

An Introduction to *The Chariot of Marvels*: Northern Treasure Master Padma 'phrin las's Memoir of a Journey to Byang Ngam ring in 1690¹

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Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) was the fourth incarnation of the Byang gter treasure revealer named Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–1409) and the second throne-holder of rDo rje brag Monastery in Central Tibet.² It appears that the majority of Padma 'phrin las's life was spent developing the estate at rDo rje drag into a first-rate rNying ma monastery. He also regularly performed state-level rites on behalf of the dGa' ldan pho brag government, including annual rites at bSam yas. While the Fifth Dalai Lama very likely cultivated his relationship with rDo rje brag at least in part as an attempt to solidify rNying ma authority amongst his allies and against those who supported his gTsang pa adversaries, it is not clear to what extent Padma 'phrin las was a mere tool of the state and to what extent he

¹ This article is a revised version of a paper that was presented in 2019 at the International Association of Tibetan Studies Conference in Paris, France.

² Although Padma 'phrin las was the fourth incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, he was the first in the series to be the focal point of a relatively robust social institution that maintained the tradition of rule by successive incarnations. Padma 'phrin las's predecessor, Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), was recognized as the reincarnation of Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1580) by his father, Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde (1550–1603), but it does not appear that at that time there was an extensive community of Byang gter practitioners who were anticipating the rebirth of their patriarch. However, we learn from the autobiography of Padma 'phrin las that the circumstances that lead to his recognition were significantly more complex. Padma 'phrin las's incarnational predecessor, Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), intended to be reborn in Central Tibet so that he could return to rDo rje brag. He in fact charged his primary disciple, *Yol mo pa* bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1589–1644), with the task of guiding the fledgling monastery through the transition. The community that supported the establishment of an incarnation lineage at rDo rje brag included the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), and *Zur chen* Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669), who were both disciples of Ngag gi dbang po. Both of these figures also took part in the training of Padma 'phrin las. Later in life, he returned the favor as he was involved with the reincarnations of all three figures, taking the rebirth of Zur chen as his primary protégé. For a summary of the life of Padma 'phrin las, see Samten Chhosphel 2012 or Boord 2013.

was his own man.³

In the Year of the Iron-Horse (1690), however, when Padma 'phrin las was fifty years of age, the Fifth Dalai Lama had been dead (secretly) for eight years.⁴ Although during this period he still received directives from the Regent, *sDe srid* Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), Padma 'phrin las's epic journey to Byang Ngam ring to visit the homeland of his incarnational ancestors was clearly part of his own spiritual journey. Many of the exploits of Padma 'phrin las life, including his various travels, are recorded in his voluminous autobiography, known as *The White Crystal Mirror* (*Rab dkar shel gyi me long*).⁵ While the entire work consists of 578 folios (1156 pages), it contains an 80-folio (160 pages: 493–653) travel memoir of his journey to Ngam ring as a titled text, *The Chariot of Marvels* (*Lam yig ngo mtshar 'dren pa'i shing rta*), which is the focus of this study.⁶

Summary of the Journey

Padma 'phrin las made the decision to travel during the first month of the year (1690), then spent three months preparing and getting permissions before departing in the fourth month.⁷ Thus, his journey took place during the summer months of an apparently calm year, while the authorities in Lha sa held their collective breaths in the absence of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The Sixth Dalai Lama, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho (1683–1706) had already been born and discovered (1688) by the emissaries of the Regent, but he had not yet been publicly recognized.⁸ By the time that Padma 'phrin las departed on his journey to

³ Samten Chhosphele implies that the force of the Fifth Dalai Lama's support for the Byang gter tradition at rDo rje brag in Central Tibet was at least in part politically motivated. For details, see Samten Chhosphele 2012. Conversely, Martin Boord makes a strong case that the Fifth Dalai Lama was an ardent practitioner of the Byang gter tradition, receiving visionary empowerments from various patriarchs of the tradition, and that Padma 'phrin las was in fact his favorite disciple. Nevertheless, Boord also describes the manner in which Padma 'phrin las was employed by the Fifth Dalai Lama for political purposes. For details, see Boord 2010, pp. xxi–xxvi.

⁴ For details regarding the secretive nature of the Fifth Dalai Lama's death, see Schaeffer 2013, pp. 357–358.

⁵ At present, there are two unedited redactions of this text, both of which are listed in the bibliography. The differences between the two are largely limited to spelling irregularities. Despite the fact that the redaction listed first, BDRC Work Number ID: W23811, is missing a couple of pages, it is by far the clearer version and therefore the primary source used in this study. The pagination that is listed throughout this article, therefore, refers to this first version of the text.

⁶ The travel memoir, like the larger autobiography, is written mostly in prose with summaries at the end of each section that are written in verse.

