beings until the end of the world age, will you not remember that, first of all, the Master

⁹ The English translation here for p. 373 is based on the translation in Nebesky's *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, 1996 [1956], p. 206.

¹⁰ The "demons who cause madness" might indicate Pe har, the arch-demon subdued by gNyan chen Thang lha (See Byang gter vol. 15, text no. 4). Pe har is the *rgyal po* spirit par excellence and the *rgyal pos* are said to cause madness in both those who worship them and those who offend them (or that they are ritually made to attack).

¹¹ This means times has come not to take the vow but to accomplish what he has promised.

of Secrets (*gsang bdag*) oppressed your vital-heart mantras at Byang lam bar ba? Second, will you not remember how, at bSam yas Has po ri, the powerful Padma Heruka overpowered you? And finally, will you not remember that, after he had assembled all the worldly gods and demons on the Kingly Mount bKra bzang, the great glorious Vajrakumāra (Vajrakīla) bestowed on you your oath. I am Padmasambhava, you are *gNyan chen Thang lha*, this place is the four districts of dBus gtsang, the blessing is like the clouds *thems se them*, compassion is like the falling rain, and the radiance of the vows is like amazing flashes!

Awesome Thang lha, please approach! To you, the awesome *sku lha* and your retinue, I make food offerings of the finest kinds of magnificent items! I make offerings of pure brook water and glacial water! I make offerings of the smoke of the sweet-scented frankincense! I make offerings of a gift of the five precious things such as gold and silver and of silk and brocade; I make an offering of a secret sheep and white rice.

om badzra thang ka ra mun nyid khu sha li amṛta [kha hī kha hī] svāhā.

So this is the offering to the sphere of the high blue sky. At this time, you should meditate on Vajrapāṇi; beating the small drum slowly, first make the exhortation with the melody [called] the “Offering of the Lion”. After that, if you recite the oath by singing the “Majestic Song of the Hero” and make offerings, [Thang lha] will protect all the yogis, and protect all the classes of the white dharma. This is the accomplishment of the deeds of offering clouds to *gNyan chen Thang lha*.

Sa ma ya, rgya rgya rgya.

This invocation and its brief introduction of Thang lha’s three vows are well known, having been partially translated by René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz¹² and David Snellgrove.¹³ Snellgrove translates Thang lha’s name as “God of the Plain.”¹⁴ A translation also followed by Geoffrey Samuel, who quotes Snellgrove’s translation of this invocation to illustrate Thang lha’s identity in Buddhism and his three vows.¹⁵ John Bellezza quotes a sTag lung invocation, entitled *Stag lung pa gNyan chen Thang lha gsol lha*, which is similar to this Byang gter invocation. This sTag lung text introduces Thang lha’s identity, family and image as the Byang gter invocation does, but does not involve the three vows.¹⁶

¹² Nebesky [1956] 1996, p. 206.

¹³ Snellgrove 1957, pp. 239-242.

¹⁴ Snellgrove 1957, p. 239.

¹⁵ Samuel 1993, pp. 185-186.

¹⁶ Bellezza 2005, pp. 195-198.

According to this invocation text in Byang gter text no. 5, we can conclude the general information of Thang lha's name, family, and image:¹⁷

<i>sKu lha</i> father	'O de gung rgyal
<i>sKu lha</i> mother	g.Yu bya zhog (gshog?) gcig
<i>sKu lha</i> himself	Yar zhur gnyan gyi lha
Domain	'Dam shod snar mo
Name as <i>lha</i>	Dri za'i rgyal po Zur phud lnga pa
Secret name	rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal
Dress	White silks and white cotton cloths
Horse	A horse of the <i>lha</i> with white heels
Body color	Radiant white
Position	Meditation
Attributes	Right hand lifts a whipstick, and left hand holds a crystal rosary
Retinues	A hundred thousand units of mounted riders

The identity, power and duty of Thang lha may be summarized in the following table:¹⁸

Identity, title	God for those faithful to their sacred oath
	Killer for those who betray the master to whom they have sworn faithful obedience
	Demon for all traitors
	Protector for all yogis
	Friend to the excellent practitioner
	Ruler of the obstructive demons
	<i>Yul lha</i> of the four districts of dBus gtsang
	<i>sKu lha</i> of Khri srong lde btsan
	Vow-holder in front of Padmasambhava
Duty	Offer the fortune of his virtuous deeds
	Subdue demons who cause madness
	Cut off the life of hating enemies
	Follow the tantric teaching and secret mantra of Padmasambhava

¹⁷ Byang gter vol.15, no.5, p. 373, 1.2-1.6.

¹⁸ Byang gter vol.15, no.5, p. 372, 1.6-p. 373, 1.6.

Afterwards, according to this invocation by Padmasambhava, the three vows can be summarized as follows:¹⁹

	<i>Deity</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Event</i>
1 st Vow	Vajrapāṇi	Byang lam bar ba	Thang lha's life essence was crushed
2 nd Vow	Padma Heruka	bSam yas Has po ri	Thang lha was overpowered
3 rd Vow	rDo rje gzhon nu	Summit of Ri rgyal bkra bzang	Thang lha was bound by an oath

Among the sixteen Thang lha-related texts of Byang gter, the overviews of the three vows of Thang lha are distributed in different texts. This article will show how the different texts in the Byang gter collection describe the three oaths.

The first vow of Thang lha

The first vow of Thang lha, as summarized in text no.5, is as follows: "First of all, Master of Secrets Vajrapāṇi (Phyag na rdo rje) crushed your life-essence (*srog snying gzir ba*) at Byang lam bar ba."²⁰ Here, Vajrapāṇi is Padmasambhava, and Byang lam bar ba is the location of Thang lha and Padmasambhava's first meeting when this master came to Tibet from Uḍḍiyāna, which is also the location of Thang lha's mountain range.

1. Early Buddhist texts on Thang lha's first vow to Padmasambhava

The earliest known Buddhist textual accounts of Thang lha can be traced back to the legend of Padmasambhava being invited to Tibet by the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan (755–797/804). According to the legend, Padmasambhava had to subjugate the autochthonous deities and demons who were preventing the establishment of bSam yas monastery in Tibet. During his journey from Uḍḍiyāna to Tibet, Padmasambhava also encountered the god Thang lha and successfully subdued him. As a result, Thang lha was bound by an oath to protect Buddhism, which became an important factor in the spread of the religion in Tibet. This story highlights the crucial role Thang lha played in the establishment and protection of Buddhism in Tibet.

¹⁹ Byang gter vol. 15, no. 5, p. 373, l. 6-p. 374, l.2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 373, l. 6.

The earliest Buddhist texts on Thang lha include:

- 1) The earliest Buddhist text, *dBa' bzhed* (9th-10th centuries), records Padmasambhava's entry into Tibet, but does not describe in detail the process of subjugating Thang lha.
- 2) The earliest works recording the life of Master Padmasambhava and his work in Tibet were written by Nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192)²¹:
 - *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud* (abbr. MTN, 12th century);
 - *Slob dpon pad ma'i rnam thar zangs gling ma* (abbr. ZL, 12th century).
- 3) Subsequently, the *lDe'u chos byung* (abbr. DChB, late 13th century)²² and *Pad ma bka' thang* (14th century) also describe the context of Padmasambhava's entry into Tibet and how Thang lha was subjugated by this master and became a Dharma god.

The identity of Thang lha in ZL, MTN, DChB, *Pad ma bka' thang*, and *dBa' bzhed* shows that Thang lha undergoes a transformative process in the earliest Buddhist texts:²³

- 1) Firstly, Thang lha was considered the autochthonous, indigenous god of Tibet before being tamed by Padmasambhava. After his transformation, Thang lha became a Buddhist protective deity.
- 2) Secondly, in his initial encounter with Padmasambhava, Thang lha tested him and was eventually tamed. After offering his vital syllables (*srog snying*) to the Master, Thang lha was bound by an oath and given a new identity as a Buddhist protector, with the secret name rDo rje mchog rab rtsal.
- 3) Thirdly, during his meeting with Thang lha, Padmasambhava revealed the deity's various identities and names, including Dri za'i rgyal po Zur phud lnga pa and Klu yi rgyal po Ni le thod dkar. Thang lha is not only a *gnyan* and a *lha* but also a *klu* and the king of the Gandharvas (*dri za'i rgyal po*).
- 4) Finally, after being tamed by Padmasambhava, Thang lha's image was transformed into that of a respectful, white-colored

²¹ There is some suspicion about Nyang ral being the author of the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po* because its narrative is not consistent with that of the *bKa' thang zangs gling ma*.

²² DChB was written in 1261. (Karmay, 2009 [1997], p. 482)

²³ About how early Buddhist texts narrate Thang lha's first vow in front of Padmasambhava, see Yuewei, W, Ph.D. thesis, (defended on July 26, 2023), *The cult of the mountain god gNyan chen Thang lha in Tibet*, Chapter Five.

young man with five topknots on his head, known as Zur phud Inga pa (“five topknots on the head”). This image became the most common portrayal of Thang lha in both peaceful and wrathful forms, as seen in later Byang gter texts.

2. *gNyan chen po'i 'phrin las* (no. 5)

In text no. 5, at his first meeting with Padmasambhava, Thang lha makes his first Buddhist vow of being a *srung ma*, and finally receives the secret name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal:

I pay homage to the great Guru Rinpoche! When the great master Padmasambhava who is the emanation of the glorious Vajrapāṇi arrived at the barbaric Tibetan land, all the *lha* and *srin* of Tibet showed contempt for his high teachings, and Thang lha ya shud (*sic*)²⁴ caused snow to fall on the master. A blizzard swirled about his feet, and fog obscured the path. The master became angry and frustrated, and after performing the meditation of Vajrapāṇi, all the gods and spirits were alarmed and became unconscious. On that occasion, he tamed Thang lha yar zhud (*sic*) and bound him with an oath, saying: “Mighty god Thang la yar zhud (*sic*), what is your vital-heart mantra? What deeds have you the power to perform?” Thang lha helplessly offered him his vital-heart mantra: *om badzra thang ka ra mu nyid khu sha li a dza dza sa ma yā hūṃ phaṭ*, then he offered him [Padmasambhava] his secret name, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal. A dza dza.²⁵

This text reveals the following significant information:

- 1) In contrast to the five early Buddhist works, this text does not mention Thang lha transforming into a big *yakṣa* or a white snake to test Padmasambhava. Instead, it simply states that Thang lha sent snow to obstruct Padmasambhava when he passed by the foot of his mountain.
- 2) Padmasambhava is seen as the emanation of Vajrapāṇi, and he visualizes himself as Vajrapāṇi when responding to the challenge set by Thang lha.
- 3) The title for Thang lha in this text is Thang lha yar zhud or Thang lha yab shud. From Dunhuang ITJ_0734 and the early Bonpo myth

²⁴ Ya/yar shud/zhur/bzhur, etc. often appear as Thang lha's names in both Buddhist and Bonpo texts. In the earliest Tibetan text, the Dunhuang Tibetan Documents, Thang lha is called Thang lha ya bzhur (ITJ_0734, 1.7r306, 1.7r308). The title “gNyan chen” does not appear in Dunhuang documents.

²⁵ Translated from no. 5, p. 370, l. 1-p. 372, l. 2.

- sTod lha rabs*, we can find these titles of Thang lha.²⁶
- 4) Thang lha yab shud fails in his challenge to Padmasambhava; he is bound by an oath, then offers his life essence (*srog gi snying*). Finally, Thang lha asks for a share of food from his subduer Padmasambhava and specifies what the content should be. Then Padmasambhava performs a ritual to Thang lha and announces his secret name. In this text, Thang lha's secret name is rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, which is different from the secret name rDo rje mchog rab rtsal given in the *Pad ma bka' thang*.²⁷

3. rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi srog gtad kyi rjes gnang
mu thi la'i 'phreng ba (no.7)

The Byang gter text no. 7 is attributed to the Fifth Dalai Lama. As it is indicated in its colophon:²⁸

This is the authorization of the life force entrustment of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal..... This was written on the 18th or 25th of the month when the Gro zhun star shines, at the Palace of Potala, by the writer (the fifth Dalai Lama), and the exhortation is done.

In the following passage, the Fifth Dalai Lama says that he excerpted this text from the *Thang yig*, i.e. the *Pad ma bka' thang*):²⁹

In the *Thang yig*, it is said: "Then to test Padmasambhava, *sKu gnyan* Thang lha [transformed into] a white snake and stretched himself so that his head reached the land of Gru gu, and his tail extended to the Sog river and g.Yer thang in Khams, and blocked off the narrow road. Master Padmasambhava planted his staff in the middle of the body of the snake and said: "You are the king of the *klu* whose name is Ni le thod dkar, and the king of the fragrance-eaters whose name is Zur phud lnga pa. Go away and prepare a *gaṇacakra* feast!" Thang lha fled to the snow mountains, but the snow melted, the peak appeared completely black, and rocks rolled down. Thang lha was unable to bear this suffering and brought the food offering. Then

²⁶ About Thang lha in Dunhuang Tibetan Documents, see Yuewei, Wang, Ph.D. thesis (defended on July 26, 2023), *The cult of the mountain god gNyan chen Thang lha in Tibet*, Part I, École pratique des Hautes Études.

²⁷ "Then in order to test Padmasambhava, Sku gnyan thang lha [transformed into] a white snake (*sbrul dkar*) and stretched himself so that his head reached the land of Gru gu, [...] After offering his life force he was entrusted with a hundred treasures and was given the secret name rDo rje mchog rab rtsal." (*Pad ma bka' thang*, 1987, 363-364)

²⁸ Byang gter no. 7, p. 543, l. 2-1. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 534: l. 3-p. 535: l. 1.

Thang lha transformed into a turquoise child with five hair-knots, wearing a white silken turban, and circumambulated [the master] while making prostrations. After offering his life force (*srog snying*) he was entrusted with the seal of the treasures (*gter rgya*) and was given the secret name rDo rje mchog rab rtsal. So it is said. This is the story about Thang lha being appointed as an oath-bound guardian (*dam la btags nas srung mar bskos*) by Padmasambhava with the eternal great seal (*phyag rgya chen po*).

This text is broadly consistent with the *Pad ma bka' thang* with two differences:

- 1) At the beginning, Thang lha is called *sKu gnyan* Thang lha, "Thang lha, the *gnyan* of the body."
- 2) After Thang lha fails in his second attempt to defeat Padmasambhava, he offers food to Padmasambhava and prostrates in the form of a peaceful young man with five topknots. He also offers his life essence to Padmasambhava, who in return gives Thang lha the secret name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal and appoints him as an oath-bound protector (*dam la btags nas srung mar bskos*). Although the Fifth Dalai Lama cites this text from the *Pad ma bka' thang*, he gives Thang lha's secret name as rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, while in the *Pad ma bka' thang*, it is rDo rje mchog rab rtsal.

The second vow of Thang lha

The second vow of Thang lha is: "Secondly, will you not remember how, at bSam yas Has po ri, you were overpowered by the powerful Padma Heruka (dbang chen pad ma he ru ka)?"³⁰ Has po ri is a hill close to bSam yas monastery, while bSam yas itself is the destination of Padmasambhava's trip to Tibet, where he met Khri Srong lde btsan and helped the king to build this monastery. Padma Heruka is a wrathful form of Padmasambhava.³¹

1. Thang lha's explanation of why he can be the sku lha of the king: no. 1 and no. 7

The full text of no. 1 is the *lo rgyus* (story) of how Thang lha and Padmasambhava met for the second time and Thang lha made his second Buddhist vow to be the *sku lha* and *srog gi lha* of the Dharma

³⁰ Byang gter no. 5, p. 373, l. 6-p. 374, l. 1.

³¹ Padma he ru ka (Heruka) is Hayagrīva. Although it is Padmasambhava who subdues Thang lha, he does the activity of subjugation assuming the form of Hayagrīva. In the Byang gter system, gNyan chen Thang lha is subordinate to Hayagrīva.

king Khri srong lde btsan.

