

# The rDo rje in the Details: A Note on sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (fl. eighth century) and His Role in Bringing Padmasambhava to Tibet

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Listen, O tantric yogin!  
My life story, my deeds  
Are inconceivable, inexpressible!<sup>1</sup>

**T**his paper surveys early historical and hagiographical references to sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (fl. eighth century), an imperial-era figure renowned as one of the main disciples of Padmasambhava, a Vajrakīla (rDo rje phur pa) adept, and a pre-incarnation of dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337–1408), *alias* Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can, the “Vulture-quilled Awareness-holder” whose late fourteenth-century revelations at Mt. bKra bzang in Byang established the Byang gter, or “Northern Treasure,” tradition. What follows does not aim to identify the real sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms of imperial-era fame. Rather, it explores textual representations of this figure, and it inquires after how sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms might have become (1) a noteworthy player in the effort to bring Padmasambhava, and thus Buddhism, to Tibet and (2) a personality at the heart of Byang gter mythology and authority. The central question can be encapsulated as follows: According to the written record, who might sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms have been before and during the time of Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can's birth and treasure-revealing activity?

## 1. Introduction

With only pre-fourteenth-century sources at their disposal, a reader of Tibetan historio- and hagiographical works could easily be forgiven

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<sup>1</sup> Spoken to sNa nam Rdo rje bdud 'joms by Padmasambhava in the *gSol 'debs le'u bdun ma*, or the *Seven-Chapter Supplication*, these lines are quoted in Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (Dalai Lama V 1617–1682), *Byang pa rig 'dzin chen po ngag gi dbang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho* (*Byang chen rnam thar*) (Dharamsala: Nam gsal sgron ma, 2007) 670.4–5: *nyon cig sngags kyi rnal 'byor pa/ nga yi rnam thar mdzad tshul ni/ bsam gyis mi khyab brjod mi lang*. Cf. Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), *Bod du sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms nas rig 'dzin chen po rgod ldem pa'i rnam thar*, in *bKa' ma mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar* (Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1972), 431.2–6. For more on the context for this citation within the Fifth Dalai Lama's biography of Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), see note no. 7 below.

for lacking a clear sense of who, exactly, sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (fl. eighth century) was. Among the many individuals mentioned in early accounts of Tibet's imperial era (seventh–ninth centuries), this figure, or someone similarly named, might appear as a minister, a messenger, a disciple, or a translator. But beyond being designated as such, his activities go largely unelaborated upon. In a word, biographical information about him appears scant. Prior to the late 1300s, one might catch a glimpse of the import that rDo rje bdud 'joms would eventually take on for the scions of the Byang gter, or “Northern Treasure,” tradition, yet it would seem that whoever this particular member of the sNa nam clan might have been—whatever part he may have played in the dramatic events of his time—is left almost entirely to the imagination.

We know that over time, however, details related to sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's life emerged and coalesced such that today, readers of modern accounts of the imperial era will find him cast as a key player in bringing Buddhism—or, more specifically, Guru Padmasambhava, the “second Buddha” (*sangs rgyas gnyis pa*) himself—to Tibet. To read 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's ('Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas 1813–1899) collected biographies of treasure-revealers and bDud 'joms Rin po che's (bDud 'joms Rin po che 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje 1904–1987) history of the rNying ma school together, for example, one finds a similar, basic sense of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's life shared between them, and what is outlined suggests a remarkable individual, indeed.<sup>2</sup>

For his part, Kong sprul begins by noting that the sNa nam in question was born among the *zhang blon*, i.e., “uncle” or “in-law” ministerial families,<sup>3</sup> and he became, in his youth, a religious minister (*chos blon*) under the emperor Khri Srong lde btsan (742–c. 800). Regarding what this role might have entailed for sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms on

<sup>2</sup> Popularly referred to as the *gTer ston brya rtsa'i rnam thar*, or *Biographies of One Hundred Treasure Revealers*, Kong sprul's work is the *Zab mo'i gter dang gter ston grub thob ji ltar byon pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdu bkod pa rin chen baidūrya'i phreng ba*, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 1 (*ka*) (New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2007–2008). For bDud 'joms Rin po che's history, see 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje, *rNying ma'i chos 'byung* (Bylakuppe, Karnataka: Ngagyur Nyingma Institute, 2002). For an English translation of this work, see Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*, translated and edited by Gyurme Dorje in collaboration with Matthew Kapstein (Boston: Wisdom Press, 1991). Notable as well in this regard is Gu ru bKra shis's (b. eighteenth century) history, which Kong sprul's *gTer ston brya rtsa* reflects in many respects. On sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms in particular in that history, see *Gu bkra'i chos 'byung* (Beijing: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1990), 171–172.

<sup>3</sup> See Kong sprul 2007–8: 386.2–387.2. bDud 'joms Rin po che does not specify that this sNa nam was born among the *zhang blon*, but it may be that he simply did not feel the need to do so. Cf. Gu ru bKra' shis (1990: 171–172) who also does not state as much.

a daily basis, neither Kong sprul nor bDud 'joms Rin po che have anything to say. However, both indicate that in the grand scheme of things, it would seem to have put him in a prime position to become one of the first disciples of Padmasambhava, and in that capacity, a Vajrakīla (rDo rje phur pa) adept.<sup>4</sup> Beyond that—which is to say, beyond the limits of his own lifetime—we also learn that sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms reappeared on the religious scene in the form of dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337–1408), *alias* Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (hereafter Rig 'dzin rGod ldem or rGod ldem), the “Vulture-quilled Awareness-holder” whose late fourteenth-century treasure (*gter ma*) revelations at Mt. bKra bzang in Byang established the Byang gter tradition.<sup>5</sup>

By the time of Kong sprul's writing in the late nineteenth century, then, sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms appears to have been a renowned personality, storied both in the sense of being a celebrated individual and a figure biographically fleshed out. Yet precisely when, how, and why the sNa nam of Byang gter fame gained the significance he enjoys today are hardly closed questions.

If one follows the present conception of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms backward in time in order to trace, as it were, a genealogy of his story and his affiliation with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the now familiar shape of sNa nam rDo rje's life, complete with references to his discipleship of Padmasambhava and his status as the pre-incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, seems to have been established as the norm by the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> Notably, the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682) testifies to rDo rje bdud 'joms's importance to the Byang gter at various turns, but not least in his biography of Ngag

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the renderings of this deity's name as either Vajrakīla or Vajrakīlaya, see Martin J. Boord, *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla: According to the Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition of Tibet (Byang-gter phur-ba)* (Tring, U.K.: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1993), 5. On sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's relationship to the Vajrakīla cult, see *ibid.*, 23. As this paper focuses on sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's appearances in historio-hagiographical works that are not centered around the transmission and development of Vajrakīla practices in Tibet, I direct readers interested in that subject to Boord and, especially, to the many inimitable *phur pa*-related studies by Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer.