⁷ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 491–493.

⁸ For a brief summary of the life of the Sixth Dalai Lama, see Wickham-Smith 2012.

Ngam ring, the eight-year-old Sixth Dalai Lama had just begun to train in the complicated arts of scholarship in secret far from Lhasa.⁹ Meanwhile, the Regent, who directed the educational curriculum of the young incarnate lama from the capital, worked to consolidate the power of his relatively newly formed government. He had also already begun construction of the Red Palace at the Potala, where the remains of the Fifth Dalai Lama would eventually be installed.¹⁰

Padma 'phrin las's journey began on the 10th day of the Fourth Month of 1690 and concluded on the 18th day of the Eighth Month of that same year, which is a total of approximately 128 days or 4 months and 8 days. He spent 41 days traveling roughly west from rDo rje brag in Central Tibet, 28 days in the greater Byang Ngam ring region, and 59 days returning east to rDo rje brag. Although he visited a great many important sites along the way, Padma 'phrin las spent multiple days at each of the following locations: Gong dkar rDo rje gdan, sPungs pa Ri bo che, rTse gdong, Gru 'dzin, Ri bo bKra bzang, Zang zang lha brag, gCung Ri bo che, lHa rtse, Sa skya, Khro pho, gZhis ka rtse, rGyal rtse, and sNa dkar rtse.

Table 1. Itinerary Highlights of Padma 'phrin las's Travel Memoir

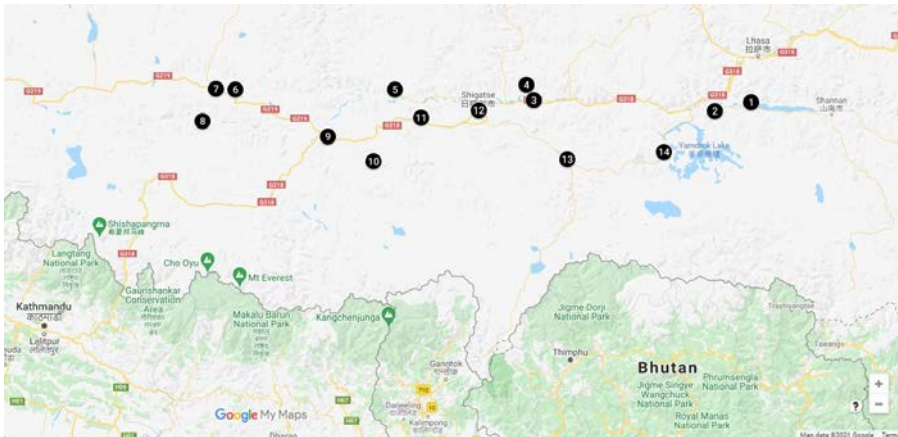
Location Map #	Du-ration	Arrival	Departure	Paginat-ion
rDo rje brag (1)	---	---	10 th Day of the 4 th Month	p. 494
Gong dkar rDo rje gdan (2)	7 Days	11 th Day of the 4 th Month	17 th Day of the 4 th Month	pp. 495-505
sPungs pa Ri bo che (3)	7 Days	25 th Day of the 4 th Month	1 st Day of the 5 th Month	pp. 514-518
rTse gdong (4)	9 Days	1 st Day of the 5 th Month	9 th Day of the 5 th Month	pp. 519-528
Gru 'dzin (5)	4 Days	15 th Day of the 5 th Month	18 th Day of the 5 th Month	pp. 535-538
Ri bo bKra bzang (6)	9 Days	25 th Day of the 5 th Month	3 rd Day of the 6 th Month	pp. 559-570

⁹ Aris 1989, p. 138. Although Padma 'phrin las was among those who knew that the Fifth Dalai Lama had died, he appears to have not met the Sixth Dalai Lama until much later (1697), when he and gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714) were sent to sNa dkar rtse to offer empowerments to the young incarnation for their respective treasure cycles. His first encounter with the Sixth Dalai Lama is described in his autobiography (pp. 1017-1018). See also Aris 1989, p. 146.

¹⁰ For an account of the construction of the Red Palace, see Chayet 2003, pp. 49-52. For an excellent description of the manner in which Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho consolidates power through the memorialization of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the 1690s, see Schaeffer 2006, 187-188.

