

Groping in the Dark Treasury. Exploring the Mi la bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia in light of a most peculiar manuscript

Etienne Bock

(Tibet Museum – Fondation Alain Bordier)

n 2017, the Tibet Museum – Fondation Alain Bordier in Gruyères, Switzerland, acquired a voluminous and richly illuminated manuscript presented as an “early version of the life of Milarepa”. Along with the book came a thorough introductory study by Andreas Kretschmar dated 2006. This study focused on the colophon of the text and listed the illustrations and their legends. The manuscript was presented as “a version [of the “Black Treasury”] authored by the 3rd Karmapa, only with a different title and a very interesting colophon.”¹

A 2016 email by Matthew Kapstein was also communicated with the manuscript. After comparing its colophon with “the available editions of the same version – the 3rd Karmapa’s – of the Milarepa songs”, M. Kapstein concluded: “the manuscript is as close as we are now able to come to the version on which all other known versions are based; it is safe to say that this does establish the importance of the manuscript for any effort to produce a critical edition of the text.”

Based on these comments, it seemed clear that the manuscript was a version of the so-called “*Black Treasury*” by the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339).

In 2021, Mr. Bordier launched the project of a publication presenting his collection and using the manuscript as its core. The research for the book was the occasion to dive into the manuscript. and explore its content.

In order to navigate through the manuscript and to locate the corresponding pages, I used several sources for comparison, mostly a 2008 edition published in Sichuan and a unicode version of the *mDzod nag ma* found within the Third Karma pa’s Collected Works.² It soon

¹ Kretschmar 2006 p. 1.

² BCG-Si 2008; DNM-RD 2011b.

became obvious, however, that the three sources were not corresponding. Based on Appendixes 2 & 3 of Quintman's *The Yogin and the Madman*,³ I used the texts' outlines to try to locate our ms. among the other versions. In parallel, I worked on a diplomatic edition of Ms-Bordier based on the Third Karma pa document, a work still in progress to this day.

Trying to understand the Bordier manuscript it was necessary to analyse the available versions of the compendia and, with the help of Kristin Blancke, we explored this literature. Throughout the detailed presentation of this manuscript and its particularities (title, content, illustrations, colophon...) this article explores the compendia corpus in order to shed some new light and question our present understanding.

1. General description

The manuscript is composed of 321 folios numbered from 1 to 323, with the folio 35 missing, and the folio 41 numbered "41-42". The text is written in *dbu med* script 'bru tsa, in black and red ink. A series of refined coloured illuminations are scattered among the pages, 107 in total, highlighting the content of the text. Every illustration has a 'khyug yig legend describing its subject.⁴

Following the outline of all the compendia, the book is divided into two major sections:

- I. The qualities of hardships experienced related to his family
- II. The qualities of his experience related to his samādhi⁵

This second part is in turn divided into 18 qualities (*yon tan*) containing 62 cycles (*skor*).

The detailed content has been described and compared with Kristin Blancke's tables (Song Charts 7)⁶ establishing a close relation between our manuscript and the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*, placing it

³ Quintman 2014a Appendix 2 pp. 199-206; Appendix 3 pp. 207-224.

⁴ The list of all illustrations with the inscriptions is presented in the text outline (see Appendix A pp. 176-80).

⁵ *Rigs dang 'brel ba dka' ba spyad pa'i yon tan* and *Ting nge 'dzin dang 'brel ba nyams su myong ba'i yon tan*.

⁶ Blancke 2023a.

among the early ‘Variant’ versions, along with Ms-BDRC and Ms-Lhasa. We shall see this matter in detail later.

2. Title

The manuscript is titled *rJe btsun mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i 'gur 'bum rnam thar 'bril ma*, “The compilation (?) of rJe btsun Mi la bZhad pa rdo rje’s Collected Songs and Liberation Story”.

The formulation of the title appears unusual on several levels. First, the expression *'bril ma* is problematic. Since it is absent from dictionaries, one could understand it as a corrupt spelling for *'brel ma* “connected, united, joined”, with the scribe mixing up the *gi gu* and *'greng bu* which can be easily confounded as they share similar written forms between the *dbu can* and *dbu med* scripts. In this case, the title would be *'brel ma*, meaning “the union of Songs and Life”.

Another possibility might be a spelling mistake for a homophonic verb. Yet, it seems improbable for a scribe to ignore such a mistake on the title page without correcting or modifying it. The eventuality of an archaism appears more logical.⁷ Two verbs similar in pronunciation, *'dril* and *'gril* convey the meaning of “assembling, collecting.”⁸ Therefore, we can reasonably assume our title to mean “compilation”.

No mention of the *mDzod nag ma* or the Karma pa is made within the title, as is the case for most manuscript versions of the compendia.⁹ An unusual feature of this title is that it places the word for “Collected Songs” (*'gur 'bum*) before “Liberation story” (*rnam thar*). All in all, this title corresponds to none of the other manuscripts of the compendia.

⁷ The same form appears in Pelliot tibétain 37 reinforcing this hypothesis: “[...] *che rabs gyis spyod pa gcig pas ni/ sha dang rus 'bril de nas gcig skyes pa las!*.” All my gratitude to Thomas Kerihuel for indicating me this reference.

⁸ Monlam Grand Tibetan Dictionary (2014) *'gril ba* = *dag yig la lar phyogs gcig tu bsdus pa*; *'dril ba* = *phyogs gcig tu sdud pa*.

⁹ Ms-BDRC and Ms-Smith. Possibly Ms-Lhasa and Ms-Drepung.

3. *Content, qualities and cycles*

« Et qui n'est, chaque fois, ni tout à fait la même, ni tout à fait une autre... »¹⁰

Paul Verlaine, « Mon rêve familial »

As pointed out by Blancke's Song Charts 7 and 8, the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia can be differentiated into two general groups: a first stratum gathering different versions of the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* (*Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* - RBC); a second stratum consisting of the so-called *Dark Treasury* (*mDzod nag ma* - DNM-RD) contained in Rang byung rdo rje's Collected Works,¹¹ *A River of Blessings* (*Byin rlabs kyi chu rgyun* - BCG), and a manuscript at the British Library (Ms-BL). To briefly summarise the findings of Blancke, these two groups can again be divided into different categories:

1a) *The Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*: Ms-Newark, Ms-Oxford, Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Gansu, RBC-Stockholm,¹² and RBC-Paltsek¹³

1b) Variant versions of the RBC: Ms-Bordier, Ms-BDRC, and Ms-Lhasa, with specific additional content

2a) The so-called *mDzod nag ma* presented in the Collected Works of Rang byung rdo rje: DNM-RD

2b) The British Library manuscript: Ms-BL

¹⁰ Verlaine 1890 p. 21.

¹¹ Referring to Roberts' explanation (2007 p. 32n128), the *mdzod nag* being "a room, or closet [that] has no windows and therefore is in the darkness", the expression 'Dark Treasury' appears more logical than 'Black Treasury'.

¹² Concerning this lost edition, see Roberts 2007 pp. 22-23. The translation of the colophon shows the connection with the other RBCs. Thanks to Marta Sernesi we could access Ms-Drukpa and Ms-Gansu, two almost identical texts, the latter sharing a comparable title and the same colophon as the lost xylographic edition.

¹³ RBC-Pt is a modern reconstructed edition based upon "two different ancient texts", as explained in the editor's preface (pp. 6-7). It is the sole version of *The Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* with an extra 18th quality. As a modern edition based on two unidentified 'ancient texts' this particularity remains questionable.

2c) *A River of Blessings*: Ms-Smith, Ms-India, Ms-Drepung (and its modern editions BCG-D and BCG-Si)¹⁴

This differentiation rests upon a series of precise elements: 1) **the structure of the texts**, consisting of the number of “qualities” (*yon tan*), the number of “cycles” (*skor*), and their order of presentation within the qualities; 2) **the content of the text**, in terms of narrative elements and songs; 3) the **titles and colophons**.

A quick look at the Song Charts and the Outlines shows that all the texts consulted share the same generic quality structure (whether 17 or 18) but that none correspond in terms of precise content. For a detailed study of each category, see Blancke’s contribution to this volume.

Ms-Bordier belongs to the group of the Variant versions of the RBC, together with Ms-BDRC and Ms-Lhasa. These three texts share the same structure as the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*. What identifies them as ‘Variant’ is some specific original content absent in the ‘Regular’ RBCs. This supplementary material consists in two short passages, one concerning sGam po pa and one concerning Ras chung pa, plus an extra song about the *bar do*.¹⁵

The difference between these three manuscripts lies exclusively in the addition of extra cycles with respect to each other. All three possess the general RBC colophon supplemented with a second colophon, different each time.

¹⁴ Quintman identifies a ‘DNM-D’ gathering two bibliographical references: a 2004 edition in the ‘*Bri gung bka’ brgyud chos mdzod chen mo* (here BCG-D) and a 2008 edition published in Chengdu, Sichuan (here BCG-Si). Both are in fact modern reeditions of a manuscript reproduced in facsimile in *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* vols. 111-112. Unfortunately, the ms. lacks its title page. Although the editor gives no information regarding its provenance, the fact that it was reproduced in the ‘*Bri gung bka’ brgyud chos mdzod chen mo* (vol. 7 & 8) points to its origin being the gNas bcu lha khang in ‘Bras spung. Cécile Ducher (2020 p. 135) explains that this collection was rewritten by hand from originals allegedly part of around 40 boxes kept in that “archive”, i.e. books that were seized from various libraries shortly after the establishment of the dGa’ ldan pho brang (1642). This manuscript is therefore named Ms-Drepung in the present study.

¹⁵ Concerning sGam po pa and the *bar do* song: quality 17, *rJe ras pa chen po mi la ras pa dang/ mnyam med dags po rin po che yab sras kyis zhu ba dang zhus len gyis skor*. Concerning Ras chungpa: quality 17 for Ms-BDRC and Ms-Lhasa, quality 18 for Ms-Bordier.

Inside this group, Ms-Bordier stands apart due to three details:

- in contrast to all the other RBCs, it has an extra 18th quality.
- in contrast to the other two Variant RBCs, it has no colophon mentioning Rang byung rdo rje's role as the compiler of the text.
- in contrast to almost all other compendia, it contains a history of the *Dark Treasury* transmitted by the Karma pas¹⁶ (from now on, *lo rgyus*). A very similar *lo rgyus* is present in one version of *A River of Blessings*, namely Ms-Drepung, and its two modern copies.

Despite the disparities of content, titles, colophons and religious affiliation, all compendia share many common points, and all identify themselves as the 'Life and Songs of bZhad pa'i rdo rje', an expression encountered in every colophon.¹⁷

The Outline in Appendix A indicates that Ms-Bordier's narrative cycles (*skor*) and their disposition within the qualities are identical to those of the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*. The only difference in structure lies in the presence of an 18th quality, as opposed to all the other *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* which all end at #17: "the quality of introducing to Mahāmudrā" (*phyag rgya chen po'i ngo 'phrod pa'i yon tan*).¹⁸ This 18th quality of "displaying the achievement of the unified vajra body in a single lifetime and its dissolution into the rainbow body" (*tshé gcig gis zung 'jug rdo rje'i sku 'grub cing 'ja' lus su yal ba'i tshul bstan pa'i yon tan*), is found in RBC-Pt, DNM-RD, and all versions of *A River of Blessings*. Since RBC-Pt is a modern edition, the first of a five-volumes

¹⁶ Ms-Bordier f. 322b.1: *rje btsun gyi rgyal po mi la ras pa'i 'gur 'bum/ chos rje karma pa nas brgyud pa'i mdzod nag ma zhes bya ba 'di'i lo rgyus ni/*

¹⁷ RBC: *dpal bzhad pa'i rdo rje rnam thar mgur chings dang bcas*; DNM-RD: *dpa' bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam thar mgur chos zhal gdams dang bcas pa*; Ms-BL: *dpal bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam thar/ 'gur ma'i chings dang bcas pa*; BCG: *rje rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i 'gur tshogs lo rgyus kyi spras pa*.

¹⁸ Due to the impossibility of consulting the RBC-St, we cannot ascertain if this version has 17 or 18 qualities.

Mi la ras pa'i gsung 'bum, we must remain circumspect and consider the possibility of a later “harmonisation” decided by the editors. In fact, this text collection contains a version of the *mDzod nag ma* attributed to Rang byung rdo rje (DNM-RD 2011) that shows multiple evidences of edition and reconstruction by the editors (orthographic corrections, new cycles and songs added, etc.), a practice also admitted in the editor’s preface to this collection.¹⁹

When examining the location of this extra ‘quality’ in Ms-Bordier and comparing it with the other RBCs, it appears that the title was simply inserted at the end of the last cycle *Brin gyi smon lam gyi skor* without addition or suppression of narrative. This specific part of the story describing the last years of *Mi la ras pa* and the circumstances of his passing beyond suffering bears no title as a separate cycle. From a symbolic perspective, the addition of this 18th section emphasises the importance of this episode as “a quality related to the experience of *samādhī*” (*ting nge 'dzin dang 'brel ba nyams su myong ba'i yon tan*). Stylistically, it also balances the text by reducing the over developed 17th section already comprising more than 15 cycles depending on the version.

Beside this extra quality, regarding the cycles, their number and order, with 62 *skor* Ms-Bordier is the closest to the ‘Regular’ *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*. One must be very careful with the analysis of cycles as they often share the same name but can vary in terms of content.

¹⁹ RBC-Pt pp. 6-7: *rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug rje btsun mi la bzhad par do rje'i mgur 'bum mdzod nag ma zhes pa ni [...] dpal karma pa thams cad mkhyen pa rang byung rgyal bas rje btsun chen po'i gsung mgur dang rnam thar brgya phrag las brgal ba bsags nas/ de dag gi legs cha bsdus te phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs par mdzad par rje nyid kyi phyag bris kong po rtse lha sgang gi mdzod nag tu bzhugs pa de las bris bshus kyi dpe mang du 'phel ba'i rgyun las **dpe mi 'dra ba lnga tsam nga tsho'i lag par rnyed son byung ba las/** 'di ni dbyin yul nas 'ongs pa'i ma dpe zhig la gzhi bcol te dpe gzhan rnams dang bsdur nas bcos gang thub byas kyang/ tshan pa so so'i mgur chings kyi lo rgyus rgyas bsdus dans brjod bya mi 'dra zhing go rim 'khrugs pa bcas rnyog 'dzing shin tu che bas ma phyi ltar rang sor bzhag ste lta klog bde ba'i ched deb dtod smad gnyis byas yod/.*

As far as the song cycles are concerned, compared to the other *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*, Ms-Bordier has no extra or lacking cycle. Therefore, we could consider its structure as a possible model for a 'basic' *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*, except for the three characteristic passages specific to the 'Variant' category: the *bar do* song, the episode of sGam po pa and the great *gtor ma*, and the presence of Ras chung in Lo ro and at the cremation ground.²⁰ If we eliminate these 3 elements and the 18th quality, we could consider Ms-Bordier's core as a hypothetical example of what the 'original' version of *The Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* must have looked like.

In terms of volume, this additional material represents approximately 3 folios out of 322, less than 1% of the whole text, making Ms-Bordier the closest manuscript to the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* and the most distant from the compendia of the second stratum.

4. Illuminations

Ms-Bordier has numerous images illustrating and highlighting some of the episodes of the life and songs of Mi la ras pa. Ms-Newark, Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Lhasa, Ms-Drepung, Ms-Smith and the British Library manuscript (Ms-BL) are also illustrated, whether exclusively with lineage masters opening the manuscript (Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Smith) or with various life scenes. A quick overview of the Outlines reveals similitudes and differences both in the choice of the episodes illustrated and in the manner of representing them. Ms-Bordier, Ms-Lhasa, Ms-Drepung and Ms-BL have their illustrations separated from the text in little frames on the sides of the pages and sometimes at the center. Ms-Newark has small illustrations inserted within the text, between the words and lines.

The presence of illustrations accompanying the text appears to be a specificity of manuscript versions of the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia, since they are absent from the xylographic prints of

²⁰ Respectively located: ff.287b.1-288a.3; ff.290.7-290b.6; ff.310b.5-312b.5.

gTsang smyon's works (except for the lineage masters).²¹ Perhaps it was technically too complicated and expensive to carve drawings along the text. This might also be the reason why the Madman commissioned narrative paintings to accompany his editions.²²

While introducing the Newark manuscript, Quintman gives a description of its illustrations.²³ He observes the “tremendous care [that] was taken in the planning and execution of the illustrations” adding that the drawings often mark the beginning of songs. This last statement is also valid for the other manuscripts where the illustrations are usually located at the beginning of a cycle to indicate the separation between two episodes.²⁴ The composition of the images is often – but not always – similar, with a great majority of scenes representing Mi la ras pa teaching to one or more disciples, with the different characters facing each other.

The number of illustrations and their aesthetic quality greatly vary depending on the manuscript. Ms-Lhasa has the simplest type of illustrations, closer to sketches, whereas the other four are more artistically elaborated. Ms-Lhasa possesses 79 images, Ms-Bordier 107, the British Library manuscript 175, Ms-Drepung 192, and Ms-Newark 292.²⁵

In the following pages I will highlight and compare a selection of episodes illustrated in the compendia as this is relevant to find similarities, disparities, patterns, or possible aesthetic influences between the different manuscripts.

²¹ See Quintman 2023 and Lunardo & Clemente 2021.

²² Quintman 2014a pp. 133-34; Sernesi 2021 p. 63.

²³ Quintman 2014a p. 87n.13.

²⁴ See outlines in Appendix A.

²⁵ This number includes the images exclusively related to the narrative. The other images (eight auspicious symbols, seven Cakravartin possessions...) were not considered.

The dream of four pillars



Fig. 1 – The dream of four pillars. Ms-Bordier ff. 18a & 19a



Fig. 2 – The dream of four pillars. Ms-Lhasa, ff. 16a & 16b

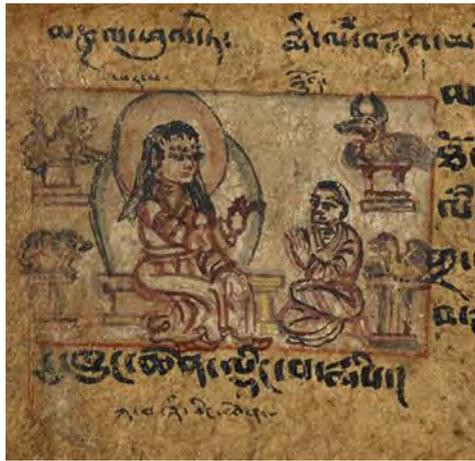


Fig. 3 – The dream of four pillars. Ms-BL f. 39b



Fig. 4 – The dream of four pillars. Ms-Drepung vol. 111 p. 68

The variety of representations of this episode shows how differently the artists imagined the scene. Although a major narrative difference exists between Ms-Bordier and Ms-Lhasa versus Ms-Drepung and Ms-BL – Mi la having the dream of the four pillars instead of Mar pa, as was in the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* – the illustrations often show Mar pa in larger proportions since he explains the dream. Even though the characters in Ms-Bordier and Ms-Drepung are different – the latter adding bDag med ma in the scene – the almost identical stylised shape of the pillars in the two illustrations is puzzling.



Fig. 5 – Ms-Newark f. 13b

Oddly, the Newark manuscript represents this scene in a completely different manner; the four pillars are absent, replaced by an unlabeled scene where Mar pa, portrayed as a *sngags pa* and accompanied by his wife preparing *ganacakra* offerings, takes the hand of Mi la and announces that he is the holder of his lineage as foretold in the dream he had.

The encounter with the rock ogress and the red man



Fig. 6 – rJe btsun, a rock ogress and a red man riding a deer. Ms-Bordier f. 63a



Fig. 7 – rJe btsun and a red man riding a deer. Ms-Lhasa f. 61a



Fig. 8 – rJe btsun, a rock ogress and a red man riding a deer. Ms-Drepung vol. 111 p. 226



Fig. 9 – rJe btsun and a woman leading a red man riding a deer. Ms-BL f. 76b



Fig. 10 – rJe btsun, an ogress, a red man and a deer. Ms-Newark f. 77b

As opposed to the previous examples, the representations of Mi la's encounter with a rock ogress and a red man riding a deer drawn from the cycle *Gung thang ling ba'i brag de la mi la ras pa dang brag srin mo gnyis kyi zhu ba zhu len/ ling ba'i skor de skor che ba* are very coherent in style. Some similarities appear in the representation of the red man on his deer in every illustration (almost identical in Ms-Bordier and Ms-Drepung). Surprisingly, the ogress appears dressed in the second stratum whereas she is always naked in the first stratum. Ms-Lhasa stands apart with the rock demoness missing in the image and the legend.

The yak horn

Concerning the famous yak horn episode, once again the images are close but not identical, whether showing Mi la inside the horn (Ms-Lhasa, Ms-Drepung), the attempt of Ras chung to get in the horn (Ms-Bordier), or Ras chung singing in front of the horn (Ms-BL). Considering these variations, the exact match of the legends of Ms-Bordier, Ms-Lhasa and Ms-Drepung is surprising: *rje btsun g.yag ru nang du bzhugs/ ras chung ba*.



Fig. 11 – rJe btsun dwelling in a yak horn and Ras chung. Ms-Bordier f. 100a



Fig. 12 – rJe btsun dwelling in a yak horn and Ras chung. Ms-Lhasa f. 96b



Fig. 13 – rJe btsun dwelling in a yak horn and Ras chung. Ms-Drepung vol. 111 p. 312



Fig. 14 – Ras chung pa and the yak horn in thang dpal mo dpal thang du g.yag ru'i skor. Ms-BL f. 128b



Fig. 15 – Ras chung under a cloud and rJe btsun dwelling in a yak horn. Ms-Newark f. 77b

Regardless of the aesthetic considerations, the diversity of this sample of illustrations shows there was no unified visual tradition for representing the episodes of Mi la bZhad pa'i rdo rje's life among the compendia. The artists did not copy from a unique source but created illustrations according to the selected episodes. The illuminations obey the constraints of the manuscript format, usually placing the illustrations on the side (and sometimes in the middle) of the page, except for Ms-Newark where they are scattered between the lines and words.

Meeting Zhi ba 'od

Finally, one episode deserves a special mention: the encounter with the future Zhi ba 'od in the *Chu mig dngul'bum* cycle. In this famous story, Mi la asks a rich young man to help him cross a river on his horse. The young man refuses pretexting the risk to injure his horse and leaves to cross the river. Mi la miraculously crosses the river floating above the water arriving at the other shore before the young man. Realising the powers of the yogin, the latter asks for forgiveness and tries to redeem himself by offering all his possessions. Then starts a long exchange of songs between the young man presenting offerings and Mi la refusing. This episode contains a large quantity of images illustrating every offering (horse, boots, cloak, etc. up to a monastery, his sister and finally his trousers). Ms-Bordier and Ms-Drepung have 11 images illustrating every failed transaction. Ms-Lhasa has 'only' 8, and Ms-Newark 17. Strangely, Ms-BL illustrates the chapter with only one image showing Mi la ras pa by a river facing a young man next to his horse and helmet.