- 1) gNyan chen Thang lha arrives at bSam yas, presents himself in front of Padmasambhava and Khri srong lde btsan and pays his homage to the latter:

When the great master Padmasambhava arrived in front of the Has po ri hill of bSam yas monastery from the middle route through Byang (*byang lam bar ba*), that shining deity gNyan chen Thang lha appeared here in front of the master as a white yak with horns reaching to the sky, with its four hooves crushing down the demons of places of the four districts of dBus gtsang. This white yak saw the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan, and from his magical emanation as the white yak that manifested from his nature, he then manifested as a man with a white handsome face as white as a conch shell, and his head decorated with five turquoise-blue topknots; and having transformed into this form, he paid homage and prostrated to the king.³²

- 2) Padmasambhava and Thang lha have a conversation about why the latter has decided to protect the king:

At that time, the great master Padmasambhava gave teachings as follows: "gNyan chen po thang lha, since you are an oath-bound worldly divinity (*lha srin*), why do you protect and befriend the king Khri srong lde btsan?" Thang lha said: "I have a connection: 1] Because I am the *yul lha* for the four districts of dBus gtsang, and since the king Khri srong lde btsan is the king of Tibet, so we are connected by our great united force; 2] Because I like friends who have a commitment to me, and since the king's vow is pure, so we are connected through our vows; 3] Because I am the *pho lha* for the marvelous males, and since the secret law of the king is great, so we are connected through good karma and deeds; 4] Because I like those who are virtuous rulers, so we are connected by means of our great united merits!"³³

- 3) Thang lha lists the reasons why he is angry at the vow breakers and hostile demons he encountered when he was traveling to bSam yas:

Thang lha said: "O, great master Padmasambhava, the reason why I have come in a body of anger and rage is that I am the life-taking demon for those who violate their vows; I am the executioner of

³² Translated from no.1, p. 322: l.1-l.3.

³³ Translated from no.1, p. 322: l. 3-p. 323: l. 3.

vow-breakers; I will crush defilement, and I will crush down the inferior *gnyan*; and since I am the antidote for the demons that cause madness and the *rgyal po* and *gong po* demons, so as soon as I saw all of them [on my way here], then spontaneously anger arose in me and I became angry and enraged!³⁴

- 4) Padmasambhava feels satisfied with Thang lha's answers and appoints him as the *sku lha* of the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan and his successors:

Then the great master Padmasambhava said: "Well then, *gNyan chen Thang lha*, since you spontaneously support the king, so from the king himself until the last member of the clan of the gods of clear light has returned to the sky, you shall be a *sku lha* for them! Let the king make offerings to you!" This is the story behind the prayer of the great deity *gNyan chen Thang lha* and the dharma-protecting king of Tibet (*bod kyi chos skyong rgyal po*).³⁵

The important messages we can take from this text are:

- 1) Location: The opening sentence, "When the great master Padmasambhava arrives in front of the Has po ri mountain of bSam yas monastery from the middle route through Byang" indicates the timeline when Padmasambhava arrived at bSam yas from the Byang lam bar ba area where he first encountered Thang lha. This marks their second meeting, with Thang lha already identified as a Buddhist protector (*srung ma*) after being bound by an oath by Padmasambhava during their first encounter.
- 2) Thang lha's prostration and his two discourses: In this text, Thang lha's attitude towards the king Khri srong lde btsan is very respectful, because at that time he is already a Buddhist protector. Meanwhile, King Khri srong lde btsan is a "semi-mythological Buddhist king" as attested in the earliest Tibetan sources from Dunhuang.³⁶ Khri srong lde btsan is both a secular and a religious figure in Tibetan history. He has a triple identity: as a powerful emperor of the Tibetan empire, as a Buddhist king who has the core role of spreading Buddhism in Tibet, and as a tantric disciple of Padmasambhava.³⁷

³⁴ Translated from no.1, p. 323: l. 3-p. 324: l. 1.

³⁵ Translated from no.1, p. 324: l. 1-l. 3.

³⁶ Van Schaik and Doney, 2009, p. 193.

³⁷ Doney 2011 raises the viewpoint that Khri Srong lde btsan is an emperor (*btsan po*), a Buddhist king (*chos rgyal*), and a tantric disciple (*mahāyogin*). Dotson 2017 also

As a Buddhist protective god who took an oath to become a protector of the doctrine in front of Padmasambhava, it is reasonable that Thang lha should prostrate to the Buddhist king, Khri srong lde btsan. Thang lha arrives at bSam yas in a wrathful form as a white yak as a consequence of his encounter with vow-breakers and hostile demons. However, upon seeing Khri srong lde btsan, he transforms into a man with a handsome white handsome face and five turquoise-blue topknots on his head and pays homage to the king. This image with five topknots is the form of *Dri za'i rgyal po* Zur phud lnga pa, which Thang lha transformed into after being subjugated by Padmasambhava during their first meeting, as recorded in the five early Buddhist texts.

Thang lha's two speeches to Padmasambhava convey important information. Among them, the first is about why he spontaneously supports and befriends king Khri srong lde btsan, and the reason given by Thang lha is that he is already connected (*'brel ba*) to this Dharma king in several ways. The other speech is about why he came as the angry white yak, i.e. that he wants to destroy vow-breakers, suppress pollution and inferior *gnyan*, and be a counter-agent—an “anti-dote”—to demons. These declarations demonstrate that Thang lha has taken on the role of protector of Buddhism, and his responsibility, identity, and values are all aligned with this Buddhist identity.

3) sKu lha, *Thang lha's new identity*
after the second meeting with Padmasambhava

This meeting involved three figures: Thang lha, Padmasambhava, and the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan. From this meeting, the main identity that Thang lha attained from Padmasambhava is that of *sku lha*, which is the “god of the body” of the Dharma kings (no. 1, 324: l. 1-1.2).

After Thang lha transformed from a wrathful yak into a respectful man with five topknots, and after performing prostrations to the Darma king, Padmasambhava asks Thang lha why he wants to protect and befriend Khri srong lde'u btsa. Thang lha's answer is very interesting. He gives four *'brel ba* (connections), showing his similarities with the Dharma king, and it is these similarities that make Thang lha willing to support and be the friend of the king as an equal. The four connections are:

- 1) Thang lha and Khri srong lde btsan are connected by an equal

argues that Khri srong lde btsan is a core Buddhist monarch, also showing the King-Centric Representations, and Yogin-Centric Representations.

- great united force (*che mnyam dpung gis 'brel lo*);³⁸
 2) by vows (*dam tshig gis 'brel lo*);³⁹
 3) by karma and deeds (*las dang spyod pas 'brel lo*);⁴⁰
 4) by great united merits (*chem nyam bsod nams kyis 'brel ba lags so*).⁴¹

These four similarities demonstrate that Thang lha decided to protect and befriend the king because they share equal strength and values, indicating an equality between them. After hearing Thang lha's explanation, Padmasambhava appointed him as the *sku lha* of the king.⁴² At the same time, Padmasambhava asked the king to make an offering for Thang lha (no.1, 324: 1.2). This type of food offering in exchange for protection also indicates an equal exchange relationship between the god and the king.

Text no. 7 first quotes *Pad ma bka' thang's* account of Thang lha's first meeting with Padmasambhava.⁴³ The Fifth Dalai Lama quotes the second meeting of Thang lha and Padmasambhava. He does not say the name of the quoted text but says: "This is the historical story according to the revealed treasure in the divine cliff."⁴⁴ From this indication and the textual contents' comparison, we can conclude that this text is in all likelihood *gNyan chen Thang lha'i phyi nang gsang gsum gyi sgrub pa las lo rgyus* (Byang gter text no. 1).

Following this quotation, the Fifth Dalai Lama comments:

So it is said, and this is the historical story according to the revealed treasure in the divine cliff: through being the special body god (*sku lha*) of the Dharma king who brings immediate blessing and long-lasting fortune, this great god himself was orally appointed as the guardian of the western copper treasury. The most precious treasury includes seven quintessential instructions, and they are hidden as the concealed treasury of the teaching cycles in the divine rock of Zang zang area.⁴⁵

This refers to the fact that Thang lha has gained another identity, *gter bdag*, from a certain event after the second encounter with the Master Padmasambhava. So, what is this event? From the following section

³⁸ Byang gter, no.1, p. 323: 1. 1.

³⁹ Byang gter, no.1, p. 323: 1. 1-1.2.

⁴⁰ Byang gter, no.1, p. 323: 1. 2.

⁴¹ Byang gter, no.1, p. 323: 1. 2-1.3.

⁴² Byang gter, no.1, p. 324: 1. 1-1.2.

⁴³ Byang gter, no.7, p. 534: 1. 3-p. 535: 1. 1.

⁴⁴ Byang gter, no.7, p. 536: 1. 4.

⁴⁵ Translated from Byang gter, no. 7, 536: 1. 4-1.6.

"The third vow of Thang lha: his last encounter with Padmasambhava," we can see that Thang lha's title *gter bdag* is derived from the event of his third encounter with Padmasambhava.

From no. 1 and 7, we see that the main content of these two texts concerns Thang lha's explanation of why he is willing and able to support and befriend the Dharma king,⁴⁶ and why he hates the vow-breakers and harmful demons;⁴⁷ these determine why he can and deserves to be the *sku lha* and *srog gi lha* of the sacred Dharma kings.⁴⁸

2. *Khri srong lde btsan explains why he deserves
a srog gi lha and a sku lha (no. 3 and no. 14)*

The *lo rgyus* sections in texts no. 3 and 14 share the same context and theme as those in texts no. 1 and 7, but add one section of Khri srong lde btsan's request for requiring a *srog gi lha* from Padmasambhava.

The *lo rgyus* content of no. 3 is as below:

- 1) The Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan requests Padmasambhava to give him a "life-force god" (*srog gi lha*):

When O rgyan chen po (Padmasambhava) was putting an end to all the gods and spirits and evil people, the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan made this request to the master: "Oh great master! I don't pursue high status, and I don't harm others. As for my nature of primordial wisdom, I am capable of relying on future states; as for my action, it is in harmony with the worldly realm; as for my deeds, I am able to accomplish the four kinds of activities without hindrance; abiding in compassion, and in accordance with my vows, I am able to take care of all my subjects without separating from them as if they were my children. Since you have unlimited power, I pray you to give me a god to subjugate the demons that cause madness and the *rgyal po* demons, a god I could worship as a life force god, for I, the Dharma king, through the kindness of you, the master, request you to please give me such a god!"⁴⁹

- 2) The master Padmasambhava suggests Thang lha, the king of Gandharvas, to be the Dharma king's *sku lha*, and appoints him as *srog gi lha* of the Dharma king:

Then the master Padmasambhava replied: "Generally speaking,

⁴⁶ Byang gter, no.1, p. 322: l. 3-p. 323: l. 3; no.7, p. 535: l. 4-p. 536: l. 1.

⁴⁷ Byang gter, no.1, p. 323: l. 3-p. 324: l. 1; no.7, p. 536: l. 1-l. 3.

⁴⁸ Byang gter, no.1, p. 324: l. 1-l. 3; no. 7, p. 536: l. 3-l. 4.

⁴⁹ Translated from Byang gter, no. 3, p. 336: l. 2-p. 337: l. 2.

among the mass of gods and demons of Tibet, since they belong to the family of harmful eight classes of spirits, they will be destroyed by the power of the great god Thang lha, the king's *sku lha*, who was in the past blessed by many buddhas. Since he is the great king of Gandharvas who dwells on the earth and sees the truth expressed in the sūtras, and since he possesses the supreme qualities without exception, we should appoint Thang lha to be the life force god of the king!" This is what the master said.⁵⁰

- 3) Thang lha arrives and commits to the Dharma king within the *maṇḍala* of Śrī Hayagrīva. Then Padmasambhava gives Thang lha the secret name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, and appoints him to be the *srog gi lha* of the king:

Then since the master, Padmasambhava, remained in the meditation of the glorious Hayagrīva, the great god Thang lha and his retinue actually came, and said to the master: "What kinds of deeds should I do?" And then the master Padmasambhava said: "You, the great god Thang lha, and the king, should make commitments to each other in the *maṇḍala* of Śrī Hayagrīva!" Then the great god Thang lha got a secret name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal and was appointed to be the life force god of the king.⁵¹

If we compare this *lo rgyus* with that in texts no. 1 and 7, similarities are:

- 1) The participants: first Padmasambhava and Khri srong lde btsan are present, and then Thang lha arrives and joins.
- 2) Location and time: both describe the events taking place after Padmasambhava's arrival at bSam yas and his assistance in establishing bSam yas monastery. The meeting between Padmasambhava, Khri srong lde btsan, and Thang lha takes place at the Has po ri hill in bSam yas.
- 3) The general outcome: the result is that Padmasambhava endows Thang lha with a new identity as the *sku lha* and *srog gi lha* of Khri srong lde btsan.

Differences are:

- 1) The initiative of Khri srong lde btsan: Text no. 3 portrays Khri srong lde btsan as playing an important and active role. He is

⁵⁰ Translated from Byang gter, no. 3, p. 337: l. 2-p. 337: l. 4.

⁵¹ Translated from Byang gter, no. 3, p. 337: l. 4-p. 338: l. 1.

depicted as the one who first requests a *srog gi lha* from Padmasambhava, giving reasons why he deserves such a god. However, in texts no. 1 and 7, there is no such proactive speech from the king. Instead, the texts begin by stating that Thang lha arrives at bSam yas Has po ri and explains his reasons for befriending and supporting the king in front of Padmasambhava and the king.

- 2) The secret name of Thang lha: Text no. 3 describes the second encounter between Thang lha and Padmasambhava and states that Thang lha is given the name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal during this meeting with Padmasambhava and Khri srong lde btsan. However, text no. 5, which recounts the first encounter between Thang lha and Padmasambhava, reveals that Thang lha was given this secret name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal during their initial meeting rather than during their second encounter.

Text no. 14 resembles no. 3 above as it not only presents Thang lha's discourse about his duty and devotion to Buddhism, but also includes Khri srong lde btsan's request for a particular *srog gi lha* and *sku lha* for himself. The text begins with the introduction of Thang lha's first encounter with the master:

When Padmasambhava (O rgyan chen po) arrived in Tibet, Thang lha sent a snowstorm against him. Since fog obscured the path, the master meditated on Vajrapāṇi and transformed into the form of this divinity. Thang lha was consequently subdued, and offered his life force and received his secret name.⁵²

Afterward, text no. 14 follows up by saying that after this first meeting, Thang lha has a second encounter with Padmasambhava and Khri srong lde btsan at bSam yas's Has po ri mountain.

- 1) Thang lha makes prostration to the king Khri srong lde btsan, and tells the king that he himself is the executioner of vow-violators, the killer of the demons that cause madness, the *rgyal po* gods and the *'gong po* demons and so on:

After that, when Padmasambhava arrived at the Has po ri mountain of bSam yas monastery, Thang lha arrived, appearing near the master in the form of a white yak with horns reaching into the clear sky and his four hooves surpassing the seven levels of the four regions. He saw Khri srong lde btsan, then transformed into a

⁵² Translated from Byang gter, no. 14, p. 653: l. 3-1.4.

handsome man with five topknots on his head and showed homage and made prostrations to the king. He happily said to king Khri srong lde btsan, "I am the life subduer of the vow-violators and the executioner of the vow-breakers. I seize polluting demons and the low-class spirits by their necks. I seize demons that cause madness, the *rgyal po* gods and the *'gong po* demons, by their necks! And, by my virtuous deeds, the demons that cause madness are also subdued and the hate-filled enemies are killed!⁵³

- 2) King Khri srong lde btsan informs the master Padmasambhava that he wishes to have a *srog gi lha* and lists the reason why he deserves such a god:

After these words the king said, "O, master! I don't pursue high status, and I don't harm others. Regarding the meaning, the power should rely on future lives as a wisdom being; regarding the manner, it should be under the worldly life, and I should have the ability to accomplish the four virtuous deeds without obstruction; and abiding in compassion, and accordance with my vows, I should be able to take care of all my subjects without being apart from them as if they were my children! And since you have unlimited power, I pray that you to give me a god to subjugate the demons that cause madness and the *rgyal po* demons, a god whom I, the Dharma king, might worship as a god of the life force (*srog lha*). Through the kindness of you, the master, I request you to please give me such a god!⁵⁴

- 3) The master Padmasambhava appoints Thang lha to be the *sku lha* and *srog gi lha* of the king Khri srong lde btsan:

Then the master Padmasambhava replied: "Generally speaking, among the mass of gods and demons of Tibet, since they belong to the eight classes of harmful spirits, they will be impotent under the power of the great god Thang lha, the king's *sku lha*, who was in the past blessed by many buddhas! Since he is the great king of the Gandharvas who dwells on the earth and sees the truth, as the scriptures say, and since he is possessed of supreme qualities without exception, we should appoint this particular one to be the life force god of the King!⁵⁵

⁵³ Translated from Byang gter, no. 14, p. 653: l. 4-p. 654: l.2.

⁵⁴ Translated from Byang gter, no. 14, p. 654: l. 3-1.5.

⁵⁵ Translated from Byang gter, no. 14, p. 654: l. 5-p. 655: l. 1.