Zang zang lha brag (7)	8 Days	4 th Day of the 6 th Month	11 th Day of the 6 th Month	pp. 573-578
gCung Ri bo che (8)	5 Days	15 th Day of the 6 th Month	19 th Day of the 6 th Month	pp. 583-588
lHa rtse (9)	7 Days	24 th Day of the 6 th Month	30 th Day of the 6 th Month	pp. 591-598
Sa skya (10)	3 Days	1 st Day of the 7 th Month	3 rd Day of 7 th Month	pp. 599-609
Khro phu (11)	3 Days	6 th Day of the 7 th Month	8 th Day of the 7 th Month	pp. 611-613
gZhis ka rtse (12)	5 Days	11 th Day of the 7 th Month	15 th Day of the 7 th Month	pp. 616-624
sPungs pa Ri bo che (3)	13 Days	17 th Day of the 7 th Month	29 th Day of the 7 th Month	pp. 629-637
rGyal rtse (13)	4 Days	2 nd Day of the 8 th Month	5 th Day of the 8 th Month	pp. 639-641
sNa dkar rtse (14)	6 Days	8 th Day of the 8 th Month	13 th Day of the 8 th Month	pp. 644-648
rDo rje brag (1)	---	18 th Day of the 8 th Month	---	p. 650

*Map 1. Major Destinations Described in Padma 'phrin las's Travel Memoir*¹¹



Generally speaking, Padma 'phrin las received a warm welcome—often involving mounted escorts or processions of monks—and was granted audiences with the top ranking lay or monastic officials at each of these locations. He met with two different patriarchs of the

¹¹ This map was prepared under the generous tutelage of Dr. Yuhao Wu at Troy University.

'Khon clan—'Khon ston 'Jam dbyangs bsod noms bstan 'dzin (17th c.)¹² in rTse gdong¹³ and Ngag dbang kun dga' bkra shis (1656–1711) in Sa skya, and he also met the Fifth Panchen Lama, Blo bzang ye shes (1663–1737), at bKra shis lhun po.¹⁴ Although he visited sites associated with each of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, he does mention at least one bKa' rgyud pa location (to be discussed below) to which he was not permitted to travel. He performed empowerments for a wide range of cycles during his travels, but tended to focus on the Byang gter at the various rNying ma pa institutions he visited.¹⁵ The traditions he established during this journey and the great number of people he ordained along the way likely contributed to the spread of the rDo rje brag monastic paradigm in gTsang and Central Tibet in the seventeenth century.

Padma 'phrin las appears to have also been constantly involved with reading and writing during his journey. The travel memoir is peppered with references that make it clear that he used the biographies of the Byang gter masters to guide his pilgrimage activities.¹⁶ He gave a vast number of reading transmissions, spent significant time reading biographies related to the places he visited, and even appears to have travelled to Khro phu in-part to obtain a reading transmission of a biography of Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde.¹⁷ With respect to

¹² The BDRC reports that gTer bdag gling pa received teachings from a *rTse gdong pa* bSod noms bstan 'dzin <https://www.tbrc.org/#!rid=P9484>, which is possibly the same patriarch of the Khon clan met by Padma 'phrin las at rTse gdong.

¹³ For a record of Padma 'phrin las's exploits in the region of rTse gdong, see Padma 'phrin las, p. 519–528. For a description of rTse gdong, see Cassinelli & Ekval 1969, pp. 362–363.

¹⁴ While Padma 'phrin las was received with great fanfare almost everywhere he visited during this journey, the two exceptions, perhaps unsurprisingly, were Sa skya and bKra shis lhun po. For details of his visits to these two areas, see respectively, Padma 'phrin las, pp. 599–609 and 616–624.

¹⁵ For example, Padma 'phrin las stayed at the rNying ma pa monastery of sPungs pa Ri bo che for a week on his way out to Ngam ring and for nearly two weeks on the return trip. During both visits, he gives extensive empowerments for various Byang gter cycles. For details, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 514–518, 583–588.

¹⁶ For example, while traveling between Gru 'dzin and bKra bzang, Padma 'phrin las reaches a point along the river that he identifies as a site mentioned in the biography of Legs ldan rdo rje, one of his previous incarnations. Evidently Legs ldan rdo rje and Shākya bzang po (ca. 16th c.) were stopped there for three days while attempting to cross the river. For details, see Padma 'phrin las, p. 540.

¹⁷ For details regarding his visit to Khro phu, see Padma 'phrin las, p. 611. For another interesting episode that occurs at gCung Ri bo che, where he reads the biographies of Thang stong rgyal po (1361–1486) and Lo chen 'Gyur med bde chen (1540–1615), see Padma 'phrin las, p. 586. According to Cyrus Stearns (2008), 'Gyur med bde chen gave over control of gCung Ri bo che, the seat of Thang stong rgyal po, to Yol mo pa bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1589–1644), who was the individual who identified Padma 'phrin las as the reincarnation of Ngag gi dbang po.

his writing activities, surely he at least took notes that were used to produce his travel memoir. He also authored a few ritual manuals, wrote numerous letters, and composed a great number of prayers that he gave away as gifts.¹⁸

As a complete explanation of his exploits is not possible here, I will focus on three different points. I will discuss the details of one of his visits to a Sa skya pa Monastery, the manner of his arrival in Byang Ngam ring, and various episodes that unfolded while Padma 'phrin las travelled through the mountains of dBus and gTsang. These passages will be highlighted to demonstrate the historiographic significance of this travel memoir and the captivating quality of Padma 'phrin' las's intimate writing style.