In this case, more than any other, it appears how the images are placed according to the different songs, giving tempo to the pages (but also accentuating the feeling of repetition). On the contrary, the modern Sichuan edition of *A River of Blessings*, containing 147 drawings directly inspired by Ms-Drepung's illuminations, chose to ignore these precedents, exclusively reproducing the river crossing scene.²⁶

²⁶ BCG-Si vol. 2 p. 645, image 103.

A missing illustration?

As explained earlier, Ms Bordier misses a single folio, no. 35. This passage corresponds to the *Brag dmar mchong gling* cycle, more precisely the episode where Mar pa appears in the sky riding a lion atop a cloud – a famous motif often represented elsewhere. One could assume that this episode was illustrated in the manuscript, as it is in Ms-BL and Ms-Drepung. If so, the total number of illustrations in Ms-Bordier would then be 108, a number of high significance and symbolism in the Buddhist culture.



Fig. 16 – Mi la ras pa and Lord Mar pa riding a lion. Ms-Drepung vol. 111 p. 145

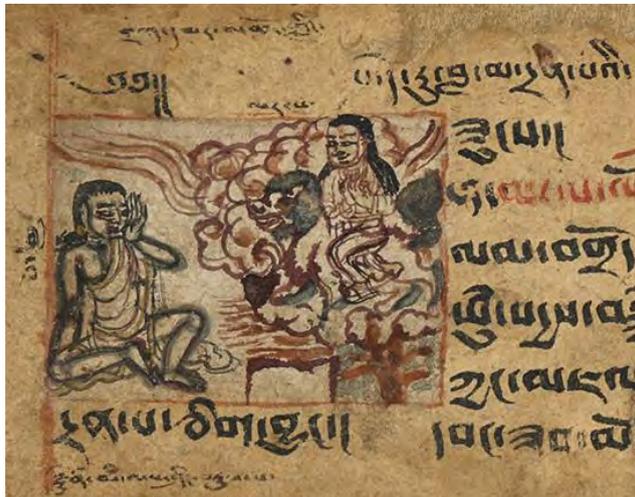


Fig. 17 – Mar pa appears before Mi la ras pa gathering wood. Ms-BL f. 44a



Fig. 18 – *rJe btsun* and *Mar pa lo tstha*, Ms-Newark f. 27b

Ms-Bordier has an illustration on f. 34a representing *Mi la ras pa* in front of a tree. Ms-Drepung has the same image on p. 145 immediately preceding *Mar pa*'s apparition. A similar image of *Mi la* next to a tree is also visible in Ms-Lhasa on f. 33a. In this case, the image is simply labelled *brag dmar 'chong gling* referring to the cycle, but it is not followed by *Mar pa* on his lion. On the contrary, Ms-BL represents only the visionary apparition scene, without the tree, but the image legend describes *Mi la* as gathering wood (*rje btsun mi las shing btus pa*). As Ms-Bordier illumination describes the scene (*shing | rje btsun*) instead of naming the cycle (*brag dmar mchong gling*), one could reasonably believe a second illustration was following on the next folio.

One can imagine that this folio might have been lost or removed for aesthetic reasons: perhaps an unscrupulous reader took this page out of the manuscript to keep it for himself.



Fig. 19 – rJe btsun and a tree. Ms-Bordier f. 35a



Fig. 20 – Mi la gathering wood near a tree. Ms-Drepung vol. 111 p. 145



Fig. 21 – Mi la near a tree. Ms-Lhasa f. 33a

A. The opening lineage

The first ten folios of the Bordier manuscript contain the images of lineage masters and deities organised as follows:

1b	Vajradhara	Tilopa
2a	Nāropa	Mar pa
3a	Mi la ras pa	Dwags po rin po che
4a	Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193)	bDe gshegs rin po che aka Phag mo gru pa (1110–1170)
5a	'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217)	Gling rje ras pa (1128–1188)
6a	gTsang pa rgya ras (1161–1211)	rGod tshang pa (1189–1258)
7a	Yang dgon pa (1213–1258)	'Gar dam pa (1180–?)
8a	mKha' spyod dbang po (1350–1405)	rGya ston chos bzang (15 th c.)
9a	'Khor lo bde mchog	rDo rje phag mo
10a	Śākya thub	'phags mchog sPyan ras gzigs dbang



Fig. 22 – Ms-Bordier ff. 1b, 2a, and 3a

From ff. 1b to 8a, we see a line of masters belonging to various bKa' brgyud sub-lineages. There is no clear designation of a particular school, but rather a mix of the Dwags po bKa' brgyud lineages: Karma kam tshang through Dus gsum mkhyen pa, mKha' spyod dbang po and rGya ston chos bzang; Phags mo gru with bDe gsheg rin po che; 'Bri gung with 'Jig rten mgon po and 'Gar dam pa, and 'Brug pa with Gling rje ras pa, gTsang pa rgya ras, rGod tshang pa and Yang dgon pa. Even though the 'Brug pa masters appear in majority, the line ends with two Kam tshang masters, bringing the succession back to this school. The last master rGya ston chos bzang is a 15th century disciple of 4th Karma pa Rol pa'i rdo rje and constitutes a first marker in time when trying to date the manuscript.

The images of Saṃvara and Vajravārāhī appear to be directly connected to the sNyan brgyud practice, and Śākyamuni and Avalokiteśvara are both universal Buddhist figures without any specific implication.

One detail can also draw the attention of the reader. All the characters are displayed on the left and right end of each page, represented in three-quarter facing each other except for three of them: Vajradhara, Mi la ras pa and mKha' spyod dbang po. These three are all in full-face, with an extra detail in the case of mKha' spyod dbang po who is accompanied by a female deity holding an umbrella. This frontal position is usually that of Buddhas and deities. Is this just a random choice or must it be interpreted as a will of the artist or the commissioner to emphasise these characters? Whatever the reason, mKha' spyod dbang po appears to have a preferential treatment, reinforcing the theory of a Kam tshang affiliation.



Fig. 23 – Details of *Vajradhara*, *Mi la ras pa* and *mKha' spyod dbang po*. Ms-Bordier ff. 1b, 3a, and 8a

This set of masters is completely different from the transmission lineage presented after the colophon in the *mDzod nag ma lo rgyus* at the end of the text (see below). In that case, the lineage starts with Ras chung pa and ends after the 6th Karma pa mThong ba don ldan (1416-1453) with his disciple Drung rin chen rdo rje (d.u.). Only Dus gsum mkhyen pa and mKha' spyod dbang po belong to both lists.

Ms-Drukpa

Among the available versions of the compendia only four have a comparable set of lineage masters: Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Smith, Ms-

Drepung, and Ms-BL.²⁷ The opening lineage of Ms-Drukpa presents a series of twenty masters composed of the bKa' brgyud forefathers from Vajradhara to Mi la ras pa, followed by seven *ras pa* disciples, sGam po pa, Phag mo gru, and the early 'Brug pa teachers down to Yang dgon pa. The group of *ras pa* consists of the “four heart-sons” plus three extra *ras pa* apparently not forming a coherent ensemble: Zhi ba 'od, Rong chung ras pa and Khyi ra ras pa. The reason of this choice remains unclear, as this selection does not correspond to any of the groups present in the compendia literature.²⁸ Concerning the disposition of the characters, all but two are represented facing each other in three-quarters: Vajradhara and gTsang pa rgya ras, founder of the 'Brug pa school.

1b	chos sku rDor rje chang chen	rDo rje rnal 'byor ma
2a	Te lo pa	Nā ro pa
2b	Mai tri pa	Mar pa lo tstsha
3a	rje Mid la	Ras chung pa
3b	Ngan sdzong ras pa	'Bri bsgom ras pa
4a	Se ban ras pa	ras pa Zhi ba 'od
4b	Rong chung ras pa	Khyi ra ras pa
5a	rje Dags po rin po che	rje Phag mo gru pa
5b	rje Gling ras pa	gTsang pa rgya ras
6a	rje rGod tshang ba	rje Yang dgon pa

Ms-Smith

Regarding Ms-Smith, Quintman mentions “twenty-four pages of illustrations, half devoted to Mi la ras pa's disciples and half depicting a lineage of masters passing through Sgam po pa, Phag mo gru pa, and the early masters of the Upper 'Brug pa lineage.”²⁹ The content, the extent and the organisation of that text altogether differ from Ms-Bordier, showing a greater coherence with the 'Brug pa school.

²⁷ Unlike the other texts, Ms-BL has portraits of masters at the end of the text inside the colophon (ff. 392a & 393b).

²⁸ For a detailed list of disciples see below p. 89 and Appendix B.

²⁹ Quintman 2014a p. 254n83.

The half illustrating Mi la’s disciples (marked with a * in the table below) closely follows the list given in the colophon,³⁰ gathering the “four heart-sons” and the “eight close disciples” (forming together the famous twelve great *ras pa* disciples) plus three out of six “accepted disciples” (*thugs zin*), the five Tshe ring sisters, and Mi la’s own sister, Pre ta. Interestingly, as often with the lists of disciples in the colophons, one of the four heart-sons was forgotten – here *Se ban ras pa* – and this omission appears in the representation with Ras chung pa appearing twice in the illuminations, under his own name (f. 3a) and under the epithet “[*gung thang gi*] *gnyen ras*” (f. 3b).

The other illustrations devoted to the ’Brug pa masters include various names of which a great number remain difficult to identify. It is interesting to note that the last three masters (ff. 10b to 11b) appear bare foot and wearing a yellow *paṇḍita* hat instead of the *bka’ brgyud sgom zhwa* worn by the other monastic masters. As for Ms-Bordier, all the masters are represented in profile except for two characters: Chos kyi bzang po on f. 8a and a disciple of Mi la ras pa Kyo ston śākya ’bum on f. 10a, without any apparent logic.

1b	rdo rje ’chang	ti lo pa
2a	na ro pa	mar pa
2b	mi la	dag po
3a	phag mo grub (<i>sic</i>) pa	*ras chang [chung] pa
3b	skyobs pa	*gnyan [gnyen?] ras ³¹
4a	gling ras pa	*ngan sdzong ras pa
4b	tsang pa rgya ras (1161–1211)	*’bri sgom ras pa
5a	rgod tshang pa (1182/89–1258)	*zhi ba ’od
5b	yang ’gon pa [rgyal mtshan dpal] (1213–1258) ³²	*rong chung ras pa
6a	spang rgang pa [dgra bcom yon tan blo gros?] ³³	*gnyan sgom ras pa

³⁰ For the lists of disciples, see Appendix B.

³¹ Ms-Smith f. 317b5 *gung thang gi gnyen ras*, another name of Ras chung pa. Replacing the missing *Se ban*.

³² Roerich 1976 p. 688; (P5262);

³³ *sPang khang pa?* (P3830); *sPang sgang pa grags pa dpal?* (P0RK410); *rGang pa’i mkhan po dgra bcom yon tan blo gros?* (P4010).

6b	byang chub bzang po [bodhibhadra?] ³⁴	*ras pa sangs rgyas rkyab
7a	rje bcan [sryan] nga' rine [rin chen ldan] (b.1202) ³⁵	*'bri rkom [sgom] ras pa
7b	zur phug pa [rin chen dpal bzang (b.1263)] ³⁶	*ras pa rdo dbyug [rdo rje dbang phyug]
8a	chos kyi bzang po ³⁷	*'khar chung ras pa
8b	nam mkha' rdo rje	*ras pa tsha g.yu ba
9a	nam mkha' dbang phyug	*le kor phyar bu pa
9b	nam mkha' sing ge	*kyo ['or] rton [ston] dge 'dun
10a	byang chub rdo rje	*kyo rton [ston] śakya 'bum
10b	rje btsun kun dga' rgyal mtshan ³⁸	*bkra shis tshe rings ma
11a	bla ma tsoms (?) dpal ba	*'thing ga zhal bzang ma
11b	dge 'dun bzang	*mi [g.]yo blo gzangs ma
12a	grub thob slob dpon chen po	*cod pan 'grin bzang ma
12b	rdo rje phag mo	*rta skar 'gron bzang ma
13a	khro bo rta mgrin	*bsring mo pre ta

Ms-Drepung

Ms-Drepung begins with a lineage, from page 2 to 19, grouping nineteen masters (the image of Nāropa is missing in the reproduction). The lineage starts with the historical Buddha and Padmasambhava and ends with Chos rje 'Jig rten dbang phyug (1454-1532), an important sTag lung master from Ri bo che, placing the manuscript at the earliest during or after this master's life. Surprisingly, none of the modern

³⁴ Roerich 1976 p. 382: "Later Mal-gyo himself went to Nepāl and thoroughly heard the Cycle of Saṃvara from Pham-mthiñ-pa and (his) brother Bodhibhadra (Byang-čhub bzañ-po), a disciple of Nā-ro-pa [...]" (P3820).

³⁵ sPyan nga rin chen ldan (P2455) disciple of Yang dgon pa. Roerich 1976 p. 691.

³⁶ (P6180).

³⁷ dPyal lot sa ba? (P3939); Roerich 1976 p. 797 "The Kha che pañ čhen (Śākyaśrī) bestowed on the lo-tsa-ba dPyal Čhos kyi bzañ po the Commentary on the Hevajra-Tantra (brTag gñis), composed by Nā-ro-pa".

³⁸ Roerich 1976 p. 716: "The Rin-po-čhe gSer-khañ-steñs-pa **Kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan** was born in the year Water-Female Sheep (čhu-mo-lug – 1223 A.D.). At the age of thirty-eight, he was appointed to the abbot's chair, and occupied the chair for thirty-three years. He passed away at the age of seventy in the year Water Dragon (čhu-'brug – 1292 A.D.)."

editions of this text (BCG-D and BCG-Si) reproduced this lineage, although the latter extensively used the illustrations of Ms-Drepung as an inspiration for its own modern drawings. Not only were the sTag lung masters erased from the picture, but also the text was identified as part of the *mDzod nag ma*.

2	[Śākyamuni]	O rgyan padma 'byung gnas
3	rDo rje 'chang chen po	grub chen Te lo pa
5	[Nāropa] ³⁹	rje Mar pa lo tsa
7	rJe btsun mi la ras pa	chos rje Dwags po
9	chos rje Phag mo gru pa (1110–1170)	chos rje sTag lung thang pa (1142–1209/10)
11	sKu yal rin po che (1191–1236)	Sangs rgyas yar byon (1203–1272)
13	rje Sangs rgyas dbon rin po che (1251–1296)	O rgyan mgon po (1293–1366) ⁴⁰
15	rGyal ba'i mtshan can	Ratna kā ra (1300–1361)
17	Grags pa rgyal mtshan ⁴¹	rje Mi g.yo mgon po
19	Kun spang rin po che	chos rje 'Jig rten dbang phyug (1454–1532)

In this lineage, only Vajradhara, Mi la ras pa and sTag lung thang pa are represented in full face. Through this line of masters, Ms-Drepung appears affiliated to the sTag lung of Ri bo che, and not to the Karma bka' brgyud nor the 'Bri gung as the two modern editions could have suggested.

Ms-BL

Ms-BL has lineage masters illustrated in the colophon ff. 392a and 393b representing sTag lung teachers. The first group gathers six teachers in chronological order. The left end of the page being severely damaged, the first character and the legend have disappeared but according to the order of succession, it was most probably sGam po pa.

³⁹ Image missing.

⁴⁰ From O rgyan mgon po to Mi g.yo mgon po, the names appear in rTa tshag tshe dbang rgyal 2010 pp. 192-312.

⁴¹ Based on the same source, could this be Grags pa dpal bkra shis rgyal mtshan?



Fig. 24 – Ms-BL f. 392a

392a	Ø	bde gshegs rin po che	stag lung thang pa	sku yal rin po che	sangs rgyas yar byon	rje btsun sangs rgyas dbon
------	---	--------------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------------------

The second group on f. 393b consists of three masters displayed in a different order, possibly going from left to right and finally at the center or simply from left to right.



Fig. 25 – Ms-BL f. 393b

393b	<i>chos sku o rgyan mgon po</i> (1293–1366)	<i>'jig rten dbang phyug</i> (1454–1532)	<i>mchog sprul bkra shis dpa</i> ⁴² (1461–1508)
------	--	---	---

These teachers along with the sources mentioned in the colophon associate the manuscript with the sTag lung of Ri bo che. It is interesting that, despite their profound differences, this manuscript and Ms-Drepung both contain a representation of 'Jig rten dbang phyug as the last master supposing a connection with Ri bo che, possibly during the same period. Again, three characters are in full face: sTag lung

⁴² Casey 2023 p.19: the 13th interim abbot of sTag lung is named bKra shis dpal ba (1461-1508)

thang pa, Sangs rgyas yar byon and 'Jig rten dbang phyug. Could this emphasise a symbolic affiliation between them?

B. The hand-to-ear posture

A characteristic representation of Mi la ras pa depicts him seated with one hand raised to his ear. This now omnipresent iconography is absent from ancient representations and seems to have appeared and spread at the turn of the 16th century, shortly after the diffusion of gTsang smyon's work.⁴³ Zhi byed ri khrod pa's description of the proper way to visualise the yogin focuses on Mi la's appearance but mentions no specific posture.⁴⁴ This gesture has been interpreted in various ways: "perhaps the better to hear the inspiration of his masters and the Dakinis";⁴⁵ to "signify his listening to the sounds of nature or refer to his use of secret, oral doctrines that were not written down but passed verbally from master to disciple"⁴⁶; to "hear the voice of the Dharma in the solitude of the mountains to which he has retreated";⁴⁷ "as if listening to the voice of inspiration";⁴⁸ "listening to the *dākiṇīs*".⁴⁹

Explaining the iconometric instructions devoted to Mi la ras pa, Gega Lama in his *Principles of Tibetan Art* does not describe the posture.⁵⁰ Some authors – sometimes the same as the ones mentioned before – also interpret this hand position as a singing posture: "his right hand cups his right ear or is placed near it. This is a gesture that singers commonly make both in the Himalayas and in India while singing to sharpen their hearing and block extraneous noise";⁵¹ "[...] souvent il porte la main derrière l'oreille à la manière des bardes afin de mieux

⁴³ See for instance HAR 65121 and images below or Mi la ras pa's numerous representations among the lineage masters of early paintings.

⁴⁴ Quintman 2012 p. 17; Zhi byed ri pa 2012 p. 432.4.

⁴⁵ Rhie & Thurman 1991 no. 79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* no. 80.

⁴⁷ Essen & Thingo 1989 II-236 p. 109.

⁴⁸ Chandra 2003 vol. 8 p. 2302.

⁴⁹ Lunardo & Clemente 2021 p. 162.

⁵⁰ Gega Lama 1983 vol. I p. 122.

⁵¹ Pal 2003 p. 246.

placer sa voix, chantant l'un de ses cent mille poèmes mystiques”;⁵²
 “Mi la, or his disciple, is frequently depicted in singing posture.”⁵³

Among the Tibetan sources – mainly ritual texts – one describes the posture without commenting on it “the right hand to the ear” (*phyag g.yas snyan gyis thad kar bstan*).⁵⁴ The most detailed description comes from 'Jam mgon Kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas: “The right hand to the ear, singing clearly the melody of a vajra song” (*phyag g.yas snyan la brten cing rdo rje mgur dbyangs lhang lhang sgrog pa*).⁵⁵ To my knowledge, this late source is the only one to clearly establish a connection between singing and the posture.

Nevertheless, most of the modern scholars' interpretations appear to be based on a specific context, namely Mi la ras pa represented alone (whether on paintings or sculptures), often in a natural landscape. It is possible that this configuration, associated with an absence of textual references, led to the interpretations mentioned above. A solitary yogin seated alone in a mountain cave might be listening to the sound of nature, the *dākinīs* or his inner inspiration. It is also possible that this identification rested upon the association of Mi la with the mKha' 'gro or bDe mchog snyan brgyud tradition, often translated Whispered Transmission, and where the hearing plays a major role. However, when considered in the context of the manuscripts' illuminations, this cannot apply. Many scenes represent Mi la addressing one or more characters in that posture or protagonists facing each other with the hand to the ear. Since the dialogues and teachings are almost systematically expressed through songs, this posture can only appear as a singing posture.

⁵² Beguin 1977 p. 177.

⁵³ Quintman 2014a p. 248.

⁵⁴ “rJe btsun mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i bla sgrub rgyun khyer” in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul *rJe btsun mi la bzhad pa rdo rje la brten pa'i bla ma'i rnal 'byor* (BDRC W3CN26750) p. 103.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* pp. 47-48.



Fig. 26 – rJe btsun, Ras chung and five girls. Ms-Bordier f. 238a



Fig. 27 – rJe btsun and Ras chung ba. Ms-Bordier f. 94a



Fig. 28 – rJe btsun, a deer, a dog, and the hunter. Ms-BL f. 171a



Fig. 29 – The great rJe btsun offering a song to the five rock ogres, chief and servants. Ms-Lhasa f. 67b

In his 2023 article, Quintman reproduces two ancient print editions of gTsang smyon's *Songs*. He states:

The Drakkar Taso print edition of the *Hundred Thousand Songs* depicts Milarepa in a new way, forming what would become the yogin's most recognizable posture: legs loosely crossed, left hand in his lap holding a skull cup, and holding his right hand to his ear in a gesture of singing (fig. 7). [...] Depictions of this classic hand-to-ear gesture are not witnessed prior to Tsangnyon Heruka's publication, and the Madman likely played a role in disseminating it for the first time.

The role of gTsang smyon in the dissemination of this type of representations cannot be denied. However, the origin of this gesture could also be related to the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia: as presented above, several of these manuscripts are illustrated and numerous scenes show Mi la ras pa and other protagonists in the singing posture. Besides, even though he did not make any clear reference to the compendia, there is no doubt that gTsang smyon used this material to write his work, especially for his *Hundred Thousand Songs*.

Most of the illustrated manuscripts appear to date from after the publication of the *Life and Songs* (Ms-Drepung, Ms-BL, Ms-Newark and possibly Ms-Bordier). Ms-Lhasa also has similar representations, but we have no elements allowing a precise dating. Could it be the earliest representation of Mi la ras pa singing? Nevertheless, the Smith manuscript, possibly dating from the 15th century⁵⁶ possesses a series

⁵⁶ Quintman 2006 p. 170.

of *ras pa* disciples in various postures, some with their hand to their ear: gNyan [gNyen] ras (Ras chung pa), Zhi ba 'od, gNyan [gNyen] sgom ras pa, 'Bri rkom [sgom] ras pa, and Ras pa tshag yu ba.⁵⁷ Although Mi la himself is not represented in that particular way in this series of lineage masters – as in Ms-Bordier or Ms-Drepung – the posture is nonetheless attested.



Fig. 30 – gNyan ras (Ras chung) and Zhi ba 'od. Ms-Smith f. 3b & 6a (courtesy of the BDRC)

Moreover, it appears logical and plausible that the first extended corpus of songs could be at the origin of the representation of a singing Mi la. We know that the xylographic print of the *Life and Songs* were not illustrated except for the ‘portraits’ of the opening pages. We also know that biographical paintings were commissioned by gTsang smyon⁵⁸ to accompany his books.

