Divided by scholasticism:
Revealing early sources on what separated the monasteries of Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu

Jonathan Samuels
(Austrian Academy of Sciences)

Introduction

R *wa sgreng* and *Gsang phu* emerged as the two foremost monasteries founded by direct disciples of Atiśa (Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna, 982–1054) in eleventh century Tibet. In contemporary writings they are both routinely referred to as Bka' gdams monasteries, but are also portrayed as having very different approaches, with Rwa sgreng frequently being characterised as more "contemplative" (Davidson 2005: 279, Apple 2018: 18), and Gsang phu being known for the analytical nature of its traditions (Hugon 2016: 290). The respective emphases on religious and intellectual practices that is seen as distinguishing the two monasteries is also often portrayed as what *defined* them as institutions. These differences seem to invite a series of questions, regarding historical relations between the two monasteries, how they ended up with such contrasting approaches, and indeed how, if both monastic communities regarded themselves as followers of the Bka' gdams tradition, they were able to explain and manage the diverging perspectives of their institutions. Although academic writings might reasonably be expected to provide at least partial answers, we surprisingly find that they have virtually nothing to say on these matters.

A point that we first need to be aware of is that while rarely drawing attention to the fact, contemporary writings present us with two *distinct* images of the Bka' gdams tradition.[1] The first is of a distinct religious *school*, with 'Brom ston Rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1004–1064), the prominent Tibetan disciple of Atiśa, represented as its "founding father" (Roesler 2019: 1145) and Rwa sgreng Monastery, established by 'Brom ston in 1056-1057, as the school's official seat. This school is described through the prism of "lineages" (see, for instance, Roesler 2019,

---

Vetturini 2013), especially those transmitted by 'Brom ston's principal disciples, known collectively as the "three brothers" (*sku mched gsum*)– Po to ba Rin chen gsal (1027–1105), Spyan snga ba Tshul khrims 'bar (1038–1103), and Phu chung Gzhon nu rgyal mtshan (1031–1106).[2] The second image of the Bka' gdams is of a looser-knit set of groups and practices linked with Atiśa. Rather than being equated solely with 'Brom ston's religious school, this Bka' gdams is expanded to embrace *entities* (groups, monasteries, and traditions) lying outside that school's generally accepted borders. Among these, the entity of chief interest in this article is the monastery of Gsang phu.[3]

The earliest biographies on Atiśa (discussed below) recount how following the master's demise, his remains and belongings were divided into four portions and distributed among major disciples. The monasteries of Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu grew from the structures built to house two portions of these relics. 'Brom ston established the monastery of Rwa sgreng in what became the Bka' gdams heartland (i.e., 'Phan po and Byang), whereas Gsang phu was founded around sixteen years later (1073) near Lhasa, by Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab (d.u.), who is portrayed as another of Atiśa's three foremost Tibetan disciples.[4] Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu were in the vanguard of the new brand of Tibetan monastery that arose at the start of the "later diffusion" period, as part of the revival of institutional monasticism in central Tibet, the collapse of which had been prompted by the breakup of the Tibetan empire. Their contribution to the evolution of the monastic institution itself in Tibet seems difficult to overstate. Unlike many of the earlier temples,[5] these monasteries housed full-time, resident communities. And while the role they served as centres for the upholding of monastic discipline was one based on established custom, the collective religious practices their communities engaged in did more to shape tradition than follow it. Rwa sgreng's apparent devotion to 'Brom ston's interpretation of Atiśa's teachings made it one

---

[2]   These individuals were brothers only in the figurative sense.

[3]   Authors and editors now very regularly evoke this second, broader image of the Bka' gdams. And whether it be in expansive treatments of Tibetan religious and cultural history (e.g. Davidson 2005), writings on more specific topics, including even Rwa sgreng itself (e.g. Iuchi 2016), or recent collections of historical manuscripts reproduced in Tibet (such as the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*), the wish to include Gsang phu is obviously a major consideration behind it.

[4]   The other member of this triad is Khu ston brtson 'grus (1011–1075).

[5]   Initial efforts towards revival, beginning in the late tenth century, focussed on the reintroduction of monastic ordination (for an early source on this see Martin 2016) and the physical restoration of pre-existing structures, including some monasteries, but predominantly numerous small temples. For a description of these temples, and the 'clans' that supported their reconstruction, see Davidson (2005: 84-112).

of the first monasteries with a recognisable *Tibetan* religious affiliation, and thus a precursor for the school-based model that went on to dominate. Gsang phu, for its part, became the first monastic home of a system now commonly described as Tibetan *scholasticism*. The point at which the two monasteries' approach began to diverge can be traced back to the tenure of Rngog Blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109) at Gsang phu. Rngog lo (the sobriquet by which he is often known in early sources), the nephew of the monastery's founder and his direct successor, was the key developer of a new set of intellectual practices, the introduction of which at Gsang phu appears to have signalled a major change in direction there.

Nothing illustrates the disparity between the two depictions of the Bka' gdams better than Gsang phu's respective place within them. In the first depiction, Gsang phu is marginalised. In the second depiction, Gsang phu occupies the foreground and is sometimes presented as the preeminent Bka' gdams monastery. The existence of these two differing notions of the Bka' gdams tradition, and the fact that scholars often fail to specify which of them they are referencing, partly explains why their claims occasionally appear to diametrically oppose each other. Thus, while some assert Rwa sgreng formed the heart of the Bka' gdams, a perspective from which Rngog lo's analytical traditions were regarded as "somewhat heterodox" (Vetturini 2013: 172), others propose that Gsang phu was "center stage" (Davidson 2005: 279) and Rwa sgreng was merely a "satellite" (ibid.). The main question regarding these two understandings of the Bka' gdams must be about what historical grounds they rest upon. The first image closely reflects what appears in the various "Bka gdams histories".[6] And although aspects of the histories' depiction require interrogation, the image itself is without doubt of considerable age.

There are far more questions about the historical basis for the second depiction. In the case of Gsang phu, for example, most appear to regard the fact that its founder was a direct disciple of Atiśa as sufficient grounds for classifying it as a Bka' gdams monastery. However, if Rngog lo's developments at Gsang phu indeed led to profound changes there, even in the generation immediately following that of the founder, the extent to which its residents regarded themselves as sharing the same tradition as their Rwa sgreng counterparts becomes a moot point. Sources that might help us to understand such questions are in short supply, and Iuchi remarks (2016: 23) that those currently available yield little information about relations between Rwa sgreng

---

[6] By "Bka' gdams histories" I mean not only the genre of works bearing the title *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (see Iuchi 2018), but also larger histories that have significant sections devoted to the Bka' gdams school. As remarked below, the differing format of these two varieties appears to shape representation of the Bka' gdams.

and other monasteries, including Gsang phu. The fact that Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu are increasingly seen as belonging to two *separate* fields of research, respectively focussing on the Bka' gdams religious school and scholasticism, further seems to divert attention from the issue of relations. But the dearth of evidence has not deterred some who subscribe to the second notion of the Bka' gdams. Davidson is one of many who view Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu as belonging to a single "*Bka' gdams* lineage" (2005: 279). And in recent years, it has also become somewhat routine to refer to Gsang phu as a Bka' gdams monastery. Nor does Davidson appear to be alone in assuming that the popularity of Gsang phu traditions during the twelfth century resulted in Rwa sgreng effectively ceding the field of scholarship to it, justifying the description of Rwa sgreng as Gsang phu's "satellite" (Davidson 2005: 279). How this is to be squared with ubiquitous reports of a tradition of study based on the "six Bka' gdams texts" (*Bka' gdams gzhung drug*),[7] associated with Po to ba, seemingly distinct from the Gsang phu programme is not immediately obvious. And while Apple's recent work (2018) avoids the issue of historical relations, it presents a picture of an independent Rwa sgreng tradition of scholarship, not one that is submissive to Gsang phu.

   This article aims to bring some degree of clarity to the historical relations between Gsang phu and Rwa sgreng, together with their traditions of scholarship, primarily by examining the role that scholasticism played in dividing the two monasteries. Gsang phu's more intellectual approach undoubtedly contrasted with what, as already noted, is regularly characterised as the more "contemplative" style of Rwa sgreng. Gsang phu's championing of scholasticism also certainly played a huge part in what separated them. But the Bka' gdams histories, some of which have been regarded as the most reliable sources on the early centuries of the later diffusion, contain no reports of splits or even friction arising from developments at Gsang phu. To investigate this article's central question it is therefore both necessary and desirable to examine earlier sources. Fortunately, important manuscripts of works from the era in question have recently become available,[8] and this article's main sources are writings dateable to the twelfth century. These throw new light on the reception of scholasticism and what appears to have been its impact on Rwa sgreng.

   The rise of Gsang phu and scholasticism more generally can be seen as a disruptor of established patterns. Vetturini, for instance, talks of "a resistance among the bKa' gdams pas to the rising tide of

---

7   The individual works are listed below.
8   Reproductions of most of these manuscripts are found in the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum* collection.

institutionalized dialectics...and mass instruction, inconsistent with the practical and personally transmitted teachings handed down by Atiśa to small groups of disciples" (2013: 175). Our early sources, which serve as a window into the state of Rwa sgreng traditions during the twelfth century, provide some support for this. But I argue that in what they tell us about the reactions to Gsang phu scholasticism, they also reveal a *constructive* (although inadvert) role that it played in the formation of other religious identities, specifically those of Rwa sgreng and the Bka' gdams tradition, but also potentially much further afield.

Tibetan scholasticism and understanding reactions to it

Research on Tibetan scholasticism, which initially largely concentrated on the intellectual content of its writings, has recently expanded to the investigation of its early growth and the diffusion of ideas and discourses within scholarly networks.[9] Less attention has been given to reactions and responses *outside* these scholarly writings and networks. The twelfth century was unquestionably a formative period for Tibetan religious expression. Hence, investigating the wider *impact* of Tibetan scholasticism, how it might have affected or shaped religious discourses and institutions, is also key to understanding it as a historical phenomenon. As alluded to above, the scholasticism associated with Gsang phu was the earliest form to become established on Tibetan soil. Like its European counterpart, it was a systematised form of thinking and philosophy that relied heavily on the use of logic. Also like that counterpart, it was not limited to a single institution: scholasticism encompassed various monasteries, groups, and individuals. But Gsang phu has a special claim to our attention not only in being the earliest institutional home of Tibetan scholasticism, but also the first institution to develop a successful model of learning that other monasteries would go on to adopt.

Current understanding of early Tibetan scholasticism is composite.[10] From the late eleventh century onwards, writers produced a relatively large amount of literature, but the vast majority was exegetic and intellectual in nature. Early writers show few signs of being self-reflective about their tradition, rarely comment on its achievements, and apparently composed no descriptive histories. For accounts of the tradition as a whole, we rely largely upon outsiders, including authors of the Bka' gdams histories (considered in the next section). When

---

[9]   This is one area of focus for the TibSchol project in which I am involved.
[10] For previous discussions on features of scholasticism see Hugon (2016) and Samuels (2020).

authors of the histories refer to what is now termed "scholasticism", they tend to rely on expressions such as "Gsang phu traditions" and in many cases, label it "Rngog's lineage". The language of lineage is employed obsessively in Bka' gdams histories, although only rarely is it meant in the literal sense of unilineal transmission. But the connotations of restrictive communication seem especially inappropriate as a description of Gsang phu traditions, since learning there was clearly very public and could involve large groups. Despite such limitations, the Bka' gdams histories include many useful details about traditions they associate with Rngog lo and Gsang phu. But it is only outside the genre, in such works as the *History of the Pramāṇa Tradition* (*Tshad ma'i 'byung tshul*) by Shākya mchog ldan (1428–1507),[11] in which "lineage" (*rgyud*) is replaced with "system" (*lugs*), that we find a fuller conception and description of this tradition as a movement, and gain some sense of its profound impact. What these sources agree on is that the tradition they describe *begins* with Rngog lo. And while questions remain about this, it is abundantly clear that these authors do not see the tradition as the continuation or revival of an earlier one, but recognise that it is new, innovative, and decidedly Tibetan.

Tibetan scholasticism is marked by its heavy reliance on methods of critical analysis, and draws considerably from the Indian Pramāṇa tradition as a source of inspiration. Early Tibetan scholasticism expressed itself both in the intellectual content of its writings and in the domain of organised learning, and its innovations manifested in three main spheres: 1. Textual analysis expressed through composition, 2. The creation of educational institutions and materials, 3. The development of educational processes and practices. Firstly, Rngog lo's compositions included groundbreaking commentarial writings. Being the first Tibetan works on certain *sūtra*-based topics, these initiated native traditions of exegetical writing, and also (in the case of his works on the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*) effectively delineated two of the fields that went on to define scholastic education. The style of Rngog lo's writing can be regarded as even more historically significant than the content. His surviving works are the first Tibetan compositions to subject Indian treatises to a rigorous and interrogative treatment that is now seen as characteristic of Tibetan scholasticism. Features of this treatment already apparent in his writings are the imposition of organisational divisions and outlines not overt in the original work, a reliance on standardised analytical and descriptive frameworks, and the critical assessment of different scholars' interpretations

---

[11]   This descriptive name is a common abbreviation of the text entitled *Tshad ma'i mdo dang bstan bcos kyi shing rta'i srol rnams ji ltar 'byung ba'i tshul gtam du bya ba nyin mor byed pa'i snang bas dpyod ldan mtha' dag dga' bar byed pa* (2006).

and assertions. As the tradition expanded beyond commentarial writings, analysis and discourse was increasingly structured around how particular things were *defined*. Authors systematically considered the definitions and assertions of other scholars, invariably finding fault with them, before presenting their own conclusive position. Analysis and criticism were also presented in a logical format, and commonly depicted as a debate, i.e., an exchange between two parties. This dialectical quality to the discourse in scholasticism in particular shaped perception of it. And as the passages below illustrate, proved an emotive issue in twelfth century religious discourse. Apart from composing commentaries, similar in style to Indian writings, Rngog lo also created a distinctive brand of "summary" (entitled *don bsdus*),[12] within which he experimented with different formats for the presentation of material.

Secondly, in the sphere of educational institutions and materials, Rngog lo is credited with the creation of the first institutions (more literally, "units" or "sections") dedicated to learning, based on dialectical principles (known as *mtshan nyid kyi grwa* or *bshad grwa*), and functioning within the wider structure of the monastery. The model proved incredibly popular and was exported into monasteries irrespective of their affiliation. Rngog lo's successors also built upon his concept of the "summary"[13] to make further innovations in the spheres of format and content. The expanded category ranged from outlines to entirely new treatments of topics, some of which were obviously intended to serve as educational materials. Both the creation of these "units" and the production of materials for them seem indicative of a shift from informal, less regulated styles of knowledge transmission and learning to a recognisable form of institutional *education*.

In the third sphere, that of educational processes and practices, written sources are less specific, and attributions to Rngog lo are less direct. However, the evidence linking Gsang phu with the creation of the first scholastic curriculum is very strong. This was an amalgam of the two more traditional areas of monastic learning, Vinaya and Abhidharma, with the two delineated by Rngog lo's commentaries (Pramāṇa and *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*-mediated Prajñāpāramitā). This curriculum did not proscribe learning at Gsang phu. As affirmed in numerous accounts, individuals could approach teachers informally for instructions on a whole range of extra-curricular topics, including tantra and medicine. Closely related to this organisation of learning, the

---

[12]   Among Rngog lo's surviving writings, there are seven of these summaries, six on individual Indian treatises and one on a *sūtra*. He is known to have compiled many more, a point returned to below.

[13]   The titles of the works by Rngog lo's successors commonly reverse the word order (i.e., *bsdus don*, etc.).

evidence linking Gsang phu with development of the first institutional processes of examination and the awarding of scholastic titles is also compelling. Gsang phu was, furthermore, known to have divided the scholastic calendar into distinct sessions (akin to terms or semesters), a practice that probably originated there. Tradition also holds that it was at Gsang phu that formalised practices of Tibetan public disputation were first developed and utilised for educational purposes.

The Gsang phu approach was eventually propagated through the foundation of various satellite institutions, but starting from Rngog lo's time, Gsang phu itself began to attract those from outside, who would study particular topics for months or years, before returning to their original areas and monasteries. This first Tibetan centre of mass study proved tremendously popular, and for more than a century, had no rival. Among the ranks of those drawn there for study purposes were the scions of influential families and figures now regarded as central to the foundation of the new schools, including the second Sa skya hierarch, Bsod nams rtse mo (1142–1182) the "first Karmapa", Dus gsum mkhyen pa (1110–1193), and (almost certainly) Phag mo gru pa Rdo rje rgyal po (1110–1170). And by no later than the twelfth century, a specific designation (i.e., *mtshan nyid pa*) was used for exponents of the dialectical approach followed at Gsang phu.[14]

This brief sketch of early scholasticism has identified different spheres within which it made an early impact. The proliferation of "dialectical units" and the adoption of the scholastic curriculum, from the twelfth century onwards, are the greatest testimony to the spread of the Gsang phu model of education and scholasticism's general advance. The huge role played by Rngog lo in establishing a native tradition of commentarial writing also helped ensure scholasticism's influence in the textual sphere. However, in the topic of Pramāṇa,[15] we discover another dimension to scholasticism's historical impact. Scholasticism stimulated a huge growth in knowledge about Buddhist Pramāṇa theory, based on the writings and thinking of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, according to which perception and inference were the only genuine epistemic means (i.e., *pramāṇa*) through which incontestable knowledge could be gained. This helped popularise the view that inference and logic had indispensable soteriological value. Scholasticism's influence can partly be measured by the increase in writings on Pramāṇa (i.e., epistemology and logic) and the expansion of the dialectical style such writings employed into other areas of learning. Only in the wake of attacks on Gsang phu scholarship by Sa skya Paṇḍita

---

[14]   See Samuels (2020: 100).
[15]   Here we should distinguish Pramāṇa as a topic of study (covering both logic and a theory of knowledge) from *pramāṇa*, referring to an epistemic means for gaining reliable knowledge. In Tibetan, both are denoted by the same term, *tshad ma*.

(1182–1251) did the territory of scholasticism become more fractured,[16] although Tibetan interest in Pramāṇa never waned. However, it is notable that the expression of anti-*pramāṇa* sentiments seems to begin in Tibet when Gsang phu was at its zenith during the mid twelfth century, when scholasticism's promotion of Pramāṇa propelled it into religious discourse. Direct disciples of Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen (1079–1153), the figure credited with the foundation of the Dwags po Bka' brgyud tradition, appear to have been among the foremost early critics. Jackson judges the brand of Bka' brgyud promoted by such figures as Zhang Tshal pa (1123–1193) and his teacher, Sgom pa Tshul khrims snying po (1116–1169), the nephew and successor of Sgam po pa, to be "anti logic but also anti-intellectual" (Jackson 1995: 90). These individuals were clearly opposed to conceptual approaches more generally, but the historical context within which their criticisms were made, as much as their content, suggest that they were responding to the growth of institutionalised monasticism and the intellectualisation of Buddhism. They specifically rejected a role for analysis and inference in the path, and delivered an unremitting message about the need to rely on personal instruction to gain realisation. They also sometimes made more direct attacks on the notion of *pramāṇa*, portraying Atiśa as a *pramāṇa* sceptic or even denier.[17]

Between the proponents of scholasticism, who fully accepted the notion of *pramāṇa* and all that it entailed (i.e., the role of reasoning and inference), and those among Sgam po pa's followers who completely rejected these, was an expansive middle ground, occupied by those who acknowledged a limited place for *pramāṇa*. Some of these individuals referred to epistemological models that appear to be *alternatives*

---

[16] Voicing criticisms of fellow scholars' views was par for the course within scholasticism. But Sa skya Paṇḍita sought to distinguish himself from Gsang phu's scholarship as a whole, thereby creating the notion of differing *systems* of Tibetan Pramāṇa interpretation and styles of scholarship.

[17] These portrayals centre on the very literal glossing of a single verse in Atiśa's *Satyadvayāvatāra* (Dergé 3902) (72b3) *mngon sum rjes dpag dgos pa med / mu stegs rgol ba zlog pa'i phyir / mkhas pa rnams kyis byas pa yin*. Those within the anti-*pramāṇa* camp read the words as Atiśa denying the existence of *pramāṇa* and asserting that the logic associated with *pramāṇa* was created *solely* to refute Indian non-Buddhist traditions, and is thus without soteriological value. As discussed by Jackson (1995: 92, 93, and 98), this relies on some questionable de-contextualisation. This sceptical version of Atiśa is also roundly rejected by Tibetan proponents of *pramāṇa*. But it is endorsed by Apple, who also says that Atiśa "disparaged the practice of debate" (2022: 9). Vetturini (2013: 10 n.11, 172), in more moderate terms, portrays Atiśa as not being particularly favourable to debate and other analytical practices (now associated with Gsang phu). The evidence for these varying depictions of Atiśa will be assessed on a later occasion.

to the twofold version of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.[18] Many individuals now classified as belonging to the Dwags po Bka' brgyud traditions occupied this middle ground. On *pramāṇa* itself there were various shades of opinion (and not a little ambiguity). But a large number, including Sgam po pa himself, accepted a limited place for reasoning and inference, specifically in the realisation of emptiness.[19] 'Jig rten mgon po (1143–1217), who is identified as founder of the 'Bri gung Bka' brgyud, is located much further along the spectrum, on the *pramāṇa*-affirming side.[20] Within the Bka' gdams tradition, those who the Bka' gdams histories identify as belonging to the "personal instructions" group (i.e., *man ngag pa*, discussed below) express views that situate them in this middle ground, and can be seen to share very close affinities with those in various branches of the Bka' brgyud tradition. As this brief discussion on the reception of Pramāṇa theory shows, the magnitude of scholasticism's impact on Tibetan religious discourse and expression cannot be fully appreciated if we limit ourselves to its direct intellectual output. It is also necessary to explore reactions to scholasticism that may have taken the form of *resistance* to its message or *alternatives* that were developed in response to it.

"Religious histories" on Bka' gdams, Rwa sgreng, and Gsang phu relations

Given Gsang phu's acknowledged historical importance, the fact that the Bka' gdams histories only assign it a peripheral place in their depiction of the Bka' gdams tradition (i.e., the image of the religious school) may seem to raise questions about how objectively these histories deal with that monastery. The representation of Gsang phu in these writings, a topic that previous studies occasionally touch on rather than fully assess, therefore requires some clarification.

Independent works bearing the title *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (i.e., "Bka' gdams religious history") start to appear from the fifteenth century, which *if* we accept the widely held view about when the Bka' gdams ceased to exist as a separate school, means that their

---

[18] In the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum* manuscripts, we find occasional references to fourfold divisions of *tshad ma* (i.e., *pramāṇa*) that do not match the fourfold categories sometimes referenced in Sanskrit Madhyamaka writings, and also threefold divisions (see also Ma 2025: 68) that do not correspond with what appears in Pramāṇa writings. But these must be discussed at a later date.

[19] See, for example, *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan* (2000), where such statements as *chos thams cad gtan tshigs kyi gzhigs nas ma grub par byed* (40b5) are attributed to Sgam po pa.

[20] Jackson sees what he describes as 'Jig rten mgon po's "pro-Pramāṇa" (1995: 89) stance as a response to the *pramāṇa* scepticism of the aforementioned disciples of Sgam po pa.

composition begins during that school's twilight phase. The two earliest examples of works now commonly referred to as *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* were composed by (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo (1433–?)[21] and Bsod nams lha'i dbang po (1423–1496). The next work in the genre was authored by Las chen Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1432–1504), a student of Bsod nam lha'i dbang po. These three, together with the *Deb ther sngon po* ("Blue Annals") by 'Gos lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal (1392–1481), a broader religious history, not dealing exclusively with the Bka' gdams, were written in a period of under two decades.[22] Later *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* are by authors with clear non-Bka' gdams affiliations, perspectives, and often, agendas.[23] But even among the first group of *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*, (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo, who was the fourth abbot of Bkra shis lhun po Monastery, can be distinguished from the other three authors, in the extent to which he projects himself as belonging to Tsong kha pa's Dga' ldan (Dge lugs) tradition. And even the works of the other three writers are testaments to the burgeoning of that tradition, and the rapid progression of the discourse on whether it should be regarded as the inheritor of the Bka' gdams legacy.[24] Indeed, as a genre, the *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* should be recognised as products of an era that witnessed the rise of the Dge lugs. The works of the other three authors—'Gos lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal, Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, and Las chen Kun dga' rgyal mtshan—are more

---

[21]   Despite the fact that the title given to this work in the recently published version refers to it as a *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (i.e., in *Paṇchen ye shes rtse mo'i bka' gdams chos 'byung dang rnam thar* 2015), it is not the author's own designation. But based on the work's content, there seems good reason to accept Iuchi's assertion (2018: 339) that this should be counted as one of the first two texts of the genre.

[22]   'Gos lo tsā ba's *Deb ther sngon po* (1984), composed in 1476 or 1478, Bsod nams rtse mo's *Bka' dgams rin po che bstan 'dzin rnams kyi byung khungs* (2015), dated 1484, Bsod nams lha'i dbang po's *Bka' gdams chos 'byung rnam thar nyin mor byed pa'i 'od stong* (1977) written in 1484, and Las chen Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's *Bka' gdams chos 'byung gsal ba'i sgron me* (2003), composed in 1494.

[23]   For a full list of these works see Iuchi (2018).

[24]   As Vetturini observes (2013: 22), these authors were not in agreement about whether the Dge lugs could be regarded as the "new Bka' gdams" (*bka' gdams gsar ma*). The Dge lugs issue does not seriously affect their representation of the Bka' gdams school's earlier history, and being tangential to the topic of this article, need not detain us here. But the political dimension to the issue, including how much assertions and denials of continuity were entangled with discourses about the future direction and affiliation of individual monasteries (and potentially claims to the ownership of monastery assets as much as its religious traditions), certainly requires investigation. The evidence and criteria used to date the Bka' gdams school's disappearance to the fifteenth century also requires some clarification. The fact that this dating seems to coincide with the rise of the *Dge lugs* tradition could be seen to suggest that the latter is to be regarded as a straightforward continuation or replacement for the Bka' gdams, a view that is too simplistic to be regarded as historically credible.

interesting cases, and it could be argued that they are the only Bka'
gdams histories composed by authors who would appear to identify
as Bka' gdams pa.[25]

Predating the *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (and the aforementioned is-
sue), however, are treatments of the Bka' gdams in earlier religious
histories, composed by non-Bka' gdams authors.[26] Throughout these
writings (i.e., both the *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* and these earlier Bka'
gdams histories), there is a great deal of consistency regarding the re-
lations between the Bka' gdams tradition and Gsang phu. These histo-
ries, composed over centuries, by authors of various affiliations, offer
almost no support for the current practice of describing Gsang phu as
a Bka' gdams institution. Reading the *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* alone may
well give the sense that Gsang phu is being marginalised, but the lim-
itations imposed by the format must be recognized as playing a major
part in this.[27] Where the format allows it, authors acknowledge the im-
portance of Gsang phu traditions, and thereby scholasticism itself, by
representing it as independent of the Bka' gdams school. The separa-
tion between the Bka' gdams and Gsang phu traditions is presented as
a fait accompli. No explanations are given of the events that led to this
separation, although a shared heritage is acknowledged, albeit tenu-
ously, through the kinship link between the uncle and nephew

---

[25]   The issue is not entirely clear-cut for any of these three authors. While agreeing
      with Vetturini that Bsod nams lha'i dbang po should not be seen as a "dGe lugs
      master" (Vetturini 2013: 9 n.9), I would go further, and assert that in his *Bka' gdams
      chos 'byung*, he primarily projects himself as a Bka' gdams pa. And while he has
      Dge lugs sympathies, he certainly does not use his *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* in the
      way that Paṇchen ye shes rtse mo and later, Paṇchen Bsod nams grags pa (1478–
      1554) do theirs, as a vehicle for arguing that the Dge lugs tradition represents the
      "new Bka' gdams". The slightly more complex case of Las chen Kun dga' rgyal
      mtshan is considered briefly below (note 54). As for Gzhon nu dpal, his identifying
      with the Bka' gdams tradition does not stretch to seeing himself as a member of
      Tsong kha pa's Dga' ldan tradition, which he describes with the perspective of an
      outsider. It also seems doubtful that he would have considered the idea of simul-
      taneously belonging to the Bka' gdams and Bka' brgyud traditions as problematic.