- 4) Thang lha and Khri srong lde btsan receive the initiation and do the samaya reinforcement in the *maṇḍala* of Hayagrīva, and the king is told to prepare a food offering for Thang lha:

After saying that, both the king and Thang lha received the tantric initiation and the samaya reinforcement through the *maṇḍala* of Śrī Hayagrīva. Until the last of the line of the gods of clear light has returned to heaven, you shall be their *sku lha*! Then the king was told to prepare an offering.⁵⁶

The content of texts no. 3 and 14 show slight differences from no. 1 and 7: in texts no. 3 and 14, Khri srong lde btsan plays a central role in explaining why he deserves a *srog gi lha*.⁵⁷ Padmasambhava then decides to appoint Thang lha, the *sku lha* of the Dharma king, as the king's *srog gi lha*.⁵⁸ Thang lha and the king then make a vow to each other in the *maṇḍala* of Hayagrīva, with Thang lha becoming the king's *sku lha* and *srog gi lha* and the king making an offering to Thang lha.⁵⁹ Both texts emphasize that Thang lha, who is already the *sku lha* of Khri srong lde btsan, is further appointed as the *srog gi lha* of the king. However, texts no. 1 and 7 only refers to Thang lha being appointed as the *sku lha* of Dharma kings, rather than as the *srog gi lha*.

3. *rGyal po Pe har, Thang lha, and the Fifth Dalai Lama*

As evidenced in several texts (nos. 1, 3, 5, 7, 14), the phrases “Thang lha subdues the demon who causes madness” and “the *rgyal po* demon” are recurrent. In Byang gter documents, it can be speculated that the demon responsible for madness, i.e. the *rgyal po* demon, is Pe har. These texts depict a pronounced antagonism between gNyan chen Thang lha and Pe har. For instance, in text 4, Thang lha is described as transforming into three forms to subdue Pe kar / dkar (*sic.*), referred to as *rgyal po* or *dkor bdag rgyal po*. The adverse influence of *rgyal po* Pe har, in this case, manifests in various diseases, including madness:

Since the *rgyal po* demon Pe kar (*sic.*) has brought and supported all the diseases and illnesses of all eight classes of demi-gods, for this, in the beginning, people depended on the male god (*pho lha*) to wipe away the following demons that appeared, but finally, the *rgyal po* demon stole the vital principle of people as a thief of the vital breath, and ruined and cut off the villages of human beings. Then,

⁵⁶ Translated from Byang gter, no. 14, p. 655: l. 1-1.2.

⁵⁷ Byang gter, no. 3, p. 336: l. 2-p. 337: l. 2; no.14, p. 654: l. 3-5.

⁵⁸ Byang gter, no. 3, p. 337: l. 2-p. 337: l.4; no.14, p. 654: l.5-p. 655: l.1.

⁵⁹ Byang gter, no.3, p. 337: l. 4-p. 338: l. 1; no. 14, p. 655: l. 1-1.2.

he caused malicious jealousy, the eye attacking, the numerous illusionary display, and in particular when he entered into the heart of any man, it caused the disease of *rgyal po*, such as madness, unstable mind, upper body distress, liver disease, parasites in the blood veins of the brain, wars, etc., and when he was doing this, Tibet was destroyed at that time.⁶⁰

In order to pacify these disturbances, Padmasambhava employed the *sādhana* cycle (*sgrub skor*) of the great divinity Thang lha as the method to subdue *rgyal po* Pe har. Padmasambhava concealed the method within the text of the copper treasury.⁶¹ The general content of this method is:

Then, as for subjugating the eight classes of demi-gods, the gods causing madness, and the *rgyal po* gods, you take the essence of the great god (Thang lha), and visualize your form as a white wild yak whose size is about that of a mountain, whose two horns are like two sharp fir trees lifting up, and the vapor of your breath is like the mist, and your bellow is like the thundering of a dragon. The thunder is like catching fire by a flame, which terrifies the *dkor bdag rgyal po* (Lord of Debts) Pe dkar (*sic*) [...] And you visualize yourself as a falcon hunting for food flying in the spacious sky, and the *rgyal po* Pe kar (*sic*) as a white little bird like a pigeon, and this falcon grasping and eating it [...] Furthermore, you visualize your own body as a black iron scorpion, with its body covering the ground, and its belly and its tail lifting up to the sky, and from its mouths, there are light rays spreading out like an iron net, then the *dkor bdag rgyal po* Pe dkar is taken in this net, then you lead this net near to you and by that time you take the god's heart out by your scorpion's fangs, then half of the god's body is eaten by you.⁶²

The conflict between Thang lha and Pe har is a central theme in the original core of Byang gter material. However, the animosity between Thang lha and Pe har completely disappears during the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), who himself strongly supported the cult of Pe har. In the two texts about Thang la authored by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the Byang gter collection (texts no. 7 and 12), the antagonistic relationship between Thang la and Pe har is not mentioned at all.

What happened is a process of transformation of the identity of Pe har. Initially, Pe har was classified as an evil *rgyal po*, but gradually, his identity underwent a transformation and became a positive figure. The

⁶⁰ Byang gter, no. 4, p. 348: l. 4-p. 349: l. 2.

⁶¹ Byang gter, no. 4, p. 349: l. 2-3.

⁶² Byang gter, no. 4, p. 349: l. 4-p. 351: l. 1.

cult of Pe har and the *rgyal po* group can be traced back to the great treasure revealer Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124-1192), and Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer was a source of the Fifth Dalai Lama's promotion of *rgyal po* cults.⁶³ Eventually, due to the support of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Pe har became the prominent protector of gNas chung Monastery and one of the central protectors of Dalai Lama Lineage.⁶⁴

**sku lha: an equal relationship between
mountain god and the king**

In the above Byang gter text, Thang lha is identified as the *sku lha* of the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan. There have been many significant discussions in recent years regarding the meaning of *sku lha*, including the works of Per Kvaerne (2021, 2023), Nathan Hill (2015), Michael Walter (2009), as well as earlier works by Ariane Macdonald (1971) and Samten Karmay (1996), among others. In this section, I will discuss Thang lha's identity as a *sku lha*.

1. *The meaning of Thang lha's sku lha identity
in the Byang gter context*

The core identity of Thang lha in texts no. 1, 7, 3, and 14, is that of the sacred Tibetan Dharma kings' *sku lha*. By combining the contents of these texts, we can determine the features of Thang lha's *sku lha* identity in the context of the Byang gter tradition:

- 1) The term *sku lha* refers to Thang lha as the protector deity and divine embodiment of the Tibetan Dharma kings, including Khri srong lde btsan. As a *sku lha*, Thang lha serves as the protector and friend of the Dharma kings.
- 2) The four "connections" (*'brel ba*) between Thang lha and the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan serve to illustrate their similarities, which in turn make Thang lha willing to support and befriend the king.
- 3) According to the Byang gter text, it was the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan who first requested Padmasambhava for a *srog gi lha* and explained why he deserved such a god. Subsequently, Padmasambhava appointed Thang lha to be the *srog gi lha* and *sku lha* of the Tibetan Dharma kings.
- 4) Thang lha and the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan make mutual vows in front of Padmasambhava, and the king performs a

⁶³ Bell, 2022, p. 165, pp. 170-172.

⁶⁴ For the details, see Bell, 2021.

ritual offering to Thang lha as his *srog gi lha* and *sku lha*.

- 5) The activities of Thang lha being the Dharma kings' *sku lha* and *srog gi lha*, and the Dharma king making offering to his *sku lha*, and their combined vows to each other, are all voluntary actions that highlight the mutual respect and close relationship between Thang lha and the Dharma kings. Thang lha willingly supports and befriends the Dharma kings, while the latter also voluntarily recognize Thang lha as their protector and make him ritual offerings.

Through the above features of Thang lha, we find two key characteristics of *sku lha* in the context of the Byang gter tradition:

- 1) The *sku lha* concept reflects the kingship function and significance of the god Thang lha as the protector of the Dharma kings of Tibet.
- 2) The *sku lha* status also symbolizes the equal relationship between Thang lha and the Dharma kings. They have reciprocal vows, are "friends" rather than king and minister. Thang lha protects the king and the king worships Thang lha.

Regarding the term *sku lha*, two points need to be added. Firstly, here, *sku lha* is likely to be another name for *yul lha* (territorial god) in Buddhist texts after the 11th century, as Per Kvaerne states in his study of the *bsGrags pa gling grags* (abbr. GLG):

"In Tibetan post-11th century Buddhism, some of the *yiillha* (*yul lha*) are also styled *kulha* (*sku lha*)."⁶⁵

According to GLG, Thang lha is one of the four great *yul lha* in Tibet:

"The 'lineage of gods protecting the (four) cardinal directions' refers to the four *yiillha* associated with, and at the same time perhaps identified with, four mountains: west-Yallha Shampo; north-Nyench'en T'anglha; south-Donglha; east-Mach'en Pomra."⁶⁶

As a *sku lha*, Thang lha is believed to protect the Tibetan Dharma kings, just like *yul lha* protect the local communities and territories they are associated with.

In addition, regarding the transformation of the meaning and form of *sku lha*, Per Kvaerne suggested that it may have undergone a transformation of *sku bla / lha* to *mgur lha*.⁶⁷ In the Byang gter literature,

⁶⁵ Kvaerne 2023, p. 53.

⁶⁶ Kvaerne 2023, p. 53. See p. 309 for more details on these four mountains.

⁶⁷ Kvaerne 2021, 2023; Ramble 2023.

as a Tibetan god that has been tamed to become a protector of Buddhism, Thang lha is endowed with the identity of *sku lha*. However, an earlier form of *sku lha* (*lha* means “god”) was *sku bla* (*bla* means “soul”) in the Tibet Imperial period. In the Dunhuang texts, only *sku bla* appears, with the meaning of “the spiritual proxy of the Tibetan emperor,”⁶⁸ the Tibetan emperor’s manifestation and “deified persona.”⁶⁹ This is different from the meaning of *sku lha* in the Byang gter texts summarized above.

2. sKu bla in Dunhuang and sku lha in Byang gter

The concept of an equal relationship between local/mountain gods and Dharma kings, as embodied by Thang lha’s *sku lha* identity, has a long history reflected in Dunhuang Tibetan documents. Although there is no word *sku lha* in these texts, the term *sku bla*⁷⁰ refers to a type of personal god that protected the kings. The meaning of *sku bla* in Dunhuang text PT_1047 shares some similarities with *sku lha* in Byang gter, but there are also some differences.

In her 1971 article “Une lecture des Pelliot Tibétain 1286, 1287, 1038, 1047 et 1290 : Essai sur la formation et l’emploi des mythes politiques dans la religion royale de Sron-bcan sgam-po,” Ariane Macdonald translates the text PT_1047 and interprets its meanings, especially that of the word *sku bla*. Her conclusions may be summarized as follows:

1) The *sku bla* are a class of divinities who protect the early kings’ bodies:

The *sku bla* is a personal god with the mission of protecting the life and power of kings and their ministers when they are pleased and satisfied. The *sku bla* is the leader, and all *sku bla*(s) have the power to control and command other deities and demons and bring punishment to kings, ministers, and subjects if they behave improperly. The *sku bla* will not abandon kings and their people who worship and rely on them, but they will abandon them if they are betrayed.⁷¹

2) The *sku bla* are assimilated with the *gnyan*, a class of mountain gods:

gNyan usually dwell on the tops of the mountains, and the *sku bla* is

⁶⁸ Hill 2015, p. 53.

⁶⁹ Hill 2015, p. 55.

⁷⁰ PT_1047: I. 1-111.

⁷¹ Macdonald 1971, p. 295 (my translation from the French original).

therefore a type of mountain gods.⁷²

3) The term *sku bla* and the role this deity played in people's lives predates both Buddhism and Bon:

PT_1047 describes a religious world in which Buddhism plays a minimal role and Bon also has only a limited influence. The deities that have a significant impact on the lives of humans and animals are primarily the *sku bla* and the *mu sman*, although there are other deities such as the *yul lha* or "land gods," *thab lha* "kitchen gods," as well as *gnyan*, *klu*, and *myi lha*.⁷³

Therefore, according to Ariane Macdonald's interpretation of PT_1047, the meaning of *sku bla* can be summarized as follows: The *sku bla* are a class of divinities that protect the bodies of early kings, typically in the form of *gnyan* and usually associated with mountain gods.

Nathan Hill and Per Kvaerne also argue that the *sku bla* have represented a parallel status with the early Tibetan kings. In his 2015 article "The *sku bla* Rite in Imperial Tibetan Religion," Nathan Hill offers his definition of *sku bla*, which is that the "the *sku bla* is the spiritual proxy of the Tibetan emperor."⁷⁴ In Hill's interpretation, the *sku bla* is a spiritual agent, or the deity as a symbol, a "deified persona,"⁷⁵ of the Tibetan emperors. Hill considers *sku bla* to be parallel deity of the divine emperor: "In terms of social hierarchy the *kula* sits as the spiritual parallel of the Tibetan emperor at the head of the great chain of being which rationalized the imperial Tibetan universe."⁷⁶

In line with Hill's argument, in his paper "The *sku bla* of the Tibetan emperors—metamorphosed in Yungdrung Bön?" Per Kvaerne succinctly summarizes Hill's argument to the effect that "in other words, the *kula* is the 'spiritual parallel' of the emperor, and hence not identical with the emperor."⁷⁷ He argues that *sku bla* are deities, not men: "Personally I am in no doubt that the *kula* has important characteristics of a deity, especially that of being distinct from the emperor and being able to abandon the emperor under certain conditions."⁷⁸

In what follows, I compare the concept of *sku bla* and their parallel relationship with the early Tibetan kings as described in the Dunhuang texts with the interpretation of the meaning of *sku lha* in the Byang gter

⁷² Macdonald 1971, pp. 300-301.

⁷³ Macdonald 1971, pp. 291-292.

⁷⁴ Hill 2015, p. 53.

⁷⁵ Hill 2015, p. 55.

⁷⁶ Hill 2015, p. 54.

⁷⁷ Kvaerne 2021, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Kvaerne 2021, p. 32.

literature and their equal relationship with Tibetan Dharma kings:

- 1) *sKu bla* and *sku lha* have similar fundamental meanings. They are divinities who protect the king's body; the king needs to worship them, and they have a relatively equal, parallel relationship with the king.
- 2) *sKu bla* and *sku lha* differ with respect to their historical setting and the type of kingship they represent. The term *sku bla* appears in the Dunhuang texts, but the term *sku lha* does not. Moreover, in texts from the Dunhuang collection, Buddhism has not been fully developed in Tibet; the concept of the king as a Dharma king or Dharmarāja, who is the divine heir of the celestial Phywa clan (the *gnam lha khri bdun* and their descendants) is not manifest yet.⁷⁹ Therefore, the kings being protected by a *sku bla* are celestial kings (kings who descended from the sky), while the kings protected by a *sku lha* are Dharma kings (manifestations of bodhisattvas). The concept of Dharma king (*chos rgyal*) appeared after Khri srong lde btsan's support for Buddhism and his alleged suppression of Bon.

However, there are other understandings of *sku bla* and their relationship to the early king:

- 1) *sKu bla* may not be mountain gods, but are possibly humans, or the early kings' manifestations. In *Buddhism and Empire*, Michael Walter considers that *sku bla* are a group of men rather than a group of divinities: "All possibilities circle around the same concept: That it [*sku bla*] was a government entity relating to the 'corporate body' of the Btsan-po".⁸⁰
- 2) The relationship between *sku bla* and early kings is not necessarily parallel, but possibly identical. Like Macdonald, Karmay also refers to the *gnyan* form and the mountain god form of *sku bla*, to the kingship protection function of the *sku bla*, and to the *sku* as the king's body; but Karmay interprets *bla* as "soul" rather than just "god," so that *sku bla* would mean the soul of the early kings, not only the gods of their bodies; in this case, *sku bla* are the early kings themselves rather than their protectors.

Karmay further proposes that the initial nine local/mountain gods (collectively named *lha dgu*) in early sources were all considered as the *sku bla* of the Tibetan kings, and *sku bla* means the soul of the early

⁷⁹ Yuewei 2023.

⁸⁰ Walter 2009: 97. Walter's discussion about *sku bla* are seen in Pages 2, 23f, 30, 43, 97-106, 142-151, 231, 233, 250 (see Walter 2009, p. 310, index).

king's body:⁸¹

In early texts, the soul of the king is called *sku bla*, 'soul of the body.' The word *sku* here is an honorific term for the body of the king. By extension, through the genealogical system, the nine mountain deities—the first Tibetan king's 'cousins'—are also considered *sku bla*. It is no wonder then that these nine mountain *gnyan* spirits were the object of propitiation as 'ancestral deities' by later Tibetan kings even when they became Buddhists in the eighth century.