That this type of representation flourished only after gTsang smyon is not contradictory since the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia as manuscripts had a limited circulation prior to the literary success of the Madman, in large part due to the spread of xylography. The multiple copies of such texts dating from around or after 1500 (Ms-Drepung, Ms-BL, RBC-Stockholm, Ms-Newark, Ms-Oxford, Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Gansu, and possibly Ms-Bordier) prove that far from eclipsing this literature, gTsang smyon's success appears to have triggered an appetite for more Mi la ras pa literature.

⁵⁷ Ms-Smith ff. 3b, 5a, 6a, 7a, 8b.

⁵⁸ Quintman 2014a p. 182; Sernesi 2021 p. 63.

5. Colophons

The colophons of the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia reflect the nature of the corpus: they share comparable information and overall structures combined differently and varying from one text to the other. Here again, the differences depend on the type of texts, as classified by Blancke.

As explained earlier, the 'Variant' forms of *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* combine the RBC colophon verbatim with supplementary material connected with Rang byung rdo rje and/or the *mDzod nag*. Ms-Bordier is no exception. After the list of Mi la ras pa's disciples come the verses connecting the ms. to the (*b*)*rgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu*, as in all RBCs.⁵⁹

The second part of the colophon is the *lo rgyus* of the *mDzod nag ma* which will be analysed below. This *lo rgyus* is the only element connecting this ms. to the Karma bka' brgyud and, unlike the two other Variant RBCs, there is no mention of Rang byung rdo rje or any other compiler.

On the contrary, the Third Karma pa appears in similar contexts in the colophons of many other bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia: Ms-BDRC and Ms-Lhasa for the first stratum and DNM-RD and *A River of Blessings* for the second. The only compendia without mention of Rang byung rdo rje are the 'Regular' RBCs (Ms-Newark, Ms-Oxford, Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Gansu, RBC-Stockholm) and Ms-BL.

Ms-BDRC

Ms-BDRC is an interesting example. The content of the text perfectly corresponds to the 'Variant' *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* with a few additional cycles as compared to the 'Regular' RBCs. Its title and colophon pages are greatly damaged, preventing a complete understanding. Nevertheless, the readable part of the last page gives compelling information:⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ms-Bordier f. 321b.6. For a translation and presentation of the generic RBC colophon, see Blancke's article in this volume pp. 13-15.

⁶⁰ Ms-BDRC f. 418a: *pas na/ yi ger ma spel gsang bar zhu/ yid bzhin nor bu gu ru dhäkki sa ma ya/ chos kyi rje rang byung rdo rjes rje btsun gyi 'gur 'bum la [...]* *gcig gzigs shing [...]* *nang nas ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis kyi bsgrigs pa 'di* mdzod nag nas gdan drangs pa 'di yin no/ mangalam/ bha wantu/.*

[...] Do not spread these words and keep them secret. Wishfulfilling Gem *guru dhākki samaya*.

The Dharma Lord Rang byung rdo rje has seen one [hundred] of the rJe btsun's Collected Songs. Among them, this one was compiled by the twelve great *ras pa* disciples. This* [text] has been retrieved from the dark treasury. Auspiciousness and happiness!

*Having looked at it thoroughly, it was compiled and written by his hand.

The first line corresponds to the end of the Lineage Wish-fulfilling Gem's verses. The second part mentions Rang byung rdo rje in an unusual manner but says the text was compiled by the twelve great *ras pa* disciples and retrieved from the dark treasury. The last line is in a different script and seems to be a missing passage included at the beginning of the previous sentence (marked here with a *). This later addition is possibly by the same hand. This colophon is the only one to mention the *mdzod nag* as a place and, interestingly, the role of Rang byung rdo rje as an author is absent from the main text and precised only in an addendum.

Ms-Lhasa

As briefly mentioned in Blancke's article Ms-Lhasa possesses a second colophon directly connecting the text with the Third Karma pa.⁶¹

The Dharma Lord Mi pham mgon po said, "It seems there is an infinite number of song collections of the great rJe btsun. Among the nearly hundred collections that I have seen, this is the most extensive. It is said to be of an authentic source as it is scribed by Lord Rang byung rdo rje himself." Therefore, he [Mi pham mgon po] extremely treasures it. This volume is that widely renowned [text].

*[...] *shin tu gzigs nas kho rang gi phyags bris m[dzad?] cing bsgrigs pa 'di*.
⁶¹ Ms-Lhasa f. 308b.4: *chos kyi rje mi phams mgon po 'i zhal nas/ rje btsun chen po 'i 'gur 'bum mtha' med pa cig yod pa 'dra zhing phyogs gcigs du sgrigs pa brgya tsams mthong ba 'i nang nas mang shos su 'dug cing/ rje rang byung rdo rje nyid kyi phyag bris mdzad pa yin pas/ khung btsun gsung nas thugs rtsis shin tu legs mdzad 'dug zhes yongs su grags pa 'i glegs bam 'di yin no/*. All my gratitude to Rinchen Dorje for his precious help in translating this obscure passage.

The formulation of this colophon is ambiguous and mentions an unknown character, Mi pham mgon po. At the moment, no corresponding historical figure could be identified. Mi pham mgon po is probably an epithet for a very important person since he is qualified as “Dharma Lord” (*chos kyi rje*) and, as we will see further, it might be an epithet of Rang byung rdo rje himself. The colophon contains no mention of the *mdzod nag* as a place or a text title.

DNM-RD

The colophon in DNM-RD contains much additional information. After concluding the text with an unusual formula, *dpa' bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam thar mgur chos zhal gdams dang bcas pa rdzogs so* – instead of the regular *dpal bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i rnam thar 'gur ching dang bcas pa* of all RBCs – the colophon starts with the usual sentence attributing the composition of the text to the twelve great *ras pa* disciples. It is followed by a list of meditation places (*rdzong* and *phug*) then by the RBC list of disciples, and alternative lists (see below). Then come the RBC *brgyud pa yi bzhin nor bu* verses and the Mi pham mgon po colophon in exactly the same wording as Ms-Lhasa. After a series of prayers, there is a second colophon related to the Fourth Zhwa dmar pa (1453–1524) and his entourage, providing us with information regarding the approximate period of redaction, between the last quarter of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century.

This part explains that the volume was requested repeatedly and financed by one Ri dbang mi dpon bzhed rtsa Blo gros rgya mtsho. Blo gros nyi ma 'od, scribe of the fourth holder of the red hat Chos kyis grags pa ye shes dpal bzang po, who was trained in literature and Sanskrit by the scholar Śākya Kumāra, gave the oral teaching. One Blo gros rgya mtsho (apparently different from the solicitant) served as a scribe and the monks Rin chen bzang po and Śākya seng ge worked as correctors.⁶²

⁶² DNM-RD 2006 p. 773.1. See the full colophon in Blancke, p. 31n69.

A River of Blessings

The colophon of *A River of Blessings* appears in two different forms. Ms-Smith and Ms-India present a more condensed version common also to Ms-Drepung. The colophon starts with a list of Mi la ras pa disciples proper to the text, which is followed by the various sources consulted to compile the volume, called *rJe btsun chen po mi la ras pa'i rnam thar rdo rje'i glu dang mgur rnams phyogs gcig tu bsdus pa*. The first source is mentioned by including a slightly modified version of Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD colophons. In this version, the Dharma lord Mi pham mgon po has disappeared, replaced by *chos rje karma pa*, and the text compiled by Rang byung rdo rje is given a name: the *mDzod nag ma*. Roberts and Quintman each give a full translation of this “final colophon” in their works.⁶³

Concerning this compilation of the hagiography together with vajra songs and spiritual songs of the great rje btsun Mi la ras pa, the Dharma Lord Karma pa has said ‘Among the nearly one hundred of spiritual songs that I have seen, this is the most extensive.’ Dharma Lord Rang byung rdo rje wrote this authoritative and highly esteemed *Dark Treasury*.⁶⁴

This last sentence is the first identification of Rang byung rdo rje’s work as the *mDzod nag ma*. As seen in the colophons of Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD, there this ‘work’ was not given a title and the volume was identified as “this very text” (*glegs bam 'di yin no*). This last formulation is absent here in *A River of Blessings* since the colophon continues with the other sources used for the elaboration of the text:

[There is also a text] said to be a compilation of seventeen different Collected Songs excellently completed in the Gung thang dpal gyi gtsug lag khang; [There is also a text] said to be a compilation from

⁶³ Roberts 2007 p. 32; Quintman 2014a Appendix 2 pp. 204-205.

⁶⁴ Ms-Smith f. 318a.3: *rje btsun chen po mi la ras pa'i rnam thar rdo rje'i glu dang mgur rnams phyogs gcig tu bsdus pa 'di/ chos rje karmāḥ pa'i zhal nas rje btsun chen po'i gsung mgur phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs pa brgya rtsa gzigs pa'i nang nas kyang/ 'di mang shol [shos] du gsung te/ chos rje rang byung rdo rje nyid kyi phyag bris mdzad pa khung btsun zhing thugs rtsis shin tu che ba'i mdzod nag ma zhes bya ba dang/.*

having seen one hundred and twenty-seven different biographies of the rJe btsun. These [versions] have been compiled and supplemented with as many of the rJe btsun's song collections as could be found. Through the merit of completing this well, may the precious teachings of the Practice Lineage flourish and expand in every direction and during all periods, and may it endure for a long time."⁶⁵

The author(s) emphasize the use of multiple sources for the work. These appear as a token of the completeness of the work gathering “as many of the songs collections as could be found”.

Ms-Drepung possesses a longer colophon with more additional material. Starting with the list of disciples, it continues with the usual colophon listing the sources. Then comes a list of the meditation places comparable to that of DNM-RD, and a long passage by 'Ba' rom pa associating Mi la ras pa's demonic encounters with his practices on the channels, winds, and drops.⁶⁶ This is followed by the *lo rgyus* of the *mDzod nag ma*, and finally some concluding auspicious prayers. In addition to the presence of 'Jig rten dbang phyug in the opening lineage masters, these supplementary elements, including those shared with DNM-RD, could indicate that Ms-Drepung is posterior to DNM-RD as well as to Ms-Smith.

Ms-BL

Kristin Blancke already described the British Library manuscript's colophon.⁶⁷ Although this text – in the same way as *A River of Blessings* – acknowledges the use of multiple sources, it starts with the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* as the first source (a reference completely absent from *A River of Blessings*). The other sources are: a text compiled from 17 song collections by a certain rDo rje 'dzin pa 'Jam

⁶⁵ Ms-Smith f. 318a.4: 'gur 'bum rigs mi cig pa bcu bdun bsags nas gung thang dpal gyi gtsug lags khang chen por legs par bsgrub zer ba dang/ rje bisun gyi rnam thar rig mi cig pa brgya dang bnyis shu tsha bdun gzigs te phyogs gcig du sgrigs pa yin zer ba dang/ de rnam phyogs cig du bsod pa la/ gzhan yang rje btsun gyi 'gur ma'i tshogs rnyed tshad kyi kha bskang te legs par bsgrubs pa 'di'i bsod nams kyi/ sgrub rgyud kyi bstan pa rin po che phyogs dus gnas skabs thams cad du dar zhing rgyas la yun ring du gnas par gyur cig//

⁶⁶ See Blancke 2021e.

⁶⁷ Ms-BL f. 392b. See Blancke's article pp. 35-37.

dbyangs (grags pa?) (the version compiled at the *Gung thang dpal gyi gtsug lag khang?*), Mar pa's hagiography, a text by Sangs rgyas dbon rin po che and "as many elements as could be found". The absence of any reference to Rang byung rdo rje or the Karma pa proves the existence of a late bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendium free from the Kam tshang sphere of influence.

Chos rje Mi pham mgon po / Karma pa

As explained above, the modified version of Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD colophons presented in *A River of Blessings* transforms the mysterious Mi pham mgon po into an unidentified Karma pa. This shift implies that the author(s) of BCG knew that this epithet designated a black hat hierarch without clearly naming Rang byung rdo rje. Searching for the identity of this Mi pham mgon po, a 16th century statue representing the Third Karma pa of the Tibet Museum, Gruyères, has an interesting inscription. The back of the lotus base is inscribed with the following formula:

mi pham chos rje rang byung mtshos skyes rdoe [rdo rje] la na mo/



Fig. 31 – Karmapa 03 Rangjung Dorje (ABS 075). Gilt copper, 16th century, Central Tibet

31.4 x 20.9 x 15.7 cm



Fig. 32 – Karmapa 03 Rangjung Dorje (ABS 075). Gilt copper, 16th century, Central Tibet
31.4 x 20.9 x 15.7 cm

Unusual as this formulation may be, the identity of the subject is beyond doubt, the iconography corresponding to the general representations of this master. This association of the epithet *mi pham chos rje* with Rang byung rdo rje reinforces the hypothesis that, in the colophons, Chos rje Mi pham mgon po and Rang byung rdo rje are in fact the same person. This appears to be the understanding of the editors of the 2011 *Mi la ras pa'i gsung 'bum*. In their introduction, they rephrased the DNM-RD colophon, dropping the reference to Mi pham mgon po and attributing to Rang byung rdo rje the statement about “the hundreds of rJe btsun’s spiritual songs and biographies.” The mention of the text being kept in rTse lha sgang’s dark treasury proves that they also added information provided by the *lo rgyus*, as will be demonstrated below.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ RBC-Pt pp. 6-7: *dpal karma pa thams cad mkhyen pa rang byung rgyal bas rje bisun chen po'i gsung mgur dang rnam thar brgya phrag las brgal ba bsags nas/de dag gi legs cha bsdus te phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs par mdzad par rje nyid kyi phyag bris kong po rtse lha sgang gi mdzod nag tu bzhugs pa de las bris bshus kyi dpe mang du 'phel ba'i rgyun las*. It is noteworthy to specify that the *lo rgyus* is absent from this five-volume collection, although obviously referred to in this passage through the rTse lha sgang *mdzod nag* and the later diffusion of the text.

A. Listing the disciples

Among the information included in the colophons of the compendia there is an enumeration of Mi la ras pa's disciples. They are listed and organised into groups and presented according to their rank. The same model prevails between the first and second strata of the compendia with some variations inside the distinct groups and a few additional categories according to the text.⁶⁹

The twelve great ras pa disciples

Starting with *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*, the disciples appear in four groups, namely the “four heart-sons” (*thugs kyi sras bzhi*) and the “eight close sons” (*nye ba'i sras brgyad*) which, put together, form the twelve great *ras pa* disciples to whom the text is attributed, followed by the “six disciples just before Mi la ras pa's death” (*sku gshegs kha'i slob ma*) and the “four sisters” (*sring bzhi*).

This pattern of groups of four, eight and six is present in all versions of *The Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*, in DNM-RD, and in *A River of Blessings*. The latter does not present the “four sisters” but replaces them with a larger group of “twenty-five women who obtained supreme accomplishment” (*bu med mchog thob pa nyi shu rtsa lnga*).

Without analysing the content of these groups in detail, some specific points deserve attention.

- The first group of “four heart-sons” is the same in all texts, gathering Ras chung, Se ban, Ngan rdzong and 'Bri sgom.
- The second group of “eight close sons”, although always present, has some variation in its composition. Ms-BL is the only compendium replacing it with a unique group called the “four close sons” (*nye ba'i sras bzhi*) that will be analysed later.
- The third group, the “six disciples just before Mi la ras pa's death”, is rather homogeneous except for one of its members. The original list from the first stratum gives the following names: Dwags po lha rje, Li skor phyag ru pa, Lo ston dge 'dun,

⁶⁹ For the complete lists of disciples source by source, see Appendix B.

sKyo ston Śāk gu, Dam pa rgyag phu pa, and 'Bri ban bkra shis. The fact that in the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* sGam po pa was thereby marginalised as a disciple of the later days was problematic for later readers. In fact, it was changed in DNM-RD, Ms-BL and *A River of Blessings*, where sGam po pa was 'restored' in his foremost position as the heir of Mi la ras pa.

Being part of the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* type of compendia, Ms-Bordier shares its colophon. Yet, a double particularity appears in the passage devoted to the group of disciples. The scribe forgot the name Ngan rdzong ston pa in the list of the "four heart-sons."⁷⁰ Another hand, probably a later reader, made a clumsy attempt to correct this. Writing in a different alphabet (*dbu can*) he put "*dags po lha rje*" before Ras chung (!), filling in the blank and trying to promote sGam po pa as the first heart disciple. This modification does not consider the redundancy of his presence among the "six pupils before Mi la ras pa's death" two lines below, nor the nonsense of including a fully ordained monk as the first of the twelve *ras pas*.

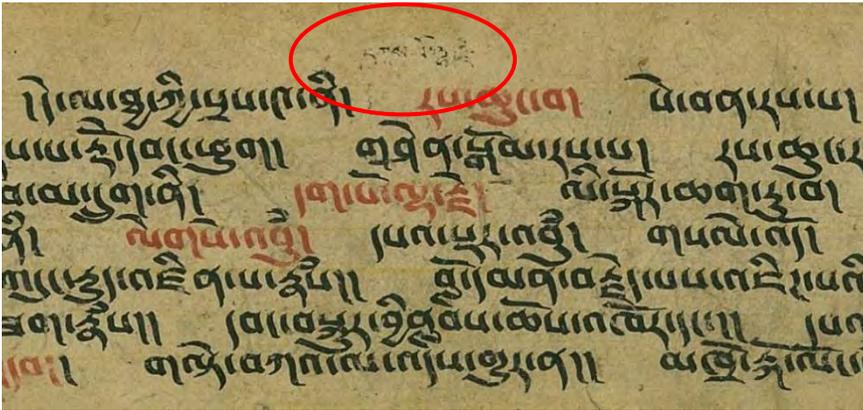


Fig. 33 – Ms-Bordier f. 322a

To overcome this problem of rank, the second stratum removed *Dwags po lha rje* from this group of six and promoted him into a newly created group: in DNM-RD and Ms-BL he appears among the "three supreme yogins and yoginīs" (*mchog gi rnal 'byor pho mo gsum*) together with Tshe ring ma and Tārā, in *A River of Blessings* he is one of "four famous

⁷⁰ See above for the omission of the *thugs sras* Se ban ras pa in Ms-Smith (f. 317b.5).

great disciples, first among all great sons” (*yong su grags pa'i bu chen bzhi/ bu chen thams cad kyi gtso bo*) including the above three with the addition of Ras chung as the holder of the sNyan brgyud.

These later texts, starting with DNM-RD and Ms-BL, multiplied the categories of pupils, thereby revealing influence from other sources. Ms-BL and *A River of Blessings* clearly acknowledge in their colophons the use of multiple texts for their compilation, whereas DNM-RD simply combines the RBC colophon connected to the *brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu* with the ambiguous statement concerning the contribution of Rang byung rdo rje to the composition, without any reference to other sources. After providing the usual RBC list of disciples, DNM-RD adds alternative versions introduced by the expression *yang lo rgyus gcig la...* showing the influence of other sources.

In a very repetitive and inaccurate statement, it mentions a group of “eight ras pa brothers” (*ras pa mched brgyad*), and “four heart-sons” without specifying who they are. Then it lists “eight close sons” (giving only seven names), “seven yogins and yoginīs who reached Khechara” (*mkha' spyod du bzhugs pa rnal 'byor pho mo bdun*) and “three supreme yogins and yoginīs” (*mchog gi rnal 'byor pho mo gsum*) including sGam po pa, Tshe ring ma and Tārā. Then follows another series comprising the “four heart-sons” – without details –, an alternate “eight close sons” and “six late disciples” (*sku bgres khar 'khrungs pa'i ston drug*) with only five names mentioned. This plethora of groups, encountered nowhere else in the compendia, clearly demonstrates external influences.

In fact, the tradition of listing the disciples of Mi la ras pa is not restricted to the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia, since it is found in other hagiographies of the yogin. The classification in 4 + 8 + 6 disciples also appears in two early texts, attributed to Don mo ri pa and Zhi byed ri khrod pa. Both sources share the same repartition as the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*, except for the “eight close sons”, replacing gNyen sgom ras pa and Khyi ra ras pa with Glan sgom ras pa and rTsang/Tsa yu ba. If Zhi byed ri pa also provides lists of disciples of a different kind,⁷¹ Don mo ri pa completes his by mentioning sGam po pa a second time, in a laudatory and dithyrambic formula concluding the list:

⁷¹ Zhi byed ri pa 2012 p. 355.1.

Among all these is the especially noble, unmatched and unrivaled unique son, holder of the lineage, the most precious and unequalled Dharma Lord sGam po pa.⁷²

This difference of treatment of sGam po pa in *the Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* and in Don mo ri pa's text – two sources dating from approximately the same period, e.g., the 13th century – can be explained as some influence from Ras chung pa's lineage in the first case whereas the second clearly belongs to the lineage originating from Dwags po lha rje. This is even more surprising when considering the passages devoted to sGam po pa in the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* where he is clearly presented as the “sun like disciple” or the “unequaled one from Dwags po”.⁷³

The eight ras pa brothers

Later sources such as *Clouds of Blessings* by Zhwa dmar pa mKha' spyod dbang po (1350–1405) and the *Lho rong chos 'byung* (1451) have a different way of classifying the disciples. Before the “four heart-sons” and “eight close disciples” comes a new category: the “eight ras pa brothers” (*ras pa mched brgyad*). This list is also present in the *Blue Annals* (1478). Its earliest mention seems to be in a short statement in *Bu ston chos 'byung* in 1322,⁷⁴ then in *Clouds of Blessings* where this disciple category is simply named, without details. The text also names other groups without specification,⁷⁵ headed by three characters: “the dākinī bKra shis tshe ring ma, *lokapāla* subduing gods and demons of mental form; the mantra-born innate sGron me,⁷⁶ subduing hidden

⁷² Don mo ri pa p. 215: *de rnams kyi nang nas khyad par du 'phags pa 'gran gyi do zla dang bral ba rgyud pa 'dzin pa'i sras gcig ni/ chos rje sgam po pa mnyam myed rin po che yin no.*

⁷³ Ms-Bordier ff. 122b.4 *dag po nyi ma 'gro la 'char*; 285b.6 *mnyam med dag po rin po che.*

⁷⁴ Bu ston 1988 p. 203.

