

Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines

Northern Treasures Histories

Third Special Issue

Coordinated by
Cécile Ducher

Edited by

Cécile Ducher, Stéphane Arguillère,
Jay Valentine & Jean-Luc Achard



numéro quatre-vingt-un — Février 2026

Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines

numéro quatre-vingt-un — Février 2026

ISSN 1768-2959

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Langues

Les langues acceptées dans la revue sont le français, l'anglais, l'allemand, l'italien, l'espagnol, le tibétain et le chinois.

La *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* est publiée par l'UMR 8155 du CNRS (CRCAO), Paris, dirigée par Matthias Hayek.

Hébergement: <http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/collections/journals/ret/>





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A Final Review of the ANR-funded project “For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures”

Stéphane Arguillère

(IFRAE/Inalco)

he ANR-funded project (ANR-21-CE27-0031, 2022–2026) “For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures” (FCHNT) was launched by a group of three—Jean-Luc Achard, Stéphane Arguillère, and Jay Valentine—with Stéphane Arguillère as “scientific coordinator,” based on Jay Valentine’s initiative of setting up a specific Byang gter panel at the IATS 2019 in Paris. The ANR (French National Research Agency) funded it with a 416 615 € grant. The largest part of this grant was devoted to salaries paid to the partners of the project: Cécile Ducher (postdoctoral fellow, IFRAE), Tenpa Tsering Batsang (research engineer, CRCAO, and doctoral student, Inalco) and Simon Martin (research engineer, CRCAO). It was initially meant to be concluded on 2026/02/01, but was extended, without additional financing, to 2026/08/31.

1. The Original Aim, To What Extent it was Achieved and What Remains to be Done

The original idea of the FCHNT project was to complete within these four years an annotated translation of a chronicle of the Northern Treasures tradition by a contemporary author, *mKhan po* Chos dbyings (2015). This extensive text (800 pages or so), included in the 2015 *Compilation of the Northern Treasures*, is a thoughtful compilation and synthesis of available sources. It covers the history of the Byang gter from the origins (including a narrative about Padmasambhava, the concealment of the *gter ma*, and sNa nam rDor je bdud ’joms) to the beginning of the 21st century. However, as it stands, this source does not qualify as a scientific publication since it generally follows the standards of Tibetan religious historiography. The main defect of this traditional approach, from a researcher’s point of view, is its “tubular” character—its tendency to reduce historiography to a series of biographies, with more or less only one individual per generation, without defining the social context of each individual. This is, of course, consistent with the aim of this historiography: to be a *catena aurea* of the transmission

of the holy teachings from masters to disciples. The first step in conducting academic research on Tibetan biographies is therefore to pull all the available threads and compile all available information in order to reconstruct some of the concrete, historical flesh omitted by traditional hagiographies, which sometimes offer no more than a chronological skeleton.

This implied the necessity of adding a significant number of annotations and commentaries, as well as figures not documented in *mKhan po Chos dbyings'* text, in order to provide context. The author indeed discarded people who were important in their time but not identified as links in the main transmission lineage. This approach was coherent with his agenda but not with ours. This led us to add biographies and developments on individuals or groups that he ignored. Eventually, our research ended up far exceeding the scope of the original project and we currently envision seven volumes instead of four.

The first of these volumes, edited by Stéphane Arguillère, has been completed and released in January 2026.¹ Initially, most of its planned content was intended as an introduction to, or supplement for, the first volume, originally thought of as containing the materials relevant to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life and his direct disciples. Volume 1 as it finally stands begins with translations of *mKhan po Chos dbyings'* biographies of Padmasambhava and sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms by Tenpa Tsering Batsang, followed by their commentaries by Jay Valentine. *mKhan po Chos dbyings'* chronicle has then a large gap between sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (8th century) and the immediate predecessor of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–ca. 1401), bZang po grags pa (d.u.). We felt it was necessary to fill this gap because an account of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life would make little sense without sufficient historical background, which was largely unavailable in published research.

Moreover, over the centuries, the Northern Treasures became a complete system of Buddhism in the rNying ma style, especially from the 16th century onward, gradually adding new material to the original core Northern Treasures. It could have been possible to describe these traditions at the point in history when they are first mentioned. We decided, however, that organizing them chronologically would be more helpful for readers. In some cases, it is known, or at least very likely, that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was trained in these traditions, even when the present-day Northern Treasures mainstream lineage (*rDo rje brag lugs*) does not claim lineages featuring their founding master as a link. Therefore, we have chosen to include in this first volume the

¹ *Northern Treasures Histories, vol. 1: Before Rigdzin Gödem*, in *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 80, January 2026, https://d1i1jdw69xsqx0.cloudfront.net/digitalhimalaya/collections/journals/ret/pdf/ret_80.pdf.

materials that are relevant in these two ways—as elements of background for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life and as a history of what got later compiled in the rDo rje brag system. However, this section, written by Stéphane Arguillère and Cécile Ducher with additions by Jean-Luc Achard regarding the Bon aspect ascribed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, grew so large that it was decided, contrary to the original plan, to end the first volume before bZang po grags pa.

The second volume, edited by Jay Valentine and Jean-Luc Achard, is now close to completion. It is entirely devoted to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his immediate environment. As with the first volume, extensive research was conducted on what could be learned about Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, his masters or predecessors, the Gung thang kings who were his patrons, and his adventures in search of concealed lands. The research also includes an overview of his nine cycles of revelations, many of which had not been studied well or at all, and anything else contributing to a better understanding of his perception of himself and the world, and his role in it.

Before the project officially concludes at the end of August, another volume by Jean-Luc Achard will be released, bearing the number six in the series. It will contain a series of annotated biographies of Northern Treasures masters from central Tibet documenting the period from the 1717–18 Dzungar invasion to the present day, as recorded by *mKhan po* Chos dbyings. It has been decided in that case not to overload the volume with additional biographies. In fact, few documents provide better information about this obscure period of the Northern Treasures than what *mKhan po* Chos dbyings compiled, since the Northern Treasures tradition in central Tibet indeed never fully recovered from the Dzungar invasion.

This means that much of our original, overambitious agenda (to cover the whole Byang gter history) was not completed within the four-year ANR grant period and must be finished in the coming years. Volume 3 (mostly by Jay Valentine, with important contributions by Cécile Ducher) is already quite advanced and will focus solely on the direct and indirect disciples of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, specifically those from the 15th century.

However, since this was a crucial century in rNying ma history, we would also like to provide sufficient background information, particularly by discussing Ratna gling pa (1403–1479), a prominent figure in the rNying ma tradition not associated with Byang gter. He was the initial compiler of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and appears to have been the one who achieved the full union of the *bka' ma* (uninterrupted oral transmission) and *gter ma* (hidden treasures) traditions as complementary aspects of the rNying ma lineage. To ignore Ratna gling pa would be to miss an important element of the context crucial to the identity

of the Byang gter. The heirs of Rig 'dzin rGod lden were not closely associated with Ratna gling pa. His heritage, collected in the 17th century at sMin grol gling rather than at rDo rje brag, shaped in large ways the rNying ma pa's later sense of identity. Therefore, the awkwardness that many present-day rNying ma practitioners feel about Byang gter may stem from its isolation from Ratna gling pa's innovations in the 15th century. Understanding this will require extensive research in Ratna gling pa's hagiographies, which will take time.

Volumes 4 (16th century) and 5 (17th century) will also necessitate extensive additional research, since they will as they will concentrate on the ascent of the Northern Treasures and their golden age during the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682). Vol. 4 will cover the 16th century and feature figures such as the “mNga' ris brothers,” mNga' ris paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–ca. 1542) and Legs ldan rDo rje bdud 'joms (ca. 1512–ca. 1565), as well as *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal (or bKra shis stobs rgyas, 1550–1602). These figures are well-documented in Tibetan sources and have already been the subject of substantial research. However, time is needed to fully reassess them in context, including exploring their lesser-known writings and revelations.

The Fifth Dalai Lama's reign is rich with well-documented yet under-researched materials. The team has decided to propose a complementary project to the ANR titled “The rNying ma pas around the 5th Dalai Lama.” If accepted, this project would enable us to conduct the necessary research, including some focused on non-Byang gter masters (or masters who did not primarily identify as Byang gter), and then extract what would be relevant to the present project. This would allow us to write our fifth volume.

2. *The Three Byang gter Special Issues of the RET*

Another achievement of the FCHNT project that was not originally planned is the publication of three special issues of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* dedicated to the Byang gter. This is the third and final issue in the series.

The first volume² (305 pages) was released in February 2022. It includes articles by Jean-Luc Achard, Elizabeth Angowski, Stéphane Arguillère, Christopher Bell, Dylan Esler, Kanako Shinga, and Alexandra Sukhanova. These articles demonstrate that the FCHNT project has attracted contributions from beyond its core team.

² No. 62, edited by Jay Valentine, Stéphane Arguillère, and Jean-Luc Achard. https://d1i1jdw69xsqx0.cloudfront.net/digitalhimalaya/collections/journals/ret/pdf/ret_61.pdf.

The same is true of the second volume³ (522 pages), which features the same contributors, as well as new ones, including Tenpa Tsering Batsang, Amanda Brown, Cécile Ducher, Simon Martin, Katarina Turpeinen, and Yuewei Wang. We were especially honored to also receive contributions from distinguished senior colleagues such as Franz-Karl Ehrhard and Roberto Vitali.

For this third “Byang gter special issue” of the *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* (568 pages), the group of authors has been further extended to include John Bellezza, Martin Boord, Varvara Chatzisavva, Zsóka Gelle, Giigch Borjigin (Gegeqi), Alexander Schiller, and the Tibetan historian Tsangtruk Topla.

While this extensive body of research is in large part the fruit of the Northern Treasures conference that was held in Paris in October 2024, much of it is by colleagues unconnected to our project. It offers new, independent perspectives on the subject matter, as well as invaluable supplementary scholarship and insights. What was originally understood as a focused project by a small, dedicated team also became a framework for incorporating other perspectives. This research could contribute to making the Northern Treasures a more central subfield of Tibetan religious history research. For more details on the topics presented in the conference and their place in the larger Byang gter history, see the introduction below.

3. Two Books

Two forthcoming books, both to be released by Wandel Verlag/ Edition Khordong (Berlin), will illustrate the outcomes of our research on the Northern Treasures’ history and thought.

First is Jay Valentine’s complete translation of *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*, the oldest and most authoritative biography of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem, written by his immediate disciple, Se ston Nyi ma bzang po. While it was not possible to include the entire text in the above-described Vol. 2 of *Northern Treasures Histories*, having this complete translation will provide much-needed background information, since most of what was said about the founder of the Northern Treasures in subsequent centuries comes from this text alone. According to Valentine’s careful philological investigations, it is likely that this text is a collage of autobiographical accounts by Rig ’dzin rGod ldem compiled by this disciple of his later years, Nyi ma bzang po. Ever since it was composed, *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight* has been an object of piety in Byang gter circles and can be regarded as a monument of the rNying

³ No. 68 (January 2024), edited by Stéphane Arguillère, Jean-Luc Achard, and Cécile Ducher. https://d1i1jdw69xsqx0.cloudfront.net/digitalhimalaya/collections/journals/ret/pdf/ret_68.pdf.

ma tradition. This text has been awaiting a complete and accurate translation, which will be appreciated by a broader audience beyond academic research circles.

The second book is Stéphane Arguillère's English translation of *sPrul sku Tshul lo* (Tshul khrims bzang po, 1884–ca. 1957)'s practice manual for the *dGongs pa zang thal*, under the title: *Fulfilling the Aspirations of the Predestined*.⁴ This book is an enhanced adaptation of Arguillère's 2016 French version of this manual and includes an edition of the Tibetan text as its second volume. The translated text is important for the specialized study of the *dGongs pa zang thal* proper, and of rDzogs chen more broadly. The publication may also be useful from a critical standpoint, as in the footnotes, the translator deconstructs the text, showing that it is largely a patchwork of copied or slightly paraphrased sources. This analysis was done already to a large extent in the French version but is further developed in the English version. It also incorporates a complete semi-critical edition of the Tibetan text, based on the five available editions, plus a systematic comparison with its sources (*dGongs pa zang thal*, Klong chen pa, quoted tantras...). Some of these sources are expected, such as the *dGongs pa zang thal* itself, while others are much less so, such as Klong chen pa's *Zab don rgya mtsho'i sprin*, the practice manual for the *mKha' 'gro yang tig*. The translator draws from this full dissection of the text to make considerations that extend beyond the Northern Treasures, contributing to a better understanding of Tibetan books in general and what it means to be a writer in Tibet.

4. The October 2024 Conference at the Inalco

The FCHNT organized the *First International Conference on the Northern Treasures* at Inalco (Maison de la Recherche) in Paris, from the 17th to the 19th of October 2024. The present volume of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* includes most of the presentations given during this conference. Some of the papers presented then, especially the ones by members of the team (Stéphane Arguillère, Cécile Ducher, Jay Valentine, and Tenpa Tsering Batsang) are not featured in this special issue as they became parts of volume 2 of our *Northern Treasures Histories*.

⁴ Arguillère 2016, *Le Manuel de la Transparution Immédiate*, Paris: Le Cerf.



Fig. 1 — The twenty speakers of the two days of the conference held in Paris on October 17-18, 2024. Katarina Turpeinen and Jean-Luc Achard presented their research online the next morning.

The conference hosted twenty-two presentations, twenty of which were delivered in person and two were delivered online. It gathered many attendees both onsite and online. Two participants came all the way from China, three from India, one from Japan and three from the United States, while others came from several European countries. This international gathering was a great occasion to discuss the Northern Treasures in their various perspectives and bring to a further level the scholarship about this emerging subfield of Tibetan Studies.



Fig. 9 — Stéphane Arguillère introducing Khenpo Ju Tenkyong, our Keynote lecturer

An overview of this conference has been published on our “Carnet d’Hypothèse” blog, with some photos,⁵ and it also includes the complete program.⁶

5. The Blog “Carnets d’Hypothèses:” Northern Treasures Histories

Any description of the outcome of the FCHNT project would be incomplete without mentioning the research notes published by team members on this *Northern Treasures Histories* blog (<https://fchnt.hypotheses.org>). The blog contains 33 articles and 22 pages documenting the project’s history, including call for papers, conferences, and publications, and many pieces of unpublished scholarship. Some of these articles are drafts that were further elaborated upon in more polished pieces. Some contain alternative or complementary material that were included in published articles and books but present an interest for either understanding better these publications, or function as a foundation for later research. Others are short pieces concerned with related topics that were not directly used in the published volumes but constitute important themes.

Here are a few recent examples of these: Jay Valentine’s (2025) [*A Parallel Edition of The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*](#) and [*A Parallel Edition of The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens*](#); Jean-Luc Achard’s (2024) philosophical notes on [*The Five Repositories of the Zangzang Lhadrak Discovery and Further Conditions of Revelation*](#) and (2025) readings on [*The History of the Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra as Portrayed in Jamyang Sönam Gyeltsen’s Garland of Jewels — Part I — The Contemplative Transmission of the Buddhas*](#) and [*The History of the Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra as Portrayed in Jamyang Sönam Gyeltsen’s Garland of Jewels — Part II — The Symbolic Transmission of the Knowledge-Holders*](#); Stéphane Arguillère’s biographical notes about (2026) [*Sangs rgyas gling pa*](#) or (2025) [*rDo rje gling pa*](#).



⁵ <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/2758>.

⁶ <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/2554>.

Introduction to the Third Special Issue “For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures”

Cécile Ducher

(IFRAE)

s mentioned in the report by Stéphane Arguillère that opens this special issue, this volume 81 of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* derives in large part from the conference held in Paris in October 2024. It was a great pleasure to host this conference in Paris, and it is similarly an enriching and precious opportunity to gather in this volume so many pieces of scholarship that shed a multifaceted light on the Byang gter tradition. Twelve of the eighteen articles published here were initially part of the conference program and six are independent contributions. From the conference, the four talks by members of the team are included in the first two volumes of *Northern Treasures Histories*. Five talks given during the conference are not presented here as they will become part of their authors' individual publications.

The present collection of articles is divided into two sections, respectively dealing with the Northern Treasures' history and with the lineage's teachings. Regarding the first section, the religious history of the Byang gter, the first five articles describe the founding of the lineage. The remaining eight describe later phases of the tradition, shedding light on important members of the lineage between the 15th and 17th centuries and exploring its metamorphoses beyond Tibetan borders until the 21st century. With regard to the 16th and early 17th century, a period particularly rich for Tibet, these pieces of scholarship are welcome additions to the field of rNying ma studies that remains until now somewhat understudied, with the exception of Marc-Henri Deroche's publications.¹

The second section delves into the Byang gter teachings themselves, dealing with rDzogs chen as it was understood in the *dGongs pa zang thal*, deity practices associated with various strata of the Tradition, and the protector gNyan chen Thang lha.

The editors of this special issue hope that these papers, along with

¹ Deroche, Marc-Henri, *Une quête tibétaine de la sagesse : Prajñāraśmi, 1518-1584, et l'attitude impartiale (ris med)*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2023.

the other publications of the FCHNT project, will contribute to a better knowledge of the rNying ma tradition in general, and its specific iteration in the Byang gter lineage and thank all the authors for their dedication to the subject.

*Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and the
Founding of the Northern Treasures Tradition*

This special issue starts with five articles concerned with the history of its founder, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–ca. 1401), and the geography of its early settlement in Byang.

The first article examines the *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens* (*brDa chen bco brgyad kyi gsol 'debs*), an autobiographical work by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Valentine provides a critical edition and annotated translation of this twenty-two-verse prayer, which presents eighteen portentous events from the treasure revealer's life as signs (*rtags*) of accomplishment and omens (*brda*) of future developments.²

The article analyzes how the two main biographers—Se ston Nyi ma bzang po (15th c.) in *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight* (*Nyi ma'i 'od zer*) and mKhan po Chos dbyings (20th c.) in *The Garland of Wondrous Tales* (*Ngo mtshar gtam gyi phreng ba*)—incorporated and reordered verses from the prayer. Valentine identifies significant chronological discrepancies between the prayer's sequence and the biographies' reconstructions, particularly regarding events at bKra bzang and sKyid grong. He also underscores the interpretive challenges surrounding the identity of the “three treasures” (*gter gsum*) mentioned in verse 18, examining whether these refer to treasure keys, objects from multiple sites, or items discovered at bKra bzang itself. Valentine's analysis illuminates both the prayer's function as primary autobiographical source material and the complex relationship between the treasure revealer's self-representation and later hagiographical interpretations. It usefully complements volume 2 of our *Northern Treasures Histories* as well as Valentine's translation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's lifestory by Nyi ma bzang po, and is an enlightening example of the way Tibetan *rnam thar* are composed.

The second article by Roberto Vitali examines Rig 'dzin rGod ldem within the historical and political context of 14th-century La stod Byang. Vitali challenges previous scholarship by clarifying the *gter ston's* ethnic origins, arguing he descended from Turkic stock rather than Mongolian Gur Ser, and tracing his lineage to De gyin De wa ra dza, a Western Turk minister under Srong btsan sgam po. Through

² It is supplemented by an article on the FCHNT blog containing a chart with four editions of the complete prayer : <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/3391>.

genealogical analysis of the *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, Vitali dates the family's relocation to g.Yas ru Byang to the early 13th century.

The great strength of this article is to contextualize Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's treasure revelations against the backdrop of the political upheavals following Yuan decline and Phag mo gru pa ascendancy under Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan. Vitali demonstrates how the collapse of Sa skya hegemony created favorable conditions for rNying ma *gter stons*, contrasting with earlier periods dominated by doctrinal disputes. The study traces Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's activities across multiple principalities—including his crucial 1366 treasure extraction at Zang zang lha brag and connections with Mang yul gung thang rulers—illuminating the complex political landscape that shaped the Northern Treasures Tradition's emergence.

John Bellezza offers in the third piece of this section a tour of the early Byang gter settlement of Ri bo bkra bzang. The article contains several beautiful pictures taken during his 2002 fieldwork, thus making the reader travel through time to the early 15th century as well as to the early 21st century, in the company of Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med, the 25th family lineage holder descending from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

Bellezza catalogs the site's sacred geography, including Padma sgrub phug (where Gu ru rin po che concealed a ritual dagger), the *bla brag* complex built on tortoise-shaped rock formations, and multiple chapels housing self-formed footprints (*zhabs rjes*) and body impressions. He lists bKra bzang's protective deities and the various shrines and places associated with each of them. He also identifies archaic defensive structures and revetments at several places suggesting pre-Buddhist Hor occupation and raising questions about cultural stratification at Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

This first section then concludes with two complementary articles that significantly advance our knowledge of an important legacy of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the opening of hidden lands, and particularly the way this was theorized in *The General Introduction to the Hidden Land* (*sBas yul spyi'i them byang*), a treasure said to be revealed by the gTer ston.

The first article authored by Zsóka Gelle examines this foundational text classified as a *them byang*, "a preliminary guide that initiates the journey of exploration, while also functioning as a prophecy to be fulfilled." The text frames Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as the predestined individual capable of unlocking the seven hidden lands in the southern borderlands.

Gelle argues that the text's apocalyptic tone is deeply rooted in the socio-political instability of 14th-century Tibet. The narrative reflects

the anxieties caused by the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, the fragmentation of the Sa skya hegemony, repeated Mongol invasions, and possibly the bubonic plague (*gnyan nad*), which ravaged Asia and Europe during this period and may well have entered Tibet. These crises are interpreted through the Buddhist framework of the Age of Degeneration (*snyigs dus*). In this context, the *sbas yul* are not merely geographical locations but soteriological refuges where the Dharma can be preserved and where an idealized Tibetan society, ruled by a *cakravartin*, can survive the apocalypse.

The General Introduction provides a complex, sometimes contradictory, map of these sanctuaries. While it lists numerous sites, it places particular emphasis on a triad of major hidden lands: Tsa ri in the east, La phyi in the west, and 'Bras mo gshongs (Sikkim) in the south, which is heralded as the "king of all hidden lands," and prophesied to be opened by seven revealers. The text also mentions specific locations like mKhan pa lung and Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba (Helambu). Gelle notes that the geographical descriptions vary from one text to another and that the list of lands in *The General Introduction* does not match the standardized list of "Seven Hidden Lands" found in other works attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem such as the *Gu ru'i ga'u bdun ma*. This, according to Gelle, suggests the composite character of *The General Introduction*, which synthesizes earlier geographical knowledge from various sources. Gelle concludes that *The General Introduction* is a "self-legitimising discourse" for the Byang gter tradition serving as a bridge between the mythic imperial past and the fragmented reality of the 14th century, and offering a "key" to safety during a perceived end-time and waiting for its corresponding "door" to be revealed in the future, hence the title of her article "Here the key, Elsewhere the door," borrowed from a Victor Hugo painting.

The article also provides an annotated outline of *The General Introduction* corresponding to the translation provided in the second article by Martin Boord. This piece is a very welcome addition to the Northern Treasures FCHNT project and a tribute to Martin Boord, who played an significant role in the spread of that lineage in the West. The article is prefaced by Stéphane Arguillère, who provides a biography and a bibliography of Boord. Arguillère also reevaluates the dates of Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan, who may have been one of the sources of inspiration for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's quest for hidden lands, and shows that Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan may have been born at the end of the 13th century and active in the first half of the 14th, living sometime between 1280 and 1365. This foreword is followed by the translation by Martin Boord of *The General Introduction* together with a diplomatic edition of the 2008 edition of that text and a few notes providing context.

Expanding the Tradition

The second section of this volume describes the expansion of the tradition between the 16th and 21st centuries. The first article is another piece of scholarship by Zsóka Gelle, who offers here a reconstruction of the life of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po (1480–later than 1541), a *gter ston* famous for the renovation of the Bodhnath stūpa and the opening of the hidden land of Yol mo gangs ra. In the absence of a full-fledged biography and despite considerable debate about the chronological details of his life, Gelle synthesizes brief biographies, local manuscripts, oral traditions, and sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's own treasure text, *The Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stūpa that Grants Liberation Through Hearing* (*mChod rten chen po bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus thos pas grol ba*) to retrace the activities of this important teacher of the Byang gter in the Himalayas in the 16th century and his influence beyond that date through the Yol mo sPrul sku incarnation lineage.

She sheds light on the various traditions he received and shared, his masters, his disciples, and contextualizes his activities within early 16th-century political instability, thus bringing together many details about Himalayan Buddhism at that period. sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po transmitted Northern Treasures teachings across traditions, established Tsuṭi temple in Helambu, and became progenitor of a family lineage still locally called the Nyingma Lama clan. His treasure text's popularity derived from addressing contemporary apocalyptic anxieties while legitimizing trans-Himalayan Buddhist networks during the Age of Degeneration.

The second article is written in Tibetan by gTsang phrug sTobs lags and contains an English introduction by Tenpa Tsering Batsang. It examines *A Play of Kun tu bzang po's Compassion* (*Kun bzang thugs rje'i zlos gar*), the biography of bKra shis stobs rgyas³ (1550–1603) authored by 'Brug pa Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645) in 1636 at the behest of bKra shis stobs rgyas' son, Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), who was recognized as the third incarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. bKra shis stobs rgyas founded in central Tibet the lay community of Gu ru Padma E waṃ lcog sgar, which his son transformed into the rDo rje brag Monastery. In this article, sTobs lags uses this biography together with his own knowledge and connections in the region of Ngam ring in western Tibet in order to determine the exact locations of the monasteries founded by bKra shis stobs rgyas, together with pictures of the remains of these institutions. He also provides detailed

³ This is an alias of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal.

historical analysis of the *byang bdag* title and its holders across regions, discusses bKra shis stobs rgyas' lHa sa rdzong pa family's relationship with Sa skya, identifies several geographical locations in gTsang, and sheds light on some details of the life of this controversial character, who was expelled from the region of Byang by the gTsang pa leader Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje that he is said to have then ritually killed.⁴

This provides the link with the next article by Alexandra Sukhanova, who examines the life of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1657). Zur chen received *Byang gter* cycles from Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po and the Third Yol mo sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1589–1644) and was among the masters of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682), thus playing a pivotal role in the transmission of these teachings. Sukhanova is especially interested in describing Zur chen's role in preserving the Northern Treasures in 17th-century Central Tibet and his contribution to the development and institutionalization of its tradition in rDo rje brag.

Sukhanova analyzes the Fifth Dalai Lama's biography of Zur chen, the *Theg mchog bstan pa'i shing rta* (1676), and his record of teachings received, the *Ganggā'i chu rgyun*, to document Zur chen's transmission lineages. Following the Third Yol mo sPrul sku's death in 1644, Zur chen became the regent of the Northern Treasures until ca. 1658, ensuring lineage continuity during the youth of the Fourth Rig 'dzin, Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717). His approach, however, far exceeded the Byang gter tradition as he was a holder of many dharma lineages belonging to different Tibetan religious schools and acted as an important intermediary in the dialogue between the dGa' ldan pho brang and the rNying ma establishments. Sukhanova shows that Chos dbyings rang grol's ecumenical approach and ritual expertise secured institutional consolidation of Northern Treasures at rDo rje brag.

A great interruption in the spread of the Northern Treasures in central Tibet was the Dzungar invasion of 1717–1718, during which rDo rje brag was destroyed and its abbot, Padma 'phrin las, was killed.⁵ Although the transmission continued in central Tibet at a much lower scale, it mostly continued further away, and this is where Alexander Schiller picks up the threads of Northern Treasures history.

⁴ This was the object of an article published by the FCHNT collaborator Simon Martin in the second special issue of the RET: "From Rāhula with Love: The Gruesome Liberation of Zhing shag pa Tshe brtan rdo rje as Told by his Compassionate Executioner", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 68, Janvier 2024, pp. 192-205.

⁵ For more details, see the article by the FCHNT collaboration Tenpa Tsering Batsang: "Reflection on the Dzungar Persecution of the rNying ma School of Tibetan Buddhism in the 18th Century, Focusing on Its Causes and the Scale of the Destruction", *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 68, Janvier 2024, pp. 206-248.

Schiller's article, the longest in this collection, examines the *Records of Teachings Received* (*gsan yig*) of the fifth incarnation of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, who was described in the article by Zsóka Gelle that was introduced above. The Fifth Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789) was primarily active in Mang yul (Western Tibet) and Helambu (Nepal). This article is an updated English translation of Schiller's research initially published in German⁶ and was thus not presented during the 2024 conference. It, however, provides such a meticulous account of the Byang gter tradition as it was revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem until the 18th century that it is a very welcome addition to the present issue. As is now well-established, records of teachings received, especially when they are detailed, are a precious source of historical information. As regards the rNying ma tradition, the most extensive is the one of the Fifth Dalai Lama, who himself used many earlier rNying ma records (documented by Schiller) that are now lost. The record studied here, microfilmed in 1992 in Samagaun (Nepal), provides detailed information on the content of *gter mas* revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and their transmission history between the late 14th and 18th centuries. It is particularly interesting as the Fifth Yol mo sPrul sku, who descended paternally from the treasure-revealer bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535), received transmissions from both the rDo rje brag lineage and from bKra bzang monastery, thus representing parallel preservation of traditions at the Central Tibetan monastery and at the original revelation site, and illuminating complex transmission networks spanning La stod byang, dBus, Mang yul, and Nepal. Although describing this text is a great achievement in itself, Schiller's goes much further than that, as he provides detailed information on many of the sources documenting the tradition, be it narrative accounts such as biographies and autobiographies (*rnam thar*), epitomes (*spyi chings*) and other records of teachings received (*gsan yig*), providing outlines of these texts in footnotes. This article is therefore an invaluable source for further study of the Northern Treasures history.

The other three articles of the historical section of this special issue bring us further away from the cradle of the tradition in bKra bzang and its further implantation in central Tibet. Giigch Borjigin and Husel Onggud examine the Manchu Prince Yunli's (1697–1738) commission

⁶ "Das Studienbuch des 5. Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms als Quelle zum Inhalt und zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der „nördlichen Schätze“ (byang gter)," in: Volker Caumanns, Jörg Heimbel, Kazuo Kano, and Alexander Schiller (eds.), *Gateways to Tibetan Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honour of David P. Jackson on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (Indian and Tibetan Studies 12), Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2021, vol. II, pp. 821–890.

of the translation of over 600 rNying ma *gter mas* into Mongolian during the early eighteenth century—a corpus that never circulated among its intended Mongol readership but represent an untapped window into the tradition as it was transmitted by disciples of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Prince Yunli commissioned translations from rNying ma lineages, including 90 works revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and extensive commentaries by the Fifth Dalai Lama and other rNying ma masters such as gTer bdag gling pa. He also personally translated and composed four treasure commentaries. Analysis of colophons, seals, and onomastic evidence reveals Prince Yunli's profound commitment to the Byang gter lineage mediated by the Fifth Dalai Lama.

The translations studied in the article are the ones preserved at the Inner Mongolia Normal University (511 treasure texts and 126 commentaries) and rank among the most extensive Mongolian Buddhist scripture translation projects outside of the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*. More texts are preserved in other institutions (St. Petersburg State University Library, University of Marburg, Cambridge University Library, and the Scheut Mission Archives in Belgium) and require further study.

These texts are “twice-buried treasures” in Mongolia, that is to say that they were textually preserved but not ritually transmitted, let alone practiced. The anonymous translators who authored these translations contrast with the ones meticulously documented in the Mongolian Kangyur (1717–1720) and Tengyur (1742–1749) translation projects. The authors of this article hypothesize that this may be due to Qing court anxieties regarding rNying ma expansion, restrictions dating from the Fifth Dalai Lama's era prohibiting dissemination beyond central Tibet and southern Khams, and the absence of qualified lineage holders in Mongolia.

The last two articles then bring us further east, in Khams, which became the Byang gter gravity center after the destruction of rDo rje brag in 1717. The article by Dylan Esler examines the life of the sixth Bāḥ gnas incarnation, Thub bstan mdo sngags bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan (1888–1964), also known as sPrul sku rGyal lo, an important throne-holder of Bāḥ gnas monastery and a close disciple of sPrul sku Tshul lo (1884–ca. 1957).⁷ The article, based on mKhan po Chos dbyings's biography of sPrul sku rGyal lo, traces his incarnational background, his studies and spiritual practice, his teaching career and religious activities, his students, and his death. It also includes descriptions of remarkable signs of accomplishment (such as

⁷ sPrul sku Tshul lo is the author of the *dGongs pa zang thal* commentary that was published by Stéphane Arguillère in French in 2016. A revised English translation with an edition of the Tibetan is forthcoming at Edition Khordong in 2026 (see the Report introducing this special issue for more details).

levitation, clairvoyance, and perhaps more significantly visions of Padmasambhava as well as being seen as Padmasambhava by his disciples). The sixth Bāḥ gnas sPrul sku reintroduced rDo rje brag ritual procedures to Bāḥ gnas monastery, established important annual ceremonies alternating between the *bKa' brgyad* and Yamāntaka traditions, founded a learning institute, and transmitted Byang gter teachings widely. His teaching activities encompassed canonical texts like the *Guhyagarbhatantra* and *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, attracting disciples from both eastern and central Tibet. The article demonstrates significant religious exchange between rNying ma and dGe lugs traditions, as evidenced by mutual transmission of esoteric teachings. His principal disciple, another Bāḥ gnas sPrul sku called Ye shes bdud 'dul (1935–2017), continued his legacy, eventually overseeing the monastery's reconstruction after the Cultural Revolution.

The last article is authored by Varvara Chatzisavva and is based on several field trips to the eastern Tibet monastery of 'Khor gdong, one of the most significant Byang gter institution located in Brag 'go in Khams, and its exile counterpart in Siliguri, India. Traditionally considered to be founded by gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (ca. 832–942), and historically associated with major figures including gTer chen Nus ldan rdo rje (1802–1864) and gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin (1922–2002), the monastery was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and rebuilt in 1985. The author provides detailed ethnographic documentation of contemporary conditions under Chinese governance, including surveillance systems, sinicization policies, and educational curricula. The article describes religious activities, preserved treasures kept in the monastery's temple, and architectural developments while analyzing the possible future of the institution in rapidly changing circumstances. It is completed by an article on the FCHNT blog with pictures by Chatzisavva illustrating what she described in the article.⁸

Dzogchen, Tantras, and Protectors

The third section of this special issue contains six articles related to the philosophical and ritual perspective of the Northern Treasures. The first piece of scholarship, by Jean-Luc Achard, examines the transmission of the *dGongs pa zang thal*, the core Byang gter rDzogs chen cycle, into the New Bon tradition through bDe chen gling pa (1833–1893). Achard contextualizes historical exchanges between Bon pos and rNying ma pas regarding rDzogs chen teachings, noting

⁸ <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/3718>.

documented cases of mutual borrowing since the 11th century, and remarks on the relative fluidity between the two traditions and between Bon and the other Tibetan Buddhist traditions in general. The article briefly retraces the history of Bon by presenting the threefold distinction of Old Bon (*bon rnying*), Eternal Bon (*g.yung drung bon*), and New Bon (*bon gsar*). New Bon is based on works hidden as *gter ma* by Dran pa nam mkha' and Vairocana and revealed later, thus bridging Eternal Bon with Buddhism. It started historically with the revelation of treasures in the 14th century, but mostly spread in the 18th century in Kham with the further revelations by Sangs rgyas gling pa (1705–1735) and the first Kun grol grags pa (1700–1769?). bDe chen gling pa described twenty-eight of his previous incarnations, the most significant in our context being his secret birth as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, one out of ten Buddhist masters. bDe chen gling pa received the complete *dGongs pa zang thal* transmission and a few other Byang gter teachings from Kun bzang nges don klong yangs (b. 1814) in 1859 and created links with other masters of the Ris med movement. He transmitted the *dGongs pa zang thal* to a few of his New Bon disciples, including his son rGyal sras Tshe dbang 'gyur med, who practiced them throughout his life. This case exemplifies actual transmission rather than textual borrowing, demonstrating continued inter-traditional exchanges of rDzogs chen teachings between Bon and Buddhist masters into modern times.

In the next article, Katarina Turpeinen examines philosophical contemplations as contemplative practices within the *dGongs pa zang thal*, which, she argues, is one of the first texts to include such meditations in the context of Breakthrough (Khregs chod). The part of the text where these contemplations are to be found is *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana (bai ro'i snyan brgyud)*, whose paradigmatic topic, according to Turpeinen, is Breakthrough, which is why it contains robust philosophical discussions. The article focuses on three analytical contemplations: (1) investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of mind; (2) distinguishing mind (*sems*) from awareness (*rig pa*, synonymous with wisdom, *ye shes*); and (3) differentiating the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) from the dharmakāya. Unlike typical rDzogs chen literature, rGod ldem's texts assert that mind possesses an origin (the universal ground), a dwelling (the six realms), and a destination (the body of essence, which is the universal ground). The universal ground is treated as synonymous with the common ground (*gzhi*) of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, resembling early Great Perfection usage rather than the individualized conception found in fourteenth-century Seminal Heart authors like Klong chen pa. Evidence from later commentaries and contemporary practice at rDo rje brag monastery suggests fluid, dialogical application of these contemplations.

Following these two explorations of rDzogs chen in the Byang gter, we then move to *yi dam* practice, and especially the way it is iterated in the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* system, the longest section in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelations. The first article by Kanako Shinga examines the *Longevity Sādhana of the Eight Pronouncements (bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub)*, an eight-text compilation totaling twenty-five folios attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. Shinga identifies a four-layered archetypal core (Outer, Inner, Secret and Most Secret) shared with two other longevity sādhanas by rGod ldem: the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* and the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*, which she studied in the previous issue of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*.⁹ In this article, Shinga is especially interested in exploring three topics. The first are divergences in this four-layered structure, especially with regards to the nomenclature and sequence of the *gsang sgrub* and *yang gsang* sections, as well as diverse descriptions of the way to practice these four levels. Here, she especially compares the three systems and underlines their differences. Second, she presents two transmission lineages of this text, the one preserved in the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (the main Byang gter lineage) and the other received by Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. She shows that the former incorporates names from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* in the lineage prayer, which is a specificity of that tradition. The third topic of the article is that of the Indic equivalents of the term *tshe sgrub/bsgrub*. Shinga argues that the term **āyurjñānanopika* (attested in *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* §5 as a translation of *'chi med tshe yi sgrub thabs* and being a Tibetan corruption of the compound **āyurjñānasāadhanopayika*) represents the proper Indic equivalent of *tshe sgrub* specific to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelation, rather than the commonly accepted **āyuhśādhana*. This, she shows, reflects sNga dar period terminology preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts, where the term *no pi ka* appears as a synonym for *sgrub thabs*.

The second article on the *bKa' brgyad* is authored by Stéphane Arguillère and is a tribute to Eva Neumaier-Dargyay, the first Western scholar to study and publish on Byang gter in her pioneering 1971 article on the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*. Arguillère first explains what the *Eight Pronouncements* are: "the practice of the Mahāyoga consists of the Eight Pronouncements, either separately (e.g., individual sādhanas of Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, Vajrakīla...) or as a group (as in the large cycles we call *bKa' brgyad*, which combine them all)." He then contextualizes Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's massive *bKa' brgyad* cycle within the historical evolution of *Eight Pronouncements*

⁹ "Section X² of the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*". In: *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 68, 2024, pp. 426–453.

systems, using the lens provided by Kong sprul's compilation of the *Rin chen gter mdzod* and tracing the development of these systems from Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192) and Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270) until the 17th and 19th century. Nyang ral's *bDe gshegs 'dus pa*, tradition says, is more *Mahāyoga*-oriented; Chos dbang's *gSang ba yongs rdzogs* is more *Anuyoga*-oriented; and rGod ldem's *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* is more *Atiyoga*-oriented, that is to say that it contains *rdzogs rim* practice instructions that lead to rDzogs chen in what was recognized in the 14th century as its ultimate form: visionary, *sNying thig*-style meditation.¹⁰

The article provides revised English translations of the two texts translated in German in the original paper. The first text, *The Teaching of the Ten Aspects of the Heart-Drop of the Completion Phase of The Eight Pronouncements, Self-Produced and Self-Arisen* (*sGrub chen bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi rdzogs rim snying tig rnam pa bcu bstan pa*), is an allegoric explanation of the *Eight Pronouncements* understood in rDzogs chen terms, demonstrating how rGod ldem's *bKa' brgyad* culminates in the *dGongs pa zang thal* through continuous ascent from *Mahāyoga*-style practice to advanced *sNying thig* visionary meditation. The second text, *The True Instructions of Sky-Face: The Essence of the Great Sādhana of the Eight Pronouncements, Spontaneous and Self-Arisen* (*sGrub chen bka' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi snying po gnam zhal don khrid*) contains a full system of practice starting with the development phase of a deity yoga on Che mchog He ru ka in union with gNam zhal ma ("Sky-Face") and continue with various perspective of achievement phase practices "based upon the deity" (*lha [la] brten pa'i rdzogs rim*) and concludes with rDzogs chen instructions on the view.

With the next article authored by Amanda Brown, we navigate between religious history and Buddhist studies, between the Byang gter and the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud lineage, and between epochs. The tantric transmission studied, a Yamāntaka practice based on the *Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor* (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri*), is a subsection of a cycle known as *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* (*'Jam dpal tshe bdag*) that was discovered by the 11th-century sorcerer rGya Zhang khrom. The *Blazing Razor* is a treasure related to that cycle revealed by the 'Bri gung Che tshang Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), and it is now largely practiced in 'Bri gung centers under the leadership of the charismatic Tibetan master mGar chen Rin po che (b. 1936). It is not part of the treasures revealed by rGod ldem in 1366, but became central to later

¹⁰ The topic of the *Eight Pronouncements* and their specificity in the Northern Treasures when compared to other systems was the subject of the talk delivered in Tibetan by 'Ju bsTan skyong during the conference and entitled *The bKa' brgyad in the Byang gter Tradition*.

Byang gter masters. This cycle can be interpreted as protection (against inner demons) and destruction (of outer obstacles), hence “war magic,” and as such was an important cultural capital in the fights that agitated dBus gtsang in the 17th century.

In the article, Brown describes the way this practice entered the Byang gter and various lineages associated with it in the 16th century and subsequently expanded and circulated among networks of power in the 17th century. In doing so, Brown sheds further light on the rich history of that period and its actors. She also describes the content of large collections related with this Yamāntaka practice in both rNying ma and bKa’ bryud contexts, and she studies and translates two samples of this rich corpus that figure in both Chos kyi grags pa’s *gSung ’bum* and the 2015 Byang gter collection. The first text, a *Yang bzlog* lineage supplication by Chos kyi grags pa, is the occasion for an exploration of the complex transmission history of this cycle. The second one, a “liberating” dagger (*kīla*) rite, illustrates the general function and structure of the ritual and thus provides a good idea of what is done or imagined in this practice. In that sense, it resembles the previous translation of a *bKa’ brgyad* excerpt by Stéphane Arguillère and gives a taste of another of the important Byang gter cycle, albeit one with a more diverse origin.

Brown’s article concludes with three appendices: 1) a chart describing the overlap of Chos kyi grags pa’s *Yang bzlog* texts in the Byang gter Collection (CNT), in Chos kyi grags pa’s *gSung ’bum* and in a *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* collection (*’Jam dpal gshin rje’i gshed yang bzlog me’i spu gri’i chos skor*). 2) Another chart listing the masters mentioned in three supplication prayers (by the Fifth Dalai Lama, in the Byang gter collection and in Chos kyi grags pa’s *gSung ’bum*), and 3) a visual Representation of the *Yang bzlog* history.

The last article of this special issue was written by Yuewei Wang and examines the multiple Buddhist identities of gNyan chen Thang lha, a mountain deity who became one of the Byang gter protectors.

As demonstrated in Wang’s previous research,¹¹ the mountain god Thang lha’s role evolved because of three vows made to Padmasambhava through which he became a protector of Buddhism in general, the body and life-force god of Dharma King Khri srong lde btsan, and the treasure guardian of one of the *gter ma* revealed by rGod ldem in 1366 in Zang zang lha brag—hence a Byang gter protector. In this research, Wang further elaborates on the way the Byang gter texts develop auxiliary identities of Thang lha under multiple forms, including executioner of vow-breakers, ancestral male god (*pho lha*),

¹¹ “gNyan chen Thang lha and His Three Vows in Byang gter,” *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines*, no.68, 2024, pp. 454-490.

wealth deity, territorial god (*yul lha*) of Tibet's four regions, and an incarnation of Bodhisattva Akāśagarbha. She describes diverse iconographic manifestations found in the Byang gter lore—ranging from a peaceful figure with five topknots to more wrathful forms and animal emanations (white yak, falcon, scorpion, nine-headed garuḍa). This multilayered identity system exemplifies rNying ma strategies for incorporating indigenous deities into Vajrayāna Buddhism, demonstrating how the Northern Treasure tradition transformed earlier, simpler conversion narratives into sophisticated ritual and doctrinal systems through contributions from key figures like Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, and the Fifth Dalai Lama. A noteworthy role of Thang lha in the Byang gter is as a subjugator of the *rgyal po* spirit Pe har, here considered as a malevolent force, while he is considered a protective deity in other systems (especially in the rNying ma system of Nyang ral or in the later dGe lugs tradition). This point is an interesting example of the fluid instrumentalization of local deities as protectors by various Tibetan traditions.



The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens: An Autobiographical Sketch of the Life of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem through Signs, Omens, and Symbols

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he treasure revealer Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–ca. 1401), whose given name was dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, is now well known as the founding *gTer ston* of the Northern Treasures Tradition.¹ Knowledge of his life has come to us primarily by way of *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*, a 15th-century biography that was composed by one of his minor students, Se ston Nyi ma bzang po (b. ca. 1386), which nearly all later biographies have relied upon as their most important source.² More recently, mKhan po Chos dbyings (b. 20th c.) has put together a new biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem that appears in his larger work entitled *The Garland of Wondrous Tales*, which is a history of the Northern Treasures that begins with the life of the Buddha and continues through the beginning of the 21st century.³ Both of these works make use of a large variety of prophetic and biographic materials that were revealed and or written in the 14th and early 15th centuries. The source that will be examined more closely herein is an autobiographical work entitled *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens*, which was written by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself. While an annotated translation of the complete prayer appears at the end of this article, it is preceded by a technical description of the prayer, a discussion of its placement within the literature of the Northern Treasures, and an inventory of the various available editions. This is followed by a brief analysis that examines the manner in which the prayer is

¹ For an easily accessible and digestible biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, see Boord 2013.

² While there are many available editions of this text, the two that are most relevant here are: Nyi ma bzang po 1983 & 2015. For a lightly abridged paraphrase of the biography that includes some translated passages, see Herweg 1994. For a complete translation, see my forthcoming publication by Wandel Verlag: Edition Khor-dong, which will hopefully be released in 2026.

³ Currently, there is only one available edition of this biography: Chos dbyings 2015. A complete translation of the biography will be included in the forthcoming *Northern Treasure Histories: Volume II*.

interpreted and utilized by the authors of *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight* and *The Garland of Wondrous Tales*.

Description of the Prayer

The complete prayer consists of a title, twenty-two verses, and a one-sentence colophon. Each stanza is composed of four lines, each with nine syllables. The first eighteen stanzas discuss the eighteen great omens mentioned in the title. Generally speaking, the first two lines of each of these stanzas are brief autobiographical accounts of something achieved or perceived by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself, which he presents as signs (*rtags*) of accomplishment. The third line explains how that particular sign is also an omen (*brda*) or symbol of something that will come to pass in the future. Each stanza ends with the refrain: "I remember your kindness, Precious One of Odḍiyāna!"⁴ The nineteenth stanza acts as a sort of summary, explaining that the signs manifest when he faithfully focuses on the emanation body (*sprul sku*) of Padmasambhava and that the eighteen great omens (*brda*), in turn, are symbols (*brda*) of Padmasambhava's compassion.⁵ The final three stanzas constitute a closing, aspirational prayer to the "Victorious One" (*rgyal ba*), who is identified as Padmasambhava. The colophon announces the conclusion of *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens*, which is further described as a biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem expressed through omens (*rnam thar brda'i sgo nas gsungs*). While the colophon does not state the name of the author, I have followed Nyi ma bzang po's lead by understanding the prayer as an autobiographical composition written by the great treasure revealer himself,⁶ which is not a stretch given the use of first-person pronouns.

Placement of the Prayer in Northern Treasures Literature

The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens is preserved within a text entitled *The Clearly Illuminated Ritual Practices of Thub bstan rdo rje brag e wam lcog sgar Communities*, which is a collection of liturgical prayers meant to be utilized at rDo rje brag Monastery and its affiliates. Therein, the prayer is sandwiched between two other prayers. The preceding is a

⁴ *bKa' drin dran no o rgyan rin po che.*

⁵ As the majority of the usages of "*brda*" in this prayer appear to refer to developments that will unfold in the future, I have mostly translated the term as "omen." The situation is more complicated in the nineteenth stanza, however, in that it offers a sort of summative interpretation of the symbolism (*brda*) of all eighteen omens (*brda*) that are foreshadowed by the corresponding eighteen signs (*rtags*).

⁶ For the passage where he states that the prayer contains Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's own words, see Nyi ma bzang po 1983, p. 93.

short, two-stanza prayer, which—according to the colophon—was written by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem to praise his own name.⁷ *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens* is followed in this collection by a larger, twenty-nine-stanza prayer to the emanated treasure revealers (*sprul sku gter ston*) that was written by Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde (1550–1603).⁸

The Editions

There are four editions (1979, 2000, 2003, 2015) of *The Clearly Illuminated Ritual Practices of Thub bstan rdo rje brag e wam lcog sgar Communities* that contain the entirety of *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens* available through the Buddhist Digital Resource Center.⁹ The 1979 and 2000 editions are images of the same handwritten text, and the 2003 edition contains the same text of the prayer with no variations, although it appears to have been digitally produced and bound in the western format. The 2015 edition, which was produced digitally to replicate a traditional Tibetan book (i.e., *dpe cha*), contains a handful of variant spellings of minor significance. The translation below is based on the 1979 edition, unless otherwise indicated in the footnotes.

Analysis of the Use of the Prayer in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Biographies

As implied in the introduction, the following analysis is limited to an examination of just two of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biographies. It appears that Nyi ma bzang po was the first to make use of the prayer in a biography of the great treasure revealer. His fifteenth-century composition, *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*, includes twelve of the twenty-two verses of the prayer.¹⁰ While, as mentioned above, the available editions of the complete prayer are nearly identical to one another, there are numerous major and minor differences between the excerpts in *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight* and the editions of the complete prayer. In addition, there are significant variations between the different

⁷ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 1979, [Untitled Prayer], in *Thub bstan rdo rje brag e wam lcog sgar ba'i 'dus sde rnams kyi chos spyod rab gsal*, pp. 122-123.

⁸ Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde 1979, pp. 127-134.

⁹ The details for these editions of *The Clearly Illuminated Ritual Practices of Thub bstan rdo rje brag e wam lcog sgar Communities* are grouped together at the beginning of the bibliography below.

¹⁰ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, *passim*. It should also be noted that he only includes the first three lines of each of the extracted verses. He systematically cuts the last line of praise to Padmasambhava.

editions of the biography itself.¹¹ It appears, for example, that the 2015 edition of *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight* has undergone some editing that is not present in earlier editions of the biography. mKhan po Chos dbyings's biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, which appears within *The Garland of Wondrous Tales*, offers a unique opportunity for comparison because, while it certainly draws information from *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*, it is not simply a derivative of that earlier biography. In fact, one of the distinguishing elements of mKhan po Chos dbyings's composition is that it includes eighteen of the twenty-two verses, i.e., all of the verses that introduce the titular "eighteen great omens."¹² Interestingly, while mKhan po Chos dbyings must have had a complete edition of the prayer at his disposal, he has incorporated many of the variations in the twelve verses that are preserved in *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*. However, he has also introduced more variations to these twelve verses as well as to the six additional verses that he brought into his biography.¹³

While some of the variations of the prayer as it appears in the biographies are discussed in the footnotes to the translation below, the analysis here is focused on the order in which a specific series of events is presented in those works. Regarding the table below, note that there are no dates listed in the first column to reflect the fact that, while the group of eighteen portentous events are presented in a particular order, the prayer itself does not contain any dates. The dates in the second and third column are either directly stated or implied in the biographies themselves.

¹¹ I have published a parallel edition of *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens* online that allows one to view the differences between the four complete editions of the prayer, two different editions of the partial prayer as it appears in *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*, and excerpts from the prayer found in *The Garland of Wondrous Tales*. See Valentine 2025: <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/3391>.

¹² mKhan po chos dbyings 2015, *passim*.

¹³ As the edition(s) of the prayer that was used by mKhan po Chos dbyings is unknown, one cannot be perfectly sure that the variations were introduced by this author or if they were present in his edition(s) of the prayer. However, it does seem that the variations were introduced by mKhan po Chos dbyings to help clarify certain opaque phrases in the complete prayer.

Table 1 – A Comparison of the Order of Events

<i>The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens</i>	<i>The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight</i>	<i>The Garland of Wondrous Tales</i>
3. Extraction of the Keys at bKra bzang	Extraction of the Keys at bKra bzang (1366) ¹⁴	3. Extraction of the Keys at bKra bzang (1366)
10. Extraction of Treasure at Zang zang lHa brag	4. Extraction of Treasure at Zang zang lHa brag (1366)	4. New Year Signs at Mt. bKra bzang, where the Three Treasures Came Together (1367 or later)
17. Observing Signs in Mang yul sKyid grong	11. New Year Signs at Mt. bKra bzang, where the Three Treasures Came Together (1367)	11. Extraction of Treasure at Zang zang lHa brag (1366)
18. New Year Signs at Mt. bKra bzang, where the Three Treasures Came Together	12. Observing Signs in Mang yul sKyid grong (ca. 1370)	18. Observing Signs in Mang yul sKyid grong (between 1366 and 1371)

It appears that the authors of the biographies had a difficult time rectifying the events described in verse eighteen with the events as they were mapping them out in their biographical compositions. Perhaps as a result, Nyi ma bzang po reversed the order of the final two verses that he incorporated into the biography, while mKhan po Chos dbyings moved the eighteenth verse of the prayer all the way back to the 4th position. Nyi ma bzang po pairs the verse in question with a fuller account of the signs witnessed at Mt. bKra bzang during the New Year celebrations of 1367 and a declaration that during his lifetime one could still witness such signs at this sacred location.¹⁵ The prayer itself does not explicitly state the cause of the signs, but it is implied that the spectacular event—the ripening of plants in the dead of winter—resulted from the bringing together of “three treasures” (*gter gsum*) at the summit of the mountain. However, it is not clear which three treasures are being referenced. Nyi ma bzang po clarifies in *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight* that the signs were witnessed at the spot where the treasure keys were extracted, thus he strongly implies that the three treasures referenced by the prayer are in fact the three treasure keys. Additionally, the placement of the event in the biography implies that the sign—out-of-season fruition of vegetation—was also a biproduct of the “fruition” of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s exploits at Mt. bKra bzang, where he established a practice center, started mastering his treasure cycles, and began receiving devotees after extracting the treasures at

¹⁴ I have not given this event a number here because the corresponding passage from the prayer was not included by Nyi ma bzang po, despite the fact that the event itself is described in detail in the biography.

¹⁵ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 102-103.

Zang zang lha brag.

mKhan po Chos dbyings also appears to understand the stanza as referring to the three treasure keys, which is why he moved the verse to the fourth position, much closer to the verse that more clearly describes the discovery of the keys. It is clear from the way that he presents the verse, however, that he does understand it as referring to signs that would occur at some point in the future, perhaps during the New Year of 1367 or later. Nevertheless, the placement of the passage is still potentially misleading, particularly if “the three treasures” does not refer to the three keys.

As reflected in Table 1, both biographies end this sequence of events with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's journey to sKyid grong in the Kingdom of Mang yul gung thang to find an additional treasure site, because the prophetic guides actually indicate that there are three treasure sites—one at Zang zang lha brag, one in Mang yul, and another at Yang le shod in Nepal—that could be discovered by the prophesied treasure revealer, his future incarnations, or other Padmasambhava-related emanations.¹⁶ While the existence and contents of the three treasures are discussed at length in *The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*,¹⁷ they are only hinted at in passing in *The Garland of Wondrous Tales*.¹⁸ However, neither biography offers any details about the recovery of treasures from the second or third sites.¹⁹ It is implied that while he saw the predicted environmental signs, his exploits in Mang yul were disrupted by the death of his patron, King Phun tshogs sde (r. 1365–1370), which ultimately led to his departure for the concealed lands in the border region in the north of present-day Sikkim.²⁰

The sequence of events in *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens*, conversely, culminates with the signs of out-of-season ripening at Mt. bKra bzang, where “the three treasures” have come together, which occurs after he observed the signs in Mang yul. As the prayer does not mention his journey to the concealed lands, it presumably only reflects the events of his life up to his return to Mt. bKra bzang after visiting Mang yul. In this context, it seems a little more likely that the autobiographical prayer is referring to three treasures (not treasure keys) that were discovered at three different locations and then subsequently

¹⁶ The three treasures are mentioned throughout the prophetic guide; see Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 1983, *passim*. For a discussion of the identity of the prophesied treasure revealer(s), see *ibid.*, pp. 329–330. For further discussion of the three prophesied treasures, see Valentine 2024, pp. 157–161.

¹⁷ Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 76–77.

¹⁸ mKhan po Chos dbyings 2015, p. 93.

¹⁹ As far as can be judged so far from a study of the colophons of the tradition, it does not appear that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem extracted treasures from these two sites.

²⁰ See Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 103–105 and mKhan po Chos dbying 2015, pp. 108–109.

brought together at Mt. bKra bzang. Yet, it is very unlikely that Rigdzin Gödem extracted the treasures of Mang yul, and it is even more unlikely that he extracted the treasures at Yang le shod as there is no record of a journey to Nepal. Thus, it appears that the identity of the three treasures that were gathered at Mt. bKra bzang as well as the fate of the second two treasures will remain as unsolved mysteries for the foreseeable future, about which one can only speculate.²¹

*The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens*²²

དང་པོ་བྱང་ཆུབ་མཆོག་ཏུ་ཐུགས་བསྐྱེད་ནས། ། ལས་འཕྲོད་ལྷོ་བས་ཀྱིས་ལུས་ལ་བཀའ་དྭགས་བྱོན། །
བྱིན་གྱིས་བསྐྱབས་པའི་སྤྲུལ་སྲུ་ལུང་བསྟན་བད། ། བཀའ་དྲིན་དན་ཉོ་ཆུན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

Having first set my mind on supreme enlightenment,
The declared signs²³ [later] appeared on my body because of the
strength of my residual karma.

That was an omen [indicating that I am] the prophesied blessed
son.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

²¹ Herweg 1994, p. 104, asserts that “the three treasures” refers to “all the items that were found together [at Mt. bKra bzang] with the key to the treasure of Zang zang lha brag.” This makes some sense as Nyi ma bzang po 1983, pp. 92-93, describes the discovery of a key, a branch from the tree of enlightenment, and seven scrolls all together at Mt. bKra bzang, which could presumably be counted as “three treasures.” While Herweg’s hypothesis should not be disregarded, I would expect that if the passage was meant to refer to three treasures “revealed at” (or perhaps “concealed at”) bKra bzang, then the prophecy could have stated that, despite its terseness. Instead, the verb ‘*dus*’ (in the complete prayer) and ‘*dzoms*’ (in the excerpt as it appears in the biographies) seems to imply that the three treasures that were discovered at multiple locations were brought together at the summit of Mt. bKra bzang. This suggests to me that the passage is referring to three treasures that were revealed at Zang zang lha brag (and perhaps two other locations) and that were later gathered at the practice center at Mt. bKra bzang. That being said, it is clear from elsewhere in Nyi ma bzang po’s biography that Rig ‘dzin rGod ldem discovered a *nāga* jewel at Mt. bKra bzang in 1361 (pp. 68-69) and that there were in fact three keys concealed by Padmasambhava at Mt. bKra bzang (1983, pp. 156-157), presumably all together, but perhaps at three locations that represent the eye, tongue, and heart of the mountain (1983, p. 79-80). Thus, it is possible that the verse in question is in fact referring to treasures that were discovered at three different locations at Mt. bKra bzang that were later gathered at its summit.

²² I am very thankful for the help received during the translation process from the following FCHNT team members: Jean-Luc Achard, Tenpa Tsering Batsang, Cécile Ducher, and Stéphane Arguillère. Of course, any mistakes are entirely my own.

²³ Here I understand “*bka’ rtags*” to refer to signs (*rtags*) that were verbalized (*bka’*) by Padmasambhava in the prophecies. Thanks to Jean-Luc Achard for his help with this passage.

ཉི་མའི་ཕྱེ་ལ་རི་རྒྱལ་ཤར་འདབས་ནས། །རྟེན་འབྲེལ་འཛོམས་པའི་བདུད་རྩི་ཆུ་མིག་རྟེན། །

དངོས་གྲུབ་འབྱུང་བའི་རྟགས་དེ་ལོན་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་བློན་བློན་མོ་ཞུ་རྟེན་པོ་ཆེ། །

When the sun peeked,²⁴ on the eastern slope of the King of Mountains,

I found the spring of nectar, which brought together the auspicious circumstances.

That sign of my coming attainment was an omen [indicating my] maturity.²⁵

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

རི་མའི་ཕྱེ་ལ་གཏོར་ཆེན་ལྗེ་མིག་རྟེན། །རོ་མཚར་མདུ་124བྱུང་བའི་རྟགས་གསུམ་མཐོང་། །

དོན་ཆེན་ཐེ་ཚོམ་མེད་པར་འགྲུབ་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་བློན་བློན་མོ་ཞུ་རྟེན་པོ་ཆེ། །

At the summit of the mountain, I found the keys for the great treasures.

I saw three amazing and wondrous signs.

That was an omen indicating that I would undoubtedly accomplish a great purpose.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

བྲག་རི་དུག་སྐྱུ་ལ་སྐྱུངས་འདྲ་བའི་ཆོ། །ལོག་པའི་བདུད་རྩི་མས་གཤོལ་འདེབས་བྲག་པོ་བྱེད། །

སྟོན་གྱི་ལས་འཕྲོས་བདུད་རྩི་མས་སྐྱུ་བའི་བད། །བཀའ་བློན་བློན་མོ་ཞུ་རྟེན་པོ་ཆེ། །

When I was travelling to the rocky mountain that resembles a heap of snakes,

Repelling māra-spirits ferociously discouraged [my progress]

That was an omen [indicating that] I would tame māra-spirits because of my residual karma from past [lives].

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

ནམ་མཁའ་སྤྱིན་མེད་ཤིན་ཏུ་དྲངས་པ་ལ། །ཆ་གང་སྟོན་མེད་ཉི་མའི་འོད་ཟེར་འཕྲོ། །

ཆོས་སྐྱུ་སྤྱིན་བྲལ་ནམ་མཁའ་ལྟ་བུའི་བད། །བཀའ་བློན་བློན་མོ་ཞུ་རྟེན་པོ་ཆེ། །

In an extremely pure, cloudless sky,

Rays of sunlight shone without the flaws of warmth or

²⁴ This phrase, "*nyi ma'i rtse la*," generally refers to dawn, or more specifically, the moment that the very top (i.e., the peak) of the sun emerges (or peeks out) from the horizon or from behind a mountain, as is often the case in Tibet. One can imagine that at such a moment a narrowed beam of sunlight might illuminate a specific spot wherein lies hidden treasure. A similar phenomenon might also occur as the sun sets in the evening. Thanks to Tenpa Tsering Batsang for his help with this passage.

²⁵ *Lon pa*.

coolness.²⁶

That was an omen [indicating that] the reality body is like a sky free from clouds.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

བར་སྒྲུང་འཇའ་ཚོན་འབར་བས་གང་བ་ལ། །ཁ་དོག་སྒྲུ་མ་འབྲེས་སོ་སོར་གསལ། །

ལོངས་སྒྲུ་མཚན་དང་དཔེ་བྱད་ལྡན་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་བློན་བློན་མོ་ལྟ་བུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

In the atmosphere, which was filled with the blaze of rainbow light,

Each of the five colors appeared distinctly.

That was an omen [indicating that] the enjoyment body is endowed with major and minor marks.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

ལྷོ་རྒྱབ་མཚམས་ནས་འཇའ་ཚོན་སྒྲུ་བའི་མདོག་གསལ་བ་བཏབ་ན་རྒྱུ་ཆད་མེད་པར་འབྱུང། །

སྒྲུལ་སྒྲུ་འགྲོ་བའི་དོན་ལ་དགོངས་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་བློན་བློན་མོ་ལྟ་བུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

When I prayed [to Padmasambhava], the colors of the web²⁷ of rainbows

Appeared uninterruptedly from the southwest.

That was an omen [indicating that] emanation bodies are intended to benefit migratory beings.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

ཕྱོགས་བཞིའི་སྤྲེའོག་ས་རྒྱམས་ལེགས་པར་བཅོལ། །ཐེ་ཚོམ་མེད་པར་གནས་དེ་རྟེན་པའི་ཆོ། །

བླག་ལྷག་འགུལ་ཞིང་གཏིར་125བདག་འབྱོན་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་བློན་བློན་མོ་ལྟ་བུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

[I] searched well in the four directions, above, and below,

When I, without a doubt, found the [treasure] site,

The cave quaked, and that was an omen [indicating that] the

²⁶ While the translation of this prayer is my own, I did check to see how Claude Sonnet 4 would translate the prayer. This one line of verse is the only one that I consciously adjusted in response to Claude's translation. Here is how Claude rendered the entire stanza: "In the sky, cloudless and utterly clear, | The sun's rays shine without the flaws of heat or cold. | This symbolizes the dharmakaya like the cloudless sky— | I remember your kindness, precious Orgyen" (Translation by Claude Sonnet 4 (Anthropic), June 5, 2025. Personal communication via Claude.ai interface). I had originally translated the second line as "Emanating flawless rays of warm sunlight and cool moonlight," but I ended up liking Claude's suggestion that the heat and coolness were the flaws in this context and thus reworked my translation as presented above.

²⁷ Here I followed the variation contained in the excerpt as it appears in Chos dbyings' biography (2015, p. 95). He replaced *zla ba* (moon, month, spouse, etc.) with *drwa ba* (web, net, etc.).

treasure protector would [soon] arrive.
I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

དུས་དང་གཟུང་སྐར་འཛོམས་པའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་འགྲིག། སྤྱི་བའི་བྲག་ལ་ཡངས་པའི་སྒོ་མོ་བྱ། །
བཀའ་བཞིན་བསྐྱབས་ན་ཅི་བསམས་འབྲུབ་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་དྲིན་དྲན་ནོལ་རྒྱན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །
The auspicious circumstances of the convergence of time, planets, and stars were appropriate, [so]
I opened the broad portal in the hard stone.
That was an omen [indicating that] if I practice according to the teachings, I will accomplish whatever I can conceive.
I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

དུག་སྦྱུལ་ནག་པའི་ནང་ནས་བྱུང་མོང་གི།²⁸ །དངོས་བྱུང་མཐུགས་མན་ངག་འགའ་ཅས་བྱོན། །
ལས་གྱི་བར་ཆད་སེལ་བྱེད་པོ་ཉའི་བད། །བཀའ་དྲིན་དྲན་ནོལ་རྒྱན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །
From inside the poisonous black snake,
Came a few common precepts [that would result in] rapid attainment.
That was an omen [indicating that] I would dispel obstacles on the path [and act as] a messenger.
I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

བསེ་སྒྲོམ་སྦྱག་པའི་ནང་ནས་ཟབ་མའི་གཏེར། །སྐྱ་གསུང་གྲགས་ཀྱི་ཚབ་ཏུ་མཛོད་ལུ་བྱོན། །
སྟིགས་དུས་སྦྱུལ་སྦྱུའི་བསྟན་པ་དར་བའི་བད། །བཀའ་དྲིན་དྲན་ནོལ་རྒྱན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །
From within the dark brown leather box, came the profound treasure,
The five-fold treasury that represents [Padmasambhava's] body, speech, and mind.
That was an omen [indicating that] in the degenerate times, the teachings of the emanation will spread.
I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

བདག་དང་ལས་ཅན་འཁོར་རྣམས་སྐད་ཅིག་ལ། །ཉམས་དགའ་བག་འོ་རིག་པ་རང་དང་ལྷན། །
བར་ཆད་བསལ་ནས་དངོས་བྱུང་འབྲུང་བའི་བད། །བཀའ་དྲིན་དྲན་ནོལ་རྒྱན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །
Instantly, I and my retinue of fortunate ones were
Joyous and cheerful and endowed with sharp insight.

²⁸ Both Nyi ma bzang po (1983, p. 96) and mKhan po Chos dbyings (2015, p. 97) adjust the final part of this line to read *thun mong gter*, which makes it clear to me that the *thun mong* can be read as modifying *man ngag*, which is a treasure.

That was an omen [indicating that] having cleared away obstacles, attainment will arrive.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

ནམ་ལངས་དུས་ན་ཕྱགས་མཆོམས་ཆར་གྱིས་གང་། །གནས་དེར་ཉི་མའི་ཕྱེལ་འཇའ་འོད་ཟུག
ཐུགས་རྗེ་ཐབས་མཁས་ལས་འཕྲོ་འཛོམ་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་རིན་པོ་མེ་ལྷན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

At daybreak, all directions were filled with rain.

When the sun peeked, rainbow light penetrated that sacred site.

That was an omen [indicating that] my compassion, skillful means, and residual karma would converge.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

གཏིང་ཆེན་གང་དུ་126ཕྱོད་པའི་ས་ཕྱོགས་སུ། །གནས་ས་བར་སྤང་ཐམས་ཅད་འཇའ་ཡིས་གང་། །

རྒྱལ་བའི་ཐུགས་རྗེས་ལས་འཕྲོ་འཛོམ་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་རིན་པོ་མེ་ལྷན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

In the lands, wherever the great treasure went,

The sky, the earth, and the atmosphere were all filled with rainbows.

That was an omen [indicating that] the compassion of the Victorious One and my residual karma²⁹ would come together.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

བྱང་ཕྱོགས་རི་བོ་བཀྲ་བཟང་མཐོང་བའི་ཆོ། །དབང་གི་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ངོ་མཚར་རྟགས་རྣམས་ཤར། །

ཡུལ་འོད་གྱི་གཞལ་ཡས་གསལ་བའི་བད། །བཀའ་རིན་པོ་མེ་ལྷན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

When I saw Mt. bKra bzang in the north,

Wondrous signs arose from the direction of power.³⁰

That was an omen [indicating that] the palace of lotus light would become manifest.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

ཡ་མཚན་ཆེན་པོ་དྲག་པོའི་བརྟུལ་ཞུགས་གྱིས། །ཐུར་ལ་སྟོབས་ཆེ་བདུད་དཔུང་ཐུལ་བའི་རྟགས། །

རྒྱ་ཆེན་འབྱུང་བ་དྲག་པོའི་འཕྲིན་ལས་བད། །བཀའ་རིན་པོ་མེ་ལྷན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

The great marvels were signs [resulting from]

The quick taming of intensely powerful hordes of māra-spirits

²⁹ The excerpt as it appears in the biographies all contain slight variations in comparison to the editions of the complete prayer. Here I have decided to follow a variation found in mKhan po Chos dbyings' composition (2015, p. 101), which reads "rgyal ba'i thugs rje las 'phro."

³⁰ Generally, "dbang gi phyogs" refers to either the east or northeast because of its association with Indra's place of dwelling.

by means of wrathful conduct.

That was an omen [indicating that my] wrathful enlightened activity would be extensive.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

མང་ཡུལ་སྦྱིད་བྱོང་ཕྱོགས་སུ་བྱོན་པའི་ཆོ། །ལུང་བསྟན་གཏེར་གྱི་ས་རྟགས་རི་ལྟ་བུ། །

རོ་མཚར་རྟགས་རྣམས་མཐོང་བས་ཡིད་ཆེས་བད། །བཀའ་རིན་པོ་ལོ་ལྟན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

When I arrived in the sKyid grong region of Mang yul,
I saw the wondrous signs as the prophesied treasure landmarks.
That was an omen [indicating that I should have] confidence.
I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

རི་ཁོ་བླ་བཟང་གཏེར་གསུམ་འདུས་པའི་ཕྱིར། །ལོ་གསར་འབྲུགས་པའི་དུས་སུ་ལོ་ཏྲོག་སྒྲིན། །

གནས་དེར་དད་ལྡན་ཅི་བསམ་འབྲུབ་པའི་བད། །བཀའ་རིན་པོ་ལོ་ལྟན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

At the summit of Mt. Trazang where three treasures came together,

During the cold of the New Year, plant life bore fruit.

That was an omen [indicating that] one with faith will accomplish whatever is conceived at that sacred location.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

དད་པའི་བྱུགས་ཀྱིས་སྤུལ་སྤུ་བྱན་པའི་ཆོ། །རོ་མཚར་རྟགས་རྣམས་འབྲུལ་མེད་དཔེ་127ཡིས་བསྟན། །

དེ་ཕྱིར་བད་ཆེན་བཅོད་བརྒྱུད་བྱུགས་རྒྱུ་བད། །བཀའ་རིན་པོ་ལོ་ལྟན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། །

When with strong faith I remembered the emanation,
Wondrous signs were shown [to me] through [these] unforgettable examples.

Thus, the eighteen great omens are symbols³¹ of [Padmasambhava's] compassion.

I remember your kindness, Precious One of Oḍḍiyāna!

སྤྱིགས་མའི་དུས་འདིར་དམག་དཔུང་འབྲུག་ཚོད་དང་། །ཆགས་སྤང་འབྲན་སེམས་ལོག་ལྟ་བུ་དར་བའི་ཆོ། །

རང་བསྟོད་གཞན་སྟོད་རྒྱུགས་པའི་ཁོང་ཁོངས་འདི། །རྒྱལ་བའི་བྱུགས་རྒྱུ་ཞི་དུལ་ལྡན་པར་མཛོད། །

In this degenerate time [of] armies and wars,

When attachment, aversion, jealousy, and wrong views are spreading,

³¹ As mentioned in a previous note, in order to reflect the complexity of this stanza and its relationship to all eighteen of the preceding verses, I found it appropriate to render the second usage of *brda* here as "symbols," while everywhere else I have translated it as "omens."

May this prideful one, he who haughtily praises himself and disparages others,
Be gentled through the compassion of the Victorious One (i.e., Padmasambhava)!

མངས་རྒྱལ་བསྟན་པ་དང་ཞིང་རྒྱལ་པ་དང་། །སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་བདེ་སྦྱིད་ལྡན་པ་དང་། །

བདག་གི་བསམ་པའི་དག་བསྟོབས་ཆེན་འདི། །རྒྱལ་བའི་བླགས་རྒྱུ་ལྷན་པར་མཛོད། །

May the teachings of the Buddha spread and flourish, and
May all sentient beings be endowed with joy and happiness, and
May these virtuous and powerful aspirations of mine
Quickly be perfected through the compassion of the Victorious One!

བདག་འདྲ་སྦྱེ་བ་འདི་དང་ཕྱི་མ་ལ། །འགོ་དོན་རྒྱ་ཆེན་འབྱུང་བའི་མཐུ་ལྡན་ཞིང་། །

ཡུལ་འབྱུང་གནས་རྒྱལ་བའི་ཞལ་མཐོང་ནས། །སྤྱོད་གསུང་བླགས་ཀྱི་དངོས་གྲུབ་བདག་ལ་སྦྱུལ། །

In this and later lives, may I and those like me,
Possess the power to greatly benefit migratory beings, and
Having seen the face of the Victorious One, Padmasambhava,
May he bestow on us³² the attainments of body, speech, and mind!

གཏིར་བཏོན་རིག་འཛིན་ཆེན་པོའི་རྣམ་ཐར་བཟའི་སྦྱོ་ནས་གསུངས་བའི་གསོལ་འདེབས་བཟུང་ཆེན་བཙོ་བརྒྱད་
ཚོགས་སོ། ། ཐཱ་

This completes *The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens: A Biography of the Great Treasure Revealer and Awareness Holder Expressed Through Omens*.

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The Prayer of the Eighteen Great Omens

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³² Here I have read *bdag* as a plural due to the usage of *bdag 'dra* in the first line of the stanza.

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Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, La stod Byang and the Historical Context of his Deeds

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he 14th century of rig 'dzin rGod ldem dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, one of several outstanding figures of renown in the ranks of the rNying ma school, was a thriving period marked by the work of great *gter ston*-s such as himself, Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396), O rgyan gling pa (1323–?) and several others, including the older contemporary kun mkhyen Klong chen pa (1308–1364).

They brought a radical change from the earlier centuries in the search of literary treasures. In the previous period, the *bKa' chems ka khol ma* and *Mani bka' 'bum gter ma*-s were meant to secure the paternity of *bstan pa snga dar* to the rNying ma tradition in a time when *phyi dar* had flourished and new schools besides the One of the Ancients were born. Freed from doctrinal assertions of that type, the 14th century *gter ston*-s concentrated on rediscoveries that contributed to the birth of a new rNying ma season of great significance.

Still the context in which they operated was remarkably complex. The case of rig 'dzin rGod ldem on which I focus in this piece was no exception. The scenario was characterised by major events that affected the life of the lands where he was active.¹

Before I focus on the context of that time, I must spend a word or two on rig 'dzin rGod ldem's ethnicity given its peculiarity and the confusion that has been propagated in the past, which do not take into consideration his ethnic affiliation both from the viewpoints of historicity and linguistics. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was of foreign origin. He was not purely Tibetan.

¹ The 14th century was a time of major turmoil and deep changes in Tibet, an eventful period in its history that involved personalities and lands throughout the plateau and beyond it. Nonetheless, focus on the context in which rig 'dzin rGod ldem operated restricts my treatment to the individuals, events and territories that had an impact upon the life of the great master. This approach leads to the consequence that many important facts of those years—signs left by other people and the developments they were responsible for in the world of 14th century Tibet—have to be omitted from my treatment.

1. *The great gter ston's kin*

An interpolation that found its way into Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's 15th century biography of the great *gter ston* states that rig 'dzin rGod ldem's people were the Gur Ser.² This proper name has been misread. It has been said to refer to the Mongols (*Blue Annals*, p. 63),³ but in Tibetan culture the Gur Ser are the Yellow Uighur.

To trace his origins, a step back of 700 years from his birth is an aspect that should be dealt with. As well-known, rig 'dzin rGod ldem's origin goes back to his ancestor De wa ra dza who proceeded to Tibet in the train of Gyim shang Ong co. The Uighur were not yet formed as a tribal group or a nation in the second quarter of the 7th century when rig 'dzin rGod ldem's ancestor came to Tibet. They began making inroads in the Kan chou territory in the first decade of the ninth century (Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, p. 163) or else in 840 (Haneda, "Introduction: Problems of Turkicization," p. 5) otherwise as late as 860 or 866 (R.A. Stein, "Mi nyag et Si hia," p. 250).⁴

Subsequently, peoples' realignment in the region followed the Tangut ruler Yuanhao's military expeditions after he took over the throne of Byang Mi nyag later than 1015 but before 1028. Various

² Gu ru bKra shis, too, talks about the rig 'dzin's origin allegedly stemming from the Gur ser. This is an indicator that the interpolation in Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's biography of the great *gter ston* predates the work of Gu ru bKra shis. This great rNying ma master also mentions the ancestor De wa ra dza and adds that he bore the title *de gyin* (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 483,6-7). His reference to the Turkic title moves the ethnic identification of the master's family in a direction that has to be considered as reliable.

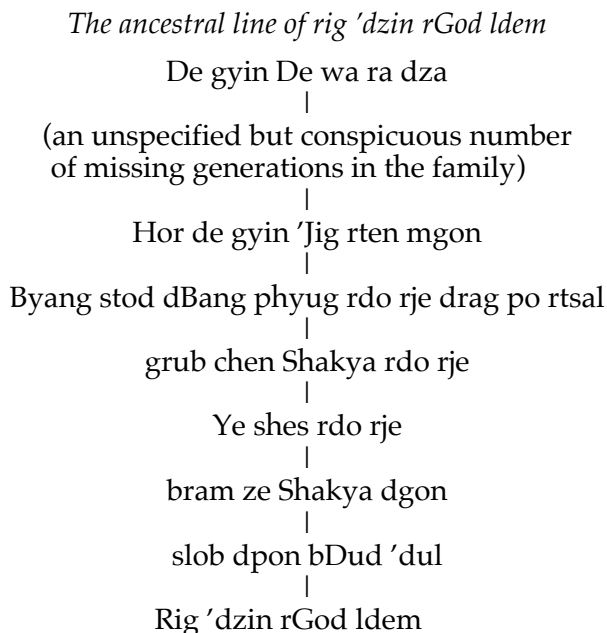
³ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was not a Mongol. What place did the Mongols hold in Tibetan history when, in 641, the Chinese princess reached Tibet according to the Introduction to the *Tun-huang Annals* (lines 12-14 in *Tun hong nas thon pa'i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha*, p. 12)? Definitely not a purported role in the Tibeto-Chinese relations.

⁴ The attribution to De wa ra dza of a Yu gur origin is explained from the viewpoint of the Ge sar *sgrung* by later Tibetan authors. The notional link with Gling Ge sar is anachronistic inasmuch as this association has a hiatus of some 400 years from De wa ra dza. This interpolation in the Sikkim and Bhutan biographies had the purpose to add further prestige to the lineage of rig 'dzin rGod ldem but the *gdung rgyud* of Gling Ge sar cannot be applied to de gyin De wa ra dza. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's own words about his origin in *sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, in a prophecy he attributed to Guru Padma, rule out a Gur ser affiliation.

The association of Gling Ge sar with the Yu gur, found in the saga of the hero, has been highlighted by Sum pa mkhan po (*Reply of Sum bha* (sic) *mkhan po's to dPal ldan ye shes in Damdinsuren, Istorickéskí korni Geseriadi*, Tibetan text, pp. 184,2-185,4). It is historically out of context to apply the interaction between Ge sar and the Yu gur, as done by Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, to a half millennium before the existence of protagonist of the saga, when De wa ra dza reached Tibet, disregarding any evaluation made of the great hero's life accepted as real by Tibetan authors but rejected by Western Tibetologists.

groups of Yu gur relocated on the western border of Byang Mi nyag, while the followers of the late Phan Blo gros, an influential A mdo dignitary of the beginning of the 11th century, settled to the south of it, in an area consonant with their A mdo ba ethnicity (*Sung rgyal rabs*, whose passages are translated into Tibetan by sTag lha Pun tshogs bkra shis in his *rGya'i yig tshang nang gsal ba'i Bod kyi rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, pp. 543,15-544,4).

De wa ra dza, the ancestor, bore the title *de gyin* which makes him a Turk.⁵ Since he became a minister favourite of Srong btsan sgam po, he could have been a Western Turk, the allies of this *btsan po* in campaigns to the west of the plateau (Beckwith 1987, p. 34; Chavannes reprint 1963, p. 288; *Ancient Tibet* 1986, pp. 231-232), rather than a Northern Turk.



Decisive evidence on the matter comes from the self-authored *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, where rig 'dzin rGod ldem has a prophecy he wrote about himself which he attributes to Guru Padma. In this prophecy, he talks about his origin. He does not say that he was of Uighur ethnic stock.

Around the mid 12th century, Hor 'Jig rten mgon, a member of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's family, still boasted the Turkic title *de gyin*, which is

⁵ For the same reading of the term *de gyin* (i.e. *tegyin*) as a Turkic title of distinction, see Dan Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures* (chapter 3, n. 25).

an indication that his *rus*—or patrilinear side—was Turkic while his *sha*—or matrilinear side—had become Tibetan. In the next generation—late 12th century—the Turkic family of rig 'dzin rGod ldem transferred itself to g.Yas ru Byang, not yet known as La stod Byang, thus bringing a cosmopolitan touch to the principality.

The prophecy rig 'dzin rGod ldem has written about himself in *sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig* is useful to approximate a date for the transfer of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's family to g.Yas ru Byang.

The *lung bstan* talks about thirty-six generations between De wa ra dza and rig 'dzin rGod ldem, including six of them between the predecessor Byang stod dBang phyug rdo rje drag po rtsal who settled in g.Yas ru Byang and the great *gter ston* (*sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig*, ff. 8b,6-9a,1).⁶ Besides De wa ra dza, no other member in rGod ldem's family is recorded in the period from 641 to the later part of the 12th century.⁷ This is a typical absence in the historiographical literature but, in the case of the great *gter ston*'s family, uncommonly extended farther than the canonical gap.

A calculation by *mi rabs* brings approximately to the early 13th century the transfer of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's historical family to the principality in the west.

g.Yas ru Byang

La stod Byang had a long history that goes back to the pre-Srong btsan sgam po period. *Grags pa gling grags* includes Zang zang lha brag among the thirty-seven 'du gnas-s of the ancient Bon po tradition, eight of them in g.Yas ru (Kværne-Martin, *Drenpa Proclamation*, p. 193). dPal ldan tshul khirms, too, includes Zang zang among the ancient thirty-seven Bon po 'du gnas-s (g.*Yung drung Bon bstan 'byung*, p. 489,3-4). The

⁶ It is significant that Drag po rtsal, the first member of the rig 'dzin's family to settle in g.Yas ru Byang since he bore the specification Byang stod in his name, was the one who prophesied the great *gter ston*'s birth in the land of La stod Byang, at the eastern flanks of Ri bo bkra bzang in Fire-Ox 1337 (*Guru bkra shis chos 'byung*, p. 483,18-20).

⁷ On the topic of the generational distance between De wa ra dza and rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the Bhutan edition (f. 9,3) writes "mi lo nyer cig" ("twenty-one years") whereas the Sikkim edition (p. 59,2) writes "mi rabs nyi shu rtsa gcig" ("twenty-one generations"), an obviously more correct way to ascertain the gap between the two members of the family, but still not without error. The Sikkim edition, too, is chronologically incorrect since it says that fifteen generations elapsed, rig 'dzin rGod ldem included, from his ancestor's transfer to g.Yas ru Byang all the way to the great *gter ston*, whereas only six occurred according to the rig 'dzin's own view. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's own statement in *sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig* that assesses the number of generations between his ancestor in the principality and himself is to be given credit. By means of an overall calculation by *mi rabs*-s, thirty-six generations went by from De wa ra dza to him.

next holy place in his classification of the 'du gnas-s is Grom pa rGyang in the area of lHa rtse, where rig 'dzin rGod ldem had an important sojourn and made a *gter ma* rediscovery (see below).

The land underwent a change of status, and therefore of name, across the centuries. It was conquered by rNam ri slong rtsan and included in his kingdom. At that time, it was still called Tho yo, its original denomination or at least the earliest that is recorded in the literature. It was still known in the same way when Srong btsan sgam po organised his state. Consequently, Tho yo was included in one of his *ru*, i.e. g.Yas ru, with the creation of the *ru gsum* in the year of the rat 712 (*Tun-huang Annals*, line 136, see *Tun hong nas thon pa'i Bod kyi lo rgyus yig cha*, p. 22), so that the area became known as g.Yas ru Byang. The name kept being used until 1268 when g.Yas ru Byang became La stod Byang, one of the dBus gTsang *khri skor bcu gsum*.

g.Yas ru Byang and its Tangut rulers

A further influx of foreign people marked a formative social antecedent in La stod Byang before the birth of rig 'dzin rGod ldem. This is recorded in dPal ldan Chos kyi bzang po's 15th century *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs*.

Tibetan sources say that Seng ge dar, who lived around or soon after the sixth generation of the Tangut royal house, became the lord of g.Yas ru Byang.

g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs, which describes the approach of Byang Mi nyag migrants towards g.Yas ru Byang, says that a royal child of the Tangut soil first moved to gTsang stod.⁸ He passed from locality to locality—Ra sa rGad po lung to sTag ste seng ge lung—and became the headman of the Mi nyag pa who migrated with him. He was Mi nyag pa lHa btsun Legs pa.

One of his nine children was Seng ge dar who became the ruler of g.Yas ru Byang and thus gave birth to a genealogy of local headmen that went on for generations to come.⁹

⁸ *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* (f. 1b,2-3): "Mi nyag Si'u rgyal po. After him at the sixth generation the nephew of rGyal rGod, a successor [in the royal family], which was long lasting and powerful, went to gTsang stod. He took control of the land. He moved to a [new] locality from Ra sa rGad po lung. He controlled the locality sTag ste seng ge lung. Here he became the elder brother of the Mi nyag [expatriates] as follows. Me nyag dpon po lHa btsun legs pa married two wives and the nine Zhu shang spun children were born. Concomitantly, they founded fiefs nearby and each of them controlled a locality".

⁹ *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* (ff. 1b,5-2a,1): "As to the greatest of the nine siblings, he was Me nyag Seng ge dar whose son was Kun dga' grags. The latter's son was Yon chen rDo rje dpal. (f. 2a) This one bowed to the feet of rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan. He was his *yon bdag*. His son was Yon chen dKon mchog grags who had

It is unclear how the sixth generation of Tangut rulers is counted in the Tibetan literature. Their sequence is not outlined beyond doubts and, moreover, in Tibetan sources the inception of the Byang Mi nyag kingdom is not clearly defined, too.

In his treatment of La stod Byang, the Fifth Dalai Lama identifies the lord of the principality in a similar way with the substantial difference from his source *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* that, in his view, the Tangut royal member who went to Tibet belonged to the seventh generations of the Byang Mi nyag kings (*dPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs*, p. 113,5-8).

The statements of both authors lack historical precision. They do not clarify the identity of the Byang Mi nyag king of those days and do not appraise the time of the dynasty foundation so that it is difficult to assess whether it is its sixth or seventh generation.

The Tangut tradition has it that the sixth king was Chunyou who had a long reign in the second half of the 12th century (r. 1153–1206). He was the king during whose reign Seng ge dar could have come to control La stod Byang. Evidence from the religious side proves matters more convincingly.

Seng ge dar's grandson, rDo rje dpal—gNam phe yo in the Tangut language—bowed to the feet of rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, the great Sa skya pa master (see n. 9). This places rDo rje dpal's interaction with the Sa skya pa master at the end of the 12th century or the beginning of the 13th at the latest given the dates of rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147–1216).

The Great Fifth confuses the matter further by making rDo rje dpal the son of Seng ge dar rather than his grandson, despite basing himself on *g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs* (see *dPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs*, p. 113,8-9).

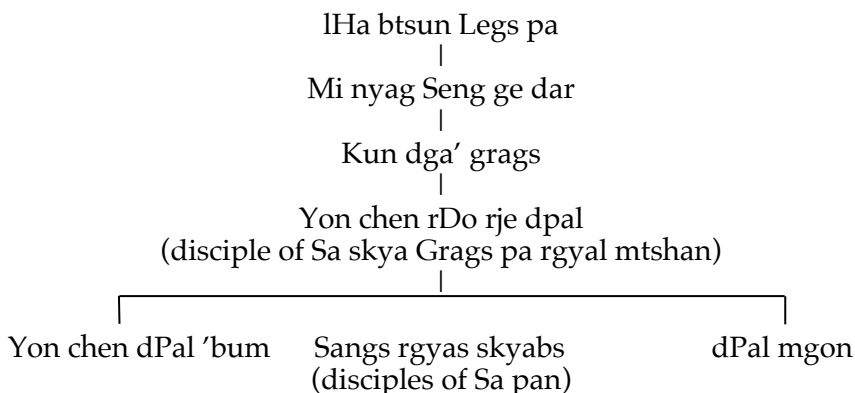
Given that the Tangut rule of *g.Yas ru Byang* began two *mi rabs* earlier than rDo rje dpal's interaction with rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, Seng ge dar's ascension to the throne of the principality fell around the mid 12th century.

These spiritual ties position the influx of Tangut people into La stod Byang before the fall of their kingdom, whereas the migrations of its inhabitants to other destinations on the plateau—rGyal mo rong, Nang chen, Khams Mi nyag, 'Bras mo ljongs—was the consequence of Gengis Khan's later conquest of Byang Mi nyag that took place in 1227.

One generation after rDo rje dpal, his three sons Yon chen dPal 'bum, Sangs rgyas skyabs and dPal mgon were devotees of Sa skya paṇḍi ta (1182–1251). This fact validates chronologically the

three sons, Yon chen dPal 'bum, Sangs rgyas skyabs and dPal mgon. Father and the sons bowed to the feet of Sa skya paṇḍi ta chen po uncle and nephews (Sa pan, 'Phags pa and Phyang na rdo rje)".

association of rDo rje dpal with rje btsun Grags pa rgyal which confirms the Sa skya pa affiliation of the principality, a distinctive trait that persisted throughout rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life. These were relations that began quite a long time before the Sa skya pa were at the head of Tibet as agents of the Yuan dynasty. The g.Yas ru Byang lineage of the period included:



The enforcement of the Yuan system of governance by means of the *khri skor bcu gsum* strengthened the Sa skya pa authority over La stod Byang, known under this appellative after it had been g.Yas ru Byang for a long time. The closeness to the Sa skya pa took the shape of a confirmation with the formal implementation of the ruling bloc that headed Se chen rgyal po and his Tibetan agents in earth-dragon 1268. It was Sa skya pa earlier and remained under the influence of the same religious and political school after the promulgation of Yuan-controlled dBus gTsang.

The outline of the royal lineage of local rulers in g.Yas ru Byang pa'i rgyal rabs proves that the lords of the principality, despite the change of overall governance in Tibet, did not stop being of Tangut origin.

Hence the land was characterised by the settling down of major groups of people who did not belong to the Tibetan layer of the land. The presence of Tangut and Turks in the principality under Sa skya pa guidance confirms that g.Yas ru Byang, not yet known as La stod Byang, experienced a moderate cosmopolitanism. It reproduced on a limited scale 7th century lHa sa, which benefitted from seminal contributions by Licchavi, Khotanese, Sogdians and Chinese under Srong btsan sgam po, witnessed by De wa ra dza.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's early years

In this scenario of minor cosmopolitanism, the great rig 'dzin rGod

ldem was born in fire-snake 1337 at sNa mo lung, the valley at the foot of the Ri bo bKra bzang mountain.¹⁰ Given that he was the rebirth of sNa nam bDud 'joms, his destiny to belong to the rNying ma tradition was evident from the outset. But Gu ru bKra shis says that rig 'dzin rGod ldem was a *skyes rabs* ("line of rebirths") member—this is how I interpret the term *skye ba* used by Gu ru bKra shis—of the bKa' brgyud master Khro phu lo tsa ba Byams pa'i dpal (1172–1236) (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 483,5-6).

He was raised to be a rNying ma by his father Srid bDud 'dul dpal and then received a formal education to the doctrines of this school from Legs pa ba and Se ston dPal chen, to whose *rus* the *rig 'dzin's* biographer Nyi ma bzang po belonged—thus showing that its clan members had a prolonged association with the *gter ston*.¹¹

Gung thang's steady support of Sa skya's policy

Being a turning point previous to the existence of rig 'dzin rGod ldem that impinged on the secular conditions of the principality, a further insertion into the reform of the social milieu brought by Tangut and Turks was that the Gung thang Khab pa took over direct control of La stod Byang in the days that followed the death of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa in 1280. The move marked the introduction of Gung thang's historical influence on La stod Byang.

The Gung thang feudatories of Sa skya launched a campaign that

¹⁰ The body features of rig 'dzin rGod ldem are most famous and therefore a prominent aspect of himself. The long description of his body traits, which covers much space in Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's biography, echoes the *purusha's* cosmic body which the *nam thar* transfers to human form.

It is common dominion that three feathers grew on the crown of his head at age twelve. They represented his previous karmic accumulation. Five more grew at age twenty-four. They marked his spiritual realisations. The growth of feathers occurred during two consecutive duodenary cycles in the *rig 'dzin's* life, whose symbolic value is in need of research.

Rig 'zin rGod ldem's feathers on his head was not his exclusive trait. In the literature, the anonymous teacher of the bKa' brgyud pa bla ma rGod 'phur pa (wood-monkey 1167-earth-dog 1238), a disciple of sKyob pa 'Jig rten mgon po, had vulture feathers on his head (Klu dkyil dgon in *Khams dKar mdzes dgon sde'i lo rgyus*, vol. 2, p. 272,14-18). He thus was a predecessor to the great *gter ston* in the matter of feathers on the crown of the head. The appellative rGod 'phur ba (the "flying vulture") was an inheritance he received from his teacher who had such a distinctive feature.

¹¹ *Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung* talks about a line of rNying ma masters from the land that had an impact upon rig 'dzin rGod ldem in his young age and kept interacting with him until the end of the *gter ston's* life. The text deals with the Se lineage settled in these territories with brief references to Se ston dPal chen 'bum, teacher of rig 'dzin rGod ldem and a relative of Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, the disciple and biographer of the great master.

reinforced the overall strategy of the Yuan agents in Tibet. Thirteen forts were built to exercise Gung thang pa control on behalf of Sa skya over the lands of the plateau to the west in a thorough territorial coverage. The name that the forts received collectively echoes a not uncommon expression (*las thabs*, “acts of duty”) in Tibetan language, while its full name reflects a historical peculiarity associated with the creation of the forts.¹² *Glang gi las thabs bcu gsum* was dubbed so because the young 'Bum lde mgon, who became the lord of Gung thang, saw the parade of his uncle 'gro mgon 'Phags pa's horses in Sa skya while sitting on an ox. Subsequently, his association with the ox persisted in the name that identified collectively the lands over which he established control by means of a network of forts.¹³

Among the “the thirteen acts of duty of the mule”, the fort that 'Bum lde mgon built in La stod Byang was La ru'i Gad rdzong dkar po.¹⁴ Its construction and the active sway of Gung thang over La stod Byang occurred at an imprecise date but around the three-year delta 1277-1280.

La stod Byang's governance during the Yuan dynasty's sovereignty

Byang *khri skor* was created subsequently as one of the thirteen dBus gTsang divisions of ten thousand and its control was assigned to the sTag sna rdzong pa with headquarters at mThong smon in Shangs. Rin

¹² *Gung thang gdung rabs* (IHa sa ed., pp. 108,8-109,2). The forts are collectively called *glang gi las thabs bcu gsum* (“thirteen districts established by the campaigns of the ox”) in *Mar lung pa'i rnam thar*, *Ngor chen gyi rnam thar* (p. 537,2-3) and *Chos legs kyi rnam thar*.

Mar lung pa'i rnam thar (f. 350b,1-3) says: “[Various] subjects were attending the [the parade of] the group of horses of 'gro mgon chos rgyal 'Phags pa in the military encampment at Sa skya. At that time, some people offered to help [Phags pa's] maternal nephew ('Bum lde mgon), who was seated on an old ox. They told him: “Do not scare the horses [with the ox]!”. Since [the nephew's dominions] were established, which became known as the *glang gi las thabs bcu gsum*, their name became spread over the surface of the land”.

Chos legs kyi rnam thar (f. 9a,5-6) is briefer: “This great nephew (i.e. 'Bum lde mgon, the nephew of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa) also founded rDzong dkar and, furthermore, established the *glang gi las thabs bcu gsum*.”

¹³ A similar denomination of duties is found in the bKa' brgyud pa milieu around the same period. The 'Bri gung abbot Cung rin po che rDo rje grags pa (1210-1278) designated rdor 'dzin 'gro mgon Phyag chen to perform the *Yul smad las tshan bco brgyad* (the “eighteen officiating duties of Yul smad”) in the area of southeastern dBus and nearby lands (see my “Bang rim *chos sde* in Dwags po (11th-13th century): mKhar nag lo tsa ba's treatment and the *Bai ser* follow-up” for Franz-Karl Ehrhard's *Festschrift*).

¹⁴ *Gung thang gdung rabs* (p. 108,14-15): “To control/subdue La stod Byang [Bum lde mgon] built La ru'i Gad rdzong dkar po”.

chen brtson 'grus,¹⁵ a Sa skya pa loyalist like his close friend Hor chen sTon Tshul, was the originator of the sTag sna rdzong pa family.¹⁶ He has a place of preeminence in *rGya Bod yig tshang*, whose author dPal 'byor bzang po was a member of the clan. The author dedicates a long chapter to these people (ibid., pp. 400,10-419,3). They exercised an important role as staunch supporters of Sa skya in the history of 13th and 14th century Tibet from the days of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa onwards. The relations in La stod Byang between the Gung thang pa and sTag sna rdzong pa is a subject of further investigation by means of documents not available at present.

The sTag sna rdzong pa originally were from the mtsho Ngon area. They descended from the bKa' ma/mi log.¹⁷ They became the *khri dpon-s* of Shangs aka Byang *khri skor*, whose empowerment derived from their association with the Sa skya pa established by Rin chen brtson 'grus when he left A mdo for Central Tibet to study religion. His first contact with this school occurred while traveling to dBus gTsang in 1265, when he met 'gro mgon 'Phags pa on the way.¹⁸

Rin chen brtson 'grus, a minister who ruled lands on behalf of Sa skya, was the first in the line of headmen of the Shangs princes. Later

¹⁵ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (p. 402 (f. 71a,10-16)): "dBon po Rin chen rgyal mtshan, this being his name as a layman, was the lord of the three great territories (dBus gTsang, Khams and A mdo?). He was intelligent and with broad views. Having faith in a pure attitude since his youth, he trained people in the various territories to treat everyone as a brother. Having heard the fame of the gTsang Sa skya bla mas, he grew faith [in them]. Wishing to bow to their feet, he went upwards".

¹⁶ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (pp. 400,10-401,3): "This is the account of the appearance of the sTag sna rdzong pa, the emanations of the Ma sang (spelled so). Swasti. When the dPal ldan Sa skya pa, the ornaments of the crown of mankind, controlled the *chol kha gsum*, the *dpon chen-s* and the *slob dpon-s*, *dge bshes-s* and *blon chen-s* who, in succession, brought to fruition the [school's] activities. Innumerable were those endowed with outstanding learning and provided with power. Among them there were, first of all, the *yus* (f. 70a) *po che'i mi gsum* (the "three men who achieved a great deal"). They were Grom pa Sa skya'i dpon chen Shaka (spelled so) bzang po, (p. 401) Shar smad Tsong kha'i dge bshes Rin brtson and Hor chen sTon Tshul, this one from mDo stod Gyon (i.e. Go 'gyo). Among them, descendants (i.e. the sTag sna rdzong pa) from the *dge bshes chen po*, who belonged to a high-standing family and [was endowed with] a brilliant intellect, exist up to the present day".

¹⁷ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (pp. 401,7-402,6) says about the bKa' ma/mi log that in the time of Khri srong lde btsan, nine brave soldiers were left as a garrison at the border between Bod and Hor, after the sPu rgyal army had destroyed the meditation place of the Bha rta (spelled so) Hor. They were instructed not to return without an order (*bka' ma log*). They settled in the territory and took bKa' ma log as their clan name. The ancestor of the A mdo ba family of sTag sna rdzong descended from them.

¹⁸ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (p. 403, 4-8): "When 'gro ba'i mgon po chos rgyal 'Phags pa went upwards (to Tibet) from the imperial court, he was invited by dGon pa ba to 'Brong. He was well attended. Those two (Rin chen brtson 'grus and Hor che ston Tshul, the latter's companion) met him also. The former asked to be ordained [and] the name Rin chen brtson 'grus was given to him".

in 14th century Shangs, the region became the land of the sTag sna rdzong pa from the homonymous name of their castle.¹⁹ Rin chen brtson 'grus was subsequently appointed *khri dpon* authorized to collect taxes from Byang by rgyal bu Chos dpal, one of the Mongol princes in charge of Tibet (*rGya Bod yig tshang*, p. 405,9-18).

In fire-sheep 1307, Zhwa lu sku zhang Grags pa rgyal mtshan and the Gung thang king Khri lde 'bum travelled to China (see, e.g., *Myang chos 'byung*, p. 168,4-9). sTag sna rdzong pa Ban rgan pa went with the same delegation to receive various appointments from the emperor. At court, he was given a patent by 'Ol ja du, which confirmed his power over the Shangs territory encompassing the lands as far as Dwang ra g.yu mtsho in central Byang thang and, therefore, his authority over La stod Byang.

The set political standards introduced before his life led rig 'dzin rGod ldem to inherit the traditional affiliation of La stod Byang to Gung thang, established at the time of the late 13th century *glang gi las thabs bcu gsum*, with a huge difference that he pursued this alignment on a personal basis, marked by the spirit of *yon mchod*.

The rig'dzin's secular inclination

Unlike other rNying ma masters such as the 14th century O rgyan gling pa who was a fierce opponent of the Yuan combine and also had a disastrous dissent from the positions of ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan that cost him exile, the rig 'dzin, despite being a rNying ma, did not take a stance against the Sa skya pa. Young rig 'dzin rGod ldem was unaffected by the transition of power. He obviously focused on the religion but was influenced, too, by the secular context in which his life unfolded.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem established a lifelong relation with the throne holders of the Gung thang royal house, who were Sa skya pa loyalists since they were their feudatories with an active part in reducing, several decades earlier than the *gter ston's* life, a vast territory under their control on behalf of their headmen.

No details are provided in the historical literature about the establishment of *yon mchod* with the Gung thang royal house but their *bla ma* / ruler interaction occurred not before bKra shis lde ascended the

¹⁹ The name sTag sna rdzong pa is retroactively applied by *rGya Bod yig tshang* to the line of the Shangs rulers, because it was only in fire-tiger 1386 that rGod po rin chen took control of sTag sna rdzong, called sTag sna dzong grub rtse in the source (*ibid.*, p. 413,17-18): "[rGod po rin chen], having gone upwards (i.e. from the imperial court to Tibet), in this place Shangs mThong smon, since there was water and he found it excellent from every point of view including the name, said: "I wish to include this [place] among [my possessions]"."

throne in water-dragon 1252 (*Gung thang gdung rabs*, p. 114,12-14), left vacant by the death of his father Chos skyong lde (*ibid.*, p. 114,12).²⁰ bKra shis lde's demise occurred in 1365 and no better approximation can be attempted to fix the inception of their *yon mchod* than during that delta of years.

To introduce an important event in the early career of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life, the foundation of Byang Ngam ring, the major institution of La stod Byang together with the holy place Ri bo bkra bzang, *Bai ser* follows the same outline of the migration of members of Byang Mi nyag to gTsang stod. As found in *g.Yas ru Bang pa'i rgyal rabs*, the migration was headed by a scion of the Tangut royal family, whom the *sde srid* calls Legs pa simply. In sTag ste, Seng ge lung had nine sons, the most distinguished being Seng ge dar. Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho then goes on to outline the circumstances that led to the establishment of Byang Ngam ring. Belonging to the Seng ge dar's lineage, ti shri Kun dga' blo gros was appointed in the Yuan period to be the *dpon chen*. Next to Gad pa Ngam nag pa, at the extremity of Ngam ring Ngam mtho chen mo resounding with the uttering of swans, in the locality Ngam rings, here he invited Shākya seng ge from the back of sTag rtse, who laid the foundations of the *chos sde* in wood-bird 1345 of the fourth *rab byung* (*Bai ser*, p. 263,16-21). In open deviance from his *sde srid* Sangs rgyas mtsho, the Fifth Dalai Lama opts to antedate its foundation sensibly since he puts it during the reign of Se chen rgyal po (r. 1260-1294) and attributes its foundation to Grags pa dar, a Tangut *dpon chen* of the La stod Byang ruling family (*dPyid kyi rgyal mo glu dbyangs*, p. 113,11-13).

Sa skya's loss of hegemony and Phag mo gru pa control of Tibet

Still in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's teens, the status quo was disrupted in the worst possible way. Soon after bKra shis lde's ascension to the throne of Gung thang the direct Sa skya hegemony over Tibet saw its last

²⁰ *Gung thang gdung rabs* (p. 114, 8-13): "Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was the religious head of the [Byang gter] as its founder. [The existence of] the master was contemporaneous with the prophecy about the birth of bKra shis sde, which said: "In particular, to the northeast of the *sku lha* of Mang yul there will be a castle with bricks (*so mang* spelled so for *so phag*) resembling turquoise. At this locality, given the royal genealogy, short in stature [and] enlightened of chos rgyal bKra shis lde, and the rediscovery of this *gter*, the teachings will be able to exist in Tibet for fifty-three human years". It said so. Much warfare broke out. Khri Chos skyong lde died in water-dragon 1352 and bKra shis lde was granted the crown". The birth date of bKra shis lde is not given in *Gung thang gdung rabs*. All that one can presume is that he and rig 'dzin rGod ldem were roughly of the same age in view of the fact that Kra shis lde's ascension to the throne could have happened in this heir apparent's teenage years, as customary.

days. Sa skya fell into the hands of ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan in 1354, so that it lost hegemony.²¹

Sa skya's fall meant that the Phag mo gru pa were able to extend their sovereignty over Shangs, contiguous in the east to La stod Byang, held by the pro-Saskya sTag sna rdzong pa. Parts of the lands to the north of the Brahmaputra were lost to Sa skya.

The absence of a date for the inception of the *yon mchod* that rig 'dzin rGod ldem entertained with bKra shis lde hinders an assessment whether the *gter ston* established it with the Gung thang lord before or after the 1354 divide that changed the equilibrium on the plateau.

In rig 'dzin rGod ldem's early years marred by an instable situation before Sa skya's fall, *Si tu bka' chems*—the locus classicus on those events—says that an attempt at subverting the status quo within the Sa skya pa alliance in 1345 involved the Gung thang Khab pa, delegated to exercise control over a vast expanse of lands in the west, was repealed by dpon chen Dar ma rgyal mtshan. The suppression of the revolt in Gung thang left the ruling conditions in the principality unaltered,²² so that, years later, the great *gter ston* was able to establish his *yon mchod* with the bKra shis lde.

Byang chub rgyal mtshan does not identify the rebels in Gung thang, who engineered the 1345 rebellion quelled by the Sa skya *dpon chen*. Was it an attempt to overthrow the Sa skya pa line on the throne?

The next sentence of *Si tu bka' chems* is enlightening since it shows that the relations between the Sa skya pa and people of mNga' ris, i.e. those of mNga' ris smad—the Gung thag Khab pa therefore—in the days immediately after the rebellion remained solid and amicable.²³ This is a sign that the 1345 rebels did not belong to the Gung thang establishment but must have been enemies of the principality headmen, Glo bo and the nomads of Byang thang being candidates.

²¹ The *khri dpon* of Byang in office up to around 1354 was dKon mchog 'od zer, the head of La stod Byang in the early part of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life before the Sa skya pa organisation of the lands was lost without a resistance, at a time marred by a succession of conflicting episodes.

²² *Si tu bka' chems in Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru* (pp. 165,19-166,21): "In wood-female-bird 1345, Dar ma rgyal mtshan, rDo rje lcam hu shri, A san bho kha tshe dban undertook the exercise of the court of law. They established the Shag 'jam mo ("postal relay") and quelled the uprising of mNga' ris. (p. 166) They went to explain the division into the *chol kha gsum*. When they explained their investigation [to reinforce the division] that extended to 'Dam, the rTa ro dmar po of dBus dissented [and thus] did not accept. The people of gTsang said they accepted. The people of dBus did not submit. Thereafter, an investigation was run that extended to Tshong 'dus mgur mo. The dBus pa of gTsang were useless in their embarrassing [behaviour]. The people of mNga' ris said they accepted. Also, the people of dBus did not submit".

²³ *Si tu bka' chems in Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru* (p. 166,7-8): "Then the people of mNga' ris invited the *si tu* (Dar ma rgyal mtshan) to Yar lungs".

*The impact of the Phag mo gru pa takeover
on the life of the great gter ston*

The age-old leaning of La stod Byang towards Sa skya was put in serious difficulty after 1354 owing to the change of authority on the plateau. The loss of Sa skya's power led to the elimination of the *khri skor bcu gsum* system substituted by the network of Phag mo gru pa forts such as lCags rtse gri gu, 'Ol kha sTag rtse, Gong dkar, Ne'u rdzong, Brag dkar, Rin spungs, bSam grub rtse, sPa nam, lHung grub rtse (*Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*, Tucci transl., p. 210,14-19). The destiny of the Gung thang fort La ru'i Gad rdzong dkar po in La stod Byang is unknown.

For a short while after the fall of Sa skya, the authority in La stod Byang remained in its bloc but the Byang *dpon chen* could not do anything in succour of the school's main seat (*ibid.*, p. 297,17-18). The Phag mo gru pa takeover of La stod Byang—including Ri bo bkra bzang/Zang zang lha brag, the centre of La stod Byang during the Yuan/Sa skya pa control over Tibet—was fait accompli sometime after ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan's official investiture by the Yuan in 1357 (*Rlangs kyi Po ti bse ru*, p. 289,1-14). The slow political transfer of La stod Byang into the Phag mo gru pa fold may have been a sign of a partial amount of resilience vis-à-vis the new rulers of Tibet in hectic years characterised by a realignment of power in Tibet, not without disputes and political games from every side.

However, *rGya Bod yig tshang*, which says little concerning the passage of Shangs and connected territories, such as La stod Byang, to the Phag mo gru pa, vaguely confirms that the Sa skya pa handed over Byang *khri skor* to ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan after the downfall of Sa skya in 1354. The end of the Sa skya pa sovereignty over the Byang *khri skor* of Shangs, Dwang ra and La stod Byang occurred with an act of formal capitulation without spilling blood.²⁴

Turbulence in Central Tibet

Earlier than the fall of Sa skya, another destabilising event hit the lands to the north of the Brahmaputra in the region of La stod Byang. This

²⁴ *rGya Bod yig tshang* (pp. 411,16-412,1): " Blo gros rgyal mtshan received both the name and the rank of *si tu*. The [Sa skya] *dpon chen* handed over both his nephew (i.e. Blo gros rgyal mtshan) and mThong smon to ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan".

Statements in *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* (Tucci transl., p. 192) convey that the military campaign did not lead to a takeover of La stod Byang: "Once rDzong spyi Grags pa rin chen led a great Phag mo gru pa army against La stod Byang, he could not cause great trouble".

was invasion by the Dung reng, a major event of those years. They were people composed of various groups from different areas of the plateau in the south, the Himalayan range and beyond. Their U ra group was settled in lHo Mon and they are known to the literature as the lHo Dung reng. The Shar Dung, who were settled in lHo brag, in the course of the invasion, marauded Myang.

The Dung reng invasion has been minimised in past western scholarship but they conquered a huge expanse of territory that included lands across the Brahmaputra. It is unclear whether La stod Byang suffered from the invasion, but it is probable.

An alliance of Tibetan principalities was needed to oust them from this major territorial occupation of the plateau. Two campaigns to defeat them testify to the resilience of these invaders from the south. The head of the alliance was Kun dga' 'phags pa, the Shar kha pa ruler of rGyal rtse, and his brother 'Phags pa rin chen. The lHo Dung reng were defeated in 1352 by an act of treachery and the Shar Dung reng in the successive years 1353-1354.²⁵

The Phag mo gru pa change of governance

With the political downgrading of Sa skya in favour of Phag mo gru pa rulership, the conditions on the plateau underwent a radical change. In "Besides the literary icon: historical hints on the life of bcom ldan Rig pa'i ral gri" (forthcoming in the *Festschrift* for Helmut Tauscher), I say that, in gTsang, the Sa skya pa had a lenient approach towards institutions not belonging to their school. Their attitude towards other monasteries was different. In their gTsang pa home grounds, they did not pursue an aggressive policy; on the contrary, they intruded heavily in the affairs of other schools in other regions of the plateau, all of them under their control.²⁶

The radical change that Phag mo gru pa governance allowed was that they let the principalities under its control to exercise limited

²⁵ While *rGya Bod yig tshang* is profuse in describing the campaigns against the Dung reng but without a precise chronology of events, *Rab brtan kun bzang 'phags kyi rnam thar* is concise but provides the dates of the military actions. The latter text (p. 8,12-17) reads: "In water-male-dragon 1352, ... the lHo Dung were exterminated at Phag ri Rin chen sgang; the next year (water-snake 1353), Shar Dung Don grub dar was decapitated".

Ibid. (p. 8,19-21): "In wood-male-horse 1354, the younger brother 'Phags pa rin chen went to lHo brag and subjugated the Shar Dung. People should be immensely grateful to the dBus gTsang [alliance]".

²⁶ Examples of Sa skya's duress during the Yuan hegemony over Tibet are several, e.g., Kham Ri bo che (see Vitali, *Upper Kham and its wider world* vol. One forthcoming) or gDan sa mthil (see my "The year the sky fell: remarks of the 1290 *gling log*," in Vitali, *Essays on the History of Tibet*).

autonomy, a secular condition not possible during the joined Yuan/Sa skya pa sway over the plateau.

Especially after the death of Byang chub rgyal mtshan in wood-dragon 1364, the internal controversies to choose a head of the Phag mo gru pa school—the dignitary who would handle the religious and secular affairs—led to a weakening not experienced in the days of the *ta'i si tu*.

These looser conditions facilitated rig 'dzin rGod ldem's activity in La stod Byang, who could continue to side with bKra shis lde, ruler of Gung thang and his steadfast sponsor.

Political realignments in the post Yuan/Sa skya period

The secular equilibrium in Central Tibet that followed the ascendancy of the Phag mo gru pa as rulers of Tibet and Sa skya's loss of power saw a realignment that was only partial since it followed, in the most, the alliances and loyalties of the previous period. The structure of the Sa skya pa alliance during the post-Yuan period was composed by their old-time loyalists in a way similar to when they were agents of their overlords from China. It comprised the Gung thang Khab pa, the Zhwa lu pa, the sTag sna rdzong pa of Shangs as well as La stod Byang for a short while before it was taken by the Phag mo gru pa.

In turn, the Phag mo gru pa alliance before its people's ascendancy to supreme authority was composed by most bKa' brgyud pa schools, the 'Bri gung pa in particular whose monastery had been severely damaged by the Yuan/Sa skya pa military intervention. The rNying ma and the Bon po, too, were fierce antagonists of foreign domination in Tibet. Hence, a wide spectrum of schools—the rNying ma, bKa' brgyud and Bon po for instance—manifested an open disliking for the Mongol sway over Tibet but could not sort out any result beyond criticism.

The evolution of these relations during the third quarter of the 14th century within the anti-Yuan bloc changed in the years just before the fall of Sa skya. Heavy reorganisations modified the earlier political alliances/enmities among the Tibetan principalities. Several members of the bKa' brgyud pa faction did not side with the *ta'i si tu*. After a long phase of close relations, the 'Bri gung pa antagonised Byang chub rgyal mtshan in the next ten years before Sa skya's fall in 1354,²⁷ and

²⁷ O rgyan glin pa had a dissent with his own bloc of anti-Sa skya sympathisers. A grudge with *ta'i si tu* Byang chub rgyal mtshan about the control of gNyal, subtracted to his people was bitter enough for the great *gter ston* to be exiled by the Phag mo gru pa supremo.

Guru bKra shis chos 'byung (p. 409,21-25): "On the occasion of his rediscovery of twenty-eight *Grub pa'i dbang po*, including *bKa' 'dus chos kyi rgya mtsho'i dkyil 'khor*,

continued to show hostility following his death. So did the g.Ya bzang pa occasionally.

That of the Tshal pa was a case apart. They remained firm in their friendship with the Yuan and the Sa skya pa. They were aligned directly to Yuan policy since the transition from Gengis Khan to Ögodei that occurred from the first to the second quarter of the 13th century.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's 1366 rediscovery

The next step in the *rig 'dzin's* life were the 1360s, years of fair contextual tranquillity. No major subverting events took place in his sphere of competence during that span of time. Those circumstances meant for the *gter ston* a renewed interaction with his *yon bdag*, the new Gung thang ruler Phun tshogs lde (b. 1338). However, outside his world, complex matters affected the Phag mo gru pa rulers of Tibet owing to the demise of ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan in 1364.²⁸

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem concentrated on Zang zang lHa brag before he undertook the long preparation that culminated in his important 1366 rediscovery. On Ri bo bKra bzang he built a hermitage monastery on the mountain slope and a temple on the peak before the 1365 *terminus ante quem* that marked the death of the Gung thang lord bKra shis lde who sponsored the work (*Rig 'dzin rGod ldem gyi rnam thar*, 1983 ed., pp. 100-101).

In wood-snake 1365, after the death of bKra shis lde, the preparations of a complete Canon to be printed at sKyid grong were

from the upper courtyard of Khra 'brug gtsug lag khang, the *gter ston* said: "Sometime an occasion will come [that is favourable to obtaining] power and [spreading] the teachings". Gong ma Si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan [indeed] got the land of Tibet under his control. O rgyan gling pa repeated time and again: "The rope of gNyal should be cut".

Ibid., (pp. 409,25-410,3): "[O rgyan gling pa's words in favour of gNyal] were heard by the *ta si* (spelled so, i.e. Byang chub rgyal mtshan) who [then] sent a messenger to him. [O rgyan gling pa] received strict summons, (p. 410) and [was subjected] to various harassments, such as a slap on his face ('gram bcag spelled so for 'gram lcag). The *gter ston* was upset. The [*si tu*] told him: "Your area has come to have extensive [virtuous] qualities, but you cannot stay there". The stone bridge of Shel brag padma brtsegs pa was obstructed".

²⁸ The succession to ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan was an affair difficult to solve, since the Phag mo gru pa headman himself was torn by controverted choices. Still during his life, he chose 'Jam dbyangs gu shri Shakya rgyal mtshan as his successor (r. 1364-1373). Then it was the turn of Byang rdor aka Grags pa byang chub (r. 1373-1381), bSod nams grags pa (r. 1381-1384/1385; sku zhang Grags pa rin chem (r. 1384/1385) and Grags pa rgyal mtshan (r. 1385-1432) that covered the life of rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

concluded.²⁹ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem activated himself to set in motion *gter ma* rediscoveries. He was at Grom pa rGyang for a preliminary finding in the local *lha khang* and to meet Phun tshogs lde. Grom pa rGyang was a locality not too far from the border of La stod Byang, which was, together with lHa rtse, historically Sa skya pa since the days of the get-together of 'Broq mi lo tsa ba with Ga ya dha ra (*gTsang stod rgyl po'i rnam thar dang rgyal rabs*, p. 122,6-8). He received from Mang lam Ri khrod pa bZang po grags pa the *kha byang* of the literary treasure to be unearthed at Ri bo Kra bzang while a *gter tshab* for the rediscovery should have been given to him by Phun tshogs lde.³⁰

Having paid a visit to Sa skya, he went to recover the scrolls and keys hidden on the peak of Ri bo bKra bzang and was then ready to unearth the main treasure at Zang zang lHa brag.

He then undertook the perilous adventure of the 1366 unearthing at Ri bo bkra bzang.

This rediscovery is given pre-eminence in his biography. A long *lung bstan* on Tibet's history, styled as a prophecy of Guru Padma requested by Mu khri btsan po, emphasises its importance. His conception is unusual. It rather is a *bstan rtsis* that works as the preliminary to introduce the unearthing. The chronological sequence of the historical phases of Tibet is imprecise if judged from the historiographical standards commonly adopted.

However, its peculiarity is that it periodises events in Tibet in a way different from the set tradition, a mix of well-known categorisations and uncommon readings of phases in the history of the land.

The *bstan rtsis* is conceived from the viewpoint of the rNying ma tradition. To be in line with the prophetic approach of the genre, the first statements of the *lung bstan* concern a period distant from the 8th century of Guru Padma and Mu khri btsan po. It begins with the post Glang dar ma period and, therefore, does not deal with *bstan pa snga dar*, the domain of the School of the Ancients. Is it that the rNying ma milieu did not need to reaffirm its unicity during the early diffusion? The entries say:

²⁹ *Gung thang gdung rabs* (p. 117,1-6): "Concerning him (bKra shis lde), his death year being wood-snake 1365, *gter ston rig 'dzin chen po rGod ldem 'phru can* activated himself to work at the *gter [kha]* [note: in fire-horse 1366, the year next to wood-snake 1365, *gter ston rig 'dzin chen po rGod ldem can* from Zang zang lHa brag, the land connected to Byang, extracted *Gung thang rgyal rgyud skyong pa mdzod lnga* ("the five treasures for the protection of the Gung thang royal line"). He established ties with Phun tshogs lde but it was not somewhat possible to arrange [them]".

³⁰ On the way back to La stod Byang, at Ngam ring he was given stripes of silk and assorted grains as *gter tshab* for his forthcoming treasure rediscovery of 1366 (*Guru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 484,19).

Glang dar ma's destruction of Buddhism will lead to sixty years of darkness. They should be dated from 842, the *btsan po's* assassination at the latest, to the end of the 9th century (901);

The good times will come to an end. The nobility will scatter to form many principalities and mNga' ris skor gsum will exist. Communities (*sde*) will practise *chos khrims* and there will also be powerful *sngags pa-s*.

From the secular perspective, this is the period that followed the implosion of the sPu rgyal state with the emergence of principalities and, thus, is a reference to the *kheng log-s* while in the west sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon formed the mNga' ris skor gsum kingdom.

From the religious perspective, this corresponds to the situation of the Noble Religion in dBus gTsang that confirms the assessment of its debased unfolding, found in *Nyang ral chos 'byung*.

Due to lHa Mu tur—i.e. dGongs pa rab gsal—there will be a restoration of the teachings. They will last for sixty-four years, hence until the mid 10th century (901-964). dGongs pa Rab gsal, dPal 'khor btsan and dPyang A po will exist during those sixty-four years.

The *lung bstan*, like several other works, assigns a late positioning of dGongs pa Rab gsal, whose existence fluctuates widely in the sources. In the case of the *lung bstan/bstan rtsis* he is somewhat closer than in other cases to the introduction of *bstan pa phyi dar*. Hence his placement falls several decades away from the possibility that he was the rebirth of 'Bro Khri gsum rje sTag snang, as held in dBon Bi ci's treatment of him (*Deb ther sngon po*, p. 89,9-13). The consequence is that dGongs pa rab gsal is considered as an older contemporary to dPal 'khor btsan and thus he would have lived in the late 9th century according to the *bstan rtsis* since dPal 'khor btsan died in 910.

The influence of dPyang A po will be equal to a ruler and dPal 'khor btsan will be a legitimate *chos rgyal*.

While the importance of dPyang A po in the affairs of dPal 'khor btsan's reign is recognised, dPal 'khor btsan is considered an authentic *btsan po* and, therefore, the sPu rgyal royal lineage would have lasted until him.

Prosperity will last for 215 years.

Those 215 years refer to the dynasty of the sPu rgyal *btsan po*-s who would have secured a happy life to the land, a typical view of the rNying ma school. I reckon them from Srong btsan sgam po's enthronement in 629 to Glang dar ma's assassination in 842, the end of the *btsan po*-s' legitimate rule. It makes 215 years precisely. This long span of time covers the dynastic period which was the exclusive appanage of the School of the Ancients.

Decay will befall lHa sa and bSam yas as well as the *mtha' 'dul* and *yang 'dul gtsug lag khang*-s.

lHa sa was troubled by turmoil from around the last quarter of the 10th century until 1160 (see Vitali, "lHa sa hectic years ca. 975-1160"), bSam yas was damaged by a fire caused by the internecine disagreements between the lHa sa *sde bzhi*.³¹

Then the Hor troops will come. Owing to repeated invasions, Tibet will be under the Mongols for sixty years.

This is too short a time since the inception of the Yuan/Sa skya pa sway over Tibet in 1268 and ended in 1354, which continued for over eighty years.

Tibet will be without rulers for 215 years.

The *lung bstan* introduces a reckoning difficult to place chronologically since the inception and end of this period are prone to several variable approximations. The correspondence with the other set of 215 years is suspicious.

Tibet will be under Hor *khrims* (the "Mongol law") for 150 years.

This is an assessment way too long for the influence of the Hor pa ruling system. Its duration is hardly comprehensible. Were it so, it would mean the principles of governance of the Yuan would have continued well after the loss of its grip over the plateau, a fact denied by secular administration of the Phag mo gru pa who introduced their own system of rulership.

A hypothesis is to reckon that 1354, the fall of Sa skya, minus 150 years comes to ca. 1206, which would warrant Gengis Khan's alleged

³¹ *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* (p. 451,8–10) summarises this decay as follows: "Then, eventually, lHa sa will be threatened by water and bSam yas will be threatened by fire".

expedition to Tibet, as proposed by late authors such as Sum pa mkhan po and mentioned by early western scholarship such as by Hambis ("L'histoire des Mongols à l'époque de Genghis-Khan et le dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang de Sumpa-Qutuqtu"). I am not in favour of accepting the existence of the 1206 invasion.

Tibet will be without peace. The only good aspect will be the existence profound *gter*-s but an impediment will make Ri bo bkra bzang unavailable. Catastrophes will precede the rediscovery at Ribo bkra bzang.

In the typical apocalyptic style of rNying ma treatments, rediscoveries are associated with calamities, most often preceding them.

At this inauspicious time, the *gter* will be rediscovered in the horse year 1366 from Ri bo bkra bzang, the mountain resembling a black snake.

This period in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life culminated in 1367 at sKyid grong, with 'Phags pa Wa ti talking to him about his future rediscoveries. The Jo bo spoke, as he did with the all-time great personalities of Tibet.

The Gung thang lord Phun tshogs lde attended to reconfirm *yon mchod* with him. The *gter ston* gave him documents on the Gung thang royal house, useful to safeguard its members.

Unfavourable conditions in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's sphere of activity

Novel dynamics after this period caused dark clouds to hang over the lands of the rig 'dzin. The life of the people in the territories related to him was perturbed, so that the work of rig 'dzin rGod ldem was affected too. A factor was the usurpation of the Gung thang throne by the Men Zhang 'brog pa-s from Byang thang, a branch of the local royal family. The Men Zhang 'brog pa-s inhabited lands in lower Byang thang, east of Gro shod, where Pra dum is sited, and west of Gung thang including Dol po and Glo bo (ibid., p. 142,8-10 and *Chos legs kyi rnam thar*, f. 10a,4-10b,3). These 'brog pa had installed themselves in southern Byang thang as early as the 12th century after their ancestors migrated from Gu ge to gTsang around the end of the 11th century, but returned westwards in Byang thang (ibid., ff. 7b,3-8a,2).

The Men Zhang had deposed the Gung thang main line related by kinship to the Sa skya pa since the days of 'gro mgon 'Phags pa, a state of affairs that lasted for five years (*Gung thang gdung rabs*, pp. 117,21-118,6). The change of governance caused rig 'dzin rGod ldem to lose

his Sa skya pa royal house of Gung thang patrons for a while.

Before the throne of Gung thang was usurped, Men Zhang 'brog pa bSod nams lde led a campaign that resulted in his takeover of La stod Byang, thus subverting the old conditions of the principality, and took over La stod lHo, too, thus expanding the authority of the Men Zhang from Gung thang over a vast area of gTsang (*Gung thang gdung rabs*, p. 119,3-5).

These events led the *Byang gter* master to conceive in 1370 the idea to seek a safer land where to live. He gave course to his thought the next year 1371, given another factor that unsettled the world in which he operated and, therefore, made him opt for exile without further hesitation. One more destabilising event was the war brought by a huge Phag mo gru pa army which moved from dBus to La stod Byang (*rGod ldem can gyi rnam thar* Sikkim ed., p.109,4-5), a distant ripple of the Sa skya pa hegemony's end over Tibet.

He took his time to reach Sikkim, which he did in 1374. Among several motivations for personalities to move to a *sbas yul* such as 'Bras mo ljongs, was to seek solitude. His choice of Sikkim as his new land was to take distance from the unfavourable events in Central Tibet. His move to 'Bras mo ljongs underpins one of the institutional roles of a hidden land besides religious ones. Among them, they served the function of refuge from a dire secular situation in the place where one used to be active. Exemplary was, in the 9th century, the decision of Khri Ral pa can's brother lHa sras gTsang ma who saved his life by migrating to lHo Kha bzhi, when the strife between the Buddhists and the representative of the old tribal order led to the assassination of his *btsan po* brother. The case of rig 'dzin rGod ldem was not as dramatic but the usurpation of the Gung thang throne that broke his life time *yon mchod* with its pro-Sa skya rulers played a role in his eventual resolution, besides obvious religious reasons that prompted him to leave Central Tibet. In 'Bras mo ljongs he found conditions not too dissimilar from those in La stod Byang. The presence of a Tangut immigration echoed the social status of La stod Byang with people of the same origin. They exercised an important role locally.

He returned to gTsang in 1384. While he was in Sikkim, the Sa skya pa line was restored on the Gung thang throne.

Return to Central Tibet

The next historical phase that took shape in those years was characterised at large by a softer influence of the Ming dynasty over Tibet in comparison with the Yuan who made their presence felt in Tibet by means of an overwhelming domination of the plateau.

Soon after his return to bKra bzang, the first signs broke out of the

conflict between the Phag mo gru pa of dBus and their subordinates, the Shar kha pa of gTsang, who had challenged the authority of sNe gdong. The ruler of rGyal rtse, Kun dga' 'phags pa, took away, in 1385, sTag rtse rdzong, a strategical locality in the wider lands frequented by the *gter ston*, from the control of the Phag mo gru pa who lost this important outpost in gTsang. The relations between rGyal rtse and sNe gdong only got worse in the next years. They fought more than a single campaign across the decades but, in the long run, the Shar kha pa were unable to take gTsang for themselves.

The war for unsuccessful supremacy waged by rGyal rtse against rTse thang/sNe gdong shows that the Phag mo gru pa political takeover was not strongly rooted, especially in gTsang.

Although the political scenario kept evolving in those years, a firm point in the *rig 'dzin*'s life kept being the steadfast bonds he entertained with Gung thang still after the passage of the throne from Phun tshogs lde to mChog grub lde, the ruler of the principality in those years (r. 1375-1390).

In 1389, *rig 'dzin* rGod ldem was given full honours by the ruler mChog grub lde.

A *bka' shog* issued by the king in favour of *rig 'dzin* rGod ldem highlights the esteem he had for the *gter ston*.

By requesting all the principality people to abide by the *gter ston*'s spiritual guidance, its conception canonically records the secular structure of Gung thang during the time of the *Byang gter* master.

Its text shows that the organisation of Gung thang followed the hierarchy and the social configuration of the sPu rgyal state. Those called to follow the *rig 'dzin* enlightened advice were:

the *dmag dpon*;
 the *dmag mi-s*;
 the *khrims gcod yul bsrungs-s* ("local guardians of the law");
 the *bsdud 'gro 'ong-s* ("tax collectors");
 the *zhang blon-s*;
 the *sa 'khor nang so 'dzin-s* ("interior holders of local areas");
 the *las tshan so so* (the "various departments");
 the *ru dpon-s* (the "head of the district");
 the *bcu dpon-s* (the "heads of ten [men]");
 the *sgos g.yog-s* (the "skilled servants");
 the *rta mdzo 'dzin-s* (the "horse and *mdzo* caretakers");
 the *Hor dgra-s* (the "select warriors/policemen").

The organisation of Gung thang reflected in the main a solution deemed as workable despite the drastic change of the state of affairs in the course of the centuries after the implosion of the sPu rgyal state.

Based on a consolidated system of issuing ordinances to the population at large from the higher religious or secular authority of the land, the *bka' shog* brought about an expansion of *yon mchod* in the sense that not only the Gung thang royalty but also the subjects from all walks of life became involved in the care of the *gter ston*.

One year later, the rig 'dzin met mChog grub lde for the first time after the issuing of the *bka' shog*, which reinforced his life-long interaction with the Gung thang rulers. On the occasion, Gung thang mChog grub lde appointed him *ti shri* ("royal preceptor") (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 488,2).

After he received honours by mChog grub lde sanctioned in the *bka' shog*, he dedicated himself to open or frequent various *sbas yul*-s. Gu ru bKra shis has a summary of the hidden lands he was active at. The doors of the the *sbas yul*-s he opened were bDe ldan sKyid mo lung, sBas yul Padma'i tshal, Rol pa mKha' 'gro'i gling, rGyal gyi mKhan pa lung, lHa'i pho brang stengs, included in a group of seven hidden lands, plus Yol mo gangs, Bu le gangs of 'Bri gung Seng ge ye shes memory, 'Bras mo khyad, sKyid mo lung, sTag so gangs ra according to Gu ru bKra shis (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 487,20-23).

He also hid treasures at localities such as *sbas yul sKyid mo lung* and at Ri bo dPal 'bar too, in lands given to him by his sponsor and part of the circuit under the control of the Gung thang throne.

The last years

More secular changes occurred during the last long years in rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life until his death.

Owing to the looser control over the lands of Tibet—a feature of Phag mo gru pa policy I mentioned before—various principalities were able to gain independent rulership. This was the case, in the west, of Glo bo, Gu ge and La dwags. In Glo bo, the dynasty of A ma dpal ruled by establishing its superiority over the neighbours (Vitali, *A short history of Mustang* (10th-15th century)). In Gu ge, rNam rgyal lde introduced a new, independent dynasty (Vitali, *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang*). In La dwags, it was the end of foreign rulership and the resurgence of local kings, as mentioned in a few sources such as *gDung rabs zam phreng* and the gNam rtse edition of *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (also see Vitali, *Early bKa' brgyud pa masters in the lands of the "upper side"* (1191-1344)).

In the later part of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life—at the end of the 14th century—Ngam ring *chos sde*, established by Shākya Seng ge in 1345, surged to a pre-eminent position with the patronage of the La stod Byang ruler and the Sa skya *dpon chen*, rta dben Blo gros rgyal btsan. gNam ring *chos sde* marked the transfer of the centre of La stod Byang

from west to east still with the support of the Sa skya headmen. With the grown importance of Ngam ring *chos sde*, a consolidation of the secular status in La stod Byang took place, so that its chieftains did not run any risk to lose their land. They opted for an open attitude towards various schools of Tibet such as the Jo nang pa, Bo dong pa and the early dGe lugs pa besides continuing to be followers of the Sa skya pa tradition (*Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*, Tucci transl., p. 192). During the tenures of four Ngam ring *mkhan po*-s, the sPe'u dkar po bla brang (the "bla brang with a turret") and the 'du khang, a small assembly hall, were built (*Bai ser*, p. 263,22-23).

In this panorama of renewed independentism, rig 'dzin rGod ldem undertook quite a long phase of rNying ma *bka' ma* for a great *gter ston* like him.

He indeed chose *bka' ma* to explain rDzogs *chen* to his disciples but was reluctant to let them have the texts of his rediscoveries. It is improbable that all twenty-five disciples who received his preaching were trained masterly enough to use them properly. He conceded to share them with one dpon mo sGrub pa mo from Ri bo bkra bzang, manifestly a local female meditator, upon her insistence (*rig 'dzin rGod ldem gyi rnam thar*, Sikkim ed., p. 132,2-3).

Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's statement that his bad fall from a horse was the consequence of the concession of the texts is just an interpretation of the events (*ibid.*, Sikkim ed., pp. 132,4-133,2). It was *las*, as every incident in one's life, but it is not entirely convincing to consider it consequent to giving out *gter ma*-s at the insistence of bKra bzang Grub pa mo. It is equally improbable to read the incident in the way *gSang ba phyag rgya can gyi skor*, one of the *Can lnga in mkhas pa lDe'u chos 'byung* (pp. 375,8-376,14), treats the sPu rgyal *btsan po*-s' falls from a horse in allegorical terms, as a premonition of death. I see in Se ston Nyi ma bzang po's a Buddhist-style interpretation of the incident.

His *bka' ma* preaching had the priority to preserve the purity of his *gter ma*-s. He was, therefore, a major *gter ma* adept until the last days of his life.

The Sikkim and Bhutan editions of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's biography do not state a date for the passing of the great *gter ston*. His demise is stereotypically assigned in the literature to 1408. Gu ru bKra shis, for one, opts for this earth-rat year as the date of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's passing (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 488,12-13). Nonetheless, Tenpa Tsering Batsang at the Paris seminar on *Byang gter* (October 2024) has proposed, adducing circumstantial evidence, that he died either in 1401 or 1402. What remains to be ascertained is why the date 1408 has found its way in collective reckoning.

In any case, the conundrum, which is important per se, changes the context in which the rig 'dzin operated marginally. An episode in the

historical context that would have fallen before or after the demise of rig 'dzin rGod ldem depending on the different order of dating his death is that the sTag sna rdzong pa, who continued to exercise some authority over La stod Byang, were able to remove dependency from the Phag mo gru pa whose control of Shangs lasted until fire-dog 1406, when Phag gru Grags pa rgyal mtshan was defeated at the siege he laid to sTag sna rdzong.³² If dead in 1401/1402, the event would have fallen after his demise.

All in all, the difference of rig 'dzin rGod ldem's death year does not alter sensibly my treatment of the historical background during the last period of his life, except for the sTag sna rdzong pa episode, in the event of an extension or reduction of his life span.

The work of rig 'dzin rGod ldem is consistently associated with the well being of Tibet in general; in particular with the Gung thang royal house and with special attention to life conditions characterised by peace on the southern border of the plateau. But this was not the case during a century, the 14th, with composite and subverting events which had an impact over the highlands. His *gter ma* work is also celebrated (*Gu ru bKra shis chos 'byung*, p. 488,5-10) in terms of stereotypes such as that:

no invasions from the borders occurred,
no diffusion of infectious diseases affected the lands,
no internal fights took place,
no impact by demons created nuisances,
the restoration of communities' power was an effect of his treasure findings, and
acts to tame the lands were undertaken.

Still, these stereotypes let space to acts of great impact that created the conditions peculiar to those one hundred years. The 14th century of rig 'dzin rGod ldem was a time of sudden, continuous changes:

swift of power,
hegemonic changes,
usurpation of the throne,

³² *rGya Bod yig tshang* (p. 415,3-9): "In particular, the dBus pa lord Grags pa rgyal mtshan, who wielded the political power of the Phag mo gru pa, having gathered a mighty army of dBus gTsang, in the fire-male-d year 1406 laid siege to sTag sna rdzong for a long time. This also happened to many [other places such as] Nang yan, Tshag skyel and Brod sdigs. The father and son (sTag sna rdzong pa Glang po rin chen and rGod po rin chen, actually the uncle and nephew), leaders and servants all stubbornly resisted [to repulse him]".

unexpected demises,
war between members of the same alliance,
changes of land control,
celebrations of his greatness, and
events that made him move to exile.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem cruised through this turmoil in pursuit of his life mission, the *gter ma* rediscoveries that were the genesis of the *Byang gter* tradition.

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Reconnaissance of Ri bo bkra bzang The Seat of Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can

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In April of 2002, I had the good fortune of visiting the monastery and mountain of Ri bo bkra bzang, the seat of the great treasure revealer (*gter ston*), Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru (circa 1337–1401/1409).^{*} Ri bo bkra bzang, an important place of pilgrimage (*gnas chen*), is situated about 2 km north of the highway that runs between Shigatse and Ngari (fig. 1).¹



Fig. 1. Ri bo bkra bzang mountain with the monastic structures of Bar lha khang and Lha khang rtse.

It is at Ri bo bkra bzang that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem found the prophetic guides (*kha byang*) of the Northern Textual Treasures (*Byang gter*). This brief article is the product of my two-day visit and the time I spent with the current head lama of Ri bo bkra bzang monastery, Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med, who affirms that he is the 25th member of a biological lineage that began with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself (figs. 2, 3). No other textual sources were used to compose this modest offering. It

^{*} I thank Jean-Luc Achard and Stéphane Arguillère for being so kind as to accept for publication this rather insignificant offering to the field of Byang gter studies.

¹ GPS coordinates of the peak of Ri bo bkra bzang: 29° 20.594' N / 86° 57.093' E.

must also be made clear to readers that I do not possess a specialization in the Byang gter tradition.² Furthermore, the information furnished here is more than two decades old, a kind of snapshot of its time. Since 2002, many changes in relations between the Chinese Communist government and religious communities in Tibet have been instituted. How these have affected Ri bo bkra bzang I know not.³



Fig. 2. Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med, the 25th holder of the Rig 'dzin rgod ldem lineage.

² As I understand it, there are still fundamental questions pertaining to the transmission of lineages connected to the Byang gter. What is clear is that the monastery of Rdo rje brag in Dbus has been predominant in the Byang gter tradition since the early 17th century, which was established after the expulsion of the prominent lineage figure *byang bdag* Bkra shis stobs rgyal from his estate in the Ri bo bkra bzang region and subsequent arrival in Dbus. In the aftermath of Rig 'dzin rgod ldem's lifetime, the Byang gter ritual traditions (*gter chos*) and lineages passed through figures such as Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542), before eventually being taken up at Rdo rje brag, effectively splitting from the propagation of the tradition and lineage in Ri bo bkra bzang, the original source of legitimization (the historical details of which are still to be fully explicated). Possibly factors such as chronic political tensions between Gtang and Dbus, the Fifth Dalai Lama's subscribing to the Byang gter of Dbus, and the progressively marginal economic status of the now exclusively pastoralist Ri bo bkra bzang locale may have contributed to the sidelining of the Ri bo bkra bzang lineage in Byang gter discourse. This footnote benefited greatly from discussions with Stéphane Arguillère.

³ Stéphane Arguillère has brought to my attention a video on YouTube posted some five years ago that was filmed at Ri bo bkra bzang: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6m5kX3f7LM>. It features the singer U rgyan tshe ring performing his lovely song, *Ri bo bkra bzang*. The video divulges that there has been some expansion of monastic and visitor support facilities and improvement of the access road to the site since 2002. Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med is depicted in the video.



Fig. 3. Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med and his son, the 26th holder of the Rig 'dzin rgod ldem lineage.

The father of Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med died in unfortunate circumstances when the current holder was six years of age. Despite having suffering many setbacks, Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med remains steadfast in his dedication to his religious calling, devoting his time to practice and study. According to him, Rig 'dzin rgod ldem was an emanation of Gu ru rin po che,⁴ who prophesized that textual treasures would be discovered at Ri bo bkra bzang. The lama observes that this prediction is chronicled in works such as the *Rgod ldem pa'i tshe rnams*.

According to Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med, the origins of the lineage of Rig 'dzin rgod ldem are traced to pre-Buddhist times and a personality named Hor gur ser rgyal po, who hailed from a country to the northwest. The ruins of his palace are reputed to exist in A mdo stod ma (Amdo rdzong). Hor gur ser rgyal po was one of three ancient Hor kings, the other two being Gur dkar and Gur nag. Little is known about Gur ser's clan or history. The foremost contemporary historian of the Ri bo bkra bzang region, whom I also had the good fortune to meet, Kun dga' dun grub (born circa 1926), opines that Gur ser's lineage may be related to the Bhata hor of Tibetan imperial times. The maternal lineage of Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med is called Stag ri, an aristocratic clan of Ru thog (in far western Tibet). The head of the Stag ri emigrated to the area in the aftermath of the Tibet-Ladakh war. The Tibetan government (Sde pa gzhung) granted this royal scion an estate known as Bde skyid gling, which was renamed Ru thog. Earlier, in the time of Bkra

⁴ It may be that this attribution of the founder to the wonderworking Buddhist sage of the 8th century takes some poetic license, but I leave this matter to specialists in the field of Byang gter studies to flesh out.

shis stobs rgyal (circa 1540/1550–1603), a major figure in the Byang gter tradition, this estate was the residence of the kings (*byang bdag*) of the Lha stod byang region.

It is believed that Gu ru rin po che accompanied by Ye shes mtsho rgyal and Sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms spent seven days in a small cave on Ri bo bkra bzang called Padma sgrub phug. During their stay in this cave, Gu ru rin po che propitiated the deity Phur pa and hid a ritual dagger (*phur pa*) in the grotto as a treasure (*gter ma*) to be re-discovered at an appropriate time. The ritual dagger is still concealed to this day. Padma sgrub phug is also believed to have been visited by the 25 Rje 'pangs lamas, and the son of the Tibetan King Khri song lde'u btsan, Mu ne btsan po. In the second half of the 9th century, the son of the last Tibetan king Glang dar ma, Gnam lde 'od srung, stayed in Padma phug before moving further west.

As a result of the merit generated by Gu ru rin po che in Padma sgrub phug, Rig 'dzin rgod ldem was born at the future site of the lama's estate (*bla brang*), on the east foot of Ri bo bkra bzang (elevation 4450 m; fig. 4). The *bla brang* is the single largest complex at the monastery and was founded on a dome-shaped rock formation said to resemble a tortoise. The two front legs of the 'tortoise' are visible. The lama's estate is located just above a valley called Sna mo lung (fig. 5). This small valley is said to have been cultivated at one time and the foundations of small houses are found in it (the current upper extent of agriculture is a few kms to the southeast of Ri bo bkra bzang).



Fig. 4. The *bla brang* of Ri bo bkra bzang monastery.



Fig. 5. Ruined *mchod rten* and traces of other religious structures in the *Sna mo lung* Valley.

The founding of the Ri bo bkra bzang monastery is attributed to Rig 'dzin rgod ldem. His lineage is preserved in an oblations text (*gsol kha*), which along with other valuable scriptures managed to survive the destruction of the monastery during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of Kun dga' don grub.

Among these manuscripts is a *gnas yig* entitled, *Gnas chen phyin 'debs gyi dge phyogs* (sic). This text notes that the ancient Hor deity of Ri bo bkra bzang was Hor gyi dpal bzang bshan pa, who was oath-bound by Gu ru rin po che and renamed Chos bdag bam chung brag btsan (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. The *lha gtsug* for the protective god Chos bdag.

Chos bdag is the clan god (*rus lha*) of Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med. He states that this is the same god as those known as Btsan rgod yab bshor dmar po and A btse rgyal po⁵, a well-known doctrinal protector, territorial and clan deity in Stod and the Byang thang. The domestic god (*phugs lha*) of the Stag ri lineage is fully named Dpal ldan lha mo bstan srung of Ri bo bkra bzang. The main protectors of Ri bo bkra bzang monastery are E ka dza ti and Rdo rje legs pa. The treasure protector (*gter bdag*) of the Ri bo bkra bzang mountain is Klu rgyal dri med nyi bdag dbang po, who appears to be another ancient Hor deity (fig. 7).



Fig. 7. The lha gtsug of the treasure protectors, Klu rgyal dri med nyi bdag dbang po (white) and E ka dza ti (red).

This god's *bskang gsol* is present in the same Byang gter text as that of Btsan rgod yab bshor dmar po. Another group of protectors are the four outer and four inner Dge bsnyen.⁶ The residences of the four inner Dge bsnyen are located in and around Ri bo bkra bzang and are

⁵ The *bsang gsol* of Btsan rgod yab bshor dmar po, which is one and a half folios in length, is found in a text of the Byang gter entitled, *Btsan srung dges pa'i mchod sprin rdo rje sgra dbyangs* (sic., 21 folios in length). There is also a *bskang ba* text dedicated to A btse rgyal po used in Ri bo bkra bzang monastery.

⁶ There is an abbreviated manuscript for this group. The four inner Dge bsnyen are: east – Rgyal mtshan btsug 'dra, south – Dug sdong skyes 'dra, west – Brag dmar rtse brgyad, and north – Rgyal mtshan spung 'dra. The four outer Dge bsnyen are: southeast – Bu le dkar po, southwest – Gnod sbyin rgyen gdang dkar po, northeast – Bdud mo snod myur nag mo, and northwest – Lha brag btsan sna spun gsum. Note that three names of the inner group are actually descriptions of their topographic nature.

marked by prayer flag masts (*dar lcog*). The residence of the western member of the group is on the summit of the Ri bo bkra bzang mountain. The other four Dge bsnyen are situated further afield. It is widely reported that Ri bo bkra bzang was once heavily covered in shrub junipers but most were cut down by the Chinese Communist government in the 1960s and 1970s for firewood.

As of 2002, there were around 20 monks and lay practitioners (*sngags pa*) affiliated with Ri bo bkra bzang, down from approximately 80 prior to the Chinese Communist period (fig. 8). Inside a chapel of the lama's residence that Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med uses for personal practice there is a dark-colored stone with a realistic human footprint (*zhabs rjes*) thought to have been made by a mature Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (fig. 9).



Fig. 8. The old monastic residences (*grwa shag*) of Ri bo bkra bzang.



Fig. 9. The self-formed footprint in stone of the mature Rig 'dzin rgod ldem enshrined in the bla brang.

Another footprint in stone bears the imprint of a young Rig 'dzin rgod ldem. Also in the chapel is a dark egg-shaped stone said to be the jewel (*nor bu*) of Rig 'dzin rgod ldem. Immediately above the lamas' residence is the Zhi khro lha khang, which was rebuilt on slightly higher ground than the pre-modern chapel. Adjacent to this chapel is a concourse for the Zhi khro 'cham held on the 9th to 11th day of the 9th Tibetan lunar month.

Climbing higher up on the eastern slopes of the Ri bo bkra bzang mountain is a small cliff called Brag zur ba, whose horizontal strata are considered to be a self-formed (*rang byon*) stack of scriptures (fig. 10).



Fig. 10. The cliff of Brag zur ba.

A little higher up is the Mthong ba don ldan, a masonry platform that marks the spot where the sky-treading goddesses (*mkha' 'gro ma*) revealed themselves to Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Mthong ba don ldan.

Higher on the slopes is Bar lha khang (4950 m; fig. 12), where the red *lha gtsug* (a kind of shrine for protective spirits) of Chos bdag, the red *lha gtsug* of E ka dza ti, and the white *lha gtsug* of Klu rgyal 'chi med are located.



Fig. 12. Bar lha khang.

Well below Bar lha khang is a sacred spring called bDud rtsis sgrub chu, whose waters are thought to be hydrologically connected to Mchod rten nyi ma, a famous pilgrimage place, located south of Sa skya. One trail from Bar lha khang accesses Pad ma phug (4860 m; fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Padma phug.

The spur with this important cave is called Sems can gla ba and, true to its name, musk deer are reported to range here.

Just below the summit of Ri bo bkra bzang is Lha khang rtse (4950 m; fig. 14). Inside this chapel is the self-formed footprint of Gu ru rin po che and his self-formed body is impressed into a cleft in the rock

formation. Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med rediscovered long-buried treasures in the form of precious ritual objects in an underground stone vault in the vicinity. Perhaps this structure marks the actual spot of the original revelation of the *kha byang*.



Fig. 14. *Lha khang rtse*.

On the very summit is the shrine for the protector Brag dmar rtse brgyad (fig. 15), from which panoramic views of the surrounding countryside extend as far east as Ngam ring skem mtsho.



Fig. 15. *Lha khang rtse and lha gtsug for Brag dmar rtse brgyad*.

Near Lha khang rtse is Mtho ris skas, a steeply inclined masonry ramp attributed to the agency of Gu ru rin po che, but which appears to belong to archaic structures that predate the dominance of Buddhism in the environs.⁷ Mtho ris skas is 1–3 m wide, approximately 10 m tall and is wedged into a notch in the rock formation (fig. 16).

⁷ A similar structure is found at Sha ba brag, a stronghold associated with the Bon adept Snang bzher lod po (8th century). On this site, see Bellezza 2001, pp. 90, 91.



Fig. 16. *Mtho ris skas* (Steps of Heaven).

Between Lha khang rtse and Bar lha khang are various standing wall and revetment fragments, which seem to belong to defensive structures that once stood on Ri bo bkra bzang (fig. 17). That this sacred mountain is thought to have been a Hor divinity mountain (*lha ri*) seems to dovetail with the existence of these ruins. However, Rig 'dzin padma 'gyur med and Kun dga' dun grub state that there is no recorded textual or oral history of a Hor fortress established on Ri bo bkra bzang. Nonetheless, there are many archaic residential, ceremonial and funerary sites in Stod and Byang thang that devolved to the Buddhists with little or no recognition of their earlier historical or cultural significance.



Fig. 17. One of the archaic revetments on the Ri bo bkra bzang mountain. The thin slab, dry wall construction, plan, situation, and lack of a Buddhist folkloric mantle all allude to an establishment of this structure no later than the Tibetan empire period.

Indeed, on a lower summit, southwest of Ri bo bkra bzang, are the remains of what is believed to have been a Hor fortress called Brag la rdzong (4780 m).⁸ The historical succession from pre-Buddhist cultural forms to Buddhist cultural forms at many, if not most, famous Buddhist pilgrimage and temple sites in Tibet is an area of study that has hardly been attempted to date. Yet, it is only by taking into account the full sweep of history that a more refined understanding of Tibetan religions is possible. Nothing exists in a vacuum and even the first epiphanies of the Byang gter tradition quite literally rest upon a land deeply drenched in the past. Finally, it may be stated that questions concerning how the discrepant Byang gter lineages of Ri bo bkra bzang and Rdo rje brag might be rectified or, at minimum, accounted for, are yet to be sufficiently addressed.

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⁸ On this archaeological site, see Bellezza 2014, pp. 110–113.

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Here the key, Elsewhere the door¹ — Notes on the *General Introduction to the Hidden Lands*

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he *General Introduction to the Hidden Lands*³ is a widely known treasure text,⁴ traditionally attributed to Padmasambhava (8th c.) and revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–1408?), the founder of the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*) tradition. This article serves as an introduction to Martin Boord's translation, offering a form of commentary that provides historical context and conceptual framework for this interesting Tibetan work.⁵ Although the *General*

¹ I borrowed the title from a painting by Victor Hugo, which I encountered during the writing of this article at its exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Created in 1871, this evocative work—characterised by an atmosphere of decay and timelessness, a labyrinth of arches and columns, and a central figure eroded beyond recognition—profoundly inspired my reflections on historical enigma and symbolic interpretation.

² I am deeply grateful to my employer, Virginia-Lewis Jones, Director of the Dame Vera Lynn Archive for her generous support in enabling the writing of this essay.