Indeed, there seems to be no evidence of *sku bla* as a mountain god in the Dunhuang texts, even in PT_1047, the one focusing on the *sku bla* deity. I agree with Nathan Hill's argument that in the Dunhuang texts, a *sku bla* is not a mountain god, but a "spiritual proxy,"⁸² a "spiritual parallel"⁸³ of the king, and the king's "deified persona."⁸⁴ Per Kvaerne's argument is that the *sku bla* has the important characters of a deity without actually being a *sku bla*. As shown in the quote given above: "*Kula* has important characteristics of a deity, especially that of being distinct from the emperor and being able to abandon the emperor under certain conditions."⁸⁵

Indeed, we have no evidence of *sku bla* as a mountain god from Dunhuang Tibetan Documents. However, as evidenced in Byang gter, during post-Imperial period, the term *sku bla* disappeared and was replaced by the term *sku lha*, with a meaning different from the *sku bla* in Dunhuang. In later Buddhist texts, the term *sku lha* also means that Thang lha and the king have a parallel relationship, they are both vow-keepers, rulers of the land, etc. We have to note, however, that in the context of kingship, the king in these Buddhist texts is different from the king in Dunhuang. In Dunhuang, the king is either a local king such as Zing po rje or a celestial king such as gNam lha khri bdun. In the Byang gter tradition, the king is the Dharma king, not originated from the sky god, but the incarnation of a Bodhisattva.

The term *sku lha* emphasizes more the god's duty of protecting the king than the king propitiating the god, which is different from PT_1047 that emphasizes that the *sku bla* can abandon the king if the king doesn't worship them properly. One assumption is that this can be due to the disintegration of the central power related to the degeneration of kingship of the Imperial time and the generation of

⁸¹ Karmay, 1996, p. 66.

⁸² Hill 2015, p. 53.

⁸³ Hill 2015, p. 54.

⁸⁴ Hill 2015, p. 55.

⁸⁵ Kvaerne 2021, p. 32.

Buddhist power: the previous kingship and its close association with pre-Buddhist gods weakened, and terms such as *sku bla* indicating a close relationship between king and local gods also degenerated. The term *sku lha* was then coined to retain part of the previous meaning, but with less emphasis on the king's closeness with the god and the god's high status so that he should be worshiped by the king.

The third vow of Thang lha

The third vow of Thang lha as summarized in text no. 5 is: "And finally, will you not remember that, after he had assembled all the gods and demons on the summit of the Mount (*ri rgyal*) bKra bzang, the glorious rDo rje gzhon nu bestowed on you an oath?" (no. 5, 374: l. 1). Here, the emanation of Padmasambhava is Vajrakumāra (rDo rje gzhon nu), embodying the enlightened activity of all the Buddhas and one of the eight Herukas of the rNying ma tradition.

It should be noted that the Mount bKra bzang is the place where Padmasambhava is said to have concealed the three whetstone keys for the treasures buried in Zang zang lha brag, Mang yul, and Yang le shod. In 1366, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem revealed the first of these treasures at the cave of Zang zang lha brag on Mount bKra bzang.⁸⁶

1. lHa chen thang lha'i phyi sgrub (no. 2)

The third vow of Thang lha is recounted in the *lHa chen thang lha'i phyi sgrub* (text no. 2) of the Byang gter collection:⁸⁷

The master Padmasambhava came to Tibet and did the virtuous deeds of subjugating the property guardian (*dkor bdag*) of bSam yas monastery. After Padmasambhava composed the *sādhana* of gNyan chen Thang lha, at the time of going to subjugate the demons of the southwest at the peak of Byang bKra bzang, all the gods and demons of Tibet were bound by an oath at the master's command. To the great *gnyan* god Thang lha, the master said, "You, the great god of Ho yul, who has great power and merit and a glorious shining mind, on the waist of the divine cliff Zang zang lha brag (*zang zang lha brag gi sked la*), so that in the future the Gung thang kings are benefitted, I shall conceal a treasure containing four treasuries! The red copper treasury is in the western side (*nub phyogs zangs mdzod dmar po*): you, Thang lha, must act as the treasure guardian (*gter srungs*) of this secret

⁸⁶ See Valentine 2023 for more details on this topic.

⁸⁷ Translated from no. 2, p. 331: l. 5-p. 332: l. 2.

treasure as you have a specific link with it. When those who have the proper karma come, you should reveal the treasure to them. When those who don't have the proper karma take the treasure, you must destroy their senses!

The main points conveyed in this text are as follows:

- 1) Context: The events described take place after the gods and demons of Tibet have been bound by an oath at the master's command, and the master has hidden the treasure on the waist of the divine cliff Zang zang lha brag.
- 2) Location: The event takes place on the summit of Mount bKra bzang in Byang.
- 3) Appointment of Thang lha: Thang lha is designated as the treasure guardian (*gter bsrung*) of red copper treasury concealed by Padmasambhava at in the Western side of the treasure casket found by rGod ldem in Zang zang lha brag.

2. *lHa chen thang lha'i las tshogs gsang sgrub shog dril* (no. 4)

The third vow of Thang lha is described in an exhortatory passage (*bkskul ba*) at the end of text no. 4, which serves as the conclusion of Thang lha's Buddhist vows, identities, and responsibilities. The ritual practitioner recites this exhortation to either Thang lha or the god rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal as a reminder of their vows and duties: "I am Padmasambhava engaging in subjugation and wrathful actions, and you are the great god 'Bar ba rtsal. By recalling the promise you once made, your power and emanation will be increased! (no. 4, 364: l. 4). The vows and responsibilities of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal include:⁸⁸

Hūm! On the top of the royal Mount bKra bzang in the region of g.Yas ru, you were the powerful Rig 'dzin rdo rje!⁸⁹ When you were bringing all gods and demons under your command, you were the *sku lha* of Khri srong lde btsan!⁹⁰ You were appointed as the mind-treasure guardian of the divine rock (*lha brag thugs gter bdag*), and as the protector of Great Perfection yogis.⁹¹ You were appointed as the antidote and executioner of all *rgyal po* demons, *'gong po* demons, and samaya violators of the dark age!⁹²

⁸⁸ Translated from no. 4, p. 365: l. 1-2.

⁸⁹ The third vow.

⁹⁰ The second vow.

⁹¹ The third vow.

⁹² The second vow.

The summary in text no. 4 (p. 365: l. 1-2) is also quoted in text 11 (p. 592: l. 2-3) and 12 (p. 635: l. 3-4). It is important to note, however, that this summary overlooks the first vow made by Thang lha, which established him as the protector (*srung ma*) and earned him the name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal. Instead, it emphasizes only the second and third vows.

Thang lha's third Buddhist vow conveys the following key messages:

- 1) Location: The vow was made on the summit of Mount bKra zang, in g.Yas ru (the region where Byang is located).
- 2) Responsibility: Thang lha was appointed as the guardian of the mind-treasure of the divine rock, with the duty to protect the Great Perfection yogis.

In the same text no. 4, there are fragments of information on Thang lha's identity as the *gter bdag* of *Zangs mdzod dmar po*:

As for the activities of the great treasure-guarding god of the western red copper treasury, this is the *sādhana* of his most profound essence teaching.⁹³

For the future lineage of Padmasambhava, he [Thang lha] is concealed as the protector (*srungs ma*) of the supreme horse copper treasury (*Zangs mdzod rta mchog*).⁹⁴

This is the activity of the secret accomplishment of the great god 'Bar ba rtsal, who is the powerful protector of the western copper treasury, the treasure guardian of Zang zang lha brag, and the chief of all.⁹⁵

3. Other texts on Thang lha being appointed as *gter bdag* of *Zangs mdzod dmar po*

Thang lha's appointment as the *gter bdag* of the red copper treasury is also frequently found in other Byang gter texts. In the *rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi rten 'dzugs kyi rim pa gsal bar byed pa dwangs shel me long zhes byed ba* (no. 10), the corresponding passage runs as follows:

You, the *sku lha* of the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan, are the guardian of the Byang gter's copper treasury (*byang gter zangs mdzod kyi bka' srung*) with six names including King of Gandharvas, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, and the great supported god (*brten pa'i lha*) of

⁹³ Translated from no. 4, p. 348: l. 1.

⁹⁴ Translated from no. 4, p. 355: l. 2.

⁹⁵ Translated from no. 4, p. 367: l.1.

the Eternal Bon religion of Tibet before the glorious Padmasambhava (dPal O rgyan chen po) arrived at Tibet. When the guru lama Padmasambhava came to Tibet, you received his command, took the oath in front of him, and were appointed as the guardian of the western copper treasury (*nub zangs mdzod kyi srung ma*). The treasure-revealer Rig 'dzin rgod ldem found the yellow scrolls of this *sādhana* cycle at the invitation of the *ḍākinī*.⁹⁶

In the *rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi srog gtad kyi rjes gnang mu thi la'i 'phreng ba* (no. 7), the passage is as follows:

So through being the special body god (*sku lha*) of the Dharma king who brings immediate blessing and long-lasting fortune, this great god himself was orally appointed as the guardian of the western copper treasury.⁹⁷

Conclusion: the three vows of Thang lha

Drawing from all the above Byang gter texts, we can summarize the places, events, and titles that Thang lha received from the three encounters and three vows as follows:

	<i>The Form of Padmasambhava</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Event</i>
1 st Vow	Phyag na rdo rje (Vajrapāṇi)	Byang lam bar ba, where Thang lha's mountain range is located	Thang lha's life-essence is crushed; he becomes the protector of Buddhism and is given the secret name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal.
2 nd Vow	Pad ma he ru ka (Padma Heruka)	On the mountain of Has po ri of bSam yas monastery.	Thang lha is appointed as the body god and life-force god of the Dharma king Khri srong lde btsan.
3 rd Vow	rDo rje gzhon nu (Vajrakumāra)	at the peak of Mount bKra bzang	Thang lha is given the <i>sādhana</i> by Padmasambhava; becomes the treasure guardian of the red copper treasury in the Zang zang lha brag.

The key messages conveyed by Thang lha's three vows can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Through the three encounters with Padmasambhava, Thang lha progressively gained his triple identities as *srung ma*, *sku lha* or

⁹⁶ Translated from no. 10, p. 562: 1.4-p. 563: 1. 2.

⁹⁷ Translated from no. 7, p. 536: 1. 5.

srog gi lha, and *gter bdag*. These identities demonstrate the deepening and evolving Buddhist status of Thang lha. The three meetings and vows of Thang lha with Padmasambhava can be seen to symbolize the gradual process of his Buddhicisation.

- 2) One noteworthy feature of Thang lha's three vows is that all of them were taken in mountainous locations. The first vow was taken near the Thang lha mountain, the second vow on the Has po ri mountain within the bSam yas monastery, and the third vow on the summit of Mount bKra bzang.⁹⁸
- 3) Furthermore, regarding the secret name rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, since it was given to Thang lha after his first encounter with Padmasambhava, this title encompasses all the identities that Thang lha gained during the three encounters, including the core identities of *srung ma*, *sku lha*, *srog gi lha*, and *gter bdag*. This is one reason why all sixteen texts related to Thang lha in vol. 15 of the Byang gter collection consistently use the official title rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal or lHa chen rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal to refer to Thang lha.

In conclusion, Thang lha's three vows only refer to his three vows in front of different manifestations of Padmasambhava, and the gradual consolidation of his Buddhist status.

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⁹⁸ Mountains are characterized by their physical features of rock and stone, and it is a common human practice to take vows while standing on a stone because it represents firmness, steadfastness, and dependability, symbolizing the unwavering nature of the vow. As Frazer said: "At initiation a Brahman boy is made to tread with his right foot on a stone, while the words are repeated, "Tread on this stone; like a stone be firm; and the same ceremony is performed, with the same words, by a Brahman bride at her marriage. In Madagascar a mode of counteracting the levity of fortune is to bury a stone at the foot of the heavy house-post. The common custom of swearing upon a stone may be based partly on a belief that the strength and stability of the stone lend confirmation to an oath. Moreover, the old Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus tells us that "The ancients, when they were to choose a king, were wont to stand on stones planted in the ground, and to proclaim their votes, in order to foreshadow from the steadfastness of the stones that the deed would be lasting." (Frazer 2009, p. 85). However, on the other hand, the function and significance of a mountain here might not be based on its stony quality, but its *height* (this idea is from Per Kvaerne, email communication, April 2023).

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The Great *Yakṣa* of bSam yas: Ngag gi dbang po and the Tsi'u dmar po Oracle

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As the institutional and incarnational identities associated with the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*) lineage solidified around the turn of the seventeenth century, Tibet was locked in a prolonged civil war between the central Tibetan territories of dBus and gTsang, on top of dealing with the mercurial encroachment of invading Mongolian troops along the borders. It was the Third rDo rje brag rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639) who was the historical linchpin for the Northern Treasures tradition at this time. He was the first throne-holder of rDo rje brag Monastery, the lineage's regional stronghold, as well as the reincarnation of the Second rDo rje brag rig 'dzin, Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1580/1625), and the maternal uncle and teacher of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682). It is no surprise then that the Great Fifth wrote the first biography of this figure, entitled the *Wonderfully Arrayed Ocean: A Biography for the Great Rig 'dzin of the North, Ngag gi dbang po*.¹ This work is more than a paean for Ngag gi dbang po, however, as it is a rich resource for understanding the political, religious, and ritual history of the age preceding the rise of the Dalai Lama's Dga' ldan pho brag administration.

One underexplored relationship revealed in this biography is between Ngag gi dbang po and the Dharma protector (*chos skyong*) Tsi'u dmar po, a central guardian of bSam yas, Tibet's first Buddhist monastery. This deity's mythic pedigree traces him back to the eighth century founding of the monastery, as well as his subjugation and appointment as a guardian by Padmasambhava. However, Tsi'u dmar po's treasure literature was first rediscovered and promoted in the sixteenth century by the famous Northern Treasures master and treasure revealer mNga' ris paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487-1542), as well as his brother Legs ldan rdo rje, Ngag gi dbang po's former incarnation. The deity's relationship with this incarnation line not only continued but was clearly strengthened into the next century. An oracle for the deity had been established at bSam yas by then, under

¹ *Byang pa rig 'dzin chen po ngag gi dbang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho*; see Tā la'i bla ma 05 2015.

the auspices of the monastery's Sa skya hierarchs,² and Ngag gi dbang po consulted a medium of the deity on numerous occasions on matters of regional stability. What follows are five vignettes illustrating the relationship between this god and this man, drawn from his biography by the Fifth Dalai Lama. These anecdotes reveal not only the multivalent utility Tsi'u dmar po offered to this Northern Treasures master, but it may suggest something about the Fifth Dalai Lama's own compositional motivations as well as encourage further observations on the engagement of oracles in Tibetan history and culture.

The Fifth Dalai Lama composed the *Wonderfully Arrayed Ocean* at 'Bras spungs Monastery in 1654. Nearly the first half of the work actually concerns the heritage and origins of the Northern Treasures tradition overall. The text spends considerable time on brief biographies of the first rDo rje brag rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can (1337–1409), as well as Legs ldan rdo rje and Ngag gi dbang po's father Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (d. 1603), who was considered a reincarnation of mNga' ris pañ chen. With Ngag gi dbang po being a reincarnation of the latter's brother, Legs ldan rdo rje, it seems fitting that my first vignette involves him and his engagement with the Tsi'u dmar po oracle. This encounter took place in 1568:

One time, [Legs ldan rdo rje] wanted to dispatch the great *yakṣa* (*gnod sbyin*) of bSam yas, Tsi dmar ba, in his gentle aspect, so he resided in meditative retreat at Mount Has po [outside bSam yas]. The Dharma protector was clairvoyantly aware of this and directly took possession of a person. The [Dharma protector] said, 'If soldiers gather at bSam yas's center and obstacles arise, [use] the power of your *samādhi* meditation.' Then [the oracle of] the Dharma protector fell back in a faint. Later, because [the oracle] was strained to the breaking point, [the Dharma protector] did not possess a person for a long time. At that time, the great master revealed himself directly and said in a displeased manner, 'I appointed [Tsi dmar ba] the guardian of [bSam yas] monastery, yet he is not acting like it!' Because of this, the great Dharma protector was freed from restraint and able to possess a person [once more].³

² See Macdonald 1978.