⁷⁵ Zhwa dmar 02 2010 p. 316.2: *bu chen dgu/ rnal 'byor ma mched bcu.*

⁷⁶ In the early sources, the character is named *lhan cig skyes pa'i sgron me* (Ms-Smith) or *sgron ma* (Ms-India). DNM-RD and Ms-Drepung changed it into *sgrol ma.*

beings with superior faculties; Zla 'od gzhon nu, the protector subduing all manifest human beings.”⁷⁷

The first complete list of “eight *ras pa* brothers” appears in the *Lho rong chos 'byung* and it includes the following disciples:

Ras pa mched brgyad
Ras chung rdo rje grags
Ngam rdzong ras pa
'Bri sgom ras pa
Se ban ras pa
Ras pa zhi ba 'od
bDe ba skyobs
Khyi ra ras pa
Ra rdzi ras pa

After presenting this group, the *Lho rong chos 'byung* names other categories, namely the “seven yogins and yoginīs who reached Khechara” (*mkha' spyod du bzhugs pa'i rnal 'byor pho mo bdun*) and the “three supreme yogins and yoginīs” (*mchog gi rnal 'byor pho mo gsum*), a group similar to that in *Clouds of Blessings* but formulated differently:

The supreme sGam po pa subduing human beings, the supreme Tshe ring ma subduing non-humans, the supreme innate mantra-born sGron me subduing *dākinīs*.⁷⁸

This definition is reproduced almost verbatim in DNM-RD, along with the preceding category, proving that its editorial team had access to the *Lho rong chos 'byung*. The alternate list of “eight close sons” (*nye ba'i sras brgyad*) of DNM-RD proves to be an erroneous replica of the “eight *ras pa* brothers” of the *Lho rong chos 'byung*. The latter

⁷⁷ Zhwa dmar 02 2010 p. 316.2: *yid gzugs kyi lha 'dre dbang du sdud pa la zhing skyong gi dā ki ma bkra shis tshe rings ma/ lkog gyur dbang po yang rab skye bo dbang tu sdud pa la sngags skyes lhan cig skyes pa'i sgron me/ mngon sum mi'i 'gro ba thams cad dbang du sdud pa la mgon po zla 'od gzhon nu/.*

⁷⁸ *Lho rong chos 'byung* p. 107: *mi rnams 'dul ba'i mchog sgam po ba/ mi ma yin 'dul ba'i mchog tshe ring ma/ dā ki ma rnams 'dul ba'i mchog sngags skyes lhan cig skyes pa'i sgron me.*

identifies “four heart-sons” as being the first four of this group of eight.⁷⁹ Interestingly, the four remaining *ras pa* correspond to the “four close sons” (*nye ba'i sras bzhi*) of Ms-BL, indicating a possible connection between this text and the *Chos 'byung*.

Two authors present original groups of eight disciples including sGam po pa. In his *Deb ther dmar po* dated 1346, Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje lists three groups with unusual denominations: “eight disciples” (*slob ma brgyad*), “four great sons” (*che ba'i sras bzhi*) and “eight close sons”, with only the first category being detailed.⁸⁰ In his *Life of Mi la ras pa*,⁸¹ gTsang smyon describes a group of “eight heart-sons” (*thugs kyi sras brgyad*) starting without surprise with sGam po pa, followed by Ras chung. This group does not match the “eight *ras pa* brothers” because it replaces bDe ba skyong with Sangs rgyas skyabs. This list is followed by a new group of “thirteen close sons” (*nye ba'i sras bcu gsum*) and “four sisters” (*sras rnams kyi sring bzhi*), very probably a reorganization by the Madman.

This brief overview establishes the deep connection between the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia and the group of twelve great *ras pa* disciples inherited from Ras chung pa's lineage. Interestingly, this group persisted in the second stratum even after the introduction of new categories and the progressive abandonment of the reference to *The Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples'* text and the *brgyud pa yid bzhin nor bu* (Ms-BL, *A River of Blessings*).

B. *The History of the transmission line of the Dark Treasury*

Directly following the first RBC colophon, Ms-Bordier has a second part, narrating “The History of the Collected Songs of Mi la ras pa, king of rJe btsun-s, called *mDzod nag ma* and transmitted by the Dharma Lord Karma pa.”⁸² Quintman already translated and commented this history of the *mDzod nag ma*.⁸³ He introduced the text as “a brief

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*: *thugs kyi sras bzhi ni/ dang po bzhi yin no.*

⁸⁰ *Deb ther dmar po* 1981 p. 80. For details, see Appendix B.

⁸¹ gTsang smyon 1981 p. 241.

⁸² Ms-Bordier f. 322b.1: *rje btsun gyi rgyal po mi la ras pa'i 'gur 'bum/ chos rje karma pa nas brgyud pa'i mdzod nag ma zhes bya ba 'di'i lo rgyus ni/.*

⁸³ Quintman 2014a pp. 105-106.

unsigned history found in several *Black Treasury* colophons” but gave only one reference.⁸⁴ After close examination, this history appears exclusively at the end of two ancient manuscripts of different nature and in different contexts: Ms-Drepung – later reproduced in its two modern reeditions (BCG-D and BCG-Si) – and Ms-Bordier. Surprisingly, it is absent from all the other compendia, starting with DNM-RD.

Both versions begin with the origins of the text compiled by the *ras pa* disciples and amended by Mi la ras pa himself.⁸⁵

In the female water-ox year (1133) when the Jetsün was eighty-two—after the *repa* disciples led by Ngamdzung Repa and Repa Zhiwa O had repeatedly asked to assemble his biography and collected songs—the Jetsün said, “I will consider its propitiousness.” He covered his head with his robe and sat still for a moment. Then he promised to do as they had requested, saying, “You should go to the places where I previously meditated. I have written bits and pieces on tree bark and leaves. Tseringma knows much of it, and much is already clear to Ngamdzung Repa and the rest of you.” The *repas* then gathered stories from all directions. Before offering a ritual feast, they asked Tashi Tseringma. The Jetsün himself then supplemented [the details] that the senior *repa* disciples had heard and added those that were missing. After the biography was arranged, the Jetsün gave its oral transmission and said, “Hold on to this dearly. In a year or two, when I die, everyone will have an auspicious connection of faith and devotion in my teachings.” Then he offered prayers of aspiration and good fortune.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 253n66 “DNM-D, 513.3 ff.”

⁸⁵ Quintman 2014a p. 105; Ms-Bordier f. 322b.2; Ms-Drepung vol. 112 p. 372.2.



Fig. 34 – Ngan rdzong, Zhi ba 'od, Ras chung pa and Tshe ring ma receive a lung from the precious bla ma rJe btsun. Ms-Drepung vol. 112 p. 373

Up to this point, Ms-Bordier and Ms-Drepung are virtually identical. Differences occur later during the description of the transmission lineage of this manuscript. Ms-Bordier states:

Then, Ras chung ba took the book to Lo ro. Then the Dharma Lord Dus gsum mkhyen pa came to Lo ro [and] he received it from Ras chung ba. Having made a copy of the book, he took it to Tshur phu. Then 'Gro mgon ras pa received it, then sPom rag pa, then Karmā pag shi (*sic*). Then he took it to Kong po and put it in rTse bla sgang's dark treasury. Then gNyen ras dge 'dun 'bum received it from Karmā pag shi, then Rang byung rdo rje, rGyal ba g.yung ston pa, Rol pa'i rdo rje, mKha' spyod dbang po, De bzhin gshegs pa, Ka bzhi rig pa'i ral gri, mThong ba don ldan, and then Drung rin chen rdo rje received it. Up to this point, it was a single transmission tradition. In the presence of mThong ba don ldan, Nang so Kun dga' rgyal mtshan took this 'Gur 'bum from Kong po and brought it southward. From this original copy, devotees made many copies. [End of ms.]⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ms-Bordier f. 322b.7: *De nas dpe de nyid ras chung [323a] bas lo ro gdan drangs/ de nas chos rje dusum [dus gsum] mkhyen pa lo ro na byon nas/ ras chung ba la lung gsan cing/ phyag dpe bshus nas mtshur phu na gdan drangs/ de la 'gro mgon ras pa chen pos gsan/ de la pom rag pas gsan/ de la karmā pag shis gsan/ de pas rkong po na gdan drangs nas rtse bla sgang gi mdzod nag nang du bzhung pa la/ karmā pag shi ba la gnyen ras dge 'dun 'bum pas gsan/ des rang byung rdoe [rdo rje]/ rgyal ba g.yung ston pa/ rol pa'i rdoe [rdo rje]/ mkha' spyod dbang po/ de 4n [bzhin] gshegs pa/ dka' 4 [bzhi] rig pa'i ral gri/ mthong ba don ldan/ de la drung rin chen rdoe [rdo rje] bas gsan/ de yan chad 1 [gcig] rgyud [brgyud] kyi lugsu [lugs su] gda' mthong ba don ldan pa'i sku drung nas/ nang so kun dga' rgyisan [rgyal mtshan] gyi[s] 'gur [mgur] 'bum 'di rkong po nas gdan drangs nas*



Fig. 35 – Chos rje Dus gsum mkhyen pa hears the transmission [of the text] from Ras chung pa.
Ms-Drepung vol. 112 p. 374

This section of the colophon presents many differences compared to the version of Ms-Drepung and its two reeditions.⁸⁷

- First, the journey of the manuscript from Tshur phu to rTse bla sgang is incorporated **within** the transmission line whereas in Ms-Drepung it is described **later**.
- Second, the moving of the ms. to Kong po is assigned to Karma pag shi and not to Rang byung rdo rje. Moreover, the latter is not credited with compiling/editing the text as he is in Ms-BDRC, Ms-Lhasa, DNM-RD and *A Rivers of Blessings*.⁸⁸
- Third, the transmission lineage varies: O rgyan pa is replaced by gNyen ras dge 'dun 'bum (the other main disciple of Karma pag shi), De bzhin gshegs pa is placed between mKha' spyod dbang po and bKa' bzhi rig pa'i ral gri, and the single transmission line ends with Drung Rin chen rdo rje, a generation earlier than Ms-Drepung, with the absence of “lama rinpoche Rasmri Bhadra” (*'Od zer bzang po?*).⁸⁹

lho rgyud 'dir phebs] de la ma phyi byas nas dad pa can rnam[s] [rnam[s] kyi mang du bzhengs pas snang ngo//.

⁸⁷ Ms-Drepung vol. 112 p. 372.2; Drikung 2004, vol. 8 p. 513.3; Si khron 2008 vol. II, p. 1037.

⁸⁸ Ms-BDRC f. 418.3; Ms-Lhasa f. 308b.5; DNM-RD p. 770.5; Ms-Smith f. 318.4; Ms-Drepung vol. 112 p. 366.2; Ms-India vol. 2 p. 553.4. Quintman 2014a p. 106: “Here the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, is credited with stashing the text within the actual Black Treasury; all versions of The Black Treasury identify him as one of its principal editors.”

⁸⁹ Both masters remain unidentified.

Altogether, these differences cannot be simply considered omissions and/or scribal errors. Are they the proof of an alternative tradition diverging from Ms-Drepung? Has the emphasis on gNyen ras dge 'dun 'bum instead of O rgyan pa a specific meaning? Most of all, why is the role of Rang byung rdo rje so diminished?

The presence of De bzhin gshegs pa between mKha' spyod dbang po and bKa' bzhi rig pa'i ral gri in Ms-Bordier appears logical and his absence in Ms-Drepung must certainly be an omission. In fact, the *Blue Annals* mentions a "bKa' bzhi rig pa'i ral gri whose name was Rin chen bzang po" among the disciples of the 5th Karma pa.⁹⁰ Although in his dictionary *Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las* mentions bKa' bzhi rig pa'i ral gri rin chen bzang po as a disciple of mKha' spyod dbang po, and not of De bzhin gshegs pa,⁹¹ Ms-Drepung's list without the latter seems strange. How could the Fifth Karma pa not be part of the transmission of this '*mDzod nag ma*' text since every other black hat hierarch and holder of the lineage was?

There are other reasons to consider the absence of De bzhin gshegs pa from the lineage masters surprising if we consider the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia as part of the sNyan brgyud tradition – as suggested by the emphasis on these teachings in the compendia as well as the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* colophon in Ms-Bordier. In fact, 'Gos Lo tsa ba explains, De bzhin shegs pa entrusted his mahāsiddha disciple Drung rMa se with "oral precepts which he did not bestow on others. Even to day these are known as the 'Oral Precepts of Zur-maṅs pa' [...]."⁹² Even though the author does not define these oral precepts, many centuries later, Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas identified them as the Cakrasaṃvara Hearing lineage.⁹³ In this logic, it seems contradictory for a leader of the Karma Kam tshang school to be holder of the 'bDe mchog snyan brgyud' and not of the so-called single transmission of this *Life and Song of bZhad pa'i rdo rje* related to it. Later on, in the same text, Kong sprul further explains that: "The special transmission of the profound and vast instructions of ripening and liberation of the Dakpo Hearing Lineage fell to the Zurmang Kagyu and it continues

⁹⁰ Roerich 1976 p. 544.

⁹¹ *Dung dkar* 2002 p. 1786.

⁹² Roerich 1976 p. 511.

⁹³ Jamgön Kongtrül 2007 p. 140.

unbroken up to the present.”⁹⁴ The matter of the different lines of transmission of the sNyan brgyud among Mi la ras pa’s disciples has already been studied by Marta Sernesi who questions the possibility of a Dwags po snyan brgyud tradition with a lineage of transmission of the Cakrasaṃvara practice descending from sGam po pa.⁹⁵

The line of masters described in the *lo rgyus* corresponds with the general succession of the Kam tshang hierarchs but has no apparent connection with the traditional transmission lineages of the sNyan brgyud.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, in the *Zur mang bka’ brgyud chos ’byung*,⁹⁷ a recent undated publication gathering texts from this branch of the bKa’ brgyud school, one of the sources is named *bDe mchog mkha’ ’gro snyan brgyud kyi chos ’byung chen mo grub pa’i rna rgyan* presents a group of hagiographies according to the ‘lineages’ of the sNyan brgyud which is very similar to our *lo rgyus*. Although no author’s name appears in the colophon, in the table of contents of the book this text is attributed to the 4th Drung rin po che Kun dga’ rnam rgyal (1567–1629). Three different lineages of transmission coming from Mi la ras pa are presented: one from Ras chung, one from Ngom rdzong (*sic*) and one from sGam po pa⁹⁸. This division, repeated and detailed on many occasions inside Mi la ras pa’s short *rnam thar* presented in this *Chos ’byung*, names this last lineage “sGam po snyan brgyud or Karma snyan brgyud”, a name encountered nowhere else.⁹⁹ Up to De bzhin gshegs pa, the masters belonging to this third lineage perfectly match those of the *mDzod nag ma lo rgyus*. Although they are separate lineages with, on the one hand, a Ras chung pa transmission for the *mDzod nag ma* and, on the other hand, a sGam po pa transmission for the ‘sGam po snyan brgyud’, both lineages present a comparable structure designating the Kam tshang as the heir of Mi la’s original life story and essential tradition.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 230.

⁹⁵ Sernesi 2004 pp. 258-62.

⁹⁶ See for instance the *bDe mchog snyan brgyud Biographies* or Sernesi 2006 pp. 258-62 and 2008 p. 180.

⁹⁷ *Zur mang chos ’byung* (n.d.).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 207, 210 and 222.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 207: *rJe dwags po la sgam po snyan brgyud dam karma snyan brgyud du’ang grags so/*.

Zur mang chos 'byung	Ms-Drepung	Ms-Bordier
sGam po pa	Ras chung pa	Ras chung pa
Dus gsum mkhyen pa	Dus gsum mkhyen pa	Dus gsum mkhyen pa
Gru gu ras pa	'Gro mgon ras chen	'Gro mgon ras chen
sPom grags pa	sPom grags pa	sPom grags pa
Karma pakshi	Karma pag shi	Karma pag shi
O rgyan pa	O rgyan pa	gNyen ras dge 'dun 'bum
Rang byung rdo rje	Rang byung rdo rje	Rang byung rdo rje
g.Yung ston pa	g.Yung ston pa	g.Yung ston pa
Rol pa'i rdo rje	Rol pa'i rdo rje	Rol pa'i rdo rje
mKha' spyod dbang po	mKha' spyod dbang po	mKha' spyod dbang po
De bzhin gshegs pa	Ø	De bzhin gshegs pa
Drung rma se	Ka bzhi rig pa'i ral gri	Ka bzhi rig pa'i ral gri
	mThong ba don ldan	mThong ba don ldan
	Drung rin chen rdo rje	Drung rin chen rdo rje
	Rasmri bha dra	

Nang so Kun dga' rgyal mtshan

Both versions of the *lo rgyus* mention a certain Nang so Kun dga' rgyal mtshan responsible for the withdrawal of the manuscript from rTse lha sgang's dark treasury and its dissemination 'far and wide'. A Nang so Kun dga' rgyal mtshan is mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of *gNyags ston pa'i gdung rabs dang gdan rabs* concerning the line of succession of Sa snag mda' nang.¹⁰⁰ Presented in a brief passage as a devout ruler, supporter of the saṅgha, he could appear as a potential candidate.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, the text gives scarce information and no date. Yet, the next paragraph in the same text deals with his brother (?) Chos kyi rje sangs rgyas lhun grub rgya mtshan dpal bzang po (d.u.) who is said to have taken ordination from Ngor chen Sangs rgyas Seng ge (1504–1569), placing him a good century after mThong ba don ldan (1416–

¹⁰⁰ All my gratitude to M. Kapstein for indicating this reference to me.

¹⁰¹ Mus chen chos nyid ye shes 1997 p. 219: *Nang so kun dga' rgyal mtshan ni/ chos la shin tu dkar bas bla ma dkon mchog rnams la sri zhu la brtson pa dang/ dge 'dun la bsnyen bkur/ ngan slong la sbyin gtong rnams la rtag 'grus su mdzad pa dang/ mda' kha dpa' rtsal che zhing mkhyen stobs kyi pha rol pa zhid yin par grags so//.*

1553). For an obvious reason of chronology, this candidate cannot correspond to our character.

Focusing only on the name Kun dga' rgyal mthsan, one could imagine a correspondence with the first Zur mang drung pa Rin po che (d.u.) who must have died before 1464 since the second incarnation was born that year.¹⁰² This identification would be convenient but the title *nang so* usually implies a political rank, hardly suitable for the First Zur mang drung pa. This hypothesis is therefore unlikely, and one must hope for new information to emerge and allow his precise identification.

In a more general way, after translating the end of this *lo rgyus*, Quintman states:¹⁰³

Here the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje is credited with stashing the text within the actual Black Treasury; all versions of *The Black Treasury* identify him as one of the principal editors. But once the treasury has been opened and the restriction of the individual transmission line was loosened, copies of the text began to proliferate and spread, leading to the great variety of manuscripts witnessed today.

This vision, though attractive and opportune, remains questionable. It raises again the issue of identifying the famous text stashed in rTse lha sgang's dark treasury.

The history of the transmission of the *Dark Treasury* is problematic on several levels. It refers to actual places and people in a rather coherent manner. In her article about the gNas bcu lha khang in 'Bras spung, Cécile Ducher explains that rTse lha sgang's library was supposedly plundered during the 17th century, with its content transferred to the dGe lugs monastery.¹⁰⁴ Later, she describes rTse lha sgang as having a renowned library:

¹⁰² BDRC: <https://library.bdrc.io/show/P9701>

¹⁰³ Quintman 2014a p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ Ducher 2020 p. 133.

Although an extensive listing of the monasteries seized is not provided in the 'Bras spungs Catalogue, it mentions three libraries contained in the Sixteen Arhats Temple, albeit without specifying its source for such claim. The three are the library of the Sne gdong Palace built by the Phag gru rulers (14th–15th c.), that of the Bsam grub rtse Palace built by the Gtsang pa rulers, and that of Rtse lha sgang, related to the Karma Bka' brgyud school and its head, the Karma pas.

[...] The Karma Bka' brgyud Library of Rtse lha sgang in Kong po housed a renowned library established by the 1st Karma pa (1110–1193). In it there was a treasure room called the “Black Treasury” (Mdzod nag ma), containing *inter alia* a large biography of Mi la ras pa. It is likely that most Bka' brgyud collections published by Paltsek mentioned earlier come from Rtse lha sgang. As said, the name of 'Bras spungs' Sixteen Arhats Temple derives from the statues of the 16 *arhats* taken from Rtse lha sgang when the monastery was seized. The reason why this monastery in particular was targeted is that its landlord, Rtse lha sgang pa, spearheaded the rebellion against the Central Tibetan forces in 1643. The battle was fierce and the Central Tibetan forces, assisted by Gushri Khan's army, annihilated the resistance, killing “some five or six thousand pro-Karma Kagyü troops from Kongpo.” In all likelihood, the whole library, together with the statues, etc., were brought to 'Bras spungs. The fate of the monastery after that date is not clear, but it definitely lost most of its assets.

Some of the manuscripts re-emerging recently from the gNas bcu lha khang such as Ms-Lhasa, Ms-Smith and Ms-Drepung could have originated from rTse lha sgang's library. Although Ms-Smith appears affiliated to the 'Brug pa and Ms-Drepung to the sTag lung of Ri bo che, this monastery's dark treasury room probably sheltered a great number of texts and possibly many versions of Mi la bzhad pa'i rdo rje's life and songs. Yet, instead of describing a library gathering a host of different versions, the *lo rgyus* tells another story. It describes a single text, an early copy of an original by Mi la ras pa and his yogin disciples, being withdrawn from the library around the mid 15th century **then** taken southward, being copied, and spreading far and wide.

One must remain cautious and not project the reality of a library in rTse lha sgang over the *lo rgyus* narrative. As a rich library, rTse lha sgang certainly accumulated the available literature concerning Mi la ras pa, and this corpus was possibly used for the elaboration of more developed versions such as DNM-RD and *A River of Blessings*.

Nevertheless, except for Ms-Drepung, none of the other late compendia mentions a connection with rTse lha sgang. Moreover, this does not correspond to the *lo rgyus*, whose unique purpose is to present a hypothetical *mDzod nag ma* text as the source of all other versions.

For the analysis of this *lo rgyus* we also need to consider its location inside the two manuscripts in which it appears. In Ms-Drepung, it comes second last in the colophon after a long accumulation of various elements:

- the list of Mi la's disciples;
- the colophon *per se*, listing the different sources (mentioning the name *A River of Blessings*);
- a list of meditation sites (close to but shorter than that of DNM-RD);
- a long passage attributed to 'Ba' brom pa connecting Mi la's supernatural encounters with his meditative practices on channels, winds, and drops;
- the *lo rgyus*;
- a group of aspiration and auspicious prayers.

This shows the succession of two opposite statements regarding the origin of the text. First, the colophon cites a text called *mDzod nag ma* composed by Rang byung rdo rje after having examined "a hundred of different versions." Later, the *lo rgyus* mentions an original text compiled by the twelve great *ras pa* disciples with the supernatural help of Tshe ring ma and amended by Mi la ras pa himself. This was transmitted to Ras chung pa and then to the first Karma pa in a secret single line, and stashed by the same Rang byung rdo rje in rTse lha sgang's dark treasury.

These two stories appear in contradiction. How can a text be at the same time an original 'autobiography' from the 12th century and a compilation made nearly two centuries later? Did Rang byung rdo rje compile various versions to enhance the original text corrected by Mi la ras pa in person? If his compilation is a separate work from this 'original' text, why are they both named *mDzod nag ma*? When the

original manuscript was taken out of rTse lha sgang by mThong ba don ldan, why did multiple copies spawn so different in content?