³ During my doctoral studies at the University of Vienna (2011-2014), I translated and analysed various versions of the *General Introduction*. I am deeply grateful to CIRDIS and the University of Vienna for making this work possible.

⁴ The text employs *gter tshegs* rather than *shad*. Its popularity is evidenced by its numerous manuscript copies preserved throughout the Himalayan region, as well as sustained interest from academic scholars, who frequently cite it: see Orofino, 1991, p. 240; Childs, 1999, p. 133; Ehrhard, 2007, p. 80; Gelle, 2020, p. 366; Baker, 2021, p. 5; Samuel, 2021, p. 64. The first English translation appears in Abdol-Hamid Sardar-Afkhami's doctoral dissertation, *The Buddha's Secret Gardens: End Times and Hidden-lands in Tibetan Imagination*, submitted to Harvard University (Sardar-Afkhami, 2001).

⁵ Martin Boord is a distinguished scholar and translator, recognized for his contributions to the study of the *Byang gter* tradition (see Boord, 1993, Boord, 2002, Boord, 2010, Boord, 2013). His translation draws upon the SIKKIM version of the *General Introduction*, a recension attested in various manuscript copies and also published in printed form under the title *Ma 'ongs lung bstan sbas yul gyi them byang*, in *mKha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs bzhugs*, Namgyal Institute, Gangtok, & Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamsala, 2008, p. 101-115, hereafter BEYUL GEN1, 2008. A manuscript of the same version, bearing the identical title, is preserved at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala BEYUL GEN2, n. d. My sincere thanks to Sonam Topgyal la, librarian of the Manuscript Collection, for drawing my attention to this manuscript and for generously sharing

Introduction belongs to the genre of prophetic revelation (*lung bstan*)—a category that permits a wide range of interpretations—it is hoped that reading the translation alongside relevant historical and religious contexts, illuminated by comparable Tibetan sources and informed by academic scholarship, will enrich our understanding of the complex phenomenon of hidden lands.

I was initially invited by Stéphane Arguillère to contribute a brief introduction to Martin Boord's translation of the *General Introduction*, intended for publication by the FCHNT in a special Byang gter issue of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*. However, it soon became apparent upon completing the first draft that a general overview alone would be insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the text's deeper significance. Composing a more detailed analysis proved to be akin to opening Pandora's box: rather than providing definitive answers, the process gave rise to a host of complex questions—not only about the concept of hidden lands, but also concerning prophetic teachings and *gter ma* literature more broadly. I found myself grappling with a number of critical questions: When was this text composed in its current form? Was it authored by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself, or is it an earlier or later work subsequently attributed to him? Given that the *General Introduction to Hidden Lands* appears to be a compilation of excerpts from various sources, likely originating in different historical contexts, can we determine the temporal strata of its constituent parts? Were these passages merely copied and preserved with their original meanings intact, or were they reinterpreted and strategically amended and repurposed to serve evolving ideological or doctrinal agendas? Moreover, did the composition of this prophetic text predate the events it purportedly foretells? And to what extent can prophetic teachings be treated as historical documents that reflect the socio-political and religious concerns of the periods in which they were composed, transmitted or reinterpreted?

These questions defy easy answers, leaving us with the hope that future scholarship will provide more conclusive insights. Accordingly, the primary aim of his article is to open new avenues for critical discussion and reflection.

many other interesting works on the topic during my visit to Dharamsala in 2023. In its other versions BEYUL GEN3, 2003, BEYUL GEN4, 1983, BEYUL GEN6, 1992, BEYUL GEN5, n. d., it is titled *sBas yul spyi'i them byang*. The provenance of the various versions of the *General Introduction* reveals that the text remains popular in Himalayan communities where the Northern Treasures lineage continues to be practised today.

1. *The concept of sbas yul*

The Tibetan term *sbas yul*, commonly translated as 'hidden lands,' denotes more than mere realms of human activity; they are sacred spaces deeply imbued with spiritual significance.

From the 14th century,⁶ hidden lands are seen as repositories of Padmasambhava's treasures, and are intimately associated with his travels, meditative practices, and miraculous deeds. They are locations where Padmasambhava is said to have subdued local deities, binding them by oath to safeguard his hidden treasures and the sanctity of these lands—an obligation they are believed to uphold to this day.⁷

The sacred topography of these hidden lands includes sites where Padmasambhava's twenty-five disciples have continuously appeared over the centuries in incarnation bodies engaging in Dharma practice, performing miracles, revealing treasures, and establishing temples and hermitages.⁸

The notion of *sbas yul* is intricately interwoven with the sacred geographical imaginaries of Indian Buddhism.⁹ Tibetan sources commonly depict the *sbas yul* as a mandala,¹⁰ with each of the cardinal directions marked by a gate. Depending on the season, certain gates offer more accessible entry points for the *gter ston* to open a particular hidden land. In the case of Yolmo, the landscape is described in a prophetic text¹¹ as the cosmological mandala with Mt. Meru in the centre. The prophecy instructs that a temple is to be constructed by the *gter ston* in the centre on the highest peak, and settlements for yogis, lay practitioners, and monastics are to be established in the cardinal

⁶ This date may be revised if new textual evidence is discovered.

⁷ On the subjugation of mountain gods by Padmasambhava see Canto 60 of the *Padma bka' thang* titled "Chapter on the subjugation of Tibet's vicious gods and demons and binding them under oath," *Bod kyi lha 'dre gdug pa can rnam btul zhing dam la btags pa'i le'u ste drug cu pa'o* O rgyan gling pa, n.d. 126b-128b. On Padmasambhava's encounters with mountain gods see Diemberger, 1994, Huber, 1999, Karmay, 1996b, Gelle, 2017.

⁸ Starting in the 1970s, several influential studies on the concept of hidden lands were published, including Aris, 1975, Reinhard, 1978, Aris, 1980, and Bernbaum, 1980. The 1990s witnessed the publication of three significant volumes that greatly advanced the study of sacred geography and mountain cults: *Mandala and landscape*, the *Reflection of the Mountain*, and the *Sacred spaces and powerful places in Tibetan culture*. Several contributions in these volumes focused specifically on Himalayan hidden lands, such as Ehrhard, 1996, Ehrhard, 1997; Diemberger, 1996 Diemberger, 1997. Subsequent important contributions include Childs, 1999, Huber, 1999, Mullard, 2011.

⁹ Boord, 2005, pp. 8-32; Huber, 1993, pp. 37-61.

¹⁰ Orofino, 1991, p. 242; Ehrhard, 1997, pp. 342-343; Huber, 1999, p. 50, p. 59.

¹¹ *Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba'i lung byang snying gi tikka*, RG6 & Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, 2003, p. 38. According to its colophon, this text was discovered by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem in Byang Zang zang lha brag.

directions. In Yolmo, this central mountain is identified as the abode of A ma g.Yang ri, the principal mountain goddess, who was subjugated by Padmasambhava and became a *gter srung*, a guardian of the Guru's hidden treasures. In other cases, such as that of Padma bkod, Vajravārahī's body-mandala is projected onto the physical landscape, with the Brahmaputra River envisioned as her central channel, extending from her head in Tibet to her womb in the jungles of northern India. As Sardar-Hamid eloquently writes: "The outer journey through the cloud forest became an inner journey of self-discovery, and the landscape itself became a reflection of the yogi's own 'body-mandala' visualized in meditation."¹²

The *sbas yul* is also portrayed as a refuge during the final years of the Age of Degeneration (*snyigs dus*), a time when the Dharma is in decline and the outer world is increasingly dominated by afflicting emotions. In this deteriorating era the only means of escaping apocalyptic conditions is to withdraw from the afflicted world and seek refuge in a hidden land. Within such sanctuaries, individuals are said to enjoy long life and good health, where bodhicitta naturally flourishes and the influence of the five poisons—ignorance, attachment, aversion, pride, jealousy—is significantly diminished.

The *sbas yul* is envisioned as a sanctuary where the Dharma can be preserved and practiced in peace—a secure haven for those seeking to undertake extended retreat. Spiritual treasures (*gter ma*) concealed by Padmasambhava and entrusted to local protector deities await discovery by the worthy practitioner. From a soteriological perspective, *sbas yul* are conceived as transitional spaces—thresholds or steppingstones to celestial realms and pure lands—where advanced stages of spiritual realisation may be cultivated and attained.¹³

The prophecies also promise that the hidden land is endowed with abundant natural resources, including fertile soil and ample food supplies. Individuals of merit from all levels of Tibetan society are deemed eligible to enter and reside within these sacred domains.

The *sbas yul* is envisioned as a site where an idealized form of Tibetan society can be maintained, insulated from the political turmoil and decline affecting Tibet. Echoing the "Golden Age" of the Imperial Period, the hidden land is ruled by a mighty *cakravartin*, a universal monarch who protects the Dharma.¹⁴ The divine origin of the king is

¹² About sTag sham pa Nus ldan rdo rje's guidebook to Padma bkod in the *gter ma* cycles *Yi dam dgongs 'dus rta mchog rol pa* and the *rTa mgrin dgong 'dus*, see Ehrhard, 1994, Sardar-Afkhami, 1996.

¹³ See a prayer from a prophetic guide attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the *Sbas pad ma tshal gyi lam yig* RG2 & Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, 2003 pp. 21–22, cited in Gelle, 2020, p. 378.

¹⁴ About the Buddhist kingship model see Apple, 2010, pp. 114–115.

believed to guarantee the happiness, prosperity, and moral order of the realm. As a secular authority, the king serves as a symbol of political and social stability, embodying the harmonious integration of worldly governance and spiritual guardianship.

Academic research to date has examined the concept of *sbas yul* from several perspectives—including Himalayan mountain cults and the subjugation of local deities by Padmasambhava; sacred topography and mandala-like spatial concepts; Himalayan migration in relation to political, historical and social dynamics; and the Buddhist conversion of Himalayan borderlands. Apocalyptic thought, though central to Tibetan religious discourse, has only recently begun to receive sustained scholarly attention.¹⁵

2. Declining Age

In the Buddhist vision of decline, the universe, human lifespan and conditions are degenerating, and the Buddhist teaching itself is in decay. Tibetan decline literature embraces the Indian cosmic vision of a myriad oscillating universes and an astronomical number of kalpas, but its real focus is the decline of the Dharma, the disappearance of Buddha Śākyamuni's teachings, that brings about an age of low morals, lawlessness and chaos. While it is widely held that the *sbas yul* concept emerged in Tibet during the 14th century,¹⁶ its doctrinal foundations can be traced to some of the earliest strata of Buddhist literature, such as the *Dīghanikāya*.¹⁷

Dudjom Rinpoche lists some important works of the decline literature translated into Tibetan, which had an impact on the Tibetan view, like the *Auspicious Aeon Sutra* (*Bhadrakalpikāsūtra*, D94), the *Great Cloud Sutra* (*Mahāmeghasūtra*, D232), and the commentary of the *Abhidharmakośa* (ABK), the *Sutra of Compassion's White Lotus* (*Karuṇāpūṇḍarīkasūtra*, D112); the *Sutra of the Dialogue with the Bodhisattva Candragarbha* (*Candragarbhaparipṛcchā-sūtra*, D356); and the *Prophetic Sutra of Maitreya*¹⁸ (*Maitreyavyākaraṇasūtra*, P1011).¹⁹ The Buddhist scriptures brought to Tibet from India, Khotan, and China, which deal with the decline and disappearance of the Dharma,

¹⁵ Apple, 2010; Gelle, 2020.

¹⁶ Brauen-Dolma, 1985, p. 251; Diemberger, 2021, p. 114.

¹⁷ The 26th sutta of the *Dīghanikāya*, the *Cakkavattisīhanādasutta* ("The Lion's Roar of the Wheel-Turning One") is an illustrative precedent, which outlines cosmological and ethical themes resonant with later Tibetan formulations found in *sbas yul* texts, see *Dīghanikāya*, 2006, 3.58–79 (26), also Gelle, 2020, pp. 361–362.

¹⁸ This text was not found in the *sDe dge bKa' 'gyur*. It seems that it was apocryphal in India but was later included within the mDo sde section of some Tibetan canon editions (Peking and Narthang) and Chinese collections.

¹⁹ Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991, pp. 943–944.

followed different timetables,²⁰ but nevertheless, they were integrated into the Tibetan tradition. The duration of the Dharma was consistently conceptualized in terms of successive five-hundred-year periods, with particular emphasis placed on the suffering and degeneration associated with the final five hundred years. Across the sources, the decline of the Dharma is attributed primarily to human agency.²¹

The Age of Degeneration or the time of strife is known in Tibetan as *snyigs dus* or *rtsod pa'i dus*,²² and *dus tha ma* or *dus mtha' ma* refers to its final period. During the period of decline, the five degenerations or five corruptions (*pañca-kaṣāya*, *snyigs ma lnga*) increase. They are (1) the degeneration of lifespan (*āyuh-kaṣāya*, *tshe'i snyigs ma*), namely the shortening of lifespan from one hundred to ten years; (2) the degeneration of times (*kalpa-kaṣāya*, *dus kyi snyigs ma*), the degenerate era when people suffer from famine, diseases, natural catastrophes and wars; (3) the degeneration of afflictions (*kleśa-kaṣāya*, *nyon mongs kyi snyigs ma*), the rise of disturbing emotions like desire, jealousy, pride, anger and ignorance and the decline of morality; (4) the degeneration of views (*dṛṣṭi-kaṣāya*, *lta ba'i snyigs ma*), the spread of false teachings and engagement in non-virtuous actions; and (5) the degeneration of beings (*sattva-kaṣāya*, *sems can gyi snyigs ma*), the decline of the physical body, beauty, health and intellect.²³

The *General Introduction* vividly portrays the effect of the five degenerations (A.2.2.) dressed in a myth, where Māra shoots seven arrows of afflictions (*kleśa*) at Tibet. Similarly to Indian Buddhist texts,

²⁰ The *Abhidharmakośa* states that the Dharma will endure for one thousand years following the parinirvāṇa of Buddha Śākyamuni; the *Karuṇāpūṇḍarikasūtra* extends this duration to one thousand five hundred years; the *Candraḡarbhapariprcchāsūtra* predicts two thousand years; and the *Maitreyavyākaraṇasūtra* foresees a span of five thousand years.

²¹ Nattier, 1992, pp. 119-126.

²² Jamgön Kongtrul (1813–1899) in the first book of his *Treasury of Knowledge* (Jamgön Kongtrul, 2005) describes the four eras based on the Indian systems: 1. the era of completeness (*kṛtayuga*, *rdzogs ldan gyi bskal pa*); 2. the era of three-quarters (*tretāyuga*, *gsum ldan*); 3. the era of two-quarters (*dvāparayuga*, *gnyis ldan*); 4. and the era of conflict (*kaliyuga*, *rtsod ldan*) saying: “The first era is called the era of completeness because splendour and enjoyments were complete. The second is the era of three-quarters, so called because theft and sexual intercourse reduced the splendour and wealth of the environment and its inhabitants by one quarter. Then, due to lying, the splendour and enjoyments were reduced to one half, and so the third era is referred to as the era of two-quarters. The fourth and final period is the era of conflict, during which even the remnant quarter of wealth and splendour gradually diminishes due to murder and the other forms of non-virtue committed by humans.” For the Indian Buddhist uses of the term *kaliyuga*, see Eltschinger, 2020.

²³ Vasubandhu & La Vallée Poussin, 1991 (ABK), p. 482.

it refers to famine, war, and epidemics as the three key indicators heralding the advent of the final era.

3. *Historical context*

Following the Mongol invasion in 1240, Tibet was gradually incorporated into the Yuan Empire over subsequent decades, with its territory divided among various princely rulers exercising control over distinct territories. As the Mongols distributed appanages among Tibetan lamas and institutions, various princes came to support different Tibetan religious schools and monasteries; in this context, Möngke²⁴ emerged as a patron of the 'Bri gung pa tradition, and he was elected as Great Khan in 1251.²⁵ When Kublai Khan (1215–1294) succeeded his older brother Möngke (1209–1259) as *khagan* in 1260, the lamas of Sa skya assumed the role of his preceptors, and Sa skya became the principal political centre of Tibet. In 1271 Kublai established the Yuan dynasty and claimed succession from prior Chinese dynasties. Despite his teacher 'Phags pa's (1235–1280) protest, Kublai did not want to tolerate any school other than the Sa skya pa,²⁶ that provoked apprehension among adherents of other traditions.

When the 'Bri gung pa monks destroyed the monastery of Bya yul and killed its abbot in 1285, their rebellion turned soon into a civil war, and the new *dpon chen* of Sa skya, Ag len rDo rje dpal with the help of Mongol troops torched the 'Bri gung monastery²⁷ and massacred all the monks. The united Sa skya and Mongol forces then marched

²⁴ Möngke also participated in the Mongol campaigns in Europe. The Mongols defeated the Kingdom of Hungary at the Battle of Muhi—April 11, 1241—leading to the destruction of the kingdom and the deaths of an estimated half of its population. They launched devastating attacks on Poland, Moravia, Bohemia and other Central European territories. Although smaller Mongol detachments continued operations into Dalmatia and Moravia in 1242, the death of Ögedei Khan in December 1241 necessitated the return of the princes to Mongolia to participate in the *qurultai* to elect a new Great Khan.

According to Petech, when Sa skya Paṇḍita traveled to Lianzhou with his two nephews—one of whom was 'Phags pa—to meet Göden Khan and discuss the political situation in Tibet, he was compelled to wait for a couple of months, because Göden had departed for Central Mongolia to attend the *qurultai*, and the meeting between the two ultimately took place only in the 1st month of 1247. Petech, 1990, pp. 9-11.

²⁵ Petech, 1990, pp. 9-11.

²⁶ Similar narratives are found concerning the 5th Dalai Lama, Gushri Khan, and other Mongol leaders of the period (17th c.).

²⁷ The 'Bri gung pas were supported by troops from sTod hor, which indicated the Chagatai Khanate this time.

through Dwags po, Kong po, lHo brag and Mon, thus imposing Sa skya and Mongol authority over the southeastern part of Tibet.²⁸

In the year of 1327, the titles and seals of Sa skya were divided among the four branches of the family. The splitting up of the Sa skya 'Khon family opened the way for many violent internal disputes, and when in 1349 Byang chub rgyal mtshan of Phag mo gru permanently usurped the position of Sa skya, the latter's Mongol allies passively acknowledged him as the new ruler of Tibet.²⁹ Anxiety over marginalisation, coupled with the relocation of political centres prompted migration, resulting in the abandonment of agricultural lands. The consequent collapse of irrigation infrastructure contributed to a severe drought and famine in Tibet.³⁰

During these periods of internal chaos, Tibet simultaneously suffered from external attacks from several directions. Invaders identified in the sources as *sTod hor* (upper or western *hor*),³¹ raided Tibet around 1320. In 1349, Muslim forces led by Sultan Shams ud-dīn Ilyās of Bengal attacked the Kathmandu Valley from the south. The inscriptions and documents cited by Petech attest to the extensive devastation inflicted upon the Kathmandu Valley, including its stupas and temples, by this army.³²

Epidemics such as the plague³³—a devastating pandemic caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*—may have contributed to the sense of anxiety reflected in *sbas yul* literature. While it is well established that the bubonic plague ravaged Europe between 1346 and 1353, becoming the deadliest pandemics in human history and resulting in the deaths approximately half the European population, an estimated 50 million people, its broader effects across Asia, including possible repercussions in Tibet, merit further consideration. The earliest reliably traceable evidence points to the emergence of the European strain in what is now Kyrgyzstan, where there was a sudden surge of

²⁸ Petech, 1990, pp. 30-31.

²⁹ Jackson, 1976, p. 47; Petech, 1990, pp. 119-137.

³⁰ Diemberger, 2021, p. 112. citing Sinha et al. 2010, pp. 1-16.

³¹ *sTod hor* refers to the Chagatai Khanate, which, until the reign of Kublai Khan, acknowledged the supremacy of the Great Khan. However, it became increasingly Turkicised and broke away. The Chagatai forces launched multiple incursions into the territories of the Delhi Sultanate and the Yuan dynasty, including regions of Tibet, both during and after the period of the Yuan rule. In 1680, the remaining Chagatai territories were absorbed by the Dzungar Khanate. More details in Petech, 1990.

³² Petech says: "The invasion by Shams ud-dīn Ilyās may have contributed, along with the perishability of the building material (timber), to the disparition of all the monuments of ancient Nepalese architecture; none of the extant buildings in the Valley proper, however ancient their foundation, seems to be earlier than the 15th century." Petech, 1984, pp. 125-126.

³³ It was not called the Black Death until the 1750s.

deaths in 1338-1339.³⁴ However, Hymes presents several Chinese sources, which mention epidemics in the 13th century in relation to the arrival of the Mongol army,³⁵ and reports about epidemic outbreaks in the middle of the 14th century in big Chinese cities. There is also a growing body of scholarly literature on epidemics in Tibet and their treatment in Tibetan medical literature.³⁶ In a particularly notable text, *The Vase of the Amṛta of Immortality* ('Chi med bdud rtsi bum pa), composed in the form of a treasure text (*gter ma*), Padmasambhava prophesies a future pandemic that will claim the lives of three out of every four people worldwide before eventually reaching Tibet. In addition to its prophetic content, the text forms part of a medical cycle devoted to the treatment of infectious diseases (*gnyan nad*) and epidemic fevers (*rim tshad*). The rediscovery of the *Vase of Amṛta* is attributed to rDor 'bum Chos kyi grags pa. According to the tradition, the yellow scroll associated with this cycle is said to have "emerged [to him] directly from the heart of Hayagrīva at the temple of Byang Pra dun rtse."³⁷ Jamgön Kongtrul further reports that rDor 'bum Chos kyi grags pa "brought supplements to the same cycle out from beneath a stone image of Maitreya and revealed the *Cycle of the Small Vase of Amṛta* from the heart of an image of the Pañjara Mahākāla."³⁸ rDor 'bum Chos kyi grags pa's dates are not known, but academic scholarship generally assumes that the text was composed in the second half of the 13th century.³⁹

The 5th Dalai Lama identified the *Vase of Amṛta* as a *byang gter* cycle and connects it to important figures like bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603) and the physicians of the famous Brang ti and Zur families.⁴⁰ According to McGrath, the *Vase of Amṛta*, based on the symptoms described and the scale of the epidemic mentioned, is best interpreted as an account of the bubonic plague in thirteenth-century Tibet.⁴¹ McGrath's translation of the root text shows that the *Vase of Amṛta* closely parallels our treasure text, the *General Introduction*, not only in terms of its narrative framework—the *Vase of Amṛta* also takes the form

³⁴ A brief report on the findings by the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig was published by *The Guardian*, June 15, 2022. For a comprehensive and thought-provoking overview of the history of the plague in East Asia, see Hymes, 2015.

³⁵ Hymes, 2015, pp. 289-293.

³⁶ See McGrath, 2019 and <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/20331-116/>.

³⁷ Simioli, 2019, p. 222. Pra dun rtse is one of the four *mtha' 'dul* temples. The translation of an interesting guidebook of Byang Pra dun rtse can be found in Ramble, 2015.

³⁸ See under No. 55. Dorbum Chökyi Drakpa in Jamgön Kongtrul, 2011.

³⁹ Simioli, 2019, p. 223, McGrath, 2021, p. 215.

⁴⁰ Simioli, 2019, p. 223.

⁴¹ McGrath, 2021, p. 217.

of a dialogue, here between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal—but also in its portrayal of the Age of Decline, highlighting moral degeneration and human agency as the underlying causes of the epidemic.⁴²

By the time the Mongol rule collapsed in the middle of the 14th century, the memory of the Imperial Era (7-9th cent.) had become a massive narrative of the Golden Age among the adherents of the rNying ma pa, in which King Khri strong lde btsan appeared as the *cakravartin* and Padmasambhava as the Second Buddha. The power of the king supported by the Buddhist order was symbolized by the system of royal temples built in concentric circles from Lhasa to the borderlands to contain negative energies and maintain order.⁴³ The protection and restoration of these sacred sites were viewed as a means of counteracting the negative effects of the declining age. Another potent means of dispelling the darkness and averting both external and internal dangers was the revelation of spiritual teachings (*gter ma*) concealed by Padmasambhava and their subsequent integration into religious practice.⁴⁴

4. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's hidden lands

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–1408?) was one of the prominent treasure revealers (*gter ston*) credited with the discovery of a substantial corpus of *gter ma* literature, including the text under examination. He was considered to be the reincarnation of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (8th c.),⁴⁵ an 8th century minister of King Khri strong lde btsan, who was dispatched to India to invite Padmasambhava to Tibet. He was recognized as a mind emanation of Padmasambhava and revered as the founder of the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*) tradition.⁴⁶

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem first received treasure texts revealed by Ri khrod pa bZang po grags pa,⁴⁷ a yogi of the Dwags po bka' brgyud

⁴² These are both general features in *sbas yul* and other type of *gter ma* literature. Compare Chapter 2 in McGrath, 2021, p. 222, with the *General Introduction* A.2.2.

⁴³ Sørensen & Hazod, 2005, pp. 171-215.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion of treasure literature and revelation see Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991; Gyatso, 1993; Doctor, 2005; Mayer, 2015.

⁴⁵ He was born into the sNa nam clan in gTsang rong. He became one of the twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava. He attained *siddhis* by practicing the *sādhana* of Vajrakīlaya. Angowski, 2022.

⁴⁶ See Boord, 1993; Herweg, 1994; Turpeinen, 2015; Valentine, 2015.

⁴⁷ He meditated on Mt. Shri (rTsib ri) in southern Tibet, where he had a dream about treasure texts hidden in the temple of Gram pa rgyang. However, he did not act on the dream at the time. Later, while in gLang 'khor, he encountered a man, thought to be a manifestation of Padmasambhava, who again urged him to reveal the hidden treasures. He then revealed caskets of treasure scrolls at the Gram pa

tradition,⁴⁸ who revealed them in 1362. Ri khrod pa bZang po grags pa entrusted the treasures to three of his “brothers” for safekeeping until they meet the person with the right karma—someone who would speak of the Gungthang king. This set of texts contained the famous *Gsol 'debs le'u bdun ma*,⁴⁹ an important prayer attributed to Padmasambhava and said to be concealed by Mu khri btsan po,⁵⁰ destined to protect and reinvigorate the royal line during the time of degeneration. According to the story, since Rig 'dzin rGod ldem met these three individuals on the road and told them that King bKra shis lde (r. 1352–1365) had just passed away, the three brothers handed over Ri khrod pa bZang po grags pa's treasures to him.⁵¹

King bKra shis lde's successor on the throne was Phun tshogs lde (1338–1370), who stayed in Sa skya and was not keen to support Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's activities. However, rGod ldem was able to instill faith in him by performing a wrathful Vajrakīlaya (Tib. rDo rje phur pa) rite, but even then, the prince offered only one *zho*⁵² of gold as a treasure substitute (*gter tshab*).⁵³

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's main treasure revelation happened in 1366 on two different occasions. The lineage he founded was named “Northern Treasures” after these discoveries.⁵⁴ While the treasure-master stayed in Mt. bKra bzang and his fame continued to grow, the political crisis was escalating. King Phun tshogs lde was killed by his father-in-law, the lord of the myriarchy of Byang, when his armies marched into Gung thang and occupied the kingdom. The young king was killed for having his first-born child with a maidservant from Sa skya. This brought the number of murdered Gung thang princes to three as prophesized in the *General Introduction*.⁵⁵ Phun tshogs lde's

rgyang temple and discovered additional treasures in the Yon bu Valley. Herweg, 1994, pp. 85–88.

⁴⁸ Dwags po bka' brgyud comprises the branches of the bKa' brgyud tradition that trace their lineage back to sGam po pa (1079–1153). In terms of sacred geography, adherents of this tradition—particularly the 'Bri gung pa and the 'Brug pa lineages—were among the earliest to establish hermitages and temples, and to assert control over pilgrimage routes at major sacred mountains such as Ti se (Mount Kailash), La phyi, and Tsa ri.

⁴⁹ See <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/topics/leu-dunma/>.

⁵⁰ Mu khri btsan po, one of the sons of King Khri strong lde btsan.

⁵¹ Herweg, 1994, p. 90.

⁵² One *zho* is approximately one tenth of an ounce of gold.

⁵³ Herweg, 1994, pp. 92–93.

⁵⁴ In order to distinguish them from the Southern Treasures (*lho gter*) that had been revealed in previous centuries by Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1136–1204) and Gu ru Chos dbang (1212–1270).

⁵⁵ Sardar-Afkhami, 2001, p. 76, citing KAH THOG RIG 'DZIN, 2006, BDRC: MW1GS45274_EC0614.

sons⁵⁶ were too young to ascend the throne. For a five-year period, the rule passed into the hand of a regent, who seems to have been the district military commander. As a result of the expansion of the Western Mallas, Gung thang's influence over certain western territories, such as sPu rang and gLo, gradually diminished.⁵⁷

In 1373, rGod ldem went to search for the hidden land of 'Bras mo gshongs and stayed there for fourteen years. Soon after his return, in 1389, he became the personal preceptor to the king of Gung thang, Khri rgyal mChog grub lde (r. 1370–1396), and according to a royal edict quoted in his biography,⁵⁸ the king offered him Ri bo dpal 'bar as a monastic estate, and one hidden land.⁵⁹ He opened the hidden land of sKyid mo lung on the southern border of Mang yul Gung thang, and offered it to the king.⁶⁰

In the hagiography of rGod ldem written by his late disciple Nyi ma bZang po, only two hidden lands are named, 'Bras mo gshongs, where rGod ldem spent fourteen years and which he discusses extensively in his *Dream Diary*,⁶¹ and sKyid mo lung, which he revealed and offered to King mChog grub lde, the King of Gung thang. Many of the texts quoted by Nyi ma bZang po remain unidentified, some may not have survived the storms of time, others may be waiting in silence to be found.

The *General Introduction* presents several lists of hidden lands; however, none of these corresponds to the specific list of seven hidden lands attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.⁶² The text's enduring prominence may be attributed, in large part, to a prophetic passage in its colophon that legitimizes Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as the *gter ston* destined to reveal seven hidden lands intended as sanctuaries for Tibetans in the final era. This passage recounts Padmasambhava's prediction that, in a future Dragon or Ox year, a man of good karma will discover this treasure text safeguarded by the twelve brTan ma⁶³

⁵⁶ mChog grub lde and bSod nams lde.

⁵⁷ Gung thang maintained close ties with Sa skya through strategic marriage alliances and frequently received military support from them in response to incursions by the Western Mallas and other attacking forces.

⁵⁸ Herweg, 1994, p. 228.

⁵⁹ NYIMA 1, 1983 mentions three, while NYIMA 2, 1985 refers to only one, without naming it.

⁶⁰ For further details about his life and activities see Boord, 2013, pp. 38–45.

⁶¹ DREAM, 1983.

⁶² With the exception of Padma tshal, the name of the remaining six hidden lands from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's list appear in other enumerations of hidden lands in the *General Introduction*, though they are often associated with different geographical locations or interpretations.

⁶³ In Buddhist texts, they are more commonly referred to as bsTan ma bcu gnyis; ancient Tibetan mountain goddesses who were subjugated by Padmasambhava. See more in Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1996, pp. 181–198.

goddesses and extract it from the eastern side of a mountain, thereby initiating the revelation of seven hidden lands in the south.⁶⁴

rGod Idem's seven hidden lands gained widespread popularity through the influential work of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), whose list draws upon *The Guru's Seven Lockets* (*Gu ru'i ga'u bdun ma*), also known as *Entry key of the Seven Hidden Lands* (*sBas yul bdun gyi them byang*),⁶⁵ a text attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod Idem.⁶⁶ This widely circulated text is frequently included in broader compilations of Northern Treasures prophecies, such as the *Lamp Illuminating Future Prophecies* (*Ma 'ongs lung bstan gsal ba'i sgron me*).⁶⁷

The list of seven hidden lands presented in *The Guru's Seven Lockets*, a source often cited by later Tibetan authors,⁶⁸ is as follows:

1. The Happy Valley Endowed with Bliss (bDe ldan sKyid mo lung)⁶⁹
2. The Hidden Lotus Grove (sBas pa Pad ma'i tshal)⁷⁰
3. The Playground of Ḍākinīs (Rol pa mKha' 'gro gling)⁷¹
4. The Valley of Artemisia in rGyal (Rgyal kyi Khan pa lung)⁷²
5. The Divine Palace Basin (lHa yi Pho brang sdings)⁷³
6. The Hidden Land called Rice Valley (sBas yul 'Bras mo shong)⁷⁴
7. The Wheat Basin (Gro mo khud).⁷⁵

⁶⁴ Earlier in the text, in A3.3. Padmasambhava prophesies that the individual who opens 'Bras mo gshongs will "gradually reveal the succession of seven hidden lands," and follows this with a disordered enumeration of additional locations that do not correspond to the later standardized list of the seven *sBas yul*.

⁶⁵ Also as *sBas yul bdun gyi them byang ga'u bdun ma*.

⁶⁶ GAU DUN1, 1983; GAU DUN3, 1995; GAU DUN2, 2015.

⁶⁷ LADAKH 1, 1973, ff. 545.4–548.1 and LADAKH 2, 1973, BDRC: W1KG22374.

⁶⁸ For instance, Guru bKra shis, in his well-known historical work *Gu bkra chos 'byung* written in 1813, cites the names of the seven hidden lands from *The Guru's Seven Lockets*. He also refers to a text called *sBas yul them yig*, which appears to differ from the *General Introduction* based on the partial list he provides. TASHI, 1990, p. 508.

⁶⁹ Tsum valley, south of Mang yul on the Tibetan-Nepalese border.

⁷⁰ Identified with the Helambu area of Nepal.

⁷¹ Rol pa mKha' 'gro gling lies west of Khumbu in present-day Nepal. All seven sites mentioned are described in Tibetan sources as the "southern valleys," indicating that, when these sources were composed, the sites were considered part of Tibet.

⁷² In the *Ga'u bdun ma*, it is identified with rGyal gyi (m)Khan pa lung in Bud. The name is sometimes rendered by scholars as "the Victorious Valley of Artemisia"; however, in other sources *rGyal* seems to refer to a specific geographical region.

⁷³ This hidden land has not yet been identified. The term *sdings* can mean "cavity", "depression", "basin", but also "plateau", "levelled ground."

⁷⁴ Identified with Sikkim, now in India.

⁷⁵ Identified with the Chumbi valley, east of Sikkim, see Schwieger, 1985, p. xxxvii, fn. 55. The description of the seven *sBas yul* can be found in GAU DUN1, 1983 ff. 6a–7b.

The Guru's Seven Lockets is included in the *Collection of the Teachings of the Northern Treasures*,⁷⁶ a sixty-three-volume compendium that serves as the foundational source for the FCHNT project.⁷⁷ Its inclusion underscores the continued significance of both the text itself and the list of seven *sbas yul* attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod lde m. Although the *General Introduction* is not included in this 2015 compilation, it nevertheless serves as the opening text in several historical and contemporary Byang gter collections related to hidden lands.⁷⁸

5. The General Introduction

In the literature concerning hidden lands, one encounters a wide array of text types, often with overlapping content.⁷⁹ The *General Introduction* by genre or text type is a *them byang*, with *them* meaning “threshold, entry” and *byang* meaning “manual.” The term *byang bu*—the second element in this compound—designates a manual in *gter ma* literature that contains prophecies indicating where and how to discover the remainder of the treasure cycle. Its function is twofold: it both authenticates the discoverer personally and verifies the contents of the treasure to be revealed.⁸⁰ As such, it serves as a preliminary guide that initiates the journey of exploration, while also functioning as a prophecy to be fulfilled. In this sense, it constitutes a secret entry certificate or passkey for the future discoverer. For the general reader it provides information on the relevant prophecies, locations, routes, rituals, as well as the dangers and benefits associated with the search and discovery of a hidden land.⁸¹

The frame story of the *General Introduction* is set at bSam yas, where King Khri srong lde btsan⁸² requests Padmasambhava to deliver teachings on the final times—an era in which the Buddha's teachings will decline and ultimately vanish. The king specifically inquires about what measures Tibetans should adopt to uphold the Dharma and survive the Age of Degeneration. In response to the king's five

⁷⁶ JANGTER COLL, 2015, BDRC: MW2PD17457, ff. 589-614.

⁷⁷ Arguillère, 2022, pp. 5-21.

⁷⁸ See BEYUL GEN1, 2008; BEYUL GEN2, n. d.; BEYUL GEN3, 2003; BEYUL GEN4, 1983.

⁷⁹ *gNas yig* (guide to the sacred places), *gnas bshad* (description of sacred places), *lam yig* (travel guides), *dkar chag* (inventory), *lam byang* (route lists), *kha byang* (preliminary treasure guides), *byang bu* (prophetic inventory), *gnas kyi ngos 'dzin* (identification of a sacred place), *gnas sgo 'byed pa* (opening of the gate to the sacred place), *them byang* (introduction), *sbas 'debs* (hidden boundary region).

⁸⁰ Gyatso, 1993, p. 128.

⁸¹ Tulku Thondup offers a general summary about the use of prophetic guides, see Tulku Thondup, 1994, pp. 72-76.

⁸² Var. Khri srong lde'u btsan.

questions, Padmasambhava outlines the geographic locations of various hidden lands (*sbas yul*), provides directions to precious metals and precious stones intended to sustain the traveler on their journey, identifies omens and signs that indicate the appropriate time to depart and offers prophecies concerning future Tibetan reincarnations who will uncover these lands. Above all, he urges Tibetans to seek refuge in hidden lands.⁸³

*An annotated outline of the General Introduction*⁸⁴

Q1. What outer and inner signs will indicate the onset of the last five-hundred-year period during which Tibetans must seek refuge in hidden lands?

A1. Outer signs: Worship will cease in the main royal temples as well as in the border-taming (*mtha' 'dul*)⁸⁵ temples, and these sacred sites will fall into decay. After five generations in 'On chang rdo,⁸⁶ an emanated ruler is prophesied to construct a temple. This prophecy appears to allude to the reign of Ral pa can (802–838),⁸⁷ who is credited with the founding the sKyid smad 'On chang rdo dPe med bkra shis dge 'phel gyi gtsug lag khang in the lower sKyid chu Valley.⁸⁸

Inner signs: The king's authority will decline, leading to a period of anarchy lasting for 123 years—a clear reference to the Era of Fragmentation (9-10th c.). Subsequently, Tibet will be conquered by the Mongols of Mu dur nag po, a figure identified with Möngke Khan. Mongol rule will endure for 125 years, corresponding the Yuan period (1240–1364).⁸⁹ According to the prophecy, the end of

⁸³ Scholars often acknowledged an uncertainty about the origin and authorship of these *sbas yul* texts attributed to Rig 'dzin rgod ldem and noticed borrowings from other works. See Aris, 1980, p. 82; Orofino, 1991, p. 245-247.

⁸⁴ The translation by Martin Boord and the Tibetan transliteration of the *General Introduction* follow this article, with the same numbering of paragraphs found in the present outline.

⁸⁵ According to the Tibetan tradition, the thirteen geomantic temples tame the supine demoness (*srin mo*) that lie on the land of Tibet. The Jo khang is in the heart centre. The four Region Subduing temples (*ru gnon*) pin down the arms and hips; the Border Taming temples (*mtha' 'dul*) the elbows and knees, the Farther Taming temples (*yang 'dul*) the palms and feet. See more in Sørensen & Hazod, 2005.

⁸⁶ It is also spelled as 'U shang rdo.

⁸⁷ The 40th king of the Yar klungs dynasty.

⁸⁸ See Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991, p. 522.

⁸⁹ According to Shakabpa, Tibet gained its independence from the Mongols in the time of Byang chub rgyal mtshan (1302–1364), and China gained hers in 1368 under the leadership of Chu Yuan-chang. Shakabpa, 1967, p. 73.

Mongol rule marks the time to seek refuge in hidden lands, but people are not ready to go.

Q2. Will Tibetans, in the future, be able to locate and successfully establish themselves in these hidden lands (*sbas yul*)?

A2.1. Rather than providing a direct response to the question, the prophecy unfolds through a somber vision of the future, foretelling the complete subjugation of Tibet by a flesh-hunting *rākṣasa* and the widespread death of its population. This ominous imagery may allude to an epidemic, such as the bubonic plague, though the reference remains ambiguous. The prophecy then reiterates that during the 125 years of the Mongol domination, Tibetan leaders will live like subordinates, and for the subsequent 60 years, they will become “butchers,” and kill each other. The prophecy concludes once more with a call to depart.

In the following passage, the prophecy exhorts those intending to leave Tibet to ensure they are guided by a virtuous leader—a righteous king who upholds the Dharma. It then outlines the necessary preparations for the journey, emphasising the importance of unwavering perseverance in the face of anticipated hardships. The text notes that, beginning with the Mongol incursion—specifically Dorta the Black’s (Go rta nag po)⁹⁰ campaign against Tibet in 1240—hidden treasures begin to be gradually revealed. It is through the power of these treasures that the aspiration to seek out the hidden lands (*sbas yul*) will arise.

The prophecy then reiterates that the Mongol rule will eventually come to an end, followed by a period of internal conflict. During a brief interlude of relative peace, a few individuals will attempt to seek out the hidden lands; however, their efforts will be met with jealousy and ridicule from others, leading some to lose faith.

A.2.2. The prophecy continues with a narrative concerning Māra, who is said to shoot seven arrows at Tibet. Although this passage appears to be an interpolation—its original source remains unidentified—it recounts how Māra, assuming the form of dGa’ rab dbang phyug, the Lord of Supreme Desire⁹¹—stands atop Mount Meru. From this vantage point, he surveys the realms and rejoices at the triumph of darkness and the decline of the Buddha

⁹⁰ The army of the Mongol military commander Dorta the Black invaded Tibet in the Iron Male Mouse year. See Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991, p. 766, Shakabpa, 1967, p. 61.

⁹¹ T. *lha’i bu’i bdud* (lit. “The māra of the sons of the gods”), Skt. *kāmadeva*. He obstructs the attainment of virtue through the forces of jealousy and desire.

Śākyamuni's teachings in Jambudvīpa. It is foretold that during this time, Bodhgāyā will be invaded by the Turks,⁹² and, even in Tibet, only remnants of the Dharma will persist.

The seven arrows shot at Tibet give rise to widespread moral and social degeneration. Rulers and leaders turn against one another in conflict and bloodshed; scholars lose their compassion and abandon study and Dharma practice; ministers and counsellors become manipulative and deceitful. Young men become consumed by craving for food and drinks, engaging in hunting, consuming red meat, and drinking blood. Women are portrayed as deceitful, and fratricide becomes common. Those with limited intelligence resort to foul language, theft, and cheating, while virtuous individuals suffer sudden and untimely deaths. In response to this, the prophecy urges people to seek refuge in hidden lands—both as an escape from a dysfunctional, conflict-ridden society and as a means of protection from the potential violence of foreign invaders.

Comparable accounts of moral decline are already attested in the Pāli Canon⁹³ and were later adapted within Mahāyāna literature, including, for instance, the *Abhidharmakośa* and other works translated into Tibetan during the first dissemination (*snga dar*) of the Dharma.⁹⁴ Similar narratives of degeneration emerge in Tibetan *gter ma* literature such as the *Ma ni bka' 'bum*,⁹⁵ the *Padma bka'i thang*,⁹⁶ the *Vase of Amṛta*,⁹⁷ and the writings associated with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's tradition,⁹⁸ as well as in the *Legend of the Great Stupa*.⁹⁹ Notably, in the case of the *Ma ni bka' 'bum*, depictions of moral decay and decline of the Dharma are framed as a rhetorical strategy to inspire the cultivation of devotion to Avalokiteśvara. In other *gter ma* texts, however, comparable themes are invoked to encourage the protection and preservation of the Buddhist teachings and their institutional foundations.

⁹² This event, when *Du ru kha rgyal po* attacked *Rdo rje gdan* and damaged the golden statue of the Buddha is part of the mythic history of the black flying leather mask (*bse 'bag*) of the *Sa skya pa*. See Sørensen & Hazod, 2005, p. 284 and Vitali, 2001, pp. 26-27, fn. 16; pp. 28-29, fn. 20.

⁹³ See Buddha, 1911, 2006, pp. 58-79.

⁹⁴ A preliminary overview of the Indian precedents of Tibetan apocalyptic literature, see Gelle, 2020.

⁹⁵ Kapstein, 1993, p. 87.

⁹⁶ Douglas, 1978, pp. 597-604.

⁹⁷ McGrath, 2021, p. 222.

⁹⁸ See Achard, 2023 for the translation of a similar narrative of a section of the *sGron ma rnam gsum* quoted by Se ston Padma dbang chen in *Byang gter spyi bcings: Byang gter chos skor rnam kyī spyi chings rin chen 'phreng ba*, TBRC W23375, p. 36. <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/1844>.

⁹⁹ Dowman, 2004, pp. 41-45.

A2.3. The prophecy then alludes—without explicitly naming them—to the existence of three hidden lands in mDo Khams,¹⁰⁰ three in dBus,¹⁰¹ eight in gTsang,¹⁰² and two in mNga' ris.¹⁰³ This is followed by a cryptic series of prophetic statements:

- a hidden land in dBus will be revealed by an emanation of Vairocana;¹⁰⁴
- a hidden land in gTsang will be opened by a single emanation embodying the three men of Khams;¹⁰⁵
- a hidden land in Western Tibet will be revealed by an incarnation of Ācārya Jñāna;¹⁰⁶
- and the hidden land of mNga' ris will remain unopened.

Thirty years after the end of Mongol rule, Tibet will be invaded by nine armies from the east and twenty-one from the west. These forces will launch five successive assaults, and the foreign incursions will continue for sixty years. The situation will become even more dire than during the cannibal demon's¹⁰⁷ attack. These incursions will bring devastation across the entirety of Tibet, from west to east. Only a solitary seed of Dharma will remain, preserved at bSam yas¹⁰⁸ and the lHa sa gtsug lag khang.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁰ Eastern Tibet.

¹⁰¹ Eastern part of Central Tibet.

¹⁰² Western part of Central Tibet.

¹⁰³ Western Tibet. There is a different distribution of hidden lands mentioned in the *Ma'ongs lung bstan gsal ba'i sgron me* (LADAKH 2, 1973, pp. 455-456.): from Ti se until rKong po on the borderlands of Mon, there are eleven hidden lands: two in mNga' ris, seven in gTsang, and four in dBus.

¹⁰⁴ Vairocana, a prominent Tibetan scholar and translator, was born in sPa gor during the 8th century. Under the patronage of Khri srong lde btsan, he was dispatched to India to study with Indian masters, where he trained extensively under the guidance of the renowned teacher Śrī Simha (Shri Sing ha). Vairocana became one of the foremost masters of rDzogs chen. Despite his achievements, he was unjustly exiled to Eastern Tibet for a period. Eventually, however, King Khri srong lde btsan recalled him to Lhasa. See his biography Ani Jinba Palmo & g.Yu sgra snying po, 2004.

¹⁰⁵ 'The Three Men from Khams' can refer to g.Yo dge 'byung, dMar Shākyamuni, and gTsang Rab gsal, who fled their meditation hermitage at Chu bo ri carrying scriptures of the Vinaya and Abhidharma. They were escaping the persecution of Buddhists in Central Tibet during the 9th century under the rule of gLang dar ma.

¹⁰⁶ gNyags Jñānakumāra: https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Nyak-Jñānakumāra/TBRC_P6525.

¹⁰⁷ It might refer to an epidemic like the plague.

¹⁰⁸ The first monastery of Tibet built during the reign of King Khri srong lde btsan in 767 AD.

¹⁰⁹ The Jo khang temple of Lhasa, also known historically as the Ra sa 'phrul snang, built originally in ca. 640 during the reign of King Srong btsan sgam po.

A2.4. The next section of the prophecy emphasizes the importance of Dharma practice during the final era and underscores the necessity to leave for hidden lands. It warns that those who fail to heed the prophetic instructions will ultimately face terrible fate. In contrast, those of discerning mind will either seek out hidden lands (*sbas yul*) or engage in solitary, single-pointed meditation in an isolated place. As a result, in their next life, they will attain liberation in the buddha-fields.

Q3. How can Tibet and its people be protected from the poisonous arrows of Māra?

A3.1. In response, the following protective sites and ritual actions are enumerated:

- Three outer places (*phyi'i yul gsum*): three temples constructed by the three Dharma kings; a mantra of Uṣṇīṣa¹¹⁰ should be inserted in the parasol or the dome of these places for protection.
- Three inner substances (*nang gi rdzas gsum*): medicine of accomplishment; relics of the Buddha; and consecrated substance from a *maṇḍala*.
- Three secret *samādhi* (*ting nge 'dzin gsum*): inseparable practice of the personal deity (*iṣṭādevatā*), bodhicitta, and deep *samādhi*.
- Three fierce mantra: mantra of Vajranakhinī (rDo rje sDer mo),¹¹¹ of the wrathful Uṣṇīṣacakravartin (gTsug gtor 'Khor los bsgyur ba),¹¹² and of Vajra Armour (rDo rje go khab).¹¹³
- Three rounds of preparation: vajra posture; dancing a fierce dance; and prostration and circumambulation.
- Practitioners are instructed to consult the text called *A Canopy of Meteoric Thunderbolts* (*gNam lcags thog gi gur*)¹¹⁴ for their own protection.

A3.2. About keys and certificates for accessing hidden lands Padmasambhava says:

- For the 33 great [hidden] lands (*gnas chen*), seven documents are required for each.
- For the 13 medium size lands (*gnas bar pa*), three documents are

¹¹⁰ The Uṣṇīṣa mantra, or Uṣṇīṣa Vijaya dhāraṇī is a powerful mantra for longevity and overcoming obstacles, and it is reputed to help during violent times.

¹¹¹ Her name translates as Vajra Claw into English. She is a wrathful activity *dākinī*.

¹¹² One of the ten wrathful guardians, her mantra is a powerful tool to counter a magical onslaught.

¹¹³ This mantra shields practitioners from physical and spiritual harm, including diseases, negative energies, and malevolent forces.

¹¹⁴ Text not yet identified.

needed per site.

- For the seven minor places (*gnas phran bu*), a single document suffices

When the human lifespan declines to between 70 and 60 years, seven incarnate beings will obtain seven treasure caches.

- There are 22 hidden lands located along the southern passageway, that extends from Khyung lung in Gu ge¹¹⁵ to Klong thang sgron ma¹¹⁶ in mDo khams. An additional three hidden lands are found along the northern route. Among these the most important are: Tsa ri in the east, 'Bras mo gshongs in the south and 'Brab mo khugs¹¹⁷ in the north.
- The 13 medium lands are situated along the southern corridor between Tsha ba'i rong in rGya mo¹¹⁸ and Pra tum in gTsang.¹¹⁹
- The minor lands are located between the more significant hidden lands. These are often inaccessible for ordinary individuals, especially Tsha byi in the north or g.Yu sa brag mo in the south.

Accessibility of hidden lands:

- mKhan pa lung in lHo brag:¹²⁰ easiest to occupy
- mKha' gro gling in Khumbu:¹²¹ easy to locate, someone might be there already
- Kun skyed kyi phug: difficult to find, easy to occupy
- Bud kyi mKhan pa lung:¹²² difficult to find, easy to occupy

¹¹⁵ Southwest of Mt. Kailash, once part of the capital city of the ancient kingdom of Zhang zhung.

¹¹⁶ One of the *ru gnon* temples, it was built to suppress the right palm of the hand of the *srin mo*. Sørensen & Hazod, 2005, p. 148.

¹¹⁷ It could refer to a hidden land somewhere in Byang district, near Dan gra and sTar sgo gangs, on the northern side of the sTar go range. It is spelled as 'Bras mo khud in another version, BEYUL GEN5, n. d., f. 5b.

¹¹⁸ Unidentified. There is a Tsha ba'i rong in rGyal rong, traditionally regarded as the place to which Vairocana was exiled. See Karmay, 1996a, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ BEYUL GEN5, n. d. f. 5b: *pra dum*. Same location as the temple, where rDor 'bum Chos kyi grags pa found the *Vase of Amṛta* and other treasures.

¹²⁰ mKhan pa lung on the Tibet-Bhutan border.

¹²¹ Located in Khumbu, Nepal. Identified with one of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's seven hidden lands, the Playground of the Dākinīs (Rol pa mkha' 'gro gling).

¹²² According to this text, Bud kyi mKhan pa lung is situated in the same direction as mKha' 'gro gling in Khum bu, near Bu le'i gangs in the southern borderland. In Padma gling pa's tradition, a hidden land bearing the same name is located on the Bhutanese side of the Tibet-Bhutan border. The stories recorded by Aris are set in that region.

- 'Bras mo gshongs:¹²³ easy place to live
- Tsa ri¹²⁴ in the east: like living in a royal palace
- Ding ding nag mo in Has:¹²⁵ distant and difficult to reach, yet easy to occupy

The three hidden lands that will undoubtedly be discovered in the future are:

1. Tsa ri gangs kyi ra ba:¹²⁶ is prophesied to be discovered by a rDzogs chen yogin, considered to be an incarnation of the eminent translator Vairocana. However, due to the negative karma accrued through sending Vairocana to exile, it is foretold that the land will ultimately be occupied by a Hinayāna practitioner.
2. 'Bras mo gshongs:¹²⁷ is predicted to be opened by three learned masters of Tibet, one of whom is a yogin devoted to the practice of Vajrakīla. Upon its discovery, three distinct mantra lineages are said to emerge within this region.
3. La phyi gangs kyi ra ba:¹²⁸ is prophesied to be opened by an emanation of Ācārya Jñāna.

¹²³ Identified with Sikkim, one of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's seven hidden lands, The Valley of Rice (*Sbas yul* 'Bras mo shong).

¹²⁴ The Dag pa shel ri ("Pure Crystal Mountain") and its surrounding area on the Tibetan side of today's border between Tibet and Arunachal Pradesh, India.

¹²⁵ In the BHUTAN version the text reads *Has kyi sbas yul ding mo*. The Tibetan toponym Has probably refers to the Haa valley (Had) in Western Bhutan.

¹²⁶ Tsa ri or rTsa ri is known in Tibetan texts also as rTswa ri, meaning "Herb Mountain." It is also identified with the Sanskrit Cāritra (originally the name of a southern port city on the Orissan coast), transcribed into Tibetan as Tsā ri tra. In Indian Tantric literature and Tibetan commentaries, Tsa ri is recognised as one of the 24 power places (*pīṭha*) or one of the eight great Tantric charnel grounds. See Huber 1999, pp. 82-83. While Huber's influential work does not specifically examine Tsa ri as a *sbas yul*, it remains a seminal contribution to the study of Tibetan sacred geography and mountain cult.

¹²⁷ Identified with Sikkim, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is said to have spent fourteen years there during the 14th century, establishing temples and meditation centres in bKra shis sdings and near dPa' bo Huṃ ri. His reincarnation, Legs ldan rdo rje (1512–1625), discovered a *gter ma* at this site—the *mKha' 'gro'i mkha' lang ma'i rgyud*—in 1568 (Dokhampa, 2003). The three masters prophesied to open 'Bras mo gshongs are Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597–1653), Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin chen po, and mNga' bdag sems dpa' chen po Phun tshogs rig 'dzin (c. 1591–1656).

¹²⁸ Located southwest of Tibet, east of gNya' nang, La phyi, along with Ti se and Tsa ri, forms a trio of holy mountains associated with Cakrasaṃvara. La phyi is also closely linked to Mi la ras pa. It is identified with Godāvāri, one of the twenty-four Tantric power places (*pīṭha*). The 'Bri gung pa and 'Brug pa branches of the Dwags po bka' brgyud pa—following the instructions of Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1110–1170), one of the three main disciples of sGam po pa—were instrumental in establishing this sacred geographical cult at Ti se (Mt. Kailash), La phyi and Tsa ri. See Huber, 1997, p. 242.

Additional hidden lands that will be revealed only, when karmic conditions are ripe include:

4. The Happy Cave of Ku thang¹²⁹ will be occupied by a realised practitioner of Hayagrīva, coming from bKra thum in gTsang.
5. Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba:¹³⁰ it will be occupied by an accomplished Guru Vidyādhara (Bla ma rig 'dzin)¹³¹ practitioner, coming from the west of bKra thum in gTsang.¹³²
6. sMan sha khum bu'i rong:¹³³ it will be occupied by an accomplished Supreme Mother Goddess (Che mchog ma mo) practitioner, coming from Tho yor nag po in Byang.¹³⁴
7. mKhan pa lung in Bud:¹³⁵ it will be occupied by an adept of Vajravīdhara,¹³⁶ coming from the west of Ru lag rgyang.¹³⁷
8. Ding mo¹³⁸ will be occupied by an accomplished Mañjuśrī Yamāntaka practitioner, coming from Nyang ro.
9. mKhan pa lung in lHo brag:¹³⁹ it will be occupied by a Heruka practitioner coming from bSam yas.
2. 'Bras mo gshongs, the king of all hidden lands, will be opened gradually by seven people when human lifespan is decreasing from sixty to fifty.
1. Tsa ri will be gradually opened by three.
3. La phyi will be revealed by two.
5. Yol mo will be revealed by three.
4. sKyid kyi yul¹⁴⁰ in Ku thang will be revealed by two.¹⁴¹

¹²⁹ Kutang is a district located in northern Nepal near the Tibetan border. It is said that sBas yul sKyid mo lung is situated in this area. Aris, 1975, p. 56.

¹³⁰ Identified with Helambu, Nepal. Tibetan tradition suggests that Yol mo gangs ra and Padma tshal, one of the seven hidden lands of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem are the same.

¹³¹ One of the bKa' brgyad deities, who embodies the eight vidhyādhara of India, or the essence of Padmasambhava.

¹³² It refers to sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po (1480–later than 1540). See Gelle 2026b in this volume.

¹³³ Everest region of Nepal.

¹³⁴ It is the birthplace of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

¹³⁵ Hidden land on the southern borderlands, partly in Khumbu.

¹³⁶ rDo rje rnam 'joms, a semi-wrathful form of Vajrapāṇi.

¹³⁷ Ru lag refers to an administrative district corresponding to the southwest of gTsang, see Uray, 1960, p. 32. rGyang is the name of the place where Gram pa rgyang is located, one of the famous *ru gnon* temples pinning down the left hip of the *srin mo*.

¹³⁸ Has kyi Ding mo, or Ding ding nag mo, Western Bhutan.

¹³⁹ Hidden land in southern Tibet near the Bhutanese border.

¹⁴⁰ Same as sKyid mo lung.

¹⁴¹ It refers to sKyid mo lung discovered first by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The main *gter ston* associated with the site is Gar dbang rdo rje (1640–1685) who discovered *gter ma* there.

Each of the remaining hidden lands will be opened by one person.¹⁴²

Due to the progressive decline of virtue in the final era, access to the necessary transmissions and oral instructions required for entering these sacred hidden places (*sbas yul*) will become increasingly difficult.

Q4. How does one search for the three hidden lands in the upper, lower, and middle regions?

A4.1. People will go to the hidden lands only when human lifespan has declined to 50 years. The three most significant hidden lands¹⁴³ are located along the frontier regions of Mon, between Tshongs 'du¹⁴⁴ in gTsang and sPra dum.

A4.2. Recommended practices for overcoming obstacles:

Practitioners are advised to engage in the meditative and ritual practices of Yamāntaka, Vajrakīla, and Heruka, as well as the sādhana practice of Hayagrīva and the Supreme Mother Goddess (Che mchog Ma mo), in order to eliminate hindrances to accessing hidden lands.

A4.3. Location of material treasures and instructions for establishing a network:

For those going to 'Bras mo gshongs: a treasure of gold is said to be located in Co ro prad, intended for the construction of a temple in Tsha mo rong. Along the line of Gang can mdzod lnga¹⁴⁵ sTag rtse ri,¹⁴⁶ which demarcates the border of Tibet, eight temples should be constructed and populated with monks. A retreat centre should be established in the heart of 'Bras mo gshongs.

According to the prophecy, Tibet will be attacked from the east by foreign armies on three separate occasions. Foreign armies will reach dBus and gTsang but will be unable to penetrate the southern land of lHo ka. Subsequently, when Mongols are foretold to

¹⁴² The numbering may appear confusing at first, but it is intentional. These two paragraphs refer to nine hidden lands; however, some of these lands are mentioned more than once. To prevent misunderstanding, the same number is assigned to each land upon its second mention.

¹⁴³ La phyi, 'Bras mo gshongs, and Tsa ri.

¹⁴⁴ In the story of the Ten Men of dBus and gTsang ordained by dGongs pa rab gsal (832–915), Bu ston recounts how mGur mo in gTsang rose to prominence as a renowned marketplace, see Obermiller, 1931, p. 203.

¹⁴⁵ The third highest mountain of the world, and the sacred mountain of Sikkim. Sikkim's guardian deity, mDzod lnga resides on its top with his acolyte Yab bdud.

¹⁴⁶ The highest of the five peaks of Gangs chen mdzod lnga.

traverse the entire Tibetan plateau, retreat into 'Bras mo gshongs will become imperative.

The prophecy further delineates mineral treasures intended to facilitate journeys to various hidden lands, including Bud, Khumbu, La phyi, Yol mo gangs ra, and others. These concealed resources are specifically designated to support spiritual practitioners in their travels to remote Himalayan locations for the purposes of meditative retreat or pilgrimage. Beyond merely identifying the location of these treasures, the text also offers practical guidance on their utilization, particularly for the renovation or construction of temples, stupas, and rest houses along the routes. The enumeration of these treasure sites reveals a visionary schema in which both spiritual and material provisions are anticipated as essential for enabling access to the hidden lands.

It is a noteworthy parallel that Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270), in his *gTer 'byung chen mo*, includes among the outer treasures “hidden wealth to buy food for Dharma practitioners.”¹⁴⁷ Similarly, following his consolidation of power in 1358, Byang chub rgyal mtshan is known to have established rest houses and provision caches along pilgrimage routes surrounding the sacred mountains of Tsa ri and Kailash.¹⁴⁸ It is evident from biographical sources (*rnam thar*), that many hidden lands served as retreat sites for earlier generations of yogis even before they were formally opened.¹⁴⁹

A4.4. The list of provision caches is followed by a description detailing the method for protecting bSam yas using a poison wind amulet. It prescribes that a man should smear his head with grease, apply sandalwood ointment to his nostrils, and place a leather casket containing poisonous gas beneath the threshold of bSam yas. This is intended to safeguard the site from destruction by a “demon” army. According to the prophecy, the army will disperse

¹⁴⁷ Gyatso, 1994, p. 276.

¹⁴⁸ Shakabpa, 1967, pp. 81–82.

¹⁴⁹ Aris (1980, pp. 61–62) notes that the high valley of mKhan pa lung (or mKhan pa ljongs), located just south of the Tibetan border in Bhutan, had served as a site for spiritual retreat since at least the latter half of the 13th century. It is listed as one of the places where the early rDzogs chen master Me long rdo rje (1243–1303) meditated. Later, following a dream revelation, Padma gling pa (1450–1521) journeyed to the same place to extract a treasure, the *Guidebook to mKhan pa lung*. Upon his return to the village, however, he was confronted by the Nas pa people, who demanded the return of the treasure, claiming it had been taken from their land. A resolution was reached only after Padma gling pa destroyed their crops by sending hail and secured the support of the Chus pa people. Then finally the dispute was settled, and the Nas pa offered the land of mKhan pa lung to Padma gling pa.

and return to its own land after three years, ushering in a period of 30 years of happiness in Tibet. However, in the final times, such measures will no longer be effective against the invading forces, and the people are advised to seek refuge in the valleys of southern Tibet.

A4.5. Tibetans living in different regions should flee to the following places:

- From dBus and gTsang people should go to lHo ka,¹⁵⁰
- from Byang people should escape to the southern gorges,
- from Byang Dang ra to the northern side of the sTar sgo range,¹⁵¹
- and mentions invading armies advancing from the west, destroying Western Tibet and killing people.

Somewhat abruptly, Padmasambhava adds another prophetic statement: "Oh, great king! Tibet's suffering will begin when, in sTod, in Mang yul Gung thang, the royal line is severed by the knife.¹⁵² The disaster in Tibet will commence with a second killing by the knife. When the third murder occurs,¹⁵³ it will mark the end of Tibet's happiness, then, flee to the hidden lands and the southern valleys."

This passage is frequently cited in sources discussing hidden lands,¹⁵⁴ and there is considerable speculation regarding which kings and historical periods it references. However, within the *General Introduction*, the passage appears to pertain to the kings of Gung thang, who were killed during the 13th to 14th centuries.

A4.6. A parallel is then drawn with India's fate during the Age of Decline, in which Buddhist temples are said to be destroyed by invading armies. According to the text, seven sūtras of the Buddha *Śākyamuni* contain prophecies concerning the final times. From

¹⁵⁰ lHo ka denotes the region of southern Tibet stretching from the Yar klungs valley southward to lHo brag.

¹⁵¹ rTa rgo rin po che (father/mountain) and Dang ra g.yu mtsho (mother/lake) are renowned pilgrimage sites for the followers of the Bon tradition in the Byang thang region of Tibet. They are also revered as locations where Padmasambhava concealed spiritual treasures (*gter ma*). For a detailed analysis of their sacred geography see Bellezza, 1997.

¹⁵² It refers to the first time, when a Gung thang king was murdered. It could refer to dGon po lde (ca. 1235?), who during a war between Gung thang and Ya tshe, fled to sKyid grong, and was killed there. Jackson, 1976, p. 44.

¹⁵³ King Phun tshogs lde (1338–1370), as mentioned earlier, was killed by his father-in-law. See Jackson, 1976, p. 47.

¹⁵⁴ RG3, 2003, p. 23.

among these texts, *The Royal Sūtra of Prophecies* (*Lung bstan rgyal po'i mdo*)¹⁵⁵ is cited. In this sūtra, the Buddha tells Śāriputra that during the final period, people should seek refuge in the region of Mount Dan tig, at the source of the Dan tig river, on remote islands in the outer ocean, and in secluded forested valleys.

Imre Galambos has proposed that Dan tig is likely a transcription of the Chinese toponym, Tante 檀特. In collaboration with Sam van Schaik, he conducted a detailed study of the term, arguing that it refers to the place of exile of Prince Sudāna,¹⁵⁶ which may have motivated the naming of a monastery in Amdo, known as the refuge of the so-called 'Three Men from Khams,'¹⁵⁷ who sought asylum there during the Era of Fragmentation.

Although I have not been able to identify *The Royal Sūtra of Prophecies*, it may be a text translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and later into Tibetan during the first dissemination of the Teaching. The citation included in the *General Introduction* portrays Mount Dan tig as a place of refuge in India—a sanctuary for preserving the Dharma during times of crisis.

Q5. How can Tibetans escape from the arrows of Māra?¹⁵⁸

A5.1. About the social disintegration and low morals of the final five-hundred years, similar to A2.2.

A5.2. About the number of people reaching the main hidden lands and attaining liberation, those, who die of hunger, disease or killed by demon armies.

A5.3. Padmasambhava is giving advice to people who will live in the final five-hundred years to go to the southern borderlands and find the hidden lands which he blessed, and where he concealed important treasures, and appointed obedient servants.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Unidentified text. The same section of this sūtra is quoted by lHa btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597-1653) in vol. 3 of his *gsung 'bum*, in a guidebook (*lam yig*) of 'Bras mo gshongs, see LHATSUN, 1974, p. 432.

¹⁵⁶ The *Sudāna Sūtra* (*Rgyal bu don grub kyi mdo*) survives both in Chinese and Tibetan versions among the Dunhuang manuscripts (IOL Tib J 76), and it is also included in the Tibetan bKa' 'gyur. See Galambos & van Schaik, 2015 and <https://earlytibet.com/2010/07/15/amdo-notes-ii/>.

¹⁵⁷ See fn. 104.

¹⁵⁸ The arrows of Māra refer to the *kleśas* (see A2.2.), mental afflictions that obscure the mind and give rise to unwholesome actions, obstructing the path to liberation. These afflictions and their resulting negative actions are considered the root causes of the sufferings characterising the Age of Decline.

¹⁵⁹ It refers to local deities, who were subjugated by Padmasambhava to be the protectors of the Dharma, and they were entrusted to protect the treasures (*gter ma*).

Colophon: Khri srong lde btsan compiled an inventory of all the prophecies, offered a mandala to his guru, and concealed the treasures. They were concealed halfway up the mountain in Byang Zang zang lha brag. Upon his departure from Tibet, Padmasambhava is said to have prophesied the future discovery of these treasures, predicting that a man of virtuous karma would discover the text on the eastern side of the mountain and thereby open the path to seven hidden lands in the south. The second colophon states that the treasure was taken out by Rig 'dzin rGod lde in Byang Zang zang lha brag.

6. Authorship

According to the tradition, treasure teachings—like the *General Introduction*—can be found in physical form, or experienced in dreams or visions, which work as a trigger in the treasure revealer's mind, helping him to recall a teaching. Then they are decoded and written down by the treasure-master. Padmasambhava is regarded as the “author” in the sense of being the original source of the revelation, while the *gter ston*—who deciphers the symbolic code and formalizes the scripture—is likewise recognized as an “author” of the textual composition. This model of dual attribution challenges conventional Western notions of authorship.¹⁶⁰ Like many works of Tibetan literature, treasure texts are typically compilations, assembled from blocks of teachings drawn from a range of sources—often incorporating material that is earlier, or even of ancient origin.¹⁶¹ Their primary purpose is the transmission of an established spiritual truth.

Although little is known about the earliest use of the term *sbas yul* in Tibetan sources, Gu ru Chos dbang (1212–1270) refers in his *gTer 'byung chen mo* to “entire valleys that are hidden as treasures, to be used in the future as retreats for Dharma practitioners.”¹⁶² This description may represent a prototype for the later development of the cult surrounding hidden lands. Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308–1363) employs the term *sbas yul* in his eulogy of the Bum thang region,¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ This also presents further challenges in English translations of *gter ma* texts, where the list of associated figures or “authors” often includes Padmasambhava, who originally bestowed the teaching; Ye shes mtsho rgyal or others, who recorded it; the *gter ston*, who discovered it centuries later; the lama, who offered commentary or transmission; and the translators, who rendered it into English.

¹⁶¹ Robert Mayer found that one of Nyang ral Nyi ma'i 'od zer's (12th c.) treasure works is a verbatim republishing of a the Dunhuang ext, IOL TibJ 331 III (c. tenth century). See Mayer, 2015, pp. 228–229.

¹⁶² Gyatso, 1994, p. 276.

¹⁶³ Klong chen pa spent six years in exile in Bhutan, residing in places such as Thar pa gling in Bum thang. He left Tibet following the failure of the 1358 revolt by the 'Bri

where he spent several years in exile, to evoke a spiritual paradise in which ideal natural features and human virtues converge to create optimal conditions for religious practice. However, the mystical dimensions that come to define later *sbas yul* literature from the time of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, are absent from his portrayal.¹⁶⁴

A substantial corpus of manuscripts concerning hidden lands (*sbas yul*) most of which are attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, circulates widely throughout the Himalayan region. Preliminary research on a selection of these texts suggests that many were likely composed later than Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's time, incorporating material sometimes from various authors. Some may have originated locally and were later ascribed to the lineage's founder.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, they are regarded as the authentic works of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, a traditional view that gains credence when considered alongside Klong chen pa's criteria for determining the authenticity and reliability of a doctrine. Teachings are authentic if:

1. They are not the result of personal, momentary invention, but represent the mental lineage of the Buddhas of the three times—that is, they ultimately originate from the Buddhas themselves.
2. They embody the symbolic lineage of knowledge-holders who have received the transmission of teachings bearing ultimate meaning, thus ensuring that the doctrines are not of provisional but of definitive significance.
3. Finally, they represent the oral lineage of specific historical individuals, transmitted in an unbroken chain throughout history. The authenticity of the teachings requires the concurrent presence of these three transmission lineages.¹⁶⁶

However, from an academic perspective, a more robust historical conclusion necessitates a critical reassessment of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's historical persona, as well as an investigation into whether the *sbas yul* teachings later attributed to him can be substantiated as originating during his lifetime. One promising approach would be to systematically compare a large corpus of *sbas yul* texts, exploring their intertextual relationships and thematic patterns. These could then be

gung bka' brgyud against the Phag mo gru pa. His exile was likely due his close association with the 'Bri gung sgom chen, Kun dga' rin chen.

¹⁶⁴ kLong chen rab 'byams pa, 2020.

¹⁶⁵ Scholars often acknowledged an uncertainty about the origin and authorship of these *sbas yul* texts attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and noticed borrowings from other works. See Aris 1979, p. 82; Orofino 1991, pp. 245-247.

¹⁶⁶ Agócs, 2025, pp. 81-82.

contextualised through a comparative analysis with works attributed to other prominent treasure revealers who have journeyed to hidden lands and composed guidebooks describing them, such as Padma gling pa (1450–1521), 'Ja' tshon snying po (1585–1656),¹⁶⁷ Rig 'dzin bDud 'dul rdo rje (1615–1672),¹⁶⁸ Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597–1653),¹⁶⁹ among others. Additionally, it would be important to examine how these texts align with or diverge from major rNying ma works of the 14th century, such as the *Mani bka' 'bum*, the *Padma bka' thang*, and canonical literature addressing the theme of the age of decline. Comparative analysis between the sources of *sBas yul* texts and those of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's other works may also yield insights into questions of authorship, attribution and doctrinal continuity.

7. Geography

Another interpretive challenge lies in the geographical identification of hidden lands. As seen from the annotated outline of the *General Introduction*, although it refers to specific Byang gter practices and prophecies concerning future discoverers—those who will follow this tradition—it also presents a synthesis of earlier Tibetan sacred geographies: power-places, sites associated with the ancient Tibetan mountain cult, earlier Bon and Buddhist traditions, and Himalayan valleys, some of which would later be identified as the seven hidden lands of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. It is noteworthy that Ti se, La phyi, and Tsa ri are frequently referenced in the *General Introduction*. These three sacred mountains (*gnas ri*) had been venerated long before the emergence of the Byang gter lineage. During Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life, they served as prominent pilgrimage routes and meditation sites under the control of the 'Bri gung and 'Brug pa bka' brgyud traditions. Significantly, however, the *General Introduction* designated a different triad—La phyi, 'Bras mo gshongs, and Tsa ri—as the three principal hidden lands, prophesied to be definitely revealed in the future.

In the course of my earlier textual research on sBas yul Yol mo gangs ra, I identified a striking instance of intertextuality: a passage describing the hidden land of Yol mo appears verbatim in a text concerning the hidden land of mKhan pa lung. This shared

¹⁶⁷ <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Jatson-Nyingpo/11572>.

¹⁶⁸ 'Ja' tshon snying po's disciple. When the Qoshot Mongols overran Central Tibet in 1642, 'Ja' tshon snying po appointed him to open the Hidden Land of Padma bkod. Sardar-Afkhani, 1996 p. 2.; Ehrhard, 1994, pp. 227-239.

¹⁶⁹ Important disciple of 'Ja' tshon snying po and Rig 'dzin bDud 'dul rdo rje. He was urged by them and a prophecy to open sBas yul 'Bras mo ljongs, and he completed the task in 1646. He established an unbroken lineage of rDzogs chen practice in Sikkim. See Mullard, 2003, Mullard, 2011.

description, employed to designate two ostensibly distinct sacred geographies, raises important questions regarding the fluidity and portability of textual representations of hidden lands.

In another case, I examined a prophetic certificate (*lung byang*) related to sBas yul Yol mo gangs ra, entitled the *Heart Essence*,¹⁷⁰ which is attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The text concludes with the statement: "This was the short summary of the snowy land of the northern gate of 'Bras mo gshongs."¹⁷¹ Notably, however, sBas yul Yol mo gangs ra is not mentioned in any extant biographies of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The toponym Yol mo, however, does appear in his biography as a geographical reference:

The *Gab pa snying thig lde mig*¹⁷² says:
If signs of Tibet's decline appear,
Seek the land between Yol mo above and Gro mo below—
the precious 'Bras gshongs lies in the middle.
Whatever omens may arise, go there!¹⁷³

It is striking that both texts refer to Yol mo as a location neighbouring¹⁷⁴ Bras gshongs despite well-established geographical identifications to the contrary. 'Bras gshongs or 'Bras mo gshongs is commonly associated with Sikkim, Gro mo (or Gro mo khud) with the Chumbi Valley situated directly east of Sikkim, and Yol mo with Helambu, located approximately 300 km west of Sikkim in a straight line. Nevertheless, the *General Introduction* situates Yol mo gangs ra near La phyi, aligning with its modern identification. Intriguingly, there is no mention of Padma 'tshal, one of the seven *sbas yul* of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem identified later with Yol mo gangs ra.

¹⁷⁰ The full title is *Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba'i lung byang snying gi tikka*, and it is included in the *Byang gter lugs kyi rnam thar dang ma 'ong lung bstan*. (RG6 & Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, 2003).

¹⁷¹ RG6 & Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, 2003, p. 43: *ces pa 'bras gshongs byang sgo'i gangs lung mdor bris so*.

¹⁷² *Key of the hidden heart essence*. This text is not identified yet, although I found another mention of it in the colophon of sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi lam yig le'u drug pa lde mig 'khrul gyi dgu skor bdog (BDRC: MW1KG818_097461), where it is mentioned that it is a prophetic teaching by Padmasambhava hidden in Byang zang zang gi brag and discovered by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

¹⁷³ *sNying gi lde mig las/ bod phung ba'i rtags byung na/ yol mo stod la gro mo smad/ bar yul rin chen 'bras gshongs/ gang gi stags byung de ru rgyug/* My translation is based on the transcription of the rGod ldem's *rnam thar* in Herweg, 1994, pp. 225-226.

¹⁷⁴ The colophon of RG6 calls it the 'northern gate' (*byang sgo*), and the biography says *stod*.

	Name of the Hidden Land	Geoloc. in the <i>General Introduction</i>	Modern identification	Revealer
1	Tsa ri Tsa ri gangs kyi ra ba	in the east	Arunachal Pradesh & Tibet border	three people will open it
2	'Bras mo gshongs	in the south	Sikkim	seven people will open it
3	La phyi La phyi gangs kyi ra ba	same direction as Yol mo	Border of Nepal & Tibet	- emanation of Ācārya Jñāna - two people will open it
4	Ku thang skyid kyi phug sKyid mo lung sKyid kyi yul	Ku thang kyi rong	Manaslu region, Nepal	- realized man who will come from bKra thum in gTsang - two people will open it
5	Yol mo Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba	same direction as La phyi	Helambu, Nepal	three people will open it
6	sMan sha Khum bu'i rong mKha' 'gro gling in Khum bu	same direction as Bud	Khumbu, Nepal	realized master of the supreme Heruka Ma mo
7	Bud kyi mKhan pa lung Bud rong	same direction as Khum bu near Bu le'i gangs	Tibet-Nepal border	realized master of the propitiation of rDo rje rNam 'joms
8	Has kyi sbas yul Ding ding nag mo sBas yul Ding mo	far away sPa gro Bum thang	Western Bhutan	realized master of Mañjuśrī Yamāntaka; coming from Nyang ro
9	IHo brag rGyal gyi mKhan pa lung, IHo brag mKhar chu'i rong	IHo brag mKhar chu refuge for the practitioners of mChims bu	IHo brag, southern Tibet bordering Bhutan	master of the practice of Heruka, coming from bSam yas
10	Byang 'Brab mo khugs Byang 'Bras mo khud	Byang; near Dang ra and sTar go gangs; northern side of sTar go gangs	Northwestern part of Tibet, Byang	---
11	Lha pho brang sdengs	---	---	mentioned only once: easy to find, difficult to liberate
12	Ti se Ti se gangs	east from the snow mountain that looks like a market gathering of gods	Mt. Kailash	mentioned that three hundred practitioners will attain liberation there during the final times
13	dBus kyi sbas yul Nags rong phug bKa' ma lung in Dvags po	same direction as 'Bras mo gshongs	Central Tibet	---

Fig. 1. — Overview of the Hidden Lands mentioned in the General Introduction¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Of the seven Hidden Lands mentioned in the *Ga'u bdun ma*, five appear under identical names in the *General Introduction* and are highlighted in bold in the

A similar ambiguity arises in the references to mKhan pa lung in the *General Introduction*: rGyal gyi mKhan pa lung is described as being located in southern Tibet, in lHo brag, while Bud kyi mKhan pa lung is said to lie in the direction of Khum bu. However, in the list of the *Ga'u bdun ma*—the principal source for Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's seven hidden lands—rGyal gyi mKhan pa lung is instead placed in Bud. These examples reflect a broader pattern of fluidity in the identification and localization of sacred landscapes. It appears plausible that the locations of *sbas yul*—like those of sacred sites of India and Tibet—were historically subject to processes of transposition, recontextualization or re-identification.

Franz-Karl Ehrhard encapsulated the nature of this phenomenon succinctly: "I shall venture the conclusion, that the text material on which the [*sbas yul*] myth is based is part of a literature that passed in various versions through the hands of various authors and commentators. In the process it was easy for overlapping traditions and differing ways of defining geographical reality to arise."¹⁷⁶

8. Conclusion

The prophecy of the *General Introduction* (*sPyi'i them byang*) foretelling Tibet's suffering through foreign invasions, internal strife, epidemics, and social disintegration, can be contextualized within the conditions of the 13-14th century—specifically the Yuan dynasty and the subsequent Phag mo gru pa period. According to the text, the gradual revelation of hidden treasures begins in the 13th century, coinciding with the onset of the Yuan rule, and these *gter ma* revelations give rise to the notion of hidden lands, and it is only after the Yuan era, in the second half of the 14th century, that efforts to locate such hidden lands begin to emerge sporadically.

While the text does reference internal turmoil, it notably refrains from naming specific political authorities or religious factions as sources of disorder. Instead, it identifies foreign invasion—particularly the Hor (Mongols) and the sTod hor (Chagatai Khanate)—as the primary threats to Tibet. In its portrayal of the country's condition, the *General Introduction* evokes a profound sense of crisis, existential dread, and life-threatening peril. These dire circumstances, it suggests, can be addressed only through drastic action—most significantly through the departure in search of hidden lands. Although the prophecy initially envisions refuge within secluded

accompanying table. *Gro mo khud* is absent, and *Yol mo gangs ra* appears in place of *Padma tshäl*.

¹⁷⁶ Ehrhard, 1997, p. 341.

mountain valleys throughout Tibet, as it unfolds and addresses the final phase of the Dark Age, it calls for a more radical response: the withdrawal from established religious and political centres in order to establish new communities on the margins. These peripheral spaces are portrayed as sanctuaries where the Dharma, along with the lineage of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, can be safeguarded within a more conducive and protective environment.¹⁷⁷

The *General Introduction* demonstrates a good geographical knowledge of Tibet and its borderlands, indicating that its author was familiar with these regions and the trans-Himalayan routes that connected Tibet with its neighbours. The inclusion of multiple lists of hidden lands suggests the possible incorporation of pre-Byang gter sources and pre-existing catalogues of *sbas yul*. The text prophesies that seven incarnate figures will each discover a cache of hidden treasures during a period when the average human lifespan has declined to between seventy and sixty years.¹⁷⁸ It further states that migration to hidden lands will commence only when the average lifespan has fallen to fifty years. Although the precise duration between the initial revelation of these treasures and the eventual discovery of the hidden lands cannot be determined with the help of these eschatological terms, historical developments appear to loosely correspond with the structure of the prophecy. Notably, textual references to hidden lands began to emerge in the 14th century, whereas the actual opening of the majority of the seven hidden lands associated with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem did not begin until the 17th century. In light of this, it is noteworthy that the *General Introduction* is recorded among the Byang gter teachings on future prophecies and hidden lands in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Records of Teachings received*.¹⁷⁹

Regardless of its date of composition, the *General Introduction* offers a glimpse into a pre-existing tradition of sacred lands predating Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, indicating that earlier Bon, rNying ma, and Dwags

¹⁷⁷ While Byang gter yogis had been meditating in the Himalayan region since the early phases of the tradition, the significant increase in the number of hidden lands (*sbas yul*) revealed during the 17th century indicates a deliberate dissemination of the Northern Treasures (*Byang gter*) tradition. This pattern becomes even more pronounced following the Dzungar invasion of 1717, during which the principal *Byang gter* monastery, rDo rje brag, was destroyed and its abbot killed. In the aftermath, reports of Tibetans relocating to the southern borderlands become more frequent, suggesting a renewed emphasis on peripheral sanctuaries as sites of refuge and religious continuity.

¹⁷⁸ According to Buddhist cosmology, the human lifespan was one-hundred years during the time of the historical Buddha and is believed to gradually decline, ultimately reaching as low as ten years at the end of the kali yuga.

¹⁷⁹ 5th DALAI LAMA, 1971, f. 329.

po bka' brgyud traditions also contributed to the conceptual development of the *sbas yul* cult of the Northern Treasures tradition.

The significance of the *General Introduction* lies in its function as a self-legitimising discourse of the visionary and mystical conceptualisation of *sbas yul* developed by the Northern Treasures tradition grounded in the cult of Padmasambhava. The text not only prophesies the future appearance of a figure—identified in the colophon as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem—who will reveal seven hidden lands along Tibet's southern borderlands, but also provides detailed descriptions of the routes to these sanctuaries, along with protective rituals and practices designed to safeguard Dharma practitioners on the way. In doing so, it functions as an esoteric manual or 'key' for locating potential places of refuge. A key waiting to find its corresponding 'door' in the future.

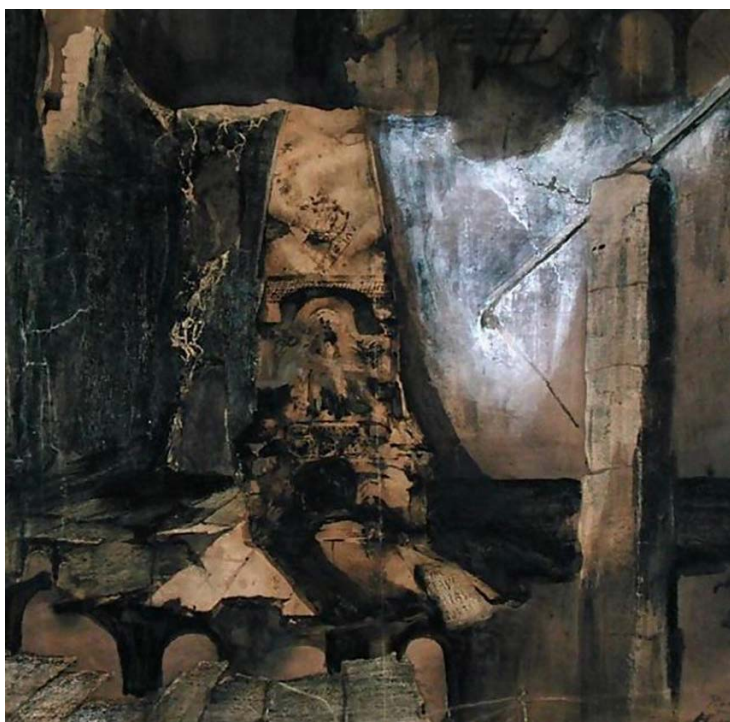


Fig. 2. — *Here the Key, Elsewhere the Door* by Victor Hugo

Completed in 1871, the painting dates to the period immediately following Victor Hugo's return to France from Guernsey, where he had spent fifteen years in exile.

Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris

(Wikimedia Commons)

List of Abbreviations

BDRC	Buddhist Digital Resource Center
D	Derge (sDe dge) Edition of the Tibetan Canon
IOL	India Office Library
LTWA	Library of Tibetan Works and Archives
PTS	Pāli Text Society
T	Taishō Tripiṭaka

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The General Introduction to the Hidden Lands

Martin Boord

(Independent scholar)

with a foreword by Stéphane Arguillère
(Inalco/IFRAE)

Since the launch of the FCHNT project, we have wanted to involve our dear friend and colleague, Dr. Martin Boord. He was one of the main pioneers in exploring the Northern Treasures corpus at a time when their importance was barely recognised, despite the beautiful article by Eva Neumaier (Dargyay), to whom we also pay tribute in this volume.

However, circumstances did not allow him to participate actively, although he gave us his full blessing and encouragement for the good success of our project. Still, we would not have liked to conclude it without publishing at least one work of his, so that he is not absent from the maṇḍala of contributors to our Byang gter volumes. This is now achieved thanks to the following article, which documents an important aspect in the career of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem: the search for hidden lands (*sbas yul*).

There are many reasons to include this work in our third and final “Northern Treasures special issue” of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* apart from our desire to pay homage to Martin Boord's priceless contribution. This translation, which captures the apocalyptic flavour of the original text, offers a clearer picture of how Rig 'dzin rGod ldem perceived his world and his role in it. What is more, despite decades of research, the topic of hidden lands, deeply associated with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, remains partly obscure and thus, in the narrower context of Byang gter research especially, this better understanding of how Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's search for hidden lands relates to other events in the second half of his life seems invaluable.¹

Before presenting the translation, perhaps we could briefly introduce our friend Martin Boord.

¹ A previous translation of this work is available in Sardar-Afkhami, 2001, pp. 39-65, an unpublished thesis defended at Harvard University in 2001.

A Presentation of Martin Boord²

Martin Boord was one of Chimed Rigdzin Rinpoche (C.R. Lama)'s senior students. Visiting India and Nepal as a teenager in 1967, he became a devoted Buddhist and immediately embarked on the study of Sanskrit in order to read the original texts. Receiving teachings from many of the great Tibetan masters of all schools who had settled in India following the takeover of their country by China, he studied the doctrines of both sūtra and tantra. Over the years, he carefully surveyed the Buddhist scriptures before immersing himself fully in the tantric practices of the rNying ma school under the guidance of Dudjom Rinpoche and Lama Khamtrul Yeshe Dorje, the renowned "weather man" of the Dalai Lama's government in Dharamsala.³ It was whilst on a pilgrimage with Yeshe Dorje in Sarnath in 1973 that Martin Boord first met with the Khordong Terchen Tulku, Lama Chhimed Rigdzin, with whom he immediately began to form a close bond of attachment.

Subsequently, Martin invited Lama Chhimed Rigdzin to Great Britain in order to inaugurate his new Dharma Centre and grant the empowerment of the Northern Treasures Vajrakīla (*Byang gter rdo rje phur pa*) for the first time in the West.

Later, moving from Europe back to India, Martin and Rinpoche translated together a number of Byang gter texts, including hundreds of pages of Vajrakīla Sādhana, which have remained the major focus of Martin's life.

Taking the *Byang gter phur pa* as his theme, Martin went on to study at the School of Oriental & African Studies at the University of London, for which he was awarded a BA in Religious Studies, followed by the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1992. His doctoral thesis was subsequently published as *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla*.⁴

Having completed his studies at SOAS, he was awarded a scholarship from the Stein-Arnold Exploration Fund which enabled him to return to India in order to research the sacred geography of Sikkim, one of the seven "hidden lands" of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. This work, to which the translation presented below is a complement, was eventually published in the *Bulletin of Tibetology*.⁵

Reading Sanskrit and Tibetan languages, as well as having studied Tibetan art for many years, Martin has acted as a consultant to the Ashmolean Museum, one of the oldest public museums in Europe, helping

² This presentation is a slightly adapted and completed version of the "official" biography found on the Khordong website: <https://www.wandel-verlag.de/en/dr-martin-j-boord-rig-dzin-rdo-rje/>.

³ On this master, see Woolf and Blanc 1994.

⁴ Boord 1993a in the bibliography below.

⁵ Boord 2003c in the bibliography below.

to identify and arrange their holdings of Tibetan cultural artefacts and paintings, and he occasionally continues to work on similar projects when called to do so. The British Museum, for example, requested his assistance when they were offered a collection of Tibetan *phur ba* for purchase, about which they had no specialist knowledge, and he has collaborated with the makers of documentary films for television, etc.

Having spent many years developing his understanding of the Dharma in meditation retreats, in 1998 Martin was invited by Lama Chhimed Rigdzin Rinpoche to accompany him as an assistant teacher on his European Dharma tour, in order to give teachings on the Deity Vajrakīla as part of a retreat held in Pfauenhof in Germany. This was so successful that the invitation was repeated in the following years, so that Martin again gave Vajrakīla teachings in Berlin in 1999 and he accompanied Rinpoche to Oxford, Wales and Vienna in the year 2000, where he taught many aspects of the Vajrayāna path, as well as his special subject—the deity Vajrakīla. Since then, Martin has given innumerable teachings on many aspects of the Byang gter tradition, throughout Europe and the USA.

He lived and worked in Oxford for 20 years, pursuing his research interests with like-minded academics and Dharma practitioners at the Oriental Institute, reading manuscripts at the Indian Institute Library and working on an *ad hoc* basis as Academic Visitor with those studying for doctorates in Buddhist Studies.

During this time, he completed a translation of the most illustrious commentary on Phur pa practice, known as *The Black 100,000 Words* (*Phur 'grel 'bum nag*), a seminal report of a group retreat that, tradition says, was undertaken by the three masters, Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Śīlamanju, in Nepal in the 8th century. These teachings were then transmitted in Tibet by Padmasambhava to Ye shes mtsho rgyal and became foundational for all subsequent lineages of Vajrakīla in Tibet. The translation of this text was published by Edition Khordong (2003a below), together with a further five volumes of Vajrakīla teachings from the school of the Northern Treasures.

His work on texts from the Northern Treasures also includes various sādhanas, funeral rituals from the cycle of the Greatly Compassionate Avalokiteśvara (2012), and collaborative translations of preliminary practices.

A Bibliography of Martin Boord's Publications⁶

- 1993a: *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla*, "Buddhica Britannica Series Continua IV", Tring, The Institute of Buddhist Studies.⁷
- 1993b: "Tibet and Mongolia" in *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide*, London, Roy Willis, Simon & Schuster.
- 1994: "Buddhism" in John Holm with Jean Bowker (eds.), *Sacred Space*, London, New York, Pinter Publishers.
- 1996a: (with Losang Norbu Tsonawa) *Overview of Buddhist Tantra by Panchen Sonam Dragpa*, Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- 1996b: *Manuscripts from the Himalayas and the Indian Subcontinent, Tibetan MSS, Catalogue 17*, London, Sam Fogg Rare Books.
- 1996c: *Maṇḍala Meaning & Method*, London, Kailash Editions, unpublished.
- 1997: "Book Review: *The Clear Mirror: A Traditional Account of Tibet's Golden Age*", *The Middle Way*, August issue, London, The Buddhist Society.
- 1998a: (contributor), in Le Monnier, María, Clark, Robert & Stadtner, Donald M., 1998, *A India, Pórtico do Norte* (catalogue), Santiago de Compostela, Auditorio de Galicia.
- 1998b: "Maṇḍala Meaning & Method: Ritual delineation of sacred space in tantric Buddhism" in *Performance Research*, Vol.3, No.3, Winter 1998, London, Routledge / ARC.
- 1998c: Editor (Tibetan), *High Peaks, Pure Earth: Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture*, by Hugh Richardson, London, Serindia Publications.
- 1998d: *East Asian Books, Tibetan MSS, Catalogue 19*, London, Sam Fogg Rare Books.
- 1998e: articles "Tibet" & "Mongolia" in *Encyclopaedia of World Mythology*, London, The Foundry Creative Media Company Limited.

⁶ This bibliography has been updated and expanded compared to the one on the Khordong website. It is not fully complete, however, for it fails to mention a few of Martin's important collaborations with his friend Gyurme Dorje. Nor could I trace the privately published translations on which Martin Boord collaborated with C.R. Lama (practice texts, etc.). A few of these titles are mentioned in the quoted presentation: "*Padmasambhava's teachings on the downfalls of tobacco; The Dragon Roar that fulfils all wishes* (Protectors text); *The Violent Storm of Meteoric Vajras* (sādhana of rDo rje gro lod); and *A Gentle Rainfall of Honey* (sādhana of Guru mtshan brgyad)."

⁷ This book was revised, enlarged and subsequently re-published as Martin Boord 2013.

- 1998f: "Book Review: *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*", *The Middle Way*, May issue, London, The Buddhist Society.
- 1999: (with Stephen Hodge) *The Illustrated Tibetan Book of the Dead*, London, Thorsons.
- 2003a: *A Bolt of Lightning From the Blue—The vast commentary on Vajrakīla that clearly defines the essential points*, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2003b: "The symbolism of the gCod drum, by 'Gyur-med blo-gsal" (English translation), in *Dzogchen Journal*, London.
- 2003c: "A Pilgrim's Guide to the Hidden Land of Sikkim: Proclaimed as a Treasure by Rig-'dzin rgod-ldem" in *Bulletin of Tibetology* 39(1), Gangtok.
- 2005a: Editor (Tibetan & Sanskrit), *The Complete Tibetan Book of the Dead*, translated by Gyurme Dorje, London, Penguin Books.
- 2005b: "Book Review: *Relics of the Buddha*", *The Middle Way*, Vol. 80, No. 3, London, The Buddhist Society, pp. 179–180.
- 2005c: (Editor) *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the first complete English translation by Gyurme Dorje, London, Penguin Books.
- 2006a: "Meditations on the Great Guru Padmasambhava", Berlin, *Khordong Newsletter*.
- 2006b: "Entering the Maṇḍala Gates", Sussex, *Tiger's Nest Dharma Diary* for 2007.
- 2006c: "Book Review: *A Marvellous Garden of Rare Gems*", *The Middle Way*, May issue, London, The Buddhist Society.
- 2006d: "Book Review: *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya*", *The Middle Way*, August issue, London, The Buddhist Society.
- 2006e: "Book Review: *Tibetan Renaissance*", *The Middle Way*, May issue, London, The Buddhist Society.
- 2010a: *A Roll of Thunder from the Void*, "Vajrakīla Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition", volume 2, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2010b: "Index", in *Jokhang: Tibet's Most Sacred Buddhist Temple*, London and Bangkok, Edition Hansjörg Mayer, pp. 277–280.
- 2011: (Editor) *The Five Nails—A Commentary on the Northern Treasures Accumulation Praxis*, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2012: *Illuminating Sunshine—Buddhist funeral rituals of Avalokiteśvara*, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2013: *Gathering the Elements—The Cult of the Wrathful Deity Vajrakīla*, revision and re-publishing of 1993: *The Cult of the Deity Vajrakīla "Vajrakīla Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition"*, volume 1, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2014: *The Path of Secret Mantra—Teachings of the Northern Treasures Five Nails Pema Tinley's guide to vajrayāna practice. Explanation of Rigzin*

- Godem's Jangter Ngöndro Zer Nga (*byang gter sngon 'gro gzer lnga*) according to the commentary by Rigzin Pema Tinley, translation and oral transmission by Khenpo Chowang, edited by Martin Boord, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2015: *A Blaze of Fire in the Dark—Homa rituals for the fulfilment of vows and the performance of deeds of great benefit*, “Vajrakīla Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition”, volume 3, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2016: (Editor) *The Complete Nyingma Tradition from Sutra to Tantra, Books 15-17, the Essential Tantras of Mahayoga* (2 vols.), translated by Gyurme Dorje, Boulder, Snow Lion.
- 2017: *A Cloudburst of Blessings—The water initiation and other rites of empowerment for the practice of the Northern Treasures Vajrakīla*, “Vajrakīla Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition”, volume 4, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.
- 2020: *An Overwhelming Hurricane: Overturning Saṃsāra and Eradicating All Evil*, “Vajrakīla Texts of the Northern Treasures Tradition”, volume 5, Berlin, Edition Khordong, Wandel Verlag.

The General Introduction to the Hidden Lands

What follows is Martin Boord's translation of *The General Introduction to the Hidden Lands* (*sBas yul spyi'i them byang*), based on his diplomatic edition of the text included in *Entry-key to the Prophesized Hidden Lands* (*Ma 'ongs lung bstan sbas yul gyi them byang*), one among several guide-books related to the hidden land 'Bras mo ljongs.⁸ We received the original unpublished version of this translation from Martin Boord as the first draft of a work in progress. Subsequently, the team of the FCHNT project retrieved his text from the PDF and added a number of suggestions for the improvement of that original draft, so that Martin insists that we now refer to it as a collaborative work and he offers his especial thanks to Zsóka Gelle, Cécile Ducher, and Stéphane Arguillère. The final translation, however, reflects Martin's interpretation of *The General Introduction*. All the footnotes are also his, except for a few additional ones⁹ (introduced by the abbreviation E/N, “editor notes”), mostly intended to clarify the chronology in relation to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life.

Martin's diplomatic edition of the text is presented in footnotes in such a way that readers can easily compare the two languages.

⁸ *Ma 'ongs lung bstan sbas yul gyi them byang*, in *mKha' spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phyogs bsdebs bzhugs*, Namgyal Institute, Gangtok, & Amnye Machen Institute, Dharamsala, 2008, p. 101-115a.

⁹ By Stéphane Arguillère.

The oldest document we have about the *sbas yul* proper seems (if the text is authentic) to be a *gter ma* of Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan (Chos kyi blo gros), the *sBas yul padma tshal gyi gnas yig kun tu gsal ba'i me long*.¹⁰ This treasure revealer has been placed in either the 12th or the 13th century and his dating is important because he is the earliest known figure to be associated with hidden lands (Samuel 2020, pp. 63, 79). However, he might in fact have been somewhat later—active at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries.

As a first clue in this regard, Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan's life story in *Gu ru bKra shis' Chos 'byung* (pp. 403–404) is found between those of Padma las 'brel rtsal (1290–1319) and Rin chen gling pa (1289–1368), perhaps indicating the generation to which he belonged.

More importantly, a detailed account of his revelations can be found in the Fifth Dalai Lama's *gSan yig*.¹¹ This document is unfortunately short on biographical information but conclusions can be drawn from lineage accounts which make him an indirect teacher to Zur Śākya 'byung gnas through Śan tiṃ pha, an unknown figure.¹² In context, Zur Śākya 'byung gnas is obviously Zur haṃ Śākya 'byung gnas and not Zur chen Śākya 'byung gnas (1002–1062). This is confirmed by gTer bdag gling pa's *Thob yig* (vol. 2, p. 54) which calls him “Zur Śākya 'byung gnas *phyi ma*.” This important figure remains difficult to date precisely but was definitely active in the middle of the 14th century. He was a disciple of both sGrol ma ba bSam grub rdo rje (1295–1376) and g.Yung ston pa rDo rje dpal (1284–1365), and was a master to sGrol ma ba's son Sangs rgyas rin chen (1350–1431).

However, another passage from the same source¹³ presents Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan as a teacher of Rin chen gling pa (1289–1368). This makes great sense, since it is likely (Arguillère 2024) that the latter was one of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's main masters. This would establish a direct lineage from Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, which may be the source of the latter's devotion to the hidden lands.

Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan is also mentioned in the context of rDo rje gling pa's hagiography (rDo rje gling pa 2009: vol. 11, p. 381). In this

¹⁰ Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan, *sPrul sku* —, 1983.

¹¹ 1971: vol. 3, f.55b–63b.

¹² See especially *op. cit.*, f.62b: *sprul sku tshe brtan rgyal mtshan nam chos kyi blo gros | tsa ri ba śan tiṃ pha la | zur pa śākya 'byung gnas* |, etc. No further information could be found about Śan tiṃ pha.

¹³ 1971: vol. 4, f.137a. The passage is difficult to understand. Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan is presented in a curious way as a disciple of rGya Zhang khrom (11th century—this seems to allude to a supernatural connection). The text begins with a list of texts containing completely disparate materials and concludes with a short lineage segment that does not extend beyond Rin chen gling pa. In any case, the connection with Rin chen gling pa is clearly stated.

passage, Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan, who was old, prophesied to his disciple *Bla ma* rDo rje that he would meet rDo rje gling pa in a Dragon Year. If we can trust the commonly accepted dates of rDo rje gling pa (1346–1405¹⁴), this would seem to be 1376. This confirms the approximate lifetime of Guru Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan: he must have been active in the early 14th century, perhaps having been born at the end of the previous century, enabling one of his direct disciples to meet rDo rje gling pa in the 1370s. However, *Bla ma* rDo rje may not have been young, as he appears to have died in the same Dragon year in which he passed the materials from Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan to rDo rje gling pa.

In conclusion, the most probable hypothesis is that Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan belonged more or less to the same generation as Rin chen gling pa, sGrol ma ba, g.Yung *ston pa* and Padma las 'brel rtsal (all born ca. 1290), or was just a few years older—i.e., that he was born at the end of the 13th century and active in the first half of the fourteenth (he must have lived sometime between 1280 and 1365).

If we now return to the *sBas yul padma tshal gyi gnas yig kun tu gsal ba'i me long* and read it on the basis of this hypothesis, then the dates for opening the *sbas yul* in this text (p. 96)—between *chu mo yos* and *byi*—can be interpreted as either 1303–1312 or, perhaps more likely, as 1363–1372. The former hypothesis cannot be ruled out, as the text lacks a colophon indicating when it was discovered, but the latter makes great sense in connection to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. It should be researched whether this text may have influenced rGod ldem's departure in search of the *sbas yul* soon after the Zang zang lha brag discovery (1366).

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¹⁴ According to some prophecies, he was born in 1322. This issue has not yet been resolved.

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The General Introduction to the Hidden Lands

Martin Boord

The *ācārya* Padmasambhava was abiding in deep meditation in the mChims phu caves near bSam yas when the king, Khri srong lde'u btsan, requested him to come to the great temple of bSam yas and presented him with a tantric feast of a hundred offerings. On that occasion, [the king] requested a number of general prophesies and teachings concerning the future and, in particular, he asked for instructions concerning the paths to the hidden lands.¹⁵

Q1. "Oh, great teacher! In the future time of the final five hundred [years of the Buddhist doctrines],¹⁶ if the people of this Land of Snows were to seek pathways to the hidden lands, what manner of outer and inner signs will appear?" Thus he asked.¹⁷

A1. To which the guru replied: "Oh, great king, listen carefully. Just as I have explained to you on previous occasions, the signs and portents of the final period will be beyond imagination. But the special signs that will arise when you must go to the hidden lands are these: Offerings will cease to be made in all of the temples built by the three bodhisattva kings,¹⁸ including your majesty, and the temples will fall into decay.¹⁹ The 'border-taming temples' and the 'temples that tame the outer limits' will be destroyed and the continuation of regular worship [at those places] will be broken.²⁰ In the region of 'On chang rdo, five

¹⁵ *Slob dpon padma 'byung gnas kyiis bsam yas mchims phu'i brag phug tu ting nge 'dzin la bzhugs pas: mnga' bdag khri srong lde'u btsan gyis bsam yas su gdan drangs nas tshogs kyi 'khor lo brgya rtsa mdzad pa'i dus su: spyir ma 'ongs pa'i dus kyi lung bstan mang du zhus/ khyad par sbas pa'i yul gyi lam yig zhus pa:.*

¹⁶ Predicted to last for a span of 5 x 500 years, the teachings of the Buddha are supposed to become generally ignored by a sceptical world in the final 500-year period of degeneration.

¹⁷ *Kyai slob dpon chen po lags: ma 'ongs pa'i dus lnga brgya mtha' ma'i tshe: bod kha ba can gyi sems can rnam sbas pa'i yul du 'gro 'tshal na: phyi'i rtags nang gi rtags ji ltar mchi: zhes zhus so:.*

¹⁸ Srong btsan sgam po (an emanation of Avalokiteśvara), Khri Srong lde'u btsan (an emanation of Mañjuśrī), and King Ral pa can (an emanation of Vajrapāṇi).

¹⁹ *bKa' stsal pa: mnga' bdag rgyal po legs par gson cig! gong du bstan pa bzhi du dus mtha' ma'i rtags bsam gyis mi khyab po bo: khyad par sbas pa'i yul du 'gro dgos pa'i rtags 'di ltar 'byung: rgyal po nyid la sogs pa rgyal po byang chub sems ldan gsum gyis bzhangs pa'i lha khang thams cad gi mchod pa chag: phal cher zhig ral du song:.*

²⁰ The 'border-taming temples' (*mtha' 'dul*) and the 'temples that tame the outer limits' (*yang' 'dul*) were built in the 7th century by Srong btsan sgam po as part of a project intended to subdue the chthonic demoness of the Tibetan land mass by pressing down upon key points of her body.

generations from now, an emanated ruler will build a temple and, 360 years from the date of that construction, it will have disappeared completely.²¹ At that time, when these outer indications have appeared in the country, you should take them as signs that it is time to go to a hidden land.²²

As for the inner indications: In the country of Tibet, the authority of the ruling king will decline and the laws will be broken. Tibet will then undergo a period of anarchy lasting for 123 years. After that, the country will be conquered by the Mongols of Mu dur nag po²³ and there will follow a period of 125 years under Mongolian rule. When, eventually, the rule of the Mongols comes to an end, at that time you must go to the hidden lands." Thus he spoke.²⁴

Q2. And the king asked further: "Oh, great master! You have spoken of the necessity for myself, the king, together with my subjects, to go to the hidden lands but, when the time comes, will we really be able to find those hidden lands or not? And will those hidden lands not also be destroyed when Tibet is overrun? And if Tibetans are downcast or fainthearted, in the end, what will happen?" Thus he asked.²⁵

A2.1. And the great guru replied: "Your majesty, listen well. If you and the people of Tibet have little faith, even though I show you how things will be, that is not the same as seeing them. Even though I explain things to you, that does not mean that they are understood. Even though I have urged you to go forward, that is not the same as actually

²¹ sKyid smad 'on chang rdo dpe med bkra shis dge 'phel gyi gtsug lag khang in the lower sKyid shod valley. A nine-storeyed temple, constructed in the 9th century by king Ral pa can as the most magnificent building in all Tibet. Nothing of it remains today.

²² *mTha' 'dul dang yang 'dul gyi gtsug lag khang phyed zhig: mchod pa 'bul ba rgyun chad 'on chang rdo'i sa phyogs su sprul pa'i rgyal po gcig gis da ste gdung rabs lnga nas lha khang gcig bzhengs par 'gyur ro: de bzhengs nas mi lo sum brgya drug cu nas zhig ral du stongs par 'gyur: de nas phyi yul gyi rtags dang sbyar te sbas pa'i yul du 'gro ran pa'i rtags so:.*

²³ Perhaps "Dorta the Black," the Mongolian military commander whose troops wrought havoc in Tibet in 1240.

²⁴ *Nang rtags bod du mnga' bdag rgyal po'i mnga' thang nyams nas khrims 'jig: bod la khrims med lo brgya dang nyi shu rtsa gsum yong: de nas mu dur nag po hor gyis 'dul: hor khrims lo brgya dang nyi shu rtsa lnga yong: de nas hor khrims 'jig: de'i dus su bod sbas pa'i yul du 'gro dgos: zhes gsungs so:.*

²⁵ *Yang zhus pa: kyai slon dpon chen po lags: sbas pa'i yul du bdag cag bod kyi rje 'bangs rnams 'gro dgos par gda' bas: de'i dus su sbas yul rnams nges par rnyed dam mi rnyed lags: bod kyis sbas yul zin nam mi zin lags: bod snying stobs zhan pas mthar cing 'gyur lags: zhes zhus pas:.*

going.²⁶ Generally speaking, the people of Tibet are persecuted by a demon who hunts for their flesh and most of the people are doomed to be killed. When the period of the final 500 years is upon us — superior men will do the work of servants during the first 125 years and then there will be a period of 60 years, during which superior men will become butchers. When that time comes, you must flee!²⁷

You must go to the hidden lands, where they will have need of a righteous king who will protect the Dharma. If they have a king [like that], all the people will be liberated. Due to the power of deeds committed by the black demon butcher king, there will come forth an ocean of malice, desire and anger and therefore I urge you to go to the hidden lands, where you must engage in acts of virtue. Those who practise virtue will be exploited and abused by wicked people, so it is important that the guides be virtuous practitioners of Dharma!²⁸

The practice of Dharma activities will be disparaged with mocking words. [Due to the belief that] one must store up good provisions for the journey, the accumulation of merit will be neglected in favour of gathering stores. Worrying about being confused by the terrain and lost on the path, the need for signs and indications just makes the head dizzy with meaningless babble. Those of small intelligence, being fearful of punishment from the Mongol rulers, will cast aside their common sense.²⁹

In Tibet, at first there will be born the demon's son called Go rta Nag po and, at that time, a number of prophesies for the future that we, as priest and patron, have set down, will gradually be revealed as treasures as they are taken out from their places of concealment. By the power of those treasures, the idea of going to the hidden lands will arise. This will be a cause of much embarrassment to all [others].³⁰

Later, when the Mongolian rule has come to an end, Tibetans will fight among themselves and the government will be scattered in

²⁶ *bKa' stsal pa: mnga' bdag rgyal po gson cig: khyed bod kyi mi khong bcol chung bas ji ltar bstan kyang mthong rgyu med: ji ltar bshad kyang go rgyu med: ji ltar bskul kyang 'gro rgyu med:.*

²⁷ *sPyir du bod srin po sha lings kyis non pa yin: phal cher gsod par 'gyur ro: lnga brgya mtha' ma'i dus na: dang po mi mgo bran gyis byed pa lo brgya dang nyi shu rtsa lnga yong: mi mgo shan pas byed pa lo drug cu yong: de'i dus na 'bros ran te:.*

²⁸ *sBas pa'i yul du 'gro ba la: chos skyong pa'i rgyal po gcig dgos te: rgyal po gcig yod na kun thar bar 'gyur te: rgyal po shan pa nag pos byed pa'i dbang gis: ru nga chags sdang gi mtsho brdol bas sbas pa'i yul du 'gro ba'i bskul ma dge byed kyis byed do: dge byed sdig byed kyis 'khol: lam sna chos byed kyis byed do:.*

²⁹ *Čos byed ya ga las smod: lam rgyags bzang po bya dgos te: chos byed 'byor pas 'phongs: sa 'khrul ma 'khrul brtag dgos te col chung po ti ta 'khor: blo chung hor gyi sdig spyod la skrag nas blo gtor:.*

³⁰ *Bod du dang po bdud kyi bu go rta nag po bya ba 'byung: de'i dus 'o skol yon mchod kyis bzhag pa'i ma 'ongs pa'i lung bstan rnam: gter kha mang po nas rim gyis rnyed par 'gyur: de'i dbang gis sbas pa'i yul du 'gro ba'i blo skye: kun kha skyengs par 'gyur ro:.*

pieces. Above all, those good people who are afraid of bandits will not be able to cleave a path. Being invited to the Tibetan hidden lands, trembling with fear, they will be unable to go due to the [lack of] strength in their hearts. At that time, there will be only a few good people who have sufficient strength of faith to seek the hidden lands and, having made great efforts to overcome the difficulties, they will provide a few years of happiness and prosperity to Tibet.³¹

The people of Tibet, clinging to the delightful ease of those times and under the sway of malicious jealousy, will revile those who virtuously seek the hidden lands and mock them loudly. At that time, those who practise virtue will become disheartened and lose faith so that they will lack the motivation to proceed to the end of their path.³²

A2.2. Then the demon called Lord of Supreme Happiness,³³ gazing out in all directions from the summit of the world mountain, will perceive the triumph of non-virtue in the outside world and his heart will be filled with evil satisfaction. Seeing the decline of Śākyamuni's teachings in the southern continent of Jambudvīpa, the mind of that chief demon Lord of Supreme Happiness will rejoice.³⁴

At that time, because the vajra seat of Bodhgāyā in India will be occupied by Moslems (*du ru ka*), the sharp weapons of Māra will be strewn everywhere, like flowers. And in the snowy land of Tibet, although the remains of the teachings will be propagated, there will come a time when the minds of people will no longer ripen.³⁵

That king of demons will then shoot seven poison arrows from the top of Mt. Meru and there will come a time in our world of Jambudvīpa when the years and months are exhausted and the light of the

³¹ *De nas hor khrims zhig ste: bod nang 'khrug byed pa'i dus na: srid le'ur 'thor: gong du jag pa 'tsher thabs byed pas dge byed kyis lam mi gshog: bod sbas pa'i yul dran pa rnams 'jigs shing skyi g.ya' ste: snying stobs kyis 'gro mi nus: de'i dus su dge byed re re tsam gyis sbas pa'i yul 'tshol ba'i 'dun pa drag po dang: rtsol ba'i dka' spyad drag po byas pas bod la bde skyid lo 'ga' 'byung:.*

³² *Bod rnams de'i bde skyid la zhen pa'i sems dang: ru nga phrag dog gi dbang gis: dge byed sbas pa'i yul 'tshol ba la smod cing ya ga sgrog pa 'byung: de'i tshe dge byed rnams yi chad pa dang: dpa' zhum ste dge ba la mthar mi 'don:.*

³³ dGa' rab dbang phyug (Praharsiteśvara), leader of the gods in Paranirmitavaśavartin, the highest heaven in the realm of sensual desire (Kāmadhātu).

³⁴ *De'i tshe bdud dga' rab dbang phyug gis: ri rab kyi rtse nas 'jigs rten gyi phyogs bzhir bltas pas: phyir nag po'i phyogs kha rgyal nas bdud brod pa skyed: lho phyogs 'dzam bu'i gling la shākya thub pa'i bstan pa nyams pa mthong bas | bdud rje dga rab dbang phyug snying dga:.*

³⁵ *De'i dus na rgya gar rdo rje gdan du ru kas 'dzin pas bdud mtshon cha'i me tog 'thor: bod kha ba can gyi yul du bstan pa'i lhag ma dar la ma smin ba'i dus 'ongs te:.*

sun and moon no longer shines. Furthermore, as the tip of the arrow-head is fired towards our world, the external signs of this will be flashes of firelight burning in the sky like lightning at evening time.³⁶

The inner signs will be: (1) Because the great and powerful men of the world — local rulers, warlords and kings — will be infected by the poison of killing, sudden hot flashes of anger will arise and people will attack each other in fits of jealous rage. Then one person will kill another and, one by one, the population will be brought to ruin.³⁷

(2) Because the important authoritative men of knowledge and learning — wise men, masters, spiritual advisors and teachers — will be infected by the poison of ignorant stupidity, suddenly there will be no joy in the hearts of men and they will become distinctly cold towards one another. At that time, whilst professing to practise religion, people will revile one other and, abandoning the Dharma, they will turn to worldly occupations. Abandoning study and practice, they will attend merely to the words. Dressed in the yellow robes of the clergy, full of arrogant discrimination against their country-folk, there will be no more than a very few who act in accordance with the words of the scriptures.³⁸

(3) Infected by the poison of disputation, ministers and counsellors will suddenly find themselves in the dark concerning plans and calculations. Then they will seek to fulfil their own desires by spreading confusion and error. At home, they will make unpleasant reports concerning events abroad and, when travelling abroad, they will spread unpleasant reports about the situation at home. At that time, trouble and turmoil will grow in Tibet.³⁹

(4) Young men will become infected by the poison of insatiable craving and those who practise Dharma and those who do not practise Dharma and everyone in between will become overwhelmed by hunger. Suddenly the heat of craving in the belly will boil up and a voracious appetite will arise, greedy to consume anything that can be eaten or drunk, and men will take to the hills to hunt for prey. They will stalk

³⁶ *bDud kyi rgyal po des ri rab kyi steng nas dug mda' bdun bod la 'phan te: de la lo zad zla zad nyi zla'i mdangs 'dzam bu'i gling la med pa'i tshe: de yang mde'u rtse 'phangs pas: phyi rtags su ni nam mkha' la me 'od dgong kha'i glog 'dra ba lam lam pa 'ong:*

³⁷ *Nang rtags su sde dpon dang l dmag dpon dang: gtso bo dang: 'jig rten gyi las stobs che ba rnams la gsod byed kyi dug phog pas: glo bur du zhe sdang tsha lam lam pa dang: phrag dog 'khrug ram ram pa skye: de'i rje su gcig gis gcig gsod: gcig gis gcig brlag par 'joms so:*

³⁸ *mKhan po dang: slob dpon dang: dge bshes dang: ston pa dang: stobs mnga' thang che ba rnams la smyo byed dug mda' phog pas: glo bur du snying mi dga' ba dang: snying grang lhang lhang pa 'ong: de'i dus su chos byed la zer zhugs te: gcig gis gcig smod: chos bor nas 'jig rten gyi las la 'jug: nyams len bor nas tshig la ltos: gos ser mo gon pas yul phyed khengs: ston pa'i bka' bzhin pa byed pa re re tsam las mi 'byung:*

³⁹ *'Khrug byed kyi dug blon po dang gros byed la phog pas: shes pa rtsi mun pa glo bur du skye: de'i rjes su blo 'khrul khong skyon che bar 'dod pas: pha rol mi 'thad pa'i gros tshur smra: tshu rol mi 'thad pa'i gros phar zlos: de'i dus su bod nang 'khrug la zing 'gro:*

the lower valleys for fish. Being able to kill their own cattle, kept downstairs at home, they will eat red meat and drink red blood. The earth will be covered with bloody skins. In the end, they will even eat the flesh of their own fathers.⁴⁰

(5) Women will become infected by the poison of deceit and there will arise a sudden mental darkness in which everything to be known must be calculated. Discussing all things in minute detail, fathers and sons will be drawn into disputes and people all over the country will quarrel. Masters and servants will resent each other. Brothers will fight and kill one another.⁴¹

(6) Those of low intelligence will be struck by the arrow of wrong deeds and galloping minds, so that anger, resentment, and bad words will suddenly arise. At that time, men will suddenly start killing one another and stealing their wealth. Daggers will strike from beneath monk's robes and even women will die by the sword. Every breath will be used to cheat others with sharp practices. And a great landslide will occur, in which people will be buried alive.⁴²

(7) The demon's poison arrow of manslaughter and murder will strike at those spiritual guides who practise religion, as well as at righteous leaders. Virtuous people will suddenly suffer from heart failures, and, at that time, whatever roots of virtue men possess will not be revealed until they eventually die.⁴³

Tibet being struck by these seven types of demonic poison arrows, the people will be scattered like tiny mice fleeing from a hawk. The thoughts of the people will not come together in unity and each person will fight with another. Faction opposing faction, people will turn against each other and there will be great strife and sorrow in the land which will last for a period of 30 human years.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *rNgam char lto ba'i dug shar po la phog ste: bod kyi chos pa dang mi chos pa 'bring po thams cad la kha ngam khyog khyog pa: lto ba tsha chil chil ba glo bur du 'byung: de'i dus su thams cad la zas skom gyi 'du shes 'dod sred langs ste phu'i ri dwags rgon: mda'i nya 'dzin: rang gi phyugs 'og tu bcug ste gsod nus: sha dmar po za: khrag dmar po 'thung: pags pa dmar po 'ding: dus mtha' mar pha sha za ba 'byung ngo:.*

⁴¹ *g.Yo byed kyi dug bud med la phog ste: glo bur du shes pa rtsi rum 'ong: de'i rjes su phra ma mang po smra ste pha dang bu 'thab tu 'jug: yul mi nang 'thab: dpon dang g.yog 'khon: pha spun nang dme byed pa gcig 'ong:.*

⁴² *Las log blo rgyugs kyi mda' blo ngan la phog nas glo bur du rngam sems hab khyur ba skye: de'i tshe glo bur du mi gsod nor 'khyer: chos gos kyi 'og nas gri 'dzugs: bud med gri ru 'chi: dbugs ma chad par dbal dang mgo rdung byed: gson po sa rdibs su bskung ba gcig 'ong:*

⁴³ *Srog gcod tshe 'phrog gi bdud dge ba'i bshes gnyen chos byed dang sde dpon ya rab la phog ste: dge byed la glo bur du snying tsha stong stong pa 'ong: de'i dus su dge ba'i rtsa ba ci yod pa mthar mi thon par 'chi:.*

⁴⁴ *De lta bu'i bdud kyi dug mda' bdun bod la phog pa dang: byi ba phran khras gtor ba ltar | bod kyi bsan pa phyogs gcig tu mi 'dril bar: gcig gis gcig rtsod: gcig gis gcig rgol: gcig gis gcig 'khrug cing | mi lo sum cu'i bar du sdug bsngal la sbyor:.*

At that time, those practitioners of Dharma who have developed the mind of awakening, courageous in heart and strong in body, together with their families and servants, skilled in the reading of signs and practical management, if they search for the pathways, they will be able to make their homes in the hidden lands. When the people have moved away to all those hidden lands of Tibet, the Moslem invaders and armies of the final period will not be able to destroy the country by slaughtering every single one of its inhabitants.⁴⁵

Having been infected by the poison arrows of Māra, the people in the rest of Tibet will repay good deeds with evil, and virtue will be overrun by wickedness. Because of all these things, therefore, those who wish to do the right thing should throw aside procrastination and gloom and get going!⁴⁶

A2.3. There are three hidden lands in the region of mDo khams and there are three hidden lands in the central region of dBus. Around the area of gTsang, there are eight hidden lands and, in the region of mNga' ris, there are two. With regard to all of them, the thing to be grasped is nothing other than confident aspiration for, in the end, Tibetans who fail to seize the good fortune of finding the paths to the hidden lands, merely listening to my description of them as Buddha-lands, will never see them for themselves.⁴⁷

Despite the fact that you and I, oh king, share the same aspiration and our hearts are intertwined in their single-minded focus on a common goal, if the hidden lands of Tibet are not found, most of those who practise virtue will survive only within the four administrative districts and the three valleys.⁴⁸

One of the hidden lands in the central province of dBus will be opened up by an emanation of the teacher Vairocana. Most of those

⁴⁵ *De'i dus na dge byed byang chub kyi sems dang ldan pa: snying rus lus stobs che ba: 'khor dang yo byad ldan pa: thabs dang rten 'brel mkhas pas lam btsal yul bzung na sbas pa'i yul thams cad zin par 'gyur ro: bod kyi sbas yul thams cad zin na: mtha' dmad dang du ru kas bod kyi mi thams cad brlag cing gsod par mi nus so:.*

⁴⁶ *Bod la bdud kyi dug mda' phog pa'i rkyen gyis bzang lan ngan gyis 'jal: dge ba sdig pas bsgrub: de'i dbang gis dge byed thams cad yid mug sgyid lug bshol nas 'gro'o:.*

⁴⁷ *mDo khams kyi yul na sbas pa'i yul gsum: dbus kyi mtha' na sbas pa'i yul gsum: gtsang gi yul phyogs na sbas pa'i yul brgyad: mnga' ris kyi sa na sbas pa'i yul gnyis yod de: phal cher yid smon las lag tu mi lon: mthar bod la sbas pa'i yul du bgrod pa'i skal ba med pas: sangs rgyas kyi yul dang 'dra: thos lo tsam las mthong bar mi 'gyur ro:.*

⁴⁸ *'On kyang nga dang rgyal po nyid kyis sems rtse gcig tu dril ba'i smon lam gyis: bod kyi sbas yul mi rnyed na: rdzong bzhi dang rong gsum tsam du dge byed phal bar ro:.*

who practise Dharma in Rong kha will reach liberation. A single emanation of the three learned men⁴⁹ will open up a hidden land in gTsang.⁵⁰ An incarnation of *ācārya* Jñāna (gNyags Jñānakumāra) will open up a hidden land in western Tibet and most of those who practise Dharma will attain freedom in its seven valleys. The hidden land in mNga' ris will not be opened but those who are in the valleys will be liberated. All those who do not escape to freedom in those places — after the rule of the Mongols has come to an end, 30 years later⁵¹ there will come nine mighty armies from the east. Twenty-one messengers of Māra will ride in swiftly as butchers from the west. Five times they will come, bringing with them thirteen mighty armies. All of this trouble will spread throughout Tibet over a period of 60 human years.⁵² Tibet is headed toward ever-increasing misery, even worse than being hunted by cannibal demons and, in the end, the country will become a wasteland, as if it had been burned up by fire.⁵³

By the blessings of the Lords of the three families, at bSam yas and on the “miraculously appearing mountain,” solitary seeds [of the Dharma] will remain for mankind, while all the rest of Tibet will be destroyed — from the furthest corner of Glo bo Pu rangs, all the way to China.⁵⁴

A2.4. As a result of their karma, all the people are heading towards slaughter! Oh, alas for the country of Tibet! Oh, those poor Tibetan people! Having come under the power of the demon, they will be tossed about on the stormy winds of spiteful resentment as they are

⁴⁹ Rab gsal of gTsang, gYo dge 'byung of Pho thong pa and sMar Śākyamuni of sTod lungs, each of whom had been ordained by Cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan and belonged to the monastery of dPal Chu bo ri. These three *bhikṣu* maintained the monastic ordination lineage in Khams throughout the dark period of Tibetan history.

⁵⁰ *dBus phyogs kyi sbas yul gcig slob dpon bai ro tsa na'i sprul pa gcig gis 'byed: rong kha ru chos byed pa phal cher thar: gtsang du mkhas pa mi gsum gyi sprul pa gcig gis sbas yul 'byed:*

⁵¹ E/N : If we consider that Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan took full power over Tibet c.a. 1350, this would be ca. 1380. This is interesting in terms of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's chronology.

⁵² E/N : This would mean up to ca. 1410. These dates may have no factual meaning, but they could perhaps be meaningful in terms of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's vision of his world.

⁵³ *A tsa ra dznya na'i sprul pa gcig gis stod du sbas yul gcig 'byed: rong bdun du chos byed pa phal cher thar: mnga' ris kyi sbas yul mi 'byed: rong la 'ga' re thar: de la ma thar ba rnam hor khrims zhig nas lo sum cu lthag song pa dang: smad nas dmag sde chen po dgu: bdud kyi pho nya nyi shu rtsa gcig stod nas myur mgyogs kyis bshan pa lan lnga: dmag sde chen po gsum: mi lo drug cu'i bar du brdol te: bod srin po sha lings kyis non pa bzhin je sdug la 'gro: mthar yul khams me yis tshig pa bzhin brlag par 'gyur ro:.*

⁵⁴ *Rigs gsum mgon po'i byin rlabs kyis: bsam yas dang 'phrul snang gi ri la mi'i sa bon tsam gcig lus l phyir bod thams cad glo bo pu rangs mtshams nas rgya nag po'i bar du kun brlag par byed do:.*

caught up in the tumultuous final days of time. But those who listen to my instructions will have a means of protection when the years and months turn dark.⁵⁵ They will have a way of averting [these evils] for three cycles of years,⁵⁶ and a secure method of escape from the demon armies. But, even though they have [such means of protection], they must maintain the wish to practise the Dharma. For those who harbour negative thoughts will suffer an evil fate and I feel great pity for all those who are caught up in such dreadful times! Those who harbour negative thoughts towards me, turning their backs on the sun and moon, will simply be cutting their own throats. They will be burned up like trees in a fire. Neglecting to apply this knowledge in a virtuous manner, how horrible it will be in later times when they are boiled and burned!⁵⁷

Those intelligent ones who listen to my teachings, on the other hand, will search for the hidden lands. Those with loving minds will meditate upon the circles of protection. Those who are strong in virtue will avert the armies of Māra. But even those who lack these skilful abilities will not in this life be destroyed by the demon if they single-pointedly engage themselves in the attainment of awakening with no attachment to the affairs of this world in an abandoned goat-herder's hut, or a cave in the woods, in isolated places such as rocky precipices or forested valleys. In the next life they will attain liberation in the bud-dha fields.⁵⁸

Those who have no enthusiasm for acts of slaughter will not be slaughtered by the armies of Māra. Those who do not eat flesh and blood as their food will not, themselves, be struck down by the sharp weapons of others.⁵⁹

Therefore, you should pay careful attention to my instructions." That is what he said.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ *Sems can las kyi dbang gis kun gsod par 'gyur te | bod khams snying re rje: bod kyi sems can snying re rje: bdud kyi dbang du gyur pas lan: phrag dog rlung ltar 'tshub pas lan: dus kyi mtha' la thug pas lan: nga yi bka' la nyan pa rnams: lo nur zla nur bsrung thabs yod:.*

⁵⁶ This probably refers to a 60-year calendrical cycle.

⁵⁷ *Lo skor gsum du bzlog thabs yod: gtan du bdud dmag thar thabs yod: yod kyang chos byed yid smon tsam: log lta can rnams ngan song rgyu: dus ngan de yi sems can rnams: snying re rje ste rang gis lan: nga la log lta byed pa dang: nyi zla rgyab kyis phyogs pa dang: srog thag chad pa'i sems can rnams: shing stong me yis tshig pa bzhin: 'di ru dge bas mi 'dogs te: phyi ma btso bsreg ya re nga:.*

⁵⁸ *Nga yi bka' la nyan pa rnams: blo can rnams kyis sbas yul tshol: byams sems can gyis bsrung 'khor sgom: dge stobs can gyis bdud dmag bzlog: de yi thabs dang mi ldan na: di ra rdza zom nags kyi phug: brag rong nags rong dben sa ru: 'jig rten 'di la ma chags par: rtse gcig byang chub sgrub pa gyis: tshe 'dir bdud kyis mi gsod cing: phyi ma rgyal ba'i zhing du thar:.*

⁵⁹ *gSod gcod las la mi brtson na: bdud kyi dmag gis gsod mi 'gyur: sha khrag zas su mi za na: bdag la gzhan gyis mtshon mi 'phog:.*

⁶⁰ *De phyir nga yi bka' la nyon: ces gsungs so:.*

Q3. And once again the king asked him: "Oh, great teacher! Please instruct us in the methods by which we who remain in the snowy land of Tibet may be protected from the poison arrows of the demon in the time of the final five hundred [years]. Please instruct us in the methods by which we may truly find the hidden lands." Thus, he made his request.⁶¹

A3.1. To which the guru replied: "Oh king, listen well! For protection against the poison arrows of Māra, outwardly there are three places, inwardly there are three substances and, secretly, there are three profound meditations (*samādhi*). There are also three fierce mantra, and you will need to make three rounds of preparation.⁶²

Firstly, as for the three outer places: Three temples should be constructed by saints who have perfectly generated the mind of enlightenment, in areas which have been perfected by the blessings of previous masters. Then, when the time comes to set out on the journey [to the hidden lands], if you make sure to insert the written mantra of Uṣṇīṣa within the parasol or dome [of a stūpa]⁶³ in those places, you will not be struck by the poison arrows of Māra.⁶⁴

[As for the three secret meditations:] If one has the deep meditation of his own personal deity (*iṣṭadevatā*) and the mind of enlightenment as well as a profound *samādhi* that has no objective referent, these three, inseparably, as appropriate, one will not be struck by the poison arrows of Māra.⁶⁵

As for the [three] inner substances: If one has the medicine of achievement, relics of a buddha, and some substance from a maṇḍala in which success was formerly attained, one will not be struck by the poison arrows of Māra.⁶⁶

As for the three fierce mantra: If one recites the mantra of Vajrarakṣiṇī, the mantra of the wrathful Uṣṇīṣacakravartin, and the mantra of

⁶¹ Yang zhus pa: kyai slob dpon chen po lags: lnga brgya mtha' ma'i dus: bod kha ba can pa la bdud kyi dug mda' bsrung ba'i thabs bstan du gsol: sbas yul nges par rnyed pa'i thabs bstan du gsol: zhes zhus so:.

⁶² bKa' stsal pa: rgyal po legs par gson cig: bdud kyi dug mda' bsrung ba la phyi'i yul gsum: nang gi rdzas gsum: gsang ba'i ting nge 'dzin gsum: drag po'i sngags gsum: bca' ba'i 'khor lo gsum dgos so:.

⁶³ See: Peter Szanto, "An old dhāraṇī from Xoxot," http://tibetica.blogspot.com/2007_12_01_archive.html.

⁶⁴ Dang po phyi'i yul gsum ni: byang chub kyi sems dang ldan pas bzhegs pa'i lha khang gsum dang: sngon du byin gyis brlabs pa'i sgrub gnas su: 'gro 'dug gi dus na gdugs sam zhwa'i bum pa la: uṣṇīṣa'i sngags bris pa dang ma bral na: bdud kyi dug mda' mi 'phog go:

⁶⁵ Ting nge 'dzin rang gi yi dam gyi lha dang: byang chub kyi sems dang: mi dmigs pa'i ting nge 'dzin gsum gang rung re dang ma bral na: bdud kyi dug mda' mi 'phog go:.

⁶⁶ Nang gi rdzas gsum ni: sgrub pa'i sman: de bzhin gshegs pa'i ring bsrel: sngon grub pa thob pa'i dkyil 'khor gyi rdzas bcangs pas: bdud kyi dug mda' mi 'phog go:.

Vajra Armour (Vajrakavaca), from the time when the evening shadows lengthen and turn to darkness, up until the moment when the stars and planets begin to shine brightly, one will not be struck by Māra's poison arrows.⁶⁷

As for the three rounds of preparation: One should sit in the vajra posture, dance a fierce dance, and offer prostrations and circumambulations. The vital points of a body that has performed these three rounds of preparation will not be struck by Māra's poison arrows.⁶⁸

Those who fail to take such precautions, however, will all be struck down by the poison arrows of Māra.⁶⁹

For their own protection, those virtuous ones who listen to my instructions should look at the text called *A Canopy of Meteoric Thunderbolts*,⁷⁰ which is included among the first of the paper scrolls.⁷¹

A3.2. To those individuals who have protected themselves in this manner from being struck by the poison arrows of Māra, I will now reveal the methods of proceeding to the sacred places of power, the key to the hidden lands.⁷²

With regard to this: In Tibet there are thirty-three great places of power and, for each of these, one requires seven key documents. There are also thirteen intermediate places of power, for each of which, three key documents are required, and there are seven minor places of power, for each of which a single key document is sufficient.⁷³

Furthermore, when the lifespan of man has gone down from seventy years, but before it has declined as low as sixty years, seven important treasure caches will be obtained by seven incarnate beings and all of them, having integrated their findings, will disappear into the hidden lands. In the southern passageway that stretches all the way from the white rock of Khugs lung in Gu ge down to Klong thang

⁶⁷ Drag po'i sngags gsum ni: rdo rje sder mo'i sngags: gtsug gtor 'khor los bsgyur ba'i sngags: rdo rje go khrab kyi sngags: dgongs ka grib so nag song nas gza' skar gyi bkrag ma thon gyi bar bzlas pas: bdud kyi dug mda' mi 'phog go:.

⁶⁸ bCa' ba'i 'khor lo gsum ni: rdo rje dkyil krung: khro bo'i stang stabs: phyag dang bskor ba byed pa'i lus gnad la bdud kyi dug mda' mi 'phog go:.

⁶⁹ De dang mi ldan pa rnams la bdud kyi dug mda' 'phog go:.

⁷⁰ E/N: This may be #101 of Thugs sgrub: Thugs sgrub kyi las tshogs rin chen khang bu'i gdams skor las ser srung gnam lcags gur khang, in CNT, vol. 7, pp. 155-205. This would confirm speculations about the connection of some elements in the Thugs sgrub with the search for the sbas yul.

⁷¹ dGe byed nga'i bka' la nyan pa rnams: bsrung ba'i phyir gnam lcags thog gi gur zhes bya ba shog ril dang po'i nang na yod pas stos shig:.

⁷² De ltar bdud kyi dug mda' ma phog pa'i gang zag la sbas yul gyi lde mig gnas chen bgrod pa'i thabs bstan gyis:.

⁷³ De yang bod na gnas chen so gsum yod: lde mig byang bu bdun bdun dgos so: gnas bar pa bcu gsum yod de: byang bu gsum gsum dgos: gnas pran bu bdun yod pas byang bu re res chog go:.

sgron ma in mDo khams, there are twenty-two hidden lands and, in the northern passageway, there are three hidden lands. Of these, the three most important are Tsa ri in the east, 'Bras mo gshongs in the south, and 'Brab mo khugs in the north.⁷⁴

As for the thirteen intermediate lands, these are situated along the southern passageway between Tsha ba'i rong in rGya mo and Pra tum in gTsang.⁷⁵

With regard to the minor lands, which are to be found in between the more important sites, ordinary people will be unable to reach Tsha byi in the north or gYu sa brag mo in the south and so there is no purpose in me discussing them here.⁷⁶

Among all of those places, the easiest one for which to search will be mKhan pa lung in lHo brag, and that will also be the easiest to occupy. mKha' 'gro gling in Khum bu is also an easy place for which to search but it may be occupied only by one who knows the appropriate method. The All-productive cave (*Kun skyed kyi phug*) will be difficult to find but easy to occupy.⁷⁷ Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba is easy to find, but one will need to know the means by which it may be occupied. The mKhan pa lung "hidden behind a cloud of dust" (Bud kyi mKhan pa lung) will be difficult to find but easy to occupy. The "divine temples that have been built" will be easy to find but liberation will be difficult. If it is taken, not one of the Dharma-practitioners will reach the end of a full lifespan there.⁷⁸ Those individuals whose power of intellect is weak will not be able to proceed to the southern land of Sikkim, [even though] it is an easy place in which to live. It is easy to go to Tsa ri in the east and, if one lives there, the enjoyments to be had are just like those in a royal palace. The hidden land of Has, called Ding ding nag mo, is far away and difficult to reach but it will be easy to occupy. As for Tsa ri in the east, it is easy to go there and, if one has knowledge of

⁷⁴ *De yang tshé tshad bdun cu ka ral nas drug cu kha ral la sleb pa'i bar la gter kha chen po bdun sprul pa'i gang zag bdun gyis rnyed par 'gyur: de rnams gung sgrigs la sbas pa'i yul du song zhiḡ: gu ge'i khugs lung brag dkar nas: mdo khams klong thang sgron ma yan chad kyi lho'i rgyud la sbas pa'i yul nyi shu rtsa gnyis: byang gi rgyud la sbas pa'i yul gsum yod: de'i nang nas che ba'i yul gsum ni: shar na tsa ri: lho na 'bras mo gshongs: byang 'brab mo khugs gsum mo:.*

⁷⁵ *Yul bar pa bcu gsum ni: rgya mo tsha ba'i rong nas gtsang pra tum gyi bar lho rgyud la yod:.*

⁷⁶ *Phran bu rnams ni de rnams kyi bar la yod de: byang gi tsha byi dang: lho'i g.yu sa brag mo ni skye bo phal pas bgrod par mi nus la: bshad pa la don med do:.*

⁷⁷ *De rnams kyi nang nas btsal sla ba ni: lho brag gi mkhan pa lung yin no: yul bzung ba yang de sla'o: khum bu'i mkha' 'gro gling btsal sla: 'dzin pa thabs la mkhas na zin no: kun bskyed kyi phug btsal ba dka' 'dzin pa sla'o:.*

⁷⁸ *Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba btsal sla'o: 'dzin pa thabs mkhas dgos so: bud kyi mkhan pa lung btsal dka' 'dzin sla: lha pho brang sdengs btsal sla thar bar dka': 'dzin pa ni chos byed re re'i tshé las mi yong:.*

the correct method, it will also be easy to occupy. As for the other hidden lands — some of them will be difficult to find and some of them are so small that I am not going to speak of them here.⁷⁹

A3.3. Even though I have spoken of many hidden lands just now, there are only three that will definitely be discovered. As for the rest, there is a specific prophesy concerning each place and the individual person who will discover it. If these two do not come together, no discovery will be made. With regard to the three places that will definitely be discovered: Tsa ri gangs kyi ra ba will be discovered by a rDzogs chen yogin who is an incarnation of the great translator Vairocana. Due to the bad karma of having sent Vairocana into exile, however, the one who actually takes the land will not be a practitioner of rDzogs chen, but one who follows the Hīnayāna.⁸⁰

Secondly, with regard to Sikkim, this will have been opened up by an emanation of the three learned men of Tibet, a Vajrakīla practitioner.⁸¹ Due to the blessings that they accumulated at bSam yas mchims phu, after the first individual has opened the land, emanations of each of the three accomplished adepts will enter, in fulfilment of his own prophesy. As a result of this, three traditions of mantra practice will develop in Sikkim.⁸²

La phyi gangs kyi ra ba will be opened by an emanation of *ācārya* Jñāna.⁸³ It will be held by one who has firm faith and confidence, due to his great devotion to *ācārya* Jñāna. Those are the three places that will definitely be discovered.⁸⁴

As for the places that will be found if all the right karmic circumstances meet together: The Happy Cave of Ku thang will be occupied

⁷⁹ lHo 'bras mo gshongs su gang zag blo stobs dman pas mi bgrod: bzung pa sla: shar tsa ri ni bgrod sla zin na longs spyod rgyal po'i pho brang dang mnyam: has kyi sbas yul ding ding nag mo thag ring bgrod dka' bzung sla: shar tsa ri ni bgrod sla 'dzin pa thabs la mkhas na sla'o: sbas yul gzhan rnam ni la la btsal dka': la la phra'u yin pas mi brjod:.

⁸⁰ De ltar sbas yul mang po bstan kyang: nges par rnyed pa gsum yod: gzhan rnam ni gnas re la lung bstan pa'i gang zag re yod de de dang ma 'phrad na mi rnyed do: nges par rnyed pa'i gnas gsum ni: lo tsa ba bai ro tsa na'i sprul pa rdzogs chen gyi rnal 'byor pa gcig gis tsa ri gangs kyi ra ba rnyed do: 'dzin pa ni bai ro tsa na spyugs pa'i las ngan gyis rdzogs chen pas mi 'dzin: theg pa dman pa gcig gis 'dzin no:.

⁸¹ E/N: Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The other discoverers are identified by Tibetan sources as Lha btsun Nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597–1653), Kaḥ thog Rig 'dzin chen po, and mNga' bdag sems dpa' chen po Phun tshogs rig 'dzin (c. 1591–1656).

⁸² Bar yul 'bras mo gshongs ni: bod kyi mkhas pa rnam gsum gyi sprul pa rdo rje phur pa'i rnal 'byor pa gcig gis 'byed par 'gyur ro: bod kyi grub thob rdo rje rnam gsum bsam yas mchims phu r tshogs pa'i byin rlabs kyi: dang po gang zag gcig gis 'byed: de rjes su grub thob rnam gsum lung bstan pa so sor gyes pa las: 'bras mo gshongs su sngags kyi sgrub sde gsum yong:

⁸³ E/N: Jñānakumāra?

⁸⁴ La phyi gangs kyi ra ba ni: a tsa ra dznyā na'i sprul pa gcig gis 'byed: a tsa ra dznyā na daa pa che bas mos gus can gcig gis 'dzin par 'gyur: gnas gsum de nges par rnyed do:

by one who has developed strength in the practice of Hayagrīva, and he will come from bKra thum in gTsang. Yol mo gangs kyi ra ba will be occupied by one who has completed the ritual practice of invoking the Vidyādhara guru, and he will come from somewhere to the west of bKra thum in gTsang.⁸⁵ sMan sha khum pu'i rong will be occupied by one who has completed the ritual practice of invoking the Supreme Mother Goddesses (Che mchog ma mo)⁸⁶, and he will come from the region of Tho yor nag po in Byang. Bud kyi mkhan pa lung will be occupied by one who has completed the ritual practice of invoking Vajradāraṇa, and he will come from somewhere to the west of Ru lag rgyang.⁸⁷ The hidden land of Ding mo will be occupied by one who has completed the ritual practice of invoking Mañjuśrī Yamāntaka, and he will come from the region of Nyang ro. mKhan pa lung in lHo brag rgyal will be occupied by one who has completed the ritual practice of invoking Heruka, and he will come from the direction of bSam yas.⁸⁸ Because these hidden lands are all of great importance for Tibet, the person who opens the door to 'Bras mo gshongs, the king of all the hidden lands, will gradually reveal a succession of seven hidden lands during the period when the [average] lifespan decreases from sixty to fifty years.⁸⁹ There will be a group of three in rTsa ri, a group of two within the ring of snowy mountains that surrounds La phyi, a group of three within the ring of snowy mountains that surrounds Yol mo, two within the region of the Happy Valley in Ku thang, and all the rest will be opened individually. If all these circumstances come together, people may take possession of the hidden lands but, if the conditions are not met, the doors to these places will remain closed.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ *Las can dang 'phrad na rnyed par 'gyur ba'i gnas ni: ku thang skyid kyi phug rta mgrin la nus pa thon pa gcig gis rnyed do: de'ang gtsang bkra thum nas 'byung ngo: yol mo gangs kyi ra ba ni: rig 'dzin bla ma'i bsnyen pa rdzogs pa gcig gis rnyed do: de'ang gtsang kra thum gyi nub nas 'byung ngo.*

⁸⁶ Perhaps referring to both Che mchog heruka and rBod gtong ma mo.

⁸⁷ *sMan sha khum bu'i rong che mchog ma mo'i bsnyen pa rdzogs pa gcig gis rnyed do: de yang byang tho yor nag po'i yul nas 'byung ngo: bud kyi mkhan pa lung rdo rje rnam 'joms la bsnyen pa rdzogs pa gcig gis rnyed do: de yang ru lag rgyang gi nub phyogs nas 'byung ngo.*

⁸⁸ *sBas yul ding mo ni 'jam dpal gshin rje gshed la bsnyen pa rdzogs pa gcig gis rnyed do: de yang nyang ro'i phyogs nas 'ongs: lho brag rgyal gyi mkhan pa lung ni: he ru ka'i bsnyen pa rdzogs pa gcig gis rnyed do: de yang bsam yas kyi phyogs nas 'byung:*

⁸⁹ E/N: Ca. 1386 and 1396. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem actually seems to have travelled earlier. However, decoding the prophecy as he may have understood it makes sense.

⁹⁰ *sBas pa'i yul de rnam bod la gces pa'i phyir: sbas pa'i yul thams cad kyi rgyal po: 'bras mo gshongs sgo 'byed pa'i gang zag tshe lo drug cu kha ral nas lnga bcu kha ral gyi bar du bdun rim par 'byung: rtsa ri la gsum 'byung: la phyi gangs kyi ra ba la gnyis 'byung: yol mo gangs kyi ra ba la gsum 'byung: ku thang skyid kyi yul du gnyis 'byung: gzhan rnam la re 'byung: de rnam dang 'phrad na sbas pa'i yul rnyed: ma 'phrad na sgo 'gag par 'gyur ro.*

Due to the meagre virtue of those who live in this degenerate period, it will be difficult for people to come into contact with the required transmissions and oral instructions and thus there will not be many who move to the sacred places. You and I, your majesty, must make prayers of aspiration that those who practise virtue be protected in the three regions of upper, lower and central Tibet, so that they may be certain to discover the places of power.” Thus he spoke.⁹¹

Q4. And, once again, the king asked: “Oh, great master! Please show us how we should search for the three most important sites within the upper, lower and central regions.” Thus he made his request.⁹²

A4.1. And Padmasambhava replied: “King, you must listen well. There are many prophesies concerning the period during which the lifespan of man declines from sixty to fifty years, which speak clearly of the nature of the secret places and indicate their locations. Although [these teachings] are very inspiring, people will not go to those areas and try to settle in them until such a time as the lifespan of man has degenerated down to fifty years. Here, in this snowy land of Tibet, people will come who have received my blessings and who have no attachment to the objects of this world, and all the hidden lands will be opened by one whose discourses will be in terms of impermanence and whose [yogic] conduct will be unpredictable.⁹³

When the time comes for these places to be occupied (“tamed”), the three most important hidden lands, which lie along the borders of Mon and that part of Tibet that stretches between Tshong ’dus mgur mo⁹⁴ in gTsang and sPra dum must be opened, as well as the seven minor lands of lesser importance. When the final period has been reached, an understanding will arise directly within the mind [of the revealer], and he will travel to one of the hidden lands and open it up. At that time,

⁹¹ *Dus mtha’ ma’i sems can bsod nams chung pas: lung dang man ngag ’dzom pa dka’: gnas chen phal cher rnyed par mi ’gyur: bdag dang rgyal po’i smon lam gyis: bod stod smad bar gsum gyi dge byed skyob pa’i phyir gnas chen nges par rnyed par ’gyur ro: zhes gsungs so:*

⁹² *Yang zhus pa: kyai slob dpon chen po lags: stod smad bar gsum la gces pa’i gnas gsum po ’tshol ba’i thabs bstan du gsol: zhes zhus so:*

⁹³ *bKa’ stsal pa: rgyal po gson gcig: tshe lo drug cu kha ral nas lnga bcu kha ral gyi bar la lung bstan mang po yod de: gnas kyi khungs brjod pa dang: phyogs mtshon pa dang: dang ba ’dren pa las gnas bgrod pa dang rnyed pa mi ’byung tshe tshad lnga bcu la sleb pa dang: bod kha ba can du ngas byin gyis brlabs pa’i gang zag ’jig rten gyi yul la yid mi chags pa: skad mi rtag pa’i sgrar smra ba bya ba nges med spyod pa gcig gis sbas yul thams cad ’byed par ’gyur ro:*

⁹⁴ Tshong ’dus mgur mo, a temple built by Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270) in mGur mo, one of the six myriarchies in gTsang. E/N: In the time of rGod ldem’s youth, this was also the place where g.Yung ston pa, the successor of Karma pa III and probably the main holder of most rNying ma lineages in gTsang was active.

however, because the merit of Tibetans will be weak, those who practise religion will be impoverished due to lack of support. The people, having been deceived and beguiled by the tricks of Māra, will not easily be converted.⁹⁵

All those practitioners of Dharma who have received my blessings, however, not being beguiled and misled, will come to an immediate understanding. Remaining undeceived and clear-headed, they will act with direct wisdom. At that time, those who practise the true Dharma will be scorned by those with no understanding, and my prophecies will be rejected in favour of false teachings. The stainless instructions will be eclipsed by the desire and anger of those who dwell in ignorant confusion. [Those who fear that] the practice of virtue will result in poverty and a lack of material possessions will never reach the borders of the hidden lands.⁹⁶

A4.2. When the time comes, the first thing that those who have received my prophecies must do is overcome the obstacles. I tell you that this is very important! This may be achieved by completing the ritual service of devotion to Yamāntaka⁹⁷ or Vajrakīla or the wrathful Heruka. After that, in order to bring all appearances under control and propitiate the hosts of worldly dākinī, you should engage in the practice of Hayagrīva⁹⁸ and the most excellent Mother Goddess.⁹⁹ My

⁹⁵ *gDul bya dus la babs na: gtsang tshong 'dus mgur mo nas spra dum gyi bar gyi bod dang mon gyi mtshams na sbas pa'i yul chen po gsum: chung ba yul phran bdun yod pa phyeshig: dus mthar thug na: gang blo 'jug pa'i thad so la song la sbas yul gcig gis phye: de dus na bod kyi bsod nams nyams pas chos byed 'tsho bas 'phongs: bdud kha langs pas rdzun dang zog pos mi 'dul ba yong:*

⁹⁶ *Chos byed nga yis byin gyis brlabs pa'i mi rnams ni: sgyu la zog med pas shes pa drang por yong: rdzun dang g.yo sgyu med pas blo drang por spyod: de'i dus su chos byed la chos log byed pas smod: lung bstan lung log gis bsnub: bka' lung dri ma med pa nyon mongs pa'i chags sdang gis 'gegs: dge byed yo byad kyi phongs: sbas pa'i yul mthar mi phyin pa yong:*

⁹⁷ E/N: This is interesting, since this deity is not present in the original Byang gter revelations, unlike Vajrakīla and “the wrathful Heruka” (to be understood as Che mchog he ru ka as a synecdoche for the bKa' brgyad). This may be a hint that rGod ldem was a practitioner of the main rNying ma Yamāntaka system, *'Jam dpal tsho bdag*, but found it so complete that no additional revelation of his own would be required.

⁹⁸ E/N: In the biographies of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, it is plain that the first cycle he practised when he went into retreat after discovering the *gter ma* was the Hayagrīva sādhanā from the *rTen 'brel chos bdun* cycle of the Byang gter.

⁹⁹ E/N: *Ma mo* is not clearly present in the original core Byang gter. However, there are a few sādhanas of Seng ge gdong ma, which is normally the main deity for *Ma mo* rbad gtong. E.g., *Dākki ma'i drag sngags seng gdong drag mo l 'di yang sgrub chen bka' brgyad kyi las ched yin*, #58 of *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*, in CNT vol. 10, pp. 279-284.

treasure teachings contain full instructions for both ordinary and supreme attainments, so that you will be able to enjoy all the necessities of life.¹⁰⁰

A4.3. Further, if those who practise Dharma lack the means of worldly survival while heading south in search of the passageway to Sikkim: Near the southwest corner of Tshong mdus 'gyur mo in gTsang, there is the area of Co ro prad. In the middle of that place is a cave, known as the White Rock of mkhar chen, in which Padmasambhava of Odḍiyāna practised meditation. Within that cave there is a treasure of gold, as much as a beast can carry, which may be removed, and with this should be built a small temple, square in shape and six feet across, in Tsha mo rong. The instructions for the approach to Sikkim have been written down and deposited [in that cave]. Along an unbroken line between Gangs can mdzod lnga and sTag rtse'i ri,¹⁰¹ which marks the border of southern Tibet, should be built eight temples and these should be provided with monks.¹⁰² These are the instructions for gaining the path to Sikkim. And, in the hollow centre of that sacred land, should be built an isolated retreat house.¹⁰³

Three times, foreign armies will invade from across the borders in the east and settle in the central provinces of dBus and gTsang but they will be unable to reach as far as the southern land of lHo kha. When these circumstances arise in Tibet, people will remember what I have said and, therefore, I urge you to have faith and act appropriately!¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *De'i dus na: nga'i lung bstan thob pa'i gang zag rnam s dang po bar chad 'dul ba gal che gsungs: 'jam dpal gshin rje dang: rdo rje phur pa khrag 'thung he ru ka gdung gi bsnyen pa rdzogs par gyis: de nas snang pa dbang du bsdu dang: srid pa'i mkha' 'gro bskang ba'i phyir: rta mgrin dang che mchog ma mo'i bsgrub pa gyis: nga'i gter kha gnyis mchog dang thun mong gi bsgrub pa tshang bar yod pas gang la gang dgos spyod:.*

¹⁰¹ E/N: As indicated in the introduction to the text by Zsóka Gelle (Gelle 2026a in this volume), the Tiger Peak (sTag rtse ri) is the highest peak of the Kanchenjunga (Gangs chen mdzod lnga) mountain range.