[26]   These include *Deb ther dmar po* (1993) by Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje (1309–1364),
      composed in the 1350s or 60s, *Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung* by Shākya Rin chen sde
      (fl. fourteenth century), dated to 1376, and *Rgya bod yig tshang chen mo* (1985), by
      Dpal 'byor bzang po, written in 1434.

[27]   When the work in question was a larger religious history, comprising descriptions
      of multiple Tibetan traditions, the author could not only include a section on the
      Bka' gdams, but was able to devote a separate one to Gsang phu immediately after
      it, as demonstrated in the earliest works, viz. *Deb ther dmar po*, *Yar lung jo bo'i chos
      'byung*, *Rgya bod yig tshang chen mo*, and *Deb ther sngon po*. For authors of the *Bka'
      gdams chos 'byung*, this option was not open, and they were therefore forced either
      to incorporate aspects of the Gsang phu tradition within the Bka' gdams school
      framework, or exclude them altogether.

Rngog.[28] Most of the authors in the pre-sixteenth century Bka' gdams histories also express genuine respect for Gsang phu practices and are reverential towards Rngog lo. Shākya Rin chen sde prefaces his section on Gsang phu traditions by effusively announcing that "There is hardly any study [tradition] created in this snowy land (i.e., Tibet) that do not come through the great translator (i.e., Rngog lo)".[29] The only exception to the portrayal of two separate traditions is made by Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, whose vision of the Bka' gdams goes some way to including Gsang phu elements. Celebrating Rngog lo for being the first creator of "dialectical units", he pronounces that "Rngog lo tsā ba, … belonged to the supreme lineage of Atiśa's disciples".[30] That exception aside,[31] the point these historians are at pains to make is that the Bka' gdams and Gsang phu traditions were not just separate, they *stood* for different things.

Only in a rather liberal sense can these writings on the Bka' gdams be described as "histories". They are not comprehensive descriptions of events or institutions, and the information they provide on these two is sporadic. They are names and details organised around the theme of "lineage" (i.e., *rgyud*), mainly in the sense of 1. Institutional (especially abbatial) successions, and 2. Lists of significant teachers and their disciples. Biographical information about the individuals concerned is also appended. In conformity with this, the sections on Gsang phu and Rngog lo's tradition are also, generally, based on the monastery's abbatial succession, the disciples of the abbots, and significant deeds of both, especially the founding of further monasteries.

The histories reveal little about relations between Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu, but the vision of the Bka' gdams school they present is relevant to events described below, so a brief analysis of this seems necessary here. The representation of the school through the framework of lineages is highly schematic and unmistakenly heavily *curated*. The most prominent lineages are the three respectively identified with each of the "three brothers", mentioned above. The designations given to their three lineages' in the *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* suggest they represent different groups or branches, partly distinguished by their

---

[28] This wish to represent "Rngog lo's tradition" as separate from the Bka' gdams is already evident in the twelfth century *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud* (1988), an even earlier religious history, composed by Myang/Nyang Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192), although the representation had not yet taken on the formulaic style of the aforementioned histories.

[29] *gangs can gyi ljongs na bshad nyan mdzad pa phal cher lo tsha ba chen po las ma brgyud pa med* (*Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung* 153).

[30] *rngog lo tsā ba … a ti sha'i slob rgyud kyi mchog tu gtogs* (1977: 366, 80b3).

[31] Bsod nams lha'i dbang po's inclusion of Gsang phu is not, however, total, since he finds no place for writings by Gsang phu scholars in his enumeration of the works that he proposes form the Bka' gdams canon (see below).

approach, i.e., those who rely on the text (the *gzhung pa*), those who rely on personal instructions (the *man ngag pa* or *gdams ngag pa*), and a third.[32] These are also portrayed as component parts, which collectively constitute the school, and circumscribe its boundaries.[33] The lineages of the 'three brothers' (who were all disciples of 'Brom ston) clearly support the 'Brom ston and *Rwa sgreng*-centric notion of the Bka' gdams school. But as Roesler (2019: 1145) observes, the 'Brom ston-centric view of the school in the Bka' gdams histories is also found earlier, in the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* (the so-called "*Bka' gdams* Scripture"). Within this, we find the edited version of a biographical tradition that the histories say was transmitted by Atiśa to Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab (Roesler 2019: 1154). It relies heavily on two earlier expansive biographies of Atiśa, the *Rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* ("Widely-known Extensive Biography"), which is generally regarded as a thirteenth century work, and *Rnam thar rgyas pa* ("Extensive Biography"), which is believed to be from the twelfth century.[34] The latest of the three biographies (i.e., the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*) is divided into two sections, the teachings related to the "father" and "son(s)" (the *pha chos* and *bu chos*), and clearly projects the 'Brom ston-centric vision of the Bka' gdams.[35] The *Bka' gdams glegs bam* tradition evidently underwent considerable *development* during the thirteenth century, and 1302 is

---

[32] There are variations in this third lineage. These, together with the terms and composition of the three divisions are considered below.

[33] The threefold division is the most popular and historically resilient version of the Bka' gdams constituents, although not the only one. Some histories include additional lineages, the main of which are those of 'Brom ston's immediate successors as abbots at Rwa sgreng (see below) and that of Atiśa's disciple and translator, Nag tsho Tshul khrims rgyal ba (1011–1064), although even when the lineages are expanded in this way, 'Brom ston remains the central figure.

[34] The *Rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* is *generally* credited to Mchims Nam mkha' grags (1210–1285/9), the seventh abbot of Snar thang Monastery. The current version of the *Rnam thar rgyas pa* is ascribed by some (including the editors of the *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, in which a reproduction of it appears) to Bya 'Dul 'dzin (Bya Brtson 'grus 'bar, either 1091–1166 or possibly 1100–1170/1174). Needless to say, there are questions about the relationship between these written accounts and the oral traditions that preceded them. Based on certain Bka' gdams histories, Roesler (2019: 1154) reports that the biographical tradition was passed from Atiśa to Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab, then through Shes rab rgyal mtshan to Phu chung ba. But the majority of contemporary scholars (Ehrhard 2004: 436 n.223, Sernesi 2015: 413, etc.) follow Eimer (1982: 42-3), who proposes that one Rong pa Lag sor pa gathered oral materials on Atiśa, using Nag tsho as a chief informant. Lag sor pa's disciple Zul phu ba (who these scholars identify as Bya 'dul 'dzin Brtson 'grus 'bar) was then the recipient of these materials, based upon which he composed the first biography. The *Rnam thar rgyas pa* and *Rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* are both believed to derive independently from this common ancestor, i.e., the original work of Zul phu ba, which does not survive.

[35] Atiśa is the "father", and among the "sons", Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab and Khu ston are depicted in junior and subordinate roles to 'Brom ston.

reported (e.g., Ehrhard 2002: 33, Vetturini 2013: 18) to have been a culminative year in the process. The "Scripture" is not simply a refined version of earlier accounts, but was expanded to include other materials (see Ehrhard 2002: 33-4).[36] Important figures from Snar thang were instrumental in this augmentation. From its foundation in 1153, Snar thang Monastery appears to have been seen as Rwa sgreng's stalwart ally,[37] and the Bka' gdams histories present it as the school's second monastery, closely followed by the likes of Lo and Bya yul. In his contribution to the tradition, as on other occasions, Mchims Nam mkha' grags (the presumed author of the *Rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*) reveals himself to be a champion editor of the Bka' gdams image.

Scrutiny of the threefold scheme's constituents reveals much about the provenance of the vision of the Bka' gdams as a school. Unlike the designations for the first two lineages (discussed below), the third is not historically stable, although a pattern seems detectable in its variations. Authors who composed histories on the Bka' gdams tradition, but belonged to "new" (*gsar ma*) schools other than the Bka' gdams itself largely reproduce the lineage vision, but differ on how they identify the third. Hence, while the Bka' gdams authors refer to it as the lineage of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, the non-Bka' gdams authors prefer to use other designations, the most popular of which is the *lam rim* ("stages of the path") lineage.[38] These non-Bka' gdams authors appear to have regarded Atiśa's legacy as part of a common heritage. Their preference for alternative designations to the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* for the third lineage seems partly to be explained by the latter's strong association with the 'Brom ston and Rwa sgreng-centric view of the Bka' gdams.

Regarding the presence of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*'s tradition in the scheme, it can firstly be observed that it is not the version of the third

---

[36] For a full break down of the contents of the two sections found in the earliest printed versions of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* see Sernesi (2015: 433-36).

[37] For evidence of the positive relations, see the letter recording offerings dispatched from Snar thang to Rwa sgreng discussed by Roesler (2021).

[38] It would appear that the earliest known Bka' gdams history, Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje's *Deb ther dmar po*, has been particularly influential. Its short section on the third lineage (1993: 65-66) interestingly presents the whole range of alternatives from which later authors might be seen to select. Thus, it describes the lineage as that of the *lam rim pa*, but also includes mention of Bya 'dul 'dzin (i.e., the author of the biographical work that was a main source for the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*), as well as the *Bka' gdams 'og ma*, a later structure built below Rwa sgreng, which by some accounts grew into a separate institution. The Sa skya author 'Jam mgon a mes zhabs (1597–1659/1660), in his Bka' gdams history, entitled *Jo bo rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i rjes 'brangs bka' gdams kyi byung tshul legs par bshad pa nyung gsal kun dga'* (composed in 1634), identifies this as the third lineage (2000: 219, 4a6).

lineage that appears in the earliest histories.[39] Secondly, while the other versions of the third lineage are described as groups (both individuals and institutions), differentiated by their contrasting approaches, the fifteenth century Bka' gdams authors classify the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* lineage as a "secret teaching" (*gsang chos*)" (Ehrhard 2002: 38). This description seems traceable to the work's compilation, during the thirteenth century, when biographical materials were combined with the tantric practice of the "Sixteen drops" (*thig le bcu drug*), in an apparent attempt to imbue the work with mystical potency and more closely align it with traditional notions of a lineage.

Dispelling any sense that the third constituent needs to be a separate group, with their own distinctive approach, the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* is treated as a tradition of biographical narrative, supported by an esoteric practice, the combination of which could apparently be accepted *in addition* to whatever approach an individual followed. Ehrhard (2002: 29) describes aspects of this enhancement as part of a "strategy to unify the three important transmitters of Bka'-gdams-pa". The idea of the third component lineage as a unifier was to become a recurring theme in later writings,[40] but the specific identification of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* with the third component quite obviously encouraged the idea that the 'Brom ston-centric vision of the Bka' gdams that it embodied was the unifying force for a tradition that was geographically dispersed, and within which different approaches had emerged.

The apparent adaptability of the third lineage suggests that the historicity of the scheme and its contents should be regarded separately. There is clearly a pattern of representing key elements within the Bka' gdams tradition in terms of threefold divisions. The three constituent lineages, three brothers, three main disciples of Atiśa, and the various extensions of the latter[41] show a dedication to triadic depiction that should prompt questions about whether schematisation has taken precedence over content, and may occasionally have predated it. The *seed* for the most persistent triadic representation, that of Atiśa's main Tibetan disciples, is found in the earliest known biographical material on Atiśa, the *Bstod pa brgyad cu pa* ("Eighty verses of praise"), composed by Nag tsho Tshul khrims rgyal ba. This singles out 'Brom ston,

---

[39] The *Deb ther dmar po* (1993: 65-66) refers to the *lam rim pa* group as the third. The *Rgya bod yig tshang chen mo* (1985: 480-81) essentially reproduces this, although it provides no name.

[40] It is even chosen by Las chen, who depicts the Dga' ldan/Dge lugs tradition as "The new Bka' gdams, within which the two rivers of the text and personal instruction (traditions) are merged (*gzhung dang gdams ngag gnyis ka'i chu bo gcig tu 'dus pa bka' gdams gsar ma*, 2003: 823).

[41] In some later sources, other areas in which Atiśa resided each have their own list of three main disciples.

Khu ston, and Rngog ston for mention,[42] and while it does so in a non-schematic fashion, it surely served as a major written source for a division that features in almost every later writing on the Bka' gdams.[43] However, for the point at which triadic schematics become embedded in Bka' gdams historical representation, we must look to the twelfth century. The early decades for Rwa sgreng appear to have been relatively stable. 'Brom ston's tenure (1056–1065) was followed by that of Rnal 'byor pa chen po (Rnal 'byor pa Byang chub rin chen 1015–1077/8),[44] incumbent from 1065 to 1077/8, and Dgon po ba Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan (1016–1082/3), abbot from 1077/8, apparently until his death, all of whom were direct disciples of Atiśa. Dgon po ba's death marked the end of this phase and the effective departure from the scene of those whose relations with Atiśa had been direct. The problems this created are discussed below, but to bridge the generational transition, serious efforts were made to promote three individuals who were disciples of 'Brom ston (i.e., the 'three brothers') as the natural heirs to Atiśa's tradition.[45] As a narrative strategy this proved brilliantly successful, as attested by most later writings on the Bka' gdams, which present a smooth and direct succession from Atiśa, through 'Brom ston to the 'three brothers'. Ehrhard (2002, 2004) makes valuable observations about the role of figures from Snar thang in the creation of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, which involve attempts to deify the 'three brothers'. But the section revealing these attempts in the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, which can be designated the "epilogue", essentially reproduces, largely verbatim, what appeared in the much earlier *Rnam thar rgyas pa*. The historical *context* for this was the concerted campaign undertaken to deal with the challenges relating to succession and continuity that faced Rwa sgreng as a result of the earlier generation's passing.

---

[42] See 34 (17b4) of the praise, reproduced in *Legs par bshad pa bka' gdams rin po che'i gsung gi gces btus nor bu'i bang mdzod*, edited by Don grub rgyal mtshan (1985). See also Eimer (1989).

[43] By the twelfth century this had been transformed into the standard, schematic formula (i.e., *khu rngog 'brom ston gsum*), identifying Khu ston brtson 'grus, Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab, and 'Brom. Also, in this first appearance, these are identified as Atiśa's three disciples in Tibet (*bod*, although it could be debated what this term means), whereas in many later sources, these are his main disciples in central Tibet (i.e., *dbus gtsang*).

[44] Due to the fact that they share the epithet rnal 'byor pa, certain contemporary sources (and possibly some Tibetan authors) confuse this figure, also known as A mes Byang chub rin chen, with a later individual named Shes rab rdo rje (d.u.), who appears to have been a disciple of Po to ba, or his student, Sha ra ba Yon tan grags (1070–1141).

[45] Why *three* individuals were chosen, and whether this is the expression of a pre-existing predisposition or the effective start of the slight obsession with triadic representation is unclear.

The campaign's message was that "the three brothers are Atiśa's heirs [lit. substitutes/ replacements]",[46] and that they alone could guarantee the continuity of the 'Brom ston-based Bka' gdams. The main strategies deployed to support this were the identification of the three brothers with various triads of deities, including the "Protectors of the three lineage-types" (*Rigs gsum mgon po*). The most distinctive triad comprises three important statue-deities of Lokeśvara/Avalokiteśvara, all with origins in the Kathmandu Valley. This is supported by a narrative connecting Atiśa with Swayambhunath, said to foretell the three brothers' succession.[47] This campaign must have been a largely post-mortem affair, aimed at the creation of a Bka' gdams pantheon rather than securing religious or secular power for the 'three brothers'.[48] The epilogue in the *Rnam thar rgyas pa* is the earliest record of these attempts to promote the 'three brothers' through identifying them with various triadic schemes, and includes a short section on each of them, but contains no clear reference to the three Bka' gdams constituent lineages. And given that the evidence linking these individuals with three distinctive approaches is very tenuous, it seems safe to infer that the connection between the 'three brothers' and the three lineages was a later creation. One might also reasonably wonder whether the threefold lineage scheme itself (which only seems to appear in sources significantly later than references to the 'three brothers') derives from the division of the brothers.

---

[46] *A ti sha'i gdung sob pa / 'phags pa sku mched gsum po yin* (*Rnam thar rgyas pa* 84b2). The term used for "representative" (*gdung sob pa*) here reprises references to Atiśa's physical remains (*gdung*)–literally, "bone(s)" –, which feature in the immediately preceding discussion in the biography about the distribution of Atiśa's relics among his main disciples. While the orthography of the second term is amended in the later biographies (i.e., using *gsob*, instead of *sob*), this cannot disguise the fact that "representative" here evokes the language of the funerary practice that involved creating a physical effigy of the deceased person to house bone remains. There is evidence that this was formerly a widespread practice in Tibet, although it is now largely confined to its cultural periphery, where in some cases, the effigy is still known as a *sob* (see Ramble 1982: 335).

[47] Since the later biographies essentially reproduce what appears in the *Rnam thar rgyas pa*, Ehrhard's discussion of this material in later sources (2004: 72-73) serves as a reasonable guide to its content. Despite the three statues of Lokeśvara/Avalokiteśvara all being originally associated with the Kathmandu Valley, the Ārya Vati eventually found its way to Tibet, and was housed in Skyid grong for centuries. The other two statue-deities, Jamali and Bhugma, remain in the Kathmandu area, and are at the centre of major local cults. There is some indication that the "three brothers" epithet for the statue-deities in Nepal is of some antiquity. There can be little doubt that the existence of this epithet was a very convenient concurrence for those promoting the 'three brothers' in Tibet, if not the source of their inspiration.

[48] This can be deduced not just from the fact that the first biography seems to have been written decades after their demise, but also the events described below.

Text versus personal instruction

At the heart of the threefold scheme of Bka' gdams constituent lineages is the division between the textual and personal instruction groups. Unlike the 'third lineage' this division seems to be substantive and well attested. The names for these two are also historically stable. The first category of individuals is always rendered by a single term (*gzhung pa*), whereas the second is denoted by two interchangeable designations (*man ngag pa* or *gdams ngag pa*).[49] References to these as separate categories within the Bka' gdams tradition go back to the twelfth century.[50] The fact that, as already observed, the divide between Gsang phu and branches of the Bka' gdams has been depicted as one between "institutionalized dialectics" and "personally transmitted teachings" (Vetturini 2013: 175) may cause us to wonder whether references to the two categories is a way of alluding to this divide. The religio-cultural aversion to criticising institutions by name hinders our ability to judge decisively on such matters. But the Bka' gdams histories consistently identify those at Rwa sgreng as the chief representatives of "textual" branch and even our earlier sources give no indication that the division originated in a split, centred upon Gsang phu.

There is no evidence that the divide was ever truly formalised. The arbiters of who and what belong in the respective categories are the historians. But preferences that institutions or individuals appear to have expressed obviously play a major part in their judgements. Hence, the textual (*gzhung pa*) category is dominated by Rwa sgreng and Snar thang–monasteries that are known, at certain points in their

---

[49] The question of whether *man ngag pa* and *gdams ngag pa* could have been separate groups appears only to have crept in relatively recently. It seems to be another expression of the nagging concerns attached to the threefold scheme: i.e., the awareness that it is traditional to describe the Bka' gdams as having three lineages/groups, but confusion about what to identify as the third. A growing urge among Tibetan scholars to gloss *man ngag* and *gdams ngag* differently appears to have fuelled the idea that the *man ngag pa* and *gdams ngag pa* designations could have denoted two separate groups. Even the editors of the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* succumb to this, and hesitatingly propose (1993: 73) that the *man ngag pa* might be a third lineage (distinguished from the *gzhung pa* and *gdams ngag pa*). Little attempt is ever made, however, to substantiate this claim by identifying institutions or individuals belonging to each group. Furthermore, Bka' gdams histories from the pre-modern era do not portray these as separate groups, and generally use the two designations interchangeably. More importantly, this interchangeability is entirely consistent with the earlier, twelfth centuries writings discussed below. Hence, the idea that the *man ngag pa* and *gdams ngag pa* formed separate groups is one that can probably be dismissed as having no historical foundation.

[50] Reference to it is found in Myang/Nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer's *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud* (1988: 469), but various mentions in the manuscript sources cited below confirm its existence.

history, to have hosted traditions of textual learning. The network of individuals associated with these two institutions, including abbots, teachers, and students/disciples constitute the *community* to whom the *gzhung pa* designation primarily applied. The sections in the histories on the textual category also include various details of important figures in these networks, together with their significant achievements, other institutions that they founded, and so forth.[51]

The sections dealing with the *man ngag pa/gdams ngag pa* invariably feature the monastery of Lo (*Lo dgon*),[52] as could easily be foreseen, given that its founder, Spyan snga ba Tshul khrims 'bar, is the 'brother' primarily identified with the second lineage in the schematic portrayal of the later histories. But there are no indications of how this or any other monastery practically realised its preference for instruction-based transmission. There are, furthermore, *fewer* references to monasteries in the sections on the *man ngag pa/gdams ngag pa*, and noticeably more to various "temples" (*lha khang*, *gtsug lag khang*, and *mchod khang*), hermitages, and retreat sites. Many of those identified as belonging to the group (figures such as Kha rag sgom chen and Zla ba rgyal mtshan) are also known to have led more peripatetic and relatively solitary existences. Large numbers of those who followed Bka' gdams traditions undoubtedly chose not to do so in the monastic setting, and the wider diffusion and less organised nature of those designated *man ngag pa/gdams ngag pa* means that they probably never formed a cohesive community, which is not to say that they did not constitute a loose 'confederacy' of those sharing similar religious outlooks, including perhaps misgivings about institutionalised monasticism. It is very significant that in their section on the instruction-based group, several Bka' gdams histories[53] include a biographical sketch of Sgam po pa. The immediate reason for his inclusion was obviously the fact that his early teachers were Bka' gdams pa. However, his later discipleship to Mi la ras pa (1040?–1123), which is cited as the basis for the Dwags po Bka' brgyud traditions' formation, also made him the most high-profile rejectionist of the Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams pa interpretation of Atiśa's tradition. However we interpret Las chen's inclusion of Sgam po ba in his *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*,[54] it appears to underline the point

---

[51] Further evidence that the *gzhung pa* and *man ngag pa/gdams ngag pa* were substantive categories is also found in later sources, including the *gsan yig* (i.e., record of teachings personally received) by Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang (1385–1438). He divides the Bka' gdams into these two categories (1978: 52), listing teachings and individuals associated with them, but makes no mention of a third category.

[52] They also include mentions of Bya yul dgon, which as Las chen's *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (344) states, had close relations with Lo gdon.

[53] Las chen (2003: 343) and 'Jam mgon a mes zhabs (2000: 219, 4a4).

[54] Las chen represents an inconvenience for those obsessed with exclusive sectarian categorisations. This single individual composed his magnum opus on the Bka'

that those in the instruction-based category were considered to form a single group only in the very laxest of senses.

In addition to its communal and institutional expressions, the textual-instructional divide must be recognised as the fundamental *opposition* and potential source of tension within the very notion of the Bka' gdams itself. The names of the two groups suggest a difference over the preferred medium for knowledge-transmission: that is, the textual versus the oral. The oral imparting of instructions was regarded as emblematic of a particular style of spiritual practice with which Atiśa became associated, involving close contact between teacher and disciple (the so-called *guru-śiṣya* relationship), facilitating personal guidance or even supervision of meditation as the main route to realisation. But following Atiśa's demise, efforts to secure his legacy demanded increasing engagement with the written sphere, to ensure that there was some physical record of materials that had hitherto existed only in the oral domain, including many of his instructions and, as we saw above, his biography. This movement into the textual sphere appears to have induced anxiety in some quarters over the potential betrayal of the tradition's original principles.

This tension does not appear to have manifested in an internal discourse between two sides expressing opposing perspectives, but

---

gdams tradition, held tenure at the Phag mo gru monastery of Rtses thang, but was a devoted disciple of Dge 'dun grub, the 'first Dalai Lama' (1391–1474), and also teacher of the staunchly Dge lugs Paṇchen Bsod nams grags pa. Patently, therefore, he cannot be placed neatly in any single affiliation 'box'. Las chen's *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* was composed at a time of heightened political tension, as the Rin spungs dynasty was reaching the zenith of its power, and as a result of which (in the following year of 1498) members of the Dge lugs tradition would be prohibited from participating in the Lhasa Prayer Festival (*Smon lam chen mo*). What might be gleaned from a deeper reading of Las chen's works about how he managed to guide Rtsed thang through the religious and political frictions of the time would be very interesting. But on the level of faith, there is no obvious sign that he felt his loyalties were torn between different traditions. His biography of Spyan snga Bsod nams rgyal mtshan (1386–1435, *Bsod nams rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa mthong ba don ldan* 2004)—who probably served as abbot of the Phag mo gru monastery of Gdan sa mthil—just like his *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*, give the impression of an author who is personally committed to the tradition he is writing about. The vision revealed in the latter work particularly was that followers of Sgam po pa, as much as those of 'Brom ston, or Tsong kha pa shared a common lineage of instruction-based teachings stretching back to Atiśa. Las chen also seems to anticipate the imminent disappearance of the Bka' gdams as an independent school, and cares what will happen to its heritage, but perhaps also has concerns about the future direction of the Dge lugs. As illustrated below, he was no fan of the analytical approach associated with Gsang phu, and in his *Bka' gdams chos 'byung*, he seeks to counter the view that it can be regarded as authentic Bka' gdams. Hence, his work presents the commitment to Atiśa's instructions-based approach as a unifying force, but portrays aspects of the analytical traditions of scholasticism as divisive.

seems evident in the insistent restating of principles and cautioning against excessive textual learning not rooted in practice. Remarks about the need for meditation and close contact with a qualified spiritual guide become so standardised in later writings as to have a generic quality. But in the earlier manuscripts sources, they are often more pointed, and there is a sense of them being directed at specific targets and perhaps commenting on ongoing events. Thus, in one twelfth century text, attributed to a certain Rje lung pa,[55] we find critical comments aimed at "this group who [rely on] textual exposition".[56] The writer goes on to reaffirm principles, citing remarks by several early Bka' gdams luminaries. Without directly discouraging textual learning, he appears to propose that limits be placed upon it, remarking that Dge bshes Sne zur pa[57] would only listen to a particular work once or twice… He (the author) criticises "repeated" study, insisting that, "[The practice of] meditation does not require a great deal of textual learning".[58] In the same section the author also refers to how those of the textual group are gaining a larger following due to their "analysis and writings" …,[59] hinting that this may be at odds with core principles. Here it is not immediately obvious whether the target is the institution of Gsang phu or Rwa sgreng. This ambiguity is not infrequent, and it seems likely that the commitment to institutionalised monasticism and organised textual learning shown by those at Gsang phu and Rwa sgreng meant that, irrespective of their individual styles, they were perceived as belonging to the same camp by some of those who identified with the instruction-based approach.[60]

If there was ever a question among Atiśa's followers about the relative merits of text and personal instruction, these are addressed head

---

[55] The editors of the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum* attribute this work, entitled *Dri ma med pa'i 'od ces bya ba bden pa gnyis kyi rnam bshad* (2006: vol. 24), to Rje lung pa, but provide no details about him and admit they are unsure of his identity. As I will discuss in a later article, this individual was a close disciple of Zla ba rgyal mtshan, and appears in Bka' gdams histories under a variety of names. An initial examination of the work's contents also reveals that rather than Rje lung pa himself, it is more likely to have been compiled by an anonymous disciple.