The extremely composite colophon of Ms-Drepung appears more like an accumulation of texts and traditions of different nature, gathering every available information and detail, thus reflecting the same compound structure of the compendium itself. The addition of this *lo rgyus* at the end of the colophon could therefore be the result of such a process.

When looking at the colophon of Ms-Bordier, the *lo rgyus* takes a completely different aspect. The final section starts with the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*' traditional colophon: the text was composed by the twelve great *ras pa* disciples such as Ngan rdzong ston pa for the sake of the great meditators. Then comes the list of the disciples (naming the twelve great *ras pas*) followed by the Lineage Wish-fulfilling Gem's verses. Directly following this part is the *lo rgyus* of the *mDzod nag ma* transmitted by the Karma pas: again, the text is said to have been "compiled by the great disciples from all directions" on the initiative of Ngan rdzong ston pa and Zhi ba 'od and amended by Mi la ras pa himself. The rest of the story is the same, with the text being secretly transmitted in a single line until the 6th Karma pa's disciple. After he retrieved it from rTse lha sgang's dark treasury, Nang so Kun dga' rgyal mtshan took it southward and many copies were made.

This version appears more coherent, presenting the manuscript as a copy of the original text transmitted faithfully – unaltered – by the Karma pas. This feeling is reinforced by the absence of any mention of Rang byung rdo rje's compilation work that modifies the entire logic of Ms-Drepung colophon. Would Ms-Bordier be the only surviving testimony of the bZhad pa'i rdo rje early compendia, this rhetoric might be convincing. Yet, through comparison with the other sources, mainly the 'Regular' *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*, we know this is impossible. Despite the baffling similarity of content nearly identical to the RBCs, the presence of the three characteristic additional elements proper to the Variant versions (*bar do* song, passages on sGam po pa and Ras chung pa), plus the 18th quality, make it unbelievable since the Variant RBCs are necessarily based upon the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* and therefore of a later date.

This leads us to the question of where and when this *lo rgyus* appeared. So far, the two available versions – in Ms-Bordier and Ms-Drepung – seem to point to a period after 1488, possibly the first half of the 16th century. The reason of its absence from DNM-RD may be that it is possibly older than the two manuscripts (Ms-Bordier and Ms-Drepung) and the *lo rgyus* is a later addition. As for the why, following the adage *Cui bono?* this story must have appeared within the Karma kam tshang lineage, presenting this school as the direct heir of Mi la ras pa's tradition. This raises many questions among which the almost complete absence of Kam tshang masters among the sNyan brgyud lineages.¹⁰⁵ The short passage concerning De bzhin gshegs pa and Drung rma se¹⁰⁶ and the Zur mang literature are, so far, the only known connections. The role of Rang byung rdo rje in the colophons, sometimes neighbouring the Lineage Wish-fulfilling Gem verses (Ms-BDRC, Ms-Lhasa) could be interpreted as a connection. Yet the silence regarding the sNyan brgyud in the 2nd and 3rd Karma pas' hagiographies does not reinforce this hypothesis.¹⁰⁷ Traditionally, the sNyan brgyud is principally associated with the 'Brug pa and sTag lung lineages¹⁰⁸ and when reviewing the lines of transmission,¹⁰⁹ no Kam tshang master appears.

As for the supposed single transmission (*chig brgyud*) of the *mDzod nag ma* mentioned in the *lo rgyus*, another single transmission comes in mind, that of the sNyan brgyud tradition itself. The Aural Transmission was said to be under the seal of secrecy and single line until the thirteenth generation.¹¹⁰ Instead, starting with gTsang smyon's literary tradition, a narrative in which the miraculous intervention of Vajrayoginī authorises loosening the seal of secrecy and the exceptional transmission to more than one disciple of Mi la ras pa. The same episode is narrated in a more detailed way in rGod tshang pa's *rnam thar* of Ras chung pa where the celestial authorisation ignites a triple tradition of Ras chung, Ngan rdzong, and Dwags po snyan

¹⁰⁵ Sernesi 2004 pp. 261-2.

¹⁰⁶ Roerich 1976 p. 511; Kongtrul 2007 p. 140.

¹⁰⁷ See Manson 2022; Gamble 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Sernesi 2004 p. 252; Roberts 2007 p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ bDe mchog snyan brgyud biographies 1983; Sernesi 2021 p. 29 table 1.

¹¹⁰ Sernesi 2004 p. 255.

brgyud.¹¹¹ Without entering any further in this matter, the thematic of a single line of transmission also regarding the 'original' compendium provides prestige and credit to the text. The secrecy attached to it is enhanced by the Lineage Wish-fulfilling Gem's verses, thus placing it on the same level as the pith instructions of the sNyan brgyud tradition.

Considering all this information, one might wonder whether this *lo rgyus* should be completely disregarded. Many elements seem credible, starting with the chronology. At present, the only available versions of this *lo rgyus* belong to manuscripts possibly produced around the first half of the 16th century, a time that saw a multiplication of compendia after gTsang smyon's publications. This could make this *History* look like an attempt to incorporate the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia tradition within the Karma kam tshang lineage. In fact, the multiplication of texts following the publication of the Madman's works at the beginning of the 16th century corresponds to a period of progressive takeover of gTsang smyon's meditation centres by the ever-growing Kam tshang tradition.¹¹²

6. Dating Ms-Bordier

After this overview of the characteristics of the Bordier manuscript comes the question of its location in time. The text alone appears insufficient to draw a definitive conclusion. The archaic spelling ('*gur*, *bsnyen rgyud*, *rog*...), the confusion between genitive and instrumental forms plead for an early date. Furthermore, the absence of the *mid la* spelling cannot rule out an ancient date. Although this archaic form is present in older texts (Don mo ri pa, Zhi byed ri khrod pa, mKha' spyod dbang po, 'Gos lo tsha ba...), it also appears in later texts such as RBC-Stockholm or Ms-Newark, the latter dating from the end of the 17th century.¹¹³ On the contrary, the spelling *Mi la* encountered in gTsang smyon's work, in DNM-RD and *A River of Blessings* goes back as far as the *bDe mchog snyan brgyud biographies* proving this cannot be considered as a relevant marker of the time of origin.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 2004 p. 259; 2021 pp. 27-28.

¹¹² Sernesi 2021 pp. 221-45, 258-76, 293-4.

¹¹³ Quintman 2014a p. 89. This estimation is connected to the presence of a portrait of the *dge lugs pa* master sKal ldan rgya mtsho (1607-1677) on Ms-Newark f. 162b.

On the one hand, the limited number of cycles and the absence of influence from gTsang smyon's *Life and Songs* would point in the direction of an early date. The historical figures whether painted (rGya ston chos bzang) or mentioned (mThong ba don ldan, Drung rin chen rdo rje) never go any later than the mid-15th century. The style of the illuminations also appears insufficient to draw a definitive conclusion.

On the other hand, the division in 18 qualities appears discordant with the first stratum and could imply an influence of the later literature. Must it be understood as some effect of DNM-RD or *A River of Blessings*? Quintman places the production of DNM-RD “shortly after the individual-transmission mandate was lifted, and perhaps within decades of Tsangnyon Heruka’s own work on the standard edition.”¹¹⁴ As will be seen below, many elements suggest a production later than 1488. Regarding *A River of Blessings*, he “[...] suggests a date of composition between the last quarter of the fourteenth and the mid-fifteenth century.”¹¹⁵ Roberts, who did not have access to DNM-RD, thinks *A River of Blessings* “may have been written in the second half of the fifteenth century by a contemporary of Tsangnyön Heruka”, “for it seems unlikely that the compiler of *A River of Blessings* would have ignored Tsangnyön Heruka’s work, as he had a predilection for compiling variants of the same incident.”¹¹⁶ Considering the possibility of an influence of DNM-RD or *A River of Blessings* on Ms-Bordier for this 18th quality, it could be dated to the second half of the 15th century.

A similar problem concerns the presence of the *lo rgyus*, exclusively encountered in Ms-Drepung, possibly dating from the first half of the 16th century. Regarding this *lo rgyus*, considering the possible context of its production as a legitimising narrative, it could have appeared after the publication and success of gTsang smyon’s *Life and Songs*. The multiplication of manuscripts and versions of the compendia at the turn of the 16th century with apparent affiliation to different schools (sTag lung, ’Brug pa, Kam tshang, and later dGe lugs) points in that direction.

Looking for material arguments, in May 23, the Tibet Museum proceeded to a C14 dating of the manuscript’s paper with a sample

¹¹⁴ Quintman 2014a p. 109.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 110.

¹¹⁶ Roberts 2007 p. 36.

taken from the first pages. The results explained in the report¹¹⁷ showed two possible periods:

- 1453–1529 (49%)
- 1547–1635 (46,4%)

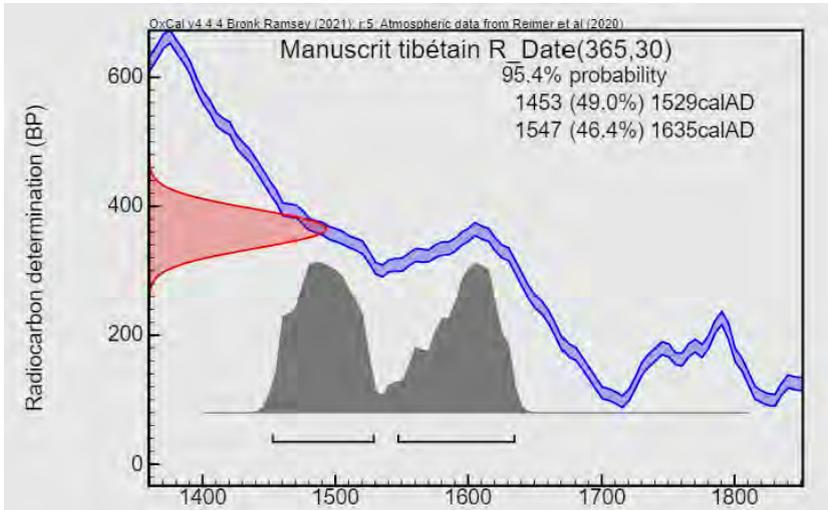


Fig. 36 – (LMC-14 : n° SacA 70331)

The report explains that the manuscript could only date from either of these two periods but not from the gap between 1529 and 1547. Although the first interval appears more likely due to the aforementioned arguments, it remains too vague to assert that the text was produced before, during or after gTsang smyon's *Life and Songs*.

¹¹⁷ Art in Lab 2023 *Rapport d'analyse 2023-0603*.

7. *A thangka illustrating bZhad pa'i rdo rje's Life and Songs*



Fig. 37 – Milarepa. Tibet 17th c. Pigments on cloth. Rubin Museum of Art. C2002.24.4 (HAR 65120)

The Rubin Museum possesses a refined and detailed painting (acc. #C2002.24.4) directly connected with our topic. The image is so dense and rich in detail that its full analysis goes beyond the scope of this article and it will deserve a study of its own. Nevertheless, some elements correspond to our study of the compendia corpus.

Mi la ras pa of greyish-purple complexion sits in royal ease posture upon a cushion and an antelope skin supported by a multi-coloured lotus. He is dressed in a cotton shawl and a meditation belt crosses his chest. His right hand is lifted to his ear and the left rests before his knee. Directly surrounding Mi la ras pa are four *ras pa* yogins. All of them, wearing the cotton robe and a hat, hold a cane and play *damaru*. Above their heads are six small monk-like miniature figures split into two groups. Finally, beneath Mi la ras pa's lotus seat are eight seated miniature *ras pa*.



Fig. 38 – Mi la and his disciples

These three groups clearly refer to the list of disciples presented in the bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia.¹¹⁸ The four main *ras pa* are the “Four heart-sons” (*thugs kyi sras bzhi*) Ras chung, Se ban, Ngan rdzong and 'Bri sgom. The eight smaller *ras pa* correspond to the “Eight close sons” (*nyes ba'i sras brgyad*). Together, these two groups constitute the famous twelve great *ras pa* disciples. The six monk-like figures must therefore stand for the six disciples of Mi la ras pa's old days. The fact that sGam po pa is not represented directly next to Mi la ras pa in the same proportions as the closest disciples is exceptional! There are other paintings representing Mi la ras pa surrounded by *ras pa* disciples, but these will be analysed later.

The central figures of the painting dwell in a cave surrounded by stylised multi-coloured rocks under a five-peaked snowy mountain whose summit is surrounded with stormy clouds. The upper part of the cave hosts five terrifying beings symbolising the first encounter with the five Long-Life Sisters (*tshe ring mched lnga*) under their demonic appearance. The same deities are figured in their glorious form riding their mount atop the snowy mountains.

¹¹⁸ See above “Listing the disciples” and Appendix B.

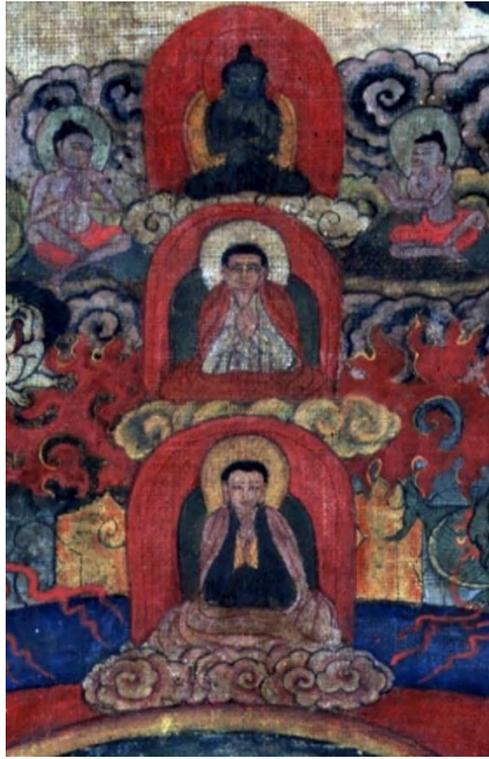


Fig. 39 – Lineage masters (detail)

Inside the stormy clouds rest the lineage masters: deep blue Vajradhara surrounded by two Indian *mahāsiddhas* (e.g. Tilopa and Nāropa). Beneath them is a broad-shouldered Tibetan figure dressed in white with a red cloak and apparently performing the teaching gesture. Comparing this figure to those in the narrative scenes of the painting, he can be safely identified as Mar pa.

Most unusual is a second, younger Tibetan figure placed between Mar pa and Mi la ras pa. Based upon the narrative scenes as well as the compendia texts, he can only be rNgog Chos sku rdo rje, Mar pa's disciple from whom Mi la Thos pa dga' received teachings. Although this episode appears diminished in gTsang smyon's *Life* so as to emphasise Mar pa's primacy, in the compendia rNgog's role remains more important. This highly unusual – unique? – representation of the bKa' brgyud forefathers seems to illustrate the vision of Mi la ras pa following Mar pa's song of the four pillars and closing the first part of the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*:

Then after obtaining the unwavering faith that both masters Mar pa and rNgog were manifestations of Buddhas, seizing the foot of the master, he formulated an auspicious aspiration prayer.¹¹⁹

The opening sentence of Bla ma Zhang's *rnam thar* of Mi la ras pa reflects the same idea: "rJe btsun Mi la, son both of Mar pa and rNgog."¹²⁰

Another statement from *The instruction on the Blazing of Supreme Caṇḍali* reinforces this connection:¹²¹

[...] that the lineage began with Tilopā and Nāropā, and continued with Mar-pa and Rngog, who transmitted it to Mila-ras-pa. Tilopā is said to have obtained supreme *siddhis*, Nāropā to have obtained ordinary *siddhis*, and Mi-la-ras-pa to have been blessed by the *ḍākinīs*.

In order to try to identify on which compendium the painting is based, we must look for specific episodes, characteristic of the various versions of this literature.



Fig. 40



Fig. 41

¹¹⁹ Ms-Bordier ff. 20b-21a: *de nas bla ma mar pa dang/ rngog gnyis la sangs rgyas kyi 'du shes skyes pa'i dad pa brtan po thob cing bla ma'i zhabs la 'dzus te smon lam bzang po btab/.*

¹²⁰ Bla ma Zhang vol. 1 p. 146.2: *mar rngog gnyis kyi sras rje btsun mi la lags/.*

¹²¹ Ducher 2017b p. 58.

Fig. 40 represents Mi la crossing a river with a book on top of his bag and his boots mistakenly laid above the book. The episode, typical of the compendia, is absent from gTsang smyon's version.¹²²

A small scene (Fig. 41) placed in the middle right side register illustrates Mi la's encounter with a rabbit riding a fox. This episode belongs to the cycle *Brag rgya rdo rje rdzong* which is absent in all versions of the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*, except for Ms-Lhasa. It is also present in DNM-RD, and in *A River of Blessings* (as part of *Brag dmar chong gling sogs gyi skor*), but not in Ms-BL. Since the scene is set amongst other demon scenes and before the encounter with Ras chung pa, it must belong to Quality no.3 (and not to no.7 as in Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD). This strongly suggests that the painting was based on a version of *A River of Blessings*.

Although the famous 'yak horn' episode appears in the painting, Mi la ras pa is not represented sitting under a flower, as described in *A River of Blessings*. However, after the *rKyang mgur gyi skor*, a scene seems to depict the encounter between Mi la and Dam pa sangs rgyas. This episode occurs in *Thog la'i skor*, which in *A River of Blessings* appears in Quality 11, whereas in the *Twelve Great Ras pa Diciples* and DNM-RD comes later, in Quality 13.

Altogether, these few elements plead for a painting based upon *A River of Blessings*. Further study would be necessary to identify the other scenes of this unique work of art.

There are examples of other *thang kas* representing Mi la ras pa surrounded by his *ras pa* disciples. Here is a comparison of a variety of possibilities.

¹²² See for example Ms-Bordier f. 6a.2; DNM-RD 2006 p. 9.3; Ms-Smith f. 11a.3.



Fig. 42 – The Life of Milarepa (1040-1123) Western Tibet, a Kagyupa Monastery, circa 1500. Mineral pigments and gold on cotton cloth 51 1/2 x 41 1/2 in. (130.8 x 105.4 cm) From the Nasli and Alice Heeramanek Collection, purchased with funds provided by the Jane and Justin Dart Foundation (M.81.90.2). LACMA



Fig. 43 – Milarepa and his disciples (detail)

This painting from the LACMA collection represents the master surrounded by eight of his disciples and scenes from his life. Some of the characters are identified by inscriptions:

Ø | Ø | Ø | *sgam po rin po che* | [*mi la ras pa*] | [*ras chung*] | '*bri sgom* | *se ban* | *ngan rdzong*

The central figure and the first *ras pa* to the right have no inscriptions. Yet there is no doubt that the latter is Ras chung pa. If this set corresponds to gTsang smyon's list of *thugs kyi sras brgyad*, the three *ras pa* without inscription on the left should be Zhi ba 'od, Khyi ra ras pa and Sans rgyas skyabs. This group of "eight heart-sons" is described in gTsang smyon's *Life* and is also visible on an 18th century painting from the Rubin Museum.¹²³ In both cases, sGam po pa is clearly identified as an ordained monk and stands close to Mi la ras pa as one of his main disciples.

¹²³ HAR acc.# P1999.2.1, Item 803 <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/803>



Fig. 44 – Milarepa on Mount Kailash. Tibet, 1400–1500. Pigment and gold on cotton, 45.5 × 30 cm (17 7/8 × 11 13/16 in.) Asian Purchase Campaign Endowment and Robert Ross Fund. Art Institute of Chicago. Reference Number 1995.277

The Chicago Art Institute painting shows Mi la ras pa surrounded by six of his disciples identified by inscriptions: *'bri sgom | ras chung | dwags po | dpal bzhad pa'i rdo rje | ngam rdzong | zhi ba 'od | khyi ra*. Four of them are represented as *ras pa* dressed in white, whereas the two characters closest to the master are in gold.

Although this group does not correspond to any of those listed in the colophons, the four heart-sons are present, as is sGam po pa. It is interesting to note that Ngan rdzong is represented closer to Mi la and in the same golden style as sGam po pa, inducing a superiority *vis-à-vis* Ras chung.

Based on the extensive dedication prayer on the rear of the *thang ka*, Amy Heller places this painting *c.*1500, after the publication of gTsang smyon's *Life*.¹²⁴ Quintman reevaluates this statement¹²⁵ pushing the date back “at least several decades”. In fact, the age and date of Mi la's death mentioned in the inscription – “In his eighty-eighth [year] on the nineteenth [day] of the tiger [month]” (*brgya cu rtsa brgyad sta (rect. stag) zla'i bcu dgu la*)” – correspond to that provided in the compendia and not that found in gTsang smyon's *Life and Songs*. However, the narrative elements of Mi la receiving the name rDo rje rgyal mtshan when taking the lay precepts (stanza #4) is not found in the compendia. The name appears exclusively in *A River of Blessings* but in a very unusual alternative *rnam thar*.¹²⁶ In this version, Mi la has already left Mar pa to go and meditate. After obtaining some realisation, he comes back to Mar pa who gives him the name rDo rje rgyal mtshan.¹²⁷ The scene described in the consecration prayer seems to be closer to gTsang smyon's version.¹²⁸ Moreover, stanza #20 states that “Bodhirāja requested four lines on the symbolism of the staff and then became one of your four son-disciples”, and this association between Ngan rdzong ston pa and the *sBa mgur gyi skor* is also proper to gTsang smyon, missing in all the compendia. Albeit the date and the age of Mi la at his death correspond to the compendia, these two examples could be interpreted as an influence of gTsang smyon, making it reasonable to date this painting after 1488.

¹²⁴ Heller 2003; Pal 2003 p. 249.

¹²⁵ Quintman 2013 pp. 487, 500n9.

¹²⁶ Ms-Smith f. 28a.3; Ms-India vol.1 p. 93.2; Ms-Drepung vol. 111 p. 81.4.

¹²⁷ Ms-Smith f. 33a.3; Ms-India vol.1 p. 113.4; Ms-Drepung vol. 111 p. 97.1.

¹²⁸ gTsang smyon 1981 p. 96.

Furthermore, in contrast to its current identification, it seems more likely that the painting represents *Mi la ras pa* on Gaurishankar instead of Mount Kailāsa. First, the Kailāsa is a single mountain whereas the painting represents a five-summit mountain range, and second, the *Tshe ring mched lnga* represented all around the painting have no connection to the Kailāsa.¹²⁹ As explained in the chapters devoted to them and attributed to *Ngan rdzong ston pa* and *Zhi ba 'od*,¹³⁰ the encounter took place in Gaurishankar. Of course, the modern name Gaurishankar is not mentioned in the Tibetan sources, the action taking place in *sMan lung chu bar*,¹³¹ but the association between the peak today known as Gaurishankar and the Five Sisters of Long Life is ancient. So it is clear that the painting is not *Mi la* at the Kailāsa but *Mi la* at the five-peaked mountain where the *Tshe ring* sisters reside, which can be identified with Gaurishankar.