¹⁰² E/N: This type of preparation may explain why rGod ldem's trip in search of the sbas yul was, it seems, so long. It does not imply that he wandered for years looking for the doorways.

¹⁰³ *De nas chos byed 'tsho bas phongs na lho 'bras mo gshongs tshol ba'i dus su: gtsang tshong 'dus mgar mo'i lho nub la nye ba na co ro prad kyi yul yod: de'i sked na u rgyan padma 'byung gnas kyi sgrub phug yod: ming mkhar chen brag dkar zer: de na gser mdzod khal gcig yod pas thon: tsha mo rong la lha khang 'dom gru bzhi pa gcig bzhangs: 'bras mo gshongs kyi bskul byang yi ge la thob la zhog: gangs mdzod lnga stag rtse'i ri rgyud ma chad lho bod kyi mtshams su lha khang brgyad rtsigs: dge 'dun gyi sde thob: 'bras mo gshongs kyi lam chos: gnas kyi mthil du dben khang rtsigs:.*

¹⁰⁴ *Shar nas mtha' dnag lan gsum dbus gtsang gi gzhuang la 'grim: lho kha tshar la mi yong bas: de'i dus bod kyi rkyen dbang gis nga dran pa yong bas dad pa dang 'phrin las skul cig:*

After that, the armies of Mongolians and others who have spread all over dBus and gTsang will, at one time, overflow and spread outwards and then you must abandon the Tibetan heartland and escape to Sikkim.¹⁰⁵

For all those who wish to go to Bud and Khum bu: There is a temple in the rocky cliffs which is like no other at all. If you go seven armspans of a man to the southwest of that temple, you will find a full measure of pure gold and seven turquoise stones which you should take and use to build a temple of stone in Bu le'i gangs. Thus, the saṅgha will become established in Bud rong. The pathway to the hidden land lies in that direction.¹⁰⁶

For all those who wish to go to La phyi and Yol mo gangs ra: To the east of Zang zang lha brag, there is a nugget of gold, which you may take. It is about the size of a goat's liver and its surface is covered with gzi stones. On the path that goes along the rGyal thang valley, you should build a traveller's rest house, and a few of the people of sNa nam should be ordained as members of the saṅgha. That is the way to the hidden lands.¹⁰⁷

For those who are going to sKyid mo lung: In the vestibule of the central door to the temple in Pra thum, there is a jar made of lapis lazuli that is filled with measured packs of gold. Taking this, you should make your abode in the ravines of Ku thang and one day you will discover the path.¹⁰⁸

By following these actions, there will be happiness and peace in the area of gTsang for a cycle of years.¹⁰⁹ Eventually, the lives of all those who practise Dharma, including those laymen whose thoughts are pure, will be saved.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, to the southeast of Mount Kailash there is a white grindstone, the size of a yak, and to the west of that stone there are thirteen gold nuggets, the size of one's hand. If any practitioners of Dharma were to become impoverished, they should take what they

¹⁰⁵ *De'i phyi ma dbus gtsang thams cad khyab pa'i hor dmag sogs dus gcig la brdol nas bod yul bor la 'bras mo gshongs su bros shig:*

¹⁰⁶ *Bud dang khum bu la 'gro bar 'dod pa rnamcang ma lta bu'i brag gi lha khang yod: lho nub kyi thad po 'doms pa bdun phyin pa na gser bsam yas kyi bre gang dang: g.yu bdun yod pas thon la bu le'i gangs brag la lha khang brtsigs: bud kyi rong la dge 'dun gyi sde thob: sbas yul gyi lam phyogs:*

¹⁰⁷ *La phyi dang yol mo gangs la 'gro ba rnamcang: zang zang lha brag gi shar na gser gzi'i dong pa gang dang thig po ra'i mchin pa tsam zhig yod pa thon: rgyal thang gi rong la lam khang tshugs: sna nam gyi la la dge 'dun gyi sde thob: sbas pa'i yul gyi lam chos:*

¹⁰⁸ *sKyid mo lung du 'gro ba rnamcang: pra thum gyi lha khang dbus ma'i sgo 'gram na mu men gyi rdza ma gser bre dos bkang pa yod pas: de thon la ku thang gi rong la gnas dang lam khang dus gcig la thob:*

¹⁰⁹ This probably refers to a calendrical cycle of 60 years.

¹¹⁰ *De ltar byas pas gtsang gi phyogs su lo bskor gcig bde skyid yong: mthar chos byed dang mgo nag pa bsam pa dkar ba rnamcang kyi srog thar ro:*

need to enable them to accomplish the route to Mount Kailash. From the edge of the snow which lies to the west of that mountain, if you cast your eyes westward, you can see a snow mountain that looks like a market gathering of the gods. When the final period has come, in that place there will be a citadel of liberation for 300 practitioners of Dharma. There will be nourishing crops to sustain you in the practice of the higher teachings and a guide to show you the way.¹¹¹

As for the way of holding the hidden lands in dBus: The snow mountains of Tsa ri in the east should be circumambulated by the faithful. Holding Nags rong phugs, the journey will be easy. Assembling in bKa' ma lung in Dwags po, the congregation of saṅgha will have great strength to benefit all beings.¹¹²

For those practitioners of Dharma who become impoverished and lack the means of sustenance, there is a vase of Mongol origin made of five kinds of precious jewels on the eastern slopes of the rocky cavern in Yer pa. Open it! It contains half a measure of gold dust. There are ten renowned turquoises that may be taken, together with however many small turquoises that are there, and, regarding the indications of the path to be taken, it is similar to what has been said about 'Bras mo gshong.¹¹³

A4.4. In front of the Red Cave of bSam yas, there is a large boulder in the shape of a rolled Chinese scroll. Beneath that boulder, there is a container made of red leather and when "poison wind" arises (i.e. the Mongols begin to invade) you must smear [that leather container] with goat fat and leave it to stand in an isolated place. There is also a white rock in the vicinity that is shaped like the *harmikā* on top of a stūpa.¹¹⁴ When that rock is removed, beneath it you will find a vase of white zinc that has been filled with a full load of pure gold and this should be taken to mChims bu for the support of the saṅgha on their path [to the hidden lands]. They will take possession of the land in the ravines

¹¹¹ Yang ti se gangs kyi shar lho na: 'dzeng rdo dkar po g.yag tsam gcig yod: de'i nub na gser thig po lag pa tsam bcu gsum yod: chos byed phongs na thon te ti se la lam khang tshugs: gangs ri de'i nub phyogs kyi gangs yod kyi mtshams nas phyogs nub tu bltas pas gangs ri lha'i khrom tshogs pa 'dra ba gcig yod: der dus mtha' ma la thug dus chos byed sum brgya thar pa'i rdzong yod: 'tsho ba'i zhing yod pas stod kyi chos byed la lam ston cig:.

¹¹² dBus kyi sbas yul bzung lugs ni: shar tsa ri gangs kyi ra ba dge byed kyis bskor: nags rong phugs bzung bas bgrod sla: dwags po'i bka' ma lung du dge 'dun gyi sde thob 'gro don stobs che'o:.

¹¹³ Chos byed 'tsho bas phongs na yer pa'i brag phug shar ma'i logs la rin po che sna lnga'i bum pa sog po'i skye regs gser phye ma bre phyed: g.yu ming can bcu: g.yu phran dong pa gang yod pas thon: 'gro ba'i lam byang ni 'bras mo gshongs dang mthun par gyis shig:

¹¹⁴ bSam yas brag mar gyi mdun na: pha bong rgya shog sgril ba 'dra ba gcig yod: de'i 'og na bse dmar po'i pa ru gcig yod: de na rdzi dug yod pas ra tshil gyis byug pa gyis la dben sar zhog: de'i brag rdo dkar po bre 'dra ba gcig yod:.

of the mkhar chu river in lHo brag. The invading armies will never reach the centre of that place.¹¹⁵

In later times, when those treasures are taken out, [a portion of them] should be used for the repair and renovation of bSam yas. Three *bre* measures should be used for the upkeep of the Dharma-practitioners, and they should escape to the hidden valleys.¹¹⁶

When it is time for all of Tibet to move to the southern ravines, that “poison wind” amulet (i.e. the red leather container smeared with goat fat) should be deposited in the gateway of bSam yas and this will prevent the annihilation of bSam yas while the rest of Tibet is embroiled in a civil war.¹¹⁷ [Otherwise] it will come about that the three-storied central temple will be destroyed and the whole of Tibet will be covered by foreign soldiers. [The deposition of the amulet] will prevent the destruction of the three-storied central temple of bSam yas and the 'Phrul snang temple of lHa sa, and also protect against the arising of trouble from enemies so that the whole of Tibet be not annihilated from the centre.¹¹⁸

For that purpose, a man born in the year of the monkey will pour a sweet ointment of sandalwood into his nostril and smear the whole of his head with goat grease. Digging down beneath the threshold of bSam yas, that leather amulet should be buried in a hole, because if this [amulet] is broken open, you must flee!¹¹⁹ It is by virtue of that [amulet] that the invading armies will be unable to reach (*ra 'cha'*) the area of bSam yas. In three years, the demon army will disperse back to their own lands and Tibet will enjoy a period of peace and prosperity for 30 human years. But, in the final period of time, it will not be possible to repel the invasion by any means whatsoever and so you must escape to the depths of the valleys in southern Tibet. During the journey you should pause to rest in the foothills of Jo mo kha rag in gTsang, and those who settle down and make their homes in the area of lHo brag mkhar chu will be liberated.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ *De bsal ba'i 'og na ti tsha'i bum pa gcig na gser bsam yas kyi khal gcig gis bkang pa yod pas: mchims bu la dge 'dun gyi lam khang gyis: lho brag mkhar chu'i rong la gnas thob: de'i gting du mtha' dmag mi yong:.*

¹¹⁶ *Dus phyi ma la gter de rnams thon la bsam yas kyi zhig gsos gyis: bre gsum gyis chos byed kyi 'tsho ba gyis la rong la bros shig:.*

¹¹⁷ *Bod thams cad lho rong la 'gro ba'i dus na: rdzi dug gi ga'u bsam yas kyi sgo la zhog cig: de'ang bsam yas kyi mtha' gogs pa dang bod la nang 'khrug yong:*

¹¹⁸ *dBu rtse ri gsum zhig ral 'byung ba dang bod mtha' dmag gis khyab yong: bsam yas dbu rtse rigs gsum dang lha sa 'phrul snang la zhig ral dang dgra'i gnod pa ma byung na bod gting nas brlag par mi 'gyur:.*

¹¹⁹ *De'i phyir mi sprel lo pa gcig gi sna bug tu tsan dan gyi lde gu blugs: ra tshil gyis mgo lus med par byugs: bsam yas kyi them pa'i 'og na mar brkos bse'i ga'u de'i nang du zhog la kha phyte ste rang bros shig:.*

¹²⁰ *Des bsam yas kyi phyogs su dmag ra 'cha' mi nus so: lo gsum na bdud dmag rang sar dengs nas mi lo sum cu bod la bde skyid 'byung: dus mthar cis kyang mi bzlog pas bod lho rong*

A4.5. Generally speaking, all Tibetans should escape to the four valleys and the three forts. The inhabitants of dBus and gTsang should escape to the hidden lands and the area around the edge of lHo kha. All those who live around the borders of Byang, being courageous of heart, should escape to the southern gorges. Those who do not find liberation in that place should carry seeds of barley grain from Byang Dang ra and head towards the northern side of the sTar sgo range of snow mountains. At a place, one further day's journey from there, they will be able to open up a pathway leading to a hidden land. From the sTar sgo mountains, at a distance of one month's journey for the average person, there stands a white snow mountain that seems to be enclosed within a ring of iron mountains, like those that stand at the edge of the world. In between those mountains, liberation will be attained by traversing one of the high mountain passes.¹²¹

If a path is sought by the virtuous, they will find the hidden land of Byang 'bras mo khud in the middle of those mountains. Occupying that land, there will be no happier place in the whole of Tibet but, if they do not find that place, then everybody must flee to the hills ("to the snow and the rocks"). The armies of Māra will slaughter everybody, beginning with the humans and livestock from Dang ra down to rGyal mo'i smug dong in lower Byang.¹²²

Those in the northern passageway from Mount Kailash down to Dang ra, will be killed when the armies subsequently arrive in the west. All those along the central route, from the entrance of Ba thag sha dung all the way up to China, having become exhausted by misery, will be defeated.¹²³

The entire area of lHo kha, from Pu rangs (sPu rang) all the way up to the ravines of Mi nyag, will be overrun as if by marauding bandits.¹²⁴

gting du bros shig: gtsang jo mo kha rag gi 'dabs su lam khang tshugs: lho brag mkhar chu la gnas thob de rnams su thar ro:.

¹²¹ *sPyir bod thams cad rong bzhi dang rdzong gsum la bros: dbus gtsang gnyis sbas yul dang lho kha tshar gyi yul la bros: byang mtha' reg la yod pa rnams snying rus che ba lho rong du bros: der ma thar ba rnams byang dang ra nas 'bru'i sa bon khyer la star sgo gangs kyi byang thad na phar nyin lam gyi sar yul 'byed du song zhig: star sgo'i gangs nas mi 'bring po'i zla gcig phyin pa'i sa na gangs dkar po lcags ri'i tshul du 'khor yod: de'i gangs bar la so gcig byas pas thar ro:.*

¹²² *dGe byed kyis lam btsal na gangs de'i khog pa na byang 'bras mo khud yod: de rnyed na bod kha ba can gyi yul na de bas dga' ba'i yul med do: ma rnyed kyang gangs brag la mi yongs kyis bros: dang ra nas byang smad rgyal mo'i smug dong yan chad kyi mi phyugs ni thog ma la bdud dmag gis gsod:.*

¹²³ *Ti se nas dang ra'i bar gyi byang rgyud ni phyis stod dmag gis gsod do: ba thag sha dung gi sgo mo yan chad nas rgya nag po'i bar gyi yul dbus kyi rgyud thams cad sdug zad la song ngo 'joms so:.*

¹²⁴ *Pu rangs nas mi nyag 'ga'i rong yan chad kyi lho kha tshar la jag pa'i tshul gyis 'joms so:.*

Oh, great king! Misery for Tibet will begin when someone of royal ancestry is murdered by a sword in Gung thang in upper Mang yul. Tibet's destruction will begin when a second one is killed by the sword. And the happiness of Tibet will be exhausted when a third is killed and therefore you must flee to the hidden lands and the southern ravines. All those who find shelter in the hidden lands at that time will attain great happiness. Those who find freedom in the southern ravines will not need to die with unhappy minds.¹²⁵

But all those who say "That will never happen!" and decide to remain in their own lands until a later time, their heads spinning with childish nonsense, those with perverted intellects who contradict my instructions, they will suffer as if crushed down beneath a mountain. But then, saying "This is painful!" they will merely flee into a pit of fire and try to wipe away their tears with stones. Suffering terribly, all of them will die. All of the fruits will be destroyed, like straw burned by fire and, because of their actions, all of those who are slaughtered by the invading armies will be reborn in the black iron house of hell.¹²⁶

At a time like that, everyone will be oppressed by misery but, when they recollect my words concerning the hidden lands, it will be too late!¹²⁷

[On the other hand,] those who have firm faith in me, having fled towards the west in order to avoid seeing those oncoming armies, will find freedom in Khotan. As I have already explained — the time to flee is when the rule of law of a king who upholds the Dharma is broken, and the Tibetan people are tossed aside as if they were nothing but a few tables and chairs. All those who do not go at that time, being attached to their homelands, will later be subjugated by the Mu dur nag po Mongols and, at that time, the people of Tibet, being afflicted by sins and obscurations, will not be able to escape. But later, when the rule of the Mongols comes to an end, such people must cast aside their concerns for a comfortable existence and undertake the difficulties of travel, for it will again be time to flee! On that occasion, all those who have heard my teachings must escape! As I have already told you, you

¹²⁵ *Kye rgyal po stod mang yul gung thang du: rgyal po nyid kyi gdung rgyud gcig gri ru bkum pa dang bod kyi sdug 'go 'dzugs so: gnyis gri ru bkum pa dang bod kyi phung 'go 'dzugs so: gsum bkum pa dang bod kyi skyid pa zad pas sbas yul dang lho rong la bros shig: de'i dus su sbas pa'i yul du thar pa rnam la bde skyid 'byung ngo: lho rong du thar pa rnam gshis ngan du 'chi mi dgos:.*

¹²⁶ *De ma yin pa'i rang yul la brtag phyis byed pa dang: col chung ti ta 'khor ba dang: blo log bka' lung la 'gal bar byed pa rnam duhkha ri yis mnan pa tsam: zug zer me 'obs su shor ba tsam cho nge brag ral ba tsam myong zhing kun gsod par 'gyur ro: sog ma me yis tshig pa bzhin 'bras bu kun brlag ste: dmag des bsad pa thams cad dmyal khang nag por las kyi dbang gis skye bar 'gyur ro:.*

¹²⁷ *De lta bu'i dus su thams cad duhkhas mnan te nga dang sbas pa'i yul dran pa zhig yong ste phyis so:.*

must escape through a variety of different pathways and precipitous gorges.¹²⁸

At that time in Tibet, as the strength of my compassion is waged against the strength of the demon's poison arrows, any individual who is aware of these predictions will be disparaged by the mass of those who have been blessed by the demon Māra, so that obstacles will begin to arise as exaggerated claims are made and derisive abuse is received. Whatever happens, however, you should not be fearful but should immediately flee!¹²⁹

A4.6. As for events taking place elsewhere during that period: There are predictions concerning events down south in India contained within seven sūtra of the Buddha Śākyamuni and each one of those scriptures speaks of the coming period when the people must flee to safety. It is said that, "At that time, the tops of nine pillars will be dislodged by the black wind of wicked Māra and invading armies will circle around in Jambudvīpa." And, in the *Sūtra of the Prophetic King*,¹³⁰ it is written:¹³¹

Oh Śāriputra, listen carefully. After my parinirvāṇa there will arise seven generations of kings who will be like lamps [for the people], but then, at the end of ten periods of five hundred years, my four orders¹³² of followers must retreat to the region of Mount Dan tig and the head of the Dan tig river and to islands in the outer ocean and the steep forested valleys of the bSe tha, and all the teachings of the Buddha that exist in the areas of India, Oḍḍiyāna, Kaśmīr, Śrī Laṅkā, Sāla, and Khotan, must go towards an island in the south-western ocean. And in the north, the teachings will spread in the land of snows.¹³³

¹²⁸ Nga la rtse gcig tu mos pa rnam: dmag la phyi mig ma bltas par bros pas nub li'i yul du thar: de'i gong du chos skyong pa'i rgyal po'i khrims zhig nas bod khri 'ur 'thor ba'i dus su 'bros ran te kun yul la chags nas mi 'gro: de'i rjes su mu dur nag po hor gyis 'dul: de'i tshes bod sdig sgrib kyis non nas mi 'bros so: de nas hor khrims zhig bde srid 'thor bas lam 'grod dka' ste 'bros ran no: de'i dus su nga'i bka' la nyan pa rnam bros shig: gong ltar lam khang dang rong sna'i mi dang mthun par gyis la bros shig:.

¹²⁹ De'i dus na bod la nga'i thugs rje dang: bdud kyi dug mda' rtsal 'gran pa'i dus su: de'i lung bstan thob pa'i gang zag la bdud kyis byin gyis brlabs pa'i thams cad kyis: ya ga dang sgro skur dang bar chad rtsom pa yong ste: ci la yang skrag par ma byed par bros shig:.

¹³⁰ E/N: see below the article by Zsoka Gelle about the identification of this text.

¹³¹ De'i dus na bab 'brel na: lho 'dzam bu'i gling na śākya thub pa'i lung bstan gyi mdo bdun yod de: so so na bros ran pa'i dus su yang: bdud sdig can gyi lung nag po bre dgu g.yos pas: de'i dus na 'dzam bu'i gling na mtha' dmag gis bskor ces pa'i lung gi dus so: de'i dus na lung bstan rgyal po'i mdo las:.

¹³² The four orders are monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen.

¹³³ Śā ri'i bu nyon cig: nga mya ngan las 'das nas rgyal po'i gdung sob sgron me dang 'dra ba lan bdun 'byung: de'i phyi ma la lnga brgya phrag bcu'i mtha' ma 'char: de'i dus na nga'i

Furthermore, as prophesied by the lords of the three families: "At the end of time, in the dregs of the final 500 years, it will be necessary for the people to flee central Tibet and move to the borderlands. They must escape to the forests and through the clefts in the mountains." Such predictions are given in one text after another.¹³⁴

For all these reasons, therefore, by the blessings of Mahākāruṇika, the lord of great compassion, I am giving these prophesies to you now. In the future, at a time when the countries of India and Tibet are overrun by hostile armies in the four directions, those who did not escape during the period foretold in the prophesies will not be able to save themselves by finding proper strategies and, when enemy armies pour in over all the borders like tumbling mountains, it will really be too late." Thus he spoke.¹³⁵

Q5. And the king asked again: "Oh, great teacher! On that occasion, when the time comes, how can we truly escape from those armies of Māra? Oh, Padmasambhava, you who clearly see the past, present and future, please give us guidance!" Thus he implored.¹³⁶

A5.1. To which the guru replied: "Oh, great king, listen carefully. Because of your love for the people of Tibet, I have revealed to you many prophecies and skilful strategies, as a result of which, the whole country is currently enjoying good times, from the interior to the far-flung borderlands. On this happy occasion, I myself and all the other translators and scholars have come here for the sake of Tibet, conferring with one another on the topic of mass slaughter. You, your majesty, are the lord and protector of Tibet! If you live a long life, you will come to see things that have never been known before."¹³⁷ The glittering

nyan thos 'khor bzhi po ri bo dan tig gi gling dang: chu bo dan tig gi mgo dang: phyi'i rgya mtsho'i do gling dang: bse tha nags kyi rong la song zhig: rgya gar dang: u rgyan dang: kha che dang: sing nga dang: tsha la dang: li'i yul dang: sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa yod pa'i gnas thams cad lho nub rgya mtsho'i do gling la song zhig: byang phyogs kha ba can gyi yul du: dus kyi mtha' ma la bstan pa dar bar 'gyur gyis:

¹³⁴ *Der yang rigs gsum ngon pos lung ston pa: lnga brgya snyigs ma la bod thams cad bas mtha' la song zhig: nags ri'i rong la bros shig: ces lung ston cig shod cig: ces gsungs pas:*

¹³⁵ *Thugs rje chen po'i byin rlabs kyis: da lta nga nyid kyis lung ston pa'o: de'i tshe de'i dus na 'dzam bu'i gling bod kha ba can gyi mtha' bzhi dmag gis 'khor yong: nga yis lung bstan pa'i dus la ma bros na: bod thabs thug pa dang mi thar te: mtha' bzhi nas dmag ri rdibs pa ltar yong nges pa'i phyir ro: zhes gsungs so.*

¹³⁶ *Yang zhus pa: kyai slob dpon chen po lags: de'i tshe de'i dus na: bdud dmag de las thar nges pa du mchis: dus gsum sa le mkhyen pa padma 'byung gnas kyis lung bstan du gsol: zhes zhus pas.*

¹³⁷ *bKa' stsal pa: rgyal po chen po gson cig: rgyal po bod la brtse ba'i phyir: bdag gis lung bstan pa dang thabs mang po bstan pa yin gyis: bod mtha' khob kyi mi 'di da lta dus bzang*

splendour of the temple of bSam yas is said to be such that it brings to a standstill even the roving eyes and restless activity of a young person. And yet there are people in Tibet who think evil of this, like dogs! There are those who talk meaningless babble about it, like foxes! There are those whose thoughts are confused and distracted, just like monkeys! And those who have fallen prey to the deceptions of evil spirits, as if they are mad!¹³⁸ Compared to this time, however, the degenerate period of the final 500 years will be ten times worse! To be without a king is like limbs without a head. In each [hidden] land, there should be one minor king. And each minor king should have the heart of a bull.¹³⁹ The topic of discussion will be the idle chatter of servants but each monastery that is established should have an abbot and a teacher. The abbots and teachers should be ordained as monks in yellow robes. This should be a topic of discussion.¹⁴⁰ When bandits are close at hand, neighbours are overrun. Practitioners of Dharma will be abused and reviled by their friends, while those with wrong views will be treated with love. Those acts which ought to be avoided will be treated as the holy Dharma. Tibet, becoming filled with evil thoughts and deeds of that type, most of the people in Tibet will be overthrown and destroyed.¹⁴¹

A5.2. Oh king, do not let your heart be dismayed. At this very moment, there are those in the three lower realms who are suffering unbearable torment. May they receive mercy! Until their deeds are purified, however, all the compassion that you feel for them in your heart

ba yin kyang: nged lo paṅ bod kyi don la 'ongs pa rnam gsod pa'i gros byed: rgyal po nyid bod kyi ngon po yin te: sku tshe ring na mi yong ba'i blo 'char:

¹³⁸ *bSam yas kyi lha khang bkrag che bas gzhon pa mig yengs nas las stabs gcog par 'dug zer: bod kyi mi 'di bSam pa ngan pas khyi dang 'dra: kha 'chal smra bas wa dang 'dra: blo sna mang bas spre'u dang 'dra: gdon gyis bsad pas smyon pa 'dra:.*

¹³⁹ *Da lta bas kyang lnga brgya snyigs ma'i dus na bcu 'gyur bas ngan du 'gro: rgyal po med pas mgo med kyi yan lag 'dra: yul phran re na rgyal phran re: rgyal phran shan pa glang snying re:.*

¹⁴⁰ The expression *gros 'go bsnyen gnas skyes 'gos byed* is obscure but there are a lot of prescriptions for temporary vows (*bsnyen gnas*) in the *Byang chub chos dbang* cycle. I suspect that these rules of life are intended for the communities rGod ldem founded, so there is a strong probability that *nye gnas* is a mis-spelling for *bsnyen gnas*. This, however, does not explain *skyes 'gos*. If we understand *'gos* in relation to *gros 'go*, though, perhaps we may understand: "Discussing about temporary vows should be their topic of discussion." Or, in context, it is about the way people with temporary vows are to be associated with monks and nuns and their *mkhan po*, etc. Or else it is the first of a series of problems that will arise, as in the text sentence?

¹⁴¹ *Gros 'go kha 'chal g.yog pos byed: gnas dgon re na mkhan slob re: mkhan slob skye bo gos ser gyon: gros 'go nye gnas skyes 'gos byed: jag pas nye bas khyim mtshes 'joms: gshe skur chos byed grogs la gtong: log lta byams sems can la byed: spang bya dam pa'i chos la byed: de lta bu'i bSam sbyor ngan pas bod khengs nas: bod phal cher phung zhing brlag par 'gyur:.*

can be of no benefit.¹⁴² And, furthermore, with regard to those demon armies at the end of time, all sentient beings of evil deeds, having taken on degenerate forms, will act as executioners in the final period. In this country of Tibet, due to the aspiration prayers of myself and the king, seven bodhisattvas will arise as leaders and 300 people will attain liberation in 'Bras mo gshongs to the south, and 200 people will attain liberation in the borderlands between Nepal and Tibet, and 160 people will attain liberation in the gorges of Khumbu, and fifty people will attain liberation in the gorges of Bud rong, and 400 people will attain liberation along the borders of sPa gro and Bum thang, and 100 people will attain liberation in the steep valleys of lHo brag mkhar chu, and 500 people will attain liberation in Tsa ri and Tsa gong. All of those people will become totally liberated. In the hidden lands they will find a safe haven.¹⁴³

As for the others who have fled to places in the vicinity of the southern gorges: Some will escape with their lives but some will face hostility and difficult circumstances in the southeast (lHo mon) and be killed. Some will die in the steep sloping forests, the snowy precipices, the rocky crags, or the wild rivers.¹⁴⁴ Others, being caught up in the civil war in Tibet, will be slain by the sword and many others, having escaped the army of demons, will die due to the evil circumstances of that time. Some will be struck down by the poisons of the southern lands and die, while others will die of hunger.¹⁴⁵ Oh, king! Whatever people try to do at that time, they will find no happiness and it will be as if they are living in hell. Those will, indeed, be unhappy times for everybody. When all is consumed by fire, never have I seen a haven of comfort, peace and tranquillity in the forest.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² *rGyal po thugs khral ma mdzad: da lta'i dus na yang: ngan song gsum na duhkha bzod glags med de: de yang snying re rje ste: las ma dag gi bar du thugs khral bya pas phan pa med:.*

¹⁴³ *Dus mtha' ma'i bdud dmag de yang: sems can las ngan can thams cad snyigs ma'i lus len pas: dus mtha' ma'i gshed ma byed pa yin: bod 'dir nga dang rgyal po'i smon lam gyis: byang chub sems dpa'i rigs can dbun gyis sna drangs nas lho 'bras mo gshongs su sum rgya thar: bal bod kyi mtshams su nyis brgya thar: brin khum bu'i rong du brgya drug cu thar: bud kyi rong du lnga bcu thar ro: spa gro bum thang gi mtshams su bzhi brgya thar: lho brag mkhar chu'i rong du brgya thar: tsa ri tsa gong la lnga brgya thar: de yang gting nas thar ro: sbas pa'i yul du btsan sa zin pa'o:.*

¹⁴⁴ *gZhan yang lho rong thag nye ba rnams la 'gro ste: la la srog thar ba yong: la la lho mon gis ngan 'byung ste gsod: la la nags rong dang: gangs rong dang: brag rong dang: chu rgod la 'chi:.*

¹⁴⁵ *La la bod nang 'khrugs te gri ru 'chi: la la bdud dmag las thar te rkyen ngan gyis 'chi: la la lho'i dug phog ste 'chi: la la ltogs te 'chi:.*

¹⁴⁶ *rGyal po de'i dus su sems can la ji ltar byas skyid med de: dmyal ba'i gnas dang 'dra: de'i dus sems can kun sdug pa'i dus yin: nags la me shor ba'i gling na so bsod dang bde skyid 'dug pa ngas ma mthong:.*

A5.3. Oh, king! At this time, whilst you are able to enjoy the profound state of innermost reality, you should seek out and occupy the safe havens." Thus he spoke and the king, his heart being choked with emotion, was unable to utter a word while many tears flowed from his eyes.¹⁴⁷

At that time, the *ācārya* Padmasambhava gave some words of advice for the people who would be living in the final 500-year period: "During the time of the final 500 years of degeneration of the doctrines of the blessed Buddha Śākyamuni, all the people of this world will become bereft of comfort and wellbeing. You should, therefore, escape to the strongholds [of the hidden lands]. Oh, you sinful folk who pay no attention to my instructions, you should unite all your wishes with acts of virtue! Many hidden lands are prophesied and there are places of safety within the forested ravines, so you should focus your desires upon the vast fields of bliss!¹⁴⁸

In the border regions of the land of rMu 'thom mon, the elements becoming unbalanced will be a basic cause of sickness and you will have need of learned people who can analyse the conditions and prescribe appropriate medicines. Among the cliffs and precipitous gorges in the occupied forests, I have left Dharma instructions concerning rejuvenation from cold. As for the rain and a covering of dense fog and poison earth — do not be afraid of these things for a messenger will find the cure and all will be put properly in order in three years. After that you will be thoroughly acclimatised to your new environment.¹⁴⁹

Even though you may hesitate to go to the forested ravines for fear of a lack of food, they will afford you safe haven. I, Padma, king of Oḍḍiyāna, have tamed the earth of all the minor lands in the southern ravines and blessed them to be your strongholds. I have concealed important treasures [in those locations] and appointed obedient servants to whom I have given instructions to conceal and guard the entrances. For that reason, each and every one of the hidden lands will be a place

¹⁴⁷ rGyal po nyid rang chos nyid zab mo la longs spyod du yod pas: da lta btsan sa bzung mdzod: ces gsungs pas: rgyal po yus kyis brnangs nas spyen chab mang po shor ro:.

¹⁴⁸ de'i dus su: slob dpon padma 'byung gnas kyis: lnga brgya mtha' ma'i sems can la zhal gdams bzhag pa: bcom ldan shākya thub pa yi: bstan pa'i snyigs ma lnga brgya'i mthar: 'dzam gling sems can thams cad la: bde skyid med pas btsan sar bros: sdig can bka' las mi nyan pas: dge byed bsam pa phyogs gcig dril: lung bstan sbas pa'i yul rnams kyang: nags rong btsan sa'i yul yin pas: bde zhing yangs pa'i 'dod pa skyungs:.

¹⁴⁹ rMu 'thom mon gyi yul mtshams na: 'byung ba mi snyoms nad gzhi'i rgyu: thabs mkhas rten 'brel sman dpyad dgos: nags rong 'dzin pa'i g.yang sa la: drod dangs ma byed sgo ba chos: char rmugs thib dang sa dug la: 'jigs par mi bya pho nya bcos: lo gsum spyod pa legs par bsams: de nas yul dang lus 'phrod 'gyur:.

of attainment, within which great treasures have been concealed. This is my decree, authenticated, sealed, and deposited.¹⁵⁰

I am the Lotus Born Guru, representative of the Jina Śākyamuni for all those who practise Dharma in this world. [This is my promise] to all those who practise the Dharma in Tibet: In those places of attainment which I have blessed, sons will make themselves at home as if in the fatherland. Without hesitation, you should go and settle in those places. Do not doubt that you and I will meet again in the next life!¹⁵¹

You should pay attention to this prophesy concerning the time when, due to the evil karma of Tibet, wicked men will arrive and slaughter the population with their swords." Thus he spoke.¹⁵²

[Colophon] And, at that time, the king Khri strong lde'u btsan separated out all of those prophesies and prepared a written inventory. Then, having presented the master with an offering maṇḍala composed of five kinds of precious jewels, he hid them as treasure.¹⁵³

Concealing this particular prophesy halfway up the mountain in Byang Zang zang lha brag, when the time came for the guru of Odḍiyāna to depart, he gave these instructions to the three faithful men of Tibet: "Oh, faithful Tibetans, listen carefully! By my command, when the time comes for this document to be revealed from its place of concealment, in the country of the gNyan, where the earth spirits are dangerous, in the northern region of this tattered country, it will have properly matured with the passing of years just like a vital seed.¹⁵⁴ This small set of instructions, like the fine roots on the stem of a lotus flower, will be found to the east, on the eastern side of a mountain. In the year of the dragon or the ox, it will be taken out as a treasure by a man of fierce demeanour who knows the wrathful rites. That man of good karma, taking out this treasure, will open the way to seven

¹⁵⁰ *Nags rong la zas med dogs kyang sa btsan pas: u rgyan rgyal po padma ngas: lho rong btsan sa'i yul phran rnam: sa 'dul byin rlabs gter chos sbas: sgo sgo bcad sgo srung bka' nyan bskos: de phyir sbas pa'i yul kun nang: sgrub gnas re dang gnas chen re: bka' rtags yin pas bzhas par bya:.*

¹⁵¹ *'Dzam gling chos byed thams cad la: rgyal ba śākya thub pa yi: rgyal tshab padma 'byung gnas yin: bod kyi chos byed thams cad kun: nga yis byin brlabs sgrub gnas su: pha yul bu yis 'dzin pa ltar: the tshom med par 'dzin du bzhud: skye ba 'di yi phyi ma la: nga dang 'phrad par the tshom med:.*

¹⁵² *bKa' 'di'i dus na bod kyi las ngan gyis: gshis ngan gri ru 'chi bas lung 'di nyon: ces gsungs so:.*

¹⁵³ *De'i tshe rgyal po khri strong lde'u btsan gyis: lung bstan thams cad kha kha so sor dkar chag yi ger btab: slob dpon la rin po che sna lnga'i maṇḍal phul nas: gter du sbas so:.*

¹⁵⁴ E/N: This is an unusual and very interesting statement, which seems not to be attested in other colophons of the original Byang gter.

hidden lands in seven precipitous valleys in the south.¹⁵⁵ May his activities be the life support of Tibet! This prophesy is to be entrusted to that person of good karma by the twelve brTan ma mother goddesses." Thus he spoke.¹⁵⁶

May this key to all the hidden lands, a prophesy for future times, be discovered by the man of good karma! SAMAYA rGYA rGYA rGYA.¹⁵⁷

This was taken out as a treasure from its place of concealment, half-way up a mountain in Byang Zang zang lha brag, by Rig 'dzin rgod kyi lde 'phru can. May there be virtue!¹⁵⁸



¹⁵⁵ E/N: This is a strong indication that all the prophecies above, which were phrased as if they referred to different people, apply in fact to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem alone.

¹⁵⁶ Lung bstan 'di u rgyan gu ru gshegs pa'i dus na: byang zang zang lha brag gi sked la sbas te: bod kyi dad pa can gsum la bka' btsal pa: nyon cig bod kyi dad pa can: nga yi zhal gdams yi ge 'di: thon pa'i dus la bab pa'i tshe: gdug pa sa bdag gnyan gyi yul: byang phyogs rdol pa'i yul khams 'dir: lo legs 'bru bcud smin par 'gyur: gter 'di shar thad ri bo'i shar: lung phran pad sdong 'dra ba'i rtsar: 'brug gam glang lo khro bo'i gzugs: drag shul can gyis gter nas 'don: las can de yis 'di khyer nas: lho yi rong bdun sbas yul bdun: las can de yis 'byed par 'gyur: de la bod kyi srog rten cig: ma mo brtan ma bcu gnyis kyis: lung 'di las can de la gtod: ces gsungs so:.

¹⁵⁷ Ma 'ongs pa'i lung bstan sbas pa'i yul thams cad kyi them yig 'di: las can gcig dang 'phrad par shog: sa ma yā: rgya rgya rgya:.

¹⁵⁸ Byang zang zang lha brag gi sked nas: rig 'dzin rgod ldem 'phru can gyis gter nas gdan drangs pa'o: dge'o:.

**Prophecies, Legends, and Histories
Concerning the Life of the Great Treasure Master:
sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po**

Zsóka Gelle

(Independent researcher)¹

SNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po (1480–later than 1541) is perhaps best known for his role in the excavation and reconstruction of the great stupa of Bodhnāth in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. He was a Tibetan treasure master, who participated in the transmission of teachings of various traditions and opened the Hidden Land of Yol mo Gangs ra. He established the first temple in the present-day Helambu region of Nepal and was posthumously venerated as the first Yol mo sprul sku,² the founder of an incarnation lineage dedicated to disseminating the Northern Treasure teachings across the Himalayan region between the 16th and 18th centuries. In the absence of a surviving contemporary biography, this chapter aims to reconstruct his life and contributions by critically examining later biographical accounts preserved in various textual collections, hagiographies of his contemporaries, and oral histories recorded in Nepal.³

Parts 1–10 trace the life of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, drawing upon various versions of his brief biographies (CHN, DTChW, TASHI, KUNSANG, KONGTRUL) included by renowned Tibetan scholars in collections dating from the 17th to the 19th centuries. These hagiographical accounts recount the prophecy found in the *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor stupa* (LOGYU) about him being the reincarnation of an 8th century Tibetan minister who vows to reborn in the Dark Age to restore the stupa. They further detail sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang

¹ I am deeply grateful to my employer, Virginia Lewis-Jones, Director of the Dame Vera Lynn Archive, whose generous support made the writing of this essay possible.

² Bogin, 2005, *The Life of Yol mo Bstan 'dzin nor bu: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Study of the Memoirs of a Seventeenth-Century Tibetan Buddhist Lama*, p. 11.

³ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the IK Cultural Transfers and Cross-Contacts in the Himalayan Borderlands at the University of Vienna for their support, which enabled me to conduct fieldwork in Nepal between 2011 and 2014. The oral history research cited in this article was carried out during that time.

po's birth in the late 15th century, his visits in bSam yas and lHa sa to reveal hidden treasures (*gter ma*), the renovation of the Bodhnāth stupa in Nepal, his pivotal role in the transmission of the Byang gter and 'Bri gung bka' brgyud teachings, a subsequent treasure revelation and retreat at Ri bo dPal 'bar, the opening of the hidden land (*sbas yul*) of Yol mo gangs ra, his spiritual testament, and his subsequent rebirth. These sources are augmented by a local manuscript preserved in Helambu (DANGPO), oral traditions recorded in the region, and relevant insights from Western scholarship. Part 11 examines the transmission of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's teachings and the diffusion of the Northern Treasure (Byang gter) in Helambu. The work concludes with a summary that contextualizes the events mentioned within a broader historical framework.

1. The legend and the prophecy

One of the most interesting sources related to sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po is his own treasure text, the *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa*⁴ that Grants Liberation Through Hearing (LOGYU)⁵, which he revealed in 1512 at bSam yas, Tibet. In addition to identifying himself as the treasure discoverer in the colophon, there is a prophecy by Gu ru Rin po che in the main narrative predicting him as the future revealer. The most important events leading up to the prophecy⁶ begin with a devout widow⁷ who lived in a previous era, during the time of

⁴ The name of the stupa is explained in traditional accounts in which local inhabitants object to the king's decision to grant land to a poor widow for its construction. In response, the king states *bya rung kha shor*, meaning "permission ('can do') was a slip of the tongue." Despite this, he refuses to retract his commitment.

⁵ *mChod rten chen po bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus thos pas grol ba*. There are numerous versions of the *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa*; see Blondeau, 1994. In the Western world, the best known version is Keith Dowman's translation, which is based on mChog gyur gling pa's (1829–1870) edition. In the present article, I have used bDud 'joms Rin po che's (1904–1988) edition (LOGYU, 1983). A famous blockprint of the LOGYU was made by Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol (1781–1851), who travelled from Tibet to the Kathmandu Valley in 1821 to renovate the stupa. See Ehrhard, 1990, pp. 362–365.

⁶ In the first chapter Gu ru Rin po che narrates the construction and consecration of the stupa during the golden age of Kāśyapa Buddha. In the second chapter he presents the aspiration prayers of those who participated in its construction and examines the ways in which their aspirations were ultimately fulfilled. In the third chapter, Gu ru Rin po che expounds on the merits of prostration, circumambulation, and offering to the great stupa. The fourth chapter depicts the moral and spiritual decline characteristic of the final time of the Dark Age. The fifth chapter is about the great being, who restores the stupa, his supporters and their attainments.

⁷ Bya rdzi mo, a poultry seller.

Kāśyapa Buddha in Nepal, and decided to build a stupa. When the construction was completed by her four sons, their servant, and various animals,⁸ they all made aspirations to be reborn in Tibet in the future to spread the Buddha's teachings.⁹

According to their wishes, the four brothers were reborn in Tibet as the Tibetan king, Khri srong lde btsan, Gu ru Rin po che, Abbot Śāntarakṣita, and sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms¹⁰ in the 8th century. The servant who carried the stones for the construction was reborn as 'Gos Padma gung btsan, the king's minister of Buddhist affairs (*chos blon*), to defeat the heretic faction that had gained influence in the court. When Guru Rinpoche predicted that the great stupa would be ruined in the future during the Age of Degeneration,¹¹ 'Gos Padma gung btsan asked him to let him be reborn in that age to rebuild it. The king and the others present made aspirations to reborn in the same era and help him. When King Khri srong lde btsan asked Guru Rinpoche to predict when and where 'Gos Padma gung btsan would be reborn in the future, he gave the following prophecy (LOGYU):

The reincarnation will be born in gTsang Nyi ma sTod,
into a family of teachers, [who are] lay Tantric practitioners,
[a] person[s] born in the Year of the Rat [and/or] Pig,
and will be named dPal or bZang po.¹²

The LOGYU text we have been examining is the reproduction of an old manuscript, various versions of which have been quoted by many authors in the last five hundred years. Since we used its 20th century reprint, it is reasonable to assume that it has undergone some minor editing almost every time it was republished or copied over the centuries. However, when we compare it with the prophecy quoted from the same source¹³ by Gam smyon Phyag rdor nor bu¹⁴ in his

⁸ A blood sucking insect, a donkey, an elephant and a crow.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of the story and its characters, see Gelle, 2019.

¹⁰ sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms or Yar lung ba mi khri gzher, son of the Ba clan in Yar lung called Khri gzher. He was a minister in King Khri srong lde btsan's court, who was sent to Nepal in the 8th c. to invite Guru Rinpoche to Tibet. Later he became one of the twenty-five disciples of Gu ru Rin po che. Among others, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337-1408?) was regarded as his reincarnation.

¹¹ sNyigs dus.

¹² LOGYU, 1983 f. 146.: *sprul pa'i skye ba gcig gtsang nyi ma stod kyi phyogs su 'byung bar 'gyur te: pha ma slob dpon rnams sngags pa'i rigs su: byi phag lo ba: dpal lam bzang po'i ming can:*

¹³ CHN, 2015 f. 493.: *mChod rten chen po bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus.*

¹⁴ Gam smyon Phyag rdor nor bu, younger brother of the Third Yol mo sprul sku, bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1589–1644).

collection of biographies (CHN)¹⁵ in the 17th century, surprisingly, we find a somewhat clearer presentation of the same:

The reincarnation will be born in gTsang Nyi ma La stod,
into a family of either teachers or tantric practitioners,
in either the year of the Rat or the year of the Pig,
and will be named dPal or bZang po.¹⁶

A late manuscript from Helambu (DANGPO) appears to draw on an oral tradition recounting the same prophecy of the LOGYU. The setting, however, differs slightly: it takes place as Guru Rinpoche prepares to depart for the southwest, to the Land of Vampires.¹⁷ At that moment, Jo mo mTsho rgyal requests him to give teachings on the future protection of the Bya rung kha shor stupa and the opening of the sacred land (*gnas chen*) of Yol mo Gangs ra. In response, Guru Rinpoche says:

In the future, at the end of times, when this stupa has fallen into ruin, the emanation of the minister of religion, Padma Gung btsan will be born. His father's birth year will be Pig; his mother's will be Rat. His clan (*rus*) will be *drang srong*,¹⁸ his caste

¹⁵ I am very grateful to Charles Taylor for drawing my attention to this text.

¹⁶ CHN, 2015 f. 494.: *sprul pa'i skye ba gcig gtsang nyi ma la stod kyi phyogs su 'byung bar 'gyur te/ pha ma slob dpon nam sngags pa'i rigs byi phag gang rung lo pa dpal lam bzang po'i ming can/* Since this is a 2015 reprint of Phyag rdor nor bu's text, it would be unwise to draw any serious conclusions. Still, comparing these two versions of the same verse provides a clear sense of how editorial choices, misspellings, and misreadings might have altered the text—and, in turn, its narrative—over time.

¹⁷ mNga' yab gling, mythologized as the southwestern island in Buddhist cosmology inhabited by rākṣasa.

¹⁸ The Hyolmo people of contemporary Nepal maintain a clan-based social structure in which the Nyingma Lama clan holds the highest status among five lama clans and several common clans. The progenitor (*thog mar me me*) of the Nyingma Lama clan is sNgags 'chang Shākya bZang po. The term *drang srong* translates to 'brahmin' in the Hyolmo language, and in more recent locally written Tibetan sources sNgags 'chang Shākya bZang po is referred to as a *bhram ze* (brahmin), someone of the highest caste. This is evidently a consequence of Sanskritization. Over the past two decades, it has become increasingly common for members of the Nyingma Lama clan in Helambu to append *Drangsong* to their names as a clan signifier, emphasizing their noble ancestry. Sources indicate, however, that *drang srong* is merely a corrupted form of the place name associated with his birthplace, which underwent continuous orthographic changes in the textual tradition, shifting from Gram so to Dram so to Drang po. In the invitation letter written in Gung thang in ca. 1533, he is called Chos rje Drang so pa (see Everding & Kah-thog, 2000, p. 273); the Fourth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin, Padma 'Phrin las (1641–1717), refers to him as Drang po sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po in his work written in 1680, see NAMTHAR, 1999, f. 641.

(*rigs*) will be Shākya,¹⁹ and he will be born in the lineage (*rgyud*)²⁰ of divine luminosity.²¹

The DANGPO interprets the birth year mentioned in the prophecy as the parents' birth years – a misinterpretation that can easily arise when reading the concise and cryptic phrasing of the original. It further supplements the prophecy with details of his ancestral lineage according to local custom.

The *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa* (LOGYU) intricately weaves together past, present, and future identities. The helper²² who carried stones for the stupa's construction during the time of Buddha Kāśyapa in Nepal vows to be reborn in the 8th century Tibet as Padma Gung btsan, a minister in the royal court. In turn, he is prophesied to be reborn in southern Tibet during the Age of Degeneration and journey to the Kathmandu Valley to renovate the stupa.

The exact period of 'Gos Padma gung btsan's life remains disputed, as sources offer conflicting accounts. The *Testament of sBa*²³ mentions another famous member of the 'Gos clan, 'Gos Khri byang yab lhag as Khri srong lde btsan's minister, not him. Based on textual evidence, Vitali suggests that Padma Gung btsan could be his grandson and

¹⁹ The term rendered here as "caste" (*rigs*, Skt. *gotra*) encompasses a range of meanings, including lineage, particularly as traced through patrilineal descent. Within Hyolmo culture, a distinction is traditionally made between *Lhasa gotra* and *Kashi gotra*, broadly correlating with individuals of Mongoloid or Indo-Aryan heritage, respectively. However, in the present context, *gotra* signifies affiliation with the lineage of Buddha Śākyamuni in a religious sense, extending beyond ethnic or hereditary classifications.

²⁰ The *Lineage of Divine Luminosity* ('*od gsal lha'i rgyud*) generally conveys the notion of divine descent. In Nyingma textual traditions, however, this expression frequently refers to the lineage of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'Od zer (1124–1192).

²¹ DANGPO, n. y. f. 4a. *ma 'ongs tha ma la na zhigs ral 'byung na/ chos blon Pema dgun mtshan gyi(s) sprul pa/ yab phag lo yum byi lo/ rus drang srong rigs ni shākya rigs 'od gsal lha'i rgyud la 'khrungs pas/*

²² *g.yog po*, male-servant.

²³ According to the *sBa bzhed*, after an inauspicious divination received by the king, the minister 'Gos Khri byang yab lhag convinced Zhang Ma zham khrom pa skyes to follow him in an act of self-sacrifice for the sake of the king. Ma zham khrom pa skyes was buried alive as a ransom, while the minister escaped leaving him there in seclusion (Pasang & Diemberger, 2000 p. 38, fn. 75). This is an important detail, because the servant in the *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa* decides to reborn as Padma Gung btsan, a minister protecting the Dharma, because he understands that one of the animals working on the construction, the donkey, is thinking to be reborn as an evil minister, Ma zham khrom pa, to destroy the work of King Khri srong lde btsan (LOGYU, 1983, p. 117). See more about the mGos clan (var. 'Gos). in Vitali, 2007a, p. 289; Hazod, 2015.

lived a bit later.²⁴ However, in later textual tradition Padma Gung btsan is included among the Buddhist ministers of Khri srong lde btsan, for instance by great historians like dPa' bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba (1504–1566) in his *Feast for the Wise*.²⁵ The descendants of the 'Gos clan played a significant role in the second dissemination of the Dharma, and made substantial contributions to the establishment of numerous temples, particularly in the sKyid grong region.

While some figures in the LOGYU belong to Gu ru Rin po che's twenty-five disciples, 'Gos Padma gung btsan—the key figure in the future legitimation of the Yol mo sprul sku lineage—is not among them. His significance may lie in his legendary role in eradicating the influence of heretical factions and advancing the propagation of Buddhist teachings at the Tibetan court, which establishes the trajectory for his 15th century reincarnation, who protected the Dharma during a time of foreign attacks in Tibet and further disseminated Gu ru Rin po che's teachings in the Himalayan borderlands.

2. Present birth

The brief biographies of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, found in various collections (CHN, CHW, TASHI, KUNSANG, KONGTRUL, DANGPO), consistently begin by asserting his status as the reincarnation of Padma Gung btsan, the 8th century Tibetan minister of religion.²⁶ This is typically followed by details concerning his birthplace and familial background, which align—at least to some extent—with Gu ru Rin po che's prophecy in the *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa* (LOGYU). This alignment reinforces the legitimacy of his lineage of rebirths as the reincarnations of Padma Gung btsan and underscores his authenticity as a treasure revealer prophesied by Gu ru Rin po che, who appears in the Age of Decline to reconstruct the stupa. Phyag rdor nor bu (CHN), our 17th century author says:

In accordance with the prophecy, he was born in La stod lHo²⁷ district, in Grang so dzong, into the family of district chiefs—a lineage of devout Tantric practitioners. Because of his past aspirations and virtuous imprints, he received numerous

²⁴ Vitali, 2007b.

²⁵ dPa bo gTsug lag 'phreng ba: GATON, 1986, f. 303.

²⁶ TASHI, 1990, p. 529. *Chos blon chen po 'gos padma gung btsan gyi skye ba yol mo sprul sku sngags 'chang shaakya bzang po ni*/ KUNZANG, 1976 f. 259.: *sngags 'chang shākya bzang po ni/ mnga' bdag chos blon padma gung btsan gyi skye ba yin*/ KONGTRUL, 2008, f. 575. is identical with TASHI, 1990.

²⁷ Shel dkar was the capital of Southern La stod, a region situated directly to the east of Mang yul Gung thang.

blessings of ripening and liberation²⁸ from an early age from esteemed masters of the Sa skya, dKar brgyud, and rNying ma traditions.²⁹

sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's birthplace, Grang so is located approximately halfway between Shel dkar and Sa skya. While all textual sources consistently place his birthplace in the La stod lHo district, TASHI and KONGTRUL refer to it as Grom pa rdzong. This variation might be attributed to a broader regional designation mentioned by Sørensen and Hazod (2005, p. 50, fn. 51), that "Grom pa (occasionally also [']Brom pa) refers to a larger area which included lHa rtse and also the district of Sa skya situated to the south-west."

3. Visit in bSam yas and discovering the Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa

sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's birth and education is followed in all his short biographies by his greatest revelation in bSam yas, the discovery of the treasure called *The Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa*. Phyag rdor nor bu 's description (CHN) of this event is copied verbatim by Guru bKra shis (TASHI) and other later authors (KONGTRUL, KUNZANG):

Once, when he [sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po] visited bSam yas, the dākinī gave him a prophecy: "In the Water-Monkey [Year], on the 18th day of the Sheep month,³⁰ from the red stupa you will reveal the scroll of the *Inventory of the Bya rung kha shor stupa, the prophecy of its renovation*."³¹ This prophecy also said, that "Earlier, lHa btsun sngon mo³² revealed it from the back of

²⁸ *Smin grol*: ripening and liberation refers here to empowerments and oral instructions.

²⁹ CHN, 2015, ff. 494-495.: *lung bstan ltar/ la stod lho grang so rdzong du/ sde dpon chos ldan sngags kyi nyams len can gyi brgyud du 'khrungs/ sngon gyi smon lam dang dge legs kyi bag chags sad pas/ sku gzhon nu nyid nas sa dkar rnying gsum gyi yongs 'dzin du ma las smin grol gyi bka' drin mang du nod pa'i skabs shig/*

³⁰ In KUNZANG, 1976 the date is written with numbers under the line as if it was previously forgotten by the scribe and inserted later, in TASHI, 1990 *tshes bco brgyad la* is part of the text.

³¹ *Bya rung kha shor gyi dkar chag zhig gsos lung bstan gyi shog dril*. According to tradition, this treasure text was originally a scroll bearing a symbol rather than a conventional written text. Consequently, its designation as a textual title may not be entirely appropriate. The name of the scroll denotes a single text, yet the long title has perplexed scholars, and some have interpreted it as referring to two separate works.

³² According to the colophon of the LOGYU, 1983, lHa dbang rgya mtsho'i blo gros is her full name.

the Vairocana statue, but later received a prophecy to put the original manuscript back. She hid a copy of the manuscript³³ in the red stupa, and this treasure master [sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po] will reveal it from there."³⁴

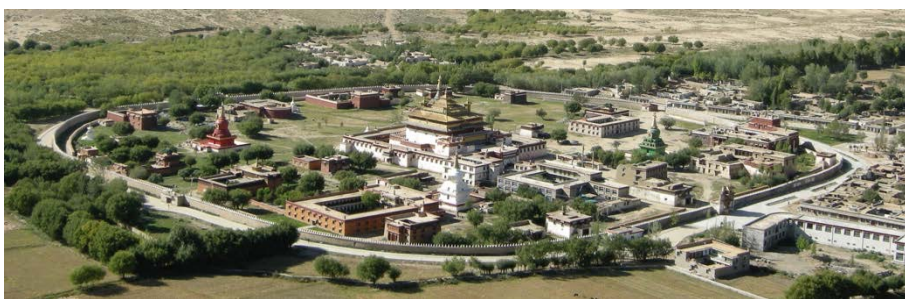


Fig. 1. — *bSam yas Monastery with the red stupa from He po Hill. Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2010.*

This is not more than a short summary of the three colophons of the LOGYU,³⁵ among which the first one mentions that Gu ru Rin po che's prophecy was written down by Ye shes mTsho rgyal with *dākinī* script and concealed behind the Mahāvairocana statue on the upper floor of bSam yas. This general colophon is followed by the first discoverer, lHa btsun sngon mo's epilogue, adding that the original treasure was a mystic formula which she copied on a yellow parchment with the ancient script and concealed it on the southwest side of the red stupa's lion throne.³⁶ The second revealer, sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's colophon says that the location of the treasure appeared to him in a

³³ *Bu yig* meaning copy (son-text) as opposed to *ma yig* which is the original manuscript (mother-text).

³⁴ CHN, 2015, f. 529. and TASHI, 1990, p. 529.: *mkha' 'gros lung bstan byung nas/ chu sprel lug zla'i tshes bco brgyad la mchod rten dmar po nas Bya rung kha shor gyi dkar chag zhig gsos lung bstan gyi shog dril gter nas bzhes/ lung bstan 'di sngar lha btsun sngon mos rnam snang sku rgyab nas bzhes pas/ slar lung bstan byung nas ma yig gter shul du bzhaḡ/ bu yig mchod rten dmar por sbas pa/ gter ston 'dis bzhes zhes 'byung/ KONGTRUL, 2008 seems to borrow the story from TASHI, 1990, and so does KUNZANG, 1976, but the latter only takes the first half and doesn't mention the first discovery and rediscovery.*

³⁵ LOGYU, 1983 ff. 154-155.: *bdag gter ston lha btsun sngon mos* (insert: *lha dbang rgya mtsho blo gros*) / *rnam snang chen po'i sku rgyab nas gter nas gdan drangs pa las/ u rgyan rin po ches/ lo rgyus 'di bu yig tu bris la/ gter gnas su slar spos zhes lung bstan byung pa ltar/ shog ser sngar shul du bzhaḡ/ bu yig* (insert: *bsam yas*) *mchod rten dmar po'i seng khri'i/ lho nub mtshams su slar yang gter du sbas te/ ma 'ongs 'di la dbang ba'i las 'phro can dang 'ohrad par shog cig/ ces smon lam btab bo/*

³⁶ According to Dowman, 2004, p. 15, "...the southwest side of the lion throne means that the text bestows liberation on Zangdok Palri, the Copper-Coloured Mountain, the pure Buddhaland of Guru Padmasambhava."

dream and he discovered it on the 18th day of the month of the Sheep, in the Water Male Monkey Year.³⁷

TASHI, KUNSANG and KONGTRUL suggest that this dream revelation happened during his visit to bSam yas, while the text written in Helambu (DANGPO) gives the narrative a local spin:

Shākya bzang po was staying at Lake Drang song,³⁸ abiding in undistracted samādhi, when the dākinī gave him a prophecy: "It is time to renovate the stūpa of Nepal; and as it is prophesised in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, in the Hidden Land of Yol mo Snow Enclosure, where the sky looks like the wheel of existence, and the earth like an eight-petalled lotus, you, sNgags 'chang, must raise a temple on the top of a mountain that looks suitable." Thus was the prophecy.³⁹

Scholarly discourse on the chronological details of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's life has been marked by considerable debate. However, the growing availability of texts from his contemporaries in recent years has provided definitive evidence that he lived during the late 15th and early 16th centuries. This evidence confirms that the Water-Monkey Year corresponds to 1512. An examination of the birth year mentioned in the prophecy reveals that 1480 corresponds to the Year of the Iron Rat, while 1479 with the Year of the Earth Pig. Consequently, both years fulfill the conditions outlined in the prophecy recorded in the *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa*. In the same text, Gu ru Rin po che prophesies that if the future reincarnation remains steadfast in his vows, he will restore the stupa at the age of twenty-five. Should this restoration be postponed, it should be completed before he reaches the age of thirty-three. However, if the work is delayed beyond this point, dire consequences will follow: foreign invasion, famine and epidemics. An army from the northeast will launch an attack, while another army will invade from the south, ultimately conquering mNga' ris. Temples will be destroyed, sacred

³⁷ LOGYU, 1983, ff. 154-155.

³⁸ The same lake is mentioned by the Fourth Yol mo sprul sku Zil gnon dbang rgyal (1647–1716) as Drang so'i mtsho mo, while he recounts a local legend in his outer biography regarding sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's birthplace. ZILNON, 1977, ff. 15-16.

³⁹ DANGPO, n. y., f. 4a.: *Shākya bzang po zhes bya ba drang song mtsho 'khor bzhugs nas sgom ting nge 'dzin la ma yengs par bzhugs pa/ mkha' 'gro'i lung bstan la/ bal yul mcod rten zhiḡ ḡsol ra na 'dug/ mdo phal po ches nas lung sten (lung bstan) pa/ sbas yul yol mo gangs rang (gangs ra) zhes bya ba/ gnam srid pa'i 'khor lo sa padma 'dab brgyad/ ris ni rtsen gyi rung ba 'dra steng du sngags 'chang 'khyod kyi dgon pa tshug/ lungs sten (lung bstan) 'byung ba dang/*

images desecrated, monks and lamas killed. The inhabitants of devastated villages will flee to Sikkim, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and the hidden valleys of the Himalayas. Conversely, should the stupa be restored in accordance with the prophecy, the outcome will be auspicious. The entire world (Jambudvīpa) will experience bountiful harvest for twenty-five years. India, Nepal and Sikkim will have abundant harvest for thirty-three years. Tibet will remain free from military incursions for sixty years and the Dharma will flourish.⁴⁰

4. *Treasure revelation at the dikes of Lhasa*

sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's main treasure discovery in bSam yas is followed in all his short biographies (CHN, TASHI, KUNSANG, KONGTRUL) with a short mention of another treasure revelation.

During the renovation of the dikes of Lhasa, he received a prophecy to reveal some of the cycles of *The Great Compassionate One, the King's Hundred-thousand Instructions*.⁴¹

The dikes of Lhasa constitute a fortified embankment⁴² along the sKyid chu River, a northern tributary of the Yar klungs gTsang po, which traverses the Lhasa region. Subject to seasonal flooding caused by summer rains, the embankment has been periodically reinforced over the centuries to mitigate flood risks.⁴³ Following the discovery and dissemination of various cycles of the *Mani bKa' 'bum*, the renovation of the dikes of Lhasa came to be regarded as a form of devotional participation in the worship of Avalokiteśvara and his royal incarnation, King Srong btsan sGam po. These efforts were primarily aimed at safeguarding the holiest temple in Lhasa, the gTsug lag

⁴⁰ LOGYU, 1983, f. 147.

⁴¹ CHN, 2015, f. 495.; TASHI, 1990, f. 529.: *de nas lha sa'i chu rags kyi zhig gso mdzad pas/ lung bstan byung nas/ thugs rje chen po rgyal po bka' 'bum gyi chos skor 'ga' zhig gter nas bzhes/ KUNZANG, 1976, uses the shorter name of the treasure, rGyal po bka' 'bum gyi chos skor. See Kapstein, 1993, "Remarks on the Mani bka' 'bum and the Cult of Avalokitesvara in Tibet," on the revelation history of the different cycles of the Mani bka' 'bum.*

⁴² *Chu rags*: dike, embankment, dam.

⁴³ Akester, 2001, "The 'Vajra Temple' of gTer ston Zhig po gling pa and the Politics of Flood Control in 16th century Lhasa," is an interesting article about Zhig po gling pa's (1524–1583) foundation of the Vajra Temple in Lhasa to counteract the threat of floods after discovering two scrolls in a stupa at bSam yas in 1556. One of them was a Guru Padmasambhava prophetic instruction to protect the lHa sa gtsug lag khang against floods. Akester, 2001, p. 5, says: "It should be noted that the destruction of the Lhasa gtsug lag khang by apocalyptic floods appears quite consistently as a motif for political strife and unrest in Tibetan literature later than the *Mani bka' 'bum*."

khang, from apocalyptic floods foretold in prophetic literature. Among the most renowned figures associated with such flood control efforts were Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1136–1204) and Bla ma Zhang brTson 'grus grags pa (1124–1194). Their successors upheld this legacy by maintaining the protection and development of the great temple.⁴⁴

According to the tradition, King Srong btsan sGam po (reign 614–648) taught the *Great Compassionate One's cycles* to some fortunate disciples, and Gu ru Rin po che later imparted teachings concerning this hidden treasure to King Khri srong lde btsan (8th century). Portions of these teachings were revealed by Grub thob dNgos grub who is regarded as the principal discoverer of these treasures. As Kapstein notes (1992, p. 82), this accomplished yogin transmitted the treasure teachings to the lord of Nyang, Nyang ral Nyi ma 'Od zer, (1124/1136–1204), who went on to reveal additional cycles. A third treasure revealer, identified as Shākya 'od or Shākya bzang po from dBu ru,⁴⁵ later uncovered further teachings from the Yakṣa shrine.⁴⁶ These included *The Sutra Cycle* (*mDo skor*) and the teachings on the *Discovery of Secret* (*Gab pa mngon phyung gi skor*). According to the tradition, Shākya bzang po was a disciple of La stod pa Mi skyod rdo rje who lived in the 12–13th century.⁴⁷ The preamble of the *Maṇi bKa' 'bum* states that among the treasures revealed by gTer ston Shākya bzang po at the Yakṣa shrine was a specific prophecy concerning river embankments. These teachings were subsequently transmitted to lHa rje dGe ba 'bum (1200–1250),⁴⁸ who is listed as one of the sixty-six Avalokiteśvara incarnations in the *Silken Dress Supplement* composed by Sangs rgyas rGya mtsho (1653–1705), the regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁴⁹

It is also noteworthy that Phyag rdor nor bu (CHN) refers to the treasure in the quote above as *The Great Compassionate One, the King's Hundred-thousand Instructions* (*Thugs rje chen po rgyal po bka' 'bum*). Some 19th-century texts like KUNSANG shortens the name of the treasure to *rGyal po bka' 'bum gyi chos skor*, while KONGTRUL further clarifies that the title refers to works attributed to King Srong btsan sGam po. Significantly, none of these authors employ the widely recognised title *Maṇi bKa' 'bum* in reference to this collection.

⁴⁴ Akester, 2001, p. 6.

⁴⁵ dBu ru is one of the two regions of Central Tibet (dBus).

⁴⁶ A shrine inside the lHa sa gTsug lag khang.

⁴⁷ See Ehrhard, 2014, pp. 144, 147, n. 8; Martin, 2020, p. 50, n. 13; Kapstein, 1993, p. 82.

⁴⁸ Akester, 2001, p. 13.

⁴⁹ *Du kū la'i god bzang*. It is a biography of the 5th Dalai Lama completed in 1696. Kellner, 2016, "Genealogy into the Future: Glimpses from Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653–1705) Exposition of the Extended Dalai Lama Lineage," p. 219.

According to Hirschberg, none of the cycles attributed to dNgos grub or Nyang ral utilize the term *Maṇi bKa' 'bum*, nor does it appear in Nyang ral's biographies. Rather, these cycles are referred to by the title *Thugs rje chen po* ("The Great Compassionate One"). The title *Maṇi bKa' 'bum* seems to appear first in the treasures and biographies of Gu ru Chos dbang (1212–1270), who may have been the one to coin the term.⁵⁰

During the time of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po (early 16th century), the city of Lhasa had emerged as a strategic focal point in the ongoing power struggles among domestic rivals. Competing religious schools allied with different sides were eager to expand their influence and promote their claims over cultural and religious heritage.

Upon examining the passage above in the brief biographies of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, one's initial reaction is to suspect that, due to the similarity of names, the event in question was mistakenly attributed to him by his original biographer and was copied by later authors. However, it remains possible that sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po played a role in the promotion of this work and the teachings and prophecies which developed from it during the centuries. The first printed edition of the *Maṇi bKa' 'bum* in 1521 was sponsored by the king of Gung thang,⁵¹ while sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po was the preceptor of his son, the prince, Kun bzang Nyi zla grags pa (1514–1560), who ruled between 1529–1536,⁵² and sponsored the printing of the *Chronicles of Padma* (*Padma bka' thang*) in 1535.

Regardless of the accuracy of the attribution, Phyang rdor nor bu, Guru bKra shis and his followers credited sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po with the revelation of various cycles of the *Maṇi bKa' 'bum*, and as it is evidenced by other events in his life, he played a significant role in the propagation of the Avalokiteśvara cult.

5. Renovation of the Bya rung kha shor stupa in Nepal

According to Nepali tradition, the construction of the original stupa of Bodhnāth—referred to as Khasau Chaitya by the Newar community and Bya rung kha shor by Tibetan and Himalayan peoples—is attributed to King Manadeva (r. 464–505 CE), a ruler of the Licchavi

⁵⁰ Hirschberg, 2012, *Delivering the Lotus-Born: Historiography in the Tibetan Renaissance*, p. 190.

⁵¹ See Ehrhard, 2004, p. 82; Clemente, 2016, p. 402: "The xylograph of this text printed in 1521 in the royal palace spread its narrative widely. Used as *editio princeps*, it was the basis for its re-print elsewhere in Gung thang as well as in other areas of Tibet and Bhutan. In the 17th century the 5th Dalai Lama also used the same edition to produce further copies of the *Maṇi bka' 'bum*..."

⁵² Everding & Kah-thog, 2000, p. 270.

dynasty. He was a prominent patron of both Buddhist and Hindu sacred sites, as evidenced by several stone inscriptions that have survived to the present day. From the 7th century onwards, however, the stupa fell into neglect and decay, and by the 14th century, Tibetan travelers who visited the site recorded that it had become little more than one of the many grassy mounds in the area. Thang stong rgyal po (1361/85–1464/85)—the renowned yogi, architect, builder of iron bridges (*lcags zam pa*), founder of the lCags zam pa tradition, and mind-emanation of Padmasambhava—is also said to have visited the Kathmandu Valley towards the end of the 14th century. His biography says that “he whitewashed Svayambhūnāth and carefully weeded Bodhnāth.”⁵³ According to an oral narrative I recorded in Helambu, when sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po arrived in the Kathmandu Valley to reconstruct the stupa in the early 16th century, the original structure was so obscured by time and vegetation that its exact location could no longer be determined. Striking the various mounds with his ritual dagger (*phur ba*), he decided to excavate the one from which water gushed forth.⁵⁴ In this way, the stupa—long buried beneath layers of earth—was found and unearthed. Based on the biography of Si tu Paṇ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas, Gu ru bKra shis likens the excavation of the stupa to a *gter ma* (treasure) revelation—a comparison that gradually solidified into an accepted historical fact in the works of later writers as well as in oral tradition.

Si tu Rin po che Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1700–1774)⁵⁵ says in his biography: “I have heard that what we call Bya rung kha shor is called Khasa⁵⁶ Caitya by the Nepalese. Khasa seems to be a corrupted form of the word 'kata'. This is why it is called 'dug-up' stupa.”⁵⁷ It appears from the story that Yol mo pa Shākya bzang po unearthed the stupa from its concealed location by excavating a large mound of earth, which can be interpreted as

⁵³ Stearns, 2007, p. 133.

⁵⁴ The spring “unearthed” by sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po is on the northeast of the stupa.

⁵⁵ The 8th Si tu Paṇ chen was not only an influential incarnation, but also a famous painter, Sanskrit scholar and historian. He lived in Khams, but travelled a lot, and journeyed even to Ladakh once and Nepal twice. He translated the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* into Tibetan (see Gelle, 2022).

⁵⁶ Si tu Paṇ chen writes *kha sa caitya* (SITU, 1968, f. 267), which is misspelled in this version as *kha pa*. In this edition of Gu ru bKra shis' text, there are several instances where the Tibetan syllable *sa* appears to have been misread by the copyist or woodblock carver as *pa*. This may account for the occurrence of 'Drang po' in some texts in place of 'Drang so,' the birthplace of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po.

⁵⁷ *bkros pa'i mchod rten*.

the discovery of a previously hidden treasure by this esteemed treasure-master.⁵⁸

This motif—the excavation of the stupa as a form of treasure discovery—is absent from earlier sources (CHN, CHW), indicating that it likely originated with Si tu Rin po che's biography and Gu ru bKra shis's interpretation. Although none of these Tibetan sources mention the discovery of artifacts dating to the reign of King Manadeva, they consistently refer to the presence of bone relics attributed to 'Od zer go cha also known as Aṃśuvarman (r. ca. 605–621 AD), a prominent ruler of Nepal.

From the central pillar⁵⁹ of this stupa, he [sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po] pulled out the relics of the Nepalese king 'Od zer go cha⁶⁰, and distributed them for the benefit of all sentient beings.⁶¹

According to a later Tibetan tradition, Srong btsan sGam po (610/620–649) married Aṃśuvarman's daughter. The extraction of this king's bone relics, alongside popular narratives of his sending his daughter to Tibet to marry the king and propagate the Dharma, parallels the legend of Bya rung kha shor stupa. It underscores Nepal's role in the Buddhist conversion of Tibet, while affirming its enduring bond with the illustrious Tibetan empire and the 16th-century reincarnation of its minister, who has returned to reconstruct the stupa.⁶²

⁵⁸ TASHI, 1990 p. 530: *dus phyis si tu rin po che chos kyi 'byung gnas kyi rnam thar du/ nged rang tshos bya rung kga shor zer ba 'di la/ bal po rnams kyi kha pa tsai tya zer/ kha pa zhes kha ta zur chag yin 'dra bas/ bskos pa'i [brkos pa'i] mchod rten zer rgyu yin 'dra ste/ yol mo ba shaakya bzang pos de'u 'bur zhig brkos nas mchod rten de gter nas drangs pa yin pas yin nam zhes gsungs snang bas/ de lta na mchod rten 'di sngar mi mngon pa la gter chen 'dis gsal bar byas pa yin pa 'dra'o/* KONGTRUL, 2008 reiterates Gu ru bKra shis's account of the stupa's discovery, and similarly draws a parallel with the revelation of a *gter ma*, while KUNZANG, 1976 merely notes that Shākya bzang po renovated the stupa.

⁵⁹ *Srog shing*, life-tree, or *yaṣṭi* in Sanskrit, the axis of the stupa, the central pillar, which is also the holder of the umbrella (*chatra*, *rin chen gdugs*), the top part of the stupa.

⁶⁰ *gDung*, "bodily remains," "bones."

⁶¹ CHN, 2015, f. 495, TASHI, 1990, p. 530: *mchod rten gyi srog shing las/ bal po'i rgyal po 'od zer go cha'i g'dung gter nas bzhes nas 'gro don la spel/*

⁶² According to the *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (Tucci ms. 59, 78) he married the daughter of the Nepali king, bDe ba lha. Although it sounds like a peculiar name, it could be the Tibetan transcription of the name Devaladeva, a king mentioned in the *Gopāla-vaṃśāvalī*, who ruled during this period (Peteck, 1988, p. 158).

[sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po] renovated the [Bya rung Kha shor] stupa according to the prophecy found in the *Inventory*,⁶³ and in response to his prayers met the great vidyādhara Padma gling pa; Kong po dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa; 'Bri gung Kun dga' rin chen; and other eminent masters and received their blessings. Thanks to these connections, the great stupa renovation proceeded as predicted without difficulty, and the complete renovation of the Bya rung kha shor stupa was accomplished without any hindrance.⁶⁴

This passage again referring to the prophecy of the *Inventory* (LOGYU), where the main actors make a promise to help the reincarnation of 'Gos Padma gung btsan to restore the stupa in the future, and Gu ru Rin po che prophesizes that with the help and blessing of his own incarnation, Padma gling pa (1450–1521);⁶⁵ the abbot Sāntarakṣita's incarnation, 'Bri gung Kun dga' rin chen (1475–1527); and King Khri strong lde btsan's incarnation, dKar po Kun grags (15th/16th c.),⁶⁶ the renovation will be accomplished.⁶⁷

dKar po Kun dga' grags pa, a rNying ma master active in the early 16th century, undertook the renovation of bSam yas Monastery in 1512.⁶⁸ He commissioned the creation of a monumental statue of Padmasambhava there, which was consecrated in 1528. This statue was specifically designed to avert foreign armies from attacking Tibet (*dmag zlog*). Following dKar po Kun dga' grags pa's passing, his relics were enshrined within the statue itself, leading to its veneration as his inner support (*nang rten*).⁶⁹

According to the biography of the Bhutanese treasure master Padma gling pa (1450–1521), he met dKar po Kun dga' grags pa in

⁶³ The abbreviated title of the treasure text is *dkar chag*, which translates to “register” or “inventory.” Despite this variation in title, the text appears to be identical to *mChod rten chen po Bya rung kha shor gyi lo rgyus thos pas grol ba*.

⁶⁴ CHN, 2015, f. 495, TASHI, 1990, p. 529: *mchod rten chen po'i zhiig gso ni/ dkar chag gi lung bstan ltar/ rig 'dzin chen po Pema gling pa/ kong po dkar chen kun dga' grags pa/ 'bri gung kun dga' rin chen sogs/ smon lam dang 'brel ba'i dam pa rnam dang mjal zhiing byin gyis brlabs/ de dag gi rten 'brel las mchod rten chen po'i zhiig gso lung bstan dang mthun par dka' tshegs med par Bya rung kha shor gyi zhiig gso thams cad gegs med mthar phyin du 'grub/*

⁶⁵ SRC: P557, a chronology of his life in Aris, 1988, pp. 216–221; BDR: P1693, among his disciples was rGod tshang pa sNa tshogs rang grol and Rig 'dzin mChog ldan mgon po as well.

⁶⁶ Short form for Kong po dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa.

⁶⁷ KUNZANG, 1976 and KONGTRUL, 2008 only say that he met these masters according to the prophecy of the *Inventory*.

⁶⁸ See Ehrhard, 2008, p. 68, n. 7 and Ehrhard 2015, p. 147, n. 11. He also renovated the Khra 'brug temple in 1520–1521. See Sørensen & Hazod, 2005, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Ehrhard, 2007, p. 84; Ehrhard, 2015, p. 159, n. 23.

1505, by which time the latter was already widely acclaimed for his reconstruction endeavours and his magical powers (*mthu*).⁷⁰ Following this encounter, dKar po Kun dga' grags pa became Padma gling pa's foremost disciple and one of his staunchest supporters. It is thus unsurprising that, in 1513, Padma gling pa consecrated the newly reconstructed temple at bSam yas and revealed two important treasures there: the *Man ngag gi skor* and the *Drag po mthing ka zhal gcig phyag gnyis*.⁷¹ sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po is listed as one of Padma gling pa's many disciples, and it is reasonable to assume that he had already been integrated into the inner circle of Padma gling pa and dKar po Kun dga' grags pa at the time of his own treasure discovery at bSam yas in 1512.



Fig. 2. — Ritual reconsecration of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa following restoration efforts in the aftermath of the 2015 Gorkha earthquake. Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2016.

Further support for this assumption is provided by an additional reference to dKar po Kun dga' grags pa's involvement in the consecration of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa. This mention appears in the writings of Gu ru bKra shis and Brag dkar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775–1835), but it is absent from the earliest short biography of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po written by Phyag rdor nor bu, as well as from other subsequent works:

⁷⁰ Aris, 1988, p. 80.

⁷¹ Aris, 1988, p. 220.

At that time, dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa was residing in Dvags po⁷² (Tibet) and he arranged for the consecration to be held on the 15th day of the Tiger month. When he did come to Nepal and was seen scattering flowers all around the stupa, Tibetans and Nepalis alike were in awe of the miracle.⁷³

Brag dkar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyug appears to give even greater significance to Kun dga' grags pa, stating that he instructed sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po to renovate the stupa and retrieve the relics of 'Od zer Go cha.⁷⁴

'Bri gung Kun dga' rin chen (1475–1527), the third major teacher mentioned in the prophecy and later quoted by Phyag rdor nor bu and other authors, was recognised as the reincarnation of 'Jig rten gsum mgon (1143–1217)⁷⁵ by one of his teachers, the 7th Karma pa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454–1506). He received full monastic ordination at the age of twenty and was enthroned as the throne-holder of 'Bri gung mthil Monastery in 1484, becoming the 16th 'Bri gung abbot ('Bri gung gdan rabs). To revitalise spiritual practice, he conferred numerous teachings, including the six yogas of Nāropā, and actively encouraged his disciples to engage in long-term meditation retreats. Many were sent on retreat to sacred sites such as Mount Kailash, Tsari, and Lapchi.

'Bri gung Kun dga' rin chen also commissioned the construction of fifty retreat houses in the vicinity of 'Bri gung mthil Monastery and oversaw the reproduction of both collections of the Buddhist Canon meticulously copied on indigo paper with gold and silver lettering. Over the course of a forty-five-year teaching tour, he bestowed empowerments and transmissions throughout Tibet. He established the Phyi dbang monastery in Ladakh.⁷⁶ In his late forties, he initiated

⁷² mChog ldan mngon po's biography confirms that Kun dga' grags pa established his seat in Dvags po (Ehrhard, 2008, p. 70).

⁷³ TASHI, 1990 pp. 529-530: *de skabs dkar chen kun dga' grags pa dvags po na bzhugs pa nas stag zla'i bco lnga la rab gnas mdzad rgya'i dus tshes bsgrigs pas bal yul du mchod rten gyi tho skor thams cad du me tog 'thor bar dngos su phebs pas bal bod kun gyis ya mtshan du 'dzin pa byung/*

⁷⁴ DTChW DTChW, 2011, ff. 632-633: dKar po Kun dga' grags pa gave a prophecy: "Renovate the Bya rung kha shor stupa in Nepal! Take out the bone relic of 'Od zer Go cha from the life tree [of the stupa] and distribute it for the benefit of beings!" Because dKar po Kun dga' grags pa was to perform the consecration in Dvags po (Tibet), [everyone was] amazed, when he arrived in Nepal at the Bya rung kha shor stupa on the 15th day of the Tiger month.

⁷⁵ Founder of the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud school, a disciple of Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po.

⁷⁶ sGang sngon bkra shis chos rdzong is the full name of the monastery, from which *sgang sngon* ("blue hill") refers to the mountain rising behind the monastery.

the construction of a six-story *bkra shis sgo mang* stupa,⁷⁷ which enshrined 3200 statues of lamas, buddhas, bodhisattvas, and protective deities.⁷⁸ Further examination of the textual sources may illuminate the nature of 'Bri gung Kun dga' rin chen's interaction with sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po and the extent to which he influenced the construction of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa.

6. The transmission of the teachings

[sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po] paid homage to numerous eminent masters, including the wrathful mantra-holder, Rig 'dzin Nam mkha' dpal ldan; the lord of the teaching and heart-son Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541); Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa; rLung ston pa⁷⁹ O rgyan dpal bzang, and others. He received nearly the entirety of the tantra [teachings]; both *bka' ma* and *gter ma* precepts; along with empowerments, instructions and *upadeśas*, whose lineages remain intact to this day. He diligently practiced the teachings, applied and realised their essence. By transmitting them fully without reservation to his qualified disciples, they became like a life-pillar⁸⁰ of tantra, *bka' ma* and *gter ma*.⁸¹

The first of the four masters mentioned in these short biographies is Rig 'dzin Nam mkha' dpal ldan.⁸² He was one of the teachers of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po and is often mentioned as a central figure of the transmission of a Yamāntaka cycle revealed by rGya Zhang khrom (b. 1016),⁸³ the *Mañjuśrī Master of Life* ('Jam dpal tshe bdag), which plays a significant role in Byang gter practice. In his study

⁷⁷ A *bkra shis sgo mang* style stupa features multiple levels, each adorned with numerous shrines containing murals and statues. The most renowned example of this style is the Gyantse Kumbum.

⁷⁸ Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen, 1986, pp. 104–110.

⁷⁹ CHN, 2015: rLung ston pa, TASHI, 1990: rLang ston pa.

⁸⁰ *Srog shing*: life-tree, vital force, axis.

⁸¹ CHN, 2015, ff. 495–496, TASHI, 1990, p. 530: *gzhan yang drag sngags grub pa'i rig 'dzin klong chen nam mkha' dpal ldan dang/ bstan pa'i mnga' bdag thugs sras nam mkha' rgyal mtshan/ rig 'dzin sangs rgyas bstan pa/ rlang ston pa O rgyan dpal bzang sogs skyes bu mang po'i zhabs la gtugs nas/ gsang sngags bka' gter gyi chos tshul dbang khrid man ngag gi rgyun bzhugs pa phal cher gsan de dag gi bsnyen sgrub las sbyor rnams ji lta ba thugs nyams su bzhes shing/ slar snod ldan rnams la dpe mkhyud med par bstsal pas gsang sngags bka' gter gyi srog shing lta bur gyur/*

⁸² BDRC: P5596, Valentine, 2018, "The Great Perfection in the Early Biographies of the Northern Treasure Tradition: An Introduction to and Translation of The Life of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan," p. 127, also mentions a certain bLa ma Nam mkha' dpal ldan from Dang ra ba, who was a disciple of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.

⁸³ Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991, Vol. 2. p. 65, n. 908.

of *Mañjuśrī Master of Life*, Stéphane Arguillère mentions that he passed on these teachings to mNga' ris Pan chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1544), who transmitted them to his brother, Legs ldan rdo rje (ca. 1512–1580).⁸⁴ Although sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po is not explicitly mentioned in the transmission lineage, he likely received these teachings from Rig 'dzin Nam mkha' dpal ldan. sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po is renowned for being a Yamāntaka practitioner and an expert in wrathful magic and ritual warfare, which he employed to repel the Hor army attacking Tibet.⁸⁵

Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541) is recorded as having given teachings to sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po and bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1536), and since both figures were already esteemed masters in their own right at the time, they also in return transmitted teachings to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan. sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, for example, bequeathed to him the treasure teachings of Padma gling pa, the *rDzogs chen kun bzang dgongs pa kun 'dus*; and the treasure teaching of Byang chub gling pa (14th c.), the *rDzogs chen kun bzang thugs gter*.⁸⁶ Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan received from bsTan gnyis gling pa Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *dGongs pa zang thal*, and his own treasure teachings, the *rDzogs chen phung po zag med* and the *Phag mo zab rgya*.⁸⁷ This latter treasure was revealed by bsTan gnyis gling pa at Ri bo dPal 'bar, which suggests that he must have visited Nam mkha' rGyal mtshan again after 1534, the date of that revelation. sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po was one of the three individuals who signed the invitation letter sent to bsTan gnyis gling pa.⁸⁸ At that time, he was residing in Mang yul Gung thang, where he served as one of the principal lamas and the preceptor to the king. The main instigator of inviting bsTan gnyis gling pa to Mang yul was the king's father-in-law bSam grub rdo rje, who was a long time disciple of bsTan gnyis gling pa and knew about his successful *hor bzlog* ritual in bSam yas⁸⁹ and his visionary dreams and magical powers. The main motivation of the invitation was to protect Gung thang from foreign invasion, as there were several Hor attacks in Gung thang in the 1520s and 30s. The third person, who signed the invitation was mDo bo che Che mchog rdo rje, who was given the management of Byams sprin lha khang by the king in 1529, and who—

⁸⁴ Arguillère, 2024, p. 379, fn. 187, 188. The source is the 5th Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*. See also Esler, 2022, p. 197, who quotes the *dBang chog mu tig phreng ba*, an empowerment rite used to initiate disciples into the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag cycle.

⁸⁵ CHN, 2015, f. 497; TASHI, 1990, p. 531.

⁸⁶ Valentine, 2018, p. 108. This was discovered later as *nye brgyud* by 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892).

⁸⁷ *rDo rje phag mo'i zab khrid* in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.

⁸⁸ Everding & Kah-thog, 2000, p. 193.

⁸⁹ Partly sponsored by the previous Gung thang king.

as a devoted disciple—accompanied bsTan gnyis gling pa to Ri bo dPal 'bar for the treasure revelation.⁹⁰

Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa is identified in the BDRC database as sNyags phu ba Sangs rgyas bstan pa, and an examination of the master-disciple lineage reveals that this master transmitted Byang gter teachings to sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po that were directly passed down from the founder of the lineage, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.⁹¹ sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po also received transmissions from Sangs rgyas bstan pa's teacher, Chos rgyal bsod nams and his son, bSod nams bkra shis who both stayed in retreat for forty-two years on Mt. bKra bzang.⁹²

Two important disciples of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po were the famous brothers from gLo bo—mNga' ris Pan chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1543)⁹³ and his younger brother, Legs ldan rdo rje (ca. 1512–1580).⁹⁴ He also transmitted teachings to their father, 'Jam dbyangs Rin chen rgyal mtshan (1445–1558). Despite the frequent references in mNga' ris Pan chen Padma dbang rgyal's biography to encounters and teachings received from sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, neither he nor his younger brother is mentioned in the short biographies (CHN, CHW, TASHI, KUNSANG, KONGTRUL).

The fourth teacher mentioned in the short biographies of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po was rLung ston pa O rgyan dPal bzang,⁹⁵ a master of another significant *gter ma* teaching, the *Kun bzang thugs*

⁹⁰ Extensive research on the history of Mang yul Gung thang has been conducted by Karl-Heinz Everding. For the summary of the treasure revelation story see Everding, 2004, p. 275, and the translation of the same event narrated in Nyi ma Seng ge's biography see Gelle, 2020. This latter story says that after Che mchog rdo rje died, he was reborn according to his aspirations as bsTan gnyis gling pa's son. This is how Byams sprin becomes the main temple of bsTan gnyis gling pa's descendants, and the 5th descendant, Nyi ma Seng ge founds Tarkeghyang village in 1723 in Yol mo. The 5th Yol mo sprul sku (sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's 5th incarnation) is the son of bsTan gnyis gling pa's 5th descendant.

⁹¹ Rig 'dzin rGod ldem > rDo rje mgon po > Rig 'dzin Nam mkha' grags pa > sPrul sku 'Jam dpal 'od zer > sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams > sNyags phu ba Sangs rgyas bstan pa > sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po.

⁹² They were originally from gLo bo. See more details in Valentine, 2020.

⁹³ His next incarnation was bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603), a disciple of Legs ldan rdo rje. bKra shis stobs rgyal's son was Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), who was recognised as the reincarnation of Legs ldan rdo rje. Ngag gi dbang po's reincarnation was Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), the biographer of mNga' ris Pan chen Padma dbang rgyal.

⁹⁴ Dudjom Rinpoche, 1991, p. 806. Many date his birth to 1452 and his death to 1565 in which case he would have lived 113 years. Kong po Kun dga' grags pa recognizes him as the speech emanation of sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms (8th c.) See more in Valentine, 2013, p. 148.

⁹⁵ BDR: P5599. Since in *Kong sprul gsan yig*, vol. 1, f. 358r, his name starts with *sras*, it is possible that he was the son of Rin chen bsam 'grub.

gter⁹⁶ of Byang chub gling pa dPal gyi rgyal mtshan (14th c.). This teaching was passed down by rLung ston pa to sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, who in turn transmitted it to Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, as mentioned earlier. rLung ston pa O rgyan dPal bzang was a treasure master affiliated with the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud lineage and was responsible for founding several 'Bri gung monasteries in the Khams region.



Fig. 3. — sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's statue in Tsuṭi, Nepal. Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2011.

The following passage in Phyag rdor nor bu 's work (CHN) offers a bit of insight into the character of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po:

He turned the unruly beings of the degenerate age into disciples capable of vigorous action ⁹⁷ and performed powerful subjugation rites. He wore a robe and hat of a Tantrika.⁹⁸ His black felt robe was decorated with a pattern of red flames of fire. He was famous for having a dry human skull suspended from

⁹⁶ Byang chub gling pa dPal gyi rgyal mtshan > (son) bSam 'grub rdo rje > Rin chen bsam 'grub > rLung ston pa O rgyan dPal bzang > sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po > Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan.

⁹⁷ 'Phrin las drag po are wrathful Tantric practices, for instance subjugation of negative forces.

⁹⁸ A similar outfit is still worn today by Black Hat dancers during annual 'chams performances, in which they embody similar tantric magicians who subdue unruly demonic forces through terrifying and violent methods driven by ruthless compassion.

his hipbone, along with other accoutrements that contributed to his terrifying appearance.⁹⁹

7. Retreat and treasure revelation at Ri bo dPal 'bar

He greatly benefitted mNga' ris Gung thang through his enlightened activities. He remained in meditation at Ri bo dPal 'bar for an extended period. He revealed a treasure, [in the form of a] red copper¹⁰⁰ statue of Avalokiteśvara Who Overturns the Depths of Saṃsāra.¹⁰¹ He resided at the foot of dPal 'bar, near the hermitage known as dKar g.ye.¹⁰²

Ri bo dPal 'bar, the “Mountain of Brilliant Splendour”, rises in Mang yul, not far from sKyid grong. The estate at the foot of the mountain was granted to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem by the king of Gung thang, Khri rgyal mChog grub lde (1371–1404).¹⁰³ sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's treasure discovery mentioned by CHN and TASHI, the revelation of the statue of sPyang ras gzigs 'khor ba dong sprugs, is especially interesting given that his disciple Legs ldan rdo rje later became famous for revealing a *gter ma* bearing the same name.

When Rig 'dzin mChog ldan mgon po traveled to sKyid grong to pay homage to the Jo bo,¹⁰⁴ [sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po]

⁹⁹ CHN, 2015, f. 496; TASHI, 1990, p. 530: *gzhan yang drag sngags grub pa'i rig 'dzin klong chen nam mkha' dpal ldan dang/ bstan pa'i mnga' bdag thugs sras nam mkha' rgyal mtshan/ rig 'dzin sangs rgyas bstan pa/rlang ston pa o rgyan dpal bzang sogs skyes bu mang po'i zhabs la gtugs nas/ gsang sngags bka' gter gyi chos tshul dbang khrid man ngag gi rgyun bzhugs pa phal cher gsan de dag gi bsnyen sgrub las sbyor rnams ji lta ba thugs nyams su bzhes shing/ slar snod ldan rnams la dpe mkhyud med par bstsal pas gsang sngags bka' gter gyi srog shing lta bur gyur/ snyigs dus kyi skye bo rmu rgod rnams 'phrin las drag po'i gdul byar 'os par gzigs nas/ drag po mngon spyod kyi las sbyor kyang kha shas mdzad/ sku'i cha byad kyang dbu la srid pa skyi lugs kyi zhwa gsol/ sku la 'phying nag skud dmar gyi me ris can bzhes/ mi mgo skam po sta zur du dpyangs pa sogs 'jigs su rung bar mdzad ces grags.*

¹⁰⁰ The words *li dmar*, *zangs* and *zangs dmar* are generally used to describe copper. *Li dmar*, the “red li” is the same as *rang byung zangs*, “natural copper.” Lo Bue's excellent article (Lo Bue, 1991, p. 13) notes that “the vast majority of so-called Nepalese ‘bronzes’ are in fact fire-gilt copper images, made by Newar artists, for the use of almost pure copper in Newar statuary is very ancient.”

¹⁰¹ sPyang ras gzigs 'khor ba dong sprugs.

¹⁰² CHN, 2015, f. 496, TASHI, 1990, p. 530: *ri bo dpal 'bar du thugs dam la rgyun ring bzhugs/ spyang ras gzigs 'khor ba dong sprugs kyi sku li dmarlas grub pa gter nas bzhes/ dpal 'bar gyi lha (CHN lha) nye) 'dabs dkar g.ye zhes pa'i dben dgon du rgyang tsam bzhugs/*

¹⁰³ Herweg, 1994, p. 127.

¹⁰⁴ The Ārya Phags pa Wa ti temple in sKyid grong is home of “one of the four brothers,” four sacred Avalokiteśvara statues made from the same sandalwood.

invited him to dKar g.ye. The treasure-master incarnation [Rig 'dzin mChog ldan mgon po] gave this master many general descriptions of the hidden lands¹⁰⁵ and texts about particular hidden lands. He advised him, saying: 'Whatever instructions you have received for opening and occupying hidden lands, do everything you can.'¹⁰⁶

Rig 'dzin mChog ldan mgon po (1497–1557),¹⁰⁷ born in lHo brag, was recognised as the reincarnation of rDo rje gling pa (1346–1405). According to his biography,¹⁰⁸ one of his important teachers was Byang chub gling pa (d. 1530), who supervised mChog ldan mgon po's first Śaḍaṅgayoga retreat. Shortly after this, they received a visit from dKar po Kun dga' grags pa,¹⁰⁹ who was already renowned for his renovation of the bSam yas monastery. Following this occasion, mChog ldan mgon po met with Kun dga' grags pa on several occasions to receive teachings. Kun dga' grags pa urged him to travel to Gung thang, as he had promised the king during an earlier visit that he would send a suitable replacement.¹¹⁰ However, mChog ldan mgon po expressed a wish to first meet Padma gling pa.

In 1519, mChog ldan mgon po met Padma gling pa in gTam zhing, Bhutan, where the seventy-three-year-old master appointed the twenty-four-year-old mChog ldan mgon po to be his representative. He received transmissions of the Bhutanese master's own *gter ma*, the *bLa ma nor bu rgya mtsho*. Subsequently, during their journey together to Tibet, Padma gling pa gave him several treasure texts (*kha byang*, *yang byang*, *gnad byang*)¹¹¹ after which they once again parted ways.

In 1521, upon learning that Padma gling pa was nearing the end of his life, mChog ldan mgon po returned for a final meeting with his teacher. In the following years, he made several visits to mKhan pa lung,¹¹² and in 1526 he travelled to the hidden land of bDe skyid

¹⁰⁵ General descriptions of hidden lands and how to reach them.

¹⁰⁶ CHN, 2015, f. 496-497, TASHI, 1990, p. 530: *de skabs rig 'dzin mchog ldan mgon po skyid grong jo bo mjal bar phebs pa/ dkar g.yer gdan drangs/ gter ston sprul sku des sbas yul spyi sger gyi kha byang mang po rje 'di par gñang nas/ sbas yul sgo 'byed pa dang/ 'dzin pa'i bka' babs khyed la yod pas cis kyang lag tu longs par mdzod gsungs/*

¹⁰⁷ According to Ehrhard, 2008, p. 86, mChog ldan mgon po passed away at the age of thirty-four in 1531.

¹⁰⁸ Ehrhard, 2008, p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ Ehrhard, 2008, pp. 67-68. He was a lineage-holder of the treasure teachings of Dri med kun dga' (b. 1347) and Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340–1396). "mChog ldan mgon po obtained from him teaching transmission of the treasure cycles *Thugs rje chen po ye shes 'od mchog* and *bLa ma dgongs 'dus kyi mkha' 'gro'i skor*, that is, the findings of Dri med Kun dga' and Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa respectively."

¹¹⁰ Ehrhard, 2008, p. 70.

¹¹¹ All three genres can belong to the category of prophetic guides.

¹¹² Hidden land (*sbas yul*) in Bhutan.

gling,¹¹³ a sacred site revealed by his previous incarnation. Thereafter, he journeyed to Gung thang to meet the king and visit the Ārya Vati temple in sKyid grong. He left Gung thang in the spring of 1527, so his meeting with sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po must have happened at Ri bo dPal 'bar around that time.

8. Opening of the Hidden Land of Yol mo Snow Enclosure

Phyag rdor nor bu (CHN) continues his narrative with an account of the opening of the hidden land of Yol mo:

On the way to Padma Tshal [also known as] Yol mo gangs ra, he recited the words of advice and the true word prayer.¹¹⁴ He founded the temple of Tsuṭi, where he installed ritual implements, objects for initiation and the treasures he had discovered—the supports for the body, speech and mind—from the Sa skya, dKar brgyud and rNying ma traditions. '[These objects],' he said 'should not cross the pass above and the river below.' With these words, he entrusted them to the local Dharma protector deity, g.Yang ri ma,¹¹⁵ in the belief that this would create auspicious conditions and support the continued flourishing of the Dharma in that place.¹¹⁶

The DANGPO, a manuscript composed in Yolmo, gives the following account:

[sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po] set out for Nepal and upon reaching Ri bo dPal 'bar engaged in a seven-day sādhana retreat. At the conclusion of this, he cast his ritual cake (*gtor ma*) and staff (*phyag ber*) in the direction of Yol mo. It is said that his footprint remains visible [at the site in Ri bo dPal 'bar where this act took place]. He then continued to Nepal, the Land of Wool, where he renovated the two stupas,¹¹⁷ and proceeded to open the outer, inner and secret gates [of the hidden land of Yol mo]. At what

¹¹³ South-eastern part of Bhutan.

¹¹⁴ *bDen brjod smon lam*.

¹¹⁵ g.Yang ri ma is a mountain goddess and a *gtor bdag* subjugated by Padmasambhava according to the tradition. For a detailed analysis of her roles, see Gelle, 2017.

¹¹⁶ CHN, 2015, f. 497; TASHI, 1990, pp. 530-531: *zhal ta dang bden brjod smon lam mdzad pa bzhin/ sbas yul padma'i tshal lam/ yol mo gangs rar phebs/ tsu t.i dgon pa btab/ der sa dkar rnying gsum dang 'brel ba'i sku gsung thugs rten gter rdzas dbang rdzas/ sgrub rdzas sogs phyag tu gang byung rnam bzhugs su gsol nas/ 'di rnam yar la ma brgal mar chu ma brgal zhes/ bka' srung dang gzhi bdag g.yang ri ma la gnyer gtad mdzad/ de yang gnas der bstan pa 'phel ba'i rten 'brel dang mthun rkyen du 'gyur ba la dgongs par 'dug/*

¹¹⁷ Referring to Bodhnāth and Svayambhūnāth.

appeared to be the highest point in the region, he constructed a temple. In this way, the prophecy was fulfilled.¹¹⁸

The text proceeds with another account, relating that sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po made aspirations to begin a three-year retreat at the site where his ritual cake and staff would fall. He wandered for some time throughout the Himalayas in search of these objects but was unable to locate them. Eventually, he settled in a cave and began meditating. As he neared the conclusion of his retreat, he had a vision in which A ma g.Yang ri¹¹⁹ appeared to him and declared: "Your ritual cake and staff are nearby." Because of this prophetic vision, the site became known as Lung bstan phug ("The Prophecy Cave").¹²⁰ Shortly thereafter, he discovered his ritual cake in the middle of a nearby clearing and found that a tree had sprouted from his staff. On that very spot, he established a temple known as Tsuṭi.¹²¹

According to a local narrative I recorded in Yol mo, a mouse pledged to assist with the construction of the temple by digging a tunnel to channel water from dMar khud mTsho—a high-altitude lake without outlet—down to Tsuṭi in a single night. However, when the rooster crowed and the crow called at dawn, the mouse mistakenly believed it had reached the temple site and surfaced to check his location. Although it was still far above the intended site, a spring gushes from the hillside at that location ever since.

Another figure associated with the construction of the temple was a bull said to have transported stones during the day and rested in a nearby cave at night. Upon completion of the temple, the bull was found deceased in the cave. Its skull was subsequently enshrined and is still preserved in a glass display cabinet located on the right side of the first-floor altar. A similar cabinet on the left side houses a ritual

¹¹⁸ DANGPO, n. y., f. 4b: *bal yul lam rgyud bzungs nas/ ri bo dpal 'bar phebs nas/ zhags bdun sgrub pa mdzad nas/ gtor ma dang phyags ber yol mo phyogs la 'phang/ zhabs rjes da lta mjal rgyu yod/ de nas bal yul nis bal (Nis bal=Nepal) la/ phebs nas mchod rten rnam gnyis la zhiḡ gsol legs par 'grub nas phyi sgo nang sgo gsang sgo phyed nas rtsed kyi ra ba 'dra bas steng du/ dgon pa bzhengs nas/ bka' 'babs lung sten nang ltar 'grub nas/*

¹¹⁹ A ma g.Yang ri is the protector of the locality and a goddess of prosperity. Her abode is the mountain peak above Tsuṭi Gonpa. With its 3771m, it is the highest point of the Helambu region. A ma g.Yang ri in her peaceful form is depicted as a white dākinī riding on a dragon. See Gelle, 2017.

¹²⁰ This cave is in the vicinity of Tsuṭi Gonpa, a bit higher on the hillside. It is still used for retreats.

¹²¹ When I first visited Yol mo in 2006, Tsuṭi Gonpa was in a state of severe disrepair. At that time, a local lama showed me renovation plans that were later carried out with Japanese assistance. During this process, the outer walls were rebuilt, but the original frescoes were preserved. However, the 2015 earthquake caused extensive structural damage, leading to the demolition of both the temple and its murals. A new temple has since been constructed on the site.

dagger (*phur ba*) fashioned from a juniper branch said to have grown from the staff of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po.¹²²



Figure 4. — Ritual dagger (*phur ba*) preserved in Tsuṭi Gonpa, said to have been crafted from the wood of the tree that grew from sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's staff. Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2013.

A local legend also recounts that a Malla king, having heard of the precious texts housed at Tsuṭi Gonpa—believed by some to have been brought from India during the time of the Buddha—sought to acquire them. The *sprul sku* of the temple, however, refused to comply with the king's request. Enraged, the king is said to have set the temple ablaze. It was only later, according to the legend, that Prithivi Narayan Shah, the founding monarch of the Shah dynasty, supported the reconstruction of the temple. Although this narrative about the Malla king has not yet been found in written sources, the textual tradition confirms that the temple was destroyed by fire in the 16th century, resulting in the loss of its original treasure documents (*gter shog*) and other treasure objects (*gter rdzas*).

9. Testament

At that point in the narrative, Phyag rdor nor bu quotes an unidentified source, presumably a testamentary document¹²³ attributed to sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po:

¹²² This local legend reminds one of the *Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa*, where humans and animals play equal part in building the stupa.

¹²³ CHN, 2015, f. 497. *bka' chems kyi yi ge na/* then later the same folio: *bka' chems las/*

When the time came for the dissolution of elements at the end of his life, his close disciples inquired about the location of his next rebirth. He responded: 'Throughout this life, I have devoted myself to the service of the two stupas¹²⁴ and have not engaged extensively in practice. Within forty-nine days,¹²⁵ I may be reborn as a descendant of rulers.¹²⁶ If you conduct a search and find compelling signs, that will be the reincarnation of your lama—do not look for other conditions. In my previous life I served the stupas without much personal practice. Now as I stand at the threshold of rebirth as a great Dharma teacher of Central Tibet, let me, as a beggar, implore you to practice diligently and strive to inspire others. If the requisite conditions are not present in the lineage of the Great Lord,¹²⁷ search no further.' With these words he passed away in the Hidden Land of Yol mo Snow Enclosure.¹²⁸

10. The reincarnation of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po

All the biographies conclude with either a brief or extended account identifying his reincarnation. Once again, Phyag rdor nor bu 's version is the most detailed, while the others appear to reproduce his wording with little variation:

His disciples undertook the search [for the reincarnation of their master]. The lineage of the Great Lord¹²⁹ comprises three branches: the sMra bo lcogs po, the eastern, and the western dGa' thang.¹³⁰ The recognized reincarnation, known as sPrul sku Nam

¹²⁴ Refers to the Svayambhū and Bya rung kha shor.

¹²⁵ *Zhag bzhi bcu zhe dgu tshan la*: forty-nine days at the most, but maybe sooner.

¹²⁶ *mNga' bdag pa*.

¹²⁷ Referring to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer.

¹²⁸ CHN, 2015, f. 498, TASHI, 1990, p. 531: *bka' chems las/ nga skye ba 'di la mchod rten chen po gnyis kyi zhabs tog la song nas/ nyams len cher ma 'grub da ste zhag bzhi bcu zhe dgu tshan la/ mnga' bdag pa'i sku brgyud du nying mtshams sbyor thub pa byed pas/ der rtsad gcod kyi yid 'ches pa byung na/ nga'i bla ma'i skye ba yin zhes bdag rkyen byed mi dgos khyed skye ba snga ma mchod rten gyi zhabs tog la song nas nyams len cher ma 'grub/ da res dbus gtsang gi chos ston chen po zhig gi 'gag tu lto lam gzan la gyis la/ nyams len la 'bad par zhu gyis la/ bskul lcag cis kyang thub par mdzod/ gal te mnga' bdag gi brgyud du rten 'brel ma 'grig na/ gzhan du rtsad gcod byed mi dgos/ zhes sogs gsungs te/ sbas yul/ yol mo gangs ra nyid du sku gshegs/*

¹²⁹ It refers to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192).

¹³⁰ As a child, Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer meditated at the foot of sMra bo lcogs Mountain in lHo brag (present-day mTsho smad County). In later years, he established his residence on the ridge above, a hermitage that eventually developed into the sMra bo lcogs Monastery, where he spent most of his life and

mkha' brgya sbyin was born in the western dGa' thang branch. He was the fourteenth descendant of the great treasure master, Nyang Rin po che.¹³¹

Nam mkha' brgya sbyin, a fourteenth-generation descendant of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer, received his name during a lock-cutting ceremony performed by the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud treasure revealer Rin chen Phun tshogs (1509–1557). The principal teacher of Nam mkha' brgya sbyin was Legs ldan rDo rje, and he is also known to have received teachings from Gar gyi dbang phyug (1524–1583). Nam mkha' brgya sbyin oversaw the renovation of the Bya rung kha shor stupa in Nepal and served as spiritual preceptor to the Gung thang king, Khri rgyal bSod nams dbang phyug lde (1577–1627). He is furthermore credited with transmitting a special Guru Yoga practice to the young Jo nang Tāranātha (1575–1635).¹³²

11. Descendants of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po in Yol mo

In the Helambu region of present-day Nepal, the descendants of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po are known as members of the Nyingma Lama clan.¹³³ The DANGPO records the lineage of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, noting those who succeeded him as the head lamas of Tsuṭi. It also mentions younger brothers who, having not inherited a lama position, subsequently relocated to other areas such as Listi in eastern Helambu, where their family owned land. There, they established new temple villages and played a key role in spreading the Northern Treasure tradition across the Himalayan regions. While early temples benefited from *guthi* land-grants¹³⁴ conferred by Malla and later Shah kings, subsequent temples received only *raikar*¹³⁵ land.

The word *dgon pa* is conventionally translated into English as “monastery.” In the Himalayan context, however, it typically refers to

where his reliquary stupa is located. The dGa' thang branches are a few miles south of sMra bo lcogs.

¹³¹ TASHI, 1990, p. 531: *zhal slob rnams kyis rtsad bcad pas/ mnga' bdag pa'i gdung rigs la/ gdan sa smra bo cog po ba dang/ dga' thang pa shar nub gnyis te tshan pa gsum du yod pa'i/ dga' thang nub mar sprul pa'i sku 'khrul bral du 'khrungs pa sprul sku nam mkha' brgya byin yin tel/ gter ston nyang rin po che nas gdung rabs bcu bzhi pa yin par byed do/* The centre of the Nyang lineage was in the south-eastern region of IHo brag (Ehrhard, 2007, p. 29).

¹³² Ehrhard, 2007, p. 29-30.

¹³³ *rNying ma bla ma'i rus pa.*

¹³⁴ Land endowments were granted to lama families in recognition of their services, to be inherited by their descendants for as long as the lineage continued.

¹³⁵ State owned land on which taxes are collected. Regmi, 1976, p. 235.

a village temple maintained by a community of lay priests. These priests are often linked through cross-cousin marriage and are directly supported by the local population. The authority, social status, and landholdings of a village lama are generally inherited patrilineally, passing from the father to the eldest son.

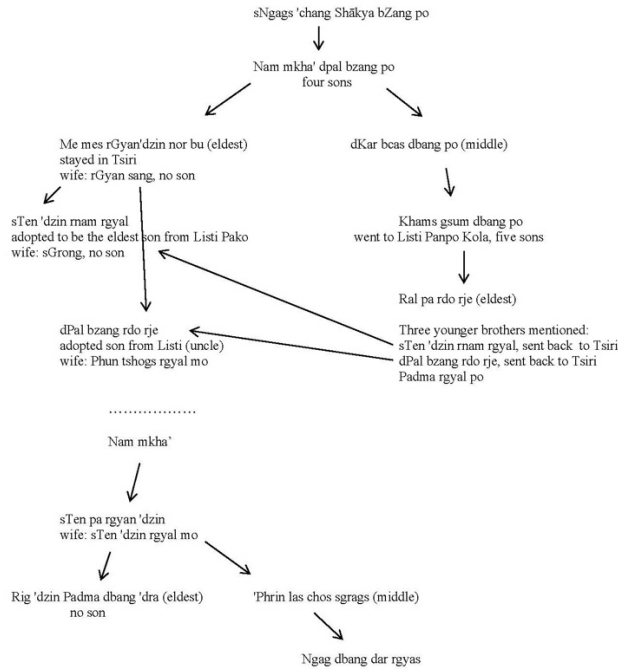


Fig. 5. —Chart showing sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's descendants in Yol mo according to the DANGPO¹³⁶

The head lama of such temple village community is known as the *tika lama*, and his children are referred to as lineage lamas. In cases where a lama has no male heirs, a son is commonly adopted from another

¹³⁶ The Tibetan spelling, including instances of apparent errors, is presented as it appears in the original text. DANGPO, n. y., f. 4b-5a: *sngags 'chang shākya bzang pos dung rgyud 'dzin pas sras/ yon nam mkha' dpal bzang po la sras bzhi/ che ba rtsod rus dgon pa nas bzhuks pas sras/ me med rgyan 'dzin nor bu la sras med tsun mo rgyan sang/ bar pa dkar bcas dbang po la/ sras kham ssum dbang po/ lis ti pan sko la phebs/ sras lnga 'khrungs/ sras che ba ral pa rdo rje/ dpal bzang rdo rje/ padma rgyal po/ sten 'dzin rnam rgyal/ me mes rgyan 'dzin nor bu'i sras che ba la/ sten 'dzin rnam rgyal/ tsun mo sgrong/ de la yang sras med dpal bzang rdo rje/ rnams 'khu bu tshab/ tsun mo phun tshogs rgyal mo/ nam mkha'i sras sten pa rgyan 'dzin/ tsun mo sten 'dzin rgyal mo/ che ba rigs 'dzin padma dbang dra la sras med/ bar pa 'phrin las chos sgrags la sras nga dbang dar rgyas bkra shis bka'/ sangs rgyas thams cad dar shing rgyas par shog/*

branch of the family to continue the line. While it is rare for a non-related disciple to inherit the position of head lama, historical exceptions to this pattern are documented.

Village inhabitants typically belong to lama clans or to common clans. In the case of lama clans, the founding ancestor of the clan is usually identified as the original lama who migrated from Tibet to settle in Yol mo¹³⁷—such as sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, who is the ancestor (*thog mar mes mes*) of the Nyingma Lama clan, the highest and oldest lama clan of the social hierarchy.¹³⁸

It is apparent from the text and the chart above that the description follows only the oldest son's line, while the other brothers are mentioned only under specific circumstances—either in case of infertility, when a son must be adopted to continue the main line, or when a younger brother establishes a new temple village and initiates a new lineage elsewhere. The document also reveals that local memory has preserved only select names within the lineage: the founding ancestors, who established the line in the 16th century and the most recent three to four generations, still known and remembered by the author of the text.

12. Summary

sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po lived during a particularly volatile period of history, when multiple rival factions struggled over control of land and resources. There were constant armed skirmishes between the western Tibetan region of gTsang and the central Tibetan region of dBus, and political power was fragmentary. Following the decline of the Phag mo gru dynasty of dBus, which was weakened by internal strife, the Rin spungs lords of gTsang expanded their influence.

¹³⁷ Yol mo is a toponym found in Tibetan sources that refers to an area northeast of Kathmandu, near the Tibetan border, encompassing some lateral ridges of the Himalaya and the surrounding valleys of the Melemchi and Yangri rivers. Today, this region is known as Helambu—a name that came into use in the 19th century—and it lies in the center of a triangle of historic trade routes, connecting Kyirong and Nyalam with Kathmandu.

¹³⁸ Over the past decade, recent political developments have prompted a significant shift in self-identification among people living in Helambu. Increasingly, individuals have adopted “Hyolmo” or “Yolmo” as an ethnonym and as a second or third name, replacing the previously used identifiers such as “Lama” or “Sherpa.” The orthographic rendering of the toponym Yol mo familiar from Tibetan textual sources, became the focal point of an intense political debate within the community. This debate arose as the toponym was reinterpreted and repurposed as an ethnonym over the past two decades. Ultimately, advocates for the spelling “Hyolmo” prevailed, and this form has since been officially adopted for referring both to the language and to the people of the Helambu region.

Between 1498 and 1516, they held effective control over Central Tibet and tried to suppress the dGe lugs pa that had come to flourish under Phag mo gru pa rule. There was a lot of sectarian rivalry between the dGe lugs pa and the Karma bKa' brgyud.¹³⁹ After the death of the 7th Karma pa, the power of the Rin spungs pa began to decline, while the dGe lugs pa order, particularly the abbot of 'Bras spungs, gained greater control. In 1516, widespread conflict erupted across dBus and gTsang, leading to shifting political alliances and some monasteries were forced to change their sectarian affiliations. After further Rin spungs pa losses in 1517 the Phag mo gru sde srid gave permission to the dGe lugs pa to attend the Great Prayer festival again after the Rin spungs pa prevented them for nineteen years to do so. In 1518, the Pag mo gru pa hierarch granted an estate adjacent to 'Bras spungs to dGe 'dun rgya mtsho (posthumous 2nd Dalai Lama) called dGa' ldan pho brang.¹⁴⁰

The Hor armies posed a significant threat to Tibet including the kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang, launching incursions around 1523 from the regions of Nepal and Kashmir. In 1529, they left the Byams sprin lha khang¹⁴¹ in sKyid grong badly damaged.¹⁴² In 1532, the Rin spungs pa domains faced a temporary threat from an incursion led by the Muslim general Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat (1499–1551),¹⁴³ acting under the orders of Sultan Said Khan, the ruler of Kashgar. The invasion aimed to expand Mongol control over strategic regions in the name of Islam, capture Lhasa, but the arduous journey, cold and snow turned the army back without ever approaching Lhasa.¹⁴⁴

This turbulent historical period, marked by frequent military conflicts and shifting alliances, was for the rNying ma yogis, sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po and his contemporaries, like the flickering light of a Dreamachine¹⁴⁵—a catalyst for visionary experiences and

¹³⁹ For instance, the Karma pa was attacked by dGe lugs pa monks in 1497 in the vicinity of Lhasa and he had to flee to the Jo khang. This angered many powerful people (Rheingans, 2010, p. 247). In 1506 a new Karma bKa' brgyud monastery was built in Lhasa to strengthen the Karma pa's position, but it was later torn down by the monks of Se ra and 'Bras spungs (Kapstein, 2006, p. 129).

¹⁴⁰ Kapstein, 2006, p. 131.

¹⁴¹ It is the most important temple of the sKyid rong region, one of the *mtha' 'dul* temples attributed to King Srong btsan sGam po, the temple that pins down the right foot of the demoness.

¹⁴² Everding, 2004, p. 273.

¹⁴³ He was a Chagatai Turco-Mongol military general, cousin of Babur, the Mughal emperor, but Haidar Dughlat considered himself an ethnic Mongol of Moghulistan.

¹⁴⁴ However, this failed invasion resulted in an interesting historical source on Tibet, Haidar Dughlat's *Tarikhi Rashidi*. (Ghaffari Fard & Quli, 2005).

¹⁴⁵ And by that I refer to Brion Gysin and Ian Sommerville's light art device invented in 1959.

prophetic insights. Their dream revelations, in turn, offered pathways for safeguarding the country, preserving the Dharma and its institutions, and protecting the community. Political leaders often viewed the unconventional methods and esoteric practices of rNying ma yogis—including their reputed mastery of magic—with scepticism. However, when their rituals appeared effective, these same leaders commissioned them as ritual specialists to extend their lifespan, to secure their authority and power, and to engage in forms of ritualized or magical warfare against their adversaries.

The second chapter of Sog zlog pa's *History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back*¹⁴⁶ underscored Padma gling pa's pivotal role in interpreting several prophecies concerning imminent Mongol incursions.¹⁴⁷ Acting in accordance with his instructions, his disciple mChog ldan mgon po (1497–1557) and Padma gling pa's son, Zla ba rGyal mtshan (1499–1587) played an important role in implementing protective measures. Sog zlog pa further notes that mChog ldan mgon po's disciples—the two famous brothers, mNga' ris Pan chen and Legs ldan rDo rje—were also instrumental in delaying the advance of Mongol forces for several years.¹⁴⁸ As previously mentioned, sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po and bsTan gnyis gling pa were likewise renowned for their Hor army-averting rituals (*hor zlog*).

Renovations and reconstructions of significant Buddhist monuments and temples served not only to preserve the Buddha's teaching but also fulfilled a symbolic function: they reinforced a sense of interconnectedness and contributed to a common identity of Tibetanness, in which doctrines, familial lineages, and individuals were perceived as linked across time and space, through cycles of incarnations and emanations. This may help explain the enduring popularity of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's most renowned treasure revelation. His treasure text, *The Legend of the Bya rung kha shor Stupa*, addresses themes central to the Age of Decline (*snyigs dus*): the disintegration of social order, the looming threat of foreign invasion, and the urgent need for collective action to counter the degenerative forces of the Dark Age. The text emphasizes the preservation of values transmitted through the Dharma—symbolized by the renovation of the stupa—as essential to resisting the forces of decline.

A much earlier but also well-known version of the legend of the Bya rung kha shor stupa appears in the fifteenth chapter of *The Copper Island* (*Zangs gling ma*), a treasure text revealed by Nyang ral Nyi ma

¹⁴⁶ *Sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus*.

¹⁴⁷ See James Gentry's excellent article "Representations of Efficacy: The Ritual Expulsion of Mongol Armies in the Consolidation and Expansion of the Tsang (gTsang) Dynasty." (Gentry, 2010, pp. 131-163.)

¹⁴⁸ Gentry, 2010, pp. 135-136.

'od zer (1124–1192). In this account, Padmasambhava recounts how the King Khri strong lde btsan established the law of Dharma in Tibet.¹⁴⁹ While this version locates the Bya rung kha shor stupa in Magadha, India, the narrative parallels the widely known legend: the stupa is constructed by a poor poultry woman and her three sons, who make aspirations to spread the Dharma in Tibet. The sons are said to reborn as Padmasambhava, Khri strong lde btsan and Śāntarakṣita. The text also mentions six evil ministers—reincarnations of animals that had participated in the stupa's construction. Similarly to the *Testament of sBa*,¹⁵⁰ Yab lhag¹⁵¹ is mentioned in the *Copper Island* as one of Khri strong lde btsan's ministers.

Another famous version of the legend appears in the *Padma bKa' thang* revealed by O rgyan gling pa (1323–ca. 1360),¹⁵² written less than two centuries after the *Zangs gling ma*. Here, the Bya rung kha shor stupa is situated in the Kathmandu Valley, near Svayambhūcaitya. In Canto 90, Padmasambhava offers a prophecy to Khri strong lde btsan regarding the future lives of Princess Pale Lotus.¹⁵³ Before doing so, he recounts two of her previous incarnations. In one, Padmasambhava, the king, and Śāntarakṣita are portrayed as brothers in a previous life engaged in constructing the stupa. During the work, a wasp—Princess Pale Lotus' previous incarnation—stings the king on the neck, and unaware, he brushes it away, inadvertently killing it. Padmasambhava then foretells that in future lives, Princess Pale Lotus will repeatedly encounter him, while reincarnating as Nyang ral, Chos dbang, Rin chen gling pa, and Dri med 'od zer.¹⁵⁴

Not only were multiple versions of the legend of the Bya rung kha shor stupa known among Tibetans, but a reference to the site of the monument in Thang stong rgyal po's biography also suggests that its location in the Kathmandu valley was already recognised and revered as a site of great religious significance even prior to sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's revelation of his treasure text concerning its renovation. The question, therefore, is what made his early sixteenth-

¹⁴⁹ Translated by Eric Pema Kunsang, see Nyima Özer et al., 1999, p. 99.

¹⁵⁰ Pasang & Diemberger, 2000, p. 38.

¹⁵¹ 'Gos Khri byang yab lhag.

¹⁵² Translated by Douglas, 1978, p. 605.

¹⁵³ IHa lcam Padma gsal was the eight-year-old daughter of the king, who, according to tradition, died after being stung by a bee. Padmasambhava is said to have revived her by drawing a red syllable NRI on her heart, after which he bestowed upon her the transmission of the sNying thig teachings. Shortly thereafter, she passed away. The teachings were subsequently concealed as *gter ma* by Ye shes mTsho rgyal. Centuries later, they were revealed by Padma Las 'brel rtsal (1248 or 1231/2–1307?), regarded as the reincarnation of the princess. This revealed cycle came to be known as the *mKha' 'gro snying thig* (*Heart Essence of the Dakinis*).

¹⁵⁴ Klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer (1308–1364).

century version of the legend so popular. Its relevance seems to have been the key factor: although articulated in a cryptic and generalised manner, the text reflects the socio-political conditions of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's time, including political instability, external threats, and the urgent need to promote the Buddhist teachings not only within Tibet but also beyond its borders, where "hidden lands" offered refuge to those forced to flee.



Fig. 6. – Illumination from an incomplete manuscript of the *Padma bKa' thang*, held in the British Library.¹⁵⁵

The brief biographies of sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po examined in this article share a common characteristic: they offer a highly generalised portrayal of the treasure master's life, one that bears notable similarities to the hagiographic accounts of Padmasambhava. sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po is portrayed as a revealer of treasures, a transmitter of teachings, a ritual specialist defending against foreign threats, a preceptor of the king, the one who opens a hidden land and a custodian who entrusts treasures to a local deity. This article is only an initial attempt to add greater depth and detail to his otherwise skeletal life story. It is hoped that future research, through the examination of a broader range of sources, will offer a more comprehensive understanding of the life and activities of this remarkable yet little known treasure master.

¹⁵⁵ I am very grateful to Charles Manson, Curator of the Tibetan Collection at the British Library, for granting permission to reproduce this image.

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བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་
གྲུག་བཟང་ཐུགས་རྗེའི་ཚོས་གར་ལ་ཐོག་མའི་དབྱེ་ཞིབ།
**Byang bdag bkra shis stobs rgyas kyi rtogs brjod kun
bzang thugs rje'i zlos gar la thog ma'i dbye zhib**

གཙང་ཕུག་སྟོབས་ལགས།
gTsang phrug sTobs lags

(ས་རྩ་ལོད་ཀྱི་མཐོ་སྒྲོབ།)
(Sarah College for Higher Tibetan Studies)

Summary



Fig. 1 – Painting representing bKra shis stobs rgyas
on a mural in sMin grol gling Monastery, Tibet.

In this paper titled *A First Analytical Study on A Play of Küntuzangpo's Compassion, a Biography of the Northern Lord bKra shis stobs rgyas*, gTsang phrug sTobs lags presents a short analysis of the biography of bKra shis stobs rgyas (1550–1603), a

prominent master of the Northern Treasures, critically examines the context of the biography, and identifies several personalities, monasteries, and places associated with bKra shis stobs rgyas referenced in the biography.

The article begins with the assertion that the most exhaustive biography of bKra shis stobs rgyas currently available, *A Play of Küntuzangpo's Compassion* (*Kun bzang thugs rje'i zlos gar*), was authored by 'Brug pa Sangs rgyas rdo rje (1569–1645) in 1636 at rDo rje Brag and sNa phu chos lung at the behest of bKra shis stobs rgyas's son, Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), and his daughter, Don yod chos skyong. Since the manuscript of the biography written in semi-cursive (*'khyug ma tshugs*) contains some archaic orthographic forms like *lang tso*, *nyam 'gyur* and *go ca* instead of the more standard forms *lang mtsho*, *nyams 'gyur*, and *go cha*, the author of this article thinks that it is very old.

According to gTsang phrug sTobs lags, there are three main parts in the biography: The first primarily concerns the tale of bKra shis stobs rgyas's past lives; the second, with ten chapters, chronicle bKra shis stobs rgyas's life; and the third mostly addresses the question of the locations and figures associated with bKra shis stobs rgyas. Utilizing sources such as autobiography of Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las's (1642–1717) and personal connections in Ngam ring, Tibet, the author endeavors to determine the exact locations of historical monasteries including gSang sngags theg mchog gling, a Nyingma monastery founded by bKra shis stobs rgyas, and Nub dgon don grub gling. He also identifies the lHa sa rdzong pa, bKra shis stobs rgyas's mother's home and a very influential family in the region who had close relationship with the House of Sa skya. Some important place names such as Zur tsho lha ri gnam rdzong (situated in today's gNya' lam district), the famous Mt. (Ri) Kun tu gzigs which is said to be prophesied in the Northern Treasure prophecies, and Bar phug rong, a birth place of Ba ri lo tsā ba (1040–1111).

In his conclusion, sTobs lags evaluates the sources utilized by Sangs rgyas rdo rje for the composition of *A Play of Küntuzangpo's Compassion*, which includes the autobiography of bKra shis stobs rgyas, referenced by others as *Dharma King bKra shis stobs rgyas's Autobiography In Verse* (*Chos rgyal bkra shis stobs rgyas rgyi rang rnam tshigs bcad ma*). However, gTsang phrug sTobs lags, while drawing upon Sangs rgyas rdo rje's work and additional sources, posits that the title of bKra shis stobs rgyas's autobiography in the form of verse may be *A Play of Magical Illusion* (*sGyu 'phrul drwa ba'i rol mo*).

The author of this work also inquires why *A Play of Küntuzangpo's Compassion* is absent from both the 2015 *Byang gter Collection* and Sangs rgyas rdo rje's collected work. He speculates that the omission of this

biography in both editions may stem from a subtle reservation regarding the biography itself within the Kagyü and Nyingma schools, attributed primarily to the historical animosity between bKra shis stobs rgyas and the gTsang pa kings on the one hand, and Sangs rgyas rdo rje's close association with the gTsang pa ruler Karma bsTan skyong dbang po (r. 1620–1642), whose biography is also written by the same scholar, on the other hand.

ས་བཅད་དང་པོ། བརྩམས་ལོ་དང་། རྩོམ་སྐུལ་མཁམ། ཇི་ལྟར་བརྩམས་ཚུལ།

རིགས་སྤྲུགས་འཆར་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོས་བསྐྱར་བ་ཆེ་མཆོག་འདུས་པ་ཙུལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྟུན་པ་ཀུན་བཟང་ཐུགས་རྗེ་འོ་ཁྱོས་གར་སྐྱ་འཕུལ་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་རྣམ་རལ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ། །མཚན་བྱང་དུ་གསོལ་བའི་བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་དེ་ནི། ད་པན་ད་ཚོར་མཇལ་རྒྱ་ཡོད་པའི་བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་(༡༥༥༠–༡༦༠༣)རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཐུན་མོང་གི་རྣམ་ཐར་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་ཆ་ཚང་ལ་ལ་གསལ་ཞེས་བཅས་རྒྱལ་ཤོས་གྱི་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་ཅིག་ཟེད་འདུག རྣམ་ཐར་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་དེ་འབྲི་ཚུམ་མཁན་ནི་ཆོས་སྲིད་ལུགས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སློན་པོ་གཙུག་ལ་སྟོད་གཡས་རུ་བྱང་པའི་ཆབ་འབངས་སུ་གཏོགས་པ། གཙུག་ལྷན་ལྟེན་མང་མཁར་གནས་གསར་ཞེས་བྱ་བར་སྐྱ་འབྲུངས་པའི་མཁས་དབང་སངས་རྒྱལ་རྟོ་རྒྱལ་(༡༥༤༩ – ༡༥༩༥) བོད་རབ་བྱུང་བརྒྱུག་པའི་མེ་ལྷ་གཉིས་ལོ་ ༡༥༩༤ ལོར་རྟོ་རྒྱལ་དུ་ཕལ་བ་ཆེ་བ་བྱུག་ཅིང་། མཇུག་བསྟོམས་ཅུང་ཟད་ལུས་པ་དེ་སྐབས་པའི་བསྟོན་གསལ་སྐུ་ཕྱོགས་ལུང་གི་འོད་ཀྱི་རྟོགས་ལུང་ལྟེན་པའི་སྐུ་ཕྱོགས་ལུང་དུ་རྟོགས་པར་མཛད་འདུག་ཅིང་། སྐུ་ལྷེས་པ་བྲག་རིར་སྐྱ་བྱང་དང་འདྲ་བའི་ཕྱག་པ་གཉིས་ཡོད་པར་མོང་སྐུ་ཕྱོགས་ཐོགས་པ་གསུངས།

ད་ལྟར་ཚོར་མཇལ་རྒྱ་ཡོད་པའི་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་དེ་ནི། བོད་ཤོག་མཚན་བྱང་ཡིག་གཟུགས་མཇུག་མ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ལམ་ནས། རིགས་སྤྲུགས་འཆར་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོས་བསྐྱར་བ་ཆེ་མཆོག་འདུས་པ་ཙུལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྟུན་པ་ཀུན་བཟང་ཐུགས་རྗེ་འོ་ཁྱོས་གར་སྐྱ་འཕུལ་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་རྣམ་རལ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ། །ཞེས་འཁོད་ལ། རང་དཔེ་རྒྱལ་ཡིག་གཟུགས་ཡིག་ཐེང་ལཱ་འཛིན་པ་མཐའ་ལུགས་ཐིག་ནག་གིས་བརྒྱན་པའི་ལྷ་ལྷ་བརྒྱུད་གཅིག་ཡོད་པའི་བྲིས་རྒྱུང་དེ། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༥༩༤ ལོར་མཇུག་རྟོགས་པར་བྱས་པའི་མཁས་དབང་སངས་རྒྱལ་རྟོ་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་ཕྱག་བསྟར་མའི་མ་དཔེ་དེ་ཡིན་མིན་བརྟུན་དཀའ་ཡང་། ཤོག་བྱ་དང་། ཡིག་གཟུགས། སྐར་ཡིག་དག་སྟེང་མོགས་ལས་དུས་སྐབས་ཀྱི་བྲིས་རྒྱུང་ཞིག་ཡིན་པ་ནི་ཚོད་དཔག་བྱེད་པ་འདྲུག་དཔེར་ན། ལང་ཚོ་ལ་ལང་ཚོ་ ཉམས་འབྱུར་ལ་ཉམས་འབྱུར། གོ་ཆ་ལ་གོ་ཆ།

རྣམ་ཐར་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་དེ་བཞེན་སྐུ་ཡིས་རྩོམ་སྐུལ་གནད་ཡོད་མེད་སྟོར་ལ་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་དེ་གའི་སྐོང་སྟོང་ནང་། “དཔྱིད་ལྷན་གྱི་མིག་རྟེན་དུ་འབྱུར་བའི་ཆོག་སྟོར་ཕུན་སུམ་ཚོགས་པའི་རྒྱན་གྱིས་རྣམ་པར་སྟེགས་པ་ཞིག་ཏུ་ཀྱིས་བཞུགས་པར་འོས་པས་བཞོ་སྐུལ་དུ་ལོང་ཞིག་ཅེས། རིག་འཛིན་རྒྱ་མའི་ཞལ་གྱི་པར་ལས་ཟགས་པའི་ཟེལ་དང་ར་མཆོག་གི་འོ་བོ་བཀའ་བཀའ་རྒྱུ་ལོ་ཀྱིས་འཛོ་བའི་བརྒྱུད་དུ་བཞུགས་ཏེ། ལུགས་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སློན་པོ་མཁས་དབང་སུ་གཏོགས་པ་བདག་གིས་སྐྱ་བའི་མཁྱིལ་པ་བྱེད་དུ་འདེགས་པ་ལ་

འཕྲིལ་སྤྲུང་གི་ཆ་ནས་མཛོད་བཟོད་དང་། ཚུལ་པར་དཔལ་བཅུའ། དགོས་དོན་དང་། བསྐྱུས་དོན། རྩིག་དོན། ལམ་ལས་སྦྱོར་
བཀའ་ལན་དང་བཅས་བསྟན་བཅོས་འཕྲིལ་སྤྲུང་གི་ཡུག་ས་སྤྱུབ་ལུག་དེ་བཞིན་མཛོད་བསྟན། རྒྱལ་པོའ་ད། དོན་བསྐྱུ་སྐབས་
དོན།

དང་པོ། རྒྱལ་རབས་སྐྱེས་སྤྱལ་གྱི་བྱུང་བ་བརྗོད་པས་མདོར་བསྟན་པའི་རབ་བྱེད།

3 གངས་རྒྱལ་དེ་ཆེ་ རིགས་སྒྲགས་འཆད་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོས་བརྒྱུད་པ་ཅེ་མཆོག་འདུལ་པ་ཅུ་པ་གྱི་རྟོགས་པ་འཛོད་པ་ཀྱན་བཟང་ལྷགས་ཆེད་རྒྱལ་གར་རྒྱལ་འདུག་པའོ། ། དེ་མི་དྲུག་གིས་མ་རྒྱལ་གསུང་། འོག་ །

རབས་བཅུ་གསུམ་བྱོན་ཡོད་པ་རྣམས་རོ་སྤྲོད་རགས་བསྟུས་ཡོད།

གཉིས་པ། བྱི་རབས་གཙུག་ལག་རྒྱུད་འབྲེལ་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་བསྐྱར་ཚུལ་རྒྱས་བཤད་པའི་རབ་བྱེད།

༡ ཚད་མས་ངེས་པའི་བཀའ་གཏེར་ལས་ལུང་བསྟན་ཚུལ། ༢ རིགས་རུས་ཚོ་འབྲང་བཟང་པོའི་བྱུང་བ་བརྗོད་པ། ༣ ཡུལ་དང་ཡབ་
ཡུམ་འབྲུངས་ལོ་བཅས་ཀྱི་སྟོར། ༤ གཞོན་ཅུའི་དུས་ནས་ཐེག་པའི་འཇུག་སྟོེ་ཐེག་པའི་རིམ་པར་བྱེད་ཚུལ། ༥ རྩེ་པ་གཡས་རུ་
བྱང་པའི་རྒྱལ་སྤྲིད་བཟུང་བ། ༦ བྱོན་མེད་སྤྱོད་མ་ལས་རིམ་མེད་གསལ་བསམ་མཛད་ཚུལ། ༧ ཉིང་ངེ་འཛིན་གྲུབ་པའི་རྟགས་
ཀྱིས་དུས་གསུམ་སྤྱི་བ་མེད་དུ་གཟིགས་པ། ༨ རྒྱུན་པར་ལྟར་སྤྲོད་གིས་འགྲོ་དོན་ཡང་དག་ལ་བསྐྱུལ་བ། ༩ དབང་གི་གསལ་ཚར་བཅད་
པ། ༡༠ སྐལ་ལྷན་རྩིས་སུ་བཟུང་བའི་རིམ་པ།

གསུམ་པ། མཐར་ཕྱིན་མཆོག་གི་གོ་འཕང་བརྟེན་པས་དགོས་དོན་བསྟུ་བའི་རིམ་པའི་རབ་བྱེད།

ས་བཅད་གསུམ་པ། བྱི་ལོ་ ༡༥༧༩ བོད་བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་མི་སྣ་དང་གནས།

༡༥ བྱང་བདག

གཙང་གཡམས་རུ་སྟོད་ཀྱི་ལྷེ་བ་ངམ་རིང་གི་མིང་གཞན་ལ་བྱང་པ་ཞེས་འབོད་དོན་གང་ཡིན་སྟོར་ལ། འགའ་ཞིག་གིས་དཔལ་ལྷན་
ས་སྐྱུ་པའི་སྐབས་བོད་ཁྱིམ་བཅུ་གསུམ་ལས། གཙང་ལ་སྟོད་ཀྱི་ཁུལ་འདྲིར་སྟོང་ཁྱིམ་གཉིས་བཅོས་པ་ལས་བྱང་གི་ཁྱིམ་རྩ་
ལ་བྱང་པ་ཞེས་དང་། ཡང་། ལོ་རྒྱུས་དེབ་ཐེར་འགའི་ནང་བྱང་བདག་རྣམས་རྒྱལ་གྲགས་བཟང་(༡༣༩༥-༡༤༢༥) རིག་ལྷན་པ་
དཀར་པོ་སྤྱད་པ་དང་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་རྒྱ་བ་བཟང་པོའི་ཡང་སྤྲིད་ཡིན་པ། ཤམ་བྱ་ལའི་བསྐལ་བའི་མར་མེ་ཐེར་བ་མཐོང་གོལ་མཆོད་
ཉེན་(ད་ལྟ་ངམ་རིང་རྩིད་སྤྲིད་གཞུང་གནས་ཡུལ་དེར་ངོས་འཛིན་རྒྱ་ཡོད།) དང་། ཤམ་བྱ་ལ་ཡི་མཆོ་ཆེན་གཉིས་དང་འབྲ་བ་ངམ་
རིང་རྒྱུ་མས་མཆོད་སྤྲང་མཆོད་གཉིས་ཡིན་པ། ལྷག་པར་གཙང་སྟོད་བྱང་ངམ་རིང་གི་ཁུལ་འདྲིར། བྱང་བདག་རིམ་བྱོན་གྱི་དུས་
ནས་དུས་འཁོར་སྐྱབ་བརྟན་དང་། དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་། ཆོ་ག་བྱུག་ལེན་དར་ཞིང་རྒྱས་པ་སོགས། སྟོད་བཅུད་ཀྱི་བཀོད་པ་བྱང་ཤམ་བྱ་ལ་
དང་གཉིས་སུ་མ་མཆིས་པས་བྱང་ཞེས་བཏགས་པ་བཞེད།

འགའ་ཞིག་གིས་སྟོབ་དཔོན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། མང་ཡུལ་གྱང་ཐང་ནས་སྟོ་རུབ་སྤིན་པོའི་ཡུལ་དུ་ཐེབས་པར། ཆོས་རྒྱལ་ཁྱི་སྟོད་ལྷེ་
བཅོན་གྱིས་སྟོབ་དཔོན་པ་སྤྱོད་འབྲུང་གནས་ལ། བདག་གི་རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་གྱང་ཐང་རྒྱལ་པོ་དང་། མ་འོངས་སེམས་ཅན་སྟོབ་པའི་གཏེར་
མཛོད་གང་དུས་སྤྱུལ། འདོན་པའི་ལྷེ་མིག་གང་ལ་བགྱིད་ཞུས་པར། སྟོབ་དཔོན་རིན་པོ་ཆེས་འདི་ནས་བྱང་གི་ཕྱོགས་རོལ་ན།

བགྱིས་ཡོན་ཏན་ལྷན་པའི་རི་(རི་ལོ་བྱ་བ་བཟང་ཡིན།)ལུང་དང་མཐུན་པའི་གནས་དེར་གཤེགས།⁴ ཞེས་བྱང་ནི་མང་ཡུལ་གྲང་ཐང་
(དང་སྤྱིད་གྲང་མཐོང་ཁ་རྒྱུང་ཁོངས།)གི་བྱང་ཕྱོགས་སུ་གནས་པས་བྱང་ཞེས་གྲགས།

གོང་གསལ་དེ་དག་ཐམས་ཅད་བྱང་པ་ཞེས་མིང་གི་འབྱུང་ཁུངས་ཀྱི་ཆ་འདྲ་བ་ཞིག་ཡིན་མོད། དོན་དངོས་སུ་བྱང་པ་ཞེས་པ་
དེ། ཡུལ་མིང་རུས་མིང་དུ་ཐོགས་པ་གང་ཞིག་སྤྱིར་ཡང་རུས་མིང་ཡུལ་མིང་དུ་ཐོགས་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་ནོ། དེ་ཡང་བྱང་མི་ཉག་སེའུ་
རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་གཙང་ལ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་དུ་གཞིས་ཆགས་པ་དང་། རིམ་པས་ཡུལ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོར་བྱུར་པས་བྱང་བདག་ཅེས་པ་བྱུང་། བྱང་
བདག་གི་བདག་འདི་སྐབས་དེར་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལ་གོ་བས་བྱང་གི་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཞེས་པ་འོ། དེ་ཡང་མི་ཉག་སེའུ་རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་ལ་བྱང་པ་ཞེས་
འཛོད་པ་ནི། མི་ཉག་པ་རྣམས་སྤྱོད་བྱང་གི་རྒྱུད་ལས་ཆད་པ་དང་། སྤྱོད་ནི་བོད་ཀྱི་རུས་ཀྱི་ཕྱི་མོ་བཞིའི་ནང་གསེས་ཤིག་ཡིན་ཞིང་།
སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་གྲུབ་པའི་མི་ཉག་འདི། ས་ཁོངས་དང་སྤྱོད་ཡུལ་བོད་ཀྱི་བྱང་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཡོད་པས། བོད་པ་(སྤྱོ་ཁ་ཡར་ལུང་ཅམ་
ཡིན།)རྣམས་ཀྱིས་ཁོ་ཚོར་སྤྱོད་བྱང་དུ་འཛོད།⁵ སྤྱོད་བཅའ་སྐུམ་པོའི་སྐབས་སྤྱོད་བྱང་གི་ཚོས་བོད་ལ་དོལ་ག་རྒྱུ་ལྟེ་སྤྱོད་པོ་
ཞུགས་པ་བཅའ་པོས་མཁུན་པས། སྤྱིར་རྒྱལ་བཅའ་པོ་སྤྱོད་བཅའ་གྱིས་བྱང་མི་ཉག་གི་ཡུལ་དུ་དམག་དྲངས། སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་བོད་
དམག་གི་འཛིགས་པ་མ་བཟོད་པས་འགའ་ཞིག་རྒྱ་ཡུལ་དུ་བོས་པས་སྤྱོད་བྱང་གཉིས་ཆགས། སྤྱོ་པ་རྣམས་ནི་དེད་གི་མམས་མི་ཉག་
དང་། བྱང་པ་རྣམས་ནི་དུའི་ཉིན་ལྷོ་སུ་བོས།⁶ མི་ཉག་བྱང་པས་བོད་སེལ་བུའི་སྐབས་དེད་གི་ཡུན་ཐོན་གྲོང་ཁྱེར་གྱི་ཉེ་
འདབས་སུ་མི་ཉག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་བཅུགས།

ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༢༢༧ ལོར་ཐོང་གར་དམག་གིས་མི་ཉག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་བསྐབས་པས། བྱང་མི་ཉག་རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་རྣམས་
གཙང་སྤྱོད་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཆས་ཡོད་ཞིང་། སྤྱག་སྤེ་སེང་གེ་ལུང་དང་སྤྱོད་པོ་ལ་འདད།⁷ སོགས་སུ་གནས་ཆགས་ཤིང་རྒྱུད་པ་མང་དུ་
འཕེལ། མི་ཉག་རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་གཙང་སྤྱོད་དུ་ཆས་པ་རྣམས་ལ། གཙང་སྤྱོད་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་བྱང་པ་ཞེས་འཛོད་ལམ་བྱུང་འདུག དེ་ཡང་
ཕགོང་ས་ལྷ་པ་ཆེན་པོས་མི་ཉག་བྱང་པ།⁸ ཞེས་དང་། རྩོན་འགྲོ་བའི་མགོན་པོ་ཏཱ་ལའ་བླ་མ་མཛད་པའི་<<མུང་ཡུལ་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་
བར་གསུམ་གྱི་ཆོས་འབྱུང་>>ལས། “བྱང་ཕྱོགས་མི་ཉག་གི་རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་རིམ་པར་སྤྱོད་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཆགས།”⁹ ཞེས་བྱུང་། གཞན་
ཡང་། ཕགོང་ས་ལྷ་པ་ཆེན་པོས་མཛད་པའི་བྱང་བདག་དག་གི་དབང་པོའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ལས། “བྱང་ཕྱོགས་ཞེས་བྱང་གི་བྱང་བདག་
པོའི་རིགས་རུས་དང་། ཕྱོགས་ཞེས་སྤྱོད་ཕྱོད་ལྟེ་མ་གྱི་འབྱུངས་ཡུལ་མཛོན།”¹⁰ ཞེས་གསུངས། གོང་གསལ་དབྱུད་ཡིག་དག་
ལས་ང་ཚོས་གཅིག་ནས་བྱང་ཞེས་པའི་མིང་གི་བྱུང་ཁུངས་ར་སྤྱོད་བྱུང་པ་བྱུང་ཡོད། དེ་ཡང་བོད་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་མིང་དང་། མི་མིང་། ཆོས་
ལུགས་གྲུབ་མཐའི་མིང་ཐོགས་རྒྱུ་ཐད། སྐབས་དེ་ཡུལ་མིང་མི་དང་ཆོས་ལུགས་གྲུབ་མཐའ་ལ་ཐོགས་པ་དང་། སྐབས་དེ་གྲུབ་

4 རིག་འཛིན་རྒྱུད་ལྷེ་མ་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར། དཔེ་གཞུགས། ཤོག ༢༠

5 བོད་སྤྱོད་པ་ཞེས་འབྱུག། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༧༤༤ དེབ། ༣ ཤོག་ ༣ ནས་ ༡༢༡

6 རྒྱལ་མོ་འབྲུག་པ། བོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་རྒྱུང་བའི་གཏམ། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐུན་ཁང། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༩༩༧ ཤོག་ ༡༧༧

7 རམ་རིང་རྒྱུད་གི་མིང་རྒྱུད་པ།

8 ཕགོང་ས་ལྷ་པ་ཆེན་པོ། བྱང་བདག་དག་གི་དབང་པོའི་རྣམ་ཐར། དཔེ་གཞུགས། བོད། ༩ པ། ཤོག་ ༢༧

9 རྩོན་ཏཱ་ལའ་བླ་མ་ <<མུང་ཡུལ་སྤྱོད་སྤྱོད་བར་གསུམ་གྱི་ཆོས་འབྱུང་>> བོད་སྤྱོད་པ་མི་དམངས་དཔེ་སྐུན་ཁང། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༩༩༣

10 ཕགོང་ས་ལྷ་པ་ཆེན་པོ། བྱང་བདག་དག་གི་དབང་པོའི་རྣམ་ཐར། དཔེ་གཞུགས། བོད། ༩ པ། ཤོག་ ༢༧

མཐའི་མིང་མི་ལ་དང་ཡུལ་ལ་ཐོགས་པ་སོགས་ཇི་རིགས་ཤིག་ཡོད་པ་བཞིན། བྱང་བདག་པོའི་རྒྱལ་རྒྱུད་གཙང་ལ་སྟོད་ངམ་རིང་
ཁུལ་གྱི་རྗེ་དཔོན་དུ་གྱུར་རྗེས། ཡུལ་དེའི་མིང་ལ་འདྲ་གཙང་ལ་སྟོད་བྱང་པ་ཞེས་ཐོགས་པ་དང་། གཙང་ལ་སྟོད་བྱང་གི་ཕྱོགས་ནས་
གཏེར་བཏོན་པའི་རྒྱུ་མའི་གཏེར་ཆོས་ལ་བྱང་གཏེར། ཞེས་ས་མིང་ཆོས་ལུགས་གྲུབ་མཐའི་མིང་ལ་ཐོགས་ཏེ་རྒྱུ་མ་བྱང་གཏེར་
གྱི་ལུགས་འདི་བྱང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ།

༢༽ རྗེ་གྲོལ་མཚོག་ཞབས།

ཁོང་གིས་ངམ་རིང་གི་གཞིས་རྒྱུད་རྒྱུ་མ་པོ་བྱང་མཚར་དུ་གྱུ་རྩ་ཆོས་དབང་(༡༢༡༢-༡༢༧༠)གི་གཏེར་ཆོས་སྤྲ་མ་གསལ་བ་
འདུས་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ཞལ་བྱེ་ནས། གྱུ་རྩ་པ་སྤྲའི་རྒྱུ་མ་པོའི་དབང་ལེགས་པར་མཛོས་པ་དེ་ནི། གསལ་སྤྲུགས་རྒྱུ་མའི་ལམ་དུ་
སྤྱོད་འདི་ཉིད་ཀྱི་འཇུག་པའི་སྒོ་དང་པོ་ཡིན།

༣༽ བྱམས་པ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན།

དབྱུང་ལོ་བཅུ་བདུན་པ་ལ་ཏུབ་དཔོན་པ་དུས་གསུམ་གྱི་སངས་རྒྱལ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ཐུགས་རྗེའི་རང་གཟུགས། བྱམས་པ་ཆོས་ཀྱི་
རྒྱལ་མཚན་ཞེས་གྲགས་པའི་སྤྲ་མ་དེ་ལེགས་པར་བརྟག་མཐར་ཡིད་ཆེས་ཀྱི་གནས་སུ་སོན་ཏེ། ཏི་ལྷི་བཀྱར་བྱང་གཏེར་ལས་འབྱུང་
བའི་དཀྱའ་པོ་ཐུགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱབ་པས་སྤྱ་དངས། འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷག་རྒྱ་ཟེལ་གཞོན་གྱི་སྟོར་སོགས། སྤྱོད་སྟོན་མའི་སྟོན་ལམ་གྱི་བཀོ་
སྤྲུལ་ལས་གྲུབ་པ་རྣམས་གསལ།

༤༽ བར་ཕུག་མོང་།

དུང་དཀར་ཆོག་མཛོད་ལས། ངམ་རིང་རྫོང་དུ་ཡོད་ཅིང་། བ་རི་ལོ་རྒྱ་བ་(༡༠༥༠-༡༡༧༧)འདས་སའི་ལུང་པ་དེ་ཡིན།¹¹ ཞེས་བྱང་
བ་བཞིན། གྲུས་པས་བརྩམས་པའི་<<གཙང་སྟོད་ལྷ་ངམ་ཕུན་གསུམ་གྱི་སྟོན་བྱང་ལོ་རྒྱལ་>>ལས། ཨོ་རྒྱན་གྱི་སྤྲུལ་ལུང་དུ་
གྲགས་པའི་སྤྲུལ་ཕུག་གམ་བར་ཕུག་ཞེས་དང་། སྤྲ་མ་བ་རི་ལོ་རྒྱ་བས་བསྟེན་མཚམས་མཛོད་པས་བར་ཕུག་གམ་བར་ཕུག་ཞེས་
མིང་དུ་ཐོགས་པར་གྲགས་པའི་བར་ཕུག་གི་ལུང་གཞུང་ཡོད། སྤྱིར་བར་ཕུག་ནི་ལྷ་ཅེ་རྫོང་དང་ངམ་རིང་གི་ས་མཚམས་གྲོང་ཆོ་དེར་
ལྷ་ཅེ་རྫོང་གཉེན་ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ནས་འགོ་འཇུགས་ཀྱིས། ཡར་ཁྱུང་གཙང་པོ་དང་སྤྱི་རྒྱུ་འདྲེས་མཚམས་དེང་གི་ངམ་རིང་རྫོང་མདོ་སྤེ་
ཤང་གི་སྤྱི་སྤུམ་མདོ་གོང་ཆོ་བར་གྱི་ཡར་ཁྱུང་གཙང་པོའི་རོང་བརྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ས་མིང་ཡིན་ཞིང་། ཁུལ་དེར་ཡར་ཁྱུང་གཙང་པོའི་བྱང་བརྒྱུད་
ས་ལུད། སྟོ་ར། བར་རག་ རེ་ཤར། ཐང་དཀར། སྟོ་ར། ཤིང་ཆེན། སོགས་དང་། ལྷོ་རྒྱུད་ལ་སྤུ་བ། མཐོང་སྟོན། ལྷ་ཕུག་ལ། འཕྲེད་

¹¹ དུང་དཀར་སྟོན་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས། དུང་དཀར་ཆོག་མཛོད། སྤེལ་ཆ། ཤེས་རིག་དཔར་ཁང་། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༠༥། ཤོག ༡༢་པ།

ལུལ་དེ་ནི་གྲོམ་པ་རྒྱུད་དང་ཐག་མི་རིང་གི་སར་གནས་ཡོད་པ་གཞིར་བཅས། གཅིག་ནས་ཡར་རྒྱུད་གཙང་པོའི་རོང་བཤུར་བར་
ཐུག་རོང་གི་མདོར་གནས་ཡོད་པ་དང་། གཉིས་སུ་ལུལ་དེར་དེ་སྔ་མཁར་གྲོང་གཞི་ཁྱེད་མི་རྒྱུད་བཞིག་ཆགས་སྤྱོད་རྒྱུད་ཤུལ་
འཛིགས་རྩམ་ཅན་ཇི་སྟེད་ཅིག་དུས་འཛམ་གྱི་ཡོད་པས་སོ། །