The Kālacakra Initiation at rDo rje gdan Gong dkar Chos sde

While Padma 'phrin las was preparing for his journey, he was invited to take part in the Sa ga zla ba festivities at Sa skya monastery of Gong dkar Chos sde, which is just more than a day's journey west along the southern bank of the gTsang po River.¹⁹ The festivities were to include an extensive set of initiations for the Kālacakra Tantra (*Dus 'khor*), and they invited him to take part in the administration of those rites. He therefore began his journey by departing rDo rje brag on the 10th day of the Fourth Month so that he could arrive at Gong dkar Chos sde on the 11th. Ritual preparations, including the consecration of the ritual space and the construction of an elaborate sand maṇḍala, began as soon as he arrived and continue through the 12th and 13th.

On the 14th of the month, they began a two-day set of initiations called "Seven Empowerments for Raising Children" (*Byis pa 'jug pa'i dbang bdun*) that employed the sand maṇḍala, which the monks had

¹⁸ For an excellent example of this literary activity, see the discussion of Padma 'phrin las's adventures in the mountains after departing from gCung Ri bo che, which is described in detail below.

¹⁹ For an account of the invitation, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 491-492. For the details regarding his visit to Gong dkar, many of which are summarized below, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 495-505. Gong dkar Chos sde was established in the fifteenth century by Kun dga' rnam rgyal (1432-1496). For a discussion of his life and works, see Fermer 2009. Evidently, Gong dkar ought to be considered the fourth of the major subdivisions of the Sa skya, alongside the more well-known Sa skya, the Ngor pa, and the Tshar pa traditions. Several of the branch monasteries were involved with the ritual institutions supporting the rule of the Dalai Lamas, including a contingent of monks stationed at the Potala's Kālacakra temple. For details, see Jackson 2015, pp. 243-244. There is also an interesting description of the drum-dancers of Gong dkar who were featured performers in a large-scale public ceremony called "The Golden Procession of the Assembly of Worship" (*tshogs mchod ser spreng*); for details, see Richardson 1993, pp. 74-81.

just spent two days creating. Padma 'phrin las himself was empowered as a master of the ceremonies (*rdo rje slop dpon*) and was seated at the center of a gathering of approximately 200 participants. The assembly include Padma 'phrin las's brother, *rNam gling Panchen* dKon mchog chos grags (1646–1718), as well as the masters and disciples of Gong dkar Chos sde and several nearby monasteries.²⁰ Padma 'phrin las performed the preparatory rites that took up much of the first day and gave an explanation of the Kālacakra Tantra based on a commentary written by bSod nams rgyal mtshan,²¹ whose manuals were also employed throughout the proceedings.

On the 15th of the month, the initiates were marched through the seven empowerments, which is understood as a multi-stage process that purifies the individual from birth through to physical maturity and establishes one as a novice tantric practitioner both literally and metaphorically. On the 16th of the month, Padma 'phrin las bestowed two sets of higher empowerments that employ the maṇḍala of the body of the visualized consort (*phyag rgya'i lus*), which is appropriate for the initiate who is no longer a child. The first set of these more exclusive empowerments is called "Four Higher Empowerments of Conventional Reality" (*Gong ma kun rdzob drang ba'i don gyi dbang bzhi*); they bring the initiates through to the level of Vajra-master. Lastly, he bestowed the final set of empowerments called the "Four Higher Empowerments for the Ultimate Sovereign" (*Don dam bdag po'i dbang gong chen bzhi*).

It is evident that the above activities greatly affected Padma 'phrin las as he recorded the following reflection in the travel memoir:

As I was returning from the temple after having just completed the higher empowerments, [I saw] that it had come down like it was the

²⁰ Despite being the younger brother of Padma 'phrin las, dKon mchog chos grags is more widely known as having trained at sMin grol gling Monastery, not rDo rje brag. He is also recognized as an accomplished scholar, thus the title "rNam gling Panchen" or "The Panchen of rNam sras gling," which is the name of his family's estate where both he and Padma 'phrin las were born. For an ever-so-brief biography of his life, see Sonam Dorje 2016. dKon mchog chos grags also made significant contributions to the study of medicine, working with the Fifth Dalai Lama and *sDe srid* Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. For a discussion of his work in this area, see Schaeffer 2003, pp. 631-632. Padma 'phrin las's autobiography reveals that the brothers maintained a close relationship. As a matter of fact, the brothers were supposed to spend more time traveling together during the summer of 1690, but as the pair departed from Gong dkar, dKon mchog chos grags is called to bDe chen chos 'khor. For Padma 'phrin las's lamenting account of their separation, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 505-506.