¹²⁹ De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996 pp. 196-97: “The *Tshe ring mched lnga* are mountain-goddesses, whose residence is supposed to be the *Jo mo gangs dkar* or *La phyi gangs*. At the foot of this mountain are supposed to be five glacial lakes with water in different colours, which are consecrated to this group of goddesses. Usually the Tibetan works only mention that the residence of these five goddesses lies “on the border of Nepal and Tibet”.”

¹³⁰ Tsangnyön 2017 chap. 28n3; Quintman 2014a p. 264n.60.

¹³¹ Ms-Bordier f. 196b.4; DNM-RD 2006 p. 497.3; Ms-Smith f. 230a.6.



Fig. 45 – Milarepa, Tibet, c. 1550¹³², Pigment on cotton, 30 × 37.5 cm (11 13/16 × 14 3/4 in.). (Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of John Eskenazi Ltd.)

Another painting from the Eskenazi collection represents the Cotton-clad yogin surrounded by eight of his disciples all wearing cotton shawls.¹³³ The upper range contains the lineage masters Tilopa, Nāropa and Mar pa surrounded by small representations of Vajradhara and Akṣobhya. The lower range has the five Long-Life Sisters riding their respective mounts. The snowy peaks of the mountain range present a strong similarity with the previous painting from the Art Institute of Chicago. Seven of the eight characters surrounding Mi la ras pa are identified by inscriptions:

¹³² Casey 2023 vol.1 p.595 no.93

¹³³ All my gratitude to Marta Sernesi for indicating this painting to me.

Ø	<i>Ngan rdzong ras pa</i>
<i>Ras chung pa</i>	<i>Se ban ras pa</i>
<i>'Bri sgom</i>	<i>Khyi ra ras pa</i>
<i>Ra rdzi ras pa</i>	<i>Ras pa rDo rje dbang phyug</i>

Unfortunately, no inscription identifies the first disciple facing Mi la. Compared to the lists of disciples from the various literary sources consulted, this group of eight could correspond to two different sets: the *ras pa mched bgryad* as described in *Lho rong chos 'byung*¹³⁴ and the *Blue Annals*, and mentioned in *Clouds of Blessings*, or the *thugs kyi sras brgyad* mentioned by gTsang smyon He ru ka. Since the painting appears to be related to the Ri bo che tradition¹³⁵ – as is the British Library manuscript – one could imagine a combination of the first two groups of four, the *thugs kyi sras bzhi* and the *nye ba 'i sras bzhi*, proper to this manuscript. The problem is none of these possibilities matches the names given on the painting.

If the *thang ka* illustrates the “eight *ras pa* brothers” then the first character should be Zhi ba 'od (but rDo rje dbang phyug should be replaced by bDe ba skyong/skyobs). The same is true for the combination of the “four heart-sons” and the “four close sons” of Ms-BL. On the other hand, if the group represents gTsang smyon's “eight heart-sons” the first character would be sGam po pa, and Zhi ba 'od and Sangs rgyas skyabs would replace Ra rdzi ras pa and rDo rje dbang phyug. Of course, it would also be possible that the artist was not referring to any of these groups.

Nevertheless, considering the general hierarchy among the disciples and since the “four heart-sons” are placed in the upper range, the unidentified first character facing Mi la ras pa would most probably be sGam po pa. It is also of interest to note that half of the disciples are represented wearing monk's robes under their white shawl (the first character, Ngan rdzong, Ras chung and rDo rje dbang phyug).

This brief overview of the paintings representing Mi la ras pa surrounded by his *ras pa* disciples shows how varied the combination

¹³⁴ *Lho rong chos 'byung* p. 107.

¹³⁵ Heller 2003 p. 4; Quintman 2013 p. 485; Casey 2023 p. 595.

can be. It also proves the Rubin Museum *thang ka* to be unique since it is the only example representing the Cotton-clad yogin surrounded by the twelve great *ras pa* disciples and without sGam po pa figured as a major pupil. Not only are the “four heart-sons” and the “eight close sons” represented along with the “six disciples of Mi la ras pa’s old days” – as described in the compendia – but the inclusion of rNgog chos sku rdo rje among the bKa’ brgyud lineage masters between Mar pa and Mi la shows a deep connection with the compendia literature and independence in regards to the other *rnam thar* tradition and gTsang smyon’s work.

8. Reflections about the *mDzod nag ma*

When exploring the compendia of the life and songs of Mi la bZhad pa’i rdo rje, one character in particular comes to the foreground, inseparably associated with a mysterious and poetic expression: the *mDzod nag ma*. This is the Third Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje (1284–1339), who appears in multiple colophons and titles as a compiler or as the author of a text deeply connected to the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*. This authorship as well as the identification(s) of that work is a complex matter with multiple levels of involvement.

Rang byung rdo rje appearances in the texts

The available corpus of compendia consists of thirteen texts¹³⁶ ranging from the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* to *A River of Blessings*. Six of these never mention the Karma pa: the ‘Regular’ *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* (Ms-Newark, Ms-Oxford, Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Gansu, RBC-Stockholm) and Ms-BL. In the other compendia, Rang byung rdo rje appears seven times in colophons (Ms-Bordier, Ms-BDRC, Ms-Lhasa, DNM-RD, Ms-Smith, Ms-India and Ms-Drepung): thrice as the author/compiler (Ms-BDRC, Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD), and thrice as the compiler of the *mDzod nag ma* (Ms-Smith, Ms-India, and Ms-Drepung).¹³⁷ It is surprising that the association between Rang byung rdo rje and the *mDzod nag ma* is not systematic, and even more that the

¹³⁶ As modern reeditions, RBC-Pt, BCG-D and BCG-Si are not considered here.

¹³⁷ In Ms-Bordier, he appears exclusively in the *lo rgyus* as a member of the transmission lineage.

expression is completely absent from two of the most prominent sources: Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD! In fact, the identification of the Third Karma pa's text as the *mDzod nag ma* appears exclusively in the colophon of *A River of Blessings*, as explained earlier. Ms-BDRC is the only first stratum source to mention the expression *mdzod nag* but in a different context, as a location and not as a title: *'di mdzod nag nas gdan drangs pa 'di yin no* "this [text] was retrieved from the dark treasury."

Concerning the titles, Rang byung rdo rje appears twice (DNM-RD and Ms-India) in the same formula: *rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje 'i gsung mgur ma mdzod nag ma zhes pa karma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyog gcig tu bkod pa*. Of the two modern reeditions of Ms-Drepung, BCG-Si is named identically, and BCG-D is titled *rJe mi la'i rnam thar mdzod nag ma*. Although no original version of DNM-RD was accessible for this study, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the title.

Out of the thirteen compendia, Ms-Oxford, Ms-Lhasa, Ms-Drepung and Ms-BL have no title, because of a missing title page or because of an empty page in the case of Ms-BL. As Quintman explained,¹³⁸ Ms-Lhasa was catalogued under the name *rJe btsun mi la rdo rje rgyal mtshan gyi rnam par thar pa'i dbu phyogs lags* by the 'Bras spung archives, but this is most certainly a mistake since the religious name rDo rje rgyal mtshan never appears in the text except for a caption written in *dbu can* "*rje btsun mi la bzhad pa rdo rje rgyal mtshan*" on f. 149a. As the whole text and legends are written in *dbu med*, this caption appears to be a latter addition.

Therefore, only two versions of the second stratum bear the title identifying the text as "*mDzod nag ma* composed by the Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje" (*mdzod nag ma zhes pa karma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa*): DNM-RD and Ms-India. This very descriptive formulation identifying the author in the title appears distant from the titles of the Variant *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* and Ms-Smith, which contain no reference to *mDzod nag ma* or to the author. In the first stratum, the Stockholm xylographic print (and its apparent copy Ms-Gansu) is the only version with a comparable title mentioning an author, in this case "the twelve great accomplished *ras pa* disciples":

¹³⁸ Quintman 2014a p. 108n76.

rJe btsun mid la ras chen gyi rnam thar bka' 'bum chen mo grub thob ras pa bcu gnyis kyis bsgrigs pa.¹³⁹ These elaborate titles mentioning author(s) seem to belong to a later tradition. The fact that this *mDzod nag ma*/Rang byung rdo rje title first appears in DNM-RD, a rather late, heavily edited version compared to a text allegedly composed or compiled by the Third Karma pa in the 14th century, pleads for an invention proper to the later versions of the compendia.

Ms-Lhasa vs. DNM-RD

Among the texts attributed to Rang byung rdo rje, two are closely related: Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD. Apart from their identical obscure colophon, they also share a comparable structure, the narrative cycles: *Brag skya rdo rje rdzong gi skor*, *rJe btsun mi la ras pa dang bu mo yid 'phrog ma gnyis kyis zhush len mgur du gsungs pa'i skor*, *Khyi ra ras pa*, *Ra rdzi ras pa* and *Lug rdzi ras pa* are distributed similarly in the same qualities. However, this is where the resemblance ends and, as observed on many occasions, the texts have more differences than common elements. Even if DNM-RD remains silent about the influence of other sources, the changes and the additional material must have come from a hitherto unknown source.

Most perplexing is the absence of two of the three extra passages of the Variant RBCs, passages found again in *A River of Blessings*. Conceiving DNM-RD as an enlarged and modified Ms-Lhasa would appear logical, but the absence of these two passages disrupts an apparent continuity in narrative development. Why would the editor remove passages otherwise present in all the texts connected to Rang byung rdo rje? The fact that the *bar do* song and the passage of Ras chung in Lo ro and at the cremation site appear verbatim in mKha' spyod dbang po's *Clouds of Blessings* should attest for their validity, especially among the Karma bka' brgyud.¹⁴⁰

What was Rang byung rdo rje's input to the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*? The additional material of the Variant versions appeared as a potential answer, but if this were the case, why was it removed from DNM-RD? Moreover, since these three episodes are found in Ms-BL

¹³⁹ Roberts 2007 p. 22; Ms-Gansu vol. 22 p. 225.

¹⁴⁰ Zhwa dmar 02 2010 pp. 464.6 & 476.2.

along with an illustration of Mi la appearing to Ras chung,¹⁴¹ and since this manuscript never mentions Rang byung rdo rje as one of its sources, this theory appears invalid. If Rang byung rdo rje's input is connected to the supplementary cycles found in Ms-Lhasa, why are the *Brag skya rdo rje rdzong* and the *Bu mo yid 'phrog ma* cycles absent from Ms-BDRC? What to say about Ms-Bordier which contains none of these extra cycles?

The Na ro bon chung affair

One of the most famous episodes in Mi la ras pa's life is the contest of miracles between the Cotton-clad yogin and a *Bon po* named Na ro bon chung, competing for the spiritual authority over mount Kailāsa. Unexpectedly, this emblematic episode often represented on paintings is absent from the first stratum compendia as well as from Ms-BL, and it appears differently among the remaining texts of the second stratum.

The episode, recounted at length in gTsang smyon's *Songs*, appears in a synthetic version as part of the cycle *Gangs ti tse'i skor* (Quality 14) in *A River of Blessings*, and in full in DNM-RD in the cycle *Gangs ti se na ro bon chung btul ba'i skor* (Quality 15). This last version corresponds verbatim to gTsang smyon's chapter.

Quintman¹⁴² gives a translation of the version in *A River of Blessings*, presenting it as “the first records of [Mila's] activities in this geographic area.”¹⁴³

Mi la reached the snows of Ti tse and, having opened the entrance gate to the sacred site, thereby had a visionary encounter with Cakrasamvara and his divine assembly on the Ti tse snows. Previously, Bon pos ruled over this sacred site, but the Rje btsun said, “This sacred site is a Buddhist location. It is the place where the Blessed One, accompanied with an assembly of five hundred arhats, once came and taught Dharma. These snows are Cakrasamvara's palace.”

An accomplished [Bon po] master called Na ro bon chung who lived there said, “This sacred site is a place blessed by the Bon po teacher Gshen rab and its snows, the divine face of Ge god. You yogin, don't

¹⁴¹ Ms-BL ff. 342a.5, 345a.4, 377b.6 and illustration 379a.

¹⁴² Quintman 2014a pp. 116 and 256n101.

¹⁴³ *Idem* p. 257n101. The text corresponds to Ms-Smith 181a.4, Ms-India II-88.4, and Ms-Drepung 506.2.

stay around here.” He then laid down a wager on the site (*gnas skug*) and drew the Rje btsun into a contest of miracles. But due to the power of [Mi la’s] mastery of miraculous display, [Na ro bon chung] was not able to [defeat him] and offered the site to the Rje btsun.

Considering that *A River of Blessings* is either prior to, or from the same period as, gTsang smyon, one can surmise that the Madman either invented his developed version of the chapter or copied it from an unknown source. The absence of songs in any known version, apart from DNM-RD, leans towards the first option. On the other hand, if such a developed version existed, one may wonder why *A River of Blessings*, the most complete compendium, did not include it despite its numerous repetitions of songs and narratives.

When looking at the Mi la ras pa literature in general, and more specifically at the earlier *rnam thars*, the episode is conspicuous by its absence. The first mention of the yogin visiting the area seems to appear in rGyal thang pa’s life story of Mi la ras pa in a very short statement:

Then, he went to the famous three, *gangs*, *ri* and *mtsho*; Ti se, king of glaciers, Ma pham, king of lakes, and the hundred (*rgya?*) summits, king of mountains. He established the teachings of the practice lineage, expanded the experience born in him, and accomplished great benefit for all beings [living] in this place.¹⁴⁴

A short mention of Mi la visiting Ti se appears in Zhwa dmar mKha’ spyod dbang po’s *Clouds of Blessings*:¹⁴⁵ “When [Mi la] thought about going to Ti se, sTon pa Shag gu requested a *gaṇacakra* [...]”. After that follow two songs abstracts drawn from different chapters: a song addressed to Ras chung in *Te pu pa’i skor* and another from *Ti se la sogs pa’i skor*, a chapter absent from the first stratum compendia.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ rGyal thang pa 1973 p. 256: *de yang gangs ri mtsho 3 la byon te/ gangs kyi rgyal po ti se/ mtsho’i rgyal po ma pham/ ri rgyal po rse rgya lows [la sogs pa] rnam su [rnam su] byon cing/ sgrub brgyud kyi bstan pa rtsud [*rtsugs = btsug] te/ nyams dang skyo [skye?] pa rgyas/ gnas de rnam la gnas pa’i semn [sems can] tshed [tshad?] pa’i don yangs mang du mdzado [mdzad do]/.*

¹⁴⁵ Zhwa dmar 02 2010 pp. 438-439: *yang ti se la ’byon par dgongs pa’i tshe ston pa shag gus tshogs kyi ’khor lo bskor te zhus pa la [...].*

¹⁴⁶ Although the song appears in Ms-Oxford’s extra chapter *mGur phran*: f. 123a.6.

As can be seen, both sources remain silent about the encounter with a *Bon po* or a miracle contest. The earliest mention of such a matter known to us at present comes from Zhi byed ri pa. In his text, dated 1373 and revised in 1381,¹⁴⁷ he mentions on three occasions the story of the encounter with Na ro bon chung. The episode is described as follows:

At the time when he went to chase the *Bon po* from mount Ti se, the rJe btsun was accompanied by bShen sgom ras pa, Li khor phyra ru ba, 'Dzang mo ras ma from Cung pa'i kre phyag, and four *dge bshes* Za ras ma from upper Gung thang; they were eight [in total], master and disciples. Li khor ba and 'Dzang mo were sent down to Blo bo, and six of them went up. With a battle of miraculous powers, the *Bon po* was driven away. The story of stealing Ti se is explained separately.¹⁴⁸

By naming the episode “stealing Ti se” (*ti se phrogs pa*), Zhi byed ri pa presents it in a very negative way. Later in the text, he analyses and questions the veracity of this story.¹⁴⁹

In a 1448 prayer to Mi la ras pa by the 15th century master Nam mkha' bsam grub, the miracle contest is mentioned in verse:

On snowy Ti se you had a contest of miracles with Na ro bon chung.
Having overpowered him, you established the teachings of the practice lineage on this snowy range. To the feet of the lamp of the teachings, I bow.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Quintman 2012 p. 13

¹⁴⁸ Zhi byed ri pa 2012 p. 339.5: *gangs ti se na bon po bton pa la byon dus rje btsun la sku 'khor ni/ bshen sgom ras pa dang/ li khor phyra ru ba dang/ cung pa'i kre phyag gi 'dzang mo ras ma cig dang/ gung thang byen lang gi dge bshes za ras ma bzhi dang/ dpon slob bryad byon pa la/ li khor ba dang mdzangs mo gnyis blo bo na mar btang nas/ dpon slob drug yar byon nas/ rdzu 'phrul sna tshogs kyis rtsod pa mdzad nas bon po bton nas/ ti se phrogs pa'i lo rgyus zur na gsal/.*

¹⁴⁹ *Idem* pp. 346.5. For more details, see Blancke 2021 g.

¹⁵⁰ Nam mkha' bsam grub f. 4b: *ti se'i gangs la na ro bon chung dang/ rdzu 'phrul 'gran zhing zil gyis mnan nas kyang/ gangs can khrod 'dir sgrub bryud bstan pa btsugs/ bstan pa'i sgron me'i zhabs la gsol ba 'debs/.*

Finally, the *Blue Annals*¹⁵¹ dated 1478, gives a more detailed account, confirming the existence of such a narrative tradition a decade before gTsang smyon:

After nine years had passed, he realized the trance of self realization, and in order to labour for the benefit of the crowds of nomads, he went towards ti se (Kailāsa).

There was a bon po adept who had mounted a drum, and was about to proceed to the snowy summit. The Venerable One reached the snowy summit within a single moment, and then having spread his linen garment, he sent the bon po adept down with his drum, and showed many other similar miracles. After that, he came down (from the summit) and numerous supporters, such as rdor mo and others attended on him.

Since the story has two protagonists, one could wonder if a version can be found in Bon sources. In his translation and presentation of the *Treasury of Good Sayings*, Samten Karmay only mentions the anecdote in a footnote but the main text remains silent about it.¹⁵²

In “The Politics of Sacred Space in Bon and Tibetan Popular Tradition”, Charles Ramble mentions two *Bon po dkar chags* about Ti se in which the episode is described.¹⁵³ The earliest text, authored by one Ye shes rgyal mtshan, is presented as a thirteenth century source.¹⁵⁴ Although Bellezza identifies the author with a 14th century homonymous character named Ka gdams Ye shes rgyal mtshan,¹⁵⁵ the information granted by the text points towards a third possible figure: Ba ye Ye shes rgyal mtshan from the 15th century.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Roerich 1976 p. 434.

¹⁵² Karmay 2001 xxixn.2.

¹⁵³ Ramble 1999 p. 17.

¹⁵⁴ Ramble identifies the author with rTogs ldan dbon po Ye shes rgyal mtshan, a master of the Southern transmission line of the Zhang zhung snyan bryud.

¹⁵⁵ Bellezza 2008 p. 247n136, a master of the Ma bryud line of transmission.

¹⁵⁶ Ye shes rgyal mtshan pp. 449-450. The introduction of the *dKar chag* mentions the Zhang zhung snyan bryud and the Me ri practice. None of the two previous candidate are connected to this specific lineage. Ba ye Ye shes rgyal mtshan appears in the transmission line of Me ri, following sPa bstan rgyal bzang po identified as a 14th/15th century master. See Karmay 2001 p. 112 and TPNI “sPa ston bsTan rgyal bzang po.” Moreover, the colophon indicates that the text was commissioned by one Yon bdag bSam ’grub, a name also found in a prayer

While reviewing all the sacred sites and caves of mount Ti se, the author states:

The great-accomplished Na ro bon chung and rje btsun Mi la ras pa stayed in the “Unchanging Miracle Cave”, [where] each of them left his changeless foot print. In the “Cave [where] the Secret *yid dam* is realised”, unborn syllables appeared spontaneously. Riding his drum, he flew into the sky, leaving his unchanging seal in the stone. Thus, the qualities are inconceivable.¹⁵⁷

This passage, lacking the mention of a contest, and apparently devoid of rivalry, is the first one to describe the “drum flight,” a detail reproduced in the *Blue Annals*, gTsang smyon’s *Life and Songs*, and DNM-RD.

As pointed out by Ramble, the absence of polemic in this passage indicates a composition before gTsang smyon’s offending version. The presence of such a story in a Bon po *dkar chag* establishes its fame even for non-Buddhists, and testifies of its integration within the sacred geography of mount Ti se.

Nevertheless, this story seems to have had a special status in the Mi la ras pa literature, appearing randomly and under various aspects. As pointed out by the examples above, the crucial period of development of this narrative in the *rnam thars* seems to have started during the second half of the fifteenth century.

When refocusing on the compendia corpus, this story appears mysterious in many ways. How could such a developed account including multiple songs have existed with so few and undeveloped occurrences in the previous literature? Why exclusively in two sources? If, as Roberts believes, *A River of Blessings* is earlier or contemporaneous with gTsang smyon’s *Life and Songs*,¹⁵⁸ this could

composed by the Sa skya master dKon mchog yon tan rgyal mtshan also dated to the 15th century. All my gratitude to Dan Martin for this information.

¹⁵⁷ Ye shes rgyal mtshan pp. 480-81: *grub thob na ro bon chung dang/ rje btsun mi la ras pa yis/ mi 'gyur rdzu 'phrul phug pa zhag/ mi 'gyur rdzu 'phrul zhabs rjes so sor zhas/ yid dam gsang ba' i grub phug na/ skye med yi ge rang byon yod/ rnga gshang phyibs nas mkha' la 'phur/ mi 'gyur bka' rtags [481] rdo la bzhag / de ltar yon tan bsam mi khyab/.*

¹⁵⁸ Roberts 2007 p. 36.

explain the absence of the extended version of the episode from it. However, why was the full version not reproduced in Ms-Drepung, possibly dated decades after the release and success of Tsang smyon's standard version? Moreover, why is the Na ro bon chung cycle present at length in DNM-RD? Was it copied from gTsang smyon or the other way around? If it pre-existed in DNM-RD, its absence in *A River of Blessings*, which cites "Rang byung rdo rje's *Dark Treasury*" as its first source in its colophon, would prove that the author(s) of *A River of Blessings* was or were not referring to that version of the text attributed to the Karma pa. Likewise, if the full episode appeared first in gTsang smyon's *Songs*, then it would necessarily place DNM-RD after 1488, and not after the Sixth Karma pa lifted the single-transmission mandate, as proposed by Quintman.¹⁵⁹

As an argument to present gTsang smyon as the author of this chapter, it is of common knowledge that the Madman reorganised, edited, and sometimes rewrote many passages of his *Life and Songs*. In this perspective, Quintman's article on Yolmo's Tiger Cave Lion Fortress¹⁶⁰ is of double interest: it establishes the editing and redacting activities of gTsang smyon as well as his role in reorganising the sacred geography related to Mi la ras pa. From the above we know the story was not completely forged, as it existed before him, but the songs and the polemical tone seems to be proper to the Madman's version.

Considering DNM-RD to be the original source appears less evident since no other compendia shares this version of the story. Since its colophon does not mention any other source, we cannot know where it could have originated or have been lifted from.