<sup>5</sup> For modern Tibetan biographies of this figure see, e.g., Kong sprul 2007–8: 561.6–564.6; bDud 'joms Rin po che 2002: 626.2–631.1; Gu ru bKra shis 1990: 171–172. For secondary scholarship on Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life, see Jurgen Wilhelm Herweg, “The Hagiography of Rig 'dzin Rgod kyi ldem 'phru can and Three Historical Questions Emerging from It” (MA thesis, University of Washington, 1994) as well as Boord 1993 and Katarina Turpeinen, “Vision of Samantabhadra: The Dzokchen Anthology of Rindzin Gödem” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2015), 14–20.

<sup>6</sup> On this point, see Jay Valentine, “Lords of the Northern Treasures: The Development of the Tibetan Institution of Rule by Successive Incarnations” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia 2013), 50–51.

gi bang po (1580–1639), the Third rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin. Therein, the Fifth Dalai Lama notes that sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms was among Padmasambhava's "inner circle of five" (*'khor lnga'i nang tshan*) among his twenty-five main disciples, and he states that given the extent of rDo rje bdud 'joms's realizations, he was "the one and only" (*ya gyal gcig yin*) disciple extolled by his guru via receiving the *Le'u bdun ma*'s verses that constitute the epigraph to this paper.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, perhaps to emphasize the point about rDo rje bdud 'joms's unique realizations, the Fifth Dalai Lama also cites Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde (*alias Karma Gu ru*, a.k.a. Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal 1550–1602)<sup>8</sup> where he states that "rDo rje bdud 'joms was unhindered, like the wind!"<sup>9</sup>—a simile that no doubt carries a dual reference: one to this sNa nam's miraculous ability to fly and pass through solid objects

<sup>7</sup> Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2007: 670.3–5: *de rjes slob dpon chen po pad ma 'byung gnas bod gangs can gyi ljongs 'dir phebs pa'i tshes las can dag pa'i 'khor lnga'i nang tshan zhang sna nam pa rdo rje bdud 'joms zhes sngags kyi rnal 'byor pa chen por u rgyan rin po ches le'u bdun ma'i stong thun du/ nyon cig sngags kyi rnal 'byor pa/ nga yi rnam thar mdzad tshul ni/ bsam gyis mi khyab brjod mi lang/ zhes gzengs bstod cing grub rtags mi 'dra ba ngo mtshar can re ston pa'i rje 'bangs nyi shu rtsa lnga'i ya gyal gcig yin pas chos rgyal dbang po'i sdes rje 'bangs nyi shu lnga'i gsol 'debs smin byed dbang gi chu rgyun du/ rdo rje bdud 'joms rlung ltar thogs med/ ces bsnags pa de'o*. Echoing the earliest biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, discussed later in this paper, the *lo rgyus* of the *Le'u bdun ma* states that the yellowed scrolls of this text were given (perhaps indirectly, according to tradition) to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem by the treasure-revealer bZang po grags pa (fourteenth century): *bzang po grags pas rgod ldem can la gnang ba'i le'u bdun ma'i shog ser rnams*. See bZang po grags pa, *O rgyan gu ru padma 'byung gnas kyi rdo rje'i gsung 'khrul pa med pa'i gsol 'debs le'u bdun ma lo rgyus dang bcas pa* (*Byang gter gsol 'debs le'u bdun*), edited by Tshe dbang nor bu, in *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*, vol. 5: 571–616 (New Delhi: Shechen Publications, 2007-2008), 616.2–3. Cf. the Fifth Dalai Lama where he attributes the discovery of the *Le'u bdun ma* to bZang po grags pa in *Jo mo'i nyams len skor dgu'am zab pa skor dgur grags pa'i lung ji ltar nos pa'i skor*, in *gSung 'bum: Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009), 541.6–7. On the prayer's connection to the brothers mNga' ris Pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal (b. 1487) and Legs ldan rdo rje (1452–1565), the latter of whom was recognized as a reincarnation of rGod ldem, see the Fifth's *gTer ston chen po dri med kun dgas spyang drangs pa'i gter chos khag gi skor*, in *gSung 'bum: Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009), 148.10 and Franz-Karl Ehrhard, "'An Ocean of Marvelous Perfections': A 17th-Century Padma bka'i thang yig from the Sa skya pa School," in *Tibetan Literary Genres, Texts, and Text Types: From Genre Classification to Transformation*, vol. 37, Brill's Tibetan Studies Library (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 161. On the *Le'u bdun ma* more broadly, see also Lewis Doney, "Life and Devotion: The Biography of Padmasambhava in Two Works of A mes zhabs," in *Unearthing Himalayan Treasures: Festschrift for Franz-Karl Ehrhard*, ed. Volker Caumanns, Marta Sernesi, and Nikolai Solmsdorf (Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 2019), 144–63.

<sup>8</sup> See Kong sprul 2007–8: 596.4–598.1.

<sup>9</sup> Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2007: 670.5. See note no. 7 above.

(details forthcoming), and the other to whatever heights he might have reached in his efforts to cultivate non-attachment.

In short, even if it is not the most robust or three-dimensional of depictions, by the seventeenth century, the imagination has some support in its efforts to conjure a sense of rDo rje bdud 'joms. Yet as we narrow our focus to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's time, rDo rje bdud 'joms's persona and his relationship to the treasure-revealer at the Byang gter's center appear to be less obviously settled. And if we extend our inquiry farther back in time, behind the world into which Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was born, things become less definitive still.

So, as sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms recedes, unobstructedly, into the mists of time, one is apt to wonder: Who might he have been in the eyes of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem? What sense or senses of this figure did the Byang gter's founder and his immediate disciples inherit?

## 2. Narrowing to sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms

In the process of seeking the earliest mentions, or actual depictions, of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (as we might recognize him), perhaps telling for our purposes is an asymmetry in the two modern accounts referred to above. That is to say that even though Kong sprul and bDud 'joms Rin po che agree that sNa nam rDo rje was a royal minister—or, at least, a messenger—as well as a disciple of Padmasambhava and an accomplished Vajrakīla practitioner, they differ in the sense they offer regarding when, where, and how sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms first met his guru. As bDud 'joms's *rNying ma'i chos 'byung* has it, emperor Khri Srong lde btsan dispatched sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms and other religious ministers as part of a delegation to invite Padmasambhava from Nepal to Tibet so that upon his arrival, the tantric adept could tame the noxious spirits hindering the consecration of bSam yas monastery. In fact, where bDud 'joms Rin po che states that Khri Srong lde btsan sent (initially unnamed) messengers in an effort to reach Padmasambhava posthaste, he adds that Padmasambhava anticipated the messengers' arrival, and he goes so far as to single sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms out among them such that he is the *only* named member of the delegation.