གང་ལྟར་ཡང་པོ་བྱང་དོན་ཅེ་ཅེ་ལྟ་གསུང་རྒྱུ་དོ། བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཡབ་དུས་སུ་གསར་བསྐྱུན་གནང་བཞིག་
ཡིན་པས་འདུག་པ་ནི། རྒྱ་མཚན་ཀྱན་དགའ་གྲོལ་མཆོག་(༡༧༠༧_༡༧༦༦)གི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཤོག་ ༢༤༤ ནང་། “གོང་ནས་བཀའ་
རིན་ཅན་གྱིས་ཅེ་ལྟ་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྒྱུ་ལང་གསར་བཞེངས་ཀྱི་རབ་གནས་ལ་ཤོག་གསུང་པའི་བཀའ་ཤོག་ཐེབས་པ་ལ། བཀའ་
རིན་བསམ་པར་དཀའ་བའི་ཡུལ་གྱིས་ཡོངས་ནས།”¹⁴ ཞེས་བྱུང་བ་ནས།

༤། ལྟ་སྟོན་པ།

ལྟ་སྟོན་པ་ཞེས་པ་དེ་བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཡུལ་གྱི་འབྲུངས་གཞིས་དེ་ཡིན་པ་དང་། ལྟ་སྟོན་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་
བྱང་བདག་དང་ས་སྐྱ་བར་དང་། བྱང་བདག་དང་རིན་སྲུངས་པ། བྱང་བདག་གི་སྲས་སྲོས་ནང་ཡན་རྒྱུན་བཅས་ལ་འགལ་ཁྲུ་བྱང་
ཡོད་པ་མངོན། རྒྱ་མཚན་གང་ལགས་ཤེ། ས་སྐྱའི་གདན་རབས་ཉེར་གསུམ་པ་སྔགས་འཆར་ཀྱན་དགའ་རིན་ཆེན་(ཕྱི་ལོ་
༡༧༡༧ ནས་ ༡༧༤༤)གི་སྐུ་དུས་སུ་ལྟ་སྟོན་པས་ས་སྐྱའི་ཆོས་དྲུང་ཁྱེད། བསེ་འབག་ནག་པོ་བཞུགས་སར་སློབ་ཐོབ་བརྒྱུ་སྟེ་
རྒྱུ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྐུ་ལ་ཐོ་འཆོས་པ་བྱེད་སྐབས། བྱང་བདག་ནམ་མཁའ་ཆོད་བར་དང་རིན་སྲུངས་པས་ས་སྐྱའི་རྒྱུ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ཉེ་སྟེ་
རྒྱུ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་སྐུ་ལ་ཉེ་སྟེ་དང་བྱང་བདག་གཉེན་མཚན་དུ་བྱུང་བ་སོགས་ལས་འཕྲོས་ཏེ། རིན་སྲུངས་པས་ས་སྐྱའི་རྒྱུ་
བསེ་ཉེ་བྱང་པ་དང་རིན་སྲུངས་པ་དག་འཐབ་བྱུང་ཡོད།

འོན་ཏེ། ལྟ་སྟོན་ལྟ་སྟོན་པ་ཞེས་པ་དེ་ཡི་གནས་ཡུལ་གང་དུ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཞེ་ན། <<དགེ་སྟོན་བྱ་བའི་བ་བླ་འཕྲིན་ལས་རང་
ཉིད་ཀྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྗོད་རབ་དཀའ་ཤེལ་གྱི་མེ་ལོང་>> ཤོག་ ༤༢༤ ནང་། “གཡམས་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱི་ཁད་ཉེ་སར་མང་མཁར་ལྷ་གྲ་
ལུང་དང་། ལུང་བསྐྱུན་དག་འཕེལ། འདར་ཆོས་སྡེ་སོགས་ཀྱང་འདུག་སྟེ་ལམ་ཕྱོགས་ཀྱིས་མཇལ་མི་བྱུག། དེ་བཞིན་དུ་གཡོན་རིའི་
རོས་སུ་མ་ཉི་པ་ཆེན་གྱི་དགོན་གནས་ས་བབས་ཡང་མཐོང་སྟེ་རི་བྱེད་ཆེས་པས་མ་སྟེ། ལྟ་སྟོན་པའི་རྒྱུ་ཉིད་ཡོད་པའི་བཅད་ཀྱི་
ལྟ་ས་མཐེལ་དུ་གྲུད་གི་གྲོ་བ་བཏབ།”

ཅེས་བྱུང་བར་གཞིགས་ན། ལྟ་སྟོན་པ་ཞེས་པ་དེ་ཆོས་འཁོར་ལྷན་པོ་དང་མི་རིང་བའི་སར་གནས་ཡོད་པ་ཤེས་ཐུབ་པ་འདུག དེ་
ཡང་སྤྱི་ཟུར་མགོན་པོ་དོན་ཅེས་“<<དུས་རབས་གསར་ཆིང་གི་བོད་>> སྤྱད་ཆ་ཤོག་ ༢༠༤ ནང་། “དེ་ནས་ཆོས་སྡེ་ཆོས་འཁོར་
ལྷན་པོའི་དགོན་པ་དང་། ཆོས་ལྷན་དགོན་པའི་ཆོས་གཞིས་ཁོངས་གཏོགས་མོ་ཡན་ཞེས་པ་སོགས་ཐེམ་གངས་སུ་མ་ཕྱོད་ཏེ། དེ་
ནས་ལྟ་སྟོན་པ་མདའ་པོར་གྲོང་ཆོག་ཅིག དུས་ཅེ་བྱག་ཏོག་ཟེར་བའི་རི་སྐར་དུས་ཅེ་ཤར་པ་དང་དུས་ཅེ་ཤར་ལག དེ་ནས་རག་ཤར་

¹⁴ <https://maps.app.goo.gl/AAg744TgTQu1Vrhy6> 达居 中国西藏自治区日喀则市拉孜县。

གོང་ལྷེ་ལྷེ་གཅིག་འཕང་མ་ཁི་བ། འཕང་ལྷོ། འཕང་ཤར། དེ་ནས་ལྷན་གྲུབ་སྤྱི་བོང་ཚོ་གཅིག་ དེར་ས་སྤྱོད་གཞུང་གི་གཉེར་ཚད་
ལས་ཁུངས་ཀྱི་འཛིན་ཁོངས་གཞིས་ཀ་གཅིག་ཡོད་པ་དང་། ཁུལ་པ་ལྷ་ས་ཁང་གསར་ར་དང་། ཞེས་བྱུང་བས་ན་ལྷ་ས་རྫོང་པའི་
གནས་ལུལ་ར་འབྲོད་ཐུབ་པ་འདུག དེར་གི་ས་ཁུལ་དེ་ཁྱེ་ཚུལ་ལྟར་ན། གཙང་ཁུལ་ས་སྤྱོད་པ་ལྷན་གྲུབ་སྤྱི་བོང་ཚོའི་བྲག་
ཤིས་ཕུག་གི་གལ་ལས་འདབས་ཀྱི་རི་གདོང་ཞིག་ཏུ་གནས་ཡོད་ཅིང་། ས་སྤྱོད་ནས་ལྷ་ཙུང་རྫོང་གི་ཕྱོགས་སུ་ཀླུ་ལོ་མི་ཁྲལ་ཉི་ཤུ་ཙམ་
ཕྱིན་མཚམས་ཀྱི་སར་ཡོད།

༥༽ ལུབ་དགོན་དོན་གྲུབ་གླིང་།

ལུབ་དགོན་པ་དེར་ས་དགའ་རྫོང་ཁོངས་དེ་སྤྱི་འབྲོད་སྤོལ་ལྟར་ན་གཙང་བརྒྱ་མཚོ་དགའའི་ཁོངས་སུ་ཡོད་ཅིང་། དགོན་པའི་
མིང་ཆ་ཚད་བར་ལུབ་དགོན་གསལ་སྤྲུགས་གླིང་།¹⁵ ཞེས་ཞུ། ཕྱིས་བོད་གཞུང་ལས་སྤྱོད་འགས་ལུབ་དགོན་པར་ཚོང་ར་གསར་
འཛུགས་བྱས་ཏེ། ཚོང་ར་དེར་བྱང་ནས་འབྲོང་པ་ཚོ་དགྲ་དང་། གྲག་ཚང་ཚོ་དུག ལ་རྒྱབ་ཚོ་བཞི། ཏེ་བ་ཚོ་ལྷ་བཅས་ཀྱི་འབྲོག་པ་
རྣམས་དང་། ལྷོ་རུབ་ཕྱོགས་ནས་ཤར་ཁུལ་དང་། རོང་ཤར། གཉལ་ནང་། སྤྱིད་གོང་། བཅུ་མ། ལུབ་རི། སྤྱེ་ཤར། སྤྱོ་བ་བཅས་ཀྱི་ཚོང་
པ་རྣམས་ཡོང་དགོས་བཀའ་གཏོང་ལམ་དང་།¹⁶ ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༩༥༩ བར་ལུབ་དགོན་གྱི་ཉི་འཁོར་ལ་ཚོང་ར་བཞིག་བཤུལ་ཁང་རོ་མང་
པོ་མཐོང་རྒྱ་ཡོད།¹⁷

༦༽ ལུར་ཚོ་ལྷ་རི་གནས་རྫོང་།

ལུར་ཚོ་ལྷ་རི་གནས་རྫོང་ཞེས་པ་དེ་ནི་དེར་གི་གཉལ་ལམ་རྫོང་ལུར་ཚོ་ཤར་གི་ཁོངས་སུ་ཡོད་ཅིང་། ཁུལ་དེ་ལུར་ཚོ་རྫོང་ཞེས་དེ་སྤྱོད་བྱེད་
ཚོ་རྒྱལ་མོ་ཞེས་པ་བྱུང་བའི་ལའང་ཤུལ་དང་། དེ་དང་ཐག་མི་རིང་བའི་སར་རྒྱུང་མ་བྱང་གཏོར་ལུགས་ཀྱི་བྲག་དཀར་གསལ་སྤྲུགས་
ཚོས་གླིང་ཡོད། དགོན་དེ་ཕྱག་འདེབས་པ་པོ་ནི་དག་སྤྱོས་ལ་འཛིགས་བྲལ་དཀོན་མཆོག་རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱིས་ཕྱབ་བཏབ་པར་
གསུངས། ཁོང་ནི་དགོན་པ་རང་གི་འདོན་འཛོག་བྱང་གཏོར་ཕུགས་སྤྱོབ་ཀྱི་ཚོ་གའི་སྤྱོད་གསལ་ལ་འདེབས་བརྒྱད་རིམ་ལྟར་ན།
ཕུགས་སྤྱོ་གྲོ་སྤྱོ་རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱི་སྤྱོ་བ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཞིང་། ཕུགས་སྤྱོ་རྒྱུན་པ་ནི་ལུབ་དགོན་བྲམས་པ་ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱི་
སྤྱོ་བ་མ་རྒྱལ་མཚན་བརྒྱད་ཀྱི་ནང་ཚན་གཅིག་ཡིན། ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༩༥༩ གོང་དགོན་ལྷེ་རི་པོ་ཆེ་ལུགས་ཟམ་པས་བསྐྱེད་པར་གྲགས།

¹⁵ བྱ་དུར་བཟང་པོ། རང་གི་མི་ཚོའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་སྤོང་ཡོར་བརྫོད་པ་བྱ་དུར་ཚངས་ཐིག་ རྟོད་ཆ། ལ་ཕྱེས་མ་ཆེན་བོད་ཀྱི་རིག་གཞུང་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ཁང་། ཕྱི་ལོ་
2013། ཤོག 11།

¹⁶ བྱ་དུར་བཟང་པོ། རང་གི་མི་ཚོའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་སྤོང་ཡོར་བརྫོད་པ་བྱ་དུར་ཚངས་ཐིག་ རྟོད་ཆ། ལ་ཕྱེས་མ་ཆེན་བོད་ཀྱི་རིག་གཞུང་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ཁང་། ཕྱི་ལོ་
2013། ཤོག 12།

¹⁷ བྱ་དུར་བཟང་པོ། རང་གི་མི་ཚོའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་སྤོང་ཡོར་བརྫོད་པ་བྱ་དུར་ཚངས་ཐིག་ རྟོད་ཆ། ལ་ཕྱེས་མ་ཆེན་བོད་ཀྱི་རིག་གཞུང་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ཁང་། ཕྱི་ལོ་
2013། ཤོག 13།

༩། གསང་སྐགས་ཐེག་མཆོག་གླིང་།

“སྐ་འབྱུར་བསྟན་པའི་ས་ཆེན་དུས་ངན་གྱི། །རྒྱ་གཏེར་གཏིར་དུ་བྱིང་བ་སྤྱིང་སྟོབས་གྱི། །
 འཇུག་པས་འདེགས་ལ་བསངས་རིར་ཐེག་མཆོག་གླིང་། །མ་ཡི་སེང་གེས་བསྟན་ལ་གསོལ་བ་འདེབས། །”
 ད་མན་བྱང་བདག་བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་ཕྱག་བཏབ་ཅིང་བྱང་གཏེར་ལུགས་གྱི་གདངས་དབྱངས་དང་ཆོ་ག་དར་སྤེལ་གཏིར་ཡུལ་
 གྱི་དགོན་གནས་གྲགས་ཆེན་གསང་སྐགས་ཐེག་མཆོག་གླིང་། དེང་ས་ཡུལ་གང་དུ་རོས་འཛིན་བྱེད་དགོས་མིན་ཐད་ཁ་ཆོན་གཅིད་
 ལུབ་པའི་གསལ་ཁ་མེད་ཀྱང་། བྱང་བདག་བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ལས། “ཡོ་བྱང་ཆེན་པོའི་ཉེ་འདབས་སྟོན་གྱི་དུས་
 གྲིབ་སེལ་བསངས་ཀྱི་བཀྲར་སྟིས་ལྷ་ཆོགས་དབྱེས་པ་བསྐྱེད་པའི་ས་ཁུལ་ཡིན་པས་བསངས་རི་ཞེས་མིང་དུ་བཏགས་པའི་རི་དེའུ་
 ཕྱོགས་མཆོམས་ཀྱི་ས་གཞི་ཐམས་ཅད་དག་ཞིང་དབྱེད་ལེགས་པ་དེར་གནས་གཞི་ཆེན་པོ་ཐེབས་ན་བསྟན་འགྲོའི་དོན་ཆེན་པོར་
 འབྱུར་ཞིང་།” ཞེས་བྱང་བས་ན།



Fig. 2: The site of gSangs ri and the ruins of gSang sngags theg mchog gling



Fig. 2: The site of gSangs ri

ཚྲོང་ཆགས་ཡུལ་གྱི་རི་བརྒྱད་ཀྱི་ཤར་འདབས་སུ་བསངས་རི་ཞེས་པའི་རི་གཤམ་དུ་བྱུང་འགོག་དུ་ལྷ་མཇལ་རྒྱ་འདུག་ན་དེ་ཡིན།
 རྫོགས་ཀྱི་འཛིན་པ་སྤྲེལ་ལས་ཀྱི་རྫོགས་བརྗོད་ལས། ཤོག ༥༧༩ ནང་། “ཕོ་བྲང་ཆེན་པོ་ངམ་རིང་དང་ཉེ་བར་སྤྲེལ། ཆོས་རྒྱལ་
 དབང་པོའི་སྤྲེལ་གསང་སྤྲེལ་ཐེག་མཆོག་གླིང་གི་གཙུག་ལག་ཁང་བཏབ་ཤུལ་བསངས་རི་ཞེས་པ་སྤྲེལ་ནས་རྗེ་སྤོན་འབངས་
 གསུམ་གྱིས་ཅེ་དང་། རྟེན་པ། མཐེལ་གསུམ་སོ་སོར་བསངས་གཏོང་སྟེ་ལྷ་འདུག་པ་ལྷར་བསངས་དུད་སོ་སོར་བཏང་བྱུང་ཞིང་།
 རིམ་བཞིན་བསྐོད་མཐར་འགྲུལ་ལྷན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རིམ་པར་བྱོན་པའི་ཕོ་བྲང་བྱང་ཕྱགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཆེ་པོ་མང་རིང་ཚྲོང་
 ཕྱིན།” ཞེས་བྱུང་། དཔེ་ལྷན་པ་དེའི་རྟེན་གཙོ་བོ་ནི་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་དབང་པོའི་སྤྲེལ་བཞེངས་ཤིང་རིག་འཛིན་རྫོང་རྒྱུ་རབ་གནས་མཛད་པའི་
 ཨོ་རྒྱལ་ཆེན་པོའི་གསེར་སྤྲེལ་བསྐོད་ནམས་དཔལ་འབར་དུ་གྲགས་པ་བཞུགས་ཡོད་པ་དེ། ཕྱིས་རབ་བྱུང་བཅུ་དྲུག་པའི་ནང་རི་པོ་
 བཀྲ་བཟང་དུ་བཞུགས་ཡོད་པ་རྫོགས་ཀྱི་འཛིན་པ་སྤྲེལ་ལས་ཀྱི་གསུངས།¹⁸

༡༠༧ རི་ཀུན་ཏུ་གཟིགས།

པ་སྤྲེལ་ལས་ཀྱི་རྫོགས་བརྗོད་ཤོག ༥༦༩ ནང་། “བྱང་གཏེར་ལས་ལུང་བསྟན་པའི་རི་ཀུན་ཏུ་གཟིགས་ཞེས་པ་ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ཐང་
 ལྷག་ཅེ་ལ་གཏད་པ། མདོ་དབྱུང་རི་སྤུམ་མདོ་ལ་གཏད་པ་ཞེས་བཤད་པའི་མཚུག་གི་རི་སྤུམ་དབྱུང་རི་སྤུམ་མདོར་སྤྲེལ།” ཅས་བྱུང་བ་ན།
 རྒྱལ་ཐང་ལྷག་ཅེ་ནི་དེང་གཙུང་ནང་སྟོད་དུ་ཡོད། དེ་ཡང་གཙུང་སྟོད་ངམ་རིང་ཁུལ་གྱི་མེས་པའི་ཞལ་རྒྱུན་དུ། གཙུང་སྟོད་རྒྱལ་ཐང་
 དཀར་པོ། གཙུང་སྟོད་ལོ་བ་ལྷ་ཅེ། ཞེས་བྱུང་ངོ་། གཙུང་རི་སྤུམ་མདོ་ནི་མདོག་རྒྱ་གཙུང་པོ་དང་ཡར་ལྷུང་གཙུང་པོ་འདྲེས་མདོར་
 ཟེར། མདོར་ན། རི་ཀུན་ཏུ་གཟིགས་ཞེས་པ་ངམ་རིང་ཚྲོང་ཆགས་ཡུལ་གྱི་ལྷ་འཛིན་སུ་ཡོད་པ་ནི། ཕ་སྤྲེལ་རྗེ་བདེ་ལྷག་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་
 དབྱིངས་རིག་བྱང་རྒྱལ་དབང་པོའི་བཀའ་འཁུམ་ལས། རང་གི་སྤྱི་ཡུལ་གཙུང་ལ་སྟོད་རྫོང་མཆོག་ཁ་བབས་ཀྱི་བྱང་གི་ཆར་ས་རྟགས་

¹⁸ 中国西藏自治区日喀则市昂仁县

ས་བཅད་བཞི། རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ཀྱི་དཔྱད་གཞི་དང་ནང་དོན་དཔྱད་གླེང་།

བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་རྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་<<རྟོགས་པ་རྫོང་ཀྲུང་བཟང་ལྷགས་མེད་རྫོགས་པར་>>ཀྱི་དབྱང་གཞི་གང་ལ་ཁུངས་
གཏུགས་ཡོད་མེད་སྟོར་ལ། རྟོགས་པ་རྫོང་དེའི་མཚུག་ཏུ་འདི་ལྟར་བཀོད་འདུག འདི་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མཛད་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་གྱི་ས་མོན་ཉུང་
འཕྲོ་ཅན་ཞིག་འདུག་པ་ཚོུས་གཞིར་བཟུང་། ལུས་སྤྱིར་བསྐྱབ་རྟོན་ཞིབ་འཛེམས་ཞུས། ཞབས་འབྲིང་བ་བགྲེས་པོ་འགའ་ལ་དྲི་མལ་
བྱས།” ཞེས་བྱུང་བ་བཞིན། བཀྲ་ཤིས་རྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མཛད་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་གྱི་ས་མོན་ཉུང་འཕྲོ་ཅན་དེར་གཞི་བཅོམ་བའི་
ཐོག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་རྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སྐུ་མཆེད་ལུས་སྤྱིར་དང་། བཀྲ་ཤིས་རྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཞབས་འབྲིང་བགྲེས་པོའང་ཅན་འགའ་ལ་བཅར་
འདི་ཞུས་འདི་ཚུམ་མཛད་ཡོད་འདུག་ན། རྟོགས་པ་རྫོང་དེ་བཞིན་ཏུ་ཅང་ཁུངས་དག་ཅིག་ཏུ་བསྐྱེད་གོས་པར་མ་ཤོན།

བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་རང་རྒྱལ་ཚོགས་བཅད་མ་མཛད་འཕྲོ་ཅན་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་ནི་དོ་བྲག་རྒྱ་ལྷོང་ལཱ་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཐར་ལས།
 “ཆོས་རྒྱལ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་ཐར་ཞལ་གསུང་མ་མཛད་འཕྲོས།”¹⁹ ཞེས་དང་། “དོ་བྲག་རྒྱ་ལྷོང་བཞི་པའི་རྒྱལ་ཐར་
 ལས། ཆོས་རྒྱལ་དབང་པོའི་སྡེའི་རྒྱལ་ཐར་ཚོགས་བཅད་མ་ཞལ་གསུང།”²⁰ ཞེས་བྱུང་ངོ་། བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རང་རྒྱལ་
 དེའི་མཚན་བྱང་དུ་རྒྱ་འབྲལ་དུ་བའི་རོལ་མོ། ཞེས་འདྲགས་སྡེ་མཛད་མེད་དམ་སྟེ། འཕགས་པ་འཇིག་རྟེན་དབང་ལྷག་གི་
 རྒྱལ་སྒྲུལ་རིམ་བྱོན་གྱི་འབྲུངས་རབས་དེབ་ཐེར་ནོར་བུའི་འཕྲིང་བ་དང་པོའི་ནང་། “ཡོན་ཏན་གྱི་སྒྲུལ་པ་ཆོས་རྒྱལ་དབང་པོའི་སྡེ།
 ཞེས་པའི་ལེ་ཚན་ནང་། རོ་བའི་རོལ་ལ་ལྷག་ཞབས་གྱི་རྩེས་གསལ་འདྲོད་མཛོན་སྟུང་དུ་བཀོད་པ་ལོགས་ངོ་མཚར་མང་ཡང་ཐམས་

19 བྱང་གཏེར་ཚེས་བསྐྱེད། རྫོགས་སྐྱེད་ལུ་པའི་རྣམ་ཐང། མོག་ ༢༥ཡ།

20 བྱང་གཏེར་ཚཱ་བསྐྱེད། རྫོགས་སྐྱེད་བཞིའི་རྣམ་ཐར། ཤོག་ ༣༧ ནང་།

ཅད་བཟོད་ཀྱིས་མི་ལང་སྟེ་སྤྱུ་འཕུལ་དུ་བའི་ལོ་མོར་སྤང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།²¹ ཞེས་བྱུང་ལ། མཁས་དབང་སངས་རྒྱལ་རྫོང་མཛད་པའི་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་རྟོགས་བཟོད་ནང་དུ་ཡང་། སྤྱུ་གསུམ་ཡོངས་སུ་དག་པ་དེའི་སྤྱུ་འཕུལ་དུ་བ་ལས།²² ཞེས་བྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། །

འོན་ཀྱང་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་ཉིད་ནས་མཛད་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་འཕྲོ་ཅན་དེ་ཇི་ལྟ་བུ་ཞིག་ཡོད་དམ་ཞེ་ན། དེ་ནི་རྟོགས་བཟོད་ཀྱན་བཟང་ལྷགས་བཟུང་ཞེས་གར་ནང་ཐོ་རེ་བ་ལུང་དྲངས་འདུག་པ་དག་ཡིན་པེས་སུ་སྤང་བ་ནི། རྟོགས་བཟོད་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ནང་། རང་དང་ཉེ་འབྲེལ་ལ་མཁོ་དགའི་ཡོ་བྱད་ཀྱི་ཆེད་དུ་ཕྱག་རྩེས་རྣམས་ཟེགས་འཐོར་དུ་སོང་བ་སོགས་ཀྱི་རང་ཚུལ་ལས་བཅུམས་སྟེ། ཕྱིས་ཚོགས་བཅད་ཀྱི་འཕྲེང་བར་སྟེལ་བ་ལས། “མེས་པོས་བཀའ་བསློམས་གསལ་གཟིམས་འཁོར་གཡོག་རྣམས། །ཁྲེལ་མེད་རང་རང་འདོད་པའི་དབང་གུར་ནས། །ཡལ་ནོར་རང་དབང་པལ་ཆེར་འཐོར་ཞིང་ཟེགས། །གྲིབ་རྒྱུད་ལུ་བས་མཛོ་ལྟ་མགོ་ལུས་ཁྲབ། །ཉིན་པར་ཕྱིས་པའི་འཁོར་བསྟུས་རི་ཁྲུངས་བསྟོར། །ནང་ཅུབ་སྟོབ་དཔོན་དུང་དུ་འཁོད་པའི་ཆོ། །ཆིང་ལ་དྲན་པ་མ་དང་ཆོས་ཁོ་ནའོ། །ཚུལ་དང་མིག་རྒྱ་བརྟོན་པའི་རྣམ་འབྱུང་ལ། །ཉེ་ལོགས་འཁོད་པ་ཀུན་ཀྱང་ཤུགས་རིང་འདོན། །ཁོ་བོ་དྲིན་ཅན་མ་ལ་བཅུ་བའི་གཏུམ། །ཐོས་པས་ཉོར་གཟའི་རྒྱུང་ལ་མཚོན་ཡོག་བཞིན། །རིགས་རན་སྟོད་པས་བསུ་པའི་བསྐྱེད་ཐབས་བཅག །”²³ ཅེས་དང་། དེ་བཞིན་རྟོགས་བཟོད་དེ་ཉིད་དུ། སྤྱུགས་འཆང་ཆེན་པོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་གསུང་ལས། ཞེས་དང་། ཚུལ་དེ་དང་ལྷན་ཅིག་པར། །ཡང་ཚོགས་བཅད་དུ། སྤྱུགས་འཆང་ཡོངས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་འམ་དབང་པོའི་སྟེ་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཞལ་ནས། ཞེས་བཟོད་པའི་གཤམ་ནས་ཚོགས་བཅད་ཀྱི་ལམ་ནས་གང་གི་མཛད་རྣམ་བཟོད་པ་དག བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མཛད་པའི་མཛད་རྣམ་འཕྲོ་ཅན་ལས་ཇི་བཞིན་ལུང་དྲངས་པ་ཞིག་ཡིན་པ་ལ་ཆོན་ཆེད་པེས་སུ་འདུག་སྟུམ།

གལ་ཆེད་དཔྱད་གཞིའི་རྒྱ་ཆ་གཞན་གཉིས་ནི། བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་སྟེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རང་གཏེར་དང་། ཇེ་བཙུན་ཀྱན་དགའ་གྲོལ་མཚོག་ཞབས་ཀྱིས་མཛད་པའི་བྱང་བདག་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་གསུམ་བཟང་གི་རྣམ་ཐར་རེད་འདུག གོང་གསལ་དཔྱད་ཆ་ལག་གཞིར་བཟུང་བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་ཀྱི་སྤང་མོ་(བྱང་བདག་བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་ཀྱི་གཅེན་མོ་)ཀྱན་དགའ་དཔལ་སྟོན་ཞུ་ཁོང་མིན་ནས་སྟུམ།)དང་། ཞབས་འབྲིང་བགྲེས་སྟེང་ཅན་འགའ་ལ་ལམ་སྟོན་བཅར་འདྲི་ཞུས་ཏེ་སྤྲིག་པ་ཞིག་རེད་འདུག

༢༡ བཟོད་དོན་དཔྱད་སྟེང་།

བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་ཀྱི་རྟོགས་བཟོད་ཀྱན་བཟང་ལྷགས་བཟུང་ཞེས་གར་ཚུམ་པའི་དུས་ནི། སྟེ་པ་གཅོང་པའི་སྤྱིད་དབང་ཆེས་ཆེར་

21 འཕགས་པ་འཇིག་རྟེན་དབང་ལྷག་གི་རྣམ་སྟུལ་རིམ་བྱོན་གྱི་འཁྲུངས་རབས་དེ་བ་ཐེར་ནོར་བུའི་འཕྲེང་བ། སྤྱི་ལོ་ ༡༩༧༧། ཤོག་ ༡༧༤།

22 རིགས་སྤྱུགས་འཆང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོས་བསྟུར་བ་ཆེ་མཚོག་འདུས་པ་ཅུལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བཟོད་པ་ཀྱན་བཟང་ལྷགས་ཇེ་ཉེ་རྒྱལ་སྤྱུ་འཕུལ་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་རྣམ་པོས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཞུགས་སོ། །དཔེ་རྒྱུང་གིས་མ། ལྷུ་མ་བཞི་པའི་རྒྱལ། ཡིག་ཕྱང་དང་པོ།

23 སངས་རྒྱལ་རྫོང་། རིགས་སྤྱུགས་འཆང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོས་བསྟུར་བ་ཆེ་མཚོག་འདུས་པ་ཅུལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བཟོད་པ་ཀྱན་བཟང་ལྷགས་ཇེ་ཉེ་རྒྱལ་གར་སྤྱུ་འཕུལ་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་རྣམ་པོས། དཔེ་རྒྱུང་གིས་མ། རྒྱལ་ཕྱང་། ཤོག་ ༢༡ བ།

རྒྱལ་པོའི་དུས་སྐབས་ཏེ། གཙང་པོའི་དཔོན་རབས་མཐའ་མ་ཀམ་བཟུན་སྐྱོང་དབང་པོས་བོད་ཁམས་ལ་དབང་ལུང་བསྐྱར་བའི་དུས་
ཏེ་ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༡༤༢༣ ལོར་ཡིན་པར་སོང་། ཚུམ་པོའི་དུས་དང་། དཔུང་གཞིའི་ཡིག་ཆ། ཚུམ་འབྲི་བའི་གནས་བབ་སོགས་ལ་ཕྱོད་ནས་
བཤད་ན། བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སྐྱ་ཆེའི་བྱང་བ་ཁ་གསལ་ཞིང་ཞིབ་ཅིང་ཕ་བ་ཞིག་ཡོང་དགོས་པ་ལྟ་བུར་སྤང་མོད། ཡགོང་ས་
ལུ་པ་ཆེན་པོས་མཛད་པའི་བྱང་བདག་རིག་འཛིན་ཆེན་པོ་དག་གི་དབང་པོའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་དོ་མཚར་བཞེད་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་བརྗོད་དོན་
དང་བཞིབ་བསྟར་བྱས་ཆོ། བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱིས་གཡས་རུ་བྱང་པའི་རྒྱལ་སྤྱི་དབང་པོར་རྣམ་པར་ལྟོ་ཁ་འཕྲོངས་རྒྱལ་ཕྱོགས་སུ་
གསང་བྱེད་གནང་དགོས་བྱུང་བའི་གནས་ཚུལ་དང་། ལྷག་པར་གཙང་པ་སྤེལ་དང་བྱང་བདག་བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་དབང་འབྲེལ་
བའི་གནས་ཚུལ་ཇི་བྱང་ཐམས་ཅད་སྟོན་ཅིང་ཡང་སྤེད་སྟོང་བྱས་མི་འདུག

དེ་བས་ཀྱང་ཡ་མཚན་པ་ཞིག་ལ་ད་ལྟ་མཇལ་རྒྱ་ཡོད་བྱང་གཏེར་ཆོས་བསྐྱར་པོད་ཕྱེང་ ༤༢ ཡོད་པའི་ནང་མཁས་དབང་
སངས་རྒྱལ་དོ་རྩེས་བཅུ་མས་པའི་བྱང་བདག་བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་འཁོད་མི་འདུག་ལ། མཁས་དབང་སངས་
རྒྱལ་དོ་རྩེ་གང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་གསུང་འབུམ་ཕྱོགས་བསྐྱོགས་ཞུས་པའི་དེབ་ཕྱེང་ཁོད་དུ་འདེགས་པའི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ཆུང་མི་འདུག གོང་
གསལ་གནས་བབ་ལ་བསམ་གཞིགས་བྱེད་སྐབས་གཅིག་བྱས་ན་གོང་གསལ་བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ལ། དཀར་
རྩིང་གྲུབ་མཐའ་སོ་སོའི་བྱང་པོར་སྤེལ་པར་མི་གསལ་བའི་ལྟ་རྒྱུ་ཞིག་མེད་དམ་སྟེ་པའི་དོགས་པ་འདུག

གནད་དོན་དེར་གཞན་དང་གཞན་གྱི་རྒྱ་མཚན་བསྟན་དུ་ཡོད་པའི་ཀྱང་། གནད་དོན་གཙོ་བོ་ཞིག་ནི་བྱང་བདག་བླ་ཤིས་
སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་དང་སྤེལ་པ་གཙང་པའི་འགལ་སྐྱེད་དང་། མཁས་དབང་སངས་རྒྱལ་དོ་རྩེ་དང་སྤེལ་པ་གཙང་པའི་དབང་མཚན་ཡོན་ལ་རྒྱའི་
འབྲེལ་བ་དམ་ཟབ་པ་སོགས་ལས་བྱུང་འདུག་སྟུང་། མཁས་དབང་སངས་རྒྱལ་དོ་རྩེ་དང་སྤེལ་པ་གཙང་པའི་མཚན་ཡོན་ཡིན་པ་མ་ཟད།
མཁས་དབང་སངས་རྒྱལ་དོ་རྩེས་ཀམ་བཟུན་སྐྱོང་དབང་པོའི་རྟོགས་བརྗོད་ཀྱང་འབྲི་ཚུལ་མཛད་ཡོད། སྐབས་དེའི་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་
ཁོད་བཤད་ཡམས་ཤིག་ལ། བྱང་བདག་པོས་སྟོན་ལམ་ལོག་པར་བཏབ་ནས་སྤེལ་པ་གཙང་པའི་བྱང་བྱེད་བསྐྱངས་པ་ཡིན་ཟེར།²⁴

དཔུང་གཞིའི་ཡིག་ཆའི་ཐོག་ལུང་། (Bibliography)

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ཀུན་བཟང་ཐུགས་མེད་སྟོན་གར་སྐྱ་འཕུལ་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་རྣམ་པོ།>> བླ་ཤིས་སྟོབས་རྒྱལ་གསུང་འབུམ། དཔེ་རྩིང་
བྲིས་མ། <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW2KG210281>
- སེ་སྟོན་ཉི་མ་བཟང་པོ། <<རིག་འཛིན་རྟོག་ཕྱེས་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར།>> སྤེལ་པ་བྱང་བདག་ཏེར་ཆོས་སྐྱོར་ཕྱོགས་བསྐྱོགས། བོད། ༥༧
རྒྱ་གར་སིམ་ལ། ཐུབ་བཟུན་དོ་རྩེ་བྲག་གླིལ། ༢༠༡༥།
http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW2PD17457_AE3877

²⁴ བྱང་པ་རིག་འཛིན་ཆེན་པོ་དག་གི་དབང་པོའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་དོ་མཚར་བཞེད་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ལས། ཤོག་ ༢༥༠ ནང་།

ཀུན་དགའ་གྲོལ་མཆོག <<ཇི་བཅུན་ཀུན་དགའ་གྲོལ་མཆོག་གི་ཕྱི་ནང་གསལ་གསུམ་གྱི་རྣམ་ཐར།>> པེ་ཅིང་། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་

སྐྱུན་ཁང་། གྱི་ལོ། ༢༠༠༥། <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW30073>

ཡེ་ཤོང་ས་ལུ་པ་ཆེན་པོ། <<བྱང་བདག་དག་གི་དབང་པོའི་རྣམ་ཐར།>> རབ་དབང་སྟོབས་རྒྱ་མཆོའི་གསུང་འབུམ། དཔེ་

གཟུགས། བོད། ༡༥། རྣམ་གསལ་སྟོན་མེ། རྩ་རམ་ས་ལ། གྱི་ལོ། ༢༠༠༧

http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW2CZ5990_E96FBA

རྩོག་དན་རྣམ་མཁའ་ཆོས་འབྱེད། <<ཇི་བཅུན་ཐམས་ཅད་མཁའ་པ་ལོ་ཆེན་རྣམ་ཐར་ཐེན་གྱིས།>> བོད་ཀྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་

རྣམ་ཐར་ཕྱོགས་བསྒྲིགས། བོད། ༢༤། མཆོ་སྟོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུན་ཁང་། ཟླ་ལོང་། གྱི་ལོ། ༢༠༡༢།

http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW1PD180878_B395E8

མཁའ་པོ་ཆོས་དབྱིངས། <<བྱང་གཏེར་ཐུབ་བསྟན་རྟོ་རྩེ་བྲག་གི་ཆོས་འབྱུང་རིག་འཛིན་བརྒྱུད་པའི་རྟོགས་བརྟུན་དོ་མཆར་གཏམ་

གྱི་ཕྱིར་བ།>> རྩ་འབྱུར་བྱང་གཏེར་ཆོས་སྟོར་ཕྱོགས་བསྒྲིགས་སྒྲུགས་བམ་ ༤༢། རྩ་གར་སིམ་ལ། ཐུབ་བསྟན་རྟོ་

རྩེ་བྲག་གྱི་ལོ། ༢༠༡༥།

http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW2PD17457_DA1394

བྱང་གཏེར་ཆོས་སྒྲིག་ཆོགས་རྒྱུང་། <<རྩ་འབྱུར་བྱང་གཏེར་ཆོས་སྟོར་སྤྱི་དཀར་ཆག་ རྩ་འབྱུར་བྱང་གཏེར་ཆོས་སྟོར་ཕྱོགས་

བསྒྲིགས་>> སྒྲུགས་བམ་ ༤༣། རྩ་གར་སིམ་ལ། ཐུབ་བསྟན་རྟོ་རྩེ་བྲག་གྱི་ལོ། ༢༠༡༥།

http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW2PD17457_C872F0

ཇི་བཅུན་ཀུན་དགའ་གྲོལ་མཆོག <<རིགས་ལུན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རྣམ་རྒྱལ་གྲགས་པ་བཟང་པོའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་པ་རབ་ལྷགས་

སྟན་པའི་འབྲུག་རྒྱ>> དཔེ་གཟུགས། <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW25587>

རིག་འཛིན་པ་རྒྱ་འཕྱིན་ལས། <<དགོ་སྟོང་བྱ་བལ་བ་པ་རྒྱ་ཕྱིན་ལས་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྟུན་པ་རབ་དཀར་ཤེལ་གྱི་མེ་

ལོང་།>> རྟོན་སྟེང་གཉིས། རྩ་འབྱུར་བྱང་གཏེར་ཆོས་སྟོར་ཕྱོགས་བསྒྲིགས་སྒྲུགས་བམ་ ༤༤། རྩ་གར་སིམ་ལ།

ཐུབ་བསྟན་རྟོ་རྩེ་བྲག་གྱི་ལོ། ༢༠༡༥།

http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW2PD17457_0F927A

རིག་འཛིན་བསྐལ་བཟང་པ་རྒྱ་དབང་ལྷུག <<ལྷ་རིགས་ཀྱི་བཅུན་པ་བསྐལ་བཟང་པ་རྒྱའི་མིང་ཅན་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་རྟོགས་པ་བརྟུན་པ་

འཇམ་གཉིན་ལྷུག་པའི་དགའ་ཆོལ་གཞོན་ཏུ་བྱུང་བའི་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་>> རྩ་འབྱུར་བྱང་གཏེར་ཆོས་སྟོར་

ཕྱོགས་བསྒྲིགས། སྒྲུགས་བམ་ ༥༡། རྩ་གར་སིམ་ལ། ཐུབ་བསྟན་རྟོ་རྩེ་བྲག་གྱི་ལོ། ༢༠༡༥།

http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW2PD17457_9B2451

གཡང་པ་ཆོས་རྩེ་མོགས། <<འཕགས་པ་འཇིག་རྟེན་དབང་ལྷུག་གི་རྣམ་སྤྱུལ་རིམ་བྱོན་གྱི་འབྱུངས་རབས་དེབ་ཐེར་ནོར་བུའི་

འཕྲིང་བ།>> རྩ་རམ་ས་ལ། སྐྱེ་སྤྱི་ཡིག་ཆེད་། དེབ་དང་པོ། གྱི་ལོ། ༡༩༧༧།

<http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW22095>

ཀམ་ཆགས་མེད། <<ཨོ་རྒྱན་པ་རྒྱ་འབྱུང་གནས་ཀྱི་གསོལ་འདེབས་ཆོན་པ་ཁག་གཅིག་>> དཔེ་གཟུགས། རྩི་ལི། པ་རྒྱ་འཕྱིན་

ལས། ༢༠༠༣།

<http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW1KG3508>

དུང་དཀར་སྒོ་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས། <<དུང་དཀར་ཆོག་མཛོད།>> སྤྲད་ཆ། ཤེས་རིག་དཔུང་ཁང་། ༢༠༠༥།
 རེབ་གོང་རྟོག་མཁུ། <<མི་ཉག་གི་སྐོར་ལོ་ཅམ་གླིང་བ>> བོད་ལྗོངས་ཞིབ་འཇུག ཕྱི་ལོ་
 ༡༩༥༦། དེབ། ༣ ཤོག་ ༣ ནས་ ༡༢།
http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW20382_5FECC8
 རྒྱལ་མོ་འབྲུག་པ། <<བོད་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་གླིང་བའི་གདམས།>> བེ་ཅིང་། མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱེད་ཁང་། ༡༩༩༩།
<http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW28950>
 བསོད་ནམས་བཟང་ལོ། <<རང་གི་མི་ཆེ་ལོ་རྒྱུས་སྤྲོད་པོར་བཞུགས་པ་བྱ་དུར་ཆོངས་ཐིག་>> སྤྲད་ཆ། རྩ་རམས་ས་ལ། ༣༥་ཁྱེས་མ་
 ཆེན་བོད་གྱི་རིག་གཞུང་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ཁང་།>> ཕྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༡༣།
http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW1KG17609_O1KG17609_G2_MZV8WBPCV5

གཉིས་པ། མི་སྣ་ཁག་ལ་བཅར་འདྲི། (List of people interviewed)

༡ ་། རམ་རིང་ཤར་གླིང་བུ་རྒྱུད་། ༢ ་། ས་རྒྱ་དཀོན་མཆོག་ཆོས་འཕེལ། ༣ ་། དག་བཤེས་འཛིགས་མེད་སྒོ་གོས།
 ༤ ་། མཁན་པོ་སྤྱན་ཡངས་རྒྱ་མཚོ།



The Role of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol in the Transmission of the Northern Treasures

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Introduction

Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol *alias* dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas (Zurchen Chöying Rangdröl *alias* Peljor Trinlé Rabgyé, 1604–1657)² was a luminary of the 17th century. Relatively little is known today about this scion of the prestigious Zur clan, rNying ma ritual specialist, talented artist,³ and close confidant of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (Ngawang Lobsang Gyamtso, 1617–1682). This article attempts to examine the former's role in preserving the transmission lineage of the Northern Treasures in 17th-century Central Tibet, as well as his contribution to the development and institutionalization of its liturgical tradition

¹ I would like to thank Professors Dr. Jean-Luc Achard and Dr. Stéphane Arguillère—the editors of this issue of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* for including my article in this volume and for the lively and constructive discussions and support within the working group of the FCHNT research project 'For a Critical History of the Northern Treasures,' in which I have had the pleasure of participating since 2024. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Cécile Ducher who kindly invited me to participate in the 2024 autumn First International Conference on the Northern Treasures—an event that served as the crucial point of departure for the present journey. I am equally grateful to Dr. Jay Valentine for his generous willingness to advise me on a wide range of questions. I would also like to thank Dr. Stéphane Arguillère; the memory of his appreciative remarks remained a quiet source of motivation during the more challenging phases of this research. Lastly but not unimportantly, my deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Alexander Schiller who gave me practical ideas on methodological approach and experiential instructions on navigating the tumultuous waters of *The Flow of the River Gangā*. This article would not have existed in this form without his valuable advice.

² This person should not be confused with his younger contemporary Kha'u dGa' ldan pa Chos dbyings rang grol, *alias* Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755). For a well-substantiated argument demonstrating that the other Chos dbyings rang grol is a distinct individual, and not a result of a textual or historical misidentification of one person as two, see Arguillère 2022a, pp. 267–269.

³ For a short, yet informative sketch on Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's artistic achievements, see Jackson 1996, p. 205.

within the rNying ma monastic institution known as rDo rje brag (Dorjé Drak, founded 1632; location 29.3277, 91.1075).

The current article has four parts. The first one briefly discusses the term “Northern Treasures” and its origins; the second and the third parts discuss the sources on Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol and sketch his background and life. The next part presents the relationship between Chos dbyings rang grol and his two principal Northern Treasures-affiliated spiritual teachers, Rig ’dzin Ngag gi dbang po and the Third Yol mo sprul sku bsTan ’dzin nor bu. The fourth part summarizes the transmissions of the Northern Treasure-cycles, which Zur chen passed on further, and briefly lists their recipients.

1. On the term “Northern Treasures”

The “Northern Treasures” (*Byang gter*) describes a part of a larger corpus of texts called “treasure texts” (*gter ma*), also sometimes translated as “discovered treasures.”⁴ They are predominantly associated with the rNying ma school of Tibetan Buddhism, because according to the tradition, most of them have been concealed and hidden by Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoché) and his consort Ye shes mtsho rgyal (Yeshé Tsogyal) in the early 9th-century Tibet for the benefit of future generations of practitioners.⁵

In 1366, Rig ’dzin rGod ldem ’phru can (Rigdzin Gödem Truchen, 1337–ca. 1401)⁶ discovered texts and artifacts in Zang zang lha brag dkar po (also known as lHa gnya’ brag)⁷ near Ri bo bkra bzang⁸ in the Byang (“northern”) Ngam ring district of La stod, v.l. Las stod byang. This collection is known as “Northern Treasures.” The word “northern” derives from the geographical area of its discovery in northern La stod, a myriarchy founded in the 13th century during the rule of Chos rgyal ’Phags pa (1235–1280).⁹ The myriarchy’s name La stod byang, in turn, derives from its location north of the Brahmaputra

⁴ Gyatso 1992, p. 97 *passim*.

⁵ For an example of a *gter ma* revealed in 1538 by a non-rNying ma master, the hierarch of the ’Bri gung bka’ brgyud school Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1577), see Burghart 2017. Another example is the *Sras mkhar ma* by Mar pa Lo tsā ba which resembles a *gter ma* in that it has been hidden for the benefit of the future generations, but its authorship is not attributed to Padmasambhava. For an insightful analysis of the *Sras mkhar ma* in relation to the rNying ma treasure tradition and its nuanced framing as a bKa’ brgyud *gter ma*, see Ducher 2016.

⁶ Sincere gratitude goes to Cécile Ducher who brought to my attention that the latest state of research demonstrates that the year of death of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem ’phru can is likely 1401.

⁷ *The Historical Study of Latö Jang Ngamring in Tsang*, p. 418.

⁸ Akester 2005, pp. 418–419. Approximate coordinates of the mountain: 29.36206, 86.87180.

⁹ Schiller 2021, p. 822, Everding 2010.

River (Yar klung gTsang po), as opposed to southern La stod (La stod lHo) on the southern side of the Brahmaputra (gTsang po), with its cultural centre at Shel dkar chos sde (Shelkar Chödé, f. 1387; location 28.6695, 87.1176) monastery.¹⁰ The “Southern Treasures” (*lHo gter*) associated with Ratna gling pa (Ratna Lingpa, 1403–1498)¹¹ were revealed in lHo brag, a region to the south of dBus (Ü).¹² Thus, they have nothing to do with southern La stod in terms of geography. Yet, some Tibetan sources mention that the location of the discovery of the Northern Treasures lies to the north of bSam yas monastery.¹³ If this was the case, then La stod Byang, the place where Rig ’dzin rGod ldem discovered most of the *gter mas* (which later became to be known as the Northern Treasures)¹⁴ should have been situated to the north of bSam yas monastery. But Byang ngam ring clearly lies to its west. The reason for this confusion might lie in the misidentification of the Northern Treasures (*Byang gter*) ascribed to Rig ’dzin rGod ldem with the Northern *gter ma* texts (also called *Byang gter*) of the Bon tradition. However, the reason the Bon pos call certain texts of their own “Northern Treasures” is different—these texts were retrieved from “the main storeroom in bSam yas and wandered to the north, diffusing them in northern La stod.”¹⁵ Another classification of the *gter ma* corpora based on cardinal directions adds even more confusion to comprehending the location of the treasure findings: the “Central Treasures” (*dbus gter*) of gTer bdag Gling pa (Terdrak Lingpa, 1646–1714), the “Eastern Treasures” (*shar gter*) of Pad ma las ’brel rtsal (Pema Ledrél Tsel, 1291–1316), the “Southern Treasures” of Ratna gling pa (Ratna Lingpa, 1403–1478), and the “Northern Treasures” (*byang gter*) of rGod kyi ldem ’phru can.”¹⁶ According to this conception, the Northern Treasures are once again geographically placed to the north (not to the west) of dBus, and the “Western Treasures” are not assigned to a specific *gter ston* (perhaps waiting their turn to be discovered). Prof. Dorji Wangchuk has noted that this classification described by Franz-Karl Ehrhard¹⁷ may take its origin

¹⁰ For a brief sketch of the early history and formation of the La stod lHo principality, see Everding 1997.

¹¹ Ehrhard 1990, p. 87f.

¹² Cf. Dargyay 1997, pp. 144–147; Dudjom Rinpoché 1991, p. 793.

¹³ Brunnhölzl 2018, p. 349, fn. 56.

¹⁴ Rig ’dzin rGod ldem retrieved *The Adamantine Iron of Dugwang* in bSam yas, see fn. 76.

¹⁵ For a concise yet detailed examination of the Bon tradition’s conception of its own Northern Treasures (*byang gter*) and an insight into the Bon perspective on treasure revelations, parallel to—but distinct from—those in the rNying ma school, see Achard 2024b, *A Brief Note on the Northern Treasures of the Bon Tradition*.

¹⁶ Ehrhard 1990, p. 87f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

during the times of gTer bdag Gling pa, and was shaped in the context of drawing a contrast to the Northern Treasures of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.¹⁸

An alternative solution to explain the discrepancy posed by the above classification is not to take the words “south, east, west, and north” literally as pointing out geographical positions in space, but rather as being parts of an imaginary *maṇḍala*.

Volume Three of the Fifth Dalai Lama's *The Flow of the River Gangā: Records of Teachings of the Profound and Vast Sublime Dharma Received* (*Zab pa dang rgya che ba'i dam pa'i chos kyi thob yig ganggā'i chu rgyun*)¹⁹ contains a lengthy section (64 folios, 111r-173v) dedicated the Northern Treasures. It lists not only the contents of the individual text cycles revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem but additionally compares the written witnesses of the lineal transmission of the Northern Treasures.²⁰ These witnesses are mainly records of teachings received (*gsan yig* or *thob yig*) and “epitomes” (*spyi chings*):

- *Epitome of the Northern Treasures* (*Byang gter chos skor rnams kyi spyi chings*) by Se bKra bzang pa Padma dbang chen (Sé Tratsangpa Pema Wangchen, fl. ca. 16th–17th c.) from the year 1627.²¹ This text is a systematic classification of the Northern Treasures entitled *The Garland of Precious Gems* (*Rin chen 'phreng ba*).
- *Epitome of the Northern Treasures* (*Byang gter chos skor rnams kyi spyi chings*) composed by mNga' ris Pañchen Padma dbang rgyal, entitled *The Illuminating Treasury of Gems* (*gSal byed nor bu'i gter*).²²

Both *Epitomes* list treasure texts discovered exclusively by Rig 'dzin

¹⁸ Dorji Wangchuk, personal communication in Vienna, May 2025. For a more detailed discussion on this division and insightful remarks, see the entry “On dBus-gter, Shar-gter, lHo-gter, Nub-gter, and Byang-gter” in Professor Wangchuk's blog: <https://sudharmablog.wordpress.com> (accessed on 25.04.2025).

¹⁹ For the contents of the section on Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's findings in Vol. 3 of *The Flow of the River Ganggā* by the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Herweg 1997, pp. 306-318.

²⁰ For the structure and the contents of the crucial historical source on the Northern Treasures—the earliest known records of teachings received (*gsan yig*) within the rNying ma school written by the Fifth Yol mo sPrul sku, see Schiller 2021. This study reframes the understanding of the institutional spread and consolidation of the *byang gter* tradition and clarifies the structure of its core cycles (*chos skor*).

²¹ See Schiller 2021, p. 840, fn. 49. Padma dbang chen, Se bKra bzang pa (ca. 16th[–17th] c.) *Byang gter chos skor rnams kyi spyi chings rin chen 'phreng ba* (BDRC, MW23375).

²² mNga' ris Pan chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542). *Byang gter chos skor rnams kyi spyi chings gsal byed nor bu'i gter*, in *gSung thor bu*, n.d. (BDRC, W3CN18537).

rGod ldem.²³

For the reasons above, the term “Northern Treasures” (*byang gter*) in the present article refers exclusively to the treasure texts revealed by Rig ’dzin rGod ldem ’phru can. A broader usage of the term “*byang gter*” includes not only the treasure texts (*gter ma*) of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem but also those of later treasure revealers. This concept is reflected in the recent 63-volume collection entitled *The Anthology of the Northern Treasures* (*Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*), a compilation of texts and written sources relevant to the tradition whose main focus is the Northern Treasures. This anthology includes treasure collections and works by ten treasure revealers or authors (vols. 1-54) who lived between the 14th and 18th centuries. Among them are Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (Jangdak Tashi Topgyal, 1550–1603), Rig ’dzin Legs ldan bdud ’joms rdo rje (Rikdzin Lekden Düdjom Dorjé, 1452–1565), and mNga’ ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542).²⁴

2. The Sources on Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol

- 1) The most extensive biography of Chos dbyings rang grol is the above-mentioned text by the Fifth Dalai Lama entitled *The Biography of the Omniscient Zur Chöying Rangdröl, the Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle* (*Zur thams cad mkhyen pa chos dbyings rang grol gyi rnam thar theg mchog bstan pa’i shing rta*) on 122 folios (further: “*The Chariot*”). This life account was written in 1676, nineteen years after the passing away of its protagonist. It can be divided into several sections.

The first section lists the past lives of Zur chen (folios 3v-6r); the second section posits the cosmological setting, beginning with a description of the universe and narrowing it down to the geography of Tibet together with a brief introduction to its religious history

²³ For a meticulous reconstruction of textual lineages and comparative analysis of early epitomes as keys to the evolving structure of the Northern Treasures tradition, see Schiller 2021. For the contents of Se Padma dbang chen’s and mNga’ ris Paṇ chen’s *Byang gter chos skor rnam kyī spyi chings*, see *Ibid.*, p. 831, fn. 29; pp. 837-838.

²⁴ The recent sixty-three volumes of the *Anthology of the Northern Treasures* (*sNga ’gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*) include, in addition to the treasures of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem (vols. 1-15), treasures from the later revelations: mNga’ ris gTer ston Gar dbang rdo rje (vol. 16), bsTan gnyis gling pa Padma tshe dbang rgyal po (vol. 17), rGya Zhang brom rDo rje ’od bar (vol. 18-26), Padma las ’brel rtsal (vols. 28-29), mNga’ ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (vols. 30-32), Rig ’dzin Legs ldan bdud ’joms rdo rje (vols. 33-34), Byang bdag chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal (vol. 35), the works of Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las (vols. 36-50) and Rig ’dzin sKal bzang padma dbang phyug (vols. 51-54) and others. For the outline and a critical introduction to this collection, see Arguillère 2022.

(folios 6r-8r). The third section contains the history of the Zur clan, starting with its early spread in mDo khams and gTsang and concluding with short accounts on the ancestors of the protagonist: Zur lHun grub rdo rje (Zur Lhündrup Dorjé, d. 1607) and Zur chen gZhon nu don grub (Zurchen Zhönu Döndrup, d. 1641), the grandfather and father, respectively, of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, who had settled in 'Brom stod (Dromtö) in Central Tibet (folios 8r-30v). The fourth section contains the life story of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (folios 30v-121r).

Much shorter biographies were composed by Tibetan authors in 18th–20th c., but most of them are summaries of the Fifth Dalai Lama's work.

- 2) A concise biography penned by Ye shes rgyal mtshan (Yeshé Gyaltzen, 1713–1793) in *The Biographies of the Lamrim Lineage Holders* (*Lam rim bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*).
- 3) An additional short biography both in English and in Tibetan composed by bDud 'joms Rin po che 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje (Düdjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshé Dorjé, 1904–1987) can be found in the so-called *bDud 'joms chos 'byung*, translated under the title *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History* by Gyurmé Dorjé and Matthew Kapstein.²⁵
- 4) *Guru Tashi's Dharma History*. Both *bDud 'joms chos 'byung* and Khetsün Zangpo²⁶ cite the entry from *Guru Tashi's Dharma History* when reporting about Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol.

Modern scholarship has mentioned the figure of Chos dbyings rang grol only in passing:

- 5) A brief and very concise English account of Chos dbyings rang grol focusing on his activities as the ally and ritual master in service to the dGa' ldan pho 'brang (est. 1642) government is given in Samten Karmay's *Biography of Zur Chöying Rangdröl by the Fifth Dalai Lama* published in 2023.
- 6) Another biography of Zur chen can be found in Volume 62 of *The Anthology of the Northern Treasures*. It is a part of *The Garland of Wondrous Tales* by mKhan po Chos dbyings. This thirty-seven-page composition is based on the biography written by the Fifth Dalai Lama and was presumably compiled by the editors of the anthology with focus on Zur chen's activities related to the Northern Treasures.²⁷

²⁵ See Dudjom Rinpoché 1991, pp. 679-683.

²⁶ mKhas btsun bzang po. *rGya bod mkhas grub rim byon gyi rnam thar phyogs bsgrigs*, 12 vols., Dharamsala, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1973–1990 (BDRC, MW1KG10294).

²⁷ *Zur kun mkhyen chos dbyings rang grol*, in *The Anthology of the Northern Treasures*, vol. 62, pp. 469-505.

3. *The Background of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol*

Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol was born in the beginning of the 17th century into the renowned Zur clan. He received the birthname Chos rje Nor bu (Chöjé Norbu). His father, gZhon nu don grub relied on “numerous non-sectarian spiritual teachers,” putting a special emphasis on *Bindu of Liberation* (*Grol tig*)—a newly-revealed (relative to his lifetime) treasure cycle by 'Phreng po gTer ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518–1584).²⁸ As is often and regrettably the case in Tibetan hagiographical writings, the details of the protagonist's mother, aside from her name Yid 'dzin and her year of death (d. 1631), are absent in the biography.²⁹

The main seat of the Zur clan was established in the 11th century by Zur chen Śākya 'byung gnas (Zurchen Śākya Jungné, 1002–1062) in the 'Owl Valley', 'Ug pa lung, v.l. 'Ug bya lung (Ukpalung, 巫巴岭; 29.27828, 89.0379) to the east of modern-day gZhis ka rtse (Shigatsé, 日喀则) in gTsang (Tsang),³⁰ “the earliest and greatest center of the post-imperial rNying ma tradition in central Tibet.”³¹ It is unclear when exactly this estate was abandoned. Local people report that it was sacked by the Dzungar troops in 1717.³² It seems, however, that a part of the Zur clan moved to 'Brom stod, v.l. 'Brom thod (Dromtö) sometime before these events. According to the account provided by the Fifth Dalai Lama in *The Chariot*, Zur Dhi ngam received a prophecy from Vajrakīla saying he should move to the Upper Drom valley ('Brom stod). The material medium of the prophecy, a statue of the deity known as the “Kīla Who Delivered a Speech” (Phur pa gsung

²⁸ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 28v4. For details on 'Phreng po gTer ston, see Deroche, Marc-Henri, 2009. "'Phreng po gter ston Shes rab 'od zer (1518–1584) on the Eight Lineages of Attainment: Research on a Ris med Paradigm," in *Contemporary Visions in Tibetan Studies. Proceeding of the First International Seminar of Young Tibetologists*, Brandon Dotson et al. (eds.). Chicago: Serindia Publications, pp. 319–342.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, fol.43v4: *yum mkha' 'gro'i mtshan ldan yid 'dzin*, “mother Yid 'dzin endowed with signs of a *dākinī*.” This phrase is frequently found in mentions of the mother of a child who later becomes a significant rNying ma teacher. Cmp. bDud 'joms chos 'byung, p. 339: “*yum mkha' gro'i rigs las mtshan ldan yid 'dzin*” and its English translation in Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, Vol. 1, p. 679: “His mother was Tshenden Yidzin.” But the word *mtshan ldan*, lit. “endowed with virtuous qualities” modifies the word *mkha' gro* (*dākinī*), and it should not be understood as a part of the personal name of the mother.

³⁰ For the biography of Shākya 'byung gnas, see *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fols. 9r–10r.

³¹ A brief description of this area is provided in Akester 2016, pp. 522–524.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 524.

'byon ma) was still physically present in the 17th century.³³ Thus, the birthplace of Chos rje nor bu—the future Omniscient Zur—is 'Brom stod (the Chinese name of the village is 邦堆乡; location 29.69843, 91.3846). This place lies on the northern bank of the sKyid chu river, in modern-day sTag rtse rdzong (Taktsé dzong, 达孜区), approximately twenty kilometers to the east of the Brag valley with its renowned Yer pa hermitages (Brag yer pa, 扎叶巴; 29.74543, 91.27863). Some local people of the 'Brom stod village identify themselves as direct descendants of the very same Zur clan of Chos dbyings rang grol.³⁴ Nowadays, the village has three households claiming their ancestry from the Zur clan; the central residential manor of the village, the 'Brom stod Lags tshang gzhis ka (Dromtö Laktsang Estate, 喇仓庄园), has been identified as a cultural relic in 2010 and put under special protection in 2016. It currently lies in ruins.



Fig. 1 — The façade of the remains of 'Brom stod lags tshang (Dromtö Laktsang) belonging to the descendants of the Zur clan in May of 2025

In 1607, when Chos rje nor bu reached the age of three, Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa (Ngawang Yeshe Drubpa, fl. 16th century, BDRC P1076) recognized him as the rebirth of Drung pa dKon mchog rin chen (16th

³³ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 26v4-6: lo lo bzhin phur sgrub mdzad par gshegs rgyu'i lo ser bsrung la phebs gdong phur chu rnam la gsol 'debs smon lam mdzad nas phyir byon pa'i rjes su sras phur zhig lhungs byung ba na bza' la 'khril ba yin nam snyam yar skyal bar chas pa na da lo 'brom stod la 'gro dgos yod ces phur pas gsung byon pas gdan drangs/ phur pa gsung 'byon ma da lta'ang yod/

³⁴ Cf. *The Study of the History of Lhasa City*, p. 76.

cent).³⁵ *The Chariot* describes how Chos rje nor bu is attracted to the stranger Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa visiting the household, and unmistakably claims the old ritual bell of Drung pa dKon mchog rin chen among many other similar objects. Some years later, in 1610, Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa took the child to sNang gsal (Nangsél) for a tonsure ceremony (lit. “hair crest-giving” *dbu skra gtsug phud 'phul ba*) and gives him the name Ngag dbang bkra shis kun dga'. Any remaining doubts about the child's identity are dispelled when he points to the altar and claims that his predecessor's old shoe must be lying somewhere beneath it—and indeed, it is found. Furthermore, when Chos rje Nor bu—the now bKra shis kun dga'—sees a wooden cabinet (*yang gtor sgam*), the past-life memories awaken in his mindstream and make him wonder if the snake which used to live underneath is still there. He moves the cabinet, and a white snake indeed emerges from beneath. It slithers to rest on his lap, just like it used to do with the consort (*gsang yum*) of his predecessor.³⁶

Since his early childhood, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol had acquired knowledge on valuable subjects such as calendrical calculations (*lo 'pho zla 'pho, mgyogs rtsis*), the Chinese method of divination using dice (*rgya nag spar than gyi rdel 'grem*s), and painting from his father Zur chen gZhon nu don grub.³⁷ He also studied the three principal ritual practices according to the sNang gsal Tradition: dancing, *maṇḍala* drawing, and chanting (*gar thig dbyangs*). Along with the secret name (*gsang mtshan*) Chos dbyings rang grol—the name by which he is renowned until today and which is said to grant liberation upon hearing (*thos grol*)—he also received the secret name Padma dbang rgyal and dBang gi grong khyer.³⁸ Around this time, he completed a three-year retreat (*lo gsum phyogs gsum*) at Zing pa stag

³⁵ BDRC P1077. Little is known about this person, although his name suggests that he belonged to the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud order. This hypothesis is confirmed by the biography which reports that by the time the child started making his first steps and talked, he said “I will go to 'Bri gung” (*nga 'bri gung du 'gro*), *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 31r1). Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's year of birth (1604) excludes the possibility of him being the *sprul sku* of the Twenty-second throne holder of the 'Bri gung monastery (f. 1179; Drikung, 直貢梯寺; 30.10659, 92.20390), dKon mchog rin chen rnam par rgyal ba sde, *alias* Chos kyi 'byung gnas 'phrin las rnam rgyal (Könchok Rinchen Namgyal Dé, *alias* Chökyi Jungné Trinlé Namgyal, ca. 1591–1654). The biography of Zur chen Chos dbyings reports that his previous incarnation, Drung pa dKon mchog rin chen, held the seats of institutions in sNang gsal and Zing pa, cf. *The Chariot of The Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 4v5–6. The Fifth Dalai Lama also mentions that he belonged to the family clan of gTer ston Kun dga' dpal bzang (BDRC P10460) and had an elder brother by the name of Kun dga' tshe mchog. Cf. *Ibid.*, fol. 30r5.

³⁶ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 31r–31v.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 32r4–5.

³⁸ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 32v; fol. 40v5.

mgo (Zimpa Tango, BDRC G4169) in 'Phan yul. Chos dbyings rang grol took the lay and probationary novice (*dge bsnyen dang bar ma rab byung gi sdom pa*) vows at the age of sixteen at Pha bong kha hermitage (帕邦喀; location 29.71958, 91.11741) from Khyab bdag 'Khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub (1561–1637), the 15th abbot of Se ra rje monastery and received the name dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas (Peljor Trinlé Rabgyé).



Fig. 2 — View from 'Brom stod lags tshang on the holy mountain (*gnas ris*) of Mahākāla and Nyen Lotsāwa's meditation cave (*gNyan dgon phug*)

Just as he reached his twentieth year in 1622, Chos dbyings rang grol requested the full ordination (*bsnyen rdzogs*). He spent the next seven years of his life in Pha bong ka dedicating himself to studies, with only short breaks. It is worthwhile to mention that the manifold teachings and empowerments which 'Khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub gave to Zur chen Chos dbyings in the course of these years included *dbang* and *lung* of *The Great Compassionate One Who Liberates All Beings* (*Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun sgrol*) of the Northern Treasures.³⁹

This is how the Fifth Dalai Lama describes the young Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, who was around twenty years old in 1624:

*This very lord, despite being an adherent of the Ancient Tantra tenets, is [still] extremely knowledgeable in the teachings of the New [schools] (gsar ma) in general, and specifically in the bKa' gdams and the dGe lugs ones.*⁴⁰

³⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 38r-39v.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 39v4-5: *rje 'di nyid grub mtha'i gdod sngags rnying ma pa yin kyang gsar ma spyi dang bye brag bka' gdams dang dge lugs kyi chos la shin tu mkhas /*

In 1633, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, himself a *sprul sku* of the 'Bri gung bka' brgyud order, received a prophetic vision of Mahākāla and took an abbatial position at Tshal Gung thang (Tsel Gungtang, 蔡公堂寺; 29.63756, 91.22739).⁴¹ This is how *The Chariot* describes it:

*On one evening, a black man [appeared in a sphere] of radiant light. He spoke: "Come here!" I was led into a spacious altar room, where I met a person who said he was Lama Zhang. [He] revealed that both the raven and the black man [I saw] previously were manifestations of the four-armed Glorious Lord of Primordial Wisdom. He commanded that I thus should act as the spiritual leader (Bla ma) of [Tshal] Gung thang.*⁴²

The abbatial position "had been donated to this master as a personal or private monastic estate together with its tenurial residence, or *bla brang*." Zur chen cared for this institution almost until the end of his life, putting considerable efforts into its revival, securing financial funds, and turning it into a foremost center of religious activities and study.⁴³

The summary of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's life events covered on more than ninety folios of *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle* goes beyond the scope of the present article. But it is important to mention that the Fifth Dalai Lama Blo bzang rgya mtsho regularly chooses the word "rimé" (ris med, "unbiased, non-sectarian") to describe Chos dbyings rang grol's teachers, affiliations, and activities. He remarks that if gathered together, Zur chen's works consisted of what looked like two volumes, and lists specific titles.⁴⁴ Most of these works seem not to be extant at present.

⁴¹ The modern-day frugal temple is only a vague resemblance of the grand monastic institution that Tshal Gung thang must have been in the past. In Tibetan-language texts, this place is often referred to as just Gung thang, and it should not be confused with Gung thang Dzong or the Mang yul Gung thang monastery (28.85209, 85.29610) in the former capital of the Mang yul Gung thang kingdom.

⁴² *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 48v1-3: nub cig 'od gsal la mi nag po zhig gis 'dir shog zer nas byon pa'i mchod khang chen po zhig gi nang du gdan drangs byung pa bla ma zhang yin zer ba zhig dang mjal ba ni sngar gyi bya rog dang mi nag po gnyis ka dpal ye shes kyi ngon po phyag bzhi pa'i rnam 'phrul bstan nas gung thang gi bla ma mdzad dgos par bskul ba dang. For an English translation of the same event from another source, *The Chronicles of Tshal Gungthang* (Gung thang dKar chag), see Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 246-250.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 111v4-6: [1] gsang ba snying po'i le'u lnga pa yan gyi ṭikka rdo rje 'chang pha bong kha pa'i gsung rgyun zin bris su mdzad pa g.yung 'grel rgyan gyi me tog ces ngo mtshar ba/ [2] nged rang nas gsol ba btab pa'i bka' brgyad



Fig. 3— Newly-built residential buildings hanging over the main hall of Tshal Gung thang. Lhasa, May 2024

We might think that the oeuvre of Chos dbyings rang grol was lost in the tumultuous times of Tibetan history that followed in the next century after his death. They were already scarce, however, at the time of his contemporaries. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho provides the reason for this unfortunate situation, namely, the attitude of both Zur chen and his entourage:

This noble one, akin to bKa' gdams kalyāṇamitras, never found even the slightest bit of delight in the petty affairs of the eight worldly concerns; [he] granted each requester the root text itself. Therefore, the original manuscripts were missing, and only a few remained. Then, the remaining handwritten notes [also] vanished without a trace. [This happened] because [the master] was surrounded only by those who brought disgrace upon the initial twenty-fold assembly; those who only cared about their own food, clothes, and distractive social interactions, instead of the life-account and the virtuous qualities of [their] spiritual master.

And then, as if coming to terms with his frustration, he adds:

bde 'dus kyi sgrub chen smin byed kyi chog sgrigs lhan thabs dang bcas pa rin po che'i 'phreng ba/ [3] gzhis ka shar pa spun gyis zhus pa'i drag po dmar chen gyi bkang gso dang 'chi blu'i lag len / [4] las byang padma ljon shing gi 'bru 'grel/ [5] g.yu thog snying tig gi sde dgu'i las byang dam skong dregs pa tshar gcod sogs 'phrin sgrub/ bkang ba/ gtor bsnogs/ gsol 'debs/ smon lam/ brtan bzhugs/ snyan dar zhal byang / chab shog/ dri ba dris lan/ rtsod bzlog/ 'grel fika sogs mtha' dag phyogs gcig tu bsgril na po ti gnyis lhag tsam yod tshod du 'dug pa/

*Such is the very nature of rDzogs chen—beyond the object of expression and the expression itself.*⁴⁵

It remains our hope that certain works of his have yet to be identified, their attribution may be obscured by the many names under which he was known. For example, in the dGe lugs Lam rim transmission lineage, Zur Chos dbyings goes under the name Zur dPal 'byor phrin las rab rgyas.⁴⁶ *The Chariot* mentions at least seven names by which Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol was addressed.⁴⁷

Name	Type	Grantee	Granting Year
Chos rje nor bu ⁴⁸	Birth	Father Zur gZhon nu don grub	1604
Ngag dbang bkra shis kun dga'	Refuge	Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa	1610
Chos dbyings rang grol	Secret thos grol	Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa	1615
dBang gi grong 'khyer	Secret	Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa	1615
Padma dbang rgyal	Secret	Ngag dbang ye shes grub pa	1615
dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas	Ordination	Khon ston dPal 'byor lhun grub	1620/21

⁴⁵ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, 111v6-112r2: rje nyid bka' gdams pa'i dge ba'i bshes gnyen ltar 'jig rten chos brgyad kyi ris la ye mi dgyes pa'i gshis thugs rtsom rnams kyang bskul ba po so sor rtsa yig de ga gnang nas ma dpe med pa kha yar snang / zin bris lus pa rnams kyang rang gi lto rgyab dang 'du 'dzi kho na las bla ma'i rnam thar dang yon tan mi sems pa'i dge 'dun nyi shu'i thog ma'i zhabs 'bring pa kho nas bskor te gar song cha med du gyur gshis brjod bya rjod byed dang bral ba'i rdzogs chen gyi gnas lugs kho na'o/ Ye shes rgyal mtshan, *Lam rim bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, pp. 796-797.

⁴⁶ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, 31.2r; 31.3v; 32.5v; 34.4v; 40.6v.

⁴⁸ *The Garland of Wondrous Tales* (p. 471.3) gives the name rDo rje instead of Chos rje, this seems to be incorrect.

Zur chen rDo rje 'chang	Epithet	Blo bzang rgya mtsho, 5th Dalai Lama	1676
Chos nyid rang grol	Alias	rDo brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las	--

Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol passed away in summer 1657. As soon as the news of his death reached rDo rje brag, Rig 'dzin Padma 'Prin las came to pay his respects and make offerings. Funerary rituals were performed based on the *sādhana*s of the Great Compassionate One (*Thugs rje chen po* ['gro ba kun 'grol]). Rituals were funded in the monasteries of Se ra, 'Bras spungs, and Pha bong ka, as well as in the temples of 'Phrul snang, Ra mo che, and the Po ta la. His mortal remains were initially cremated at rDo rje brag and subsequently placed in Chims phu.⁴⁹

Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol *alias* dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas was posthumously recognized as the First gZims pa rta mgo *sprul sku*.⁵⁰ His incarnation, the Second gZims pa rta mgo Sprul sku Kun dga' bsod nam (Zimpa Tango Tulku Künga Sönam), was born in rNam sras gling (Namséling estate, 朗赛林庄园; 29.23239, 91.53305) in Mon mKhar (Mönkhar).⁵¹ This is the same household where Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las was born.

4. Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol as the vessel of the Northern Treasures

Upon evaluating *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, it seems that the two main *kalyāṇamitras* of Zur chen Chos dbyings were 'Khon ston dPal 'byor lhun grub (in his earlier life-period) and later Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639). Chos dbyings rang grol met them regularly, obtaining not just formal empowerments and transmissions, but also personal advice and experiential instructions.

⁴⁹ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fols. 115v6–117r2.

⁵⁰ Zimpa Tango Tulku, cf. the spelling *zing pa stag mgo* given by the Fifth Dalai Lama in *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 27.5r, 32.6r, 41.4r, 118.3r.

⁵¹ Cf. *Collection of Important Tibetan Historical Documents*, p. 312.



Fig. 4 — Modern wall painting of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol in the Zangs mdog dpal ri temple of rDo rje brag monastery, May 2025 ⁵²

Concerning specifically the Northern Treasures, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol received the initiations and transmissions from mainly two figures, the above-mentioned Third Rig 'dzin of rDo rje Brag Ngag gi dbang po and the Third Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (Yölmo Tulku Tenzin Norbu, 1589–1644).

Apparently, the Zur clan had maintained a certain connection with the holders of the Northern Treasures lineage even before Chos rje nor bu Chos dbyings rang grol was born. Zur Shākya Ratna (ca. 16th century) received the cycles of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem from a certain Bla ma Ratna.⁵³ Zur chen gZhon nu don grub (d. 1641) had acquired a variety of treasure traditions within the family lineage from his father Zur lHun grub rdo rje, the grandfather of Chos dbyings rang grol. Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550–1603) recognized Chos dbyings rang grol's father, gZhon nu don grub, as a manifestation of Kumārārāja (Ku mā rā dza, 1266–1343), a renowned lineage holder of the *sNying thig* (*The Heart Essence*) corpora of rDzogs chen (Dzogchen) doctrines from the 14th century, and the root guru of Klong chen rab 'byams pa Dri med 'od zer (Longchen Rabjampa Drimé Öser 1308–

⁵² I heartily thank Lhakpa Tsering for helping me to take this photo.

⁵³ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 24r4.

1364).⁵⁴ Thus, it does not come as a surprise when we read that in 1612 gZhon nu don grub took his eight-year old son to a place called “Ha ka ling tse in China” (*rgya ha ka ling tse*)⁵⁵ to meet the Third Rig ’dzin Ngag gi dbang po, the son of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal. Ngag gi dbang po prophesized that the child of gZhon nu don grub would bring immense benefit to the rNying ma school, instructed the father to take good care of his son and maintain proper ritual purity. He also gave the child a protective knot (*bka’ bsgo phyag mdud*) and samaya-substances (*dam rdzas*).



Fig. 5 — A modern statue of Ngagki Wangpo in Dorjé Drak monastery, May 2024

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 28v6. For biographical notes on this person, see Dudjom Rinpoché 1991, Vol. 1, pp. 568-572; Garry 2007, “Kumāradza,” <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kumaradza/4043>, accessed on 2.6.2025.

⁵⁵ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 31v5. This is where bKra shis stobs rgyal established the forerunner of rDo rje brag monastery, Gu ru Padma E waṃ lCog sgar (Guru Pema Evaṃ Chogar), an encampment of Dharma-practitioners focused on the Northern Treasures (Cf. *Guru Tashi’s Dharma History*, p. 674). The same source refers to Ha ka ling rtse as located in mDo khams and in mDo smad (*ibid.*, p. 561; 674). *The Sakya Chronicles* localizes and describes the area: “One crosses the bend of the rMa chu (Machu River), one arrives to a region which is known as Ha ka ling tse; the upper settlement of the region is Tibetan-speaking, and the lower one is Chinese-speaking” (*Sa skya gdan rabs*, vol. 77, p. 71: *de nas rma chu khug pa brgyud nas grong stod bod dang grong smad ba rgya yi skad smra ba’i mi rigs kyi yul ljongs ha ka ling rtser grags pa’i gnas su phebs/*). I thank Dr. Alexander Schiller for this reference. According to Dr. Lhamo Kyab, Ha ka ling rtse is likely to be located in the vicinity of modern-day Langzhou, because *ling rtse* often refers to Langzhou in Tibetan texts.

The first initiation that Ngag gi dbang po gave Chos dbyings rang grol was Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *Pure Perception Joined with Guru Amitābha* (*Dag snang tshe gur sbrags ma*). This is a special guru-yoga practice of the thirteen peaceful and wrathful manifestations of Amitāyus focusing on longevity. Its colophon narrates that in 1396, when Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was in his sixtieth year in sNa mo lung (v.l. gNa' mo lung, the "Jasmine Valley"),⁵⁶ he saw a prophetic dream in which he received the transmission of *Dag snang tshe gur sbrags ma* directly from Padmasambhava.⁵⁷ This treasure cycle together with the ritual manual and explanations of visualizations by bKra shis stobs rgyal⁵⁸ must have been held in special regard at this time-period, because twenty-two years later—in his thirtieth year in 1635—Chos dbyings rang grol granted *The Pure Perception Joined with Guru Amitābha* (*Dag snang tshe gur sbrags ma*) to thirty masters (*slob dpon*) in dPos sgar in 'Brag Yer pa⁵⁹ and to the Fifth Dalai Lama.⁶⁰ Sometime shortly before his passing, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol officially requested the reincarnation of Ngag gi dbang po—Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las—to compose a ritual text for accomplishing the deities' *maṇḍala* and making offerings.⁶¹

According to *The Chariot*, Chos dbyings rang grol first met Ngag gi dbang po at nineteen (1624). He paid regular visits to rDo rje brag until the end of his life. *The Chariot* mentions rDo rje brag more than fifty times on approximately ninety folios. Occasionally, such as in 1636, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol stayed in rDo rje brag for several months to serve the monastery, perform rituals and assist in conveying empowerments.⁶² On other occasions, such as in 1624 and 1639, he paid visits to receive empowerments or to study.⁶³

⁵⁶ Achard 2024a: "This toponym is also regularly spelt sNa mo lung, the Jasmine Valley. It is located in La stod, in the Byang myriarchy (bdr:G4815). This is rGod ldem's actual birthplace." This valley lies on the eastern side of Mt. bKra bzang (Schwieger 1990, p. 261). I was not able to locate the coordinates of this place on a map. An account by Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las testifies that this place was already in ruins by the 17th century (Valentine 2022, p. 225).

⁵⁷ Schwieger 1990, pp. 260-261; *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, pp. 344.6-345.1 (fols. 172v6-173v1).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, fols. 172v6-173r4.

⁵⁹ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 55r1-4. mKhan po Chos dbyings in his biography of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang states that it was Ngag gi dbang po who gave this empowerment (*The Garland of Wondrous Tales*, p. 483.4). But this information seems not to be in line with the account of *The Chariot*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 173r4 (p. 345.4).

⁶¹ Schwieger 1990, p. 260.

⁶² *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 57v2: rdo rje brag tu zla ba gsum gyi bar zhabs phyir bzhugs te nges don bde 'jug gi steng nas bka' gter gyi dbang gi chu bo thams cad gcig tu 'dres pa'i 'jam dpal phyag rgya zil gnon gyi dbang bzhi yongs rdzogs/

⁶³ *Ibid.*, fol. 38v2-3: tshur lam rdo rje brag tu sprul sku rigs 'dzin chen por drag po rtal gyi byin rlabs thugs dbang e ka dzā fi'i bka' gtad ljags lung thor bu gsan/ *Ibid.*, fols. 62r6-



Fig. 6 — Entrance of the rDo rje brag monastery, May 2025

Ngag gi dbang po and Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol did not meet only in rDo rje brag. In 1624 Zur chen received teachings and empowerments from Ngag gi dbang po in rTsed thang.⁶⁴ In 1636 they met in the “mighty land of hermits” (*mtshams lung dbang chen*), sBrags yang rdzong (Drak Yongdzong; 29.4024, 91.2390).⁶⁵ In 1624, Ngag gi dbang po sent Zur chen to lNga mchod gra tshang (Ngamchö Dratsang, 29.24340, 91.78161) in rTsed thang to assist in solving a presumably sectarian dispute with a certain Rab ’byams pa of E brag.⁶⁶ “Zurchen was able to defend Rnying ma tantric exegesis at rTsed thang monastery during lectures he gave there in 1624”.⁶⁷ This is how *The Chariot* describes this event:

The content of the lectures was excellent, and the phrasing both clear and eloquent. Whether the questions posed by the monastery officials concerned the sūtra or the mantra, he answered them promptly and with remarkable

62v1: rigs ’dzin yol mo ba rdo rje brag tu phebs/ ’phros byung ba ltar rje nyid kyang byon zhugs mi ’bul ba’i phyag g.yog gnang gsung skal byin rten zhus shing gter ston yol mo bar bka’ chos kyi ’brel ba gsan/

⁶⁴ Ibid., 38r1-2: byang pa rig ’dzin chen po rtses dang za ra bas gdan drangs pa’i zhabs phyir phebs gsung gleng zhib mol dang bstan pa’i rnam gzhaq mdzad par legs skyes stsal/ gter kha gong ma’i brag dmar ’bring pho mo’i spu gri’i dbang zhu ba gnang /

⁶⁵ Ibid., 56r6.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 37r1-2.

⁶⁷ Cabezón 2009, p. 222, fn. 71.

*precision. Thus, the renown of his knowledge and wisdom began to spread.*⁶⁸

This episode illustrates how Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol acted as a mediator in the dialogue between representatives of different religious schools in dBus, particularly between Ngag gi dbang po's newly established rNying ma community at rDo rje brag and the long-rooted dGe lugs monastery in rTsed thang.

Ngag gi dbang po and Chos dbyings rang grol exchange blessings by means of material relics:

*As a support for blessings, the Spiritual Lord presented an entirety of Vajrakīla volumes written by the hand of the Great Awareness-Holder (Rig 'dzin chen po), a depiction of his face carved in stone (kha'u'i rten rdo), and a manuscript by the Omniscient bSod nams rgya mtsho (the Third Dalai Lama, 1543–1588).*⁶⁹

Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol also had an ancient artefact, the Kīlaya Taming the Demons of the Three Realms (*Phur pa srid gsum bdud 'dul*), in his possession.⁷⁰

In the course of his life, he received many empowerments from Ngag gi dbang po, including cycles revealed by bKra shis stobs rgyal.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 37v4-5: *gsung bshad brjod bya'i don bzang zhing rjod byed kyi tshig sbyor 'jebs pa las tshan pa rnams kyis mdo sngags tha snyad gang la dri ba zhus kyang lan thogs med du 'brel chags kho na mdzad pas sku yon dang mkhyen rab kyi grags pa thon/*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.6r-68.1v: *rje bla mas rigs 'dzin chen po'i phyag bris ma'i phur pod yongs rdzogs kha'u'i rten rdo la zhal gyi sku brnyan thams cad mkhyen pa bsod nams rgya mtsho'i phyag bris ma byin rten du stsal/*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 55r2. This dagger is said to have been in a private possession of Padmasambhava (Samuel 2020, p. 66), who used it in a ritual in Yang le shod (Pharping), cf. Herweg 1994, p. 75. In the words of Guru Rinpoche himself: "Kīla the length of my handspan, forged of iron by the blacksmith dPal-rtsegs of Mon. It has been consecrated as a *karmakīla* and so, merely by brandishing it in the air, all the mischief of enemies and obstructors will immediately be averted. The name of that kīla is *Srid gsum bdud 'dul* (Controller of Demons in the Three Worlds) and its activity is such as to quell all demonic interferences" (Martin Boord, no date, https://www.khordong.de/alt/Engl/Rinpoche/northern_treasures.html, retrieved on 8.6.2025). Rig 'dzin rGod ldem revealed it in the 14th century on the south-eastern slope of Mt. Zang zang lHa brag and gave it to Khri mchog grub lde (ca. 14th century), the king of Mang yul gung thang (Herweg 1994, p. 75, fn. 204). However, after the king's death, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem re-concealed this artefact around the rTsum area (sKyid mo lung and Mt. dPal 'bar, see *Ibid.*, p. 171; p. 274).

⁷¹ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 102r3: *chos rgyal byang pa'i gter gsar karma gu ru/*

Concerning specifically the Northern Treasures, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol received from Ngag gi dbang po the following teachings and empowerments:

- *Pure Perception Joined with Guru Amitābha* (*Dag snang tshe gur sbrags ma*), in *Ha ka ling rtse* in 1612;⁷²
- *The Benedictive Heart-Empowerment* (*Byin rlabs thugs dbang*) of the *Wrathful Guru* (*Thugs sgrub drag po rtсал*) in 1624 and its *Eight Sādhana Sections* (*sGrub pa sde brgyad*) in 1636 in *rDo rje brag*;⁷³
- *Accomplishing the Lineage of the Vidyādhara*s (*Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub*) in 1626;⁷⁴
- *The Smoke Offering Pleasing the Deities* (*lha rnams mnyes par bya ba bsangs mchod*) from the *Seven Dharmas of Profound Interdependence* (*Zab mo rten 'brel gyi chos bdun*);⁷⁵
- *Ekajāṭī, the Glorious Mistress of Mantras* (*dPal sngags kyi bdag mo E ka dza ṭī*) in 1624 in *rDo rje brag*;⁷⁶
- *Guru yoga* composed by Chos rgyal dbang po'i sde (*bKra shis stobs rgyal*)—*The Heart Essence of Gödem, Making the Rain of Accomplishments Fall* (*dNgos grub byin 'bebs rGod ldem thugs tig*);⁷⁷
- *The Cast Diamond Overpowering Poisons* (*Dug dbang rdo rje'i pha lam lcags*).⁷⁸

Interestingly, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is said to have retrieved the last treasure text on this list at bSam yas monastery, from below the feet of an image of Hayagrīva.⁷⁹ *The Flow of the River Ganggā* demonstrates that Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol passed most of the above transmissions he received from Ngag gi dbang po over to the Fifth Dalai Lama.

⁷² *Ibid.*, fol. 71v5-6; cmp. *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, 344.6-345.4 (fol. 172v6-173r4).

⁷³ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle.*, fol. 57v4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, fol. 42r2-5.

⁷⁵ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, 327.2-3 (fol. 104r2-3). This smoke offering belongs to the *Seven Dharmas of Profound Interdependence* (*Zab mo rten 'brel gyi chos bdun*), see Herweg 1997, p. 314.

⁷⁶ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 38v3; *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, 335.5-336.6 (fol. 118.4r5-118v6).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 345.5-346.2 (fol. 173r5-173v2).

⁷⁸ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 98r3-4.

⁷⁹ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 343.5 (fol. 172r5). According to Dr. Valentine, other biographers do not mention Rig 'dzin rGod ldem has ever paid a visit to bSam yas monastery. See, for example, Se ston Nyi ma bzang po (14th–15th c.). *sPrul sku chen po'i rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer* [*The Clarifying Ray of Sunlight*], in *Byang gter lugs kyi rnam thar dang ma 'ongs lung bstan: Collected Biographies and Prophecies of the Byang gter Tradition*, Gangtok 1983, Sherab Gyaltsen and Lama Dawa, pp. 49-147; *The Garland of Wondrous Tales*, pp. 469-505.

When the Third Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po passed away in 1639, Zur chen came right away to perform funerary rites and was regularly present at the monastery's activities and gatherings up until Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu assumed regency of rDo rje later that year.

According to the Buddhist tradition, teachings or accounts are not to be expounded without a formal request. In 1654, "Padma dbang gi grong khyer Ngag dbang bkra shis kun dga'—the manifestation of gNyag Jñānakumara who is of the very essence of the Universal Sovereign Vajrasattva [himself], the descendant of the Zur clan renowned to be the kings of mantras of [all the] three lineages of So, Zur, and gNubs based in 'Ug pa lung valley," submitted such a request to the Fifth Dalai Lama, resulting in the composition of Ngag gi dbang po's biography in 'Bras spungs in 1654.⁸⁰ It is therefore through Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's initiative that we now have access to a detailed account of Ngag gi dbang po's life and exploits.

As mentioned above, the second notable figure to grant Zur chen the Northern Treasures was the Third Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu. According to *The Chariot*, Zur chen met him relatively late in his own life, when he was thirty-five. Their first meeting took place shortly after Ngag gi dbang po's passing away in 1639. Zur chen Chos dbyings arrived to rDo rje brag before bsTan 'dzin nor bu—who at that time was presumably in retreat at Yon po lung in the rGyang valley⁸¹—and arranged the cremation ceremony of Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po.

Right after taking the regency in rDo rje brag, the Third Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu started granting Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol further transmissions and teachings of the Northern Treasures that the latter hadn't received from Ngag gi dbang po in the past.

⁸⁰ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 105v6: byang pa rigs 'dzin chen po'i rnam thar 'bri dgos tshul phebs pa bzhin nyer bsdogs byas/ Cmp. Byang pa rig 'dzin chen po ngag gi dbang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho (BDRC, W4CZ302329), fol. 63v1-3: dus gsum mkhyen pa padma 'byung gnas kyi rgyal tshab mi nyag byad pa sngags 'chang ngag dbang rig 'dzin rdo rje chos rgyal bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar bkod pa rgya mtsho zhes bya ba 'di ni/ so zur gnubs gsum sngags pa'i rgyal por grags pa'i zur 'ug bya lung pa'i gdung las son cing / gnyags dznya na ku mā ra'i rnam sprul khyab bdag rdo rje sems dpa'i ngo bor gyur pa padma dbang gi grong khyer ngag dbang bkra shis kun dga'i gsung gis bskul ba dang du blangs tel/ fol. 64r4-5: shing pho rta lo... cho sde chen po dpal ldan 'bras spungs su sbyar ba .../

⁸¹ For the activities of the Third Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu in this time-period, see Bogin 2014, pp. 322-324. Yon po lung is a meditation cave of Guru Padmasambhava located in the rGyang (江塘) valley near modern-day lHa rtse town (拉孜), next to the Gram pa rgyang temple. This place is renowned because of *gter mas* and inventories that were found there. The key to the Northern Treasures was discovered in this place (Dargyay 1997, p. 129). Approximate coordinates of the cave: 29.1368, 87.7586, based on Google maps and references in Ferrari 1958, p. 66; 154-155, fn. 556-557.

The following list of the Byang gter lineages that Zur chen received from the Third Yol mo sprul sku is entirely drawn from the Fifth Dalai Lama's *The Flow of the River Ganggā*:

- *The Empowerment for Enlightened Behavior* (Byang chub sems spyod dbang);⁸²
- The single tradition (*brgyud lugs gcig*) of "Liberation by Wearing" (*btags grol*), the lineage with the sign Śrī (*shrī'i rtags yod pa'i brgyud pa*), and the lineage with the sign Su (*su'i rtags yod pa'i brgyud*)—all three belonging to the supplemental *Entrustment-Seal Cycle* (*mtsha' rten gtad rgya'i skor*) of the *Unimpeded Intent of Samantabhadra* (*dGongs pa zang thal*);⁸³
- The complete oral authorization (except the rituals of the gTer ston, *gter ston gyi cho ga bsgrigs ma gtogs pa'i lung yongs su rdzogs pa*) of the *Extremely Profound Ear-Whispered Cycle* (*Shin tu zab pa snyan brgyud kyi skor*) belonging to the *Inner Dharma of the Perfect Saṃbhogakāya of Lord Amitāyus* (*mGon po tshe dpag med nang longs spyod rdzogs sku'i chos*);⁸⁴
- *Beacon Illuminating the Distinctions of Karmic Causes and Results* (*Las rgyu 'bras kyi dbye ba mun sel sgron me*) of the *Naturally Arising and Naturally Dawning Great Perfection* (*rDzogs pa chen po rang byung rang shar*);⁸⁵
- Oral authorization of *Yol with Signs* (*Yol gyi rtags yod pa'i lung*) and the *Torma-Empowerment of the Black Garuda of Action* (*Las kyi bya khyung gi gtor dbang*) of *The Heart Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (*Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal*);⁸⁶
- *The Great Compassionate One Who Liberates All Wandering Beings* (excluding the composition of Lord bKa' 'gyur ba [mGon po bSod nams mchog ldan], *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol/ rje bka' 'gyur bas mdzad pa ma gtogs pa*);⁸⁷
- Oral authorization of *The Great Supreme Kīla* (*Phur pa che mchog*), also known as the *Nine-Headed Kīla* (*Phur pa dbu dgu*) or *Multicolored Deity* (*lHa khra*).⁸⁸

⁸² *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 231.1-4 (fol. 116r1-4).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 251.6-252.1 (fol. 126r6-126v1); for the classification of these lineages as belonging to *dGongs pa zang thal*, cmp. Herweg 1997, pp. 307-309.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 310; *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, pp. 263.5-264.2 (fol. 132r5-132v2).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 228.4-229.3 (fols. 114v4-115r3).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.5-6 (fol. 145.5-6); pp. 288.6-289.1 (fols. 144v6-145r1); Herweg 1997, pp. 310-311.

⁸⁷ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, 306.5-6 (fol. 153v5-6).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.2-3 (fol. 154r2-3): *rdo rje phur pa che mchog gam phur pa dbu dgu dang lha khra sogs gzhi gcig la mtshan gsum du grags pa'i chos skor*; pp. 315.5-316.1 (fol. 158r5-158v1).

It is notable that Yol mo pa bsTan 'dzin nor bu received these transmissions from Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po. This testifies to bsTan 'dzin nor bu's role in ensuring that Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol became a full-pledged holder of the lineage of the rDo rje brag tradition in general and the Northern Treasures in particular. In 1640 Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu recognized Chos dbyings rang grol as the rebirth of gNyags Jñānakumara (fl. 8th century) and granted him a yellow-scroll paper (*shog ser*) of a *gter ma* inventory (*kha byang*) he had previously recovered in Yon po lung in rGyang valley.⁸⁹

Apart from these events, the descriptions of Yol mo sprul sku's activities in the biography of Zur chen are rather sketchy. At the same time, however, this does not imply that his role was merely formal. Available evidence indicates that they were in a rather close relationship. bsTan 'dzin nor bu consults Chos dbyings rang grol for an interpretation of a dream concerning the rebirth of Ngag gi dbang po;⁹⁰ later Chos dbyings rang grol performs a cleansing ritual (*byab 'khrus*) for Yol mo pa's sake who is invited to Kathmandu to perform rituals at the king's court.⁹¹ Toward the end of his life in 1644, Yol mo sprul sku stated his intention to be reborn in India, but he was urged to take birth in Tibet in order to reveal more treasure texts in his next lifetime. The Third Yol mo sprul sku also gave Zur chen his final testament and secret prophecies.⁹²

An examination of *The Flow of the River Ganggā* reveals that Zur chen also received Northern Treasures from other spiritual friends besides Ngag gi dbang po and Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu. Among them we see famous luminaries of the 17th century, such as Bka' 'gyur ba mGon po bSod nams mchog ldan (1603–1659), the teacher of both Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol and the Fifth Dalai Lama Blo bzang rgya mtsho. The latter regarded bSod nams mchog ldan as an emanation of Kashmiri Pundit Dharmapāla from the times of Khri srong lde btsan (742–800).⁹³ In 1676, the Fifth Dalai Lama composed a biography of Bka' 'gyur ba mGon po bSod nams mchog ldan.⁹⁴

According to *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, Zur chen met Bsod nams mchog ldan relatively often in different places, such as in Gung

⁸⁹ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 63r2.

⁹⁰ Valentine 2013, p. 191.

⁹¹ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 71r6.

⁹² *Ibid.*, fol. 75r6–76v2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, fol. 86r4.

⁹⁴ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, Dalai Lama V: *mGon po bsod nams mchog ldan bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa ngo mtshar dad pa'i rlabs phreng*, in *Gong sa lnga pa chen po'i gsung 'bum*, pp. 337–570. Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, 1991–1995 (BDRC W294).

thang, 'Bras spungs, and in Yer pa sPos dga'.⁹⁵ In 1647, Chos dbyings rang grol asked bSod noms mchog ldan to give him all the teachings the latter has ever received. It is evident from Blo bzang rGya mtsho's *The Flow of the River Ganggā* that there were some Northern Treasures' cycles among those:

- Empowerment and oral authorization (*lung*) of the ritual arrangements written by the *tertön* [Rig 'dzin rGod ldem] (*dBang dang gter ston gyis mdzad pa'i chog bsgrigs kyi lung*) to the Dharma of the Perfect Innate *Sam̐bhogakāya* of Lord Amitāyus (*mGon po tshe dpag med nang longs spyod rdzogs sku'i chos*);⁹⁶
- Permission-granting (*rjes gnang*) and life-entrustment ritual (*srog gtad*) of *The Protectress of the Common and the Special Teachings on the Unimpeded Realization of Dzogchen Commands, the Glorious Mistress of Mantras Ekajaṭī* (Chos sde spyi dang khyad par rdzogs chen zang thal gyi bka'i srung ma dpal sngags kyi bdag mo ae ka dza ṭī);⁹⁷
- Iron Stalk with the ritual one thousand buddhas (*lCags sdong ma sangs rgyas stong gi bskyed chog yod pa*) belonging to *The Heart Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal);
- Permission-granting (*rjes gnang*) of the Keeper of Treasures, King of Gandharvas with Five Topknots on His Head, Nyenchen Thangla (Nub zangs mjad kyi gter srung Dri za'i rgyal po zur phud lnga pa'am gNyan chen thang lha);⁹⁸
- *The Great Kinkarah, Guardian of the Treasures Dorjé Lekpa* (gTer srung ging chen rdo rje legs pa).⁹⁹

Another renowned master who granted Northern Treasures to Chos dbyings rang grol was lHa btsun nam mkha' 'jigs med (Lhatsün Namkha Jigmé), *alias* Kong smyon He ru ka Kun bzang rnam rgyal (Kongnyön Heruka Künsang Namgyal, 1597–1650). This "Dzokchen

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 86v1, 94v-95v, 88v2, 87v. On Yer pa sPos dga' see Sörensen & Hazod 2007, p. 97; Ferrari 1958, p. 104.

⁹⁶ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, S. 263.1-4 (fol. 132r1-4).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 336.6-337.2 (fol. 168v6-169r2).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 341.3-5 (fol. 171r3-5). This text was not revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, but gNyan chen thang lha is revered in the Byang gter lineage. This text is included in the *Építome of the Northern Treasure's Dharma Cycles, the Precious Garland* (*Byang gter chos skor rnam kyi spyi chings Rin chen 'phreng ba*) by Se Padma dbang chen (17th c.), Schiller 2021, p. 831: "Neben diesen neun Zyklen werden zu den „nördlichen Schätzen“ des Rig 'dzin rGod ldem ergänzende Textsammlungen gezählt, die im Wesentlichen weiteren Meditations- und insbesondere auch Schutzgottheiten gewidmet sind."

⁹⁹ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 339.3-6 (fol. 170r3-6).

yogī" (*rdzogs chen rnal 'byor*)¹⁰⁰ is credited with a "reintroduction" of the sacred places connected to Padmasambhava in the land of Sikkim and for conducting the enthronement ritual for the first Sikkimese king, Chos rgyal Phun tshogs rnam rgyal (1604–1670).¹⁰¹ In 1651, Zur chen invited Kong smyon He ru ka to pay a visit to Tshal Gung thang, and thus he received spiritual gifts which include the Northern Treasures:

- The complete [set of] the three—empowerment, guiding instructions and oral authorization (*dbang 'khrīd lung gsum yongs rdzogs*)—of the *Naturally Arising and Naturally Dawning Primordial Purity* (*Ka dag rang byung rang shar*) which do not include the *Beacon Illuminating the Distinctions of Karmic Causes and Results* (*Las rgyu 'bras kyi dbye ba Mun sel sgron me ma gtogs pa*);¹⁰²
- Full empowerment, guiding instructions and oral authorization (*dbang 'khrīd lung gsum yongs rdzogs*) without any [teachings of *The Lineage*] *With Signs* (*rtags yod pa rnams ma gtogs*) on the *Unimpeded Intent of Samantabhadra* (*dGongs pa zang thal*) which included "extremely elaborate experiential instructions" (*nyams 'khrīd shin tu rgyas pa*).¹⁰³

Kong smyon He ru ka Kun bzang rnam rgyal also gave Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol the most complete transmission of oral authorization, pointing-out instructions and empowerment (*dbang lung khrīd*) on *Vajravārahī Sealed with Profundity* (*Phag mo zab rgya*).¹⁰⁴

We also encounter lesser-known personalities in the transmission lineage of the Northern Treasures in the 17th century. One of them is sGam smyon sprul sku Phyag rdor nor bu (Gamnyön Tulku Chakdor Norbu, d. 1658), the younger brother of the Third Yol mo sprul sku. sGam smyon sprul sku and Zur ston Chos dbyings rang grol seem not to have been very close friends, but they met at least twice. Their first meeting took place on the sad occasion of the Third Yol mo sprul sku's passing in 1644.¹⁰⁵ Later in 1650/1651, when sGam smyon sprul sku

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 229.1 (fol. 115r1).

¹⁰¹ Mullard 2011, p. 134.

¹⁰² *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, pp. 228.4–229.1 (fols. 114v4–115r1).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 250.2–6 (fol. 125v2–6). Herweg 1997, pp. 307–308. *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 98v4.

¹⁰⁴ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 98v1–4. The Phag mo'i zab rgya teachings are part of the cycle *The Unimpeded Intent of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal*); see the related texts in Schwieger 1985, pp. 22–26 (nn. 21–24); cmp. *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 235.1 (fol. 118r1).

¹⁰⁵ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fols. 75r5–75v2.

visited Lhasa, Zur chen Chos dbyings invited him to Tshal Gung thang and they “exchanged discourses, teachings, and doctrines.” These include the meditation instructions on Vajravārāhi in one’s heart center (*rang snying rdo rje phag mor bsgom pa’i gdams pa*) of *The Extraordinary Marvelous Secrets of Vajravārāhi* (*Phag mo gsang ba rmad byung*),¹⁰⁶ *The Extensive and Middling Secret Empowerments within one tradition [of practice]* (*yang dbang rgyas ’bring gnyis kyi brgyud pa lugs gcig*), and *The Empowerment of the Direct Anointment* (*rGyal thabs spyi blugs kyi dbang*)¹⁰⁷ belonging to *The Heart Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (*Thugs sgrub drag po rtсал*).¹⁰⁸



Fig. 7 — A modern stone plate “I bow to Gamnyön Chakdor Norbu” in ’On smon ldan (29.37870, 91.81491), the residence of Ngari Pañchen.

Even though Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol has already received *The Cast Diamond Overpowering Poisons* (*Dug dbang rdo rje’i pha lam lcags*) once from Ngag gi dbang po, in 1651 he again received this cycle of the Northern Treasures from sGam smyon sprul sku Phyag rdor nor bu for three times in total, for the benefit of wandering beings.¹⁰⁹ It includes the oral authorization of the [manual, which] condenses the practice in a convenient manner by the glorious bKra shis stobs rgyal

¹⁰⁶ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 250.2-6 (fol. 125v2-6).

¹⁰⁷ Peter Schwieger translates *rgyal thabs spyi lugs* as “Weihe zur Buddhaschaft” (“Initiation into buddhahood”) in the context of *dGongs pa zang thal* (Schwieger 1990, p. 35).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 286.2-3 (fol. 143v2-3). For these empowerments belonging to *Thug sgrub drag po rtсал*, see Herweg 1997, p. 310.

¹⁰⁹ *Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 98v: *sngar chos rgyal byang par rigs ’dzin rgod ldem gyi gter ma’i dug dbang tshar gcig gsan yang lcags yos lo sgam smyon sprul sku phyag rdor nor bur ’gro don ched du tshar gsum / tshe dbang brgya rtсал / byang gter gyi chos tshan kha shas /*

(lag len go bde bar bsdu pa dpal bkra shis stobs rgyal gyis mdzad pa'i lung dang bcas).¹¹⁰

It is evident from Blo bzang rgya mtsho's *The Flow of the River Ganggā* that sGam smyon sprul sku received all of those cycles from his elder brother,¹¹¹ who did not have the chance to pass it over to Zur chen before his death.

In 1647, sNgags 'chang Kun bzang dbang po (Ngakchang Künzang Wangpo, fl. 17th century) gave Zur chen both the oral authorization of the *Extensive Tantra* (rGyud chen gyi lung) and the empowerment of *The Naturally Arising and Naturally Dawning Wrathful [Deities of the] Eight Pronouncements* (bKa' brgyad drag po Rang byung rang shar).¹¹² Presumably a 'Bri gung bka' brgyud master, Kun bzang dbang po was a reincarnation of dBang phyug tshe 'phel bzang po (fl. 16th century), a "realized being from Gungthang" (gung thang du grub pa'i dbang phyug tshe 'phel bzang po) who took part in the ordination of the 17th throne-holder of 'Bri gung in 1527.¹¹³

The two others who gave Northern Treasures' Cycles to Chos dbyings rang grol were his father, Zur gZhon nu don grub (d. 1641), and his uncle, Zur Ngag dbang phun tshogs:

- Experiential instructions (nyams 'khrid) on the Dharma[-cycle] of the *Perfect Innate Sambhogakāya* of Lord Amitāyus (mGon po tshe dpag med nang longs spyod rdzogs sku'i chos);¹¹⁴
- The *Zhön Lineage With Signs* (gZhon gyi rtags yod pa) of *The Heart Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal);¹¹⁵
- The *Torma-Empowerment* of the enlightened body, speech and mind with guiding instructions (sku gsung thugs kyi gtor dbang dang 'khrid) of the *Accomplishing the Lineage of the Vidyādhara*s (Rigs 'dzin gdung sgrub);¹¹⁶
- Experiential instructions on *The Beacon of Quintessential Profoundity* (Yang tig gces sgron gyi nyams 'khrid) and on the mindstream transference at the time of death ('pho ba'i nyams 'khrid) from the *terma-cycle The Heart Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal);¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 344.1-4 (fol. 172v1-4); Herweg 1997, p. 317.

¹¹¹ Cf. fn. 96; 98-99 for references to *The Flow of the River Ganggā* which testify that sGam smyon sprul sku received the above-mentioned Northern Treasures cycles from his older brother.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 300.6-301.3 (fols. 150v5-151r3).

¹¹³ Burghard 2017, p. 44.

¹¹⁴ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 263.4-5 (fol. 132r4-5), Herweg 1997, p. 310.

¹¹⁵ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 290.2-3 (fol. 145v2-3).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 260.6-261.2 (fol. 130v6-131r2).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 289.1-3 (fol. 145r1-3).

- *The Empowerment Ceremony Which Causes Ripening* (smin byed dbang chog bka' rgya ma) of the Secret Instructions on the Profound Path of Tsa-lung called Ocean of Bliss and Emptiness of the Yum [cycle of Vajravārāhī] of Dorje Drakpo Tsel (rTsa rlung zab lam gsang 'khrid bde stong rgya mtsho zhes rDo rje drag po rtsal gyi yum bka');¹¹⁸
- The Empowerments of the Life Force in Full (Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs) of the Great Garuda in Full (Khyung chen yongs rdzogs) and of the Vāsudevas in Full (Nor lha yongs rdzogs gsum gyi dbang) belonging to the Naturally Arising and Naturally Dawning Wrathful [Deities of the] Eight Pronouncements (bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar).¹¹⁹

The next person in the line of masters transmitting the Northern Treasures to Zur chen Chos dbyings is Rigs 'dzin 'Phrin las lhun grub (1611–1662), the abbot of Dar rgyas chos sdings (Dargyé Chöling; 29.23724, 91.32407), a monastery in Grwa nang (Dranang) valley. Rigs 'dzin 'Phrin las lhun grub is more renowned as the father of gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje (Terdrak Lingpa Gyurmé Dorjé, 1646–1670). Around 1650, Zur chen received from him *The Experiential Instructions on the Beacon of Quintessential Profundity* (Yang tig gces sgron gyi nyams khrid). Based on these experiential instructions, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol put together the concise *Guiding Root Verses to the Beacon of Quintessential Profundity Utterly Clarifying the Flow of the Oral Instructions* (Yang tig gces pa'i sgron me'i khrid kyi rtsa tshig gsung rgyun rab gsal). Much later, in 1712, Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las employed this text to compose *The Guiding Instructions on the Beacon of Quintessential Profundity Which Fully Clarify the Meaning of the Main Scripture* (Yang tig gces sgron khrid kyi zin bris gZhung don rab gsal) belonging to *The Heart Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal) cycle.¹²⁰ Rigs 'dzin 'Phrin las lhun grub also took part in funerary rites for Zur chen in mChims phu (Chimpu hermitage, 青普; 29.37328, 91.54753).¹²¹

Lastly, it is worth mentioning sNgags 'chang Don grub bkra shis (Ngakchang Döndrup Tashi). Not a lot is known about this person, except that he was of Eastern Tibetan origin, from the Gru gu yang waṃ (Drugu Yangwaṃ) clan.¹²² When this master stayed at 'Bras spungs monastery in 1656, he gave Zur chen teachings on *The Three*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 291.1–4 (fol. 146r1–4); Herweg 1997, p. 311.

¹¹⁹ *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, pp. 301.6–302.1 (fol. 151r6–151v1).

¹²⁰ Cf. Arguillère 2022a, p. 271; *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, p. 289.3–5 (fol. 145r3–5).

¹²¹ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, 116v6.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 82r1.

Quintessential Points of the Mother Tantras (*Ma rgyud snying po don gsum*), the New Treasures of the Dharma-king Byang pa (*Chos rgyal byang pa'i gter gsar*).¹²³ As mentioned in Part One, the word “Northern” did not initially refer to the Northern Treasures of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, but rather to the geographical area (*byang*, the North) of the Dharma King's domain, i.e., Byang Ngam ring, as a part of his title. Thus, the Dharma King of the North is the person who spread the New Treasures (*gter gsar*) forth: Chos rgyal dbang po sde, i.e., bKra shis stobs rgyal.

5. *Vessels in Turn: The Disciples of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol and the Ongoing Transmission of the Northern Treasures*

Among many students of Zur chen dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas who received Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelations, two stand out as most influential in the lineage of the Northern Treasures. These are the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Fourth Rig 'dzin of rDo rje brag, Padma 'phrin las.

Blo bzang Padma 'phrin las was born in 1641 when Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol was nearing his forties. Zur chen was indirectly involved in the recognition and search of this *sprul sku* of Ngag gi dbang po, his beloved spiritual teacher.¹²⁴

Padma 'phrin las was only around three when the Third Yol mo sPrul sku, the regent of rDo rje brag, passed away. Thus, starting from 1644, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol became the main lineage holder of the Northern Treasures in dBus. A close ally and guru of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Chos dbyings rang grol is also “an important connection for Pema Trinlé because he is the direct link to the Northern Treasure transmissions that define Pema Trinlé's incarnation lineage.”¹²⁵

The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle describes the first in-person meeting of the seven-year-old Padma 'phrin las (or eight according to the Tibetan traditional point of view) and Chos dbyings rang grol who was forty-two in 1647 (Fire-Pig year), which took place at rDo rje

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 108r1-2.

¹²⁴ For Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's role in the early life of sPrul sku Rin po che (“precious reincarnation”)—Blo bzang padma 'phrin las, as the Great Fifth Dalai Lama refers to him in childhood, and for the initial encounters between them from the perspective of Padma 'phrin las as portrayed in his autobiography, see Valentine's *The Lords of the Northern Treasures*. This source, in agreement with *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, affirms Zur chen's significant support in assisting the Third Yol mo sprul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu to locate sPrul sku Rin po che, though not as the primary agent. For this reason, the source of the narrative presented in *The History of the Nyingma School* (bDud 'joms chos 'byung) stating that Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol recognized and enthroned Blo bzang Padma 'phrin las, remains questionable (cf. Dudjom Rinpoché 1991, p. 683).

¹²⁵ Valentine 2017, p. 228.

brag.¹²⁶ The Fifth Dalai lama is careful to mention that Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol was not able to attend the hair-cutting ceremony (*dbu gtsug bsil*) of Padma 'phrin las in 1646 because of an illness, but did send a lot of gifts as a sign of his support to the Third Yol mo sprul sku's choice of Ngag gi dbang po's reincarnation and his willingness to establish a strong bond.¹²⁷ Even though it is the Northern Treasures that define the reincarnation lineage of the *yang srid*, the first long-life empowerment Zur chen Chos dbyings bestowed on the boy was *The Life Force of the Single Hriḥ* (*Tshe dbang hriḥ gcig ma*).¹²⁸

Only sometime later in 1648 (Earth-Mouse year)¹²⁹ did Zur chen grant Padma 'phrin las together with his parents and the residents of rNam sras gling manor the Northern Treasures' *Iron Stalk* (*lcags sdong ma*) from *The Heart Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (*Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal*).¹³⁰ This order may reflect lingering doubts which emerged after *The Longevity Ritual of the Iron Stalk* (*Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*) had failed to prolong the life of dGa' ldan khri chen dKon mchog chos 'phel (Genden Trichen Könchok Chöphel, 1573–1646), who passed away soon after receiving this longevity empowerment from Zur chen less than a year prior to these events.¹³¹ Much later in his life, Padma 'phrin las composes a manual on *The Iron Stalk* during his pilgrimage in Byang Ngam ring in 1690.¹³²

Indeed, Padma 'phrin las wrote a couple of Northern Treasures manuals based on Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's instructions. For example, *The Notes on the Beacon of Quintessential Profoundity* (*Yang tig gces sgron zin bris*) are "based on oral teachings by Zur chen."¹³³ Chos dbyings rang grol was likely well-versed in this practice, having received experiential instructions through two distinct lineages: one transmitted by his uncle, Zur Ngag dbang phun tshog, and the other by Rigs 'dzin 'Phrin las lhun grub, the father of gTer bdag Gling pa.

Moreover, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol urged Padma 'phrin las to compose an empowerment manual on *The Pure Vision of Tsegur Drakma* (*Dag snang tshe gur sbrags ma*) from the Northern Treasures.¹³⁴ This is the first empowerment that Zur chen himself received at the

¹²⁶ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 84r5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81r1-2: sprul sku rin po che rdo rje brag tu gdan drangs pa rim gyis 'bras spungs su dbu gtsug gsil bar phebs dus rje bla ma sku khams bsnyun pa dang 'grig gshis ngos phebs ma thub par legs skyes kyi zhu 'phrin 'bul ba rgyas par gnam /

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. 84r4.

¹²⁹ Valentine 2017, p. 229.

¹³⁰ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, 84r5-6.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 80v2-3.

¹³² Valentine 2022, p. 228. Further research is required to clarify in which extent this manual is based on Chos dbyings rang grol's instructions.

¹³³ Arguillère 2022a, p. 267.

¹³⁴ Schwieger 1990, p. 260.

age of twelve in 1612 from the previous incarnation of Padma 'phrin las, the Third Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po.



Fig. 8 — A modern depiction of the Fourth Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las in rDor rje brag, May 2024

The reader of the autobiography of Padma 'phrin las learns that “Chos dbyings rang grol was of unequal kindness to rDo rje brag.”¹³⁵ The former seeks to meet Zur chen and receive important transmissions of the Northern Treasures. At the age of sixteen in 1655, he arrived at Tshal Gung thang, the abbatial residence of Zur chen dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas, to receive the empowerment, oral authorization, and experiential instructions on the *rDzogs chen Ka dag lhun grub* (*Primordial Purity and Spontaneous Presence of Dzogchen*), which make the basis of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's manual on *The Unimpeded Intent of Samantabhadra* (*dGongs pa zang thal*).¹³⁶ Padma 'phrin las repaid Zur chen's kindness by performing *sku rim* rituals for well-being and longevity “in an elaborate and grand manner, and he also performed the Zor-ritual of the Wrathful Mañjuśrī Holding the

¹³⁵ See *Omniscient Zur Chöying Rangdröl*, p. 494.5

¹³⁶ The full title of this manual is *The Quintessence of Samantabhadra's Intent, Experiential Instructions on Primordial Purity and Spontaneous Presence called “The Supreme Direct Path Leading to the Pure Realm of the Liberated Abode of Dharmakaya”* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa'i bcud Ka dag lhun grub kyi nyams khrid Thar gling chos sku'i zhing kham su bgrod pa'i nye lam chen po*), cf. *The Anthology of the Northern Treasures*, vol. 3, pp. 305-332). For the description of its contents and the colophon, as well as the position of this manual within the landscape of the *rDzogs chen* manuals, see Arguillère 2022a, pp. 262-265.

Mudrā That Overpowers With Brilliance ('Jam dpal phyag rgya zil non)."¹³⁷

As soon as the news of Zur chen's passing away reached Padma 'phrin las in 1657, he performed funerary *pūjās* and the cremation ceremony based on *The Great Compassionate One Who Liberates All Beings* (*Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun sgrol*) together with his community in rDo rje brag monastery. Right after the cremation concluded, an eagle appeared, circling in the sky which made everyone think that it was a manifestation of Zur Chos dbyings rang grol.¹³⁸

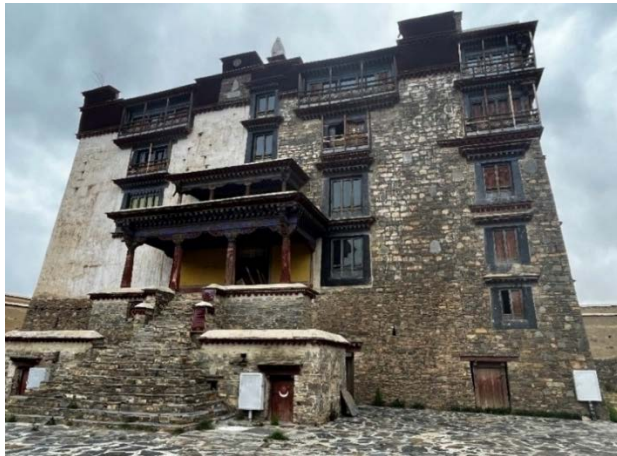


Fig. 9—The reconstructed Manor of rNam sras gling, an unusual architectural example combining the style of a lay household and a monastic residence, May 2024.

Padma 'phrin las officially petitioned the Fifth Dalai lama, beseeching him to write Zur chen dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas's biography. Padma 'phrin las was later involved in the recognition of Zur chen's sprul sku, Ngag dbang Kun dga' bsod nams. Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol thus became the first in the succession of Zing pa sTag mgo, v.l., the gZims pa rta mgo incarnation line.¹³⁹ Be it a result of well-performed aspirational prayers, Zur chen's spiritual realization, a display of *rten 'brel* (auspicious interdependence) in action, or perhaps political agreements, the reincarnation of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, was born at rNam sras gling—the very same household to which Padma 'phrin las belonged. Kun dga' bsod nams seems to have later become the closest disciple of Padma 'phrin las, who

¹³⁷ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 107r3-6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 117r3-4.

¹³⁹ *Collection of Important Tibetan Historical Documents*, p. 312; Valentine 2013, p. 230.

even appointed him as a regent of rDo rje brag monastery in his absence.¹⁴⁰

Apart from Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, *The Chariot* mentions six other main disciples of the Omniscient Zur chen. Among them are Gon po bSod nams mchog ldan and Tshul khriims rdo rje (1598–1669), the speech-emanation of Padma gling pa (1450–1521).¹⁴¹ However, the most notable disciple of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol was the Fifth Dalai Lama, who incidentally did not include himself in this list.¹⁴² In his records of teachings received, *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, the Dalai Lama expresses this special attitude towards his teacher of the Northern Treasures by calling Zur chen “Vajradhāra, the Omniscient One,” “the Incomparable One,” “the One endowed with kindness,” and “root guru” (*rtsa ba'i bla ma*). In the biography of his teacher, as expected, the Dalai Lama uses the humilific verb *zhus* (meaning “I humbly requested or asked”) when describing the events.

The Fifth Dalai Lama's contribution to the preservation and the spread of the Northern Treasures teachings can not be overemphasized. Firstly, rDo rje brag monastery—the stronghold of the Northern Treasures practice in Central Tibet (dBus)—would not have been established and expanded without his patronage. Secondly, his written works ensured the documentation and the preservation of the Northern Treasures' contents and history. Volume Three of Ngag dbang rgya mtsho's records of teachings received, *The Flow of the River Ganggā*, contains an extensive section dedicated exclusively to the tradition of the Northern Treasures (*byang gter*). In this record, Ngag dbang Blo bzang rgya mtsho documents the breadth of his studies in this treasure tradition, including specific empowerments, reading transmissions, and practical instructions drawn from the various cycles associated with the Northern Treasures.¹⁴³ But far beyond its value as a track of his personal studies, this *gsan yig* is of a great historical significance for the literary history of the Northern

¹⁴⁰ Valentine 2013, pp. 231–232.

¹⁴¹ For the full list of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's disciples, see *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 110r3–5.

¹⁴² In some secondary sources Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol is presented as standing in a mutual student-teacher relationship with the Fifth Dalai Lama, readily at the service of dGa' ldan pho 'brang's ritual needs (Karmay 2023). This notion might have been influenced by the traditional dGe lugs view which struggles to perceive any master as standing above **The Great** Fifth Dalai Lama, much less a rNying ma-associated one. At the same time, an examination of *The Chariot* reveals that this is just one aspect of their multifaceted relationship. Looking specifically from the perspective of the Northern Treasure's lineage, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol can certainly be considered as the root guru of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

¹⁴³ A comprehensive overview of the scope of these studies is provided by Herweg, App. 1.

Treasures. The Dalai Lama discusses in great detail the content of several other *gsan yigs* of this tradition that were available to him at his time, but which have not survived to the present day.¹⁴⁴

In addition, the Fifth Dalai Lama authored the biographies of two preeminent teachers and ritual specialists of the Northern Treasures' tradition in Central Tibet (dBus) during his time. The biography of Ngag gi dbang po's was composed at Chos dbyings rang grol's request in the year of 1654. In 1676, after the death of his own teacher in the ritual traditions of the Northern Treasures, the Fifth Dalai Lama authored the biography of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol. Through these efforts, the Fifth Dalai Lama made a significant contribution to ensuring that the story of the life of these two masters—and, more broadly, the history of transmission of the Northern Treasures in the 16th century—did not fall into obscurity.¹⁴⁵

It is evident from *The Flow of the River Gangā* that the Fifth Dalai Lama received almost all of the Northern Treasures from Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol.¹⁴⁶ Their first meeting took place in 1629 in Pha bong kha, by merit of an invitation of 'Khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub. This is how the Fifth Dalai Lama describes the start of a relationship which lasted almost three decades until the end of Zur chen's life:

*At the close of autumn, I received a summons from Vajradhāra [‘Khon ston dpal ‘byor lhun grub]. Upon my arrival at Pha bong kha, the noble lord [Zur chen], who [was also there] in service of [Vajradhāra], attended the private introductory audience. Up to that point, I had only known him by sight, and this occasion marked the beginning of our closer acquaintance. However, I refrained from addressing him on any subtle topics. [At the same time, some others,] such as Sa skyong bSod nams rab brtan and Tsha ba Dka' bcu pa, consistently remarked on this reincarnation from Zing pa, noting his exceptionally peaceful and gentle demeanor, along with his virtuous qualities. Nevertheless, my own lack of genuine good qualities hindered my pure perception, thus I failed to realize his great significance.*¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ See Schiller 2021, p. 840, and note 49.

¹⁴⁵ Cmp. *Ibid.*, p. 846, especially fn. 119.

¹⁴⁶ Besides Zur chen as teacher of the Northern Treasures, further religious teachers of the Dalai Lama mentioned in *The Flow of the River Gangā* include sMan lung pa alias Khra tshang pa Blo mchog rdo rje (1595–1671, P2668), the 22nd abbot of Zha lu, Rin chen bsod nams mchog grub (1602–1681, BDRC P3510), gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714, BDRC P7), Pha bong ka pa dPal 'byor lhun grub (P1561–1637, BDRC P647), and a mysterious 'Dar nag rGyal sras bDe ba bzang po.

¹⁴⁷ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 43r6-43v3: ston mjug rdo rje 'chang gis shes gsungs nas nged pha bong khar yong skabs rje nyid zhabs phyir bzhugs pa'i sger gyis ngos 'phrad la byon/ de snga phan spyen 'dris tsam las med kyang 'di skabs nas thugs 'dris pa'i 'go tshugs/ 'on kyang nged rang na phra gshis ngos kyi gsung gleng sogs ni ma byung /

From 1641 onwards, the Dalai Lama reports on Zur chen's annual visits to the dGa' ldan pho brang in 'Bras spungs and the Potala Palace in lHa sa. The following episodes concerning the Northern Treasures and the relationship between Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol and the Fifth Dalai Lama are richly described by the Fifth Dalai Lama himself in *The Chariot*.

In 1642 while staying in retreat, dPal 'byor 'phrin las rab rgyas presented the Fifth Dalai Lama with support for his practice in the form of a hand-drawn image (*phyag bris*) of Padmasambhava in his wrathful form *rDo rje drag po rtsal*, the central figure of the Byang gter cycle *The Heart-Practice of the Wrathful Guru* (*Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal*). When receiving this gift, the dwelling cell of Ngag dbang rGya mtsho transforms into a chapel of the fierce protector appearing in radiant clarity with numerous guardian deities manifesting in various forms.¹⁴⁸

In 1643, Zur chen intended to confer profound teachings on *The Iron Treasury Kīla from the Northern Treasures* (*Byang gter phur pa lcags khang ma*),¹⁴⁹ but a fire in Zhol village disrupted this undertaking. Fortunately, Zur chen's ritual mastery caused the wind to change direction, preventing any substantial damage. Later, the Dalai Lama compiled a liturgical manual on *The Iron Treasury Kīla*¹⁵⁰ basing it on the instructions he had received from Chos dbyings rang grol.¹⁵¹

In the summer of 1651, when the Dalai Lama undertook a summer retreat for approximately two months at 'Bras spungs, Chos dbyings rang grol gave him teachings on *The Hundred Profound Teachings of the Dakini* (*Phag mo zab brgya*).¹⁵²

The intimate relationship between Zur chen and the Dalai Lama as allies and friends is further illustrated in the episodes describing how they mutually perform healing rituals when one of them was ill. For example, in 1642 when the Dalai Lama got sick with a "lung disease," he reports that it is only due to Zur chen that he was able to recover. The next year, in 1643, the Fifth Dalai Lama performed many longevity

sa skyong bsod nams rab brtan dang tsha ba dka' bcu pa sogs kyis zing pa sku skye 'di spyod lam zhi dul che zhing yon tan can zhig 'dug ces gsung 'phros mdzad kyi 'dug na'ang nged rang mtshan nyid pa'i nyams kyis dag snang chung bas 'gangs che snyam pa'i nyams snang ma byung /

¹⁴⁸ *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 69v4-6. Cmp. Karmay 2014, p. 177.

¹⁴⁹ Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol received this cycle from Yol mo bsTan 'dzin nor bu, cf. fn. 92. This cycle is also known as *The Great Supreme Kīla* (*Phur pa che mchog*), the *Nine-Headed Kīla* (*Phur pa dbu dgu*) or the *Multicolored Deity* (*lHa khra*), cf. Herweg 1997, p. 313.

¹⁵⁰ The name of this manual is *Lha brag gter byon gyi phur pa lcags khang drag sngags spu gri'i las byang 'jigs med rdo rje pha lam* (Boord 2010, p. 273 fn. 121).

¹⁵¹ Cf. Solomon p. 105.

¹⁵² *The Chariot of the Supreme Vehicle*, fol. 100r3-4; cf. fn.

rituals connected to the visualizations from *The Iron Stalk of Amitayus* (*Tshe dpag med lcags kyi sdong po*) for the sake of Zur chen.

It is important to add that Zur chen's role as the guru of the Fifth Dalai Lama was not limited to conferring exclusively Northern Treasures. The Dalai Lama also received a wide array of additional treasure traditions from Chos dbyings rang grol. In 1645, for example, Zur chen gave the Fifth Dalai Bla ma teachings related to *The Sugatas of the Eight Pronouncements* (*bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*) and the *Yutok Heart Essence* (*g.Yu thog snying thig*).¹⁵³ In addition, the Fifth Dalai Lama received from Zur chen the "practical magic" rites of the rNying ma religious tradition—which also encompassed protective rituals intended to repel Mongol incursions—which he considered crucial to his regency over Tibet.¹⁵⁴

Finally, we know from the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama that dPal 'byor rab rgyas was his teacher in practical subjects like astrology or the reading rules of Sanskrit manuscripts.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

The examination of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol's biography by the Fifth Dalai Lama revealed that the "omniscient Zur" was an ecumenical teacher, talented artist, and holder of many dharma lineages belonging to different Tibetan religious schools. He also acted as an important intermediary in the dialogue between the dGa' ldan pho 'brang and the rNying ma establishments.

After the Third Yol mo sprul sku's passing in 1644, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, along with the Fifth Dalai Lama, became the main vessel of the Northern Treasures in Central Tibet (dBus). Unlike the Fifth Dalai lama, however, Chos dbyings rang grol possessed a greater aptness in rNying ma rituals and a direct affiliation to the rNying ma and the bKa' brgyud schools. Thus, Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol was *de-facto* the main lineage holder and regent of the Northern treasures in dBus between 1644 and ca. 1658.¹⁵⁶ His presence secured the continuity of the lineage of the Northern Treasures until the Fourth Rig 'dzin of rDo je brag Padma 'phrin las received the proper educational background and reached the age of being able to continue

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, fol. 80r6. Cmp. Karmay 2014, p. 355.

¹⁵⁴ Solomon 2018 p. 92 *passim*, Cmp. Karmay 2004, p. 8.

¹⁵⁵ Karmay 2014, pp. 134-135.

¹⁵⁶ I would argue that the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang rgya mtsho, albeit being a lineage holder of the Northern Treasures in Tibet in the 17th century along with Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, could not have become the "heir of the lineage" of the Northern Treasures due to his status and position within the dGe lugs hierarchy and the dGa' ldan pho brang. Cmp. Solomon 2018, p. 100.

the projects of his predecessor, Ngag gi dbang po, by taking the abbatial position at rDo rje brag. In other words, Zur chen Chos dbyings acted as a bridge during the transfer of authority between the Third and the Fourth Rig 'dzin incarnations of rDo rje brag ensuring the continuation and integrity of the transmission lineage of the Northern Treasures within its stronghold at rDo rje brag.



Fig.10 — A statue of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (Chinese: 苏钦 曲英让追) in Gong dkar bshad sgrub gling (Gonkar Shedrupling, 贡嘎夏珠林寺; 29.2747, 90.78693) Monastery.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ I warmly thank Tenzin Namgyal-la for taking his time to drive all the way from Lhasa to take this photo on my behalf.

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The Records of Teachings Received of the Fifth Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms as a Source for the Content and Transmission History of the Northern Treasures (Byang gter)*

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The core teachings of a religious school—their content, origin, and transmission—are central themes in traditional Tibetan historiography and are reflected in various forms of religious literature. One such genre, attested since the beginnings of the later dissemination (*phyi dar*) of Buddhism in Tibet, are “records of teachings received” composed under the generic titles *gsan yig* (“records of what was heard”) or *thob yig* (“records of what was received”). In these accounts, religious practitioners documented the essential teachings acquired during the course of their training. These records were often supplemented by a transmission history of the teaching, specifying each link in the lineage—from its origin to the most recent recipient who received and passed it on: the author of the *records of teachings received*. For historians, these texts constitute invaluable sources for reconstructing the history of a religious school and the formation of its tradition.¹

* This is the English translation of an article I originally published in German in 2021, under the title “Das Studienbuch des 5. Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms als Quelle zum Inhalt und zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der ‚nördlichen Schätze‘ (byang gter),” in: Volker Caumanns, Jörg Heimbels, Kazuo Kano, and Alexander Schiller (eds.), *Gateways to Tibetan Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honour of David P. Jackson on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (Indian and Tibetan Studies 12), Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, 2021, vol. II, pp. 821–890. I would like to thank the editors of this special issue of the *Revue d'Études Tibétaines* (RET)—Prof. Dr. Jean-Luc Achard (Director of the RET), Prof. Dr. Stéphane Arguillère, and Dr. Cécile Ducher—who kindly agreed, together with Prof. Dr. Jay Valentine, to publish an English translation of this article in the present volume dedicated to the Northern Treasures. My special thanks go to Alexandra Sukhanova (M.A.), at whose initiative the translation was undertaken, and who provided essential assistance throughout the translation process. The translation does not incorporate subsequent research findings. Shortly after its publication, I became aware of the *Records of teachings received of gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje* (1646–1714), in which he documented his studies of the Northern Treasures. Consequently, the *gsan yig* compiled by the Fifth Yol mo sPrul sku (1726–

In 1992, staff members of the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) were able to microfilm the *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)² in Samagaun (Gorkha, Nepal). Although composed in the 18th century, this text is the earliest extant source of its kind within the rNying ma school and offers the most detailed account of the content and transmission history of what is known as the “Northern Treasures” (*byang gter*). Tradition attributes the discovery of this multi-volumed textual corpus to the legendary “treasure-discoverer” (*gter ston*) Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408/09) who is said to have brought this treasures to light from the mountain Zang zang lha brag in La stod byang (Central Tibet) in the mid-14th century.

1. The Northern Treasures of Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can

The religious teachings of the rNying ma school are traditionally classified according to their mode of transmission. One such category is known as “treasures” (*gter ma*), comprising instructions for spiritual practice concealed during the early dissemination of the Buddhist doctrine (*bstan pa snga dar*) by Padmasambhava—the tantric master from Uddiyāna—or one of his disciples, at secret locations throughout Tibet, often in rock caves. These teachings were intended to be rediscovered, retrieved, and disseminated at a prophesied time during the later dissemination by a *gter ston*, typically regarded as a

1789) can no longer be regarded as the earliest extant *records of teachings received* on the Northern Treasures within the rNying ma tradition—as asserted in the article. I noted the significance of 'Gyur med rdo rje's *gsan yig* in my presentation at the 16th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies (July 6th, 2022, Prague). The dating of the epitome (*spyi chings*) by Se Padma dbang chen remains uncertain, due to the lack of precise biographical data on this individual. In my article, I proposed that the Fire-Hare year mentioned in the concluding colophon—identified as the year of the text's completion—corresponds to 1627. However, in the aforementioned presentation—where I discussed the epitomes of the Northern Treasures composed by mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542) and Se Padma dbang chen (c. 16th–17th century)—I concluded that the text should more likely be dated one *rab byung* cycle earlier, and therefore suggested the year 1567.

¹ The significance of *records of teachings received* as historical sources has been noted on several occasions; see, for example, Taube 1969: 283–284. For an outline of the *records of teachings received* as a literary genre and an overview of the relevant secondary literature, see Sobisch 2002: 161–164.

² Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms, Yol mo sPrul sku 05. Rig 'dzin bla ma karma bdud 'joms zhabs kyi gsan yig gi rim pa rnam phyogs gcig tu sgrigs pa zab rgyas chos kyi gan mdzod. Ms., dbu med, 167 fols.

reincarnation of one of Padmasambhava's close disciples.³ The recovery of such *gter ma* is attested from the 12th century onward, reaching its peak in terms of the number of treasure-discoverers during the 14th and 15th centuries.⁴

The Northern Treasures—one such treasure tradition—derive their name from the site of their discovery: the rock mountain Zang zang lha brag in La stod byang, located in the northwestern part of Central Tibet (*dbus gtsang*; with *dbus* here specifically referred to as 'Central Tibet'), approximately 50 km west of the fortress Ngam ring. This fortress was built in the mid-13th century to serve as the seat of the secular rulers of the region, the Byang pa, and of the adjacent monastery Byang Ngam ring chos sde, which served as the spiritual center there.⁵ According to tradition, these treasures were concealed by Padmasambhava at this location in the 8th century and rediscovered and brought to light in the mid-14th century by Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (henceforth: Rig 'dzin rGod ldem), who is considered a reincarnation of Zhang sNa nam bDud 'joms rdo rje, a close disciple of Padmasambhava. Padmasambhava and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem are thus the two central figures of the Northern Treasure tradition.

The narrative surrounding the origin and revelation of the Northern Treasures appears to have already been established during Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's lifetime. The written tradition begins with a group of texts, among which particular emphasis was placed on those designated as *kha byang* ("guide"), *lam byang* ("guide on the path"), *snying byang* ("guide to the essence"), and *zhal chems* ("testament"). This group comprised approximately thirty texts, the majority of which extended to only a few pages. They introduced fundamental narratives of the treasure tradition—such as the site where Padmasambhava hid the treasures, the prophesied time of their recovery, prophecies concerning the treasure-discoverer, and

³ For the classification of Nying ma literature into "pronouncements" (*bka' ma*) and "treasures" (*gter ma*), see, for example, Dargyay 1979: 68–69; Thondup 1986: 45–49; Dudjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje 1991: 39, 396. For characteristics of treasure literature, as well as discussions on the authenticity of *gter ma* and the origins of this tradition, see, among others, Doctor 2005: 17–51; Gyatso 2015; Mayer 2019.

⁴ For an overview of the treasure traditions of the rNying ma school, see Dargyay 1979; Thondup 1986; Dudjom Rinpoche Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje 1991: 741–881 (Part Six).

⁵ On the history, sources, and literature concerning the myriarchy (*khri skor*) of La stod byang, see Everding 2010. For an introduction to the political (Ch. 2 and 3) and religious history (Ch. 4) of La stod byang, see Gung thang bsTan 'dzin nor bu 2018.

descriptions of the treasure contents—thus establishing the foundation for the tradition's historical narrative.⁶

At the beginning of the 15th century, Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, a close disciple of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, composed the first biography of the treasure-discoverer. The framework of this biography was formed by events from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's life, supplemented by the legends already circulating about him, along with the narrative of Padmasambhava's concealment of the Northern Treasures, prophecies concerning their revelation, and related materials. Nyi ma bzang po drew extensively from the sources mentioned above, often quoting them verbatim.⁷ The climax of the narrative is marked by the recovery of the *gter ma* and a detailed description of their contents. In this biography, the narratives of the concealment and revelation of the Northern Treasures and the life story of the treasure-discoverer were merged and established as a cohesive mythic account.⁸ According to this narrative, Padmasambhava, at the request of the prince lHa sras Mu khri btsan po, concealed the Northern Treasures on the slopes of Mount bKra bzang during his travels through Tibet. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem received the "keys" (*lde mig*) to revealing these treasures from the hermit bZang po grags pa and, at the age of thirty—in the Year of the Horse (1354)—revealed the treasure for the benefit of the King of Gung thang, the "patron [along with] the recipients of [his] offerings" (*yon mchod*), and for future beings. Subsequently, he founded a monastery at the site, along with a temple dedicated to Padmasambhava on the top of the mountain. A few years later, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was summoned to the royal court of Mang yul Gung thang, where he served as court chaplain. He was granted a monastery on Mount dPal 'bar in Mang yul as his permanent residence. However, some years later, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem left Mang yul and "opened" the hidden land (*sbas yul*) of 'Bras mo gshongs (Sikkim) in the far south of Tibet, designating it a practice site for the followers of his religious tradition. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem returned to Ri bo bKra bzang many years

⁶ Not all texts from this group, which likely circulated contemporaneously and are known to us only by title through quotations, have survived. Some of these texts were incorporated into the collections of the Northern Treasures. See *infra*, note 7.

⁷ Se ston Nyi ma bzang po quotes from approximately twenty-five of these texts. "Eight paper scrolls" (*shog dril bgyad po*), said to have been recovered for the king of Gung thang, are listed and emphasized as core texts in the early formation of the Northern Treasures tradition; see GDNT, pp. 87–88; also KDBNT, pp. 433–434. mNga' ris Pañ chen and Se Padma dbang chen likewise quote extensively from this corpus in their epitomes of the Northern Treasures; see *infra*, 2.c (Epitomes / Tables of Contents).

⁸ The revelation of the Northern Treasures and their contents are discussed, among others, in: Dargyay 1979: 129–132; Schwieger 1985: xxx–xxxviii; Boord 1993: 21–35; Herweg 1994: 85–103.

thereafter. His activities providing religious services to the royal court led him back once again to Mang yul. He spent his final years in his homeland in La stod byang, where he passed away in the Iron-Snake year (1401).⁹

The sacred sites Ri bo bkra bzang (La stod byang), Ri bo dpal 'bar (Mang yul), and the hidden land of 'Bras mo gshongs have since been closely associated with the dissemination of the Northern Treasures and gradually developed into key centers of activity for the tradition in the subsequent years. In addition to the religious center of bKra bzang—the starting point for the transmission of the Northern Treasures—the monastery of bDe grol was founded near the fortress of Ngam ring during the formative years of the tradition. Both monasteries lay within the dominion of the Byang family. Over time, numerous branch monasteries were established.¹⁰ Conflicts in the 16th century between leading clerics of the Byang family and the King of gTsang led to a decline in the significance of the Northern Treasures at their place of origin, prompting religious authorities of the tradition to relocate to Central Tibet (*dbus*) and Southern Tibet. At the beginning of the 17th century, Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), recognized as a reincarnation of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, established the monastery of Thub bstan rDo rje brag in Central Tibet, approximately 40 km west of bSam yas. This monastery became the new principal

⁹ Herweg (1994: 44–152) offers a translation of selected passages from this biography relevant to the discussion of historical issues. The contents of considerably later textual sources concerning the life of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem are discussed by Schwieger 1985: xxx–xxxi and Herweg 1994: 155–158. Information about his life are summarized in Schwieger 1985: xxx–xxxviii; Herweg 1994 (*passim*); Everding 2000: vol. II, pp. 226–233, 244–247, 481–496; Solmsdorf 2014: 12–16. Schwieger particularly examines Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's position as a *gter ston*, his relationships with ruling houses, and his prophecies regarding the opening of hidden lands (*sbas yul*). Everding focuses primarily on his role at the royal court of Mang yul Gung thang. The earliest biography cited above records his birth year as a Wood-Mouse Year (*shing pho byi*), corresponding to 1324, and his death as an Iron-Snake Year (*lcags mo sprul*), i.e., 1401. The treasure's recovery event is dated to his 30th year, a Horse year (=1354). However, the colophons of individual texts date the revelation to a Fire-Horse Year (*me pho rta*), corresponding to 1366; see Schwieger 1985: 46, 47, 65, 77, 80, etc. Using his 30th year as the basis, a birth year of 1337 can be calculated. Later sources also cite an Earth-Mouse Year (1408) as his year of death. Discrepancies between the dates in the earliest biography and those in later sources have been noted by Herweg (1994: 175–176) and Everding (2000, II: 232–233). The biographical dates (1337–1408/09) given here follow Schwieger 1985, Dargyay 1979, and Everding 2000.

¹⁰ A list of Tibetan monasteries associated with the Northern Treasures is provided by Choden 1973: 4–5. See also the recent list compiled by the editors of the modern edition BTChK, vol. 62, pp. 883–898.

center for the dissemination of the Northern Treasures,¹¹ although the tradition continued at the monastery of bKra bzang as well.¹² In addition to the treasures recovered at Mount Zang zang lha brag, further teaching cycles were incorporated into this treasure tradition over time. These cycles were brought to light by treasure-discoverers (*gter ston*) other than Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, much later and in different locations.¹³ The present article is limited to the original Northern Treasures of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

According to the earliest accounts of the revelation of the Northern Treasures by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, the treasure was divided among five boxes, organized according to their spatial arrangement at the discovery site. These accounts mention, among the recovered items, a few valuables, ritual objects, and relics—but most notably, collections of writings. With the exception of the *Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang*

¹¹ On the history of the monastery rDo rje brag, see the early 20th-century chronicle by Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rdo rje (DJBGB). The religious chronicle titled *Bod yul gangs can gyi ljongs su snga 'gyur bka' gter gyi chos brgyud 'dzin pa'i gdan sa chen po thub bstan rdo rje brag e waṃ lcog sgar ba'i chos brgyud dang gdan rabs bcas kyi lo rgyus mdor bsdu* (Simla, 1983) by sTag lung rTse sprul Rinpoche (born c. 1926) was not available to me, nor was its English translation (*A Brief History of Dorje Tak Monastery in Tibet and its Lineage Holders*, Leh, 1985). Brief overviews of the monastery's history, as a new institution in Central Tibet for disseminating the Northern Treasures and led by throne-holders recognized as reincarnations of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, can be found in: Boord 1993: 29–31; Herweg 1994: 29–31; Dalton 2016: 78–96, among others.

¹² An outline of the history of the monastery bKra bzang is provided in Gung thang bsTan 'dzin nor bu 2018: 300–302.

¹³ This later tradition includes, in particular, the *gter ma* cycles of those treasure-discoverers recognized as reincarnations of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem—namely, Rig 'dzin Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (c. 16th century) and Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639). Also included are the treasures of the mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542), the elder brother of Rig 'dzin bDud 'joms rdo rje. These two brothers from Glo bo, descendants of the royal house of Mang yul Gung thang, drew on the early transmission of the Northern Treasures in La stod byang and began disseminating the treasure teachings in Central Tibet (*dbus*) and Southern Tibet from the early 16th century onwards. Also part of this tradition are the treasures of Byang bdag bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603), regarded as a reincarnation of mNga' ris Paṇ chen, who founded the lay-practitioner community of epitom, the site where his son Ngag gi dbang po later built the monastery rDo rje brag. Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po expanded the community and is regarded as the actual founder of the monastery, which then received the name Thub bstan rDo rje brag E waṃ lcog sgar. All these later treasure-discoverers were active in Central Tibet or Southern Tibet. Included as well are the treasures of mNga' ris gTer ston Gar dbang zla ba rgyal mtshan (1640–1685) and sKal bzang padma dbang phyug (1719/20–1770), as part of the later 17th and 18th-century tradition. A concise overview of the treasure-discoverers associated with this tradition is provided by Choden 1973: 6–7. A compilation of the expanded textual corpus considered part of the Northern Treasures was published in 2015 under the title *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (BTChK), comprising 63 volumes, including a table of contents.

thal collection and the *rDo rje phur pa'i chos skor* collection, the early narrative literature that has come down to us—transmitted primarily as part of the treasures—as well as the earliest biographies of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, do not yet contain those designations for the text collections that would later become constitutive of this treasure tradition. Instead, the contents of the “Five Treasures” (*mdzod lnga*) are initially outlined only in extremely brief terms—on the one hand, according to their purpose and content (as cited in the *Zhal chems bdun pa*), and on the other, in connection with the meditation practice centered on specific deities (as in the *Rig 'dzin rtsa ba'i sgrub thabs*). These brief descriptions of the “treasures” cannot be directly identified with the later, well-known designations of the individual text collections of the Northern Treasures.¹⁴

It was not until the late 15th century that hagiographical writing within this religious school resumed. In these sources, the designations for individual text collections of the Northern Treasures are documented in writing for the first time.¹⁵ These collections are

¹⁴ The *rdzogs chen* text collection *Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal* is mentioned several times in the biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem by Se ston Nyi ma bzang po (GDNTh, pp. 132, 143). This collection is also listed by title in early narrative literature, for example in the quasi-autobiographical text *sPrul sku rig 'dzin chen po'i mnal lam le'u brgyad pa* (PKNL, p. 160). According to GDNTh, this collection was located in the center of the treasure repository and thus held a central place in the early textual tradition. As sources for discussing the contents of the treasure, mNga' ris Pan chen and Se Padma dbang chen cite the *Zhal chems bdun pa* (BTSNT, fols. 2b–3a; BTRPh, fols. 27b–28a) and the *Rig 'dzin rtsa ba'i sgrub thabs* (BTSNT, fol. 3a–b; BTRPh, fol. 27a–b) in their epitomes of this treasure tradition. To the best of current knowledge, the *Zhal chems bdun pa* has not survived independently and is known only through quotations in these epitomes. The *Rig 'dzin rtsa ba'i sgrub thabs* is a text belonging to the *Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* cycle. For the content of the Northern Treasures, see RDzGTh, p. 114. The *rGod ldem rnam thar* (GDNTh, pp. 96–97) describes the “Five Treasures” in a manner similar to that in the *Zhal chems bdun pa*, closely following the wording of *sNying byang rgyas pa gnad gyi thim bu* (NyBGP, p. 313). Descriptions of the treasure contents vary considerably across these early sources. Translations or summaries of individual texts' wording regarding treasure contents are found in Dargyay 1979: 130–131; Schwieger 1985: xxxv–xxxvi; Boord 1993: 25–26; and Herweg 1994: 32–33.

¹⁵ In his biography collection of figures from the early Northern Treasures tradition in *La stod byang*, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang names four text cycles by title: *rDzogs pa chen po kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal gyi skor* (NThOPh, p. 198), (*pha chos*) *rDo rje phur pa* (*ibid.*, p. 177), *Rigs 'dzin gdung sgrub* (*ibid.*, p. 186) and *Thugs bsgrub* (=sgrub) *kyi bskor* (=skor) (*ibid.*, p. 186). The biography of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (NKhNTh; translated in Valentine 2018), written in 1557 by Nam mkha' bsod nams dpal, mentions nine cycles: *Byang gter skor gyi rdzogs pa chen pa zangs* (=zang) *thal*, *Rang byung rang shar*, *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*, (*pha chos*) *rDo rje phur pa* (*ibid.*, p. 212); *Thugs rje chen po nyon mongs rang grol* (i.e. *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol*) (*ibid.*, p. 214); *Gu ru zhi ba'i bskor* (=skor) (add.: *Rigs 'dzin gdung bsgrub* (=sgrub)), *Drag po mthing kha'i bskor* (=skor) (add.: *Thugs bsgrub* (=sgrub)), *Byang chub sems pa'i spyod dbang gi bskor* (=skor) (*ibid.*, p. 213); *rTen 'brel chos bdun* (*ibid.*, p. 214).

organized into closed teaching cycles (*chos skor*), each centered around a specific topic that lends its name to the entire cycle. In terms of content, these cycles encompass a wide-ranging corpus of doctrinal, practice, and ritual texts, among others.¹⁶ At the core of the tradition are essentially nine teaching cycles, which together comprise several thousand folios and are arranged into approximately thirteen to fifteen volumes, depending on the edition.¹⁷

Cycle I	<i>Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal</i> ¹⁸ (Xyl., Ms.)
Cycle II	<i>Ka dag rang byung rang shar</i> ¹⁹ (Xyl., Ms.)

¹⁶ An overview of the contents of both *rdzogs chen* cycles is provided by Schwieger 1985.

¹⁷ The relevant source texts primarily refer to nine ritual cycles that constitute the core corpus of these Northern Treasures. See, for example, the enumeration of these treasures in the biography of Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (NKhNTh; see *supra*, note 15). These cycles are numbered here with Roman numerals from I to IX. Titles of the individual cycles may vary slightly or appear in abbreviated form in the source materials. A list of these text cycles and their allocation to the "Five Treasures" is provided by Choden 1973: 6–7; cf. Schwieger 1985: 35–36; Boord 1993: 25–26. However, some texts offer alternative allocations. Regarding these teaching [and ritual] cycles (*chos skor*), the following sources are listed: (a) surviving manuscripts and block prints (only collections with a significant number of texts are included here), (b) title lists or inventories based on the surviving *records of teachings received* (*gsan yig*), and (c) content descriptions and title lists from epitomes (with references). The above-mentioned text collections are drawn from the holdings of the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC). These holdings were reviewed to the extent possible during the preparation of this article (<http://www.tbrc.org>, accessed May 23, 2020). See also the collection of manuscripts and block prints in Herweg 1994: 34–38. Due to space constraints, most relevant secondary literature on the text collections is not cited here, except for one catalogue (Schwieger 1985), which provides a comprehensive bibliographical record, partly with content descriptions, of both *rdzogs chen* teaching cycles (Cycles I and II).

¹⁸ Source texts: A 'dzom chos sgar, n.d. (Leh, 1973), Xyl., 4 vols. (BDRC, W18557; W4CZ1100). —gNas chung, n.d. (Leh, 1979), Xyl., 4 vols. (BDRC, W4CZ1106). —n.pl., n.d. (Sumra, 1978), Ms., 3 vols. (BDRC, W4CZ1105). —n.pl., n.d., Ms., 1 vol. or 2 vols. (BDRC, W8LS19760; W3PD889, vol. 64; W3CN18479). Modern edition: BTChK, vols. 1–2 (BDRC, W2PD17457, I4PD423–I4PD424). Title lists: NDThY; DLSY; BDThY; KDJSY. Epitomes: BTSNT: fol. 7b (*rTsol med kyi theg pa ston pa zab mo chos kyi lung byang*), fols. 7b–8a (*sGron ma rnam gsum*); BTRPh: fols. 35b–38b. The text collection (in the A 'dzom chos sgar print) is described in detail in Schwieger 1985: xviii–xxvii; text nos. 1–111 (pp. 1–113), including notes on deviations between the A 'dzom chos sgar and gNas chung editions of the corpus.

¹⁹ Source texts: A 'dzom chos sgar, n.d. (Leh, 1973), Xyl., 1 vol. (BDRC, W18557; W4CZ1100). —n.pl., n.d. (Paro, 1979), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W27283). Modern edition: BTChK, vol. 3 (BDRC, I4PD425). Title lists: NDThY; DLSY; KDJSY; BDThY. Epitomes: BTSNT: fols. 6b–7a (*Ka dag gi zhu lan gnad kyi yi ge*, i.e., a list of individual titles); BTRPh: fol. 35a–b. The text collection (in the A 'dzom chos sgar print) is described in detail in Schwieger 1985: xviii–xxvii; text nos. 112–127 (pp. 114–132).

Cycle III	<i>bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar</i> ²⁰ (Xyl., Ms.)
Cycle IV	<i>bCom ldan 'das rdo rje phur pa</i> ²¹ (Ms.)
Cycle V	<i>(phyi sgrub) Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol</i> ²² (Xyl., Ms.)
Cycle VI	<i>(nang sgrub) Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub</i> ²³ (Xyl., Ms.)
Cycle VII	<i>(gsang sgrub) Thugs sgrub gu ru drag po rtsal</i> ²⁴ (Xyl., Ms.)
Cycle VIII	<i>Zab mo rten 'brel chos bdun</i> ²⁵ (Ms.)
Cycle IX	<i>Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod dbang</i> ²⁶ (Ms.)

The first four text cycles can be assigned—according to their primary content—to traditions that, following the classification system of the rNying ma school, belong to the highest classes of tantra: the two

²⁰ Source texts: n.pl., n.d., Xyl., 2 vols. (BDRC, W1KG11884). —n.pl., n.d. (Darjeeling, 1984), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W1KG12971). —n.pl., n.d., Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W1PD181177). Modern edition: BTChK, vols. 9–12 (BDRC, I4PD431–I4PD434). Title lists: NDThY; DLSY; GSThY; BDThY; TGSY. Epitomes: BTSNT: fol. 7a (*bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi them sbyang*); BTRPh: fols. 39a–41a.