[56] *gzhung bshad pa'i tshan pa 'di* (2006: 11, 2a3).

[57] Sne'u zur pa Ye shes 'bar (1042–1118) was a prominent figure associated with Rwa sgreng in the early decades and a disciple of Dgon po ba, the second abbot.

[58] *bsgom pa la gzhung mang po thos mi dgos* (2006: 13, 3a2).

[59] *gzhung bshad pa'i tshan pa 'di la 'khor mang bar yong ba ni lta rtog 'dra 'am yi ge 'dri bas skyo rogs byas pas 'khor mang ba yin gsung* (2006: 11, 2a3).

[60] Certainly by the fourteenth century, to distinguish their style from other varieties of textual learning, exponents of Gsang phu scholarship were referred to as those who followed the *gzhung chen* approach. But I am unsure when this designation was created.

on in the manuscript of another piece of twelfth century writing, composed by Lce sgom pa Shes rab rdo rje.[61] He recounts:

> Once more, when the great Jo bo rje [Atiśa] the singular divine one, arrived in central Tibet, his three disciples, Khu [ston], Rngog [Legs pa'i shes rab], and 'Brom [ston] asked Jo bo whether, for an individual (lit. a single basis) to attain the states of liberation and full enlightenment, it is *sūtra*s and *śāstra*s that are more important or the personal instructions of the lama. Jo bo responded that personal instruction is more important than texts. Asked why this was, Jo bo replied that even if one knew the [whole] *tripiṭaka* well enough to recite it and was a scholar with respect to the characteristics/definitions (*mtshan nyid*) of all phenomena, unless at the time of practice one implements the instructions of one's lama, the person and the dharma will go their separate ways.[62]

This seems to lay to rest any questions regarding which medium and perhaps even approach is superior. However, the remarkable *convenience* of having Atiśa address the issue so directly and stating his response so unequivocally to his three main disciples cannot pass without comment. What is also striking about this passage is its pointed reference (and implied criticism) of those who are essentially "skilled in definitions" (*mtshan nyid la mkhas* [*pa*]), a phrase that seems as though it could have been specially coined for advocates of the approach followed at Gsang phu. Such a reference would, of course, be anachronistic, since Gsang phu was only founded after Atiśa's demise. Somewhat surprisingly, we discover that this combination of words features in Tibetan translations of canonical works. But even *if* it could be established that Atiśa might have used such wording,[63] we might speculate that the author, who was very much in the Rwa sgreng

---

[61] He was apparently an indirect disciple of Po ta ba, who wrote a commentary on the latter's celebrated *Dpe chos*. A variety of dates have been suggested for him, including 1124/5–1204/5 and 1140/50–1220. The text in which the passage cited here appears in is entitled *Bka' gdams thor bu ba zhes pa'i man ngag* (2015).

[62] *yang jo bo chen po rje lha 1 dbus su byon dus su // jo bo'i slob ma khu rngog 'brom gsum gyis / jo bo la rten gyi gang zag 1 thar pa dang thams cad mkhyen pa'i go 'phang thob par byed pa la // bka bstan chos kyi gzhung dang: bla ma'i gdams ngag gnyis gang tso che lags zhus pas / jo bo'i zhal nas / bzhung bas man ngag gtso gsung: de ci lags zhus pas sde gnod 3 kha thon du 'chad shes cing chos thams cad kyi mtshan nyid la 'khas kyang nyams su len pa'i dus su: bla ma'i bdams ngag gi lag len med na chos dang gang zag so sor 'gro gsung:* (2015: 498, 2b3-4).

[63] I have yet to locate other accounts of the episode, and am keen to see how they might differ in depiction and wording, and what these might reveal about the slants and perspectives of those who recount them and whether they have identifiable targets.

camp, would not have been unhappy with them being interpreted as if they might refer to the style of scholarship at Gsang phu.[64]

Remarks in twelfth century writings about the text's inferiority to personal instruction and the intrinsic risks of textual study seem to express genuine concern over the growing influence of formalised learning. But they also appear to be well-rehearsed rhetoric, expressing an orthodoxy that even those deeply involved with textual learning seem to have been reluctant to challenge. Furthermore, as we see in what follows, those in the textual (*gzhung pa*) camp appear to have hit upon smarter ways of negotiating the sensitivities attached to reliance on the text than directly challenging the orthodoxy.

Turmoil and ascent:
the formative phase in relations (1085–1160)

Sporadic references, such as contained in the previous section, can be informative about attitudes. But now we turn to a specific period of history. As mentioned above, it was in the wake of Atiśa's demise (in 1054) and the distribution of his remains and belongings that Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu emerged as two major institutions. Atiśa's early biographies generally depict relations between 'Brom ston and Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab as amicable. Following the passing of this first generation of disciples, there is little concrete information about cross-institutional contacts.[65] But the years between 1085 and 1160 represent, I believe, the formative phase in relations between Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu; the time during which the lines between scholasticism and the Bka' gdams opposition to it were drawn. On Rwa sgreng at the onset of this period, Apple proposes that:

> Potowa became the fourth abbot of Radreng in the early 1080s when he was around fifty years of age. At this time the three spiritual brothers became more prominent and the term "Kadampa" became popularized as a reference for those who follow the precepts and practices given by Atiśa and Dromtonpa. Potowa popularized the use of six texts…Additional texts utilized

---

[64] The case for this not being an anachronistic interpolation may seem to be strengthened by the appearance of a corresponding term in Tibetan translations of canonical works. But there are questions about the provenance of this presumed correspondent term (*lakṣaṇakuśalāḥ*). While not pursuing the question of its attestation in Sanskrit sources here, I observe that whenever it appears in the Tibetan translation that is claimed to be of Sanskrit origin, the translation has *always* been made from Chinese, and not directly from Sanskrit.

[65] Roesler says that Atiśa's disciples failed to agree on his successor and "split after a last joint assembly held in 1055" (2019: 1149), but I am unsure about the basis for this report and find no support for it in early sources.

by Potowa included Atiśa's *Entry to the Two Realities* and *A Lamp for the Path to Awakening* (Apple 2018: 22).

Apple paints this period, heralded by the assumption of office[66] by Po to ba, 'Brom ston's disciple, and the 'brother' chiefly associated with the Bka' gdams pa textual-based tradition, as the one in which the main features now understood to characterise the school coalesced. Apple's account ends with Po to ba eventually standing down from the post, going off into meditational retreat, a detail consistent with what appears in the main biographies. Certain later histories appear to support this upbeat image.[67] But some also make reference to the brevity of Po to ba's tenure, saying that it ended abruptly and in controversial circumstances.[68] The histories that propagate this upbeat image depict the event (if they mention it at all) as an isolated one, and report Po to ba's post-Rwa sgreng spiritual career positively. They make no special comment on the chronology of the three brothers' deaths. But if these figures were as important to the Bka' gdams school as later reports suggest, the rapid succession in which their passings occurred (Spyan snga in 1103, Po to ba in 1105, and Phu chung in 1106) would surely have been greeted with some consternation. However, these individual events were part of a far deeper crisis, since when Phu chung, the last of the 'brothers' died, some two decades after Po to ba's departure, Rwa sgreng remained leaderless and total collapse appears to

---

[66] I sometimes use "abbot", although the term in question (*gdan sa ba*) could perhaps more informatively be rendered "monastery head" or "monastery leader". As discussed below, this is distinguished from the monastery's "head/master of teaching" (*chos dpon*). In some cases it appears that certain individuals held both roles dually, whereas in others, the incumbents were separate.

[67] Apple's description appears to draw from the accounts in *Deb ther sngon po* (1984: 328) and also Las chen's history (2003: 429), which indeed mention the popularisation of the name and Po to ba's association with the "six *Bka' gdams* texts" (*Bka' gdams gzhung drug*): 1. *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (D 3940), 2. *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* (D 3871), 3. *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (D 4037), 4. *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (D 4020), 5. *Jātakamāla* (D 4150), 6. *Udānavarga* (D 4099).

[68] Sources that provide details of the circumstances of the departure refer to a clash with and insulting remarks directed at Po to ba by another monk or monks. The common denominator in these reports is the use of designation *Khams* (*pa*) for the other party or parties. Among the histories composed by three authors who appear to identify as *Bka' gdams pa*s, in the *Deb ther sngon po* (1984: 326), this is an individual referred to as Khams pa Sgom chung ba. In Bsod nams lha'i dbang po's *Nyin mor byed pa'i 'od stong* (1977: 308, 51b1) it is a group, referred to as Zhang Chos rgyal, etc., who are all described as *Khams pa*. Las chen's *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (2003: 425) only alludes to the problem, a matter I return to below. A further reference to the *khams pa* is found in another account of the clash, which predates those in the histories, and is discussed below. Vetturini (2013: 115 n.560) notes that there are different versions of the controversy involving Po ta ba. Apple makes no mention of the contentious circumstances of Po to ba's departure at all.

have been a real prospect. Although the *Deb ther sngon po* gives some details, among the Bka' gdams histories, it is the two works composed in 1484, by (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo and Bsod nams lha'i dbang po (and most specifically the latter) that present a fuller picture and acknowledge the calamitousness of the crisis that overtook Rwa sgreng.[69] These two accounts[70] closely match that found in the earliest surviving history of Rwa sgreng (or *Rwas sgreng*),[71] composed by 'Brom Shes rab me lce, probably in 1299, another work that has only recently resurfaced.[72] According to this work, Po to ba's tenure lasted only a year, meaning that his unceremonious departure would have been around 1084 or 1085.[73] 'Brom Shes rab me lce reports that this began a *sixty-five* year break in the Rwa sgreng succession.[74] That the three early biographies of Atiśa[75] chose to end their narrative with Po to ba's departure from Rwa sgreng, giving no hint of a crisis, is surely no coincidence.[76]

'Brom Shes rab me lce says that just one or two years after Po to ba's death, reports of Rwa sgreng's sad decline reached Mtha' bzhi sgom pa (d.u.), a disciple of the 'three brothers', and that he travelled there

---

[69] Davidson's reference to problems arising after Po to ba's tenure (2005: 279) derives from his reading of later Bka' gdams histories. But the sources that allow us to gain a fuller picture of events have only become available more recently.

[70] See Bsod nams rtse mo (2015: 38-39) and Bsod nams lha'i dbang po (1977: 308-310, 51b-52b).

[71] The author uses this variant spelling throughout.

[72] The full title of the work is *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od zer*. A reproduction of the only known manuscript was published in *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs sgrigs* (2010). Iuchi (2016) provides an annotated edition of the work together with an introduction. As she remarks (2016: 7), the colophon's reference to "wood-pig" as the year of composition might alternatively mean 1335. I favour the earlier dating, for reasons outlined below.

[73] (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo also says that the tenure lasted for a year, whereas Bsod nams lha'i dbang po says that it was either for one year or three. The *Deb ther sngon po* and other histories (including the *Deb ther dmar po* 1993: 62) prefer the longer period (i.e., departure around 1088).

[74] There are many reasons for regarding 'Brom Shes rab me lce's account of this period as the most credible. In addition to being the earliest and fullest description of events, its author is the quintessential "friendly witness"; an avowedly pro-Rwa sgreng party, whose name suggests clan or some other shared group relationship with 'Brom ston. Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, who like (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo, supports 'Brom Shes rab me lce's account in almost every regard, can also be seen as a friendly witness. Why the other Bka' gdams-affiliated authors ('Gos lo tsā ba and Las chen Kun dga' rgyal mtshan) felt disposed to downplay the crisis seems obvious, but even the fragments of information that the former provides appear to correspond with 'Brom Shes rab me lce's account.

[75] That is, the *Rnam thar rgyas pa*, *Rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*, and *Bka' gdams glegs bam*.

[76] It is tempting to see their closing scene of Po to ba disappearing into the wilderness as an image with an apt (and perhaps metaphorical) poignance.

to see for himself. Apparently distressed at what he discovered, and determined to intervene, he set out to visit various notable figures associated with the Bka' gdams tradition to enlist their support. Donations were gathered, woman and animals were expelled from the property, buildings were renovated, new monks were recruited, and the rules of monastic discipline were restored, with Mtha' bzhi sgom pa himself being appointed temporary head. After a long interregnum, the Rwa sreng succession was only restored with the appointment of Zhang 'Od 'jo ba.[77] As remarked by Iuchi (2016: 28-30), 'Brom Shes rab me lce reports that the Tangut ruler[78] was successfully petitioned for help and it was during Zhang 'Od 'jo ba's tenure that a monk-patron relationship was established.[79] The accounts of 'Brom Shes rab me lce, Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, and (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo make it clear that the breakdown was not simply in administration and order, but also in any effective programme of teachings. (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo distinguishes between the two, as does Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, who says that "The interregnum [during which] there was no leader at Rwa sgreng was for thirty years. The [system of teaching] dharma also fell into serious decline".[80] The *Deb ther sngon po* (1984: 326) offers support for the latter, referring to a "Dharma famine" (*chos kyi mu ge*) that hit Rwa sgreng,[81] beginning with the death of Dgon po

---

[77] There are scant details about the identity and dates of this individual. Basing her calculations on the length of his tenure, Iuchi proposes that he died in 1150. She also reports (2016: 21 n.60) that in some later sources, he is named as Dar ma g.yung drung or Dar ma grags. But I believe that at least some are references to other individuals. 'Od 'jo ba is an epithet for those who served as abbot at 'Od 'jo Monastery. This monastery (*'Od 'jo longs spyod kyi sgang*), which appears to have been located in 'Phan yul, was founded by Zhang 'Od 'jo ba's teacher, Dar ma grags (aka dge bshes Stabs ka, d.u.). He served as the monastery's first head. Hence, the references to 'Od 'jo ba Dar ma grags. The *Deb ther sngon po* (346) has a short section on this monastery. It says that one Rong ston kha bo che was the early abbot of the monastery, and that later it was led by a Gzhon nu yon tan. Some later sources perhaps confuse this figure with Po to ba's celebrated disciple, Sha ra ba Yon tan grags, who the *Deb ther sngon po* (1984: 333) says died in 1141, aged 72. The same source says that Gzhon nu yon tan, (the abbot of 'Od 'jo) was born in 1067 (*me mo lug*), and died aged 87, in 1153 (*chu mo bya*). Another piece of evidence, cited below, would seem to corroborate that this figure is Zhang 'Od 'jo ba.

[78] Iuchi (2016: 28) identifies the ruler as King Weiming Renzong (reign: 1139–1193).

[79] 'Brom Shes rab me lce states that Zhang 'Od 'jo ba's twenty-five-year-old disciple dge bshes Gdugs phub pa was the individual appointed in the role, which presumably means he was dispatched to the Tangut kingdom.

[80] *ra sgreng du gdan sa bar stongs lo sum cu dang / chos tshugs la yang dar rgud cher byung* (1977: 308, 51b3). Vetturini (2013: 217) notes the variant *tshul* (for *tshugs*) in some editions.

[81] Las chen, in his *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (2003: 425), also mentions the famine, but is less clear about its causes.

ba Dbang phyug rgyal mtshan, Po to ba's immediate predecessor.[82] It also directly attributes this "famine" to the lack of monastery-head, remarking that the early demise of several abbots discouraged others from taking up the post.

It is perhaps worth recapping how far, within a few steps, we have come from Apple's account of Po to ba's abbotship and the apparent suggestion that he was responsible for establishing a teaching programme that included some of Atiśa's works. Early Tibetan accounts do not support the idea that Po to ba implemented a programme based on the six works at Rwa sgreng, and even the *Deb ther sngon po* makes no such claim, although it does directly link the "six texts" with Po to ba. However, even if he tried to initiate such a programme, it was clearly not successful, because the whole monastic institution appears to have been on the verge of collapse around Po to ba's ears![83]

Due largely to their full acknowledgment of the crisis at Rwa sgreng, the accounts of 'Brom Shes rab me lce and Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, and even the truncated version of (Paṇchen) Bsod nams rtse mo, have a degree of consistency and coherence that cannot be matched by authors who apparently wish to downplay or ignore the crisis, and whose abbatial successions include some major discrepancies.[84] In this crisis we discern the most likely reason behind the campaign to promote the 'three brothers',[85] the probable scenario runs as follows: The crisis at Rwa sgreng was sparked by the death of Dgon po ba in 1082/3, who was likely perceived to be the last in the generation of direct disciples of Atiśa capable of assuming a leadership role. Seniors at Rwa sgreng turned to a new generation, in the form of Po to ba, who was a celebrated teacher, but had an unproven track record as

---

[82] He had succeeded Rnal 'byor chen po (Byang chub rin chen), and the tenure of these first two successors of 'Brom ston lasted thirteen and seven years respectively (Iuchi 2016: 20). Other sources agree that these two headed the monastery for two decades, if not always about the length of their respective tenures.

[83] Practically every modern reference work and popular writing on the Bka' gdams tradition cite the "six texts". The *Deb ther sngon po* is the main source for this claim. And although some reference to this group of works and Po to ba's links with it occur in slightly earlier sources (discussed below), none of them suggest that they formed the basis of study at Rwa sgreng. Apple also claims that even at 'Brom ston's time, Rwa sgreng had a distinct "curriculum" (2018: 20). No clear evidence is provided for this claim and passages in the twelfth century works examined below appear to counter it. There can be no doubt that 'Brom ston, Po to ba, and others taught at *Rwa sgreng*. But it is a huge and unwarranted leap to gather references to teachings on individual texts, then describe them as constituting a "curriculum". For more on that topic see Samuels (2021).

[84] It also seems significant that the *Deb ther dmar po* makes no attempt to provide an abbatial succession for Rwa sgreng, although it gives them for other monasteries, including Snar thang and Gsang phu.

[85] As discussed below, a third, apparently earlier source provides further insights into the crisis.

a leader.[86] Whether he officially assumed the abbotship or merely agreed to act as a stand-in, he clearly decided not to continue in the role, and seems to have handed over responsibilities to certain trusted disciples. A series of individuals were called upon and various differ-ent arrangements experimented with, including a splitting of roles, with abbots of other monasteries taking joint responsibility for Rwa sgreng and their own main institution. But seniors watched, no doubt with growing desperation, as each arrangement failed, and the mon-astery fell into ever deeper decline. Only with the appointment of Zhang 'Od 'jo ba was some success in restoring Rwa sgreng's fortunes achieved, with several of his immediate successors enjoying long ten-ures. But as 'Brom Shes rab me lce informs us, Zhang 'Od 'jo ba himself was one of the 'shared' appointments, since he served jointly as abbot for Rwa sgreng and 'Od 'jo. This detail would seem to confirm the identification for him given above (see note 77). The fact that it was during his tenure that the support of the Tangut king was secured was surely a crucial factor, and *perhaps* created a precedent (if not a model) for future arrangements, such as the Sa skya-Mongol one, by means of which Rwa sgreng was able to regain kudos and a lucrative stream of revenue.[87] The fact that this shift towards new patronage occurred

---

[86]   The histories give the impression that his reputation was gained on the basis of his combining teaching and scholarship with a semi-reclusive lifestyle. According to the *Deb ther sngon po* (1984: 327), it was only at the age of 51 (1078), several years before his appointment at Rwa sgreng, that he was coaxed out of this lifestyle to "work for the benefit of others" (*gzhan don mdzad*). This suggests he had no real background in monastic leadership and administration.

[87]   Later Tibetan authors try, it appears, to make sense of the confused sources they consulted by essentially *constructing* an abbatial succession using the names of those featuring in those sources, even if their exact role in events was probably ambiguous. The *Bai ḍūrya gser po* (1989: 183) by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), for instance, makes no mention of a break, but cites five names be-tween Po to ba and 'Od 'jo ba. In this version, Po to ba is succeeded by his disciple, Sha ra ba Yon tan grags, followed by his teacher, dge bshes Stabs ka ba, before reverting to another of Po to ba's disciples, Dol pa Shes rab rgya mtsho (1059–1131). The author also says that Rngog lo was the abbot preceding Po to ba. The reason for his inclusion in the list is explained below. By fully embracing the notion of the crisis, it should be possible to resolve some of the conflicting accounts regarding the Rwa sgreng abbatial succession. Evidence scattered throughout other histories could also be incorporated to create a clearer picture of events. The *Deb ther sngon po* (1984: 326), for instance, does not present a crisis in the manner of 'Brom Shes rab me lce and Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, but provides some details of events after 'Od 'jo ba. It says that following his tenure, "before too long" (*ring po ma lon par*) someone called Mkhan po Gur ston was appointed, but soon left the post. Follow-ing this, an individual named Rma ston was invited, but declined. However, the *Deb ther sngon po* reports that following an intervention from Lha 'gro ba'i mgon po, he reversed his decision, and enjoyed a successful tenure. Given the Bka' gdams context, the most likely Lha 'gro ba'i mgon po is the figure identified in Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang's *gsan yig* (1978: 52) as Byang chub 'od zer (and

almost simultaneous with the collapse of the Pāla Empire (around 1161) in north-eastern India, under whose auspices the great monastic institutions like Vikramaśilā, Somapura, and even Nālandā had flourished, helping to supply Tibet with religious masters of Atiśa's ilk, seems unlikely to have been mere coincidence. But the campaign surrounding the 'three brothers' helped restore damage to the Bka' gdams

in other sources as Byang chub 'od), the third abbot of the 'Chad ka gsar ma ("new 'Chad ka) Monastery in 'Phan yul, but if so, his dates (1186–1259), would be too late. Brom Shes rab me lce's work has different names for the successors of Zhang 'Od 'jo ba; that is, Rgya 'Dul ba and slob dpon Jo gdan rtsang pa, but the length of tenures (one year and five years respectively) seems to match the account in the *Deb ther sngon po*. Shākya Rin chen sde (*Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung*: 61b1) has another figure, Rnal 'byor Sher rdor (see note 44), taking over straight after Po to ba, but then acknowledges a break in the succession (or record) until 'Od 'jo ba. But immediately after, the account is very similar to that in the *Deb ther sngon po*, with Gur ston succeeding 'Od 'jo ba, and the extra detail that Lha 'gro ba'i mgon po's student, Rma ston, was resident in Klung shod mkhar thog (which *possibly* points to the Bka' gdams Monastery of Mkhar thog in 'Phan po) at the time of being invited. In contrast with the *Deb ther sngon po*, 'Brom Shes rab me lce (2010: 274, 21b5) says that Gur ston's tenure was a long one, lasting fifteen years. As Iuchi observes (2016: 21) he appears to be the last abbot referred to by 'Brom Shes rab me lce. However, a comment that has not been picked up on relates to Gur ston's immediate predecessor, slob dpon Sna ra ba, of whose tenure it is said, "During that time, the devil(s) murdered many monastics" (*de'i dus su bdud kyis dge 'dun mang po skrongs*, 2010: 274, 21b4). The content and language of this leave little doubt that this refers to the Mongolian attack led by Doorda Darqan (*Dor rta*), which has generally been dated to 1241, and which later historians report involved attacks on *Rwa sgreng* and *Rgyal lha khang*, resulting in a number of monastic deaths. The date 'Brom Shes rab me lce reports for slob dpon Sna ra ba's death, *chu mo glang* (i.e., most likely 1253) also supports this. Hence, far from being Zhang 'Od 'jo ba's immediate successor, it appears that Gur ston did not take up his post until almost a century later! That is, not in 1153, upon the death of 'Od 'jo ba, but around 1253, with the passing of slob dpon Sna ra ba. Could it really be the case that the *Deb ther sngon po* (and the *Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung*), either by accident or design (we recall the *Deb ther sngon po*'s cryptic expression "before too long"), have skipped a whole century? Astonishing as such a proposal might appear to many in Tibetan studies, it is one that should be seriously considered. 'Brom Shes rab me lce's account, in fact, refers to two figures named 'Od 'jo ba who served as Rwa sgreng abbots (Zhang 'Od 'jo ba and Dgon 'Od 'jo ba), and it appears likely that they and their tenures were conflated by later historians. But it also seems that the same historians may have conflated two separate periods of crisis in the Rwa sgreng succession, one in the twelfth century, the other in the thirteenth. Whether even a thirteenth century dating for Gur ston's tenure can accommodate the identification of Lha 'gro ba'i mgon po as Byang chub 'od (which a twelfth century one cannot) remains open to question. But this may just be another of the discrepencies apparent in the later histories, since Lha 'gro ba'i mgon po does not feature in 'Brom Shes rab me lce's account. The fact that this account seems to end with the tenure of Gur ston appears to support the earlier dating for his work (i.e., 1299 rather than 1335). The reference to the Mongol raid and the deaths at Rwa sgreng would therefore count as a rare example of a relatively early mention of the event by a *Bka' gdams* writer.

narrative, and the predominant memory of the period (as reflected in the histories) is of the continuity these figures represented rather than a tradition in turmoil.

So much for Rwa sgreng itself, but what should interest us even more here is that Rwa sgreng's decades of crisis (i.e., circa 1085 to 1160) coincide *exactly* with the ascent of Gsang phu, encompassing the whole of Rngog lo's tenure and a major portion of its other most famous son, Phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge (1109–1169), the sixth abbot. That the sharply contrasting fortunes the two institutions experienced were merely coincidental would defy credibility. Again, 'Brom Shes rab me lce proves himself to be the most reliable and informative historian of events, since he confirms interactions between the two monasteries. He specifically reports that Rngog lo was invited to Rwa sgreng to teach at this time. This was a highly unusual if not unique occurrence. Ignoring for a moment what we understand to be the significant differences in the two monasteries' styles, there appears to be no record of any other teaching arrangements or reciprocal exchanges between them. Nor does 'Brom Shes rab me lce mention any other figures being invited to Rwa sgreng to teach. He provides these details: [88]

> Up until that point [when 'Od 'jo ba became abbot], for sixty-five years following Pu to ba's departure there had been no fixed monastery-head and [other] such things. [But] Mtha' bzhi, etc. and [various] elders had [essentially] taken charge [lit. "sat"] in as [assembly-] heads. It is also said that there were no real dharma study activities. At one point [responsibility] was handed to Rngog Blo ldan shes rab, who served as head of dharma teaching for several years. Twice each month, at night, he presided, [teaching while] seated upon a metal stool, [set upon] a heap of ashes.[89]

---

[88] *de yan chad la pu to ba bzhud ting … phyin chad der lo drug bcu rtsa lnga'i bar der gdan sa ba la sogs pa gtan phebs pa* [19b5] *med / mtha' bzhi la sogs pa dang / 'gres po 'dra bas gral mgo' byed yin / chos kyi nyan bshad yang bsh..a' ma med pa de 'dra byung skad / skabs cig rngog blo ldan shes rab la phul bas / khong gis* [19b6] *chos dpon lo kha yar (mdzad) / nub mo me bus pa'i thal phung gi steng na / lcags (kyi) khri'u* shing *btsugs yin zla ba re re gnyis gnyis bzhugs pa gcig mdzad* (2010: 270 and Iuchi 2016: 109).