The specific reference to him occurs after we see Śāntarakṣita (fl. mid-eighth century), the figure originally invited to Tibet to help establish Buddhism on the plateau, advises Khri Srong lde bstan to solicit Padmasambhava's help next. After we see Śāntarakṣita declare his intention to send messengers to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet, the *rNying ma'i chos 'byung* continues:

Since the emperor said that he himself would likewise entreat [Padmasambhava], [royal] messengers were subsequently dispatched. Anon, the master knew that sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms and the others dispatched were swiftly on their way.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, neither Kong sprul's biographical section on sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms nor his summary account of how Padmasambhava came to Tibet under the section on Khri Srong lde btsan offer this detail.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, if one were to read Kong sprul's account without external knowledge of rDo rje bdud 'joms, Kong sprul's version of events would instead seem to suggest that this sNa nam only encountered Padmasambhava after the guru from Oḍḍiyāna (by way of Nepal) reached bSam yas. According to the *gTer ston brgya rtsa*, sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's "gnostic vision" (*ye shes kyi gzigs pa*) drew him from wherever he was at the time to bSam yas while its grounds were being consecrated by "the abbot, master, and religious king" (*mkhan slob chos gsum*), i.e., Śāntarakṣita, Padmasambhava, and Khri Srong lde btsan. In order to join the trio on site, says Kong sprul, rDo rje bdud 'joms aimed his *kīla* at Mt. Has po, created a tiny crack in the rock, and passed through it.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Kong sprul could have assumed prior knowledge on the part of his readers such that it would be needless to say that sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms had met Padmasambhava before this miraculous event. (After all, how else could he have become so skilled with a *kīla* as to pierce a mountain?) Nevertheless, on the surface, it would seem that sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms arrived rather late to the party.

If this difference in accounts is not enough to send a scholar of Tibet's religious history back to the archives, a closer look at Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's earliest biography might prove motivating in this regard. In their recent work on the history of the Byang gter and on Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *oeuvre*, respectively, Jay Valentine and Katarina

<sup>10</sup> bDud 'joms 2002: 171.1–2: *btsan po rang yang de bzhin 'tshal gsungs pas pho nya snga rting du brdzangs/ slar sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms la sogs pa lam du stabs myur pos mngags pa slob dpon gyis mkhyen te*. Cf. Gu ru bKra shis 1990: 150: *slob dpon spyān 'dren pa'i pho nya snga rting du brdzangs shing/ slar sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms sogs lam du bshad rtsol drag pos rin po che'i phyag rten dang bcas mngags pas pho nya rnam ngal zhing dub pa slob dpon gyis mkhyen nas*.

<sup>11</sup> Kong sprul 2007–8: 362.1–3.

<sup>12</sup> Twice amid his brief biography of sNa nam, Kong sprul (2007–8: 386.2–387.2) states that the mark made by the tantric adept's *kīla* remains today. bDud 'joms (1991: 196.5–197.1) too, affirms sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's affiliation with *kīla* practices and his ability to pass directly through solid rock (*sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms kyis brag ri la zang thal du gshegs*), but he does not explicitly associate him with Has po ri.

Turpeinen observe that during the Northern Treasure tradition's earliest days, sNa nam rDo rje hardly occupied a place of prominence in the Byang gter lineal imaginaire.<sup>13</sup> Based on careful analysis of *sPrul sku chen po'i rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*, or *The Ray of Sunlight* (*Nyi ma'i 'od zer*),<sup>14</sup> a biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem written by Nyi ma bzang po (fl. fifteenth century), one of rGod ldem's immediate disciples, Valentine argues that "It is doubtful that Gödem Truchen was considered to be a direct reincarnation of Nanam Dorjé Dujom or anyone else during his lifetime." Still, "even if he was," he continues, "his status as a reincarnation of an eighth-century personality is not as important as his status as a magical emanation of [the buddha] Samantabhadra in his early biography."<sup>15</sup>

Turpeinen concurs on both points. She notes that it is indeed curious that in *The Ray of Sunlight*, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is nowhere stated to be a direct incarnation sNa nam rDo rje, especially given how important this assertion is later on in the tradition.<sup>16</sup> And although it is true that in the anthology titled *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*, or *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra*, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is, in fact, deemed a rebirth of rDo rje bdud 'joms, Turpeinen notes that in that case, sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms nevertheless has a very slight role such that "he is only mentioned in passing a couple of times."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in spite of identification with sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms during (or very close in time to) Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's own lifetime, it would seem that such an association was not integral to rGod ldem's status as an authentic treasure-revealer (*gter ston*).<sup>18</sup> The salient legitimizing factor may have been his connection to Samantabhadra, the primordial buddha at whose behest Padmasambhava himself is said to have concealed treasures.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that early sources on Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life and career as a treasure-revealer would emphasize a connection to Samantabha-

<sup>13</sup> See Valentine 2013: 50–53 and Turpeinen 2015: 16.

<sup>14</sup> Nyi ma bzang po, *sPrul sku chen po'i rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*, in *Byang gter lugs kyi rnam thar dang mang 'ongs lung bstan*, vol. ga (Gangtok, Sikkim: Sherab Gyaltzen and Lama Dawa, 1983), 49–147.

<sup>15</sup> Valentine 2013: 53.

<sup>16</sup> Turpeinen 2015: 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. In terms of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's role in the *Unimpeded Realization*, Turpeinen's point stands. However, he is mentioned there more than a couple of times as sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms or rDo rje bdud 'joms across the three-volume collection. See, for example, vol. 1 of Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can 1973: 18.4, 62.1, 79.1–2, 91.4, 96.2, and 243.6. I thank Jean-Luc Achard for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>18</sup> Valentine 2013: 50–53; Turpeinen 2015: 16.

<sup>19</sup> Turpeinen 2015: 15 and Ibid., "Tales of Realization – Narratives in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Revelation", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 43, (January 2018), 156. On this connection, see also Boord 1993: 22–23.

dra over a link to sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms is perhaps unsurprising. After all, Samantabhadra is, in a sense, rDo rje bdud 'joms's teacher's teacher—his *ādibuddha* as *ādiguru*—and why not trace one's lineage directly to the primordial source? But, even where sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's identity and role in history goes unelaborated upon, his connection to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem remains. And so, where does one first meet the sNa nam who would link rGod ldem not only to the imperial era but also to an ahistorical past?