²¹ I assume this to be bSod nams rgyal mtshan (1312–1375), the 14th throne-holder of Sa skya, who is known to have written about the Kālacakra. For details, see Townsend 2010.

start of the heavy rains for the year. [Everything] was wet with [various forms of] precipitation, including hail. Although they had irrigated the streets of the monastery, on that day even the drainage ditches were overflowing with water. Occurrences such as these [demonstrated that I had established] very good and appropriate connection [through my activities at the monastery]. Indeed, with this contented state of mind, I engaged in my nightly activities [as if I were] in the realm of the Lord of the Naga-serpents.²²

In total, Padma 'phrin las remained in Gong dkar for eight days before departing for destinations further west.

Arrival at the Byang gter Related Sites of Byang Ngam ring

The first place that Padma 'phrin las visited as he entered the homeland of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was a small town in the region called Tho yor nag po. He had read in the biography of Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde that there had been a scale model of a maṇḍala here that was used in the fifteenth century to repel foreign invaders. Padma 'phrin las was very disappointed to discover that the pilgrimage destination did not live up to his expectations as there was no maṇḍala to be found. In anger he writes:

Generally speaking, in Tibet we have made sure that there are [still living] embers of the important places such as the destroyed temples of holy sites. But here, I felt sincere remorse as there wasn't even a trace of what had been destroyed by the people of Byang and g'Tsang. I thought about how this [place was] like [the fabled] city of frightened Gandharvas [far] up in the mountains, which was destroyed by the power of the sun. That is where the old potter lives, turning his potter's wheel. I thought of how [his movements] causes the continuous turning of his wheel, just as this city [turns in] the bowels of cyclic existence. Although [the syllables for invoking the wrath of the gods] came to my mind and I wanted to form them in my mouth, I hesitated [before rushing toward] the eight worldly desires. [Instead], I swallowed [the words] along with my [angry] spittle before they left my mouth.²³

Padma 'phrin las also finds Ngam ring to be uncomfortably hot. Unlike the region surrounding rDo rje brag in central Tibet, there had been very little rain in Ngam ring. He also complains that there are very few trees, so even shade was difficult to find. Thus, as Padma

²² Padma 'phrin las, pp. 502-503.

²³ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 547-548.

'phrin las reached Ngam ring, he reported that he was physically exhausted and mentally tormented by the heat of the road.²⁴ Nevertheless, these negatives were balanced by his warm welcome in Ngam ring.

By the time Padma 'phrin las began to approach Ngam ring, all of the relevant parties knew that the living incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, one of the most important treasure revealers of their own region, was on his way home. A large party of both lay and ordained practitioners mounted their steeds and rode out to meet him on the trail so that they could ceremoniously escort this great lama into Ngam ring.²⁵ The escort party notably included the living patriarchs of the Se ston and Me ston lineages of family practitioners who received the Byang gter transmissions from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem in the fourteenth century and continued to maintain those traditions at their family estates in Ngam ring when Padma 'phrin las arrived in 1690.

As the party came near to the great fortress of Ngam ring, Padma 'phrin las viewed the remains of gSang sngags Theg mchog gling, which was the regional seat of Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rdo rje—the second incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem—and was constructed by Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde. When they finally arrived before the fortress of Ngam ring, Padma 'phrin las was welcomed in grand fashion. On the nearby mountain aptly named bSangs ri, large juniper-burning rituals (*lha bsangs*) were performed simultaneously at the base, middle, and peak in his honor. This practice followed a time-honored local custom that was originally performed by the king, ministers, and vassals who would be stationed respectively at the top, middle, and bottom of the mountain in reflection of the social hierarchy of Ngam ring. Padma 'phrin las's visit coincided with an important summer religious gathering, and thus he writes:

Indeed, a very large number of alms-bearers (*rams chos rgyag mkhan*) had arrived from such places as Shis ser 'bras, which was nearby, for a summer religious gathering. The laity [came to] express their loyalty to Jang [Ngam ring]. As soon as [everyone] was assembled to fill the temple to its twelve doors, I spoke [the words of] a blessing. [Later,] those living in the common dwellings of the monastic college urged me to join them. I went as [they asked,] and they earnestly honored me with tea, sweets, and other [refreshments].²⁶

²⁴ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 546-548.

²⁵ For the events described in this paragraph and the next, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 550-552.