One final observation: as seen earlier, according to its colophon DNM-RD was produced under the auspices of the Fourth Zhwa dmar, although he is not explicitly described as having been directly involved in the project. It is noteworthy that in two of his personal productions – a double prayer to Mi la ras pa, and a pilgrimage guide to Ti se dated 1504¹⁶¹ – the episode is absent. These omissions, even in a text produced more than twenty years after the standard version of the *Life and Songs* by gTsang smyon, and possibly also of DNM-RD, tend to

¹⁵⁹ Quintman 2014a p. 109.

¹⁶⁰ Quintman 2014b p. 69.

¹⁶¹ Zhwa dmar 04 2009a vol. 4 pp. 194-96 & 2009b vol. 6 p. 426.

indicate that the episode was still not fully integrated in the narrative tradition.

Although no definitive conclusion can be reached regarding the origin of the extended Na ro bon chung chapter – whether invented by gTsang smyon, created for DNM-RD, or copied from an unknown outer source – its presence in DNM-RD contributes to setting this compendium apart from the rest of the corpus.

Reconsidering A River of Blessings

Reflecting on the compendia, one cannot but share the observations made by previous scholars on the matter, especially P.A. Roberts, A. Quintman, and M. Sernesi.

Before 2014, there was a consensus regarding the identity of *A River of Blessings* as a separate group, gathering what we call Ms-India and Ms-Smith. The arguments used to distinguish this entity from the other compendia were its composite nature, the multiple sources mentioned in the colophon and the titles of these texts.

Describing the 1978 Dalhousie edition, Roberts states:¹⁶²

[...] However, the scribe, in his addendum, refers to this text as *A Dark Treasury* (*mDzod nag ma*), and the title of the edition, clearly based on that in the colophon, is *A Dark Treasury of the Songs of the Lord of Yogins, Mila Shepay Dorje, compiled by Karmapa Rangjung Dorje* (*rNal-'byor gyi dbang-phyug mi-la bzhad-pa'i rdo-rje'i [gsung] 'gur mdzod nag-ma zhes-pa karma-pa Rang-byung rDo-rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod-pa*). [...] Perhaps the scribe of the existing manuscript of *A River of Blessings* misunderstood the syntactically clumsy and ambiguous colophon, which is open to interpretation.

In his 2006 thesis, Quintman observes:¹⁶³

An Indian publication in 1978 reproduced a two-volume manuscript under the title *The Black Treasury Compiled by Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje* (*Mdzod nag ma zhes karma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa*). The ambiguity of this title has led to some confusion regarding the text's identification and its history. In that case, however,

¹⁶² Roberts 2007 pp. 31-2.

¹⁶³ Quintman 2006 p. 161.

both title and attribution appear to have been based on a mistaken reading of the work's somewhat ambiguous colophon. The text — actually titled *A River of Blessings* and analyzed in the next section— is instead a later compendium, and lists among its sources a compilation referred to as *The Black Treasury*, written by Rang byung rdo rje and based upon his “valid sources and his personal research” (*khung btsun shing thugs rtsis*). The text was thus confused for one of its sources.

Finally, Sernesi notes:¹⁶⁴

The River of Blessing (Byin rlabs kyis chu rgyun gyis nyon mongs pa'i tsha gdung sel bar byed pa) was mistaken for the earlier work and published as *Rnal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur ma mdzod nag ma zhes pa karma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa*, Damchoe Sangpo, Dalhousie 1978.

The publication of Quintman's *The Yogin and the Madman* in 2014 constitutes a turning point in the understanding and classification of the sources. This is especially true of '*A River of Blessings*', which was absorbed into a larger group, associated with other texts, called by Quintman '*The Black Treasury*' organised in 'early' and 'later' strata. This denomination is defined as followed:

As a general title, *The Black Treasury* does not indicate a single text or even multiple editions of a single text. Rather, the name refers to a broad collection of biographical compendia sharing common (if not always identical) sources, structures, and content. In this sense, *The Black Treasury* seems to have been understood as a container into which all known material about Milarepa's life and career might be locked away.¹⁶⁵

The main difference between his earlier statements and that of *The Yogin and the Madman* is the access to the so-called 'DNM- D',¹⁶⁶ which appears to have played a major role in modifying Quintman's perception of the corpus. This was probably due to the titles of these texts: *rJe mi la'i rnam thar mdzod nag ma* for the 2004 Drikung edition

¹⁶⁴ Sernesi 2010 p. 418n167.

¹⁶⁵ Quintman 2014a p. 105.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 110, 276. The 'Bri gung version of 2004 and the Si khron version of 2008 are gathered under the name DNM-D without indicating the difference in the titles.

and *rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes kar ma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa* for the 2008 Si khron edition. Whereas before Ms-India was the only text to contain the expression *mDzod nag ma* in its title, three sources out of four now had the same reference. The other key element must have been the *lo rgyus* of the *mDzod nag ma* present at the end of these two texts forming the so-called 'DNM-D'. Through the combination of these elements, *A River of Blessings* disappeared as an autonomous group.

However, our recent access to Ms-Drepung somehow turns the tables. Unfortunately, as often with this literature, this manuscript's original title page is missing. The manuscript was reproduced as facsimile and published as *rJe btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam thar rdo rje'i glu dang mgur rnams phyogs gcig tu bsdus pa*, a sentence opening the text's colophon. This proves that the titles of its recent reeditions BCG-D and BCG-Si were creations and deliberate choices made by the editors. The fact that dPal brtsegs did not choose to use *mdzod nag ma* in the title of the facsimile of Ms-Drepung, although still cataloguing the text as authored by Rang byung rdo rje, proves that the association between this text and the *mDzod nag ma* is far from being systematic.

Text	Title	Date/period
Ms-Smith	<i>rJe rnal sbyor gyi dbang phyug dpal bzhad pa'i rdo rje'i 'gur 'tshogs tshad phyogs gcig du bsgrig pa lo rgyus kyis sbas pa zhes bya ba bzhugs so</i>	Mid-15th?
Ms-Drepung	Ø	16 th century?
Ms-India	<i>rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur ma mdzod nag ma zhes pa karma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyog gcig tu bkod pa</i>	18 th -19 th c.?

Regarding Ms-India, based on the scribe's colophon Roberts¹⁶⁷ posits that "the dates for this particular manuscript [are] 1722–3, 1782–3, 1842–3 and 1902–3, with the latter two dates being more likely."

¹⁶⁷ Roberts 2007 p. 34.

In the colophon of the manuscript, the expression *mdzod nag ma* appears twice: first among the list of sources used for the text, in the modified colophon shared with Ms-Lhasa and DNM-RD; second at the very end of the scribe's colophon, in an aspiration prayer where the expression *rnam 'gur mdzod nag ma* designates the text.¹⁶⁸

This formula proves that the scribe did consider the whole text as a *mDzod nag ma*, despite the evident contradiction with its own colophon and poetic title *A River of Blessings*. Nevertheless, using the same title for texts of different nature (DNM-RD, Ms-India and BCG-Si) generates confusion.¹⁶⁹ A detailed study of the structures and content clearly demonstrates a distinction between these sources. For all these reasons, it appears of foremost importance to continue to keep *A River of Blessings* as a separate category.

In search of the mDzod nag ma

This fact of considering Ms-India as a *mDzod nag ma* “composed by Rang byung rdo rje” betrays a wider tendency.

Regarding *A River of Blessings*, if Ms-Drepung unfortunately lost its title page, luckily, Ms-Smith still has its original title showing no reference nor association with the Third Karma pa or the *Dark Treasury*. This confused assimilation must have evolved through time.

The Variant *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples*, the earliest sources to mention Rang byung rdo rje, are not self-identified as *mDzod nag ma*, as proved by their titles and colophons. It seems this identification of the compendium attributed to Rang byung rdo rje as the *Dark Treasury* started on the one hand with the modified colophon of *A River of Blessings* and, on the other hand, in the title of DNM-RD, although the expression is absent from its colophon. Due to the uncertain dating of these texts, we cannot ascertain which text influenced the other or how the tendency began. It seems that later, perhaps reinforced by the influence of the *lo rgyus*, when the original manuscript reproduced in Ms-India was written, the expression had already expanded to include

¹⁶⁸ Ms-India vol. 2 p. 557.4: *rje de nyid kyi rnam 'gur mdzod nag ma 'di nyid mkha' 'gro'i zhal rlung kyi drod ma yal gdam ngag phal pa'i slad ma zhugs...*

¹⁶⁹ See for instance the results of a ‘mdzod nag ma’ search in BDRC database showing BCG-Si, Ms-India, DNM-RD 2006, DNM-RD 2013, BCG-D, Ms-Smith, a reference from the NGMPP (corresponding to Ms-India) but not Ms-Drepung.

other texts containing the reference to that text attributed to the Third Karma pa.

Starting with the modern edition of Ms-India in 1978 followed by the progressive rediscovery of the compendia literature,¹⁷⁰ the tendency to identify the new editions as *mDzod nag ma* intensified (see e.g. the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo and Si khron editions), aggravating the confusion.

In 2014, with *The Yogin and the Madman*, the tendency moved up a notch with the incorporation of all texts connected to Rang byung rdo rje under the category *mDzod nag ma* without a clear definition of the term; the texts were only defined as “closely associated with the line of Karmapas”.

The propensity to assimilate the entire bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia with the 'Black Treasury' literature reached its peak in 2023, when Quintman described the Newark edition of the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* as:

A manuscript copy of the so-called *Twelve Great Disciples*, among the earliest Black Treasury texts, takes a different approach to illustrating Milarepa's life.¹⁷¹

This last statement appears problematic when connected to the following definition of the 'Black Treasury':¹⁷²

But the tradition of *The Black Treasury* is also closely associated with the line of Karmapas, Kagyu hierarchs famous for their iconic black crowns, for which reason the name might equally be rendered “the treasury of the black.” It is now clear that the name refers to a specific chapel—or perhaps a single room in a chapel—in southern Tibet associated with the Karmapas wherein an early version of *The Black Treasury* was preserved.

This paragraph, intertwining different levels of information, establishes a direct connection between the *mDzod nag ma* and the Karma pas. The first sentence which associates the 'colour' of the 'Black Treasury' *mdzod nag* with the Karma pas' black hat *zhwa nag*, is unprecedented

¹⁷⁰ Quintman 2014a pp. 107-10.

¹⁷¹ Quintman 2023.

¹⁷² Quintman 2014a p. 105.

and absent from all the sources consulted. The reference to the Karma pa is related to the frequent mention of Rang byung rdo rje in many of the colophons of the different texts. The second sentence refers to the *lo rgyus* – the ‘brief unsigned history found in several *Black Treasury* colophons’¹⁷³ – where the *mdzod nag* is identified as rTse lha sgang’s library in Kong po.¹⁷⁴

Including Ms-Newark as part of the *mDzod nag mas* creates much confusion. First, how could the Newark manuscript, which never mentions *mdzod nag ma* nor Rang byung rdo rje – or any other Karma pa – be considered as such? On the contrary, the illustrations prove that the ms. originated from a dGe lugs milieu.¹⁷⁵ Second, as established by Blancke’s Song Charts, the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* constitutes the oldest stratum of this literature that was later slightly modified/edited by the Karma pas. As explained earlier in Blancke’s article, the existence of a text originating from Mi la ras pa’s disciples called the *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* cannot be taken at face value. The same is true of the *lo rgyus*, which imitates the colophons of the Tshe ring ma chapters and that of the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis*, with the extra details of Mi la ras pa’s personal intervention on the text. Adding the element of the single lineage transmission through the Karma masters, it suggests a Kam tshang origin of the compendia, which is far from reflecting the historical truth.

This conflation might lead to an erroneous understanding of the compendia, taking the form of a syllogism: All compendia are *mDzod nag ma*. All *mDzod nag ma* are connected to Rang byung rdo rje. Therefore, all compendia are connected to Rang byung rdo rje.

One cannot deny the literary evidence proving that the Third Karma pa must have played a role in the transmission history of the compendia, although this role still needs to be determined. In the meantime, the existence of texts completely independent from his influence is undisputable.¹⁷⁶ The systematic reference to Rang byung rdo rje’s *mDzod nag ma* as the first source of *A River of Blessings*, replacing the reference to the *Ras pa bu chen bcu gnyis* and its

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 105.

¹⁷⁴ Ms-Drepung vol. 112 p. 372, Ms-Bordier f. 322b.

¹⁷⁵ See the representations of Tsong kha pa and sKal ldan rgya mtsho on ff. 153b and 162b.

¹⁷⁶ Ms-Newark, Ms-Oxford, Ms-Drukpa, Ms-Gansu, RBC-Stockholm and Ms-BL.

colophon, could indicate a direct connection to the Karma kam tshang lineage. Nevertheless, how to understand the transmission lineages connecting the manuscripts to the 'Brug pa and sTag lung lineages? All these contradictions must not be overlooked.

Finally, the choice of *mDzod nag ma* as a general designation for the compendia appears inadequate since it is also used to designate other works of different nature. As Roberts explains, the *History of Drakar Taso* identifies Zhi byed ri pa's work as "*A Dark Treasury*."¹⁷⁷

The one named Shiché Ripa (*Zhi-byed Ri-pa*) who is famous for having read a hundred and twenty-seven different biographies of the venerable one, composed *A Dark Treasury* and a block print of this previously existed amongst the retreat centres of Chuwar (*Chu-dbar*), as is described in the biography of Gamnyön Chardor Norbu (*sGam-smyon Phyag-rdor Nor-bu*).

Moreover, Quintman quotes a personal communication with Dezhung Rinpoche who claimed that "he had never heard of *The Black Treasury* written by Rang byung rdo rje", which is telling of the very recent importance of this designation.¹⁷⁸

For all these reasons, as practical and attractive as it may seem, the expression *mdzod nag ma* seems too inaccurate and connoted to designate a group of texts that, while sharing common features of content and structure, maintain many differences and original traits that must be kept in mind. Quintman's designation of these texts as 'compendia' perfectly fit this corpus. Because of the systematic designation of Mi la ras pa under his secret name in all the colophons, "bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia" appears as an even more accurate and appropriate designation.

Through this exploration of the compendia literature, numerous interrogations were raised. The systematic comparison of these texts revealed interesting elements but could not always bring answers, and many questions remain.

If on the one hand, these texts present multiple similarities, conveying a sense of homogeneity, on the other hand, numerous

¹⁷⁷ Roberts 2007 p. 33. See also in this volume Blancke p. 10.

¹⁷⁸ Roberts 2007 p. 32; Quintman 2014a p. 253n74.

differences between them persist, in their structure as well as in their content. Unfortunately, they provide almost no information concerning their date and place of production, making it complicated to establish a clear chronology. The lineage masters' illuminations could indicate a religious affiliation, but there is no apparent consistency between these illustrations and the colophons.

All these elements make it difficult to elaborate hypotheses and it appears that the corpus of compendia available today cannot bring definitive answers. One could hope for the reemergence of new versions of the compendia or currently unknown sources such as that from Gung thang dpal gyi gtsug lag khang to help us progress.

Conclusion

The detailed examination of Ms-Bordier has been an occasion to compare and analyse it in the context of the entire corpus of the *bZhad pa'i rdo rje* Compendia. In the end, this study raises more questions than it answers. The lineage masters illustrated at the beginning of the text do not point to a specific school, although they might indicate the Karma kam tshang tradition. Nothing is said about its commissioner, although he must have been a rich and important figure – whether religious or not – to be able to afford such a lavishly adorned work of art. Thanks to the C14 dating, we know for sure that this luxurious and expensive copy of an early version of the *Life and Songs of bZhad pa'i rdo rje* was commissioned at the latest in 1529 or 1635. It was still considered as part of the *Lineage Wish-fulfilling Gem* and had hardly any connections with the *Dark Treasury* tradition, except for the transmission history presented in the *lo rgyus*. The abrupt ending of its colophon without any mention of Rang byung rdo rje or any other author seems to build a narrative emphasising its value as a copy of the original text attributed to the *ras pa* disciples and supposedly compiled with the help of the great rJe btsun himself. We now know this story to be unrealistic, since the comparison with the other available texts proves that Ms-Bordier, as a 'Variant' version, was at least 'second generation' compared to the 'Regular' *Twelve Great Ras pa Disciples* to which it is so close.

The systematic comparison of this manuscript with the other texts from the compendia corpus was also the occasion to address the

question of the illuminations and the visual tradition connected to the bZhad pa'i rdo rje literature.

In addition to the value of having an almost complete manuscript presenting some of the most refined images known to this day of the *Life and songs of bZhad pa'i rdo rje*, the Bordier manuscript, along with Ms-Newark, proves that the ancient versions of the this work, almost stripped of every later addition and identified as part of the bDe mchog snyan brgyud transmission lineage was still valued even after the unrivalled success of gTsang smyon He ru ka's *magnum opus*.

Acknowledgements

I express my deep gratitude to the following persons whose help was determining for this study:

Jean-Luc Achard for his help in publishing our work in the RET; Atteqa Ali and Andrea Ko (Newark Museum of Art) for their kind authorisation to reproduce images from Ms-Newark; Michela Clemente and Filippo Lunardo for the discussion about Mi la's posture; Rinchen Dorje for his precious advice and help with the interpretation of difficult parts in the Tibetan texts; John Eskenazi, Jane Thurston Hoskins and Clair Whiteman (John Eskenazi Ltd.) for the authorisation to use their beautiful painting; Amy Heller for her kind support and wise guidance; Matthew Kapstein; Andreas Kretschmar; Dan Martin; Emily Nazarian (Rubin Musuem of Arts) for the authorisation to reproduce the *thang ka*; Antje Ziemer (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin) for her kind help with the NGMPP manuscript; Burkhard Quessel (British Library) for his kind help and authorisation regarding Ms-BL; Jann Ronis, Karma Gongde and Travis De Tour (BDRC) for granting us access to all these texts,

A special mention to Andrew Quintman, Peter Alan Roberts, Marta Sernesi, and Cécile Ducher for their pioneer studies and for sharing information and documents and taking the time to answer my endless questions. Finally, many thanks to Alain Bordier for supporting this study, and of course to Kristin Blancke for the shared efforts and discoveries, her amazing analysis of the Mi la ras pa literature, and the countless hours of discussions without which this article would not be.

Bibliography

bZhad pa'i rdo rje Compendia

Ms-Newark

rJe btsun chen po mid la ras pa'i rnam thar zab mo. N.p., n.d. 244 folios. *dBu can* manuscript in the collection of the Newark Museum, microfilm master negative No. 0001, Tibetan Book Collection, Folio 36.280, Biography of Milarepa, IIB R 16.

Ms-Oxford

[No cover title]. No title page. N.p., n.d. *dBu can* manuscript in the Bodleian Library Microfilm Reel No. SN 1207 ms. Tib. a. 11a.

RBC-Pt, Paltsek edition

“*rJe btsun chen po mid la ras pa'i rnam thar zab mo*.” *rJe btsun mi la ras pa'i gsung 'bum* vol. 1 (dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang nas bsgrigs). Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2011. [MW1KG14335].

Ms-Drukpa

“*rJe btsun mid la ras pa chen po'i mgur 'bum*”. *Te lo nā ro dang mar mi dwags gsum gyi rnam thar yig rnying*. Vol. 2. *dBu can* manuscript. [W3CN22290].

RBC-St, Stockholm edition

rJe btsun mid la ras chen gyi rnam thar bka' 'bum chen mo grub thob ras pa bcu gnyis kyis bsgrigs pa, 276 folios, Blockprint. Asian Collections, Folkens Museum Etnografiska, Stockholm.

Ms-Gansu

“*rNal 'byor dbang phyug mi la chen po'i rnam thar bka' 'bum chen mo grub thob ras pa bcu gnyis kyis bsgrigs pa ngo mtshar kun 'dus*.” *Bod kyi snga rabs dam pa rnam kyis gsungs chos phyag bris ma rin chen gser phreng*. Bam po 19, vols. 22-25. 'Brug thar and Karma bde legs (eds.). Kan su'u rig gnas dpe skrun khang. [W3CN5697].

Ms-BDRC

[Incomplete title] ...*bcas dbu'i gzigs phyogs legs par bzhugs so.* N.p., n.d. 396 folios. *dBu med* manuscript. [W3CN25684].

Ms-Bordier

rJe btsun mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i 'gur 'bum rnam thar 'bril ma zhes bya ba bzhugs so. N.p., n.d. *dBu med* manuscript in the collection of the Tibet Museum – Fondation Alain Bordier, ABM 039.

Ms-Lhasa

[No cover title] *rJe btsun mi la rdo rje rgyal mtshan gyi rnam par thar pa'i dbu phyogs lags.* Unpublished *dbu med* manuscript in the archives of 'Bras spung Monastery. 'Bras spung dkar chag: phyi ra 42, 017082, 309 folios.

DNM-RD

2006. "rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes pa karma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa." *Karma pa rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum.* Zi ling: Mtshur phu mkhan po lo yag bkra shis, 2006. Vol. ga, 5–778 p. [MW30541].

——— 2011a. "rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes pa kar ma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa bzhugs so." *rJe btsun mi la ras pa'i gsung 'bum* vols. 2 & 3 (dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe mying zhib 'jug khang nas bsgrigs). Pe cin: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2011. [MW1KG14335].

——— 2011b. "rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje'i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes pa kar ma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa bzhugs so." *gSum pa rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*, vol. Ga. Swayambhu, Kathmandu, Nepal: Karma Lekshey Ling, 2011. Unicode document. [http://www.dharmadownload.net/karmapa/03_karmapa/3rd%20Karmapa%20pages/03_3rd_karmapa%20text.htm].

——— 2013. “rNal ’byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje’i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes pa kar ma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa bzhugs so.” *dPal rgyal dbang karma pa sku phreng rim byon gyi gsung ’bum phyogs bsgrigs*. dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib ’jug khang, 2013?, vol. 23 (pa) 862 p. [MW3PD1288].

Ms-Smith

rJe rnal sbyor gyi dbang phyug dpal bzhad pa’i rdo rje’i ’gur ’tshogs tshad phyogs gcig du bsgrig pa lo rgyus kyis sbas pa zhes bya ba bzhugs so. Unpublished *dbu med* manuscript in the collection of E. Gene Smith. [MW4CZ45235].

Ms-India

rNal ’byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje’i gsung mgur ma mdzod nag ma zhes pa ka rma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyog gcig tu bkod pa. Dalhousie: Damchoe Sangpo, 1978. 2 vols. Reproduction of a handwritten *dbu med* manuscript. [MW23432].

Ms-Drepung

[No cover title] “rJe btsun mi la ras pa’i rnam thar rdo rje’i glu dang mgur rnam phyogs gcig tu bsdu pa zhes bya ba.” *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* (91-120), vols. 111 & 112. Zi ling: mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2015. Facsimilé edition of a *dbu med* manuscript. [MW4PD3075_50BE18].