### 3. A Rocky (or) Emissarial Start?

The earliest source that would seem to reflect, at least in spirit, the sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms we know today is Pelliot tibétain 44 (PT 44), the *circa* late-tenth-century Dunhuang text<sup>20</sup> that details Padmasambhava's journey from Yang le shod, a site traditionally held to be near modern-day Pharping in Nepal, to the temple of Nālandā in India in order to fetch the *Phur bu'i 'bum sde* (i.e., *The Hundred Thousand [Verse] Tantra of Vajrakīla*).<sup>21</sup> Within this text, which, as Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer note, "in many ways works as a charter myth for Phur pa rituals as practiced to this day,"<sup>22</sup> we find a member of the sNa nam clan receiving the "glory of the Kīla" among other disciples of Padmasambhava. Matthew Kapstein's translation of the relevant passage is reproduced below:

Having acquired the accomplishment of the Kīla, concerning [his attainment of] the signs, Padmasambhava, having set a limitless forest ablaze, thrust [the Kīla] at the blaze. Śrīgupta, having struck it at the rock in the region of the frontier forest of India, broke the rock into four fragments and thus "thrust it at stone." The Newari Ser-po thrust it at water and so reversed the water's course, thereby establishing Nepal itself as a mercantile center. Such were the miraculous abilities and powers that emerged.

In Tibet Ācārya Sambhava explained it to Pagor Vairocana and Tse Jñānasukha. Later Dre Tathāgata and Buna Ana heard it and practiced at the cave of Samye Rock at Drakmar. Dre Tathāgata thrust it at fire. Buna thrust it at

<sup>20</sup> For a summary of the scholarship on the date of PT 44, see Cathy Cantwell and Robert Mayer, *Early Tibetan Documents on Phur pa from Dunhuang* (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008), 41–42. See also the earlier work by Frederick Alexander Bischoff and Charles Hartman, "Padmasambhava's Invention of the Phur-bu: Ms. Pelliot Tibétain 44," in *Etudes Tibétaines dédiées à la mémoire de Marcelle Lalou*, ed. A. Macdonald (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1971), 11–28.

<sup>21</sup> On this source, see esp. Cantwell and Mayer 2008.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



the Rock of Hepo. Then the glory of the Kīla came to Chim Śākya and Nanam Zhang Dorje-nyen. Then it was explained to Jin Yeshe-tsek.<sup>23</sup>

Above, we see Buna ('Bu na) associated with the Rock of Hepo, i.e., Has po ri, not, as we find in Kong sprul,<sup>24</sup> the named member of the sNa snam clan. And although we do see that sNa nam clan member associated with *kīla* practices, the name rDo rje gnyan only approximates that of rDo rje bdud 'joms.<sup>25</sup> Whether this passage carries a misnomer for rDo rje bdud 'joms or intends to signify another notable member of his clan (say, for example, the translator sNa nam Zhang Ye shes sde or minister Zhang sNa nam Nya bzang) is unclear.

Unfortunately, our hope for a less ambiguous initial encounter does not lie in the *dBa' / sBa bzhed*, even if several sNa nam clan members—namely rGyal tsha lha snang, Nya bzang, Ma zhang khrom pa skyes, Ye shes sde, and Bse btsan<sup>26</sup>—occupy its folios. But if, from PT 44 and the *dBa' / sBa bzhed*, we turn to the *Chos 'byung me tog snying po*, the late twelfth-century chronicle attributed to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192),<sup>27</sup> things get a bit more interesting. There, we do find sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms associated with a particular *phur pa* tradition,<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 158–159; see also Cantwell and Mayer 2008: 61–62 and Bischoff and Hartman 1971: 11–28. In a master's thesis on the Phur-pa cycle, Mengyan Li cites Bingfen Luo (2007: 662) who suggests a different separation of the syllables in the text than those accepted by Bischoff and Hartman 1971, Kapstein 2000, and Cantwell and Mayer 2008. See Mengyan Li, "Origination, Transmission, and Reception of the Phur-pa Cycle: A Study of the Rdo-rje-phur-pa Cycle of Tantric Teachings in Tibet with Special Reference to Sog-bzlog-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan's (1552–1624) *Phur pa'i lo rgyus*" (Master's Thesis, Universität Hamburg, 2018), 36, note no. 4. In addition to Cantwell and Mayer's studies, I encourage readers interested in *phur pa* transmissions to read this excellent thesis.

<sup>24</sup> Kong sprul 2007–8: 386.

<sup>25</sup> See Cantwell and Mayer (2008: 51–52) on whether this could be sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms.

<sup>26</sup> On these figures and how they are referred to across witnesses to this work, see Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Deimberger, *dBa bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 2000) on rGyal tsha lha snang (67n220 and 93n362); Nya bzang (50n125); Ma zhang khrom pa skyes (35–38; 35n61); Ye shes sde (96n380), and Bse btsan (70n241).

<sup>27</sup> See Martin 2020: 64, no. 33.

<sup>28</sup> See mNga' bdag Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (Nyang ral), *Die größte Geschichte des tibetischen Buddhismus nach alter Tradition Rnying ma'i chos 'byung chen mo*, edited by R.O. Meisezahl (Sankt Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1985), 354.2.3. Cf. *Ibid.*, *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*, ed. Nyan shul mKhyen rab 'od zer et al., *Gangs can rig mdzod 5* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1988), 485: *sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms la brgyud pas sna nam lugs su grags*. He is also listed among Padmasambhava's disciples. See, e.g., Nyang ral 1985: 318.1.1.

affirming early characterizations of him as a *kīla* adept. However, if we look for him where modern accounts might otherwise lead us, that is, to the scene wherein Khri Srong lde btsan sends a delegation to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet, we do not find him tasked with entreating the guru (not explicitly, in any case). Nevertheless, as it stands, the episode is worth recounting in brief for how it would seem to shift across texts and over time to include rDo rje bdud 'joms.

So, as Nyang ral's *Me tog snying po* has it, after Śāntarakṣita has been unable to subdue the noxious spirits wreaking havoc at bSam yas, he advises Khri Srong lde btsan to invite Padmasambhava up from Yang le shod to quell them. Khri Srong then tells his court that he has been having dreams about the guru, and he announces that he wishes to invite him to Tibet. From there, the emperor orders his subjects to send three messengers (*bang chen pa mi gsum*) to approach Padmasambhava with the invitation.<sup>29</sup> After some deliberation, it could not be resolved among his subjects who should go, and so, the Khri Srong himself orders what would appear to be two, rather than three, main messengers, and depending on the source, one or three servants (*g.yog po gcig* or *g.yog po gsum*) to bear gold to Padmasambhava. Within the passage on the king's dream and following order, the line that refers to the number of individuals dispatched reads "a whole *drey* of gold was entrusted to both sBas Mang rje gsal snang and Se 'og Lha lung, along with *one* servant" or "along with *three* servants."<sup>30</sup>

At first glance, this difference might appear insignificant. Perhaps a scribe simply got the number of servants wrong in copy, or the account is remembered (slightly) differently on this point. But with later versions of this event in mind, one can begin to see how the devil—or the rDo rje—could come to inhabit the details in this case. Disagreement would seem to have opened a door, or ambiguity may have paved the way for opportunity. Whatever the case, the details are worth scrutinizing, if not yet in terms of the *who*-s, then with respect to the *how many*-s.