²⁶ Padma 'phrin las, p. 552.

While visiting with the monks, Padma 'phrin las questioned them regarding the controversial expulsion of Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde, who was a scion of the ruling family of Jang Ngam ring.²⁷ After spending a few days visiting the estates of the Se ston and Mes ston patriarchs, Padma 'phrin las traveled to the original epicenter of the Byang gter Tradition, Ri bo bKra bzang. Along the way, he stopped at the birthplace of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and at the location by a river where the would-be treasure revealer received a cash of treasure materials from disciples of *Ri 'khrod pa bZang po grags pa*. Both of these events, of course, figure prominently in the biographies, and the reader can feel the tension building as Padma 'phrin las narrates his journey to bKra bzang in the travel memoir. He writes:

I got off of my horse and rested for a short while at the ruined dwellings of sNa mo lung, which is where the great treasure revealer, [Rig 'dzin rGod ldem], was born. Then, following the horse trail I had used to ascend, I guided [my steed] easily back along the road. Just before I arrived at that sacred destination, more than one hundred male and female practitioners of bKra bzang, predominantly nuns (*btsun ma*), [joined me as my] escort, bearing an extensive variety of instruments—drums, cymbals, and conch-shell trumpets—as well as flags, victory banners, and pennants.²⁸

As he narrates his passage past the temples that mark the outer circumambulation route of bKra bzang, he reflects on the auspiciousness of reaching his final destination on the 25th day of the fifth month, which he understands to be a good sign. He reports that the weather confirms his interpretation:

Rain had been scarce while I was on the road, and [here they] were pained by the drought. However, since the night I arrived in Ngam ring, there had been a little rain, and since [I passed the village of] Ra lung, there had been a little more. But, upon arriving at bKra bzang, great torrents of rain began to fall [frequently], fulfilling the wishes of the farmers. And, [the great rains were signs that I had established]

²⁷ This is a sensitive subject for on the one hand, the monks clearly express that it was prudent to banish Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde because he performed wrathful tantric practices without first receiving proper initiations and trainings. The monks were evidently concerned that his actions would cause calamities in Ngam ring if Chos rgyal dbang po sde had been permitted to remain. Interestingly, one of the monks reportedly produced a letter for Padma 'phrin las to read that had been written to chastise Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde for his misdeeds. On the other hand, if it weren't for the expulsion of this besmirched patriarch, rDo rje brag might not have been established in Central Tibet. For details, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 552-553.

²⁸ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 559-560.

very good connections [with the people of Ngam ring].²⁹

Padma 'phrin las remains at bKra bzang for a total of nine days, before heading to Zang zang lha brag, where there is another community of Byang gter practitioners awaiting his arrival.

Cathartic Experiences in the Mountains

Not all of Padma 'phrin las's adventures, however, involve high-level meetings with regional leaders. The memoir includes many descriptions of the cathartic experiences he enjoyed while traveling through the mountains. For example, on the 18th day of the fourth month, Padma 'phrin las traversed the Gam pa la Mountain Pass. This was a harrowing experience, which, as he explains in the memoir, caused him to experience some sort of stomach illness that was to plague him sporadically throughout his journey. On the 21st day of the fourth month, the main trail brought Padma 'phrin las within close proximity of the cave complex called Brag dmar ke'u tshang, which is in the borderlands between Yar 'brog and Rin spungs.³⁰ He was particularly interested to visit these caves because they were originally occupied by sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms, the 8th-century disciple of Guru Rinpoche, who is said to have been involved in the concealment of the Northern Treasures. Moreover, sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms was also understood by this point in history as one of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's pre-incarnations and therefore also as one of Padma 'phrin las's pre-incarnations.³¹

Unfortunately, when Padma 'phrin las reached the mouth of the gorge that includes this cave complex, he was still suffering from the illness that he had contracted the last time he ventured high up in the mountains. He decided, therefore, that he would commune from afar and send his prayers from the safety of the trail. As his company was

²⁹ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 560-561.

³⁰ For the details of this episode, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 508-509.

³¹ As I argue elsewhere, it is not entirely clear in the earliest extant biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem that he was understood as a "reincarnation" of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms during his own time. He is described as an emanation (*sprul pa*) of rDo rje bdud 'joms, but the designation is not presented as central to his identity. See Valentine 2013, pp. 26-56. It appears that over time it becomes nearly a requirement that a treasure revealer must be a reincarnation of one of Guru Rinpoche's twenty-five Tibetan disciples. And, while there are early examples, such as Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (12th c.) who claimed to a reincarnation of the emperor Khri srong lde btsan (c. 742-800), I remain unconvinced that such an incarnational relationship was considered a requirement until later. The development likely paralleled the proliferations of the institution of rule by incarnation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For details on Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, see Hirshberg 2016, p. 65.

about to depart, however, Padma 'phrin las changed his mind. This is the first site associated with the great siddhas of the past that he had come across on this journey. How could he pass up the opportunity to make a karmic connection with such an important site? He also clearly did not want to set the precedent of retracting from hardship during this journey at the expense of missing such great opportunities.