[89] The credence of these details seems enhanced by their idiosyncratic nature. I am unaware of any tradition involving heaping ashes from where a teaching could be delivered. But whether the mound was specially prepared for the occasion or the 'ready-made' one (i.e. a large monastery like Rwa sgreng surely had a dedicated ash-heap), delivering teachings from such a place strikes one as a ritualised act of humility. I also understand the seat to be a stool (rather than a small, but elaborate throne). In the manuscript marginalia, an unknown hand has added "wood" (*shing*) to the "metal stool", suggesting that he understands this to be a small bench or stool with a wooden frame, probably covered or overlaid with metal. But this clarification does nothing to make it sound any more Tibetan. Was this perhaps a token of Rngog lo's many years in Kashmir, from where he had only recently

If 'Brom Shes rab me lce's account is correct, far from inviting Rngog lo for a one-off guest appearance, senior figures made him the "head/master of teaching" (*chos dpon*) at Rwa sgreng. This arrangement is also attested by Bsod nams Lha'i dbang po. Practical considerations must have played a part in determining the frequency of the teaching.[90] But the symbolic significance of the original and foremost Bka' gdams monastery needing to turn to its junior must have been huge.[91] It seems unsurprising that later narrators of the Bka' gdams school's[92] story were inclined to edit out references to the decades of crisis at Rwa sgreng and the need to turn to Rngog lo and Gsang phu for help. We are left to wonder what impact these events and Gsang phu's eclipsing of Rwa sgreng made upon the latter's community, and whether it left a legacy of resentment. With regard to that, the question that seems most insistent is whether Rngog lo discharged his duties in a manner that respected Rwa sgreng traditions, or whether he used the opportunity to introduce the analytical approach that he was developing at Gsang phu: a question considered below.

---

returned? Portable stools of various designs were certainly used in Indic culture during this time in religious and social contexts, as much to reinforce notions of social standings, as for comfort and convenience.

[90] Bimonthly teaching sessions sounds like a relatively light programme, although the ceremony described surrounding these events suggest these were only the more formal side of his activities there. That Rngog lo could have regularly shuttled between Gsang phu to Rwa sgreng (a distance of close to 100 km as the crow flies) cannot be totally ruled out, but would seem far less likely than the obvious alternative. And indeed there is evidence (see next note) that he took up temporary residence at Rwa sgreng for the "duration"

[91] Due to uncertainty about the chronology, the possibility that this might refer to an arrangement in place *between* the time of Rngog lo's return from Kashmir and his appointment as head of Gsang phu cannot entirely be ruled out. But the assertion that the arrangement lasted for several years makes this seem less likely. Added to which, Bsod nams lha'i dbang po (1977: 309, 52a2) agrees that Rngog lo was handed responsibility for teaching at Rwa sgreng, and performed this simultaneously with his Gsang phu duties, situating this arrangement between Rngog lo's ascension during the 1190's and his death (in post) in 1109. Bsod nams lha'i dbang po unfortunately reveals nothing further about Rngog lo's teaching (or seating arrangement), but he adds another detail about the latter's involvement with Rwa sgreng, stating that for several years, in conjunction with his role at Gsang phu, Rngog lo spent one or two months at Rwa sgreng during the "break in the teachings' programme" (*chos bar*) (i.e., at Gsang phu) (*rngog blo ldan shes rab la phul bas / gsang phu dang sbrel te lo kha yar du du chos bar zla ba gcig gnyis tsam bzhugs pa yang mdzad do*).

[92] Mchims Nam mkha' grags' biography of Po to ba (entitled *Pu to ba'i rnam thar*, contained in the *Bka' gdams gser phreng*), for instance, refers to the time that its subject studied at Rwa sgreng, but makes no mention of him having served as the head. This might seem to suggest that by excluding reference to the crisis when recounting the events of the time, Mchims sought to erase it from the historical memory. But there is more to say on this matter below.

When text is personal instruction:
remarks on Atiśa's *upadeśa* writings

The twelfth century Tibetan writings examined below all take, as their subject, works by Atiśa that belong to a category very salient to the text-instruction divide, that of *upadeśa* (denoting "instruction", etc.). In the Tibetan writings on them, as elsewhere, the two terms often translated as "personal instruction" (i.e., *gdams ngag* and *man ngag*) are largely used interchangeably. But specifically as labels for Atiśa's works, *man ngag* assumes greater prominence, due to being the main translation term for the Sanskrit *upadeśa*. Atiśa was obviously fond of naming or describing his works as *upadeśa*.[93] Five titles from his extant writings in Tibetan feature *man ngag*. To these should be added the *Satyadvayāvatāra*, since within the text, Atiśa describes its contents as a *upadeśa/man ngag*.[94] The provenance of these works is important to our investigation. Based on their contents, details in their translation colophons, and so forth, it seems reasonably certain that *Ekasmṛtyupadeśa*, *Bodhicittamahāsukhāmnāya*, and *Madhyamakopadeśa* were written in Tibet. It is *possible* that the *Sūtrārthasamuccayopadeśa* is also a Tibetan composition.[95] The *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa* appears to

---

[93]   The total number of works attributed to Atiśa is discussed below.

[94]   Four of the five works in the Dergé Tengyur feature *upadeśa* in the Sanskrit title and *man ngag* in their Tibetan. These are: *Ekasmṛtyupadeśa* (*Dran pa gcig pa'i man ngag*) D 3928, *Madhyamakopadeśa* (*Dbu ma'i man ngag*) D 3929, *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭa-nāmamadhyamakopadeśa* (*Dbu ma'i man ngag rin po che'i za ma tog kha phye ba zhes bya ba*) D 3930, and *Sūtrārthasamuccayopadeśa* (*Mdo sde'i don kun las btus pa'i man ngag*), D 3957 & D 4482. The *man ngag* in the title of the fifth work, *Bodhicittamahāsu-khāmnāya* (*Byang chub kyi sems bde ba'i man ngag*) D 1696, is a translation of *amnāya* rather than *upadeśa*. The sixth work is the *Satyadvayāvatāra* (*Bden pa gnyis la 'jug pa*), D 3902. Two other works that probably had *upadeśa* in their original titles (*Yi ge drug pa'i man ngag* and *Bde mchog gi rgyud la brten pa'i rlung gi man ngag*) have been attributed to Atiśa, but appear not to surive.

[95]   The information in colophons cannot be accepted uncritically. Added to which, in general, the details they supply about when a text was translated into Tibetan may tell us very little about the date of its composition. However, when the colophon of a work by Atiśa states that it was translated by Rgya Brtson 'grus seng ge (usually in collaboration with Atiśa), it would seem to be a reasonably clear indication that it is a pre-Tibetan composition, since Rgya Brtson 'grus seng ge, by all reports, died in Nepal (circa. 1041), while accompanying the master to Tibet. When the colophon states that the translation was by Tshul khrims rgyal ba (Nag tsho lo tsā ba), again, usually in collaboration with Atiśa, it seems to indicate the work itself was composed in central Tibet, then translated relatively soon after. The works whose colophons attribute their translation to Rma Dge ba'i blo gros seem to have been written by Atiśa in Gu ge and Spu hreng, prior to his arrival in central Tibet. The colophon to the *Sūtrārthasamuccayopadeśa* states that it was translated by Nag tsho, but the qualification here is that Nag tsho is unusually referred to here as *zhu chen*. This might suggest that he was revising an earlier translation, although no mention of such an earlier translation is made.

have been written in India. Contemporary scholarship understands the *Satyadvayāvatāra* to be a work Atiśa wrote before he arrived in Tibet, but this is a point considered below.

There are two striking features of Atiśa's general pattern of composition. Firstly, he generally chose not to engage in commentarial writings. The only borderline exception to this the *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* (D 3948), although this is the autocommentary to his *Bodhipathapradīpa* (D 3947).[96] Secondly, works within his oeuvre are almost all incredibly short.[97] The vast majority of Atiśa's surviving writings were those composed in Tibet, and he appears to have decided that the short, pithy format, exemplified by his *upadeśa*, was the best suited for his Tibetan audiences. This fact alone must greatly have shaped understanding of Atiśa's style, and it partly explains why those following the Bka' gdams tradition would wish to show their loyalty to it, through emulation.[98]

Turning to the reception of these works, when presented with a Sanskrit religious term, such as *upadeśa*, and an apparent Tibetan equivalent (such as *man ngag*), it is easy to assume that the latter is a specially coined translation. But in the case of *man ngag*, there is little to support this.[99] The Tibetan terms *man ngag* (like *gdams ngag*) carries strong (although not exclusive) connotations of oral transmission. It is

---

[96] Patchy as records of Atiśa compositional activities prior to his time in Tibet are, there is currently no evidence that he was any more inclined to commentarial writing at that stage in his life. But an early list of Atiśa writings provided by Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri, in his *Bstan pa rgyas pa rgyan gyi nyi 'od* (2006: 199-202) refers to Atiśa's autommentary to *Satyadvayāvatāra*. However, no such work is known in Tibetan, and the Tibetan commentators on the *Satyadvayāvatāra* (discussed below), writing before Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri, appear to make no reference to it.

[97] His *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā* (102 folios in the Dergé Tengyur) is his only really long composition. The *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa* (20.5 folios) is one of his few works of medium length, and is also by far the most extensive of his *upadeśa*. Below this, even works such as his *Dharmadhātudarśanagīti* (D 2314 and D 4475, nearly six folios) and *Karmavibhaṅga* (D 3959, five folios) count as relatively long works for Atiśa. But the length of his remaining *upadeśa* really illustrate his preference for brevity. Their lengths are: *Ekasmṛtyupadeśa* (1 folio), *Madhyamakopadeśa* (1 folio), *Sūtrārthasamuccayopadeśa* (2.5 folios), *Bodhicittamahāsukhāmnāya* (1 folio side), and *Satyadvayāvatāra* (1.5 folios).

[98] Whether the *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa*, Atiśa's sole lengthy *upadeśa*, was an aberration or indicates that his conception of *upadeśa* underwent a change in Tibet must remain a matter for conjecture.

[99] The view that *man ngag* and *gdams ngag* are translation terms has, to my knowledge, never been questioned, and the common presumption (e.g., Kapstein 1996: 274) appears to be that the explanation for their origins must be sought in pre-existing items of Sanskrit vocabulary. But even minor probing reveals that these two do not have settled Sanskrit equivalents. A cursory look at the titles of works in the Tibetan canon also tells us that the term *man ngag* was favoured for translating *upadeśa*, rather than *gdams ngag*, as proposed by Kapstein (1996: 274).

not easy to account for this if the term originates in *upadeśa*.[100] An alternative scenario to *man ngag* and *gdams ngag* being conduits for foreign notions of orally conveyed instruction would see Tibetans predisposed to understanding *upadeśa* in a particular way. This would envision a pre-existing culture within which direct, oral communication was regarded as essential, particularly for conveying information of a practical (and not necessarily religious) nature, a culture of which terms like *man ngag* and *gdams ngag* would be expressions. This scenario would see the terms as having been recruited for translation purposes, but some gap in meaning between them and *upadeśa* still remaining.[101]

---

[100] *Upadeśa* has a long history in Sanskrit outside Buddhist writings. Oberhammer et al. (1996: 33-6) survey the early history of a term which, as Hugo (2013: 284 n.38) observes, covers a range of meanings too wide to be rendered by any single English word, but includes notions of "instruction", "teaching", and "advice". *Upadeśa* was especially important in Vedic exegesis (Hugo 2013: 284), and in the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* (ca. 300–200 BC) it denotes instruction on the sacred texts, with the early commentarial tradition describing it as a particular type of determinate speech. Later, Maṇḍana Miśra (660–720?) made *upadeśa* a key component within his influential theory of action, defining it in terms of instruction that guided towards correct activity. The *practical* aspect is reported always to have been a prevalent one to *upadeśa* (Hugo 2013:284). For Maṇḍana, with his overwhelming concern for the correct performance of Vedic ritual (see Hugo 2013), this was action directed towards the achievement of religious goals. In Buddhist Sanskrit writings, *upadeśa* are described as instructions, but with more emphasis on them being *accurate* representations of earlier *sūtra* teachings. But notably we find Asaṅga directly linking it with Abhidharma material, in the sense of being a *summary* of essentials (Oberhammer et al. 1996: 35-6). This latter fits with what would become, for generations of Tibetan scholars, one of the most familiar uses of *upadeśa*; namely in the subtitle description of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (i.e., *Prajñāpāramitopadeśaśāstra*), stressing that it was a condensation of the Prajñāpāramita essentials. Its format (i.e., the list-like succinctness of its delivery) can be presumed to inform this subtitle more than its content or medium of communication. Hence, *upadeśa* has a whole range of meanings and associations (many of which chime with Tibetan understanding of *man ngag*), including brevity and pithiness, being a condensation of essentials, and conveying information for practical usage. But in none of this do we find any basis for the strong association with *orality* that we see in the case of *man ngag*. The imagery evoked in sections of Atiśa's *upadeśa* does, however, have an oral aspect to it, raising the question of whether an oral dimension to *upadeśa* has simply gone unreported. I would like to express thanks to my IKGA colleagues Dr Akane Saito and Dr Thomas Kintaert for the information and references they provided regarding the use of *upadeśa* outside Buddhist literature.

[101] A large part of the evidence that seems to support this scenario relates to an analysis of the terms *gdams ngag* and *man ngag* and their early usage, especially outside the religious sphere. Due to the limits of space, these must be presented on a separate occasion. But the idea that *man ngag* and *gdams ngag* are derived from Sanskrit runs into two obvious problems relating to translation conventions. Firstly, neither term appears to match any known Sanskrit etymology (for *upadeśa*, etc.). Secondly, the first syllable of *man ngag* is also totally oblique (and indeed may not be of Tibetan origin). The chances that translators attempting to convey an unfamiliar

The two *upadeśa* by Atiśa directly relevant to the discussion here, in that they are the subjects of the Tibetan manuscript writings, are the *Satyadvayāvatāra* and the *Madhyamakopadeśa*. What links them is that they both deal with the "view" (i.e., the correct understanding of Madhyamaka). A third work, Atiśa's *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa* should also be mentioned. It shares the last part of its title (i.e., *Madhyamakopadeśa*) with the *main* work of that name. Although, in fact, only a portion of it deals with Madhyamaka, it shares further affinities with the other two, in its projection of a Madhyamaka *upadeśa* lineage. Despite both dealing with Madhyamaka, the *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa* are very different in style. *Satyadvayāvatāra* is a terse, versified expositional work, of a kind demanding, if not designed for commentary. It mentions the names of various schools and scholars, and alludes to the philosophical positions held by them. The *Madhyamakopadeśa* is almost the opposite, with a looser, more informal style and tone. Among Atiśa's works it is unique, in that it is clearly intended as an instruction on meditation, in the form of a guided analysis, directing the reader towards the correct understanding and meditative experience of emptiness, and is structured around the meditation session. Also perhaps uniquely, it contains *no* citations from scripture, references no names of scholars, etc., and Atiśa twice states that in this work he has suspended the accepted scholarly practices of supporting assertions with scripture and reasoning, a choice he obviously made to enhance its meditational dimension.

It seems unsurprising that the direct, more informal style of the *Madhyamakopadeśa* would be appealing to those in the Bka' gdams tradition. Given that it was a written composition, it also demonstrates that the category of *upadeśa* (and perhaps particularly Tibetan understanding of it as *man ngag*) had a peculiar adeptness for straddling, if not blurring the divide between the written and oral spheres. In this respect, Atiśa's *upadeśa* could be seen as the perfect subject for those wishing to advance textual learning among a Bka' gdams community, some portions of which were suspicious of formalised study.

The three anonymous writings
and the background of their appearance

The remainder of this article focusses mainly on key passages within anonymous Tibetan works, the contents of which can only be explained when viewed in the context of the crisis at Rwa sgreng and the subsequent promotion of Atiśa's *man ngag*. The Tibetan works

---

Indic concept to their Tibetan audience would have chosen to do so by creating a composite term with an equally mystifying component seem to be virtually nil.

considered here are, loosely speaking, commentaries on the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra*. Two of the three, the *Dbu ma'i man ngag gi bshad pa* (henceforth UMSh) and *Dbu ma'i man ngag gi 'bum* (henceforth UMB) focus on the *Madhyamakopadeśa*, and the third, entitled *Bden gnyis 'bum* (henceforth DNyB), on the *Satyadvayāvatāra*.[102] These three Tibetan works are anonymous and undated. Their existence was unknown to modern scholarship until reproductions of them were recently published among a host of other works.[103] They appear to belong to the mid twelfth century,[104] that most fecund era in the development of Tibetan Madhyamaka thinking and interpretation, marked by the introduction of the Svatantrika–Prāsaṅgika distinction, arising from the groundbreaking translations and commentaries of Pa tshab nyi ma grags (1055–1145?), who championed the thought of Candrakīrti. Gsang phu scholarship at the time, by contrast, seems largely to have favoured the system of "Madhyamaka [interpretation of the] three eastern [masters]" (*dbu ma shar gsum*),[105] and Phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge in particular was known for his opposition to Candrakīrti. The huge upsurge of interest in Madhyamaka coincided with the decades of crisis at Rwa sgreng. As noted above, Davidson claims that during this time, Rwa sgreng was reduced to the status of Gsang phu's satellite; a relatively common understanding among those who assume that Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu were both Bka' gdams monasteries, and that the popularity of Gsang phu's traditions resulted in Rwa sgreng ceding the field of scholarship to the Gsang phu 'specialists'. But the manuscript sources examined here (which were not available when the 'satellite picture' was formed) tell a different story, demonstrating that certain parties associated with Rwa sgreng wanted it to maintain its own, distinct voice. So, while references to Rwa sgreng

[102] James Apple's earlier work on some of these texts must be acknowledged. He was the first to bring attention to texts within this group and make several useful observations about them, including that they are by Tibetans (in one case linked with Rwa sgreng), claiming to represent the Madhyamaka tradition of Atiśa. He also correctly observed that the title folios of the UMB and DNyB have been switched, resulting in them being miscatalogued in the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*. Apple's *Jewels of the Middle Way* (2018) marks the culmination of his work on them. I have some more specific remarks on aspects of his translation and interpretation below.

[103] Reproductions of manuscripts and the only known versions of these works appear in the first tranche of the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*.

[104] Apple speculates that these are very earlier compositions, and specifically proposes that the DNyB could have been written ca. 1100 (2018: 125). He also conjectures about a number of possible authors. But the evidence I present below seems to establish that this is around half a century too early.

[105] The "eastern" is usually understood to refer to the Bengal area, and the "three [masters]" are generally identified as Jñānagarbha, Śāntarakṣita, and Kamalaśīla (i.e., those who would eventually be represented as advocating a Svatantrika Madhyamaka position).

within the works suggest that the crisis there formed the backdrop to their composition, the authors do not align themselves with either of the aforementioned schools of Madhyamaka interpretation. They agree with Pa tshab, in holding Candrakīrti to be Nāgārjuna's premier commentator, but do not view his interpretation as incompatible with the 'Svatantrika' commentator Bhāviveka.[106] They also present their position on Madhyamaka as uniquely loyal to Atiśa's tradition.

The idea of Rwa sgreng as Gsang phu's satellite also ignores the important evidence in the educational domain: there appears to be no record of a "dialectical unit" being founded at Rwa sgreng during this time, or that Pramāṇa was formally studied there. Given the popularity of both, and the fact that even Rwa sgreng's chief ally, Snar thang, would eventually succumb, the absence of these at the former monastery must surely be interpreted as evidence of resistance to these two key features of scholasticism.[107]

---

[106] Various references in Atiśa's writings suggest that this is an accurate representation of his position. According to Apple, Atiśa "synthesized the teachings of Bhāviveka and Candrakīrti" (2022: 8), and this partly characterises what Apple proposes was Atiśa's "undifferentiated Madhyamaka" (ibid. :1), his "vision of Madhyamaka as Great Madhyamaka (*dbu ma chen po*)" (ibid.: 17). But Vose (2009: 24) shows that Atiśa was not averse to criticising Bhāviveka, suggesting the former was not quite so 'undifferentiating'.

[107] The fact that Snar thang seems to have exhibited a similar resistance, preferring to stay loyal to what those in charge there probably saw as the 'original' Bka' gdams tradition, must have played a huge role in the close relationship Rwa sgreng and Snar thang enjoyed. But as reported in the *Deb ther dmar po* (1993: 63), Skyel nag Grags pa seng ge founded a "dialectical unit" (*mtshan nyid kyi grwa sa*) there during the tenure of the fifth abbot, Zhang ston Chos kyi bla ma (1184–1241), somewhere between 1232 and 1241. In Las chen's later account, this foundation is dated to the time of the seventh abbot, Mchims Nam mkha' grags. But this possibly conflates the foundation with the installing (in 1262) of Bcom ldan Rig pa'i ral gri (1227–1305), as the principal instructor there. The latter's tenure in that position was a very stable one, lasting forty-four years. He was also a Pramāṇa specialist, and as his biography confirms, his teaching on the subject was at the heart of the programme of learning he oversaw at Snar thang. It has been observed (van der Kuijp 2003: 433 n.113) that Mchims' biography of Zhang ston makes no mention of the unit's foundation during his time. This should not, I believe, surprise us, since Mchims cannot be regarded as an impartial (or entirely reliable) witness. As we have already seen, Mchims was a chief editor of the Bka' gdams image, and he unquestionably respected scholarship, particularly in the field of Abhidharma, a specialisation he inherited through his family. But he appears to have held Pramāṇa and scholasticism in poor regard. His own record of the teachings he personally received (i.e., his *gsan yig*, 2009), enumerates several hundred texts ranging over a whole host of subjects, but makes no mention of any Indian Pramāṇa works, although there is a *solitary* reference to instruction he received according the Gsang phu-style "Pramāṇa summary" (*tshad ma bsdus pa*, 2009: 43, 5a3). There are also a number of comments in his writings that betray a disdainful attitude to dialectical learning, which he portrays as clashing with Bka' gdams traditions. The fact that Mchims is reported to have been part of a group that invited Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i

The specific aspects distinguishing the Madhyamaka interpretation represented in the three anonymous writings under discussion will be investigated on another occasion. Here, the focus is on remarks interspersing the commentarial content, particularly in the prologue sections. The majority of the content is clearly aimed at an audience sympathetic with the Bka' gdams perspective. Apple correctly observes that the tradition of Madhyamaka represented in works such as these was "contemplative in nature" (2018: 1). There is a notable emphasis on Atiśa's *upadeśa*/*man ngag* being designed for meditational useage. There also appears to be a *de*-emphasis on them as written compositions, as attempts are made to project them as personal instructions with oral origins. These messages would particularly have appealed to those in the instruction-based camp (i.e., *man ngag pa*/*gdams ngag pa*) of the Bka' gdams, some of whom harboured concerns about an expansion of textual scholarship. That said, some remarks in these works are harsher in tone, and are obviously directed at elements outside the tradition. It becomes apparent, as we see below, that these are *responses* to earlier criticisms about the approach adopted at Rwa sgreng. The value of these responses lies both in the historical information they contain and the testimony to the discourse they represent.

Rngog lo at Rwa sgreng: more than a hint of controversy

Taking into account both what we now know about Rngog lo's involvement with Rwa sgreng and the existence of these anonymous works, the discovery that Rngog lo shared an interest in the two aforementioned *upadeśa* by Atiśa takes on additional significance. A list of Rngog lo's writings, compiled by his disciple and biographer, Gro lung

---

ral gri may therefore seem incongruous, although as recorded in the latter's biography, he had received teachings from Mchims on Abhidharma, a personal connection that is likely to have been a factor. Van der Kuijp (2003: 412) points to a claim relating to an earlier time, made by Shākya mchog ldan (writing in 1479) according to which 'Bru sha Bsod nams seng ge, a disciple of Phwya pa's, had first introduced Pramāṇa teachings at Snar thang, based on Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇaviniścaya*. Just to issue a minor corrective, Shākya mchog ldan's claim (in his *Rngog lo tsā ba chen pos bstan pa ji ltar bskyangs pa'i tshul mdo tsam du bya ba ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mo* 1995) is not that 'Bru sha "founded there a seminary" (van der Kujip 2003: 412), but that he initiated "study of the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*" (*snar thang du rnam par nges pa'i bshad srol btsugs*, 1995: 453, 6a6), which seems a crucial distinction. That said, historical sources are not in agreement on the matter, and what exactly 'Bru sha Bsod nams seng ge did at Snar thang and whether his efforts were successful require further investigation. What can be said is that if the writings from Snar thang and those about Mchims' predecessors are anything to go by, prior to the creation of a "dialectical unit" there some time between 1232 and 1241, while the monastery was a place of some scholarship, the style promoted within scholasticism was not regarded with approval there.

pa Blo gros 'byung gnas (ca. 1040–1120), lists "summaries" of Atiśa's *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa*.[108] The list places *Madhyama-kopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra* together, using *man ngag* as the name of the former, rather than a description of both.[109] Writing much later, in his *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (composed in 1494), Las chen acknowledges both, but also remarks that "The extensive commentary on the *Madh-yamakopadeśa* [we now] see, which is said to have been composed [by Rngog lo], does not appear on Gro lung pa's list".[110] Las chen does not state whether he had access to either "summary", but he clearly indi-cates the existence, in the late fifteenth century, of a larger commen-tary, attributed to Rngog lo, although unfortunately, none of these three works survive.[111]

Rngog lo is known to have written a number of Madhyamaka sum-maries, none of which are known, with certainty, to be extant,[112] but the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra* seem to be the only clear examples of him summarising or commenting on writings by Atiśa.[113] The versified style and relatively scholarly content of the *Satyadvayāvatāra* could be said to make it amenable to analytical treat-ment, either in the form of an actual commentary or the identification of its structural outlines. But the *Madhyamakopadeśa* is a different mat-ter. Atiśa could not have been more explicit that this was material in-tended for meditational use rather than study, which would normally have placed it firmly outside the areas of interest to scholasticism. Whether as a full commentary or a scholarly "summary", Rngog lo is reported to be the first Tibetan to produce writings on the

---

[108] They are referred to as the *bden chung dang man ngag gnyis* in the biography (14b2). For a legible version see the image reproduced in Kramer (2007: 141).