Along these lines, if we recall and reassess Khri Srong lde btsan's original wish to dispatch a party of three messengers, it seems a curious move on his part to designate only two himself. Why not appoint three named messengers and note, incidentally (or not), the number of

<sup>29</sup> Nyang ral 1985: 203.1.2. Cf. *ibid.* 1988: 276. Cf. Kong sprul 2007–8: 362.1–3: *bang chen mi lnga*.

<sup>30</sup> Nyang ral 1985: 203.1.3–4: *sbas smang rje gsal snang dang se 'og lha lung gnyis g.yog po cig dang bcas pa la gser phyed bre gang bskur*. Cf. Nyang ral 1988: 276–277: *sbas man rje gsal snang dang/ se 'og lha lung gnyis g.yog po gsum dang bcas la gser phyed bre gang bskur*. The names of the two messengers above vary depending on the source. Where I refer to them in the body of this paper, I transliterate their names as they appear in whatever text is cited directly.

servants or attendants that accompanied them? Why two messengers plus one servant or two plus three?

A source that offers the names of two main messengers and notes that there was one unnamed servant would, at least, seem to resolve the issue of achieving Khri Srong lde btsan's originally desired party size. Such a group does total three individuals, even if not all members are named. But where one finds two named messengers and three servants, this brings the total number up to five individuals, and suddenly, the emperor's emissarial cup runneth over. Moreover, where once there was only one person unaccounted for among the first Tibetans to meet Padmasambhava, now, in the latter case, there are three.

Still, whether any of the messengers in Nyang ral's history were sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms remains, as yet, a mystery, and this mystery persists in the *Zangs gling ma*, the highly influential revealed history-cum-hagiography of Padmasambhava that is also attributed to Nyang ral.<sup>31</sup> Although we find a similar passage therein about the emperor's dispatch of two named messengers and three unnamed attendants, again, we cannot confirm the presence of rDo rje bdud 'joms. However, what proves nonetheless interesting about the *Zangs gling ma* is that when one compares witnesses and editions, numbers continue to prove vexing. Or, better, one finds that numbers tend to warrant enough concern as to bear overspecification.

To wit, in the *Zangs gling ma*, after Khri Srong lde btsan has appointed two named messengers, who are, once again, sBas Mang rje gSal snang and Senge mgo Lha lung (rather than Se 'og Lha lung, as above), and the emperor has conferred upon them what would appear to be, decidedly, three servants, the narrator sees fit to tally up the entire party by way of noting that "the five masters and servants" (*dpon g.yog lnga*) were given a whole *drey* of gold dust to convey to Padmasambhava.<sup>32</sup> And so, even at the risk of redundancy, the *Zangs gling*

<sup>31</sup> On Nyang ral's *oeuvre* and attributions to him, see Daniel Hirshberg, *Remembering the Lotus-Born: Padmasambhava in the History of Tibet's Golden Age* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> See *Slob dpon padma'i rnam thar zangs gling ma* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1989), 38–39 where it specifies that five people went to Yang le shod: *bang chen gyi khas len ma byung nas/ rgyal po nyis kyis/ sbas mang rje gsal snang dang/ senge mgo lha lung gnyis la bka' stsal nas/ g.yog po gsum dang dpon g.yog lnga la gser phye bre gang dang lam rgyags sogs bskur nas lam du zhugs pas*. Compare with the passages from the witnesses reproduced in Lewis Doney, *The Zangs gling ma: The First Padmasambhava Biography. Two Exemplars of its Earliest Attested Recension*. Series Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abteilung 2 (Vitae), Band 3 (Andiaest: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2014), 125, fol. 24b.3–25a.1 and 245, fol. 21a.2–4. In the manuscripts reproduced by Doney, ZLh (125, fol. 24b.3–25a.1) reads *rgyal po nyid kyi ltsas [?] mang po rje gsal snang dang/ seng mgo lha lung gnyis la bka' lung gsal nas/ g.yog po gsum btang ste/ spon g.yog lnga la gser phye bre gang rdzad nas/ bar gyis lam rgyags la sogs pa bskur ste lam du btsug pa dang/ slob dpon gyi spyang sngar/*

*ma* prefers to do the math for the reader rather than leave the calculation up to her.

To seek the same inclination or further details in historical sources that appear close in time to Nyang ral's works is, regrettably, to come up short on both counts. The *Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo* (ca. 1167) by bSod nams rtse mo (1142–1182), for example, states that Khri Srong lde btsan sent messengers to invite Padmasambhava, but he does not name any,<sup>33</sup> and the shorter IDE'u history (ca. mid-thirteenth century),<sup>34</sup> despite its interest in the status and affairs of the sNa nam clan, does not indicate messengers among its ranks.<sup>35</sup>

However, if we look to the longer IDE'u history, written sometime after 1261,<sup>36</sup> sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms makes several appearances. The section on Khri Srong lde btsan's life and interest in Buddhism notes the king's own (contested) sNa nam clan affiliation, and it lists the names of the ministers at court during both the earlier and later parts of the emperor's life.<sup>37</sup> Although none of the ministers in this section are dubbed sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms, later in the text, we do learn that when Khri Srong lde btsan saw fit to dispatch messengers to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet, he designated *three* individuals by name: mChims Shākya sra/spra (=pra) ba, Shud pu (=bu) Dpal gyi seng ge, and finally, sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms.<sup>38</sup> For his part, Bu

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*bsrung ma rnams kyis bskul ba.* ZLi (p. 245, 21a.2–4) reads *bang chen pa la khas len pa ma byung nas rje nyid kyis/ sbas mang po rje gsal snang dang/ ye gong lha gnyis la bka' gsal nas/ g.yog gsum bskul tel/ dpon g.yog lnga la gser phye bre gang brdzangs nas/ bar gyi lam rgyags la sogs pa bskur nas lam du bcug pa dang/ ghu ru'i spyan sngar srungs ma rnams kyis bskul ba.*

<sup>33</sup> bSod nams rtse mo, *Chos la 'jug pa'i sgo*, in *'Phags yul rgyan drug mchog gnyis kyi zhal lung* vol. 1: 47–141 (Lha sa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe nying dpe skrun khang, 2015), 133.

<sup>34</sup> Martin (2020: 85, no. 68) estimates a date of ca. 1220 for this source.

<sup>35</sup> IDE'u Jo sras, *IDE'u chos 'byung* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1987).

<sup>36</sup> Martin 2020: 96, no. 88. On both the shorter and longer histories and their attributions, see Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp, "Dating the Two Lde'u Chronicles of Buddhism in India and Tibet," in *Études Bouddhiques Offertes à Jacques May, Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 46.1 (1992), 468–91.