²¹ Source texts: n.pl., n.d. (Leh, 1973), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W23775). —n.pl., n.d. (Dalhousie, 1977), Ms., 2 vols. (BDRC, W29251). —n.pl., n.d. (Darjeeling, 1984), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W27295). Modern edition: BTChK, vol. 13 (BDRC, I4PD435). Title lists: NDThY; DLSY; KDJSY. Epitomes: BTSNT: fols. 5b–6b (*Phur pa rin chen mdzod*); BTRPh: fols. 44b–46a.

²² Source texts: gNas chung, n.d. (Gangtok, 1979), Xyl., 1 vol. (BDRC, W27296). —n.pl., n.d. (Delhi, 1982), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W27284). Modern editions: Solukhumbu, 2017 (BDRC, W2KG209269, vol. 2); —BTChK, vol. 4 (BDRC, I4PD426). Title lists: NDThY; DLSY; GSThY; PGThY; KDJSY. Epitome: BTRPh: fols. 47b–48a.

²³ Source texts: gNas chung, n.d. (Gangtok, 1981), Xyl., 1 vol. (W23449). —n.pl., n.d. (Delhi, 1982), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W27284). Modern editions: Solukhumbu, 2017 (BDRC, W2KG209269, vol. 2). —BTChK, vol. 5 (BDRC, I4PD427). Title lists: NDThY; DLSY; PGThY; KDJSY. Epitome: BTRPh: fols. 38b–39a.

²⁴ Source texts: n.pl., n.d. (Darjeeling, 1984), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W27870). —n.pl., n.d. (Sumra, 1978), Ms., 1 vol. (BDRC, W4CZ1105, vol. 3). —gNas chung, n.d. (Gangtok, 1980), Xyl., 4 vols. (W23453). —n.pl., n.d., Ms., 2 vols. (BDRC, W3PD999). Modern editions: Solukhumbu, 2017 (BDRC, W2KG209269, vol. 1). —BTChK, vols. 6–8 (BDRC, I4PD428–I4PD430); Title lists: NDThY; DLSY; GSThY; BDThY; PGThY; KDJSY. Epitomes: BTSNT: fols. 3b–4a (*Thugs sgrubs (=sgrub) them sbyang*); BTRPh: fols. 41a–44b.

²⁵ Source texts: n.pl., n.d., Ms. (in: BDRC, W2PD17514, vol. 11). Modern edition: BTChK, vol. 15, various texts (in: BDRC, I4PD437). Title lists: DLSY; KDJSY; YBSY. Epitomes: BTSNT: fol. 4a–b (*Zab mo rten 'brel gyi chos bdun*); BTRPh: fols. 46a–47b.

²⁶ Source texts: n.pl., n.d., Ms. (in: BDRC, W2PD17514, vol. 10). Modern edition: BTChK, vol. 14 (in: BDRC, I4PD436). Title lists: DLSY; KDJSY; TLThY; YBSY. Epitome: BTRPh: fol. 48a–b.

rdzogs chen cycles (Cycles I and II)²⁷ can be assigned to the group of the *atiyoga* class, the cycle of the *bka' brgyad* deities (Cycle III) and the *Vajrakīla* ritual tradition (Cycle IV) accordingly to the group of the *mahāyoga* class. Three textual collections place Padmasambhava at the center of the practice in the form of the deities Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol (Cycle V), Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub (Cycle VI), and rDo rje drag po rtsal (Cycle VII).²⁸ The cycle *Zab mo rten 'brel chos bdun* (Cycle VIII) comprises a collection of teachings and ritual practices centered on Padmasambhava and deities such as Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, Hayagrīva, and Vajravārāhī. The collection *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod dbang* (Cycle IX) brings together teachings and ritual traditions revolving around Vairocana and other deities. In addition to these nine cycles, supplementary collections of texts are also counted among the Northern Treasures of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, primarily dedicated to additional meditation practices and, in particular, to protective deities.²⁹ Moreover, these cycles contain prophecies (*lung bstan*),

²⁷ In the textual tradition, these two *rdzogs chen* cycles are assigned to the group of the "six oral transmissions" (*snyan brgyud drug*) of Padmasambhava; see BTRPh, fol. 34b. Cf. Schwieger 1985: lxvi, note 164.

²⁸ These cycles were conceptually summarized as "methods for the [ritual] accomplishment of the three—i.e., the outer, inner, and secret—[forms] of the spiritual teacher [Padmasambhava]" (*gu ru phyi nang gsang gsum sgrub tshul*); see KDJSY, ca, fol. 4a; or as "the three [forms of] accomplishment of the mind [of the teacher]" (*thugs sgrub gsum, thugs sgrub rnam gsum*); see PBGNTh, fol. 44b; cf. Ehrhard 2008: 49, 87.

²⁹ The earliest systematic classification of all texts attributed to the Northern Treasures is presented by Se Padma dbang chen in his epitome *Byang gter chos skor rnam kyī spyi chings rin chen 'phreng ba* (BTRPh), written in 1627. In addition to the nine text cycles mentioned above (see *supra*, notes 18–26, and *infra*, note 47), eleven further collections are distinguished (BTRPh, fols. 43a–44b, 48b–52b): (i) *Tshe dpag med longs sku ma'i chos skor*, (ii) *mNga' dbang gi chos skor* (*dBang chen yongs rdzogs* and *Thugs sgrub kyī dzam bha la'i skor*), (iii) *Chos skyong bka' srungs gter bdag dang bcas pa'i chos skor*, (iv) *mGon po stag zhon gyi skor*, (v) *bKa' bsrung ma'i skor*, (vi) *gTer bdag skor*, (vii) *rDo rje legs pa*, (viii) *Thang lha'i skor*, (ix) *sTong dpon pa'i skor*, (x) *Lung bstan gyi skor*, (xi) *Zhi rgyas dbang drag gi chos skor*. Based on this epitome, the 5th Dalai Bla ma developed an even more detailed classification of the texts in his *records of teachings received* (DLSY, vol. III). In addition to the nine text collections mentioned above (such as *supra*, notes 18–26, and *infra*, note 59), he distinguished the following text cycles: (i) *Phag mo gsang ba rmad byung gi skor* (pp. 253–256), (ii) *mGon po tshe dpag med nang longs spyod rdzogs sku'i chos skor* (pp. 262–264), (iii) *rTsa rlung zab lam gsang 'khrid bde stong rgya mtsho zhes rdo rje drag po rtsal gyi yum bka'i skor* (pp. 290–291), (iv) *mNga' dbang rin po che'i skor* (pp. 318–320), (v) *Guru phyag na rdo rje'i skor* (pp. 320–321), (vi) *Man ngag kha 'thor shing brgyad* (p. 327), (vii) *Lung bstan dang sbas yul lam yig gi skor* (pp. 327–332), (viii) *bKa' brgyad kyī bka' srung mgon po bstan srung dregs pa* (pp. 332–334), (ix) *rDo rje phur pa'i bka' srung dpal mgon legs ldan nag po stag zhon lcags khrab can gyi skor* (pp. 334–335), (x) *Chos sde spyi dang khyad par rdzogs chen zang thal gyi srung ma dpal sngags kyī bdag mo e ka dza ti'i skor* (pp. 335–337), (xi) *gTer srung bstan ma bcu gnyis kyī skor* (pp. 337–338), (xii) *gTer srung dbang chen rdo rje legs pa'i skor* (pp. 338–339), (xiii) *gTer srung dri za'i rgyal po zu phud*

including guides for the discovery and opening of “hidden lands” (*sbas yul*).³⁰

As far as is currently known, the written transmission of the Northern Treasures existed solely in manuscript form for several centuries. The manuscripts examined thus far provide no information regarding formal publication. However, the colophons of individual texts occasionally contain later additions, which allow for dating particular stages in the transmission. One example is a manuscript copy of the text cycle *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* (Cycle VII) from the private library of Yolmo Lama rDo rje in Helambu (Nepal).³¹ Some texts within this manuscript include information on the transmission history in the form of lineages of tradents, concluding with the names of religious figures who can be dated to the 15th or 16th centuries. Several texts note that “[this] is the text [of a person] named Nam mkha’” (*nam mkha’i ming can gyi dpe’o*).³² Although this individual cannot be definitively identified due to the brevity of the name,³³ the attached lineage suggests that this person received transmission from teachers dating to the 15th or 16th centuries, including the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku Śākya bzang po (BTThG, pp. 20, 567, 646, 655), his disciple Drin can Che mchog rdo rje (*ibid.*, p. 269),³⁴ as well as Chos rje Kun dga’ gzi brjid pa (*ibid.*, p. 126) and gSang sngags rdo rje (*ibid.*, p. 134).

lga pa’am gnyan chen thang lha’i skor (pp. 340–342), (xiv) *dBang gi ma mo bdun gyi gsol kha* (p. 342), (xv) *bKa’ srung srog bdag bdud kyi rgyal po’am legs ldan nag po dang ston dpon du grags pa don du pe har rgyal po la ngos ’dzin pa ’di’i skor* (pp. 342–343), (xvi) *Chos sde spyi’i srung ma bkra bzang zhing skyong gi gsol mchod yul ming bod yul ma* (p. 343), (xvii) *Srog bdag yam shud dmar po* (p. 343). See the overview in Herweg 1994: 307–318. Several of these cycles, which supplement the central text collections, have been preserved in the manuscript collections, and partially also in the modern edition BTChK (vol. 15).

³⁰ Instructions for discovering and opening these sites as places of refuge for the adherents of this tradition are preserved in separate text collections; see e.g., BTNTh. In the epitome by Se Padma dbang chen from the 17th century (see above, note 29), a multitude of these texts are listed under the text group of prophecies (*lung bstan gyi skor*).

³¹ The handwritten copy BTThG represents an early stage in the transmission of this text cycle and contains fewer texts than later copies. See *infra*, note 77.

³² See BTThG, pp. 12, 32, 49, 72 etc.

³³ The short name Nam mkha’ is known from lineages found in the relevant *records of teachings received*. In various lines, this name is attested in the context of individuals dated to the turn of the 15th to the 16th century, including, for example, Thugs sras Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan (1454–1541); see, for example, KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 13a; DLSY, *ga*, fols. 126a, 126b, 131a, etc. Even in this manuscript copy of the cycle *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* (BTThG), religious figures are mentioned by name who could be identified with a person named Nam mkha’: these are sNgags ’chang Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan (*ibid.*, p. 528) and gSang bsgrub (=sgrub) Nam mkha’ rdo rje (*ibid.*, p. 258).

³⁴ The lineage starting from Rig ’dzin rGod ldem (BTThG, p. 269): 1. sPrul sku Rig ’dzin chen po, 2. Drin mchog rDo rje dpal, 3. mTshan ldan Byams pa gshes (=bshes)

In addition to manuscript versions of the text collections that have been preserved, several collections were also disseminated through block printing:

1. The A 'dzom chos sgar xylograph (4 vols., BDRC, W18557 / W4CZ1100) encompasses the two *rdzogs chen* text cycles *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I) and *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II) and was printed either at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century.³⁵
2. The gNas chung sGra dbyangs gling block print (4 vols., BDRC, W4CZ1106) includes not only the *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I) collection but also the three cycles centered on Padmasambhava in his specific manifestations mentioned above (Cycles V, VI, VII). This print likely dates to the second half of the 19th century.³⁶
3. The xylograph of the collection *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* (2 vols., BDRC, W1KG11884) is of unknown provenance in terms of both place and date.³⁷

To date, no manuscript or block print has been located that unifies all the text cycles of the Northern Treasures into a single compilation from what is considered "Old Tibet."³⁸

nyen, 4. Drin can Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, 5. sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams, 6. Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa, 7. sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po, 8. Drin can Che mchog rdo rje, 9. (*des bdag*) Nam mkha'i ming can (*la bsnang [=gnang] ba'o* /).

³⁵ In the preface to the reproduction of the two *rdzogs chen* text collections from the Northern Treasures in the A 'dzom chos sgar print, the editor states that this print project was directed by A 'dzom 'Brug pa 'Gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje. See Choden 1973, Preface. While the title dates the print to the beginning of the 20th century, the preface dates it to the end of the 19th century. The biographical dates of 'Gro 'dul dpa' bo rdo rje, founder of the rNying ma monastery A 'dzom chos sgar, are 1842 to 1924; see BDRC, W6002. Cf. Schwieger 1985: xxiii-xxiv.

³⁶ The gNas chung block print of the collection *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* was produced under the direction of Chos rje Shākya yar 'phel. See the editor's preface; BDRC, W4CZ1106, vol. 1. Cf. Schwieger 1985: xxiii-xxiv. IHa lung Shākya yar 'phel held the office of oracle (*sku rten*) of gNas chung from 1856 to 1900. See Bell 2021: 185.

³⁷ This print edition (BDRC, W1KG11884) includes the text *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi dbang gi cho ga rig 'dzin dgongs rgyan*, composed by rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) in the Iron-Bird year (=1681), which allows dating the print to the late 17th century at the earliest. Its layout closely resembles that of other prints produced at the printing house of Thub bstan rdo rje brag. See, for example, *rDo rje brag gi bca' yig* (Delhi: Khasdub Gyatsho Shashin, 1979. BDRC, W8LS66621).

³⁸ The modern edition *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (BTChK), published in 2015 and comprising 15 volumes of the Northern Treasures from the

2. Sources on the content and the history of transmission of the Northern Treasures

Information regarding the contents and transmission of the Northern Treasures text collections is primarily found within specific texts contained in the teaching cycles (*chos skor*). In addition, further insight into the history of their dissemination and contents is provided by other sources—chief among them narrative accounts such as biographies and autobiographies (*rnam thar*), as well as epitomes (*spyi chings*) and records of teachings received (*gsan yig*).

2.a Information from texts within the teaching cycles

The text collections themselves contain descriptive accounts of the teaching cycles' contents, ranging from brief summaries of the main themes to detailed listings of individual text titles within each cycle. Determining when these texts were incorporated into the collections requires case-by-case investigation.³⁹ Information on the history of transmission is often found in the colophons of individual texts. These frequently contain repetitive material describing key events related to the concealment of the *gter ma* by Padmasambhava and the recovery of the treasure by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. A Fire-Horse Year (1366) and the mountain *Zang zang lha brag* are identified as the time and place of the treasure's revelation.⁴⁰ In some cases, colophons also include supplementary historical information, such as a lists of the names of the tradents of a given text (see above, note 34). The collections were further supplemented with independent narratives (*lo rgyus*, *khog*

tradition of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, represents an editorial effort to compile the majority of accessible texts into a single collection.

³⁹ Tables of contents (*them/thems byang*, *tho byang*) are known as bibliographic sources from the Northern Treasures text collections. mNga' ris Paṇ chen already quoted some of these texts in his 16th-century epitome of the Northern Treasures. See *supra*, notes 18–21, 24, 25. The early 17th-century epitome by Padma dbang chen lists several of such table of contents: sNyan rgyud (=brgyud) drug gi tho byang (BTRPh, fol. 35b) for the collection *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*; Rig 'dzin rtsa ba bsgrub (=sgrub) pa dgos (=dgongs) pa'i them byang (*ibid.*, fol. 38b) for the collectio *Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub*; Them byang zhal gdams (*ibid.*, fol. 39a) for the collection *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar*; and Them byang gsal ba'i sgron ma (*ibid.*, fol. 41a–b) for the collection *Gu ru thugs sgrub kyi chos skor*. These indicate that early compilations of the text cycles were not always as extensive as those known by the time of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku. See *infra*, note 77.

⁴⁰ Schwiieger 1985: xxiii. For a detailed account of the events, see, for example, the colophon of a text from the collection *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*; Schwiieger 1985: 76–78 (Text 78). In this catalogue, Schwiieger provides detailed information from the colophons of the two *rdzogs chen* cycles.

dbub) that recount the origin and transmission of the treasures.⁴¹ Occasionally, colophons refer to additional texts from the later tradition.⁴²

2.b Biographies and autobiographies

Following the composition of the first life account (GDNTh) of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem in the early 15th century, the writing of biographies within this tradition resumed only from the late 15th century onward. This revival began with the compilation of a collection of six biographies (NThOPh) assembled by Sangs rgyas dpal bzang. This collection opens with the biography of rNam rgyal mgon po, son of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, and continues with accounts of the early religious authorities of this tradition—namely, rDo rje dpal, Byams pa bshes gnyen, rDo rje mgon po, and Ngag dbang grags pa—concluding with a brief autobiography of the compiler himself, Sangs rgyas dpal bzang.⁴³ From the early 16th century onward, additional biographies have been preserved, offering life narratives of clerics who remained active in La stod byang, the geographic and spiritual birthplace of the tradition. These include the autobiography of Chos rgyal bsod nams (ChGNTh) and the biography of Thugs sras Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (NKhNTh).⁴⁴ These religious figures were associated with the monasteries Ri bo bra bzang, bDe grol and Shri ri (La stod lho). Beyond the ritual cycles themselves, these biographical texts are significant for containing, for the first time, written designations of the text cycles, thereby providing valuable insight into the history of transmission of individual teaching cycles.

⁴¹ Such as the narrative texts *Lo rgyus* (BTRPh, fol. 47b) from the *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* collection and *Khog dbubs* (*ibid.*, fol. 35b) from the *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* collection.

⁴² See Schwieger 1985: xxiii. The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku also refers to such writings from the later tradition in his *gsan yig*; see *infra*, notes 75–78, 81.

⁴³ The lineage following Rig 'dzin rGod ldem represents a principal transmission lineage of central *byang gter* ritual cycles in La stod byang, with minor variations attested. See, for example, the transmission of the cycle *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* (in KDJSY, ca, fol. 9a3–b2; cf. *infra*, note 100, transmission lineage A; and *infra*, Appendix 1, plate 1 [=Transmission lineage A] and plate 6 [=Transmission lineage F]). A translation of this biography collection was provided by Valentine 2017. This text later served historians as a basis for biographical sketches on the Northern Treasures' transmission: Bya btang Phyag rdor nor bu (c. 17th century) continued the lineage in BTBGNTh up to the 3rd Yol mo sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644) and sPrul sku Tshul khribs bzang po (19th/20th century) in BTBGR up to the 7th rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Chos dbang mnyam nyid rdo rje (1886–1932/35).

⁴⁴ Translations of these two biographies are available in Valentine 2018 and Valentine 2020.

Beginning in the 16th century, sources emerge documenting the expanding dissemination of the Northern Treasures throughout western, central and southern Tibet. Among the earliest of these are the autobiographies of the two brothers (*sku mched gnyis*) from Glo bo—namely, mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal and his younger brother Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje—who stand out as the most influential disciples of the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku in promoting the Northern Treasures in Central Tibet (*dbus*) and Southern Tibet. From the latter half of the 16th century onward, a multitude of further life accounts emerge, chronicling the history of transmission. These particularly include narratives concerning teachers active at the monastery rDo rje brag—the new principal center of the tradition in Central Tibet (*dbus*)—as well as accounts related to the tradition holders within the reincarnation lineage of the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku. Additionally, these sources document religious figures active in Mang yul (Western Tibet) and in 'Bras mo gshongs (Southern Tibet). In these texts, the transmission of entire text cycles, or even individual texts from these collections, is now recorded as a distinct and discrete event. Among the earliest significant biographical and autobiographical sources from the 15th and 16th centuries are the following:

1. Se ston Nyi ma bzang po (14th-15th century), GDNTh (composed c. early 15th century)
2. Sangs rgyas dpal bzang (c. 15th century), NThOPh (composed c. late 15th century)
3. sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams (1442–1509), ChGNTh
4. Nam mkha' bsod nams dpal (15th-16th century), NKhNTh (composed 1557)
5. mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal rdo rje (1487–1542), PBGNTh (composed 16th century)
6. mNga' ris Rig 'dzin Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (16th century), LDNTh (composed 16th century)

2.c Epitomes / Table of contents

The earliest comprehensive presentation of the contents of the Northern Treasures that has been preserved was produced by mNga' ris Paṇ chen in the early 16th century. His epitome (*spyi chings*) opens with an outline of the revelation and contents of the “Five Treasures” (BTSNT, fols. 2a–3b), drawing upon the earliest extant narrative sources relating to the Northern Treasures. Following this introduction, mNga' ris Paṇ chen compiled excerpts from sources providing a descriptive overview of the individual text cycles (*ibid.*,

fols. 3b-8a).⁴⁵ The final section concludes with a presentation of the *rdzogs chen* teachings, organized according to the classification of teachings within this textual tradition into “36 oral transmissions” (*snyan brgyud sum cu rtsa drug*) from the teaching cycle *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*, including the listing of titles from this cycle (*ibid.*, fols. 8a-15a).

Building upon this foundational epitome, Se bKra shis pa Padma dbang chen⁴⁶ composed a more detailed epitome of the doctrinal teachings and ritual tradition of the “Five Treasures” in 1627. He extensively incorporated verbatim passages from mNga' ris Paṇ chen's *spyi chings* without explicit citation. The eighth chapter of this work (BTRPh, fols. 27a-52b) is devoted specifically to the contents of the individual ritual cycles. A significant innovation in this epitome is the inclusion of detailed listings of the individual text titles within the cycles.⁴⁷ Padma dbang chen's text thus represents the earliest substantive source beyond the ritual cycles themselves, offering detailed information about the corpus of individual texts comprising these collections.

1. mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal rdo rje (1487-1542), BTSNT
2. Se'i sGrub pa po Padma dbang chen (c. 16th-17th century), BTRPh (composed 1627)

2.d Records of teachings received

In compiling *records of teachings received* (*gsan yig*, *thob yig*), authors documented both the contents and the transmission histories of the

⁴⁵ For the sources in the BTSNT cited here by mNga' ris Paṇ chen, see *supra*, notes 18–21, 24, 25.

⁴⁶ The name bKra bzang pa (or Se) Padma dbang chen appears in various lineages related to the transmission of the *byang gter* teachings; see, for example, DLSY, ga, fols. 143b, 159a. This individual can therefore be dated to the 16th or 17th century. According to the colophon, the text was composed in the Fire-Hare year (*me mo yos*), corresponding to 1627. The 5th Dalai Bla ma (1617–1682) also used this epitome of Se ston as a source for his *records of teachings received*; see *infra*, 2.d (Records of teachings received).

⁴⁷ The titles of the nine *byang gter* cycles listed in the epitome BTRPh (mentioned above), which stand at the center of the textual tradition, are as follows: *rDzogs chen rang byung rang shar* (fol. 35a–b), *dGongs pa zang thal* [incl. *Tshe dpag med longs sku ma'i chos skor*] (fols. 35b–38b), *Gu ru zhi ba* (i.e., *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub*) (fols. 38b–39a), *sGrub chen bka' brgyad* (fols. 39a–41a), *Gu ru thugs sgrub* (fols. 41a–44b), *rDo rje phur pa* (fols. 44b–46a), *Zab mo rten 'brel* (fols. 46a–47b), *Thugs chen 'gro ba kun grol* (fols. 47b–48a), *Byang sems spyod dbang* (fol. 48a–b). Following this, titles of other text cycles belonging to the Northern Treasures appear (fols. 48b–51b), whose designations were mentioned earlier; see *supra*, notes 29.

respective textual collections. The author enumerated the titles of the textual cycle he received through reading transmission (*lung*) and frequently provide a detailed account of the lineage of transmission. This lineage traditionally begins with Padmasambhava receiving the teachings from personifications of the *dharmakāya* and *saṃbhogakāya* in a supramundane realm, followed by the complete transmission lineage initiated by the revelation of the treasures by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, extending down to the author of the *gsan yig* itself.

Records of teachings received from the rNying ma School:

A significant number of *records of teachings received* are known from the rNying ma school, in which the transmission of the Northern Treasures is well documented. However, only a few relatively late examples have survived. The earliest *gsan yig* known to us derive from the early transmission tradition in La stod and are preserved primarily through the 5th Dalai Bla ma, who utilized them as sources for his own compositions. Two such early records are known: the *gsan yig* of Chos rgyal bsod nam (1442–1509) and that of his son Chos skyong bsod nam bkra shis; unfortunately, neither text has survived. Although Rig 'dzin rGod ldem was active in Western and Southern Tibet during the 14th century, substantial dissemination of the Northern Treasures to Western Tibet and Central Tibet likely did not occur until the early 16th century. This dissemination was principally driven by the first Yol mo sPrul sku Shākya bzang po (died c. 1541) and his prominent disciples, mNga' ris Paṇ chen (1487–1542) and Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (c. 16th century). In the course of composing a history of the transmission of the 'Dus pa mdo, Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717) authored biographies of mNga' ris Paṇ chen and Legs ldan rdo rje, directing readers to their *records of teachings received*, which must have been extant at the time, in 1681.⁴⁸ These *records of teachings received* are also no longer extant. In his own *gsan yig*, the 5th Dalai Bla ma references lost *records of teachings received* composed by Chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603), Byang pa Padma chos rgyal (b. 16th century), and bKra bzang pa Nam mkha' rig 'dzin (b. 17th century), all originating in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁴⁹ From the later

⁴⁸ For the *gsan yig* of mNga' ris Paṇ chen, see KDBNTh, pp. 324, 332. For the *records of teachings received* of Legs ldan rdo rje see *ibid.*, pp. 370, 374.

⁴⁹ In his *gsan yig*, the 5th Dalai Bla ma compared his own transmission of teachings with those found in numerous earlier *records of teachings received*. All of these sources are no longer accessible today, including the earliest records from the rNying ma school by lDong ston sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nam (DLSY, ga, fols. 114b, 155a, 157b) and his son bKra bzang pa Chos skyong bsod nam bkra shis (*ibid.*, fol. 133b); the *records of teachings received* of Rig 'dzin chen po (*ibid.*, fols. 114a–b, 115a, 133b, 142a, 150a, 155b, 157b)—this honorary title most likely refers to

transmission tradition of the 17th and early 18th centuries—especially at the monastery of rDo rje brag in Central Tibet, which became the principal seat for the transmission of the Northern Treasures and is closely associated with its first two throne holders, Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639) and Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717)—no *gsan yig* are presently known. The earliest surviving *gsan yig* from the rNying ma school date to the 18th century and are attributed to the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku and sNgo ra dBang phyug rdo rje (contrary to this statement, see my revised view given in the first note, marked *) Two additional 20th-century *gsan yig* have also been preserved. The *records of teachings received* formerly composed in the rNying ma school, many of which are no longer preserved, are as follows:

1. lDong ston sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod noms (1442–1509) (not preserved)
2. bKra bzang pa Chos skyong bsod noms bkra shis (15th–16th century) (not preserved)
3. mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal rdo rje (1487–1542) (not preserved)
4. mNga' ris Legs ldan bdud joms rdo rje (b. 1500/12?) (not preserved)
5. Chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603) (not preserved)
6. Byang pa rGyal sras Padma chos rgyal (b. 16th century) (not preserved)
7. bKra bzang pa Nam mkha' rig 'dzin (b. 17th century) (not preserved)
8. KDJSY: 5th Yol mo sprul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)
9. BDThY: sNgo ra dBang phyug rdo rje (c. 18th century)⁵⁰

mNga' ris Rig 'dzin chen po Legs ldan rdo rje; cf. vol. IV of the 5th Dalai Bla ma's *gsan yig*, where this title is frequently used and often refers to the *records of teachings received* of the brothers from mNga' ris); those by Chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal (*ibid.*, fols. 114b, 115a, 133b, 135b, 142a) and Byang pa rGyal sras Padma chos rgyal (*ibid.*, fol. 113b); and by bKra bzang pa Nam mkha' rig 'dzin (*ibid.*, fols. 155a, 157b; and very likely also fols. 113b, 114b, 115a, 133b, 134a, and 160a—these are passages where the 5th Dalai Bla ma refers only to the title bKra bzang pa). Furthermore, he also drew on the *records of teachings received* of Zhwa lu 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse (*ibid.*, fols. 113b, 114a, 114b, 115a, 133b, 151a, 155a, 157b) and mTsho smad mKhan chen Shākya dbang phyug (*ibid.*, fols. 133b, 134a, 135b). In addition, the 5th Dalai Bla ma makes a somewhat casual mention of the epitome (*spyi chings*) by Se'i sNgags 'chang bKra bzang pa Padma dbang chen (*ibid.*, fols. 118a, 155b, 157b), which he used as a key source for classifying the teachings of the Northern Treasures in his *gsan yig*. For the *byang gter* studies of Chos rgyal bsod noms, see Valentine 2020: 120–121, and notes 30, 32, 33.

⁵⁰ BDThY, pp. 6–9: *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II); *ibid.*, pp. 9–18: *Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I); *ibid.*, pp. 34–40: *gSang mtshan thugs kyi sgrub pa* (i.e.,

10. TLThY: sTag lung rTse sprul Rin po che (born c. 1926)⁵¹

11. YBSY: gNas nang Ye shes bdud 'dul (20th century)⁵²

Records of teachings received of
Zhwa lu 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang phyug (1524–1568)

sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams and bKra bzang pa Chos skyong bsod nams bkra shis transmitted teachings to the 13th Zhwa lu mKhan chen Tshar chen Blo gsal rgya mtsho (1502–1566/67) and to his successor the 14th Zhwa lu mKhan chen mKhyen brtse dbang phyug (DLSY, *ga*, fols. 113b, 114a–b, 115a, 133b, 151a, 155a, 157b).⁵³ The *records of teachings received* authored by the latter is no longer extant.

Records of teachings received
from the mDo chen bKa' brgyud School

The earliest known *gsan yig* on the Northern Treasures from the mDo chen bKa' brgyud school dates to the first half of the 17th century and was composed by Gur phu ba Nor bu bde chen. Two additional 18th-century examples also survived. Practitioners of the mDo chen school maintained close contact with the rNying ma school in Mang yul, transmitting teachings across sectarian boundaries. The preserved *records of teachings received* from this school are.⁵⁴

Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, pp. 40–42: *sPyod yul thams cad kyi mthar thug gsang bar rmad byung*; *ibid.*, pp. 42–47: *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* (Cycle III). The editor of this *records of teachings received* assigns dBang phyug rdo rje to the rDo dmar family and the rNying ma school.

⁵¹ TLThY, pp. 141–152: *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I) and *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II); *ibid.*, pp. 152–156: *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* (Cycle V); *ibid.*, pp. 156–161: *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (Cycle VI); *ibid.*, pp. 161–168: *gSang sgrub drag po rtsal* (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, pp. 168–175: *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* (Cycle III); *ibid.*, pp. 175–180: *Phur pa* (Cycle IV); *ibid.*, pp. 180–184: *Byang chub spyod dbang* (Cycle IX).

⁵² YBSY, pp. 225–235: *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I); *ibid.*, pp. 235–238: *Thugs chen 'gro ba kun grol* (Cycle V); *ibid.*, pp. 238–241: *Nang sgrub rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (Cycle VI); *ibid.*, pp. 241–250: *gSang sgrub* (i.e., *rDo rje drag po rtsal*) (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, pp. 250–252: *Byang chub spyod dbang* (Cycle IX); *ibid.*, pp. 252–257: *Ka dag* (= *Ka dag rang byung rang shar*) (Cycle II); *ibid.*, pp. 263–267: *rTa mgrin dregs pa dbang bsodud* (part of *rTen 'brel chos bdun*) (Cycle VIII); *ibid.*, pp. 274–276: *gSang ba rmad byung*; *ibid.*, pp. 289–295: *sGrub chen bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* (Cycle III); *ibid.*, pp. 295–302: *Phur pa lugs gsum* (Cycle IV); *ibid.*, pp. 316–320: *bsTan bsrungs yongs rdzogs*; *ibid.*, p. 322: *Tshe sgrub lcags sdong ma*; *ibid.*, pp. 324–326: *Thang lha*.

⁵³ On the significance of the *records of teachings received* of 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang phyug for the composition of the *gsan yig* of the 5th Dalai Bla ma, see Valentine 2020: 127–128.

⁵⁴ Smith (n.d.) provides a transcript of the individual titles of text collections and transmission lineages, based on the *records of teachings received* from the mDo chen

1. NDThY: Gur phu ba Nor bu bde chen (b. 1617)⁵⁵
2. GSThY: Gur phu ba rGyal sras seng ge (d. 1752)⁵⁶
3. PGThY: Gur phu ba Padma rgya mtsho (c. 18th century)⁵⁷

Records of teachings received of
the 5th Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho

Beyond the rNying ma school, the 5th Dalai bla ma was a notable tradent of the Northern Treasures. He composed a biography of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as well as a life account of his teacher, rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po.⁵⁸ The *gsan yig* of the 5th Dalai Bla ma devotes a substantial section—over fifty folios—to his study of the Northern Treasures:

DLSY: 5th Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho
(1617–1687)⁵⁹

school. Detailed tables of contents for the *records of teachings received* of Nor bu bde chen, rGyal sras seng ge, and Padma rgya mtsho can be found in Ehrhard 2008: 105–119.

⁵⁵ NDThY, pp. 76–82: *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* (Cycle III); *ibid.*, pp. 82–85: *rDzogs pa chen po ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II); *ibid.*, pp. 91–92: *Dug dbang rdo rje pha lam*; *ibid.*, pp. 94–95: *gSol 'debs le'u bdun ma*; *ibid.*, pp. 131–133: *Thugs rje chen po nyon mongs rang grol* (i.e., *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol*) (Cycle V); *ibid.*, p. 133: *Rig 'dzin gdong (=gdung) sgrub* (Cycle VI); *ibid.*, pp. 133–138: *Thugs sgrub gu ru rdo rje drag po rtsal* (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, pp. 138–141: *bCom ldan das rdo rje phur pa* (Cycle IV); *ibid.*, pp. 464–470: *rDzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal lhun grub* (Cycle I) and *rDzogs pa chen po ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II); *ibid.*, pp. 475–476: *Chos skyong bstan srung yongs rdzogs*. Cf. Ehrhard 2008: 105–111, 113–115. Gur phu ba bDe chen rdo rje received the earliest transmissions of teachings in the year 1633; see the colophon of NDThY for details, pp. 82, 91. See Smith (n.d.); Ehrhard 2008: 106, 107.

⁵⁶ GSThY, pp. 352–356: *Thugs sgrub gu ru rdo rje drag po rtsal* (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, pp. 359–365: *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* (Cycle III); *ibid.*, pp. 365–368: *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* (Cycle V). See Smith (n.d.); Ehrhard 2008: 110, 111.

⁵⁷ PGThY, pp. 419–424: *Nang sgrub rig 'dzin gdung sgrub (=sgrub)* (Cycle VI); *ibid.*, pp. 424–432: *gSang sgrub 'gu (=gu) ru thing (=mthing) ka drag po rtsal* (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, pp. 432–435: *Phyi sgrub thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* (Cycle V). See Smith (n.d.); Ehrhard 2008: 112, 113.

⁵⁸ These two biographies are preserved in the collection KDBNTh, pp. 428–445 (Rig 'dzin rGod ldem) and pp. 478–533 (Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po).

⁵⁹ DLSY, ga, fols. 112b–115a: *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II); *ibid.*, fols. 115a–116a: *Byang chub spyod dbang* (Cycle IX); *ibid.*, fols. 116a–127a: *Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I); *ibid.*, fols. 128b–131a: *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (Cycle VI); *ibid.*, fols. 132b–145b: *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, fols. 146a–151b: *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* (Cycle III); *ibid.*, fols. 151b–153b: *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* (Cycle V); *ibid.*, fols. 153b–159b: *rDo rje phur pa* (Cycle IV); *ibid.*, fols. 161a–164a: *Zab mo rten 'brel gyi chos bdun* (Cycle VIII). For additional text cycles in this *gsan yig*, see *supra*, note 29. See Herweg 1994: 307–318. On the significance

Records of teachings received of
Brag dkar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyug

Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug was also part of the transmission lineage of the Northern Treasures. Residing at Brag dkar rta so Monastery (Mang yul), he disseminated teachings from both the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud and rNying ma schools. As a youth, Chos kyi dbang phyug received the transmission of the central textual cycles of the Northern Treasures directly from 'Phrin las bdud 'joms, which he recorded in detail in his extensive *gsan yig*:

ChBThY: Brag dkar rta so sPrul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug
(1775–1837)⁶⁰

4. *The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku*
Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)

As a teacher and ritual specialist of the rNying ma school, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms was active during the 18th century, primarily in Mang yul (Western Tibet) and Helambu (Northern Nepal). His activities were closely tied to the origins of his ancestors and their social status as ritual priests in these regions. From the age of thirty, he began his teaching career in Tarke Ghyang (Helambu). A few years later, he relocated to Mang yul, where he spent nearly the remainder of his life. There, he carried out his religious activities primarily at the sacred sites of Byams sprin lha khang, mGon [g]nang ri khrod, Ri rgyal dpal 'bar,

of the 5th Dalai Bla ma's *records of teachings received* for the transmission history of the Northern Treasures, see Ehrhard 2012: 86.

⁶⁰ ChBThY, fols. 71a–92a, 94b–95a. *Ibid.*, fols. 71a–72b: *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II); *ibid.*, fols. 72b–75b: *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I); *ibid.*, fols. 75b–77a: *Phyi grub thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* (Cycle V); *ibid.*, fols. 77a–78b: *Nang sgrub rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (Cycle VI); *ibid.*, fols. 78b–86a: *gSang sgrub drag po mthing ka* (Cycle VII); *ibid.*, fols. 86a–88b: *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* (Cycle III), a list of titles is missing (see *infra*, note 92); *ibid.*, fols. 88a–92a: *bCom ldan 'das rdo rje phur pa* (Cycle IV); *ibid.*, fols. 94b–95a: *Byang chub spyod dbang* (Cycle IX), a list of titles is missing here. A copy of this manuscript was kindly made available to me by Prof. Dr. Franz-Karl Ehrhard. A title list of the complete works of Chos kyi dbang phyug is provided in Ehrhard 2004: 535–564 (Appendix V); with the bibliographical details concerning the *records of teachings received* on p. 538. The sections pertaining to his studies of the Northern Treasures are, for the most part, a verbatim reproduction of the *records of teachings received* of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms; see *infra*, notes 75–78, 80, 81.

and dNgos grub phug. From 1772 to 1780, he served as abbot of the bKa' brgyud monastery Brag dkar rta so.⁶¹

On his father's side, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms belonged to a family lineage that traced its ancestry to the treasure revealer bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535). In the early 16th century, bsTan gnyis gling pa was patronized by King Kun bzang nyi zla grags pa (1514–1560) for his role as a ritual priest at the royal court of Mang yul Gung thang.⁶² From that time onward, his descendants assumed custodianship of the Byams sprin lha khang, an office they maintained over many generations until the end of the 18th century.⁶³ 'Phrin las bdud 'joms was the seventh-generation descendant of bsTan gnyis gling pa.

Rig 'dzin Nyi ma seng ge, the father of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms, was the principal disciple of the 4th Yol mo sPrul sku (SSNTh, fols. 9a–10a). In the 1720s, he received a land grant in Upper Helambu (Northern Nepal) in recognition of his services at the Malla court in Kathmandu. There, Nyi ma seng ge settled and founded the monastery of Padma chos gling at the foot of Mount g.Yang ri (var. lect. dByangs ri), along with an adjacent practice center (SSNTh, fols. 26a–28a). A settlement gradually formed around the monastery, eventually becoming the present-day village of Tarke Ghyang. It was here that 'Phrin las bdud 'joms was born.

Chos nyid rang grol, the mother of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms, belonged to the rDo dmar family, which had migrated from Western Tibet and settled in Glang 'phrang (Northern Nepal). Her father, Mi 'gyur rdo rje, received a religious education within the rNying ma school and was part of the transmission lineage of rGyal thang pa Zil gnon rdo rje and his disciple Padma ngag dbang. Two of Mi 'gyur rdo rje's sons would later become influential teachers of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (KDJNTh, *passim*).

Later in his life, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms was recognized by his father as the reincarnation of the 4th Yol mo sPrul sku. Since the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku, Shākya bzang po (died c. 1541), successive incarnations in this lineage had carried out their religious activities in Helambu. Shākya bzang po identified Helambu as the hidden land of Yol mo, a designation known to him through the prophecies of Rig 'dzin rGod Idem. As the primary sphere of activity for these incarnations,

⁶¹ The following information concerning the life of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku is drawn from his autobiography (KDJNTh). His tenure as abbot of Brag dkar rta Monastery is also recorded in the *Brag dkar rta so gdan rabs*, the chronicle of the monastery's abbatial succession. See Sernesi 2019: 395, Table 2, and p. 407.

⁶² On the patronage of bsTan gnyis gling pa at the court of Mang yul Gung thang, see Everding 2000 (II): 563–575.

⁶³ In the biography of his father (SSNTh), the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku also reports on the activities of the family of bsTan gnyis gling pa at Byams sprin lha khang. See Everding 2000 (II): 234, 563–565.

Helambu became closely associated with the lineage, which came to be known collectively as the Yol mo sPrul skus. Karma bdud 'joms was the fifth and final recognized incarnation in this line.⁶⁴ Shākya bzang po, the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku, was a contemporary of bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480–1535). He was also patronized by the royal court of Mang yul Gung thang, which granted him land and official positions on Mount Ri bo dPal 'bar to ensure his continued presence in the region. As a teacher and ritual specialist, Shākya bzang po was primarily active in La stod byang, Gung thang, Mang yul, Glo bo (Mustang), and Helambu.⁶⁵

The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku received his primary training from teachers of the rNying ma school. In Mang yul, however, he also established connections with teachers of the bKa' brgyud school.⁶⁶ Among the central religious practices maintained within the reincarnation lineage of the Yol mo sPrul skus since the time of Shākya bzang po were the doctrinal teachings and ritual cycles of the Northern Treasures. The 1st Yol mo sPrul sku had received this transmission in La stod byang from Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541) and Chos rgyal bsod nams (1442–1509). 'Phrin las bdud 'joms studied these teachings from early childhood under the guidance of his principal teachers in Helambu, Mang yul, and Glang 'phrang. He received his final comprehensive instructions on the complete ritual corpus around the age of thirty-five, during his stay at Ri bo bkra bzang (La stod byang).

⁶⁴ The life of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku—particularly with regard to his recognition as a reincarnation within the Yol mo sPrul sku lineage—is discussed in detail in Ehrhard 2007: 40–45.

⁶⁵ The activities of Shākya bzang po and his role in the transmission of the Northern Treasures are documented in autobiographical accounts composed close in time to the historical events, as well as in later hagiographies of his two principal disciples: mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (PBGNT, fols. 19a, 24b; KDBNT, pp. 316–319) and his brother Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (LDNT, pp. 265, 279, 285–286; KDBNT, pp. 348, 352, 355, 358). On the life of the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku Shākya bzang po, see Ehrhard 2007: 25–29; for the dating of his death, see KDBNT, p. 370. For information on the studies of the aforementioned two brothers under Shākya bzang po, see Ehrhard 2007: 28–29.

⁶⁶ The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku provides an account of his principal teachers and the subjects of his religious training in his *records of teachings received*; see *infra* (4.a Content outline of the *gsan yig*). A more comprehensive list of his teachers appears in the addendum to his autobiography KDJNT, fol. 107a–b.

4. *The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku's Records of teachings received*

The *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku were microfilmed in 1992 by the Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) from the private library of Slob dpon 'Gyur med in Samagaun (Gorkha, Nepal), as part of his collected works.⁶⁷ For the time being, this manuscript must be regarded as a *codex unicus*. The text comprises 167 folios and is written in *dbu med* script. In several places—particularly along the margins—, the ink has partially blurred due to moisture, rendering the script difficult to read or, in some sections, entirely illegible.

4.a *Content outline of the gsan yig*

The *records of teachings received* of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (*Rig 'dzin bla ma karma bdud 'joms zhabs kyi gsan yig*) are structured into ten sections. In the first nine sections, the subjects of his religious education are organized according to his principal teachers. The tenth section serves as a brief addendum. The overall arrangement of these ten sections follows a largely chronological order. In the marginal notations, the sections are numbered consecutively from *ga* to *na*,⁶⁸ and each section is paginated independently. The first folio of each section features miniatures depicting the tradents of the teachings contained therein. The text does not include a concluding colophon.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ 'Phrin las bdud 'joms kyi gsung 'bum. Ms., 24 texts, 552 fols. (NGMPP, 381/9–382/1, 382/2–382/24).

⁶⁸ The numbering of the text sections of the *records of teachings received* begins with the third letter of the Tibetan alphabet. In section *da* of his *gsan yig* (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 3b4), the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku refers—by citing a title list in an earlier part of the text—to the “third chapter of the *records of teachings received*” (*thob yig le'u gsum pa*), specifically referencing content from section *ca*. Accordingly, section *ga* would implicitly correspond to the first chapter. It is improbable that the section numbering begins arbitrarily with the third letter, suggesting instead that the extant *gsan yig* is incomplete and originally comprised at least two additional preceding sections. Given that the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku left home in 1734, at the age of nine, to begin his studies with rDo dmar Rig 'dzin Padma rdo rje—the focus of section *ga*—only his father, Nyi ma seng ge, and his mother, Chos nyid rang grol, are likely candidates for his earliest teachers. On his early studies with his father, see *infra*, note 71. Could these initial studies have been the subject of the missing first two sections? Or might the *gsan yig* have begun with introductory material of a different nature, such as (auto)biographical sketches or similar content?

⁶⁹ The place and dates of transmission are based on the extant *records of teachings received* (KDJSY). Supplementary information provided in square brackets is drawn from the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku's autobiography (KDJNTh).

- *ga* (7 fols.): Studies with rDo dmar Rig 'dzin Padma rdo rje (d. 1738) in 1736, gNas chen Ri rgyal dPal 'bar (Mang yul)
- *nga* (5 fols.): Studies with [rDo dmar] Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub (d. 1767) in 1751, gNam sgo zla gam (Glang 'phrang)
- *ca* (15 fols.): Studies with gNyags ston Rig 'dzin Padma gsang snags bstan 'dzin [in 1742, 1747], [? dNgos grub phug (Mang yul)]
- *cha* (28 fols.): Studies with Bla ma Ratna bhadra (d. 1760) in 1752, dNgos grub phug (Mang yul)
- *ja* (8 fols.): Studies with mDo chen pa 'Gyur med o rgyan gsang snags bstan 'dzin [in 1744], gNas chen dPal sdings (Gung thang)
- *nya* (8 fols.): Studies with mDo khams Kun bzang 'phrin las [in 1748], Byams sprin gtsug lag khang (Mang yul)
- *ta* (50 fols.): Studies with Lo ri ba Srid zhi yongs grol (d. 1763) [in 1758, 1759, 1762], [mGon [g]nang, (Mang yul)]
- *tha* (13 fols.): Studies with Brag dkar rDo rje 'dzin pa Ye shes chos grags (1705–1772) [in 1759, 1763, 1768/69], [Brag dkar rta so, (Mang yul)]
- *da* (32 fols.): Studies with bKra bzang pa Rig 'dzin Kun bzang ye shes in 1760/61, gNas chen Ri rgyal bkra bzang (La stod byang)
- *na* (2 fols.): Studies with rJe btsun Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755), 'Brug pa Rin po che ['Phrin las shing rta] (1718–1766), dPa' bo Rin po che [gTsug lag dga' ba] (1718/19–1781) and [Lo ri ba] Srid zhi yongs grol (d. 1763).

In terms of content, the *records of teachings received* encompasses key aspects of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms's religious education. The individuals selected by the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku represent his most influential teachers from the rNying ma and bKa' brgyud schools. However, the *records of teachings received* does not provide a comprehensive account of his entire religious training. In his autobiography, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms names additional teachers and outlines a wide range of further subjects of study that extend beyond those documented in the *gsan yig*.

4.b Content of the ritual cycles according to the *gsan yig*

The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku devoted a significant portion of his *Records of teachings received* to the transmission of the Northern Treasures. The teaching cycles of this treasure tradition were central to his early education in Mang yul (Western Tibet) and Glang 'phrang (Northern Nepal). Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms received extensive instructions

on this religious tradition, which had been adopted by both his father and the previous incarnations of his reincarnation lineage as the primary focus of their religious practice. Later in his life, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms traveled to bKra bzang (La stod byang), the site of the original treasure revelation and an early center for the dissemination of the Northern Treasures. There, he received substantial portions of this transmission, as they had—according to his *gsan yig*—been preserved through what he describes as an unbroken lineage maintained at the site of its discovery.

In his *Records of teachings received*, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku begins his account of the Northern Treasures with a concise historical overview outlining the context of transmission: He provides the name of the teacher from whom he received each cycle and, where applicable, the location and year of the transmission. This is followed by detailed information concerning the origin, scope, and contents of the *byang gter* cycles. These include: the title of the ritual cycle, the name of the treasure-discoverer, and the site of the treasure revelation. Subsequently, he records information on the specific components of each cycle, including the empowerments (*dbang*), reading transmission (*lung*), and practical instructions (*khrid*) associated with the respective teachings. 'Phrin las bdud 'joms also lists all individual texts belonging to each cycle—sometimes supplemented by later materials that relate to the Northern Treasures as revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. In addition, the lineage (*brgyud*) of each reading transmission is documented, and, where applicable, that of specific empowerments as well. The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku begins with the traditional account of the supramundane transmission, whereby Padmasambhava is said to have received the teachings from manifestations of the *dharmakāya* and *sambhogakāya* in the transcendent realm. This is followed by the principal lineage of human transmission, beginning with the treasure revealer Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and continuing through successive masters down to 'Phrin las bdud 'joms himself. In some cases, additional transmission lineages (*brgyud pa phran*) are also noted.

The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku received transmissions of the Northern Treasures through multiple lines of transmission. These stages of studies are outlined here in their approximate chronological order:⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Below are the individual titles of eight of the nine ritual cycles central to the tradition, as found in the *records of teaching received* (KDJSY). Contracted words in the original text have been silently expanded, and syllables that are difficult to read or illegible—primarily due to moisture damage—are marked. Where possible, these readings have been reconstructed based on a parallel version preserved in the *records of teachings received* of Brag dkar Chos kyi dbang phyug (ChBThY), which provides an identical or nearly identical text for six of the key teaching cycles (Cycles I, II, IV, V, VI, VII). These reconstructed syllables are marked with an asterisk (*). Syllables that remain indeterminate are marked with a question

Karma bdud 'joms participated in the first instruction in Northern Treasures rituals during his early childhood. Around the year 1734, at the age of nine, his father Nyi ma seng ge conferred practical instructions on the *Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* in the meditation cave Ca thang sgrub phug in Glang 'phrang.⁷¹

According to his autobiography, at the age of eleven (c. 1736), he received teachings on the *rdzog chen* cycle *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* from his uncle, rDo dmar Padma rdo rje, at Ri bo dpal 'bar (Mang yul).⁷²

Following the death of his father in 1738, Karma bdud 'joms's came under the care of the rDo dmar family. During his residence at their estate in Glang 'phrang, he received extensive religious training, particularly in the years 1739 and 1740. These studies included instructions on the ritual cycle *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar*, as well as the reading transmission for the associated textual corpus.⁷³

mark. In addition to the source text, the individual titles are numbered in accordance with their order in KDJSY.

⁷¹ In his autobiography, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku recounts having participated in his father's teachings in Glang 'phrang (KDJNTh, fol. 10b). Cf. Ehrhard 2007: 43. Additionally, in his *records of teachings received*, he lists his father Nyi ma seng ge as a direct teacher in the transmission of the *Thugs chen 'gro ba kun grol* cycle (KDJSY, ca, fol. 5a3). His autobiography notes that—apart from receiving empowerments and the reading transmission (*dbang lung*) of the *Byang gter thugs rje chen po* cycle—he did not receive the complete transmissions (*bka' lung*) from his father (KDJNTh, fol. 16b), likely due to his father's early death in 1738 when Karma bdud 'joms was only thirteen (KDJNTh, fol. 13b).

⁷² For his first study visits, Rig 'dzin Nyi ma seng ge sent his son 'Phrin las bdud 'joms to Mang yul several times between the ages of nine and eleven. According to his autobiography, his initial residence in Mang yul was at the sacred site dKar ye dngos grub mtsho gling, located near Mount Ri bo dpal 'bar. For the location of dKar ye, see Ehrhard 1997: 258–259, note 16. The significance of this site in the dissemination of the Northern Treasures is discussed in Ehrhard 2007: 44, note 51. At age eleven (c. 1736), 'Phrin las bdud 'joms took lay vows at Ri bo dpal 'bar Monastery, before rDo dmar Padma rdo rje. It was during this time that he began his formal studies in the rNying ma tradition under Padma rdo rje—who was the son of rDo dmar Mi 'gyur rdo rje and brother to his mother Chos nyid rang grol—and received his first instructions in the *rdzog chen* cycle *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* from the Northern Treasures. For these studies, see KDJNTh, fols. 11a–12a. These studies were not included in the *gsan yig* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku. Padma rdo rje had previously received this transmission from his father, Mi 'gyur rdo rje; see *infra*, notes 95 and 96. Mi 'gyur rdo rje had migrated with his rDo dmar family from southwestern Tibet to Glang 'phrang. See Ehrhard 1997: 258, note 14; Ehrhard 2007: 43–44. For biographical information on Mi 'gyur rdo rje and two of his sons, see the recently composed family history by Brag sne Kun bzang chos 'phel 1996: 89–137. Cf. Ehrhard 2007: 43, note 50. On Padma rdo rje, see Brag sne Kun bzang chos 'phel 1996: 137–139.

⁷³ For these studies, see KDJNTh, fol. 14b. These, too, were not recorded in the *gsan yig* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku.

Further studies related to the *byang gter* tradition are documented in his autobiography for the year 1742. At the age of seventeen, Karma bdud 'joms learned of the rNying ma teacher Khams lung pa Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin and traveled to meet him in Mang yul. From this teacher—who belonged to the transmission lineage of rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las—he received his first comprehensive instructions on the *byang gter* corpus. Several years later, in 1747, he once again received teachings from Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin, this time specifically on the *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* ritual cycle. In his *gsan yig*, these areas of study are detailed and include the cycles of the “three [forms of ritual] accomplishment of the mind [of the teacher]” (*thugs sgrub gsum*)—listed as cycles V, VI, VII—as well as the Vajrakīla cycle (Cycle IV):⁷⁴

- [1742, 1747:] gNyags ston Rig 'dzin Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin
 — Gu ru *phyi nang gsang gsum sgrub tshul* (KDJSY, ca, fols. 4a1–11b1)
 — (*phyi sgrub*) *Thugs chen 'gro ba kun grol* (KDJSY, ca, fols. 4a2–5a3)⁷⁵ (Cycle V)

⁷⁴ In his autobiography, Karma bdud 'joms reports that in 1742 he received from Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin the empowerments and reading transmission for the ritual cycle *Byang gter rdo rje phur pa*, as well as the empowerments, reading transmission and practical instructions for the cycle *Byang gter thugs rje chen po* (KDJNTh, fol. 17a–b). Five years later, in 1747, he received from the same teacher the empowerments, reading transmission, and extensive instructions for the *Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* cycle (KDJNTh, fol. 23a–b). Corresponding sections in the *gsan yig* are found in KDJSY, ca, fols. 4a1–11b1, 11b1–13b6. The first page of this section of his *gsan yig* is reproduced in the appendix (*infra*, App. 2, Fig. 1). Karma bdud 'joms explains that Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin was regarded as a descendant of gNyags Jñānakumāra—a disciple of Padmasambhava—and recognized as the reincarnation of Khams lung Nam mkha' 'jigs med. In his youth, he studied at the monastery E waṃ lcog sgar and received the *byang gter* transmission from his teacher Khams lung Rig 'dzin Padma dbang rgyal (1657–1731), himself a disciple of rDo rje brag Padma 'phrin las (KDJNTh, fol. 17b). Cf. Ehrhard 2008: 82, note 34. For information on the gNyags family, see Gung thang bsTan 'dzin nor bu 2018: 246–257. The Khams lung family is associated with the monastery Nub dgon (La stod byang); see Ehrhard 1997: 257, note 10. For biographical sources on Khams lung Rig 'dzin Padma dbang rgyal see *ibid.*: 257, note 10; cf. Ehrhard 2008: 81–82, note 34; 83–84, note 37. The family residence in sKyid rong was at dNgos grub phug; see Ehrhard 1997: 257, note 10. For source texts describing this sacred site, see *ibid.*: 259, note 16; Ehrhard 2004: 411–412, note 176. It is assumed that dNgos grub phug was also that site in Mang yul where Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms met his Khams lung teacher and received the first comprehensive transmissions of the Northern Treasures.

⁷⁵ Title list (KDJSY, ca, fol. 4a3–b1) *lung*: (1) *Phyi rgyud 'gro ba kun grol gyi rgyud le'u bcu gcig pa*, (2) (*de'i*) *sGrub thabs dbang dang bcas pa*, (3) (*yang de'i*) *sGrub thabs*, (4) *Yon tan brgyas (=rgyas) pa snying po don gyi rgyud le'u bzhi pa*, (5) *Nang rgyud nyon mong (=mongs) rang grol gyi rgyud le'u drug pa*, (6) (*de'i*) *sGrub thabs*, (7) *gSang rgyud chos nyid rang gsal gyi *rgyud le'u bzhi pa*, (8) (*de'i*) *sGrub thabs*, (9) *mNgon rtogs yid bzhi nor bu*, (10) *'Phrin las smon lam*, (11) *dBang chog ma nor lam ston*, (12) *gNas lung*,

- (nang sgrub) Rig 'dzin dong (=gdung) sgrub (KDJSY, ca, fols. 5a4–6a4)⁷⁶ (Cycle VI)
- (gsang sgrub) Drag po mthing ka (KDJSY, ca, fols. 6a4–11b1) (Cycle VII)⁷⁷

(13) *Zas gtad*, (14) *'Pho ba*, (15) *Ro sreg*, (16) *Tsha tsha*, (17) *sByin sreg*, (18) *Rab gnas*, (19) *Las sbyor thugs rje rtse gcig ma*, (20) *'Gro don las sbyor lnga pa*, (21) *Tshe sgrub*, (22) *'Dzams (=Dzam) dkar thugs sgrub*, (23) *sGrub chen gyi spyi 'khog chen mo*, (24) *bKa' bsrung mchod thabs*, (25) *Las *rgyu 'bras *kyi *dbye *ba mun sel sgron me*, (26) *Khrid yig gsal ba'i sgron me*, (27) *(de'i ngo 'phrod) sNyan rgyud yi ge med pa*, (28) *sGron ma drug gi dang po*, (29) *gTer byon rgyud (=brgyud) 'debs kha skongs dang bcas pa*. Cf. the title lists in ChBThY, fols. 75b–76a, and PGThY, pp. 432–433. Appended to the titles of this textual collection are additional texts by lHa btsun Legs ldan rdo rje and Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las related to this tradition (KDJSY, ca, fol. 4b1–3).

⁷⁶ Title list (KDJSY, ca, fol. 5a6–b4) *lung*: (1) Rig 'dzin dong grub (=gdung sgrub) *gyi them *byang, (2) *Rig 'dzin 'dus pa rtas ba'i rgyud rin chen 'bar ba le'u bzhi pa, (3) *Phyi sku 'bag la rten (=brten) nas sgrub pa*, (4) *Nang gtor ma*, (5) *gSang ba dza gad la rten (=brten) nas sgrub pa*, (6) *Bye brag tu mtshan brgyad *so *so'i *dgos *sgrub*, (7) *Nang *sgrub kyi cha lag rig 'dzin mchod thabs, (8) *Bla ma'i las byang dgos 'dod kun 'byung*, (9) *Phyi nang gsang gsum gyi 'dzab dgongs*, (10) *mNga' bdag la gdam (=gdams) pa mnyam nyid ma gu ru zhi ba'i sgrub *thabs *kyang *zer*, (11) *dBang chog rgyas 'bring sdus (=bsdus) gsum*, (12) *rTags bstod*, (13) Rig 'dzin rnam kyi thugs dam bskul ba, (14) *bShags pa smon lam bkra shis*, (15) *gShin don gnas lung*, (16) *gTor ma'i bstod pa*, (17) *Byin 'bebs*, (18) *Rab *gnas *kyi *lo *rgyus*, (19) *Rab gnas se (=bse) sgrom ma*, (20) *Nyams rtags gsal sgron*, (21) *Las tshogs nor bu'i phreng ba cha lag bcas*. Cf. the title lists in ChBThY, fol. 77b, and PGThY, pp. 421–422. 'Phrin las bdud 'joms adds further texts here by Yol mo ba (i.e., bsTan 'dzin nor bu) and Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las related to this ritual tradition (KDJSY, ca, fol. 5b4–5).

⁷⁷ Title list (KDJSY, ca, fols. 6b3–8b6) *lung*: [I.] (1) *sGrub thabs gsum gyi lo rgyus*, (2) *gSang ba rin chen 'dus pa'i lo rgyus*, (3) *Thugs sgrub rtas ba'i gleng bzhi (=gzhil)*, [II.] (4) *sKu gsung thugs kyi gnad 'dus*, (5) *rDo rje he ru ka thugs kyi sgrub pa*, [III.] (6) *gSang ba rin chen 'dus pa'i sgrub thabs*, (7) *(de'i) Las sbyor gnad kyi man ngag*, (8) *dKyil 'khor bcud dril*, [IV.] (9) *Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu*, (10) *Hām 'dren thabs nyer gcig*, (11) *bSrung *khor*, (12) **Khro bcu'i bsrung bzlog*, (13) *Ngag grol*, (14) *Ngag nus bskyed pa*, [V.] (15) *rTags mthong dngos grub blangs pa*, [VI.] (16) *sGrub pa sde drug gi dbang gi cho ga*, (17) *Byin rlabs thugs rje'i dbang lnga*, (18) *Sa *chog *rgyal *tho*, (19) **Thig 'rtsa brgyan (=rgyan) bkod*, (20) *dBang gi sngon 'gro*, (21) *Bum dbang gi spyi chings dang bcas pa*, (22) *sKyabs sems sdom bzung*, (23) *sGrub pa sde brgyad kyi dbang chog chen mo*, (24) *gTor dbang*, (25) *rGyal thabs spyi lugs kyi dbang chog*, (26) *mNgon rtogs *sgom byang gsal sgron*, (27) *dKyil 'khor rgyas pa'i sgrub thabs*, (28) *Bum sgrub*, (29) *gTer sbod*, (30) *dNgos sgrub bskul ba*, [VII.] (31) *Las byang 'bring po*, (32) **Las *gzhung rtas *tho*, (33) **Bar *them*, (34) *Byin dbab*, (35) *Las byang chen mo*, (36) *'Dzab bstod*, (37) *Rig pa hām skyon ma*, (38) *'Dzab gong (=dgongs) chung ba*, (39) *sPyod lam rgyun gyi rnal 'byor*, (40) *dKon mchog spyi bskul*, (41) *bDe gshegs spyi *bskul che ba chung ba*, (42) *rGyas pa'i *sbyin 'bsreg*, (43) *dBang gi *sbyin bsreg*, (44) *Las bzhi dang ro bsreg*, (45) *Me spra*, (46) *Hom chog*, (47) *Zor bsreg mnan gsum*, [VIII.] (48) **sNgags kyi las byang don bstod bcas*, [IX.] (49) *Las tshogs rin chen sdong po*, [X.] (50) *gNas chen byin 'bebs*, (51) *rNam 'joms rtas ba'i sgrub thabs*, (52) *sGrub pa'i 'phrin las*, (53) *Bag chags stobs 'joms kyi khros chog*, [XI.] (54) *sKu gsung thugs kyi gdul bya*, [XII.] (55) **Gong *po *ar *gtad *kha *sgyur (=bsgyur)*, (56) *mNan pa'i bskul*, (57) *dGra sri mnan pa*, [XIII.] (58) *Nad bdag stobs 'joms rtas ba don bdun pa*, (59) *Lo rgyus*, (60) *mDos chog*, (61) *dGyer *glud rabs*, (62) *sTobs 'joms dang lnga pa*, (63) **Khyung *nag *gi *sgrub *thabs bstod bskul dang bcas pa*, (64) *Bya khyung gi lo rgyus*, (65) *sGom rim*, (66) *sNgags rim*, (67) *rDzas sbyor nad rims bsrung*

bsad *bso (=gso), (68) sNgags byang, (69) *'Khor *lo bri yig, (70) rDo rje khrab ring *bdud *rtsi *bum *chung *bskor (=skor) *la *rgyud, (71) *'Khor *lo, (72) *bsGom *bzlas, (73) mTha' bsgyur, (74) *Zug *stag, (75) lHog pa, (76) Gag pa, (77) Phag 'khor, (78) Srin 'joms, (79) Cha *lag bu bdun, (80) gSo byed sman kyi rtsa ba, (81) Chings, (82) Shog ril dkar ser *sngo gsum, (83) 'Od *'bar *sgron *ma'i *shog *ril, (84) mNga' bdag dang *mtsho rgyal la gdam (=gdams) pa nad kyi rgyu bshad pa, (85) brTag cing sman gyi bcas thabs, (86) Kun 'joms bsrung ba sngags byang, (87) bsTan mas *phul ba'i *gor *bsrung, (88) *'Byung po'i *nad *bsrung *khrag *thung nag po'i gdam (=gdams) pa, (89) Rigs gsum mgon po'i sgo nas *'go nad bsrung ba, (90) Thos *pa sgra la rten (=brten) te bsrung ba, (91) Rims seb (=Rim gseb) du 'gro ba'i bsrung ba, (the list of titles continues at the bottom of the page:.) (92) Mig nad srung ba, (93) sMan gyi lha mo *lcam *dral gyi sgrub *thabs, (94) (de'i) zhal *gdams, [XIV.] (95) *Thugs *rje *byams *pa'i *man *ngag, (96) *Dug *lga *bstan *bcas, (and in the main text:.) (97) Man ngag *zab *mo ngan pa bzang *bsgyur, [XV.] (98) *lag *chings lcags sgrog khril (=khril) ba, (99) Yul dang rang bsrung sgrub shing, (100) sNgags rdzas sgrub shing, (101) Gor bsrung jag chings sgrub shing, (102) Bal mo'i jag 'ching *lcags mdzod ma, (103) rKang *gyogs man ngag, [XVI.] (104) *Phywa *phrin nor bu mchog rgyal byang gling ma, (105) *Sad bsrung sprin gyi sgo (=go) cha dang na ga 'brug sgrogs, (106) Char gcod me'i spu gri, (107) Ser bsrung gnam lcags gur khang phyi bsrung nang bsrung yang gsang *bsrung *ba gnad yig dang bcas pa, (108) *Zhing gi lud sbyor rigs gnyis, (109) Lo zan sems can kha 'chings, (110) Byi bsrung rigs gnyis, [XVII.] (111) Go cha brgyad kyi man ngag, (112) mTshon bsrung *'khor *lo'i bri *yig, (113) sNgags dmigs la rten (=brten) pa'i mtshon bsrung, [XVIII.] (114) Las tshogs rin chen 'char 'bebs, (115) Dzam bha lcang gu'i lo rgyus sgrub thabs chu *sbyin gtor 'bul *bstod dang bcas pa, [XIX.] (116) *Them *byang, (117) *Phyi *sgrub *rin *chen bum pa, (118) Nang *sgrub *lcags *kyi *sdong po, (119) *gSang sgrub hri (=hrh) gcig ma, (120) Yang gsang nam *mkha'i rdo rje, (121) Tshe *khor bri *yig, (122) brDa yig lde mig, [XX.] (123) Phag *mo'i them yig, (124) Lo *rgyus, (125) *mKha' *'gro gsang ba'i *thugs *sgrub, (126) dMar mo dbang bsdu pa'i *sgrub thabs zangs mdzod ma, (127) dBang bsdu las kyi mkha' 'gro'i sgrub thabs, (128) sNying *tig gsang sgrub gtsug rgyan ma, (129) gSang sgrub gtor *'bul bstod pa dang bcas pa, (130) *sByin bsreg, (131) Srog *'khor bri yig, (132) *Nag mo thod rgal gyi sgrub pa'i gsal byed, (133) *Gri snying ril bu zla dkyil la rten (=brten) pa'i mngon shes le tshan, (134) Rigs *bzhi'i srog *'khor, (135) Phag mo rigs *bzhi'i *sgrub thabs, (136) dBang *bsdu, (137) Mig 'thong, (138) mNgon shes, (139) Zas nor 'du ba, (140) *Dug 'don, (141) rGyags skyel, (142) Las tshogs bcu gsum par grags pa bsrung ba gsum dang *du *ba gnyis so sor *phye (Dittography: *phye) bas *nang *ses (=gses) bcu drug pa, (143) rTsa rlung dbang gi sbyin bsreg, (144) Zhi rgyas dbang drag gi las tshogs, (145) Tshangs pa'i bu mo khol por bkol ba, (146) Thig le'i gzung ba, (147) bDud kyi bgegs bsal, [XXI.] (148) *Slob *bu'i *'dod pa rtag (=brtag) thabs, (149) Slob bu'i snod rtag (=brtag) pa, [XXII.] (150) Yang tig gces pa'i sgron ma, (151) Drag po rtsal gyi 'pho ba, (152) sKu gsum gtan la dbab pa'i rgyud le'u gsum pa, [XXIII.] (153) *Phyi nang gsang gsum gyi rtags rim, (154) Nyams rtags gsal sgron, (155) bsNyen sgrub rtags rim, [XXIV.] (156) Rang byung rang shar gyi rgyud le'u bcu pa, [XXV.] (157) Nor sgrub rin chen spungs *pa *las *Nor *lha'i *phyi sgrub, (158) Dzam lha dkar po phyi nang gsang gsum gyi sgrub pa chu sbyin gtor ma gsang rdzas la rten (=brten) pa, (159) Thod pa la rten (=brten) nas long spyod sgrub pa, (160) A pa ra tsitta *khol por *bkol *ba *gnod sbyin snying 'gul, (161) gNod sbyin ma rdo rje khol mor bkol ba, (162) gNod sbyin brgyags skyel. (gzhan yang de dag gi khongs su rtogs (=gtogs) pa): (163) mKha' 'gro *gtan *bzhuks don brgyad pa, (164) rNga la lpags pa *skyon *thabs, (165) *gTer ma bka' sgrub. The titles of this textual collection are grouped in KDJSY into 25 sections, each marked with an ordinal number (here given in square brackets). Two ordinal numbers (VI and XIV) are missing from the text and have been added here based on ChBThY. The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku justifies this ordering by referring to an early table of contents for the textual corpus of this collection, here briefly designated as *Them byang* (i.e., the text

— *Zab gter bcom ldan 'das dpal rdo rje gzhon nu* (fols. 11b1–13b6)⁷⁸ (Cycle IV)

The next major transmission of doctrinal teachings and ritual cycles from the Northern Treasures took place in 1751. During his stay in Glang 'phrang, within the circles of his extended family, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms received from rDo dmar Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub—the younger brother of the late Padma rdo rje—the necessary empowerments, reading transmission, and direct instructions for the

Thems byang gsal ba'i sgron ma (KDJSY, ca, fol. 6b1–2). This table of contents lists only 25 texts. Reference to this table of contents has already been made in the aforementioned epitomes: BTSNT: fols. 3b–4a (*Thugs sgrubs them byang*); BTRPh: fols. 41a–44b (*Thems byang gsal ba'i sgron ma*). Cf. the list of titles in ChBThY, fols. 79a–81b. Supplementary texts concerning this ritual cycle by Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde and Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las are appended to the list of all titles in the *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* cycle (KDJSY, ca, fols. 8b6–9a3).

⁷⁸ Title list (KDJSY, ca, fols. 11b3–12b6) *dbang 'phrin las*: The titles are grouped into three sections (I, II, III): [I.] *Phur pa rgyas pa che mchog lha khra'i bskor* (=skor) (fols. 11b4–12b2): (1) *rDo rje phur pa thugs gsang ba sku'i brgyud* (=rgyud) *le'u bcu pa*, (2) *Phur pa'i 'phrin las chen mo*, (3) *Phur pa'i 'dzab*, (4) *Phur pa'i bstod bskul*, (5) *Phur bsrung gi bskul dang bcas pa*, (6) *Rin chen dbang gi mdzod*, (7) *rNam gsum srog gi 'khor 'lo zhes dkar po lam gyi sgron ma*, (8) *bKa' nyan lcags kyi ber ka*, (9) *Nag po dug gi 'khor*, (10) *Zor bsreg mnan gsum*, (11) *rDo rje phur pa'i tshe'i las byang*, (12) *Tshe dbang*, (13) *Tshe bsgrub*, (14) *Phur pa'i bka' sgo*, (15) *gSum tshogs rgyas pa*, (16) **Satstsha 'debs pa*, (17) *brGyud rims* (=rim) *gsang ba rin po che*, (18) *dNgos grub blang ba*, (19) *Khro bo rol pa'i gtor bzlog*, (20) *Zur la nang gses kyi *bskyed pa*, (21) *sPyan 'dren*, (22) **bZhugs *gsol*, (23) *Phyag*, (24) *sTim* (=bsTim) *pa*, (25) *sMan rag sbyor sgröl gyi *mchod pa*, (26) *bDen brjod bstod pa*, (27) *Rig 'dzin bskul*, (28) *lHa tshogs bskul ba*, (29) **Dam can bsrung ma'i bskul dang bcas pa*. [II.] *Phur pa 'bring po drag sngags spu gri lha nag gi skor* (fol. 12a3–12b3): (30) **sPu *gri *nag po gsang ba'i rgyud le'u bcu gcig pa*, (31) *Phur pa drag sngags kyi 'phrin las chen mo tshogs mchod lhag ma dang bcas pa*, (32) *Yang gsang spu gri 'bar ba'i 'phrin las 'bring po*, (33) *Phur pa khra phyag dang bcas pa'i 'bstod pa*, (34) **Dam can bcu gnyis rtsa ba gsum du sgril te bskul ba*, (35) *bsKul bsdu pa*, (36) *Dam can ma mo'i rkyang bskul*, (37) *Pho nya 'gugs 'dren gru gsum mthing nag ma*, (38) *Bi to ta ma la nas *byung ba'i rgyun *gtor gyi rim pa*, (39) *Drag po'i bzlas pa 'phro 'du las kyi bsnyen pa*, (40) *Ki la ya chos nyid du bzla ba*, (41) *sPyod lam rgyun gyi rnal 'byor*, (42) *Phur pa'i las thams cad kyi don bsdu pa drag po *sngags *kyi *rtsa *ba*, (43) *Phur pa drag sngags kyi ti ka* (=ti ka) *bse sgrom ma*, (44) *Phur pa srog gi spu gri*, (45) *Drag sngags rdo rje phur pa'i lugs 'di khyad par 'phags pa'i lo rgyus*, (46) *Phur pa'i rgyud* (=rgyud) *dang tshad* (ChBThY reads: *tshan*) *bstan pa*, (47) **sGrub *thabs *rgyun *khyer*, (48) **Phur pa khro bo rol pa'i bzlog gzhung dbus phyogs 'khor lo ma*, (49) *Phur pa'i las kyi sri chung bcu gsum mnan pa*, (50) *sDe brgyad bsrung bzlog*, (51) *Ser ba gdong *bzlog*, (52) *rDzas kyi *mthun* (=mthu) **chen *bco *brgyad*, (53) **mTshon *dra *thog 'dra'i man ngag gi nang nas gsung* (=gsungs) *pa'i las sbyor bzhi pa*. [III.] *Phur pa bsdu pa dril sgrub lha *'dus kyi skor* (fol. 12b4–5): (54) *rDo rje phur pa rtsa ba thams cad dril nas nyams su len pa*, (55) *Las la sbyar ba'i man ngag*, (56) **Thugs *kyi *snag* (ChBThY reads: *brngag*) **pa *gsang ba phur cig* (=gcig) *ma'i bsgrub* (=sgrub) *thabs*, (57) *Dril *sgrub kyi 'phrin las chen mo*, (58) *(de'i) 'Phrin las 'bring po*, (59) *'Phrin las bsdu pa*, (60) *mTshan brgyad kyi bstod pa la rten* (=brten) *nas bskul ba*. Cf. the list of titles in ChBThY, fols. 88b–90a. 'Phrin las bdud 'joms subsequently adds later writings composed by Padma 'phrin las on the subject (KDJSY, ca, fols. 12b6–13a1).

two *rdzogs chen* cycles (Cycles I and II).⁷⁹ The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku recorded the details of these transmissions in his *records of teachings received*:

1751: *gcung* [rDo dmar] Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub:

- Ka dag rang byung rang shar (KDJSY, nga, fol. 2a1–b2)⁸⁰ (Cycle II)
- Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal (KDJSY, nga, fols. 2b2–4a4)⁸¹ (Cycle I)

⁷⁹ For these *rdzog chen* studies, see the autobiography (KDJNTh, fol. 34a–b). Among the five sons of rJe Mi 'gyur rdo rje, Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub was the second youngest (KDJNTh, fol. 34b). The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku composed a short biography of his teacher, including a prayer (*ibid.*, fol. 34b), which is preserved in his *Collected Works* (i.e. KZNTh). For further information on Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub, see Brag sne Kun bzang chos 'phel 1996: 139–141. The transmission of the *rdzogs chen* cycles from the Northern Treasures was received by Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub within the family tradition from his elder brother Padma rdo rje. See below, notes 95 and 96.

⁸⁰ Title list (KDJSY, nga, fol. 2a2–5) *rgyab rten lung*: (1) sNgon 'gro gzer lnga, (2) *Zhus lan *gnad kyi yi ge, (3) *Zhal chem rin chen gzer bu, (4) O rgyan padma'i zhal gdams, (5) mKhar chen gza'i zhus lan, (6) dMar khrid nyams *len brgyad pa, (7) sNying po bsdus pa rig pa'i dbang, (8) Zab mo gnad kyi *them bcu, (9) sNying po bcud bsdus lam gyi gnad dang gnad tig zhal gdams zab mo'i them, (10) Ngo sprod rang rig rang gsal, (11) mTsho rgyal gyi gegs sel nor bu'i bang mdzod, (12) rGyud las byung ba'i man ngag gsal ba'i *sgron me, (13) Kun grol *rdo *rje *sems dpa'i rgyud, (14) rDzogs pa chen po rang 'byung (=byung) rang shar gyi rgyud, (15) Bar do lnga'i ngo sprod, (16) rDzogs pa chen po'i 'phrin las, (17) bKa' bsrung dur khrod ma gsum dang bstan ma bcu gnyis kyi gsol kha bcas. Cf. the title lists in ChBThY, fols. 71b–72a, and BDThY, pp. 9–15.

⁸¹ Title list (KDJSY, nga, fols. 2b5–4a2) *lung*: (1) Kun *tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal gyi rgyud le'u nyi shu pa, (2) dGongs pa zangs (=zang) thal gyi rtsa ba le'u lnga pa, (3) dGongs pa zang thal gyi rgyud chung le'u brgyad pa, (4) sKye med ma bcos rang 'byung (=byung) gi rgyud le'u drug pa, (5) Rig sems (=Sems) dang rig pa dbye ba'i rgyud le'u drug, (6) Khrul pa sems kyi rgyud le'u bdun, (7) 'Khrul pa sems dang rig pa dbye ba'i rgyud le'u drug, (8) Rig pa rang gsal gyi rgyud le'u gsum, (9) *Ye *shes rang la gnas pa'i rgyud le'u drug, (10) Rin po che phreng pa'i rgyud le'u drug, (11) Man ngag snying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud le'u brgyad pa, (12) sNying gi dgongs pa'i rgyud le'u drug, (13) Padma'i bka' yig dang po, (14) Ye shes chen po stan (=bstan) pa'i rgyud le'u *drug, (15) Sangs rgyas rdo rje sems dpa' dgongs pa rang shar gyi rgyud le'u drug, (16) rDo rje sems dpa' kun grol yangs pa'i rgyud le'u dgu (ChBThY reads: drug), (17) Bar do rang snang gi rgyud le'u bdun, (18) Kun tu bzang po ye shes zang thal gyi sgron ma le'u lnga pa, (19) sNyan rgyud (=brgyud) *sde drug gi sngon 'gro, (20) Dang po chu'i bcud blangs pa, (21) bDud rtsi bcud kyi tshes sgrub, (22) rLung rig gi *bcud *du blangs pa, (23) rDo rje can gyi grib bsrung ba, (24) gNas kyi grib bsrung ba, (25) Rang rgyud dag pa, (26) Lus *phyi nang gi *skyon *bcos pa, (27) Ngag sgra'i skyon bcas pa, (28) Yid rtog pa'i 'khrul snang bzlog pa, (29) Las kyi 'phrin las kyi le'u ste bcu gcig, (30) sNgon 'gro rin chen gzer lnga, (31) rGyud 'debs ka dag *lhun *grub gnyis, (32) sNyan rgyud (=brgyud) drug gi tho byang, (33) Yang dag don gyi snyan rgyud (=brgyud) rin po che, (34) Thugs kyi dgongs pa yi ge med pa'i snyan rgyud (=brgyud), (35) sNyan rgyud (=brgyud) yi ge med pa'i mthar thug pa, (36) sNyan rgyud (=brgyud) rin po che'i lung byang ye shes thugs kyi lde mig, (37) Man ngag khyad par *du *phags pa snyan rgyud (=brgyud) gang zag dbang po rab 'bring tha gsum gyi grol tshul, (38) dGongs pa zang thal gyi khrid gzhuṅ chen mo, (39) Ye shes

During his stay in Helambu from 1749 to 1751, when he was engaged in the reconstruction of the Avalokiteśvara temple on Mount g.Yang ri—originally built by his father but later destroyed by lightning—Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu, whom he had first met in Nepal in 1747, appeared at the site in 1750 (KDJNTh, fols. 23b–24a). At that time, Tshe dbang nor bu conferred upon the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku the empowerments for the *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* cycle (KDJNTh, fol. 32b). In 1751, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms again received teachings from Tshe dbang nor bu on this same *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* cycle (Cycle VII), along with transmissions of additional texts composed by Tshe dbang nor bu himself in connection with this ritual system. Furthermore, Tshe dbang nor bu bestowed instructions on the *rdzogs chen* cycle *Ka dag rang byung shar* (Cycle II), as well as empowerments for the Vajrakīla cycle (Cycle IV). These areas of study were recorded by the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku in the addendum to his *records of teachings received*:⁸²

[1750, 1751:] rJe btsun Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755):

— Byang gter rDo rje phur pa (KDJSY, na, fol. 1a2) (Cycle IV)

chen po mngon du gyur ba'i man ngag, (40) *Ngo sprod nyi shu rtsa gcig*, (41) *rTags *kyi yi *ge*, (42) **Tshad *gyi yi ge*, (43) *gNad kyi yi ge*, (44) *Bī (=Bi) ma la'i khrīd yid*, (45) *Bī (=Bi) ma la'i snyan rgyud (=brgyud) 'brel (=grel) tig chen mo*, (46) *Bai ro tsa na'i snyan rgyud (=brgyud) dang po*, (47) *sNyan rgyud (=brgyud) bar pa*, (48) *sNyan rgyud (=brgyud) phyi ma*, (49) *Bai ro tsa na'i thugs rgyud*, (50) **dBang *lga'i *dbye ba*, (51) *Rig pa'i rtsal dbang gi 'brel pa*, (52) *mKha 'gro'i gsang sgrub 'phrin las*, (53) *rTsa gnas lus kyi 'khor lo*, (54) *rTsa rlung gnad kyi sgron ma*, (55) *sGron ma rnam gsum thugs kyi bang mdzod*, (56) *bTags grol yid *bzhih *nor *mchog*, (57) *Sangs rgyas thams cad sras gcig pa'i rgyud*, (58) *brTags grogs (=bTags grol) bcang thabs*, (59) *'Das rjes dang po*, (60) *gNyis pa*, (61) *gSum pa*, (62) *mThong grol rin po che*, (63) *'Chi kha ma'i sangs rgyas khug pa lga'i man ngag*, (64) *Bar do 'od *gsal *gyi *sgron ma*, (65) **gSol 'debs *skye *med gu ru ma*, (66) *Zhi khro lhun grub kyi 'phrin las bskul ba*, (67) *rDzogs chen 'phrin las*, (68) *rNal lam le'u brgyad pa*, (69) *Zang zang lha brag nas gter *ston pa'i lo rgyus*, (70) *gNas spar ba'i *man ngag*, (71) *gSang sngags bstan pa rnam gsum gyi zhus len (=lan)*, (72) *rDo rje phag mo zab rgya drug gi rtsa rlung gi gdams pa*, (73) *rDo rje phag mo'i man ngag thor bu rnam gsum*, (74) *rDo rje phag mo'i zab rgya drug gi dang po lus ngag yid gsum gyi dam bca'i mthun (=thun) bzhi'i rnal 'byor gyi khrim (=khrigs)*, (75) *Zab rgya'i dmigs rim*, (76) *rTsa gsum rin chen sgron ma*, (77) **rTsod *bzlog *ye *shes *sngon *du bstan pa'i snyan rgyud (=brgyud)*, (78) *Ye shes rang shar gyi rgyud le'u gnyis*, (79) *Gying (=Ging) mchod thabs*, (80) *Sangs rgyas rang chas kyi rgyud le'u gnyis pa*. Cf. the title lists in ChBThY, fols. 72b–74b, and BDThY, pp. 35–38. In the *records of teachings received*, the transmission continues with texts authored by Yongs 'dzin Ngag dbang bzang po, Mi 'gyur rdo rje, and Padma rdo rje on this ritual tradition (KDJSY, nga, fols. 4b4–5a2).

⁸² For these studies, see KDJNTh, fol. 35b. In the *records of teachings received*, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku limits himself at this point solely to listing these text cycles or individual texts for which he had received empowerments (*dbang*) and instructions (*khrīd*) (KDJSY, na, fol. 1a).

- *Thugs sgrubs yang tig gces sgron* (KDJSY, na, fol. 1a4) (from Cycle VII)
- *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (KDJSY, na, fol. 1a4) (Cycle I)

According to his autobiography, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms returned to Mang yul the following year, in 1752, where he received empowerments and the reading transmission for the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle from Bla ma Ratna bhadra.⁸³

From the late 1750s onward, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms also studied under Lo ri ba Srid zhi yongs grol. Around 1762, he received from Lo ri ba further transmissions from the Northern Treasures, including those for the *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal* cycles (Cycle VII) and the *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* cycle (Cycle V). These transmissions are likewise recorded in his *records of teachings received*.⁸⁴

[1762:] Lo ri ba Srid zhi yongs grol (d. 1763):

- *Byang gter Thugs rje chen po* (KDJSY, na, fol. 2a2) (Cycle V)
- *Thugs sgrub* (KDJSY, na, fol. 2a2–3) (Cycle VII)

Karma bdud 'joms frequently visited rDo rje 'dzin pa Ye shes chos grags, the throne-holder of the Brag dkar rta so Monastery, beginning in 1759 and continuing until Ye shes chos grags's death in 1772. According to his *records of teachings received*, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku, received from Ye shes chos grags specific instructions on the ritual approach to the deity Thugs grub drag po rtsal as transmitted within the rDo dmar family tradition.⁸⁵

The final major *byang gter* transmissions were conferred during the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku's extended stay—lasting approximately nine months—at Ri rgyal bKra bzang in 1760 and 1761. During this period, he received empowerments, reading transmissions, and practical instructions on the doctrinal teachings and ritual cycles of the

⁸³ For these studies, see KDJNTh, fols. 35b–36a. In his *gsan yig*, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku did not record the individual texts of the reading transmission of the *bKa' brgyad* cycle. However, four texts from the ritual cycle *gSang ba rmad du byung ba* are included in his *records of teachings received*: (1) *gSang ba smad (=rmad) 'byung gi legs non*, (2) *Chos 'byung*, (3) *lDe mig*, (4) *rjes gnang* (KDJSY, cha, fols. 13a6–14a1), along with the lineage of transmission (*ibid.*, fols. 13b2–14a1). In the textual tradition, this group of texts is sometimes also assigned to the cycle *Kun bzang dgongs pa zangs thal* (Cycle I).

⁸⁴ Regarding his studies with Srid zhi yongs grol, see KDJNTh, fol. 61a. In his *gsan yig*, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms merely mentions the titles of the two text cycles and specifies that he received from Lo ri ba the spiritual blessing, the heart empowerment, and direct instructions to the ritual cycle *Thugs sgrub* (KDJSY, na, fol. 2a2).

⁸⁵ This is the ritual text *Thugs sgrub drag po rtsal gyi bsnyen yig rdo dmar lugs* composed by rDo dmar Padma rdo rje (KDJSY, tha, fols. 8b6–9a1).

Northern Treasures from bKra bzang pa Kun bzang ye shes, in accordance with the tradition maintained at bKra bzang Monastery. His sons, Padma dga' ba and Tshe dbang 'jigs med dpal bzang po, also served as tradent of these ritual lineages. These transmissions are likewise documented in the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku's *records of teachings received* (Cycles I, II, VI, VII, VIII, IX):⁸⁶

1760, 1761: bKra bzang pa Rig 'dzin Kun bzang ye shes:

- *Byang gter rdzogs chen ka dag rang byung rang shar* (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 2b1–3) (Cycle II)
- *rDzogs chen dgongs pa zang thal* (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 2b3–3a3)⁸⁷ (from Cycle I)

⁸⁶ In his autobiography, these transmissions are detailed and include practical instructions as well as the *dbang chen* empowerment for the cycle *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*; the empowerments and reading transmission for the *Ka dag lhun grub* cycle; the *dbang 'bring po* empowerment and remaining reading transmission for the *Thugs sgrub* cycle; the *rab 'byams bka'* empowerment for the *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* cycle; the empowerment, practical instructions, and reading transmission for *Zab lam bde stong rgya mtsho*; the empowerments for the cycle *Byang chub sems pa'i spyod dbang*; and from the cycle *rTen 'brel chos bdun*, the empowerments and reading transmission for the *mNga' dbang rin chen 'bar ba* and *rTa mgrin dregs pa dbang bsodud*; furthermore the *gtor dbang* empowerment for the *bKa' brgyad rang shar*, the empowerments and reading transmissions for the complete *mGon po bstan bsrung*, among others; as well as the empowerments for the *Byang gter rdo rje phur pa* (KDJNTh, fols. 55b–56a). Regarding this transmission in bKra bzang, Karma bdud 'joms provides titles lists of the ritual cycles only sporadically in his *gsan yig* (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 2b1–6b3), likely because he had already recorded them earlier in his *records of teachings received*. He also partially refers back to the lists of titles given previously (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 3b4). Unless otherwise noted, the *gsan yig* does not include further title lists. The first page of this section of his *records of teachings received* is reproduced in the appendix (*infra*, Appendix 2, Fig. 2). There is notable lack of primary sources on Kun bzang ye shes; currently, no biographical information is available. In Karma bdud 'joms's *records of teachings received* related to the transmission of the Northern Treasures, the following individuals are listed as teachers of Kun bzang ye shes: Kun 'dus tshe dbang (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 2b, 4a), Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (*ibid.*, fols. 2a, 3b, 6b), Chos rgyal gTer bdag gling pa (*ibid.*, fol. 4a), O rgyan bstan 'dzin nor bu (*ibid.*, fols. 4b, 5b), and sPrul sku Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams (*ibid.*, fol. 6a).

⁸⁷ Title list (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 2b4–3a1) *lung*: (1) *Bai ro'i snyan rgyud (=brgyud) dang po*, (2) *Bar pa*, (3) *Phyi ma*, (4) *Yang dag don gyi snyan rgyud (=brgyud)*, (5) *Rigs lnga'i sgrub thabs*, (6) *Rigs lnga'i mchod 'bul*, (7) *Zhi khro'i 'phrin las tshogs bcas*, (8) *sKang (=bsKang) bshags*, (9) *(zab rgya las) Phag mo dges pa 'phrin las kyi rgyud*, (10) *Thig le'i gegs bsel*, (11) *rTsa gnas lus kyi 'khor lo*, (12) *rTsa lung rig pa'i gnad zab mo*, (13) *Man ngag thor bu rnam gsum*, (14) *mThun (=Thun) bzhi'i rnal 'byor gyi khrin (=khrigs)*, (15) *rDo rje mkha' 'gro'i dus (=bdud) rtsi*, (16) *rTsa lung gnad kyi sgron ma*, (17) *mKha' 'gro'i las rim*, (18) *Zab rgya'i dmiigs rim*, (19) *bKa' bsrungs bsodud mchod sangs rgyas rdo rje 'chang*.

- *Zab lam bde stong rgya mtsho zhes thugs sgrub kyi gsang khrid zab mo* (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 3a3–b4)⁸⁸ (from Cycle VII)
- *Thugs sgrub sgrub pa* (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 3b4–4a2) (Cycle VII)
- *Bla ma rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 4a2–4) (Cycle VI)
- *Byang gter byang chub spyod dbang* (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 4a4–5a1)⁸⁹ (Cycle IX)
- *Zab mo rten 'brel chos bdun* (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 5a1–b3)⁹⁰ (Cycle VIII)
- *gSang ba'i ma ning drag por khros pa mgon po yid bzhin gyi nor bu bstan bsrung yong rdzogs* (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 5b3–6b3)⁹¹

In the *gsan yig* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku, the reading transmissions for eight (Cycles I, II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX) of the nine principal text cycles that form the core of the ritual tradition of the Northern Treasures are explicitly listed. The *records of teachings received* contains

⁸⁸ Title list (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 3a4–5) *lung*: (1) *Zab lam bde stong rgya mtsho mthong ba yid dga'*, (2) *Gu ru thugs sgrub kyi gsang khrid*. 'Phrin las bdun 'joms lists here additional texts that he attributes to an individual entitled *rje nyid* (i.e., presumably bKra bzang pa Kun bzang ye shes) (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 3a5), including the lineage of transmission for these texts (*ibid.*, fol. 3a6–b2).

⁸⁹ Title list (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 4a4–b3) *lung*: (1) *rNam par snang mdzad rgyud kyi sgrub thabs zangs mdzod ma*, (2) *rNam par snang mdzad sku'i rang chas dgongs pa bstan pa'i le'u bkod pa rnam gsum zhes pa mthong grol*, (3) *lHa mo phyag rgya rnam gzigs ma'i rgyud kyi sgrub thabs zangs mdzod ma*, (4) *bDe gshegs mchod pa'i cho ga*, (5) *dBang chog zangs mdzod ma*, (6) *sMon lam yid bzhin nor bu*, (7) *Byang chub spyod dbang rin po che gser mdzod ma*, (8) *mGon bdun bcu'i gtor chog*, (9) *brTan khrim (=gTan khrims) kyi slab (=bslab) bya zhes zangs mdzod ma*, (10) *Yon tan rin po che'i gzung gser mdzod ma*, (11) *Dus dgu'i gso sbyong zhes dus khrim (=khrims) 'bogs tshul*, (12) *(de'i gsal byed) Dus dgu mchod pa'i cho ga sgrub gnyis kun 'joms*. See the title lists in DLSY, *ga*, fols. 115a–116a; TLThY, pp. 181–182; YBSY, pp. 250–251.

⁹⁰ Title list (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 5a2–b1) *lung*: (1) *rTen 'brel chos bdun gyi them byang*, (2) *O rgyan padma'i sgrub thabs 'di gnyen po stobs kyi sgrub pa*, (3) *sPyan ras gzigs mthong grol gyi sgrub thabs*, (4) *dBang chen yong (=yongs) rdzogs kyi them byang*, (5) *Mu stegs dbang phyug chen po'i sgrub thabs kyi phreng ba*, (6) *Ma hā dhe wa'i sgrub thabs*, (7) *dBang phyug chen po mchod pa'i 'phrin las*, (8) *rTa mgrin dregs pa dbang bsdud*, (9) *Dregs pa dbang bsdud kyi 'phrin las*, (10) *Dregs pa dbang bsdud kyi 'phrin las sgrub thabs las tshogs dang bcas pa*, (11) *Gu ru'i zhal khrigs chim rdo rje phreng chung la gdams pa*, (12) *Bum dbang bsdud*, (13) *dBang phyug chen po gtso? khar gyi bskul*, (14) *dBang chen gyi sngon 'gro*, (15) *lHa chen dpal 'bar gyi srog khor (=khor) rgyas pa*, (16) *dBang phyug chen po'i lo rgyus*, (17) *sPogs chog gnad kyi ti ka (=ṭī kā)*, (18) *Ma hā dhe wa'i dbang chog*, (19) *Man ngag dam? pa bsam rgyud ar la gtad pa*, (20) *U ma dhe ba'i sgrub thabs khyad par can*, (21) *dBang bsdud las kyi 'khor lo'i rgyud*, (22) *sNgags kyi them yig spogs chog yang kho (=khol) dang bcas pa*, (23) *Gegs bsel (=sel)*. See the title lists in DLSY, *ga*, fols. 161a–163b; YBSY, pp. 263–265.

⁹¹ Title list (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 5b5–6) *lung*: (1) *mGon po bstan bsrung yongs rdzogs kyi dbang gi byang bu*, (2) *gSang bskul bsdud pa*, (3) *'Phrin las bskang bshags dang bcas pa*, (4) *bsKul gyi rim pa bstan bsrung yongs rdzogs kyi rgyud*, (5) *Las tshogs a mu ka cham dbab [nag] po tshon (=mtshon) 'dra thog? 'dra bcas*.

no reference to the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle (Cycle III).⁹² In addition, 'Phrin las bdud 'joms provides title lists of several smaller ritual cycles stemming from the tradition of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem,⁹³ as well as texts from the later tradition that engage with and elaborate upon the contents of this treasure corpus.⁹⁴

The *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku constitutes the earliest extant textual source of its kind from the rNying ma school that offers detailed insight into the doctrinal teachings and ritual cycles of the Northern Treasures, as they were transmitted in the 18th century across diverse lineages in La stod byang, Mang yul (Western Tibet), and Nepal (Glang 'phrang). Alongside the epitome compiled by Se Padma dbang chen, the *records of teachings received* of the mDo chen bKa' brgyud school, and the *gsan yig* of both the 5th Dalai Bla ma and sNgo ra dBang phyug rdo rje, this text ranks among the most significant literary sources documenting the contents and transmission of this treasure tradition from the early 17th to the late 18th century. Moreover, beyond the contents found in other *records of teachings received*, the *gsan yig* of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms also points to

⁹² From the available material, it is not clear why the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku did not include the transmission of the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle in his *records of teachings received*. In his autobiography, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku reports that he received religious instructions on this cycle around 1739/40. For these studies, see KDJNth, fol. 14b. Cf. *supra*, note 73. In the *thob yig* of Brag dkar Chos kyi dbang phyug, it is noted that, as a fifteen-year-old, he had received empowerments and some reading transmissions (*lung thor bu*) from his teacher 'Phrin las bdud 'joms, though he was uncertain about details (ChBThY, p. 204). In the *records of teachings received* from other clerics in Mang yul, the reading transmission is indeed attested: Gur phu ba Nor bu bde chen received the transmission of the main teachings of this cycle from his teacher O rgyan bstan 'dzin nor bu in 1633, in the lineage via Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde and rDo rje brag Ngag gi dbang po (NDThY, p. 82). Gur phu ba rGyal sras seng ge received this cycle via rDo rje brag Padma 'phrin las from his teacher Khams lung Padma dbang gi rgyal po (GSThY, p. 365), and sNgo ra dBang phyug received the transmission from his teacher Kun bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan in the transmission via rDo rje brag Padma 'phrin las and Khams lung Padma dbang rgyal (BDThY, p. 47). Cf. the transmission lineages in Smith (n.d.). Accordingly, this *bKa' brgyad* ritual tradition circulated precisely within those circles from which the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku had received the central teachings of the Northern Treasures.

⁹³ Among the less extensive ritual cycles are, among others, *gSang ba rmad du byung ba* (see *supra*, note 83), *rTa mgrin dregs pa dbang bsdu* (see *supra*, note 90) and *Zab lam bde stong rgya mtsho zhes thugs sgrub kyi gsang khrid zab mo* (see *supra*, note 88).

⁹⁴ Regarding texts from the later tradition, see *supra*, notes 75–78, 81, 88. 'Phrin las bdud 'joms mentions writings by tradents of the treasure tradition who were active in Central Tibet, Western Tibet, and Nepal from the 16th to the 18th century, including Legs ldan rdo rje (16th century), Chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal *alias* dBang po'i sde (1550?–1603), Yol mo ba 03 bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644), Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), rDo dmar Mi 'gyur rdo rje (b. 1675), and rDo dmar Padma rdo rje.

important supplementary writings from the later tradition that further illuminate the *byang gter* cycles.

Other extant *records of teachings received* from the rNying ma school are by no means as extensive as that of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku. The *gsan yig* of sNgo ra dBang phyug rdo rje (c. 18th century), for instance, was composed around the same time as that of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. dBang phyug rdo rje received the transmission of the Northern Treasures from several of the same teachers who had also instructed the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku—most notably his principal teacher, rDo dmar Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub (Cycles I and VII), as well as Khams lung Kun bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (Cycles II and III). The contents of the transmission dBang phyug rdo rje received from the rDo dmar family thus closely mirror those recorded in the *gsan yig* of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. However, dBang phyug rdo rje additionally preserved the reading transmission of individual texts of the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle (Cycle III), thereby supplementing our knowledge of a text cycle otherwise unrecorded in the *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku (KDJSY). Two later *records of teachings received* from the rNying ma school—those of sTag lung rTse sprul Rin po che (TLThY) and gNas nang Ye shes bdud 'dul (YBSY), both dating to the 20th century—offer more recent testimonies of the transmission history of this treasure tradition.

The title lists of the individual cycles of the Northern Treasures preserved in the *records of teachings received* of the mDo chen bKa' brgyud school provide valuable insights into the scope and content of these collections as they were transmitted during the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly in Mang yul (Western Tibet). In the *gsan yig* of three prominent representatives of this school, title lists for seven of the core cycles (Cycles I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII) are preserved. Among these, the *records* compiled by Nor bu bde chen—parts of which are explicitly dated to 1633—constitute the earliest known *records of teachings received* relating to the transmission of this treasure tradition. The transmission maintained by teachers of the mDo chen school active in Mang yul were passed down through a network of individuals and lineages that significantly overlap with those recorded in the *gsan yig* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku. A substantial portion of the transmitted *byang gter* teachings was disseminated through tradents active in Central Tibet (dBus), including Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde, rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, and rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las.

In the *gsan yig* of the 5th Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, individual titles for all nine core cycles of the treasure tradition are listed. As both a disciple of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669) and teacher of rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–

1717), Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho was not only a tradent of the Northern Treasures but also deeply engaged with their transmission history. In composing his *gsan yig*, he collected prior available *records of teachings received* and compared their contents systematically. It is primarily through his efforts that we know of now-lost earlier *records of teachings received*—particularly those from the early rNying ma school—some of which date back to the late 15th century (see *supra*, 2.d, *Records of teachings received*). Drawing on the earliest systematic classification of the contents of the Northern Treasures—originally provided by mNga' ris Paṇ chen in the early 16th century—the 5th Dalai Lama organized the entire textual corpus of the Northern Treasures into 26 sections in his *records of teachings received* (see *supra*, note 29).

The *records of teachings received* of Brag dkar Chos kyi dbang phyug include title lists and transmission lineages that are identical or nearly identical in large part to those found in the *records of teachings received* of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. This strongly suggests that he based his compilation on the text of his teacher.

A comprehensive evaluation of all *records of teachings received*—comparing their content and cross-referencing them with surviving manuscripts and printed editions to trace interrelationships and transmission lineages—would require a substantial, standalone study beyond the scope of this article.

Even provisional comparisons reveal considerable variation in number and arrangement of individual texts within the same text cycles. It should also be noted here that identifying identical text titles across different sources is often challenging. A single text may appear under different titles, be referenced only by abbreviated titles, or be described by its content rather than a formal title—making cross-source verification difficult or, in some cases, uncertain.

4.c On the transmission of the Northern Treasures

To engage in the practice of any specific teaching, a disciple requires not only the necessary empowerments (*dbang*) received from a teacher—along with the corresponding authorization to carry out the practice—but also the reading transmission (*lung*) of the text itself. The authenticity of this transmission is safeguarded through the lineage (*brgyud*), a chain of names representing the tradents, which is communicated to the disciple during the course of the transmission process. In his *gsan yig*, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku recorded the lineage of the reading transmission for each ritual cycle. Moreover, his *records of teachings received* include alternative or secondary transmission lineages, which are marked here with the word “furthermore” (*yang*).

In certain instances, transmission lineages to particular empowerments are also provided.

Cycle I	<i>Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal</i> ⁹⁵
Cycle II	<i>Ka dag rang byung rang shar</i> ⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Transmission lineages: the *records of teachings received* distinguishes between three transmission strands (a, b, c): (a) (KDJSY, *nga*, fol. 4a2–b4) *lung*: i. Chos sku Kun bzang yab yum, ii. Long (=Longs) *sku *Zhi *khro rigs lnga, iii. rGyal ba rdo rje, iv. rDo rje sems dpa', v. dGa' rab rdo rje, vi. 'Jam dpal gshes (=bshes) gnyen, vii. Rig 'dzin Shri (=Shri) singha, viii. rGyal sras Padma 'byung gnas, ix. Pañ chen Bi (=Bi) ma [la] mi tra, x. sGra bsgyur Bai ro tsa na, xi. mNga' bdag *Khri srong lde btsan, xii. mkha' 'gro Ye shes mtsho rgyal. 1. Rig 'dzin dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, 2. (*sras mchog*) rNam rgyal mgon po, 3. 'Dren mchog rDo rje rgyal mtshan, 4. Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa, 5. Sprul sku Shākya bzang po, 6. Rig 'dzin mkhyen rtogs dbang po, 7. Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas blo gros, 8. Nam mkha' rin chen, 9. Grub thob 'Chi med tshe ring, 10. Ngag dbang zil gnon rdo rje, 11. Padma ngag dbang chos 'phel, 12. rDo dmar Rig 'dzin Mi *gyur rdo rje, 13. (*de sras*) Rig 'dzin Padma rdo rje, 14. (*cung*) (=gcung) Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub 'od gsal bstan pa'i nyi ma, 15. (*bdag*) 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. —(b) 1. gTer ston, 2. Nam rgyal mgon po, 3. rDo rje *chang *bSod *nams bzang po, 4. mkhas grub Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 5. mkhas btsun Chos kyi rin chen, 6. rje btsun Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 7. Bya btang Shākya dpal bzang, 8. 'Jam dbyangs chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 9. Thugs sras Blo gros rgyal mtshan, 10. *mkhas *grub Byams pa bzang po, 11. sPrul sku Shākya rgyal mtshan, 12. rGyal thang pa Zil gnon rdo rje, 13. *Grub mchog Padma ngag dbang (*man gong bzhin*). —(c) 2. (*sras mchog*) *rNam rgyal mgon po, 3. Se ston *Nyi *bzang (*yab sras*), 4. Se ston *mGon po bzang po, 5. Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, 6. Se ston Kun dga' bzang po, 7. Se ston Byang chub rdo rje, 8. Se ston Ngag dbang rdo rje, 9. Chos rje dPal ldan bkra shis, 10. rGyal thang pa Zil gnon *rdo rje, 11. *Grub mchog Padma ngag dbang, 12. Rig 'dzin Mi 'gyur rdo rje, 13. Padma rdo rje, 14. Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub, 15. (*bdag*) sNgags ban 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. Cf. ChBThY, fols. 74b–75a. —Transmission lineage (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 3a1–2): *lung*: 1. gTer ston (*yan phyi ltar*), ... [1.] Rig 'dzin Kun 'dus tshe dbang 'bar (*gong ltar dang*), [2.] Nam mkha'i dge 'dun, [3.] rje Kun bzang ye shes, [4.] (*bdag*). Cf. ChBThY, fol. 75a. Additional transmission lineages for the empowerments received by 'Phrin las bdud 'joms are documented (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 3a2–3). For an overview of the transmission of the cycle *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*, see Arguillère's compilation based on introductory texts (*khrid yig*); Arguillère 2018: 247 (Appendix).

⁹⁶ Transmission lineage: (KDJSY, *nga*, fol. 2a6–b3) *rgyab rten lung*: i. Chos sku Kun tu bzang po, ii. Long (=Longs) sku rDo rje sems dpa', iii. sPrul sku dGa' rab rdo rje, iv. Rig 'dzin Shri (=Shri) singha, (the lineage continues at the bottom of the page:) v. *O *rgyan *Padma *byung *gnas, vi. *Ye *shes *mtsho *rgyal. 1. Rig 'dzin *dNgos *grub *rgyal *mtshan, 2. Rig 'dzin *Nam *mkha' *grags *pa, 3. *sPang *ston *bDe legs rgyal *mtshan, (and the main text continues with the individuals:) 4. Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, 5. mGon po zla ba, 6. 'Jam dbyangs chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 7. Thugs sras *Blo *gros rgyal mtshan, 8. Byams pa phun tshogs, 9. rNam grol ba Karma dar rgyas, 10. (*de sras*) rje btsun dBang gi rgyal po, 11. (*de dbon*) Rig 'dzin Mi 'gyur rdo rje, 12. (*sras mchog*) Rig *dzin Padma rdo rje, 13. (*gcung) *Kun *bzang *gyur med lhun grub, 14. (*gnyis kas bdag*) 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. Cf. ChBThY, fol. 72r. —Transmission lineage (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 2b1–3) *dbang*: 1. gTer ston (*yan phyi ltar*), 2. (*sras mchog*) rNam rgyal mgon po, 3. rDo rje mgon po, 4. Ngag dbang grags pa, 5. Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, 6. Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, 7. Ngag

Cycle IV

Cycle V

Cycle VI

*rDo rje phur pa*⁹⁷*Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol*⁹⁸*Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub*⁹⁹

dbang rgya mtsho, 8. Tshe ring dbang po, 9. Klu sgrub dbang po, 10. Rol pa'i rdo rje, 11. Thugs mchog 'od 'bar, 12. Kun 'dus tshe dbang, 13. rje Kun bzang ye shes, 14. (*bdag*). Cf. ChBThY, fol. 72a–b.

⁹⁷ Transmission lineages: (a) (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 13a3–b1) *dbang lung*: i. Chos sku Kun tu bzang po, ii. Long (=Longs) sku rDo rje sems dpa', iii. sPrul sku gSang bdag Phyag [na] rdo rje, iv. *sMug *nag dbang gi mkha' 'gro, v. Tshangs pa'i rgyal po *gdong *gsum, vi. lHa dbang rGya byin, vii. Klu rgyal 'Jog po, viii. rGyal po Dza, ix. mKhas pa Shakya (=Shākya) pra bha, x. Rig 'dzin Padma 'byung gnas, xi. mKhas pa Bi ma la mi tra, xii. Bal po Shri la *manydzu, xiii. mkha' 'gro *Ye *shes mtsho rgyal, xiv. sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms. 1. Rig 'dzin dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, 2. (*sras mchog*) rNam rgyal mgon po, 3. rDo rje mgon po, 4. Ngag dbang grags pa, 5. Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, 6. Thugs sras Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, 7. sNgags *chang *Shakya (=Shākya) *bzang po, 8. Rig 'dzin bDud 'joms rdo rje, 9. Chos rgyal Mang ga'i mtshan can, 10. Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, 11. Yol mo sPrul sku sTobs ldan dpa' bo, 12. Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, 13. Gang (=Gangs) can mgon? po? Thams? cad? mkhyen pa Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 14. Rig 'dzin chen po Padma 'phrin las, 15. Rig 'dzin Padma dbang gi rgyal po, 16. (*gnyis kas*) rDo rje bla ma Rig 'dzin Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin, 17. (*bdag*). Cf. ChBThY, fol. 90a–b. —(b) (fol. 13b2–3) (ChBThY adds: *spu gri'i dbang lung*): 1. *gTer *bton, 2. Sangs rgyas byams bzang, 3. Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, 4. Se ston mGon po bzang po, 5. Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, 6. sPyan tshab mGon po zla ba, 7. Nub dgon mNyam med chen po (ChBThY adds: Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan), 8. *Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde (*man 'dra*). Cf. ChBThY, fols. 90b–91a.

⁹⁸ Transmission lineages: (a) (KDJSY, *ca*, fols. 4b3–5a1) *rgyab rten lung*: i. *Chos *sku 'Od dpag med, ii. Long (=Longs) sku sPyan ras gzigs, iii. sPrul sku Padma 'byung gnas, iv. Las can dag pa'i 'khor lnga. 1. gTer bston (=ston) Rig 'dzin chen po dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, 2. (*sras mchog*) rNam rgyal *mgon *po, 3. Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa, 4. Sangs rgyas byams bzang, 5. Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, 6. Chos rgyal bsod nams, 7. Shākya bzang po, 8. Paṇ chen Padma dbang [rgyal], 9. Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rdo rje, 10. Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde, 11. Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, 12. sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu, 13. Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, (ChBThY added: 14. rGyal mchog lnga pa chen po), 15. sPrul sku Rig 'dzin chen po Kun bzang Padma 'phrin las, 16. *Kham lung Rig 'dzin Padma dbang gi rgyal po, 17. sNyags (=gNyags) ston Rig 'dzin Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin, 18. (*bdag*) 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. —(b) (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 5a1–2) *gter gzhung rtsa ba'i dbang lung*: 12. sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu, 13. Rig 'dzin 'Chi med rgya mtsho, 14. Zil gnon dbang rgyal rdo rje, 15. (*pha jo*) rDo rje rig 'dzin Surya (=Sūrya) singha, 16. (*bdag rigs kyi bu*) 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. —(c) (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 5a3) 13. *Zur *chen (*nas*), 14. Thams cad mkhyen pa rGyal dbang lnga pa chen po, 15. sTob (=sTobs) sras Zil gnon pa, 16. Thugs sras Sūrya'i mtshan can, 17. ['Phrin las bdud 'joms]. Cf. ChBThY, fols. 76b–77a.

⁹⁹ Transmission lineage: (KDJSY, *ca*, fols. 5b5–6a3) *lung*: i. Kun tu bzang po, ii. Rigs lnga'i sangs rgyas, iii. Phyag na rdo rje, iv. sMug nag dbang gi mkha' 'gro, v. Tshangs pa'i rgyal po, vi. lHa dbang rGya byin, vii. *Klu rgyal 'Jog *po, viii. *Chos rgyal lung stan (=bstan) *rDo *rje rgyal po Dza, ix. mKhas pa Shakya (=Shākya) pra bha, x. Rig 'dzin Padma 'byung gnas, xi. Slob dpon Bi (=Bi) ma la mi tra, xii. Bal po Shri (=Shrī) la *manydzu, xiii. mkha' 'gro Ye shes mtsho rgyal, xiv. sNa nam rDo rje 'bdud *joms. 1. gTer ston Rig 'dzin dNgos grub rgyal mtshan, 2. (*sras mchog*) rNam rgyal mgon po, 3. dPal ldan rgyal mtshan, 4. Grub chen rGyal mtshan

Cycle VII	<i>Thugs sgrub gu ru drag po rtsal</i> ¹⁰⁰
Cycle VIII	<i>rTen 'brel chos bdun</i> ¹⁰¹
Cycle IX	<i>Byang chub spyod dbang</i> ¹⁰²

'bum, 5. Bya btang bSam 'grub rgyal mtshan, 6. Chos rje dPal ldan seng ge, 7. Grub chen *dKon *mchog *skyabs, 8. *Paṇ *chen *Padma dbang rgyal, 9. Rig 'dzin Legs ldan rdo rje, 10. Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde, 11. Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po, 12. Yol mo sPrul sku, 13. Zur *Chos dbyings rang grol, 14. *Rig 'dzin *Padma 'phrin las, 15. Padma *dbang rgyal, 16. (two illegible syllables) *Padma *gsang *sngags bstan 'dzin, 17. (*bdag*). Cf. ChBThY, fol. 78a.

¹⁰⁰ Transmission lineages: (a) (KDJSY, ca, fol. 9a3–b2) *lung*: i. Kun bzang Che mchog He ru ka, ii. rGyal ba rigs lnga, iii. gSang bdag Phyag [na] rdo rje, iv. sMug nag dbang gi mkha' 'gro, v. Tshangs pa'i rgyal po gdong gsum, vi. lHa dbang rgya byin, vii. Klu rgyal *jog po, viii. rGyal po Dza, ix. mKhas pa Shakya (=Shākya) pra bha, x. Rig 'dzin Padma 'byung gnas, xi. Paṇ chen Bi ma [la] mi tra, xii. Bal po *Shri la *manydzu, xiii. mkha' 'gro Ye shes mtsho rgyal, xiv. sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms. 1. gTer ston Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, 2. (*sras mchog*) rNam rgyal mgon po, 3. rDo rje dpal ba, 4. *rDo *rje *mgon po, 5. *Byams pa *bshes gnyen, 6. Ngag dbang grags pa, 7. Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, 8. Thugs sras Nam *mkha' rgyal mtshan, 9. sNgags 'chang Shakya (=Shākya) bzang po, 10. Rig 'dzin bDud 'joms rdo rje, 11. Chos rgyal dBang po'i sde, 12. (*sku'i sras*) Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang *po, 13. Rig 'dzin *Yol mo ba sTobs ldan dpa' bo, 14. (*gnyis kas*) *Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol, 15. Rig 'dzin Gang shar rang *grol, 16. (*gnyis kas*) Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, 17. Rig 'dzin Padma dbang rgyal, 18. (*gnyis kas*) Drin can bla ma gNyags ston Rig 'dzin Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin, 19. (*bdag*) Rig 'dzin 'Phrin las bdud 'joms. —(b) (fol. 9b2–4) 1. and 2. gTer ston (*yab sras*), 3. rDo rje 'chang *bSod *nams bzang po, 4. Gu ru dBang phyug mgon po, 5. Bla ma dPal ldan bzang po, 6. Grub chen bDe gshegs rgyal mtshan, 7. sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams, 8. Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa, 9. *Shakya (=Shākya) *bzang *po (*man gong ltar*). —(c) (fol. 9b4) [1.] Sangs rgyas byams bzang, [2.] Chos rgyal bsod nams (*man 'dra*). —(d) (fol. 9b4–5) 2. (*sras mchog*), 3. gSang sngags sdong po, 4. dPal ldan rgyal mtshan, 5. rGyal mtshan 'bum, 6. bSam grub rgyal mtshan, 7. dPal ldan seng ge, 8. *dKon *mchog *skyabs, 9. Legs ldan rdo rje (*man 'dra*). —(e) (fol. 9b5–6) 1. gTer ston, 2. Sangs rgyas byams bzang, 3. bSe (=Se) ston mGon po bzang po, 4. bSe (=Se) ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan, 5. sPyan tshab mGon po zla ba, 6. Nub dgon Byams pa chos [kyi] rgyal mtshan, 7. *dBang *po'i *sde (*man 'dra*). —(f) (fol. 9b6) 1. gTer ston, 2. Nam mkha' grags pa, 3. sPangs (=sPang) ston bDe legs rgyal mtshan, 4. bSe (=Se) ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan (*man 'dra*). —(g) (fols. 9b6–10a1) [1.] Ngag gi dbang po, [2.] sTobs ldan dpa' bo, [3.] *sGam *smyon Phyag rdo rje *nor bu, [4.] Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (*man 'dra*). Cf. ChBThY, fols. 82a–b. Additional transmission lineages associated with various empowerments are presented (KDJSY, ca, fols. 10a1–11a3).

¹⁰¹ Transmission lineage: (KDJSY, da, fol. 5b1–3) *lung*: i. Chos sku sNang ba mtha' yas, ii. sPyan ras gzigs, iii. O rgyan chen po, iv. mTsho rgyal, v. rDo rje phreng chung. 1. Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, 2. rDo rje dpal ba, 3. Byams pa shes (=bshes) gnyen, 4. Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, 5. Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan, 6. Rig 'dzin Ngag dbang rgya mtsho, 7. Drin can Tshe ring dbang po, 8. Rang grol Klu sgrub dbang po, 9. Rig 'dzin Rol pa'i rdo rje, 10. Thugs mchog 'od bar, 11. Kun 'dus tshe dbang, 12. O rgyan bsTan 'dzin nor bu, 13. rJe bKra bzang pa chen po, 14. (*bdag*). — (fol. 5b1–3) 13. (*yab rje*), 14. (*sras*) Padma dga' ba, 15. (*bdag*).

¹⁰² Transmission lineage: (KDJSY, da, fol. 4b3–6) *lung*: i. rNam par snang mdzad, ii. Thub dbang, iii. lHa dbang rgya byin, iv. Kun dga', v. Klu sgrub, vi. O rgyan chen Gu ru Shakya (=Shākya) seng ge, vii. rDo rje bdud 'joms. 1. *rGod *ldem can, 2. *rNam rgyal mgon po, 3. rDo rje dpal ba, 4. rDo rje mgon po, 5. and 6. *mTshan

For eight of the aforementioned core cycles of the Northern Treasures (Cycles I, II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX), the *gsan yig* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku provides the transmission history in the form of teacher–disciple chains. These records distinguish between the transmission of empowerments (*dbang*), reading transmission (*lung*), and practical instructions (*khrid*) on the teaching contents. Often, multiple transmission lineages are recorded for the reading transmission, as well as various types of empowerments. A selection of six of these transmission lineages (A through F)—which include the transmission of the two *rdzogs chen* cycles (Cycles I and II) and the three cycles associated with ritual practices centered on Padmasambhava (Cycles V, VI, VII)—is presented in Appendix 1 and will be outlined below.

Northern Treasure Transmission Lineages
A (App. 1, Table 1) and B (App. 1, Table 2)

The transmission of the Northern Treasures began in the second half of the 14th century. By the early 16th century, the transmission extended across approximately five to seven generations of disciples, who were mainly active in La stod byang (bKra bzang, bDe grol) and La stod lho (Shri ri). Aside from the extant *records of teachings received*, there are few narrative sources detailing the transmission history of this period, with occasional transmission lineages scattered across the colophons of individual texts.¹⁰³ The most influential figure during this time, aside from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, was his son rNam rgyal mgon po (c. 1399–1424), who died at a young age and, according to the *records of teachings received* available to us, through whom virtually the entire transmission was passed down. Many of the tradents from this time, comprising a circle of approximately 35 individuals in the *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku, are otherwise largely

*Idan bla ma rnam gnyis, 7. Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, 8. Kun dga' don grub, 9. Kun dga' lhun grub, 10. Shakya (=Shākya) bzang po, 11. Pan (=Pan) chen Padma dbang rgyal, 12. *cung* (=gcung) Legs *Idan *rje, 13. dBang po'i sde, 14. (*sras*) Ngag gi dbang po, 15. Chos dbang lhun grub, 16. Ngag dbang Shakya (=Shākya) rgyal mtshan, 17. Rig 'dzin 'Phrin las lhun grub, 18. (*sras*) gTer chen 'Gyur med rdo rje, 19. Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, 20. Ö rgyan bsTan 'dzin nor bu, 21. rJe *bKra bzang pa chen po, 22. (*bdag*). Cf. ChBThY, fols. 94b–95a. —Another transmission lineage (KDJSY, *da*, fols. 4b6–5a1) *lung*: 14. Ngag gi dbang po (*yan gong ltar*), (*de nas*) 15. Yol mo ba chen po, 16. Zur Chos dbyings rang grol, 17. Padma 'phrin las (*man gong ltar*).

¹⁰³ For the transmission lineage provided by Karma bdud 'joms for a single text, see, e.g. *Yang tig gces sgron gyi khrid* (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 11a3–6).

unknown, except for a few mentioned in biographical sources.¹⁰⁴ For this period, six fixed transmission lineages are listed in the *records of teachings received* of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms, with minor variations or side branches noted in some cases. These lineages document the reading transmission of the *byang gter* ritual cycles.

After the early 16th century, the Northern Treasures began to spread beyond the La stod region. A particularly influential figure in this expansion was the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku Shākya bzang po (died c. 1541), who served as a teacher and ritual specialist of the Northern Treasures not only in La stod byang but also in regions along the Tibetan–Nepalese border (Gung thang, Mang yul, Glo bo) and later in Helambu (Nepal). His two most important disciples, who later propagated this religious tradition in Central Tibet (*dbus*) and Southern Tibet, were the aforementioned brothers from mNga' ris, who studied with him for several years in sKyid rong (Gung thang), dKar ye (Mang yul), and Glo bo.¹⁰⁵ mNga' ris Paṇ chen later brought the teaching transmission to 'On (Central Tibet), while his younger brother Rig 'dzin bDud 'joms rdo rje introduced it to 'Bras mo gshongs (Southern Tibet).

The further transmission in Central Tibet continued through Chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603) and his son Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639), both of whom were recognized as reincarnations of the two mNga' ris brothers. With the founding of the monastery rDo rje brag by Ngag gi dbang po, this site emerged in the 17th century as the new center for the dissemination of the Northern Treasures. The associated religious traditions thus became institutionalized in Central Tibet. The 3rd Yol mo sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644), a member of this transmission lineage, continued the transmission to Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669), until it reached, through the 5th Dalai Bla ma Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), who is considered a rebirth of Ngag gi dbang po. From this branch of transmission, which was primarily centered at the rDo rje brag Monastery in the 17th and 18th centuries and later continued through representatives of the Khams lung family to Mang yul, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku received teachings of the *thugs sgrub rnam gsum* ritual cycles (Cycles V, VI, VII) and the Vajrakīla cycle (Cycle IV) in the years 1742

¹⁰⁴ The tradents of transmission lineage A, from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem to Sangs rgyal dpal bzang, are documented in the biographical collection NThOPh compiled by Sangs rgyas dpal bzang. See *supra*, note 43.

¹⁰⁵ For the transmission of the Northern Treasures from the 1st Yol mo sPrul sku Shākya bzang po to his two disciples from mNga' ris, see *supra*, note 65.

and 1747 from his teacher Khams lung Rig 'dzin Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin, presumably in dNgos grub phug (Mang yul).¹⁰⁶

The transmission of the Northern Treasures in this branch, which occurred via Central Tibet, is extensively documented in biographical sources.¹⁰⁷ The rDo rje brag Monastery emerged as the new center for the dissemination of the Northern Treasures. The *byang gter* text collections attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem were further expanded by the tradents of this branch, starting from the two brothers from mNga' ris up to rDo rje brag sPrul sku Padma 'phrin las, with a multitude of supplementary writings added over time.¹⁰⁸

Transmission Lineage C (App. 1, Table 3)

In this transmission via the rDo rje brag Monastery, Karma bdud 'joms had already received the empowerments for the cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* from his father Rig 'dzin Nyi ma seng ge (1687–1738) during childhood. His father, in turn, had received the transmission through his main teacher, the 4th Yol mo sPrul sku Zil gnon dbang rgyal rdo rje (1647–1716) and from the latter's father Rig 'dzin 'Chi med rgya mtsho.¹⁰⁹

Alongside this transmission—which extended from La stod byang to Central Tibet (dBus) in the early 16th century—the transmission of the teachings continued to exist in western Central Tibet. The *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku contain several teacher-disciple lineages that show the Northern Treasures were transmitted to *Mang yul*, either directly from *La stod byang* (Transmission Lineages D and E), or that the transmission had been continuously maintained

¹⁰⁶ The transmission of the text cycles *Thugs sgrub gu ru drag po rtsal* (Cycle VII) and *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (Cycle VI) within these branches of transmission is presented in the appendix, *infra*, Appendix 1 (Table 1, and Table 2).

¹⁰⁷ The sources documenting the transmission of the Northern Treasures within this branch include biographical and autobiographical accounts of the lives of mNga' ris Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542) and his brother Legs ldan rdo rje (born 1500/12?), as well as the biographies of the Yol mo sPrul skus—namely the 3rd Yol mo sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644), the 4th Yol mo sPrul sku Zil gnon dbang rgyal rdo rje (1647–1716), and the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789). Biographies are also available for Chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603) and two abbots of the rDo rje brag Monastery, Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639) and Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717), in addition to the accounts of Rig 'dzin Nyi ma seng ge (1687–1738) and Brag dkar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775–1837).

¹⁰⁸ The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku refers to these works in his *gsan yig*. See *supra*, note 94.

¹⁰⁹ See the lineage in KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 5a. See *supra*, note 98. The transmission of the text cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* (Cycle V) within this branch of lineage is presented in the appendix, *infra*, Appendix 1 (Table 3).

in La stod byang from its inception in the 14th century through to the 18th century (Transmission lineage F).

Transmission Lineage D (App. 1, Table 4)

The transmission of the *byang gter* text cycles also continued circulating within religious circles in La stod byang. A branch transmission of the *rdzogs chen* cycle *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* was preserved primarily through members of the Se ston family. Starting with Se ston Nyi ma bzang po, who as a direct disciple of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and authored the first and most influential hagiography of his teacher, the other tradents in this family remain largely unknown. However, according to the historical chronicle by Gu ru bKra shis, the Se family later came to occupy the bKra bzang monastery.¹¹⁰ From there, the transmission reached rGyal thang pa Zil gnon rdo rje, who resided in Ling ba (*var. lect.* Ling nga) Brag dmar rdzong (Mang yul), a former retreat site of the yogin Mi la ras pa located near the monastery Brag dkar rta so.¹¹¹ The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku received the *rdzogs chen* teachings in this transmission lineage from clerics of the rDo dmar family (his maternal relatives), who had settled in the Tibetan-Nepalese border region Glang 'phrang (Northern Nepal) in the early 18th century. These clerics were also active in Mang yul as teachers and ritual specialists. In 1751, rDo dmar 'Gyur med lhun grub transmitted the reading transmission of this *rdzogs chen* cycle to the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku in gNas chen Zla gam gnam sgo (Glang 'phrang).¹¹²

Transmission Lineage E (App. 1, Table 5)

Another transmission lineage for the *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* cycle is recorded. Originating with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and his son, the ritual cycle was passed down to tradents in the La stod byang

¹¹⁰ The historian Gu ru bKra shis reports that the Se family was split into the branches Se mKhar ba and Se bKra bzang pa. According to this source, the bKra bzang Monastery was founded by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem and later served as the residence of his son, rNam rgyal mgon po. It subsequently became the seat of the Se ston family branch, which included figures such as bKra bzang pa Se ston Padma dbang chen, Tshe dbang rig 'dzin, Nam mkha' rig 'dzin, Thugs mchog 'od 'bar, Se ston Kun bzang 'dzam gling rdo rje, and others; see GKChB, p. 664. Cf. Martin 1991: 334; Gung thang bsTan 'dzin nor bu 2018: 380–382.

¹¹¹ On rGyal thang pa Zil gnon rdo rje and his significance in the dissemination of the Northern Treasures, see Ehrhard 2008: 76, note 28; 103–104, note 4. Gur phu ba Nor bu bde chen also received the transmission of individual ritual cycles from this treasure tradition from Zil gnon rdo rje, see *ibid.*: 113, note 14.

¹¹² The transmission of the text cycle *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I) within this branch of the lineage is presented in the appendix, *infra*, Appendix 1 (Table 4).

region, most of whom are known only by name. The transmission of the Northern Treasures was continued through Nub dgon 'Jam dbyangs [=Byams pa] chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1511–1571) and Thugs sras Blo gros rgyal mtshan (16th century), who were based in the Nub dgon Monastery in La stod byang, north of Gung thang.¹¹³ From there, the transmission reached rGyal thang pa Zil gnon rdo rje, who resided further south in Ling ba Brag dmar rdzong (Mang yul). The 5th Yol mo sPrul sku received the reading transmission of this *rdzogs chen* cycle from his relatives of the rDo dmar family in Glang 'phrang.¹¹⁴

Transmission Lineage F (App. 1, Table 6)

The *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku also provide a transmission tradition that, according to this account, seems to have been continuously maintained in La stod byang from its inception, most likely centered in Ri bo bkra bzang, the origin of this treasure tradition. Initially, the transmission was passed from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem all the way to Sangs rgyas dpal bzang, and then continued through Thugs sras Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541). It was further transmitted by other lesser-known teachers from La stod byang, some of whom were members of the bKra bzang family. Within this transmission tradition, the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku received empowerments, reading transmissions, and direct instructions for a large part of the principal cycles of the Northern Treasures (Cycles I, II, VI, VII, VIII, IX), including the *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* cycle. He received these transmissions in 1760 and 1761, during his visit to *gNas chen Ri rgyal bkra bzang Monastery*, where he was initiated into the Northern Treasures ritual cycles from *bKra bzang pa Kun bzang ye shes*. This transmission upheld a long-standing tradition that had been preserved at the place of origin for nearly four centuries.¹¹⁵

A preliminary comparison of the transmission lineages preserved in the *records of teachings received* of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku with those available in the *gsan yig* literature from the mDo chen bKa' brgyud school and from the 5th Dalai Bla ma reveals a consistent pattern

¹¹³ For the location of Nub dgon Monastery, see Ehrhard 1997: 257, note 10; Ehrhard 2008: 26. A brief outline of the history of the Nub dgon Monastery is provided by Gung thang bsTan 'dzin nor bu 2018: 396–397. For Nub dgon Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan, see Ehrhard 1997: 69, note 19. Chos rgyal bKra shis thob rgyal also received the transmission of the Northern Treasures from Byams pa chos kyi rgyal mtshan in 1556 at Nub dgon. See *ibid.*: 69, note 19.

¹¹⁴ The transmission of the text cycle *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (Cycle I) within this branch of the lineage is presented in the appendix, *infra*, Appendix 1 (Table 5).

¹¹⁵ The transmission of the text cycle *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (Cycle II) within this branch of the lineage is presented in the appendix, *infra*, Appendix 1 (Table 6).

among the tradents of the Northern Treasures in La stod byang. A fixed group of individuals is regularly named across various records, with considerable overlap. Beyond the tradition's region of origin, the transmission of these individual ritual cycles continued through several locally adapted lineages, shaped by the specific area of dissemination and the particular school into which they were integrated.

Concluding remarks

Source texts of the doctrinal teachings and ritual cycles of the Northern Treasures have come down to us in considerable quantity—primarily as closed corpora of texts belonging to individual teaching cycles (*chos skor*) and preserved in manuscript form, but later also compiled into larger collections and published as block prints. An assessment of the transmission history of these source texts requires a thorough investigation of both the manuscript and print sources. The individual editions differ considerably in scope and content. Also included in the cycles were tables of contents (*them/thems byang*, *tho byang*), which document the scope of the text collections at an early stage. For research into the history of transmission of these text collections, a number of additional sources are available to us—including particularly biographical sources, epitomes (*spyi chings*), and *records of teachings received* (*gsan yig*). Given that the transmission of the Northern Treasures began in the 14th century, the *records of teachings received* preserved from the 17th and 18th centuries must be considered relatively late witnesses to the history of transmission. The *records of teachings received* authored by the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku, which has been examined here, is—among all known examples from the rNying ma school—the earliest extant source of its kind, and the most detailed account regarding the content and transmission history of the Northern Treasures of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. In the course of receiving the reading transmission for the individual ritual cycles, Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms carefully recorded the individual titles in his records of received teachings, thereby providing us with an accurate account of the scope and contents of these textual collections as they circulated in the 18th century in Mang yul (Western Tibet) and Glang 'phrang (Northern Nepal). 'Phrin las bdud 'joms received the doctrinal teachings and ritual cycles at various training sites in Mang yul, Glang 'phrang, and Helambu, and—following his journey to the place of origin of this treasure tradition—in bKra bzang (La stod byang), drawing on multiple lineages of transmission. The transmission lineages documented in his *records of teachings received* testify to a complex transmission history of the ritual cycles, which—beginning in

the 14th century in La stod byang—extended extended to Central Tibet (dBus) as well as to the Tibetan-Nepalese border regions of Mang yul, Gung thang, Glang 'phrang, and Helambu. A comparative evaluation of other *records of teachings received*, examined from the same perspective, may help to refine and expand the insights gained from this particular source. This remains a task for future research, and is particularly linked to the hope that some of the early specimens of *records of teachings received*—listed in the present article as “not preserved”—may eventually become accessible for investigation in the near future. Such materials could offer valuable insight into earlier stages of the transmission history, particularly from the late 15th or early 16th century, as they have already been brought to our knowledge fragmentarily through the *gsan yig* of the 5th Dalai Bla ma, especially in the course of his discussion of the contents of the *records of teachings received* relating to the Northern Treasures.

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Abbreviations (Databases of digital and microfilmed source texts)

BDRC Buddhist Digital Resource Center, <https://www.bdrclio>
 NGMPP Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project
<https://catalogue.ngmcp.uni-hamburg.de>

Tibetan sources

- BDThY sNgo ra dBang phyug rdo rje (c. 18th century). *Thob yig zin bris su bkod pa yid bzhin nor bu'i gter mdzod*. Delhi: Chopel Legdan, 1979. (BDRC, W21025).
- BTBGNTTh Bya btang Phyag rdor nor bu (c. 16th–17th century). *Byang gter bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar bsam 'phel ma ni ka'i 'phreng ba*. In BTChK, vol. 59, pp. 457–546.
- BTBGR sPrul sku Tshul khriims bzang po (19th–20th century). *Byang gter bla ma'i brgyud pa'i rim pa*. In *gSung 'bum*, vol. 8, fols. 52b–63b. (BDRC, W1PD26799).
- BTChK sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs. 63 vols. n.pl.: *Byang gter dpe sgrig tshogs chung*, 2015. (BDRC, W2PD17457).
- BTNTTh *Byang gter lugs kyi rnam thar dang ma 'ongs lung bstan (Collected Biographies and Prophecies of the Byang gter Tradition)*. Gangtok: Sherab Gyaltzen and Lama Dawa, 1983. (BDRC, W27866).

- BTRPh Se'i Grub chen Padma dbang chen (16th–17th century). *Byang gter chos skor rnam ki spyi chings rin chen 'phreng ba*. Ladakh, 1972. (BDRC, W23375).
- BTSNT mNga' ris Pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542). *Byang gter chos skor rnam ki spyi chings gsal byed nor bu'i gter*. In *gSung thor bu*, n.pl., n.d. (BDRC, W3CN18537).
- BTThG *Byañ gter thugs sgrub gyi skor: A collection of texts from the revelations of Rig-'dzin Rgod-kyi-ldem-'phru-can concerned with the gsar sgrub practice*. Darjeeling: Lama Dawa and Chopal Lama, 1984. (BDRC, W27870).
- ChBThY Brag dkar rta so Chos kyi dbang phyug (1775–1837). *Zab rgyas chos tshul rgya mtsho las / rang skal du ji ltar thob pa'i yi ge rnam grol bdud rtsi'i bum bzang*. In *Brag dkar chos kyi dbang phyug gi gsung 'bum*, vol. ga. (NGMPP, L377/3).
- ChGNTh sNgags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod nams (c. 15th–16th century). *Rig 'dzin chos rgyal bsod nams kyi rnam thar*. In BTNTh, pp. 235–250.
- DChThY *mDo chen bka' brgyud kyi thob yig skor*. Dalhousie: Dam-choe Sangpo, 1980. (BDRC, W23754).
- DJBGB Yon do mChog sprul Kun bzang 'gro 'dul rdo rje (c. 19th–20th century). *gSang chen snga 'gyur rnying ma pa'i gdan sa chen po dpal thub bstan rdo rje brag e wam lcog sgar chos 'khor rnam rgyal gling dgon gyi byung ba mdo tsam brjod pa ngo mtshar baidūrya'i phreng ba*. [Reprint edition, n.pl., 2004], (BDRC, W00KH03797).
- DLSY Dalai Bla ma 05 Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682). *Record of teachings received: The gSan-yig of the Fifth Dalai Lama Nag-dbañ-blo-bzañ-rgya-mtsho*. 4 vols. Delhi: Nechung & Lhakhar, 1970–71. (BDRC, W30183).
- GDNTh Se ston Nyi ma bzang po (c. 14th–15th century). *sPrul sku chen po'i rnam thar gsal byed nyi ma'i 'od zer*. In BTNTh, pp. 49–147.
- GKChB sTag sgang mKhas mchog Ngag dbang blo gros alias Gu ru bKra shis (b. 18th century). *bsTan pa'i snying po gsang chen snga 'gyur nges don zab mo'i chos kyi byung ba gsal bar byed pa'i legs bshad mkhas pa dga' byed ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mtsho* (Gu bkra'i chos 'byung). Pe cin: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1990. (BDRC, W20916).
- GSThY Gur phu ba rGyal sras seng ge (d. 1752). *bKa' drin mnyam med chos kyi rje / gter bdag gling pa'i rgyal ba'i sras / 'gyur med yid bzhiñ las (=legs) grub zhabs / zab mo'i chos kyi thob yig*. In DchThY, pp. 265–307. *bKa' drin mtshungs med bla ma rje / bstan pa'i nor bu'i zhabs drung du / gsang sngags bka' gter dbyer med kyis / rgyal sras seng ge'i thob yig*. *Ibid.*, pp. 333–356. *rDor*

- brag rigs (=rig) 'dzin chen po'i thugs sras / nub dgon pa sngags 'chang rigs (=rig) 'dzin padma dbang gi rgyal po nas / bdag rgyal sras seng ges dbang lung thob pa'i yig chung zur bkod. Ibid., pp. 357–377.*
- KDBNTh *rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717). bKa' ma mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar. Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1972. (BDRC, W21523).*
- KDJNTh *Yol mo sPrul sku 05 Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789) and Tshe dbang 'chi med mgon po (1755–1807). Rig 'dzin chen po karma bdud 'joms zhabs kyi rnam pa thar pa gsal bar byed pa'i nyin byed ngo mtshar snang ba'i gter mdzod. Delhi: Dawa Lama, 1982. (BDRC, W22982).*
- KDJSY *Yol mo sPrul sku 05 Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789). Rig 'dzin bla ma karma bdud 'joms zhabs kyi gsan yig gi rim pa rnams phyogs gcig tu sgrigs pa zab rgyas chos kyi gan mdzod. (NGMPP, L382/2).*
- KZNTTh *Yol mo sPrul sku 05 Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789). Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub 'od gsal bstan pa'i nyi ma'i rnam thar gsol 'debs. (NGMPP, L382/21).*
- LDNTh *mNga' ris Rig 'dzin Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (b. 1500/12?). Rig 'dzin mnga' ris pa chen po legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje'i rnam thar chen mo. In BTChK, vol. 59, pp. 217–304.*
- NDThY *Gur phu ba Nor bu bde chen (b. 1617). rGyal dbang padma k̄āra yi / rnam 'phrul mchog gi sprul pa'i sku / bstan 'dzin nor bu'i zhabs drung du / bka' gter zab chos thob yig. In DchThY, pp. 75–95. No title. Ibid., pp. 97–190. Byin rlabs thugs rje'i sprin spung can / ngag dbang zil gnon rdo rje las / zab rgyas smin grol dam chos kyi / thob yig utpala 'phreng tshogs. Ibid., pp. 461–487.*
- NKhNTh *Nam mkha' bsod nams dpal (15th–16th century). Thugs sras nam mkha' rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar. In BTNTh, pp. 207–234.*
- NThOPh *Sangs rgyas dpal bzang (c. 15th century). Bla ma rnams kyi rnam thar 'od kyi 'phreng ba. In BTNTh, pp. 173–206.*
- NyBGP *Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408/09). sNying byang rgyas pa gnad gyi thim bu. In BTNTh, pp. 299–319.*
- PBGNTTh *mNga' ris Pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542). Yongs rdzogs bstan pa'i mnga' bdag nges pa don gyi pañ chen mnga' ris pa padma dbang rgyal rdo rje grags pa rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rtogs pa brjod pa rin chen phreng ba. In gSung thor bu, n.pl., n.d. (BDRC, W3CN18537).*
- PGThY *Gur phu ba Padma rgya mtsho (c. 18th century). Rig 'dzin chen po padma dbang rgyal gyi zhabs drung du byang gter sgrub*

- bskor* (=skor) *rnams* (=rnam) *gsum gyi thob yig*. In DchThY, pp. 419–448 (incomplete).
- PKNL Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408/09). *sPrul sku rig 'dzin chen po'i mnal lam le'u brgyad pa*. In BTNTh, pp. 159–172.
- RDzGTh Rig 'dzin rGod kyi ldem 'phru can (1337–1408/09). *Rig 'dzin rtsa ba'i sgrub thabs*. In *Rig 'dzin gduñ sgrub kyi chos skor*. Gangtok: Bari Longsal Lama, 1981, pp. 111–128. (BDRC, W23449).
- SSNTh Yol mo sPrul sku 05 Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789). *Gu ru sūrya seng ge'i rnam thar mdor bsdus nges shes 'dren pa'i shing rta*. (NGMPP, E2691/6).
- TGSY gTer bdag gling pa 'Gyur med rdo rje (1646–1714). *gTer bdag gling pa'i gsan yig*. In *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar*. vol. 1, pp. 189–193. (BDRC, W1KG11884).
- TLThY sTag lung rTse sprul Rin po che [Tshe bshad sgrub nyin byed phrin las bzang po] (born c. 1926). *Byang gter chos skor khag gi thob yig*. In BTChK, vol. 63, pp. 137–217.
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**Appendix 1: The transmission of the Northern Treasures
according to the records of teachings received
of Karma ’phrin las bdud ’joms**

Transmission lineage A
Thugs sgrub gu ru drag po rtsal (Cycle VII)

La stod byang

1. gTer ston Rig ’dzin rGod ldem (1337–1408/09)
2. Sras mchog rNam rgyal mgon po (c. 1399–1424)
3. [Drin mchog] rDo rje dpal ba
4. [sNgags ’chang] rDo rje mgon po
5. [mTshan ldan] Byams pa bshes gnyen
6. [mTshan ldan] Ngag dbang grags pa
7. [Drin can] Sangs rgyas dpal bzang
8. Thugs sras Nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan (1454–1541)

Gung thang, Mang yul, Glo bo

9. [1st Yol mo sPrul sku] sNgags ’chang Shākya bzang po (died c. 1541)

IHo kha (Central Tibet), ’Bras mo gshongs (Southern Tibet)

10. Rig ’dzin [Legs ldan] bdud ’joms rdo rje (b. 1500/12?)
11. Chos rgyal [bKra shis stobs rgyal] dBang po’i sde (1550?–1603)
12. (*sku’i sras*) [1st rDo rje brag] Rig ’dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639)
13. Rig ’dzin [3rd] Yol mo ba sTobs ldan dpa’ bo (1598–1644)
14. (*gnyis kas*) Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669)
15. [5th Dalai Bla ma] Rig ’dzin Gang shar rang grol (1617–1682)
16. (*gnyis kas*) [2nd rDo rje brag] Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las (1641–1717)

Mang yul

17. [Khams lung] Rig ’dzin Padma dbang rgyal (1657–1731)

18. (*gnyis kas*) [Khams lung] gNyags ston Rig 'dzin Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin
19. (*bdag*) [5th Yol mo ba] Rig 'dzin 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)

Table 1: The reading transmission of the ritual cycle *Thugs grubs drag po rtsal* (VII) was received by Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms in 1742 in Mang yul (? dNgos grub phug) from his teacher Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin from the Khams lung family (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 9a–b; KDJNTh, fol. 17a–b). This transmission closely corresponds to the one through which the Vajrakīla cycle was conferred in the same year via the same Khams lung teacher. In that case, the transmission passed directly from (2) rNam rgyal mgon po to (3) rDo rje mgon po and from him to (4) Ngag dbang grags pa (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 13a–b; KDJNTh, fol. 17a–b).

Transmission lineage B
Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub (Cycle VI)

La stod byang

1. gTer ston Rig 'dzin dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337–1408/09)
2. Sras mchog rNam rgyal mgon po (c. 1399–1424)
3. [Grub chen] dPal ldan rgyal mtshan
4. Grub chen rGyal mtshan 'bum
5. Bya btang bSam 'grub rgyal mtshan
6. Chos rje dPal ldan seng ge
7. Grub chen dKon mchog skyabs

lHo kha (Central Tibet), 'Bras mo gshongs (Southern Tibet)

8. [mNga' ris] Paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542)
9. Rig 'dzin Legs ldan [bdud 'joms] rdo rje (b. 1500/12?)
10. Chos rgyal [bKra shis stobs rgyal] dBang po'i sde (1550?–1603)
11. [1st rDo rje brag] Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639)
12. [3rd] Yol mo sPrul sku [bsTan 'dzin nor bu] (1598–1644)
13. Zur Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1669)
14. [2nd rDo rje brag] Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las (1641–1717)

Mang yul

15. [Khams lung] Padma dbang rgyal (1657–1731)
16. [Khams lung] rDo rje bla ma Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin
17. (*bdag*) [5th Yol mo sPrul sku] 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)

Table 2: Empowerments, reading transmission and extensive instructions for the cycle *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (VI) were conferred upon 'Phrin las bdud 'joms in 1747 in Mang yul (? dNgos grub phug), by his teacher Khams lung Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 6a; KDJNTh, fol. 23a–b).

Transmission lineage C
Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol (Cycle V)

La stod byang

1. gTer bston (=ston) Rig 'dzin chen po dNgos grub rgyal mtshan (1337–1408/09)
2. Sras mchog rNam rgyal mgon po (c. 1399–1424)
3. Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas bstan pa
4. [Rig 'dzin] Sangs rgyas byams bzang
5. [Dzin can] Sangs rgyas dpal bzang
6. [sNgags 'chang] Chos rgyal bsod nams (1442–1509)

Gung thang, Mang yul, Glo bo

7. [1st Yol mo sPrul sku] Shākya bzang po (died c. 1541)

lHo kha (Central Tibet), 'Bras mo gshongs (Southern Tibet)

8. [mNga' ris] Paṇ chen Padma dbang [rgyal] (1487–1542)
9. Rig 'dzin Legs ldan [bdud 'joms] rdo rje (b. 1500/12?)
10. Chos rgyal [bKra shis stobs rgyal] dBang po'i sde (1550?–1603)
11. [1st rDo rje brag] Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1639)
12. [3rd Yol mo] sPrul sku bsTan 'dzin nor bu (1598–1644)

Mang yul, Helambu

13. Rig 'dzin [Yol mo sTobs ldan dbang po] 'Chi med rgya mtsho
14. [4th Yol mo sPrul sku] Zil gnon dbang rgyal rdo rje (1647–1716)
15. (*pha jo*) rDo rje Rig 'dzin Surya (=Sūrya) singha (1687–1738)
16. (*bdag rigs kyi bu*) [5th Yol mo sPrul sku] 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)

Table 3: The transmission of the ritual cycle *Thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol* (V) was received by the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku in early childhood from his father Rig 'dzin Nyi ma seng ge (KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 5a).

Transmission lineage D
Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal (Cycle I)

La stod byang

1. gTer ston Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–1408/09)
2. Sras mchog rNam rgyal mgon po (c. 1399–1424)
3. Se ston Nyi [ma] bzang [po] (*yab sras*)
4. Se ston mGon po bzang po
5. Se ston Rin chen rgyal mtshan
6. Se ston Kun dga' bzang po
7. Se ston Byang chub rdo rje
8. Se ston Ngag dbang rdo rje
9. Chos rje dPal ldan bkra shis

Mang yul, Glang 'phrang

10. rGyal thang pa Zil gnon rdo rje
11. Grub mchog Padma ngag dbang
12. [rDo dmar] Rig 'dzin Mi 'gyur rdo rje (b. 1675)
13. [rDo dmar] Padma rdo rje (d. 1738)
14. [rDo dmar] Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub (d. 1767)
15. (*bdag*) [5th Yol mo ba] sNgags ban 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)

Table 4: The reading transmission of the *rdzogs chen* cycle *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (I) was conferred upon Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms in 1751 at gNas chen Zla gam gnam sgo (Glang 'phrang). Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub from the rDo dmar family served as teacher (KDJSY, *nga*, fol. 4b).

Transmission lineage E
Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal (Cycle I)

La stod byang

1. gTer ston [Rig 'dzin rGod ldem] (1337–1408/09)
2. [Sras mchog] Nam rgyal mgon po (c. 1399–1424)
3. rDo rje 'chang bSod nams bzang po
4. mKhas grub Chos kyi rgyal mtshan
5. mKhas btsun Chos kyi rin chen
6. rJe btsun Kun dga' rgyal mtshan
7. Bya btang Shākya dpal bzang
8. [Nub dgon] 'Jam dbyangs [=Byams pa] chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1511–1571)
9. Thugs sras Blo gros rgyal mtshan
10. [Ngam ring] mKhas grub Byams pa bzang po

11. [Nub dgon] sPrul sku Shākya rgyal mtshan

Mang yul, Glang 'phrang

12. rGyal thang pa Zil gnong rdo rje
13. Grub mchog Padma ngag dbang
14. rDo dmar Rig 'dzin Mi 'gyur rdo rje (b. 1675)
15. (*de sras*) [rDo dmar] Rig 'dzin Padma rdo rje (d. 1738)
16. (*cung*) (=gcung) [rDo dmar] Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub (d. 1767)
17. (*bdag*) [5th Yol mo sPrul sku] 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1726–1789)

Table 5: The reading transmission of the cycle *Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal* (I) was received by Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms in 1751 at gNas chen Zla gam gnam sgo (Glang 'phrang) from his uncle Kun bzang 'gyur med lhun grub (KDJSY, *nga*, fol. 4a–b).

Transmission lineage F
Ka dag rang byung rang shar (Cycle II)

La stod byang

1. gTer ston [Rig 'dzin rGod ldem] (1337–1408/09)
2. Sras mchog rNam rgyal mgon po (c. 1399–1424)
3. [sNgags 'chang] rDo rje mgon po
4. [mTshan ldan] Ngag dbang grags pa
5. [Dzin can] Sangs rgyas dpal bzang
6. [Thugs sras] Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan (1454–1541)
7. [gNubs chen] Ngag dbang rgya mtsho
8. [sKyi ston sNgags 'chang] Tshe ring dbang po
9. [Rang grol] Klu sgrub dbang po
10. [Rig 'dzin] Rol pa'i rdo rje
11. [bKra bzang pa] Thugs mchog 'od 'bar
12. [Rig 'dzin] Kun 'dus tshe dbang
13. rJe [bKra bzang pa] Kun bzang ye shes
14. (*bdag*) [5th Yol mo ba Rig 'dzin 'Phrin las bdud 'joms] (1726–1789)

Table 6: The transmission of the *rdzogs chen* cycle *Ka dag rang byung rang shar* (II) was received by the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku in 1760/61 at gNas chen Ri rgyal bkra bzang (La stod byang) from bkra bzang pa Rig 'dzin Kun bzang ye shes (KDJSY, *da*, fol. 2b).

**Appendix 2: The records of teachings received
of the 5th Yol mo sPrul sku Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms
(Rig 'dzin bla ma karma bdud 'joms zhabs kyi gsan yig)**



Figure 1

Text page from the *records of teachings received (gsan yig)* of Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms, concerning his studies with Rig 'dzin Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin. The miniatures depict gTer ston Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (left) and Padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin (right). KDJSY, *ca*, fol. 1a. Private library of Slob dpon 'Gyur med, Samagaun, Gorkha, Nepal. NGMPP, L382/2. Manuscript, c. 18th/19th century. Captions beneath the images, left: *rig 'dzin chen po dngos grub rgyal mtshan la na mo /*, right: *sprul pa'i sku padma gsang sngags bstan 'dzin la na mo /*.

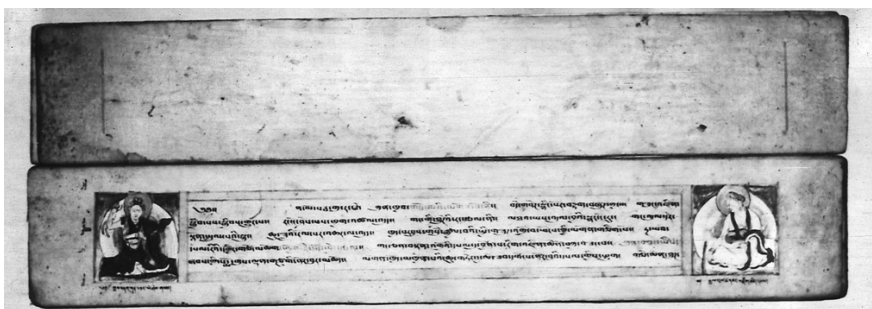


Figure 2

Text page from the *records of teachings received* of Karma 'phrin las bdud 'joms, concerning his studies with bKra bzang pa Rig 'dzin Kun bzang ye shes and his sons, Padma dga' ba and Tshe dbang 'jigs med dpal bzang po. The miniatures depict Rig 'dzin Kun bzang ye shes (left) and Tshe dbang 'jigs med dpal (right). KDJSY, *da*, fol. 1a. NGMPP, L382/2. Captions beneath the images, left: *khyab bdag kun bzang ye shes zhabs /*, right: *(two illegible syllables) tshe dbang 'jigs med dpal /*

Twice-Buried Treasures: Translation Project of Mongolian Treasure Literature by Prince Yunli (1697–1738)¹

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Abstract

n the early eighteenth century, Manchu Prince Yunli (1697–1738) commissioned the translation of over 600 rNying ma treasure texts (Tib. *gter ma*) into Mongolian—yet this massive corpus never circulated among its intended Mongol audience. This devout Buddhist prince oversaw systematic translations predominantly from the Northern Treasure (Tib. *byang gter*) tradition, including works attributed to Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337–1401) and commentaries by the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682).