[109] Gro lung pa describes them (see previous note) as "the shorter work on the truth(s) and the instruction". In the early sources particularly, Tibetan authors refer to the *Satyadvayāvatāra* by the "shorter" designation (i.e., *bden chung*), apparently to dis-tinguish it from Jñānagarbha's *Satyadvayavibhaṅgavṛtti* (*Bden gnyis rnam par 'byed pa* D 3881), the main title for which in Sanskrit (although not Tibetan) is the same as Atiśa' work.

[110] *dbu ma'i man ngag la 'dis mdzad zer ba'i Tika rgyas pa cig snang ba ni gro lung pa'i dkar chag na mi snang go* (Las chen 2003: 152).

[111] Although there are no Tibetan versions of these works, there is a text in Tangut language (the existence of which was made known to me by my colleague, Zhouyang Ma) that claims to be based on Rngog lo's instruction on the *Satyadvayāvatāra*. This work, presumably by one of Rngog lo's disciples, is cur-rently being examined by another scholar, Mengxi Li, and I keenly await the results of her research.

[112] For a comprehensive list of Rngog lo's writings as identified by Gro lung pa, to-gether with those on lists compiled by two later authors see Kramer (2007: 109-13, 126). But Kramer makes no reference to the list compiled by Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri (2006: 251-53).

[113] See note 115 for a possible proviso to this.

Madhyamakopadeśa.[114] One reason for the attention he gave to the work may have been the avuncular link, since Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab is reported to have been the first recipient of Atiśa's teaching.[115] But could these works by Rngog lo have been expressly aimed at the Rwa sgreng audience during his time teaching there? As with the content of the teaching itself, the question is again whether Rngog lo's writings on Atiśa's two *upadeśa* would have catered for what we understand to be the Rwa sgreng style, or whether, in the treatment of these works, he saw an opportunity to promote his analytical approach.

Putting aside the issue of the commentary, it is not at all obvious why a summary of the *Madhyamakopadeśa*, a very short and accessible work, might have been deemed necessary, *unless* the approach had some analytical dimension: Rngog lo does not give the impression of being someone likely to summarise a meditation session. The prospect of him having composed these works for an audience at Rwa sgreng is enticing. It does not seem unrealistic to hope that a copy of this work may yet resurface, but until such a time, the intriguing questions about its style and content must remain matters for speculation.[116] However, in another source, we unexpectedly discover a reference to Rngog lo

---

[114] None of the lists of Rngog lo's writings featured in Kramer (see previous note), nor the one compiled by Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri, mention this lengthier work (although some refer to a longer work by Rngog lo on the *Satyadvayāvatāra*). It should also be remarked that Las chen's wording (see note 110) regarding the reliability of this attribution is non-commital. But we can probably exclude the possibility that the work in question was either the UMSh or UMB. Neither fit the description of an extensive *Tika*. It is also difficult to imagine that Las chen could mistake their style and content for that of Rngog lo.

[115] A number of sources also refer to a work on *lam rim* by Rngog lo. Kramer (2007: 113-14 n.180), among others, notes its appearance on Shākya mchog ldan's list of Rngog lo's works, and seems (again among others) sceptical about its existence. But just five years after its mention by Shākya mchog ldan, it again appears, on the list compiled by Bsod nams lha'i dbang po (1977: 380, 87b), who supplies specific details, perhaps suggesting direct knowledge of the work. He refers to three traditions of *lam rim*, distinguishing Rngog lo's from those of Po to ba and Spyan snga ba. Rather than a writing on Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, he identifies the work by Rngog lo as a twenty-folio "clarification" (*gsal byed*) on six stanzas on *lam rim* ascribed to his uncle, Legs pa'i shes rab. He goes on to say the *Bstan rim chen mo*, the famous work by Gro lung pa, Rngog lo's disciple, which is usually said to be the first work of the *bstan rim/lam rim* genre, is an expansion on the two earlier works. Kramer questions the existence of the work partly because, he reports, it is not mentioned by Gro lung pa. It should also be remarked that it does not appear on Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri's list. Leaving aside this issue, as with the *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa*, the underlying assertion seems to be that Rngog lo only ventured into the territory associated with Atiśa and the *Bka' gdams* when the avuncular link justified it or called upon him to do so.

[116] How those at Rwa sgreng might have reacted if Rngog lo subjected the *Madhyama-kopadeśa*, Atiśa's quintessential instruction on meditation, to his analytical treatment is one such fascinating question.

and his reception at Rwa sgreng, which might count as circumstantial evidence regarding the compositions. Despite the fact that, as remarked above, Mchims' biography of Po to ba made no mention of its subject's tenure at Rwa sgreng, his (Mchims') biography of 'Brom ston shows no such reticence.[117] This work predates 'Brom Shes rab me lce's work,[118] and includes what is both the earliest and most comprehensive account of Po to ba's departure from Rwa sgreng (*Snar thang gser phreng* 196b-197a). Mchims' preparedness to elaborate on the circumstances seems motivated by his wish to defend Po to ba's decision to leave. But Mchims does not set this in the context of the crisis. This goes beyond trying to protect Po to ba from any blame for the subsequent turmoil. Mchims patently (and sometimes clumsily) tries to avoid any reference to the crisis. Mchims also divulges a detail that it easily missed. Namely, that like Po to ba, his two other 'brothers' elected to stay away from Rwa sgreng during the period in question. That is, they appear to have chosen not to intervene in the crisis. Both justifying their choice and deflecting attention away from events at Rwa sgreng itself, Mchims says, "We are reliably told that if the 'three brothers' had just stayed at Ra sgyeng (i.e., Rwa sgreng) the tradition would not have spread as extensively as it has. It is due to each of them having remained separately, as individual lords of the doctrine, that the Rwa sgyeng dharma-tradition has spread everywhere".[119] This direct reference to the "Rwa sgyeng (i.e., Rwa sgreng) dharma-tradition" is also a rare admission that Rwa sgreng's version of the Bka' gdams tradition was not the only one that existed.

Mchims' determination to circumvent references to the Rwa sgreng crisis extends to him implying that the succession in the abbotship was unbroken. He says that after Po to ba (198a), 'Od 'jo ba Dar ma grags took over in the "wood-monkey" year (1104). Tibetan and contemporary scholars alike (as mentioned above) have mistaken this for the much later *Zhang* 'Od 'jo ba, whereas it is almost certainly dge bshes Stabs ka ba (Dar ma grags). Mchims' account of the two decades between Po to ba's departure and Stabs ka ba's apparent arrival is very sketchy, and his assertion that the latter held the post for fourteen years seems unreliable. The objectivity of Mchims' reporting on matters pertaining to scholasticism has already been called into question.

---

[117] Like Po to ba's biography, 'Brom ston's biography (entitled *Dge bshes ston pa'i rnam thar*) is included in the *Snar thang gser phreng*.

[118] Even taking the earlier dating for 'Brom Shes rab me lce's account, since the *terminus post quem* for the composition of this biography would be Mchims' death in 1289, it would predate it by at least a decade, although in all likelihood, it was written well before that time.

[119] *sku mched gsum ra sgyeng kho nar bzhugs na 'di 'dra'i bstan pa rgyas pa mi 'byung ba la / so sor bstan pa'i bdag po mdzad pas ra sgyeng pa'i chos srol phyogs thams cad du dar zhing rgyas par gyur pa yin gsung skad* (*Snar thang gser phreng* 197a5-6).

His biography of 'Brom ston reports the case of one Lhab chung ston, who "abandoned the company of eight thousand monastic dialectitions to go to present himself before dge bshes Ston pa (i.e., 'Brom ston)".[120] This is a regular trope for Mchims: his narratives frequently feature monks who, disillusioned with dialectical study, turn away from it to the 'real' (i.e., Rwa sgreng-style) Bka' gdams. A number of sources confirm that Lhab chung ston (d.u.) was 'Brom ston's disciple. But here Mchims is caught out using the narrative as a vehicle to express his own biases, since he anachronistically imports features of scholasticism, including the term "monastic dialectitians" (*mtshan nyid kyi gra pa*), and dialectical study as a mass activity itself, into the pre-Rngog lo period.

Nevertheless, Mchims' reporting of Po to ba's departure and events immediately following it deserve our attention. He portrays the tenure of the first three abbots as a golden epoch, during which time they were said to be appropriately known as the "[true] Rwa sgreng spiritual guides" (*ra sgyeng ba'i dge ba'i bshes gnyen*). But then Mchims says that when the leadership role fell to Po to ba, due to his age (between 56 and 58 at the time), he was less than enthusiastic about taking up the post, and having only taught a little, became the subject of criticism. Mchims says that the immediate prompt for Po to ba's departure was derogatory comments he heard directed against him by a young monk, referred to as Khams pa Sgom bu.[121] But Mchims portrays an earlier set of disparaging remarks as far more damaging to Po to ba's standing. These were by the more authoritative-sounding figure, referred to as Dpon Chos kyi rgyal po, who Mchims accuses of being motivated by envy. Rather than denoting a secular role, the title *dpon* ("official") was used at Rwa sgreng for occupants of various religious posts. And while Chos kyi rgyal po sounds like an official title, it actually referred to a specific individual. No doubt this is the same Zhang Chos rgyal, mentioned in Bsod nams lha'i dbang po's account of events. Statues owned by this individual are included in Mchims' inventory of Rwa sgreng's holy objects, in a list of names made up exclusively of previous abbots and respected teachers (2010: 199a6). His prominence as a religious figure at Rwa sgreng is confirmed by 'Brom Shes rab me lce's history, which mentions Dpon Chos kyi rgyal po five times, and identifies several major iconographic features he commissioned at Rwa sgreng. The reliquary for his own remains was constructed next to Dgon po ba's, suggesting that he was probably a close disciple. Po to ba was an outsider, brought in to succeed Dgon po ba,

---

[120] *lhab chung ston pas mtshan nyid kyi gra pa stong brgyad brgya yod pa bor nas dge bshes ston pa'i spya sngar byon* (*Snar thang gser phreng* 193b2).

[121] That is, similar to the name mentioned in the *Deb ther sngon po* (see note 68).

so the potential for tension in the relationship is certainly imaginable.

In reporting what occurred immediately after Po to ba's departure, Mchims makes a remark of immense importance. He says,

> Then, dpon Chos kyi rgyal po invited *dge bshes* Rngog lo tsha ba. But it is said that the majority [at Rwa sgreng] were displeased with this, and [expressed this by] referring to him as 'the *dge bshes* institution-head' (*dge bshes gdan sa ba*), and that from that point on, the assembly-head/master (*tshogs dpon*) at Rwa sgreng was known as the 'institution-head'.[122]

The title by which Rngog lo was reportedly dubbed, which references both his credentials as a scholar and leader (i.e., of Gsang phu), may not immedialy sound unflattering, but is clearly intended to convey an unwelcome institutional shift away from the time when Rwa sgreng had been led by "spiritual guides" (*kalyāṇamitra*). It implies that with Rngog lo's appointment, Rwa sgreng was in the hands of someone with technical rather than spiritual qualifications.[123] Mchims' own biases may have predisposed him to viewing the act of inviting the head of Gsang phu into the heart of Rwa sgreng negatively, and to judge it as driven by Dpon Chos kyi rgyal po's envy (presumably of Po to ba). But his identification of this individual's role in the process (which seems entirely credible) supplies us with another piece of the historical puzzle. It also gives voice to an undercurrent of resentment over Rngog lo's involvement at Rwa sgreng that appears to have lingered for several centuries.

The anonymous works' spin on Atiśa's *upadeśa*

While the *Satyadvayāvatāra* only makes one mention of meditation, the Tibetan commentator in the DNyB makes no less than forty-two references to it. This conveys not just the anonymous authors' message that what *man ngag* in general and specifically those dealing with Madhyamaka are talking about is meditation, but also that the *Satyadvayāvatāra*'s   purpose   was   the   same   as   that   of   the

---

[122] *de nas dpon chos kyi rgyal pos dge bshes rngog lo tsha ba spyan drangs pa la phal cher mi mnyes pas dge bshes gdan sa ba zhes btags te de man chad kyi ra sgyeng gi tshogs dpon la gdan sa ba zhes gleng bar gda'* (*Snar thang gser phreng* 197a1-197b2).

[123] Mchims asserts that the designation originally given to Rngog lo was transferred to the title of assembly-head/master, rather than claiming that Rngog lo himself was given that post or confirming that such a post existed at the time. Hence, it is uncertain whether his assertion clashes with 'Brom Shes rab me lce and Lha bsod nams dbang po's description of Rngog lo's role as that of "head/master of teaching" (*chos dpon*).

Madhyamakopadeśa. Relating to this purpose, the first folio of UMSh explains the etymology of the term *upadeśa* by stating that "It is through this brief text that the [meaning/truth] is understood, and one is able to meditate on that [truth], and thus it is the easy means of realisation. Due to this, it is *man ngag (upadeśa)*."[124] The emphasis on how this *upadeśa* is an instruction intended for use in meditation, facilitating swift realisation, might seem to be directly aimed at the internal audience. However, reading the whole section, one notices strong correspondences with the standard analytic framework that opens writings in the tradition of scholasticism. This framework, already apparent in the works of Rngog lo, begins with a classification of the Buddha's words and authoritative explanations of these (i.e., *bka'* and *bstan bcos*).[125] The opening section of UMSh appears to be an *alternative* version of this, in which *upadeśa* replaces these two, and is presented as the ultimate form of speech (and paramount medium of teaching). In scholasticism, *upadeśa* is not a distinct category, and no obvious significance is attached to the name.[126]

It is, however, in the discussion on the provenance of these writings by Atiśa that the authors provide us with the clearest image of their understanding of the *upadeśa*. As stated above, based primarily on references in the *Satyadvayāvatāra*'s colophon, contemporary scholarship generally sees the work as one of Atiśa's pre-Tibetan compositions. But the accounts in some later Tibetan sources, including various Bka' gdams histories, are at variance with this. These assert that the work was composed when Atiśa was in Lhasa, during the final decade of his life. The *Deb ther sngon po* describes the sequence of events as follows: "There [in Lhasa] following the request by Rngog [Legs pa'i shes rab] to the paṇḍit [Atiśa] and the translator [Nag tsho], they translated [Bhāvaviveka's] *Madhyamakahṛdayavṛttitarkajvālā*, [and Atiśa] composed the long and short *man ngag/upadeśa* of it".[127] The colophon to the Tibetan version of Bhāvaviveka's work confirms that Atiśa and

---

[124] *de gzhung nyung ngu 'dis go ba dang bsgom du btub pas thabs sla bas rtogs pas man ngag yin* (UMSh: 318, 1b5).

[125] This section on the "initial statement" (Skt. *ādivākya*, Tib. *ngag dang po*) was already a feature of Indian Buddhist exegetical literature, but the tradition of Tibetan scholasticism developed and standardised its form. The contents of these sections are discussed further below.

[126] This is apparent in Rngog lo's description of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. In his *Mngon rtogs rgyan 'grel rin po che'i sgron me bsdus don* (2006) he gives *upadeśa/man ngag* no special gloss, simply combining it with *bstan bcos*. In sharp contrast with the etymology in the UMSh (note 124), he states only that "Since [this] *śāstra* [is one that] reveals [that the Prajñāpāramita] has the ultimate object/ive, it is [referred to as] the *Upadeśaśāstra*" (*bstan bcos don daM chen po dang ldan par bstan pas ni man ngag gi bstan bcos kyi bshad pa 'di*, 2006: 126, 1b7-8).

[127] *der rngog gis lo paṇ la zhu ba phul nas / rtog ge 'bar bar sgyur / de'i man ngag tu dbu ma'i man ngag che chung gnyis mdzad* (1984: 316).

Nag tsho worked on the translation together, with the former teaching the text to Nag tsho, who translated it accordingly. We can also be sure that the two *man ngag* referred to in the *Deb ther sngon po* are the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and the *Satyadvayāvatāra*.[128] Neither of Atiśa's works seems to indicate that it is an instruction on Bhāvaviveka's work, but the deeper analysis of all three writings that would be necessary to assess what substance the claim might have must wait until another occasion.[129] The more pertinent question might seem to be why *two* separate *man ngag* would be deemed necessary, given that both (according to our authors' conception of *man ngag*) are instructions on meditation. Here we seem to encounter a genuine difference in the conception of *upadeśa*. Unlike in Gro lung pa's list, those in the Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams tradition represent both the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra* as *man ngag*. That is, *man ngag* is not just the name of an individual work, but is a description that may encompass a number. This finds some basis in Atiśa's writing, since in all three of his Madhyamaka-related *upadeśa*,[130] the *upadeśa* itself is not identified with either individual texts or fixed wording. Instead, the concept is a more fluid one: it is a lineage of instruction, transmitted from Nāgārjuna through Candrakīrti. What form it might take, and which portion or aspect of it are revealed on any particular occasion appear to be matters on which the custodian (i.e., Atiśa) could exercise discretion. This would explain how the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra*, despite their differing content, could both be described as *upadeśa*/*man ngag* arising from the same source, although it still does not tell us why two would be necessary for the same recipient(s).

---

128   Given the correspondence in their names and the distinctions in their length, it might seem more logical to understand the "long/er" *man ngag* as a reference to the *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa* and the "short/er" as the *Madhyamakopadeśa*. But as remarked above (note 109), the "shorter" designation had already been attached to the *Satyadvayāvatāra* for several centuries, to distinguish it from Jñānagarbha's *Satyadvayavibhaṅgavṛtti*. Furthermore, the *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa*'s colophon also clearly states it was composed in *Vikramaśīlā* (although the possibility of other versions of the text without this colophon cannot be ruled out). But more important than either of these facts is that the *Deb ther sngon po*'s assertion of shared Tibetan origins for the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and the *Satyadvayāvatāra* is also found in our much earlier anonymous sources.

129   The possibility that the narrative may be conflating two separate, and perhaps unrelated events (i.e., the translation and the compositions) should also be considered. But quite apart from his contribution to the translation, Atiśa's connection with *Tarkajvālā* seems to be confirmed in Nag tsho's *Bstod pa brgyad cu pa* (1985: 34, 17b6), which refers to an occasion when Atiśa taught it at Somapura Monastery (current day Bangladesh), during which he forecast his own death, twenty years in the future.

130   That is, his *Madhyamakopadeśa*, *Satyadvayāvatāra*, and *Ratnakaraṇḍodghāṭanāmamadhyamakopadeśa*.

While the anonymous works do not confirm all the details of the *Deb ther sngon po*'s account, they certainly identify common origins for the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra*. Regarding the *Madhyama-kopadeśa*,[131] the UMSh begins by saying that "this dharma[132] is one that was composed following a request by Rngog Legs pa'i shes rab.[133] The prologue does not state where the composition was undertaken and makes no mention of the *Tarkajvālā*. But immediately following the reference to Legs pa'i shes rab it details an exchange, which is obviously supposed to have occurred after the composition, and for which "the translator (lo tsā ba)"[134] is cited as the witness and source. 'Brom ston and Dgon po ba (i.e. the individual who would become the third abbot of Rwa sgreng) are both mentioned,[135] and the account states, "We are informed that Dgon po ba said, '[What] appears written here [and what Atiśa] has given [us in this text] is the dharma that [Atiśa] explained [to me earlier] in private'."[136] The prologue on the *Satyadvayāvatāra* in the DNyB (again making no mention of a place or Bhāvaviveka's *Tarkajvālā*) describes the process of the text's appearance in four steps: 1. The request (by Legs pa'i shes rab), 2. The composition (by Atiśa), 3. The translation, and 4. The reaction (of Dgon po ba). That reaction is reported in the following terms: "On reading this, we are [reliably] told that geshe Dgon po ba declared 'What is written here is just like the personal instruction that Atiśa conveyed to me [orally]!'"[137] Dgon po ba's reaction is clearly projected as part of the process, and is immediately followed by a remark about the lineage's purity,[138] preceding the passage in the *Satyadvayāvatāra* on the pure lineage of Nāgārjuna's (Madhyamaka) *upadeśa*/*man ngag* passing through Candrakīrti. In both cases, we note that Dgon po ba is essentially verifying the authenticity of the teaching. Superficially, reference

---

[131] Unusually, the Tibetan translation of the *Madhyamakopadeśa* has two colophons, the second of which makes very explicit reference to Legs pa'i shes rab's involvement in the teaching.

[132] While the authors seem to conceive of the *man ngag* in the collective sense, they use the term dharma (*chos*) to denote the particular form of instruction embodied in the text in question.

[133] *chos di' dge bshes gsang phu bas zhus nas mdzad* (UMSh 318, 1b1).

[134] This, we can be reasonably sure, is Nag tsho lo tsā ba, the *Madhyamakopadeśa*'s translator.

[135] Further work on deciphering this exchange is required, a task hindered by the poor quality of the reproduction of the manuscript in the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum.*

[136] *dgon po ba'i zhal nas nga la lkog du skrol pa'i chos de 'di na bris nas snang ba la gnang skad* (UMSh 318, 1b2).

[137] *dge bshes dgon po bas 'di gzigs nas nga la A ti shas gdams ngag gnang ba bzhin tu 'di na bris na 'dug gsung bar gda'* (DNyB 372, 1b3).

[138] *khong rgyud dangs pa de kun la gnang ba bzhin du gsungs ba yin pas* (DNyB 372, 1b3). "He" (*khong*) refers to Dgon po ba, and this line is followed by further remarks about his transmission of the teaching.

to these exchanges may seem to be included merely to affirm the consistency of Atiśa's spoken and written teachings. But in both cases, and especially clearly in the second, what *authenticates* the written composition is the verification that it is the product of a personally conveyed oral instruction. This message that the text, even when composed by Atiśa, remains inferior to the personal instruction, and only gains validity through confirmation that it accords with that instruction, is surely exactly the one that elements of the internal audience would have craved to hear.

These origin accounts for the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra* downplay the idea of them as written compositions, instead highlighting their oral origins. The evidence that seems to directly counter both the assertion of Tibetan and oral roots for the *Satyadvayāvatāra* is contained in its colophon. While not specifying a *place* of composition, it mentions two figures, namely Suvarṇadvīpīya Sugataśrīmitra (i.e., Atiśa's teacher Gser gling pa)[139] and a bhikṣu named Devamati.[140] Based on the references to these figures, contemporary scholarship generally understands the work as hailing from Atiśa's earlier time in Sumatra (circa. 1012 to 1024).[141] The twelfth century Tibetan writings on the *Satyadvayāvatāra* throw little light on events to which the colophon refers. DNyB and another contemporary writing on the *Satyadvayāvatāra* are obliged to pass comment on the colophon, but do this by providing cursory glosses to some of the terms.[142] Making no attempt to explain the combined meaning of the

---

[139] I follow Sinclair (2021: 5) for this version of his personal name. Suvarṇadvīpīya Dharmakīrti, the one based on Tibetan sources (i.e., *Gser gling pa Chos kyi grags pa*), seems more likely to be an epithet.

[140] The relevant line in the *Satyadvayāvatāra*'s colophon is: *gser gling rgyal po gu ru pha la yis / dge slong de ba ma ti btang gyur nas* (D 3902: 145, 73a6).

[141] There is agreement that the two references to the "king of Suvarṇadvīpa" (*gser gling gi rgyal po*) are to Suvarṇadvīpīya Sugataśrīmitra. The identity of Devamati has been more open to discussion. Lindtner (1981: 198) tentatively reads it as a *nom de plume* for Atiśa. But the majority (Solonin & Liu 2017: 154, Apple 2018: 117, etc.) see Devamati as an agent of the teacher dispatched and responsible, in some manner, for overseeing the composition of the work. Due to the reference to these two individuals, the composition is assumed to have been undertaken in Sumatra, although there is no clear picture of why Atiśa's teacher would need to rely on an agent for communication. In this understanding the *Satyadvayāvatāra* is a textual composition, written at the behest of Suvarṇadvīpīya Sugataśrīmitra, for his personal perusal. In this sense it seems incompatible with the version of the origins that identifies Legs pa'i shes rab as the instigator and a group of his fellow Tibetans as the first recipients.

[142] The second work is the *Bden pa gnyis kyi rnam par bshad pa*, which an annotation in the manuscript attributes to Rnal 'byor pa Shes rab rdo rje (who is likely to have been a disciple of Po to ba). The author glosses "dispatched" (*btang byas*) as referring to a messenger, and hence clearly understands that the colophon reveals something about one individual working on behalf of another. But his comments

wording or the event to which they refer, neither work acknowledges that the colophon contains an origin account. The only direct reference any of the anonymous texts make to this version of the *Satyadvayāvatāra*'s provenance is in the UMB, which says, "Jo bo [Atiśa] composed [this *Satyadvayāvatāra*] after Suvarṇadvīpīya Sugataśrīmitra instructed him, 'You [should] write [your] presentation of the two truths in a letter and courier it to me'".[143] Again, no mention is made of the location: the author does nothing to dispel the impression that Devamati was an individual dispatched to Tibet by Suvarṇadvīpīya Sugataśrīmitra to both deliver the instruction, then convey the work, in the form of a letter, back to Sumatra, once it was completed. As we see below, the UMB's author has another reason for mentioning this account, unrelated to settling its exact provenance, although in his reference to it, he appears to confirm that this is the widely known understanding of the work's origin. The main evidence against Tibet being the location of these events is, however, not the mention of Suvarṇadvīpīya Sugataśrīmitra and Devamati, but that Rgya Brtson 'grus seng ge is given as the name of the text's translator.[144] But none of the authors make any attempt to reconcile what appear to be two conflicting accounts of the *Satyadvayāvatāra*'s origins.

One of the main objectives that the anonymous authors divulge in the prologues is that they want the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra* to be treated as an inseperable pair. In pursuit of this objective, they assert that both works share the same origins: the physical versions of the two are not written compositions, but reproductions of oral instructions that Atiśa delivered directly to Tibetan disciples, and both were requested by Legs pa'i shes rab. The authors' projection of the works as belonging together[145] seems partly to be

---

are remarkably uninformative about the context, and seem to betray not a little confusion.

[143] *Jo bos mdzad cing de nyid kyi bla ma gser gling pas khyed dbu ma'i bden pa gnyis kyi 'jog lugs cig yi ger bris la skur dang gsung nas mdzad pa yin* (UMB: 336, 1b4).

[144] As stated above, he is reported to have died before reaching Tibet. The possibility that colophons contain errors is one to which we must always remain alert. However, none of the authors contest the idea that Rgya Brtson 'grus seng ge translated this work.

[145] As already remarked (note 102), due to the presumably inadvertent switching of their cover folios, the UMB and DNyB have been miscatalogued by editors of the *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*. The editors' mistake seems understandable. In addition to the fact that the descriptive portion of the works' title is shared (i.e., they are both designated *'bum*), the UMB, a text that is supposed to be commenting on the *Madhyamakopadeśa*, begins as though its subject is the *Satyadvayāvatāra*, discussing the two truths and the *Satyadvayāvatāra*'s origins. Far from indicating that the UMB's author was given to bouts of mental wandering, this tells us he was very concentrated on creating the impression that the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra* belonged together.

informed by the concept of Atiśa's Madhyamaka *upadeśa*: it is a lineage of realisation-inducing instruction of which both works' contents are expressions.[146] But as becomes apparent in the next section, there was also another reason, specifically related to Rwa sgreng, for these authors wanting to unite the two works.