<sup>37</sup> mKhas pa IDE'u, *mKhas pa lde'us mdzad pa'i rgya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*, in *rGya bod kyi chos 'byung rgyas pa*, 1–412 (Lha sa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1987). On Khri Srong's contestation, see Lewis Doney, "Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer and the *Testimony of Ba*," *Bulletin of Tibetology* 49, no. 1, 7–38 (2013), 22–25.

<sup>38</sup> mKhas pa IDE'u 1987: 303: *btsan pos mchims shākya sra ba/ shud pu dpal gyi seng gel/ sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms gsum la gser bskur nas btang bas bod du byon.* See also *ibid.*, 340–341 where, as in bDud 'joms Rin po che (2002), Padmasambhava is said to have anticipated the group's arrival: *rgyal po dgyes nas spyan 'dren mi gsum btang ste/ sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms/ 'chims shākya sra ba/ shud bu dpal gyi seng ge gsum la gser gyi pa tra brgyad brdzangs te btang ba/ slob dpon gyis spyan 'dren 'byung bar mkhyen nas/ rgya gar gyi chu 'phreng shing 'phreng dang...* In Ne'u Paṇḍita's history (1283), we find a "rNa nam rDo rje" associated with an invitation to Yer pa, but this would

ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364), like Nyang ral, designates just two main messengers—sBa Mang rje gSal snang and Seng gong Lha lung (rather than Se 'og or Senge mgo)—in his *chos 'byung* (ca. 1322–1326). But Bu ston also names their attendants, which number five individuals total, instead of one or three, and the first attendant listed is sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms.<sup>39</sup>

To be sure, an examination of all available witnesses to these works (and more) could aid us further in refining our understanding of precisely when and how sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms might have occasion to slip in or out of the imperial picture at the point of Khri Srong's decision to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet. Yet even here, based on a cursory look at several of the influential sources leading up to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's time, rDo rje bdud 'joms appears to be a more mutable messenger than not.

#### 4. Taking Padma-vitae into Account

Fourteenth-century hagiographical accounts of Padmasambhava's exploits prove especially interesting for thinking through how it is that sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms might have come to exceed mere mention. Still, his mutability—or what seems, in some instances, to be his fungibility—persists. On this point, we will examine the *Padma bka'(i) thang (yig)* (alt. *bKa' thang shel brag ma*, 1352<sup>40</sup>) attributed to the treasure-revealer O rgyan gling pa (b. 1323) closely. But first, in observance of its indebtedness to Nyang ral's *Zangs gling ma*,<sup>41</sup> we might see what, if anything, Sangs rgyas gling pa's (1340–1396) *Me long gsal ba* yields.

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seem to be rNa nam rDo rje dbang phyug who is noted earlier in the same line. See Grags pa smon lam blo gros, *Bod kyi rgyal rabs phyogs bsdebs* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1985), 38.4–5. See also 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal on Yer pa, a place famous for its flying adepts, in *Deb ther sngon po* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1974), 44, fol. 22b.1: *yer pa nas nam mkha' la 'phur ba mang po byung zhes grags*.

<sup>39</sup> Bu ston Rin chen grub, *bDe bar gshegs pa'i bstan pa'i gsal byed chos kyi 'byung gnas gsung rab rin po che'i mdzod* (s.l.: Chos grwa chen mo bkra shis lhun grub), fol. 141a.1: *slob dpon padmasam bha wa zhes bya ba mthu rtsal dang ldan pa zhig yod pas/ de spyen drongs shig gsungs pa dang/ btsan pos/ rmi lam du byung ba skad bgyis te/ sba mang rje gsal snang dang/ seng gong lha lung gnyis la g.yog sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms/ lce dznyā na sidha/ mchims shākya pra bha/ brang ting dza ya rakši ta/ shud pu dpal gyi seng ge dang/ lnga btang bas/ slob dpon gyis mkhyen te*.

<sup>40</sup> On redactions of this source, see Lewis Doney, "A Richness of Detail: Sangs rgyas gling pa and the *Padma bka' thang*," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 37 (December 2016), 71–72. Doney notes that extant versions of this source were redacted in line with a version of the *Zangs gling ma* in the sixteenth century. The possible implications of this fact for representations of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms will be discussed in the conclusion to this paper.

<sup>41</sup> On this point, see Doney 2016: 73n15.

This text, contained in the *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* cycle,<sup>42</sup> shows the figures sBas Mang po rje sNang gsal and Gser 'og Lha lung dispatched along with three attendants, and it notes that the party of five, total, was outfitted with many offerings (*g.yog po gsum dang lnga la zhu rten mang po bskur*).<sup>43</sup> The scene and its numbers are certainly familiar enough. Here, however, because the number five (*lnga*) immediately follows “three servants” (*g.yog po gsum*)—rather than “[the entire party of] five masters and servants” (*g.yog po gsum dang dpon g.yog lnga*), as we find in the *Zangs gling ma*<sup>44</sup>—one wonders if readings alternative to “the five [masters and servants]” could have occurred more readily than not. Some prevailing lack of clarity around just how many servants there might have been (three? three plus five?) could, in short, account for the numbering we find in histories along the lines of Bu ston's, for example. Or, albeit a speculative stretch, perhaps the homophony between *lnga* and *sna* could have paved the way for the appearance of a sNa nam in the emissarial mix in general, but not least at the head of the group of attendants.<sup>45</sup> Either way—whatever the potential for variant readings—consensus at the time of Sangs rgyas gling pa's writing would still appear to lean in favor of two main messengers and one to three anonymous attendants.

Or does it? The kindred *bka' thang*-s, or “testimonies,” of O rgyan gling pa and Sangs rgyas gling pa indicate otherwise, and what is more, they have the identities of the main messengers take a new turn. Put another way, in both O rgyan gling pa's *Padma bka' thang* and Sangs rgyas gling pa's *bKa' thang gser 'phreng* (late 1300s), clan affiliations are no longer what they once were. Listed first in concordant emissarial triplets is one sBa Mi khri bzher rDo rje bdud 'joms, followed by mChims kyi Shākya pra bha and Shud bu Dpal gyi ye shes.<sup>46</sup> With

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>43</sup> Sangs rgyas gling pa, *Yid ches shing khungs btsun pa'i lo rgyus shel gyi me long gsal ba*, in *Bla ma dgongs 'dus* (Gangtok: Sonam Topgay Kazi, 1972), 704.6: *slob dpon chen po spyang drang pa la/ sbas mang po rje snang gsal dang/ gser 'og lha lung gnyis g.yog po gsum dang lnga la zhu rten [705.1] mang po bskur nas btang bas/ bang chen pa rnams lam du zhugs pa*.

<sup>44</sup> See note no. 32 above.