³ Tā la'i bla ma 05 2015, pp. 335-336: *skabs shig bsam yas kyi gnod sbyin chen po tsi dmar ba rgyud 'jam du gtong bar bzhed nas/ has po rir sku mtshams la bzhugs pas chos skyong gis mngon shes kyis rig nas mi'i khog la dngos su zhugs/ bsam yas mthil pa rnam dmag la bskul te bar chad byed par 'ongs pa na/ ting nge 'dzin gyi nus pas chos skyong gan rgyal du 'gyel/ slar ar la gtad pas yun ring po'i bar mi'i khog la 'jug rgyu ma byung / de'i tshes slob dpon chen pos dngos su zhal bstan nas/ ngas gtsug lag khang gi srung mar bskos pa*

It is clear who the boss is here, as Legs ldan rdo rje was not about to countenance Tsi'u dmar po's laxity, and the scene also gives us our first glimpse into the relationship between the deity and this incarnation line. The second vignette brings us to Legs ldan rdo rje's incarnation, Ngag gi dbang po himself, though the date in which this interaction took place is unclear. Five folios earlier we are told that the Tsi'u dmar po medium's name is Bla ma dpa' bo, which is mentioned here as well, but it seems this oracle of the deity is traveling with the master as he makes his way around eastern Tibet:

[Ngag gi dbang po] resided at a foothill pass where there was great concern over the Mongols. When he was performing the evening mending and restoring rites for his *samaya* oath, the *yakṣa* Tsi dmar ba's oracle, named Bla ma dpa' bo, that very night was surrounded by all the Dharma protectors and they completely [possessed] his body. Because of this, [the master] said, 'It must be that the attacks by the Mongolian troops will not happen.' [The Dharma protectors] replied, 'If you saw our omens and the manner in which most of us arrived, it is indeed so.'⁴

As with his warning to Legs ldan rdo rje, Tsi'u dmar po, and other protectors besides, are here through the vessel of his oracle to forecast the encroachment of Mongol troops in the area. The next, much longer vignette continues this trend and includes other miraculous omens as well. Since this episode is two folios long, I am summarizing events, while highlighting the interactions with the deity:⁵ Ngag gi dbang po and a group of his disciples were traveling to the area of Tre bo in the East to meet with the Tenth Kar ma pa Chos dbyings rdo rje (1604–1674), but they went the wrong way and ended up among an encampment of Mongolians who attacked them. As the skirmish was about to pick up, a black raven alighted on a nearby tent and sang melodious songs, causing the Mongolians to change their minds, put their faith in Ngag gi dbang po, and request blessings. With the help of these converted Mongolians, the master and his troupe made safe passage to a nearby monastery, and he recited the *Seven-Chapter*

la de 'dra ma byed ces mi dgyes pa'i rnam 'gyur mdzad pas/ bcings pa las bkrol te chos skyong chen po mi'i khog tu 'jug thub par gyur (sa 'brug 1568, 7th month, 10th evening).

⁴ Ibid, p. 387: *de nas sog dogs chen po yod pa'i la rtsa zhig tu bzhuḡs pa'i nub thugs dam bskang gso mdzad pa'i tshe gnod sbyin tsi dmar ba'i sku khog bla ma dpa' bo zer ba des/ do nub chos skyong thams cad sku la bskor nas khrig ge 'dug pas sog po'i dmag gi gnod pa mi 'ong ba 'dra zhus pa la/ nged rang gi mig ltas dang byings phebs lugs la bltas na de ka 'dug gsung.* Ibid, p. 377: *sku khog bla ma dpa' bo.*

⁵ Ibid, pp. 389-392.

*Prayer*⁶ for the monks there. One of the monks told him, "About a hundred Mongolians came down, crowded [like] a quiver, on this mountain face, [and] an ominous dark man hindered them, then vanished."⁷ Shortly after, at a nearby encampment, Ngag gi dbang po performed an extensive incense offering for Tsi'u dmar po and questioned his oracle about these auspicious omens. The oracle replied, "There was great danger at the mountain [shaped] like a three-legged hearth, so I came at that time – I was the raven, while the great dark man was Rāhula."⁸ Ngag gi dbang po then performed a thanksgiving feast for each of the Dharma protectors. He eventually arrived at Tre bo and sent a messenger to the Karma pa, but they were intercepted by Yang ri drung pa Kun dga' lhun grub, who was apparently a hypocritical and deceitful fellow. The Tsi'u dmar po oracle told Ngag gi dbang po, "Because this Yang ri drung pa is an emanation of the hindering spirit (*bdud*) Yag sher nag po, meeting with him will bring about obstructions and is dangerous to your life. You must perform the methods for subduing this opponent."⁹

With this lengthy episode, we see not only Tsi'u dmar po but the planetary deity (*gza'*) Rāhula make an appearance in different forms to quell or repel Mongolian threats. Even Machiavellian Tibetans prove equally dangerous here, and thus Tsi'u dmar po offers his mantic warnings to Ngag gi dbang po.

A fourth, likewise lengthy, vignette is also better served as a summary.¹⁰ Not long after his time in Tre bo, Ngag gi dbang po traveled to Mi nyag and met with people at a border-taming temple near bZhang ra lha rtse Mountain. The Tsi'u dmar po oracle asked those there three times, "Dar rtse mdo brethren, are you not about to break the golden yoke of China and Tibet?"¹¹ Then, after some discussion about quarreling in the area, he urgently requested of those assembled, "Then if about one day and night were to pass, [we] will not emerge from Dar rtse mdo. We must reach Ha ka and Ling tse, and the people of [Dar rtse] mdo must also go to relieve the troops of Ling tse. We

⁶ Tib. *gSol 'debs le'u bdun ma*.

⁷ Ibid, p. 390: *ri gdong 'di la sog po brgya tsam zhig sag thag rong nge babs byung ba mi smug yor re ba zhig gis bsgribs nas gar song ma byung gsung*.

⁸ Ibid, p. 391: *ri skyed po spun gsum 'dra ba ru nyen chen po yod/ de dus nga 'ong byas pa de pho rog de yin/ mi smug po chen po de ra hu la yin zhes gsungs pas*.

⁹ Ibid, p. 392: *nub cig gnod sbyin chen po khog tu zhugs nas/ yang ri drung pa 'di bdud yag sher nag po'i sprul pa yin pas de dang phrad pas tshe la bar chad byung nyen yod/ mi mthun phyogs zil gyis gnong pa'i thabs mdzad dgos tshul gsungs*.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 394-396.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 394: *gnod sbyin chen po khog tu zhugs nas/ dar rtse mdo ba'i a po tsho/ rgya bod gnyis kyi gser gyi gnya' shing chag la khad pa de e tshor zhes lan gsum gsungs pas*.

must go immediately."¹² It is the people of these regional locales, Ha ka and Ling tse, that seem to be at odds with one another, with those of Ha ka especially being the aggressors. At one point the oracle again speaks, quipping, "Dar rtse mdo brethren, troops or shoulders without a head are weak."¹³ In any case, it took Ngag gi dbang po showcasing his own magical ability before the Ha ka forces were cowed. The text states that he flew to the top of the Ha ka fortress and caused flames to blaze all around it. The two sides then fearfully agreed to resolve the matter and the dispute between Ha ka and Ling tse was ended. Here it is not Mongolians that are cause for unrest but a local dispute among Tibetans in Dar rtse mdo. And while Ngag gi dbang po forcefully ended the dispute with his own powers, it was Tsi'u dmar po through his oracle that galvanized this decision.

My long-time friend and colleague, Jay Valentine, brought the following and final vignette to my attention. We actually troubled over how best to read this passage three years ago, so I hope I have a better handle on it now than I did then. Here we find that Ngag gi dbang po has returned to bSam yas Monastery in Central Tibet at the invitation of sDe pa Brag kha ba, the regional leader.¹⁴ The sDe pa is not the most steadfast individual, as he had initially allowed Ngag gi dbang po and his followers to stay at the Kham gsum zangs mkhar gling Temple near the monastic complex, but he reneged on the advice of some underhanded bSam yas monks. Nevertheless, Ngag gi dbang po had a productive and memorable time; he spent a week in retreat with some disciples in the bSam yas mChims phu valley revealing treasures, he made offerings at each of the many temples of the monastery, and he performed a thanksgiving offering for Tsi'u dmar po. However, in an echo of the tense engagement Legs ldan rdo rje had with the deity in the sixteenth century, Ngag gi dbang po needed to press Tsi'u dmar po into service once more after his capricious nature got the better of him. This event took place in 1618, one of the few times we're given a solid date.¹⁵ It seems the wife of bSam yas's sDe pa was seriously injured by Tsi'u dmar po, so they requested Ngag gi dbang po to intervene. The master at first frightened the sDe pa with his clairvoyant diagnosis, stating, "When you affixed to your threshold a *cakra* for severing the king [spirit's] path, the Great Dharma protector [Tsi'u dmar po] became enraged. In addition to god and man meeting

¹² Ibid, p. 395: *de nas zhag gcig tsam song ba na dar rtse mdo nas mi byung ste/ha ka dang ling tse gnyis thug mdo pa rnams kyang ling tse'i dmag rogs la 'gro dgos pa byung.*

¹³ Ibid, p. 395: *gnod sbyin pa khog tu zhugs tel dar rtse mdo pa'i a po tsho/ mgo med kyi dpung pa rong rong de e mthong zer bas.* I think reading the word *dpung ba* as either troops or shoulders works quite well here as a double entendre.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 408.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 409: *sa pho rta* (1618).

at the Pe har Chapel (*sPe dkar lcog*),¹⁶ whatever empowerment [I might perform] – [like] me eating my own flesh or drinking my own blood – would not suffice. If you're afraid, I will guide you to the divine abode of the thirty-three gods once you are free of your physical form."¹⁷ He then explained his plan, "I am one who acts for the benefit of sentient beings, and I must [now] bind the guardian deity. You are harming not only the ordinary kinds of mischievous spirits (*rgyal 'gong*), great and small, but also the guardians of the teachings – don't do this."¹⁸ What follows is a fascinating battle of wills between god and man, with Ngag gi dbang po subjugating Tsi'u dmar po while brandishing a *vajra*. This scattered the Dharma protector to the sky, but he remained tempestuous and unpacified, and there was a roaring clap of thunder. Ngag gi dbang po then threatened the deity, exclaiming, "If you were frightening, you would be able to knock down an elm tree trunk to obstruct my house. [But] if I'm frightening, I would be able to knock down a great prayer flagstaff to obstruct your chapel."¹⁹ He then performed a weapon *gtor ma* [dough offering] rite for Rāhula (*Khyab 'jug*),²⁰ creating a great whirlwind and breaking that flagstaff at the Pe har Chapel, like he said he would. In hopes of settling the matter, though, the sDe pa invited Ngag gi dbang po to the Pe har Chapel to reintegrate his *samaya* oath with the deity. The ceremony was a success, but not without a final insult from Ngag gi dbang po. He performed a supplication rite for the deity gNyan chen thang lha, and stated severely to Tsi'u dmar po, "Since the [position of] local protector for this place was entrusted to [gNyan chen] thang lha, you do not need to do this. Padmasambhava said that in the future [gNyan chen] thang lha would act [as such]."²¹ He then added, "Your life essence belongs

¹⁶ This refers to the Pe har dkor mdzod gling chapel in bSam yas monastery, which houses the protector deity Pe har as well as Tsi'u dmar po. Images of the two deities are still visible on the chapel's main shrine room today.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 416: *rā dza rgyu lam gcod pa'i 'khor lo sgo la sbyar ba nal chos skyong chen po thugs khros te sbe dkar lcog tu lha mi 'dzom thog tu/ nga rang sha rang gis za/ rang khrag rang gis 'thung dbang mi 'ong ba ci yin/ khyod 'jigs na nga lus rten 'di las phrol nas lha gnas sum cu rtsa gsum du skyol dang sogs 'jigs 'jigs mang du gsung ba.*

¹⁸ Ibid: *nga sems can gyi don byed mkhan yin pa la srung ba ni 'dogs dgos byung / rgyal 'gong phra rags dkyus ma'i rigs ma gtogs khyed bstan srung rnam la gnod pa ni ma byas sogs 'jam pa'i sgo nas gsungs.*

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 416-417: *khyod 'jigs na nga'i gnas tshang 'gag gi khu 'brog sdong po 'di bskyel thub pa gyis/ nga 'jigs na khyod kyi btsan khang 'gag gi dar po che 'di bskyel thub pa byed gsungs.*

²⁰ See Bailey 2015, p. 43. I am grateful to Stéphane Arguillère for bringing this rite's connection to Rāhula to my attention.

²¹ This is in contrast to Legs ldan rdo rje reasserting Tsi'u dmar po's appointment earlier. For more on gNyan chen thang lha, see Wang 2023 (in this volume).

to me, mine does not belong to you!"²² In the end, he implemented a subjugating *mudrā*, reintegrated his *samaya* oath with the wayward protector, and restrained him by placing a *vajra* on Tsi'u dmar po's head.

This last vignette nicely bookends the relationship between this incarnate treasure master and Tsi'u dmar po, with both the first and last interactions taking place at bSam yas. Fifty years prior, in his preincarnation as Legs ldan rdo rje, he had to keep the deity in check so that he continued to hold his office properly. As Ngag gi dbang po this relationship continued, with the master stressing his control over the protector even in his most capricious moments. Regardless, over the course of the master's travels and his own magical exploits, he consulted Tsi'u dmar po several times through his oracle, who clearly traveled across Tibet with him. The various anecdotal examples I have shared or summarized show how Tsi'u dmar po was consistently entreated for prophetic and clairvoyant advice in response to enemies both foreign and domestic, whether in converting or repelling Mongol forces, resolving disputes between competing factions, or contending with manipulative statesmen and ignorant local leaders.

Having become famous in his final years as an army-averting ritual specialist, Ngag gi dbang po relied on Tsi'u dmar po not only to guard the Northern Treasures lineage, as indicated by his ritual corpus, but the whole of Tibet during such a fraught and uncertain time. This reliance on both treasure prophecy and the influential pronouncements of the Tsi'u dmar po oracle at the turn of the seventeenth century in many ways acts as a harbinger for similar mechanisms the Fifth Dalai Lama would use later during the consolidation of Tibet when he promoted the protector Pe har, who possesses the gNas chung Oracle and who is likewise steeped in Northern Treasures lore. However, in this narrative Tsi'u dmar po precedes this development in significant ways; he is a demon king conquering a fractured land rather than one ruling through a centralized government.

In his masterful study of the life, writings, and legacy of the rNying ma master and more famous Mongol-repeller, Sog bzlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624), James Gentry focuses on objects of power in this figure's works and activities. He happens to give the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Wonderfully Arrayed Ocean* due attention through this lens,²³

²² Ibid, p. 417: *de'i tshang lha'i gsol ka mdzad nas 'di'i gnas srung thang lha la bcol bas khyod rang byed mi dgos/ o rgyan rin po ches ma 'ongs pa na thang lhas byed par gsungs yod ces pa dang / khyod kyi srog snying nga la yod/ nga'i srog snying khyod la med ces babs lci ba'i gsung.*

²³ See Gentry 2013, pp. 449-476; see also Gentry 2016 for the official publication of this work.

since the text is partly an apologia on the superiority of Ngag gi dbang po's treasure and ritual activities in contradistinction to Sog bzlog pa, who the Great Fifth considered a harmful charlatan. Sog bzlog pa is even mentioned a few times near the end of Ngag gi dbang po's biography in this contrasting manner.²⁴ The text reads as a triumph of the Northern Treasures tradition over the alternative heterodox tradition of Sog bzlog pa and his lineage, which had been supported by the dGe lugs pa's enemies in gTsang. In fact, it is telling that in 1654, the year that the Fifth Dalai Lama composed this biography, his government also forcefully converted Nges gsang rdo rje gling, the lineage monastery in gTsang tied to Sog bzlog pa's master, Zhig po gling pa, into a more Northern Treasures-oriented center.²⁵ The Great Fifth likewise composed the core liturgical manual for gNas chung Monastery around this time,²⁶ and it is easy to see in the incarnational relationship between Ngag gi dbang po the ritual master and Tsi'u dmar po the oracular god a reflective precursor to the bond between the Dalai Lama and the gNas chung Oracle as it would become institutionalized from the mid-seventeenth century onward. By this time the Great Fifth had been in power for more than a decade, and he clearly spent that time consolidating ritual hegemony in Tibet as well as building and promoting his administration's narrative architecture.²⁷

For my concluding observation, I want to draw on Gentry's larger project of exploring and emphasizing the materiality of ritual practice. He does an excellent job of examining the various sensory and material objects of visions, mantras, amulets, pills, initiation substances, as well as instruments for repelling enemies, quelling natural disasters, and controlling the material world, but I submit that oracles should be added to this list and explored more historically as well as within the framework of the material turn. The attire, hand implements, and blessed objects of oracles come readily to mind in this regard, and there is robust anthropological literature that discusses these, but the oracular vessel, the body and voice of the medium, can also be discussed as objects. Their clairvoyance and prophecy are as much a sensory object as the visionary experiences of masters, along with the physical omens that sometimes precede or accompany them, such as miraculous birds, disappearing dark men, and claps of thunder. In this regard, I am particularly inspired by Gentry's use of Alfred Gell's notion of 'distributed personhood,' where "the identities and agencies of deities, persons, and power objects can extend beyond corporate

²⁴ See Gentry 2013, pp. 411-413, 430-431.