Institutional responses

All three anonymous works share affinities of perspective, but two of them, the DNyB and UMB, are even more closely related, and will be the focus of the following examination.[147] The clearest evidence regarding the historical context and date of their appearance is in the DNyB. Its author states, "During my time also, the 'three brothers' and their great disciples and their own disciples [in turn] have passed away and their system has declined. And various other systems have arisen."[148] The author goes on to link these circumstances with the decline in the pure tradition of Atiśa's Madhyamaka view. His melancholy observations seem to situate the composition a few generations after the initial crisis at Rwa sgreng, seemingly close to the end of that period (between 1150 and 1160).[149] As remarked above, coincidental with the

---

[146] The author of the UMB (340, 3b5) asserts that the written version is only *man ngag* in the figurative sense, and that the only "actual Madhyamaka *man ngag*" is an unbroken stream of realisation generated in the continua of successive beings.

[147] In what follows, I focus on a number of key passages in the DNyB and UMB. Apple has produced translations of both works (2018: 123-170 and 291-326), but these have some serious shortcomings. Without dwelling on these, I would observe that Apple approaches such materials solely as religious writings, testaments to the unbroken continuity in Atiśa's traditions, rather than seeing their value as historical documents. This means that he fails to appreciate the context of their creation—namely, that they arise from the Rwa sgreng crisis—and that amid the exposition on Madhyamaka, there is a conversation with another interlocutor. This places Apple in a poor position to explain (and indeed comprehend) why certain comments are made and what they are intended to mean. It is particularly obvious that he has not taken the time to analyse the argument in the UMB's prologue section (aspects of which I summarise below). Consequently, his translation of this section in particular is largely incoherent.

[148] *kho bo'i ring la yang sku mched gsum dang de'i slob ma chen po dag dang de dag gi slob ma dag kyang 'das shing de dag gi lugs kyang nub la / lugs mi 'dra ba sna tshogs byung ba yin / jo bos dbu ma'i lta ba ...* (DNyB 391, 11a3-4).

[149] The author mentions no names of individuals known to have lived beyond the mid to late twelfth century. Apple (2018: 124) uses the reference to the 'three brothers' in the passage cited above in support of his dating the work to ca.1100. This is obviously erroneous, since the UMB's author remarks that after the demise of the 'three brothers' (between 1103 and 1106) he has witnessed the passing of two *further* generations of important disciples, which clearly places the work several decades later. Among the notable figures associated with the Bka' gdams tradition whose deaths occurred during Rwa sgreng's decades of crisis, and to whom the author is likely to be referring are Sne'u zur pa (died 1118) and Ka ma ba Shes rab

crisis there was an explosion of activity in the field of Madhyamaka. The DNyB's author states the need to re-establish Atiśa's Madhyamaka tradition, after what he suggests is a time in which it had come close to disappearance. The author particularly makes the point that the pure Madhyamaka view Atiśa held was that of Candrakīrti, and with respect to the unidentified "various other systems" that he says sprung up during the decline of Atiśa's tradition, it is again worth reminding ourselves of Phywa pa's opposition to Candrakīrti.

The most open declaration that these works represent a Rwa sgreng voice is in UMB, where the author directly addresses his prologue to the "followers of Rwa sgreng".[150] The fact that the Tibetan figures mentioned in relation to the Madhyamaka view by our anonymous works seem exclusively to be associated with Rwa sgreng and the Bka' gdams school is another clear sign of authorial affiliation. These figures include 'Brom ston, and Po to ba especially, but as was noted above, Dgon po ba (the third abbot of Rwa sgreng), who is assigned the dual role of verifier and main custodian of Atiśa's Madhyamaka *upadeśa*. And despite the fact that the prologues acknowledge Legs pa'i shes rab's involvement in events, through his request to Atiśa, neither he nor any other figures associated with Gsang phu feature further in what the works say about Atiśa's tradition.

The DNyB and UMB seem to have a shared understanding of the events that led up to the near disappearance of Atiśa's Madhyamaka tradition and what measures should be undertaken to restore it. Reference is made to controversies about the authenticity of certain writings identified as Atiśa's. The DNyB says that many works have "been [falsely] attributed to Atiśa",[151] but were not in fact the teachings of the great scholar, and that they are "not worthy of faith/confidence".[152] The UMB goes further, stating that "A group of the others [i.e., works] that are [falsely] attributed to the lord [Atiśa, are actually by] Tibetans".[153] In both cases the authors are making general observations about a large number of works that were reportedly composed by Atiśa. Neither identify by name those that they regard to be of questionable provenance,[154] but the UMB singles out from the works "just

---

’od (1131) – who are reported to have been Dgon po ba's two main disciples – Glang ri thang pa (1123), Dol pa ba (1131), Bya yul ba Gzhon nu 'od (1138), and Sha ra ba Yon tan grags (1141).

[150] *Rwa sgreng ba'i rjes su 'brang ba rnams* (UMB 336, 1b3).

[151] *jo bo la kha 'phangs pa mang ba cig yod* (DNyB 372, 1b5).

[152] *yid ches ba'i gnas ma yin* (DNyB 372, 1b6).

[153] *gzhan ma tsho cig jo bo la kha 'phang pa'i bod ma yin* (UMB 336, 1b2).

[154] The authors of the UMB and DNyB use the same distinctive term, *kha 'phangs pa*, which clearly denotes a misattribution. But they seem to stop short of an accusation that the works concerned are willful forgeries. There is more on this term below.

these three"[155] among what he refers to as "[those] called Atiśa's short [works]" (*jo bo'i chos chung*),[156] saying these are genuine compositions by Atiśa, a matter about which "there is no need for [contentious] discourse".[157] The DNyB also refers to "just these three dharmas", which appear to be the same ones.[158]

Two of the three writings concerned are obviously the *Madhyamakopadeśa* and *Satyadvayāvatāra*. It is at this point that the UMB's author introduces the account about the *Satyadvayāvatāra* having been written and dispatched to Suvarṇadvīpīya Sugataśrīmitra. This he presents as one of the main reasons why there can be confidence in the work (i.e., because its origin is known).[159] It is not specified what the third work is, but the most likely candidate is the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, which is a short text of less than three folios. Furthermore, doubts about its authorship seem unlikely. This appears to be Atiśa's first composition in Tibet, written at the request and under the patronage of the rulers of Guge, prior to the master's arrival in central Tibet. This origin story was presumably well known, and if any of Atiśa's works are likely to have been widely available in the twelfth century, it is this one.[160] The only other candidate, for reasons explained below, is another short work by Atiśa, the *Caryāsaṃgrahapradīpa*.[161]

As observed above, even ignoring Atiśa's *upadeśa* works, the vast majority of his writings, which he certainly composed in Tibet, are extremely short and generally pithy. It is interesting to learn that the authorship of certain short writings said to be by him was questioned, little more than a century after his death. In 'Brom Shes rab me lce's inventory of Rwa sgreng's most hallowed material objects, he places what he reports were just over fifty texts personally owned by Atiśa (28b5-29a4) at the top of the list of the "blessed objects of speech" (*gsung gi rten*), a sizeable portion of which must have been Sanskrit writings. But the situation with texts containing Atiśa's own teachings is much less clear. It is obvious that no agreed canon of his writings existed at this time, and texts purportedly by him, it can probably be

---

[155] *gsum po 'di tsam yin* (UMB 336, 1b2).

[156] UMB 363, 1b1.

[157] *chos 'di gsum tsam* (DNyB 372, 1b5).

[158] *zer mchu mang po dgos pa med* (UMB 336, 1b3).

[159] The fact that, as alluded to above, the UMB's author uses this origin account to help build his case for the existence of a core set of authentic works composed by Atiśa would appear to confirm that knowledge of the account was widespread. It is also difficult to see how this reference to the account could be interpreted as anything other than a personal endorsement of its veracity.

[160] It is reported to have been composed at the request of the western Tibetan ruler Lha Byang chub 'od (984–1078).

[161] *Spyod pa bsdus pa'i mgron ma* (D 3960), a single-folio text.

presumed, trickled into Rwa sgreng in an unregulated fashion, from different sources over several decades.

One might expect that the most likely objective of these attempts to grapple with the issue of distinguishing genuine works from those of dubious provenance would be that of forming a reliable corpus of Atiśa's writings. There are indeed strong echoes of the discussion in the early *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* by Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, who attempts to create a comprehensive survey of Bka' gdams literature, a point discussed further below. But even *if* the creation of such a corpus was one of the author's objectives, we can be certain that the provenance controversy rumbled on for many decades. Hence, when Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri, writing more than a century later, presents what he claims is a definitive list of authentic writings by Atiśa, he is still reporting on the controversies surrounding what he describes as works falsely attributed to the master.[162]

However, the UMB's author, who gives the impression of being a figure of authority at Rwa sgreng, reveals another purpose, more specifically linked with Rwa sgreng as an institution. Directly addressing the Rwa sgreng community on the short writings by Atiśa, he refers to certain "songs" by him, like the *Caryāgīti*,[163] but says that because these are tantric works, they are "not suitable [as ones] to be listened to and taught in an [open] assembly".[164] He then singles out just these "three works" as the ones that, by contrast, can be "listened to and taught in an assembly".[165] He also remarks that "while there are many presentations of the two truths, for followers of Ra sgreng, it is to these dharmas in their entirety that [we] can adhere".[166] The various references he makes to the "assembly" and the activities of "listening" (i.e., learning)

---

[162] At the end of the list in his *Bstan pa rgyas pa rgyan gyi nyi 'od* (see note 96), Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri uses the same term (*kha 'phangs pa*) as our anonymous authors, which with respect to the latter, I translated as "[falsely] attributed". Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri uses the term liberally throughout the work in question, as he frequently seeks to identify texts of purported Indian origin that he judges to be Tibetan compositions. But as with our anonymous authors, Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri's understanding of the term (*kha 'phangs pa*) seems to be one that accommodates rather than should be equated with the notion of a forgery. Thus on occasions, when he intends the term to be understood in the accusatory sense, he adds the specification that the composition involved an act of "willful deception" (*bslu ba'i bsam pa kha 'phangs byas pa* 2006: 243).

[163] The first is Atiśa's *spyod pa'i glu* (D 1496). The second, referred to as his *Rdo rje'i glu*, appears to be his *Dharmadhātudarśanagīti*, which later turns up in the *Bu chos* of the *Bka' gdams glegs bam* (Ehrhard 2002: 37).

[164] *gsang sngags la brten pa mang po cig yod de tshogs su mnyan bshad byar mi btub* (UMB 336, 1b2).

[165] *tshogs su mnyan bshad btub pa* (UMB 336, 1b1-2).

[166] *bden pa gnyis la 'jog pa mang po yod kyang / ra sgreng ba'i rjes su 'brang ba rnams chos 'di kun bzhin du byas pas chog* (UMB 336, 1b3).

and teaching confirm that he is talking about organised study, or more particularly, he is prescribing texts that should be used for institutional learning at Rwa sgreng.

The information contained in this discussion is extremely valuable for understanding historical developments in two separate spheres. The first relates to the creation of a Bka' gdams canon. In the sixth chapter of his work, Bsod nams lha'i dbang po seems to be the first to make a serious attempt to delineate such a corpus, which he divides into four collections. 1. The "Six *Bka' gdams* texts", 2. The "Hundred or so works of the lord (Atiśa)" (*Jo bo'i chos chung brgya rsta*),[167] 3. The *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, and 4. Assorted Tibetan writings (namely, works belonging to genres classically associated with the Bka' gdams, such as *blo sbyong, lam rim, dpe chos,* anthologies of advice {*man ngag* or *gdams ngag*}, and short tantric works). Our focus here should be on the second (i.e., the "Hundred or so works").[168] Although the conception of these works as a collection is Tibetan, as with the six texts, the contents are understood to be exclusively of Indian origin. As such, the collection has been appended to different versions of the Tibetan Tengyur (see Vetturini 2013: 152 and Roesler 2015: 504 n.29). The works contained in the collection are not all by Atiśa, but it has been proposed that the collection itself might represent "a set of concise core texts that were considered essential within Atiśa's tradition" (Roesler 2015: 504). Roesler (ibid.) suggests that the collection may go back to the twelfth century if not earlier, but little concrete evidence has so far emerged regarding the agents and steps involved in its compilation. Bsod nams lha'i dbang po breaks down the collection into categories, dividing them by genre.[169] He also identifies the work's authors, and ascribes a total of thirty-eight to Atiśa.[170] He furthermore enumerates a whole series of works outside the collection, attributed to Atiśa.[171]

---

[167] As discussed below, there is an important spelling variation in the title. In canonical and other later writings, we see *chos 'byung* rather than *chos chung*.

[168] Bsod nams lha'i dbang po deals with the collection on folios 84a-87a of his work.

[169] See Vetturini (2013: 151-60) for a useful itemisation.

[170] This is far more than the twenty-seven enumerated and translated by Sherburne (2000). Vetturini points out where Sherburne's attributions diverge from those of Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, but does not directly ascribe the *Śaranagamanadeṣanā* (D 3953) and *Cittotpādasaṃvaravidhikrama* (D 3969) to Atiśa. However, Bsod nams lha'i dbang po clearly identifies these as Atiśa's writings, and the count of thirty-eight is based on this.

[171] Bsod nams lha'i dbang po clearly relies on Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri's much earlier *Bstan pa rgyas pa rgyan gyi nyi 'od*. Nevertheless his survey represents a much more concerted effort to create an authoritative classification of Atiśa's writings. He lists many writings (mainly tantric *sādhanā*s, rituals, and letters containing spiritual advice), correctly enumerated by Vetturini (2013: 158-160) as forty-eight, that he (Bsod nams lha'i dbang po) appears confident are further works by Atiśa. He also lists another group attributed to Atiśa, saying that their provenance can, for

Useful as Bsod nams lha'i dbang po's classification is, it conceals the order within which works in the collection are consistently organised.[172] Its first portion is made up of a core set of writings by Atiśa, to which others (including further works by Atiśa) appear to have been added later. The first four works in the collection, which can be regarded as the seed of this core, are the very works mentioned above: namely, in order of appearance, the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, *Caryāsaṃgrahapradīpa*, *Satyadvayāvatāra*, and *Madhyamakopadeśa*. Our anonymous writings never mention the collection of the "Hundred or so works", and quite obviously hail from a time well before the formation of it in its current form. The correspondence between the UMB and DNyB's three texts and the configuration forming the basis of the collection is too close to be merely coincidental. Our manuscript works are surely documenting the elementary stage in the collection's development. For the UMB's author, "Atiśa's short dharma [teachings]" (*Jo bo'i chos chung*) connotes a disordered group of writings, apparently only brought together due to their brevity and claims of shared authorship. Evidently, however, significant doubts remained as to whether they were all truly by Atiśa. The UMB and DNyB combine the *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa* with a pre-existing third (i.e., almost certainly the *Bodhipathapradīpa*),[173] and assert that these

the most part, be trusted, but that he does not intend to scrutinise the authenticity of each individually in his *Bka' gdams chos 'byung* (within which the list features). However, he also names writings on certain tantric deities (see Vetturini 2013: 159) that he reports are ascribed to Atiśa in certain canonical catalogues (*bstan 'gyur gyi tho rnams su jo bo'i mdzad byang sbyar ba*, 1977: 379, 87a4). Bsod nams lha'i dbang po statement that he has not included these in his list shows that he has misgivings regarding their authorship. A detailed comparison of the lists provided by Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri and Bsod nams lha'i dbang po must wait until another occasion. But these sources, combined with references in the considerably earlier UMB and DNyB are witness to the longevity of this controversy over provenance.

[172] The order in which the works in the collection are presented in the Dergé, Peking, and other editions of the Tengyur, and is reproduced in more recent publications, such as *Jo bo'i chos 'byung brgya rtsa*, edited by Bstan 'dzin phun tshogs (2002), is consistent. Vetturini refers to "diverging compilations" (2013: 151) of the collection, and proposes that "inconsistent numbering of works" (ibid.) is behind a discrepancy in the total number of constituents, which some claim is a hundred and eleven, and others, a hundred and twelve. However, Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang's "record of teachings personally received" (*gsan yig*, 1978: 46-51), clearly states that the total number of works in the collection is a hundred and three. Further inspection is required to determine whether such differences are ones of substance or just enumeration.

[173] The regularity with which we encounter the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, *Satyadvayāvatāra*, and *Madhyamakopadeśa* presented as a group in later writings is likely to convince us that they constitute another of the by now familiar *Bka' gdams* triadic schemes. The biography to Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri (2006: 47, 3b), for instance, says that he received the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, *Satyadvayāvatāra*, and *Madhyamakopadeśa* as a triad, from an individual known as 'Dul 'dzin dpal bzang. Mchims' *gsan yig* (2009:

constitute a set of three works whose provenance can be totally trusted. This foundation of authenticity, once established, would go on to serve as the whole basis for the later collection. This would also make sense of the variation in the collection's name. The designation for the collection preferred by later writers (i.e., *jo bo'i chos 'byung*),[174] which unexplainably employs the term that denotes a religious or lineage history (i.e., *chos 'byung*), can be said with relative certainty to represent an act of creative editing. Based on the fact that they were all short and believed to be by Atiśa, the original group of writings were reasonably described as "Atiśa's short works" (*jo bo'i chos chung*). But with the collection's expansion, and its inclusion of much longer commentarial works, such as Śantarakṣita's *Saṃvaraviṃśakavṛtti* (D 4082) and Atiśa's own *Bodhimārgapradīpapañjikā*, some were probably concerned that the syllable originally conveying "short" (i.e., *chung*) might now seem to carry the demeaning connotation of "lesser", so replaced it with one that had a similar sound, creating a popular, pseudo-etymology. The collection is commonly characterised as one that deals mainly with the bodhisattva's conduct.[175] This is somewhat at odds with the way that the *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa* are presented in our anonymous works, where it is argued that they are texts dealing with the view. One might suspect that the *Caryāsaṃgrahapradīpa*, a work that explicitly describes the bodhisattva's conduct, was inserted into the original core group, to support the aforementioned claim. There are a number of such inconsistencies that must lead to the conclusion that the collection was not created as a whole: our texts bear witness to the first of the several stages in its evolution.[176] As to the

---

38, 2b2, and 41, 4a1-2) also refers to two separate occasions on which he received this triad of teachings.

[174] Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang's *gsan yig* (see note 172), for instance, composed in the early fifteenth century, uses *chos 'byung*.

[175] Bsod nams lha'i dbang po, for instance, gives *spyod phyogs brgya rtsa* ("The hundred or so [works relating to] the domain of conduct") as the alternative title for the collection, using the point about it teaching how a bodhisattva acts as his justification (*byang chub pa sems dpa'i spyod pa gtso bor ston pas spyod phyogs brgya rtsa*, 1977: 373, 84a8).

[176] Compilers of the various Tengyurs incorporated the collection as a whole, but differed on how it should be characterised and where it should be placed. Rather than assigning it to a specific category, compilers of the Dergé Tengyur simply appended it at the very end, as a separate volume (D 4465 to D 4576), following the *Sna tshogs* section. Others, including compilers of the Narthang (vol.121 N 4167 to N 4269) and Peking (vol.121, Q 5378 to Q 5480) Tengyurs, incorporated the collection within the *Mdo 'grel* section. The choice to retain the collection as an integral whole meant that in all of the above cases, certain works appear twice in the Tengyur (i.e., once in the *Jo bo'i chos chung*/*'byung* section, and once according to their individual content categorisation). It should also be noted that the number of works in the collection in the Dergé version roughly corresponds with Bsod nams

individual(s) who had a hand in this evolution or even might have been responsible for creating a final version of the collection, thirteenth century writings seem to offer some tantalising clues.[177]

The other sphere that the prologue passages inform us about relates to the actual objective of the UMB and DNyB's authorship. The stated purpose behind the composition of the anonymous works is, according to the DNyB's author, the restoration of Atiśa's Madhyamaka tradition. The assertions about trustworthy attributions may sound (as remarked above) like they preface the creation of a literary corpus, and while the UMB and DNyB clearly contribute to the *Jo bo'i chos chung/'byung brgya rtsa*'s formation, this does not appear to have been their immediate purpose. Instead, the sights of the UMB and DNyB are set upon the achievement of a more bespoke institutional objective. They recommend the bringing together of the *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa* (two works that respectively embody slightly more scholarly and meditative perspectives on Madhyamaka), and that these be combined with a third text, almost certainly the *Bodhipatha-pradīpa*, and that the three works be *taught*. The recommendation is not that the three works be *added* to a pre-existing corpora: no mention is made of the "six Bka' gdams texts" or any other body of writings that are already being studied. This, on the one hand, simply adds weight to the mid-twelfth century dating of these works. They belong to the tail-end of the crisis period, when efforts are being made to bring the decades-long interruption in teaching, the "dharma famine", to a halt. But even if no living witnesses remained to Rwa sgreng practices prior to this interruption (beginning before Dgon po ba's death in 1082/3),

---

lha'i dbang po's enumeration, whereas that in the Narthang and Peking versions matches that of Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang's list.

[177] Bcom ldan Rig(s) pa'i ral gri's biography, for instance, lists teachings its subject received from the sixth abbot of Snar thang, Sangs rgyas sgom pa (1179–1250). Included in a group of Bka' gdams-sounding materials, reference is made to a *Gtsang nag pa'i chos chung brgya rtsa* (2006: 57, 8a). Admittedly, later in the biography (2006: 66, 13a), it is reported that *Jo bo'i chos chung brgya rtsa* was received from another teacher. But in Mchims' *gsan yig* also there are references to *Gtsang nag pa'i chos chung* (2009: 37, 2a4) and *Gtsang pa'i chos chung* (2009: 39, 3a8). Again, these appear among Bka' gdams-sounding materials, although elsewhere, once more, there are references to *Jo bo'i chos chung brgya rtsa* (e.g., 6a). The eponymous Gstang nag pa is highly unlikely to be Phywa pa's famous, twelfth century disciple Gtsang nag pa Brtson 'grus seng ge. But the name could be a contraction of Gtsang pa jo nag pa, who appears to be a twelfth century figure, and features in some sources (such as the first volume of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gsan yig*, 1991: 87) in relation to the lineage of teaching of certain works in the *chos chung brgya rtsa* collection. That *gsan yig* (1991: 89-100) also contains another detailed breakdown of works within the *Jo bo'i chos chung brgya rtsa*, which it says total one hundred and three. *Gtsang nag pa'i chos chung* may yet prove to be a red herring, but the contexts in which its title crops up make it sound like a *Bka' gdams*-related collection. So, both it and the mystery individual whose name is attached to it warrant further investigation.

it may still seem curious that no mention or allusion is made to earlier teachings, especially if these are attempts to *revive* former practices. Instead, the discussion is framed as one about which of Atiśa's works are appropriate to teach. Only now, it appears, has it become necessary to select individual works by Atiśa for the purpose at hand, while rejecting others. The remark about works on tantra makes no reference to precedents. This, it appears, is organisation of a rudimentary order. The most rational explanation for the remarks in the UMB and DNyB is that they are part of the *first* real attempts to organise and create a programme of study at Rwa sgreng, not just from the works of Atiśa, but more generally.[178] This does not mean, of course, that this is the beginning of learning at Rwa sgreng. In the case of the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, it seems highly likely that some tradition of less formalised and probably more personalised instruction on it already existed. But the recommendation that the three texts can be used as the basis for more structured learning at Rwa sgreng unquestionably marks the creation of something new: what could be described as the move towards a nascent curriculum. Most importantly, these remarks clearly are not aimed at prescribing (and in the case of tantra) proscribing knowledge transmission at Rwa sgreng in general terms. They are concerned with what materials are fitting to teach in "the assembly", suggesting that the shift or transition we are seeing here is one towards *public* teaching before larger groups.

A response to what and to whom?

The UMB and DNyB share a number of features. Firstly, while claiming to belong to a meditation-based tradition of Madhyamaka introduced into Tibet by Atiśa, they represent an attempt to inject a more contemplative perspective into the sphere of Madhyamaka commentarial writing. Secondly, the two works share the same institutional objectives. The Madhyamaka tradition of Atiśa they refer to, which it is suggested has come perilously close to disappearance, appears to symbolise Rwa sgreng and its practices. And as outlined above, the proposal that three works by Atiśa should serve the basis of a new form of institutional study among the "followers of Rwa sgreng" obviously constituted part of efforts to bring a decisive end to the crisis that had engulfed Rwa sgreng. Thirdly, the UMB and DNyB share the descriptive portion of their title (i.e., *'bum*). In fact, there are so many correspondences in their argument, the sentiments they express, as well as

---

[178] This point also distinguishes these discussions from those on the formation of *Jo bo'i chos chung*/*'byung brgya rtsa* as a collection. All versions of the collection include texts on tantra, whereas here, tantric works are being excluded from the activity under discussion.

the passages they cite and the language and distinctive phraseology they sometimes employ,[179] that we can be reasonably sure that they were authored by a single individual. The identity of the individual(s) remains a mystery, but Zhang 'Od 'jo ba must be placed high on the list of likely candidates, simply by virtue of being the first head of Rwa sgreng who reportedly achieved success in attempts to restore its fortunes.

While the crisis provides the context, the specific references and critical tone of some remarks alert us to the presence of some *other*, towards or against whom they seem to be directed, and from whom those in the Rwa sgreng community are being encouraged to distinguish themselves. The DNyB's author seems to provide a clue about the target of the criticisms when he likens the decline in Atiśa's tradition of Madhyamaka in Tibet with that of Nāgārjuna's own system earlier in history, saying that the latter was mentioned in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*. He does not cite the passage in question, but it is recognisable as lines featuring in the closing stanzas of the Tibetan translation of Candrakīrti's work.[180] The DNyB's author lists Candrakīrti, among an illustrious group of figures he associates with the Madhyamaka *upadeśa*, as someone who is *against* the conceptual approach. In the *Prasannapadā*'s first chapter, Candrakīrti refutes aspects of the Pramāṇa tradition, designating his opponent as a "logician" (Skt: *tārkika*, Tib: *rtog ge ba*). It is in this respect that the DNyB's author seems to regard Candrakīrti as an especially potent ally.[181] Throughout the DNyB, the author rails against the analytical approach. Regarding the gaining of meditative experience he says that "It [truth] is not something that can be realised by valid cognition that sees the ordinary or

---

[179] For instance, to recommend that the three works by Atiśa be adopted, both works use exactly the same wording, i.e., *chos 'di kun bzhin du byas pas chog* (UMB: 336, 1b3 and DNyB: 372, 1b6). More examples are given below.

[180] *des mdzad pa'i // gzhung rnam dang ni de yi slob ma'i tshogs de dag kyang dus mang zhig na nyams par gyur // de nyid nyi ma nub pas deng sang gzhung lugs gsal po de ni gang na'ang med* (D 3860: 199a 6-7).