Thus, Padma 'phrin las descended from his mount and sent it along with the packhorses and their minders to strike camp in a nearby meadow. He then climbed the steep trail in solitude with very few supplies. As he explored the cave complex, he blessed the rooms and forged a connection with the sacred site by sprinkling medical herbs in each of the rooms. In observation of the fact that sNa nam rdo rje is revered as an early master of the Vajrakīla, Padma 'phrin las performed his own ritual arrangement of the cycle in the caves, chanting the liturgy while tapping out rhythms on a small drum, which he discovered in one of the caves. He then performed a small feast offering with his meager supplies and wrapped the statuary of the caves with ceremonial scarves. Before he departed, he encountered the nun who maintained the site. She served him tea while he granted audiences to the locals who were also there visiting these sacred caves.

Padma 'phrin las's descent was very difficult; he felt weak and had to borrow a walking staff to help himself down the path. These hardships, however, did not detract from the auspiciousness of his experiences of the day. Quite to the contrary, the difficulties that were experienced figured prominently in Padma 'phrin las's own interpretation of the events of this meaningful day. In the travel memoir, he writes:

I have opened this first door [of my pilgrimage] by visiting a sacred site of a [true] siddha, [and]

[Receiving] the blessings of sNa nam [rdo rje], [in these caves of] Brag dmar ke'u tshang, [and]

By means of my esoteric practice of the sacred activity of the Kīla-Dagger Cycle,

I have [also] widely opened hundreds of doors [for establishing all] varieties of sacred connections!

The physical illnesses of my body, which were caused by the influence of demons,

Have been cleared well away [from me], and in my heart, [I feel] the supreme gift of profound happiness!

I ascertained these signs and their meanings with crystal clarity, [and]

[Having] obtained these sprouts [of comprehension], my confi-

dence [in myself and the importance of this journey] has been assured!³²

Two months later, on the 21st Day of the Sixth Month, Padma 'phrin las had finished his extensive visit to Ngam ring and had just departed gCung Ri bo che, which was established by Thang stong rgyal po and was the home to a skilled troupe of actors. After spending a couple of days traveling in the mountains intent on reaching his next destination, which happened to be lHa rtse, Padma 'phrin las decided to proceed at a more leisurely pace. He writes:

Although I planned to travel [far] the day after that, the road was in bad condition. As soon as [this] was explained [to me], the pack animals [were permitted] to descend [without me]. I was very pleased [to] travel the bare minimum [on foot that day]. There were [verdant] pastures, and I stopped for a break at a mountain pass. That day, the sky was clear and I was as happy and carefree as a drunk and burden-free layman without [a care in the world]. In the morning and the evening, I performed my practices while walking with a slow gait.

I received correspondences from Lama Kun dga' rgya po (17th c.).³³ He gifted me with a book—an instruction manual for Mind-Training (*blo sbyong*)—that was written by Sems dpa' chen po gZhon nu rgyal mchog (14th c.).³⁴ I had sent [him a letter] from Zang zang [expressing my] doubts regarding the creation and completion stages (*bskyed rdzogs*) for [the goddess] mKha' spyod ma. [His correspondence included], among other things, annotations [meant to] clear away my doubts. I composed a response in verse and sent [it back to him with the courier].

[Then], in accordance with the request of *rTse gdong bdag chen* Khri Rin po che,³⁵ [I had begun] writing a manuscript concerning the empowerment for the longevity benediction (*tshé dbang*) of the Byang gter cycle [known as] lCags sdong ma. Because I had leisure on that day, I finished writing it.³⁶

³² Padma 'phrin las, p. 510.

³³ Bla ma Kun dga' rgyal po was an elderly master, presumably of the Se clan given that Padma 'phrin las met with him at brGya mkhar gSang sngags gling, the ancestral seat of the Se in the Ngam ring area. It seems that the two forged a strong connection while Padma 'phrin las was in the region. For details, see Padma 'phrin las, pp. 556-589.

³⁴ The bKa' gdams pa master named gZhon nu rgyal mchog is well known for his extensive work with Mind-Training (*blo sbyong*) teachings. For details, see Sernesi 2016, p. 168-169.

³⁵ This is, of course, the young Sa skya patriarch, 'Khon ston 'Jam dbyangs bsod nams bstan 'dzin, who he met at rTse gdong on the trip out to Ngam ring.