BCG-Drikung

“rJe mi la’i rnam thar mdzod nag ma.” *’Bri gung bka’ brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*. Lhasa: S.N., 2004, vols. 7 & 8. Reproduction of a handwritten *dbu can* manuscript. [MW00JW501203].

BCG-Si khron

rNal ’byor gyi dbang phyug mi la bzhad pa rdo rje’i gsung mgur mdzod nag ma zhes kar ma pa rang byung rdo rjes phyogs gcig tu bkod pa bzhugs so. Chengdu: Si khron dpe skrun tshogs pa/

Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2008, 2 vols.
[MW1PD83964].

Ms-BL, British Library manuscript

[No cover title] *The Life and songs of the Yogi Milarepa, Mi la 'i rnam mgur bris ma*. N.p., n.d. *dBu med* manuscript, British Library Or 16756.

Tibetan Language Sources

'Bras spungs Catalogue

dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, ed. *'Bras spungs dgon du gzugs su gsol ba'i dpe rnying dkar chag* [Catalogue of the Old Manuscripts Kept in 'Bras spungs Monastery]. 2 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2004. [MW28949].

'Bri gung gdan rabs so bzhi ba chos kyi blo gros. "Gangs ri chen po ti se dang mtsho chen ma dros pa bcas kyi sngon byung lo rgyus mdor bsdus su brjod pa'i rab byed shel dkar me long." *gNas yig phyogs bsgrigs*. Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1998. [MW20828].

Bla ma Zhang brTson 'grus grags pa. *gSung 'bum brtson 'grus grags pa*. Gam-po-pa Library, 2004, vol. 1 pp. 146-158. [W26673].

Bu ston chos 'byung

Bu ston rin chen grub. *bDe gshegs bstan pa'i gsal byed chos kyi 'byung gnas*. Par gzhi dang po. 1 vol. Gangs can shes rig gi nying bcud. Pe cin: Krung go bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1988. [MW1923].

Byang chub bzang po. *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro sñan rgyud (Ras chuñ sñan rgyud): A manuscript collection of orally transmitted precepts focussing on the tutelaries Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī*. Reproduced from a rare manuscript in the library of Apho Rinpoché, 2 vols., New Delhi: 1973. [W24891]

Dam pa Ras chen. “rGyud pa yid bzhin nor bu las rje btsun ngan rdzong ras pa’i rnam thar ’khrul med”. *Ngam dzong sñan brgyud kyi skor*. Reproduced from a rare manuscript from the library of Yudra Rinpoché. Bir: D. Tsondu Senghe, 1985, pp. 1-17.

Deb ther sngon po

’Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal. *Deb ther sngon po*. Par gzhi dang po, Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984. [W1KG5762].

Deb ther dmar po

Tshal pa si tu kun dga’ rdo rje, and Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las. *Deb ther dmar po*. Par gzhi dang po. 1 vol. Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1981. [MW1KG5760].

bDe mchog snyan brgyud biographies

bDe mchog sñan brgyud biographies, Reproduction of rare manuscripts from the Stag-sna Monastery in Ladakh, Darjeeling: Kargyud Sungrap Nyamso Khang, 1983. [W21145].

Don mo ri pa

rDo rje mdzes ’od. *bKa’ brgyud kyi rnam thar chen mo rin po che’i gter mdzod dgos ’dod ’byung gnas*. D. Tsondu Senghe, 1985. [W27600].

Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las. *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo*. Par gzhi dang po, Krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002. [MW26372].

rGyal thang pa [rGya ldang pa] bDe chen rdo rje. *dKar brgyud gser ’phreng, A thirteenth-century collection of verse hagiographies of the succession of eminent masters of the ’Brug pa dkar brgyud pa*. Palampur, 1973. [W23436].

’Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha’ yas

rJe btsun mi la bzhad pa rdo rje la brten pa’i bla ma’i rnal ’byor. 1 vol. [S.I.]: Ma hā shrī gsung rab gling nas bsgrigs. [W3CN26750].

——— *gDams ngag mdzod: A treasury of instructions and techniques for spiritual realization*. Photostatic edition reproduced from a xylographic print from the dPal spungs blocks. Delhi: N. Lungtok and N. Gyaltan, 12 vols., 1971. [W20877].

dKon mchog yan lag rgyal mtshan, “Yon bdag bsam ’grub la smras pa.” *gSung thor bu dkon mchog yon tan rgyal mtshan*, Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Community, 1984, pp. 582–87. [MW1KG2767_CF0A47].

Lho rong chos ’byung

rTa tshag tshe dbang rgyal. *Lho rong chos ’byung*. Par gzhi dang po. 1 vol. Gangs can rig mdzod 26. Lha sa: Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1994. [W27302].

Mi nyag mgon po. “Zhwa dmar chos grags ye shes kyi rnam thar mdor bsdus.” *Gangs can mkhas dbang rim byon gyi rna.m thar mdor bsdus*. Pec in: Krung go’i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1996-2000. Vol. 1 pp. 205-214. [W25268_I1PD36334].

Mon rtse pa Kun dga’ dpal ldan. *dKar-brgyud Gser-phreng: A golden rosary of lives of eminent gurus*. Leh: Sonam W. Tashigang, 1970. [W30123].

Mus chen chos nyid ye shes

gNyags ston pa’i gdung rabs dang gdan rabs. Par gzhi dang po, Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1997. [MW1GS88816].

Nam mkha’ bsam grub rgyal mtshan. *rJe btsun mi la’i gsol ’debs dang bslab bya khag gnyis*. [W1NLM875].

Ngan rdzong ston pa Bho dhhe ra tsa. “Mi la rdo rje rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar.” *rJe btsun Mi la ras pa’i gsung’bum*, Beijing: dPal rtsegs, 2011, vol. 5, pp. 126-153. [W1KG14335].

——— “Mi la rdo rje rgyal mtshan gyi rnam par thar pa.” *Karma pa rang byung rdo rje 'i gsung 'bum*, 2006, Zi ling, vol. 4, pp. 89-124. [W30541].

O rgyan pa Rin chen dpal. *bKa' brgyud Yid bzhin Nor bu yi 'Phreng ba, A precious rosary of lives of the 'Bri guñ-pa Dkar-brgyud-pa tradition*. Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1982. [W23181].

Padma dKar po (Kun mkhyen). *Mkha' 'gro snyan brgyud kyi yig rnying. The ancient cycle of practice focussing upon the Cakrasamvara tantra received from Vajravarahī by Ras-chuñ rdo-rje-grags*. Darjeeling, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 99-128. [W21141].

Sangs rgyas 'Bum. “Mi la ras pa'i rnam thar.” *Rwa lung dkar brgyud gser 'phreng*”: *Brief Lives of the Successive Masters in the Transmission Lineage of the Bar 'Brug pa Dkar-brgyud-pa of Rwa-luñ*. Palampur, India: Sungrab Nyamso Gyunpel Parkhang, 1975–78, 1:167-216. [W19222].

rTa tshag tshe dbang rgyal. “bKa' rgyud rin po che'i lo rgyus phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs pa'i gsal 'debs rgyas pa (smad cha).” *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* (130), Par gzhi dang po, vol. 13, mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2010, pp. 192-312. [MW1KG10687_BF9C21].

sTag lung Ngag dbang rNam rgyal. *sTag lung chos 'byung ngo mtshar rgya mtso*. Lhasa, 1992. [W17276].

gTsang smyon He ru ka

(gTsang smyon he ru ka) Rus pa'i rgyan can. *rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug chen po mi la ras pa'i rnam mgur*. Par gzhi dang po, Ziling: mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1981. [W21763].

——— *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud (Ras chung snyan rgyud). Two Manuscript Collections of Texts from the Yig cha of gTsang smyon He ru ka*. Reproduced from 16th and 17th-century manuscripts belonging to the Venerable Dookpa Thoosay

Rimpoche. *Bod ljong bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang*, S. W. Tashigangpa, Leh, 1971. [W17276].

Ye shes rgyal mtshan, “Gangs ri mtsho gsum gyi dkar chags.” *sNañ srid mdzod phug gi rtsa ba dañ spyi don gyi gsuñ pod*, Dolanji, 1973, pp. 445-489.

Zhang Lo tsā ba Grub pa dpal bzang. *Zhang lo 'i thim yig*. In *bDe mchog mkha' 'gro snyan rgyud (Ras chung snyan rgyud)*. A manuscript collection of orally transmitted precepts focussing upon the tutelaries *Cakrasamvara* and *Vajravarahi*, representing the *yig-cha* compiled by *Byan chub bZang po*. Reproduced from a rare manuscript in the library of Apho Rinpoché. New Delhi, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 1-5. [W24891].

Zhi byed ri pa

2004. “Mi la ras pa'i rnam thar nyi zla'i 'od zer sgron me.” *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*, edited by 'Bri gung a mgon rin po che and Ra se dkon mchog rgya mtsho, vol. 9, pp. 251-498. [Lhasa]: ['Bri gung mthil dgon], 2004. [MW00JW501203_ADDD82].

——— 2012. g.Yung ston Zhi byed ri khrod pa, “rJe btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam par thar ba nyi zla'i 'od zer sgron ma (dbu can bris ma).” *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs* (61-90), 2012 par gzhi dang po 2012 par thengs dang po, vol. 19, pp. 261-470. Zi ling: mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2012. [MW1PD180878_39A087].

Zhwa dmar 02 mKha' spyod dbang-po.

[N.d.] *Chos rje dpal ldan mi la ras chen gyi rnam par thar pa byin rlabs kyi sprin phung*. N.p., n.d. *dBu med* manuscript, 103 p. [W2CZ7838].

——— 1978a. “Chos rje dpal ldan mi la ras chen gyi rnam par thar pa byin rlabs kyi sprin phung.” *The Collected Writings (gsuñ 'bum) of the Second Zhwa-dmar mKha-spyod-dbañ-po*. Gangtok,

Sikkim, India: Gonpo Tseten, 1978, Vol. 1, pp. 188-317. [W23928].

——— 1978b. “Chos kyi rje dpal ldan sgam po pa chen po’i rnam par thar pa kun khyab snyan pa’i ba dan”. *The collected Writings (gSun-’bum) of the Second Zwa-dmar mkha’-spyod dbaṅ-po*. Gangtok: Rumtek monastery, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 319-433. [W23928].

——— 2010. “Chos kyi rje mnga’ bdag mi la ras chen gyi rnam par thar pa byin rlabs kyi sprin phung.” *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs (130)*, Par gzhi dang po, vol. 24. mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2010, pp. 327-486. [MW1KG10687_7B4AD9].

Zhwa dmar 04 Chos grags ye shes

2009a. “rJe btsun bzhad pa’i rdo rje’i zhabs la phyag ’tshal ba dad pa’i rnga chen dang rnam thar bstod pa gnyis.” *gSung ’bum chos grags ye shes*, vol. 4. Krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009, pp. 194–96. [MW1KG4876_C7ABEC].

——— 2009b. “Ri bo gangs chen dang mtsho ma dros pa chu bo bzhi dang bcas pa gtan la dbab pa mkhas pa’i rna rgyan.” *gSung ’bum chos grags ye shes*, vol. 6. Krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2009, pp. 440–63. [MW1KG4876_7663E4].

——— 2009c. “dPal stag lung thang po’i gdung rgyud ri bo che’i chos rje ’jig rten dbang phyug la bstod pa bzhugs so.” *Zhwa dmar chos grags ye shes gsung ’bum* vol. 4 p. 231. [MW1KG4876 - 11KG4881].

Zur mang Chos ’byung

Zur mang bka’ brgyud chos ’byung. rDo dgon gna’ deb srung skyob tshogs pa. N.d., [W4CZ48435].

Western Language Sources

Art in Lab 2023. *Rapport d'analyse 2023-0603* (Unpublished).

Béguin, Gilles 1977. *Dieux et démons de l'Himalaya*. Paris : Editions des musées nationaux.

Bellezza, John Vincent 2008. *Zhang Zhung, Foundations of Civilization in Tibet, A Historical and Ethnoarchaeological Study of the Monuments, Rock Art, Texts, and Oral Tradition of the Ancient Tibetan Upland*. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Blancke, Kristin

<https://independent.academia.edu/kristinblancke>

——— 2020. Song Chart 5 – *Outline and Songs in The Life of Rechungpa in Golden Rosary Manuscripts in Rechungpa's Lineage*.

——— 2021a. *The Teaching Transmission from Marpa to Mila in the Hagiographies*.

——— 2021b. *The Entrustment Of The Samvara Aural Transmission To Rechungpa*.

——— 2021c. Ngendzong Tonpa, *The Complete Liberation of Mila-Vajra-Victory Banner*.

——— 2021d. *Gampopa Sonam Rinchen Meets Jetsun Mila*.

——— 2021e. *The Interconnection between Inner Winds and Outer Perceptions of Non-human Beings by Lord Barompa Darma Wangchuk*.

——— 2021f. *Mila's Instructions on the Intermediate States*.

- 2021g. *Zhijé Ripa – The Illuminating Lamp of Sun and Moon Beams.*
- 2023a. *Song Chart 7 Outline and Song Index of the different versions of The Twelve Great Repa-Disciples.*
- 2023b. *Song Chart 8 Outline and Song Index in A River of Blessings and in The Dark/Black Treasury.*
- 2023c. *Life and Songs of the Glorious Laughing Vajra – The episode at the Zangyü kitchen.*
- 2023d. *Life and Songs of the Glorious Laughing Vajra – Meeting Paldarbum.*
- Forthcoming. *In Search of Mila's Collected Songs: Back to the Basics, A Comparative Study of Stories and Songs of Milarepa In Tibetan Texts From the Twelfth through the Fifteenth Centuries.*
- Bock, E., Falcombello, J.-M., and Jenny, M. 2022. *Buddhist Art of Tibet, in Milarepa's footsteps.* Paris: Flammarion.
- Chandra, Lokesh 2003. *Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography*, 15 vols. New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.
- Ducher, Cécile 2017a. *A Lineage in Time: The Vicissitudes of the rNgog pa bka' brgyud from the 11th through 19th centuries.* History. Université Paris sciences et lettres, English. NNT:2017PSLEP052.
- 2017b. *Building a Tradition, The Lives of Mar-pa the Translator.* München: Indus Verlag.
- 2020. "Goldmine of Knowledge: The Collections of the Gnas bcu lha khang in 'Bras spungs Library." *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, no. 55, Juillet 2020, pp. 121-139.

- Essen, Gerd-Wolfgang & Thingo, Tsering Tashi 1989. *Die Götter des Himalayas, Buddhistische Kunst Tibets, Die Sammlung Gerd-Wolfgang Essen*, München: Prestel-Verlag.
- Gamble, Ruth 2010. “Laughing Vajra: the outcast clown, satirical guru and smiling Buddha in Milarepa’s songs.” D. Templeman ed., *New Views of Tibetan*. Melbourne: Monash Asian Institute Press, pp. 137-166.
- 2015. “Milarepa.” J. Powers ed., *The Buddhist World*. London: Routledge, pp. 564-578.
- 2020. *The Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, Master of the Mahāmudrā*. Boulder: Shambhala.
- Gega Lama 1983. *Principles of Tibetan art: illustrations and explanations of Buddhist iconography and iconometry according to the Karma Gardri school*. Antwerp: Karma Sonam Gyamtso Ling.
- Heller, Amy 2003. “The Tibetan Inscriptions: Historical Data as Sources of New Discoveries and Enigmas.” *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure* symposium. Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, April 5.
- Karmay, Samten G. (ed. & transl.) 2001 [1972]. *The Treasury of Good Sayings, A Tibetan History of Bon*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsiddass.
- Khenchen Thrangu 2019. *Tilopa's Wisdom – his life and teachings on the Ganges Mahamudra*. Boulder: Snow Lion.
- Khenpo Könchog Gyaltzen. 2006. *The Great Kagyü Masters: The golden lineage treasury*. Victoria Huckenpahler ed., Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.
- Kragh, Ulrich Timme. 2013. “The Significant Leap from Writing to Print: Editorial Modification in the First Printed Edition of The Collected Works of Sgam po pa Bsod nams Rin chen.” *Journal*

of the International Association for Tibetan Studies 7: pp. 365–425.

——— 2015. *Tibetan yoga and Mysticism: A Textual Study of the Yogas of Nāropa and Mahāmudrā Meditation in the Medieval Tradition of Dags po*. Studia Philologica Buddhica, Monograph Series XXXII. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies.

Kretschmar, Andreas 2006. *The “Black Treasury” / An important manuscript of the Milarepa legend*. Unpublished.

Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thayé, Harding, Sarah (transl.) 2007. *The Treasury of Knowledge, Book Eight, Part Four: Esoteric Instructions, A Detailed Presentation of the Process of Meditation in Vajrayāna*. Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications.

Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé, Callahan, E.M. (transl.) 2023. *Marpa Kagyu, Part 1: Methods of Liberation: Essential Teachings of the Eight Practice Lineages of Tibet, Volume 7 (The Treasury of Precious Instructions)*. Boulder: Shambhala.

Larsson, Stefan 2012. *Crazy for Wisdom. The Making of a Mad Yogin in Fifteenth-Century Tibet*. Leiden: Brill.

——— 2016. “Prints about the Printer: Four Early Prints in Honor of the Mad Yogin.” Hildegard Diemberger, Franz-Karl Ehrhard and Peter Kornicki eds., *Tibetan Printing: Comparisons, Continuities and Change*. pp. 309-331. Leiden: Brill.

Lunardo, Filippo. & Clemente, Michela 2021. “Mi la ras pa’s Representation in Mang yul Gung thang Xylographs: Preliminary Remarks on the Stylistic Changes of “the Laughing Vajra.”” *East and West*, ISMEO vol. N.S. 2 (61) – no. 2, December 2021, pp. 159-82.

Manson, Charles 2022. *The Second Karmapa Karma Pakshi, Tibetan Mahāsiddha*. Boulder: Shambhala.

Martin, Dan 2001. *Unearthing Bon Treasures: Life and Contested Legacy of a Tibetan Scripture Revealer, With a General Bibliography of Bon*. Leiden: Brill.

——— 2023. *TPNI Tibetan Proper Names Index*
<https://sites.google.com/view/tibetosophy/>

Nebesky-Wojkowitz, René de 1996. *Oracles and demons of Tibet. The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*. Delhi: Book Faith India.

Pal, Pratapaditya et al. 2003. *Himalayas, An Aesthetic Adventure*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago.

Petech, Luciano 1978. “The ’Bri guñ sect in Western Tibet and Ladakh” in *Bulletin of the Csoma de Körös Symposium 1978 no. 1-2*. Budapest: Library of the Hungarian Academy of Science, pp. 313-325

Quintman, Andrew 2006. *Mi la ras pa’s Many Lives: Anatomy of a Tibetan Biographical Corpus*. PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan.

——— 2008. “Toward a Geographic Biography: Mi la ras pa in the Tibetan Landscape.” *Numen*, no.55, pp. 363-410.

——— 2010. (transl.) *The Life of Milarepa*. London: Penguin Classics.

——— 2012. “Between History and Biography: Notes on Zhi byed ri pa’s *Illuminating Lamp of Sun and Moon Beams*, a Fourteenth-Century Biographical State of the Field.” *Revue d’Études Tibétaines*, no. 23, pp. 5-41.

- 2013. “Life writing as Literary Relic: Image, Inscription, and Consecration in Tibetan Biography.” *Material Religion* volume 9, issue 4, pp. 468-505.
- 2014a. *The Yogin and the Madman, Reading the biographical corpus of Tibet's great saint Milarepa*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 2014b. “Redacting Sacred Landscape in Nepal: the vicissitudes of Yolmo's Tiger Cave Lion Fortress.” *Himalayan Passages: Tibetan and Newar Studies in Honor of Hubert Decleer*. Boston: Wisdom, pp. 69-95.
- 2023. *A Tibetan Liberation Tale Illustrated in Print and Manuscript, 2023*.
<https://projecthimalayanart.rubinmuseum.org/essays/earliest-extant-printed-edition-of-milarepas-life-story/>
- Ramble, Charles 1999. “The Politics of Sacred Space in Bon and Tibetan Popular Tradition.” Huber, Toni (ed.) *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places In Tibetan Culture, A Collection of Essays*. Dharamsala: The Tibetan Library of Works and Archives.
- Rhie, M.M. & Thurman, A.F. 1991. *Wisdom and Compassion, the Sacred Art of Tibet*. New-York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.
- Roberts, Peter Alan 2007. *The Biographies of Rechungpa, The evolution of a Tibetan hagiography*. London: Routledge.
- 2010. “The Evolution of the Biographies of Milarepa and Rechungpa.” Covill L., U. Roesler & S. Shaw, eds., *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined*. Boston-Oxford: Wisdom, pp. 181-203.
- Roerich, George N. & Gendun Choepel 1976 [1949] *The Blue Annals, Parts I & II*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

- Sernesi, Marta 2004. "Milarepa's Six Secret Songs, The Early Transmission of the bDe-mchog snyan-brgyud." *East and West* 54, pp. 251-287.
- 2007. *The Aural Transmission of Saṃvara and Rechungpa's Legacy*" Tesi di dottorato. Torino: Università degli studi.
- 2010. "To establish the qualities of the Master. Considerations on early bKa' brgyud hagiographical writings." Pinuccia Caracchi et. al. (eds) *Tīrthayātrā Essays in Honour of Stefano Piano*. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, pp. 401-424.
- 2011. "The Aural Transmission of Saṃvara: An Introduction to Neglected Sources for the Study of the Early Bka' brgyud." *Mahāmudrā and the bKa'-brgyud Tradition: PIATS 2006: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter 2006*. Ed. by Roger Jackson & Matthew T. Kapstein. Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, pp. 179-210.
- 2021. *Re-enacting the Past: A Cultural History of the School of gTsang sMyon Heruka*, Wiesenbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag.
- Stagg, Christopher (transl.) 2017. *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa: A New Translation*. Boulder: Shambhala.
- Tai Situpa, XIIth Khentin 1988. *Tilopa (some glimpses of his life)*. Eskdalemuir: Dzalandara Publishing.
- Tiso, Francis Vincent 2014. *Liberation in One Lifetime: Biographies and Teachings of Milarepa*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Tsangnyön Heruka, Quintman, Andrew (transl.) 2010. *The Life of Milarepa*. London: Penguin Classics.

Tsangnyön Heruka, Stagg, Christopher (transl.) 2017. *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa: A New Translation*. Boulder: Shambhala.

Torricelli, F. & T. Naga. transl. 1995. *The Life of the Mahāsiddha Tilopa* by Mar-pa Chos-kyi bLo-gros. Dharamsala: LTWA.

——— 2001. “Zhang Lo-tśa-ba’s Introduction to the Aural Transmission of Śaṃvara.” *Le parole e i marmi. Studi in onore di Raniero Gnoli nel suo 70° compleanno*, a cura di R. Torella. Serie Orientale Roma, 92, pp. 875-96.

——— 2019. *Tilopā: A Buddhist Yogin of the Tenth Century*. Dharamsala: LTWA.

Verlaine, Paul 1890. *Poèmes saturniens*. Paris : Léon Vanier.