[181] In the DNyB passage linking the decline of the two Madhyamaka traditions, the author incorporates a number of words found in Pa tshab's translation (see previous note), although due to the paraphrasing, it is difficult to tell whether he relies on that translation. The author selects the passage in the *Prasannapadā* because he wants to draw a parallel between Candrakīrti's reference to the Madhyamaka decline and that which he asserts has befallen Atiśa's tradition in Tibet. And it is in this context that he refers to the passing of the various generations (cited in note 148). Pa tshab's translation of the *Prasannapadā* (completed some time before 1145) made the work accessible to a wider Tibetan audience, although Tibetan scholarship had some knowledge of the work's contents before that translation. Here the DNyB's author displays that he has knowledge of the wording of this specific verse. This, added to the fact that he seems to choose the work because of its attack on the Pramāṇa tradition, suggest to me a conversance with the *Prasannapadā* that is likely to derive from consulting Pa tshab's translation.

through [relying on] logic: it must be realised by means of the lama's personal instruction".[182]

As discussed above, the UMB and DNyB evoke the notion of faith as the means of overcoming doubts about the authorship of the three short works attributed to Atiśa. But there is an even more striking way that the theme of faith is used to convince and motivate the community to see itself in a certain way, which also gives us a clear glimpse of the unnamed other. Following the title and single line of praise that head the text, the DNyB launches with the words:

> Generally speaking, there are two [categories of] those who engage [in the Buddhist path]. There are those with wisdom, the followers of dharma, and the faithful, the followers of the person. We practice as the faithful and should exclusively follow that person in whom there can be conviction.[183]

The division between these two types of follower, the *dharmānusārin* and *śraddhānusārin*,[184] appears frequently in the Prajñāparamita and Abhidharma writings, especially in relation to the topic of the "twenty saṃgha" (*dge 'dun nyi shu*). Kamalaśīla also made the distinction in his *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā*.[185] All these sources were well known to Tibetan scholars, who regularly referred to the distinction. An implicit premise in most of these Indian writings, inherited by Tibetans, is that the first type of follower has superior faculties. This seems to receive a further boost with the advent of scholasticism, and we see the follower of dharma increasingly being equated with the "follower of reasoning" (*rigs pa'i rjes su 'brang ba*, **nyāyānusārin*), a description that features in the works of both Rngog lo and Phywa pa.[186] It is made increasingly clear that the dharma or logical approach is preferable, and the faith-based follower is inferior. In later traditions of scholasticism, such as that of the Dge lugs, the alignment of that school's approach with that of the follower of logic is total, and the "follower of faith" carries a pejorative connotation. The stages of evolution through which a

---

[182] *de tshu rol mthong ba'i tshad ma'am rtog ges mi rtogs pas / bla ma'i gdam ngag las rtogs par bya ba yin pa dang* (DNyB 373, 2a1-2).

[183] *spyir shes rab *can* chos kyi rjes su 'brang ba dang / dad pa can gang zag gi rjes su 'brang ba'i 'jug pa gnyis las / rang cag ni dad pa can du byas la yid ches pa'i gang zag gi rjes su 'brang ba kho nar grub pa cig tu byed dgos pa yin* (DNyB: 372, 1b1-2).

[184] Tib. *chos kyi rjes su 'brang ba* and *dad pa'i rjes su 'brang ba*.

[185] *De kho na nyid bsdus pa'i dka' 'grel* (D 4267), commentary to Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgrahakārikā* (D 4266). See McClintock (2010: 300) for a translation and brief discussion on these lines in Kamalaśīla's work.

[186] It appears, for instance, in the third verse of Rngog lo's *Mngon rtogs rgyan 'grel rin po che'i sgron me bsdus don*, where it says, *chos smra rten dang rigs pa'i rjes'brangs pas* (2006: 126, 1b2-3). It also features in Phywa pa's *Tshad ma rnam par nges pa'i 'grel bshad*, which has *'di rigs zhes pa ste rigs pa'i rjes su 'brangs nas so* (2006: 426, 196b8).

textual distinction between two kinds of practitioner became identified with specific religious groups in Tibet, with advocates of scholasticism eventually using "follower of reason" as a means of self-identification, requires further investigation. Suffice here to say that even in the twelfth century, the designation's association with scholasticism was strong. The DNyB's opening statement, beginning with the evocation of the division, then inviting those it addresses to see themselves *as* the "followers of faith" is, so far as I am aware, a unique *subversion* of the emblem, and what can only be interpreted as a call for its Rwa sgreng audience to distance themselves from what scholasticism was beginning to project as the ideal practitioner (i.e., one who chiefly relied on logical reasoning).

The UMB, which is equally critical of the analytical approach and the use of logic as the DNyB, seems to sweep away any lingering doubts about the target of these criticisms. Its author remarks: "The Lhasan(s) say(s) to [us,] the one(s) from Ra sgreng, that as far as the view is concerned, [we] put [our] hopes in a deity."[187] Quite apart from the fact that it is difficult to make sense of this remark unless the "Lhasan(s)" is understood to denote a person or persons affiliated with Gsang phu,[188] the subsequent remarks by the author appear to confirm this identification. The UMB's author sees himself as engaged in a discourse with those at Gsang phu. The "view" is an obvious reference to the understanding of emptiness and the two truths. The author's proposal that study of the *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa*, two works dealing with the view, be formalised at Rwa sgreng is responding to critical comments that have been directed against Rwa sgreng. But in addition to this proposed measure, the author also formulates a retort to those at Gsang phu. There are several distinguishable parts to this, all of which are informative. In the first, the author volunteers to defend Rwa sgreng against the disparaging remarks directed at it. His rebuttal of the criticism regarding the reliance on faith begins with the words, "[Well indeed,] for the view, we exclusively put our hopes in the deity!"[189] He goes on to say that followers of the Mahāyāna, who are seeking to realize the two truths need to direct their prostration

---

[187] *lha sa ba ra greng ba la lta ba lha la re zer te / lta ba lha la re ba kho no yin la* (UMB: 341, 4a1).

[188] Due to the vernacular style of the remark, it could be interpreted as referring to single individual or a group. Regarding the first, it should be noted that Phywa pa was born in Stag rtse rdzong, slightly to the east of Lhasa. However, it is reasonably clear that the object of the criticism (i.e., the *Ra sgreng ba*) is not a particular person from the monastery, so much as its residents more generally. The direct reference to Rwa sgreng, the conversational tone of its delivery, together with its slightly unrefined content do not suggest a comment of literary origin. This sounds far more likely to be reporting "This is what he/they are saying about us".

[189] *lta ba lha la re ba kho no yin la* (UMB: 341, 4a1).

and offerings to the Buddha, using him as a witness to the actions they are undertaking. They also need to clear away their karmic obscurations to realisation of the two truths through confession, and make prayers to receive the blessing to be able to gain that realisation. The passage, which is a short description of Rwa sgreng practices designed to bring realisation of emptiness, is virtually identical to one appearing in the DNyB.[190] Rather than evidence of an intertextual relationship involving two parties, this seems to be a straightforward case of a single author reusing his own words.[191] The passages in both works end with the words, "The logical approach is incapable of bringing realization of the two truths". Putting both references to the deity together, it seems that the original criticisms were aimed at an over-investment in deity-related practices. Although this might be interpreted in different ways, the image conjured is of someone praying to a deity, perhaps in the form of an image, for understanding of the view. As such, it implies criticism of an approach that is portrayed as over reliant on faith and is irrational, since the act of praying is incongruous with the intended result. In his spirited defence, rather than rejecting what was likely intended as a caricature of someone praying before a deity for realisation, the UMB's author essentially *owns* the criticism. This parallels the ownership of the "follower of faith" characterisation at the start of the DNyB. Identifying the 'deity' or divine one in question as the Buddha, the UMB's author argues that the act of praying to the Buddha is entirely rational, as he sits at the centre of the nexus of practices that must be undertaken to achieve a result that reliance on logic alone can never yield.

---

[190]   *rang cag theg pa chen po rnams kyis bden pa gnyis rtogs par bya ba nyid du brtsams pa yin pas / de bzhin gshegs pa mngon sum du byas la phyag btsal mchod pa phul la bden pa gnyis rtogs pa'i gags su gyur pa'i las sgrib rnams de bzhin gshegs pa dpang du gsol la bshags / bden pa gnyis kyi don ji lta ba bzhin du rtogs par mdzad du gsol zhes gsol ba btab na de'i byin brlabs kyis bden pa gnyis rtogs par gyur ba las / de gnyis rtog ges gtan la dbab par mi nus pa'o //* (DNyB: 373, 2a6-8).
theg pa chen po rnams kyis bden pa gnyis rtogs par bya ba nyid du brtsams pa yin pas thams cad mkhyen pa yid kyis mngon sum du byas la phyag btsal mchod pa dbul de dpang du gsol la / bden pa gnyis rtogs pa'i gags su gyur pa'i las sgrib rnams thams cad bshags par bya zhing / gsol ba btab na de'i byin brlabs kyis bden pa gnyis rtogs pa las / de gnyis rtog ges gtan la dbab par mi nus // (UMB: 341, 4a1-2).

[191]   Aside from the fact that the two passages use different epithets for the Buddha: *thams cad mkhyen pa* (*sarvajñā*) in UMB as opposed to *de bzhin gshegs pa* (*tathāgata*) in DNyB, little separates them. Both passages also employ the same non-standard spelling for "obstacle" (i.e., *gags* rather than *gegs*), although the possibility that this might is an idiosyncracy of the scribe (who appears to be the same for both manuscripts) cannot be completely ruled out. Another peculiarity that the two works share is their way of rendering the Sanskrit *paṇḍita*. Namely, *pan bi ta* (UMB: 336, 1b5) and *pan pi ta* (DNyB: 372, 1b5).

In a second portion of his response, the author attempts to distinguish Rwa sgreng's practices from those of its detractors (i.e., those at Gsang phu). Indirectly referring to the familiar scheme of Buddhist scholarship's joint reliance on the resources of scripture and reason, he argues that scripture is superior. Making out a case for rooting one's practice in the Buddha and his pronouncements, he says "The master(s) who realised *dharmata*-truth treated the [Buddha] alone as *pramāṇa*".[192] On scripture taking precedence over reasoning, he adds "Whenever the master Bhāvaviveka set out the profound meaning, he advised that it could not be established merely with dry logic, but solely by setting out the Buddha's pronouncements [on the matter]."[193] The UMB's author does not specify where Bhāvaviveka expresses this position, but obviously has his *Madhyamakaratnapradīpa*[194] in mind. The view represented in the UMB should more correctly be identified as that of Bhāvaviveka's commentator, Avalokitavrata. In his *Prajñāpradīpaṭīkā*,[195] he asserts that Bhāvaviveka regularly provides scriptural backing for his reasoning establishing the final view. However, Avalokitavrata makes the point with an extreme paraphrasing of the position expressed in Bhāvaviveka's work, announcing, for instance, "I do not teach that the aggregates are without essential nature merely by means of dry logic of my own devising. There are also scriptural passages [such as] these [that confirm it]."[196] Whatever we make of Avalokitavrata's rewording of Bhāvaviveka's/Nāgārjuna's position, it is useful for the UMB's author, who makes the reference to "dry logic" (*śuṣkatarka*) sound like an unfavourable judgement of reasoning's worth in comparison to scripture.

Kamalaśīla also seems to represent an unnamed presence in this discourse. Śāntarakṣita makes only brief remarks about reasoning and scripture both having a role to play in establishing an understanding of the ultimate, in the autocommentary (D 3886) to his *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*. But in Kamalaśīla's commentary on the work (*Madhyamakālaṃkārapañjikā* D 3886), this is developed into a discussion about the relationship between logic and scripture in this context. And although he once comes close to using the "dry logic" language of his

---

[192] *chos nyid bden pa gzigs pa'i slob dpon gyis kyang de nyid kho na tshad mar mdzad* (UMB: 344, 5b3).

[193] *legs ldan 'byed pas zab mo'i don gtan la dbab pa thams cad kyang rtog ge skam po tsam gyis gtan la me phebs gsung gyis lung kho nas gtan la phab* (UMB: 344, 5b5).

[194] *Dbu ma rin po che'i sgron ma* (D 3854), Bhāvaviveka's commentary on Nāgārjuna's root treatise.

[195] *Shes rab sgron ma rgya cher 'grel pa* (D 3859).

[196] *kho bos rang gi bsam pas rtog ge skam po tsam gyis phung po rnams ngo bo nyid med pa nyid du bstan pa ma yin te / de ltar lung de dag kyang yod do //* (D 3859: 61b2). Avalokitavrata repeats the same formula some thirteen times, simply replacing one subject (here, the aggregates) with another on each occasion.

likely contemporary Avalokitavrata, it is important to clarify his very different perspective on this. He writes:

> Because reasoning produces ascertainment it brings complete satisfaction. [With respect to this] someone could say "Well if that's the case, reasoning alone should be sufficient. What's the purpose of scripture?" [We respond,] it is not like that, as scripture is the jewel (*akālaṃkāra*) adorning reasoning. If one does not [treat it as such,] certain scholarly individuals could abuse one, saying "This is the dry analysis of a logician"[197]

While stressing, therefore, the aridity of logic divorced from Buddhist scripture, Kamalaśīla clearly casts the latter in a subordinate role. He furthermore presents faith derived from ascertainment, and relying on inference, as an ideal. None of this would be music to the ears of the UMB's author, and it may well be that he mobilises Bhāvaviveka (or rather Avalokitavrata's outspoken version of Bhāvaviveka) as a counter to Kamalaśīla. It should also be noted that Phywa pa wrote his own commentary to Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*, which relies heavily on Kamalaśīla. Phywa pa unsurprisingly follows Kamalaśīla in presenting faith based on realisation gained through reasoning and inference as the ideal.[198]

Concluding this portion of his retort to Rwa sgreng's detractors, the UMB's author remarks, "[Though you say we believe that] 'the view is revealed by a deity', [we say,] that deity is Buddha! And it is from his scriptural pronouncements that realization of the [ultimate] state [of things] is generated. It is not realized by conceptual logic".[199] The implication is clearly that the Rwa sgreng community's emphasis on scripture shows that they have their priorities right, whereas those at Gsang phu concentrate disproportionately on the less important portion of the twofold scheme, namely, reasoning.

A third portion of the UMB's response is contained in the following statement:

---

[197] *rigs pa ni nges pa skyed par byed pas yongs su tshim par byed pa yin no / ji ste gal te de lta na go rigs pa kho nas chog mod / lung gis ci zhig bya zhe na / ma yin te / lung ni rigs pa'i rgyan yin pa'i phyir ro / de lta ma yin na / 'di ni rtog ge ba skam pos brtags pa yin no zhes mi mkhas pa kha cig gis brnyas par yang 'gyur ro* (D 3886 87b1).

[198] There are various issues within this topic that require further investigation, including how Kamalaśīla and Phywa pa, among others, gloss Śāntarakṣita's reference to the *śraddhānusārin* in his *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti* (D 3885), and more generally, the association between the *dharmānusārin* and *śraddhānusārin*, their respective relationships with reasoning and scripture, and assertions about the different ways that they are said to develop faith, one of the prominent discourses in the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* commentarial tradition. This topic will be explored elsewhere.

[199] *lta ba lhas ston zhes bya ba sangs rgyas la lha zhes bya ba la de'i lung las gnas lugs rtogs pa'i lta ba skye yi rtog ges mi rtogs pa yang yin* (UMB: 344, 5b7).

> In the *sūtra*s on Vinaya, various [of the Buddha's] pronounce-
> ments were gathered. In [Śākyaprabha's] *Prabhāvatī*[200] there is
> much use of the objection-response [method with respect to
> these. But any such] analysis [determining] whether there are
> contradictions in the pronouncements is settled solely by means
> of scripture. In the Abhidharma commentary and the commen-
> tary to the Great [treatise on] Dependent Relatedness[201] also,
> however much this objection-response [method] is employed,
> matters are always settled by scripture alone. [202]

Further to his argument that scripture, rather than reasoning, must be
regarded as the final arbiter and guide to truth, the author appears to
address a possible misgiving. He states that even when treatise writ-
ers seem to question authoritative pronouncements, they are employ-
ing a *method*, and that such a question always anticipates the intro-
duction of some other scriptural pronouncement to provide a defini-
tive answer. The term chosen by the author to denote the objection-
response method (*brgal lan*, **codyaparihāra*) shows that he is referring
to the last element of a fivefold scheme recommended by Vasubandhu
in his *Vyākhyāyukti* ("Principles of Exegesis" D 4061)[203] as a way of
structuring commentary on passages of scripture. The fivefold
scheme was enthusiastically embraced by Tibetan scholasticism, and
it is regularly cited immediately following the "initial statement"
(note 125). But early scholasticism's use of this fifth element is espe-
cially interesting, with moves made to develop it into a more system-
atic methodology and organisational scheme, applied to treatises.
This is probably traceable to Rngog lo, who applies it in his commen-
tary to the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* (*Tshad ma rnam nges kyi dka' ba'i gnas rnam
par bshad pa 'grel pa*), in which he divides large sections of the text into
"objection" (*brgal ba*) and "refutational-response" (*lan*).

---

[200] *Āryamūlasarvāstivādiśrāmaṇerakārikāvṛttiprabhāvatī* (D 4125). *'Phags pa gzhi thams cad
yod par smra ba'i dge tshal gyi tshig le'ur byas pa'i 'grel pa 'od ldan.*

[201] These two Indian commentaries (*mdzod 'grel tig* and *rten 'brel chen po'i ti ka*) are also
mentioned in the DNyB. The first, in all likelihood is Vasubandhu's *Abhidharma-
kośabhāṣya* (D 4090). The root text of the second is almost certainly Nāgārjuna's
Pratītyasamutpādahṛdayavyākhyāna (D 3837). The commentary could be the
Pratītyasamutpādahṛdayakārikā (D 3836), the autcommentary, which like the root
work is contained in the *Jo bo'i chos chung/'byung brgya rtsa*. But based on the des-
ignation and description of it in the UMB, it seems more likely to be the
Pratītyasamutpādādivibhaṅganirdeśa (D 3995), Vasubandhu's commentary on the
original.

[202] *'dul ba'i mdor yang lung nyi tshe bsdus / 'od ldan du rgal lan mang po byas de yang / lung
kho nas 'gal mi 'gal dpyod / mdzod 'grel ti ka dang rten 'grel chen po'i ti ka kun nas brgal
lan ji tsam cig 'byung ste yang / lung kho nas gtan la phab* (UMB: 344, 5b4).

[203] For more on the treatise's background and content see Skilling (2000).

The UMB's author does not reject Vasubandhu's scheme, but seems to be reaffirming a widely held understanding of its fifth element; namely, that it should only be a two-step exchange. The objection (whether genuine or contrived) prompts a response, necessarily citing a passage of scripture, which provides a resolution. His emphasis is clearly on the nature of the response, and it is easy to imagine that Rngog lo's position, suggesting that the response could be a critical one, more in the form of a refutation than a resolution, might have provoked the UMB's author to make his remark. However, his singling out of Śākyaprabha's *Prabhāvatī* appears to provide a more specific clue. Among Phywa pa's recently resurfaced writings we discover a commentary composed by him on the *Prabhāvatī*. Within this he enumerates Vasubandhu's fivefold scheme, and in explanation of the objection-response element, he says:

> The purpose [of the objection-response (*brgal lan*) exchange] is [1.] to reveal one's own tenet position and [2.] to [allow] future beings to become skilled in the sequential-chain of objection and refutation.[204]

Phywa pa makes no obvious attempt to apply this to the Vinaya context, neither does he seem particularly concerned with hermeneutics. Instead, he equates the objection-response method with disputation practice, going on to describe the interlocutors involved as "opponents" (*rgol ba*). And in what must count as one of his clearest statements about the purpose of the agonistic exercise, he describes the dialectical exchanges of objection and refutation in didactic terms, and perhaps even, as ends in themselves. That is, one engages in dialectical exchanges to show others how it is done. Another recently resurfaced commentary on the *Prabhāvatī* (entitled *'Dul ba 'od ldan gyi tikka*) is by one Brtson 'grus 'bar. Bringing us almost full circle, this is none other than Bya 'Dul 'dzin Brtson 'grus 'bar, the individual so instrumental in transmitting biographical materials on Atiśa that served as the basis for the *Bka' gdams glegs bam*, who was *also* the one who ordained Phywa pa as a bhikṣu and taught him Vinaya. Phywa pa had almost certainly received instruction on the *Prabhāvatī* from Brtson 'grus 'bar, but the latter's commentary appears to make *no* mention of Vasubandhu's scheme or the objection-response method. While a more detailed

---

[204] *dgos pa ni rang gi grub mtha' bstan pa dang / ma 'ongs pa'i gang zag rnams brgal lan gyi 'phreng pa la mkhas par bya'o* (*'Od ldan zhes bya ba'i Tikka tshig don rab gsal*, 260, 6b6-7).

comparison of the two commentaries is required, this one difference in the two works seems to attest to Phywa pa's spirit of innovation.[205]

It seems highly likely that the UMB's remarks about the objection-response method are a response to Phywa pa, intending to counter the idea that such exchanges were in any way adversarial or structured around opposition. If one thing unites writings classifiable as Bka' gdams and distinguishes the brand of learning they promote from that of scholasticism, it is their *absence of dialectics*. Scholars aligned with the Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams approach appear to have a genuine distaste not so much for an analytical or questioning style, but rather the assertive, argumentative, and refutation-based approach associated with scholasticism. An episode clearly intended to be illustrative of this, is found in Mchims' biography of Po to ba:

> When [during the teaching] two monks were heatedly disputing, [Po to ba] gently smiled and said to them, "[As you know] even engaging in a dharma disputation in the presence of dge bshes ['Brom ston] is unbecoming, so are you [really now actually] arguing right in front of me?"[206]

Whether or not the reference this makes to monastic etiquette relating to 'Brom ston is accurate, the sentiments expressed here, about an aversion for formal disputation, and its association with vulgar behaviour appear to have been widespread. Language, as much as content, was also important for those following the Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams tradition. They noticeably distanced themselves from certain terms that became strongly associated with dialecticism and disputation,

---

[205] The *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum* contains two versions of what appear to be the same text, a third commentary on the *Prabhāvatī*, entitled *'Grel ba 'od ldan gyi tshig don gsal byed*. The editors ascribe the work to Sbal ti Brtson 'grus dbang phyug (1129-1215), who they identify as the founder of Skyor mo lung Monastery, and another student of Bya 'Dul 'dzin Brtson 'grus 'bar. This identification is based on the colophon, which states that one Brtson 'grus dbang phyug was the author. But this could conceivably be someone other than Skyor mo lung's founder. More importantly, the text seems far closer in style to Phywa pa's treatment of the *Prabhāvatī* than Bya 'Dul 'dzin Brtson 'grus 'bar's, and includes discussion of Vasubandhu's fivefold scheme and *even* what appears to be the same section on the objection-response method (*brgal lan*) as in Phywa pa's work. This suggests that the author was considerably influenced by Phywa pa's style, which would not fit the current profile of Skyor mo lung's founder. One therefore wonders whether the author was a student of Phywa pa. Needless to say, the issue requires further investigation.

[206] *Jo bo gnyis rA rA rtsod pa byas pa la / dge bshes kyi spyan sngar chos kyi rtsod pa byar mi rung na / khyed gnyis nga'i drung du tshig gi rtsod pa byed dam gsung nas zhal 'dzum yal mdzad nas snang* (*Pu to ba'i rnam thar* 7a1). This passage also appears almost verbatim in Las chen's *chos 'byung* (2003: 46), and the biography is his most likely source.

including "dispute" (*rtsod pa*) and eventually, even the aforementioned objection-response sequence (*brgal lan*). Less abrasive descriptions were chosen for religious exchanges involving those of their own tradition, such as the discourse between 'Brom ston and Khu 'dol reported in the DNyB (383, 7a5), which is characterised as a "[open] discussion" (*'bel gtam*).

Given what they found objectionable about dialectical practices, it seems unsurprising that followers of the Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams tradition preferred to express their opposition to scholasticism in the form of occasional dismissive comments or unfavourable characterisations, rather than sustained tirades or refutations. But statements by later writers, ostensibly talking about the Bka' gdams tradition itself can be particularly revealing. Among a series of succinct encapsulations that Las chen offers in his Bka' gdams history, we find:

> The distinctive features of [Bka' gdams] dharma exposition are:
>   A minimum of objection and response (*brgal lan*), refutation, "dharma disputes", and controversial statements
>   And refraining from [engagement in] bullying expressions of power, self-composed [elements of teaching], and "summaries" (*bsdus don*).[207]

Thus, dispelling any ambiguity about his target, Las chen presents a checklist of practices associated with Gsang phu and scholasticism more generally. It may strike us as ironic that he defines Bka' gdams teaching entirely through negation, in contradistinction to features that characterise the Gsang phu approach.

The theme running through the UMB and DNyB is that what the Bka' gdams should stand for is a total faith in and reliance upon the Buddha and the paragon guide, Atiśa. These are presented as the Bka' gdams tradition's fundamental tenets, contrasting with scholasticism's multivocality, dialecticism, questioning attitude to authority, and claim to rely on logic more than scripture. What is less clear is whether any of the remarks in the UMB and DNyB are accusatory in tone. That is, whether they are intended not just to demonstrate how true to the original Bka' gdams message those at Rwa sgreng have remained, but how far from it they feel those at Gsang phu have wandered. From the UMB's many references to the "deity" (*lha*), we can be reasonably sure that this term featured in the criticisms of Rwa sgreng to which the author responds. And while he always glosses "deity" as the Buddha, we should not forget Atiśa's unusual epithet, the "singular divine one" (*lha cig*). Thus, it is at least possible that the author's repeated use of

---

[207] *chos bshad kyi khyad par ni / brgal lan sun 'byin chos dmag zer mchu nyung / dbang za rang gzo bsdus don mi mdzad cing* (2003: 46).

the term is intended as a coded reference to Atiśa, the deity from whom those in the Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams tradition received instruction on the view, through his *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa*.

Conclusions

This article places a spotlight on the period spanning just over a century following Atiśa's death (in 1054), which must be regarded as one of the most formative eras for Tibetan religious Buddhist traditions. Those who invited Atiśa to Tibet had looked southward to Buddhist masters and institutions in north-eastern India, and approached them in a supplicatory fashion for guidance. But his passing could be seen as ushering in a new era, within which Tibetan figures, such as 'Brom ston, 'Khon Dkon mchog rgyal po (1034–1102), and Sgam po pa, who would later be identified as the founders of new schools, flourished, and native forms of institutionalised monasticism were first expressed and gained a firm foothold. By the end of the century in question, with the Pāla Empire spiralling into decline, increasingly self-reliant Tibetan religious traditions were assertively being exported to the Tangut state.[208]

When later Tibetan historians began describing the first stages in the evolution of these new schools, their accounts reflected the spirit of expansion that prevailed in those times, but they were also premised on the notion of continuity: they proposed that each school, from the time of its inception, had certain practices and principles that lay at its heart. And as is particularly apparent in the Bka' gdams histories, these schools were also portrayed as being circumscribed by unambiguous borders of faith and resting upon solid, monumental institutions. Hence, the Bka' gdams pa (i.e., followers of the Bka' gdams tradition) were both united and defined by a common purpose, and they looked to Rwa sgreng as their stable centre. These authors were less inclined to dwell on (or sometimes even admit) the stuttering progress, setbacks, and upheaval that almost inevitably characterise the formation of religious systems. And they categorically did *not* acknowledge that religious identities might be flexible and formed through processes of negotiation.