³⁶ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 589-590.

This passage wonderfully captures the personality of Padma 'phrin las, revealing him both as an individual who truly enjoys the natural world around him and as a sincerely engaged practitioner of the dharma who relishes any opportunity to put pen to paper.

This final episode in the mountains takes place on the Seventh Day of the Eighth Month, close to the conclusion of his journey. He writes:

We departed early the next morning [from sKyid khud in Nyang]. We arrived at the seat of an ancient family called Lung dmar. There was hardly any reason to go on pilgrimage here as almost all the buildings [were in] ruins and the walls [were] crumpling.³⁷ A descendent of the house of Lung dmar, however, did come out to meet me. [Later,] I ate the midday meal by the banks of the gZhung chu River straight up from Ra lung. Although I did not see the monastery of Ra lung, I could just make out the haze of incense [in that direction]. I am connected on my mother's side to 'Brug smyon Kun [dga'] legs [pa] (1455-1529), and I am very devoted to the past bKa' brgyud masters.³⁸ And, Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde took one of his consorts (*gsang yum*) from Ra lung.³⁹ [Thus,] I wanted to visit and make a connection. In those days, however, [the monastery] had been put under the jurisdiction of the family [of] the [master of] religious services (*sku rim pa*) of the government. If I were to go on pilgrimage to Ra lung, it would break my promises and so forth. [So, I] did not have the opportunity [to visit], and I bent [my] course [away] and did not go [to Ra lung].⁴⁰

As Padma 'phrin las continued his journey in the afternoon, he encountered further complications in the mountains. He writes:

A short way ahead, [I reached] the snow-capped mountain called gNod sbyin gang bzang, which terrified me. [I found myself experiencing] fearful respect for those mountains and gorges, into which I did not want to travel. When I was almost to the mountain pass called Kha ro, black clouds gathered in the sky. Then came flashes of red lightning, the fierce sounds of thunder, and other [signs of impending meteorological doom]. Because of all that, I thought about how I was so frequently tormented [by such experiences], [which led to the further] torment of *duḥkha*.

³⁷ Gyurme Dorje describes Lung dmar as "one of the most impoverished areas of Tsang," which suggests that there has been little improvement over what Padma 'phrin las experienced in the area in 1690; see Gyurme Dorje 2004, p. 267.

³⁸ For a discussion of the life and works of 'Brug smyon Kun dga' legs pa, see DiValerio 2011, pp. 397-473.

³⁹ Presumably, this consort was someone other than 'Phyong rgyas Za hor Yid 'dzin dbang mo (16th c.), the mother of his child, Ngag gi dbang po (1580-1639), who was one of Padma 'phrin las's previous incarnations.

⁴⁰ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 642-643.

As was appropriate [in such situations], I visualized the yidam divinities and recited [their mantras] from atop my horse. [Donning] the identities (*nga rgyal*) of each of the divinities, I proclaimed my vows at [gNod sbyin] Gang bzang. In particular, for a long time I cultivated the identity of the subjugating and wrathful Padmasambhava as I generated a protective boundary [around myself].

Then, it rained savagely. Swirling [winds], which I had never before experienced, were coming from Mt. gNod sbyin gang bzang, and [another] whirlwind was fiercely approaching from the direction of Ra lung. I thought [about how the weather] was like my anger over not visiting Ra lung [where I should have visited] the four-armed protector of my ancestors. So, abiding in the identity of Cakrasaṃvara, I pronounced the names of the bKa' brgyud Lamas and proclaimed my vows. Then, I praised and exhorted the Wisdom-Protectors (*ye shes mgon po*) saying, for example, "Sugatas of [gNod sbyin] gang [bzang], I make these vows [here] before your eyes!" As soon as I was [engaged in] bKa' brgyud practices in the presence [of the protectors], the sky cleared up and the sun [suddenly] appeared! We all laughed [with relief]! That night, I stayed in a pleasant pasture in the boarder [regions].⁴¹

The passages above offer, of course, only a small sampling of what Padma 'phrin las's travel memoir has to offer as a historiographic source. The empowerment ceremonies, which he performed at his major destinations, were often events as prestigious and well-attended as the Kālacakra initiation at Gong dkar rDo rje gdan described above. Although he was not welcomed with burning mountains at each of his stops, Padma 'phrin las was consistently received in a manner befitting his status as an elite Buddhist master, and the narratives of each of these receptions offers insight into the varying customs of each of his destinations. Lastly, Padma 'phrin las's reflections in the travel memoir, such as those describing his experiences in the mountains, provide us with the small windows that are needed to capture a glimpse of another individual's heart and mind from whom we are separated by hundreds of years and the veil of death.

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⁴¹ Padma 'phrin las, pp. 643–644.

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