Philological analysis of colophons, seals, and onomastic evidence reveals Prince Yunli's profound personal commitment to the Fifth Dalai Lama's Northern Treasure lineage. Political and institutional factors, however—including Qing court anxieties regarding rNying ma expansion and restrictions stemming from the Fifth Dalai Lama's era—blocked dissemination among Mongol communities. The translations, now preserved in institutions such as Inner Mongolia Normal University, remained treasure texts in a literal sense: buried treasures textually preserved but never ritually transmitted. This case illuminates the fraught relationship between textual production and religious transmission in Tibetan Buddhism's expansion beyond the Plateau, offering new perspectives on the understudied history of the rNying ma tradition in Mongolia.

¹ I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues, Erdenebaatar Erdene-Ochir, Naljor Tsering, and Yuewei Wang, for their invaluable assistance during the preparation of this article. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the editors and peer reviewers of this issue for their dedicated work and professional insights. All remaining errors and omissions in this article are solely the responsibility of the author.

Introduction

The rNying ma School, the oldest lineage within Tibetan Buddhism, derives its name (Tib. *rnying ma*) from the Tibetan word meaning “ancient” or “old,” signifying its preservation of teachings transmitted during the “Early Dissemination” (Tib. *snga dar*) 4th–10th century of Tibetan Buddhism. The rNying ma tradition encompasses diverse transmission lineages, among which the treasure tradition constitutes a vital component, alongside the distant canonical transmission (Tib. *ring brgyud bka’ ma*) and the profound pure vision transmission (Tib. *dag snang*). Together, these form the three major transmission systems of the rNying ma School. Due to its unique revelation, discovery, and transcription processes, the authenticity of treasure literature has often been challenged by the New (Tib. *gsar ma*) traditions. Critics argue that the process for revealing the treasure lacks sufficient standardization, casting doubt on its legitimacy. Skepticism particularly surrounds the cryptic symbols (Tib. *brda yig*), the encoded scripts, and the qualifications of treasure-revealers. As the representative of the old tradition, the rNying ma School preserves esoteric practices—such as union (Tib. *sbyor*), subjugation (Tib. *sgrol*, “liberation”), medicinal alchemy (Tib. *smān sgrub*), and corpse rituals (Tib. *ro sgrub*)—transmitted from the Early Dissemination period. These practices, which diverge significantly from those of other schools’ doctrinal and ritual systems, have been a focal point of controversy. By the late 16th century, during the Second Dissemination Period (1578–present) of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia, the rNying ma tradition had spread there, along with other schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

1. The rNying ma School and Its Historical Links with Mongolia

The rNying ma School’s association with Mongolia dates back to the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). Historical records indicate that prominent rNying ma masters such as Shākya ’od (fl. 13th century), G.yung ston Rdo rje dpal (1282–1365, during the reign of Güyük Khan), and Zur bZang po dpal (14th century, during the reign of Buyantu Khan) engaged with the Yuan imperial court through diplomatic channels.² Additionally, during the Mongol aristocracy’s military engagements in Tibet, contact were established with rNying ma masters, most notably Gu ru chos dbang (1212–1270)³ and Sog zlog pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624).⁴ These multifaceted interactions, spanning political and

² Tsering (1978).

³ Guangdian (2019).

⁴ Haschuluu (2015).

religious spheres, crucially facilitated the initial dissemination of rNying ma teachings in Mongolia.

Following the collapse of the Yuan dynasty, Buddhism in Mongolia entered a period of decline (1368–1578). However, the late 16th century marked a revival, particularly after 1578, when Tibetan Buddhism regained prominence under Mongol patronage. Between 1602 and 1607, a systematic effort to translate Tibetan Buddhist scriptures into Mongolian emerged, incorporating key rNying ma treasure texts such as *The Compiled Ma ṇi Scripture* (Tib. *Ma ṇi bka' 'bum chen mo*), *The Biography of Padmasambhava* (Tib. *Padma bka' thang yig*), and *Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State* (Tib. *Bar do thos grol chen mo*).⁵ Although these works had been well-established in Tibet, their Mongolian translations were printed later in Beijing under imperial supervision. Notably, *The Biography of Padmasambhava* underwent editorial revisions by the Third lCang skya Khutukhtu, Rol pa'i rdo rje (1716–1786), reflecting the Qing court's involvement in rNying ma Treasure texts.⁶

In this context, the Mongolian Treasure translation project initiated by Prince Yunli (1697–1738) represents a significant yet understudied chapter in this history. As a devout Buddhist, Prince Yunli organized the translation of numerous rNying ma treasure scriptures, creating a corpus that remains vital for understanding cross-cultural religious exchanges during the Qing period. This effort occurred against Gelug school's dominance, as the “Yellow school” (Mon. *šir-a-yin šašin*) consolidated its institutional power through alliances with the Qing court. In contrast, the rNying ma School—often pejoratively labeled the “Red School” (Mon. *ulayan-u šašin*) in Mongolian sources—faced marginalization, resulting in scant historical documentation of its activities.

Fortunately, recent scholarship has made significant strides in addressing this historiographical gap, particularly following the facsimile publication of the Treasure collection preserved at the Inner Mongolia Normal University Library.⁷ This collection, published in 2015, comprises 511 Treasure texts and 126 commentaries, ranking among the most extensive Mongolian Buddhist scripture translation projects outside the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur*. In addition to these published facsimiles, the St. Petersburg State University Library holds notable collections. Vladimir Uspensky conducted an exceptionally meticulous study, as does the University of Marburg in Germany.⁸ Cambridge

⁵ Gügch (2022).

⁶ Kapstein (2005).

⁷ Inner Mongolian People Publishing House (2019).

⁸ For an introduction to the treasure texts held at Saint Petersburg University (Russia) and at the University of Marburg (Germany), see Uspensky (1997: 32).

University Library's Mongolian collections⁹ and the Scheut Mission Archives in Belgium¹⁰ also contain relevant materials, further exploration is required.



Fig. 1: Facsimile publication of the Treasure collection preserved at the Inner Mongolia Normal University Library

Preliminary analysis of these materials allows for their classification into three principal genres: ritual texts, commentaries, and biographies.

- The ritual texts constitute the largest category, predominantly featuring *sādhana*s.
- There are 123 treasure commentaries, including many on the Northern Treasure tradition composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama.
- Interestingly, in Yunli's collection, we also found the secret biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama, *Sealed Illusions Clarified: Liberation upon Seeing* (Mon. *Tamayatu-yin Vivangirid-i todadyaysan üjged tusatu orušiba*)¹¹ as well as biographies of two of his disciples: the biography of gTer bdag gling pa (1646–1714), the founder of sMin grol gling Monastery called *The Chariot of Faith: A story of the Dharma king of Treasures* (Mon. *Yeke sang-tu nom-un qayan-u tuyuji süsiüg-iin tergen kemekü orušiba*)¹² and the autobiography of Padma 'phrin las', the fourth incarnation of Rig 'dzin rgod ldem and abbot of rDo rje brag Monastery,

⁹ Bawden (1957). This catalogue includes several Mongolian-language Treasure texts from Prince Yunli's collection.

¹⁰ Heissig (1957: 167). The catalogue includes a Mongolian translation from Prince Prince Yunli's collection entitled *Prayer to the Second Buddha Uṛchen Padmasambhava and His Retinue* (*Qoyaduyar burqan určan Padmasambhava šabinar-luya seltes-iin jalbaril*), which was composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama.

¹¹ Husel (2005). The Tibetan Title of the Fifth Dalai Lama's Secret Biography is *rGya can gyi 'khrul sang rnams gsal bar bkod pa mthong ba don ldan*. See Karmay (2000).

¹² Editorial Committee of *Union Catalogue of Ancient Mongolian Books in China*, (1999: 893), Text No. 04787.

called *The Crystal Mirror: Monk Padma 'phrin las's Autobiography* (Mon. *dGe slong padma 'prin las öber-iin domuγ-yin ögü-legsen čayan bolur toli orušiba*).¹³

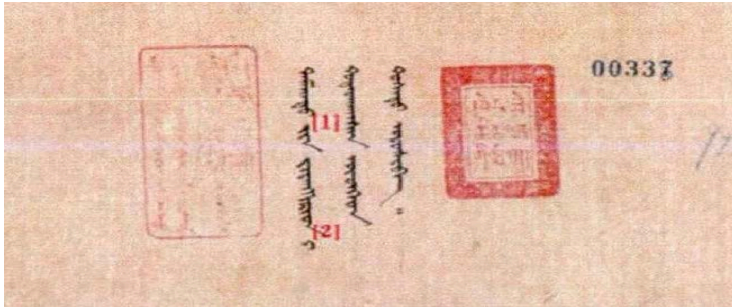


Fig.2 – Mongolian translation of the secret biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama

2. Translators and Collectors of Mongolian Treasure Literature

2.1 The Collector: Prince Yunli (1697–1738)

The Mongolian Treasure texts bear several seals identifying them as part of Prince Yunli's collection, including the "Seal of the Seventeenth Son of the Great Emperor Mañjuśrī, Prince Kengse" (Tib. *'Jam dbyang brtsa chen rgyal po'i sras bcu bdun keng se wang gi tham ka*), "The Seal of First Rank Prince Guo" (Tib. *Kheng se chin wang gi tham ka*), and that of the "Power of the Buddha Padmasambhava" (Tib. *Buddha guru rtsal*), etc. Some texts carry two or three seals, confirming their provenance from Prince Yunli's library.



Fig.3 Prince Yunli's seals on Mongolian treasure texts

Prince Yunli, the seventeenth son of Emperor Kangxi, held the title *Prince Guo* (Ch. 果 *guo* means "resolute and decisive") in Chinese sources, also rendered as "Prince Kengse" in Manchu and Mongolian.

¹³ Uspensky (1999: 274).

His Lay Buddhist name in Chinese was Zide Jushi (自得居士, “Layman of Self-Attainment”). In contrast, his secret initiation name was “Power of the Buddha Padmasambhava” (Tib. *Buddha Gu ru rtsal*, Mon. *Buddha Güriü rtsal*). Prince Yunli was a prominent statesman during the Yongzheng reign—aptly described by Vladimir Uspensky as a “Manchu statesman and Tibetan Buddhist,” balancing political duties with deep religious engagement.¹⁴ In 1723, at 26, he was promoted to “Second Rank Prince Guo” (多罗果郡王), and by 1729 ascended to the level of “First Rank Prince Guo” (和硕果亲王). As a Prince, he received an elite education, mastering Manchu, Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongolian. Scholars remain divided over Yunli’s stance toward the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Some researchers, citing his patronage of rNying ma treasure text translations, argue that he exclusively favored the rNying ma while marginalizing other schools. However, a wider range of Buddhist texts associated with Yunli demonstrates that his patronage in fact extended to the dGe lugs, Sa skya, and other traditions, reflecting a cross-school inclusiveness.¹⁵

As a Manchu prince, Yunli devoted significant efforts to collecting, publishing, and translating Mongolian Buddhist texts. His collection included over a thousand works, ranging from Yuan-era classics like *The Twelve Deeds of the Buddha* (Mon. *Burqan-u arban qoyar joki-yangyui*) to *Explanation of the Knowable* (Mon. *Medegdekiin-i belgetey-e geyigüliigči šastir*, Tib. *Shes bya rab gsal*). He also funded Mongolian translations of Buddhist scriptures such as *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (*Qutuytu kkir ügei aldaršiysan-i uqayulqui neretü yeke kölgen sudur oruşıba*) and *An Eulogy to Mañjuśrī* (*Mañjuśrī-yin Maytayal*) for publication. The rNying ma treasure collection thus represented only one facet of his broader Buddhist scripture collections.¹⁶

Vladimir Uspensky suggested that Yunli might have prepared to translate the Mongolian *Tengyur*. Unfortunately, he died before the project began. His efforts, however, might have laid the groundwork for later Mongolian *Tengyur* translation projects. Shortly after his death in 1738, the Qing court initiated the Mongolian translation project of the *Tengyur* (1742–1749), which was completed within eight years.

¹⁴ Uspensky (1999: 274)

¹⁵ Regarding Prince Yunli’s (1697–1738) life and deeds, multiple scholars have addressed this subject, including: Uspensky (1997); Sečenbilig (2019: 371–380); Narenchaogetu (2002); and Faxiang (2009).

¹⁶ Regarding Prince Yunli’s Mongolian Buddhist scripture career, See Giigch (2022).

2.2 Anonymous Translators

Despite 18th-century Mongolian literature's convention of documenting authorship, the treasure translations conspicuously omit the translators' names. Colophons typically state only: "Translated by order of Second Rank Prince Guo, the Seventeenth Son of the Mañjuśrī Emperor, power of Buddha Padmasambhava," which stands in sharp contrast to the Mongolian *Kangyur* (1717–1720) and *Tengyur* (1742–1749), which meticulously list all translators.

So why were the translators anonymized? This phenomenon may be related to the historical circumstances faced by the rNying ma school during that period. In the early Qing Dynasty, whether in Tibet or Beijing, the development of the rNying ma school encountered significant challenges. Primarily in Tibet, local authorities imposed restrictions on the dissemination of rNying ma teachings.¹⁷ The Fifth Dalai Lama, a significant leader of Tibetan Buddhism in the 17th century, also believed that the teachings of the rNying ma school should not be spread outside of Ü-Tsang and southern Khams. For instance, he mentioned several times in his biography, "The rNying ma teachings should not be propagated in regions such as Amdo in the north, Han China, and the Hor regions, but only in Ü-Tsang and southern Khams."¹⁸ In addition, Qing archival records note that in 1674, the Dalai Lama petitioned Emperor Kangxi to ban the teachings of Padmasambhava among Chinese monastics.¹⁹ Moreover, the rNying ma school suffered further blows in 1718 when the Dzungar Mongols destroyed its two main monasteries—rDo rje brag and sMin grol gling—and executed several masters.

Against this backdrop, Prince Yunli's sponsorship of Treasure translations constituted a quiet revival. The more than 600 texts represent only a part of the project; others remain scattered in many institutions. Intriguingly, Prince Yunli himself participated in translations, as evidenced by texts like *Offering Ritual to the Black Dharma Coal-Faced Dākinī* (Mon. *Qara nom-yin negüresün ökin tngri-diir baling ergükiü orošiba*)²⁰ and *The Lamp Accumulating Auspiciousness* (Mon. *Irügel öljei qutuy-un ĵula orošiba*).²¹

So who were the unnamed translators? It is possible that the contemporary translation group of dGe lugs pa monks translated the Mongolian *Kangyur* (1717–1720) and *Tengyur* (1742–1749) under impe-

¹⁷ Petech(1972: 106).

¹⁸ Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Paljor (2013: 573).

¹⁹ Zhonghua Publishing House (2012: 10).

²⁰ Uspensky (1999: 363).

²¹ Inner Mongolian People Publishing House (2019: 91-93).

rial patronage. Whether Prince Yunli's Treasure project enjoyed similar official support remains unclear—a historical enigma awaiting further research.

3. Mongolian Translations of Northern Treasure Literature

The Northern Treasure tradition represents a significant branch within the rNying ma School's treasure-revelation lineage, named for its association with the northern gTsang region. The great treasure revealer Rig 'dzin rgod ldem is identified in Tibetan sources as the systematizer of the Northern Treasure tradition.

During Prince Yunli's era, Northern Treasure texts were systematically translated into Mongolian alongside other rNying ma scriptures. Of the 636 identified Treasure texts currently available, only 179 contain colophons that document their revealers, providing valuable evidence for tracing their Tibetan origins. Notably, most of these attributed works derive from the Northern Treasure lineage holders like Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, the tradition's founder, who is credited with 99 texts. His name appears in various hybrid Sanskrit-Tibetan-Mongolian forms such as "Üqayan-i bariyči tas-un örbelgetü," "Tjajur bariyči rgod kyi ldem pu can" and "Arvis bariyči tas örbelgetü." All these variants reflect his Tibetan name "Rig 'dzin rgod ldem dNgos grub rgyal mtshan" (Knowledge Holder with Vulture Feathers, Victory Banner of Siddhis/Accomplishments).

The colophons of the 126 commentaries on Treasure texts indicate that the vast majority were composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama and his disciples Padma 'phrin las and gTer bdag gling pa. Among these, twenty three were authored by the Fifth Dalai Lama, such as *The Jewel Garland: The Intermediate Ritual for Realizing Northern Treasure's Heart Sadhana* (Mon. Umar-a sang-un sedkil-iin bötiigel-iin dumdadu jang üile erdeni-yin erike), *The Source of Benefit and Bliss, The Great Compassionate Activity of Universal Liberation from the Northern Treasure* (Mon. Umar-ayin sang yeke nigülesügči qamuy amitan-i getülgegči-yin üiles temdeg tusa amuyulang yarqu-yin orun), *The White Light Dispelling Darkness: A Peaceful Fire Offering Unifying Three Phurba Traditions* (Mon. Umar-a sang-un yadasun yurban yosun-u alin-dur-ču nayirayulun bolqu amurlingyui yal mandal qarangyui-i arilyayči čayan gerel orušiba).²² Interestingly, among these Treasure commentaries, we have found four commentaries translated or composed by Prince Yunli, such as *The Yoga of the Vajra Guru: A Condensed Text on Recollection and Prayer, Composed by the Fifth*

²² The Tibetan titles of these three Treasure texts are *Byang gter thugs sgrub 'bring po'i 'phrin las rin chen 'phreng ba*, *Byang gter thugs rje chen po 'gro ba kun grol gyi las byang phan bde'i 'byung gnas*, and *Byang gter phur pa lugs gsum gang la'ang sbyar chog pa'i zhi ba'i sbyin sreg mun sel 'od dkar*.

Dalai Lama (Mon. *Včir doγšin küčüiti-yin lama yoga kiged duradyal jalbiral quriyangyui egün-i tabuduyar ilayuyusan jokiyaysan*). In its colophon, it is mentioned that Prince Yunli referenced the works of the Fifth Dalai Lama when composing this text:²³

The Vajra Guru Yoga, recitations, and prayers, among others, are extracted from various works by the Fifth Dalai Lama, authored by the “Power of the Buddha and Guru” (Mon. *Buddha giirü rtsal*).

Although Prince Yunli and the Fifth Dalai Lama had no direct interaction, a close examination of these Northern Treasure texts reveals Prince Yunli’s deep reverence for the Fifth Dalai Lama. No evidence has confirmed that Prince Yunli had any direct relation with Northern Treasure masters other than the Fifth Dalai-Lama. It is, in fact, likely that he received these transmissions from a lineage coming down from the Dalai Lama, but nothing more is known about this topic at this stage.

Furthermore, Prince Yunli’s secret initiation names reflect a possible connection to the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Northern Treasure tradition. The name “Power of the Buddha and Guru” (Mon. *Buddha giirü rtsal*) and “Power of the Wisdom and Vajra” (*Ye shes rdo rje rtsal*)—recorded in the colophons of the Mongolian translation of Treasure texts—were likely bestowed upon him by rNying ma masters associated with the Fifth Dalai Lama. Many Northern Treasure lineage holders, including the Fifth Dalai Lama, incorporated the syllable “*rtsal*” (power) in their secret names. For example, in the colophons of Mongolian Treasure translations, the Fifth Dalai Lama’s secret names appear in various forms, such as “Power of Vajra, the Unattached Mantrin of Zahor” (Mon. *Za hor-un tarniči toyin dörbel ügei küčüiti včir*, Tib. *Za hor gyi sngags ’chang thog med rdo rje rtsal*), “Power of the Laughing Mad Yogin of Zahor Who Subdues with Majesty” (Mon. *Za hor-yin γaljayu tarniči süir-iyer daruyči iniyegeči idetü*, Tib. *Za hor gyi sngags smyon zil gnon bzhad pa rtsal*). These parallels suggest a shared naming convention, reinforcing Prince Yunli’s indirect ties to the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Northern Treasure tradition.

Conclusion

The translation of rNying ma Treasure literature under Prince Yunli’s patronage represents a remarkable yet paradoxical chapter in the history of Tibetan Buddhism’s transmission to Mongolia. This ambitious

²³ Inner Mongolia People Publishing House (2019: 27-30).

18th century project produced an extensive corpus of Mongolian Buddhist texts, meticulously preserving essential Northern Treasure teachings and commentaries. However, as this study has demonstrated, textual translation alone proved insufficient for establishing a living tradition.

Three key factors contributed to this interrupted transmission: First, the absence of sustained lineage transmission and qualified masters to expound these teachings in Mongolia created a fundamental disconnection between text and practice. Second, the Qing court's institutional preference for Gelug School created an unfavorable environment for rNying ma's institutional development. Third, the inherently esoteric nature of Treasure literature—particularly its wrathful practices—required oral explanations and initiations that may never have materialized in the Mongolian context.

Future research may explore comparative cases of interrupted Treasure transmissions or investigate whether any elements of these translated treasure texts have indirectly influenced Mongolian Buddhist practice. The discovery of additional manuscripts in Russian and European collections could also shed new light on this little-known translation endeavor.

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A Sketch of the Life of the Bāḥ gnas sPrul sku Thub bstan mdo sngags bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan (1888–1964)*

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Introduction

he Bāḥ gnas monastery was founded in Khams in 1728 by Bāḥ gnas Rig 'dzin rgya mtsho, the first Bāḥ gnas hierarch, and *Bya bral* Padma rgyal mtshan. The monastery is a stronghold of the Byang gter lineage in Eastern Tibet, with close links to 'Khor gdong monastery. The present article will present a sketch of the life of an important throne-holder of modern times, the sixth Bāḥ gnas incarnation, Thub bstan mdo sngags bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan (1888–1964).

The article is divided into six parts, which deal, respectively, with our protagonist's incarnational background, his studies, spiritual practice, teaching career and religious activities, students, and death. The material presented here is mainly drawn from the biography compiled in Chos dbyings' *Byang gter thub bstan rdo rje brag gi chos 'byung rig 'dzin brgyud pa'i rtogs brjod ngo mtshar gtam gyi phreng ba*,¹ given that one of the principal tasks of the FCHNT project is to assess and translate the biographies of the lineage masters found in this work.

1. Incarnational Background

The name of Tshul khriims bzang po (aka sPrul sku Tshul lo, 1884–ca. 1957) is well known to all those engaged in the study of the Northern

* I am grateful to Tenpa Tsering Batsang for his help in clarifying a passage in the biography studied in this article, and to the other members of the FCHNT project, particularly Stéphane Arguillère, Jean-Luc Achard, Cécile Ducher, and Jay Valentine, for inviting me to the Paris conference where this paper was first presented. Both Stéphane Arguillère and Martin Boord offered helpful comments regarding specific ritual details alluded to in the biography.

¹ Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 825–832. Reference has also been made to the next biography in the volume (*Ibid.*, pp. 833–840), devoted to Ye shes bdud 'dul, bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's successor.

Treasures tradition.² He was a disciple of *gTer ston* bSod rgyal las rab gling pa (1856–1926), wrote his biography,³ and was the root teacher of 'Chi med rig 'dzin Rinpoche (aka C.R. Lama, 1922–2002), who can be considered the 'godfather' of Byang gter studies in the West.⁴ One of Tshul khriims bzang po's main disciples was the sixth Bāḥ gnas⁵ Rig 'dzin, Thub bstan mdo sngags bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan, the subject of this article. If we turn backwards to the previous Bāḥ gnas hierarchs, the founder of Bāḥ gnas monastery was the first Bāḥ gnas Guru Rig 'dzin (rgya mtsho), who was the teacher of Khams sprul Shes rab me 'bar (1752–1815), the uncle of Nus ldan rdo rje.⁶ Rig 'dzin rgya mtsho had been renowned as an incarnation of Hūṃkara, one of the eight awareness-holders of India,⁷ of gNyags Jñānakumāra,⁸ of Ra Lotsāwa (1016–ca. 1128),⁹ and of Vairocana,¹⁰ among others. It is said that he established Bāḥ gnas monastery, the full name of which is Bāḥ gnas bsam gtan o rgyan chos gling, in a solitary place where a *bāḥ* syllable had dissolved—hence the name Bāḥ gnas ('the abode of *bāḥ*'). He himself is held to have displayed numerous indications of accomplishment, such as leaving footprints in solid rock, and so forth.

The second incarnation was sKal bzang padma 'od 'bar; the third was O rgyan bstan 'dzin; the fourth was Rig 'dzin chos dbyings rdo rje; and the fifth was Chos grags 'jigs bral rgya mtsho, a monk

² Among Tshul khriims bzang po's important works, we are fortunate that Stéphane Arguillère has published a full French translation of his *Manual of the Transparent Intent of Samantabhadra*: Tülku Tsullo 2016. An English translation is under preparation (Arguillère forthcoming 2026). For the historical context of such practice manuals in the Northern Treasures tradition, see Arguillère 2022.

³ Matteo Pistono's popular account of *gTer ston* bSod rgyal's life (Pistono 2014) is mainly based on *sPrul sku* Tshul lo's biography.

⁴ On whom, see Das 2021, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Chime-Rigdzin/TBRC_P1KG9680 (accessed 22 February 2025).

⁵ In Chos dbyings' account, the word is spelt 'Bāḥ gnas' (rather than Baḥ gnas) throughout.

⁶ Arguillère 2021, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/khamtrul-sherab-mebar/13688> (accessed 22 February 2025).

⁷ Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 1, pp. 475–477.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 601–605. On gNyags Jñānakumāra's role in the process of codifying the rDzogs chen approach, see Esler 2023, pp. 24f; on his function as an early transmitter of tantric instructions, including those related to Vajrakīlaya, see Cantwell 2022, p. 144.

⁹ Gardner 2009, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ra-Lotsawa/TBRC_P3143 (accessed 22 February 2025).

¹⁰ On the great translator Vairocana, see Dudjom Rinpoche 1991, vol. 1, pp. 538–540. The *'Dra 'bag chen mo*, Vairocana's extensive biography, is ascribed to his direct disciple, g.Yu sgra snying po (for an English translation, see Jinba Palmo 2004), but historically speaking can be dated no earlier than the 12th century, possibly even to the 14th century and to figures from the Zur lineage. See Kapstein 2008, p. 280, 283.

upholding the Vinaya. The sixth incarnation, Thub bstan mdo sngags bshad sgrub rgyal mtshan (aka *sPrul sku* rGyal lo), was born in rTa'u county in 1888 as the son of one Grags pa tshe ring of the sTo clan and his wife Cog 'e mgon po mtsho; it is held that the child's mother had the marks of a sky-farer (Skt. *ḍākinī*) and that her son was born amidst numerous wondrous signs. Basing himself on various prophecies, *gSang 'dzin* mGon po dbang rgyal (1845–1915),¹¹ the nephew and successor of 'Khor gdong *gTer chen* Nus ldan rdo rje (1802–1864),¹² identified him as the incarnation of the previous throne-holder of Bāḥ gnas. When he was three years old¹³ in 1891, the year of the female iron hare, he was enthroned in Bāḥ gnas monastery.

2. Studies

The following year marked the beginning of his formal studies. He is said to have learnt to read and write with great ease. mGon po dbang rgyal bestowed on him empowerments (*dbang*) and directives (*khrid*), and the accomplished master (*grub brnyes*) of Bāḥ gnas, Ye shes bstan 'dzin, gave him the doctrinal injunctions related to the Northern Treasures tradition. Tshul khriṃs bzang po supervised his full education in the sūtras, tantras, and traditional sciences, with a particular emphasis on the Northern Treasures tradition, and declared that their master-disciple relationship went back many lifetimes. He was ordained as a monk by the third rDo grub chen Rinpoche, 'Jigs med bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865–1926),¹⁴ who also gave him appropriate teachings.

The ninth rDo rje brag *Rig 'dzin*, Thub bstan chos dbang mnyam nyid rdo rje (1886–1933), was invited to Bāḥ gnas monastery (probably in 1921),¹⁵ and bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan received from him teachings related to the treasures of lHa brag.¹⁶ From *Rig 'dzin* gar gyi dbang

¹¹ Arguillère 2023, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Gonpo-Wanggyel/13817> (accessed 22 February 2025).

¹² Arguillère 2018, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Khordong-Terchen-Nuden-Dorje/TBRC_P1KG9679 (accessed 22 February 2025).

¹³ Four years old by Tibetan reckoning. Throughout this article I use the common European system, even though Chos dbyings' account uses the Tibetan system instead.

¹⁴ Nyoshul Khenpo 2005, pp. 323–326.

¹⁵ Chhosphel 2013, https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Ninth-Rigdzin-Chenpo-Nyamnyi-Dorje/TBRC_P728 (accessed 22 February 2025).

¹⁶ According to Khenpo Ju Tenkyong's keynote lecture, "The bKa' brgyad in the Byang gter Tradition," delivered at the First International Conference on the Northern Treasures (Paris, 18 October 2024), the term *lHa brag* is used when referring specifically to the Five Treasures (*mdzod lnga*) of *Rig 'dzin* rgod ldem's core revelations, designating as it does the place of their revelation, Zang zang lha

phyug (1858–1930) he received the complete two volumes of the *sNying thig*¹⁷ and other associated teachings. When in dKar mdzes monastery the venerable Tshe mchog gling pa (?),¹⁸ the head dGe lugs master, bestowed upon numerous masters and incarnations of the gSar ma monasteries the empowerments relating to the Guhyasamāja, Cakrasamvara, and Vajrabhairava tantras, he received them at the same time. Interestingly, when bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan bestowed the empowerments and scriptural authorizations (*lung*) of the *sNying thig ya bzhi*, the dGe lugs master received these transmissions from him, so that each of them was in turn master and disciple of the other. Given the highly esoteric nature of this particular cycle of rDzogs chen teachings,¹⁹ this episode shows a remarkable degree of religious exchange between masters belonging to different schools, which incidentally may have been more frequent than we think in the eastern regions of Tibet in the 19th and 20th centuries.²⁰

3. Spiritual Practice and Signs of Accomplishment

bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan was not only assiduous in his studies but also in his spiritual practice, and the signs of accomplishment²¹ were quick to manifest. For instance, while he was in a retreat focused on the Byang gter Vajrakīlaya,²² the sound of the *kīlaya* mantra resounded day and night inside the maṇḍala for the duration of the retreat. Similarly, when he was in retreat performing the propitiation (*bsnyen*

brag. On the five treasures discovered by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, see Boord 1993, pp. 25f. For more on this topic, see Achard 2024, <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/2433> (accessed 21 February 2025).

¹⁷ There are many rNying ma lineages bearing this name, but it is likely that this refers more specifically to the *Klong chen snying thig*. In most editions, however, the collection is comprised of three volumes. Cf. van Schaik 2004, p. 379.

¹⁸ This probably refers to dPal ldan bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (b. 19th century), the fifth incarnation of Tshe mchog gling yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713–1793), the tutor to the eighth Dalai Lama, 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho (1758–1804).

¹⁹ On this collection and its overarching structure, see Germano 1992, pp. 26–37.

²⁰ See in particular three chapters in Mathes and Coura's 2021 *Nonsectarianism (ris med) in 19th- and 20th-Century Eastern Tibet*: Duckworth 2021, pp. 66–80; Pearcey 2021, pp. 81–92; and Pang 2021, pp. 93–116.

²¹ For a systematic study of such signs of accomplishment and their significance, based on some of the early sources of the rNying ma tradition, see Esler forthcoming.

²² Although it has been suggested that Vajrakīlaya is an incorrect spelling of the dative (Vajrakīlāya) form of Vajrakīla (Boord 1993, p. 5), it cannot be excluded that the traditional form Vajrakīlaya (*not* Vajrakīlāya) is in fact correct and represents the second person singular of the active causative imperative of the verb *√kil* ('to stake' or 'to bind', thus meaning 'bind!'). See Mayer 1997, p. 620, n. 5. It should be mentioned that Boord recognizes the legitimacy of the *verbal* form *kīlaya*, which as he notes occurs widely in Sanskrit texts and mantras.

pa; Skt. *sevā*) for the Byang gter Thugs sgrub (that is, the secret Guruyoga practice according to the Northern Treasures system, which is focused on the wrathful form of Padmasambhava),²³ he beheld the face of Padmasambhava himself. While he was engaged in the meditations related to the *Transparent Intent of Samantabhadra* (*Kun bzang dGongs pa zang thal*),²⁴ sPrul sku Tshul lo praised him and declared that the Bāḥ gnas incarnation had reached the criterion of realization that consists in remaining undistractedly at all times in the state of the view without grasping, thus confirming bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's experiential mastery of the highest teachings of rDzogs chen.

On another occasion, when he was on his way to 'Ba' grub pa monastery (aka O rgyan theg mchog gling) to bestow the empowerments and scriptural authorizations of the Northern Treasures tradition, his mule fainted and fell over, yet the master remained sitting in the sky unsupported. Since he was the head master of the local ruler of Hor brag, he would regularly perform religious rituals on his behalf. Once, while he was presiding over a Vajrakīlaya ceremony to suppress negative forces for this ruler, at the very point in the ritual when the signs of success were supposed to manifest, those present saw the footprint of an ogress (Skt. *rākṣasī*), which was an indication that the devils summoned had indeed appeared in the ritual enclosure²⁵ and were waiting to be liberated.

On yet another occasion, again while travelling to 'Ba' grub pa monastery, he told his party that they should stop for the night, although they had not yet reached the resting station. His servants asked whether they might not go on a little further, as there was a valley with abundant grass and a stream, which would provide a more congenial resting spot. bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan would not listen, however, and was adamant that they should not go on. As it turned out, it became apparent the next day that a group of brigands had been lying in ambush in the valley that night. If bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan and his party had continued on their route, they would most certainly have been assaulted. Later, when the whole story was related to his hosts in 'Ba' grub pa monastery, sGa rje sPrul sku declared that the Bāḥ gnas sPrul sku's perceptivity of all that is invisible to ordinary mortals

²³ Extensive translations of these and other Byang gter ritual texts have been provided by C.R. Lama in the *Byang-gter Teaching and Practice According to the Tradition of Khordong Monastery*, a series in twenty volumes translated with James Low and others between 1975 and 1985.

²⁴ On this collection, see Turpeinen 2015 and 2018.

²⁵ The text (Chos dbyings 2015, p. 828) reads *sri khang* ('house for the devils'), referring to a ritual structure used to capture the negative forces that are to be tamed and suppressed in the course of the ritual. This is usually a skull which is buried in the ground once the devils have been trapped inside it.

was truly unhindered.

Some of his closest disciples saw him as Padmasambhava in person. For example, one morning, as his faithful attendant dGe rtse a yang opened the door to his bedroom, instead of seeing his master asleep in his bed, he beheld a swirling lake with a blossoming lotus stem at its centre and Padmasambhava seated upon it.²⁶ He immediately closed his eyes and prayed with one-pointed devotion, and when he reopened them, he saw that his master had resumed his ordinary form.

4. Religious Activities and Teaching Career

One of bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's important activities was to reintroduce the 'correct' ritual procedures of rDo rje brag monastery in Central Tibet to his seat of Bāḥ gnas monastery. This is itself an interesting phenomenon, for it shows that even at times when the Northern Treasures tradition was successfully flourishing in Eastern Tibet, where, after all, it had inspired the rise of the fully fledged lineage of the New Treasures of 'Khor gdong (*'Khor gdong gter gsar*), this cycle of treasures having been revealed in close dependence on, and as a continuation of, the original Northern Treasures,²⁷ the masters of the tradition in Eastern Tibet continued to look upon the mother monastery of rDo rje brag as the original and authoritative source of their ritual and spiritual knowledge, which it behoved them to regularly reconnect to. Thus, when bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan was in rDo rje brag in Central Tibet, he spent a lot of time observing and studying the ritual procedures of the monastery, which he subsequently introduced to Bāḥ gnas monastery. In particular, he took pains to establish in Bāḥ gnas the tradition of the oblation of the twenty-ninth day of the twelfth month (*dgu gtor*), a ritual where the negativities of the previous year are repelled, alternating every year between the eight injunctions (*bka' brgyad*) and Yamāntaka.²⁸ It is

²⁶ Traditionally, viewing the master as identical to Padmasambhava, the fountainhead of the rNying ma tradition, is a sign of having perfected the qualities associated with pure vision and devotion, which are considered crucial to realizing the state of the Great Completeness. See Patrul Rinpoche 2011, p. 310; Dilgo Khyentse 1988, p. 83; and (with direct reference to the Northern Treasures tradition) Tülku Tsullo 2016, p. 171. For some psychologically astute observations on this topic, see Low 2013, p. 109.

²⁷ On the ways in which more recent treasure revelations serve to refresh the blessings of the lineage, representing and 'repackaging' older treasure models in a manner that fits new circumstances, see Cantwell 2020, pp. 12f.

²⁸ On the need to consider the Yamāntaka cycle, at least in its earlier instantiations, separately from the framework of the eight injunctions under which it is often subsumed, see Arguillère 2024, pp. 305–307. The tradition of alternating yearly the oblation of the twenty-ninth day (*dgu gtor*) between the eight injunctions and

important to mention that these are very extensive rituals, which necessitate the presence of scores of well-trained monks and ritual specialists, let alone considerable resources for their performance.²⁹ bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan also erected supports of the buddhas' body, speech, and mind and established a new seminary (*bshad grwa*) at Bāḥ gnas.

In terms of his teaching activity at the seminary, he would regularly provide explanations on the *Guhyaagarbha-tantra*,³⁰ 'Jigs med gling pa's (1729–1798) *Treasury of Qualities* (*Yon tan mdzod*),³¹ the *Thirty-Seven Procedures of the Heirs of the Victorious Ones* (*rGyal sras lag len*) by Thogs med bzang po (1295–1369), the *Five Nails of the Northern Treasures* preliminary practices, the *Three Sets of Vows*,³² and the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva (8th century).³³

He also spread the empowerments and scriptural authorizations of the Northern Treasures in 'Ba' grub pa monastery, as well as at the monastery of Dar rtse mdo (a town in East Tibet, aka Kangding). His fame as a Byang gter master was such that several prominent masters and incarnations from Central Tibet, including the rDo rje brag rGyal sras sPrul sku, the Chu bzang sPrul sku, and sKal ldan niam dag rdo rje, came to him in order to receive his teachings and instructions, and he took them on as disciples. Even the tenth rDo rje brag Rig 'dzin, Thub bstan 'jigs med niam grol rgya mtsho (1936–2024), repeatedly requested that he come to Central Tibet so that he could receive his teachings, but this had to be put off due to the political upheavals that occurred in Tibet at the time.

5. Principal Students

bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's principal disciple was the Bāḥ gnas sPrul sku Ye shes bdud 'dul (1935–2017). It will be recalled that one of bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's teachers was the accomplished master of Bāḥ gnas, Ye shes bstan 'dzin, and it was bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan himself

Yamāntaka is also observed at the Dorje Drak monastery in Shimla (Stéphane Arguillère: personal communication).

²⁹ On the annual cycle of rituals as performed in 'Khor gdong monastery, see Low 2013, pp. 151–166.

³⁰ See Dorje 1987.

³¹ On which, see van Schaik 2004, p. 25.

³² This refers to *Ascertaining the Three Sets of Vows* by mNga' ris Paṇchen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542), a foundational text on the three sets of vows. For an English translation that also contains a commentary by the late Dudjom Rinpoche (1904–1987), see Dudjom Rinpoche 1996.

³³ Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, translated by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Śāntideva 1998). For background to this text's popularity in the 19th century Tibetan context, see Viehbeck 2016.

who recognized Ye shes bdud 'dul as Ye shes bstan 'dzin's incarnation, performing the hair-cutting ceremony and giving him his religious name. bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan carefully supervised Ye shes bdud 'dul's education and declared that Ye shes bdud 'dul would be the holder of his lineage.³⁴ Later, after bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's death, Ye shes bdud 'dul would go on to study with *mKhan po* 'Jigs med phun tshogs (1933–2004),³⁵ and when he orchestrated the reconstruction of Bāḥ gnas monastery in the wake of the destruction wreaked by the Cultural Revolution, *mKhan po* 'Jigs med phun tshogs was invited as guest of honour for the consecration (*rab gnas*) of the new temple and the simultaneous enthronement of bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's own incarnation, an event which was held in 1991.³⁶

Apart from Ye shes bdud 'dul, bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan's biographer Chos dbyings lists the following figures as his important disciples:³⁷ *mChog sprul* Chos kyi nyi ma,³⁸ the *rDo rje brag rGyal sras sPrul sku*, the *Chu bzang sPrul sku*, *sKal ldan rnam dag rdo rje*, *rGya nag mChog sprul* of 'Ba' grub pa monastery, *A myes sngags tsha Rinpoche*, *rGya gar sPrul sku* of 'Ba' grub pa monastery, *gZhi chen dBon sprul*, *mGo tsha mChog sprul*, *Rag khros ma 'das sPrul sku*, *sTag rtse kun bzang nyi ma*, *mKhan po Ku bod*, *La thang mChog sprul dGra can*, the *Shungs 'byung Yang sprul*, the 'Khor gdong *sPrul sku* Vajra,³⁹ *rGyal sras sPrul sku*, *Rag shul sPrul sku rTogs ldan*, *lCags mdud sPrul sku* A snyan, *Gong thal sPrul sku* Byang chub rdo rje, and *Lama sKal bzang sbyin pa* of the Upper Six *Ḍākinī* (*ḍāki drug stod*) monastery.

6. Death

In 1964 at the age of seventy-six, the Bāḥ gnas *sPrul sku* bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan passed away amidst wondrous signs that included earthquakes and rainbow-hued clouds billowing in the sky; it is said that he went straight to the palace of Lotus Light on the Copper-Coloured Mountain, the pure field of Padmasambhava. *sPrul sku* Chos kyi nyi ma performed the clarifying instructions (*gsal 'debs*) for the heart pledge (*thugs dam*). The latter refers to the profound meditative state attained by advanced practitioners at the moment of death, which

³⁴ Chos dbyings 2015, pp. 833f.

³⁵ On this famous master and his activity, see Germano 1998, pp. 53–94.

³⁶ Chos dbyings 2015, p. 838.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 831.

³⁸ Along with *sPrul sku* Lung rtogs, one of the two main reincarnations of *sPrul sku* Tshul lo.

³⁹ This could be a reference to *sKal ldan gling pa* (aka *bDe chen rol ba'i rdo rje* and *Padma dbang gi rgyal po rdo rje* rgyal mtshan, ca. 1886–ca. 1922), the third incarnation of *Nus ldan rdo rje*.

manifests outwardly as a forestalling of the usual signs of physical decay, with the body retaining a life-like appearance for several days or weeks after ‘clinical death’.⁴⁰ In this context, the clarifying instructions are intended to refresh the memory of the practitioner by pointing out the nature of mind on the verge of the moment of death.

bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan’s incarnation was given the name O rgyan chos grags; he studied both with Ye shes bdud ’dul, bShad sgrub rgyal mtshan’s main disciple and successor, and with *mKhan po* ’Jigs med phun tshogs, and has been pursuing their activities and carrying forth their legacy.

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⁴⁰ Cornu 2024, p. 25; Langouët 2024, p. 180.

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The present and future of 'Khor gdong Monastery in Brag 'go (Khams, Eastern Tibet) and Siliguri (West Bengal, India)

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Khor gdong is one of the 284 Byang gter monasteries in Tibet, India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Generally speaking, the very origin of 'Khor gdong monastery is not known,¹ but it is understood that its founder was gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (circa 832–942), a practitioner of Yamāntaka. He is said to have built a huge Yamāntaka mantra's prayer wheel on the monastery grounds from which the place took its name, 'Khor lo dong.² Since then, many sages lived in this place, including the tantric sage Rig sngags 'chang ba A mgon³ who settled there in the 12th century. Others who lived there over the centuries are the female practitioner *sras mo* Rin chen tshul rdor;⁴ *rJe dbon* Rin chen phun tshogs;⁵ *Yang dbon* lHa dbang mtshan 'chang;⁶ *dBon* Sangs rgyas bstan 'dzin;⁷ *dBon* bkra lha dbang;⁸ *dPa' bo* bSod nams shes rab;⁹ Khams *sprul* Shes rab me 'bar (1752–1815), who built a small temple and placed in it a thangka with the eight bKa' brgyad deities;^{10,11} Nus ldan rdo rje 'gro phan gling pa (1802–1864);¹² *gSang 'dzin* mGon po dbang rgyal (1845–1915);¹³ *sPrul sku* Tshul lo

¹ https://khordong-byangter.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_29.html.

² The full name of the monastery is Thub bstan E vam gsang sngag chos 'khor nram rgyal gling.

³ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 274.

⁴ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 276.

⁵ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 278.

⁶ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 280.

⁷ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 282.

⁸ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 284.

⁹ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 286.

¹⁰ Low 2013:139-140.

¹¹ Arguillère 2021.

¹² Arguillère 2018.

¹³ Arguillère 2023.

(1884–c.1957) and his brother *mChog sprul* 'Gyur med rdo rje (1887–1967);¹⁴ *gTer sprul* 'Chi med rig 'dzin (1922–2002),¹⁵ and many others.¹⁶

Brag 'go Town

'Khor gdong is situated in Tre hor, in the sNyi Yul district of Khams, nearby bDe ba village, in eastern Tibet. The nearest town is Brag 'go (Ch. Luhuo), a place of heightened tension between the Tibetan population and Chinese authorities. As per 2025, foreign visitors are tolerated in the town, unlike other places where foreigners are barred from accessing altogether, for example, Bla rung sgar in gSer thang county; Ya chen sgar south of dKar mdzes; Lung sngon monastery of the late *Rig 'dzin* Hum dkar rDo rje (1969–2025), as well as all the monasteries located in the mGo log counties of dGa' bde, Dar lag, and Padma; unopened areas in Chinese Qinghai (Huangyuan county in Xining; Huzhu county in Haidong; Guinan county in Hainan; Qilian county, Haiyan county, Menyuan county, Xihai county in Haibei; Delingha city, Huaya Dachaidan, Tianjun county, Mangnai city in Haixi),¹⁷ together with the vast majority of monasteries in central Tibet,¹⁸ as well as random crackdowns that restrict access to monasteries altogether.

The urbanisation in Brag 'go town is ongoing and rapidly accelerated with the original Tibetan character of the town largely lost and replaced by a typical Chinese cityscape (fig.1-6 Visual Appendix)¹⁹ with tall buildings, retail shops, restaurants, vendor stalls, and police stations and cubicles mushrooming at every corner. After the Covid crisis, tall buildings were erected in the centre of the town where there

¹⁴ Arguillère 2024.

¹⁵ Das 2021.

¹⁶ <https://khordong-byangter.blogspot.com/2016/07/a-brief-history-of-khordong-1.html>, <https://khordong-byangter.blogspot.com/2016/08/a-brief-history-of-khordong-2.html>

¹⁷ According to a document issued by the Immigration Bureau in Xining titled, "List of open and closed areas in Qinghai Province."

¹⁸ Although there has never been any official statement anywhere available (online or onsite) to reference, according to travel agents and eyewitnesses (including the author of this article who was refused entrance at the police check post in gSer thang twice in 2019 together with other travellers from Hong Kong), foreigners, as of 2025, are still barred from entering bLa rung sgar, and similarly entrance to Ya chen sgar is forbidden—brief pirate visits may be possible but staying is not. See for example <https://www.thelandofsnows.com/sertar/>. About the rest of the restricted areas in Khams and A mdo, see the website [The Land of Snow](https://www.thelandofsnows.com/), which keeps an updated list of restricted locations. For these restricted areas there is supposedly an official permit but this document is difficult to obtain.

¹⁹ The article comes with a Visual Appendix (VA) at <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/3718>. Unless otherwise stated, all photos are by Varvara Chatzisavva (2019–2025).

is now a big Chinese supermarket, a shopping mall (erected by *mKhan po bSod dar rgyas* of *Bla rung sgar*), more neon lights, and so on. The prayer wheels that used to be at the foot of the hill leading to Brag 'go dGa' ldan rab brtan rnam rgyal gling have been demolished and replaced with a tall wall behind which lies a new police station and government buildings blocking the view and sunshine from the Tibetan houses right behind them (fig.7-12 VA).

'Khor gdong Monastery

Considering the heightened surveillance and tight control everywhere in the region, it is never sure whether it is possible to visit 'Khor gdong monastery at the planned day of visit, since several factors including the police, the Tibetan drivers, extreme weather phenomena, landslides and so forth, may prevent the trip. The three new surveillance cameras (installed in 2024) on the single stretch of road in the monastery (from the police station all the way to the entrance gate of the temple) also ensure that police staff may call anytime to enquire about the presence of any foreigner in the monastery if spotted on camera.

According to the description in the Chinese poster displayed on a glass board at the entrance of 'Khor gdong, the monastery is 700 years old and is situated at an altitude of 4.150m. It counts 33 permanent residents (115 in total) and 24 permanent monks (200 in total).²⁰ The members of the temple administration include a township Party Committee Secretary, a Deputy Secretary of the township Party and United Front worker, a Party Committee director, two full-time cadres, a financial manager, and four accountants and treasurers—the staff is both Tibetan and Chinese. The head of the monastery and the most senior *sprul sku* are members of the People's Assembly and the Civil Affairs Congress. The temple counts six main halls, 123 monk rooms, but no large statues.

Religious Activities in 'Khor gdong

According to the Chinese notice board, the monastery hosts five Buddhist activities annually. Since these are not named, I provide the details:

1. The *bKa' brgyad dgu gtor* (from 22nd to 29th of the 12th Tibetan month), the traditional *dgu gtor* pūjā performed in many Tibetan

²⁰ These figures do not reflect clearly the exact number of Tibetan monastic and lay residents and Chinese monastics and employees stationed in the monastery.

Buddhist monasteries before the new year, here involving recitations related to the *bKa' brgyad* deities and a nine-stage ritual dance.

2. *O rgyen rin po che'i dus dran tshe bcu* (from 4th to 7th of the 4th Tibetan month). *Gu ru rin po che Tse bcu* with '*cham* dances based on *Gu ru Chos dbang's* (1212–1270) *gter ma Bla ma gsang ba 'dus pa*. On that occasion, the big *thangka* of *Padmasambhava* is unfurled on public display.
3. *Ge sar dus mchod* (from 1st to 10th of the 5th Tibetan month)—an opera performance narrating the life and deeds of King *Ge sar*.
4. *bSam lhun chos tshogs* (from 1st to 15th of the 1st Tibetan month), this is the *bSam pa lhun 'grub ma*, *The Prayer to Guru Rinpoche that Spontaneously Fulfills All Wishes*.
5. *Sa snying dung sgrub* (10–11th days of the 4th Tibetan month). This is community accumulation of 100 million mantras of *Sa yi snying po*.²¹

In fact, there are more observances not stated in this notice board, for example, the '*das mchod* of *mkhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs* (11th Tibetan month). According to the life-story of *sprul sku 'Chi med rgyal mtshan*,²² each year, to help restore the decline of the Dharma and beings, he gives the empowerment for the *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* and the *Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub* (both treasures of *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*) as well as *rGya zhang khrom's gter ma 'Jam dpal tshe bdag*. Moreover, the summer retreat (*dbyar gnas*, which starts on the 15th of the 6th Tibetan month for one and a half months) is done according to the practice of the three bases of the Vinaya. The consecration ritual of *mChog sprul Tshul khrim bzang po* is based on the practice of *Rig 'dzin rgo ldem's* treasure *Thugs sgrub drag mthing* and the consecration ritual text *rGyud don rgya mtsho*. Furthermore, *sprul sku 'Chi med rgyal mtshan* offers the *Thugs chen 'gro ba kun grol sgrub mchod*; the *Byang gter* liturgy *lHa bsang rgyags brngan*; the *bKa' brgyad sman sgrub chen mo* according to the practice of *gSang 'dzin mGon po dbang rgyal*²³; the *Phur pa sgrub chen*; the *Gro lod sgrub chen* from the *gTer gsar*; and the *Zhi khro* liturgy *lTa ba klong yangs*. He also established the *bDe chen zhing sgrub*. He has maintained existing traditions such as the opera play called *Sras dpa' bo* (an opera play on the life of *mkhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs*) and created new ones like

²¹ This is *bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha*, usually depicted as a Buddhist monk, primarily revered in East Asian Buddhism (China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam) which rely on the Chinese Buddhist canon.

²² '*Chi med nor bu* 2023: 477–481.

²³ Another name of *mGon po dbang rgyal*.

the opera on the life of King Ge sar and the opera called *'Dan sras zlos*. Regarding Northern Treasures rDzogs chen empowerments and transmissions like the *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal* and the *'Khor gdong rdzog chen khrid mKha' 'gro gsang mdzod* from *gter chen* Nus ldan rdo rje's *gter chos*, it is unknown when these take place, if at all, and whether there are hurdles presented by officialdom since these teachings take months to complete and large public gatherings that spread over larger periods in monasteries are restricted by the authorities all over Greater Tibet. But there was indeed a teaching on *'Jigs med gling pa's Ye shes bla ma* in 2023 to a visiting group of Han people by one of the *bla ma* of the monastery.

The annual liturgical calendar of the monastery with the rituals of worship and meditation performed annually at *'Khor gdong* from the time of Shes rab me 'bar until *gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin* was twenty years old,²⁴ was revised after *'Chi med rig 'dzin* left *'Khor gdong* in 1939. The current calendar is not anywhere readily available online to help keep track with the monastery's teachings, as is the case with the vast majority of Tibetan monasteries in China, but it is said to be more aligned now with the calendar of *gSer thang Bla rung sgar* while it used to follow the system of *rDo rje brag*.

*Rules in the Monastery
and sPrul sku Recognition*

In 2024, two new Chinese boards were placed in the courtyard of the main temple together with two Chinese marble lion statues. One board is headlined "Keluodong Temple Publicity Board in Luhuo county" (written in Chinese) or "Propaganda Poster in *'Khor gdong* Monastery in *Brag 'go rDzong*" (written in Tibetan). It lists the "Twelve Musts" as framed during the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China that seek to promote and improve "ethnic unity," safeguard national sovereignty, get all ethnic groups adapt to a modern socialist society in line with the leadership of the Party (fig. 13 VA).

The other board is headlined "Adhere to the direction of sinicization of religion in China and promote the healthy inheritance of Tibetan Buddhism" (fig. 13 VA) and dictates the process, regulations as well as the "historical customs and religious rituals to be followed by Living Buddha reincarnation" (ie., the standards of the Tibetan Buddhist *sprul sku* recognition system), using the Golden Urn lottery to recognize a *sprul sku* and having the result approved by the Central Government following the "29-Article of the Imperially-

²⁴ Low 2013:151-166.

Decreed Regulations for the Post-war Settlement in Tibet” promulgated in 1793 by Emperor Qianlong.^{25,26}

It is worth mentioning here that although Ritiman Das declares that “Chime Rigdzin once explained that because the Khordong Terchen Tulku had become a figure of considerable importance in the region, the Tibetan government in Lhasa mandated the use of the Golden Urn to select him, a method designed to remove influence of powerful families,”²⁷ it was in fact exceptional that *gter sprul* 'Chi med rig 'dzin was selected with the Golden Urn since no other 'Khor gdong *sprul sku* is known to have been selected that way. This issue therefore requires further inquiry as, albeit not unusual, this system is not the one used to select *sprul sku* neither in 'Khor gdong nor in the wider area. That said, *gter sprul* 'Chi med rig 'dzin was not coming from the 'Khor gdong bDe ba tshang family line,²⁸ to which all ancestral masters of 'Khor gdong traditionally belonged, including Khams *sprul* Shes rab me 'bar, 'Khor gdong *gter chen* Nus ldan rdo rje, *sprul sku* Tshul lo and his brother 'Gyur med rdo rje, as well as mGon po dbang rgyal who married Zhi wa 'tsho, the daughter of 'Khor gdong *gter chen*. In our times, the young *sprul sku* Padma bkra shis (b. 2006) also belongs to this family line.

Be that as it may, *gter sprul* 'Chi med rig 'dzin was recognized by several prominent lamas including the 13th Dalai Lama, the 10th sMin gling *khri chen*, and the 39th Sa skya *khri* 'dzin. He was one of the highest rNying ma *bla ma* of his time, given the close relationship with rDo rje brag, main monastery of the Northern Treasures, with the Dalai Lama's government (dGa' ldan pho brang) and his own connection with the Tibetan establishment. When 'Chi med rig 'dzin left 'Khor

²⁵ For a comprehensive analysis about how in 1995 the P.R.China resurrected the Qing-era law mandating that the *sprul sku* of prominent masters must be identified by drawing lots from a golden urn, hoping in this way to limit the ability of the 14th Dalai Lama and the exiled Tibetan government to independently identify reincarnations of the Dalai Lama, see Oidtmann 2018.

²⁶ On June 2, 2025 and before his 90th birthday, the 14th Dalai Lama announced his succession plan affirming that the 600-year-old institution will continue, adding that the dGa' ldan pho brang Trust would consult heads of Tibetan Buddhist traditions and other religious leaders to search and recognise a successor in accordance with past tradition without anyone else having the authority to interfere in this matter (Central Tibetan Administration 2025a). Swiftly rejecting the plan, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the succession of the Dalai Lama should be in accordance with the Chinese law and approved by the CCP (National Herald India, 2025).

²⁷ Das 2021.

²⁸ I would like to thank Stephane Arguillère for the insight and input. For the transformation of the Northern Treasure tradition from family-based and following the succession customs of the rNying ma pa into institutions headed by *sprul sku*, see Valentine 2013: 130.

gdong, he worked for a while in the administration of the 14th Dalai Lama in Lha sa, sorting out historical documents and organizing the library.²⁹ In addition, during the visit of Zhou Enlai in India in 1956-57, he was part of the delegation to welcome the Chinese Premier (fig. 1) who was awarded Visva-Bharati's highest accolade, the Desikottama, by Professor Satyendranath Bose.³⁰



Fig. 1 – gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin with the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai during the latter's visit to India in 1956-57 (Photos: Left & Middle: courtesy of 'Khor gdong Monastery, Brag 'go, 2023; Right: Visva-Bharati website).

History of 'Khor gdong Monastery

In his *Collected Works*, gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin explains that 'Khor gdong monastery used to be the head of sixteen branch monasteries³¹ some of which were built by the thirteen companions of Khams sprul Shes rab me 'bar, and that it had 108 temples and one very big stūpa which took six years to build. 'Khor gdong was completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The following pictures capture the image of the monastery since it was rebuilt and through to 2019 and up to 2024 (fig. 2). There doesn't seem to be any existing archive of pictures earlier than 1980s.

²⁹ Das 2021.

³⁰ <https://www.visvabharati.ac.in/snbosebirthanniversary.html>.

³¹ Thub bstan e vam gsang sngags zhug 'byung gling in mDo khog built by 'Jigs bral rgya mtsho; sTag rtse dgon in Nyar tri built by rNam grol rgya mtsho; gZhug chen dgon in gZhi 'khor built by Ye shes rgya mtsho; Ra krom dgon in sNyi smad built by Nus don bzang po; Ba lar dgon in Mi nyag built by Kung dga' nges don; Baḥ gnas dgon in Baḥ khog village built by Ye shes rdo rje; mDo rDo rje brag in Dar rtse mdo built by rNam sgrol rDo rje bzang po; Tri bu dgon in Baḥ village built by Kun dga' theg mchog bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan; Thub bstan e vam dga' mtshal near 'Khor dgon built by 'Phrin las lhun sgrub; gTso gnas dgon in gTso village built by U rgyan che mChog; 'Bro ri ri khrod hermitage in bSer khog built by Thog med bzang po; Gra lags dgon in Dza village built by Shes rab rgya mtsho; 'Gu tsha dgon in upper Zu village built by Shes rab bzang po; sNe lung dgon built by Shes rab bzang po; sPang le dgon built by Shes rab bzang po (Low 2013:140-141)

It was *dBon chen bSod nams 'od gsal* (1928–2001) who rebuilt the monastery in 1985 (fig. 3)³² and this temple was again restored in the 2010s by *sprul sku 'Chi med rgyal mtshan* (b. 1982) (fig. 4).^{33, 34}



Fig. 2 – 'Khor gdong monastery through time, from 1980s to 2024
(Photos: Left: Courtesy of 'Khor gdong Monastery, Brag 'go (2023).
Middle and Right: Varvara Chatzisavva 2018, 2024)

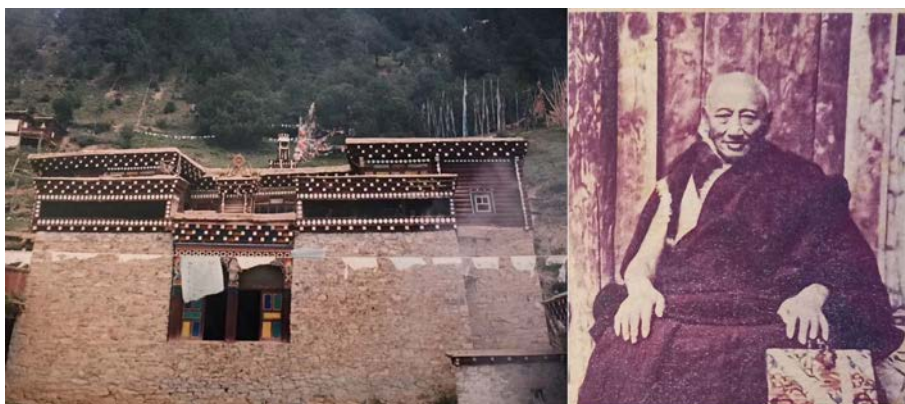


Fig. 3 – The main temple as rebuilt by *dBon chen bSod nams 'od gsal*
(Photos: Courtesy of 'Khor gdong Monastery, Brag 'go, 2023)



Fig. 4 – The main temple as restored by the current head of the monastery
sprul sku 'Chi med rgyal mtshan (Photos: Varvara Chatzisavva, 2024).

³² 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 306.

³³ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 477-481.

³⁴ Lefort 2010: 28:00 min.

At the time of the Cultural Revolution, *dBon chen* bSod nam s'od gsal saved the treasures now enshrined in the main temple by hiding them in the mountains around 'Khor gdong. In the main temple are enshrined several *sku gdung* (fig. 15 VA), or fragments of them, saved from destruction: that of *gTer chen* Nus ldan rdo rje (1802–1864), of *mKhan chen* Bya bral padma chos dbyings khyab brdal (1920–1997), of *mChog sprul* 'Gyur med rdo rje (1887–1967), and part of *gTer sprul* 'Chi med rig 'dzin (1922–2002).

Treasures kept in the Monastery

Among the many *gter ma* and other precious things in the treasury, there are the several *sgrom bu* revealed by *gter chen* Nus ldan rDo rje.³⁵ Among them, there is a stone chest with the handprints of Ye shes mtsho rgyal, Mandāravā, Padmasambhava (fig. 16 VA); a *gter ma* casket containing sky iron, the title of a *gter ma* text scroll, and two *gter ma* statues (fig. 17 VA); the dagger of *rDo rje gro lod* that binds gods and demons to their oaths (fig. 18 VA); the seal that 'Chi med rig 'dzin used to bind by oath a ghost named sNyu rgyal—he put the seal on the ghost's forehead getting it to vow not to harm any humans or other beings—as well as the hat of 'Chi med rig 'dzin bearing his seal (fig. 19–20 VA); the hat that bDud 'joms rin po che (1903–1987) gifted to 'Chi med rig 'dzin (fig. 21 VA); a silver *dbang gtor ma* made by *dBon chen* bSod nam s'od gsal which is used during annual rituals (fig. 22 VA); a large *thangka* representing Padmasambhava (fig. 23 VA), the ceremonial hat that bDud 'joms 'Jigs bral ye shes rdo rje offered to 'Chi med rig 'dzin; the reading glasses of A khyug rin po che of Ya chen sgar; the orange robe of *mKhan chen* Chos dbyings kyab brdal (1920–1997) and so forth. Some of these *gter ma* were extracted by 'Khor gdong *gTer chen* Nus ldan rdo rje (1802–1864) in the sacred mountains near the monastery where his hermitage is located and where several self-manifesting mantras appear on the rocks together with the mantra *om āḥ hūṃ hrīḥ*, which Nus ldan rdo rje wrote with blood from his nose. His handprint on a rock could be clearly seen until its destruction by

³⁵ A brief description of these treasures revealed by Nus ldan rdo rje at mTsho sngon lake and other places, can be found in Low 2013:142, where seven *Gu ru mthong ba don ldan* statues are listed together with eleven stones called *rDo sgrom mthong ba don ldan* that bear the handprints and finger prints of Gu ru Rin po che and Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and twenty-seven other treasure stones, etc.

shooting during the Cultural Revolution.³⁶ The hoof-print of Nus ldan rDo rje's horse and a self-arising *nor bu*³⁷ are also visible on rocks.

Daily Life in the Monastery

There has been a renovation going on in the monastery for some time (fig. 24-26 VA). Construction work had already started in June 2023 and lasted for a couple of years—but as it usually happens with Tibetan monasteries within the jurisdiction of the P.R.C., construction work seems to be an ongoing and never-ending process, as is the paving of the roads. The funds for the construction work come from the *bla ma*, the local people, and partly from state funding. The latter is listed in the annual Financial Disclosure, a Chinese document pinned on the board for public announcements at the entrance of the monastery. For example, according to the Financial Disclosure in 2023, the monthly income of the temple was 3,427 RMB. In July 2023 the temple received 82,000 RMB (10,000 RMB for the temple and 3,000 RMB for each of the 24 monks), deposited to the salary of the Civil Affairs Commission, with an additional amount of 6,258 RMB deposited to the salary of the director of the Buddhist Association. All labour work is done mainly by local people living in the monastery but Chinese labourers are often involved. The initial plan in 2023 was to build a new kitchen hall, but in the process a new auditorium was built, as well as a new hall for the big prayer-wheels; rails were put in place for safety; a wall has been built around the temple for lay people; and yet another hall is about to be constructed near the new *shes grwa*. Also, a new treasury room is being prepared; the temple floors are getting floor-heating and so on. With the new gates in place, the monastery now looks like a fortress. Despite these developments, there is no tap water and water is carried in big jerricans from the spring. Toilets are organic and dried solid waste is used as fuel—there is no sewage system. But there is electricity, wifi, a police station, a small convenience shop, three surveillance cameras, and red lamp posts adorned with the Chinese flag.

In the new temple in the new *shes grwa* (fig. 31 VA)³⁸ on top of the mountain reside some Chinese nuns as well as Chinese devotees and

³⁶ Lefort 2010: 32:54 min, 52:36 min.

³⁷ This refers to a symbol of the Three Jewels which in its most simple form looks like three balls arranged in a triangular shape.

³⁸ Regarding the establishment of the new *shes sgrwa* and temple, following *sKyabs rje grub dbang* Karma chos 'phel bzang po's suggestion, there was a pure site on the upper part of 'Khor gdong Monastery to expand the monastic estate, divinations were done accordingly and starting from the 22nd day of the 1st Tibetan month of 2017, *mChog sprul* Lung rtogs bstan 'dzin bzang po, *mDo sngags* 'Od gsal chos kyi nyi ma, *rGyal sras* Nor bu dbang rgyal, *mKhan chen* Tshe ring dpal ldan, and others

visitors who come help out with the chores and cooking during events, receive teachings, do retreat, or simply for holiday. During certain pūjā days, the Chinese nuns are preparing the yellow and red “memorial tablets for the deceased”—a feature of Chinese Buddhism that has made its way into Tibetan Buddhist temples in Tibet and abroad.

The shop in the *shes grwa* is stocked with snacks, soft drinks and other necessities. Among these items there are few products (e.g., soaps, bottled mineral water) labelled with the Chinese brand name of the monastery shop QIMAIPULI³⁹ (fig. 28 VA)—these products are manufactured in Guangdong, China. The latest business launched by the monastery in 2025 is a hotel restaurant in Bra 'go (Fig. 27 VA). With the commercialisation and touristification of the Tibetan monasteries under the P.R.China and the urge towards self-sufficiency,⁴⁰ several monasteries have launched their own brands offering merchandise beyond traditionally sold items like incense, books and so forth. For example, in the Moksa café shop in rDzogs chen monastery, customers can buy all sorts of trademarked memorabilia and accessories from an extensive collection of items ranging from umbrellas, caps, earbuds, T-shirts, cups, hot-water bottles and even engraved pebbles (fig. 29-30 VA)—all items of Chinese manufacture.

Education in the Shes grwa

When it comes to the education received by the monks in the 'Khor gdong *shes grwa*, the daily schedule (fig. 32 VA) of classes taught is as follows in the chart below. Unlike what Lefort narrates in 2010 (30:52 min), novice monks do not learn English nor geography as they used to in the school that *sPrul sku* Shes rab nyi ma founded and inaugurated in 2005; they do all speak Chinese though. Needless to say, this weekly program is very different from the traditional Dharma education received by the 'Khor gdong monks at the time of 'Chi med rig 'dzin.⁴¹

were invited to perform the earth taming ceremony and blessed the site. *sPrul sku* Lung rtogs named it “sKu gsum Rig 'dzin gling.” The name of the *shes sgrwa* is “sNga 'gyur byang gter 'khor gdong bslab gsum nor bu 'byung gling.”

³⁹ QIMAIPULI where “Qimai” is the Chinese pinyin transliteration for the Tibetan name “Chime.” The Tibetan name is provided in a subheading: '*chi med kun phan spus legs tshong khang*.”

⁴⁰ See Caple 2019: 38-93.

⁴¹ Low 2013: 146.

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Laws & Regulations	Practice of Rituals	Writing	National Security Law	Grammar	<i>Tantra</i>
Inner Principles	Real-time Politics	Astrology	Practice of Rituals	Regulations on Religious Affairs	Inner Principles
<i>Tantra</i>	Epistemology	Tantra	Policy of benefiting temples and monks	Maths	Grammar
Lunch break					
Regulations on Religious Affairs	Poetics	<i>Abhidharma</i>	Calligraphy	<i>Abhidharma</i>	
<i>Prajñāpāramitā</i>	Grammar	Laws & Regulations	Inner Principles	Synonyms	
<i>Abhidharma</i>	Physical Education	Maths	Tantra	Law	

Some of these classes are taught by Chinese teachers residing in the monastery. All the classes and taught material must adhere to the overarching policy of sinicization as articulated in a Chinese document that is hanging on the wall in the *shes grwa* (fig. 33 VA). The translation of the Chinese text is as follows:

1. The Buddhist Canon study class supports the leadership of the Communist Party of China, loves the motherland, opposes national separatism, strictly abides by the national laws and regulations, adheres to discipline and diligent conduct, loves the country and loves Buddhism, and guides Tibetan Buddhism to adapt to the socialist society.
2. The Buddhist Canon study class guides the monks to adhere to the direction of sinicization of religion and to actively participate in the activities organized by Buddhist associations in prefectures and counties (cities), such as “Love the country,

- love religion, love the hometown," etc., and interprets the canons and the doctrines in line with the needs of our times.
3. The teachers of the Buddhist Canon study class must be ordained and hold a qualifying teaching certificate. The Temple Management Office, Buddhist Association, Religious Affairs Bureau, United Front Work Department, Public Security Bureau and other relevant departments will screen the existing Buddhist Canon teachers and remove the monks with unsatisfactory political performance.
 4. The study program must include courses such as politics, history, culture, law, as well as national, provincial and state affairs.
 5. The curriculum, textbook selection, and teaching process shall be strictly managed by the Temple Management Office, Buddhist Association, Religious Affairs Bureau, United Front, and other relevant departments.

Other Northern Treasures Monasteries in Kham

'Khor gdong monastery is affiliated with other Byang gter monasteries in the neighbouring areas, namely Shugs 'byung monastery (fig. 34-35 VA), Baḥ gnas monastery (fig. 36-37 VA), Ba smad monastery (fig. 38 VA), and it shares ties with the neighbouring "camps" of Bla rung sgar and Li mdo chos sgar in gSer thang (fig. 39-40 VA). Li mdo chos sgar was the seat of *mKhan chen Bya bral* Padma chos dbyings khyab brdal.

Both *mChog sprul* Lung rtogs bstan 'dzin bzang po (b.1955) of Ba smad monastery (commonly known as *sPrul sku* Lung rtogs), and *mDo sngags* 'Od gsal chos kyi nyi ma (b. 1954) of Baḥ gnas monastery (commonly known as Chos kyi nyi ma rin po che), highly revered *bla ma* in the areas of Bra 'go, rTa'u and gSer thang, are reincarnations of *sPrul sku* Tshul lo (1884–c.1957) who was the elder brother of 'Khor gdong 'Gyur med rdo rje (1887–1966). 'Khor gdong 'Gyur med rdo rje's only still living son, *rGyal sras sprul sku* Nor bu dbang rgyal (b.1950) or *sPrul sku* Nor bu, as he is commonly known,⁴² lives in 'Khor gdong monastery with his extended family.

gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin and his reincarnation

The people in 'Khor gdong monastery fondly remember *gTer sprul* 'Chi med rig 'dzin who lived away from the monastery since he was 18 years old in the 1940s only to return for the first time in 1985 since he

⁴² 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 300-302.

left—and second time in 1990.⁴³ He arrived on horseback as the old wooden bridge was not fit for cars.⁴⁴ The memory of *gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin* is kept alive in the “mother” 'Khor gdong monastery through a fragment of his *sku gdung*, a few small old photographs in the treasury room and on the altar as well as the lineage portrait pictures that local people keep in their homes. On the throne inside the new temple in the *shes grwa*, it is not the statue of *gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin*⁴⁵ that is enthroned but often that of *mKhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs* (1933–2004) of *Bla rung sgar*,⁴⁶ perhaps because the previous incarnation of *mKhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs* was *gter chen Las rab gling pa* (1856–1926), whose main disciple was *sPrul sku Tshul lo*. In fact, still back in 2019, it was the statue of *dBon chen bSod nams 'od gsal*⁴⁷ that was installed on the throne in the old main temple, but later it was moved to the treasury room (fig. 41–43 VA) where it is still kept. It is worth mentioning here that during the revival of Buddhism in the 1980s, *dBon chen bSod nams 'od gsal* met with *mKhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs* who bestowed the empowerments of the Four Heart Essences (*snying thig ya bzhi*) at 'Khor gdong.⁴⁸

The *yang srid* of *gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin* (1922–2002) is Padma bkra shis, who, as of 2025, is pursuing his studies at Ba smad monastery. Padma bkra shis was born in 2006 on the auspicious day of Lha babs *dus chen* commemorating the descent of Buddha Śākyamuni from heaven. He is said to have been recognized in 2006 by many highly revered *bla ma*, including the great Byang gter master

⁴³ Das 2021 and <https://khordong-byangter.blogspot.com/p/ugen-chencho-of-khordong-byangter.html>.

⁴⁴ Lefort 2010: 27:35min. Since then, a lot of tar has been poured on that road and the bridge, but somehow—as it seems to be the case in the whole of Greater Tibet—the road is still not good enough and is needing regular paving.

⁴⁵ A sculptured statue of *gTer sprul 'Chi med rig 'dzin* is enshrined at the branch 'Khordong monastery in Siliguri which he established in order to spread the lineage teachings in India and then in the West. The use of silicone flesh statues of deceased masters has become widespread in many Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Tibet and India, replacing the previously sculptured ones (see also Brox 2022: 106). The cost of these silicone statues, as of 2024 in Chengdu, is around 50,000 RMB.

⁴⁶ The reasons and/or sociopolitical dynamics, other than solidarity, dictating why *mKhan chen 'Jigs med phun tshogs*, from all the eminent *bla ma*, should have such a prominently elevated position, often a divine status, in the monasteries around *Bla rung sgar* and beyond but also in the imagination of people (Tibetans and non-Tibetans), is the topic of another discussion. See also Germano 1998: 53–94; Sodargye 2025: 76.

⁴⁷ *dBon chen bSod nams 'od gsal* was the one who rebuilt the monastery after it was completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and saved all the *gter ma* of the monastery from destruction by hiding them in nearby mountains.

⁴⁸ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 454.

Rig 'dzin rNam grol rgya mtsho and others, as the *yang sprul* of 'Chi med rig 'dzin and of sKye med Ye shes thig le rol pa rtsal. He was enthroned in a grand ceremony in 2020 in the presence of *sPrul sku* Lung rtogs, Chos kyi nyi ma rin po che, *sPrul sku* Nor bu, *mKhan chen* Zla ba, *sPrul sku* 'Chi med rgyal mtshan, *mKhan chen* Thub bsten nyi ma, *sPrul sku* Tshe ring nyi ma, *sPrul sku* Blo gros rgya mtsho, *sPrul sku* 'Chi med rdo rje, and others, amidst a big saṅgha gathering.⁴⁹ However, his recognition has not yet been ratified by Chinese authorities, the reasons behind this conspicuous delay being unknown. Ideally, *yang sprul* Padma bkra shis, once he properly completes his training, should be able to visit on a regular basis the branch of 'Khor gdong Monastery in Siliguri, West Bengal, India, which was founded by *gTer sprul* 'Chi med rig 'dzin after purchasing there a large piece of land together with his son *sprul sku* O rgyan che mchog,⁵⁰ who has been maintaining it since with the support of the Western students of the *gTer sprul* who in turn run several 'Khor gdong centers in Europe. However, as it happens with Tibetans and especially Tibetan monastics in the P.R.China, obtaining (and/or renewing) a passport to travel abroad, and especially to India, is not a straightforward safeguarded procedure and they are routinely refused their passports and freedom of movement. Similarly, *sprul sku* 'Chi med rgyal mtshan, who travelled three times to Poland in the past,⁵¹ also faces difficulties renewing his passport. Thus, with these two main *bla ma* linking the two monasteries in Tibet and India (and Europe) unable to travel freely back and forth, in order to bestow empowerments, offer teachings and ensure the continuation of the 'Khor gdong lineage and tradition outside of Tibet, and with the difficult communication between Tibetans in India and Tibet, the mother monastery and its branches are in danger of gradually growing apart and becoming disconnected.

Conclusion

In the documentary titled *Journey to the Source* filmed in 2010 and offering a remarkable insight into the tradition and life of 'Khor gdong monastery in Khams, the narrator, when watching the young monks receiving their education and training at the newly established *shes grwa* at 'Khor gdong—while earlier they had to depend on other

⁴⁹ 'Chi med nor bu 2023: 306.

⁵⁰ Das R. (2021) "The Third Khordong Tertrul, Chime Rigdzin," https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Chime-Rigdzin/TBRC_P1KG9680.

⁵¹ <https://khordongweb.wixsite.com/khordong-pl-eng/chhimed-gyaltzen-rinpoche>.

institutes for their education—expressed his relief and confidence that the continuation of the lineage is maintained. The film is closing with the auspicious affirmation that the 'Khor gdong lineage is secure in India and the practice is thriving in Europe and ends with the aspiration that “we are all awaiting for the arrival of the fifth reincarnation. All is good.” This may be indeed true to some extent, and the fifth reincarnation is already here, but the future will tell whether this enthusiasm is realistic.

Tibetan monasteries in the P.R.China increasingly become monastic estates in government land enmeshed in the uneasy realities of the Chinese socialist society and its market economy, wherein they must adapt following an alien Chinese leadership that dictates, controls and restricts how they operate.⁵² High lamas are under tight surveillance (often under house arrest), isolated from the rest of the world and from their monasteries' branches in exile as well as from their wider international audience. Under such circumstances, it is not certain that the 'Khor gdong lineage will maintain continuity outside Tibet in the future.⁵³ With intensified regularization and sinicization campaigns and tighter crackdowns to tighten restrictions and increase enforcement, Tibetan monastic institutions, including 'Khor gdong monastery, cannot fulfil their potential as international educational, religious, and recreational destinations. Counterproductive as it is to cut off Tibetan *bla ma* from their international audience within the P.R.China and abroad, a more meaningful and fruitful implementation of opening up, cultural and academic exchange, and boosting of tourism—the designated pillar of Tibetan economy—would involve Western Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and scholars having unrestricted access to Tibetan monasteries and institutions in the P.R.C., and similarly Tibetan scholars and monastics having access to Western audiences within the P.R.C. and abroad.

⁵² Caple 2019; Goldstein 1998: 15-52; Cabezon 2008: 261-294.

⁵³ While masters from the Northern Treasures and gLong chen sNying thig lineages do offer empowerments in 'Gro phan gling in Poland, there are no 'Khor gdong *bla ma* who can offer the 'Khor gdong Dharma cycle and bestow the 'Khor gdong rDzogs chen empowerments and give transmissions and instructions in India, Europe, etc. (See here: <https://khordongweb.wixsite.com/khordong-pl-eng/program-2025>). Unlike monasteries in Tibet which do not publicly announce their events, Tibetan monasteries in exile maintain an online presence through their websites and social media keeping their audience updated about their activities and teaching, be them onsite or online.

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bDe chen gling pa (1833–1893) and the cycle of the *dGongs pa zang thal* — A case of transmission of a *Byang gter* teaching in the New Bon tradition*

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n the present paper, I would like to introduce a very limited and actually sideward topic involving bDe chen gling pa, a later proponent of the New Bon (*bon gsar*) system,¹ and his connection to the core cycle of the Northern Treasures (*Byang gter*) teachings, namely the *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po dgongs pa zang thal*).²

Such a connection of Bon with the Northern Treasures is not really a surprising issue since Bon has its own *Byang gter* system which predates its rnying ma counterpart by a few centuries. The presence of these two similarly named tradition has brought some authors into thinking that the founder of the Bon po *Byang gter* system, i.e., dPon gsas khyung rgod rtsal (b. 1175)³ is the same person as Rig 'dzin rgod Idem (1337–1408), the founder of what one can define as the Buddhist

* I would like to thank Marianne Ginalska for her kind suggestions and corrections on earlier drafts of this paper and for a repeated help on the mp4 film presented during the conference on the Northern Treasures (Paris, October 19, 2024).

¹ On bDe chen gling pa and New Bon, see Achard, *Bonpo Hidden Treasures*, *passim*. For more historical data on New Bon, see *id.*, “Kun grol grags pa and the revelation of the *Secret Treasury of the Sky Dancers*”; “Erroneous Conceptions Frequently Shared about New Bon (*Bon gsar*)”; and more specifically “A Fourfold Set of Emanations, Variegated Currents and Alien Elements : Contribution to the Origins and Early Development of New Bön and its Revelations”.

² For a complete annotated and descriptive catalogue of the *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*, see in particular P. Schwieger, *Die Werksammlungen Kun-tu bzang-po'i dgoñs pa zañ-thal, Ka-dag rañ-byuñ rañ-sar und mkha' 'gro gsañ-ba ye-śes kyi rgyud*, *passim*. See also K. Turpeinen, *Vision of Samantabhadra*, *passim*. See also the list of contents of the 2015 *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* in Achard, “The Table of Contents of the *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*”.

³ On Khyung rgod rtsal, see the fascinating and impressive paper by R. Vitali, “Feats of an eclectic Bon po master: dByil ston Khyung rgod rtsal's 'das log journey and *gter ma* rediscoveries,” *Revue d'Études Tibétaines*, no. 68, Janvier 2024, pp. 36-68. See also Achard, “A Brief Note on the Northern Treasures of the Bon Tradition”, in *ib.*, pp. 29-31.

side of the Northern Treasures.⁴ This identification is actually wrong since these founders have diverging birth-places, dates of birth, parents' names, and so forth.

1. Exchanges between Bon pos and rNying ma pas

Starting with the late 11th century in Tibet, the literary scene of Tibet has seen quite a few exchanges between Bon pos and other Buddhist adepts. This is in particular visible through borrowings of texts, often in the form of plagiarism, with sometimes decisive changes in the lexicon that is being used, either due to doctrinal necessities—such as transforming *chos sku* into *bon sku* and *vice versa*—or with the intent of evidently hiding the borrowing itself with alterations of specific terms. It has long been thought that Bonpos were responsible for these borrowings—and this is true in many cases—but, as far as Dzogchen teachings are concerned, borrowings by rNying ma authors from Bon texts are, to say the least, far from scarce.

In the context of academic studies focusing on Dzogchen, I should stress here that several cases of borrowings or exchanges between the Bon and the rNying ma traditions have already been demonstrated, starting with the work of Samten Karmay in his PhD thesis entitled *The Great Perfection*.⁵ In this work, S. Karmay has brilliantly demonstrated that a rnying ma tantra included in the *Collection of Ancient Tantras* (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*)⁶ is actually a slightly disguised copy of a Bon work included in the bon collection known as the *Triple Proclamation of the Great Perfection* (*rDzogs chen bsgrags pa skor gsum*).⁷ The demonstration of the borrowing has been proven due to the presence of

⁴ On rGod ldem's biography see Herweg, *The Hagiography of Rig 'dzin Rgod ldem 'phru can*, as well as the forthcoming translation of his biography by Jay Valentine.

⁵ S.G. Karmay, *The Great Perfection, A Philosophical and Meditative Teaching of Tibetan Buddhism*, pp. 216-223.

⁶ This is a collection of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga Tantras that exists in several versions in Tibet and in Bhutan. One of these was first collected by Ratna gling pa (1403-1478) but, to my knowledge, we do not have any copy of it. The most famous are those of mTshams brag and sDe dge, although representing two different "families" of texts. On catalogues of the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum*, see Achard, "La liste des Tantras du rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum"; and *id.*, "Rig 'dzin Tshe dbang mchog grub (1761-1829) et la constitution du rNying ma rgyud 'bum de sDe dge". On the *rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum* see also, D. Martin, "NGB Historical Notes" and R. Mayer, *A Scripture of the Ancient Tantra Collection*, *passim*.

⁷ The *rDzogs chen bsgrags pa skor gsum* is a large corpus of treasures revealed by bZhod ston dngos grub (12th c.) in 1180 CE in Lho brag mkho mthing. See its structure in Karmay, *A Catalogue of Bon po publications*, pp. 100-103. As its title indicates, the collection is divided into three proclamations (*bsgrags pa*) that were made in the lands of the God (*lha*), of the Nāgas, and humans, respectively in extensive, intermediate and abridged forms.

doxographical elements that do not exist in the rNying ma tradition but are actually present in Bon Dzogchen texts.⁸

I have also shown some examples of these borrowings in my own thesis,⁹ as well as in a paper specifically dedicated to that topic.¹⁰ Thus, the discussion of these exchanges is not really a novelty but it should not come as a surprise since both the Bon and the rNying ma traditions recognize Dzogchen as the “supreme peak” (*yang rtse*) of their system in Nine Vehicles. The commonality of themes discussed in the texts of the Great Perfection in both systems would naturally entail literary exchanges expressed through direct borrowings of entire texts or sections of these.

In the instance I am intending to highlight in this paper, this will be less a case of borrowing than a case of actual transmission of a rnying ma cycle of teachings into a particular tradition known as New Bon (*bon gsar*). In other words, I shall be briefly discussing here how a complex system such as the *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal* or *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra*, has been transmitted to a Bon po lineage holder and how it has supposedly been handed over for at least a generation after this transmission. The terrible havocs of the Cultural Revolution (文革) have probably put a definitive end to it.

2. The three kinds of Bon

It is quite well-known that the Bon tradition itself recognizes several categories of Bon, such as Old Bon (*bon rnying*), Eternal Bon (*g.yung drung bon*), and New Bon (*bon gsar*). This classification is the one currently accepted by modern-day Bon pos, even though it has been criticized by some in modern academia. In my opinion, this nevertheless certainly remains the best scheme enabling one to attest of the various kinds of Bon that one may have to differentiate from one another. Indeed, a proponent of Eternal Bon would most evidently not recognize himself in the ritual activities of local priests involved in peculiar rites pertaining to Old Bon, nor would he overtly accept the doctrinal and liturgical bridges elaborated by some masters belonging to the New Bon tradition. The distinction between the three categories remains consequently pertinent. This does not mean that one has to accept the

⁸ The doxographical elements that do not exist in rNying ma text is the reference to the “five categories known as *Bon sgo bzhi mdzod lnga*” and the corpus of the *rGyud bu chung bcu gnyis*. Karmay notes also that the cosmological description of “gShenrab’s former life in four heavens” does not appear in Buddhist texts.

⁹ *L’Essence Perlée du Secret*, p. 215-247. All the “exchanges” I am referring to in this book and here have been made in the context of Dzogchen teachings.

¹⁰ See Achard, “Le Tantra des Vingt-Deux Perles de l’Esprit de Parfaite Pureté — un exemple d’intertextualité entre les traditions Bon po et rNying ma pa”.

traditional chronology that accompanies this threefold classification in Bon work but that one may use it—be it in a simplistic manner—to assess the various categories of Bon one may encounter.

Furthermore, no matter if academia is right or wrong on the issue of these three kinds of Bon, *de facto* evidences show that there was indeed an ancient Bon religious tradition prior to the coming of Buddhism during the imperial period. Its existence is proven by a few Dunhuang manuscripts, as well as ancient texts such as those discovered in the dGa' thang bum pa stūpa.¹¹ It is difficult to describe it as a perfectly organized system with specific doctrinal representations since the picture one may elaborate about it, based on these documents, is rather that of a set of loosely connected spiritual beliefs and apotropaic rituals involving sacrifices that would certainly repulse post-dynastic Bonpos. Be it as it may, Old Bon is still existing today, mostly in the marches of Tibet, in the Himalayas and in Eastern Tibet. It is quite distinct from Eternal Bon and New Bon, in both their lay and monastic versions.

Regarding the second category of Bon—Eternal Bon—, there is very little—if any—evidence of the existence of such a highly developed doctrinal tradition of Bon prior to the late 10th-early 11th century, but what is certain is that it obviously did not spring out of nowhere. Traditional histories of Eternal Bon trace the origins of this system back to sTon pa gshen rab mi bo, a Bon Buddha said to have been born in an extraordinary remote past in 'Ol mo lung-ring, the capital of sTag gzig country. Some of his disciples or later heirs in the lineage were said to have introduced Eternal Bon in Tibet although there is apparently not a single trace of this tradition during the imperial period: no ruins of monasteries, temples, libraries, etc. This issue remains quite obscure and difficult to understand since, to my knowledge, we still have no clear idea who was concretely involved in the development that led to its appearance as a comprehensive tradition with vast corpora of texts already available by the 11th century.

For instance, the sole revelations of *gter ston* gShen chen Klu dga' (996–1035),¹² with their complete sets of Sūtras, Tantras, and Dzogchen teachings, already places Eternal Bon on a par with other burgeoning traditions. At that time, there was probably not much difference between a so-called Bon po and a practitioner of what was to soon become the rNying ma tradition.

Despite the darkness that obscures its origins, Eternal Bon appears on the religious scene of Tibet around the late 10th century, soon

¹¹ See Bellezza, "Straddling the Millennial Divide", as well as Karmay, "A New Discovery of Ancient Bon Manuscripts", *passim*.

¹² On this early and extremely important treasure revealer, see D. Martin, *Unearthing Bon Treasures*.

developing under the impetus of various treasure revealers and lay masters. The origins of its monastic tradition raises also complex historical issues involving quasi-legendary figures who played a role in both the bon po and the post-dynastic vinaya lineages. The part taken by an individual such as Bla chen dGongs pa rab gsal in both traditions still remains to be correctly evaluated.¹³

3. The spread of New Bon (Bon gsar)

Owing to its important development in Eastern Tibet in the 18th century, some have felt compelled to date the origins of New Bon from that late period. This is actually a mistake. New Bon claims to come from sets of works that Dran pa nam mkha' and Vairocana elaborated together in a spirit of ecumenism, bridging Eternal Bon and Buddhist teachings together.¹⁴ However, according to the later tradition, emperor Khri srong lde btsan (r. 755–797) was not pleased with the results and ordered that these texts should in no way be spread but rather hidden as treasures.

Some of these treasures started to be rediscovered in the 14th century by sPrul sku Blo ldan snying po (b. 1360) who regarded himself as an emanation of Padmasambhava. For instance, one of his secret names was Pad 'byung Nam mkha' rin chen, Pad 'byung being the abbreviated form of Padma 'byung gnas, i.e., Padmasambhava (or rather Padmākara). However, if the role played by Padmasambhava in New Bon is certainly recurrent, one should avoid generalizations on this topic since, in some specific lineages of New Bon, it has been clearly overestimated. The problem of New Bon's origins is complex because they stand beyond clear historical limits. Furthermore, many of New Bon's lineage holders consider themselves as "pure bon pos" whereas the official heads of Bon, namely of Eternal Bon, regard New Bon as an altered, not to say degenerated form of Bon, essentially contaminated by rnying ma teachings.

Thus, starting with the 14th century, New Bon has been gradually

¹³ On dGongs pa rab gsal, see Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang Chos kyi nyi ma, *Bla chen byang chub sems dpa'i dgongs pa rab gsal gyi rnam par thar pa*, and 'Jigs med Rigs pa'i blo gros, *Bla chen dgongs pa rab gsal gyi rnam thar thub bstan khang bzang*. See also Willock, "Thu'u bkwan's Literary Adaptations of the Life of Dgongs pa rab gsal" which discusses Thu'u bkwan's sources and the date of dGongs pa rab gsal's death. Furthermore, see bSod nams dbang rgyal, *Bla chen dgongs pa rab gsal dang 'brel ba'i dpyad gleng phran bu* who briefly investigates dGongs pa rab gsal and his being a Bon po monk prior to convert to Buddhism. On the bon po version of the story, see Karmay, *The Treasury of Good Sayings*, pp. 107-109.

¹⁴ This is how the proto-history of New Bon is depicted in gSang sngags gling pa's *Dran pa bka' thang*, although the expression "New Bon" (*bon gsar*) does not appear in this text.

expanding, mostly in Eastern Tibet, and by the 18th century, it boomed to an unprecedented level with the large diffusions of the discoveries and compositions made by Sangs rgyas gling pa (1705–1735) and the first Kun grol grags pa (1700–1769?).

The diffusion of Sangs rgyas gling pa and Kun grol grags pa teachings paved the way for other treasure revealers, and this tradition soon reached its peak with bDe chen gling pa. bDe chen gling pa himself was a lineage holder of both Eternal Bon and New Bon, even though masters associated with the hierarchy of Eternal Bon do not recognize him as a member of their lineage. This is their official position, despite the fact that he himself acknowledge being a direct disciple of the 22nd sMan ri Abbot, Nyi ma bstan 'dzin (b. 1813), one of the main Eternal Bon authority of the period. Be it as it may, in Eastern Tibet, his teachings have been widely spread down to the present day, in particular his own meditation system based on the tradition of *A khrid*, an ancient cycle of Dzogchen instructions dating back to the late 10th century.

4. *bDe chen gling pa,*
a Bon po sprul sku of Rig 'dzin rgod ldem

In his own tradition, bDe chen gling pa is a kind of unusual representative of Bon in general since he recognizes that he has incarnated several times as Buddhist masters of the past. He describes his previous lives as being dispatched into four categories: outer births, inner births, secret births, and innermost secret births, all counting seven incarnations. The seventh in each are those of bDe chen gling pa himself.

1. *Table of bDe chen gling pa's rebirths*

I. Outer births	II. Inner births
1. Drang strong dri med snying po 2. gShen po don ldan Ye shes 'byung gnas 3. Kun dga' bo (Ānanda) 4. Bru ston 'Dul ba rgyal mtshan 5. mTha' bzhi rang grol Mu la ratna (Nam mkha' rin chen) 6. Mi pham mgon po 7. bDe chen gling pa	1. g.Yung drung dbang ldan 2. Khri thog par tswa 3. lCe tsha mkhar bu 4. Vairocana (Bee ro tsa na) 5. Nyi ma'i rgyal po 6. g.Yu thog Yon tan mgon po 7. Mi 'gyur Tshe dbang gSang sngags grags pa

III. Secret births	IV. Innermost secret births
1. gZhod ston dNgos grub grags pa 2. rGod kyi ldem 'phru can 3. rMa lha thog pa (rMa ston lcam me) 4. rDo rje gling pa 5. Khod po Blo gros thogs med 6. Sangs rgyas gling pa (Byang chub rdo rje) 7. Rig 'dzin kun grol gsang ba rtsal	1. g.Yung drung bdud 'dul thog med rtsal 2. dGa' rab snying po 3. Padma rdo rje rtsal 4. rDo rje thog khros 5. Grub thob Tsā ri ba Gling ras 6. Mi shigs rdo rje 7. g.Yung drung bDud 'dul thogs med rtsal

On the above table, his Buddhist rebirths are highlighted in bold. We can see that, out of the forty-nine names listed there, ten of these rebirths are those of Buddhist masters. The one that should retain our attention is his second incarnation among his secret births, namely his manifesting as the famed rnying ma *gter ston* Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, or according to a longer version of his name given in the table, Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can, the historical founder of the Northern Treasures.

As we shall now see, in his *Innermost Secret Autobiography* entitled *the Crown Jewel of the Lord of Nāgas* (*Yang gsang rnam thar klu dbang gtsug gi nor bu*),¹⁵ bDe chen gling pa had his own manner of telling the story of his rebirth as Rig 'dzin rgod ldem. The account is very short and anecdotal but unfortunately not to the point of providing convincing or reasonable details about the revelation of the main cycle of the Northern Treasures, the *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*.

First of all bDe chen gling pa quotes from a text entitled *The Prophetic Treasure of Amoghapaśa* (*Don yod zhags pa'i gter lung*). This text does not actually exist under such a title but it corresponds to a work known as *The Red Copper Lasso, the Mirror Clarifying the Auspicious Periods* (*Dus tshod rten 'brel gsal ba'i me long zangs zhags dmar po*)¹⁶ which was discovered by Sangs rgyas gling pa. Actually, the prophecy given

¹⁵ This innermost secret (*yang gsang*) autobiography is not dated. However, it is mentioned by title in the abridged biography entitled *sKal ldan dgyes pa'i dga' ston* which was written sometime after 1873 (see Achard, *Bonpo Hidden Treasures*, p. 174). It is also mentioned in bDe chen gling pa's *rNam thar chen mo* (p. 179) but it is unclear if this is the result of a later editorial addition (Achard, *op. cit.*, p. 173).

¹⁶ Sangs rgyas gling pa, *Sangs rgyas don yod zhags pa'i bsgrub pa las: Dus tshod rten 'brel gsal ba'i me long zangs zhags dmar po*, *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, vol. 24, pp. 665-718.

in the text is put in the mouth of Padmasambhava and addressed to the 8th century translator Vairocana but, as an incarnation of Vairocana himself, bDe chen gling pa considers that it also naturally applies to him.

In the prophecy that introduces the actual narration, it is said:

*Furthermore, when two hundred years had elapsed after that,
In the vicinity of Mount bKra bzang in the eastern direction,
The fortunate being rGod kyi ldem 'phru can
Will extract profound Treasures and protect the tibetan subjects.¹⁷*

The first verse—"Furthermore, when two hundred years had elapsed after that"—refers to the incarnations immediately preceding that of rGod ldem. They are not explicitly listed in Sangs rgyas gling pa's text, except for unnamed groups of treasure revealers, paṇḍits and siddhas that preceded him by two hundred years.

The second verse says:

In the vicinity of Mount Trazang in the eastern direction,

Mount Ri bo bkra bzang is generally thought to be located in the northern direction. It is actually localized in western Tibet in the county of Byang, and the fact that it is described here as being in the eastern direction logically shows that the original speaker enunciating the prophecy was himself abiding in an even more western location than the actual localization of the mountain. It is in the vicinity of that place that rGod ldem was born in 1337.¹⁸

The third verse of the prophecy says:

The fortunate being rGod kyi ldem 'phru can

rGod ldem is described here as a fortunate being (*las can*) in the sense that he is regarded as the incarnation of one of Padmasambhava's twenty-five disciples, known as sNa nam rDo rje bdud 'joms. rGod

¹⁷ *Klu dbang gtsug gi nor bu*, p. 44 : *de yang 'di nas gnyis brgya 'das pa'i dus/ shar phyogs ri bo bkra bzang nye 'dabs su/ las ldan skyes bu rgod kyi ldem 'phru can/ zab mo'i gter 'don bod 'bangs skyobs par byed/*. The text of the Red Copper Lasso (*Zangs zhags dmar po*) is nearly identical (p. 704-705, variants in bold): *de yang 'di nas gnyis brgya (p. 705) 'das pa'i dus/ shar phyogs ri bo bkrag bzangs nye 'dabs na: las can skyes bu rgod kyi ldem 'phru can: zab mo gter ston bod 'bangs skyo (sic!) bar byed.*

¹⁸ Mount Ri bo bkra bzang is precisely located in the Tho yor nag po district in Byang. There are caves there where Padmasambhava is said to have stayed (voir Rig 'dzin rgod ldem, *Ri bo bkra bzang gi gnas bshad*, p. 147). For its early association with "the Hor of pre-imperial period", see Bellezza, *Spirit-Mediums*, p. 282. On Tho yor nag po, see also Hazod, "Imperial Central Tibet," p. 172.

Idem actual name was dNgos grub rgyal mtshan. His nickname rGod kyi Idem 'phru can refers to the incredible growing of vulture feathers that started to appear in his hair when he was twelve (in 1348 according to our comput), and that eventually turned into a tuft of white hair when he was twenty-one (in 1357).¹⁹

Finally, the last verse of the prophecy says:

Will extract profound Treasures and protect the tibetan subjects.

This verse makes references to rGod Idem's spiritual activities, starting with his excavation of numerous treasures that will eventually constitute the core of the Northern Treasures corpus. Among these is the famed cycle of the *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra* (*Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*) which will remain the central collection of Dzogchen teachings within the Jangter tradition down to the present day.

The mention of the protection of the Tibetan people refers to the connection rGod Idem was supposed to develop with the Gung thang kings, even though his destiny was actually elsewhere. These Gung thang kings failed to support the treasure system initiated by rGod Idem²⁰ who eventually traveled south, towards Sikkim, intensively spreading the teachings he had recovered as treasures.

We are now coming to the main account of bDe chen gling pa's previous birth as Rig 'dzin rgod Idem. As he starts his narration, bDe chen gling pa explains that when he, as Rig 'dzin rgod Idem, went to retrieve the Treasures at Mount bKra bzang, he experienced an incredible sense of elation when he met with O rgyan Padmasambhava on the top of the mountain. This meeting is not included in the original story written in the first person by rGod Idem himself in the *dGongs pa zang*

¹⁹ It is very unlikely that actual vulture feathers grew into rGod Idem's hair, despite their being the cause of his famous nickname. It is more probable that a kind of *canities subita* syndrome affected him at this stage of his life, although this condition generally impacts the entire hair, not a few tufts looking like vulture feathers. It is also said in traditional medicine that tarantula bites (or other similar spiders) can cause a sudden whitening of hair (if bitten on the head) but, to my knowledge, this is not sufficiently documented to explain the phenomena. On *canities subita*, see the reference *in fine* in the bibliography under M. Nahm. This may also be a case of poliosis.

²⁰ "(There were) numerous voices that raised concern about these texts and considered them as forgeries. Some Sa skya advisers in the following of the Gung thang kings were clearly against the revealed literature. (...) there were groups or individuals hostile to the *terma* tradition, their main reason for casting doubt upon the revelatory literature as a whole being that they regarded it as entirely made up by the *gter stons* and as being devoid of an uninterrupted line of transmission" (Achar, "The History of the *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra* as Portrayed in Jamyang Sönam Gyeltsen's *Garland of Jewels*" (forthcoming).

thal.²¹ This is therefore an anecdotal detail that was added by bDe chen gling pa.

In the original story narrated by rGod ldem,²² some atmospheric events are described and they are synthesized by bDe chen gling pa, reporting that turquoise mists filled the area and that there was a gentle rain of nectar that fell on the treasure site. In the original story, rGod ldem explains that a heavy rain fell all around and that numerous other atmospheric events accompanied him and his assistants on their way back, after the revelation of the treasure.

bDe chen gling pa adds another detail, referring to the appearance of black birds and their melodious songs gathering around them while they were descending the slopes of the mountain. He also mentions herds of deer running around the mountain, as if they were circum-ambulating it. He then adds that he has persistent memories of these pleasant events but one should note that rGod ldem does not provide such details despite his quite comprehensive account of the revelation itself.

bDe chen gling pa also recalls his visit to the temple of Gram pa lha khang where he witnessed several atmospheric wonders. This temple is one of the twelve edifices known as “border-taming temples” (*mtha’ ‘dul lha khang*) that were built by king Srong btsan sgam po in order to both control the demoness that embodies the landscape of Tibet, and to protect the frontiers of the kingdom.²³ This temple built in southern Tibet is the one that is located on the left buttock of the demoness in the traditional depiction of the temples constructed on the various regions of Tibet corresponding to specific body parts of the demoness.²⁴

Seeing the miraculous atmospheric events that occurred when he arrived there, rGod ldem felt compelled to offer a golden libation. He then entered the temple and saw a wrathful leonine figure having the form of Vaiśravaṇa. In bDe chen gling pa’s narration of the event, it is unclear if rGod ldem had a vision or if he saw a statue that looked unusual to him.

Without apparently any link with the visit to the Gram pa temple, he reports that by merely looking at the yellow scrolls (*shog ser*) of the

²¹ See the translation of this first-hand account in Achard, “Revisiting the Revelation of the Gongpa Zangthel”, and a its analytical summary in *id.*, “Notes on the History of the Revelation of the Treasure (*gTer bton pa’i lo rgyus*), *passim*.”

²² *Id.*

²³ It is located east of modern Lha rtse township.

²⁴ In Sangs rgyas gling pa’s celebrated *Ma ‘ongs lung bstan*, it is described as being associated with the left hip of the demoness. See Vitali, “The narrative of Srong btsan sgam po’s subjugation of the demoness”, p. 103 and p. 174.

treasures,²⁵ their meaning would appear clear to him and that the scrolls themselves were quite numerous. rGod ldem's biography by Nyi ma bzang po gives a slightly different picture: rGod ldem appears to have difficulties transcribing the symbolic scripts written on these scrolls and it even seems that all the scrolls were not translated during his lifetime.

The reference to the large number of these scrolls seems however to fit with the classic narration associated with this discovery. What sounds rather odd to me is that bDe chen gling pa seems to say that he had these yellow scrolls in his own hands, something that is most certainly doubtful: even if these have survived the passage of time, there are great chances that they have been kept among the family descendants of rGod ldem or by his official later incarnations, either in Ri bo bkra bzang, Zang zang lha brag, or in rDo rje brag, the main monastery of the Northern Treasures.

The prophetic account closes on a quick iconographic description in which bDe chen gling pa depicts Rig 'dzin rGod ldem as wearing a secret attire (*gsang ba'i chas ldan*) and as holding a book and a trident (*khatvāṅga*). This hardly fits with most depictions of rGod ldem, in which he generally holds a casket, or a vajra and a phurpa, etc.

Despite all these contradictions with earlier narrations and descriptions originally made by rGod ldem, bDe chen gling pa sees a convergence between his previous rebirth as rGod ldem and the fact that he eventually received the complete transmission of the *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra*.

The convergence occurred in the year 1859, an interesting period for bDe chen gling pa which he started by engaging in a retreat in Brag gsum g.yu mtsho where he stayed the time necessary to transcribe some yellow scrolls that he had discovered the year before. Among these, were the original scrolls containing the cycle known as the *sKu gsum dgongs 'dus*.²⁶ After departing from his retreat, bDe chen gling pa journeyed to the southern shores of the Brag gsum turquoise lake,

²⁵ Very often, original *gter ma* texts are written on yellow scrolls of various size and length. See Thondup, *Hidden Teachings of Tibet*, pp. 68-70 (and illustrations 12-19 in the pictures insert of the book).

²⁶ This is bDe chen gling pa's unique discovery of a Dzogchen cycle of teachings, included in vol. 2 of his *Collected Revelations*. See Achard, *Bon po Hidden Treasures*, pp. 19-24 (covering texts #31-41). It is interesting to note that he discovered this cycle the same year that he received the transmission of the *dGongs pa zang thal*, although he presents the discovery as having happened before this transmission. Also, given the place dedicated to the *bKa' brgyad* teachings in the Northern Treasures, it is noteworthy to add that this *sKu gsum dgongs 'dus* cycle is included within the larger corpus of the *bDe gshegs spyi spungs gsang ba thugs kyi brnag pa bka' brgyad yi dam sde dgu'i bsgrub skor* (see Achard, *op. cit.*, p. 19). Note also that the nickname of the *sKu gsum dgongs 'dus* is the *Rig 'dzin gsang sgrub*.

where he came across a casket containing peculiar substances as well as a wide series of assorted artifacts.

Subsequently, he ventured down to Zangs brag rin chen 'bar ba,²⁷ where he unlocked another treasure trove, from which he took out the original yellow scrolls containing the *Bon skyong dgongs 'dus*.²⁸

During that same year, while in Shel brag tshal,²⁹ he fell seriously ill and thought he was actually nearing death. At that time, he had a vision of a red *thig le* entering his central channel (*rtsa dbu ma*) and dissolving within his heart. Upon the completion of this dissolution, he experienced a profound sense of total inner clarity. This miraculous event was followed by an apparition of Sangs rgyas gling pa, manifesting clearly as his former incarnation (he indeed reports in one of his autobiographies that he considered himself as an emanation of Sangs rgyas gling pa). As we have seen above, Sangs rgyas gling pa is counted as the sixth incarnation among his seven secret rebirths.

5. The meeting with Kun bzang nges don klong yangs

Later that year, after his recovery, he met Kun bzang Nges don klong yangs (b. 1814) in Chos 'khor gling and gave him the transmission of several of his new Treasures (*gter gsar*), as well as some of his profound Buddhist teachings which he had previously discovered.³⁰

Kun bzang Nges don klong yangs, also known as Rig 'dzin rDo rje gsang ba rtsal, was an important rnying ma master who lived in Kong po and Padma bkod. He wrote an interesting short history of the rNying ma tradition³¹ and authored about twelve volumes of works which have not yet been reprinted, except for two of his autobiographical

²⁷ This is an important mountain and *gter gnas* from the Gyim shod district in Khyung po. bDe chen gling pa found the famed *Ma mo yang snying 'dus pa* there (Achard, *op. cit.*, p. 149). It is said that the place was converted to the Buddha's teachings by Dran pa nam mkha', his wife and sons (*id.*, p. 119). Vairocana, who had accompanied them to this sanctuary, wrote a *dkar chag* and hid it as *gter ma*. The text, entitled *Zangs brag rin chen 'bar ba'i dkar chag rdo rje 'bar ba'i phreng ba zhes bya ba*, was retrieved earlier by bDe chen gling pa, in 1858 (*sa rta*); see *id.*, p. 119, text no. 257.

²⁸ So far, I haven't been able to locate this collection in the sources available to me. It may be the case that the yellow scrolls were not simply transcribed at all.

²⁹ Located in Gyim shod district. It was one of bDe chen gling pa's favorite place where he discovered several of his treasures, including the central work of his Dzogchen cycle, *The Transparency of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa*, *Kuntuzangpo's Contemplation according to the Great Perfection's Definitive Meaning* (Nges don rDzogs pa chen po kun bzang dgongs pa 'khor 'das zang thal); see Achard, *op. cit.*, p. 20 (text no. 34).

³⁰ I may be wrong but to my knowledge not a single of bDe chen gling pa's Buddhist *gter ma* has surfaced so far.

³¹ Its title is *Bod du byun ba'i gsañ sñags sñā 'gyur gyi bstan 'dzin skyes mchog rim byon gyi rnam thar nor bu'i do śāl*. See the bibliography *in fine* for full references.

compositions which have been published by Gene Smith in 1974.³²

From Kun bzang Nges don klong yangs, which he himself called Kun bzang Rin po che, bDe chen gling pa received all the initiations, reading transmissions and instructions of the *rDzogs chen zang thal ma*, namely the *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra* revealed by rGod ldem in 1366. It is owing to this transmission that bDe chen gling pa later diffused these teachings to a small number of his disciples within the New Bon movement.³³

On the same occasion, Kun bzang Nges don klong yangs gave him the transmissions of several other important texts from the rGod ldem revelations, including the *Prayer in Seven Chapters* (*gSol 'debs le'u bdun ma*),³⁴ the *Prayer that Spontaneously Fulfils All wishes* (*bSam pa lhun grub ma*),³⁵ as well as the biographies of the masters of what bDe chen gling pa designates as the "Northern lineage" (*byang brgyud*), namely the Northern Treasures.³⁶ The *Prayer in Seven Chapters* and the *Prayer that Spontaneously Fulfils All Wishes* have become some of the most famous works of this tradition. They were actually found by sPrul sku bZang po grags pa who handed over the original scrolls written in ḍākini scripts to Rig 'dzin rgod ldem who then transcribed them into Tibetan language.

6. Connections with other Buddhist hierarchs

Some years later, bDe chen gling pa's connections with other Buddhist masters and treasure revealers intensified after he met *gter chen* mChog gyur gling pa (1829–1870), one of the founding members of the Ris

³² These are: 1. *Rig 'dzin rdo rje gsang ba rtсал gyi gsang ba'i rtog brjod ngo mtshar dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i rang sgra*, and 2. *Rig pa 'dzin pa rdo rje gsang ba rtсал gyi rtogs pa brjod pa sgra dbyangs lha mo'i gling bu*. See in the bibliography under Kun bzang Nges don klong yangs.

³³ The meeting between the two masters is recorded as follows by Nges don klong yangs in his long autobiography entitled *The Reed Pipe of the Melodious Goddess* (*sGra dbyangs lha mo'i gling bu* p. 475): "The sDe dge Treasure Revealer, Tshe dbang grags pa [i.e., bDe chen gling pa] came (for a visit) and (on that occasion) I requested the complete empowerments and transmissions of his New Treasures. In return, I gave him the entire transmission, from beginning to end, of the *rDzogs chen zang thal*, as well as the longevity empowerment for the *Iron stalk* of the Northern Treasures (*sde dge gter ston bla ma tshe dbang grags pa phebs par nyid kyi gter gsar yongs su 'dus pa'i dbang lung zhushing/ phar la rdzogs chen zang thal thog mtha' bar gyi lung dang/ byang gter lcags sdong tshe dbang phul*).

³⁴ See the complete translation of this text in, *inter alia*, Pearcey, "The Prayer in Seven Chapters", <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/topics/leu-dunma/>.

³⁵ This prayer actually corresponds to the seventh chapter of the *Le'u bdun ma*. See *id.*, "Sampa Lhundrupma", <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/tulku-zangpo-drakpa/leu-dunma-chapter-7>.

³⁶ Achard, *Bon po Hidden Treasures*, p. xxi.

med movement. It was mChog gyur gling pa who gave him one of his favorite secret name: Rig 'dzin Kun grol gsang ba rtsal. He also developed a profound friendship with 'Jam dbyangs mKhyen brtse'i dbang po (1820–1892), and Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) with whom he exchanged teachings and rare treasure substances (*gter rdzas*), including powerful garuḍa-pills which he gave to Kong sprul and which completely cured the latter from his smallpox.

As far as the Northern Treasures tradition is concerned, there is no mention in his autobiographies of other transmissions received by bDe chen gling pa on this matter. What we know from the same sources is that he gave the full transmission of initiations, reading transmissions, and instructions-guidance to his own son rGyal sras Tshe dbang 'gyur med.³⁷ The latter was born to Karma dPal sgron, one of bDe chen gling pa's consorts who also gave him a daughter named Phrin las lha mo.

Tshe dbang 'gyur med played a decisive role in the spread of his father's Revelations, especially regarding the Dzogchen teachings bDe chen gling pa had himself received from his various masters, including the *Kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*. He was deeply attracted to Dzogchen teachings and practiced them with great zeal throughout his life. Both father and son were definitely important figures in the further development of Bon and New Bon in Eastern Tibet during the late 19th century. Tshe dbang 'gyur med resumed his father's activities throughout the early decades of the 20th century.

7. Further, modern exchanges between Bon and Buddhists masters

In conclusion, and beyond the sole Northern Treasures, I would like to highlight the fact that exchanges of Dzogchen teachings from Bon pos to Buddhist masters or from Buddhist masters to Bon pos are not really unusual. For instance, we can refer here to several Buddhist lamas who, in the past decades, received teachings on the *Zhang zhung snyan rgyud* — the most important Dzogchen cycle of the entire Bon tradition. Among them are Namkhai Norbu Rinpoché (of Sa skya upbringing), His Holiness the Dalai Lama (of the dGe lugs pa school), as well as others from the bKa' rgyud tradition, and so forth.

As far as the Northern Treasures are concerned, several contemporaneous bon po masters have shown a growing interest in the *dGongs pa zang thal*, although not with the motivation of receiving its

³⁷ His exact dates are still to be clarified. Provided he is identical to Bya btang Tshe dbang 'gyur med, he was still alive in 1912 when he received a transmission from Shar rdza bKra shis rgyal mtshan (1859–1934); see Achard, *Enlightened Rainbows*, p. 77. See also *id.*, *Les Instructions sur le A Primordial*, pp. 106–108 for his abridged biography.

transmission but rather with the intent of reading and studying it outside their own traditional corpuses. This is in particular the case of Yongs 'dzin bsTan 'dzin rnam dag rin po che whose understanding and penetration of Dzogchen teachings are certainly unmatched among living masters of both lineages of the Great Perfection, those of the Bon and rNying ma traditions.

Within the sole *Byang gter* tradition, the recent publication of 63 volumes making up *The Collection of the Cycles of Teachings of the Northern Treasures belonging to the Early Translations* (sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs), as shown by the present ANR research project, has rekindled the interest for these works and will certainly encourage further literary explorations delving into the profound richness of this lineage.

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- *Klu dbang gtsug gi nor bu: g.Yung drung bdud 'dul thogs med rtsal gyi yang gsang rnam thar klu dbang gtsug gi nor bu yang gab tsitta'i rgya can*, in *ib.*, vol. 9, pp. 1-272 (Achard, *Bon po Hidden Treasures*, no. 389).
- *sKal bzang dgyes pa'i dga' ston: Rig 'dzin kun grol gsang ba rtsal gyi rnam thar bsdus don skal ldan dgyes pa'i dga' ston*, in [Collected Revelations], in *ib.*, vol. 9, pp. 1-38 (Achard, *op. cit.*, no. 392).
- *Nges don rdzogs pa chen po kun bzang dgongs pa 'khor 'das zang thal*, in *ib.*, vol. 2, pp. 66-102 (Achard, *op. cit.*, no. 34).
- *bDe gshegs spyi spungs gsang ba thugs kyi brnag pa bka' brgyad yi dam sde dgu'i bsgrub skor*, in *ib.*, vol. 13 (Achard, *op. cit.*, nos. 443-487).
- *rNam thar chen mo: Rig 'dzin kun grol gsang ba rtsal gyi phyi nang gsang ba thun mong dril ba'i gter 'byung lo rgyus rnam thar chen mo ngo mthar padma'i dga' tshal thabs shes nyi zla'i rgyan can*, in *ib.*, vol. 9, pp. 1-765 (Achard, *op. cit.*, no. 388).
- *Ma mo yang snying 'dus pa*, in *ib.*, vol. 8 (Achard, *op. cit.*, nos. 331-387).
- *Zangs brag rin chen 'bar ba'i dkar chag rdo rje 'bar ba'i phreng ba zhes bya ba*, in *ib.*, vol. 5, pp. 75-80 (Achard, *op. cit.*, no. 257).

Blo bzang Chos kyi nyi ma (Thu'u bkwan, 1737–1802)

Bla chen byang chub sems dpa'i dgongs pa rab gsal gyi rnam par thar pa mdo tsam gdam du brjod pa rin po che'i phreng mdzes zhes bya ba, in *Blo bzang*

chos kyi nyi ma'i gsung 'bum, Zhol par ma, published by Ngawang Gelek Demo, 1969–1971, vol. 2, pp. 521–534.
purl.bdrc.io/resource/W21506.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem (1337–1408)

Ri bo bkra bzang gi gnas bshad: Lung bstan/gnas chen byin 'beb kyang zer: ri bo bkra bzang gi gnas bshad yang zer: bod kham kun la dgos pa'i lung bstan ces kyang zer, in *Drag po rañ 'byuñ rañ shar chen po'i rgyud dan bka' brgyad kyi bsñen thabs 'das pa'i źal luñ rin chen phreng ba bcas*, *A Collection [of] Byañ-gter texts rediscovered by Rig-'dzin Rgod-ldem*, published by Tashi Dorji, Delhi, 1975, vol. 2, pp. 147–163.

Sangs rgyas gling pa (1705–1735)

Sangs rgyas don yod zhags pa'i bsgrub pa las: Dus tshod rten 'brel gsal ba'i me long zangs zhags dmar po, *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, 2nd ed., Chengdu, vol. 24, pp. 665–718.

gSang sngags gling pa (dBal gter, 1864–1959?)

Dran pa bka' thang: rGyal kun spyi gzugs dran pa nam mkha' rje'i/ rnam thar g.yung drung gsang ba'i mdzod chen, *Bon gyi brten 'gyur chen mo*, 2nd ed. Chengdu, 1999, Vols. 274, 291, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297 & 298.

bSod nams dbang rgyal

Bla chen dgongs pa rab gsal dang 'brel ba'i dpyad gleng phran bu, *Bod rig pa zhib 'jug*, no. 11, Beijing, 2011, pp. 400–412.



Philosophical Contemplations in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection Anthology

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Does the mind have an origin? What distinguishes mind from pristine awareness? What is the nature of the universal ground before saṃsāra and nirvāṇa manifested? These are some of the philosophical questions discussed in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's Great Perfection anthology, *The Unimpeded Realization of Samantabhadra* (*Kun tu bzang po'i dgongs pa zang thal*). This paper argues that these philosophical reflections are employed as contemplative practices in the context of breakthrough (*khregs chod*) and rGod ldem's anthology revealed in 1366 may be one of the earliest sources to incorporate this type of analytical reflection in breakthrough. The paper will first introduce the textual source of the philosophical contemplations, which is the cycle of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*. Then, I shall offer brief remarks on the historical context of these analytical reflections vis-à-vis breakthrough, and lastly, focus on discussing the content of these contemplations, their distinctive philosophical ideas, and how they may be applied in lived contexts of oral instruction.

The Three Oral Transmissions

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's synthesis of the Great Perfection (*rDzogs chen*) is presented in the form of three oral transmissions (*snyan brgyud*) that are the core of his huge *rDzogs chen* anthology. They contain the major texts that outline the *rDzogs chen* practices and their related philosophical ideas in rGod ldem's revelation. All other practices and cycles are in a preparatory or supplementary role compared to the supreme Great Perfection practices of the oral transmissions. *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* are centered around the recognition of pristine awareness or the realization *dharmakāya*, and the cycle also contains other *rDzogs chen* practices and philosophical discussion on the nature of reality, cosmogony, and death. *The Oral Transmissions of Padmasambhava* discuss the Seminal Heart tradition's distinctive visionary practice, direct transcendence (*thod rgal*), and *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is a scholastic treatise covering a set of eleven topics of

rDzogs chen philosophy and practice. Thus, the oral transmissions present the most quintessential topics of the *rDzogs chen* tradition, especially the Seminal Heart (*sNying thig*), while many other cycles and texts of the anthology feature topics that appear also in normative tantra such as deity yoga rituals, severance (*gcod*), and essence extraction (*bcud len*).

All the oral transmissions are teachings that the three masters of awareness (*vidyādhara*, *rig 'dzin*), Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Vairocana, are said to have received from Śrī Sīṃha in India. Śrī Sīṃha is portrayed as an eclectic *rDzogs chen* figure, possessing the essential transmission of the Great Perfection teachings that dGa' rab rDo rje brought to our world from the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods, where they had been transmitted by the emanations of the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra.¹ Śrī Sīṃha entrusted different parts of the transmission to the three masters of awareness, who transported the teachings to Tibet and unified the transmission again by passing it to the king Khri strong lde btsan, Ye shes mtsho rgyal, and other imperial period recipients, as well as concealing it as a treasure unearthed by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. The format of the texts as oral transmissions, or literally “aural transmission” (*snyan brgyud*), highlights their value as secret, precious teachings passed down in a direct lineage and their experiential character as contemplative instructions given directly to a student.

The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana

The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana lay the philosophical groundwork of the *rDzogs chen* view and how to realize it in contemplation. The paradigmatic topic of the cycle, as this paper suggests, is breakthrough, which is intimately linked to the correct view, hence the robust philosophical discussion. There are also many other topics and agendas such as death and bardo states, cosmogony, distinctive *rDzogs chen* empowerments called analogical introductions, narratives, doxography, and polemical discussion that establishes the Great Perfection as the supreme vehicle.

The doxographical sections of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* classify the cycle as Mind Series that teach especially the *rDzogs chen* view, while the narratives relate how Vairocana studied the teachings of the cycle under Śrī Sīṃha in the Nine-Story Palace of Buddhas in India. The association of Vairocana with the Mind Series comes from traditional Nyingma historiography, and some the earliest narratives

¹ *The First Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po), *The Unimpeded Realization* (from here on UR) II:473.

of how Vairocana received *The Eighteen Texts of the Mind Series* (*Sems sde bco brgyad*) from Śrī Siṃha are located in Nyang ral Nyi ma 'Od zer's *Religious History* (*Chos 'byung*). Nyingma historiography also associates Vimalamitra with these early Mind Series scriptures as the translator of thirteen of *The Eighteen Texts* after Vairocana had translated the first five upon his return to Tibet.²

The narrative framing in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* contains two layers. The cycle begins with a story from the imperial period Tibet. The three masters of awareness, Padmasambhava, Vairocana, and Vimalamitra, are meditating in the retreat cave of mChims phu, near bSam yas monastery. Encouraged by a vision of seven *ḍākinīs*, the king Khri srong lde btsan comes to ask the masters of awareness for a teaching that will enlighten a busy person such as himself without having to meditate. As a result, the three masters give him the teachings of the cycle. Embedded in this metanarrative on the Tibetan soil are stories from an earlier time in India that portray Śrī Siṃha giving the teachings to Vairocana such as a parting scene that culminates the transmission:

At that time, the Tibetan translator Vairocana had stayed in the presence of erudite Śrī Siṃha in India from the age of fifteen to fifty-five. He received all the Great Perfection teachings and assimilated their essence. When he was about to go to Tibet, he prostrated to the teacher a thousand times, circumambulated him a thousand times, and offered him five hundred units of gold. He lamented and wept profusely because he could not bear the anguish of separating from the teacher. Śrī Siṃha said: "Karmically destined son, I will entrust you the Great Perfection that I explained before and the pith instructions that have been transmitted orally like a scarf given when departing. You are inseparable from Vajrasattva and Samantabhadra, so do not feel anguish. Come out of grief for the benefit of Tibet! When you pass away, you will hold the teachings of the Buddhas for 1500 great eons." With this prophecy, he entrusted the oral transmission to him.³

² Lopez, "The 'Twenty or Eighteen' Texts of the Mind Series," 51-52. In this article, Lopez discusses the history of the Mind Series from the point of view of the different lists of *The Eighteen Texts*.

³ *Dus der bod kyi lo tsa wa bai ro tsa na lo bco lnga nas lnga bcu rtsa lnga ma lon gyi bar du rgya gar gyi yul du mkhas pa shrI sing+ha'i spyang sngar bsdad nas rdzogs pa chen po'i chos thams cad zhus te zhun thar bcad: slar bod kyi yul du byon khar: slob dpon kyi drung du phyag stong bskor ba stong gser gyi pa tra lnga brgya phul te: slob dpon dang 'bral mi phod pa'i gdung ba'i smre sngags bcu gsum zhus: spyang chab mang du btang bas: shrI sing+ha'i zhal nas: las can gyi bu: sngar bshad pa'i rdzogs pa chen po dang: skyel dar gyi tshul du snyan brgyud kyi man ngag 'di gtad pas khyod kun tu bzang po rdo rje sems dpa' dang dbyer med kyi: yid gdung bar ma byed cig: bod kyi don la songs shig: khyod kyi tshe 'phos nas bskal pa chen po stong lnga brgyar sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa 'dzin par 'gyur ro: zhes lung bstan te snyan brgyud gtad pa'o:.* *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle*

The narrative contextualization of Vairocana receiving the teachings from Śrī Siṃha is elemental in establishing the Indian origin of the cycle and the character of the teachings as oral transmission. Much of the cycle is presented as dialogues between Vairocana and Śrī Siṃha, which emphasizes the character of the teachings as oral transmissions given directly to the disciple. The narrative introduction of the king requesting for the teachings ties the cycle to Tibet, the familiar ground of the audience. It also sets the stage to anticipate a rare, precious teaching that can engender awakening without extended practices.

Although not named in the text, this paper proposes that the precious teaching resulting in swift awakening is the contemplative practice of breakthrough, which aims at the direct recognition of one's pristine Buddha awareness. Breakthrough is a characteristic meditation of the *rDzogs chen* tradition, originating from the Mind Series.⁴ The negation of practice in the early Great Perfection resulted in the simplest method to enlightenment: recognition of one's pristine, already awakened awareness (*rig pa*). This is the heart of breakthrough, and as the name indicates, it is about breaking through confusion to the recognition of one's enlightened nature.

Instead of outlining practices, the Mind Series literature contains philosophical reflections on the nature of reality together with poetic descriptions and aphorisms. Sometimes the method of recognition is accompanied with instructions on a seated, cross-legged meditation posture, typically the seven-point posture of Vairocana. Other times even the fixed, cross-legged posture is condemned as artificial fabrication upon the natural state.⁵ However, the question remains as to what extent these negations of practice were meant to be taken literally, and to what extent they were a heuristic device to shock a committed practitioner to loosen his fixated grip toward formal practice. Certainly, the later tradition views breakthrough and direct transcendence as the peak of the nine vehicles, suitable for advanced practitioners prepared by years of rigorous practice. However, it seems that the boundaries were more fluid in the early Tibetan Renaissance period and *rDzogs chen* practices were available to yogis without extensive background in sūtric and tantric contemplative training.

Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma), UR II:486-488.

⁴ In *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*, Germano discusses the origin of breakthrough in the Mind Series: "[M]ind series discourse and praxis was transformed in its assimilation by the Seminal Heart under the rubric of breakthrough contemplation" (120), and "The direct transcendence incorporates most of what is unique to the Seminal Heart, while the breakthrough serves as rubric for those older elements of the Great Perfection continuing to play an important role in its new formulations." (146)

⁵ Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*, 69.

The method of negation and deconstruction has a long history in Buddhism, originating with the Śākyamuni Buddha's negation of brahmanic rituals, caste system, and the Upaniṣadic doctrine of the self (*ātman*). Nāgārjuna's Middle Way philosophy and the Perfection of Insight (*prajñāpāramitā*) literature are the most notorious examples of the philosophy of deconstruction within Buddhism. David Germano points out that this deconstructive approach thrives only upon a host it criticizes, and it fulfills an important function of shaking and shattering established structures, thus making room for playfulness, transformation, and generation of new ideas and practices.⁶

This development is evident in the Mind Series' negation of normative tantric practice, which created the space for innovative developments in the subsequent Space Series and especially Pith Instruction Series, culminating in the Seminal Heart and its creative appropriation of tantric philosophy and practice. Thus, we have tantric meditations of generating divine *maṇḍala* worlds reconfigured in the Seminal Heart practice of direct transcendence, the world-creating Mahāyāna Buddhas re-envisioned in the Seminal Heart cosmogony, and the Madhyamaka emptiness reinterpreted as a fertile source of manifestation in the *rDzogs chen* view on the universal ground. Breakthrough, on the other hand, is a more direct descendant of the quest for instant enlightenment through non-conceptual meditation in the Mind Series. By the time of the 14th century, breakthrough had become paired with direct transcendence (*thod rgal*), the latter being ranked as superior. However, the breakthrough recognition of pristine awareness was thought to be necessary for the successful practice of the visionary techniques of direct transcendence. This view is clear also in rGod ldem's anthology, which frequently contains instructions on letting the mind be, so that the pristine awareness can manifest before engaging in the practice of direct transcendence. For example, *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* discusses three non-conceptual letting-be meditations of breakthrough to be performed before direct transcendence.⁷

It is interesting to note that *The Oral Transmission of Vimalamitra* is the only source in the anthology that uses the terms breakthrough and direct transcendence.⁸ However, *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* contains the same kind of structuring of *rDzogs chen* practices without the explicit application of this terminology. The text discusses the nature of mind and teaches various types of letting-be meditation that are clearly breakthrough immediately before explaining

⁶ Germano, *Mysticism and Rhetoric in the Great Perfection*, 69-70.

⁷ For the section on breakthrough, see UR IV:325-336, and direct transcendence UR IV:336-349.

⁸ See UR IV:325.

the key points of direct transcendence such as the three postures.⁹

Similarly to *The Guide Text*, *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* do not employ the term breakthrough, and even classify the cycle as belonging to the Mind Series. Nevertheless, looking at the larger context of the cycle and the anthology itself, it is reasonable to view the teachings of the cycle as breakthrough. Firstly, the cycle contains many Seminal Heart topics, such as death, visionary bardo states, subtle physiology, and analogical introductions (*dpe'i ngo sprod*). Thus, the association with the Mind Series is not to be taken literally but it functions as a tribute to this earlier strand of the Great Perfection and serves the agenda of the anthology to integrate the Three Series in its synthesizing framework. Secondly, *The Unimpeded Realization* is a Seminal Heart anthology that teaches breakthrough and direct transcendence, even though the terms are employed only once. Thirdly, the teachings of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* sound like breakthrough. For example, *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* states:

The followers of the unimpeded Great Perfection assert that the nature of the mind is clear light. Moreover, they say that the appearances of confused mind are blindly swirling. By letting the mind be in the natural state, that which is called the nature of the mind becomes clear. ---

The meaning of self-display is clear within you. Your own light blazes inside yourself. The self-awareness abides in the natural state.¹⁰

The Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana also teaches a letting-be meditation that sounds like breakthrough:

If you wonder "well then, how is the clinging cut, and how does one meditate on it?", release both the body of confused appearances and the notion of an intellect that meditates, and let your cognition be in the state of *dharmakāya*'s profound clarity without any grasping at all.¹¹

⁹ The section on breakthrough is in UR IV:369-379 and direct transcendence in UR IV:379-384.

¹⁰ *rdzogs chen zang thal bas ni: sems gyi rang bzhin 'od gsal du 'dod te: de yang sems 'khrul pa'i snang ba bun long long ba de la zer ba yin te: sems rang lugs su bzhag pas: sems kyi rang bzhin bya ba de sa ler 'ong: rab 'byor sems kyi rang bzhin 'od gsal ba'o: --- don rang snang rang la gsal: rang 'od rang la 'bar: rang rig rang sor gnas pa yin no: The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma), UR II:506.*

¹¹ *'o na 'khrub ji ltar gcod: ji ltar sgom snyam na: snyems byed kyi lus dang: sgom blo'i shes pa gnyis ka phyal gis btang la: chos sku gting gsal gyi ngang la shes pa 'dzin med du tsan gyis zhog cig: dpe rat+na man shel lta bu: don rang lus chos kyi skur yod pas: lus rdos pa can ma yin no: stong pa zang thal du sgom: chos sku gsal ba'i sbubs su sgom: The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud phyi ma) UR II:544.*

Therefore, considering the Seminal Heart character of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, as well as the general context of *The Unimpeded Realization*, it is reasonable to view the breakthrough-like instructions of *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* as breakthrough.

Besides Seminal Heart topics, *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* contextualize breakthrough in polemical discussions that aim to establish the Great Perfection as the supreme Buddhist vehicle. The narrative aspect of the argument is crystallized in a fascinating story that describes the conversion of Mañjuśrīmitra, who represents normative Buddhism, by dGa' rab rDo rje, who is a *rDzogs chen* figure. The specific plot of this narrative may be distinctive to rGod ldem: at least *The Seminal Heart of Vimalamitra* (*Bi ma snying thig*) belonging to *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*sNying thig ya bzhi*) contains a different version of the meeting of dGa' rab rDo rje and Mañjuśrīmitra. In this version, Mañjuśrīmitra has a vision of Mañjuśrī, who tells him to go to the charnel ground of Cool Grove, if he wishes to attain enlightenment in this life. Mañjuśrīmitra does as instructed and studies there with dGa' rab rDo rje for 75 years.¹²

In *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, Mañjuśrīmitra resides in Bodh Gaya, India, as the leader of 500 Buddhist *paṇḍitas*, or learned scholars, who all resent dGa' rab rDo rje, a new spiritual teacher that had arrived in their domain, because they view his *rDzogs chen* teachings as heretical. After the other *paṇḍitas* have unsuccessfully debated dGa' rab rDo rje, Mañjuśrīmitra agrees to debate him and says: "If I will be victorious in the debate, [dGa' rab rDo rje] is an emanation of a demon, so pierce his tongue and exile him!" Mañjuśrīmitra then loses the debate to dGa' rab rDo rje. The scene culminates in a graphic detail of Mañjuśrīmitra attempting to cut off his own tongue, because he realizes he had slandered the unsurpassable teaching of a Buddha:

[Mañjuśrīmitra] put his tongue on the edge of the knife. dGa' rab rDo rje grabbed the knife, threw it away, and said: "Mañjuśrīmitra, do not cut off your tongue! Accept my teaching! Having differentiated the view, there is nothing to debate in the meaning of the Great Perfection. From now on, meditate on the meaning of the Great Perfection and free yourself from the faults and downfalls of karmic retribution."¹³

¹² *The Seminal Heart in Four Parts* (*Snying thig ya bzhi*), V:529-30.

¹³ *lCe spu khri'i kha la blangs pas: dga' rab rdo rje'i phyag gis spu khri blangs te 'phang nas 'di skad gsungs so: 'jam dpal bshes gnyen lce ma gcod: nga yi bstan pa khyed gyis zungs: lta ba la shan phyed pa las: rdzogs chen don la rtsod pa min: phyin chad rdzogs chen don sgoms dang: rnam par smin pa'i nyes ltung bral: The First Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud dang po), UR II:468.

Incorporating Analytical Contemplation in Breakthrough

In the narrative of Mañjuśrīmitra's conversion, dGa' rab rDo rje urges Mañjuśrīmitra to “differentiate the view” (*lta ba la shan phyed*), which is a crucial point in the philosophical contemplations. At the time of rGod ldem, breakthrough is not only about letting go of conceptual constructs and recognizing the pristine awareness as in the early Mind Series, but it augments this type of non-conceptual practice with the philosophical contemplations, in which you differentiate (*shan phyed*) the correct view (*lta ba*). In *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, this is done through three types of analytical reflection: (1) investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind (*sems kyi byung gnas 'gro*), (2) distinguishing mind from wisdom (*ye shes*) or awareness (*rig pa*) — wisdom and awareness being synonymous in this context — and (3) differentiating the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) from the reality body (*dharmakāya, chos sku*). While these are common philosophical topics in the *rDzogs chen* literature from early on, some authors such as rGod ldem also discuss them as analytical reflections to be applied in contemplation. The aspirant contemplates these three topics as part of breakthrough, aiming to realize and experience the correct view both through the meditation of letting the mind be and by reflecting analytically on these profound subjects. It is also notable that the view on the mind and universal ground in rGod ldem's anthology contains some distinctive elements, for example, the mind is said to have an origin, dwelling, and destination, and the universal ground is discussed as synonymous with the common ground (*gzhi*) of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

*Is rGod ldem the First Author to Incorporate
the Three Philosophical Contemplations in Breakthrough?*

Seminal Heart works contain different approaches to discussing these three types of analytical reflection. It seems that investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind was the first one of these philosophical topics to be applied as a contemplative practice. This is how it is treated in Klong chen pa's *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*) that briefly lists it as a preliminary, not of breakthrough, but direct transcendence.¹⁴ As for differentiating mind from wisdom and universal ground from the *dharmakāya*, the same work does not discuss them anywhere in the eighth chapter on *rDzogs chen* practice, but presents them as part of the philosophical discussion on human psychology in the fourth chapter, thus indicating that Klong

¹⁴ *Treasury of Words and Meanings* (*Tshig don mdzod*), 374.

chen pa did not view them as contemplative practices.¹⁵

In *The Clouds of the Ocean of Profound Meaning* (*Zab don rgya mtho'i sprin*), Klongchenpa presents breakthrough as containing more philosophical reflection than in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*. He discusses investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind both as a preliminary of breakthrough and as part of the actual practice. In addition, this version of breakthrough contains an analytical inquiry into the agent who transmigrates in samsara and into the faulty nature of ordinary mind. After these analytical reflections, the second part of breakthrough contains non-conceptual letting-be meditations.¹⁶ Despite the presence of these analytical reflections, *The Clouds of the Ocean of Profound Meaning* contains neither the meditation to distinguish mind from wisdom nor the differentiation of the universal ground from the *dharmakāya*.

However, an earlier work, *The Blazing Illuminating Lamp*, which is a commentary to *The Tantra of Unimpeded Sound* and attributed to Vimalamitra, mentions the differentiation of mind from wisdom as an idea to be realized in contemplation. The text does not discuss it as part of the pith instructions on breakthrough, but the section on differentiating mind from wisdom contains a brief reference that suggests this differentiation is actualized upon successfully practicing direct transcendence. The text states that the method of differentiation is to meditate in a place where the mind is not distracted and relying on seeing the lamps, which are the result of wisdom manifesting in direct perception.¹⁷

rGod ldem's anthology may be one of the earliest sources where all these three philosophical reflections are applied as part of the breakthrough practice, but more research is needed to ascertain the history of these reflections vis-à-vis breakthrough. In later *rDzogs chen* literature, these reflections are commonly applied as contemplative practices and the number of conceptual pairs to differentiate increases. For example, Jigs med Gling pa's (1730-1798) *Seminal Heart of Klong chen pa* (*Klong chen snying thig*), not only contains the mind-wisdom and universal ground-*dharmakāya* differentiations, but also adds seven more pairs to distinguish, making a total of ten practices that are all to be applied in *rDzogs chen* contemplation.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 229-250.

¹⁶ *The Clouds of the Ocean of Profound Meaning*, Pt. 7, 428-435.

¹⁷ *The Blazing Illuminating Lamp* (*Sgron ma snang byed 'bar ba*), for the method of differentiating universal ground and *dharmakāya*, see II:270-271, and the method of differentiating mind and awareness, see II:272-273.

¹⁸ The ten differentiation practices are (1) mind and awareness (*sems/rig pa*), (2) stability and essence (*gnas pa/ngo bo*), (3) proliferation and dynamic energy (*'phro ba/rtsal*), (4) mode of liberation and key points (*gröl tshul/gnad*), (5) universal ground and *dharmakāya* (*kun gzhi/chos sku*), (6) occasion of confusion and liberation

As for rGod ldem's anthology, we should note that the connection of breakthrough and the three analytical reflections is not spelled out explicitly in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, for the cycle does not clearly state that these philosophical reflections should be meditated on in breakthrough. However, the anthology contains sufficient indications to conclude that these reflections were intended to be employed as contemplative practices. This is also how they were understood in two later commentaries on *The Unimpeded Realization*.

The first indication that these philosophical reflections are to be applied as contemplative practices is that they occupy a central place in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, which is a cycle on breakthrough. Secondly, the discussion is often akin to a contemplative instruction, because the text gives direct advice, such as "identify pristine awareness devoid of the mind."¹⁹ The main indications come from two texts that outline practice programs. *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* lists various preliminary practices for rDzogs chen contemplation, such as the *ru shan* practice²⁰ and exercises involving a Hūṃ syllable. The last preliminary practice is called investigating the mind, and it contains the analysis of the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind. The subsequent actual practice of breakthrough involves looking at the mind with the mind, in order to clear away the movements of the illusion-like ordinary mind (*sems*) so that one can realize the unborn nature of the mind itself (*sems nyid*), i.e. pristine awareness.²¹ Thus, this text approaches the practice of the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind as a preliminary that is practiced just before breakthrough, and the subsequent breakthrough contains the practice akin to differentiating mind and awareness.

The second text that outlines a practice program is *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to this Great Tantra*. The text discusses the topic of distinguishing the mind from awareness in the chapter on rDzogs chen practice just before explaining direct transcendence. This indicates that these reflections on

(*'khrul/grol skabs*), (7) spontaneity as ground and result (*gzhi/ 'bras lhun grub*), (8) original purity as path and result (*lam/ 'bras ka dag*), (9) intermediate state and deities (*bar dol/lha*), and (10) encouragement and pure land (*dbugs 'byin/zhing*). For a translation of an excerpt from Jikmé Lingpa's *Treasury of Good Qualities* that discusses the distinction between mind and wisdom, see Higgings, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet*, 327-334.

¹⁹ *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*, UR II:500.

²⁰ The term *ru shan* refers to differentiating the domains of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. The practice in this text entails imitating the behaviors of the various inhabitants of six realms as well as deities in pure lands for the purpose of distinguishing the experience of these domains and severing future rebirth in saṃsāra.

²¹ *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* (*Chos nyid mngon sum kyi khrid yig*), UR II:366-370.

the mind and awareness are part of the text's conception of the breakthrough practice.²² It is also interesting that upon differentiating mind from awareness, one practices direct transcendence, which is referred to as "the practice for perceiving awareness directly." It is said to be awareness that dawns from the heart onto the sky, *binḍus* are the essence of awareness, and the appearances of *maṇḍala* deities are the visions of awareness. Thus, after the recognition of awareness in breakthrough, one learns to perceive the visionary dimension of awareness in direct transcendence.

It is interesting to note that two later practice commentaries on *The Unimpeded Realization* include some of these philosophical reflections as part of the breakthrough practice. *The Island of Liberation* by Zur chen Chos dbyings Rang grol (1604-1669) describes breakthrough as centered around the reflection on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind, thus presenting this analytical meditation as elemental in breakthrough. *Fulfilling the Hopes of the Fortunate Ones* by Sprul sku Tshul khriṃs bZang po (20th century) presents the reflection on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind as a preliminary of breakthrough, while differentiating mind and awareness is part of the actual practice of breakthrough. We should note that the inclusion of these reflections as part of breakthrough indicates only that this is the way they were practiced at the time of composing the commentaries, not at the time of rGod ldem. However, the absence of topics in a commentary does not mean those practices were not taught by the teachers transmitting them, because additional topics and sections may be added in the context of oral transmission. For example, sTag lung rTse 'phrul Rin po che (1926-2015) included these three philosophical contemplations from *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* in the way he transmitted breakthrough in the rDo rje brag monastery in exile in Shimla, India, even though only the investigation of the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind is described in *The Island of Liberation*, which is the main commentary rTse 'phrul Rin po che employed to transmit the practice.

Thus, we see that the later Northern Treasures tradition explicitly regards some of these analytical reflections as belonging to breakthrough contemplation, and the latest commentary by Tshul khriṃs bZang po is the most detailed and includes the largest variety of philosophical topics. One reason for the less detailed and less explicit presentation of the analytical side of breakthrough in the anthology itself may be the general style of the anthology, which is more archaic and poetic, lacking the clarity of commentarial literature. Another

²² *The Tantra of Becoming a Buddha by merely Seeing, Hearing, Wearing, or Praying to this Great Tantra* (rGyud chen mthong ba dang thos pa dang btags pa dang smon lam btab pa tsam gyis sangs rgyas pa'i rgyud), UR IV:117-118.

reason may be that this analytical approach to breakthrough was only taking shape at this period: the anthology may be one of the earliest sources, where these philosophical reflections are connected to breakthrough.

*The Content of the Philosophical Contemplations:
The Origin, Dwelling, and Destination of the Mind*

The chapter on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the ordinary mind (*sems*) of a sentient being contains rigorous reflection on the questions: Where does the mind initially arise from? Where does it abide in between? Where does it disappear in the end when one attains enlightenment? As a philosophical topic, this investigation is a common subject in *rDzogs chen* literature and appears also in many Mahāmudra works, but the view in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* is distinctive because, surprisingly to a *rDzogs chen* text, the mind is said to have an origin, dwelling, and destination.

The investigation on the origin of the mind reaches all the way to the beginning of time. *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* presents a detailed discussion on the cosmogonic manifestation or “ground-presencing” (*gzhi snang*) and the arising of ignorance in the first moments of manifestation due to the lack of recognition, resulting in a downward spiral of increasingly coarse saṃsāric existence, which is the path of sentient beings. The mind arises from the universal ground (*kun gzhi*) due to this very ignorance and lack of recognition of one’s true nature, so the mind’s origin is the universal ground. As opposed to sentient beings, the nirvāṇic trajectory of Samantabhadra begins when he recognizes the self and other as one, and sees the other, the phenomena that is seemingly out there, as a display or projection of his own self (*rang snang*). As for the mind’s dwelling and destination, in the succession of innumerable lifetimes in saṃsāra, the mind is said to dwell in a body, and in the end, when one attains enlightenment, it dissolves into the body of essence (*ngo bo nyid kyi sku*), which in this context refers to the universal ground.²³

This discussion is utilized to establish the superiority of the Great Perfection over other vehicles, because the other vehicles are said to assert that the mind does not arise from, abide, or disappear anywhere. *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* states:

As for the dharma teaching of the common vehicles, they look for the origin of the mind, and by not finding it, it is introduced as unborn. Looking for the dwelling place and not finding it, it is introduced as

²³ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na’i snyan brgyud bar ma), UR II:500.

non-dual union. In the end, they look for the place it disappears to, and by not finding it, it is introduced as non-ceasing. The followers of the unimpeded Great Perfection are completely sure that all the activities of the mind are mistaken. They assert that first, the origin is the intermediate state of the universal ground, so you should identify the ground. In the middle, its dwelling place is in the six realms, and it is confused. However, as soon as the excellent lama teaches the pith instructions in this life, you should abandon the activities of the mind as you abandon poison or like a visitor turns back from a mistaken path. Identify the pristine awareness devoid of the mind! In the end, the place of disappearance called the body of essence is the ground of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. When the realization thus becomes actual, you will become enlightened.²⁴

It is curious that the view on the mind lacking origin, dwelling, and destination is ascribed to “common vehicles,” while it is actually a typical view in the Great Perfection literature and *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* are distinctive in describing the mind as having an actual source, dwelling, and place of cessation.

Although *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* teach that the mind has origin, dwelling, and destination, *The Unimpeded Realization* contains other texts that present the standard *rDzogs chen* view on the topic. *The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā* states:

That which is called the mind is merely your own continuum of confused appearances of dualistic grasping originating from ignorance. It is like a cloud or mist covering the empty sky, [or] like clouds obstructing the sky when a hurricane arises. Even if you look for the source, dwelling, and destination, you will not find them.²⁵

The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points also propounds a similar view:

The confused mind is clouded by the co-emergent ignorance. Upon

²⁴ *Theg pa spyi'i chos ni: sems kyi byung sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de skye med du ngo sprod pa yod: gnas sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de gnyis me zung 'jug tu ngo sprod pa yod: tha ma 'gro sa btsal bas ma rnyed pa de 'gag med du ngo sprod pa yod: rdzogs pa chen po dgongs pa zang thal bas: sems kyi byas pa thams cad 'khrul par thag rbad kyi bcad do: dang po byung sa yang kun gzhi bar ma do nas byung bas gzhi ngos zin: bar du gnas sa rigs drug tu gnas nas 'khrul kyang: da lta bla ma dam pas man ngag gsungs ma thag tu: mgron po lam nor log pa bzhin tu sems kyi bya ba dug bzhin 'dor nas: sems med kyi rig pa ngos 'dzin: tha ma 'gro sa ngo bo nyid kyi sku bya ba 'khor 'das gnyis ka'i gzhi de rtogs pa mngon du gyur na sangs rgyas par 'dod do: Ibid., UR II:500.*

²⁵ *Sems zhes bya ba ni: ma rig pa las byung ba'i gnyis 'dzin kyi snang ba 'khul pa rang rgyud kho na zhig yin te: nam mkha' stong pa la sprin dang na bun 'thibs pa dang 'dra: sa gzhi la rlung 'tshubs langs te bar snang sgrub pa dang 'dra: byung sa dang gnas sa 'gro sa btsal yang mi rnyed do: The Guide Text on the Direct Perception of Dharmatā (Chos nyid mngon sum gyi khrid yig), UR II:366.*

the lack of the source in the beginning and the lack of destination in the end, in the middle it binds itself.²⁶

While *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* specifies the universal ground as the origin of the mind, the six realms as the dwelling, and the body of essence as the destination, the passages above describe the mind as lacking a source, dwelling, and destination. A skillful commentator might attempt to explain this contradiction away by saying that from the point of view of the conventional truth the mind can be said to have a source, dwelling, and destination, while ultimately no such thing can be pinpointed. We may also choose to view this as another example of how paradoxes are utilized in the Great Perfection. However, the most obvious reason for these different explanations is heterogeneous sources, multiple authors, and even multiple editors at work in the compilation of *The Unimpeded Realization*.

Differentiating Mind from Awareness

This investigation on the source, dwelling, and destination of the mind is related to discerning the ordinary mind (*sems*) from the pristine awareness (*rig pa*) or wisdom (*ye shes*). Some texts in *The Unimpeded Realization* speak about differentiating mind and awareness, while others discuss differentiating mind and wisdom. In either case, the content of the discussions is almost identical, indicating that the terms are understood as synonyms in this context. *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* contains a chapter on distinguishing mind and wisdom, both of which are viewed as possible paradigms in terms of human conscious ability, perception, and experience. The mind comprises the ordinary scattered thought processes and perceptions mediated by conceptuality and operating in terms of subject and object. Wisdom awareness refers to the quality of being aware itself, and to the raw, direct perception before the mind steps in and labels the content in conceptual categories.

The discussion on distinguishing mind from wisdom awareness is centered around examining their different abodes, pathways, gateways, essences, creativity (*rtsal*), activities, and results. The abode of the mind is said to be in the lungs, its pathway is the respiratory passage, and gateway is the nose and mouth. Awareness resides in the heart center, flows out via the luminous channel that connects the heart to the eyes, and comes out from the watery lamp of the eyes. It is interesting that the mind is related to the respiratory system and

²⁶ 'Khrul pa'i sems 'di lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pas bsgrub nas: dang po byung sa med pa tha ma 'gro sa med pa la bar skabs 'dir kho rang gis kho rang bcings nas: *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu)*, UR V:329.

breath, as breathing is directly affected by mental states and vice versa. The creativity of the mind is said to be connected to the five poisons, such as desire and hatred that conspicuously influence the breath. It is not surprising that wisdom awareness is connected to the subtle body and its luminous network of channels and *cakras*, as in the Seminal Heart literature the Buddha Nature is typically described as residing at the heart and brain in the form of the peaceful and wrathful deities. The creativity of awareness entails the manifestation of the form bodies: the visionary dimension of the deities' enjoyment bodies or *sambhogakāyas* and fleshly emanation bodies or *nirmāṇakāyas*.

The essence of the mind is said to be ignorance, while the essence of wisdom is the clear, non-conceptual, blissful, empty awareness. The activities of the mind are all dualistically based actions involving a subject and object, self-grasping, and mental poisons, while the activities of wisdom awareness are the feats of the emanation bodies. The results of the mind stem from the dysfunctional character of the mind, illustrated by the simile that the mind is like a crippled rider mounted on the breath and subtle winds (*rlung*) that are like a wild, uncontrolled, blind horse. This leads to thickening veils of conceptuality, latent tendencies, karma, and suffering in the cyclic existence. Wisdom awareness is not connected to breath or conceptuality, and is thus lucid, unimpeded, blissful, and free from birth and death. The recognition of its self-display results in enlightenment.²⁷

Differentiating the Universal Ground from the Dharmakāya

Differentiating mind and awareness is closely connected to distinguishing the universal ground from the *dharmakāya*, which is a prominent topic in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana*. Both topics involve discerning patterns and frameworks of unawareness (the mind and universal ground) from those of awakened reality (awareness and *dharmakāya*), and the process of discerning involves increasing reflexive awareness. However, the discussion on the mind and awareness operates more on the level of individual existence as it contains the analysis on their location and pathways in the body, while the distinction between the universal ground and *dharmakāya* is discussed in more impersonal terms, including narratives of creation, Samantabhadra's recognition, and the origin of saṃsāra's confusion. Another difference is that between the mind and the universal ground. The mind, although akin to the ground, functions in the realm of delusion and saṃsāric existence, but the ground is the basis of both saṃsāra and

²⁷ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud bar ma), UR II:492-494.

nirvāṇa. It has neither ignorance nor wisdom but is indeterminate. The *dharmakāya*, on the other hand, cannot be distinguished from awareness in any ontological sense.

The universal ground (*kun gzhi*) is not one of the easiest topics in *rDzogs chen* philosophy, especially because many prominent Tibetan authors have different views on its nature, attributes, and classifications and how it relates to the primordial ground before the bifurcation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, referred to as the original ground (*thog ma'i gzhi*) or simply the ground (*gzhi*). In general, fourteenth century Seminal Heart authors such as Klong chen pa in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* describe the universal ground in individual terms: it is the receptacle of all the latent tendencies and karma of a living being, and thus closely related to the universal ground consciousness (*kun gzhi rnam shes*), which is the collection of those latent tendencies themselves and notably similar to its precursor, the *ālayavijñāna* of the Yogācāra philosophy. Klong chen pa's universal ground is very different from the ground, which he depicts as the primordial, cosmogonic, impersonal ground before the trajectories of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa manifest.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, however, uses the terms ground and universal ground interchangeably when referring to the primordial ground of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. This usage reflects the way the terms were employed in the early Great Perfection before the individual universal ground was increasingly differentiated from the primordial ground by the emerging Seminal Heart traditions.²⁸ However, rGod ldem's view is different from the early Great Perfection in the sense that the universal ground is not identified with the Buddha Nature or the nature of reality as it is in the early Great Perfection, but it is neutral and devoid of awakened qualities. It is interesting that a late twelfth century Seminal Heart author, mKhas pa Nyi 'bum identifies the primordial ground not only with the Buddha Nature but also with the result of enlightenment, but the terminology he uses for the primordial ground does not include the word universal ground.²⁹

In *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* in rGod ldem's anthology, the reflections on distinguishing the universal ground from the *dharmakāya* are also employed as a polemical tool to highlight the superiority of the Great Perfection over other vehicles. The common vehicles are said to mistake the ground for the *dharmakāya* due to viewing

²⁸ For a discussion on the ground in the early Great Perfection and the increasing trend to differentiate the universal ground and primordial ground with the rise of the Seminal Heart, see Higgings, *The Philosophical Foundations of Classical rDzogs chen in Tibet*, 167-175, 184-188.

