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

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Introduction

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

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

[2] The *Lamp* from now on.

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

Manuel Lopez, "In Search of the Lost Manuscript: The Obscure Recension History of the Tenth-Century Text *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 52, October 2019, pp. 90-118.

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

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

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

5 On this issue see Kapstein 2011.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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9 Donati 2007.

10 Esler 2018.

11 West 1973: 7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The various accounts of his life[17] present us with a figure deeply engaged in the intellectual Buddhist world of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, traveling to India, Nepal, and Central Asia from a very young age, learning from a wide variety of teachers, collecting and translating texts, and composing commentaries and treatises on some of the most cutting-edge Buddhist literature of the period, such as that of the Anuyoga and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) traditions.

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

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

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[16] See Dalton 2014: 2. Bold is mine.

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

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

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

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

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

[20] On Śāntarakṣita's philosophical views see Blumenthal 2014.

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

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

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

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

grounded their transgressive and antinomian discourses and practices on a radical understanding of the non-dual nature of reality (*gnyis su med pa*), a realization that there was ultimately no difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.[24] Unlike the gradual and especially the sudden approach, Mahāyoga will include complex rituals, visualizations, chanting, and sometimes even the use of sexual consorts (real or imagined). Finally, gNubs chen introduces Atiyoga, or the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*), a new tradition that was probably a genuine and original Tibetan reinterpretation of the Buddhist tradition[25] (although the text claims to be of Indian origins), and that presents itself, at least rhetorically, as a rejection of all types of practice. Atiyoga can be seen to a great extent as a unique continuation of some meditational experiences of the Mahāyoga tradition, as well as a rejection of its rhetoric, and in particular of its sexual and wrathful practices. In the *Lamp*, gNubs chen uses the doxographical genre not only to passively organize the various forms of Buddhism that were being imported into Tibet, but also to actively and creatively engage in the construction of a unique Tibetan Buddhist view.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Lama. According to the *par byang*, the xylographic edition from which the present photoset is produced was based on a manuscript copy which belonged to Tāranātha (b. 1575). The well-known historian Ka-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang norbu (1698–1755) also has quoted it in his history of the Ch'an teaching in Tibet." But as he also mentions, it was overall a "rare work in Tibet itself." See Karmay 1988: 102-103.

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

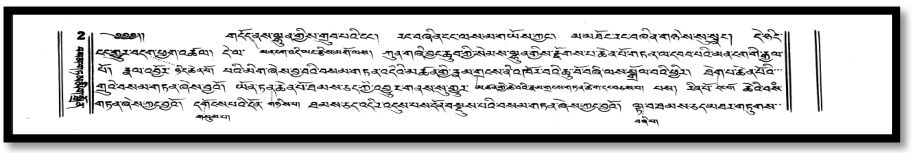
29 See Karmay 1988: 102.

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

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

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

Leh edition – 1974



The Leh edition[31] (from now on, Leh), the earliest one available, was published in 1974, and according to the preface written by Gene Smith, it was

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

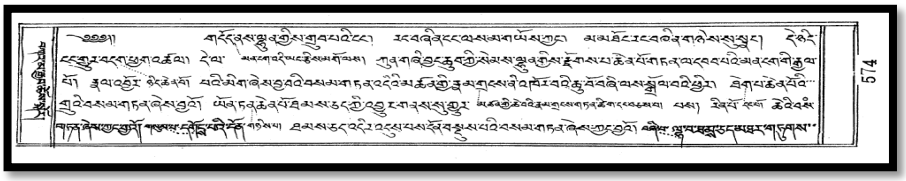
[30] On the diversity of traditions that operated under the label of "Atiyoga," see Germano 1994.

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

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

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

Volume 104 of the 120 Volume Collection of the bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa - 1999[33]



The second edition, published in volume 104 in the 120-volume collection of the *Extremely Extensive Spoken Teachings* (*bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa*) was an initiative of Khen po Mun sel[34] in order to incorporate additional bKa' ma works that had not been included in the early bKa' ma

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

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

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

collection edited by bDud 'joms rin po che in 1982.[35] The work was carried out by mKhan chen 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan[36] with the help of dKar ma bde legs and published in 1999.[37] As Esler conveys in his critical analysis of the various editions of the *Lamp*, though, and as it can be easily recognized looking at the first page of both editions as seen in this section, the edition found in the 120 collection "is useless for text-critical purposes, as it is merely a photostatic reproduction of [the Leh edition from 1974], with a few typographical amendments to make all the interlinear glosses fit into the Tibetan page format."[38]

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

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

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

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

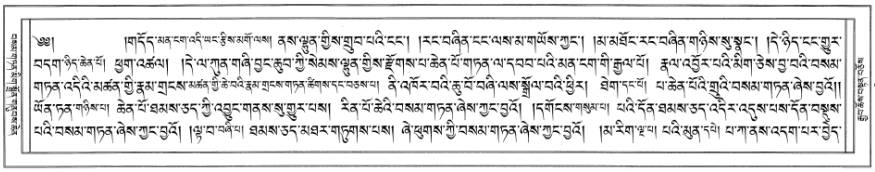
37 Karma Delek (dKar ma bde legs) is the head of the Peltsek Reseach Center on Tibetan Language and Ancient Texts (dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang), in Lhasa, and one of the main Tibetan scholars who have studied the figure of gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes.