²⁵ See *ibid*, pp. 466-468.

²⁶ See Bell 2021, pp. 75-76.

²⁷ See Bell 2021.

boundaries into the locales, objects, texts, and social others – past, present, and future – with which they are thought to share structural similarities, direct resemblances, adjacent boundaries, or physical incorporation.”²⁸

The anthropologist Wei-Ping Lin, in her book *Materializing Magic Power*, likewise draws on material studies and object-agency networks by examining the localization of deities through statues and spirit mediums in Taiwan. She is much more explicit about examining oracles through the lens of materiality, especially in how they embody, interact with, and adapt to the expectations of deities and the demands placed upon them.²⁹ Both studies provide excellent models and approaches to apply to the context of Tibetan oracles. Tsi'u dmar po, through the vignettes discussed above, provides a brief but vivid case study that evinces the interplay between powerful masters, wrathful protectors, and the histories and localities impacted by the ritual engagement and prophetic activities of an oracle's personhood being distributed across Tibetan communities and in the face of encroaching enemies and social unrest. And it is Ngag gi dbang po's active, if stern, support of this Great *Yakṣa* that helps to advance the power and reputation of the Northern Treasures at the start of the seventeenth century.

In my previous article on Tsi'u dmar po for the first Northern Treasures special edition of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, I appended to the discussion of the deity a complete translation of his root tantra, the *Warlord's Tantra* (*dMag dpon gyi rgyud*).³⁰ It seems only fitting, as a “spiritual” sequel to that discussion, to append to this article a translation of the accompanying *sādhanas* for that tantra, all included in the same manuscript.³¹ Like the *Warlord's Tantra*, these *sādhanas* are treasure texts rediscovered by the foundational treasure master mNga' ris paṅ chen, Legs Idan rdo rje's brother.³² They are particularly pertinent to this concluding discussion of materiality because they predominantly concern the construction of various consecrated objects for housing or summoning Tsi'u dmar po and the team of seven spirit horsemen he leads, called the Seven Unruly Riders (*Ya ba rkya bdun*). One of the below texts even has suggestive references to a Tsi'u dmar po oracle at bSam yas.

The first of the five accompanying *sādhanas* consists of two short preliminary rites, the first of which names and describes the

²⁸ See Gentry 2013, pp. 436-437.

²⁹ See Lin 2015, pp. 71-72.

³⁰ See Bell 2022, specifically pp. 174-186.

³¹ For an earlier rough translation of these accompanying *sādhanas*, see Bell 2006, pp. 164-179.

³² See Padma dbang rgyal 1976.

seven she-wolves that accompany the Seven Unruly Riders. The second preliminary text provides instructions for drawing Tsi'u dmar po's life *cakra*. The second *sādhana* is the most interesting for being the most detailed in terms of the material objects constructed and consecrated. Described as four scrolls, the first gives liquid libations, the second consecrates a sacred stone and whip, the third elaborates on the nature of the life stone and a model of the martial spirit fortress, and the fourth scroll instructs one on how to create powerful spear and lasso objects that bring success in battle. The text ends on the severity of its secrecy and the importance of its transmission being tied to the lineage of Khri srong lde'u btsan. These scrolls also seem to have been proffered by a Tsi'u dmar po oracle at bSam yas Monastery. Even if anachronistic, it suggests the importance of oracular transmission by the sixteenth century. The third *sādhana* is mostly in seven-syllable verses and focuses on the Seven Unruly Riders. The fourth *sādhana* provides an extensive invocation in verse before describing a mythic conversation between Padmasambhava and Tsi'u dmar po on the deity's heritage. The fifth and final *sādhana* concerns passing the transmission of these works onto one's disciples and making sure the material offerings are properly entrusted. It reinforces the creation of a *gtor ma* fortress offering as well. After a brief outline, a full translation of the *Warlord's Tantra's* accompanying *sādhanas* is provided below:

The Warlord's Tantra's Accompanying Sādhanas (312.3-332)

A. Preliminaries

1. *Sending Forth the Dogs of the Martial Spirits [known as] the Seven Unruly Riders (312.3-314.3)*
2. *Drawing the Cakra (314.3-315.2)*

B. The Great Capricious Spirit Sādhana Cycle Based on the Outer Offerings (315.2-320.1)

1. *a. Introduction: The Four Scrolls (315.2-315.4)*
b. First Scroll: The Outer Offerings (315.4-315.6)
2. *Second Scroll: The Inner Cane Whip (315.6-316.4)*
3. *Third Scroll: The Secret Life Stone and Life Cakra (316.4-317.3)*
4. *a. Fourth Scroll: The Ultimate Red Spear and Lasso (317.3-318.3)*
b. The Extremely Secret Text (318.3-319.6)
Colophon (319.6-320.1)

C. Sādhana of the Capricious Spirit Offerings (320.1-322.6)

D. Invocation and History of the Capricious Spirit (322.6-328.5)

E. The Treasure of Mighty Lotus [Hayagrīva] Entrusting the Warlord's Life Force (328.5-332)

The Warlord's Tantra's Accompanying Sādhanas (312.3-332)**A. Preliminaries***1. Sending Forth the Dogs of the Martial Spirits [known as] the Seven Unruly Riders (312.3-314.3)³³*

BHYO!³⁴ The bitch Dung mdog mtshal mig ma³⁵ emits from her mouth the poisonous vapors of the planetary spirits (*gza'*). She hastens when she smells the odor of human flesh and blood. She who snatches the enemy's breath at daybreak drinks the enemy's life breath in gulps. She who follows after Lha btsan dkar po,³⁶ run, run, run now! Sic,³⁷ sic! Send forth fits of madness upon the enemy! The time has come for the blazing lightning wolf!³⁸

BHYO! The bitch dMar mo mtshal mig ma³⁹ opens her mouth and bares copper fangs. A fog of disease foams at her mouth. She who fetches the previously received breath of the enemy drinks the warm brain blood of the [oath-]breakers. She who follows after Brag btsan dmar po,⁴⁰ run, run, run now! Sic, sic! Drink the brains of the enemy! The time has come for the red copper wolf!

BHYO! The bitch dMar nag khrag mig ma⁴¹ gathers her poisonous breath like clouds. She bares her iron fangs and claws like weapons. [She who] steals the enemy's life-force at midnight drinks the oath-breaker's life-force in gulps. She who follows after Klu btsan dmar po,⁴² run, run, run now! Run now, bloody she-wolf! Sic, sic! Cut down the enemy's lifeline! The time has come for the red blood wolf!

BHYO! The bitch dMar mo mthing mig ma⁴³ opens her mouth, bares her fangs, and vomits warm blood. She senses the smell of blood

³³ This title is preceded by small images, possibly of bones in a specific configuration as well as entrails, and is followed by a small image of a blazing heart.

³⁴ This is an untranslatable and powerful seed syllable, and such syllables will be left untranslated below.

³⁵ Lit. "Conch Shell-colored Bloody-eyed Female."

³⁶ Lit. "White God-Martial Spirit." In my article, "Tsi'u dmar po: How a Northern Treasure God Became Ecumenical," I provided this and the next five martial spirits' names as direct translations (Bell 2022, p. 179); I choose here to keep them as names proper in the text to be consistent with the later encounter we will have with these deities below.

³⁷ Tib. *phyo*. I translate this word here with the expression often emphatically said to set a dog on someone.

³⁸ Tib. *lcam*; read as a misspelling of *spyang*, as per the repeated instances below.

³⁹ Lit. "Red Bloody-eyed Female."

⁴⁰ Lit. "Cliff-Martial Spirit."

⁴¹ Lit. "Dark Red Bloody-eyed Female."

⁴² Lit. "Red Serpent-Martial Spirit."

⁴³ Lit. "Red Azure-eyed Female."

a league away. She who tracks down the enemy and snatches their breath drinks their warm heart blood in gulps. She who follows after Grib btsan dmar po,⁴⁴ run, run(, run now)!⁴⁵ Run now, red she[-wolf] dripping with blood!⁴⁶ Sic, sic! Drink the enemy's warm blood! The time has come for the red blood-dripping she[-wolf]!

BHYO! The bitch dMar mo gzi mig ma⁴⁷ opens her mouth and howls "Ooo!" to the ten directions. A leather pouch of diseases is bound to her neck. She who snatches the enemy's breath in the evening sends out plagues to the oath-breaking enemies. She who follows after bDud btsan nag po,⁴⁸ run(, run, run now)! Run now, great iron she-wolf! Sic, sic! Send plagues to the enemy! The time has come for the radiant iron wolf!

BHYO! The bitch dMar mo gzi mig ma⁴⁹ opens her mouth, bares her fangs, and smells the odor of blood. A bloody mane gathers [about her head] like a cloud. She who slashes the enemy's neck and snatches their breath drinks the [oath-]breaker's heart blood in gulps. She who follows after Gri btsan dmar po,⁵⁰ run(, run, run now)! Run now, great radiant she[-wolf]! Sic, sic! Seize the enemy's heart! The time has come for the red radiant she[-wolf]!

Say "Sic, sic, sic, sic, sic, sic!" twenty-one times. ŚUBHAM!⁵¹

⁴⁴ Lit. "Red Polluting-Martial Spirit." Padma dbang rgyal 1985 (p. 7.4) has Grib btsan dpal thogs, while Padma dbang rgyal 1976 (p. 313.4) has Gri btsan dmar po. Although the order is unclear, the former spelling, with *grib*, is likely the equivalent of this figure, since the sixth martial spirit below is also spelled Gri btsan dmar po, and correlates to Padma dbang rgyal 1985. Thus, I read this name as Grib btsan dmar po.

⁴⁵ Three small lines following *rgyugs shig rgyugs shig* ("run, run") act as ellipses, indicating that the reader is to complete this command with how it has previously been done, with *da rgyugs shig* ("run now!"); this saves space and is a common feature in ritual texts where commands and actions are often duplicated and formulaic, as this section illustrates.

⁴⁶ Tib. *khrag 'dzag dmar mod rgyugs shig*. The Tibetan is somewhat obscure at this point. While the text reads it as *dmar mod*, based on the commands that end the previous section on dMar nag khrag mig ma (*khrag gi spyang mo da rgyugs shig*) and in the following sections – as well as the consistent pattern of seven-syllable verses – there is good reason to believe that the verse is missing a *tsheg* and should in fact say *khrag 'dzag dmar mo da rgyugs shig*. I have translated the line according to this reading. However, if the line were translated as is, it would still make a degree of sense: "Run the instant the red blood drips!"

⁴⁷ Lit. "Red gzi-eyed Female." *gZi*, while often translated as agate or onyx, is a distinctly cylindrical black-and-white striped stone unique to Central Asia and considered to possess auspicious and protective attributes.

⁴⁸ Lit. "Black Hindering-Martial Spirit."

⁴⁹ Lit. "Red gzi-eyed Female." This is the same name as the previous she-wolf, and while an alternative spelling is likely, it is unknown.

⁵⁰ Lit. "Red Knife-Martial Spirit." See note 44 above.

⁵¹ Sanskrit for "splendid, auspicious, fortunate, righteous."

2. *Drawing the Cakra* (314.3-315.2)

Regarding the way to draw and encircle [Tsi'u dmar po's] *cakra* according to this [manuscript's] illustrations: ⁵² Below the CARATHAM⁵³ at the center, write, "SAMAYA RAKṢA RAKṢA⁵⁴ HŪM⁵⁵ HŪM PHAṬ.⁵⁶ You, great capricious spirit (*gnod sbyin*; skt. *yakṣa*) Tsi'u dmar po, reside firmly in this vessel without transgressing the commands of master Padma[sambhava]! Then obtain for me, the yogin, excellent provisions in this and all future lives! May all outer, inner, and secret connections continuously and effortlessly be arranged! Dispel adverse conditions! Establish amicable conditions! May your magic against hostile enemies not be meager! May your might against harmful obstructing spirits (*bgegs*) not be feeble! May you accomplish the [enlightened] activities of the four actions unimpeded!"⁵⁷

For the remarks on the [wheel] spoke, write, "Great capricious spirit, do not transgress the commands of master Padma[sambhava]!" On the circumference, below the JA JAḤ⁵⁸ AM, write the mantras written at the center, such as KĀYAVAJRACARATHAM,⁵⁹ along with additional verses. On whatever colored areas are not covered with words, you may put down [words of] praise. ŚUBHAM!

⁵² No such illustrations are included in this edition of the text, though, presumably they were in other non-extant editions.

⁵³ Tib. *tsa ra thang*; the suffix of *thang* (*nga*), I read here as an *anusvāra* in Sanskrit; thus, *caratham* is Sanskrit for "moving, wandering, going."

⁵⁴ Sanskrit for "protect, protect the commitment oath."

⁵⁵ Sanskrit for "absorb;" see Beyer 1973, p. 101.

⁵⁶ This syllable encapsulates knowledge and means.

⁵⁷ Tib. *las bzhi*; 1. pacification (*zhi ba*), 2. augmentation (*rgyas pa*), 3. subjugation (*dbang*), and 4. destruction (*drag po*).

⁵⁸ Sanskrit for "summon;" see Beyer 1973, p. 101.

⁵⁹ The complete mantra is: OM KĀYAVAJRACARATHAM. VĀGAVAJRACARATHAM. CITTAVAJRACARATHAM. This is Sanskrit for "The moving adamant assembly. The moving adamant hero. The moving adamant heart." This is provided in chapter four of Tsi'u dmar po's root tantra; see Bell 2022, p. 182.

***B. The Great Capricious Spirit Sādhana Cycle
Based on the Outer Offerings (315.2-320.1)***

1a. Introduction: The Four Scrolls (315.2-315.4)

*The Great Capricious Spirit Sādhana Cycle Based on the Outer Offerings
SAMAYA.⁶⁰*

Homage to Glorious Hayagrīva!

The capricious spirits known as the Seven Emanating Riders⁶¹ give in offering their own life forces and blazing hearts. By means of the outer offerings, the oath-bound [protectors] gather like clouds; by means of the inner cane whip, the oath-bound [protectors] follow like dogs; by means of the secret life stone and life *cakra*, the oath-bound [protectors] are lured like children; and by means of the ultimate red spear and lasso, the enemies and obstructing spirits are utterly struck down. These are the four scrolls – these are the profound pieces of the heart.

1b. First Scroll: The Outer Offerings (315.4-315.6)

First, regarding the basis of the [outer] offerings, bless pure golden and turquoise libations and pure foods with the six mantras and six *mudrās* for the [spirit's] image. When the arrogant ones are invited and venerated, how will all the necessary actions be achieved? If they mourn their strife with the gods, it is authentic, and they will become faithful. Practice together and it will be profound. SAMAYA. Seal! Seal! Seal!⁶²

2. Second Scroll: The Inner Cane Whip (315.6-316.4)

Second, [regarding the basis of the inner] cane whip, anoint a red scarf or red birch bark with red sandalwood paste in the middle of the third or seventh verse. Properly draw a life *cakra* with the blood of a grown man who had an untimely death. Along with a cubic stone of magnetite that has TRI⁶³ written on it in blood, place [these items] into

⁶⁰ This title is contained within the image of a blazing heart acting as a visual offering. The text itself is then prefaced by unintelligible *dākinī* script that looks in Tibetan something like *shakhajanya*.

⁶¹ Tib. *rol pa rkya bdun*; this is an alternative name for the Seven Unruly Riders (*yan pa rkya bdun*).

⁶² Tib. *rgya rgya rgya*.

⁶³ Sanskrit for “three.”

a pit and tightly bind the opening with sealing wax. Fasten a whip cord of five-colored silk to a copper ring and set it on a cushion.

Once the capricious spirits are invited and absorbed [into the items] again and again, and the choicest portions and offering *gtor ma* are produced, the oath-bound [protectors] are bound to you wherever you go, and they will follow like dogs. Whatever actions are entrusted to them, they will accomplish without obstruction.

Thus, the second step that explains their life and heart is completed. SAMAYA. Seal! Seal! Seal!

3. *Third Scroll: The Secret Life Stone and Life Cakra* (316.4-317.3)

Homage to Glorious Hayagrīva!

[Third,] regarding the basis of the secret life stone – the essence of which the oath-bound [protectors] are lured to like children – on the west side of one's meditation house, knead together red earth taken from the land where the martial spirits (*btsan*) dwell and bloody water [mixed with] the clay visible on the southern face of a spring. Then coat it with the powder of the five precious things⁶⁴ and fragrant incense.

[Build] an arrow-length martial spirit fortress⁶⁵ supported by a life tree of juniper or barberry, with red pennons on its peak. On its life tree, in accordance with the secret tantra, combine into a paste the blood from someone who died violently, vermillion, and red sandalwood, and draw the life stone mantra *cakra* on a red scarf or red birch bark. On a cubic stone, a drop of gold ore, and an eyeless [unblemished?] turquoise, draw seven T[R]I with vermillion, then wrap them in strips of silk and conceal them [in the fortress].