²⁹ For Nyibum's view on the ground, see Dalton and Yeshe, "Signification and History in Zhang Nyi ma 'bum."

ultimate reality as emptiness, instead of emptiness and awareness.³⁰ In the Great Perfection, it is understood that both the ground and the *dharmakāya* are empty, non-conceptual, all-pervading, and free from suffering, but the ground lacks the illuminating clarity, wisdom and dynamism of awareness present in the realization of the *dharmakāya*. The Tibetan word for a Buddha, *sangs rgyas* is made up of two words: *sangs* "to be pure" and *rgyas* "expanded". By using a citation from *The Golden Seal Tantra, The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* explain the difference of the universal ground and *dharmakāya* by saying that the ground is pure (*sangs*) because all the afflictions of desire, hatred and so forth have been cleared away, but wisdom has not expanded (*rgyas*). Instead, the *dharmakāya* of a Buddha has both these aspects of purity and expanded wisdom.³¹ To further highlight the difference between the *dharmakāya* and the universal ground, the text contains a long discussion on the *dharmakāya*'s five wisdoms and creative manifestations in the visionary dimension of the enjoyment body, which are aspects not shared by the universal ground.

Tying this back to the first philosophical contemplation, the investigation of the source, dwelling, and destination of the mind, we may raise a question that since the universal ground is said to be the destination of the mind in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, does this jeopardize differentiating the *dharmakāya* from the universal ground? Since the ground is devoid of illuminating awareness and hence different from the *dharmakāya*, why, in the final levels of enlightening realization, does the mind dissipate in the ground and not in the *dharmakāya*?

This question is not addressed in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*, but we may speculate that since the ordinary mind is an instrument of confusion that does not ultimately exist, it is ontologically different from the enlightened awareness of the *dharmakāya*, which thereby cannot be the mind's destination. However, the indeterminate universal ground that is devoid of luminous awareness and the ground of both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, is an appropriate destination for the mind to dissipate in. The mind arose from the ground due to the lack of recognizing the nature of appearances as self-display, and it dissipates in the ground upon this realization. As this happens, the mind's confusion-creating functions that obscured the *dharmakāya* cease to operate, and the ever-present luminous clarity of the awakened awareness is perceived.

³⁰ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan bgyud bar ma), UR II:503-504.

³¹ *Ibid.*, UR II:504.

Application of the Philosophical Contemplations

Since it is argued that these sophisticated philosophical reflections in *The Middle Oral Transmission of Vairocana* were applied as contemplative practices in the context of the breakthrough, it begs the question of how exactly they were applied. The texts provide detailed descriptions, including polemical discussion, but we do not know if this type of scripted reflection was applied to contemplative practice as such. These analytical contemplations may have been more fluid and personal in the lived contexts of private reflection and dialogues between a spiritual teacher and student.

This type of fluidity is indicated by some of the narratives of the anthology, such as *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* that is found in the fifth volume, *The Self Emergent, Self-Arisen Primordial Purity* and describes Ye shes mtsho rgyal's training under Padmasambhava. In this text, the above-mentioned philosophical contemplations are merged under the rubric of investigating the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind. This investigation involves discerning the ordinary mind from the deeper presence of awareness, but without the details of the different locations, pathways, functions and so forth of the mind and awareness. The investigation on the mind also examines the nature of the universal ground as the origin of bifurcation into the trajectories of confusion and awakened awareness. The format is dialogical. Padmasambhava asks Ye shes mtsho rgyal such questions as: "Where does the mind arise from?" or "What is the cause of saṃsāra?" If her reply does not reveal realization, Padmasambhava sends her off to further meditate on the question. The text contains no polemical references, and in addition to the analytical reflections, Padmasambhava instructs Ye shes mtsho rgyal to practice non-conceptual letting-be meditation, or to simply let the mind be, so that the pristine awareness can manifest. When she perceives visions of awareness, Padmasambhava instructs her not to grasp at them, as this would lead to proliferation of conceptuality. Instead, she must apply the watchman of mindfulness and let go of the brief experiences, so that eventually the realization of reality-as-it-is or *dharmatā* will become actual.³²

Another way to apply the philosophical contemplations is indicated in *The Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana*. The text contains a discussion on the presence of the *dharmakāya* in the body as five kinds of vibrant energy (*dwangs ma*) or luminous appearances in the fabulous palace of the exalted mind (*tsitta*) at the heart center of the subtle body, but then instructs the practitioner not to meditate on the *dharmakāya* in this manner, because "you will generate attachment to your body, fall

³² *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* (Zab mo gnad kyi them bcu), UIR V:324-337.

in the extreme of permanence, and go astray into meditating on conceptual fantasies."³³ Instead, the text gives a simple letting-be meditation that is colored by the philosophical idea of the *dharmakāya* being present in the body:

Release both the body of confused appearances and the notion of an intellect that meditates, and let your cognition be in the state of *dharmakāya*'s profound clarity without any grasping at all. The analogy is that of a jeweled crystal. The meaning is that your own body exists as the *dharmakāya*, so it is not the corporeal body. Meditate on it as empty and unimpeded. Meditate on it as the sphere of clarity of the *dharmakāya*.³⁴

Based on *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* and *The Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points* we can speculate that there may be three possible ways that the analytical reflections can be employed in the breakthrough practice. Some of the reflections may be applied more or less as described in the passages of analytical contemplation in *The Middle oral Transmission of Vairocana*. Secondly, as in the dialogues between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal, the analytical reflections can be applied in more fluid ways, assimilating the ideas creatively. The third way of employing the reflections is to create simple, uncontrived meditations based on the philosophical ideas, as we can see above in *The Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana*. In the rDo rje brag monastery in Shimla, India, the analytical reflections are applied as part of breakthrough in a dialogical format that progresses in fluid ways based on the individual needs of a student. Thus, anecdotal ethnographic evidence supports the application of the philosophical contemplations much like in the dialogues between Padmasambhava and Ye shes mtsho rgyal.

Conclusion

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's distinctive take on the *rDzogs chen* view and practice is evident in *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana*. In addition to teaching a simple, non-conceptual meditation of letting the mind just be, the cycle incorporates philosophical contemplation in breakthrough. The contemplations to be pondered upon are the investigation on the origin, dwelling, and destination of the mind,

³³ *The Exceedingly Secret Unsurpassed Later Oral Transmission of Vairocana* (Yang gsang bla na med pa bai ro tsa na'i snyan brgyud phyi ma) UR II:544.

³⁴ *snyems byed kyi lus dang: sgom blo'i shes pa gnyis ka phyal gis btang la: chos sku gting gsal gyi ngang la shes pa 'dzin med du tsan gyis zhog cig: dpe rat+na man shel lta bu: don rang lus chos kyi skur yod pas: lus rdos pa can ma yin no: stong pa zang thal du sgom: chos sku gsal ba'i sbubs su sgom: Ibid., UR II:544.*

differentiating mind from awareness, and differentiating the universal ground from the *dharmakāya*. While these topics appear in earlier *rDzogs chen* literature, rGod ldem's anthology may be one of the first sources where these three appear together, not as general philosophical discussion, but as contemplative practices in the context of breakthrough.

Contrary to the *rDzogs chen* literature in general, *The Oral Transmissions of Vairocana* teach that mind does have an origin, dwelling, and destination. Its source is the universal ground, it resides in bodies in the six realms and finally dissipates in the universal ground. rGod ldem's use of the word "universal ground" is different compared to other Seminal Heart authors and resembles the way it is understood in the early Great Perfection literature. The universal ground has much more personal connotations to Seminal Heart authors such as Klong chen pa, as it usually refers to the receptacle of latent tendencies and karma of a sentient being. However, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem uses the term universal ground to refer to the primordial ground before the separation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and it is the primordial ground that is to be differentiated from the *dharmakāya*.

Ten Steps of the Profound Key Points, a prominent narrative in *The Unimpeded Realization*, suggests that the way these philosophical contemplations were applied was not rigid but could change depending on the capacity of the student. The narrative presents an example of fluid application of the philosophical contemplations, as it depicts Padmasambhava teaching breakthrough to Ye shes mtsho rgyal by means of both non-conceptual letting-be meditation and spontaneous, situational dialogues inspired by the philosophical contemplations. This type of application is also supported by contemporary ethnographic evidence from the rDo rje brag monastery.

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From Ordinary Mortals to Lofty Parinirvāṇa: A Study of the *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* *

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0. Preamble

he tenth volume of *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (BDRC#W2PD17457, hereafter CNT) contains a series of eight *tshe sgrub* texts (see Table 1 below).

§	Title [fols.]	§	Title [fols.]
1.	<i>bKa' brgyad kyi tshe dbang yongs rdzogs</i> [5 fols.]	5.	<i>Tshe'i phyi sgrub</i> [3 fols.]
2.	<i>sGrub pa chen po dang 'brel ba'i tshe sgrub yongs rdzogs</i> [4 fols.]	6.	<i>Tshe'i nang sgrub</i> [2 fols.]
3.	<i>Tshe'i phrin las</i> [5 fols.]	7.	<i>Tshe sgrub Hrī: gcig ma</i> [2 fols.]
4.	<i>Tshe'i bstod byang bkol ba</i> [2 fols.]	8.	<i>Yang gsang nam mkha'i rdo rje</i> [2 fols.]
Total 25 fols.			

Table 1 — Series of eight texts in the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle

These eight vignettes belong to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's (ca. 1337–1401, BDRC#P5254)¹ *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle.² The present study therefore provisionally designates this compilation of *tshe sgrub* literature—comprising twenty-five folios edited for liturgical recitation (*bklags chog tu bkod pa*)³—as the *bKa' brgyad tshe*

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the First Byang gter Conference (Paris 2024), where participants' scholarly discussions proved invaluable. I acknowledge with gratitude Prof. Arguillère, Prof. Valentine, and Dr. Ducher, who offered their precious *tshe* (time and life) to enhancing the final submission through their expertise. All remaining shortcomings are entirely my responsibility.

¹ For Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's date as “ca. 1337–1401”, see Batsang & Valentine (forthcoming).

² For an early discussion of the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* tantra, see Neumaier 1970: 134, which references its classificatory framework as presented in the *Thu'u bkwan grub mtha'*. For the latest relevant study, see Arguillère 2026 in this special issue of the *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*.

³ For the term *bklags chog tu bkod pa*, see RT *gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, 203,3: *bka' brgyad rang shar gyi chos sde tshe lha yongs rdzogs kyi dbang/ gter gzhuṅg phyi nang gsang ba yang gsang hrīh gcig ma yongs rdzogs sgrub thabs pra brtags rnam dang/ phrin las dbang bskur bcas bklags chog tu bkod pa*.

sgrub (Longevity *Sādhana* of the Eight Pronouncements).⁴

Transcending the boundaries of such *chos sde* cycles, the *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* (KT) shares four core sections (sections §§5–8, highlighted in grey in Table 1 above) with two other longevity *sādhana*s attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can: (1.) the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (CD) and the (2.) *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub* (PNST).⁵ As the Venn diagram below (Figure 1) demonstrates, these four common sections—Phyi/Nang/gSang/Yang gsang (Outer/Inner/Secret/Most Secret)—can be understood as a systematic framework of *tshe sgrub* practices encompassing gradual development from "lower" tantric practices such as *rasāyana* (elixir extraction, *bcud len*) to advanced practices of deceiving death ('*chi bslu*), culminating in the vidyādhara level of Mahāmudrā.

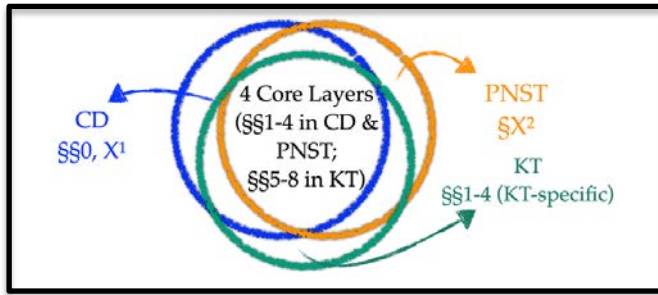


Figure 1 — Common 4 Core Layers and Distinctive Elements in the CD, PNST, and KT

The non-shared distinctive sections that protrude in the Venn diagram above (e.g., KT, §§1–4), beyond these four core layers, should be treated as secondary revelations appended to the archetypal core of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's revelations during various later periods. For instance, sections containing the *bla ma brgyud* lineage (PNST, §5=X² and KT, §1) can hardly be considered revelations by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can. As shall be examined more thoroughly in Chapter 2.2 of the present study, the form of this transmission lineage—developed through quotations from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*—is presumed to have been formalised around the sixteenth century. The natural tendency of these later developments to seek attribution to the pristine

⁴ For the catalogue reference of the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, see CNT Vol. 10 *dKar chag*, 3,3f. and *bKa' brgyad rang shar Catalog*, vol. 2, nos. 16–23, where all these eight vignettes are listed as independent texts. In contradistinction, the *RT gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, 203,3f., does not present detailed content specifications, a matter which shall be elucidated later in Chapter 2.2. The '*Bras spungs dkar chag* includes the *Tshe bsgrub lcags sdong ma* (#010168, p. 904), yet no title corresponding to the KT *per se* has been located.

⁵ For a structural comparison between CD and PNST, see Shinga 2024: 429–431.

authentic revelation may be understood as manifestation of the genuine devotion of lineage holders to the great *gter ston*. However, the inflated attribution of authorship concentrated upon the great *gter ston* has progressively obscured the contours of the archetypal *gter ma* literature that constitutes Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's own revelations.⁶

What follows is an attempt to present and discuss three focal points concerning the *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*: (1.) the developmental four-layered structure of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's archetypal core, (2.) the two major transmission lineages hitherto known, and (3.) the Indic-cum-Sanskrit equivalents of the term *tshe sgrub* / *bsgrub*.⁷ Through this methodological approach of distinguishing Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's revelations from later accretions, the present study seeks to illuminate the Indic equivalent of the *tshe sgrub* terminology he employed and contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse concerning the term **nopika*.

1. The Stratified Corpus of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's Tshe sgrub

From a philological perspective, the shared four core layers identified in the Venn diagram above (Figure 1) exhibit substantial discrepancies between recensions, manifesting as diverse traditions concerning the nomenclature and sequence of the gSang sgrub and Yang gsang sections (see Table 2 below).

Text	sigla	Edition	gSang sgrub	Yang gsang
CD	CD_A	gNas chung (W23453)	<i>Nam mkha'i rdo rje</i>	<i>Hrīḥ gcig ma</i>
	CD_B	RT_A (mTshur phu)	<i>Hrīḥ gcig ma</i>	<i>Nam mkha'i rdo rje</i>
	CD_C	RT_B (dPal spungs)		
	CD_D	CNT		
PNST	PNST	Yol mo bla ma rDo rje (W27870)	<i>Nam mkha'i rdo rje</i>	<i>Hrīḥ gcig ma</i>
KT	KT_A	CNT	<i>Hrīḥ gcig ma</i>	<i>Nam mkha'i rdo rje</i>
	KT_B	RT_B (dPal spungs)		
	KT_C	RT_A (mTshur phu)		

Table 2 — gSang sgrub and Yang gsang across the recensions of CD, PNST and KT

The gNas chung xylographic edition (CD_A) and the PNST manuscript preserve the sectional sequence "gSang sgrub: *Nam mkha'i rdo rje* → Yang gsang: *Hrīḥ gcig ma*" (highlighted in grey in Table 2).⁸

⁶ Authorship in *gter ma* literature is, as is well known, problematic; for one recent discussion see Shinga 2023: 172–173, i.a. 172n48.

⁷ Note that the present study renders the term *rgya gar skad* as "Indic-cum-Sanskrit" or simply "Indic".

⁸ To be precise, the PNST manuscript does not contain the Yang gsang section per se, but rather encompasses two distinct iterations of gSang sgrub—namely, (1.)

Conversely, all RT editions transmit the sequence "gSang sgrub: *Hrīḥ gcig ma* → Yang gsang: *Nam mkha'i rdo rje*". Adding to this complexity, the CNT editions diverge amongst themselves: the CNT edition of the CD (CD_D) follows the former arrangement, while the CNT edition of the KT (KT_A) adheres to the latter.

How should such pronounced discrepancies between recensions be interpreted? What must be considered here is the fact that the CNT edition of the KT (KT_A) exhibits a sectional structure fundamentally distinct from the two RT editions (KT_B and KT_C), transcending mere terminological variations. The computer-inputted modern CNT edition comprises 25 folios (i.e. 50 pages) with 8 pages dedicated to sectional frontispieces across all eight sections (§§1–8). In contrast, the xylographic RT edition contains 21 folios (42 pages) with merely 2 pages devoted to sectional frontispieces.⁹ The RT editions thus appear considerably less organised than the CNT edition. Such extensive structural divergences suggest that the CNT edition belongs to a distinct transmission lineage from the RT editions.¹⁰ While conclusive evidence regarding the base text for the CNT version remains elusive, it would be untenable—at least for the KT—to regard the CNT edition as a revised version of the RT edition. From a philological standpoint, the Byang gter rdo rje brag lugs benefits from the "textual transmission" (*tshig gi brgyud pa*) preserved through the diligent efforts of 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899, BDRC#P264). However, the transmission preserved in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo* (RT), an anthology (*phyogs bsgrigs*), remains subsidiary compared to mainstream traditions such as the CNT edition.

Returning to the question concerning nomenclature and sequence within the gSang sgrub and Yang gsang sections, in the absence of

gSang sgrub: *Nam mkha'i rdo rje* and (2.) gSang sgrub: *Hrīḥ gcig ma*. While it might appear rhetorically apposite to reorganise this duplication by designating the latter as Yang gsang rather than repeating the gSang sgrub classification, such is not the case herein. Nevertheless, the sequential arrangement exhibited in this manuscript (i.e., *Nam mkha'i rdo rje* → *Hrīḥ gcig ma*) may, ipso facto, be considered a noteworthy historical testimonium.

⁹ These two pages read respectively as follows: (1.) KT_B, 297,1; KT_C, 295,1: *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar las: 'chi med tshe lha yongs rdzogs kyi tshe'i phyi sgrub*, (2.) KT_B, 313,1; KT_C, 311,1: *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar las: tshe lha yongs rdzogs kyi phrin las smin byed dang bcas pa padma'i rgyan phreng*.

¹⁰ The divergent placement of the *Tshe'i pra brtag pa* chapter (KT, §X) between CNT and RT editions constitutes compelling evidence for separate transmission lineages. This chapter appears at the end of §2 in the CNT version (KT_A, 475,5f.)—though I have yet to verify this in the *bKa' brgyud rang shar* catalogue—while the RT editions position it at the conclusion of *sGrub pa chen po dang 'brel ba'i tshe sgrub yongs rdzogs* (KT_B, 311,1f.; KT_C, 309,1f.). Combined with systematic variant readings (*pra* versus *bkra*—my ongoing edition adopts the RT reading *pra*), this provides *prima facie* evidence for independent transmission lineages.

definitive evidence regarding the archetypal *gter ma* revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod lIdem can, any hypothesis remains conjectural. Future investigation of the biographical texts concerning himself as well as his teachers may illuminate this issue. Meanwhile, the present study maintains the hypothesis "Yang gsang: *Hrīḥ gcig ma* → gSang sgrub: *Nam mkha'i rdo rje*" as preserved in the Them byang section of both the gNas chung block edition and the RT edition of the CD.¹¹

1.1. Four Nuclei Evolutionis:
From *Phyi* (Outer) to *Yang gsang* (Most Secret)

While trans-sectarian testimonies attest to the longevity *sādhana*s revealed by Rig 'dzin rGod lIdem can in various historical genres such as *rnam thar* and *gsan yig* literatures, the specific characteristics of individual longevity *sādhana*s remain insufficiently explored.¹² As evidenced by the typical merit (*yon tan*) "so that at the time of death, in the Western Pure Land, one will be born before Amitābha ('Od dpag med)",¹³ these practices may represent either a tributary or mainstream current within Tibetan Pure Land thought. However, whether their sources can be traced back to Indic originals remains an unresolved question (discussed in detail in Chapter 3.1).

In the following, I shall provide an attempt to examine the similarities and differences within four developmental cores shared

¹¹ See CD, §0.3.1. See also Shinga 2020: 54, which discusses that the section nomenclature "gSang sgrub: *Nam mkha'i rdo rje* → Yang gsang: *Hrīḥ gcig ma*" seems to be reasonable in the CD.

¹² Much of the *tshe sgrub* literature attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod lIdem can appears, in my current assessment, to bear some connection to the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (CD). The NGMCP catalogue records approximately twenty extant texts related to the CD, yet transforming these into *capta* presents considerable difficulties—an *opus arduum*, to borrow the Roman expression. The '*Phrin las padma'i 'phreng ba* serves as a case in point. While the NGMCP catalogues the "Author Name" of this *dbu med* manuscript (Microfilm #L 1134/5, in part) as "gTer ston bZang po grags pa", this attribution is, as Valentine 2023 has argued, unlikely. The colophon in my ongoing critical edition identifies Rig 'dzin rGod lIdem as the revealer of this text. The question of authorship for his *tshe sgrub* literature is, however, complex: this text appears to represent a later development, reformulated as "an accessible, medium-length extraction" (*khyer bde bar 'bring du bskar ba*) from the CD, which I take to be his authentic revelation. As this example demonstrates, his *tshe sgrub* literature reminds us of the limitations of our present understanding as we proceed with scholarly humility.

¹³ See KT_A, 499,1 (§6. Nang sgrub); KT_B, 301,3; KT_C, 299,3:

'das tshe nub phyogs bde ba can:

'od dpag med kyi spyang sngar skye.

Note that while the KT explicitly specify rebirth in the presence of Amitābha in the western Pure Land of Sukhāvati, the CD merely employs the expression "born in the land of Sukhāvati", see CD, §2.8.1: *bde ba can gyi zhing du skye.*

between the *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* (KT) and the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (CD), thereby giving a general overview of the diverse conceptions within the *tshe sgrub* literature attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can. Do his *tshe sgrub* texts differ from those of earlier *gter stons* such as Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192, BDRC P364) or Gu ru Chos kyi dbang phyug (1212–1270, BDRC P326)? If so, what accounts for these differences? To what extent can we detect the influence of **Āyuhśādhana*s translated from Indic language into Tibetan during the fifteenth century within Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's *gter ma* literature? This analysis aims to provide philological evidence that may inform future scholarly investigations.

1.1.1. Outer Sādhana (*Phyi sgrub*)¹⁴

The Outer Sādhana elements common to both KT and CD texts notably emphasise creating an immortality elixir (*bcud len*; Skt. *rasāyana*) through precise measurements of various materials, including *cong zhi* calcite and *brag zhun* mineral extracts. In the CD, the instructions for the preparation of the elixir are more elaborate, specifically detailing nine nutritive substances (e.g. *'bri mar* and *sbrang rtsi*) rather than the simpler formula found in the KT.¹⁵ Both texts share some common elements in their promised benefits, such as achieving the qualities of various animals (lion, elephant, peacock, and garuḍa), but the CD provides a more systematic explanation of these benefits and includes additional details about overcoming six types of death (*chi ba drug po*) and specific signs of accomplishment.

The ritual visualization aspects are more developed in the CD, with specific instructions about using five skull-cups possessing the proper characteristics (*mtshan ldan thod pa lnga*) and detailed visualizations of the five Buddhas in union with their consorts. The ritual instructions in the KT are comparatively simpler, though both emphasise the importance of proper mantra recitation. The eschatological element—namely, concern over the degraded conditions of the final five hundred years (*lnga brgya tha ma*)—forms a principal ideological foundation of *tshe sgrub* literature and appears consistently in both

¹⁴ Regarding the Outer Sādhana (*Phyi sgrub*) in the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, I should note that the term *no pi ka* appearing in the Indic title merits particular attention and I shall attempt to analyse it in detail in Chapter 3.

¹⁵ The pharmacological aspects also differ notably. While both texts discuss the preparation of medicinal substances, the CD provides more precise measurements and timing for gathering ingredients, particularly regarding the seasonal collection of four types of plants (e.g., *shug pa*). It also includes more detailed instructions about the proper times for consumption and dietary restrictions.

texts.¹⁶ Both texts ultimately aim to achieve longevity through this *tshe sgrub* text. The KT describes direct ritual practice and elixir preparation, while the CD provides a more comprehensive system including more detailed colophon information about its discovery as a treasure text, and a broader cosmological context.

1.1.2. Inner Sādhana (Nang sgrub)

Second, in the Inner Sādhana (Nang sgrub), the sādhas recite the longevity dhāraṇī/mantra (CD: *sngags*; KT: *tshe yi snying po*) several hundred times daily to achieve two merits—(1.) attaining a lifespan of one hundred years and (2.) being reborn in Sukhāvātī (CD: *bde ba can gyi zhing*; KT: *nub phyogs bde ba can*: ‘od dpag med kyi spyan sngar) after death. These Sukhāvātī-related terms pertain to the divine realms of immortals—the domains where siddhas of the *tshe sgrub* dwell after death upon achieving the deathless state of parinirvāṇa. However, as far as I can tell at this point, the precise nature of these realms has not yet been thoroughly examined. ‘The word-cum-name’ (Almogi 2020)¹⁷ Sukhāvātī in the *tshe sgrub* corpus ascribed to Rig ‘dzin rGod ldem can requires further investigation in relation to his other revelations that belong to the *bde smon* genre.¹⁸

A key difference lies in the dhāraṇī-cum-mantra. The KT contains a shorter mantra of longevity (*tshe yi snying po*) *Om, Aḥ, Hūṃ, Hrīḥ, vajra*

¹⁶ See KT_A, 500,1 (§6. Nang sgrub); KT_B, 302,1; KT_C, 300,1:

bskal pa dus kyi tha ma la: mi rnams tshe thung snying rus chung : de dus tshegs chung sgrub sla myur: tshe sgrub kun gyi don bsdu nas: bdag ‘dra padmas gter du sbas:. For the importance of concealing *gter ma* in the context of *snyigs ma lnga yi tshe* (the age of the five degenerations) within the CD, see Shinga 2020: 69–73.

¹⁷ The expression ‘word-cum-name’ is taken from Almogi 2020, which presents a recent comprehensive study on the different usages and meanings of term “Akaniṣṭha” in the rNying ma sources and their Indic predecessors. I think her observation regarding Akaniṣṭha (‘Og min), as stated below, could be extended to Sukhāvātī (bDe ba can) as well. See Almogi 2020: 30: ‘[...] in the course of time one also witnesses an increasing number of occurrences of the word-cum-name Akaniṣṭha, particularly in later (Tantric) literature, where it is clearly no longer employed in the sense of a “location” within the Buddhist cosmology, but is rather used to express varying aspects of Buddhist philosophical ideas and praxes’.

¹⁸ Regarding the term *bde ba can*, a detailed comparative study of the *bDe ba can gyi smon lam* and the *bKa’ brgyad tshe sgrub* would prove illuminating, though this remains a desideratum for future research. In the *Jōdokyō Tenseki Mokuroku* (2011), Keikyo Nakamikado (中御門敬教) observes that the *bDe ba can gyi smon lam*: *Zab lam dbang gyi cha lag* draws its content from the Larger and Smaller Sukhāvātīvyūha sūtras, with no discernible tantric elements present (p. 88). My own provisional assessment suggests that the *bDe ba can gyi smon lam*, traditionally ascribed to Rig ‘dzin rGod ldem can, may represent a later textual development from his *tshe sgrub* corpus.

āyuse, *Hūṃ*, *Bhrūṃ*, *Nṛ*, *Jah*, *siddhi phala*, *Hūṃ*, *Āḥ*,¹⁹ while the CD includes a longer *dhāraṇī* beginning with *Oṃ namo bhagavate aparimitāyurjñāna-suviniścitatejorājāya...* which is not present in the KT at all. As I have discussed several times earlier,²⁰ this longer *dhāraṇī* is specifically identified in the citation from the *Aparimitāyuhṣūtra*.

1.1.3. Secret Sādhana (gSang sgrub): *Nam mkha'i rdo rje*

Third, the Secret Sādhana (gSang sgrub) of Space Vajra (*Nam mkha'i rdo rje*) primarily involves supplicating Hayagrīva and Amitāyus for Vajra-like steadfast protection,²¹ and a *prāṇāyāma* practice called "*Nam mkha'i bcud len*" (taking the quintessence of space/ākāśa).²² In terms of the protective mantra (*bsrung ba'i sngags*) described metaphorically as wearing armour of protection (CD: *gzhan gyis mi*

¹⁹ See KT_A, 498,4f; KT_B, 301,2f; KT_C, 299,2f. The significance of oral transmission proves especially crucial in conferring *dhāraṇī* and mantra. In transcribing mantras from Tibetan script into Roman alphabet, I have yet to establish a definitive methodology. Rather than employing Wylie transliteration, the present study attempts phonetic representation. For the syllable *hrīḥ*, I adopt the notation that appends *h* to *hrī*, following the specification in the CD, which describes its form as "featuring the *tsheg drag* mark". See *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* §4.2.3: *hrīḥ dmar tsheg drag ldan par bsgom*. That *hūṃ* as a single syllable terminates in anusvāra remains uncontested, as Buddhist treatises on visualising this *bīja* amply demonstrate. For recent discussion of Indian interpretations dividing *hūṃ* as *ha + ū + ma*, *ha + ū + a + ṃ*, and so forth, see Tokushige 2025. However, pronunciation of this crucial seed syllable ཨྵ must follow the *upadeśa* (*man ngag*) of one's lineage. For instance, sNar thang lo tsā ba Sanggha shrī (b. 14th century, BDRC#P3662), a contemporary of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, argues that this anusvāra (*klad kor*) should be pronounced (*bklag par bya*) as 𑖠, distinct from the anusvāra 𑖡 in the mantra syllable 𑖡. For details, see *sNgags kyi bklag thabs* 56,13. I express sincere gratitude to rGan Ngawang Woesung Gonta and Khenpo Ju Tenkyong for their invaluable counsel regarding proper pronunciation in recitation practice.

²⁰ For Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's citation of the *dhāraṇī* from the *Aparimitāyuhṣūtra*, see, i.a., Shinga 2023.

²¹ In the *Tshe'i phrin las* (*bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, §3), it is Vajra Amitāyus (rDo rje tshe dpag med), not Amitāyus, who constitutes the Five Buddhas. Vajra Amitāyus is visualised as white in color, holding a long-life vase, and in union with his consort Pāṇḍaravāsīnī (Na bza' dkar mo).

See KT_A, 480,6; KT_B, 318,6; KT_C, 316,6: *hrīḥ dkyil 'khor chen po'i [po'i A] po B, C] dbus kyi lte ba la: rin chen khri rkang rma bya brgyad bsnol steng: padma nyi zla brtsegs pa'i gdan steng du: hrīḥ las bcom ldan rdo rje tshe dpag med: sku mdog dkar po tshe yi bum pa bsname: yum chen na bza' dkar mo gnyis med 'khril*.

²² The compound *bcud len* typically denotes "a method of prolonging life and enhancing physical strength through reliance on substances such as flowers" (see *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, s.v. *bcud len*, p. 755). In the present context, however, it is more appropriate to parse the phrase as *nam mkha'i bcud + len*—that is, "taking" or "absorbing" the quintessence of space—rather than treating *bcud len* as an indivisible unit.

tshugs go cha; KT: *bsrung ba'i go cha*), the KT presents the mantra in a more straightforward manner: prefixed with three core bīja (*Om*, *Āḥ*, *Hūṃ*) before *Bhrūṃ*, *vajra āyuse*, *Hūṃ*, *Āḥ*, followed by the vajra armor mantra.²³ In the CD, the protective mantra sounds simpler like *Om*, *vajra yakṣa kavaci*, *Hūṃ*, *Bhrūṃ*, but it includes mentions of specific timing requirements.²⁴

Regarding the concept of deceiving death (*chi ba bslu*), both texts mention this *prāṇāyāma* practice but approach it differently. The KT connects it directly with the practice of swallowing nectar-visualised saliva (*mchil ma*), while the CD relates it more specifically to the practice of controlling vital winds (*srog rlung*; Skt. *prāṇa*). While performing the wind-based longevity practice (*rlung la tshe sgrub pa*), the practitioner absorbs *prāṇa* to enliven their *nāḍī* system. The practice of absorbing space's essence (*Nam mkha'i bcud len*) shows variations in presentation. The KT describes a direct process of inhaling space (*nam mkha' rngubs*) through the practitioner's mouth and nostrils, and then transforming it into nectar (*bdud rtsi*), while the CD presents a more complex procedure involving specific visualisations of lotus seats, sun and moon discs, and syllable transformations. Both texts agree on the basic outcomes of overcoming illness (*nad*) and purifying obscurations (*sgrib pa*), but present different methodologies for achieving these results.

1.1.4. Most Secret Sādhana (Yang gsang): *Hrīḥ gcig ma*

Lastly, fourth, in the Most Secret Sādhana (Yang gsang) of Only *Hrīḥ* (*Hrīḥ gcig ma*),²⁵ both texts outline a meditation practice centered on the red bīja *Hrīḥ* transforming into Padma tshe dbang rtsal.²⁶ The KT

²³ As for the protective mantra, a romanization of the original Tibetan text (see KT_A, §8, 506,3; KT_B, 304,1; KT_C, 302,1) for ease of reading, primarily following KT_C, as follows: *Om*, *Bhrūṃ*, *vajra āyuse*, *Hūṃ*, *Āḥ*.

Āḥ, *Bhrūṃ*, *vajra āyuse*, *Hūṃ*, *Āḥ*.

Hūṃ, *Bhrūṃ*, *vajra āyuse*, *Hūṃ*, *Āḥ*.

Om, *vajra yakṣa kavac*, *Hūṃ*.

²⁴ According to Kaḥ thog rig 'dzin Tshe dbang nor bu (1698–1755, BDRC#P676) in his *Gung thang rgyal rabs*, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can maintained close ties with King Khri rgyal mChog grub lde of Gung thang (d.u.). See *Gung thang rgyal rabs*, 34,11f. For a German translation, see Everding 2000: 118 (§14.4). While I have been able to find no specific references to *tshe sgrub* practices, the religio-political context suggests the king may have pursued magical solutions through *tshe sgrub* cultivation to protect his realm and subjects without recourse to military bloodshed.

²⁵ The term *gcig ma* in this section title might be more appropriately rendered as "Single Deity Sādhana" to better capture its liturgical connotations.

²⁶ In both the CD and the KT, the passage describing how the sādhaka, having generated themselves as Padma tshe dbang rtsal, subsequently "beholds Padma thod

delineates this transformation through technical meditative directives, whereas the CD augments these prescripts with natural metaphors—such as fish appearing in clear water or bubbles rising—suggesting a more spontaneous manifestation process.²⁷ Furthermore, the distinct passages emphasising the ineffable nature (CD, §4.5.2: *tha snyad brjod du med*) of the array of visualized phenomena arising in this meditation are not found in the KT's exposition.

Both texts delineate a seven-day (*zhag bdun*) practice whereby the sādḥaka attains absolute certainty regarding the dharmakāya nature of one's own citta (*rang sems chos skur blo thag chod*) and subsequently achieves the vidyādhara stage of Mahāmudrā.

The above comparative analysis of the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* (KT) and the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (CD) reveals the sophisticated structure of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's *tshe sgrub* corpus. While the *Phyi sgrub* relies on material ritual elements such as longevity pills and consecrated vases, the highly refined Yang gsang employs metaphysical elements of an ineffable nature. Traditionally, Buddhist longevity practices have developed through a critical examination of preceding Vedic traditions while flexibly accommodating societal needs by incorporating their practical aspects.²⁸

Appendix 1. Origin Claims for the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*

The attribution of the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* (KT) to the five treasures presents conflicting testimonies between the CNT (KT_A) and RT editions (KT_B, KT_C). The CNT catalogue explicitly derives the *bKa' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar* cycle "from the Eastern White

phreng" (*padma thod phreng dngos su mthong*) appears within the *Hriḥ gcig ma* section. Both Padma tshe dbang rtsal and Padma thod phreng may be understood as distinct aspects of Padmasambhava's activity concerning the transcendence of death.

²⁷ See CD, §4.2.1: *dwangs pa'i chu la nya ldang ltar: chu las chu lbur rdol ba bzhin: skad cig dran pas snang ba la: ngag tu hriḥ zhes brjod pa yis: bdag nyid padma tshe dbang rtsal*. Note that as Prof. Stéphane Arguillère has kindly pointed out, such imagery represents a commonplace formula within the rNying ma tradition for describing instantaneous visualisation that bypasses the formal structure of the three samādhis.

²⁸ For a classification of Buddhist sūtras that expound longevity rituals (*jani-tam/ 延命法*, term employed by Hatsuzaki to designate practices for extending lifespan) into three distinct categories, see Hatsuzaki 1968, which lists: (1.) 'Sūtra of the sermon under the Pippala tree' (p. 942), e.g., 金剛秘密善門陀羅尼經 (T 1137, 1138, 1139, 1140≈D 614/P 309), (2.) 'Sūtra of the sermon by the River Gaṅgā', e.g., 諸佛集會陀羅尼經. (T 1346≈D 513/P 150) and (3.) 'Sūtra of the sermon at the top of Mount Sumeru (p. 941), e.g., 金剛壽命陀羅尼念誦法 (T 1133. 不空譯).

Conch Shell Treasury" (*shar dung mdzod dkar po*).²⁹ The RT edition, however, exhibits internal inconsistency: while its corpus claims derivation from the same eastern treasury,³⁰ its catalogue attributes the cycle to the Southern Yellow Golden Treasury (*lho gser mdzod ser po'i chos sde*).³¹

The account placing it in the Southern treasury has become the standard, dominant system, being attested in the *gsan yig* of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617–1682).³² Yet detailed subdivisions of the five treasuries (*mdzod lnga'i nang tshan*) remain matters of scholarly conjecture across various sources.³³ The discrepancies between editorial versions constitute an essential

²⁹ See CNT Vol. 10 *dKar chag*, 1,2: *shar dung mdzod dkar po nas byon pa'i bka' brgyad pod gnyis par/ bka' brgyad phyogs bsgrigs dkar chag la/*.

³⁰ See KT_B, 326,3; KT_C, 324,3: *sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms kyi yang srid sprul sku rig 'dzin chen po rgod kyi ldem 'phru can gyis spyang drangs pa las/ 'dir mdzod lnga'i nang tshan shar dung mdzod dkar po nas byon pa bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi chos sde/ yongs rdzogs rnam pa gsum gyi nang tshan 'chi med tshe lha yongs rdzogs kyi smin byed sgrub pa'i skabs su babs pa stel/*

³¹ See RT *gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, 166,4: *rig 'dzin nyi zla 'od 'bar gyis spyang drangs pa'i lho gser mdzod ser po'i chos sde bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi rtsa dbang/ rdzogs rim rnam kyi khrid// brgyud 'debs dang sngon 'gro mdor bsdus// las byang// sngags kyi phrin las dril sgrub bcas gter gzhung dbang chog// bsnyen yig// gnam zhal don khrid// rim lnga// ye shes zang thal// rdzogs rim snying thig rnam bcu bcas gter gzhung/*. Regarding the epithet *Rig 'dzin Nyi zla 'od 'bar*, I have found no evidence to identify this figure with *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can*, and the possibility that it refers to an entirely different *gter ston* cannot be excluded.

³² See *Thob yig gangga'i chu rgyun*, vol. 3, 291,5: *sprul sku rig [rig em.] rigs/ 'dzin chen pos lho gser mdzod ser po nas spyang drangs pa'i bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar ni rgyud las/ zhi khro bka' brgyad lha chags ni/*. The *gsan yig* of the Great Fifth may be regarded as more historically reliable than evidential sources replete with mythological elements, such as *chos 'byung* or hagiographical *rnam thar*. Yet uncritical acceptance of *gsan yig* literature as historical fact would be methodologically naïve, since such records were susceptible to deliberate editorial intervention. Nishizawa (forthcoming) demonstrates this through the conspicuous absence of *Red mda' ba gZhon nu blo gros* (1349–1412), a contemporary of *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can*, from later *Sa skya pa gsan yig* records. *Red mda' ba* represented a collateral lineage distinct from the mainstream *Sa skya* transmission running from the *Sa skya Five Patriarchs* through *g-Yag phrug* (1350–1414) and *Rong ston* (1367–1449). His interpretations exhibited heterodox tendencies *vis-à-vis* orthodox *Sa skya* doctrine, rendering his systematic exclusion from lineage records a likely *suppressio veri* on doctrinal grounds.

³³ For early scholarship on the five treasuries, we are much indebted to Herweg 1994: 25. For a recent discussion of this issue, see Achard 2024, which demonstrates that the details of the five repositories (*mdzod lnga*) are described variably in different sources (e.g. the *Rig 'dzin rtsa ba'i sgrub thabs*), including the conditions and extraordinary omens associated with their revelation. The attribution system of the five repositories may itself have been a later construction, given the paucity of such references in texts presumed to represent the earliest strata. This issue will be discussed in the *Northern Treasure Histories*, vol. 2 (forthcoming 2026; personal communication with Prof. Arguillère, 28 July 2025).

component of our textual heritage. Any reconstruction, regardless of critical methodology employed, cannot transcend the status of legendary hypothesis. The present study therefore confines itself to observing these irreconcilable traditions.

2. Transmission Lineages of the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* (KT)

In the following chapter, I shall attempt to elucidate the complex evolution of the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, wherein certain elements were incorporated during subsequent historical phases. While the core textual corpus maintains its doctrinal integrity (see Chapter 1.1), textual examination (and hopefully also doctrinal investigation) indicates a gradual accretion of supplementary material. These additions, which emerged through varied transmission lineages, reflect the dynamic nature of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's *tshe sgrub* practice. In essence, a nuanced understanding of these posterior contributions illuminates not merely textual history per se, but indeed the broader intellectual currents that have shaped this significant corpus of religious literature.

2.1. Transmission Lineages in CNT Edition: *Citation and Context of the Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*

The initial section of the CNT version (KT_A, §1), entitled *bKa' brgyad kyi tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* (*Complete Longevity Empowerment of the Eight Pronouncements*; hereafter *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs*), primarily focuses on conferring longevity and vitality upon practitioners, thereby enhancing their life force and health for deeper spiritual engagement. This section thus functions as a foundational introduction to subsequent practices, establishing the framework for more profound exploration of longevity empowerment within the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*. In this contextual setting, it is entirely appropriate that the *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* intermittently cites verses from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* (D360; P2; Ng.529/Tb.424; T1188; abbr. MS) while invoking blessings through the recitation of twenty-six names of various deities and dignitaries (see Table 3 below).³⁴

³⁴ See *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, KT_A, 459,1–468,3, which corresponds broadly to KT_B, 328,5–330,4 and KT_C, 326,5–328,4.

#	Category and Folio Locus	Numerary
1.	Three Buddhas ³⁵ [461f.]	3
2.	Eight Manifestations of Guru Rinpoche [461,3f.]	8
3.	Dākinī Ye shes mtsho rgyal [462,4f.]	1
4.	Eight Byang gter Masters [462,4f.]	8
5.	Four Gatekeepers [463,2f.]	4
6.	Many Messengers (<i>pho nya</i>) [463,3f.]	1
7.	Many Longevity Deities (<i>tshe lha</i>) [463,3f.]	1
Total		26

Table 3 — The twenty-six sacred beings in the BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub, §1

As I recently discussed in Shinga 2024,³⁶ this pattern of invoking the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* while reciting the names of various deities and dignitaries likewise appears in the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* section (§X²) of the PNST.³⁷ Here, the Eight Byang gter Masters (highlighted in grey in Table 3 above) represent as a form of *bla brgyud*—a lineage of transmission relating to the BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub.

Regarding the eight lineage holders in the *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* (KT), five consecutive Byang gter masters from Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can through Ngags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod noms (1442–1509, BDRC#P10121) overlap with the five patriarchs enumerated in the *bKa' brgyad brgyud 'debs* (KG) and the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* section (§X²) of the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub* (highlighted in grey in Table 4 below).³⁸

#	Eight Lineage Masters Relating to the KT	MS	KG
1.	Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can (ca. 1337–1401)	v. 37	5,3
2.	sNgags 'chang rDo rje dpal (b. 14th c., BDRC#P10115)	v. 65	5,4
3.	mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen (BDRC#P10116)	v. 38	5,5
4.	Sangs rgyas dpal bzang (BDRC#P10117)	v. 59	5,6
5.	Ngags 'chang Chos rgyal bsod noms (1442–1509, BDRC#P10121) ³⁹	v. 55	6,1
6.	Chos skyong bsod noms bkra shis (ca. 16th c.)	v. 147	-

³⁵ Three Buddhas grant deathless longevity to devotees entering their temporal spheres: (1.) Samantabhadra in Akaniṣṭha's dharmadhātu palace, (2.) Amitābha in Padma-dbang's buddha-field, and (3.) Amitāyus in Sukhāvātī.

³⁶ See Shinga 2024: 433–435. For the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, verse numbers follow Davidson 1981; for bibliographical references, see Shinga 2024: 451 (bibliography).

³⁷ For a critical edition and annotated English translation of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*, Section X² of the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*, see Shinga 2024: 437–449.

³⁸ For the *bKa' brgyad brgyud 'debs*, see KG, 5,3–6,2. I am grateful to Prof. Arguillère for opening my eyes to this important text concerning the *bKa' brgyad* lineage within the Byang gter tradition. For the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs*, see also Shinga 2024: 435–437 (Chapter 4.2).

³⁹ The term *rdo rje 'chang ba kun gyi rje*, read by all three recensions (KT_A, 463,1; KT_B, 330,2; KT_C, 328,2), appears to correspond to *sarvavajradharādhipaḥ* in MS 107d.

7.	'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po (1524–1568, BDRC#P1089)	v. 107? ⁴⁰	-
8.	sDing ma ba bsLab gsum rgyal mtshan? (1526–1577, BDRC#P1090) ⁴¹	v. 23? ⁴²	-

Table 4 — Comparative table of luminaries

Of particular note are the divergent lineages that emerge from the sixteenth century onwards. The First Yol mo sprul sku Śākya bzang po (b. 15c, BDRC#P1698) and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang phyug bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1524–1559, BDRC#P1089), while appearing in separate lineages, made parallel contributions to the continuity (*rgyun*) of *tshe sgrub* literature within the Byang gter tradition.⁴³ The longevity sādhanas of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can, preserved through these textual and oral lineages (*dpe lung gi rgyun*), thus embody a religious heritage transcending sectarian boundaries—a heritage that may be considered a precursor to the nineteenth-century non-sectarian (*ris med*) scholar-mystic movement in eastern Tibet.

Given the nature of the genre, texts such as the *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* (KT_A, §1) and the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* (PNST, §X²), which include in their *bla brgyud* the names (generally epithets) of these later lineage holders, are recognised—even amongst conservative contemporary Tibetan lamas—not as authentic revelations of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem but rather as later accretions ascribed to him more broadly. In the case of the *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* (KT_A, §1), as Table 4 demonstrates, it is manifestly untenable to date the lineage earlier than the sixteenth century.

When, then, did the invocation of verses from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* become incorporated into the *bla brgyud* of *tshe sgrub* literature ascribed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can? The role accorded to this tantra within the Byang gter tradition may have been influenced, at least in part, by the presence of the 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo. This commentary, attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, demonstrates his penetrating understanding of the esoteric meanings underlying

⁴⁰ For the dates of Chos rgyal bsod nams and Thugs sras Chos skyong bsod nams bkra shis, I follow Valentine 2020.

⁴¹ I have not yet been able to identify this lama with certainty. The text reads solely 'jam dbyangs rgyal sras (KT_A, 463,2; KT_B, 330,3; KT_C, 328,3. Note the variant reading *rgyas* for *rgyal* in KT_A). The tentative identification with sDing ma ba bsLab gsum rgyal mtshan (1526–1577, BDRC#P1090) is based upon a lineage succession in the CD. See Shinga 2020: 295 (Appendix 6), i.a. nos. 13–14.

⁴² The term *gsang sngags rig sngags 'chang ba'i rigs*, read by all three recensions (KT_A, 463,2; KT_B, 330,3; KT_C, 328,3), appears to correspond to *mantra-vidyādharakulam* in MS 23c.

⁴³ Notably, both the names of the First Yol mo sprul sku and 'Jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po also appear in the transmission lineage of the *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po*. See Shinga 2020: Appendices 5, 6 (pp. 293, 295).

Mañjuśrī's various names.⁴⁴ The practice of chanting sacred names and meditating upon divine forms may initially appear to be simple litany or hymn. Yet such recitation of sacred appellations constitutes not merely an act of devotion but an essential component of the initiatory process requisite for immersion in practice. In this context, the 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo serves as a bridge between scriptural teaching and meditative realisation, fostering within the Byang gter tradition both intellectual comprehension and practical insight into the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*. Each name is explicated not only in its literal sense but also in its deeper tantric significance, being linked to the immutable wisdom body (*ye shes kyi sku*). In this regard, Mañjuśrī, *qua* Vajra Lord (*rdo rje dbang phyug*), is called the Secret Victor (*gsang ba'i rgyal*) because the lineage of the Victorious One (*rgyal ba'i gdung*) is maintained only by keeping it concealed from the unsuitable (*skal med*) whilst revealing it to the suitable (*skal ldan*).⁴⁵

The following example illuminates the mystic meaning behind the name mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen (b. 14-15th c., BDRC#P10116), one of the Eight Patriarchs. To understand why the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* cites a verse (MS 38) from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's interpretation in the 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo provides a valuable clue.

bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub, 462,⁴⁶

By its nature, great loving kindness (*byams chen*) is immeasurable. [MS 38a]
Byams pa bshes gnyen, your time has come,
Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of immortal life!

'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo, 291,⁴⁷

"By its nature, great loving kindness (*mahāmaitrī*) is immeasurable". [MS 38a] That is, when one realizes the meaning of one's own *dharma*tā, a single loving-kindness arises towards all sentient beings, like a mother towards her only child, and one is

⁴⁴ In point of fact, the 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo is a *ṭīkā* (*mchan dkyus*) on Padmasambhava's own *bhāṣya* (*mchan*), see 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo, 362,4f. The provenance of the 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo as found in the CNT will be discussed in the *Northern Treasures Histories*, vol. 2 (personal communication with Prof. Arguillère, 28 July 2025).

⁴⁵ 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo, 274,2: *rdo rje dbang phyug gsang ba'i rgyal// ces pa ni/ ye shes kyi sku la 'gyur ba med pas/ rdo rje chos la dbang bas dbang phyug skal med la gsang zhing skal ldan la bstan pa tsam gyis/ rgyal ba'i gdung 'dzin pas/ gsang ba'i rgyal ces pa'ol/*.

⁴⁶ *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, KT_A, 462,5 (cf. KT_B, 330,1; KT_C, 328,1):
byams chen rang bzhin dpag tu med: [MS 38]
byams pa bshes gnyen kyi dus la babs:
'chi med tshe yi dngos grub stsol:.

⁴⁷ 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo, 291,4: *byams chen rang bzhin dpag tu med//* [MS 38] *ces pa ni/ rang gi chos nyid kyi don rtogs pa'i dus na/ sems can thams cad la bu gcig pu'i ma ltar byams pa gcig 'ong stel/ 'gro don dpag tu med pa nus sol/*.

|| capable of immeasurable benefit for beings.

The epithet-cum-invocation of mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen (b. 14-15th c., BDRC#P10116) in the *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* (KT_A, §1) may represent a hermeneutical reception of the commentarial tradition on MS 38a preserved in the 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo (JD). The JD explicates the reference in MS 38a to immeasurable "great loving kindness" (*mahāmaitrī*; *byams chen*) as the boundless altruistic intention that spontaneously arises through the realisation of one's own *dharmatā*,⁴⁸ likening it to a mother's love for her only child. The KT cites this same verse within a ritual invocation context. It directly addresses mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen as the embodiment of this limitless loving-kindness, petitioning for the bestowal of longevity *siddhi*. Here, in the devotion and dedication to lineage masters, the true meaning of the name plays a crucial role. The abstract principle of great compassion becomes personified in the figure bearing the name mTshan ldan Byams pa bshes gnyen, and the realisation of *dharmatā* described in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's commentary (*mchan dkyus*) appears to be transposed into a ritual economy wherein the deity's grace confers the accomplishment of immortality.

I have not yet been able to find firm evidence regarding the extent to which the JD influenced the Byang gter tradition. Whether the philosophical interpretation of the canonical verses of the *Mañjuśrī-nāmasaṃgīti* (MS) by Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can came to be received and patterned within the epithet-cum-invocations of longevity *sādhana*s thus remains a matter for future investigation. In this context, the juxtaposition of the two readings of MS 38a referenced above by the present study—the philosophical commentary preserved in the JD and the liturgical practice in the KT—sheds modest light on the possibility that the *Mañjuśrī-nāmasaṃgīti* is a revered canonical scripture within the Byang gter tradition, and that a single scriptural passage within this tradition can sustain complementary interpretive trajectories.

Should it become clear in future that the JD is authentic as a text attributed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can and was indeed studied within the Byang gter tradition, the likelihood would increase that the anonymous author of the *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* selected verses from the *Mañjuśrī-nāmasaṃgīti* with reference to the JD.

⁴⁸ The Tibetan translation of the *Mañjuśrī-nāmasaṃgīti* is not necessarily a literal rendering of the original Sanskrit (see below).

mahāmaitrīnāyo 'meyo mahākāruṇiko 'gradhīḥ |

mahāprajñō mahādhīrmāṇi mahopāyo mahākṛtīḥ || MS 38 ||

2.2. Transmission Lineages in RT Edition

I must reiterate that the RT edition of the *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* should not be considered the principal transmission lineage (on the subsidiary nature of RT transmissions, see Chapter 1 above). The main lineage continues through the principal holders of the Byang gter succession centred at rDo rje brag, as evidenced in the CNT edition referenced earlier (see Chapter 2.1 above). Nevertheless, neglecting to examine one of the two major transmission lineages of the texts employed in the present study (i.e. KT_A on one hand, and KT_B and KT_C on the other) would constitute a philological oversight.

The RT transmission lineage appears in two related passages within the *RT gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*.⁴⁹ If my understanding is correct, the *bKa' brgyad rang shar* lineage (*brgyud pa*) originates with the Ādibuddha Kun bzang He ru ka. The succession proceeds through Sangs rgyas dpal bzang (ca. 15th c.) and Chos rgyal bsod nams (1442–1509, BDRC#P10121), continuing via Thugs sras Chos skyong bsod nams bkra shis (ca. 16th c.) and Rig 'dzin Padma phrin las (1641–1717/8, BDRC#P657), *inter alios*, before reaching 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899, BDRC#P264).⁵⁰

This credible testimony indicates that some form of the RT transmission (*bka'*) persisted into the nineteenth century.⁵¹ However,

⁴⁹ *RT gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, 203,3: *bka' brgyad rang shar gyi chos sde tshe lha yongs rdzogs kyi dbang/ [...] brgyud pa ni/ chos rgyal bsod nams yan bka' brgyad rang shar ltar la/ de nas/ thugs sras chos skyong bsod nams bkra shis/ [...] smon lam dbang rgyal/ des bdag la'o/ [...] 166,4: rig 'dzin nyi zla 'od 'bar gyis spyang drangs pa'i [...] brgyud pa ni/ kun bzang he ru ka/ rdo rje 'chang/ rdo rje chos/ smug nag dbang gi mkha' 'gro/ indra bo dhi/ rig 'dzin brgyad/ o rgyan chen po/ dag pa'i 'khor lnga/ rgod lden can/ rnam rgyal mgon po/ sngags 'chang rdo rje rnam gnyis/ byams pa bshes gnyen/ sangs rgyas dpal bzang/ chos rgyal bsod nams/ yol mo sprul sku shākya bzang po/ legs ldan rje/ byang bdag dbang po'i sde/ ngag gi dbang po/ sngags 'chang stobs ldan dpa' bo/ phyag rdor nor bu/ rig 'dzin padma phrin las/ rig 'dzin dbang rgyal/ rdo rje thogs med/ 'gyur med blo ldan/ padma bshes gnyen/ nges don bstan 'dzin bzang po/ bstan 'dzin chos rgyal/ 'gyur med bstan 'dzin 'phel rgyas/ rnam 'dren smon lam dbang rgyal/ des bdag la'o/.*

⁵⁰ Following Chos rgyal bsod nams (1442–1509, BDRC#P10121), the lineage proceeds through successive masters including Yol mo sprul sku Śākya bzang po (b. 15th c., BDRC#P1698), Rig 'dzin Legs ldan bdud 'joms (1452–1565, BDRC#P1701), Byang bdag bkra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1564, BDRC#P646), and Rig 'dzin Ngag gi dbang po (1580–1632, BDRC#P639), *inter alios*.

⁵¹ 'Jam mgon kong sprul's compilation of the RT demonstrates scholarly integrity in his principled approach of avoiding fabricated transmissions while candidly acknowledging uncertainties as 'requiring verification' (*brtag dgos pa yod*). For instance, see *RT gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, 204,1: *gter chen sangs rgyas gling pas dgyer bye ma dkar po'i mchod rten nas spyang drangs pa'i rig 'dzin tshe sgrub nyi zla kha sbyor gyi dbang/ [°gyi° em.] °kyi° sgrub thabs snying po bsod pa dbang chog bcas chags med gsum/ brgyud pa ni/ chos longs sprul gsum/ [...] gsang sngags mgon po/ des bdag la'o/ 'dir chags med zhabs kyi/ gan yul ma nges pas bar gyi brgyud khungs brtag dgos pa*

these sources provide insufficient evidence to ascertain whether such transmission encompassed concrete practice (*sgom sgrub*).⁵² Additional textual evidence is therefore required to establish whether this constituted actual transmission (*don gyi brgyud pa*), including reading transmission (*bklags lung*), explanatory transmission (*bshad lung*), or oral teachings (*'chad nyan*).

3. Indic-cum-Sanskrit Equivalent of the Term “*tshe sgrub/bsgrub*”

3.1. **Āyurjñānanopika* Attested in the BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub, §5

A cursory examination of Tibetan canonical sources suggests that *tshe sgrub* practice likely originated in India rather than constituting a Tibetan innovation. For instance, rKTs-T3099 (A3252/D2336: **Āyuh-sādhana/Tshe sgrub pa'i thabs*) was, according to its colophon, translated from Sanskrit (*rgya gar skad*) into Tibetan by a team under bSod nams rgya mtsho (1424–1482, BDRC#P208) in the presence of Nags kyi rin chen (alias Vanaratna, 1384–1468, BDRC#P207).⁵³ Though comprising merely a few lines of *tshe sgrub* literature centred on *prāṇa* (*rlung*) control, rKTs-T3099 provides evidence that a Sanskrit text entitled **Āyuh-sādhana* was translated as *Tshe sgrub pa'i thabs* and transmitted to Tibet during the era roughly contemporary with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can.

The tacit acceptance in current scholarship of the term **āyuh-sādhana* as the Sanskrit equivalent of *tshe sgrub* appears largely indebted to Chandra's citation of this rKTs-T3099 (s.v. *tshe sgrub pa'i thabs*, p. 1947).⁵⁴ However, the term **āyuh-sādhana* lacks, as far as I can

yod cing/. Such transparency considerably enhances the text's credibility. Nevertheless, when evaluating these accounts as historical testimony—assuming such evaluation remains viable—one must consider that his sectarian perspective may have introduced certain interpretative biases.

⁵² The transmission received by 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas most likely encompassed concrete practice. For him, the *bKa' brgyad rang shar* constituted one of his most important teachings. See Neumaier 1970: 134: '*Padma-gar-dbañ*, der Kompilator des *gTer-gyi-mjod-č'en-mo*, berichtet, daß *bka'-brgyad ran-šar* mit zu seinen wichtigsten Lehren zählt'. For the relevant passage in the RT upon which Neumaier bases this claim, see also Neumaier 1970: 134n18.

⁵³ Note that Nags kyi rin chen is said to have received the *Padma tshe khrid* directly (*angos su tsal ba*) from Padmasambhava, as preserved in the *Rin chen gter mdzod chen mo*. However, this textual and oral transmission (*dpe lung gi rgyun*) had apparently ceased by 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas' era. See RT *gyi dkar chag dang brgyud yig*, 218,2.

⁵⁴ See Chandra, s.vv. *tshe sgrub* and *tshe sgrub pa'i thabs* (p. 1947). The latter cites D2336 (rKTs-T3099) as philological evidence, while the former references the *Rin 'byung snar thang brgya rtso* 'pheng bcas nas gsungs pa'i bris sku mthong ba don ldan. Neither source thus constitutes Indic primary material.

ascertain, definitive attestation from Sanskrit primary sources.⁵⁵ Consequently, the Sanskrit equivalent of the term *tshe sgrub* requires critical examination, including but not limited to **āyuhśādhana*.

Turning from the problematic correspondence between **āyuhśādhana* and *tshe sgrub*—for which bilingual primary attestation remains unknown—to the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, alternative possibilities emerge. The *gter ma* literature occasionally preserves fossilised remnants of earlier Tibetan adaptations, relatively free from standardised Sanskrit translation.

Within the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*, three distinct sections bear bilingual titles in both Indic-cum-Sanskrit (*rgya gar skad*) and Tibetan, as shown in Table 5 below.⁵⁶

§	Indic Title	Tibetan Title
1.	<i>*Āyurjñāna-abhiṣiṅga-nama</i>	<i>Tshe'i dbang chog ces bya ba</i> [bKa' brgyad kyi tshe dbang yongs rdzogs bzhugs so]
3.	<i>*Āyurjñāna-karma-natha</i>	<i>Tshe dang ye shes dpag tu med pa'i phrin las</i> zhes bya ba [bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar las tshe'i phrin las bzhugs so]
5.	<i>*Āyurjñāna-nopika-nama</i>	<i>'Chi med tshe yi sgrub thabs zhes bya ba</i> [bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar las Tshe'i phyi sgrub bzhugs so]

Table 5 — Three parallel Indic-Tibetan titles in the *bKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*⁵⁷

As highlighted in grey, the three corresponding pairs demonstrate thematic unity through the term *āyurjñāna*,⁵⁸ while their Tibetan equivalents remain disparate. Such semantic non-correspondence typically results from mediation through intermediary languages or dialectal variants. Particularly noteworthy is the compound **āyurjñāna-nopika* (KT_A, 492,1: *ā yur dznyā na no pi ka*), which appears

⁵⁵ Given the current advances in Buddhist Sanskrit manuscript research, one cannot dismiss the possibility that the term **āyuhśādhana* may be attested in these codices in the near future. Based on my limited investigation, I have not been able to find this term in Bhattacharya's widely used critical edition of the *Sādhanaṃālā* (Bhattacharya 1968). However, as Sakuma 2002 demonstrates, numerous manuscripts identifiable as the *Sādhanaṃālā* subsequently 'have become available in recent years' (p. 7) which Bhattacharya did not or could not employ, see Sakuma 2002: 7–11. A thorough examination of the promising Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts that might attest to the term **āyuhśādhana* remains quintessential for future research, though it lies beyond the feasible scope of the present study.

⁵⁶ Note that when examining the nature of *gter ma* literature, one must necessarily consider the possibility that their archetypes or prototypes (or indeed earlier textual stages) at the time of their concealment would have been composed not in Indic languages, but rather in the cryptographic language of the *Dākinīs* (*mkha' 'gro'i brda skad*) and/or in the language of *Uḍḍiyāna* (*o rgyan skad*). See *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po*, §1.1.1. For a related discussion, see also Shinga 2020: 55–62.

⁵⁷ Square-bracketed titles in Table 5 are from the title page of each section.

⁵⁸ For the term *āyurjñāna*, see MW, s.v. *āyurjñāna* (p. 148).

alongside the semantically transparent Tibetan *'chi med tshe yi sgrub thabs* (underlined in Table 5). This correspondence provides valuable evidence for examining the Indic etymon of *tshe sgrub / tshe yi sgrub thabs* and merits careful consideration.

3.2. *Nopika: An Overview

Regarding the term **nopika* within the compound *āyurjñānanopika* (KT, §5), multiple instances with variant readings are known from Dunhuang manuscript Pelliot 849, dated to the late 9th to early 10th century. According to Joseph Hackin's edition annotated French translation (1924),⁵⁹ this manuscript constitutes a Sanskrit-Tibetan glossary with Sanskrit terms in the upper register and corresponding Tibetan equivalents immediately below, encompassing both Buddhist terminology and general vocabulary (see Figure 2 below).

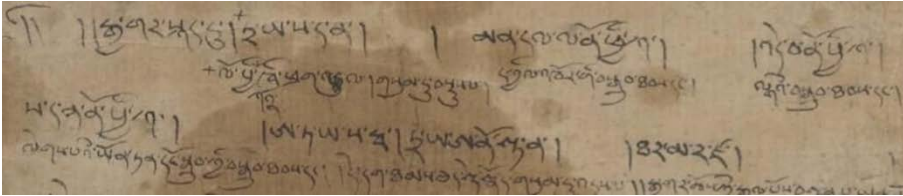


Figure 2 — Pelliot tibétain 849, pl. 233, ll. 38–41 (cf. Hackin 1924: 6,5–10)⁶⁰

In this work, Hackin interprets the terms “*no pyi ka*” (ll. 38 and 40), along with its variant readings “*lo pyi ka*” (l. 39) and “*no phyi ka*” (ll. 38), as the Sanskrit equivalent of the term ‘*sgrub-thabs*’ (p. 46).⁶¹ Since Hackin 1924, considerable scholarly attention has focused on the term **nopika* and its variant readings.⁶² Examination of usage examples in

⁵⁹ Regarding Pelliot tibétain 849, Hackin 1924 employed the provisional reference number “3531” for this Dunhuang manuscript. The current standard designation “849”, however, follows the Lalou Catalogue (1939, vol. 1, p. 186).

⁶⁰ This figure is reproduced from:
<https://idp.bl.uk/collection/E13C7A0408C84349A9534F84C720F5BE/?return=%2Fcollection%2F%3Fterm%3DPelliot%2Btib%25C3%25A9tain%2B849>.
 Note that line numbers here follow the facsimile edition in Macdonald & Imaeda 1978, pl. 233.

⁶¹ With reference to the *Deb ther sngon po* in Das (s.v. *no pi ka*, p. 744), Hackin 1924 observes that the term ‘*no-pi-ka*’ is merely a translation of “*sgrub thabs*.” See Hackin 1924: p. 46, ligne 24 (2): ‘Les expressions *no-pi-ka* et *sgrub-thabs* ont donc un sens distinct dans le *Deb-ther-sngon-po*; alors, que dans notre manuscrit, l’un des termes n’est que la traduction de l’autre’.

⁶² The following studies, arranged chronologically, came to my attention during the course of the present research: Eastman 1983 noted about the term ‘*no-pyi-ka*’ (p. 48) that ‘[T]his term, of uncertain sense or origin, is seen frequently in the Tun-

broadier contexts has centred primarily on whether **nopika* represents a Tibetan corrupta derived from Sanskrit terms such as *sādhānopāyika*. Among these discussions, Kapstein's argument (2006) merits attention: 'The unusual term *no p(h)yi ka*, which persists in Rnying [sic] *ma pa gter ma* literature at least through the fourteenth century, may be explained as derived from the last four syllables of Skt. *sādhānopāyika*' (p. 21, n. 33).⁶³ Since I have not been able to locate his citation, and given that the context and reading of the term *sādhānopāyika* remain uncertain, verification proves impossible, though such a form should perhaps be regarded as irregular rather than standard Sanskrit.

According to the BHSD (1953, s.v. *upayika*), the term *upayika* derives from Pali *upaya* and represents an adjectival form meaning 'serving as an approach or means' (p. 139), formed by adding the suffix *-ika* to Sanskrit and BHS *upāya*. The absence of *vr̥ddhi* in the stem suggests an irregular formation.⁶⁴ Edgerton notes that in BHS, *upayika* appears exclusively in compounds, specifically in *sādhānopayika* (with *-karma-*, or *-visaraḥ*), which occurs in colophons of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*.⁶⁵ The term *sādhānopayika* itself exhibits considerable textual variation across the manuscript tradition. Beyond the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, variant readings of this compound proliferate in later tantric literature, suggesting both the term's semantic fluidity and its adaptability to

huang Mahāyoga texts. P. tib. 849 gives *bsgrub-thabs* as a gloss for *no-pyi-ka*, although this ordinarily translates *sādhana*' (p. 59, note 16). Cantwell & Mayer 2008 analysed its usage in Pelliot tibétain 349, particularly in the compound '*phur bu'i no phyi ka*' as 'Phur bu's means for attainment (*no phyi ka* = *sādhānopāyika*)' (pp. 150, 152). van Schaik 2009 provides a comprehensive analysis of the term *no pyi ka* and related vocabulary. In the online discussion, PDSz (Péter-Dániel Szántó?) suggested that 'no pi ka is a corruption / fake re-sanskritization of *upāyikā* (cutting the compound *Sādhānopāyikā* in the wrong place for example)' (posted 26 October 2009). For a general overview, see Chögyam Trungpa 2013: 633–635. For the examination by Gerloff & Schott 2024 concerning the term *sādhānopāyika* attested in the *Jñānasiddhi*, see fn. 65 below.

⁶³ Kapstein's argument can be verified within the context of the three *sādhana*s (*tray a sa da na*) cited in Fig. 2 of the present study. The last of these three contains the term *sa da na no pyi ka*, which corresponds to *legs pa'i yon tan dngo sgrub kyi bsgrub thabs* (methods for accomplishing excellent qualities).

⁶⁴ Cf. *Mvy*, nos. #1299 (S 1295): *aupanāyikah/nye bar gtod pa*; #6317 (S 6339): *au-payikam/cho ga'am thabs*; #6985 (S 7020): *aupayikah/thabs dang ldan pa*. These correspondences exhibit *vr̥ddhi* in their Sanskrit stems. I am indebted to Prof. Alexis Sanderson and Ishii Yutaka for their generous scholarly guidance on classical Sanskrit grammar regarding the term *sādhānopayika* (personal communication, June 2025).

⁶⁵ See, however, Gerloff & Schott 2024: 52n61, which observes that 'the word *sādhana* and the label *sādhānopāyikā* in the final colophon of the *Jñānasiddhi* 'do not seem to be used in the narrower sense of the term *sādhana* as denoting a class of texts predominantly comprising ritual procedures'.

different ritual contexts. The *sadhanopayikā* (Tib. *sgrub thabs*) found in the *Vajrasattoasādhana*, for instance, concerns sequential practices (*anukrama*) such as seed-syllable determination. Since these apparently cannot be adequately transmitted through written text alone, they must be heard (*śrutoā*) and thus require oral transmission. This suggests that *sadhanaupayikā* represents a specialised BHS term denoting practical oral instructions (*upadeśa/man ngag*)—essentially “methods conducive to accomplishment.”⁶⁶

Thus, the term **nopika*, while originating in BHS vocabulary and undergoing phonetic simplification during transmission to Tibet,⁶⁷ had already functioned during the sNga 'gyur period as a specialised religious concept (*sādhana-cum-upāya*) broadly corresponding to Tibetan *sgrub thabs*. Therefore, *no pi ka* corresponding to *sgrub thabs* in the *Tshe'i phyi sgrub* section (KT, §5) may reasonably derive from the sNga dar period. No evidence has yet emerged linking Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's terminology to the translation activities of his contemporaries such as Nags kyi rin chen (alias Vanaratna, 1384–1468, BDRC#P207).

3.3. **Āyurjñāna-sādhana: An Alternative Possibility for Tshe sgrub*

Regarding the correspondence between *Āyurjñāna-nopika* and 'Chi med tshe yi sgrub thabs in the *Tshe'i phyi sgrub* section (KT, §5), how should we interpret the remaining elements *āyurjñāna* and 'chi med tshe yi? A quintessential clue lies in the aforementioned thematic unity of *āyurjñāna* within KT (see Chapter 3.1 above). Concerning this term *jñāna*, reference should be made to the definition in the ritual sealing (*rgyas btab pa*) section of the *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* (KT, §1): “The

⁶⁶ See *Vajrasattoasādhana*, VS_S 4,11: *ityanenānukrameṇa sādhanopayikāṃ śrutoā vajra-gurorājñāṃ prāpya sveṣṭadevatāyāḥ purato 'rghaṃ dadyāt* |.

VS_T 37,1: *zhes bya ba'i rim pas sgrub pa'i thabs thos nas/ rdo rje bla ma'i gnang ba thob nas rang gi 'dod pa'i lha'i mdun du arga phul te/*.

⁶⁷ Such diverse Tibetanization, as Kapstein 2006 has argued, is likely a legacy of Indian masters' oral teachings, which were variously transcribed by Tibetan disciples in their own script. See Kapstein 2006: 22–23: ‘What we have here is the transcription of medieval spoken Indic as it sounded to an Indologically untrained Tibetan ear: [...] the student here attempts to transcribe the master's words using the informal tools offered by the spelling conventions of his own language, without reference to phonological science’.

Intriguingly, parallel instances of such truncation exist. One notable example is the Tibetan term *bye ma ka ra* (sugar), which drew my attention in Wangchuk 2024. Here, *ka ra* combines with *bye ma* (sand) to form a compound derived from Sanskrit *śarkarā* (denoting both ‘sugar’ and ‘sand’), exemplifying comparable elision of the initial element (*śar-*) during Tibetanisation. See Apte, s.v. *śarkarā* (p. 1537), Negi, s.v. *ka ra* (p. 7), Chandra, s.v. *ka ra* (p. 1947). See also *Tshig mdzod chen mo*, s.v. *shel ka ra* (p. 2859).

essence of deathless life is the nature of the five wisdoms.” From this we may discern the essential identity of “life” (*tshe*) and “wisdom/gnosis” (*ye shes*) in the *BKa’ brgyad tshe sgrub*.

bKa’ brgyad tshe sgrub, KT_A, 467,3 (§1. *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs*):⁶⁸

Hrih! The nature of deathless life is

The essence of the five wisdoms.

Their five [coloured] lights are luminously clear and accompanied by radiance (*mdangs*),

While human life coalesces into the oily essence (*snum*) [formed by the union of the father’s semen and mother’s menstrual blood].

The term *snum* (oil/essence) occurs infrequently in the *gter ma* literature, and I find myself rather dismayed by its interpretative difficulties. In this regard, examination of usage in the *rTa mchog rol pa’i rgyud chen po* from the *rNying ma rgyud ’bum* (rKTs-G262) proves illuminating.⁶⁹

rTa mchog rol pa’i rgyud chen po, 381,6:⁷⁰

Hūṃ! In the ruby-red lotus palace,

Bhagavan Amitābha,

And the great mother Pāṇḍaravāsīnī, together

Are the abode of life [manifesting as] the play of non-duality.

The father’s life energy (semen) is white and radiant,

The mother’s life energy (menstrual blood) is red and radiant,

The life energies of father and mother in non-duality coalesce into the oily essence.

The place where life and wisdom are held in perfect command (*dbang*)

When one engages in one-pointed practice,

Bestow the accomplishments (*siddhi*) of life!

⁶⁸ *BKa’ brgyad tshe sgrub*, KT_A, 467,3 (§1. *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs*):

hrīḥ: *chi med tshe yi rang bshin ni*:

ye shes lnga yi ngo bo ste:

’od lnga gsal la mdangs dang bcas:

mi yi tshe ni snum la ’dril..

⁶⁹ For the *rTa mchog rol pa’i rgyud chen po*, see *De bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi dgongs pa bla na med pa gsang ba rta mchog rol pa’i rgyud chen po* (A1129/D839), in which *rta mchog* corresponds to *aśvottama*. As is well known, Aśva and Hayagrīva are traditionally associated with medicine and naturally came to feature in longevity *sādhana*s.

⁷⁰ *rTa mchog rol pa’i rgyud chen po*, 381,6:

hūṃ padma rā ga ’i gzhal yas na// [°rA ga’i gzhal yas na//] raga’i gzhalayasan//]

bcom ldan snang ba mtha’ yas dang//

yum chen gos dkar mo dang gnyis// [°mo°] °ma°]

gnyis med rol pa’i tshe yi gnas//

yab kyi tshe ni dkar la gdangs// [°dkar la gdangs//] °dkaralagadangs//]

yum gyi tshe ni dmar la gdangs//

yab yum gnyis su med pa’i tshe rnam snum la ’gril//

tshe dang ye shes dbang gi gnas//

rtse gcig bsgrub pa’i tshe lags kyi//

tshe yi dngos grub stsal du gsol//.

The *rTa mchog rol pa'i rgyud chen po* understands this union as the convergence of the father's (Amitābha) white vital essence (seminal bodhicitta) and the mother's (Pāṇḍaravāsīnī) red vital essence (menstrual bodhicitta), which condense into "oily essence" (*snum*). This *snum* transcends mere materiality: it represents "the place where life and wisdom are held in perfect command" (*tshe dang ye shes dbang gi gnas*), a state wherein longevity and gnosis are wielded at will. The accomplishments (*siddhi*) of life (*tshe yi dngos grub*) therefore signify the sādḥaka's realisation, through yogic process, that longevity and gnosis manifest as distinct modes of a single essence within the ruby-red lotus palace of the dharmadhātu. Such direct cognition of non-dual ultimate reality not only augments the sādḥaka's vital force but establishes the intrinsic identity of vitality and gnosis itself.

I have yet to ascertain fully the extent to which this framework from the *rTa mchog rol pa'i rgyud chen po* influenced the longevity sādhanas of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can. Nevertheless, the present study has demonstrated that both texts employ the exceedingly rare term *snum la 'dril/ 'gril* to articulate the essential identity of "longevity" (*tshe*) and "wisdom/ gnosis" (*ye shes*).⁷¹ Moreover, this fundamental identity may extend to the correspondence between **āyurjñānanopika* and '*chi med tshe yi sgrub thabs* in the *Tshe'i phyi sgrub* section (KT, §5). This bilingual title precisely expresses the ultimate soteriological goal of the *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub*: the attainment of awakened deathless amṛta states transcending birth and death (*tshe/ āyus*)⁷² through the perfection of gnosis (*ye shes/ jñāna*).⁷³ It represents a transformative journey from ordinary existence to sublime parinirvāṇa—complete liberation from all physical and mental conditioning.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The variant readings of the term *snum la 'dril/ 'gril* in the *rTa mchog rol pa'i rgyud chen po* appear in three passages, as far as I am aware: (1.) the passage cited above (381,6 in the *Tshe'i le'u ste brgya dang go dgu pa*), (2.) 57,6: *snum la 'dril* and (3.) 140,6: *snum la 'khril*.

⁷² Cf. Mvy, nos. #773 (S 773): *āyurvaśitā/ tshe la dbang ba*; #5052 (S 5053): *āyurve-dah/ tshe'i rig byed*; #9156 (S 9221): *āyusmān/ tshe dang ldan pa*.

⁷³ The compound *āyurjñāna* is known to exhibit a structure wherein *jñāna* functions simultaneously as both means and goal, rendering any singular interpretation such as "the attainment of *āyus* through the perfection of *jñāna*" debatable. On this matter, reference may be made to Gerloff & Schott 2024 which discusses the semantics of the title *jñānasiddhi*, analysing it as accomplishment through gnosis ('*jñānena siddhiḥ*') and accomplishment of gnosis ('*jñānasya siddhiḥ*'), see Gerloff & Schott 2024: 80n130 and 553n600. The title **Āyurjñānanopika* may be understood analogously: it permits a dual reading as both "that which conduces to the accomplishment of longevity-gnosis" and "the method for accomplishing longevity through gnosis".

⁷⁴ For the connection between amṛta (*bdud rtsi*) and nirvāṇa, I can do no better than to quote Schmithausen 2000: "The term *amata*/amṛta is used for nirvāṇa but not for biological life; [...] it need not imply anything more than that nirvāṇa is a state

Appendix 2. *Nopika in Canonical Sources

In light of recent advances in digital humanities,⁷⁵ this section aims to examine textual evidence for the term *nopika in the Tibetan canonical sources as a contribution to future comprehensive research.⁷⁶ In examining the Tibetan transliterations found in the title entries,⁷⁷ we observe notable variations: *no pi ka*, *no pi kā*, *lo pi ka*, and *no pi kaṃ*. These variants correspond to different combinations of terms in both the Tibetan titles and their conjectured Sanskrit reconstructions. This correlation suggests a systematic pattern of transformation rather than random corruption. The term *no pi ka* frequently appears in conjunction with *sādhana* in the conjectured Sanskrit titles, while corresponding to *sgrub thabs* in Tibetan titles. For instance, in rKTs-T1062 (*Jñānasiddhi*, A3130/D2219/P3063), we find “*no pi ka*” corresponding to *sgrub pa’i thabs* in *Ddznyā na siddhi nā ma sā dha no pi kā* (D2219).⁷⁸

The analysis reveals that both *no pi ka* and *lo pi ka* frequently occur in texts containing *maṇḍala* (*maṇḍa la*) in their titles. While the Tibetan translation of this **maṇḍala-nopika* correlation extends beyond *sgrub thabs/sgrub pa’i thabs*, as exemplified in rKTs-T788 (A2832/D1926/P2789) where it appears in conjunction with *cho ga* as *dkyil ’khor gyi cho ga*.⁷⁹ The form *lo pi ka* demonstrates a particularly strong correlation

unaffected by dying’ (p. 38). Although these observations were made in the context of early Buddhism, they remain essential for any investigation of the *tshe sgrub* practice, i.e., methods of transcending death, along with its exegesis and development.

⁷⁵ I am deeply grateful to rKTs and DharmaNexus for enabling efficient cross-referencing and pattern analysis through their pioneering applications of advanced techniques in Buddhist philology.

⁷⁶ This initial investigation acknowledges that crucial aspects remain to be explored in future studies. For instance, with reference to A2196/D1301/P2431 (*He badzra sā dha no pi ka*) ascribed to him as translator, examination of Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po’s thoughts on the transliteration in his works lies beyond the scope of this study. Such a comprehensive investigation, together with other relevant metadata (e.g., variant readings), would offer valuable insights into the chronology of transmission and transformation of the term **nopika* and its related terminology.

⁷⁷ The present paper draws solely upon title data, with conjectured Indic forms following the *dPe bsdur ma* edition (A) unless otherwise noted. In the case of the rNying ma canonical collections, the *rNying ma rgyud ’bum* for instance, the term *no pi ka* presents a denser jungle of variant readings. For instance, the *Jig rten mchod bstod sgrub pa rtsa ba’i rgyud* (rKTs-G224), ascribed to Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (1124–1192. BDRC#P364), exists in multiple recensions, yielding such variants as *no bi ka* and *no bhi ka*.

⁷⁸ Variant reading is given in A3130: *Dznyā bā siddhi nā ma sā dha no pi kā*.

⁷⁹ See rKTs-T788: Tib. *gShin rje dgra’i dkyil ’khor gyi cho ga gshin rje gshed ’byung ba*; Skt. **Yamārimaṇḍalavidhiyamāntakodaya* (cf. A2832: *Ya mā ri maṇḍa la no pi ka ya mānta koda ya nā ma*); Eng. *A Yamāri Maṇḍala Ritual called “The Source of Yamāntaka”*.

with the term *maṇḍala*, as evidenced in rKTs-T1351 (A3446/D2529/P3352),⁸⁰ which reads *ma hā maṇḍa la lo pi ka*, and rKTs-T1338 (A3433/D2516/P3339),⁸¹ which reads *ma hā maṇḍa lo pi ka*. Both texts, however, are rendered in Tibetan in combination with *cho ga* as *dkyil 'khor chen po'i cho ga*. A notable variation is found in rKTs-T432 (A2197/D1302/P2432), where *sā dha no pi ka* is rendered as *sgrub pa'i thabs kyi man ngag* (*sādhānopadeśa*).⁸²

Thus, the relationship between *no pi ka* and ritual terminology proves significant, as evidenced by the correspondence of “*aupayikam / cho ga'am thabs*” in *Mvy*, no. 6317 (S 6339). In rKTs-T369 (A2135/D1240/P2369), for instance, we find *no pi ka* appearing alongside *maṇḍa la no pi ka bi dhi* in the transliterated Sanskrit and *dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga'i sgrub thabs* in the Tibetan. This correlation supports the hypothesis that **nopika* may have evolved from *upāyika* through a process of corrupt re-Sanskritization.

4. Conclusion

In summary, drawing together the arguments presented in this paper, four primary conclusions can be hypothesised as follows:

(1.) Concerning the four stratigraphic strata: The common archetypal core underlying three textual corpora of longevity practices (*tshe sgrub*) attributed to Rīg 'dzin rGod ldem can—namely (a.) *Tshe sgrub lcags kyi sdong po* (CD), (b.) *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub* (PNST), and (c.) *BKa' brgyad tshe sgrub* (KT)—comprises four stratigraphic strata: *Phyi/Nang/gSang/Yang* *gsang* (Outer/Inner/Secret/Ulimate practice of the single syllable Hrīḥ). These strata establish a systematic framework for longevity practices that progresses from relatively external, material-based practices such as *rasāyana* (*bcud len*) towards the attainment of vidyādhara status. While the textual structure suggests an increasingly subtle trajectory, the question of whether practitioners engaged with these stages sequentially or selected individual practices remains open to

⁸⁰ See rKTs-T1351: Tib. *rDo rje dbyings kyi dkyil 'khor chen po'i cho ga rdo rje thams cad 'byung ba zhes bya ba'i don bsdus pa*; Skt. **Vajradhātu-mahāmaṇḍalavidhisarvavajrodaya-nāma-piṇḍārtha* (cf. A3446: *badzra dhā tu ma hā maṇḍa la lo pi ka sarba badzrodaya nā ma piṇḍārtha*); Eng. *The Concise Meaning of “The Source of All Vajras”, A Vajradhātu Maṇḍala Ritual*.

⁸¹ See rKTs-T1338: Tib. *rDo rje dbyings kyi dkyil 'khor chen po'i cho ga rdo rje thams cad 'byung ba*; Skt. **Vajradhātumahāmaṇḍalavidhisarvavajrodaya* (cf. A3433: *badzra dhā tu ma hā maṇḍa lo pi ka sarba badzro dā ya nā ma*); Eng. *A Ritual for the Great Vajradhātu Maṇḍala called “The Source of All Vajras”*.

⁸² See rKTs-T432: Tib. *dPal kye'i rdo rje'i sgrub pa'i thabs kyi man ngag*; Skt. **Śrīhevajra-nāma-sādhānopadeśa* (cf. A2197: *Shrī he badzra nā ma sā dha no pi ka*); Eng. *Personal Instructions on the Sādhana of Glorious Hevajra*.

investigation. Biographical accounts, later ritual compendia—such as those in Padma 'phrin las' writings—and fieldwork data may offer valuable evidence as to whether this gradient reflects actual stages of practice or functions primarily as a doctrinal taxonomy.

(2.) Regarding the dhāraṇī attested in the *Aparimitāyuhṣūtra*: The dhāraṇīs recited in the CD and the PNST contain two instances of *om* which correspond to the same canonical family as D675/P362 of the *Aparimitāyuhṣūtra*. By contrast, the KT contains no dhāraṇīs attested in the *Aparimitāyuhṣūtra*, suggesting selective reception regarding the adoption of specific dhāraṇīs even amongst *tshe sgrub* literature sharing an analogous common archetypal core.

(3.) Regarding textual transmission lineages: Fundamental structural differences are found between the CNT edition (KT_A) and RT editions (KT_B, KT_C), extending beyond mere terminological variations. The RT lineage commences with the Ādi-Buddha Kun bzang Heruka and extends through to 'Jam mgon kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899, BDRC#P264). The CNT lineage incorporates verses from the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* (MS) while listing eight Byang gter patriarchs in the *Tshe dbang yongs rdzogs* section (KT, §1). This lineage, commencing with Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can and concluding with sixteenth-century lamas, mirrors the pattern of the *bsKul zhing gsol 'debs* section (§X²) of the *Phyi nang gsang ba'i tshe sgrub*, suggesting a later interpolated stratum. This practice of invoking MS verses when venerating Byang gter patriarchs likely crystallised around the sixteenth century, possibly drawing upon the 'Jam dpal gyi don 'grel zab mo, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's commentary on the MS.

(4.) Concerning the bilingual correspondence between **āyurjñānanopika* and *'chi med tshe yi sgrub thabs* as attested in KT, §5: The term **āyurjñānanopika* represents a Tibetan corruption of the compound **āyurjñānasādhano-payika*, consisting of *āyurjñāna* and BHS *sādhano-payika*. Since the term *no pi ka* appears as a synonym for *sgrub thabs* found in the Dunhuang find, the usage ascribed to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can likely reflects the sNga 'gyur terminology rather than the *phyi dar* translation activity. The bilingual terminology may be construed as “practice of transcending death through gnosis”, wherein nirvāṇa / *āyus* is achieved through the perfection of wisdom / *jñāna*. The enduring significance of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem can's legacy merits recognition within tantric scholarship as equally significant as, if not more so than, the conventionally posited correspondence between **āyuhṣādhana* and *tshe sgrub*.

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- BHSD Franklin Edgerton. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, vol. 2, Dictionary. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.
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<http://www.rkts.org/index.php>
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Tshe sgrub lcags sdong gi ‘phrin las padma’i ‘phreng ba: ‘phrin las
rgyas pa’i nang nas khyer bde bar ‘bring du bskar ba. Ca. 19 fols. 7
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**Re-reading Eva Neumaier (Dargyay)'s “*bKa’-brgyad
rang-byung rang-shar*, ein rDzogs chen Tantra:”
A Reflection on Mahāyoga and Visionary rDzogs chen in
Rig ’dzin rGod ldem’s Eight Pronouncements System**

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he first research publication about the Northern Treasures was Eva Neumaier-Dargyay's (1937–)² 1971 presentation of a text from the largest cycle among Rig ’dzin rGod ldem (1337–ca. 1401): the *bKa’ brgyad rang byung rang shar*. This article also includes (p. 135) the first English-language account of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem's life and discoveries.³ Since fewer and fewer Tibetologists can read European languages other than English, a simple English translation of this seminal article might have been useful as a document on the earliest stages of the research on Byang gter. However, more than fifty years have passed, and much of the valuable information the 1971 article contains has either become common knowledge or has been put into a larger perspective.⁴ For this reason, it has been deemed preferable to propose a brief summary and discussion of Eva Neumaier's presentation of the text, condensing all the information it contains that is still relevant, followed by a revised edition of the Tibetan text and

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Cécile Ducher for her meticulous proof-reading of this article and her thoughtful suggestions for improving the translation. Her requests for clarification also led me to reformulations that will undoubtedly be more suitable for the reader.

² Eva Neumaier was known as Eva Dargyay after her marriage to the Tibetologist Lobsang Dargyay (1935–1994). Her 1971 article on the *bKa’ brgyad rang byung rang shar* was published before she changed her name, hence she will be called Eva Neumaier here, which is the name with which she signed the article.

³ The second oldest biography of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem in a Western language is certainly also in the same author's *The Rise of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet* (Dargyay 1977), pp. 129–131. This is one more reason to pay homage to Eva Dargyay in the context of our Byang gter studies.

⁴ Typically, Eva Neumaier's explanations of specific rNying ma doctrines, which are much better understood today, are often based on the meaning of technical terms in more general Mahāyāna doctrine, rather than on their more specific meaning in rNying ma context.

an English translation of the text that the 1971 article presented in German. Both the edition and the English translation have been reworked on the basis of a better edition that have become available since the 1970s:⁵ the 2015 *Compilation of the Northern Treasures* in 63 volumes.⁶

This article is a tribute to Eva Neumaier's pioneering work.

A Presentation and Discussion of Eva Neumaier's 1971 Article

Eva Neumaier's article begins with a general discussion of the rNying ma doctrines in the context of late dGe lugs polemics⁷ about their authenticity and value. Her intention in describing the opinions of both Sum pa mkhan po (1704–1777) and Thu'u bkwan (1737–1802) is to show that "even great Tibetan scholars, who were in the midst of the events and who had access to very different sources than those available to modern scholars, could not reach a unanimous [negative] verdict." Therefore, it is "necessary to present information material so that scholars can form their own, well-founded judgment on the basis of relevant textual publications." She then goes on to present the edited

⁵ Eva Dargyay used an edition of the text contained in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's *Rin chen gter mdzod* (mTshur phu edition). In many cases, she struggles with words that are actually misspellings or misreadings in this edition, possibly due to the poor quality of the printing.

⁶ sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs.

⁷ 1908 (Calcutta) edition, and Thu'u bkwan's *Grub mtha' thams cad kyi khungs dang 'dod tshul ston pa legs bshad shel gyi me long*. This importance attributed to dGe lugs polemical literature has become surprising today since we are more aware of a fact that escaped earlier scholars: the deep ignorance of the rNying ma materials on the dGe lugs side, which gives us the feeling that these polemical writings are not only biased, but, nearly always, quite uninformed, based only on a few misinterpreted texts. The same feature is still salient in Samten G. Karmay's *The Great Perfection* (1989), which devotes many pages to points of the dGe lugs polemics that may sound absurd to us (e.g., confusing the rDzogs chen's *ye zhi* or its *kun gzhi* with the Vijnānavādins' *ālayavijñāna*, as understood by dGe lugs doxographers). This should not be so surprising if we consider this literature from a more historical and sociological point of view: it is not uncommon that a dominant group (here, the high clergy of the dominant branch of Tibetan Buddhism), when they want to display their power to judge all dominated groups, first of all assign them to caricatural stereotypes. Earlier Tibetologists were too close to a state of things in which the dGe lugs intellectual hegemony was still functioning to merely discard these polemics are irrelevant and altogether uninformative.—These somewhat disparaging remarks on the level of knowledge that these dGe lugs pa scholars may have had of rNying ma doctrines, although globally correct, must, however, be tempered in the case of Thu'u bkwan: two entire volumes of his works devoted to *rTa mgrin gsang sgrub* give the impression of a very thorough knowledge of this cycle, very well understood in all its rNying ma terminological, doctrinal, liturgical and meditative dimensions. These traits are echoed, in the same milieu and at the same time, by the Mongolian scholar Brag ri Dam tshig rdo rje for *rTa mgrin yang gsang*, the other large Hayagrīva cycle of rNying ma origin preserved in the dGe lugs school.

and translated texts that she knows from Kong sprul's *Rin chen gter gyi mdzod chen mo*.⁸ To do this, she begins by presenting "the framework of the doctrine of rNying ma pas, into which the preceding texts are to be integrated." This is a general presentation of the rNying ma pas' nine vehicles, including their idiosyncratic classification of the tantras, contrasted with those of the gSar ma pas—a point which is now common knowledge in its essentials and does not need to be repeated here.

Within this framework, she writes (*op. cit.* p. 134): "This *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* Tantra belongs to the *bskyed rim Mahāyoga* section." She then goes on to summarize the global structure of the Eight Pronouncements⁹ using Thu'u bkwan's *Chos 'byung*,¹⁰ and, on this basis, introduces the text she wishes to present.

She obviously could not be aware of the extent of the corpus to which these texts belong, which was not available in the early 1970s. As a result, Neumaier's article, more than fifty years later, feels as if she is describing a detail of the architecture of a huge cathedral without considering it in its specific context—not the rNying ma doctrines as a whole, which she summarizes, but, more specifically, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *gter chos*, and, within it, the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*.

The various bKa' brgyad Systems

Since a detailed description of this cycle within the context of an overview of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelations as a whole will be included in Volume 2 of our forthcoming (FCHNT, spring 2026) volumes of *Northern Treasures Histories*, I will give only the most relevant elements here.

First, at the present state of research, it is difficult to unilaterally

⁸ Neumaier 1971, p. 133: "Vol. *Ba* of the mTshur phu edition. The Tantra is the seventeenth treatise in this volume, the commentary called *don khrid* is the sixteenth. I will discuss the origin and affiliation of these texts below."

⁹ In this article, "Eight Pronouncements" in romans means the classificatory structure or concept, or the general idea. In italics it refers to any specific corpus of texts.

¹⁰ Neumaier, *op. cit.*, p. 134, translating Thu'u bkwan's *Chos 'byung*: "...The most important of *bskyed rim*—it is also known as *sGrub pa bka' brgyad*, and these are: '*Jam dpal sku*, *Padma gsung*, *Yang dag thugs*, *bDud rtsi yon tan*, *Phur pa phrin las*. These are the five divisions that lead beyond this changing world. *Ma mo rbod gtong*, *dMod pa drag sngags* and '*Jig rten mchod stod* are known as the three divisions belonging to the changing world." The original text is found in Thu'u bkwan 1984, p. 65: *bskyed rim gyi gtso bo ni | sgrub pa bka' brgyad du grags pa ste | 'jam dpal sku | padma gsung | yang dag thugs | bdud rtsi yon tan | phur pa phrin las rnam la 'jig rten las 'das pa'i sde lnga dang | ma mo rbod gtong dang | dmod pa drag sngags dang | 'jig rten mchod bstod rnam la 'jig rten pa'i sde gsum zhes grags so |*.

characterize the Eight Pronouncements¹¹ as an inherent structure of Mahāyoga as a body of tantric literature, for two reasons: on the one hand, this presupposes a great deal about the unity of Mahāyoga as a whole. On the other hand, it cannot be said that all the later developments of the Eight Pronouncements belong to Mahāyoga in the narrowest sense.

Mahāyoga was introduced into Tibet during the first spread of Buddhism—sometime between the 8th and 10th centuries. The Eight Pronouncements structure is admittedly always presented in the rNying ma doxographies as inherent to Mahāyoga as such. It is far from self-obvious, however, whether the idea of this structure was present from the very beginning with all its integral parts, or whether it was later constructed as a synthesis.

More precisely, Tulku Thondup 1989 (pp. 30-31) divides the Mahāyoga in two parts, "Tantra section" and "Sādhana section," the second of which corresponds to the Eight Pronouncements.¹² It would then be clearer to say that the *practice* of the Mahāyoga consists of the Eight Pronouncements, either separately (e.g., individual sādhanas of Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, Vajrakīla...) or as a group (as in the large cycles we call "bKa' brgyad," which combine them all). Although the overarching structure is very logical *per se*, it is quite possible that it was created in the context of a *later* combination of various traditions that were not originally intended to form a global entity or introduced together in the exact same period of time. I have shown elsewhere that the original rNying ma Yamāntaka corpus, for example, is not referred to the Eight Pronouncements.¹³ Furthermore, the scheme of the "Eight Vidyādhara" who each revealed one of the Eight Pronouncements, with Padmasambhava gathering the scattered traditions and synthesizing the whole as the ninth, may well be a simplified narrative of the fact that the various systems compiled as "the Eight Pronouncements" were originally more or less independent of one another and passed through different lineages.

The first known complete system is the *bKa' ma bka' brgyad rdzong*

¹¹ For an overview in French of the bKa' brgyad system as understood by contemporary rNying ma scholars, see Tendzin Samphel 2003.

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 31 (slightly corrected and adapted): This second part consists of "the Scriptures of *Sādhana*s of the Eight Great *Maṇḍala*s of Deities (*sgrub pa bka' brgyad*), of which there are two kinds, the canonical (*bka' ma*) and discovered treasures (*gter ma*). The Eight Great *Maṇḍala*s of Deities are: (a) Yamāntaka of Body; (b) Hayagrīva of Speech; (c) Vajraheruka (Yang dag) of Mind; (d) Dūtsi Chechok (*bdud rtsi che mchog*) of Virtues; (e) Vajrakīla of Action; (f) Mamo Bod-tong (Ma mo rbod gtong); (g) Jigten Chod-tod ('Jigs rten mchod bstod) and (h) Modpa Trag-ngag (dMod pa drang sngags)."

¹³ Arguillère 2024b, pp. 305-307.

'*phrang*.¹⁴ Although it is presented as belonging to the uninterrupted oral transmission (*bka' ma*)—meaning: as not being a *gter ma*—its status in this regard is altogether unclear. Its texts show that it was passed from *gTer ston* Grub thob dngos grub (d.u.) to Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192).

Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer is, as far as we can know, the key figure for the Eight Pronouncements. He revealed a very extensive cycle known as the *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, which differs from later versions in that it even includes detailed doctrinal discussions of the whole of Buddhism and is thus clearly intended as a synthesis of the Dharma rather than merely a collection of Mahāyoga rituals. Later cycles, such as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's, are more directly oriented toward ritual practice. In Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, Padmasambhava emerges as the central master of all the tantric teachings, in a way that is completed by Nyang ral's grand Padmasambhava narrative, the *bKa' thang zangs gling ma*. Reading the biographies of the rNying ma masters of the following centuries, it is clear that this cycle remained central to the definition of rNying ma identity at least until the Dzungar invasion of 1717–1718 and the reorganization of rNying ma practices and doctrines by Rig 'dzin 'Jigs med gling pa (1730–1798) and his direct and indirect disciples in a context in which it is quite possible that some of the texts that were once central to the rNying ma identity had already been lost.¹⁵

A second important link in the chain of transmission and elaboration of the Eight Pronouncements is Guru Chos dbang (1212–1270), whose *gter ma* cycle *bKa' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs*¹⁶ is also always

¹⁴ For the texts, see *rNying ma bka' ma shing tu rgyas pa* (mKhan po Mun sel [compiler], Chengdu, d.u.), vol. 67, with some elements in vol. 13. See the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*, 1971 (Delhi, Nechung and Lhakar), vol. 2, f°196a, for this description: *sangs rgyas gnyis pa padma 'byung gnas | pañ chen dri med bshes gnyen | lo chen bai ro tsa na | gnubs ban nam mkha'i snying po ste rgya bod kyi mkhas pa mi bzhis gsang sngags theg pa mchog gi don thams cad rdzong 'phrang srog gsum du dril ba'i gdams pa | man ngag kun gyi bcud phyung ba | zab gter snying po'i chos sde | kun tu bzang po nas grub thob dngos grub kyi bar du snyan nas snyan zhal nas zhal du brgyud pa'i bka' ma nyams pa bla ma mnga' bdag chen po nas bka' gter zung 'jug chu bo gnyis 'dres su bzhugs pa'i gdams pa deng sang nyin mo'i skar ma las kyang ches cher dkon pa bka' ma bka' brgyad rdzong 'phrang du grags pa'i skor la | ...* This could mean either that the *bKa' ma rdzong 'phrang* as it stands today is pure *bka' ma*, supplemented by Nyang ral's *bDe gshegs 'dus pa*, or that Nyang ral also had a personal revelation of the *bKa' ma rdzong 'phrang*.

¹⁵ The *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* seem to be quite well preserved. However, many of the impressive quantity of rNying ma texts that are presented as available, or even central, in, e.g., the Fifth Dalai Lama's *Record of Teachings Received*, or that of *gTer bdag gling pa* (1646–1714), no longer exist or have not resurfaced yet. Although this has not yet been systematically researched, it seems that the first half of the 18th century was a period of massive destruction of rNying ma literature.

¹⁶ The best available edition seems to be Guru Chos dbang 1979.

mentioned among the teachings received by all rNying ma masters at least until the 18th century. Recent scholarship has focused less interest on this cycle, and it is certainly less original doctrinally—and in any case, like all the later bKa' brgyad cycles, it builds upon Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa, the systematic study of which is therefore a priority for understanding all that follows. In the general rNying ma tradition,¹⁷ Guru Chos dbang's cycle is understood to have added an Anuyoga layer to the original Mahāyoga structure. More specifically, this means that Guru Chos dbang revealed a complete set of rdzogs rim body techniques (gtum mo, sexual yogas...) to be included in the general apparatus.

We then arrive at the time of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem. It should be noted that another major bKa' brgyad system was revealed by his contemporary O rgyan gling pa (1323–ca.1355). O rgyan gling pa's system has become rare, but the texts are probably not lost: large excerpts are included in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*. It seems that they were later re-revealed (*yang gter*).¹⁸ It should also be researched, but this is far beyond the scope of the present paper.

As an indication of the vitality of the Eight Pronouncements through the ages, we can consider the respective representation of each century in Kong sprul's selection in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*.¹⁹ Three and a half volumes (2136 pages) of the 1976 edition are devoted to the Eight Pronouncements, of which:

¹⁷ The original presentation of the Eight Pronouncements in such terms—integrating Nyang ral, Chos dbang, and rGod ldem's revelations in a unified system called bKa' brgyad rnam gsum—is traditionally attributed (e.g., in Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las' [1641–1717] practice manuals for the *Byang gter bka' brgyad*) to mNga' ris pañ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542). However, few works by this author seem to have survived, and especially no writings on this topic—which makes it difficult for us today to understand his reputation.

¹⁸ This may be Rig 'dzin Padma dbang phyug's (1720–1771) bKa' 'dus, contained in vol. 52-53 of CNT (*Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, 2015). This remains to be verified, but O rgyan gling pa's name appears in the CNT version of this cycle.

¹⁹ For what this method is worth. I have already used it (Arguillère 2024b) in order to get an overview of the interest about Yamāntaka among the rNying ma pas throughout history. If we compare the results obtained here with that earlier attempt, we may notice, for example, the same relative underrepresentation of Guru Chos dbang, whose historical importance, however, is beyond doubt when we consider how often his name appears in lists of teachings received by the rNying ma masters from his time onward. Kong sprul may have had a more complex agenda than simply sampling the various cycles according to their popularity over the centuries. In some cases, it is reasonable to assume that mKhyen brtse'i dbang po and himself wanted to revive cycles that had fallen into disuse because they found them *intrinsically* interesting for some (unexplained) reason (e.g. Rin chen gling pa's *A ti rdzogs pa chig chod*—see Arguillère 2024a), and ignored others because they may have felt that they did not bring anything substantially new (which might be the case for Guru Chos dbang's bKa' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs).

- 32,5% (693 pages) belong to the 12th century (Nyang ral);
- 6,5% (140 pages) to the 13th (Guru Chos dbang);
- 19% (410 pages) to the 14th (207 pages for rGod ldem and 203 for Yar rje O rgyan gling pa [1323–ca. 1355]²⁰);
- 5% (around 100 pages) to the 15th (Padma gling pa [1450–1521] and maybe bSam gtan bde chen gling pa—“15th–16th c.” according to BDRC, but more probably mid-16th century²¹),
- 12% (259 pages) to the 17th (‘Ja’ tshon snying po [1585–1656], Klong gsal snying po [1625–1692], Mi ‘gyur rdo rje [1645–1667], Padma bde chen gling pa [BDRC: “between 1627 and 1663”–1713]),
- And the last 25% (534 pages), to the 19th (mKhyen brtse’i dbang po [1820–1892] and mChog gyur gling pa [1829–1870]).

The proportion of the 19th-century material is not significant, as Kong sprul’s tendency seems, in any case, to be:

- (1) To document the earliest extensive *gter ma* cycle, understood as the *original seed* upon which the rest grew;
- (2) To present later cycles when they are perceived as the *coronation* of a given system;
- (3) To document some cycles that are somewhat *original* or that *have become central* to some living branches of the rNying ma tradition;

²⁰ His association with the bKa’ brgyad is less well known than his contribution to the legend of Padmasambhava.

²¹ “15th–16th c.” according to BDRC, but more probably mid-16th century. This *gter ston* (bdr:P4689) is not well known, but the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) devotes a rather long discussion to his rDzogs chen cycle in his *rJe btsun bsam gtan gling pa’i a ti’i chos skor gyi dkar chag theg mchog rin cen* (sic) *do shel* (in Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009: vol. 27, pp. 589–601). The Fifth Dalai Lama presents him as an important figure and describes his work as a fine synthesis of gSar ma and rNying ma approaches, with a somewhat Sa skya coloration, which bSam gtan gling pa seems to have inherited from his ancestors. According to the description given by the Fifth Dalai Lama (*op. cit.*, pp. 594–595), his works included responses to the anti-rDzogs chen polemics of Karma pa Mi bskyod rdo rje (1507–1554). This would place him in the sixteenth rather than the fifteenth century (as indicated in the BDRC fact sheet). Indeed, Guru bKra shis (1990: p. 446), in the brief paragraph he devotes to bSam gtan gling pa, says that he was a contemporary of ‘Brug pa Padma dkar po (1527–1592). In another passage of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s work (*op. cit.*, p. 598), bSam gtan gling pa is presented as a grand-disciple of Yar lungs pa Seng ge rgyal mtshan (bdr:P6515, 1345–1413) through his disciple of *mKhan chen* bSod nams rgyal mchog. This allows us to conclude that the latter’s disciple *mNyam med* Sangs rgyas gling pa Nam mkha’ bsod nams (bdr:P0RK1228) is in fact bSam gtan bde chen gling pa.

- (4) To complete the apparatus with revelations of either mKhyen brtse'i dbang po or mChog 'gyur gling pa and with manuals for empowerment and practice, often written (or compiled) by Kong sprul himself when he did not find them already written in a form he considered satisfactory.

From this perspective, one could perhaps interpret Kong sprul's selection to mean that, in his mind, 1. the sole basis of the whole system is Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*; 2. Chos dbang's *bKa' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs* did not add anything very significant; 3. the system reached its perfection with rGod ldem, Ö rgyan gling pa, and perhaps Padma gling pa; and 4. there were further significant developments in the 17th century—either because they were truly original in some way, or because these traditions were still alive in Kong sprul's time, which was probably the case with the four selected *gter chos*, whose traditions are not extinct even today.

We can then tentatively say that the *bKa' brgyad* is a literary genre that was imposed by the genius of Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer on the basis of the earlier *bKa' brgyad bka' ma rdzong 'phrang* and that it flourished until the 16th century (63% of the total collection belongs to this formative period and we also know that mNga' ris *pan chen* (1487–1542) was a major specialist of the Eight Pronouncements). Later centuries struggled to keep it alive because it was perceived as part of the core of the rNying ma tradition, but perhaps with some difficulty because of its excessive ritual complexity, which makes it a system more suited to the grand liturgy of well-equipped monasteries than something appropriate to personal, solitary meditative practice. This point would require further research, however, as the revelations of more recent *gter stons* such as bDud 'joms gling pa (1835–1904) present complete *bKa' brgyad* systems.

Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar

Returning now to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*, it is a massive corpus (although less so than Nyang ral's *bKa' brgyad*). It is presented as having been found, along with all of God ldem's known *gter ma*, in 1366 at Zang zang lha brag. It fills four complete volumes (volumes 9–12 of the 2015 *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, a total of 174 texts, 2276 pages of dense typography). This makes it the largest cycle in the original core of the Northern Treasures, which is an indication (if not a proof) of its centrality to Rig 'dzin rGod ldem himself.

It must be remarked that the texts singled out by Eva Neumaier²² from the *Rin chen gter mdzod* selection are a tiny drop in this ocean (not even 20 pages, representing about 1% of the total) and the tantra she translated is not among the three major ones found at the beginning of the first volume.²³ Of course, this does not imply they are unimportant, as there are certainly reasons why they were chosen by Kong sprul for the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, but it must be understood that they are not considered to be the core of the entire system in the original *gter chos*.

A seeming contradiction in Eva Neumaier's article is the characterization of the tantra as "A rDzogs chen tantra" in the title of the paper and her explicit assumption (quoted above) that, since it belongs to the bKa' brgyad, it is a *Mahāyoga* tantra. In fact, the rNying ma tradition, when it later combined Nyang ral, Chos dbang and rGod ldem's Eight Pronouncement systems in a synthesis known as *bKa' brgyad rnam gsum*, tends to say that Nyang ral's *bDe gshegs 'dus pa* is more *Mahāyoga*-oriented;²⁴ that Chos dbang's *gSang ba yongs rdzogs* is more *Anuyoga*-oriented; and that rGod ldem's *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* is more *Atiyoga*-oriented. In this sense, the formula "A rDzogs chen tantra" is not wrong.

The standard doctrine on this issue, as phrased by Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las, states that in *Mahāyoga*, the apparent world and inhabitants are meditated upon as deities, while in *Anuyoga* these deities are said to be complete inside our vajra body, and in *Atiyoga*, "they are complete in the maṇḍala of the mind."²⁵ However, although this formula suggests a mere slight shift in the interpretation of one and the same practice, it may actually refer to very different ones: for example, the *Atiyoga* version implies that either the deities are perceived as

²² Text #90: vol. 10, pp. 589-596, *sGrub chen bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi rdzogs rim snying tig rnam pa bcu bstan pa*, and text #91, vol. 10, pp. 597-607, *sGrub chen bka' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi snying po gnam zhal don khrid*.

²³ Text #4: *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 9, pp. 29-175: *Drag po rang byung rang shar chen po'i rgyud kyi rgyal po* in 26 chapters plus a short conclusion about the concealment and discovery of the *gter ma*; text #5: *sGrub chen bka' brgyad rtsa ba'i rgyud rgyal tshab rang byung rang shar bsam 'phel nor bu rgya can*, same volume, pp. 177-286 (this tantra contains all the instructions for *rdzogs rim* and *rdzogs chen*, followed by all sorts of magic "activities"); text #6: *sGrub chen bka' brgyad yongs rdzogs kyi sngags rgyud rin po che'i gter rgyud*, same volume, pp. 287-302 (a mantra compendium).

²⁴ This point should be taken *cum grano salis*. The *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* contains quite many explanations about *Anuyoga* and *rDzogs chen*. Globally, the rNying ma pas are not fully consistent with their tendency to present *Mahāyoga* as analogous with the *gSar ma pas' pha rgyud* (and, consequently, with their idea of presenting the *Anuyoga* as an analogon of the *gSar ma pas' ma rgyud*).

²⁵ Padma 'phrin las 2015, p. 61: *de yang bskyed pa ma hā yo ga snang srid lha'i dkyil 'khor phyi dkyil du sgom pa yin te | rgyud de nyid las | snang srid yongs rdzogs gzhal yas khang chen gsal : zhes dang | a nu yo ga ltar na de dag thams cad rdo rje lus kyi dkyil 'khor la tshang bar rdzogs shing a ti yo gar thams cad sems kyi dkyil 'khor du rdzogs pa yin te | ...*

virtually present in the nature of the mind—which would be the only focus of the practice—or they appear as luminous visions.

We can be puzzled by this association of the hyper-complicated ritual structure of the Eight Pronouncements with rDzogs chen, a term that evokes Chan-like simplicity. Reading the texts, however, it becomes clear that rGod ldem's corpus contains practice instructions that are complete in terms of *rdzogs rim*-related body techniques and lead to rDzogs chen in what was recognized in the 14th century as its ultimate form: visionary, *sNying thig*-style meditation. Some texts in the corpus²⁶ contain brief but explicit instructions for *khregs chod* and *thod rgal*, understood as the apex of this immense pyramid of rituals and as the coronation of all its meditative practices. The texts translated in the 1971 article do indeed contain clear allusions to the *thod rgal* visionary practice, although this is not apparent in the German translation because the techniques and their specific terminology had not yet been described. This is evident in passages such as the following (p. 594, text edited below with the translation):

When [you are] settled [in this] without distraction, Intelligence (*rig pa*) will be caught in the Element.²⁷ (...) By applying the three [*thod rgal*] postures to this, Intelligence will blossom into the five primordial wisdoms (*ye shes lnga*).

The two texts chosen by Neumaier are a tantra and the "guidance to [its] meaning" (*don khrid*). Here is how she describes them:²⁸

These eight stages [meaning, each of the Eight Pronouncements] are explained individually in the tantra. They form the philosophical background against which the *sādhana* as it is performed in the *don khrid* is set. (...) The *don khrid* not only gives a meticulous, iconographic description of Che mchog,²⁹ but also provides the true meaning (*don*) of the emblems and forms to be realized in meditation. This is what makes it so valuable for understanding these teachings.

²⁶ For example, text #115: *Man ngag gsal ba'i sgron me*, in CNT, vol. 11, pp. 367-376, or text #127: *rTsa ba sdong po lta bu'i khrid : gyes pa yal ga lta bu'i khrid : 'bar ba me tog lta bu'i khrid : smin pa 'bras bu lta bu'i khrid thams cad 'di la tshang ngo : drag po rang byung rang shar gyi gzchung khrid lus kyi srog shing lta bu*, vol. 12, pp. 1-60.

²⁷ Meaning, in context: the *rdo rje'i lu gu rgyud* will be caught in the *dbyings kyi ra ba*.

²⁸ Neumaier 1971, p. 134.

²⁹ Che mchog He ru ka, understood as a wrathful form of the primordial Buddha Kun tu bzang po, is the main deity of the central maṇḍala in the *Eight Pronouncements*.

After a general explanation of rDzogs chen,³⁰ Eva Neumaier proceeds to describe the cycle as sampled in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*:³¹

The *Rang byung rang shar* cycle also includes a *sngon 'gro*, the prayer that prepares the mind for the celebration of the *sādhana*, along with many other texts. At the beginning it contains the *bla ma brgyud pa*, the enumeration of the masters of this particular teaching. Above all, gNubs Nam mkha' snying po should be mentioned. G. Tucci³² has clearly identified him as a master of Ch'an Buddhism. The invocation of the hierarchs is followed by meditation instructions. Unfortunately, this text has not been reproduced due to lack of space.—Another text in this cycle is the *don khrid*, the "meaningful commentary,"³³ which qualifies as a *sādhana* (*sgrub thabs*) according to its content. It not only reproduces the iconographic description, but also the meaning of the individual symbols.

This is followed by a reflection on the nature of tantric Buddhist deities in the vein of H. v. Guenther. Eva Neumaier's intention seems to have been to discuss the *meanings* of this whole pantheon. In Western neoesotericism or neo-gnosis, the decoding of symbols plays indeed a central role, much more so than in Buddhist or Hindu Tantrism. The combination of elementary fieldwork and textual reading shows that if the Tibetans believe that full visualization will eventually bring the actual realization of what it symbolizes, they do not really believe that keeping these concepts in mind will help with their realization. Be that as it may, such a background, which may have played a role in Neumaier's 1971 approach, belongs to the field of the phenomenology of religious experience, with all its epistemological issues, and to a way of thinking that involves the search for perennial structures. The present article belongs more to the history of religions proper and to philology, albeit in a form that does not seek to oppose the search for eternal truths: it

³⁰ In the West, rDzogs chen was initially understood more or less as a *doctrine*, which it is to some extent. However, even its specific philosophical aspects were not fully perceived. Its meditative aspects, particularly those related to the visionary development (*thod rgal*), were not well grasped in the 1970s. Thus, Eva Neumaier's 1971 conception of rDzogs chen seems to be only of a self-perfected state or nature.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 138. The author seems to be unaware that, although the *Rin chen gter mdzod* selection is quite large, it covers only a small part of the cycle. However, this cannot be blamed on her, considering the state of documentation in 1971. Only consulting *Records of Teachings Received* that include catalogs, such as that of the Fifth Dalai Lama, could have made her aware of this fact.

³² Neumaier 1971, p. 136, n. 21: "Tucci, 1958: *Minor Buddhist Texts, Part II*, Rome: IsMeO, p. 21." See Van Schaik 2015, p. 167, for a note about this figure.

³³ This is how I understand the German formula "bedeutungsvolle Kommentar." The Tibetan phrase *don khrid* rather means: commentary of the meaning.

is about describing the way in which historically situated concrete agents have captured them in their writings.

This is followed by the edition of the Tibetan text and its German translation. For the present English translation, it was considered preferable to present the Tibetan text in the footnotes, which makes it easier for the reader to check each passage. I have not systematically pointed out the corrections made in the Tibetan (which have become easy on the basis of the available editions), nor the points where my translation differs from the German one. Since the basic Tibetan edition is now the *Compilation of the Northern Treasures*, I have changed the page references accordingly.

Most of the 1971 footnotes belong to an earlier state of research, and so they have been removed. The ones I have preserved are indicated.³⁴

One aspect of the 1971 paper not discussed here is a series of interesting remarks presented in large diagrams. In these diagrams, Eva Neumaier points out discrepancies between these two texts and the *Kar gling zhi khro* regarding the systems of correspondence between the visualized aspects and elements of ordinary experience. Karma gling pa's revelations are most likely somewhat later than those of rGod ldem,³⁵ and there is no intrinsic reason to give them any normative value³⁶ (which Eva Neumaier certainly did because of this system's fame in the West when she wrote her article). Nevertheless, it would be beneficial to conduct a systematic comparison of the various rNying ma structured pantheons of peaceful and wrathful deities based on a broader corpus, including older systems (from the *sGyu 'phrul drwa ba* through the *sNying thig* systems and the successive bKa' brgyad revelations).

If readers were to compare my English translation with the German one, they would not only find discrepancies due to a different understanding of the content, but also a different appreciation of style. Eva Neumaier has obviously tried to make the text more explicit than it actually is, especially by inserting logical connections when the

³⁴ "Neumaier 1971," with page reference.

³⁵ See Cuevas 2003 on the problems of dating Karma gling pa. His short life may have been later than generally assumed: the dates 1326–1386 often given are due to a confusion of the dates of the beginning and end of the sexagenary cycle in which he was born with his own dates of birth and death. He was probably born near the end of the 1326–1386 *rab 'byung* and may have died in the early 15th century.

³⁶ The *Kar gling zhi khro* system, although completely alien to the Northern Treasures, was incorporated into the rDo rje brag liturgy, albeit late in the eighteenth century. The reasons why rDo rje brag, which had its own sufficient practice and ritual devices covering the same needs as the *Kar gling zhi khro*, adopted this system, are unknown. See Chapter 16 of vol. 1 of the FCHNT series (January 2026) devoted to the history of Northern Treasures tradition.

originals are often just a series of juxtaposed assumptions. This may be related to a perception of these texts as somewhat philosophical.

In the following translation, I have attempted to render the text's style more faithfully, including its strong tendency toward parataxis. As is well known, style is an idiolect, and the problem of literary translation is to create a system of differences with "neutral style" in the target language that is analogous to the differences that characterize the text in its original language.

I have not gone very far in this direction in terms of how the text would feel to a Tibetan reader, which would imply a reconstruction of the "horizon of expectations"³⁷ of such a reader (of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's time? Ours? With or without the necessary specific competence to read this text?).

However, our current level of knowledge of the rNying ma literature allows us to better appreciate these texts by relating them to their specific context—earlier and contemporary rNying ma literature. For instance, Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's revelations are much closer to the raw, abrupt, and unadorned poetry of O rgyan gling pa's *Padma bka' thang* than to Klong chen pa's rhetoric, which is both finely lyrical and conceptually precise. In any case, without claiming to reproduce the effect of reading the original Tibetan text in English, I have tried to be faithful to its syntax, doing my best to respect the verbal tenses or modes and the grammatical elements (particles, verbal connectors...) or *their absence*. Similarly, I have not polished the text's style by eliminating repetitions or by using abstract terms instead of very simple and concrete ones. Therefore, the text will read much drier and sometimes more obscure in English than in German. Nevertheless, this brings us closer to the character of the translated texts—the tantra and the *don khrid*.

The first text, *The Teaching of the Ten Aspects of the Heart-Drop of the Completion Phase of The Eight Pronouncements, Self-Produced and Self-Arisen*,³⁸ is basically an allegoric or analogical explanation of the Eight Pronouncements, understood in purely rDzogs chen terms. The reason why it has ten chapters is that the "master" (*bla ma rig 'dzin*) aspect (the ninth of the Eight Pronouncements, so to say) is included, and that there is a chapter of recapitulation (*spyi dril*). The order of the chapters in the text is not the most common one and, contrary to what Eva Neu-maier seems to assume, they do not read as the successive steps of a spiritual path in any obvious way. This order is in fact connected to the structure of the nine-maṇḍala layout: center, east, south, west, north, then intermediary directions, south-east, etc. Thus, after the five

³⁷ See Hans Robert Jauss 1982.

³⁸ *sGrub chen bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi rdzogs rim snying tig rnam pa bcu bstan pa.*

usual Herukas corresponding to Body, Speech, Mind, Qualities and Activities, the sixth chapter is about the first of the three "worldly" aspects of the Eight Pronouncements, "Summoning and Sending out the Matṛkas" (*ma mo rbod gtong*). It is followed by the "master" aspect, and then we find the two last of the three "worldly" aspects: "Worldly Offerings and Praises" (*'jig rten mchod bstod*) and "The Fierce Mantras of Curse" (*dmod pa drag sngags*). The tenth and last chapter is the global synthesis. It is followed by a colophon alluding to the discovery of the *gter ma*, but in terms that are not very specific (neither Rig 'dzin rGod ldem nor Zang zang lha brag, or even which of the five repositories (*mdzod*) from which this text was extracted is explicitly named).

The second text, *The True Instructions of Sky-Face*:³⁹ *The Essence of the Great Sādhana of the Eight Pronouncements, Spontaneous and Self-Arisen*,⁴⁰ begins with a detailed description of the two main deities, male (Che mchog he ru ka) and female (gNam zhal ma). The female deity is curiously⁴¹ presented under three forms, corresponding to Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga (rDzogs chen). Their attributes are explained in connection to the ultimate View and this seems to be the reason why these instructions, which present only visualizations (and thus feel more like development phase instructions), are said to belong to the achievement phase "based upon the deity" (*lha [la] brten pa'i rdzogs rim*).

While redoing the translation in English, I was surprised to find that Eva Neumaier's edition and translation of the second text stops abruptly at the end of p. 605 of the CNT edition—i.e., at the end of the description of the deities. The last two pages are skipped without any indication of this fact or the reasons for it.⁴² It is somewhat ironical that Eva Neumaier ignored the part of the text that best justifies the title of her 1971 article as it contains more classical completion stage (*rdzogs rim*) instructions (body techniques, etc.) and the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) aspect of the practice. Although the instructions are quite allusive, this part of the text includes the verses:

³⁹ As already mentioned, gNam zhal [ma], "She with a Face of Sky," is the *yum* of Che mchog He ru ka, wrathful Samantabhadri.

⁴⁰ *sGrub chen bka' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi snying po gnam zhal don khrid*.

⁴¹ It is not explicit which form should be visualized in union with the male deity or where the two other ones should be visualized. These points could be clarified based on Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las' detailed commentary on the practice, the *Byang gter bka' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi phrin las kyi rnam bshad rab gsal nyin byed snang ba* (CNT, vol. 44, pp. 398; henceforth, Padma 'phrin las, 2015). This extensive text deserves to be described and analyzed.

⁴² This is not due to a difference in the editions: the text is complete also in the *Rin chen gter mdzod*, which Eva Neumaier used as the basis of her translation. See e.g. *Rin chen gter mdzod*, vol. 23, pp. 165-200.

If you want to see the actual (*don*) Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra,
Fully look into the [celestial] Element.⁴³

As a fruit, the fourth vision of rDzogs chen, *chos zad*, is promised.⁴⁴ The overall conclusion relevant to our Byang gter studies is that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's practice ideal may have been a fusion of the most advanced forms of tantrism—including both elaborate rituals with their aspects of magical action and body techniques—and visionary rDzogs chen rather than separate practices of one or the other. The extensive *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar*, of which the wrathful Padmasambhava cycle (*Thugs sgrub*) is somewhat of an appendix,⁴⁵ is seen as culminating in *The Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra* (rDzogs chen *kun bzang dgongs pa zang thal*) through a continuous, gradual ascent from a Mahāyoga-style practice to the most advanced forms of rDzogs chen.

At the present state of research, it is difficult to say to what extent the visionary rDzogs chen was already included in Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer and/or Guru Chos dbang's *bKa' brgyad* systems. What is certain, however, is that Rig 'dzin rGod ldem, in this *gter ma* revealed in 1366 (and "translated" from the *ḍākinī* script sometime before 1401, the probable date of his death) somehow goes in the same direction as the Mahāyoga-rDzogs chen synthesis achieved by Klong chen rab 'byams in the *Phyogs bcu'i mun sel* (1352), his commentary on the *gSang ba snying po*. There are no traces of communication between Klong chen rab 'byams or his disciples and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's circle, although there is a strong hint that rGod ldem was aware of Klong chen rab 'byams' existence.⁴⁶ However, in 14th-century Tibet, this does not necessarily mean that he had access to Klong chen pa's works. What can be safely assumed is that in the same way as Rig 'dzin rGod ldem somewhat furthers Klong chen rab 'byams' synthesis of the *Bi ma snying thig* and *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, he is also presenting, in the *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* cycle, a practical way to practice what Klong chen rab 'byams taught in theory in the *Phyogs bcu'i mun sel*, combining this exegesis of the *gSang ba snying po* with the *bKa' brgyad* heritage of Nyang ral and Chos dbang.



⁴³ CNT, vol. 10, p. 606: *Kun bzang dgongs pa ye shes zang thal don : mthong bar 'dod na dbyings la rdzogs par blta* :.

⁴⁴ Loc. cit.: *de tshē chos nyid zad pa'i ye shes shar*.

⁴⁵ Both cycles and their interconnection are described in our forthcoming vol. 2 of *Northern Treasures Histories*. The *Thugs sgrub* is found in CNT, vol. 6 & 7.

⁴⁶ See Arguillère 2024a, pp. 94-99.

*An English Translation of the Texts Edited and Translated in the
1971 Article (with the Missing Part of the Second One)*

First Text: The Teaching of the Ten Aspects of the Heart-Drop of the Completion Phase of The Eight Pronouncements, Self-Produced and Self-Arisen

[589] Here is the teaching of the ten aspects of the heart-drop of the completion phase of The Eight Pronouncements, Self-Produced and Self-Arisen. This is the Tantra [for] Contemplating the Self-Produced and Self-Arisen.⁴⁷

In Indian language: *e mandra ro mas ni mahā sa ma ti na ma.*

In Tibetan: *Drag po rang byung rang shar chen po'i dgongs pa bstan pa zhes bya ba*

In English: "Teaching of the contemplation of the Great Wrathful Self-Produced and Self-Arisen [deities]."

Homage to the Glorious Samantabhadra [as] the Great Supreme Heruka!⁴⁸

In⁴⁹ the palace of the spontaneously established nature of the Akaniṣṭha of the Element of Reality (*dharmadhātu*), the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra dwelt together with crowds of peaceful and wrathful deities around him [in numbers] beyond imagination.

Then⁵⁰ the Lord of Secrets, Vajrapāṇi, stood up and asked: "Kye! spontaneous Buddha Samantabhadra, how is the heart of the meditation of the Eight Pronouncements?" So he asked.

⁴⁷ CNT, vol. 10, p. 589: *sGrub chen bka' brgyad drag po rang byung rang shar gyi rdzogs rim snying tig rnam pa bcu bstan pa bzhugs so : rang byung rang shar dgongs pa'i rgyud do :.* An alternative translation could be based on the understanding of *dgongs rgyud* as meaning a tantra that expresses the ultimate intention. However, in context, it rather seems to mean a tantra containing instructions for meditation (as *dgongs pa* is also an honorific for terms meaning contemplation). The pseudo-Sanskrit (?) title also leans in this direction, with its word **sa ma ti*, which certainly refers to samādhi. I have made no further effort to reconstruct the correct Sanskrit. In fact, the *rgya gar skad* of such texts could be anything, from an almost purely "elfic" language to a reproduction of an archaic phonetic transcription of whatever language the original corpus of the Eight Pronouncement was translated from—which needs not be Sanskrit.

⁴⁸ [590] *rGya gar skad du : e mandra ro mas ni ma hā sa ma ti na ma : bod skad du : drag po rang byung rang shar chen po'i dgongs pa bstan pa zhes bya ba : dpal kun tu bzang po che mchog he ru ka la phyag 'tshal lo :.*

⁴⁹ *'Og min chos kyi dbyings rang bzhin lhun gyis grub pa'i pho brang na : thog ma'i sangs rgyas kun tu bzang po la : 'khor zhi khro rab 'byams gyi lha bsam gyis mi khyab pas bskor nas thabs gcig tu bzhugs so :.*

⁵⁰ *De'i tshe gsang ba'i bdag po phyag na rdo rje bzhangs te 'di skad ces zhus so : kye : rang byung gi sangs rgyas kun tu bzang po : sgrub pa chen po bka' brgyad kyi : thugs kyi dgongs pa ji ltar lags : zhes zhus so :.*

[The Buddha] said:⁵¹

“Listen, Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 How pitiful is sentient beings’ ignorance,
 [While they are] inseparable from me—the contemplation of the
 Eight Pronouncements,
 The maṇḍala of primordial wisdom. [591]
 Let⁵² all those who practice the Eight Pronouncements,
 When they engage in contemplation, do so in this way.
 Because ignorance is unceasing delusion,
 Birth, death, suffering, movements, changes,
 Being, non-being, attachment, aversion,
 —All [of these] are the [proliferating] foliage of ignorance.
 This is exactly Yama, the Lord of Death.⁵³
 Because⁵⁴ the universal basis is not [morally] determined, it is dull.
 Do not allow yourself to slip into a state of being unaware⁵⁵ and
 distracted,
 But [remain] relaxed in unaltered non-proliferation,
 With the power [of] eradicating [ordinary] consciousness.
 Since⁵⁶ you have settled in [its] vivid self-radiance,
 You will realize the fivefold primordial wisdom.⁵⁷
 Then you are freed from the demon of death
 And have overcome the deceptive illusory appearances of the phe-
 nomenal world.
 This is the contemplation of Mañjuśrī, the Body [aspect].”

⁵¹ *bKa' stsal pa : nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : ye shes dkyil 'khor bka' brgyad kyi : dgongs pa nga dang dbyer med kyi : sems can ma rig snying re rje : . [591]*

⁵² *De dag bka' brgyad sgrub pa rnam : dgongs pa len na 'di ltar longs : ma rig 'khrul pa'i rgyun yin pas : skye 'chi sdug bsngal 'pho 'gyur dang : yin dang ma yin chags sdang kun : ma rig pa yi lo 'dab yin : de ka 'chi bdag gshin rje yin : .*

⁵³ The first Heruka of the Eight Pronouncements is Yamāntaka, “the one who puts an end to death.” Ignorance is described here as a state of spiritual death and the reconnection with our original condition destroys this state.

⁵⁴ *Kun gzhi lung med yin pas rmugs : dran med yengs bor ma btang zhig : spros med ma bcos lhug pa la : shes pa drungs 'don ngar dang bcas : .*

⁵⁵ The discussion with Marc-Henri Deroche on the occasion of his lecture at Inalco (13/03/2025, invited by the SFEMT) drew my attention to the use of *dran pa* in Byang gter context, already noted (in passing and about one isolated text) by Kapstein (1992). Indeed, while a search for occurrences of this term in the writings of Klong chen pa shows that it almost always has negative connotations, in the present two texts the connotations are always meliorative.

⁵⁶ *Rang mdangs sa ler bzhaq pa yis : ye shes lnga po rtogs par 'gyur : de tshe 'chi bdag bdud las thar : snang srid 'khrul snang khram la thob : 'jam dpal sku yi dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : grol lam gshin rje'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste dang po'o : .*

⁵⁷ Given the many allusions to luminous visions in this text, these two verses could very likely be interpreted to mean that once you have settled into the “natural state,” visions of the five colors will spontaneously appear.

Thus he spoke.—*First chapter: The Exposition of Heart Drop of the Lord of Death*,⁵⁸ the path of liberation.

"Listen,⁵⁹ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 One's own Intelligence (*rang rig*) is undefiled.
 [It is] the way of all completely pure Buddhas.
 When one does not conceptually cling to whatever appears, [592]
 In the phenomenal world devoid of I and me,
 All visible forms are appearance-and-emptiness;
 The sounds [that one] hears are empty-resonance without essence
 (*ngo bo*).⁶⁰
 Moving⁶¹ fictions are like the wind.
 Leave all this as it is, undifferentiated:
 Then you will triumph over saṃsāra.
 This is the contemplation of the Lotus Speech."⁶²

Thus he spoke.—*Second Chapter: The Exposition of the Heart Drop of the Lotus, the Supreme Speech.*

"Listen,⁶³ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 Since the universal basis⁶⁴ was without mindfulness,
 The four doors fell into ignorance.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Here, "Lord of Death" (*gshin rje*) must obviously be understood as *gShin rje gshed*, Yamāntaka.

⁵⁹ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : rang rig dri ma med pa ste : rnam dag sangs rgyas kun gyi lan : cir snang rtog pas ma [592] ded par : snang srid nga bdag med pa ru : gzugs snang thams cad snang stong yin : sgra rnam grags stong ngo bo med .*

⁶⁰ The reason why only visual and auditive consciousnesses are mentioned here could be that in most texts, there are only pure visions and auditions (hence the very common phrase *sgra 'od zer gsum*), and no pure experiences connected to the three other senses, understood as connected to the ordinary material body.

⁶¹ *Dran rtog 'gyu ba rlung dang 'dra : thams cad dbyer med so mar zhog : de tshe 'khor ba zil gyis gnon : padma gsung gi dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : gsung mchog padma'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste gnyis pa'o .*

⁶² In rNying ma contexts and especially in the bKa' brgyad, "Lotus Speech" (*padma gsung*) means Hayagrīva, the second of the eight Herukas.

⁶³ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : kun gzhi dran pa med pa yis : sgo bzhi ma rig pa ru song : sems kyang ma rig pa las byung : rtog pa sems kyi yan lag yin .*

⁶⁴ *Kun gzhi*, in rDzogs chen (*snying thig*), can mean three things: 1. The ultimate nature of things, Intelligence (*rig pa*), is the original ground (*ye gzhi*) and the basis of arising ('*char gzhi*) of all phenomena. However, it is not called "morally indetermined" (*lung ma bstan* or *lung med*). It also cannot be "without mindfulness." 2. *Kun gzhi lung ma bstan*, the one discussed here, is, so to say, a reification of the first moment of ignorance. 3. *Kun gzhi rnam shes*, the *ālayavijñāna* of Buddhist idealism, which either consists of all the karmic traces (*bag chags*) or is their surface of inscription.

⁶⁵ Eva Neumaier-Dargyay (Neumaier 1971, p. 146, n. 43) notes that the expression (*sgo bzhi*) is unclear but decides to translate it as a metaphor meaning "from all

Mind (*sems*) also arises from ignorance.

Discursive constructs (*rtog pa*) are the branches of the mind.

If⁶⁶ you want to take up the contemplation of the Perfect [Heruka of the] Mind,⁶⁷

[Understand that] the fluctuations of the mind are like clouds:

Do not block [them] or follow⁶⁸ [them, but] leave them alone.

[In this way,] you will be purified of such subject-object discursive constructs

And Intelligence [will be recognized] as self-produced and vivid.

Leave it naturally blended with attentive awareness.⁶⁹

Then self-produced Intelligence will arise.⁷⁰

This is the contemplation of Yang dag [Heruka], the Mind.”

directions.” She speculates on a possible alternative spelling: *bsgo gzhi*. In the context—that of the primordial beginning of the *samsāra* in rDzogs chen—one would rather expect an allusion to the “eight spontaneously established doors” (*lhun grub sgo brgyad*). The “eight spontaneously established doors” are somehow related to the eight channels of the heart *cakra*, which are themselves related to the representation of the heart as an octagonal jewel in rDzogs chen. However, in the description of how the mind (*sems*) originally went astray into delusion, the “fall” in *samsāra* occurs through only *one* of the eight doors, not four of them. Alternatively, *sgo gsum*, the three doors (body, speech, and mind) would make sense, as a way of naming a sentient being as a whole. In a more tantric context, the *sgo bzhi* can only refer to the four doors of the maṇḍala—but what this could mean here is unclear. The occurrences of *sgo bzhi* later in the text all refer to the *sgo ma bzhi*, the door-keeper goddesses, but this does not help much either, except to suggest an alternative theory of the primordial beginning of the *samsāra*.

⁶⁶ *Yang dag dgongs pa len 'dod na : sems kyi 'gyu ba na bun 'dra : ma 'gags ma 'grod rang sar zhog : de ka'i gzung 'dzin rtog pa sangs : rig pa rang byung sa le ba : rang bzhin dran rig bsres la zhog : de la rang byung ye shes 'char : yan dag thugs kyi dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : yang dag thugs kyi snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste gsum pa'o .*

⁶⁷ Yang dag he ru ka is the third of the eight Herukas, corresponding to the mind aspect.

⁶⁸ *'Grod*, not found in dictionaries, but the meaning can be conjectured from the context.

⁶⁹ This phrase, *rang bzhin dran rig bsres la zhog*, is doctrinally interesting. While modern rNying ma authors (from 'Jigs med gling pa onwards) tend to assume the importance of *dran pa* at least at the beginning of rDzogs chen meditation, this is not found in, e.g., Klong chen pa's writings, where this term is rather associated with ordinary mind (*sems*), which can only obscure the essence of *rig pa*. It should be investigated whether Rig 'dzin rGod ldem is starting something new in this regard, or is the heir of another tradition of rDzogs chen instructions. I would like to thank Marc-Henri Deroche for bringing this point to my attention by asking me (13/03/2025) about the status of *dran pa* in Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's *gter chos*.

⁷⁰ Again, one may wonder what is the difference between the mere *recognition* of Intelligence and the fact that “self-produced Intelligence will arise.” But this makes full sense in the context of instructions in the sNying thig style: first (*khregs chod*) one settles in the continuous flow of recognized Intelligence, and then (*thod rgal*) luminous visions arise. This explanation works in many passages below and will not be recalled with each of them.

Thus he spoke.—*Third Chapter: The Exposition of the Heart Drop of Yang dag [Heruka], the Mind.*

"Listen,⁷¹ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
Discursive constructs (*rnam rtog*) come from⁷² ignorance.
From this come the kleśas, the five poisons.
Sentient beings fall into the ocean of [these] five poisons.
Leave discursive constructs in a relaxed state.
Then, the kleśas are [their] mother, Buddha[hood].
The five poisons have not been abandoned, but, self-arising, they
are cleared away
[And]⁷³ the primordial wisdom (*ye shes*) of Intelligence arises.
There, the five wisdoms arise
And the ocean of the five poisons becomes *amṛta*.
The *siddhi* of immortality is attained. [593]
This is the contemplation of Amṛta[kuṇḍalin], the Qualities."

Thus he spoke.—*Fourth Chapter: The Exposition of the Heart Drop of Amṛta[kuṇḍalin], the Qualities.*

"Listen,⁷⁴ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
The consideration of I, me, object, and subject,
Is the enemy that blocks Buddhahood, the Reality Body.
[However,] if one recognizes self-produced Intelligence,
The obstructive enemy is stripped [of its power and]
The primordial wisdom [of] Intelligence develops.
The evil obstructive enemy is liberated by the *kīla*.⁷⁵

⁷¹ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : ma rig pa la rnams rtog 'ong : de las nyon mongs dug lnga 'byung : sems can dug lnga'i rgya mtshor lhung : rtog pa rang shar glod la zhog : de tshe nyon mongs ma sangs rgyas : dug lnga ma spangs rang shar dengs : rang byung rig pa'i ye shes 'char : de la ye shes lnga shar ba'i : dug lnga'i rgya mtsho bdud rtsir 'gyur : 'chi ba med pa'i dngos grub thob : bdud rtsi [593] yon tan dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : bdud rtsi yon tan snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste bzhi pa'o .*

⁷² The Tibetan text, both in Neumaier 1971 (p. 141) and in *Byang gter phyogs bsgrigs* 2015 (p. 592), reads *ma rig pa la rnams rtog 'ong*. Both translations (hers and mine) rather assume that the text should be read *ma rig pa las*.

⁷³ I understand the genitive *shar ba'i*, which does not make sense in context, to be a spelling error for *shar bas*.

⁷⁴ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : nga bdag gzung 'dzin bltas pa de : sangs rgyas chos sku'i dgra bgegs yin : rang byung rig pa ngo shes pas : dgra bgegs cham la phebs pa yin : rig pa ye shes rgyas pa dang : dgra bgegs phur pas bsgral ba yin : de tshe rtogs pa thal gyis phyung : nga bdag gzung 'dzin rtsa ba sangs : phur pa phrin las dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : phrin las phur pa'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste lnga pa'o .*

⁷⁵ The previous chapter was about the fourth Heruka, Amṛtakūṇḍalin, corresponding to the "qualities" (*yon tan*) aspect; this one is about Vajrakīla, the fifth Heruka, corresponding to the "activities" (*phrin las*).

Then suddenly realization arises
 And one is purified from the root of I, me, subject and object.
 This is the contemplation of Kīla, the Activities."

Thus he spoke.—*Fifth Chapter: The Exposition of the Heart Drop of Kīla, the Activities.*

"Listen,⁷⁶ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 The universal basis is not defined as anything,
 [But] when you recognize [it], this is Intelligence (*rig pa*).
 It is the very essence of the universal basis.
 The omniscient primordial wisdom arises.
 Intelligence, [when] unaltered (*ma bcos*) and undistracted (*ma yengs*),
 is vividly awake (*hrig ge*), clear in its natural place.
 The unborn Body of Reality is the sky of the [main] female [deity],
 In which uncontrived primordial wisdom[s] arise.⁷⁷
 This is the contemplation of Summoning and Sending out the
 Matṛkas."

Thus he spoke.—*Sixth Chapter: The exposition of the Path of Desire, the Heart Drop of the Matṛkas.*⁷⁸

"Listen,⁷⁹ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 The universal basis is everything's birthplace;
 It is self-produced; it is primordial wisdom.
 It⁸⁰ cannot be expressed by phrases such as: "[this is] it."

⁷⁶ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : kun gzhi ci yang ma nges pa : ngo shes dus na rig pa yin : de ka kun gzhi snying po yin : thams cad mkhyen pa'i ye shes 'char : rig pa ma bcos ma yengs pa : hrig ge rang sar gsal ba de : chos sku skye med yum gyi mkha' : de las 'gag med ye shes 'char : rbod gtong ma mo'i dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : chags lam ma mo'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste drug pa'o .*

⁷⁷ This again alludes to the arising of luminous visions in the sky. "The sky of the [main] female [deity]" (*yum gyi mkha'*) is in general a tantric euphemism for the female sexual organ. Here, however, the metaphor alluding to sexual union is applied to luminous visions (*ye shes*) arising in the spacious element (*dbyings*), so that "sky" actually means "sky."

⁷⁸ *Ma mo rbod gtong* is the six of the Eight Pronouncements, the first of the three "worldly" ones, as it basically contains magical practices. But here, and this will be the case also for the next two "worldly" aspects, this is understood in an analogical way to mean rDzogs chen practices.

⁷⁹ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : kun gzhi kun gyi byung sa [CNT 2015: byung ba] ste : rang byung yin te ye shes yin .*

⁸⁰ *Tshig gis 'di ltar brjod du med : she bya rnon pos bzo rgyu med : yid kyis ched du bsgom du med : de don shes na rtogs pa yin : gzhi don rig na rig pa yin .* This paragraph is missing in Eva Neumaier's Tibetan text and German translation.

Sharp [intellect even] cannot make it up [to be] cognitive object.
 It cannot be deliberately meditated on by mental [consciousness].
 If this is understood, this is realization.
 When one knows (*rig na*) the meaning of the basis, this is Intelligence (*rig pa*),
 Unmoved⁸¹ by [either] discursive constructs (*rnam rtog*) [or] the five poisons. [594]
 When [you are] settled [in this] without distraction,
 Intelligence will be caught in the Element.⁸²
 Although various adventitious circumstantial appearances [may] occur nebulously,
 They will be purified and disappear.
 It is [in itself] self-produced and immovable,
 But it is uncertain whether one will gain stability gradually or obtain it immediately.⁸³
 Discursive constructs and passions (*kleśa*) will be purified.
 Through implementing the three postures⁸⁴ to it,
 Intelligence will blossom into the five primordial wisdoms.
 When Intelligence matures, the fruit is obtained.
 One will have power over birthless and deathless life.
 The attainment of contemplation is Mahāmudrā.⁸⁵
 The arising of primordial wisdom[s] is Dzogchen.
 This is the contemplation of the Master Vidyādhara."

⁸¹ *rNam rtog dug lnga mi g.yo* [594] *bar : ma yengs pa ru bzhaḡ pa de : rig pa dbyings su 'dzin pa yin : rkyen snang sna tshogs glo bur ba : bun gyis skyes kyang sangs kyi dag : rang byung g.yo ba med pa de : rim gyis brtan pa thob pa dang : gcig char thob pa nges med pa :* [CNT 2015: *med nges pa :*] *nyon mongs rtog pa sangs par 'gyur : de la lta stangs gsum gcun* [CNT 2015: *bcun*] *pas : rig pa ye shes lnga ru rgyas : rig pa smin par* [CNT 2015: *smin pas*] *'bras bu thob* [CNT 2015: *'thob*] *: skye 'chi med pa'i tshe la dbang : dgongs pa longs pa phyag rgya che : ye shes shar pa rdzogs pa che : rig 'dzin bla ma'i dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : rig 'dzin bla ma'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste bdun pa'o .:*

⁸² Here, the terms *rig pa* and *dbyings* do not refer to metaphysical realities, but to elements of the *thod rgal* visionary process. In the present context, *rig pa* means the "vajra chains" (*rdo rje'i lu gu rgyud*) which must be "caught" (*'dzin*) within "the enclosure of the Element" (*dbyings kyi ra ba*).

⁸³ Here I am following the text edited by Eva Neumayer, better than that of CNT.

⁸⁴ This is a direct allusion to the three body-postures and maybe the three eyes-posture of *thod rgal*.

⁸⁵ It is likely that the bKa' brgyud systems of Mahāmudrā originally integrated rDzogs chen instructions of the *sems sde* type. But after the time of Klong chen pa, it is also evident that a tendency began to use bKa' brgyud Mahāmudrā instructions in place of *khregs chod*, and to consider that only *thod rgal* was truly original in rDzogs chen. This may be the meaning of this verse and the next, although there are no clear traces of bKa' brgyud associations in the oldest sources on Rig 'dzin rGod ldem.

Thus he spoke.—*Seventh Chapter: The exposition of the Path of Desire, the Heart Drop of the Master Vidyādhara.*

Listen,⁸⁶ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 This gasping to “I” and “me”
 Was born from all-imagining ignorance (*kun brtag ma rig pa*).
 As the habitual tendencies of this [grasping] grew stronger,
 The benefits and harms of enemies and allies, gods and demons,
 As well as whatever manifests, appears as dual, “I” and “me.”
 Because there is no thing (*rgyu med*) for the mind to grasp,
 If one’s own non-grabbing Intelligence is left unamended,
 Discursive constructs self-liberate—delusion is destroyed.
 Then, one has liberated the worldly saṃsāra;
 The eight [types of] gods and demons are enslaved.
 Through the realization of selflessness, saṃsāra is liberated.
 This is the contemplation of Worldly Offerings and Praise.

Thus he spoke.—*Eighth Chapter: The exposition of the Heart Drop of the Worldly Arrogant [Spirits].*

“Listen,⁸⁷ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 Certainty about of the three-worlds saṃsāra
 Is that the basic discursive construct is hesitation (*snyems byed*).
 When doubt (*the tshom*) and dualism come, one is deluded.
 When the grasping of “I” occurs, one’s executioner has arisen.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : nga dang bdag tu 'dzin pa de : kun brtag ma rig pa las byung : de yi bag chag mthu brtas pas : dgra gnyen lha 'dre'i phan gnod dang : cir snang nga bdag gnyis su byung : sems la 'dzin pa'i rgyu med pas : 'dzin med rang rig ma btos na : rtog pa rang grol 'khrul pa 'jigs : de tshe 'jig rten 'khor ba sgrol : lha srin sde brgyad bran du 'khol : bdag med rtogs pas 'khor pa grol : 'jig rten mchod bstod dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : 'jig rten dregs pa'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste brgyad pa'o :.*

⁸⁷ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : srid gsum 'khor ba'i nges pa ni : rtas ba'i rnam rtog snyems byed yin : the tshom [595] gnyis 'dzin byung nas 'khrul : ngar 'dzin byung bas rang gshed langs : skye 'chi 'khor lo rgyun ma'i chad : 'khor ba gzhi med glo bur pa : rtas bral yin par shes pa de : dang po shes pa'i rig pa yin : rig gnas [CNT 2015: rig nas] rang sor bzhag pa de : rig pa rang byung chen po yin : de ltar gnas na sgom pa yin : nyon mongs dug lnga rang shar dag : rang gshed rang bdud rang gis grol : dug lnga gnas 'gyur ye shes shar : dmod pa drag sngags dgongs pa yin : zhes gsungs so : drug sngags dmod pa'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste dgu pa'o :.*

⁸⁸ “One’s executioner” (*rang gshed*) is a common phrase in Tibetan texts of destructive magic, whether it means a spirit sent specifically to kill a designed target or whether it should be understood in the sense that something within oneself, normally designed for one’s protection, turns against the one it is supposed to protect, in a sort of auto-immune way. The hostile agent may himself suffer the same magical operation, and then “One’s executioner [becomes] a demon for himself [and] liberates himself.” Of course, the whole process is understood here in a sublimated way, as an allegory of rDzogs chen practice.

The wheel of birth and death will [then] not stop [turning].
 Saṃsāra is ungrounded and adventitious.
 Knowing that it is rootless is, first of all, the Intelligence of knowing.
 To leave this intelligence that [one] has [gained] just as it is
 Is Intelligence, the great self-produced [nature].
 If one remains like that, this is meditation.
 Passions, the five poisons, are purified on the spot.
 One's executioner [becomes] a demon for himself [and] liberates himself.
 The five poisons are transmuted [and] the primordial wisdoms arise.
 This is the contemplation of The Fierce Mantras Cursing."

Thus he spoke.—*Ninth Chapter: The exposition of the Heart Drop of The Fierce Mantras of Cursing.*

Listen,⁸⁹ Master of Secrets, Holder of the Vajra!
 Regarding the contemplation of the global synthesis of the Victors:
 The universal basis is not conceived as being the fruit.
 The basis is self-produced and motionless.
 If it is not imbued with awareness (*dran pa*), it is actually dullness (*gti mug*).⁹⁰
 Intelligence is a self-arisen clarity.
 When one remains firmly on the ground of awareness (*yang dag dran pa'i sa*),
 It is bright and alert, vividly still and radiant,
 Like an ocean without waves,
 Brilliant, limpid, lucidly clear,
 Like the arising of the stars and planets in the sky.
 If you remain like this, it is Dharmadhātu.
 This is the contemplation of the great pervasive-extension,⁹¹
 It is called birthless Dharmadhātu.

⁸⁹ *Nyon cig gsang bdag rdo rje 'dzin : spyi dril rgyal pa'i dgongs pa ni : kun gzhi 'bras bur mi 'dod de : gzhi ni rang byung g.yo med yin : dran pas ma zin gti mug dngos : rig pa rang shar [CNT 2015: rang gsal] gsal ba la : yang dag dran pa'i sa [CNT 2015: so] tshugs pas : lhang nge lhan ne lham me ba : rgya mtsho'i rlabs dang bral ba ltar : sa le sen ne yer re ba : mkha' la gza' skar shar ba ltar : de ltar gnas pas chos kyi dbyings : khyab brdal chen po'i dgongs pa yin : skye med chos kyi dbyings zhes bya .*

⁹⁰ This is the third occurrence of the idea that the difference between *ye gzhi ka dag* and *kun gzhi lung ma bstan* is the presence of *dran pa* in the former and its absence in the latter.

⁹¹ *Khyab brdal* is a specific technical term of rDzogs chen, referring to the way in which Buddha nature is present in ordinary beings.

Then⁹² the passions are uprooted.
 Even if discursive constructs suddenly arise,
 Saṃsāra has been interrupted by⁹³ rootless Intelligence.
 Now again, unchanging contemplation
 Is the absence of discursive constructs [but] is *not*⁹⁴ primordial wisdom.
 In a cloudless sky,
 [Let your] eyes and Intelligence stare wakefully, and then [596]
 For Element and Intelligence are merged,
 While inwardly experiences of emptiness arise,
 Outwardly you will see the signs of clarity.
 [There are] the signs of Intelligence and those of primordial wisdom,
 The perception of immutable certainty, and,
 Inwardly, one has attained stability.
 Appearance and emptiness are united.
 Then, one has reached contemplation."

Thus he spoke.—*Ninth Chapter: The exposition of the Heart Drop of the Essence that is the Global Synthesis.*

This⁹⁵ completes the presentation of the contemplation of the Wrathful [Eight Pronouncements], Self-Produced and Self-Arising. *Samaya*. Triple seal: seal of profundity, seal of secrecy, seal of impartation. *Iṭhi*. The Emanation Body, the Great Vidyādhara [rGod Idem can], brought it out from the treasure [cache].

⁹² *De dus nyon mongs rtsa ba chod : rnam rtog glo bur langs gyur kyang : rtsa bral rig pas 'khor ba 'chad : de yang dgongs pa mi 'gyur ba : rtog med yin te ye shes min : nam mkha' sprin dang bral ba la : mig dang rig pa hur bton nas : [596] dbyings dang rig pa bsres pa yis : nang du ston pa'i nyams shar bas : phyi ru gsal ba'i rtags mthong 'gyur : rig pa'i rtags dang ye shes rtags : mi 'gyur nges pa mthong pa dang : nang du brtan pa thob pa yin : snang stong zung du chud pa yin : de tshe dgongs pa lon pa yin : zhes gsungs so : spyi dril snying po'i snying tig bstan pa'i le'u ste bcu pa'o :*

⁹³ I understand the genitive (in both editions) to be a misspelled instrumental.