<sup>45</sup> See note no. 39 above. One also wonders about *phur pa* and 'phur pa in this regard given sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms was renowned as a *kīla* (*phur pa*) adept who could fly (*phur ba*).

<sup>46</sup> See O rgyan gling pa, *Padma bka' thang* (Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2006), 292: *de skad gsol bas rgyal po shin tu dgyes/ de nas rgyal pos myur mgyogs kha gsum btang/ sba mi khri gzher rdo rje bdud 'joms dang/ mchims kyi phru gu shākya pra bha dang/ shud pu dpal gyi seng ge bzhi la ni/ gser phye bre re gser gyi pa tra re/ rgya gar rdo rje gdan du brdzangs par gyur/ lo tsā bzhi pos rgya gar yul du bgrod*. Cf. Sangs rgyas gling pa, *bKa' thang gser 'phreng* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2007), 229: *de nas rgyal pos nyid kyi bang chen du 'os pa'i mi gsum bkug stel sbas mi khri bzher rdo rje bdud 'joms dang/ mchims kyi shākya pra bha dang/ shud bu dpal*

that, a question arises: is sBa Mi khri bzher rDo rje bdud 'joms his own person, or has rDo rje bdud 'joms been conflated with—or rendered potentially conflatable with—sBa Mi khri bzher, a figure who does not appear elsewhere with “rDo rje bdud 'joms” attached to his name?

In an initial effort to make sense of what we ultimately find in these *bka' thang*-s, we might check them against other notable Padma-*vitae* that hail from roughly the same time. In the *O rgyan padma 'byung gnas kyi skyes rabs* (late 1300s),<sup>47</sup> attributed to the treasure-revealer rDo rje gling pa (1346–1405?), for example, we find the same series and numbering that occurs in both the *Padma bka' thang* and the *gSer 'phreng*. Yet in Padma gling pa's (1450–1521) *bKa' thang mun sel sgron me*, the group is noted to be four (*bzhi*) rather than three in number.<sup>48</sup> With that, discrepancies, however subtle, persist.

Since it is the most well-known of the fourteenth-century Padma-*vitae*, perhaps a careful examination of O rgyan gling pa's *Padma bka' thang* is in order. Below, with emphasis added, is a translation of the passage from a modern edition in which sBa Mi khri bzher and rDo rje bdud 'joms are distinguished from one another as separate individuals. Here, in chapter fifty-nine of the *Padma bka' thang*, after a figure named Siddharāja tells Khri Srong lde btsan that India is teeming with *paṇḍita*-s, and that in terms of tantric accomplishments, Padmasambhava stands at the apex of the lot, the narrator states:

The king was extremely pleased by [Siddharāja's] tidings. Subsequently, he dispatched *three* high-speed messengers. To the *four*—sBa Mi khri bzher, rDo rje bdud 'joms, mChims kyi Phru gu Shākya pra bha, and Shud dPal gyi seng ge—[he distributed] *drey*-s of gold dust and gold bricks, each of

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*gyi ye shes gsum la gser bre re dang gser gyi pa tra re bskur nas rgya gar rdo rje gdan du brdzangs so/ de nas bod kyi lo tsā ba gsum pos kyang rgya gar di slebs te.*

<sup>47</sup> rDo rje gling pa, *O rgyan padma 'byung gnas kyi skyes rabs lo tsha'i 'gyur byang nram thar rgyas par bkod pa* (Thimphu, Bhutan: Druk Sherig Press, 1984), p. 179.3, fol. 90a.3: *de nas rgyal pos myur 'gyogs pa nya btang/ sba mi khri bzher rdo rje bdud 'joms dang/ 'chims kyi phru gu shakya pra bha dang/ shud pu dpal gyi senge dang gsum yin/ gser phye bre re gser gyi pa tra rel rgya gar rdo rje gdan du rdzangs par gyur/ lo tsha gsum pos rgya gar yul du bgrod.* sBa Mi khri bzher is named at the end of the previous chapter, i.e., chapter 55 (p. 179.2; fol. 90a.4), in the context of naming the rebirths of the personages involved in the building of the Boudanath *stūpa*. See also p. 181.7, fol. 91a.7 where we see, with a variant spelling of the clan name, a rNa nram rDo rje bdud 'joms named among the seven individuals sent to meet Padmasambhava at Nyi ma mtsho in Nepal. See Doney 2016 on the dating of this source.

<sup>48</sup> Padma gling pa, *bKa' thang mun sel sgron me*, (Thimphu, Bhutan: Drug Sherig Press, 1981). See chapter 55, p. 357.7, fol. 171a: *sba mi khri bzher rdo rje bdud 'joms dang/ mchims kyi phrug gu shākya pra rba dang/ shud pu dpal gyi seng ge bzhi la ni/ gser phye bre re gser gyi pa ta rel g.yog po bdun bdun sum bcu rtsa gnyis la.* As in O rgyan gling pa (2006), sBa Mi khri bzher appears at the end of the previous chapter, i.e., chapter 54, p. 355.4, fol. 170b.4.

which were to be conveyed to Bodhgaya in India. [Then,] the *four* translators traveled to the Indian subcontinent.<sup>49</sup>

Here, we see three messengers dispatched, but four individuals are supplied with gold. By contrast, in Sangs rgyas gling pa's *gSer 'phreng*, the numbers do not change across the passage, and the fact that there are three individuals is, fittingly, noted three times:

Then, the king himself summoned *three* people who were worthy messengers: sBas Mi khri bzher rDo rje bdud 'joms, mChims kyi Shākya pra bha, and Shu bu dPal gyi ye shes. Having furnished the *three* [messengers] each with a *drey* of gold [dust] and a gold brick, he dispatched them to Bodhgaya in India. Then, the *three* Tibetan translators departed for India as well.<sup>50</sup>

Even where the numbers in both passages above would indicate otherwise, text-internal evidence suggests that Mi khri bzher and rDo rje bdud 'joms are not one and the same figure. To offer but one indicator on this point, in both the *Padma bka' thang* and the *gSer 'phreng*, sBa Mi khri bzher appears (sans rDo rje bdud 'joms attached to his name) in the chapter immediately prior to the one in which Khri Srong lde btsan dispatches his messengers.<sup>51</sup> There, a Yar klungs sBa Mi khri bzher features in the story of the origins of Boudhanath *stūpa* (*mchod rten bya rung kha shor*), and he is karmically linked to Khri Srong lde btsan, Sāntarakṣita, and Padmasambhava as the fourth of four sons born to the daughter of a poultry farmer (*bya rdzi*).<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> O rgyan gling pa 2006: 291: *de skad gsol bas rgyal po shin tu dgyes/ de nas rgyal pos myur mgyogs kha gsum btang/ sba mi khri gzher rdo rje bdud 'joms dang/ mchims kyi phru gu shākya pra bha dang/ shud pu dpal gyi seng ge bzhi la ni/ gser phye bre re gser gyi pa tra re/ rgya gar rdo rje gdan du brdzangs par gyur/ lo tsā bzhi pos rgya gar yul du bgrod.* Toward the end of the same chapter, rDo rje bdud 'joms appears (sans sBa Mi khri bzher) once again but as part of an emissarial triplet including sKa bad dPal brtsegs and Cog ro Klu'i rgyal mtshan. Cf. Sangs rgyas gling pa 232.