The oath-bound [protectors] having been summoned, placed, and venerated in the [fortress], recite the life and heart [mantra] many times and perform the consecration with the *Essence of Dependent Origination* [*Dhāraṇī*]. Once completed, like a puppy attached to its mother, the [martial spirits] will act to constantly protect the palace temple and the land.

Thus, the third step – the essence of the oral instructions for offering their oath and the core of their life – is completed. SAMAYA. Seal! Seal! Seal!

⁶⁴ Tib. *rin chen sna lnga*; 1. gold (*gser*), 2. silver (*dngul*), 3. turquoise (*g.yu*), 4. coral (*byu ru*), and 5. pearl (*mu tig*).

⁶⁵ Tib. *btsan mkhar*; while this can often refer to a thread-cross structure or a spear-filled mountain altar (*lab rtse*), here it likely refers to a model constructed from the mixed clay.

4a. *Fourth Scroll: The Ultimate Red Spear and Lasso* (317.3-318.3)

Homage to Glorious Hayagrīva!

[Fourth,] regarding the basis of the [ultimate] red spear and lasso – the method for utterly striking down the oath-breakers, enemies, and obstructing spirit – on a red boulder, draw a man's bamboo, pine, or cane whip an arm span in length, the tip of an iron blade, and a tailless [being]. Fasten it with copper spikes and redden it with blood from someone who died violently as well as vermillion, then apply good quality tinder grass. Within that, write the life *cakra* and [verses] derived from the tantras with blood from someone who died violently as well as vermillion.

Recite the following: "I pray that you accompany me, like a shadow its body, and utterly strike down hostile enemies for me! SAMAYA. Seal! Seal! Seal!" Then write the glorious Hayagrīva mantra on the upper part of a spear. On the lower part of the spear, write the three words, "Beckon, Dispatch, Slay!" Write "TRI" and summarize the life stone *cakra* on the surface of a cubic stone, wrap it in human skin, and [place it] inside the iron spear.

On a banner of red silk, draw the life *cakra*. Then [draw] the form of Hayagrīva above it and the form of the oath-bound [protector (Tsi'u dmar po)] encircled by the eight classes [of gods and spirits] below it. Complete once ten million [recitations of] the accomplishing the enthronement or approaching Glorious Hayagrīva [mantras]. Along with that, simultaneously anoint with blood and vermillion a lasso made from the hair of a hero who died in battle, then consecrate it.

If you diligently [produce these] fulfillment offerings and carry them to wherever [you need them], you will be victorious after every battle and the opposing army will be defeated.

4b. *The Extremely Secret Text* (318.3-319.6)

This is extremely secret. Properly guard the teachings of U rgyan Padma[sambhava] and do not entrust them in the hands of anyone not in the royal lineage of Khri srong lde'u btsan or it will turn back on them later. Even if [the teachings] were followed by others, though their children and wealth would increase in the short term, in the end they will suddenly come to ruin, such as quarrels and untimely deaths. Therefore, this must be kept secret.

In order to protect the royal lineage, I, O rgyan [Padmasambhava], placed these scrolls in a leather manual. Then, as the guardian of the teachings of Glorious Hayagrīva, I hid them within the eye of the

Vairocana [statue] at the temple of bSam yas Monastery, Mount mChims phu.

In the final age, a day will come when the Dharma king will be brought down to the common folk. At that time, the capricious spirit's eight classes of arrogant [gods and spirits] will manifest and speak the language of the red-colored *vidyādhara*s of the lotus family and the language of horses. They will fiercely roar and make beautiful appearances. They will be accepted by one accomplished in my – Padma[sambhava's] – compassionate wisdom. Thus, if properly established, [the capricious spirits] will protect the Dharma king and his retinue, and they will restore ruined monasteries.

This was taught at the time to both King Khri srong lde'u btsan and Ngan lam rGyal ba mchog dbyangs.⁶⁶ SAMAYA. Seal! Seal! Seal! I cast as the seal a plague spirit (*gnyan*) of the eight classes of arrogant [gods and spirits].

The capricious spirit [Tsi'u dmar po] directly bestowed this [text] while [I (Padmasambhava) was performing] the Hayagrīva accomplishment inside the Hayagrīva Cave at Mount mChims phu. I secretly hid it until the ox [year]. From dusk until midnight on the twenty-ninth day of the fifth month of the ox year, [Tsi'u dmar po] directly⁶⁷ manifested in the room above the eastern entrance to bSam yas Monastery's central temple⁶⁸ and spoke like a person. On the first day of the sixth month, I reflected on [if what was said] was similar to what was bestowed in writing. On the second day, I confidently and intrinsically recognized that [the text] was written like his oral instructions. This must be kept secret.

Colophon (319.6-320.1)

This was revealed from a treasure [text] by mNga' ris Paṅ chen Padma [dbang] rgyal po ye shes rol pa rtsal.

⁶⁶ 8th century. This was a major disciple of Padmasambhava and one of the first seven monks ordained at bSam yas Monastery; see Sørensen et al., p. 605, n.64. It is also believed, in the bKa' bryad context especially, that he was the one who received the transmission for the Hayagrīva-related corpus; I am grateful to Stéphane Arguillère for bringing this to my attention.

⁶⁷ Tib. *sku dngos su*; this could also be translated as "in person" or "in a physical embodiment," which may have oracular implications.

⁶⁸ Tib. *dbu tshal*; read as a misspelling of *dbu rtse*.

C. Sādhana of the Capricious Spirit Offerings (320.1-322.6)

*The Sādhana of the Capricious Spirit Offerings*⁶⁹

HRĪḤ PADMACAṄḌAMAHAĀKROTAHAYAGRĪVA⁷⁰ HULU
HULU⁷¹ HŪṂ PHAṬ.

Properly display and consecrate the offering *gtor ma*. Regarding the practice manual for the Seven Emanating Riders, the arrogant ones are conventional and do not need to be visualized. Having mentally constructed red rays of light [emanating] like iron hooks from the syllable on the luminous heart of the Great Lord Hayagrīva, one invites [the martial spirits] from each of their abodes. Burn incense and butter flour, and fan it with a red scarf. Cry out with an anguished roar:

KYAI!

In those many places over there,
in the direction of the setting sun over there,
on the red plains, the copper land of the martial spirits,
obey the words of the Mighty Lotus [Hayagrīva].
The great and powerful Seven Emanating Riders
have bodies mostly red in color and
brandish banners and lassos in their hands.
Together with the horde of the eight classes of arrogant [gods
and spirits]
They come hither and go thither and arrive at this place.
ŚULATRIVAJRASAMAYA⁷² JAḤ JAḤ.

BHYOḤ!

Within the martial spirit fortress,
the enjoyment of flesh and blood is inconceivable,
the pleasing offerings are utterly beautiful,
And [the martial spirits] sit on the throne of pure *samaya*
together with ŚULATRISAMAYATIṢṬHA.⁷³

⁶⁹ This title surrounds a smaller image of a blazing heart with other visually represented offerings nearby, possibly of entrails and bones. The text is again prefaced by unintelligible ḍākinī script that looks in Tibetan something like *zhardam thambya ratya nyla*.

⁷⁰ Sanskrit for "The Fierce Lotus, Great Wrathful Hayagrīva." Note that here, as elsewhere, the Tibetan transliteration is not exactly accurate to proper Sanskrit spelling. I let it sit because language is fluid, and because the Tibetan understanding of Sanskrit is its own language.

⁷¹ This repetitive expression represents an exclamation of joy in Sanskrit.

⁷² Sanskrit for "the oath of the trident, the three-pronged vajra."

⁷³ Sanskrit for "stand [with] the oath of the trident."

KYAI!

The noble Seven Emanating Riders
 carry out [all] conceivable enlightened activities
 and obey the words of the Mighty Lotus [Hayagrīva].
 Praise to you, oath[-bound] treasure lords,
 I offer these pure [image] ablutions.
 Toward myself and your patrons
 act completely with compassion!
 ARGHAM⁷⁴ VIŚUDDHE⁷⁵ SVĀHĀ.⁷⁶

Pure incense gathers like clouds.
 I offer flowers, [butter] lamps, perfumed water,
 offering foods, and pleasant music.
 Act completely with compassion!
 DHŪPE⁷⁷ PUṢPE⁷⁸ ĀLOKE⁷⁹ GHANDHE⁸⁰ NIVIDYE⁸¹
 ŚAPDAPŪJA⁸² HOḤ.⁸³

KYAI!

The noble lords of life,
 the terrifying Emanating Seven [Riders] gather.
 The sacred substances that please you
 are piled into little dough balls of red flesh and blood.
 The immaculate nectar [of immortality] pools like an ocean.
 An oblation of RAKTA⁸⁴ fills a pond.
 The enjoyment offerings are arranged like the stars.
 The drums, flutes, and cymbals boom like thunder,
 accompanied by a multitude of melodious songs.
 May the *samaya* oaths of the seven oath-bound brothers be
 fulfilled.
 May the *samaya* oaths of the wild, blazing martial spirits be
 fulfilled.

⁷⁴ Sanskrit for "water offering."

⁷⁵ Sanskrit for "completely purified."

⁷⁶ Sanskrit for "hail!" This is an exclamation used for oblations to deities.

⁷⁷ Sanskrit for "incense."

⁷⁸ Sanskrit for "flowers."

⁷⁹ Sanskrit for "light."

⁸⁰ Sanskrit for "perfumed substance."

⁸¹ Sanskrit for "food offering." I am grateful to Cécile Ducher for clarification on argham as well as n(a)ividyē.

⁸² Sanskrit for "sound offering [music]."

⁸³ Sanskrit for "dissolve;" see Beyer 1973, p. 101.

⁸⁴ Sanskrit for "blood, red."

[May the *samaya* oaths] of the eight classes [of gods and spirits] and their thousandfold companions [be fulfilled].⁸⁵
 [May the *samaya* oaths] of the temple-guarding oath-bound [protectors be fulfilled].
 May the *samaya* oaths of the emissaries of the four actions [be fulfilled].

BHYO!

The red fortress leather shifts and sways.⁸⁶
 The red silk pennons flutter and wave.⁸⁷
 The red banners billow out.⁸⁸
 The arrogant ones' flying arrows rise up high.⁸⁹
 The butcher minions chop and cut.⁹⁰
 Their whistling calls buzz and ring.⁹¹

BHYO!

May the *samaya* oaths of the majestic lords be fulfilled.
 In the presence of master Padma[sambhava]
 they undertook and understood the *samaya* oath.
 The royal lineage of Khri srong lde'u btsan,
 together with the transmission of the *samaya*-keeping yogins,
 they protect as one *samaya* oath.
 Cut off the lineages that harm their bodies.
 Annihilate the horde of hindering spirits (*bdud*) with wrong views.
 Do not transgress the adamant vow of the tantric adepts.
 You are entrusted [with the vow]! Take care of [the vow]! You
 who are endowed with power and strength,
 do not carelessly wax and wane [in your commitment]!
 Do not chase after flattery or food!
 [If] you are unsatisfied, we will remedy it, so

⁸⁵ Three small lines here following *sde brgyad stong zla* ("the eight classes [of gods and spirits] and their thousandfold companions") act as indicators that the reader is meant to complete this verse the same as the previous verses, with *thugs dam bskang* ("May the *samaya* oaths...be fulfilled").

⁸⁶ These six verses illustrate a Tibetan onomatopoeic device where each line ends with a word duplication that dynamically illustrates the sound while simultaneously conveying its meaning; in this case *ldems se ldem*, "swaying side to side." These readings are aided by, but vary at points, from John Bellezza's translation of a variant edition of this text; see Bellezza 2005, p. 290.

⁸⁷ Tib. *pu ru ru*.

⁸⁸ Tib. *yangs se yang*.

⁸⁹ Tib. *sgrengs se sgreng*.

⁹⁰ Tib. *rol lo lo*.

⁹¹ Tib. *di ri ri*.

protect us like a dear son or grandson.

The choicest pure offerings should be scattered in the direction [of the spirits] and you should invoke them [as such].

This *sādhana* for the offerings of the seven fierce martial spirit brothers was composed by Padma thod phreng rtsal⁹² [Padmasambhava]. SAMAYĀ. Protect the words of the Mighty Lotus [Hayagrīva]. SEALED.

This text was revealed by [mNga' ris Paṅ chen] Padma [dbang] rgyal po [ye shes] rol pa rtsal from Vaitsaling Temple⁹³ [at bSam yas Monastery], Mount mChims phu.⁹⁴

D. Invocation and History of the Capricious Spirit (322.6-328.5)

*The Invocation and History of the Capricious Spirit*⁹⁵

In the direction of the setting sun over there,
 on the red plains, the copper land of the martial spirits,
 into the skies, the copper cliffs point and point.⁹⁶
 On the peaks, the maroon vultures chase and hunt.⁹⁷
 On the opposite face [of the mountains], the martial spirit
 riders race and race.⁹⁸
 Along the middle area, wolves scour the fields for food.
 At the base, poisonous [waters] splash and surge.⁹⁹
 Inside the red bronze cliffs,
 boiling lakes of blood churn and swirl,¹⁰⁰
 the maroon fortress leather shifts and sways,¹⁰¹
 the copper locks are arranged and arrayed.¹⁰²

⁹² Lit. "Powerful Lotus Skull Garland." This is the secret name for Padmasambhava.

⁹³ Tib. *Bhe tsha'i gling*; this refers to one of the western subcontinent temples in the bSam yas monastic complex; its name comes from the famous 8th-century translator Vairocana (Tib. *Bai ro tsa na*), to whom it was dedicated.

⁹⁴ Spelled here 'Chim bu.

⁹⁵ Like the previous instances, this title similarly surrounds a small image of a blazing heart.

⁹⁶ Tib. *zangs se zangs*. The following verses return to the repetitive onomatopoeic device seen in the previous text. My translations are again aided by Bellezza 2005 (pp. 189, 291, 320).

⁹⁷ Tib. *lings se lings*; Bellezza (2005, pp. 291) interprets this as the flapping of a bird's wings, which is also feasible here.

⁹⁸ Tib. *sha ra ra*.

⁹⁹ Tib. *zu lu lu*.

¹⁰⁰ Tib. *me re re*.

¹⁰¹ Tib. *ldems se ldem*.

¹⁰² Tib. *khriḡs se khriḡs*.

Inside the terrifying martial spirit fortress,
 the horde of serpent-martial spirits revel.
 Their bodies are a resplendent greenish-red color and
 their red matted hair is gathered [like] fire light.
 Fiery meteors shoot from their eyes.
 Bloody hailstones fall from their mouths.
 They wear big robes of red silk¹⁰³ on their bodies.
 [The robes] have a trim of blue-checked brocade.
 They wear majestic turbans of red silk on their heads.
 They wear belts of precious gold.
 They ride blue horses with black bottoms as mounts.
 Their red silk [saddle] mats hang and flap.¹⁰⁴
 Their multicolored saddles creak and groan.¹⁰⁵
 The silver martingale straps dazzle and flash.¹⁰⁶
 The copper stirrups chime and jingle.¹⁰⁷
 The gold harnesses and turquoise bridles shimmer and shine.¹⁰⁸
 The red silk reins flutter and wave.¹⁰⁹
 The cruppers of black serpents dazzle and flash.¹¹⁰
 The tiger-skin quivers on their right side are vivid and clear.¹¹¹
 The leopard-skin quivers on their left side dazzle and flash.¹¹²
 They cast the painful illness of the martial spirits on their
 enemies.
 Their red leather shields spin and swirl.¹¹³
 They throw the lasso of the martial spirits at their enemies with
 their right hands
 [and] capture like a sheep the oath-breakers they spot.
 On the red leather spears in their left hand
 red silk pennons flutter and wave.¹¹⁴
 They throw the spear¹¹⁵ of the martial spirits at their enemies.
 They bring behind them a copper whirlwind.

¹⁰³ Tib. *dan* [sic: *dar*].

¹⁰⁴ Tib. *lhubs se lhub*.

¹⁰⁵ Tib. *wam se wam*.

¹⁰⁶ Tib. *khyugs se khyug*.

¹⁰⁷ Tib. *khro lo lo*.

¹⁰⁸ Tib. *sha ra ra*.

¹⁰⁹ Tib. *pu ru ru*.

¹¹⁰ Tib. *khyugs se khyug*.

¹¹¹ Tib. *wal le wal*.

¹¹² Tib. *khyugs se khyug*.

¹¹³ Tib. *kyi li li*.

¹¹⁴ Tib. *pu ru ru*.