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

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

by Gene Smith to describe the original Leh edition.[40] Some of the scholars who have worked on the *Lamp* consider Leh and Chengdu 110 to be independent witnesses of an older version of the text.[41]

Volume 104 of the 120 Volume Collection of the bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa – 2009[42]



The final and most recent edition of the text, the one found in volume 104 of the 133-volume edition of the *Extremely Extensive Spoken Teachings* (*bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa*), is the final and largest edition of this collection to date. This is an electronic version also based on the Leh edition, making it also irrelevant for a philological study of the origins of the text. It also has many misspellings, the product of a hurried transcription of the text.[43]

We have, then, two editions that are irrelevant for critical purposes (the edition from 1999, and the electronic version of 2009), and two editions, Leh and Chengdu 110, that are, regarding the content, essentially the same, but that include enough differences (particularly concerning spelling, as well as the content and position of the interlinear notes) that seem to warrant a close comparative analysis of the two

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40 See Esler, "Critical Edition: Introductory Remarks," p. 326. Michael Sheehy, from TBRC, helped me clarify some of the main differences between the 120 and the 110 editions.

41 See Donati's diplomatic edition of the text, and Dylan's critical edition. Both scholars seem to prioritize Chengdu 110, since they consider it a more reliable witness. Donati, for example, says: "giving [sic] the strong connections between the personages mentioned in the colophons and those involved in the redaction of the rNying ma bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa, I have decided to rely on the bKa' ma edition rather than on Leh," p. viii. See also Esler ibid., p. 325.

42 gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes. *bSam gtan mig sgron 133*, vol. 104, 133 vols. Chengdu, 2009.

43 The edition found in the 133-volume collection, not mentioned by Esler in his analysis of the various editions of the text, is an electronic version of the text that was included in this, at the moment, largest edition of the *bKa' ma shin tu rgyas pa* published in 2009. dKar ma bde legs, also responsible for this latest edition, told me in a personal communication that all of the texts in this latest collection are plagued with errors, since there was not enough funding to thoroughly review and edit all of the texts. Personal communication 2013.

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

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

According to the text, the colophon was written by 'Jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtsho[47] (1893–1959), of Kaḥ thog monastery, a reincarnation of 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892), both very important figures in the non-sectarian movement (*ris med*) that swept Eastern Tibet in the 19th century and was extremely influential in the revival of the Kama literature (*bka' ma)* in the rNying ma tradition. According to the colophon, 'Jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtsho prepared the edition of the text in order to fulfill the enlightened activities of his previous incarnation, 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po, who is described in the colophon as "the last student of the rGyal

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

[45] Donati 2006, Esler 2018.

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

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

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

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

These issues have been tackled by Esler in his critical edition of the text, in which he offers a possible stemma of the text, establishing the relationship between Leh and Chengdu 110 as seen in image below. As we can see in Esler's stemma of the text, both Leh (M in his chart) and Chengdu (C) have a common ancestor in ϒ, the supposed block-print, prepared by 'Jam dbyangs blo gros rgya mtsho in Katok, which was based on a manuscript belonging to sMin gling lo chen Dharmaśrī[51] (β), and this one, in turn, was based on a manuscript belonging to Tāranātha (α). While Esler's philological work is remarkable and seems to explain some of the differences between the Leh and the Chengdu-110 edition, the fact that there are no witnesses of either of

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

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

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

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

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

Searching for the Lost Manuscript

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

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

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

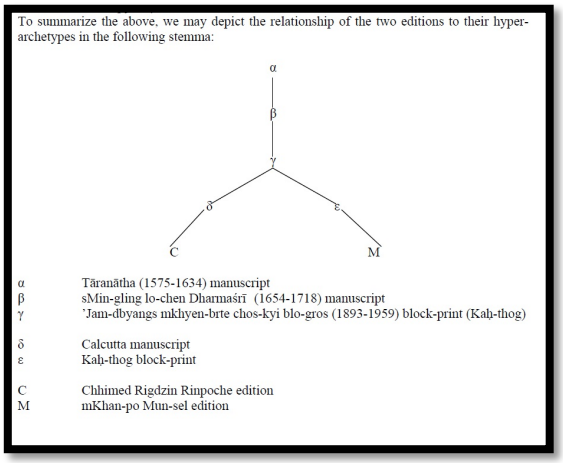

Figure 1. Esler's bSam gtan mig sgron stemma

The Chengdu Edition and the mysterious block-print

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Manuscript Not Found… Now What?

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

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

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

[58] On the copyist of the manuscript, see Esler's "Critical Edition: Introductory Remarks."

[59] See West 1973: 7.

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

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

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

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

The copious interlinear notes found in the text offer evidence of some heavy editing during the early decades or centuries after its composition, offering some clues as to its early reception history among the early rNying ma and Great Perfection followers. All currently extant manuscripts of the *Lamp* are interspersed with the same interlinear annotations.[61] These annotations reflect the heavy editing that the text underwent during its writing or with most certainty after its completion by gNubs chen, and they expand ideas discussed within the text, offer some insight on obscure passages, and correct textual problems (sometimes a misquoted sutra), but also create textual problems of their own (misattributing a sūtra, for example).[62] Karmay, in his pioneer study of the early Great Perfection, which was also the first serious study of the *Lamp*, was already skeptical regarding gNubs chen's authorship of the interlinear notes, particularly since they seem to include a few anachronisms, like the use of the name gLang dar ma to refer to King 'U'i dum brtan.[63] Meinert[64] and Esler[65] have offered other

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

61 Tib. *mchan bu* or *mchan 'grel*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[67] See Van Schaik 2015: 21-23.

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

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

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