The first image of the Bka' gdams identified at the beginning of this article is largely faithful to this vision. It presents a schematic and highly edited view of the Bka' gdams tradition that easily lends itself to idealisation. In terms particularly of the continuity and homogeneity it projects, it cannot be regarded as historically realistic. The second, less prescriptive image of the Bka' gdams escapes this fault. Its more

---

[208] For more on this topic see Zhouyang Ma (2023).

heterogeneous notion of the Bka' gdams has the ring of historical cred-
ibility, and for investigating the evolution of practices during the cen-
tury or so in question, it seems sensible to remain open to the idea that
we may be dealing with multiple interpretations of Atiśa's traditions,
and even different versions of Bka' gdams. However, the manner in
which this more inclusive understanding of the Bka' gdams is being
applied requires scrutiny. From the late twelfth century onwards we
begin to see clear written evidence of claims to belong to a Bka' gdams
tradition. These are expressed in terms of personal compositions and
in contemporary records (in biographies and catalogues of teachings
received, etc.). Thus, there are clear historical grounds for classifying
particular individuals as Bka' gdams pa and certain institutions as Bka'
gdams monasteries. But prior to this, the only real referent for these
classifications is the first generation of Atiśa's disciples. Hence, Gsang
phu is classified as a Bka' gdams institution purely on the grounds that
its founder, Legs pa'i shes rab, was a principal disciple of Atiśa. Such
references to a Bka' gdams tradition and institutions during the first
generation are, strictly speaking, inaccurate. Even the most pro-Bka'
gdams historians, including 'Gos lo tsā ba and Las chen, acknowledge
that a tradition identifying and referring to itself as Bka' gdams only
truly emerged during Po to ba's time. This admission that the Bka'
gdams tradition did not truly materialise until several decades after
'Brom ston's death, rare that it is, deserves to be taken seriously. It
could, however, well be argued that in the case of founder figures in
particular, there should be a historical dispensation for such anachro-
nisms. Nāgārjuna may not have declared himself to be the founder of
the Madhyamaka school, but that need not totally invalidate the claim
that he should be described as such, retrospectively. Equally, while it
may not be historically correct to refer to Gsang phu as a Bka' gdams
monastery during Legs pa'i shes rab's time, even sticklers for historical
accuracy may be prepared to let it pass without comment.

However, in the present case, by the second generation, with Rngog
lo's ascension, Gsang phu was undoubtedly launched on a separate
trajectory from the tradition that was developing among those at Rwa
sgreng, who identified with 'Brom ston, and were perhaps already us-
ing the designation Bka' gdams to distinguish their tradition from oth-
ers. The contents of the manuscript sources examined in this article tell
their own story about the period in question, and the findings pre-
sented here will necessarily be new to those who have grown accus-
tomed to referring to Gsang phu as a Bka' gdams monastery. But the
separation between the Gsang phu and Bka' gdams traditions is one
about which *later* Tibetan historians could hardly have been clearer.
As set out in this article, the Bka' gdams histories overwhelmingly pre-
sent Gsang phu and its traditions as *independent* of the Bka' gdams

school. Since most of these histories have been widely available for many decades, and in the case of the *Deb ther sngon po*, even in English translation, what explains the increasing contemporary practice of describing Gsang phu as a Bka' gdams monastery? It is surely not based upon the findings of any historical research. The suspicion must be that a growing appetite for historical simplification and an impatience with nuance is to blame here. The Gsang phu identity is placed in the Bka' gdams category largely as a matter of convenience, and especially by those who believe that in the twelfth century as much as the twenty-first, Tibetan Buddhist traditions must belong to one of four categories (i.e., those of the four main schools).

What later historians say about Gsang phu and its relation to the Bka' gdams tradition should be counted as significant, but for the definitive word on whether Gsang phu was a Bka' gdams monastery we must turn to the recently resurfaced manuscript sources. The issue is one of *self-identification*. That is, did those from Gsang phu think and talk of their monastery, practices, and themselves as Bka' gdams (pa)? While it must be acknowledged that these manuscript sources are limited in their range and that the analysis of their contents is still at a relatively early stage, the works by early Gsang phu writers have thus far yielded no mentions of the Bka' gdams tradition, let alone claims to follow it. The absence of references to Atiśa's traditions is also somewhat deafening.[209]

In the present case, it is fortunate that the combination of the early manuscript sources and some later more candid historical witnesses allows us to uncover much, not just about the split between Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu, but also the formation of their respective traditions. Absolutely central to an understanding of events is the succession crisis at Rwa sgreng. Before considering Gsang phu, it is briefly worth reflecting on what the crisis tells us about Rwa sgreng's place within the wider Bka' gdams tradition. The fact that Rwa sgreng was able to call upon a relatively large number of monasteries, with whom it apparently shared the notion of a religious affiliation, reminds us of the extent of the Bka' gdams network. It also suggests that the crisis was localised to Rwa sgreng: these other monasteries were in a position to respond to the appeals, and even 'lend out' some of their top figures, seeming to demonstrate that they remained viable institutions through the decades of *Rwa sgreng*'s crisis. This fact alone should

---

[209] In the sense that they can only be based on the sources and evidence currently available, judgements in this area are provisional. The materials in the early manuscripts are disproportionally intellectual in content (i.e., they are primarily commentarial writings and "summaries"). Liturgical writings, auto-biographical materials, personal letters, and so forth, should they ever emerge, may offer another perspective.

discourage any sense that Rwa sgreng's fate can necessarily be equated with that of the wider Bka' gdams tradition. By the middle of the twelfth century, this network already encompassed a considerable number of dispersed, independent or semi-independent monasteries, to say nothing of what we can assume was a large proportion of committed individuals outside the monastic system. Since neither Rwa sgreng nor any other single authority actively controlled religious expression in this network, it seems safe to infer that it harboured a greater interpretational range of Atiśa's traditions than the unified vision projected in later sources would have us believe.

Up until the time of the crisis, while Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu were the two main monasteries founded by Atiśa's followers, Rwa sgreng was the clear senior. Differences first began to surface when Rngog lo succeeded his uncle at Gsang phu, but initially, these were not pronounced enough to prevent those at Rwa sgreng turning to Gsang phu, in the form of Rngog lo, during the former's hour of need. Controversies surrounded the start of the crisis and Rngog lo's involvement with Rwa sgreng. There was the dispute that prompted Po to ba's departure and what now appears to be the curious decision of all 'three brothers' to avoid the monastery during the crisis. And while 'Brom Shes rab me lce and Bsod nam lha'i dbang po report Rngog lo's involvement in positive terms, a slightly earlier historical witness (namely, Mchims Nam mkha' grags), depicts the appointment as an unwelcome intervention by one dpon Chos kyi rgyal po, who is accused of being motivated by envy. Mchims also says that the appointment itself was not well received at Rwa sgreng. He cannot be regarded as an impartial witness, and it seems quite possible that the real 'crime' he felt Dpon Chos kyi rgyal po was guilty of was that of directly exposing Rwa sgreng to the influence of Gsang phu's analytical traditions. Although Rngog lo's writings on Atiśa's *upadeśa* works are not extant, the mere fact that he composed them seems highly likely to be linked with his time at Rwa sgreng, where it is easy to imagine that a scholastic slant on the *upadeśa* would not have been well received. But whether it was due to individuals representing Gsang phu taking advantage of the crisis by seeking to convert those at Rwa sgreng to the analytical approach they were developing, or simply the painful awareness among those at Rwa sgreng that Gsang phu's brand thrived while its own languished, as the DNyB and UMB appear to attest, the crisis leaves a legacy of resentment.

Whatever role in the divide the crisis played, the main difference between Rwa sgreng and Gsang phu was undoubtedly over their opposing attitudes to scholasticism. In the language of the DNyB, this was quite literally a divide between "faith" and "reason". And while this is glossed as differing approaches to gaining experience of

ultimate truth, the disagreement seems to be a wideranging one over the methods and practices promoted within scholasticism, and a genuine disapproval of dialectics and disputation among followers of the Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams tradition.

Finally, I return to my argument about the constructive role of early scholasticism in the creation of religious identities and in shaping the Tibetan religious landscape. This article has identified some clear examples of historical editorship of the Bka' gdams image. Much of this was necessitated by the crisis at Rwa sgreng. But by the time that the Bka' gdams histories begin to appear, damage to the narrative of continuity in the tradition appears largely to have been repaired. The biographies of Atiśa, with their promotion of the 'three brothers', seem to have played no small part in this. From the mid-fourteenth century, Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams and Gsang phu traditions are mainly represented as separate and independent of each other, and any overt signs of tensions in their relationship have been banished. But the idea that at the time of the crisis, both traditions were fully formed, and particulary that the Rwa sgreng community were already unified by a distinct approach that was implacably opposed to the new analytical practices of scholasticism seems untenable, especially in light of Rngog lo's apparently lengthy engagement there. However, by the end of the crisis, this situation had changed. The UMB and DNyB represent important and perhaps unique historical records of the emerging Rwa sgreng-Bka' gdams identity and the way it was being developed in *contradistinction* to that of the "followers of reason" at Gsang phu. In terms of their subject matter, the two works mark attempts to create a distinct commentarial voice, with a meditative perspective, which seems intended to counter the predominating intellectual approach that had been championed by Gsang phu authors. They use Atiśa's *upadeśa/man ngag* as the vehicle for this meditative perspective, presenting these works less as written compositions than expressions of personalised, oral instructions.

In the discourse interspersing the Madhyamaka content, the followers of the Rwa sgreng tradition are also encouraged to distance themselves from scholasticism, together with the identity and practices associated with it. The works not only directly respond to criticisms of the Rwa sgreng approach, but take the opportunity to set out what defines this approach, describing, from a number of angles, what distinguishes it from that of the logicians at Gsang phu. But most crucially of all, as part of the response, the works propose the implementation of practical measures. These are presented as steps towards the *restoration* of Atiśa's Madhyamaka tradition, but this is a thin disguise for what is patently the introduction of new elements, intended to formalise and organise learning at Rwa sgreng. We can be certain, both from

the context of their introduction and the form they take, that these measures were inspired by the Gsang phu innovations in the field of curricula and public teaching. Since by the time of the UMB and DNyB's composition (most likely between 1150 and 1160) Gsang phu's groundbreaking model of learning was proving immensely popular, it also seems reasonably clear that a programme of study that placed Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa*, *Satyadvayāvatāra* and *Madhyamakopadeśa* at its core was intended as an alternative and perhaps rival to the style of learning at Gsang phu. There is, as yet, no clear evidence regarding the implementation and success of this proposed programme of study at Rwa sgreng, although the decades of stability there from the 1150s onwards were obviously due to organisational improvements, and a new programme of teaching does appear to have ended the decades of "dharma famine". The UMB and DNyB also represent the earliest evidence of efforts to combine the aforementioned *upadeśa*/*man ngag* to form a triad for didactic purposes. As numerous biographies and records of teaching from later centuries attest, this proved a resounding success, and teaching this triad become a widespread and enduring practice.

Hitherto, the rise of Tibetan scholasticism has mainly been understood in terms of its most tangible manifestations; namely, in the foundation by Gsang phu scholars of satellite institutions and the adoption of Gsang phu-style scholastic curricula and "dialectical units" in monasteries unaffiliated with Gsang phu. With the reappearance of early manuscript sources and the refining of techniques used to analyse them there is the potential for the rediscovery of early intertextual discourses informing us about other aspects of scholasticism's impact. As the UMB and DNyB certainly demonstrate, and the anti-*pramāṇa* rhetoric that developed in some quarters may also indicate, responses to scholasticism that took the form of outright resistance or the creation of alternatives to it may have been every bit as *formational* to the identity of certain religious traditions as adoption and imitation. This article can be seen as the first step in the exploration of these other varieties of response.

Bibliography

Tibetan Language Sources

Anonymous. 2006. *Dbu ma'i man ngag gi bshad pa* (UMSh). In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol.19. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang. 317-34.

Anonymous. 2006. *Dbu ma'i man ngag gi 'bum* (UMB). In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol.19. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 335-69 (incorrectly catalogued as *Bden gnyis 'bum*).

Anonymous. 2006. *Bden gnyis 'bum / Bden chung 'bum* (DNyB). In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol.19. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 370-401 (incorrectly catalogued as *Dbu ma'i man ngag gi 'bum*).

'Brom Shes rab me lce. 2010. *Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od zer*. In *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 11, Editors, Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang. Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 233-296.

Bcom ldan Rigs pa'i ral gri. 2006. *Bstan pa rgyas pa rgyan gyi nyi 'od*. In *Bcom ldan Rigs pa'i ral gri'i gsung 'bum* (collected works), vol.1. Lhasa: Khams sprul bsod nams don grub, 96-257.

Bsam gtan bzang po. 2006. *Bcom ldan rigs pa'i ral gri'i rnam thar dad pa'i ljon shing*. In *Bcom ldan Rigs pa'i ral gri'i gsung 'bum* (collected works), vol.1. Lhasa: Khams sprul Bsod nams don grub, 41-94.

Bsod nams lha'i dbang po. 1977. *BKa' gdams rin po che'i chos 'byung rnam thar nyin mor byed pa'i 'od stong*. In Two Histories of the bKa'-gdams-pa Tradition from the Library of Burmiok Athing. Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 207-393.

Bstan 'dzin phun tshogs (editor). *Jo bo'i chos 'byung brgya rtsa*. 2002. Gangs can rig brgya'i sgo 'byed lde mig 30. Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

Bya ('Dul 'dzin) Brtson 'grus 'bar. 2010. *Jo bo chen po lha cig gi rnam thar* (*Rnam thar rgyas pa*). In *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 5, Editors, Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 359-531 (the ascription to this author is speculative and highly doubtful).

_____ . 2007. *'Dul ba 'od ldan gyi tikka*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 31. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 81-180.

Dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang (editors). 2006-2015. *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 1-120. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

Dpal 'byor bzang po. 1985. *Rgya bod yig tshang chen mo*. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

'Gos lo Gzhon nu dpal. 1984. *Deb ther sngon po*. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

'Jam mgon a mes zhabs. 2000. *Jo bo rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i rjes 'brangs bka' gdams kyi byung tshul legs par bshad pa nyung gsal kun dga'*. In *Gsung 'bum ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams*, vol. 6. Kathmandu: Sa skya rgyal yongs gsung rab slob gnyer khang, 213-21.

Las chen Kun dga' rgyal mtshan. 2003. *Bka' gdams chos 'byung gsal ba'i sgron me*. Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang.

_____. 2004. *Bsod nams rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa mthong ba don ldan*. In *'Bri gung bka' brgyud chos mdzod chen mo*. vol 51 (zhi), *Lhasa: *'Bri gung mthil dgon, 181-331.

Lce sgom pa Shes rab rdo rje. 2015. *Bka' gdams thor bu ba zhes pa'i man ngag*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 95. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 495-530.

Mchims Nam mkha' grags. 2009. *Mkhan po 'phyims (mchims) pa'i gsan yig*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 61. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 35-47.

_____. 2007. *Jo bo'i rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 48. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 299-449.

_____. 2007. *Zhang ston chos bla'i rnam thar*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 50. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 375-95.

_____. *Pu to ba'i rnam thar*. In *Bka' gdams gser phreng*. Attributed to Snar thang mkhan chen nyi ma rgyal mtshan, Skyo ston smon lam tshul khrims, and Mchims nam mkha' grags, 208-220. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/W2CZ7888. [BDRC bdr:W2CZ7888]

_____. *Dge bshes ston pa'i rnam thar*. In *Bka' gdams gser phreng* (see entry above).

Mkhas grub Dge legs dpal bzang. 1978. *Mkhas grub thams cad mkhyen pa dpal bzang po'i gsan yig*. In The collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of the lord mkhas grub rje dge legs dpal bzang po. Zhol par khang Collection, vol. *ka*. New Delhi: Mongolian Lama Guru Deva, 33-119.

Nag tsho Tshul khrims rgyal ba. 1985. *Bstod pa brgyad cu pa*. In *Legs par bshad pa bka' gdams rin po che'i gsung gi gces btus nor bu'i bang mdzod*. Edited by Don grub rgyal mtshan. Tsongdu senghe: Bir, Kangra, 30-39.

Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho. 1991. *Zab pa dang rgya che ba'i dam pa'i chos kyi thob yig gangā'i chu rgyun las glegs bam dang po* (*gsan yig ka*). In The Collected Works (*gsung 'bum*) of the Vth Dalai Lama Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-gya-mtsho, vol.1. Gangtok: Sikkim National Press, 3-837.

Nyang ral nyi ma'i 'od zer. 1988. *Chos 'byung me tog snying po sbrang rtsi'i bcud*. Beijing: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang.

Paṇ chen Ye shes rtse mo. 2015. *Bka' gdams rin po che'i bstan 'dzin rnams kyi byung khungs paṇ chen ye shes rtse mos mdzad pa*. In Ser gtsug nang bstan dpe rnying 'tshol bsdu phyogs sgrig khang (ed.), *Paṇ chen ye shes rtse mo'i bka' gdams chos 'byung dang rnam thar*. Lhasa: Ser gtsug nang bstan dpe rnying 'tshol bsdu phyogs sgrig khang, 1-51.

Phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge. 2006. *Dbu ma rgyan gyi 'grel ba*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol.6. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 433-518.

_____. 2006. *Tshad ma rnam par nges pa'i 'grel bshad*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol.8. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 35-427.

_____. 2006. *'Od ldan zhes bya ba'i Tikka tshig don rab gsal*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol 9. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 251-526.

Rje lung pa. 2006. *Dri ma med pa'i 'od ces bya ba bden pa gnyis kyi rnam bshad*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 24. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 9-525 (the ascription to this author is questionable).

Rnal 'byor pa Shes rab rdo rje. 2006. *Bden pa gnyis kyi rnam par bshad pa*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol.21. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 519-625.

Rngog Blo ldan shes rab. 2006. *Mngon rtogs rgyan 'grel rin po che'i sgron me bsdus don*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 1. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 125-203.

_____. 2006. *Tshad ma rnam nges kyi dka' ba'i gnas rnam par bshad pa'i 'grel pa*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 1. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 419-705.

Sbal ti chen po Brtson 'grus dbang phyug. 2007. *'Grel ba 'od ldan gyi tshig don gsal byed*. In *Bka' gdams gsung 'bum*, vol. 36. Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 11-141 and 143-271 (the ascription to this author is questionable).

Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. 1989. *Bai ḍūrya gser po*. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang.

Sgam po pa Bsod nams rin chen. 2000. *Dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhus lan*. In *Sgam po pa'i gsung 'bum* vol.2. Kathmandu: Khenpo S. Tenzin & Lama T. Namgyal, 103-288.

Shākya Mchog ldan. 2006. *Tshad ma'i mdo dang bstan bcos kyi shing rta'i srol rnams ji ltar 'byung ba'i tshul gtam du bya ba nyin mor byed pa'i snang bas dpyod ldan mtha' dag dga' bar byed pa*. The collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of Gser mdog Paṇ chen Shākya Mchog ldan, vol. 19 (*dza*) Kathmandu: Sachen International, Guru Lama, 1-155.

_____. 1995. *Rngog lo tsā ba chen pos bstan pa ji ltar bskyangs pa'i tshul mdo tsam du bya ba ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mo*. The collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of Gser mdog Paṇ chen Shākya Mchog ldan, vol. 16 (*ma*) New Delhi: Nagwang Tobgyel, 443-456.

Shākya Rin chen sde. *Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung.* Scan of manuscript copy. BUDA website. http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/W25583. [BDRC bdr:W25583]

Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje. 1993. *Deb ther dmar po*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe sprun khang.

Non-Tibetan Sources

Apple, James B. 2018. *Jewels of the Middle Way: The Madhyamaka Legacy of Atiśa and His Early Tibetan Followers*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.

_____. 2022. "The Great Middle Way of Mere Appearance." In *The Routledge Handbook of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (1st ed.), edited by William Edelglass, Pierre-Julien Harter, & Sara McClintock. Routledge, 601-614

Davidson, Ronald M. 2005. *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

Ehrhard, Franz-Karl. 2002. "The Transmission of *Thig-le bcu drug* and the *bKa' gdams glegs bam*". In *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, edited by Helmut Eimer & David Germano. Leiden: Brill, 29-56.

_____. 2004. *Die Statue und der Tempel des Ārya Va-ti bzang-po. Ein Beitrag zu Geschichte und Geographie des tibetischen Buddhismus* [Contributions to Tibetan Studies Volume 2]. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag.

Eimer, Helmut. 1982. The Development of the Biographical Tradition Concerning Atiśa (Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna), *The Journal of the Tibet Society* 2: 41-51.

_____.1989. "Nag tsho Tshul khrims rgyal ba's *Bstod pa brgyad cu pa* in its Extant Version". *Bulletin of Tibetology* 1, 21-38.

Hugo David. 2013. "Action Theory and Scriptural Exegesis in Early Advaita-Vedānta (1): Maṇḍana Miśra on upadeśa and iṣṭasādhanatā". In *Scriptural Authority, Reason, and Action. Proceedings of a Panel at the 14th World Sanskrit Conference, Kyōto, September 1-5, 2009*. Edited by Vincent Eltschinger and Helmut Krasser. Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Verlag, 271-318.

Hugon, Pascale. 2016. Enclaves of Learning, Religious and Intellectual Communities in Tibet: The Monastery of gSang phu Ne'u thog in the Early Centuries of the Later Diffusion of Buddhism. In *Meanings of Community across Medieval Eurasia: Comparative Approaches*, edited by Eirik Hovden, Christina Lutter, and Walter Pohl, Leiden: Brill, 289-308.

Iuchi, Maho. 2016. *An Early Text on the History of Rwa sgreng Monastery: the Rgyal ba'i dben gnas rwa sgreng gi bshad pa nyi ma'i 'od zer of 'Brom shes rab me lce*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

_____. 2018. "The Bka' gdams chos 'byung Genre and the Newly Published Ye shes rtse mo's Bka' gdams chos 'byung." In *The Historical Development of Tibeto-Himalayan Civilization*, edited by Iwao Kazushi and Ikeda Takumi. Kyoto: Rinsen Books, 338-355.

Jackson, David. 1995. "The Status of Pramāṇa Doctrine According to Sa skya Paṇḍita and Other Tibetan Masters: Theoretical Discipline or Doctrine of Liberation?" In *The Buddhist Forum (1991–1993): Papers in Honor and Appreciation of Professor David Seyfort Ruegg's Contribution to Indological, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies*, edited by Tadeusz Skorupski and Ulrich Pagel, 85-129. New Delhi: Heritage.

Kapstein, Matthew. 1996. "gDams-ngag: Tibetan Technologies of the Self". In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre,* edited by Roger Jackson and José Cabezón. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 275-89.

Kramer, Ralf. 2007. *The Great Tibetan Translator: Life and Works of rNgog blo ldan shes rab (1059–1109)*. München: Indus Verlag.

van der Kuijp, Leonard, W.J. 2003. "A treatise on Buddhist epistemology and logic attributed to Klong chen rab 'byams pa (1308–1364) and its place in Indo- Tibetan Intellectual History". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (31.4), 381-437.

Lindtner, Christian. 1981. "Atiśa's Introducion to the Two Truths, and its Sources". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (9.2), 161-214.

Ma, Zhouyang. 2023: *An Inner Asian Buddhist Revolution: The Rise of Tibetan Buddhism in the Tangut Xia State* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Harvard University.

_____. 2025. "Two Early Biographical Accounts of Atiśa Preserved in Tangut Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (145.1), 65-90.

Martin, Dan. 2016. The Highland Vinaya Lineage: A Study of a Twelfth-Century Monastic Historical Source, the 'Transmission Document' by Zhing-mo-che-ba.* *Zentralasiatische Studien* (45), 279-308.

McClintock, Sara L. 2010. *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla on Rationality, Argumentation, and Religious Authority.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Oberhammer, Gerhard; Prets, Ernst and Prandstetter, Joachim. 1996. *Terminologie der frühen philosophischen Scholastik in Indien. Ein Begriffswörterbuch zur altindischen Dialektik, Erkenntnislehre und Methodologie.* Vol. 2 (u-pü). Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Beiträge zur Kultur– und Geistesgeschichte Asiens 17).

Ramble, Charles. 1982. Status and death: mortuary rites and attitudes to the body in a Tibetan village. *Kailash* 9, 333-359.

Roesler, Ulrike. 2019. Atisha and the Kadampa Masters. *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism* Volume II: Lives, 1145-1158.

_____. 2015. "'As It Is Said in a Sutra': Freedom and Variation in Quotations from the Buddhist Scriptures in Early Bka'-Gdams-Pa Literature." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 43, no. 4/5, 493-510.

_____. 2021. "Tigers and Leopards for the Monastery: An Inventory of Gifts from sNar thang to Rwa sgreng". In *Gateways to Tibetan Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honour of David P. Jackson on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, edited by Volker Caumanns, et al. Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 779-801.

Samuels, Jonathan. 2020. "The Tibetan Institutionalisation of Disputation: Understanding a Medieval Monastic Practice". *Medieval Worlds* 12, 96-120.

_____. 2021. "Challenging the Curriculum: The course of studies in Buddhist monasteries of medieval Tibet and beyond". *The Eastern Buddhist*. Third series 1(1), 89-129.

Sernesi, Marta. 2015. "Bibliography and Cultural History: Remarks on the Bka' gdams glegs bam". In *The Illuminating Mirror: Tibetan Studies in Honour of Per K. Sørensen on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, edited by Olaf Czaja and Guntram Hazod. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 411-444.

Sherburne, Richard. 2000. *The Complete works of Atiśa, Śrī Dīpaṃkara Jñāna, Jo-bo-rje. The Lamp for the Path and the Commentary, together with*

the newly translated Twenty-five Texts. (Tibetan and English). New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.

Sinclair, Iain. 2021. "Dharmakīrti of Kedah: his life, work, and troubled times". *Temasek Working Papers Series*, no. 2.

Skilling, Peter. 2000. "Vasubandhu and the Vyākhyāyukti Literature." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23.2: 297-350.

Solonin & Liu. 2017. "Atiśa's Satyadvayāvatāra (*Bden pa gnyis la 'jug pa*) in the Tangut Translation: A Preliminary Study". *Journal of Indian Philosophy* vol.45, 121-62

Vetturini, Gianpaolo. 2013. *The bKa' gdams pa School of Tibetan Buddhism* (Revised version of 2007 PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London)
https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/rare-books/downloads/Gianpaolo_Vetturini_PhD.pdf

Vose, Kevin A. 2009. *Resurrecting Candrakīrti: Disputes in the Tibetan Creation of Prāsaṅgika.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Zhang, Yisan (ed.). 1993. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang.

❖