<sup>50</sup> Sangs rgyas gling pa 2007: 229: *de nas rgyal po nyid kyis bang chen du 'os pa'i mi gsum bkug ste/ sbas mi khri bzher rdo rje bdud 'joms dang/ mchims kyi shākya pra bha dang/ shu bu dpal gyi ye shes gsum la gser bre re dang gser gyi pa tra re bskur nas rgya gar rdo rje gdan du brdzangs sol/ de nas bod kyi lo tsā ba gsum pos kyang rgya gar du slebs te.*

<sup>51</sup> See O rgyan gling pa 2006: 291 and Sangs rgyas gling pa 2007: 228. See also, e.g., where O rgyan gling pa (2006: 341–342) names the intrepid (*snying rus can*) who went to India, and sBa Mi khri bzher and rDo rje bdud 'joms appear a page apart. Wangdu and Deimberger (2000: 70n239) note that we do find alternatives names for Khri gzher across *sBa bzhed* witnesses. None are rDo rje bdud 'joms, however.

<sup>52</sup> Keith Dowman (1973, revised 2004) has translated the legend of this *stūpa*'s construction, the *mChod rten chen po bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus* attributed to Yol mo ba Shākya bzang po (fl. early sixteenth century). See Keith Dowman, trans., *The Legend of the Great Stupa and the Life Story of the Lotus Born Guru*, Revised Edition (Berkeley, CA, 2004). Tradition holds that this treasure text, which dates to 1512



According to Śāntarakṣita, who, in this context, offers up this information as part of an effort to convince an initially reluctant Khri Srong lde btsan to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet, the four brothers who built the *stūpa* wished to one day be reborn as, effectively, Śāntarakṣita, Padmasambhava, Khri Srong lde btsan, and sBa Mi khri bzher—the abbot, master, emperor, and minister in charge of correspondence (*'phrin blon*).<sup>53</sup> Given that imperial-era sBa clan members were renowned for their diplomatic work, it is, in general, unsurprising to see a sBa occupying this position. But to recall the *Zangs gling ma's* chapters twelve and fifteen is to find this inclusion of a minister as a fourth brother unexpected. As Nyang ral's chapters have it, the brothers once united in their *stūpa*-related efforts and aspirations were not four but three.<sup>54</sup>

### 5. Conclusion: Mixed Messengers, or Meetings and Partings

If we imagine, now, a reader who would trace narrative representations of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms forward in time from around the late-tenth century to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's era, it would still be easy to forgive them for having, at best, a hazy sense of who rDo rje bdud 'joms was—that is, save to say that he was hardly a fixture in the story of Padmasambhava's invitation to Tibet. (And at this juncture, to see bDud 'joms Rin po che single rDo rje bdud 'joms out where he might be otherwise entirely absent<sup>55</sup> strikes one as a bold move ripe for further explanation.) After all else, it would seem that this sNa nam was

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(see Martin 2020: 214, no. 253), was first discovered in the eleventh century and then re-concealed before being rediscovered in the sixteenth. Therein, the youngest brother of the poultry farmer's daughter is also Yar klungs sBa Mi khri bzher. On the origins of this legend, see Anne-Marie Blondeau, "Bya-rung kha-shor: Légende Fondatrice Du Bouddhisme Tibétain," in *Tibetan Studies*, ed. Per Kvaerne, vol. 1 (Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994), 31–48 and Franz-Karl Ehrhard, "The Stūpa of Bodhnath: A Preliminary Analysis of the Written Sources," *Ancient Nepal*, no. 120 (October 1990): 1–9.

<sup>53</sup> See O rgyan gling pa 2006: 291 and Sangs rgyas gling pa 2007: 228, respectively.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Nyang ral 1988: 55–64 and 85–91. Later, where 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481) refers to the connection, it appears as if it were only between Śāntarakṣita and Khri Srong lde btsan. See 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, *Deb ther sngon po* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1974), 42, fol. 21b.6.

<sup>55</sup> In the *Deb ther Sngon po* (1476–1478), for example, where it recounts the invitation of Śāntarakṣita to Tibet, we see dBa' gSal snang entreat Śāntarakṣita to come to Tibet, but we do not learn who made up the emperor's delegation to Padmasambhava. See 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal 1974: 41, fol. 21a.6 ff. 'Gos Lo tsā ba otherwise mentions sNa nam Rdo rje bdud 'joms in the context of listing *siddha*-s who lived during the time of emperor Khri Srong lde btsan (p. 93, fol. 2a.3) and where he discusses the life of Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (fl. eleventh century). On p. 150, fol. 30b.2–3, he says that Rong zom learned precepts (*gdams pa*) within the lineage of sNa nam Rdo rje bdud 'joms and others.

remembered along with the emissarial sBa-s of the imperial age, and in some cases, that recollection resulted in an interchange, a conflation, or, simply, a conjunction in the textual record. To be sure, one can leave open the possibility that sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms—as either a main messenger or an attendant—did, in fact, first encounter his guru abroad. It would be difficult to claim that he did so unequivocally, however.

Ultimately, the idea of rDo rje bdud 'joms inherited by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his contemporaries seems unlikely to have been a stable one. But if the literary record has taught us anything about the evolution of Tibet's heroes of yore, determinacy may be that which works against the formation and development of authority. In other words, the ability to project or expand upon the idea of rDo rje bdud 'joms as, at bottom, an early disciple of Padmasambhava could have been one of this figure's most attractive features for the founders of a nascent treasure-revelation tradition. Going forward, as one traces sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms beyond the fourteenth century, the question then becomes, to what degree did the creation of rGod ldem and rDo rje bdud 'joms occur in tandem?

To begin to address this question, one might take a cue from the Fifth Dalai Lama and turn to the *Le'u bdun ma*, both the prayer itself and its history. If, at the time of the Fifth's writing, it was above all important to affirm sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms's presence at Padmasambhava's moment of departure rather than at the very start the guru's sojourn in Tibet, we would do well to examine how he came to occupy such a prominent role in that scene. Did rDo rje bdud 'joms arrive there of his own accord, unobstructed like the wind, or was he conveyed there on the basis of something decidedly more than a whim—a drive on the part of early Byang gter patriarchs that would render him not an incidental connection to Padmasambhava but an integral one?

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