¹¹⁵ The Tibetan word here is actually *zhags pa*, "lasso." However, since that has already been discussed and described in this way, and since the current context concerns the spear, I am reading this as a scribal error and assuming the intended word here is *mdung*, "spear."

In great whistling songs
 they receive names in Sanskrit.
 The great capricious spirit is Tsi'u dmar [po].
 He is called the Dharma king in Tibet.
 He is the king of the god-martial spirits and warrior gods.
 Since he protects the steadfast wheel of Dharma,
 Kun khyab rdo rje drag po rtsal [Tsi'u dmar po],¹¹⁶
 [like] the thousand untamed and wrathful sword-wielding
 ones,
 has many names for one person.
 This figure on an orange-reddish horse
 draws back [his arrow] to shoot at maroon sheep and red birds.
 I make offerings of flesh and blood *gtor ma* [and]
 to the hateful enemy oath-breakers
 he quickly sends blood-vomiting diseases and knife fights.
 Accomplish the entrusted actions!

BHYOḤ!

Furthermore, regarding one of the martial spirit brigands:
 The god-martial spirit with a face on his body¹¹⁷
 has a radiant yellowish white body color.
 He wears red-mottled brocade on his body.
 He has a tiger-skin quiver on his right and a leopard-skin
 quiver on his left.
 He rides a horse with a maroon body and face as his mount.
 He brandishes a golden arrow and a golden bow in his hands.
 He notches the arrow and strikes¹¹⁸ the enemy's heart.
 He sends knife-fighting apparitions to the enemy.

BHYOḤ!

Furthermore, regarding one of the martial spirit brigands:
 The red lord of Gro shod Ridge in Tibet¹¹⁹
 is the overlord of the red copper cliff.
 His red body color blazes [like] fire light.
 He wears a long violet cloak on his body.

¹¹⁶ Lit. "The Mighty All-Pervading Wrathful Vajra." This is Tsi'u dmar po's secret name, bestowed on him by Padmasambhava when he was subjugated.

¹¹⁷ Tib. sKu la zhal gyi lha btsan. This is an epithet for the rider Lha btsan dkar po. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1998 (pp. 172-173) provides a similar description of the seven riders drawn from a different text.

¹¹⁸ Tib. *brdog* [sic: *brdeg*].

¹¹⁹ Tib. Gro shod bod kyi sgang dmar rje; A common variant is Gro shod bod kyi sgang dmag rje; "the Warlord of Droshö Ridge in Tibet;" see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1998, p. 172. Gro shod is a district in Tsang. This is an epithet for the rider Brag btsan dmar po.

He rides a horse with white hooves as his mount.
 He wields a sword for slaughtering in his right hand.
 He throws at the enemy the copper lasso in his left hand.
 He sends knife-fighting apparitions to the enemy.

BHYOḤ!

Furthermore, regarding one of the martial spirit brigands:
 The serpent-martial spirit who fills a courtyard¹²⁰
 has a terrifying dark red body color and
 [wears] distinct boots and cotton garments on his body.
 He wears a belt of poisonous snakes.
 He has a tiger-skin quiver on his right and a leopard-skin
 quiver on his left.
 He rides a yellow tiger as his mount.
 He brandishes a red iron spear with his right hand.
 He wields a lasso of poisonous snakes with his left hand.
 He sends knife-fighting apparitions to the enemy.

BHYOḤ!

Furthermore, regarding one of the martial spirit brigands:
 The polluting-martial spirit of Red rDo rong¹²¹
 has a terrifying red body and
 wears a red fur-lined robe on his body.
 He has a tiger-skin quiver on his right and a leopard-skin
 quiver on his left.
 He brandishes a red leather spear in his right hand.
 He brandishes the intestine lasso of the martial spirits in his left
 hand.
 He rides a red donkey with a white belly as his mount.
 He sends knife-fighting apparitions to the enemy.

BHYOḤ!

Furthermore, regarding one of the martial spirit brigands:
 The hindering-martial spirit, the black-headed heron,¹²²
 has an utterly terrifying blue-green body color.
 He wears a big robe of black silk on his body.
 He wears on his head the black silk of the hindering spirits.
 He rides a tan horse with a black midsection as his mount.
 He brandishes a black silk banner in his right hand.

¹²⁰ Tib. Ra ba gang gi klu btsan. This is an epithet for the rider Klu btsan dmar po.

¹²¹ Tib. rDo rong dmar po'i gri[b] btsan. This is an epithet for the rider Grib btsan dmar po; see note 44 above.

¹²² Tib. Kang ka thod nag bdud btsan. This is an epithet for the rider bDud btsan nag po.

He then throws a rosary lasso from his left hand.
He sends knife-fighting apparitions to the enemy.

BHYOḤ!

Furthermore, regarding one of the martial spirit brigands:
The knife-martial spirit who rushes lightning fast¹²³
has the red color of blood on his body and
wears red copper armor on his body.
He has bound to his head a majestic turban of red silk.
He has a tiger-skin quiver on his right and a leopard-skin
quiver on his left.
He possesses a red leather shield radiating firelight.
His copper sword gleams as it repels.
His red silk banner swirls about like the wind.
His red martial spirit horse darts about like a sudden flash of
lightning.
He leads a pack of wolves and jackals.
He soars above mountain birds and ravens.
He holds a gleaming knife over [the enemy's] lifespan.
He sends knife-fighting apparitions to the enemy.
He sends many apparitions and many wolves to the enemy.

These are the seven brigand riders of the martial spirits.
This group of arrogant, wrathful martial spirits
leads martial spirit troops toward the hateful enemy.
They send swords¹²⁴ and jackals to the enemy.
They send gathering [clouds] and floods to the enemy.
They send avalanches and wolves to the enemy.
They send violent suicide to the enemy.
Accomplish the entrusted actions!

Finish speaking thus and invoke the [martial spirits] at the time for slaughtering. This is the invocation for the horse race of the martial spirit brigands, the *sādhana* for the Seven Emanating Riders. In its essential meaning, this is the full assault of master Padma[sambhava].

Regarding the history of these [spirits]: Long ago, in the land of the blazing volcano charnel grounds in India, in front of the dark red copper mountain, there were eleven red fierce martial spirits resembling standing demonesses who designed the demoness'

¹²³ Tib. rTsal thog rgyug gi gri btsan. This is an epithet for the rider Gri btsan dmar po.

¹²⁴ Tib. mtshon phri [sic: mtshon gri].

flaming chimney.¹²⁵ Padmasambhava dwelled there, and at midnight, when seven wolves with bloody manes came and created obstacles for the guru, the master abided in the meditative absorption of Glorious Hayagrīva and raised his *vajra*. Because of this, they departed to the seven horsemen, who came to pay homage.

[Padmasambhava] asked, "Who are you?"

[The leader] said, "I am called Tsi'u dmar [po], leader of the capricious spirits. Previously, Glorious Hayagrīva conferred empowerments [on me] and, having bestowed on me the *samaya* oath, I promised to be a guardian of the [Buddhist] teachings."

The guru said, "Where is your abode? Who are your parents? Where is your [life] essence? Tell me!"

Tsi'u dmar [po] acceded, saying, "My abode is here, India; in Tsang, it is called the split cavern. My father is rMu rje legs pa.¹²⁶ My mother is the capricious spirit called Zangs mgrin ma.¹²⁷ My life essence resides in a tantra recited by Glorious Hayagrīva. It is an enjoyment [object] that is in a small leather amulet box full of fingernails and toenails [covered] in dung on the cliff. I will protect the teachings of the Buddha."

The guru also conferred empowerments and said, "Your secret name is Kun khyab rdo rje drag po rtsal."

The master retrieved the tantra from the cliff and protected it. Then Padma[sambhava] came¹²⁸ to Tibet. The seven horsemen welcomed him and he asked, "Is this the land of the capricious spirit Tsi'u dmar [po]?"

Having also not given this *sādhana* to anyone, [Padmasambhava] concealed it in the throat of [the statue of] Virūpakṣa,¹²⁹ king of the seven peaks. One time, it was concealed in the Vairocana statue at Vaitsaling Temple¹³⁰ in bSam yas [Monastery], Mount mChims phu. This was revealed as a treasure [text] by the *vidyādhara* mNga' ris Paṅ chen.

Concerning the four lotuses,¹³¹ you should affix them to the soles of your feet and concentrate on the face [of them] as much as possible. Press on top of your knees [with] your fists. Put your fists over the lotuses with your hands [in the] single-pointed *vajra* [*mudrā*], then

¹²⁵ Padma dbang rgyal 1976, p. 327.2: *srin mo'i khol ma me lce ris kyi drag bstan dmar po srin mo lang pa 'dra ba bcu gcig yod*.

¹²⁶ Lit. "Excellent Lord of the Savage Spirits."

¹²⁷ Lit. "The Copper-necked Woman."

¹²⁸ Tib. byon slabs [sic: byon slebs].

¹²⁹ Tib. sPyan mi bzang; this is the king of the west among the four great guardian kings (*rGyal chen bzhi*).

¹³⁰ Tib. *Be tsa gling*; variant spelling.

¹³¹ This is an unexpected but detailed body yoga instruction.

make the Vajradhara *mudrā*. If [the *mudrā*] falters, strike the face [of the lotuses] for a moment and relax to improve [the *mudrā*]. HAṬ PHAṬ SUBHAM.

*E. The Treasure of Mighty Lotus [Hayagrīva]
Entrusting the Warlord's Life Force (328.5-332)*

*The Treasure of Mighty Lotus [Hayagrīva]
Entrusting the Warlord's Life Force.*¹³²

Homage to the lord of the glorious arrogant ones!

When the time for approaching (*bsnyen*) Hayagrīva has passed, the seven capricious spirit brothers are certain to physically appear. In this regard, you should strive to fearlessly make offerings and praise them. When you entrust the Dharma teachings, create a great red *gtor ma* fortress object. On its top, arrange the seven pure food offerings for the martial spirits adorned with red banners. Disperse the choicest of the pure offerings and the golden libations and entrust the [requested] actions. Since the disciple wants to accomplish subjugating actions for the lama, in order to [produce] red and extensive [offerings, he should] offer gifts of turquoise and conch shell for the lineage, grains for riches, and weapons for power.

KYAI!

The venerable lama, the wrathful king, requests –
because you are near to the actions of the arrogant ones –
being bound to the *samaya* command,
take care of the *samaya* oath of the arrogant ones.

Request as such and visualize the *gtor ma* offerings for Hayagrīva. In addition to that, the wrathful lord of O rgyan [Padmasambhava], possessing an iron hook and lasso, meditated on the awe-inspiring neighing [of Hayagrīva] and the gathering of the ten limbs¹³³ was clarified. [Having] gone for refuge and produced *bodhicitta*, the

¹³² Like the previous instances, this title similarly surrounds a small image of a blazing heart.

¹³³ Tib. [*bsnyen sbyor*] *yan lag bcu*; the ten limbs of *kriyā* tantra approaching and accomplishing liturgies: (1) The abode which is established wherever (*gang du sgrub pa'i gnas*), (2-4) the three essential natures (*de nyid gsum*), (5-7) the three meditative concentrations (*bsam gtan gsum*), (8) the ritual which engages in mantra practice (*sngags sgrub pa la 'jug pa'i cho ga*), (9) the ritual of burnt offerings (*sbyin sreg gi cho ga*), and (10) the ritual of empowerment (*dbang bskur gyi cho ga*).

disciple visualizes [himself] as the Great Glorious One [Hayagrīva] and the wisdom being is absorbed into them. They should burn incense, conduct a great symphony, and place the *gtor ma* offering above their head.

HRĪḤ!

The emanation body from within the innate Dharma body is the lord of the arrogant ones with magnificent wrathful faces. Calling out in the awe-inspiring neighing [of Hayagrīva], he subdues the hindering spirits and oath-breaking spirits. May you attain the supreme empowerment of Hayagrīva! [Recite] the root mantra: KĀYA ABHIṢIÑCA¹³⁴ OM. Then consecrate and scatter red flowers.

HRĪḤ!

The secret mantra king, endowed with the cry of HULU, earnestly engages in [the practice] and quickly bestows accomplishments. May the glorious mind that embodies the supreme speech of the Buddha attain the supreme empowerment of the authentic mantra!

Recite the root mantra: ABHIṢIÑCA¹³⁵ ĀḤ.

[Then] take a dagger staff in hand and touch the heart [with it].

HRĪḤ!

The power of the *bodhicitta* of wisdom and awareness [and] the strength of the supreme horse's pace that destroys afflictive emotions uphold the treasures with a hundred thousand intrinsic good qualities. May you attain the wisdom and the power of the non-abiding mind!

Recite: CITTAJÑĀNA ABHIṢIÑCA¹³⁶ HŪḤ.

This is the extended empowerment of the divine tamer¹³⁷ [Hayagrīva]. SAMAYA. Seal! Seal! Seal!

Next, regarding the support gifts for the arrogant ones:

¹³⁴ Sanskrit for "body empowerment."

¹³⁵ Sanskrit for "empowerment, consecration."

¹³⁶ Sanskrit for "mind knowledge empowerment."

¹³⁷ Tib. *gnyen po lha*.

KYAI!

The red fortress structure [walls] shift and sway.¹³⁸

The owls on the peak screech and whistle.¹³⁹

Entrust to the disciple¹⁴⁰ the support where [the spirits] reside.

May the arrogant ones constantly remain!

RAKṢAMAHĀYA¹⁴¹ HŪṢ SVĀHĀ!

The life stone and the life *cakra*, the secret supports, [have] the strength of dominion and are quick as lightning.

Entrust to the disciple the support that calls out and incites.

May the life force and the tantra constantly be connected!

Entrust the life stone mantra and *cakra*. Then absorb them into the red spear and lasso and entrust them into the hands [of the disciple].

Regarding the *samaya* oath of the inseparable life force, the red spear and the lasso, the implements of the martial spirit, are endowed with the *samaya* of the Great Bliss Lotus [Hayagrīva].¹⁴²

Constantly entrust to the disciple the enlightened activities.

RAKṢAKARMA¹⁴³ JAḤ BHYO *rbaḍ*¹⁴⁴

Then play the drums, flutes, and cymbals.

Hang red banners, the spear, and the lasso from the veranda and give the choicest golden libations, [then] invoke and dispatch [the spirits].

Endeavor toward actions [that] constantly give offerings.

Confer the tantra and accomplishment substances.

This is the protector of Śākya[muni]'s teachings.

[He possesses] the famed livestock of the powerful martial spirits and

great power, and he liberates the enemy and obstructing spirits.

¹³⁸ Tib. *ldems se ldem*.

¹³⁹ Tib. *lhangs se lhang*; see Bellezza 2005, p. 320.

¹⁴⁰ Tib. *bu*; read in this context as short for *slob bu*.

¹⁴¹ Sanskrit for "of great protection."

¹⁴² Tib. *Pad ma bde chen*. This is not a common epithet for Hayagrīva, but given the context he is clearly meant; I speculate that the scribe meant to write Pad ma dbang chen.

¹⁴³ Sanskrit for "protective activities."

¹⁴⁴ Lit. "to dispatch."

Because he is the power of the arrogant one's life force,
 he is the personal god of [King] Khri srong lde'u btsan.
 Entrust to the disciple this transmission of the royal lineage;
 the *samaya* oath will deteriorate for others.

The two tantras, the life stone, the apparitions, and
 the full assault – along with the offering activities –
 on the peak of Ma bu tshang ba sbra dun¹⁴⁵
 were concealed within the chest of the Virūpakṣa [statue].

One time, the secret heart of Hayagrīva at bSam yas [Tsi'u dmar po] was concealed in an iron amulet box as a protector for the teachings of Hayagrīva, the Dharma lord who subjugates the arrogant ones. Regarding the three stages from the scroll that is the central axis of the secondary text of this [work]: it was hidden in the Vairocana statue at [bSam yas Monastery, Mount] mChims phu. When the dark age rises, at a time when the royal lineage will be brought down to the common folk, a man will appear like fierce lightning who will receive this very [text]. Since he will accomplish the knowledge mantra of Padma[sambhava], the arrogant ones will gather involuntarily [and] come forth from the direction of the copper plains, the land of the martial spirits. Then, when this is accomplished, they will protect the royal lineage. This will bestow the fruit of the desired aim. Without the *samaya* oath, won't [the martial spirits] slip from one's hand?

When master Padma[sambhava] came to subdue the flesh-eating demons of the southwest for both King Khri srong lde'u btsan and the monk rGyal ba mchog dbyangs, he instructed them and hid [these] three treasure texts.

SAMAYA. Seal! Seal! Seal!

May it be virtuous!

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¹⁴⁵ Lit. "the complete mother and son amber yak-hair tent." By context, this appears to be a location, and likely near bSam yas, but otherwise unknown.

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