⁹⁴ Sic in the two editions. This does not make much sense. I suspect this should be read as *rtog med yin te ye shes yin* instead of *ye shes min*. Indeed, rDzogs chen may recognize the existence of dull mental states that are devoid of discursive constructs—because the mind is immobilized—without having the quality of *ye shes* or *rig pa*—because *kun gzhi lung ma bstan* still obscures its clarity. But this idea does not seem to apply in the present context.

⁹⁵ *Drag po rang byung rang shar chen po'i dgongs pa bstan pa rdzogs so : samaya : rgya rgya rgya : zab rgya : gsang rgya : gtad rgya : iṭhi : sprul sku rig 'dzin chen pos gter nas gdan drangs pa'o : dge'o .:*

*Second text: [597] The True Instructions of Sky-Face.⁹⁶
The Essence of the Great Sādhana of the Eight Pronouncements,
Spontaneous and Self-Arisen⁹⁷*

[598] <166> Homage⁹⁸ to the Sugatas, the deities of the Eight Pronouncements! In whoever is able to meditate [on] the Great Supreme Heruka, male and female, [in whom] unadulterated saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are fully complete, the qualities will be spontaneously perfect in an instant. I, Padmasambhava, [will now] give the oral instructions for this.

When⁹⁹ the two accumulations through taking refuge and generating bodhicitta have been performed, meditate on the master above the crown of your head and pray [to him]. Take the four empowerments and do the absorption in the four syllables.

From¹⁰⁰ the state of emptiness, either [perform] the fully complete sādhana, or clearly visualize [yourself] in just one moment as the male and female [deities].¹⁰¹

As¹⁰² for [one's] body,¹⁰³ the complete [maṇḍala] mansion (*gzhal yas khang*) is clearly [visualized] in the center of the palace (*pho brag*) endowed with the five *cakras*.¹⁰⁴ [In] the universal basis, <167> the completely pure active [side] of the intellect (*rnam dag yid kyi byed pa*) is the

⁹⁶ gNam zhal [ma], "She with a Face of Sky," is, as seen above, the *yum* of Che mchog He ru ka, wrathful Samantabhadri.

⁹⁷ [597] sGrub chen bka' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi snying po gnam zhal don khrid ces bya ba bzhugs so :.

⁹⁸ [598] bDe gshegs sgrub pa bka' brgyad lha la phyag 'tshal lo : 'khor 'das ma bcos yongs rdzogs he ru ka : che mchog yab yum sgom bar sus nus pa : skad cig gcig gis yon tan lhun gyis grub : de yi zhal khrid padma bdag gis bstan :.

⁹⁹ sKyabs 'gro sems bskyed tshogs gnyis bsags byas la : bla ma spyi bor bsgoms la gsol ba btab : dbang bzhi rdzogs byas yi ge bzhi yis bstims :.

¹⁰⁰ sTong nyid ngang las sgrub thabs rdzogs pa'am : skad cig tsaṃ las yab yum skur gsal gdab :.

¹⁰¹ These two possibilities refer to the gradual (three samādhis, etc.) or instantaneous visualization of the maṇḍala. The first system is often ascribed to the Mahāyoga and the second one to the Anuyoga, but things do not seem to be so simple in actual practice, where the frontiers between the three inner classes of tantras are often blurred.

¹⁰² De yi lus ni yongs rdzogs gzhal yas khang : 'khor lo lnga ldan pho brag dbus na gsal : kun gzhi'i rnam dag yid ni byed pa yab : bya ba chos ni rnam dag bzang mo yum : snang srid gzhi'r bzhengs gdan la yongs rdzogs pa : 'khor 'das sku gsum ma g.yos sku gsum thugs : rang byung ye shes rang shar [599] lhun gyis grub : zhi khro rab 'byams mtshan ma'i rdzas dang bral : dran shes tsaṃ gyis sa lam nges par bgrod : ma bcos rig pa rang shar chos kyi sku : kun tu bzang po khro pa'i rang rtsal las : che ba'i che mchog kun bzang he ru ka :.

¹⁰³ The use of the non-honorific form *lus* indicates that this is about the meditator's own body, not that of the deity.

¹⁰⁴ This periphrasis seems to mean: in one's heart.

male,¹⁰⁵ and the completely pure passive side, *dharma*, is the female [Samanta]bhadrī, [appearing] fully complete on the seat of phenomenal existence arising from the Basis. Saṃsāra and nirvāṇa [do not deviate from] the Trikāya, Body, Speech, and Mind. Self-arising spontaneous pristine awarenesses [599] are spontaneously perfect: the abundance of the peaceful and wrathful [deities] is devoid of characterized substantiality (*mtshan ma'i rdzas dang bral*). The levels and paths are definitely traversed by mere attentive awareness.¹⁰⁶ Unaltered, self-arising Intelligence is Dharmakāya. From Samantabhadra's own wrathful expressive power (*khros pa'i rang rtsal*) [arises] the Heruka who is supremely great among the great, on¹⁰⁷ top of Mt. Meru, which is made up of the five elements, [in which] there is no difference between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. There are [the eight] cemeteries, a palace, the vajra enclosure, [the vajra] tent and [a circumference of] fire. In its center are a vajra rock, a lotus, the sun, the moon, the eight prostrated nāgas, and above them, <168> a lion, a tiger, a leopard, an elephant, a bear, a water buffalo, a *makara* and a great snake, [all forming] a throne, above which is a blazing ten-spoked golden wheel.¹⁰⁸ Above it, on a mat [made of] the trampled eight fierce gods, [is the Great Supreme Heruka]. His dark brown body color [symbolizes] the unaltered universal basis. [His] twenty-one heads [are] the complete qualities of the Fruit. The main central face is dark brown, the six faces above [it] are blue. The seven right heads are white, blue, white, black, blue, dark blue, and white, [600] one above the other. The seven left heads are red, green, red, green, blue, green, and red, one above the other. The twenty-one right hands hold the peaceful male [deities]; the twenty-one left hands holds the excellent female [deities]. Of the six Bhagavan

¹⁰⁵ To rephrase the explanation found in Neumaier 1971, p. 154, n. 61, in a slightly clearer way: all the elements of the maṇḍala are sublimed components of the ordinary experience. *Kun gzhi* seems to correspond to the palace itself. Then all the deities correspond to one of the eight consciousnesses with its specific objective field, starting with *manas* and it is object, *dharma*.

¹⁰⁶ This is another interesting occurrence of *dran pa*: *dran shes tsam gyis sa lam nges par bgrad* :.

¹⁰⁷ 'Khor 'das gnyis med 'byung lnga ri rab steng : dur khrod gzhal yas rdo rje ra gur me : de dbus rdo rje brag dang padma dang : nyi zla klu brgyad bskyel ba'i steng phyogs na : seng ge stag gzic glang chen dom dang ni : ma he chu srin sbrul chen khri steng du : gser gyi 'khor lo rtsibs bcu 'bar ba'i steng : dregs pa'i lha brgyad brjis pa'i gdan steng du : sku mdog smug nag kun gzhi ma bcas pa : nyer gcig dbu ni 'bras bu'i yon tan rdzogs : rtsa zhal smug nag steng zhal drug ni mthing : g.yas pa'i zhal bdun dkar sngo dkar nag mthing : sngon po dang ni dkar [600] po rim par brtsegs : g.yon gyi zhal bdung dmar ljang mthing : ljang sku dang ni dmar po rim par brtsegs : phyag g.yas nyi shu rtsa gcig zhi ba yab : g.yon pa nyer gcig bzang mo yun rnam dang : bcom ldan thub drug g.yas gsum g.yon na gsum : sbyong gzhi sbyang byed phung khams skye mched lha : zhabs brgyad gdan la brkyang bskum bgrad cing bzhuks : rnam brjid bco brgyad chas rdzogs gar dgur ldan :.

¹⁰⁸ In context, 'khor lo means the circular weapon and the ten spokes are its ten points or blades.

Munis, three are in the [next] right [hands] and three in the [next] left [hands]. [These] deities are the skandhas, dhātus and āyatanas, [in their aspects of] bases to be purified (*sbyong gzhi*) and means of purification (*sbyang byed*).¹⁰⁹ [He stands with his] eight legs widely spread apart on the throne—[the right ones] bent and [the left ones] extended. He is complete with the eighteen frightening attributes and the nine moods of dance.

The¹¹⁰ Great [main] female [deity], Sky-Face, Queen of the Sphere (*dByings phyug*), embraces the [main] male deity. [As a symbol of] the unaltered principle, she has one face and two arms; the dark brown color of her body [means that this] Body can transform into anything. The right [arm] embraces the male deity, the left offers him a skullcup full of blood. She embraces the Great Glorious [main] male deity, [meaning that] the Fruit is spontaneously perfect. [As a sign of] taking this as a path, she is of heavenly color.

As¹¹¹ for the first of the nine heads of the Mahāyoga [goddess],¹¹² they are blue, white, <169> yellow, red, and green,¹¹³ the colors of the five elements: [thus,] the [set] of male and female herukas of the five families is complete in the [main] female [deity]. Above, the right head

¹⁰⁹ Che mchog he ru ka has are forty-two arms, corresponding to the 42 peaceful deities among the one hundred *zhi khro lha*, 21 male and 21 female deities. The six Munis (Buddhas corresponding to the six main states in saṃsāra) are counted among them. How the next 35 items (the 5 *phung po*, the 18 *kham*s and the 12 *skye mched*) makes 34 is not explained in this text. The only possibility is that the three lists are reduced to the 5 skandhas and 12 āyatanas—17 items—multiplied by two, in order to represent the “aspects of bases to be purified (*sbyong gzhi*) and means of purification (*sbyang byed*)”—which then amounts to 34.

¹¹⁰ *Yum chen gnam zhal dbyings phyug yab dang 'khril : rtsa ba ma bcos zhal gcig phyag gnyis pa : sku mdog smug nag cir yang 'gyur ba'i sku : g.yas pa yab 'khyud g.yon pa dung dmar stob : 'bras bu lhun rdzogs dpal chen yab dang 'khril : de nyid lam gyur gnam zhal gnam mkha'i mdog :.*

¹¹¹ *Ma hā yo ga dbu dgu'i dang po ni : mthing dkar ser dang dmar ljang 'byung lnga'i mdog : rigs lnga yab yum khrag thung rdzogs pa'i ma : de steng g.yas dkar g.yon dmar dbus mthing zhal : chos sku longs sku sprul sku'i ngo bor rdzogs : de steng zhal gcig mthing sngon gnam zhal ma : mkha' spyod dbyings rig 'gyur med lhun gyis grub :.*

¹¹² The text is not very clear about the goddesses of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga. The main male deity is in union with a female deity that has just been described as one-faced and two-armed. We do not know where the other three are located. Perhaps these three aspects corresponding to Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga are disposed in a triangle, two at the front right and left and one at the back, as for the three emanations of Yamāntaka in the main systems of 'Jam dpal tsho bdag (lCags sdig and lCags 'dra).

¹¹³ This form of the main female deity has nine heads, arranged as a pyramid with a first row of five heads with the colors of the five elements. The list of colors is probably to be understood in the order: central face, then first to the right, first to the left, second further to the right and second further to the left. A second row of three heads above (right white, left red, center blue) symbolize the three kāyas, with a final unique (dark blue) head at the top.

is white, the left one red, the middle one blue, [meaning that] in [her] essence, the Bodies of Reality, Enjoyment and Emanation are complete. Above it is a single blue-dark blue (*mthing sngon*) head—the [reason why she is called] She with a Sky Face, Khecarī¹¹⁴ [in whom] the immutable [unity] of Dhātu and Intelligence is spontaneously perfect.

[In this form, she has] eighteen arms,¹¹⁵ the first two of which hold a vajra and a skullcup. [She presents this] blood-filled skullcup [to the mouth of] Samantabhadra Heruka, the Lord of the Sugatas, [in whom] skillful means and discernment are inseparable. Her eight [other] right arms hold the eight *kaurī* [and] *matṛka*, clearly visualized as the purity of the eight consciousnesses and faculties. [601] Her¹¹⁶ eight left arms hold the eight *seng ha* and *phra men*, [representing] the purity of the four objective fields¹¹⁷ and the four times.¹¹⁸ Her four spread legs trample down the four demons [of] the four extremes, spontaneously perfected in the form (*ngo bo*) of the [four female] gatekeepers. She is finely adorned with the jewels and graveyard ornaments.¹¹⁹ The mental factors (*sems 'byung*) are spontaneously established as the crowds of her retinue of [both] action and primordial wisdom—the Powerful Ones (*dbang phyug*), the Dākinīs, the *Ging* spirits, etc.

The¹²⁰ Anuyoga [form of the] Great [main] female [deity] Sky-Face is the color of the sky. Her upper face is [that of] the wrathful Vajra Queen of the Dhātu, connected to the secret [*cakra*] of the Glorious Vajra male deity. Below it are eight heads—white, yellow, red, and

¹¹⁴ Khecara is generally the pure land of the dākinīs, but Vajravārahī as the archetypal dākinī is often called Khecarī (*mkha' spyod ma*) and I presume that this is the meaning of *mkha' spyod* in this context.

¹¹⁵ *Phyag ni bco brgyad dang po rdo rje dang : thod pa khrag bkang kun bzang he ru ka : thabs shes gnyis med bde gshegs kun gyi rje : g.yas kyi phyag brgyad koo ri ma mo brgyad : rnam shes dbang po dag pa'i rnam par gsal :.*

¹¹⁶ [601] *g.Yon gyi phyag brgyad seng ha phra men brgyad : yul bzhi dus bzhi dag pa'i rnam par rdzogs : zhabs bzhi bgrad pas bdud bzhi mtha' bzhi gnon : ye shes sgo skyong ngo bor lhun gyis grub : rin chen dur khrod rgyan gyis legs par brgyan : sems byung dbang phyug mkha' 'gro ging la sogs : las dang ye shes 'khor tshogs lhun gyis grub :.*

¹¹⁷ Neumaier 1971, p. 156, n. 71: “*yul bzhi* are unknown.” More than fifty years later, this has not become any clearer.

¹¹⁸ Neumaier 1971, p. 156, n. 72: “*dus bzhi* here refer to the four seasons, according to the clear information provided by Mr. Geshay Lobsang Dargyay.” However, in a rNying ma context (and there is one such occurrence below in this text), these can also be past, present, future and eternity (*dus med*).

¹¹⁹ The combination of both jewels and macabre ornaments is said in many rNying ma tantric commentaries to mean the combination of the “powerful” (*dbang*) and “wrathful” (*drag*) activities.

¹²⁰ *A nu yum chen gnam zhal nam mkha'i mdog : steng zhal khro ma rdo rje dbyings phyug ma : rdo rje dpal chen yab kyi gsang bar sbyor : de 'og zhal brgyad dkar ser dmar ljang mdog : phyogs mtshams bskor ba kro ti yum chen brgyad :.*

green.¹²¹ In the eight [cardinal and] intermediary directions [are] the eight great *kro ti* female deities, touching the soles of the eight feet of the Wrathful King [Che mchog he ru ka].

Her¹²² nine right hands hold Samantabhadra and the eight *kaurī*. <170> Appearances are the skillful means: [they are] united with the empty Dhātu. The nine left hands [hold] Samantabhadri and the eight witches (*phra men*), the union of emptiness [and] discernment (*shes rab*), appearances and skillful means. The eight blazing legs [are] the eight male and female gatekeepers who purify extremisms and wrong views [and] integrate [them] into the Path. The complete graveyard [ornaments and] jewels [denote] the integration of appearances and mind as the Dhātu and the primordial awareness [of] Intelligence.

The¹²³ Atiyoga [form] of the Great [main] female [deity] Sky-Face is of blue color. She has nine heads [stacked in] three rows; the uppermost head, bluish black, is alone: [the symbol] refers to the primordial wisdom of the Dharmadhātu of the vajra family. In the middle one of the three rows of heads, the eastern¹²⁴ [face] is white, the southern one yellow, the western one red and the northern one green: the four [remaining] primordial wisdoms of the four [remaining] families. The lowest of the three rows [602] has the colors of the families in the same way.

¹²¹ The description does not seem to be complete, as we only have four colors for eight heads. This could mean that in this case there are two rows of four heads with the same colors. This works with the explanation of the *a ti yum chen* below, which has a single head above two rows of four heads, each facing one of the cardinal directions.

¹²² *Khro rgyal zhabs brgyad bar ba'i mthil la sbyor : phyag dgu g.yas pa kun bzang ko ri brgyad : snang ba thabs de stong pa'i dbyings la sbyor : g.yon pa'i phyag dgu bzang po phra men brgyad : stong pa shes rab snang ba thabs dang sbyor : zhabs brgyad 'bar ba sgo skyong yab yum brgyad : mthar 'dzin log lta rnam dag lam du sbyor : dur khrod rin chen chas rdzogs snang ba sems : rig pa ye shes dbyings dang mnyam par sbyor :.*

¹²³ *A ti yum chen gnam zhal mthing ka'i mdog : dbu dgu rim gsum steng zhal mthing nag gcig : chos dbyings ye shes rdo rje'i rig dang sbyor : rim gsum bar ma shar dkar lho phyogs ser : nub dmar byang ljang rigs bya'i ye shes bzhi : rim gsum 'og ma de bzhi [602] rigs gyi mdog :.*

¹²⁴ In a quadrangular pattern, "east" normally means front, "south" right and so forth. Although this should be modified according to the actual orientation of the deity in context, here, these terms most probably retain this conventional meaning, since a presentation that would not begin with the front and then turn clockwise would be very awkward.

The¹²⁵ four Bodies¹²⁶ and the five pristine awarenesses are the five blood-drinkers. [She is holding] a vajra [in her right hand] and a skull-cup [in the left, symbolizing] the non-dual union of the Element and Intelligence. The *kau[rī]* and *seng* [*ha ma* she holds in her] right and left [hands] refer to objects, consciousnesses and faculties.¹²⁷ The four legs are the four primordial awarenesses¹²⁸ endowed with the four immeasurable [thoughts].¹²⁹ The deep meaning is the mode of being of the eighteen emptinesses.¹³⁰ The primordial awareness of Intelligence devoid of extremes is spontaneously perfect. This is the unborn naturally pure miraculous [manifestation arising] from the non-dual playful [union] of the Great Glorious male and female [deities].

In¹³¹ order to tame the world, on the boundary of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa, on the top of the [strata of] space, wind, blood, the great earth, and Mt. Meru,¹³² there is the fully complete [assembly of] the Great Glorious One. <171> Under their feet, the hell worlds are complete without exception [as] masses of fire and air. The *preta* and the animals are complete [as] water and earth. In the middle of Mt. Meru, on the four continents, the world of desire, the basis [of the existence] of gods and humans, is complete without exception. From the waist of Mt. Meru to the summit of existence, the World of Form with its seventeen levels is complete. At its boundaries, at the summit, the four levels of

¹²⁵ *sKu bzhi ye shes lnga 'byon khrag 'thung lnga : rdo rje thod khrag dbyings rig gnyis med sbyor : g.yas g.yon ko seng yul shes dbang po sbyor : zhabs bzhi chad med bzhi ldan ye shes bzhi : stong nyid bco brgyad gnas lugs zab mo'i don : mtha' bral rig pa'i ye shes lhun gyis grub : dpal chen yab yum gnyis med rol pa las : skye med rang bzhin dag pa'i cho 'phrul yin .*

¹²⁶ Neumaier 1971, p. 158, n. 82: "*sku bzhi: chos sku, longs sku, sprul sku, ngo bo nyid kyi sku.*"

¹²⁷ This obscure phrase becomes clear if one refers to the explanation of the attributes of the *Anuyoga* form above.

¹²⁸ Neumaier 1971, loc. cit., n. 86: "*ye shes bzhi: the usual ye shes lnga, but without chos dbyings ye shes.*"

¹²⁹ Neumaier 1971, loc. cit., n. 85: "*snying rje, byams pa, dga' ba, btang snyoms.*"

¹³⁰ Although the explanation of the symbolism of the legs is interposed, this seems to refer to the eighteen arms.

¹³¹ *'Jig rten 'dul phyir 'khor 'das mtshams nyid du : mkha' rlung khrag dang sa chen ri rab steng : dpal chen yongs rdzogs 'dag pa'i zhabs 'og na : me rlung 'khrugs pa dnyal kham ma lus rdzogs : sa chu gnyis la yi dwags dud 'gro rdzogs : lhun po'i sked na gling bzhi sa steng du : 'dod kham lha mi'i brten yul ma lus rdzogs : lhun po'i sked pa nas ni srid rtse'i bar : gzugs kham gnas rigs bcu bdun rdzogs pa'i mtshams : rtse la gzugs med mu bzhi ma lus rdzogs : de steng dpal gyi pho brang 'og min zhing .*

¹³² This is a tantric transposition of the Abhidharma cosmology: the "great earth"—the world as flat disc—rests on a whirlwind, itself grounded in space. It carries the great ocean—here transformed into a sea of blood—and, in its midst, Mt. Meru. After describing the central male and female deities and the three goddesses of the three inner classes of tantras, the text discusses the whole assembly before returning (if I understand correctly) to the main central deity.

the Formless World are complete without exception. Above this [all] is the palace of the Glorious One, the pure land of Akaniṣṭha.

On¹³³ the vajra rock of the immovable universal basis are piled the lotus flowers of the assimilation of the two truths and dependent [origination, corresponding] the accomplishment of the vehicles of the Śrāvakas and the Pratyekabuddhas. [Che mchog he ru ka stands] on the sun of ultimate bodhicitta, on the surface of which is the moon disk of superficial¹³⁴ bodhicitta: he has fully accomplished the vehicle of the bodhisattva[']s pāramitās. Above it are the eight *nāgas* who uphold the precepts of ritual purity, [meaning that] he has fully accomplished the View and Conduct of the Kriyā [tantras]. [603] Above it is a throne made of eight stacked animals, [symbolizing the fact that] he has fully accomplished the Upa¹³⁵ [tantras, in which] View and Conduct are combined. The fact that he has attained the goals of the trainings [of these outer vehicles is symbolized by] the ten-spoked wheel of the ten bhūmis, and as for the bhūmis and paths [that are] the fruit, fully complete and unmixed, [of the] eight [lower] vehicles that he overwhelms with his splendor, [they are represented by] the eight arrogant gods that he tramples.

Embodiment (*bdag*)¹³⁶ of the purified five poisons [as] <172> the five pristine awarenesses, the great sovereign[s],¹³⁷ spontaneously perfect, are dark brown [and] blue. [Because] he overwhelms the eight

¹³³ Kun gzhi mi g.yo rdo rje brag steng du : bden gnyis rten 'brel thugs chud pad sdong brtsegs : nyan thos rang sangs rgyas pa'i theg pa rdzogs : don dam byang sems nyi ma rgyas pa'i khar : kun rdzob byang sems zla ba'i dkyil 'khor steng : byang sems phar phyin theg pa ma lus rdzogs : de steng klu brgyad gtsang sbra'i chos 'dzin pa : kri ya don kyi lta spyod [603] ma lus rdzogs : de steng byol song brgyad kyi khri brtsegs pa : lta spyod 'dres pa u pa yongs rdzogs pa'o : de dag rnam kyi slob pa'i mthar thugs pa : sa bcu'i chos kyi 'khor lo rtsibs bcu pa : ma 'dres yongs rdzogs 'bras bu'i sa lam ni : theg brgyad zil gnong dregs pa'i lha brgyad brdzis ..

¹³⁴ Kun rdzob kyi byang sems. This term refers to the two aspects of "aspiration" and "engagement" (*smon 'jug*) as opposed to "absolute bodhicitta" (*don dam byang sems*) which refers to the realization of the true nature of phenomena. The translation is admittedly problematic, but no better alternative could be found; the other options create more problems than they solve.

¹³⁵ The way the Caryā Tantras are called in rNying ma terminology.

¹³⁶ Dug lnga dag pa ye shes lnga yi bdag : khyab bdag chen po lhun rdzogs smug mthing mdog : mtha' brgyad zil gnong zhabs brgyad lha brgyad brdzis : yid chos rnam dag kun bzang yab dang yum : rtsa ba'i phyag gis thugs kar bsnol thabs 'dzin ..

¹³⁷ The logical connection with the previous phrase is not obvious. *Khyab bdag* denotes a deity that is beyond the distinction of the five families. Here, it refers to the main deity. However, the reference to colors ("dark brown [and] blue") suggests that "the great sovereign" means both the male deity Che mchog he ru ka and the female deity gNam zhal ma. But then the text returns only to Che mchog (eight legs, etc.). It is unclear in context which deity is being described, as the manual attributes do not seem to match with the list above.

extremes¹³⁸ with his splendor, his eight feet trample the eight gods. With his main arms crossed in front of his chest, he holds Samantabhadra the male and female [main deities, who are] the purified mental [consciousness, *yid*] and [its objects,] dharmas.

The purity of the five [aggregates]—Consciousness,¹³⁹ Form, Sensation, Feeling, and Formations—is the five lower right arms. The purity of the five [elements]—Space, earth, water, fire, and air purified—is the five lower left arms marked by the five mudrās. Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi, etc., [signify] the five primordial awarenesses of which [he] is endowed. [Samanta]bhadrī,¹⁴⁰ Buddhalocanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍarāvasinī, and Tārā, etc., [are] the possession of the power¹⁴¹ of the five families. The purity of the five poisons is the [set of] the male and female [forms of the] five families, which are complete [in him].

Below,¹⁴² [the eight next right arms hold] Kṣitigarbha, Ākāśagarbha, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi, Maitreya, Sarvanivāraṇaśikambhin, Samantabhadra, and Mañjuśrī, [the] eight [great bodhisattvas]. They are the four consciousnesses and the [four associated] faculties (*dbang po*) of the eye, ear, nose, and tongue.

The¹⁴³ eight [next] left [arms hold] Lāsyā, Mālā, Gītā, Nṛtyā, Dhūpā, Puṣpā, Ālokā, and Gandhā, which are forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and the four times purified. This completes the eight male and [eight] female Bodhisattvas.

¹³⁸ Neumaier 1971, p. 159, n. 92): “These are the following eight double terms, which are individually resolved into the eight *mtha'*, the extremist views: *skye 'gag mtha' gnyis, rtag chad kyi mtha' gnyis, yod med kyi mtha' gnyis, 'gro 'ong gyi mtha' gnyis...*”

¹³⁹ *rNam shes gzugs sogs 'du shes 'du byed lnga : rnam par dag pa de 'og g.yas pa lnga : mkha' sa chu me rlung lnga rnam dag pa : de 'og g.yon pa'i phyag rgya lnga yis 'dzin : rnam snang mi bskyod rin 'byung snang mtha' yas : don grub la sogs ye shes lnga dang ldan : kun bzang spyan ma mā ki kos dkar mo : sgrol ma la sogs rigs lnga'i dbang dang ldan : dug lnga dag pa rigs lnga yab yum rdzogs :*

¹⁴⁰ Kun bzang. One would rather expect Dhātṛīśvarī (dByings phyug ma) in this position.

¹⁴¹ *Rig lnga'i dbang* could mean: the empowerment of the five families. But, in context, *dbang* more likely refers to the fact that these fact goddesses are called *dbang phyug ma, īśvarī(s)*.

¹⁴² *De 'og g.yas brgyad sa snying nam mkha'i snying : 'jig rten dbang phyug phyag na rdo rje dang : byams pa sgrib sel kun bzang 'jam dpal brgyad : mig dang rna ba sna lce rnam shes dang : dbang po rnam bzhi rnam par dag pa'o :* It is admittedly difficult to understand the visualization, especially since this description does not seem to match the one found above in the same text.

¹⁴³ *g.Yon pa'i brgyad na sgeg phreng glu gar dang : spos dang me tog mar me dri chab ma : gzugs sgra dri ro reg [604] dang dus bzhi rnam : rnam par dag pa sems dpa' yab yum rdzogs :*

In the¹⁴⁴ [next] four right and four left arms, eight in all, [are, to the right] the four wrathful kings—gatekeepers [that represent] the purified body consciousness, [body] faculty,¹⁴⁵ objects of touch, and tactile consciousness: Yamāntaka, <173> Prajñāntaka, *Padmāntaka, and *Karmāntaka:¹⁴⁶ the purified [set of] the body consciousness.¹⁴⁷ Not in his right but in his left arms [he holds] the four female gatekeepers [that represent] the purification of eternalism, nihilism, [the view of a] self¹⁴⁸ and [that of] characteristics: Ankuṣī, Pāṣī, Śṛṅkhalā, and Gaṇṭā.

The¹⁴⁹ remaining six main deities that abides in the basis, in whom the four immeasurable [dispositions] are complete are, to the right: Indra [Kauśika],¹⁵⁰ Vemacitra and Śākyamuni, these three, which are the purity of the mental factors (*sems byung*) of pride, jealousy, and desire. To the left: *Dhruvasiṃha, Jvālāmukhadeva, and Dharmarāja, the purity of stupidity, avarice, and hatred. Thus the six pāramitās are complete.

With¹⁵¹ his twenty-one heads, the ten ordinary bhūmis and the special eleven unsurpassable bhūmis are complete. With his sixty-three

¹⁴⁴ De 'og g.yas g.yon bzhi bzhi brgyad rnam na : gshin rje shes rab padma las mthar byed : lus kyi rnam shes dbang po reg bya dang : reg shes dag pa khro rgyal sgo ba bzhi : g.yas min [CNT 2015: g.yas yin, less plausible] g.yon na lcags kyu zhags pa ma : lcags sgrog dril 'khrol sgo ma chen mo bzhi : rtag chad bdag dang mtshan 'dzin dag pa'o .:

¹⁴⁵ There is clearly something wrong here in the text, as *lus kyi rnam shes* and *reg shes* are basically the same thing. But as body as the organ of touch is missing, we can easily reconstruct the series of four: 1. body, 2. touch-faculty, 3. tangible qualities, and 4. tactile consciousness.

¹⁴⁶ Yamāntaka and three *mthar byed* deities (*gshin rje shes rab padma las mthar byed*). There are occurrences of Prajñāntaka in Buddhist tantric literature, but I am not so sure about *Padmāntaka and *Karmāntaka, the Sanskrit names of which were constructed on the same model.

¹⁴⁷ There is clearly something wrong here as explained above.

¹⁴⁸ The *Rin chen gter mdzod* edition (p. 173) reads *dag* instead of *bdag* in CNT. The latter is more likely in context.

¹⁴⁹ *Tshad med bzhir rdzogs gzhi gnas rtsa ba'i lha : lha ma drug gi g.yas na brgya byin dang : thag bzang śā kya thub pa gsum bzhugs pas : sems byung na rgyal phrag dog 'dod chags sbyong : g.yon na sen ge rab brtan kha 'bar ma : chos kyi rgyal pos gti mug ser sna dang : zhe sdang sbyong mdzad pha rol phyin drug rdzogs .:*

¹⁵⁰ These are the "Six Munis," the enlightened emanations that are active in each of the six classes of beings.

¹⁵¹ *Nyer gcig dbu yis thun mongs sa bcu dang : khyad par bla med sa chen bcu gcig rdzogs : spyen mig drug cu rtsa gsum bgrad pa yis : bdud dang log lta zil kyis mnan byas te : ji ltar ji snyed chos kun ma sgribs gzigs : snyan shal bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis rab yangs pas : phyi nang chos kun ma lus yongs rdzogs gsan : shangs dbugs bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis zan thal bas : gzungs 'dzin rtag pa sdud cing gzhi bar byed : mche ba rnon po bzhi bzhis zhal kun mdzes : sa lam kun la mtha' bzhi rtsad nas gcod : spyi gtsug rnam par dag pa rdo rjes mdzes : rang byung ye shes rang [605] shar lhun gyis grub : dur khrod 'bar ba'i chas chen bco brgyad gsol : ma 'dres bco brgyad sangs rgyas chos rnam rdzogs : gza' klu bdud kyi mgur [sic for mgul] chus dregs pa 'dul : rus rgyan pha rol phyin drug lam kyi chos : rgyal ba'i yum chen yab drug mnyam par sbyor : gzig sham khrel dang ngo tsha la sogs pa : 'phags pa'i nor bdun yongs rdzogs lhun gyis grub .:*

eyes gazing, demons and wrong views are overwhelmed by splendor, and he sees all things without obscurations, [both] *as they are* and *as many as they are*.¹⁵² With his forty-two ears wide open, he hears all the internal and external phenomena without exception. The forty-two nostrils [are the quality of] transparency:¹⁵³ they collect the discursive constructs and hold them [inside]. Each face is adorned with the four sharp canines that cut off the four extremes at their roots in all the bhūmis and paths. <174> The completely pure top of [each of his] heads is adorned with a vajra. The self-arising of spontaneous pristine awareness [605] is spontaneously perfected. He is wearing the eighteen great attributes of the flaming cemeteries, [symbolizing the fact that] the eighteen unmixed characteristics of a Buddha (*sangs rgyas chos*) are all complete [in him].¹⁵⁴ Because [he wears] planetary spirits, nāgas and māras as chest ornaments,¹⁵⁵ he subdues the arrogant [spirits]. The bone ornaments are the elements of the path (*lam gyi chos*)—the six Pāramitās. The great female [partners] of the Victorious ones are united with the six male deities. They wears the leopard skin loin-cloth, [symbolizing] shame¹⁵⁶ before himself and before others. The fully complete [set] of the seven noble treasures¹⁵⁷ is spontaneously perfected [in him].

¹⁵² This alludes to the two forms of a Buddha's omniscience: perceiving all things *ji lta ba*, in their ultimate nature, and *ji snyed pa*, in their phenomenal details.

¹⁵³ *Zang thal* means active transparency (the ability of light to pass through transparent bodies) and, by analogy, the capacity of solid bodies to pass unhindered through other solid bodies.

¹⁵⁴ Neumaier 1971, pp. 161-162, n. 103: "These 18 properties are divided into four groups: two groups of six properties and two groups of three properties: A. *rtogs pa ma 'dres pa drug*: 1. *sku la 'khrul ba mi mnga' ba*; 2. *gsung cha cho med pa*; 3. *thugs dran pa nams pa med pa*; 4. *thugs mnyam par ma bzahag ma mi mnga' ba*; 5. *srid pa dang myang 'das tha dad pa nyid kyi 'du shes mi mnga' ba*; 6. *so sor ma brtags pa'i btang snyoms mi mnga' ba*.—B. *spyod pa ma 'dres pa drug*: 1. *'dun pa nyams pa mi mnga' ba*; 2. *brtson 'grus nyams pa mi mnga' ba*; 3. *dran pa mi mnga' ba*; 4. *ting nge 'dzin mi mnga' ba*; 5. *shes rab mi mnga' ba*; 6. *rnam par grol ba las mi mnga' ba*.—C. *'phrin las ma 'dres pa gsum*: 1. *'od 'gyed pa sogs sku'i phrin las*; 2. *sems can gyi bsam pa dang mthun par 'doms pa'i gsung gi phrin las*; 3. *thugs kyi phrin las*.—D. *ye shes ma 'dres pa gsum*: 1. *'das pa*; 2. *ma 'ong ba*; 3. *da ltar byung ba la ma chags ma thogs pa'i ye shes*. (Cf. Tibetan Tripitaka bKa' 'gyur, vol. 39, p. 80.1.4.)."

¹⁵⁵ Neumaier 1971, p. 162, n. 104: "*mgur chu*: *mgur* is probably a spelling mistake for *mgul*; *chu* could stand for *chings*." The first correction is correct, but the second is not: *mgul chu* exists with the sense of "chest ornament." The three beings represent respectively the negativities of the sky (*gza'*, "planets"), of the underworld (*klu*, "serpents") and of the intermediary space (*bdud*, "demons").

¹⁵⁶ In a good sense: pudor, awareness of what one is doing, decency...

¹⁵⁷ Neumaier 1971, loc. cit., n. 105: "*'Phags pa'i nor bu bdun*: *dad pa*, *tshul khrims*, *gtong ba* (*sbyin pa*) *la sgom pa*, *thos pas rgyud khrol ba*, *khrel yod*, *ngo tsha shes*, *shes rab phun sum tshogs pa*."

Meditate¹⁵⁸ clearly, with undistracted awareness (*dran pa*), on the Venerable Lord of All, the Great Glorious One, Male and Female. Do not [allow yourself to] be distracted [from them, but] constantly practice dhyāna (*bsam gtan*). During one session,¹⁵⁹ meditate on the deity. During [the next] session, think of it (*yid la bya*).¹⁶⁰ During [the third] session, [chant] the secret mantra and meditate (*gyer sgom*) on it by combining [this] with the deep recitation of the profound *hūṃ*. During [the fourth] session, generate divine pride (*lha'i nga rgyal*) by remembering the purity [of the various aspects of the visualization].

If¹⁶¹ you meditate firmly for one month, six months, or twelve months,¹⁶² you will fully attain the spontaneously perfected qualities of the Vidyādhara of Complete Maturation, the Vidyādhara that have Power over Life, the Vidyādhara of the Mahāmudrā and the Spontaneously Perfected Vidyādhara. This is the deity-connected achievement phase that must be integrated with the view of clarity and emptiness free from grasping.¹⁶³

Now,¹⁶⁴ having <175> fully taught¹⁶⁵ deity yoga, [let me, Padmasambhava, present] the achievement phase of letters based on the channels. The body is the channels, and the channels are the letters. The letters are skillful means and discernment inseparable, the unborn

¹⁵⁸ Kun gyi rje btsan dpal chen yab yum la : dran pas ma yengs gsal bar bsgom bya ste : de la ma yengs rtag du bsam gtan bya : thun gcig lha bsgom thun gcig yid yul bya : thun gcig gsang sngags don la gyer sgom dang : zab ma hūṃ gi dzab bzlas spel bar bya : thun gcig rnam dag dran pas nga rgyal bskyed : 'khor ba 'di yin myang 'das pa 'di : bdun brgya nyer lnga dpal chen sku la rdzogs : bde gshegs dkyil 'khor kun kyi bdag nyid do .

¹⁵⁹ Neumaier 1971, loc. cit., n. 106a): "Time unit of the meditation exercise, ca. four hours."

¹⁶⁰ *Yid la bya* commonly means "memorize." The visualization is so complicated indeed that it makes sense that, if the first session is devoted to an attempt to keep the whole image as clear and stable as possible, the second one may be devoted to review the details of the whole maṇḍala (of which we have seen only the main deities) and try to memorize each of them.

¹⁶¹ Zla gcig drug dang bcu gnyis rab sgom na : rnam smin tshe dbang phyag chen rig pa 'dzin : lhun grub yon tan ma lus thob par 'gyur : de ni lha la brten pa'i rdzogs rim ste : gsal stong 'dzin bral lta bas zin bar bya :

¹⁶² The time required to obtain the accomplishments is commonly presented as depending on the capacities of the practitioners: superior, middle, or inferior.

¹⁶³ Eva Neumaier's edition and translation abruptly stops here with the words: *sGrub chen bka' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi snying po gnam zhal don khrid*, which are the title of the text and do not belong here. I have edited and translated the missing part.

¹⁶⁴ De nas lha yi rnal 'byor rab bstan nas : rtsa la brten pa yi ge'i rdzogs rim ni : lus ni rtsa yin rtsa ni yi ge ste : yi ge thabs shes dbyer med skye med aḥ : aḥ ni stong dang mi stong gnyis med rdzogs : dbugs la brten pa rlung [606] ni rdzogs rim ni : 'byung 'jug gnas gsum 'bru gsum rang grol te : om āḥ hūṃ ngam gsang ba hūṃ gi sgrar : rgyud du dran pas bskyangs na gsung 'dzin ni : rtog pa rang grol skye ba'i rtsa ba chod : grags stong 'dzin med lta bas zin par bya .

¹⁶⁵ Rin chen gter mdzod (p. 175, l. 1) reads *brtan*, but this makes less sense in context.

letter *ah*. *Ah*¹⁶⁶ includes empty and non-empty [realities] without duality.

As for the [yoga] based on breath, [this is] the achievement phase [associated with] winds. Exhaling, inhaling, and holding [breath] with the self-liberated three syllables: if you are continuously aware of *om āḥ hūṃ* or of the sound of secret *hūṃ*, and if you maintain [this awareness], the discursive constructs [will be] self-liberated and the root of birth cut off. Let [this] be integrated with the ungrasping view of [the inseparability of] sound and emptiness.

As¹⁶⁷ for the achievement phase of the *biṇḍu* based on the vital fluids (*bcud*), the bliss born in body, speech and mind is the flaming and dripping primordial wisdom—the subtle drops (*phra thig*) of inner heat (*gtum mo*). Block the lower wind¹⁶⁸ and carry (*bskyal*) it toward the *ham* at the top of your head. The pure part (*dwangs ma*) of the body's vital fluids (*bcud*) will disappear in its own place. Let [this] be integrated with the ungrasping view of [the inseparability of] bliss and emptiness.

As for¹⁶⁹ the achievement phase of bodhicitta,¹⁷⁰ the complete purity of one's own mind: bliss is completely and spontaneously present in the *nirmāṇakāya*, [which is the aspect of the] body. [It is] the first joy [during] the great vase empowerment.¹⁷¹ Clarity is completely and spontaneously present in the *sambhogakāya*. [It is] supreme joy during the supreme secret empowerment.¹⁷² Non-conceptuality is completely and spontaneously present in the *dharmakāya*, [which is the

¹⁶⁶ A in *Rin chen gter mdzod* (p. 175), although it is *Ah* at the previous occurrence. There is some confusion due to the *gter ma* punctuation.

¹⁶⁷ *bCud la brten pa thig le'i rdzogs rim ni : lus ngag yid la skyes pa'i bde ba ni : 'bar 'dzag ye shes gtum mo phra thig yin : 'og rlung bsdams la spyi bo'i ham la bskyal : lus bcud dwangs ma rang rang gnas su thim : bde stong 'dzin med lta bas zin par bya .*

¹⁶⁸ Could be plural, it is impossible to tell from the text without more context. Thanks to Cécile Ducher for this remark.

¹⁶⁹ *Rang sems rnam dag byang sems rdzogs rim ni : bde ba sprul sku lus la lhun grub rdzogs : dga' ba dang po bun pa'i dbang chen yin : gsal ba longs sku dag la lhun grub rdzogs : mchog tu dga' ba gsang ba'i dbang mchog go : mi rtog chos sku yin te shes rab ye shes so : dbyer med ngo bo nyid kyi dus gsum dang : dus med sgo gsum 'bral med lhun cig skyes : ngo bo nyid sku bzhi pa'i dbang chen rdzogs .*

¹⁷⁰ Although this paragraph contains a recapitulation of the four empowerments, this is the practice associated with the third, *shes rab ye shes dbang* (sexual yoga). The connection with the four empowerments is that the four joys are attained when the vital constitution (*kham*s) ascends and descends through the four cakras, from the navel to the top of the head. It is these four stages that are associated here with the four empowerments. I thank Cécile Ducher for helping me to rephrase my translation in a way that makes much better sense.

¹⁷¹ The vase empowerment is the first empowerment of the superior tantras, connected with the development phase.

¹⁷² The second empowerment of the superior tantras, connected to the achievement phase "based on one's own body."

aspect of] mind (*yid*). It is no-joy during the primordial awareness-discernment [empowerment].¹⁷³ Their indivisibility is the very essence of the the coemergent [joy,] inseparable from the three doors of the three times and eternity. <176> It is the svabhāvikakāya, which is perfected during the great fourth empowerment.

If¹⁷⁴ you want to see the actual (*don*) *Transparent Contemplation of Samantabhadra*, fully gaze in the [celestial] Element.

Conclusions about the *view* have come to an end and philosophical standpoints are complete without confusion: they are perfected in the summit of A ti.

*Meditation*¹⁷⁵ with an object [a focus], without an object, intellectual mindsets, and the eight [lower] vehicles, unmixed and self-luminous: they are perfected in the essence.

All pure and impure individual *conducts* are complete and unmixed with regard to what is [to be] adopted and [what is to be] abandoned: they are naturally perfected.

Ripe and unripe *fruits* as well as mental phenomena are complete is the unsurpassed meaning: They are perfected in the great [realization] beyond concepts.

Granting and non-granting of *empowerment* as well as the progressives dharma are complete at the summit of the infinite wisdom empowerment.

All *Samayas*, those obtained, kept, damaged and not damaged, are complete in what is originally kept undamaged and does not have to be [actively] kept.

Then, all is assimilated in the condition of the unaltered complete Heruka, Che mchog male and female.

Having condensed the cream (*bcud*) of the ocean of tantras of the Secret Mantra, <177> I, Padmasambhava, have composed for the sake of sentient beings this profound treasure of the true oral guidance (*zhal gyi don khrid*) of Sky-Face, a path that quickly leads to unsurpassable complete Enlightenment. Samaya! Triple Seal!

Take care¹⁷⁶ [that this should not] fall into the hands [of those who are] not [proper] recipients [or do] not [keep] samayas. *Guhya* :

¹⁷³ This is *prajñā-jñāna*, the name of the third empowerment of the superior tantras, connected to the achievement phase "based on another person's body."

¹⁷⁴ *Kun bzang dgongs pa ye shes zang thal don : mthong bar 'dod na dbyings la rdzogs par blta : yid dpyod 'dzin pa'i lta ba nub par 'gyur : de tshe chos nyid zad pa'i ye shes shar : lta ba thag chod mthar brten grub mtha' rnam : ma 'dres yongs rdzogs a ti'i rtse mor rdzogs .:*

¹⁷⁵ I would like to thank Cécile Ducher for her sensible suggestions for reformulating my translation. In its current form, it is much more readable than its original version.

¹⁷⁶ *sNod med dam med lag tu shor ra re : gu hya : mantra kha tham : dug sprul spungs pa'i khog pa nas : ye shes gsal ba'i gter phyung ngo : rgya rgya rgya .:*

mantra kha tham : From within the mass of poisonous snakes, [this] treasure of clear primordial wisdom was extracted. Triple Seal !¹⁷⁷

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¹⁷⁷ Although this colophon and the way the text is edited in CNT clearly show that the edited and translated portion of the text is perceived as a complete whole, in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* edition, the text continues on the same page with further completion phase instructions: *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar gyi rdzogs rim lnga pa* (pp. 177-185) and then *sGrub chen bka' brgyad kyi rdzogs rim khrid gzhung ye shes zang thal* (pp. 185-200). The first text is akin to *Guhyasamāja's* five stages, while the second text contains brief yet comprehensive rDzogs chen (*snying thig* style) instructions. These texts are also included in CNT, but they do not appear to constitute an integrated whole with the text translated here. This understanding of the *rdzogs rim-rdzogs chen* sequence would be interesting to compare with its equivalents in Klong chen pa's *gSang ba snying po*-related works.

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The *Ultimate Repelling* Yamāntaka Practice: A Shared Ritual Repertoire Among the rNying ma Byang gter and the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud Traditions Examined through the Texts of Chos kyi grags pa

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Introduction

Tibetan Buddhists invoke the fierce deity Yamāntaka (a wrathful form of Mañjuśrī) to clear away negative forces. This deity's practice is an antidote to all sorts of calamities, for instance malicious spirits, negative emotions, or the spells of rival sorcerers. Perhaps most prominently, monks perform large public Yamāntaka rituals prior to the festivities of Lo gsar to usher in an auspicious new year.² Despite typical public performance, Yamāntaka practice is widely known as a secret and dangerous, yet effective, approach to saṃsāric obstacles; and as such, Yamāntaka is a deity that spans all traditions and manifests in myriad forms. The recent compilation of Northern Treasures (*Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*) contains ten volumes completely dedicated to this deity within the cycle known as '*Jam dpal tshe bdag, Mañjuśrī Master of Life*.'³ This article

¹ I want to thank the Florida State University NAIS (Native American and Indigenous Studies) Center for sponsoring the field research referred to in this article. Also, many thanks to the FCHNT Committee and especially Stéphane Arguillère and Cécile Ducher for offering valuable comments on my initial draft, as well as my advisor Bryan Cuevas. Any remaining errors are my own.

² For example, monks at sMin grol gling in Dehradun, India, perform a *gtor bzlog* of '*Jam dpal gshin rje dregs 'joms*, and the monks at Kham pa sgar bKa' shis ljongs in Himachal Pradesh, India, perform a *sgrub chen* of '*Jam dpal khro chu* in close proximity to the new year. Additionally, a *sgrub chen* of *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri* is performed at mGar chen Institute in Arizona, USA. In Shimla, India at rDor rje brag, the monks alternate between '*Jam dpal tshe bdag* (a specifically Yamāntaka practice) and *bKa' brgyad rang byung rang shar* (in which Yamāntaka is one of eight of the deities practiced), performing each biennially. However, some institutions invoke other wrathful deities in corresponding new year rites; e.g., at 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud Byang chub gling monastery in Dehradun, India, monks perform a *sgrub mchod* invoking Mahākāla.

³ For an introduction to this 63-volume anthology, see Arguillère 2022.

offers a preliminary examination of the texts contained within one particular sub-cycle of *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* which appears in both the Northern Treasure compilation and the texts of 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud masters—the *Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor* (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri*). This investigation will focus specifically on the texts attributed to the 24th 'Bri gung throne-holder, Rig 'dzin Chos kyi grags pa (1595–1659), a renowned *gter ston* whose work remains popular in contemporary Buddhist practice.

1. Danger and Secrecy

Since Yamāntaka practice targets maleficence and provides the training to potentially harm others, instructions for performing such practices are purportedly highly guarded. For example, in my recent field work in Dehradun, India, I was not allowed to observe the *gtor ma*-making sessions for the Yamāntaka *gtor bzlog* at sMin grol gling monastery. If non-monastic members of the broader saṅgha are interested in the *gtor ma*-making ceremony, they must watch the carefully curated video online that focuses on the artistic prowess of the monks rather than any meanings or textual instructions which are not ostensibly meant to be accessible to mere lay practitioners. Likewise, Byang gter *Yang bzlog* texts reflect this reticence to share specialized Yamāntaka instructions widely, as several texts contain warnings against dissipating the teachings. For instance, in the Byang gter collection a ritual which gives instructions for a wheel, effigy, and the magical substances of the *Yang bzlog* emphasizes its secret nature not only in the closing section, but also in the title itself. The title culminates in a strong imperative to conceal the text: *Herein lies these hidden, most secret aspects which are the wheel, effigy, and magical substances of the Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor. Conceal them!*⁴ Moreover, the final line reads: "Do not reveal these techniques to anyone. Conceal them!"⁵ Likewise, another rite, *gShin rje yang zlog me'i spu gri* (*The Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor Yama*) ends with this warning: "It is not appropriate to spread to people who are devoid of vows. If spread, there is danger of it reversing on oneself. Because of that, do it in secret."⁶ Even though this rhetoric of secrecy is common to Buddhist esoterica more generally (e.g., across texts of the Highest Yoga Tantra, Skt. *yoga-niruttara*), based on ethnographic field work,

⁴ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i 'khor lo dang lingga dang rdzas rnams kyi gab sbas ches gsang ba rnams 'dir yod do sbos shig go. Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, p. 33.

⁵ *gNad 'di rnams su la yang ma ston par sbos shig. Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, p. 36.

⁶ *Dam tshig dben pa'i mi la spel du mi rung ngo / spel na rang la ldog pa'i nyen yod pas gsang bar bya'o. Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, p. 361.

Yamāntaka text and practice seem particularly problematic if given to the wrong person or performed without the utmost pure intent. Despite these explicit, adamant warnings and pervasive stories about its possible danger, Yamāntaka rites have been practiced in Tibet for centuries and have propagated throughout tantric networks. One such practice is the *Yang bzlog*, which has expanded worldwide to various saṅghas (in Nepal, Taiwan, Europe, and America). The corresponding empowerment and *sgrub chen* ceremonies (especially footage from America and Taiwan) are now broadcast online, reaching hundreds of practitioners across the globe. Among these teachings, the practices and commentaries attributed to Chos kyi grags pa, as a prominent 'Bri gung master and eventual friend to the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1682), have proven especially influential. This consequential figure in the tumultuous history of 17th-century Tibet developed a Yamāntaka ritual repertoire that notably permeates sectarian boundaries and has endured for centuries.

Thus, I approach this Yamāntaka secret ritual knowledge as a “cultural capital” which enables ritual specialists to form these networks both historically and more recently throughout the modern Tibetan diaspora, including digital environments.⁷ Here, secrecy, or perhaps narratives of secrecy, paradoxically function as a mode of transmission. Yamāntaka practice, like the *Yang bzlog*, affords a specialized tantric asceticism by nature of magic/sorcery and secrecy that is seemingly amplified compared to other fierce deity traditions. Indeed, I have been told by several informants that incorrect Yamāntaka practice can easily cause adverse effects, such as natural disasters or car accidents. These concerns are narrated as so paramount that even when content is shared online for example, it is deliberately controlled (and openly discussed as such).

Modern lamas such as mGar chen Rin po che (b. 1936), who founded the mGar chen Buddhist Institute in Chino Valley, Arizona, claim Yamāntaka ritual knowledge is typically divided into two main components—protection and destruction. This dual framework serves as both an entry point to tantric practice, providing protective benefits for all practitioners, and a barrier to more advanced rites, as destructive rituals are reserved for experienced adepts. This two-tiered system operates as a built-in mechanism for balancing secrecy and display.⁸ Through this interpretation, the practice can be managed

⁷ Bourdieu 1977. For a discussion on “cultural capital” as applied specifically to Tibetan Buddhist studies, see Ducher 2017.

⁸ This echoes theories of secrecy by Bellman 1981 and Campany 2009. Bellman envisions secrecy as a form of communication, and claims that oftentimes narratives about secret content trump the importance of the secret content itself. Likewise, in the context of east Asian traditions, Campany argues that Daoist

while also allowing some form of participation to a wider audience. Yamāntaka practice thus affords⁹ a form of askesis, or tantric asceticism, in two significant ways: First, it functions as an ethical affordance of self-discipline, requiring practitioners to maintain secrecy and share knowledge only with those deemed worthy. Second, it serves as an ethical restraint on harmful magic—offering practical knowledge of how to harm enemies but mandating abstention from its use. These dual ethical affordances not only provide pragmatic skills (both for lay and monastic followers), but also serve as a source of power for lamas, who navigate the tensions between secrecy and disclosure. Ritual specialists leverage this knowledge to form connections beyond their sectarian affiliations, as demonstrated here by the historical friendships between lamas of dGe lugs pa, rNying ma, and bKa' brgyud pa sects centering around these tantric practices, and more recently, extending beyond geographic constraints as they are disseminated across the global Tibetan diaspora and into digital spaces.

I conceptualize the transmission of secret ritual knowledge as a dynamic dialogue, wherein practitioners actively create new interpretive spaces and negotiate alternative approaches to secrecy. This is particularly relevant in digital environments, where the ease of network building increases the risk of widespread access to traditionally guarded practices. Traditions must adapt over time, striking a balance between transmutability and the preservation of authenticity and ritual power as they integrate into new socio-historical contexts, including the digital realm. It is thus clear that the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka (through its flexibility and secret power) is particularly valuable as cultural capital since it afforded political alliances in the 17th century, and its significance is apparent nowadays as the practice (at least the protection part) becomes widely accessible via online practice opportunities that bring together practitioners from around the world.

transcendents/immortals (仙), often construed as hermetical bearers of secret content, are paradoxically defined through publicly social pathways.

⁹ For a discussion on “affordances,” see Keane 2014; 2018.

2. The Yang bzlog Version of Yamāntaka as a Sub-Cycle in the Byang gter

The main *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri* (Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor) deity who is at the center of these practices is similar in appearance to other versions in the *'Jam dpal tshe dag* (*Mañjuśrī Master of Life*) cycles found in the Northern Treasure literature. He boasts three faces—his right face is white, his middle face is dark blue, and his left face is red. He has six arms and four legs. He is distinctive, however, in wielding an iron hook in his upper left hand (see the curved blade in Fig. 1). In his right hands, from top to bottom, he holds a sharp wheel, a sword, and a nine-pronged *vajra*. In his lower left hands, he holds a pestle in his middle left hand, while his final left hand is engaged in a threatening *mudrā*.¹⁰



Fig. 1—Detailed image of Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka Lord of Life
thang ka print (original is housed at mGar dgon).
Courtesy of mGar chen Buddhist Institute.¹¹

¹⁰ For example, his accoutrements differ from those of the *Khro chu dug sdong* Yamāntaka who holds battle axes in his right hands and human hearts in his left (Brown 2024). Most versions of Yamāntaka within *'Jam dpal tshe bdag*, however, consistently display the wheel, sword, *vajra*, scepter, pestle, and *mudrā*. See Arguillère 2024b for a comprehensive description of the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* maṇḍala (pp. 335–44).

¹¹ An electronic version of this image can be found here: <https://www.garchen.store/store/p248/thangka-yamantaka.html> - /.

In the recent Byang gter 63-volume compilation, *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, the *Yang bzlog* texts which invoke this deity appear primarily in volumes 25 and 26, with a few distributed in other volumes. For example, a separated and arranged daily recitation practice (*gShin rje tshe bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa*)¹² appears in volume 27 among several others. This text parallels the practice at the mGar chen Institute, specifically beginning at the generation-stage portion of the mGar chen liturgy. As the mGar chen liturgical text notes, Chos kyi grags pa has compiled an annotated version of this text which can be found in his *gSung 'bum*.¹³ The version that appears in the Byang gter collection lacks the annotations and has no colophon, perhaps predating the annotated version written by Chos kyi grags pa. However, based on preliminary fieldwork, contemporary masters understand this as Chos kyi grags pa's *gter ma*. Whether he personally revealed the *gter ma* (perhaps as a re-revelation) or whether this refers more broadly to his position as one of the main progenitors of the *Yang bzlog 'Bri gung* practice remains unclear and requires further research.

To reiterate, the *Yang bzlog* section of texts is a subsection of the larger portion of the collection dedicated to the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* cycle, which spans 10 volumes from volume 18 to volume 27. The majority of these texts are *gter ma* discovered by the 11th-century sorcerer rGya Zhang khrom. Some texts, most notable in the context of the *Yang bzlog*, were revealed by *lHa rje gNubs chung* (also 11th century). These texts are thus part of the Byang gter in the broadest sense, as they are not the core treasures revealed by *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem* (1337–1408) in the first 15 volumes of the compilation. *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*'s particular association with the *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* Yamāntaka cycle remains unclear. Stéphane Arguillère points to evidence that he was known as a Yamāntaka master, practicing the form Nāgarakṣa.¹⁴ He is also noted as a lineage holder by the 5th Dalai Lama of a Yamāntaka-adjacent deity Yab shud dmar po. Moreover, he is listed in a lineage prayer to *'Jam dpal tshe bdag* by 'Ju Mi pham (1846–1912) which mirrors the lineage of a rDzogs chen cycle mentioned in the 5th's *gSan yig*.¹⁵ This suggests perhaps that the Byang gter inclusion of the Yamāntaka cycle stems from its connection to rDzogs chen which originally were practices embedded in the larger Mahāyoga corpus.¹⁶

¹² *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 27, pp. 385–406.

¹³ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 191–236.

¹⁴ For more information about *Rig 'dzin rGod ldem*'s practice of this deity see Arguillère 2024a.

¹⁵ Arguillère 2024b, pp. 297–99.

¹⁶ See Arguillère, forthcoming 2026.

The 'Bri gung *Yang bzlog* texts (as part of the sub-cycle to 'Jam dpal tshe bdag) in particular were most likely incorporated into the Byang gter via connections between masters such as Chos kyi grags pa's grandfather rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs (1509–1557) and Rig 'dzin rGod ldem's reincarnation, Legs ldan bdud 'joms rdo rje (1452–1565). The 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* provides further clues on the flow of teachings from 'Bri gung masters to key rNying ma figures associated with the Byang gter (e.g., one lineage for the empowerment of the sharp inner cutting (*rnon po nang gcod*) flows from Chos kyi grags pa to Chos dbyings rang grol (1604–1657), and a lineage for a reading transmission (marked with “*khon*” in his text) flows from Rin chen phun tshogs to Rgyal sras Padma chos rgyal to Chos rgyal bKra shis stobs rgyal (1550?–1603), etc.).¹⁷ However, as will be explained in a later section, the main *gter ma* transmission lineage does not reflect these connections. Nevertheless, this time period corresponds closely to the founding of rDo rje brag, when there was a need to consolidate the practices in which the key figures of the Northern Treasures tradition were experts.¹⁸ Since it was imagined as an open canon as such, these were most likely gradually worked in as part of the Northern Treasures in the broader sense of the term, especially as they were an effective means to political power via magical warfare.

3. 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's *Yang bzlog* in 17th-Century War Magic

Perhaps the most infamous use of the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka cycle is attributed to the 'Bri gung master Chos kyi grags pa who exacted magic against the armies led by Gushri Khan (1582–1654) in the 17th century.¹⁹ That period is generally known for the employment of so-called “war magic” against rival factions.²⁰ Both the 5th Dalai Lama and Chos kyi grags pa were well known as skilled magicians with the technical expertise and charismatic power to wield various destructive rites against their enemies. Since 'Jam dpal tshe bdag practices afford the ritual means to assert dominance in political and quite literally, military battlefield, the *Yang bzlog* cycle held significant importance for both great masters. They each contributed to the writings and compilations of *Yang bzlog* materials and purportedly later shared

¹⁷ *gSung 'bum* / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, vol. 3, p. 42.

¹⁸ Arguillère, Ducher, Achard 2024, p. 11.

¹⁹ FitzHerbert 2018, p. 106. See Bailey and Wenta 2024 for a discussion on the category of “magic” specifically in a Tibetan context.

²⁰ FitzHerbert 2018 extensively discusses war magic in this period; see also Cuevas 2019.

notes on the subject.²¹ Indeed, several texts in the Byang gter *Yang zlog* section are attributed to them.

Chos kyi grags pa, perhaps not as well-known as the illustrious 5th Dalai Lama, was nonetheless a prominent figure in this time period and particularly in the development of the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud tradition. He was a renowned scholar of multiple disciplines. Besides his expertise in sorcery, he exhibited mastery over various subjects including astrology and medicine.²² He is certainly a standout figure in the events surrounding the consolidation of Tibet, and his relationship with the 5th Dalai Lama is of particular interest in the context of the Northern Treasures. Despite his relative importance to the tradition, few works of Western scholarship have investigated his contributions.²³ Here, I will summarize some of the main events of his life that have been previously documented to provide further context for his ritual repertoire.

Chos kyi grags pa lived during a period of significant political tension between the gTsang kings, various Mongol factions, and the rising dGa' ldan pho brang. He was born to the sKyu ra clan in 1595 to the 21st throne-holder of 'Bri gung, Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs (1547–1602). He had three brothers: Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs (1574–1628), the sixth Zhwa dmar pa Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630),²⁴ and dKon mchog rin chen (1590–1654). Throughout his and his brothers' lives, various groups of Mongols threatened the security and control of 'Bri gung lands. In 1623, his brother Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs was abducted by Thumé Mongols.²⁵ Not long after the death of this brother (who died in prison), Chos kyi grags pa, although reticent, assumed responsibility of the throne at 'Brig gung 'thil. In the context of his new position, he married, but later separated from, the gTsang princess (whose family was an enemy to the 5th Dalai Lama); he also deployed war magic on the Thumé Mongols who continued to encroach on 'Bri gung pa territory.²⁶ Unable to produce an heir, he established an incarnation lineage in which he identified a reincarnation of his older brother, dKon mchog rin chen, as the Che tshang or "older brother" who would in turn identify Chos kyi grags pa's reincarnation as the Chung tshang or "younger brother," with he and his brother traditionally recognized as the first of each

²¹ FitzHerbert 2018, pp. 106–7; Sobisch 2020, pp. 20–21.

²² For information on Chos kyi grags pa's medical expertise see Czaja 2007, pp. 349; 355 and Czaja 2013, pp. 81–82.

²³ Most notably, Czaja 2007; 2013, FitzHerbert 2018, and Sobisch 2020.

²⁴ For an examination of the biography and writings of Chos kyi dbang phyug, see Bhutia 2023.

²⁵ Sobisch 2020, p. 18.

²⁶ FitzHerbert 2018, p. 65 ; Sobisch 2020, p. 18.

succession.²⁷ After the Qoshot Mongols, commanded by Gushri Khan, came to capture the gTsang king and advanced the 5th's consolidation of power (1642), Chos kyi grags pa was arrested in 1645 for exacting destructive magic against the enemies of gTsang.²⁸ However, according to some sources, the Dalai Lama visited him while he was imprisoned and insisted that Chos kyi grags pa be released; other accounts suggest he recommended his release from afar.²⁹ In either scenario, he was freed, and sources emphasize that they specifically exchanged knowledge on the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka practices, either during this meeting or subsequent ones.³⁰

Despite the variation in these accounts, the implicit narrative suggests that this specialized magical secret practice formed a bond or alliance between the lamas. In other words, the *Yang bzlog* teachings served as a connector, a unifying element. The sharing of secret knowledge defined lines of trust and respect and bolstered the reputation of each lama. In fact, the 5th Dalai Lama generally embraced diverse practices across sectarian boundaries; he even supported practices like Chos kyi grags pa's, which might seem surprising given the political rivalries at the time (recall, Chos kyi grags pa was married into the family of the gTsang kings who were ultimately defeated by Gushri Khan, solidifying the 5th's rule).

However, this tolerance and cosmopolitan attitude was not extended to all ritual specialists. The 5th Dalai Lama openly criticized specific rNying ma groups that aligned themselves with gTsang power, namely the lineages of Zhig po gling pa (1524–1583) and his eminent student, the famed Sog bzlog pa ("Mongol-repeller") Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1552–1624).³¹ These tensions are referenced in at least one of the Byang gter *Yang bzlog* texts, an empowerment ritual with an unknown author, perhaps written or at least edited by the 5th himself.³² The text's title indicates that the empowerment was composed by Rin chen phun tshogs (*Tshe bdag yang bzlog gi dbang dpal 'bri gung pa rin chen phun tshogs kyis mdzad pa'i khungs dag yin*), who

²⁷ Sobisch 2020, p. 17. This reincarnation lineage survives today in the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud tradition. The current Che tshang (07), dKon mchog bstan 'dzin kun bzang 'phrin las lhun grub (b. 1946), presides over the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud Institute in Dehradun, India. Che tshang Rin po che travels the world teaching the dharma and advocating for environmental conservation through his Go Green Go Organic initiative. Meanwhile, the current Chung tshang (08), bsTan 'dzin chos kyi snang ba (b. 1942) has remained in the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

²⁸ Esler 2022, p. 198; FitzHerbert 2018, p. 106.

²⁹ FitzHerbert 2018, p. 107; Karmay 2014, p. 200.

³⁰ Esler 2022, pp. 198–99; FitzHerbert 2018, pp. 107–08; Karmay, 2014 p. 407.

³¹ For an extensive study on the ritual repertoire of Sog bzlog pa see Gentry 2017.

³² *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, pp. 209–15.

could be Chos kyi grags pa's grandfather and previous incarnation.³³ The ritual itself notes that Ratna (a common name for his grandfather, with Chos kyi grags pa known as the second Ratna) composed a manuscript on the ritual details of practice (which is related to the sharp inner cutting (*rnon po nang gcod*)).³⁴ As mentioned previously, Rin chen phun tshogs is connected to the Byang gter tradition as the treasure companion of Legs ldan rdo rje, the Second rDo rje brag rig 'dzin.³⁵ Also, it is through rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs that the Yang bzlog practice enters the 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud tradition.³⁶ However, it is also possible that this Rin chen phun tshogs is Chos kyi grags pa's father, Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs. Indeed, in his *gSan yig*, the 5th discusses a *gtor ma* empowerment of the sharp inner cutting (*rnon po nang gcod*) compiled by Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs.³⁷ The 5th follows this with a warning that the sNang rtse *sde pa* that is, the sNang rtse faction (*phyogs*)—Zhig po gling pa, Sog bzlog pa, and his disciple Gong ra lo chen gZhan phan rdo rje (1594–1654), or perhaps simply Zhig po gling pa himself as a *sde pa* (leader) of said faction,³⁸ misinterpreted the language of this empowerment as essence (*bcud*) rather than cutting (*gcod*). It is in the same spirit that the subtitle of the Byang gter text includes a critical comment about the sNang rtse *sde pa*, characterizing Rin chen phun tshogs' (whichever one it is) teaching as authentic (*khungs dag*) without the corruption of self-fabrication (*rang bzo'i slad pa med pa*) in contrast to the sNang rtse teachings, implying that the latter produced inauthentic doctrine.³⁹ In this way, the 'Bri gung teachings were legitimized with a strong reputation that continued through to Chos kyi grags pa. An interesting future avenue of research would include further examination of the

³³ Sobisch 2020, p. 17. For an extensive study on Rin chen phun tshogs see Burghart 2017.

³⁴ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, p. 215.

³⁵ Esler 2022, p. 198.

³⁶ Confirmed during a practice hosted by contemporary Lama Thub bstan nyi ma (b. 1965) who has trained extensively in Yamāntaka practice.

³⁷ *gSung 'bum / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 3, p. 34. Of course it is possible that this is an erroneous attribution (being the grandfather as well).

³⁸ Gentry 2017 discusses the sNang rtse faction (named after the homeland of Zhig po gling pa) and the continual rhetoric of the 5th Dalai Lama which denigrates this group, yet lauds the Northern Treasures (see especially, pp. 380–408). Also see FitzHerbert 2018, pp. 52; 103. FitzHerbert makes the compelling argument that the 5th's self-proclaimed expertise in "war magic" was critical to the success of the dGa' ldan pho brang. Important to this context, he describes how the 5th appropriated fierce rites from the powerful rNying ma Byang gter and 'Bri gung pa masters and used discourse on legitimacy and efficacy as a platform to marginalize political enemies, e.g., the sNang rtse faction.

³⁹ *Tshe bdag yang bzlog gi dbang dpal 'bri gung pa rin chen phun tshogs kyis mdzad pa'i khungs dag yin / snang rtse sde pa sogs kyi rang bzo'i slad pa med pas yid ches kyi gnas so*. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 25, pp. 209–15.

'Bri gung pa texts for similar criticisms coupled with a comparison of the relevant sNang rtse texts. However, it is my initial inclination that much of this criticism may stem from the 5th since it is well documented that rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs had an amicable relationship and shared political interests with Zhig po gling pa.⁴⁰

The details of 'Bri gung Chos kyi grags pa's life (including the relationship to his father's and grandfather's teachings, his relationship with the Fifth, and his relationship to the sNang rtse figures) will become clearer with further research on his autobiography, found in his *Collected Works* (*gSung 'bum*), as well as on the various biographies composed by other 'Bri gung masters. His contribution to the Yamāntaka ritual text tradition is extensive; there are two volumes in his *gSung 'bum* dedicated to Yamāntaka and four independent volumes of the *Yang bzlog* based on his direct visions of the deity ('*Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i chos skor*). In fact, Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813–1899) notes that Chos kyi grags pa revealed his own mind treasures of the *Yang bzlog*.⁴¹ Suffice it to say, he is an illustrious figure in the Tibetan world, and his importance and contributions to Yamāntaka practice deserve greater scholarly attention.

4. Chos kyi grag pa's Yang bzlog in the Byang gter and 'Bri gung Texts

Based on colophonic materials, Arguillère has identified several *Yang bzlog* texts within the *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* that were authored by Chos kyi grags pa—at least one in volume 21, seven in volume 25, and three in volume 26.⁴² Many of these texts also appear in Chos kyi grags pa's *gSung 'bum*. Chos kyi grags pa's *gSung 'bum* contains a diverse range of text types, certainly not limited to Yamāntaka teachings. As a veritable polymath, his collected works span various subjects such as grammar, medicine, and perhaps most notable in terms of previously examined texts in Western scholarship—a commentary on the *Single Intention* (*dGongs gcig*) of 'Jig rten gsum mgon (1143–1217).⁴³ Here I present a preliminary investigation of the overlap between the *Yang bzlog* inclusions in the

⁴⁰ See Burghart 2017, p. 159 ; Sørensen and Hazod 2007, pp. 514-20.

⁴¹ See Kong sprul 2011, p. 346 for a brief biography.

⁴² For his catalogue (including notes on authorship, etc.) of the '*Jam dpal tshe bdag* texts in the *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, see: <https://fchnt.hypotheses.org/manjusri-master-of-life-a-table-of-the-4-first-volumes-of-the-jam-dpal-tshe-bdag-cycle-included-in-the-byang-gter-phyogs-sgrigs>.

⁴³ See Sobisch 2020 and Viehbeck 2009.

Byang gter compilation and the *gSung 'bum*, as well the 4-volume *Yang bzlog chos skor*.

The Yamāntaka texts appear in volumes 11 and 12 of his *gSung 'bum*. There are several other Yamāntaka cycles included in these two volumes, for instance the *Khro chu dug sdong* cycle, but most of the texts, especially those found in volume 11, are dedicated specifically to the *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri* cycle. Table 1 (in the Appendix) shows each Byang gter text (from Vol. 21, 25, 26, and 27) that I have found in Chos kyi grags pa's collection described above (the *gSung 'bum* and the *Chos skor*).⁴⁴ My findings are listed here by numbered order of appearance in the Byang gter collection:

- from volume 21, one text—a liturgy and ritual procedures for a *homa* of the four activities;
- from volume 25, eleven texts—a practice of the yoga of the four-*vajra* completion stage, a purification ritual, two empowerment-related rituals, a supplement for a *gaṇacakra* (*tshogs kyi 'khor lo*), an accomplishment and approach ritual from the *Zla gsang gzhi bsnyen*, an explanation of the series of vows written in 1631, a pacification *sādhana* written in 1636, another four-*vajra* completion stage practice, an application of activities of the hostile fire, and minor actions substituting the hostile fire rite;
- from volume 26, six texts—the main body of practice of the *Yang bzlog*, an important repelling ritual, a supplement to the daily practice of *Yang bzlog*, a dagger ritual, an extended history of the *Yang zlog*, and a transmission supplication of shared *bka' ma* and *gter ma* lineages;
- from volume 27, two *Yang zlog* texts—an arrangement of regular recitation practice and a text containing oral instructions for the approach and accomplishment.⁴⁵

In the following sections, I will discuss in detail two of these texts found in both the *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* and the *gSung 'bum*—the transmission supplication (*gsol 'debs*)⁴⁶ and a “liberating”

⁴⁴ Note there are other 'Bri gung masters that have contributed to the 4-volume *Chos skor* collection.

⁴⁵ Note the texts in volume 27 are *gter ma* texts that appear with notes written by Chos kyi grags pa in his compilations.

⁴⁶ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri dang zla gsang gi rgyud bka' gter rnam thun mong gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa*, *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 277–80; *gShin rje'i gshed yang zlog gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa*, *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 187–90.

(i.e., killing) dagger rite.⁴⁷

5. *Chos kyi grag pa's Yang bzlog*
Example 1: Transmission Supplication

The transmission supplication provides a glimpse into the traditional lineages of the *Yang bzlog* textual tradition. These texts are simply a list of names that are read in reverence to the masters who propagated the particular teachings, generally in chronological order. As mentioned above, there is a layered complexity regarding the identity of the *gter ston* responsible for the *Yang zlog* cycle. As Arguillère has noted, a text by the 5th Dalai Lama in the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (also contained in the Byang gter compilation) includes a *Yang bzlog* lineage that identifies these practices as a *gter ma* discovered by *lHa rje gNubs chung*, but all the '*Jam dpal tshe bdag* sections in the collection begin with a blurb about rGya Zhang khrom.⁴⁸ Both the Byang gter and *gSung 'bum gsol 'debs* indicate that these two figures are in succession within the lineage (*lHa rje gNubs chung* following Zhang khrom).

Table 2 (in the Appendix) shows a comparison between the transmission lineage in the 5th Dalai Lama's *Yang bzlog* text and the lineages found in the Byang gter and the *gSung 'bum gsol 'debs* texts. Both the Byang gter and *gSung 'bum* lineages generally mirror⁴⁹ the 5th Dalai Lama's list up through gNubs chen Sangs rgyas ye shes (marked with a star "*" on Table 2). In fact, the Byang gter and *gSung 'bum* lists mainly differ from the 5th's because these lists have collapsed the *bka' ma* and *gter ma* lineage into a single "shared" (*thun mong*) lineage, meaning they omit all *bka' ma* transmission after gNubs chen since this is the juncture in which *lHa rje gNubs chung* or rGya Zhang khrom would be the discoverer of a treasure hidden by him. Thus, after gNubs chen, the 5th Dalai Lama's list continues to Yon tan rgya mtsho then several other names included in the *bka' ma* list (which is not shown in the others) prior to reaching the *gter ma* at the juncture of *lHa rje gNubs chung*, interestingly omitting rGya Zhang khrom altogether. From the lineage lists, it is not clear that they discover the cycle separately, as revealed in the histories (*lo rgyus*) of this cycle discussed below, which by nature of genre can provide more nuance compared

⁴⁷ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba*, *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 181–95; *Yang zlog me'i spu gri las / phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol*, *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 359–76.

⁴⁸ Arguillère 2024b, p. 317–18; 327. *Rin chen gter mdzod*, *Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 26, pp. 434–6; *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, *Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 25, pp. 1–32 (relevant lineage list appears on pp. 3–4).

⁴⁹ Note, only slight variation of names in spelling / style.

to a simple linear enumeration characteristic of the *gsol 'debs*. However, receiving the transmission separately still does not account for this absence. In the 5th's list, he seemingly notes that *lHa rje gNubs chung* received the teachings from the *bka' ma* transmission and also later as a *gter ma*.⁵⁰ It is possible that the 5th purposely omitted *rGya Zhang khrom* for simplicity or some other reason (indeed, as the histories shows all texts are eventually funneled to *lHa rje gNubs chung*). However, elsewhere in the 5th's writings *Zhang khrom* is prominent, in the context of the *Yang bzlog* generally and this ritual more specifically, therefore this is unlikely. It is more probable that specific texts within a given cycle follow different transmission lines; the multiple lineages marked with special signs (as previously mentioned, e.g., "*khon*") in his *gSan yig* confirm this. The 5th's list in this particular texts notes that there is a union (*zung 'jug*) of the *bka'* and *gter* at the juncture of *rGya ston Nam mkha' dpal* (*alias Rig 'dzin gsang ba*), prior to the teachings entering the 'Bri gung *bKa' brgyud* tradition through *rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs*. This may suggest that there are different texts passed through via each mechanism—*bka'* and *gter*. *rGya Zhang khrom* may not have received certain transmissions that were passed along via the *bka' ma* route. Given the union of the texts, perhaps these were later indistinguishable from a *gter* and hence incorporated in *gter* compilations. It may remain unclear which texts followed the *bka' ma* transmission and which texts originated from *rGya Zhang khrom's* treasures—later transmitted to *lHa rje gNubs chung*—and which were discovered independently by *lHa rje gNubs chung* himself (or, as will be described below, whether such a distinction in regard to the *gter ma* exists at all). Careful charting of the texts enumerated in the 5th's *gSan yig* and Chos kyi grags pa's expanded history may reveal the later traditions' understandings of these matters.

Setting aside the more prominent issue of *Zhang khrom's* absence, another point of inquiry is whether the names of *Byang chub mgon po* and *Nam mkha' mtshan*⁵¹ represent different individuals. The numbered list in the *Byang gter* and the pattern of listing in the *gSung*

⁵⁰ *Bka' nas brgyud dang slar yang gter ston rgya. Rin chen gter mdzod, Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 26, p. 435; *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 25, p. 4. Note, this section (describing the propagation as a *gter ma*) is a bit unclear. It is possible to read this "*rgya*" as *rGya Zhang khrom's* name, but the structure seems to indicate two verbs (*brgyud* and *rgya*); furthermore, if it is the name, this would be a truncated form that seems abnormal compared to other mentions of *Zhang khrom*.

⁵¹ Note, *mtshan can* (or its truncated form *mtshan*) appears in multiple name enumerations in this article; this simply means "having the name." For example, here, *Nam mkha' mtshan* means "the one who has the name *Nam mkha'*."

'bum (two names per independent linear section) suggests that they are different individuals. Additionally, further down the list, the Byang gter *gsol 'debs* numbering system indicates that mChog grub rgyal po maṅga'i mtshan may refer to a single individual (perhaps based on the 5th Dalai Lama lineage, it could be Chos kyi grags pa's father Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs since he follows his own father rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs *alias* gNam lcags me 'bar; rJe ratna). However, it is more likely that these are two distinct names as indicated by the *gSung 'bum* lineage list and the histories—mChog grub rgyal po as Chos rgyal Rin chen phun tshogs (Chos kyi grags pa's father), and Maṅga'i mtshan as Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs (Chos kyi grags pa's brother).⁵² Note both *gsol 'debs* culminate here since the text is compiled by Chos kyi grags pa.

Returning to the ambiguities surrounding the *gter* discoveries of gNubs chung and Zhang khrom, one may consult Chos kyi grags pa's *gSung 'bum* which contains an abridged history not found in the Byang gter (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus mdor bsdu*).⁵³ Scholar-practitioner Eric Fry-Miller (*alias* Eric Yon tan rgya mtsho) has translated this truncated history into English.⁵⁴ The tantric lineage follows closely the lineages in Table 2 from the Byang gter collection and *gSung 'bum*; however, there are important points not conveyed in the supplication due to its condensed format, which cannot accommodate an extended narrative framework.

For example, in the lineage described by the history, after dGa' rab rdo rje receives the tantras from the deities (gShin rje'i gshed by means of rDo rje rnon po),⁵⁵ he entrusts them to Mañjuśrīmitra ('Jam dpal bshes gnyen). Then Mañjuśrīmitra conceals a root tantra (*Zla gsang 'jam dpal kyi thugs*) to be discovered directly by Jñānagarbha (Ye shes snying po),⁵⁶ but all other texts, it is said, were given to *Śāntiṃgarbha (the *gsol 'debs* enumeration is Mañjuśrīmitra, *Śāntiṃgarbha, then Jñānagarbha). A subsequent key point in this history clarifies how the

⁵² It should be noted that in the 5th Dalai Lama's work (e.g., in his *gSan yig*), Maṅga'i mtshan refers to *Byang bdag* bKra shis stobs rgyal. This name seems to be used for Chos kyi grags pa's brother only in this specific context.

⁵³ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 37–46.

⁵⁴ Fry-Miller's translation of several *Yang bzlog* materials (including the truncated history) can be found here: <https://www.buddhavisions.com/shop/yamantakas-fire-razor-of-ultimate-repelling/>.

⁵⁵ Rather than rDo rje rnon po (Skt. Vajratīkṣṇa) and Lag na rdo rje (Skt. Vajrapāṇi), who appear in the Byang gter *gsol 'debs* (or *gSang bdag* rdo rje in the *gSung 'bum* version) the history reads that Lag na rdo rje alone collected Yamāntaka's teachings. *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum* Vol. 11, p. 40.

⁵⁶ The root tantra lineage given by Fry-Miller is not directly given in the *gSung 'bum* text (that is, Jñānagarbha to Khrag 'thung nag po to gTsug lag dpal dge). However, some of these finer points are elucidated and expanded upon in the extended history.

Yang bzlog cycle emerged. Here, the text states that gTsug lag dpal dge extracted the pith of all the instructions on protection, repelling, killing, and suppression (*srung, bzlog, bsad, mnan*), which coalesced to form the *Yang bzlog*.⁵⁷ Then these were given to Padmasambhava, Vasudhara, then gNubs (who the text identifies as the reincarnation of Vasudhara's brother who had passed away).⁵⁸

The next noteworthy point, returning to the question of whether the treasures belong to Zhang khrom or *lHa rje* gNubs chung, is that this text explains that both are treasure revealers of the *Yang bzlog* cycle. Zhang khrom discovered the treasure gNubs hid at Phung po Ri bo che, and then entrusted them to *lHa rje* gNubs chung. Meanwhile, *lHa rje* gNubs chung independently discovered treasures (it not clearly narrated in this history whether these are the exact same texts) hidden by gNubs at mKho mthing Temple of lHo brag.⁵⁹ Thus, the history highlights several nuances that cannot be depicted in a singular lineage of the *gsol 'debs*.

Close analysis of the extended history found both in the Byang gter and the *gSung 'bum* will hopefully further elucidate these issues, but for now, I will simply provide a few preliminary notes about this text. This extended history offers a five-part explanation (*bshad pa*) of the *Yang bzlog* history: 1) The taming of 'Chi bdag gshin rje by bCom ldan 'das 'Jam dpal dbyangs, 2) The transmission of the tantras, 3) The manner in which they were disseminated to the world ('jig rten khams), 4) The arising of the sādhanas based on those tantras, and 5) The manner in which they were condensed to the essence which is the *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri*.⁶⁰ Table 3 (in the Appendix) offers a visual representation of the lineages described above and reflects the more extensive lineage list found in this extended history (noted in grey).⁶¹ Fascinatingly, the extended text claims that the treasures *lHa rje* gNubs chung uncovers are not different (*khyad par ma mchis pa*) from Zhang khrom's discoveries.⁶² Thus, perhaps the answer to the previously

⁵⁷ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 41–2.

⁵⁸ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, p. 42.

⁵⁹ *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 42–3. The phrasing regarding each text is as follows: *lho brag mkho mthing gi lha khang dang / phung po ri bo che gnyis su tshar re sbas so*. For an extended conversation on *lHa rje* gNubs chung and particularly his connection to Mi la ras pa's (1040?–1123?) activities, see Martin 1982 (who also relays a version of this history, especially see pp. 56–58). Martin also notes the two sets were identical.

⁶⁰ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, p. 216.

⁶¹ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 231–9.

⁶² Lama dGa' dpe's (Lama Thub bstan nyi ma) text describes these two sets as the earlier and later *gter ma*, noting that gNubs chung possesses the lineage of both (p. 27). mGar chen Rin po che has described the teachings that he gives online as teachings from the Zhang khrom treasures. Further field research will reveal whether or not this implies a different set of texts. There is also a perplexing line

posed question of which texts are whose, may be a moot point. This certainly warrants further investigation and raises important questions about Zhang khrom's function as a fundamental treasure revealer and incarnation of gNubs. If *lHa rje* gNubs chung discovers and transmits the same treasure, what then is Zhang khrom's role? What might behoove a treasure concealer to hide the same text independently for different discoverers in this context, especially since all seemingly are funneled to *lHa rje* gNubs chung eventually? I will leave these essential questions for future investigation and instead turn to an example of the ritual content shared in the *Yang bzlog* cycle of the *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum* and Byang gter compilation.

6. *Chos kyi grag pa's Yang bzlog*
Example 2: A "Liberating" Dagger Ritual

This ritual (*Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba*, *From the Ultimate Repelling Blazing Razor, the separate pith instructions for striking the dagger*), which appears in both the Byang gter compilation and *Chos kyi grags pa's gSung 'bum*, is a dagger ritual that "liberates" (a euphemism for killing).⁶³ The dagger (Skt. *kīla*) is a prominent ritual implement in tantric Buddhist liturgy, often associated with the deity Vajrakīla as discussed extensively in the scholarship of Martin Boord, Cathy Cantwell, and Robert Mayer.⁶⁴ In fact, I suspect that this ritual is an appropriation of ritual content from a Vajrakīla cycle refashioned as a sort of Yamāntaka/Vajrakīla aggregate.⁶⁵ Below, I provide a preliminary summary coupled with

in the 5th Dalai Lama's *gSan yig* that implies Zhang khrom discovered treasures at mKho mthing temple (*gSung 'bum / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 3, p. 34.).

⁶³ *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgribs*, vol. 26, pp. 181–95; *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 359–76.

⁶⁴ For example, Boord 1993; 2013, Cantwell 1997; 2020; 2022, Cantwell and Mayer 2007, and Mayer 1996. Also notable is Elser's article (2020) which discusses a *phur pa* text within the revelations of Myang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1124–1192). See Li 2018 for an overview of previous scholarship on *phur pa* texts, relevant Tibetan histories, and various transmissions.

⁶⁵ Cantwell's descriptions of early *phur pa* and Vajrakīla texts contain overlapping themes of this ritual, e.g., a deified *kīla* as the Supreme Son (*sras mchog*), (Cantwell 2020, p. 10) and similar phrasings on compassionate killing, such as noting that the *samaya* for killing via compassion is not actually killing and suppressing (Cantwell 1997, p. 115). Also, based on the writings of 'Phrin las bdud 'joms (1725–1789), Boord (1993) describes three types of Vajrakīla within the Byang gter literature, one which is particularly similar to the main *Yang bzlog* deity—i.e., a deity with three faces and six hands. He also notes that it is common for Vajrakīla, to manifest with a *kīla* body (Boord 1993, p. 90), similar to the version of Yamāntaka within this ritual. Given these details, the similarities between Vajrakīla and Yamāntaka texts certainly warrant further investigation to uncover any aspects of appropriation, or perhaps mutual sharing of ritual elements (some that may predate the specific

direct translations of the rite from the Byang gter compilation to illustrate the general function and structure of the ritual.

The rite promises to crush all enemies and obstacles (*dgra bgegs brlag*). The instructions include a combination of visualization sequences, physical movements, and manipulation of material objects to liberate (*bsgral*) a victim and elevate his consciousness to a pure land in the ultimate act of compassionate violence. Since this is such an overtly violent ritual, the text carefully expresses a justification for compassionate killing. This exemplifies why these rites are deemed dangerous (given the potential for nefarious misuse or misinterpretation of meaning) and hence narrated as secret and efficacious war magic.

The ritual begins with an homage to Yamāri. The practitioner must first grasp a wrathful-faced dagger (*phur*) in between joined palms, manifesting (*gsal*) the right hand as the sun and the left as the moon. On the right five fingers, the five families manifest from OM, HŪM, HRIM, HRĪH, ĀH and on the left five fingers, the five consorts manifest from MŪM, LĀM, MĀM, PĀM, TĀM. The union of the *yab yum* creates *bodhicitta* which emanates the Supreme Son (*sras mchog*), Yamāntaka-Vajrakīlāya.⁶⁶ This *yab yum* formation and resultant deity will be a prominent aspect of the mechanics throughout the ritual. This resultant deity is similar to the main deity of the *Yang bzlog* cycle described above but notably with wings and a dagger body similar to depictions of Vajrakīla. The text describes him thus:⁶⁷

He has adamantine wings⁶⁸ and three faces: black, white, and red. In his three right hands he holds a wheel, sword, and *vajra*. In his three left, he holds an iron hook, a wooden pestle, and the third makes a threatening *mudrā*. The final two, roll (*bsgril*) a *vajra* dagger at the heart.⁶⁹ He is adorned with the eight charnel

development of either cycle). As will be clear in the translation of the text, the author is careful to add that the “Son’s” (the language of a “Son” applied not only to the deified *kīla* but also to the victim) liberation in the pure land is only part of some transmissions.

⁶⁶ The version in the *gSung 'bum* varies slightly, noting that the *yab yum* union emanates a black *rdo rje phur bu*, then the Supreme Son rises forth. *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, p. 360.3. This language is similar to the *'phrin las phur pa* texts translated by Cantwell 2020, p. 67.

⁶⁷ See https://library.bdrclio/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 182.3–3.1.

⁶⁸ Note in most rNying ma depictions the deity has wings as described here; however, sometimes he is depicted without wings as in the form shown in Fig. 1.

⁶⁹ Based on Cantwell’s (2020, p. 10) description of the typical Vajrakīla iconography of the central deity (right face white, middle face dark blue, left face red with his bottom two hands rolling a dagger), this certainly seems like an amalgamation of Yamāntaka/Vajrakīla. That is to say, I understand the final two hands described

ground ornaments. His lower body is a meteoric iron dagger sparking fire like it was extracted from the bed of coals (*sol ma*) of a blacksmith, emitting from the mouth of a water dragon. He bears (*'chang*) a garland of snakes.

The visualization sequence continues with several *yab yum* pairs, manifold peaceful and wrathful deities, along with dharma protectors, *yamas*, and various spirits juxtaposed on a five-pointed *vajra* [dagger].⁷⁰ The practitioner then visualizes:⁷¹

From the three corners of the [*phur bu*] tip, various weapons rain down. By mere rolling (*bsgril*), the three realms tremble. And by merely brandishing (*phyar*) it, the three realms of existence are frightened. By merely striking (*gdab*), enemies and obstacles can be destroyed.

Then, from the dagger, light rays emanate and all the blessings of the buddhas gather and dissolve into the dagger. The practitioner becomes endowed with the power of liberating the three realms in a single instant. He rolls the dagger (as Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka), and the text reiterates the spatially defined *yab yum*, a manifestation of skillful means on the right and wisdom on the left, a union which results in the Son arising from an azure HŪM. The Son (Yamāntaka-[Vajra]kīlāya with the lower body as the dagger) is said to have the capability of purifying enemies, obstructors, the five poisons, the three poisons and so on; the power is invested to him who is liberated as the Son of the Victor (*rgyal ba'i sras*), having annihilated action (*las*) and afflictive emotions (*nyon mongs*).⁷²

rolling the dagger as the bottom of the three sets of hands—the right holding the *vajra* (which is perhaps a dagger with a *vajra* handle), and the left making the threatening *mudrā* (basically transforming the base Yamāntaka form into a form that undertakes a Vajrakīla action); however, the description here is ambiguous.

⁷⁰ I understand this as a five-pronged *vajra* atop a *kīla* (the wrathful face the opposite end of the *kīla*, *vajra* in the middle). The text specifies that this sequence is *de dag gi sked*, which presumably means at the center of the previous *yab yum* formation. This possibly references the physical dagger that the practitioner is holding between his hands wherein the *yab yum* emerges. However, the text does not specify this identification of the implement explicitly. The body of the deity as a dagger (and the dagger in the deity's own hands) further complicates the interpretation of this passage.

⁷¹ See https://library.bdr.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgribs*, vol. 26, p. 183.2–3.4.

⁷² It is my understanding that the practitioner (as Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka) rolls the dagger which activates the rolling of the dagger by the main dagger-bodied deity, the Son (Vajrakīla-Yamāntaka). The language of “Son” seemingly is used in this

After once again rolling the dagger and reciting mantras, the practitioner strikes an effigy at the place where the life-force resides. Importantly, after this instruction to strike, the text includes a cited excerpt and notes on wrathful compassion:⁷³

{Note:⁷⁴ From the *Golden Rosary* written by Padmasambhava: ‘First, as the commitment (*dam pa*) of power (*mthu*), generate the supreme mind of enlightenment in oneself and by compassion for the benefit of others, accomplish power. Generating hatred (*zhe sdang*) at the time the dagger strikes the effigy—this is the method (*thabs*) of enlightened activities of a buddha.’ So, it is said. As the causal and temporal motivation (*rgyu dus kyi kun slong*),⁷⁵ one must be inspired (*kun nas slangs*) by the mind of enlightenment and compassion, and one must also generate fierce anger as the motivation at the time of action (i.e., the temporal motivation, *dus kyi kun slong*).} Then strike {note: the blade (*dbal*) just disappearing (*nub*)} at the RNRI/NR⁷⁶ of the heart. And regarding lifting up to the realm (*gnas spar*):⁷⁷ {note: This enemy with negative karma, wanders saṃsāra because he previously also performed non-virtuous deeds. Now moreover, if he stays for a long duration, having performed many non-virtuous actions he will not cease (*’gog*)⁷⁸ from being born in the lower realms. Because of that, at this moment, having severed the negative karmic continuum, he will attain the Son of the

context for the resultant deity and the victim. Further research, particularly comparisons to Vajrakīla texts, may clarify this interpretation.

⁷³ See https://library.bdr.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 184.6–5.3.

⁷⁴ Notes in braces indicate text that appears in a smaller font which is usually added to the main larger-font text (which is often recited) to provide further instruction or explanation.

⁷⁵ The *sGom sde tshig mdzod chen mo* (vol. 1, p. 504) suggests this term is a combination of the two terms for types of motivation: *rgyu’i kun slong* (causal motivation) and *dus kyi kun slong* (temporal motivation). I interpret this to mean that a practitioner must have a general motivation of compassion to approach the practice which should also manifest explicitly during the action; meanwhile the temporal motivation (at the very time of action) should not only carry this compassionate motivation but also a fierce motivation. Admittedly this is unclear and must be clarified with further research.

⁷⁶ The syllable in the *gSung ’bum* is NR (vol. 11, p. 364.5). This NR is used throughout the rest of the text in the *Byang gter* as well, thus it is likely the extra ‘R’ and the non-vocalic middle ‘R’ are scribal errors.

⁷⁷ This means liberating the consciousness to a pure land.

⁷⁸ Interestingly, the *gSung ’bum* rather reads *’os med*, which conveys the meaning that this victim would not be worthy of such a fate, that is, he does not deserve to be continually reborn in these unfortunate circumstances (vol. 11, p. 346.6).

Mañjuśrī Wisdom Being (Skt. *Jñānasattva*).⁷⁹ The wrathful-thinking mind is generated.}

Within the notes, the text continues to emphasize compassion, gentleness, and the lack of malicious thoughts in performing such actions, drawing from the tantra *The Wheel that Achieves All Actions of Black Yamāntaka* (*gShin rje'i gshed nag po'i las thams cad 'grub par byed pa 'khor lo'i rgyud*), the words of Nāropā (d. 1040), and the teachings of Atiśa (982–1054) to 'Brom (1004–1064) in the *bKa' gdams Scriptures of Father Teachings* (*bKa' gdams glegs bam pho chos*). In fact, the text claims that this *samaya* which liberates via compassion is not killing (*bsad*) and suppressing (*mnan*), but instead a liberating (*bsgral*) of the aggregates through the union of compassion and skillful means.

Then, with this orientation of compassion established, the practitioner raises (*spar*) the consciousness (*rnam shes*) as the Son of the Victor. The text continues with specific instructions on dagger placement, and then explains the victim's predicament, having broken his vows. Citing the 9th chapter of the *Dark Red Yama, Blazing Impurities* (*gShin rje dmar nag 'bar ba'i dme rgyud*), the texts asserts that when a previous lama has given an empowerment, the wisdom being resides there in the heart, and thus if the vow is protected, *siddhis* (*dnogs grub*) are bestowed; however, if the vow is broken, a demon devours the heart blood. Expanding from this citation, the text describes the wisdom being (in the case of vow breaking) rather as Las kyi gshin rje'i gshed, transforming into a nine-headed iron scorpion who devours from the eight heart channels, drinking the heart blood. The related visualization sequence describes light rays emanating from the dagger. The subtle essence of the wind scatters and the subtle essence of the blood gathers and dries, causing all the vow-breaker's constituent elements to dissolve into one another sequentially, and finally into the essence of consciousness (NR). That essence of consciousness is gathered up at the tip of the dagger and then passes through the interior space of the dagger. The remaining visualization describes how the consciousness transforms and then transports to the

⁷⁹ A similar process of raising the consciousness of the victim to the pure land and the victim attaining (in this case) Vajrasattva's son is described in Cantwell 1997, p. 114. In reviewing this article, Arguillère has pointed out that the *jñānasattva* designation functions distinctively in this context, whereas in usual tantric meditation it simply refers to the "actual" deity that descends and merges with the mentally created deity, *samayasattva*. This unique function warrants further investigation.

pure land, again highlighting the function of the *yab yum* formation.⁸⁰

That NR itself, at the heart of the *yab*, Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva who is at the middle of the *vajra*, dissolves into the form of a white ĀḤ. Having dissolved, it becomes a dharmakāya buddha. Consequently, when the Mañjuśrī *yab yum* perform the union, that ĀḤ itself transmits through the middle path of the *yab*. From the path of the *vajra*, it falls into the secret center of the *yum*, transforming into the Son Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva, attaining buddhahood as the sambhogakāya in the southern pure land, Tiers of the Immaculate and Pure (rDul bral yang dag brtsegs). By means of that, the emanations radiate without limits, liberating beings of the three realms. Due to that, visualize buddahood is attained as the nirmāṇakāya form, accomplishing the two goals.

More visualization sequences follow (similar to above, reiterating the dagger shape of the body, etc.). The text then calls on the practitioner to plant the dagger, the blade barely disappearing; the weapons in the ritual are said to have the power to sever the roots of enemies, obstructors, and saṃsāra itself. The practitioner must strike the weapon in different locations to separate each aspect of the victim's consciousness (*rnam shes*; Skt. *viññāna*):⁸¹

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the navel, separate the body-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion ('*khṛul*) of body!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the throat, separate the speech-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion of speech!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the eye, separate the form-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion of form!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the nose, separate the nose-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion of smell!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the ear, separate the ear-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in sound!

⁸⁰ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 186.6–187.3.

⁸¹ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 187.6–188.3.

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the tongue, separate the tongue-consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in taste!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the secret part (*gsang ba*), separate the substratum (*kun gzhi*, Skt. *ālaya*) consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in saṃsāra!

KĪ LĀ YA at the center of the four limbs, separate the tactile sensation (*reg bya*) consciousness from its basis—sever from the root, the delusion in touch!

After striking, the eight consciousnesses dissolve into the dagger. Then a series of subsequent dissolution stages occur (from dagger to deities to Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva), culminating with Mañjuśrī Jñānasattva ultimately dissolving into the practitioner himself. Next, three restorations (*gso*) must be performed: restorations for the self, the dagger, and the enemy. These restorations involve visualization sequences that enliven or invigorate. For example, for the self, one imagines merit, fortune, and so forth dissolving into the self, and for the dagger visualizations, countless daggers emanate and sever enemies and obstacles. During the restoration of the enemy, the defilements (*grib*) and transgressions (*nyes ltung*) of the eight consciousnesses are purified by light rays of mantras striking the heart of the effigy. This causes him to immediately transform into Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka.⁸² Thus:⁸³

Having been lifted up by the crossed-*vajra* wind, visualize that he transforms, taking birth as the Son of the Victor, by means of being cast to the point of union of the Mañjuśrī *yab yum*, in the field of The Immaculate (*rDul bral*) of the southern direction.

Upon leading the enemy to liberation in the buddha field, the practitioner takes up a series of daggers that target different aspects of the victim, reciting mantras and striking at the place where those aspects abide: the *bla* dagger (a *mi'i mchog* dagger), the heart dagger (a teakwood dagger), and the life-force dagger (a dagger of knife-iron). Subsequent striking instructions follow, along with a direction to perform an activation of substances (*thun bskul byas*) of the *Zla gsang*.

⁸² Note that the identity of the victim, the practitioner, the Son, and Yamāntaka seem to be quite fluid throughout the ritual. Further research must be conducted to parse through the complexities of these seemingly conflated designations.

⁸³ See https://library.bdrclio/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgribs*, vol. 26, p. 189.3–189.4.

The practitioner then must again take up the wrathful-faced dagger from before, and various weapons emanate:⁸⁴

Visualize as the three: body, speech, and mind of the enemy are crushed to dust. And, HŪṂ, I, Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka perceived that you were tormented by the three poisons which are stirred up (*bsnyogs pa*) by afflictions and habitual tendencies. From that, Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka, in order to liberate you by means of compassion, DZAḤ! DZA!, even though having spread out like the planets, summons and liberates [you] with *vajra* weapons. From the tip of the adamantine dagger, cutting the root of hatred (*zhe sdang*), the adamantine weapons come down like a rain of fierce thunderbolts.⁸⁵ HŪṂ E DZAḤ!

By emanating a collection (*tshogs*) of blazing iron hooks {note: if there is joy as they excessively emanate, strike each and every weapon at the effigy, like in the chanting text, but it is merely a possibility}, hook! BADZRA ANGKUŚA DZAḤ!⁸⁶

By emanating a collection of blazing lassos, bind! BADZRA PĀṢE HŪṂ!

By emanating a collection of blazing iron chains, restrain! BADZRA SPOḤ ṬA BAṂ!

By emanating a collection of blazing bells, descend! BADZRA GHANṬA HO!

By emanating a collection of *vajra* wheels, cut! BADZRA TSAKRA ṆA!

By emanating a collection of *vajra* swords, cleave! BADZRA KHANGGA ṆA!

By emanating a collection of nine-pointed *vajras*, grind⁸⁷ (*lhogs*) to dust! BADZRA ṆA!

By emanating a collection of iron *vajra* hooks, quickly hook! NR TRI DZAḤ!

By emanating a collection of *vajra* pestles, beat! BADZRA MU KHA LA!

⁸⁴ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs*, vol. 26, pp. 190.3–192.1.

⁸⁵ Due to the context which follows, this sentence is translated from the version in the *gSung 'bum* (vol. 11, p. 370.6) which reads *rdo rje phur bu'i rtse mo nas / zhe sdang* (whereas, the *Byang gter* version reads *rdo rje phu bu zhe sdang*).

⁸⁶ Note I am transcribing phrases and mantras as they appear in the Tibetan text rather than rendering them in Sanskrit.

⁸⁷ The *Byang gter* version reads *rdul du lhogs shig*, whereas the *gSung 'bum* (vol. 11, p. 371.4) reads *rdul du rlogs shig*.

By emanating a collection of *vajra* threatening hand gestures, hit!
BADZRA TATDZA NI!

By emanating a collection of blazing goads (*mchil pa*), lead!
BADZRA Ā NA YA!

By emanating a collection of blazing blood skulls, intoxicate!
PATTA KA RA!

By emanating a collection of blazing butcher's knives, liberate!
BADZRA TSHENDHA NA!

By emanating a collection of blazing *citta*, corrupt! BI RU DDHA!

By emanating a collection of blazing Mount Merus, completely suppress! KRANTA KU RU!

By emanating a collection of blazing battle-axes, split! BADZRA
PA ŚU PA!

By emanating a collection of blazing *daṇḍa*, hit! BADZRA TĀ ṬA
YA!

By emanating a collection of blazing lassos, bind firmly!
BANDHA NA!

Moreover, a collection of emanated messengers, with various weapons intensely blazing, cast to strike, TĀ ṬA YA! Stick in the vital places, SU TSI YA! Quickly kill, MĀ RA YA! Devour the meat, BHU DZA THAḤ! Drink the blood, PI BA THA! Gnaw⁸⁸ the bone, BHAKṢA YA! Destroy the entrails, BHAÑDZA NA! Strike the brain,⁸⁹ KHĀ RAṂ KHĀ HI! Accomplish the enlightened activities, KARYA HO! Thus, strike {note: as the blade disappears}.

Then striking with weapons that have killed a human (*mi bsad pa'i mtshon cha*): HŪṂ! I am the wisdom body of all buddhas who are present throughout the three times. Regarding the weapons of sharp wisdom: The unobstructed weapon of fierce action, by means of the intensely blazing great *vajra* fire, severs from the root—the obstructors and the enemies who are intensely tormented by afflictions and karma, the wrong views, the assemblage of the five poisons, the continuous birth in saṃsāra.

⁸⁸ The Byang gter version reads *myur*, whereas the *gSung 'bum* (vol. 11, p. 372.3) reads *mur*.

⁸⁹ Perhaps this is a variant of *'debs*. The Byang gter version reads *klad pa bsadabs*, whereas the *gSung 'bum* reads *klad pa stobs* (vol. 11, p. 372.3).

Next, a mantra is recited and wheels and effigies are manipulated by the practitioner. Again, the ritual returns to the *yab yum* configuration:⁹⁰

Then, place one dough effigy (*zan ling*) and the corpse effigies (*ling ro*) of the liberated inside a stone mortar {note: which is three-sided} and strike it with a *vajra* pestle. And, strike with the *vajra* of the *yab*, which is the pestle, in the womb (*bha ga*) of the *yum*, which is the mortar. By striking, cut from the root the afflictions of the enemy and visualize as he is born as the Son of the Victor. HŪM DZAḤ! Strike, the pestle which is a blazing *vajra*. This evil-doer who has transgressed the teachings, liberate him with the *vajra* weapon.

Then, the practitioner adorns a *gtor ma* with a small piece of the corpse effigy, sprinkles it with *amṛta* and *rakta*, and tosses it, burning the remaining corpse effigy. The next section of the ritual ensures that these procedures are not killing in a mundane sense, again by citing salient canonical sources. It reads as follows:⁹¹

From the *Tantra of Black Yamāri* (*gShin rje gshed nag po'i rgyud*):⁹² 'E MA HO! The true secret which is the innermost: It is not killing [rather] delivering (*bkrol*) from evil action. As much as there is killing, nevertheless it is not killing. By doing thousands of misdeeds, one is not born in Avīci hell, for example. E MA HO! The nature of a great buddha, by means of killing, causes one to attain enlightenment. Killing a sentient being, killing itself, is done by great compassion itself. E MA HO! The supreme power of compassion will not become accomplished by means of inferior compassion.' Thus, it is said. The *Tantra of Black Yamāri* (*gShin rje dgra nag gyi rgyud*) was translated by Paṇḍi ta Thugs rje chen po and Lo tsā ba Rwa rDo rje grags. Later, Paṇḍi ta Sa manta Śrī and Lo tsā ba Rā chos grags,⁹³ produced a modified translation. From this modification: 'by means of killing like this, that one will be born as the son of a buddha; that one will be liberated from evil deeds,' {note: Moreover, the *Tantra of the*

⁹⁰ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgribs*, vol. 26, p. 192.3–192.4.

⁹¹ See https://library.bdrc.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgribs*, vol. 26, pp. 193.2–194.1.

⁹² For a complete English translation of this tantra, see Galasek-Hul 2025 in the 84000 Reading Room (<https://84000.co/translation/toh467>).

⁹³ The *gSung 'bum* names this translator as Rwa Chos rab (vol. 11, p. 374.2). For more information on the activities of these translators, see Cuevas 2021.

Wheel, Performing the Accomplishment of All Activities of Black Yamāri (gShin rje gshed nag po'i las thams cad grub par byed pa 'khor lo'i rgyud) as translated by Bā ro phyag sdum⁹⁴ and Rwa Rdo rje grags, has solely this transmission} hence, which is thus said.⁹⁵ If in possession of this key point, and if the enlightened activities which are wrathful, fierce activities are performed in earnest, the *mantrin*, from the fire pit, will inevitably become enlightened ('tshang mi rgya ka med pa).

The remaining section of the ritual contains some instructions on suppressing and cursing wheels as well as further information about liberating rituals. For example, the ritual text cites the *Secret Companion of the Longevity Lord Assemblage Tantra* (Tshe bdag zla gsang 'dus pa'i tantra), in regard to three different types of liberation: liberation by realization (*rtog pa*) and the view (*lta ba*); liberation by approach, accomplishment, and rituals; and liberation by inciting and dispatching messengers. The final lines read as follows:⁹⁶

Nowadays in this Land of Snow, some practitioners, having engaged in unwholesome practices such as, [violations] of monastic comportment, quarreling, deception, greed, and poison applications, degrade themselves and others. Some who do good, noble things are ridiculed by all. Therefore, the teachings, especially those which are Vajrayāna, have many methods that do not tame sentient beings via peace—those who have aversion to the Buddhist teachings and masters, those harming yogis, and those who have become entangled (*bcur*) are vanquished by an undertaking (*las ka*) such as this. If taken up out of compassion, at this time one's own happiness and the Three Jewels are elevated. Having severed his misdeeds, the continuation of saṃsāra, happiness is established. Due to that, one accomplishes unmatched benefit to beings. Subsequently, among the fire pit, I, the *mantradhara*, will achieve Buddhahood. Because of that, the two purposes (self/others) will arise implicitly. The teaching, especially of Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka, like this killing method,⁹⁷ may it be realized by all. U YA AKṬHAM!

⁹⁴ The gSung 'bum reads *rdum* (vol. 11, p. 374.3).

⁹⁵ Note Chos kyi grags pa employs these gSar ma authoritative texts within a rNying ma context, seemingly combining the traditions. This legitimization strategy warrants further investigation, especially in contrast to how other figures have navigated these different textual traditions (e.g., the 5th Dalai Lama).

⁹⁶ See https://library.bdr.io/show/bdr:MW2PD17457_5924E1. *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgribs*, vol. 26, p. 195.2–195.5.

⁹⁷ The Byang gter text reads *gsod 'dugs*, meanwhile the gSung 'bum reads *gsod lugs* (vol. 11, p. 376.1).

In short, this dagger ritual provides instructions for liberating a victim by severing his consciousness via ritual weapons and an effigy, then transferring it to a pure land. Essential to this process is the correct understanding and application of compassionate motivation connected to the two aims (*don gnyis*), that is, benefit to oneself, as performing this action facilitates one own's enlightenment, and benefit of others, as it purifies the karma and defilements of another. Due to the violent aspects of the process, for example stabbing the victim's effigy with a dagger and visualizing as it is hooked, bound, restrained and so forth, a significant portion of the text serves as an internal justification of compassionate violence and carefully describes the mechanics of such action. Interestingly, this act of liberating is narrated in terms of birth rather than simply death and destruction. The liberation comes to fruition from the seed of the union between skillful means and wisdom, visualized as the Son produced from the *yab yum* pair. This reiterates the proper orientation of the practitioner and necessary prowess not only as a practical magician but also as an adept in contemplation.

7. *Chos kyi grags pa's Yang bzlog in Contemporary Practice*

One of the most fascinating aspects of the *Yang bzlog* practice is its continuity from a rich historical legacy to contemporary practice. Rituals texts included in both the Byang gter compilation and *Chos kyi grags pa's gSung 'bum* (namely a *ganacakra* ritual and an arrangement of regular practice)⁹⁸ are practiced in 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud centers at close proximity to the lunar new year, particularly at the mGar chen Buddhist Institute in Arizona and its sister monastery in Taiwan. Practitioners worldwide are invited to join the *Yang bzlog* Yamāntaka *sgrub chen* in the comfort of their own home via online practice (of course with the understanding they must receive the empowerment prior to participation). According to mGar chen Rin po che, this practice has both a protective function as well as a destructive function. Due to the risk of misinterpretation or misuse of this practice, he deliberately restricts online practice to the protective aspects only. Observing his discourse on the practice, it is evident that mGar chen

⁹⁸ *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las / kha skong tshogs kyi 'khor lo* (Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, vol. 25, pp. 195–202; *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11, pp. 865–70). *gShin rje tshe bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa* (Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, vol. 27 (pp. 385–406); *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*, vol. 11 (pp. 191–236). This latter regular practice arrangement is a *gter ma* text included in the Byang gter; technically it is only the *gSung 'bum* which contains *Chos kyi grags pa's* annotated version. A significant portion of the liturgy used in the mGar chen practices seems to stem from this text.

Rin po che is keenly aware of potential criticisms regarding the transmission of empowerments of such a potent, and hence traditionally restricted, practice through an online medium. He has taken much care to address this, framing the online experience within Buddhist principles of non-attachment and the illusions of an essential reality. In this context, mGar chen Rin po che explicitly articulates why dharma transmissions retain their authenticity in digital medium, suggesting it may enhance effectiveness by diminishing the physical attachment to the guru and defy the seemingly concrete world of conceptual reality by transversing temporospatial boundaries. The complete in-person practice (not limited to the protection portion) held at their center in Arizona is narrated as significantly more austere. Practitioners must enter a lottery drawing in order to secure a seat. During the retreat, participants observe prohibitions against bathing, “seeing the sky,” and speaking (except when reciting mantras and liturgical texts). The ‘Bri gung bKa’ brgyud Rin chen dpal ri monastery (founded by H.E. Grub dbang bSod nams ‘byor ‘phel Rin po che, b. 1939) also hosts a *Yang bzlog* retreat at the Great Lotus Stūpa in Lumbini, Nepal. And recently, beyond the practices near the new year (September 2025), Lama Thub bstan nyi ma (*alias*, Lama dGa’ dpe, b. 1965) held a truncated form of the practice from ‘Bri gung’s Seattle location, broadcasted online. Notably, Lama Thub bstan nyi ma has produced a compilation (translated into English) on the practice of Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka.⁹⁹ Many of the sections of this text, for example the historical background, overlap with the *Yang bzlog* histories presented here. Both Lama Thub bstan nyi ma, and mGar chen Rin po che who provides the forward to the book, emphasize the suitability of this practice for the degenerative age since peaceful deities are unable to tame the dense afflictions that plague sentient beings during this time period. Furthermore, Lama Thub bstan nyi ma claims that Mañjuśrī-Yamāntaka practice in particular contains the power necessary “to clear away the dark fog of ignorance,” clarifying that, “the wisdom mind of such a deity is a union of great wisdom and compassion.”

Beyond the *Yang bzlog* practice itself, Chos kyi grags pa specifically remains an important figure in the contemporary traditions. For example, *rDo rje slob dpon* Dr. Hun Lye (b. 1970), spiritual director of Urban Dharma (a ‘Bri gung center in Asheville, North Carolina), named his broader dharma initiative (Drikung Dharmakirti International) after Chos kyi grags pa (Skt. Dharmakīrti). This organization’s website, characterizes Chos kyi grags pa as a

⁹⁹ The full title of this text is *The Protection and Repelling Drubchen of Manjushri Yamantaka: Commentary and Compilation by Venerable Lama Gape* (translated by Ina Bieler).

“renaissance man” and “probably the most important master in the Drikung Kagyu lineage after Kyobpa Jigten Sumgön.”¹⁰⁰ Evidently, this tradition maintains its relevance for present-day practitioners who, while perhaps not deploying ritual magic in the context of physical warfare, engage these practices to repel a multitude of contemporary obstacles.

Conclusion

The examination of the *Yang bzlog* in both the Byang gter and 'Bri gung tradition raises several important questions. First, do certain ritual practices possess inherent qualities that facilitate their historical significance and continued relevance in contemporary ritual repertoires? Additionally, how do these enduring traditions narrate their legitimacy and historical development to further consolidate their authority for future generations of practitioners who now can access teachings quickly and easily through digital media? Furthermore, how does the textual history of this ritual system contextualize broader sociopolitical developments during its composition, compilation, and transmission? Clearly the *Yang bzlog* played a substantial role in the 17th-century events that fundamentally altered modern conceptions of “Tibet” as a political and cultural entity.

On a final concluding note, my preliminary analysis suggests two points: firstly, the *Yang bzlog* practice itself affords a tiered system that enables ritual specialists to exact power and establish networks through the controlled dissemination of coveted secret instruction (even when the content's secrecy may be less significant than the discourse of secrecy itself). Secondly, and relatedly, although the *Yang bzlog* is particularly felicitous to this result, the charismatic authority and framing of power and secrecy remain fundamental to the success and sustained relevance of these practices (regardless of whether they are actively performed or simply revered as part of a distinguished cycle). The enduring significance of the *Yang bzlog* in both the Byang gter and 'Bri gung bKa' brgyud traditions may stem from a convergence of factors—the historical happenstance of certain influential ritual masters focusing on these particular rites, combined with the intrinsic structure of the *Yang bzlog* itself as a tiered system of power and wrathful efficacy.

¹⁰⁰ <https://drikungdharma.kirti.com/about-2/who-we-are/>.

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- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las / kha skong tshogs kyi 'khor lo, vol. 25, pp. 195–202.
- Zla gsang gzhi bsnyen las don grub bsnyen pa'i sdebs dang ma grub na ar la gtad pa dang ru khugs kyi las shintu gsang ba, vol. 25, pp. 223–9.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las gshin rje'i gshed kyi rgyud rnams nas bshad pa'i dam tshig gi rim pa rnams, vol. 25, pp. 231–41.
- Phyang rgya zil gnon zhi bar bsgrub pa'i thabs, vol. 25, pp. 243–55.
- 'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed phyang rgya zil gnon gyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzogs rim rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor zhes bya ba ches zab cing gsang ba snying khrag lta bu, vol. 25, pp. 299–375.
- gShin rje yang zlog me'i spu gri, vol. 25, pp. 351–61.
- Zla gsang las bsad pa mthar thug gdug pa me'i las sbyor, vol. 25, pp. 385–406.
- gDug pa me'i las sbyor gyi kha bsgyur las phran rnams, vol. 25, pp. 417–25.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lag len dngos gzhi, vol. 26, pp. 41–63.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i nye bar mkho ba'i bzlog byang asti, vol. 26, pp. 149–58.
- Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len lhan thab [=thabs] med du mi rung ba, vol. 26, pp. 173–80.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba, vol. 26, pp. 181–95.
- Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus rgyas pa, vol. 26, pp. 215–44.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri dang zla gsang gi rgyud bka' gter rnams thun mong gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa, vol. 26, pp. 277–80.
- gShin rje tshe bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa, vol. 27, pp. 385–406.
- Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i bsnyen sgrub kyi zhal gdams gud du sbas pa, vol. 27, pp. 557–65.

— Unknown

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- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i dbang chog bdud dpung zil gnon gyi nyer mkho lhan thabs kyi rim pa*, vol. 11, pp. 129–158.
- *Phyag rgya zil gnon zhi bar sgrub pa'i thabs*, vol. 11, pp. 159–74.
- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus las / gshin rje'i gshed kyi rgyud rnam nas bshad pa'i dam tshig gi rim pa rnam*, vol. 11, pp. 175–86.
- *gShin rje'i gshed yang zlog gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdus pa*, vol. 11, pp. 187–90.
- *Yang zlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa*, vol. 11, pp. 191–236.
- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i kha skong tshogs kyi 'khor lo*, vol. 11, pp. 253–67.
- *Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las / phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba*, vol. 11, pp. 359–76.
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- Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i bsnyen sgrub kyi zhal gdams gud du sbas pa, vol. 11, pp. 831–52.
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Appendix

*Table 1 — Overlapping of Chos kyi grags pa's Yang bzlog texts
between the Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs,
Chos kyi grags pa's gSung 'bum, and the
'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i chos skor.*

<u>Byang gter Compilation</u>	<u>gSung 'bum</u>	<u>Yang bzlog chos skor</u>
Key: + indicates overlap with Arguillère's colophon examination ¹⁰¹		
Volume 21		
22) 'Jam dpal gshin rje gshed phyag rgya zil gnon gyi las bzhi'i sbyin sreg gi lag len dang ngag 'don dngos grub kyi 'dod 'jo (pp. 335–91)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 467–528)	Vol. 1 (pp. 455–519)
Volume 25		
5) rDzogs rim rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor gyi nyams len rgyun khyer du bsdus pa / dpe 'di nyams khrid gzhung ma thob pa la bstan na dam las nyams pa (pp. 63–77)		Vol. 4 (pp. 257–79) *authorship confirmed in colophon (but edited)
6) Zla gsang las sku gzugs dbang po skyon sbyang rab tu gnas pa'i cho ga (pp. 79–147)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 377–456)	Vol. 4 (pp. 121–221)
8) Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i dbang chog bdud dpung zil gnon gyi nyer mkho lhan thabs kyi rim pa (pp. 155–185)	Vol. 11 (129–58)	Vol. 3 (pp. 299–343)
9) Phyi dbang (=nang) gi chas dbang zab mo (pp. 187–94)		Vol. 3 (pp. 287–98) *authorship not listed in colophon
10) Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las / kha skong tshogs kyi 'khor lo (pp. 195–202)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 253–67)	
14) Zla gsang gzhi bsnyen las don grub bsnyen pa'i sdebs dang ma grub na ar la gtad pa dang ru khugs kyi las shintu gsang ba (pp. 223–9)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 865–70)	Vol. 2 (pp. 217–24)
15) Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las gshin rje'i gshed kyi rgyud rnams nas bshad pa'i dam tshig gi rim pa rnams (pp. 231–41)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 175–86)	

¹⁰¹ As indicated above, Arguillère has catalogued the 'Jam dpal tshe bdag texts found within the Byang gter compilation, noting authorship if expressed in the colophon.

16) <i>Phyag rgya zil gnon zhi bar bsgrub pa'i thabs</i> (pp. 243–55)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 159–74)	Vol. 2 (pp. 21–39)
22) <i>'Jam dpal gshin rje'i gshed phyag rgya zil gnon gyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzogs rim rdo rje bzhi'i rnal 'byor zhes bya ba ches zab cing gsang ba snying khrag lta bu</i> (pp. 299–375)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 661–758)	Vol. 2 (pp. 473–603)
25) <i>Zla gsang las bsad pa mthar thug gdug pa me'i las sbyor</i> (pp. 385–406)		Vol. 4 (pp. 321–57) *authorship not listed in colophon
28) <i>gDug pa me'i las sbyor gyi kha bsgyur las phran rnams</i> (pp. 417–25)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 601–12)	Vol. 4 (pp. 359–72)
Volume 26		
6) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i lag len dngos gzhi</i> (pp. 41–63) *lineage list ends with sPrul sku Gar gyi dbang phyug rtsal		Vol. 4 (pp. 379–401) *lineage list ends with Chos kyi grags pa
13) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i nye bar mkho ba'i bzlog byang asti</i> (pp. 149–58)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 345–58)	Vol. 1 (pp. 281–95)
15) <i>Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len lhan thab [=thabs] med du mi rung ba</i> (pp. 173–80)		Vol. 1 (pp. 57–71) *authorship not listed in colophon
16) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri las phur gdab kyi man ngag gud du bkol ba</i> (pp. 181–95)	Vol. 11 (pp. 359–76)	
20) <i>Yang zlog me'i spu gri'i lo rgyus rgyas pa</i> (pp. 215–44)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 1–35)	
24) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri dang zla gsang gi rgyud bka' gter rnams thun mong gi brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs bsdu pa</i> (pp. 277–80)+	Vol. 11 (pp. 187–90) *varies slightly (follows gter)	Vol. 1 (pp. 33–42) *varies slightly (follows gter)
Volume 27		
35) <i>gShin rje tshe bdag yang bzlog gi ngag 'don rgyun gyi nyams len bkol zhing bsgrigs pa</i> (pp. 385–406) *gTer ma with no colophon (thus not specifically attributed to Chos kyi grags pa)	Vol. 11 (191–236) *this is an annotated version	Vol. 3 (pp. 59–106) *this is an annotated version
49) <i>Yang bzlog me'i spu gri'i bsnyen sgrub kyi zhal gdams gud du sbas pa</i> (pp. 557–65) *gTer ma of rGya Zhang khrom	Vol. 11 (pp. 831–52) *varies slightly and contains commentary	Vol. 2 (pp. 163–92) *varies slightly and contains commentary

Table 2 — Yang bzlog lineage lists from the *Rin chen gter mdzod* (5th Dalai Lama), *Byang gter* compilation, and *Chos kyi grags pa gSung 'bum*

	<u>5th Dalai Lama</u> <u>brgyud 'debs</u>	<u>Byang gter</u> <u>gsol 'debs</u>	<u>gSung 'bum</u> <u>gsol 'debs</u>
	Key: * indicates the point of the <i>bka' ma</i> / <i>gter ma</i> divide + indicates unclear name divisions		
1.	gShin rje gshed	gShin rje'i gshed	'Jam dpal dbyangs bcom ldan gshin rje
2.	rDo rje rnon po	rDo rje rnon po and Lag na rdo rje 'dzin	gSang bdag rdo rje 'dzin
3.	dGa' rab rdo rje	dGa' rab rdo rje	dGa' rab rdo rje
4.	'Jam dpal bshes gnyen	'Jam dpal bshes gnyen	'Jam dpal bshes gnyen
5.	Santim garbha	Santim garbha	Santim garbha
6.	Ye shes snying po	Ye shes snying po	Ye shes snying po
7.	Nam mkha' snying po	Kha garbha	Nam mkha'i snying po
8.	Khrag 'thung nag	Khrag 'thung nag po	Khrag 'thung nag po
9.	gTsug lag dpal dge	gTsug lag dpal dge	gTsug lag dpal dge
10.	Rig 'dzin Padma 'byung	Slob dpon Padma 'byung	Slob dpon Padma 'byung
11.	Ba su dha ra	Bāsu dhara	Ba su dhara
12.	gNubs chen Sangs rgyas*	Sangs rgyas ye shes*	Sangs rgyas ye shes*
13.	Yon tan rgya mtsho (cont. <i>bka'</i>)		
14.	Ye shes rgya mtsho	(gter)	(gter)
15.	rDo ston lCags spe ba		
16.	Me ston Dran chung		

17.	Dran <i>ston</i> mTha' bral <i>rje</i>		
18.	dKon mchog rin chen		
19.	bKra shis rgyal mtshan dpal		
20.	mThar phyin lha sgom ¹⁰²		
21.	Gangs pa Śāk (=Śākya) 'bum		
22.	Gra phyi g.yung <i>ston pa</i>		
23.	rGyal ba rdo rje		
24.	Rig 'dzin Dar ma 'bum		
25.	rNal 'byor dbang phyug		
26.	<i>Ston pa</i> Sangs rgyas mgon		
27.	<i>Bla chen</i> Khams <i>ston</i> *	<i>gTer ston</i> Zhang khrom (<i>gter</i>)	<i>gTer ston</i> Zhang khrom (<i>gter</i>)
28.	<i>lHa rje</i> gNubs chung	<i>lHa rje</i> gNubs chung	<i>lHa rje</i> gNubs chung
29.	mTshur <i>ston</i>	mTshur <i>ston</i> Rin rdor	mTshur <i>ston</i> Rin rdor
30.	sKu Zhang	sKu zhang dpal	sKu zhang dpal
31.	Tshul khrims rin chen	Tshul khrims rin chen	Tshul khrims rin chen
32.	Byang mgon Nam mkha' mtshan+	Byang chub mgon po+	Byang chub mgon po+
		Nam mkha'+	Nam mkha'i mtshan can+
33.	Tshul khrims rgya mtsho	Tshul khrims mtshan can	Tshul khrims mtshan can
34.	rGya <i>ston</i> Nam mkha' dpal ¹⁰³	Rig 'dzin gSang ba	Rig 'dzin gSang ba

¹⁰² Aguillère 2024b notes that this name is most likely a duplicate. Specifically, see p. 378, note 170.

¹⁰³ At this juncture the *bka' ma* and *gter ma* lineages are said to be unified (*tshul khrims rgya mtsho rnam la / bka' gter zung 'jug rgya ston nam mkha' dpal*). Rin chen gter mdzod, *Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 26, p. 435; *Byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs, Yang zlog nag po me'i spu gri'i las byang rdo rje thog mda'*, vol. 25, p. 4.

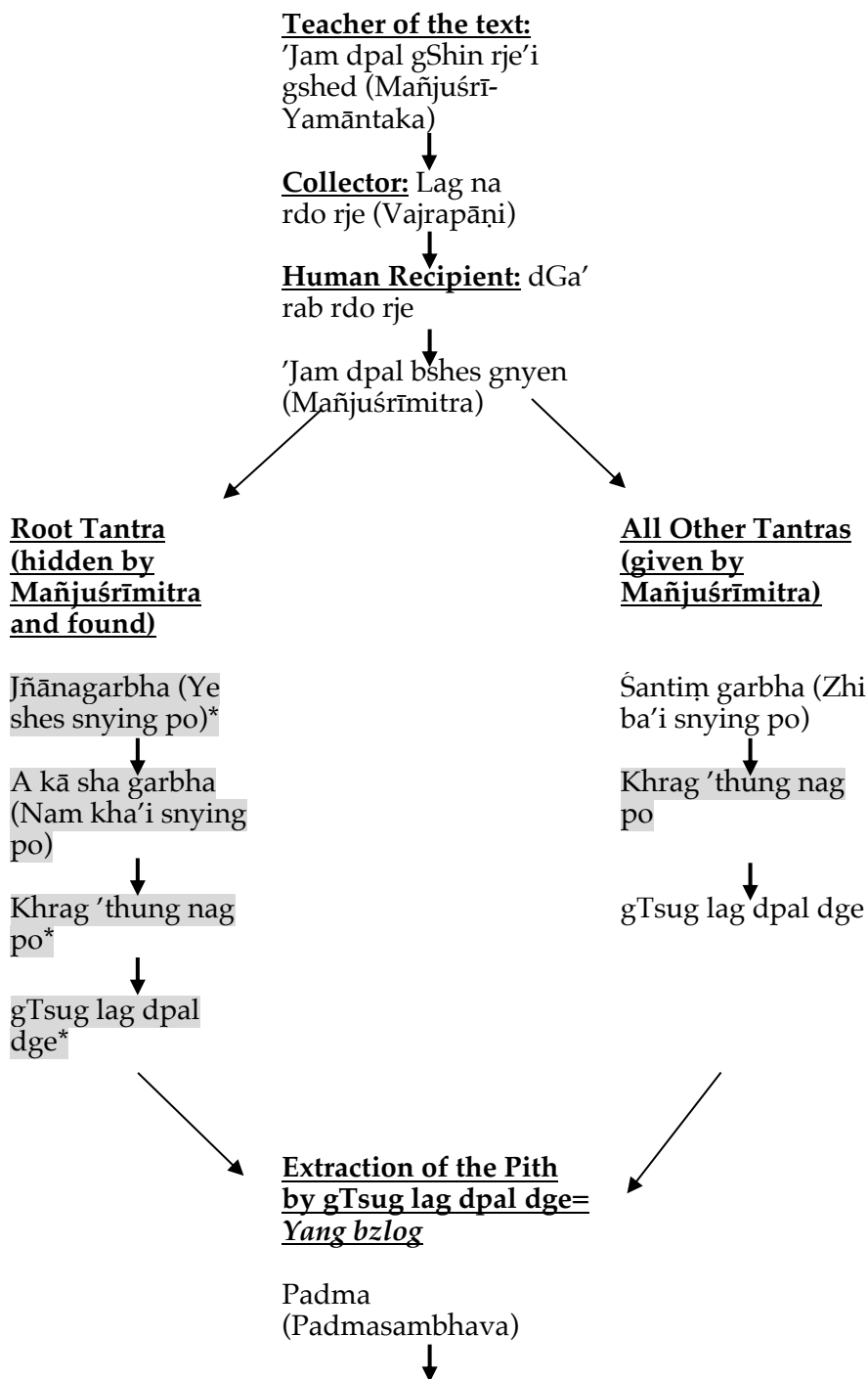
35.	gNam lcags me 'bar (rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs)	rJe btsun ratna (rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs)	rJe btsun ratna (rGyal dbang Rin chen phun tshogs)
36.	<i>Chos rgyal</i> Phun tshogs <i>rje</i>	mChog grub rgyal po manga'i mtshan can ⁺	mChog grub rgyal po ⁺
37.	bTsan yag <i>sprul</i> <i>sku</i> bKra shis phun tshogs (Nā ro bKra shis phun tshogs?)		Manga'i mtshan can ⁺
38.	Drag po'i mtshan can ¹⁰⁴		
39.	<i>lHa sras</i> dBur smyon (Chos kyi grags pa); note this lineage continues in the text		

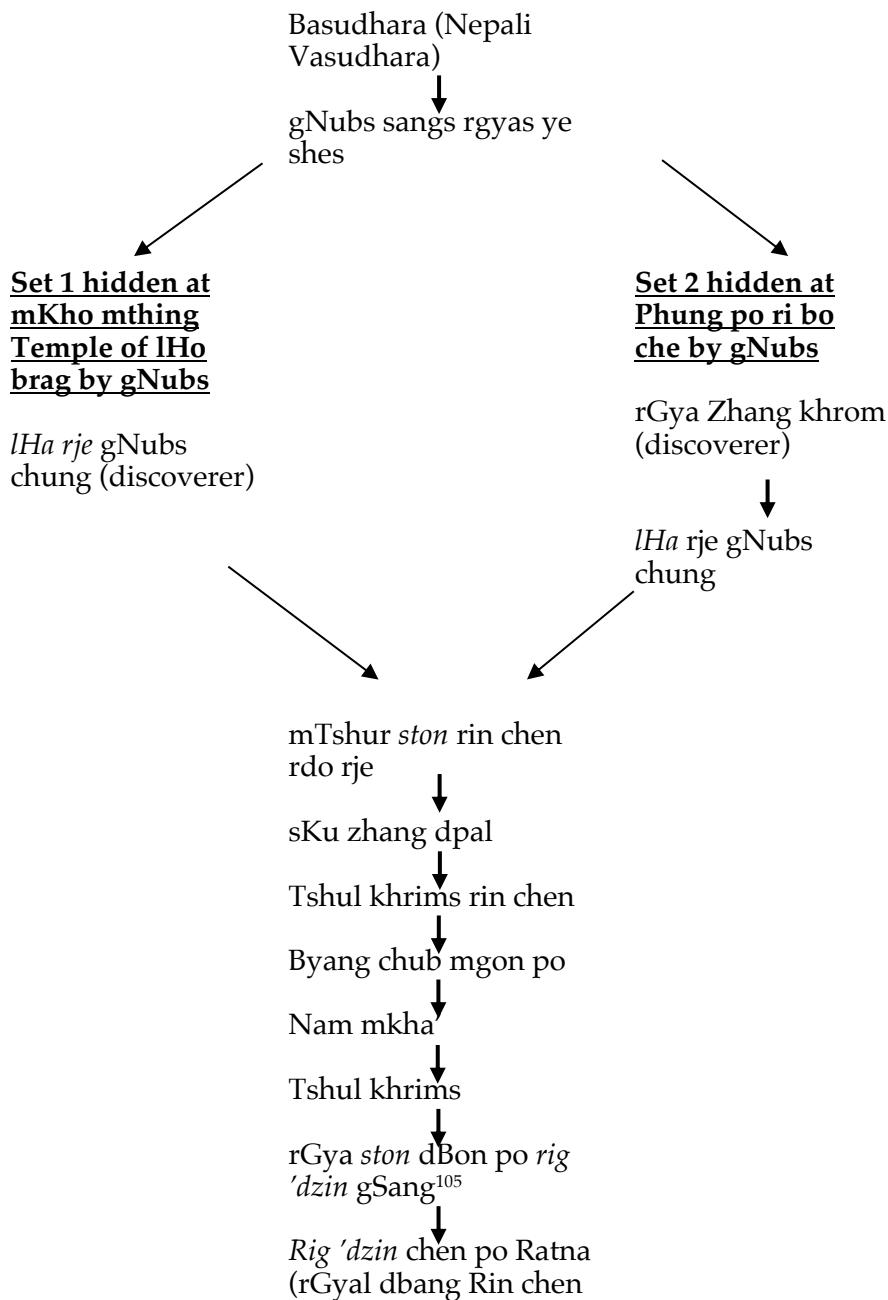
Table 3 — Visual Representation of the Yang bzlog history
extracted from the truncated histories (in Tibetan and English)
and the extended history

Key:

-* indicates English
versions not found in
the Tibetan truncated
history
-(grey) indicates
origination from the
transmission history of
the extended version

¹⁰⁴ Since this name is missing from other lineages it may be a duplicate or an epithetical phrase. However, in his *gSan yig*, the 5th makes reference to this moniker in regard to transmission lineages, seemingly as a distinct individual—e.g., *rlung 'khor mkho mthing ma ka'i rtags can gyi brgyud pa ni / spo bo'i sngags 'chang nas chos kyi grags pa la brgyud de rdzogs rim rnams ni yi dam gyi lhas rje dbur smyon la dngos su gnang ba stsal bas 'jam dpal phyag rgya zil gnon* (*gSung 'bum / Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, vol. 3, p. 43).





¹⁰⁵ In the Byang gter version of this history, his name reads: rGya ston dBon po rig 'dzin gSang ba nam mkha' dpal.

phun tshogs, Chos kyi
grags pa's grandfather)



rJe btsun Dharma (Chos
rgyal Rin chen phun
tshogs, Chos kyi grags
pa's father)



mTshungs med manga
(Nā ro bKra shis phun
tshogs, Chos kyi grags
pa's brother)



Chos kyi grags pa
(author of the history)



The Multiple Identities of gNyan chen Thang lha in Byang gter

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n my previous study on gNyan chen Thang lha,¹ through an analysis of sixteen ritual texts dedicated to this deity in the volume 15 of CNT 2015 (see Appendix), I delineated three core Buddhist identities constructed through his tripartite vows in front of Padmasambhava:

- 1) With his first vow taken in Byang lam bar ba, Thang lha offered his life essence (*srog snying*) to the Master Padmasambhava. He then became a protector (*srung ma, bstan bsrung*) of Buddhism and got a secret name, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal².
- 2) With the second vow taken on Mount Has po ri of bSam yas monastery, Thang lha was designated by Padmasambhava as the body god (*sku lha*) and life force god (*srog gi lha*) of the Dharma King Khri srong lde btsan.³
- 3) With the last vow taken at the top of Mount bKra bzang, Thang lha received a *sādhana* cycle (*sgrub skor*) from Padmasambhava and became the treasure guardian (*gter bdag, gter bsrung*) of the Copper Red Treasury (*Zangs mdzod dmar po*) in Zang zang lha drag, the holy place where Rig 'dzin rgod ldem discovered his five treasures (*mdzod lnga*). As the Copper Red Treasury is one of the five treasures, this vow signifies that Thang lha officially became with it the protector of Byang gter itself.⁴

¹ Wang 2024. And for the current article, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Stéphane Arguillère and Dr. Cécile Ducher for their invaluable guidance and advice throughout the writing of this article.

² CNT 2015 vol. 15, no.5, p. 370, l.1-p. 372, l.2 ; no.7, p. 534, l.3-p. 535: l.1.

³ CNT 2015 vol. 15, no.1, p. 322: l.1-p. 324, l.3; no.3, p. 336: l.2-p. 338, l.1; no.14, p. 653, l.3-p. 655, l.2; no.7, p. 535, l.1-p. 537, l.5.

⁴ CNT 2015 vol. 15, no. 2, p. 331, l.4-p. 332, l.3; no. 4, p. 536, l.5; no. 10, p. 562, l.4-p. 563, l.2; no. 11, p. 592, l.2-l.3; no. 12, p. 635, l.3-l.4.

Having thus encountered Padmasambhava three times, Thang lha gradually acquired his triple identity as a Buddhist protector, the body god and life force god of the Dharma King, and the treasure guardian of Byang gter. In my 2024 article, I argued that this evolving triple identity can be understood as a symbol of the gradual Buddhization of a mountain god under the Buddhist developing process of Tibet.

Beyond this tripartite framework, the Byang gter texts further elaborate on other auxiliary identities that collectively delineate Thang lha's multidimensional role in Byang gter cycles:

- 1) First of all, Thang lha is the antidote (*gnyen po*) and executioner (*gshed ma*) of vow-breakers and various demons.
- 2) He is the ancestral male god (*pho lha*) of marvelous men and the protector of wealth.
- 3) Akin to the role of *pho lha*, he is also portrayed as the guardian of property, the wealth god.
- 4) Thang lha is the territorial god (*yul lha*) to the four regions of Tibet
- 5) Thang lha is given a transcendent nature, he is renowned for having "one nature and six names", meaning that he is the incarnation of Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha and has six titles.
- 6) As for the body images, Thang lha possesses various manifestations in Byang gter texts, including animal manifestations.
- 7) Finally, the Byang gter texts also introduce Thang lha's family and retinue.

This multilayered identity system not only codifies Thang lha's transition from mountain god to fully-integrated Buddhist entity, but also epitomizes the Nyingma strategies for incorporating autochthonous deities into Vajrayāna frameworks after the 14th century.

In addition, the ritual texts analyzed here originate from the *Byang gter* tradition, systematized by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337–1408?) in the 14th century. While Rig 'dzin rgod ldem is credited with revealing the core *gter ma* cycles, many subsidiary texts in Volume 15 were composed by later lineage holders. Chief among these authors is Sngags 'chang yol mo ba (the first Yol mo *sprul sku*, b. 15th century), a key systematizer of the Thang lha cult. Sngags 'chang Yol mo ba explicitly authored the "offering manual for physical supports" (*phyi rten 'bul thabs*, no. 13) and the eulogy *lHa chen 'bar ba rtsal gyi mnga' gsol* (no. 6). In the colophon of no. 13, he recounts composing it during a journey to Chu glang 'on phu stag tshang, where a visionary encounter with a white yak—interpreted as a direct emanation of

Thang lha—confirmed the ritual's efficacy and sanctified the text's authority. Other texts bear attributions to key figures: no. 12 was composed by the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682). However, most texts lack explicit authorship, reflecting the Byang gter traditon's emphasis on revelatory continuity over individual credit. Notably, Yol mo ba's works bridge Rig 'dzin rgod ldem's revealed liturgies and later commentaries, establishing the foundational ritual structure for Thang lha practices. The corpus spans over three centuries: from early *terma* revelations by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (14th c.), through ritual formalization by figures like the First Yol mo ba (15th c.), to later institutional systematizations such as that by the Fifth Dalai Lama (17th c.). This layered authorship illustrates the Byang gter's evolution from revealed liturgy to elaborated ritual exegesis, with Yol mo ba playing a pivotal role in transforming Thang lha's identities into a cohesive *sādhana* system, situating the deity's multifaceted roles within the dynamic historical framework of textual production and lineage adaptation.

The antidote and executioner of vow-breakers and various demons

Thang lha can treat vow-breakers in the most wrathful way. In Byang gter, he is described as the antidote (*gnyen po*) of samaya-damaging ones (no.12, 613:l.3); the life force taker (*srog bdud*) of all vow-polluters; the executioner (*gshed ma*) of all vow-breakers (no.12, 613:l.3); and the one suppressing pollutions (*grib*), *rgyal po* and '*gong po* demons, and vow-violators (no.12, 613:l.4). These similar identities all appear in the context of Thang lha's second meeting with Padmasambhava when he made the second vow. In that context, he appears as a wrathful white yak that kills vow-breakers and various hostile demons (no.1, 323: l.3-324: l.1):

Thang lha said, and continued to say: "O, great master Padmasambhava, the reason why this morning I came in a body of anger and rage, is that 1) I shall crush down the pollution of the life-cutting demons who have broken vows, 2) I am the killer of demons who have broken vows, and 3) I will crush down pollution and the inferior *gnyan* from lower class, and since 4) I am the antidote for the demons causing madness and the *rgyal 'gong* demons, as soon as I saw all of them [on my way here], anger spontaneously arose in me and I became angry and enraged! I acquire the luminosity of the butter-lamp's light shine [to destroy the demons] all at once!" He said this.⁵

⁵ Translated from no.1, p. 323, l.3-p. 324, l.1. (323: l.3): *zhes zhus so/ yang zhus pa/ kyee slob dpon chen po lags/ da nang gung gi snga dro bdag khro zhing gtum pa'i gzugs su byas*

In text no. 5, there is an invocation that praises Thang lha's identities as the punisher of vow-breakers, the subjugator of demons that cause madness, and the executioner of avenging enemies:

You are the god for all vow-holders, the killer for all vow-breakers, the subduer for all vow-polluters, the glory of all yogis, and the friend of supreme practitioners! To offer the fortune of your virtuous deeds, you should subdue the demons who cause madness and cut off the life of hate-filled enemies!⁶

As for Thang lha's identity as the watcher and executioner of all Buddhist vow takers, Nebesky-Wojkowitz offered a translated paragraph in *Oracles and Demons in Tibet*, but didn't point out the provenance of this paragraph:

According to the various religious tasks which gNyan chen thang lha is supposed to carry out he is addressed as the "*lha* of all the *dam can*" (also "*lha* of all the pious"), "executioner of all spirits who refuse to become *dharmapālāh*"; this passage might, however, also mean: "executioner of all monks who became unfaithful to their religious vows", "*bdud* of all oath breakers", "the one who let fall the stroke of fate destined by the karma", and "*yul lha* of dBus gtsang ru bzhi" (the territorial god of the four regions of Tibet).⁷

Although the source of this paragraph is not given, we can find similar information in the Byang gter text no.1 (no. 1, 323: l. 3–324: l. 1), and in no. 5 quoted above.

Thang lha's identity as the god of vow-keepers and executioner of vow-breakers is reminiscent of the ancient Āryan deity Varuna, who was described as the supreme sky god, the mystical ruler, and the universal king. Varuna was responsible for supervising men to fulfill their oaths by binding them with ropes in his hand. Varuna was known as the deity who "binds."⁸

nas 'ong ba ni/ (l.4) bdag dam tshig nyams pa'i srog bdud/ dam tshig nyams pa'i gshed mal/ grib gnon ma rabs kyi gnyan gnon/ smyo 'dre rgyal 'gong gi gnyen po lags pas/ de rnams mthong ba dang rang bzhin gyis (324: l.1) bdag la zhe sdang skyes te gtum zhing khro bo lags so/ lan gcig mar me'i mdangs gsal zhus/ zhes zhus so.

⁶ Translated from no.5, p. 372, l.6–p. 373, l.1. (372: l.6): *dam can kun gyi lha/ dam med kun gyi gshed/ mna' zan kun gyi bdud/ rnal 'byor (373: l. 1) kun gyi dpal/ sgrub mchog bdag gi grogs/ phrin las skal phog pa/ smyo ba'i 'dre 'dul zhing/ sdang pa'i dgra srog gcod.*

⁷ Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1996, p. 207

⁸ Eliade 1996, p. 69.

The ancestral male god and the protector of land and people

Like text no. 12, in which Thang lha is the protector (*srung ma*) of the noble people with merits (no. 12, 613: l. 3), in text no. 1, when Thang lha explains why he is willing to cover and protect the Dharma King Khri Srong lde btsan, he gives four reasons, two of which are that he is the ancestral male god (*pho lha*) and friend (*grogs pa*) of men who have good karma and merits:

Because I am the *pho lha* for males who are not shameless and since the secret law of the king is great, we are connected through good karma and deeds. Because I am a friend to virtuous rulers, we are connected through our great united merits!⁹

Thang lha's identity as male god emphasizes his character as the deity of excellent males, as the word *pho* (male) suggests. *Pho lha* is an ancient term that refers to the ancestral deity or clan god in the patrilineal context. In Thang lha's case, as a *pho lha*, he protects excellent males. However, in broader contexts, *pho lha* as an ancestral god protects all community members who are his descendants.

In most cases, *pho lha* is identified as an ancestral deity or clan leader who has led clan members to settle in a specific area. The *pho lha* then often transformed into a *yul lha* (territorial god) dwelling on the mountain of the clan's land, with *pho lha*, *yul lha*, and mountain god often being considered synonymous. However, with the introduction of Buddhism, the *pho lha* acquired new identities such as *chos skyong* and *bstan srung*, becoming a protector of religion. For example, the divinity Pho lha lHa btsan sgang dmar transformed from *pho lha* to *yul lha* and then to *chos skyong*, as recounted by Hildegard Diemberger.¹⁰ Similarly, Guntram Hazod records the example of the *pho lha* of

⁹ Translated from no. 1, p. 323, l. 2-1.3. (323: l.2): *bdag skye bo ngo tsha can gyi pho lha lags pas/ rgyal po gsang khrims che bas las dang spyod pas 'brel lo/ bdag sde pa bsod nams can gyi grogs la dga' (l. 3) bas/ che mnyam bsod nams kyis 'brel ba lags so/ zhes zhus so.*

¹⁰ Diemberger 1998, pp. 44-55, tells the story of a mountain god called lHa btsan Sgang dmar, who is appearing as a horseman in red residing on a small peak close to Ding ri Glang skor in the area traditionally called La stod lho, and identified as a protecting territorial deity as well as an ancestral god. He is a protector for multiple beings: local communities, ancient lords of La stod lho, one of the kings of Gung thang born in Ding ri, the monastery of Shel dkar and the traditional military camp of Ding ri. The origin of lHa btsan Sgang dmar is as the ancestral deity of a clan and the protector of the lords of La stod, but with Buddhism's introduction in Tibet, he gradually became the protector of doctrine (*chos skyong*, *dharmapāla*) and the protector of monastery of Shel dkar. He is worshiped as *pho lha*, *yul lha* and *chos skyong*, but the offerings of blood-sacrifices that he received were the basis of a conflict between his identity as the *pho lha* / *yul lha* and his Buddhist identity as a *chos skyong*.

Phoksumdo, where the ancestral clan leader's *pho lha* transformed into the *yul lha* of the locals.¹¹ The gender of a *pho lha* is not always male. Charles Ramble notes that in the village of Kag, in Mustang (Nepal), the *pho lha* is regarded as a female divinity on a high mountain, with a male spouse standing beside the water. This example contrasts with the better-known gendered roles of "male mountains" and "female bodies of water."¹²

In text no. 4, Thang lha's protection extends to various types of people and objects. Firstly, he is the "secret life force god" (*srog gi lha*) of dharma kings and also serves as their dharma protector (*chos skyong*). Secondly, he is the protector of the lives and possessions of ritual practitioners, as well as the people around them and their descendants. Thirdly, he is the protector of noble ranks, virtuous lineages and families, and the faithful. Fourthly, he is the protector of the gTsang region of Tibet. Lastly, Thang lha is the protector of ritual practitioners, kings with great power, and all lords:

Since there is the awesome commitment to worship the god as the secret life force god and as the dharma protector, the texts and letters should only be transmitted to others, even not in the direction of breathing, and should not be shown to many. Secrecy is essential. If you act accordingly, your life, possessions and retinue all will increase, and all your successors will receive covering and protection by this god. Finally, this god will cause you to attain the fruit of the supreme status of an unsurpassable *vidyādhara*. Since this god is the god of noble ranks, of lineages of good character, of great attributes, and of faithfulness, and especially since he is the god of the gTsang region, and particularly a god with great compassion, so you should worship him with the good grains of the torma consisting of the three white and three sweet, and you should avoid polluting and breaking of samayas. In the location where you worship him, you should not

¹¹ Hazod 1996, pp. 92-111, describes that in Phoksumdo (Northwestern Nepal), the local *yul lha gsol* ritual of Mtsho yul reveals the worship and memorialisation of their first clan leader (*pho lha*) who led the ancestors of the local community from Tibet to Phoksumdo; the *pho lha* of the first clan was then transformed into a *yul lha* in the later folk tales and his power expanded as he became the *yul lha* of all clans.

¹² Ramble 1996, p 150: "Numerous authors have drawn attention to the association that is found in Tibet (as indeed in a number of other cultures) between male mountains and female bodies of water—usually lakes, but also rivers. Tibetan geographical literature itself makes frequent reference to such combinations. Te's triad conforms agreeably to this model. The three divinities of Kag do not. First, Pho lha is regarded (at least, by the people whom I questioned on the matter) as being a female divinity; Jo bo Chos rgyal, in spite of the fact that he stands near the water, is male. The Pho lha sde lnga is their offspring".

propitiate other worldly gods of the dark side as your *pho lha*. Particularly, in the time of degeneration, if people worship the protector of ritual practitioners, of the king with great power, and of all lords, then the practitioners will all be auspicious and endowed with great power.¹³

In no. 4, the text warns ritual performers that “In the location where you worship him, you should not propitiate other worldly gods of the dark side as your *pho lha*.” In text no. 1, Padmasambhava asks Thang lha why he covers and befriends the Dharma King Khri Srong lde btsan, and Thang lha provides four reasons, one of which is “Because I am the *pho lha* of the males who are not shameless, and since the secret law of the king is great, so we are connected through good karma and deeds” (no. 1, 323: l. 2). Therefore, we can see that Thang lha himself is a sacred *pho lha* who protects marvelous men.

Hence, out of respect for Thang lha, the performers of the ritual should not worship the worldly gods from the dark side as their *pho lha*, as it would contaminate Thang lha. This requirement in the ritual regarding the *pho lha* reflects the Tibetan concept of purity.

Wealth God, Guardian of Property

Thang lha is also portrayed as the guardian of property, a wealth god (*nor lha*). This can be seen in text no. 12. In its invocation, the prayer to Thang lha is:

I am the one who fulfill my part of the [sacred] contract that binds us: please perform the deeds that I entrust to you! Through these offerings and rituals of expiation, please protect and defend me and other patrons of sacred places! I ask you to accomplish the Buddha activity you promised, and protect those who practice and who teach. *Bswo, bswo! lHa rgyal lo!* By virtue of offering yak and sheep, please avoid our losing of property (*nor la god kha med pa*), and act as the owner of horses on the upper land, as the owner of sheep on the lower land, and as the owner of yaks and oxen!

¹³ Translated from no. 4, p. 366, l. 3-l. 6. (366: l. 3): *shin tu gab sbas gsang te/ gsang srog gi lha dang chos skyong du brten pa dam tshig lag(s) pas/ rang las gzhan du dpe dang yi ger lung (rlung) phyogs tsam du'ang mi bstan/ sba ba gnad/ de yis tshe dang [l. 4] longs spyod 'khor g.yog rnams rgyas pa dang/ tshe rabs kun du 'go zhing skyobs la/ tha ma bla na med pa'i rig 'dzin gyi 'bras bu la sbyor bar mdzad do/ 'di ni rigs mthol/ gzhung bzang/ rtags mtshan che/ [l. 5] snying nye/ khyad par gtsang ris kyi lha/ lhaq par rnying rje dang ldan pa zhiq yin pas/ gtor ma dkar gsum mngar gsum 'bras bu bzang po la brten zhiq/ grib dang dam sel la 'dzems/ 'di brten pa'i sar [l.6] nag phyogs kyi lha 'dre gzhan pho lhar mi brten/ khyad par snying (snyigs) dus kyi sgrubs pa po dang/ rgyal po stobs dang ldan pa dang/ rje dpon rnams kyi srungs mar brten na/ kun las bkra shis shing mthu rtsal che ste.*

For property, please bring increase in wealth; please perform spontaneously-appearing virtuous deeds! *Bswo, bswo! lHa rgyal lo!*¹⁴

Territorial God of dBus gtsang ru bzhi

The identity of Thang lha mentioned in text no. 12 as “the territorial god of the four regions of Tibet” (*dbus gtsang ru bzhi'i yul lha*) (no. 12, 613: l. 3) is an identity that comes up frequently in Byang gter texts. In text no. 1, when Thang lha explains why he covers and protects Khri Srong lde btsan, the first reason he gives is that he is the territorial god (*yul lha*) of the four regions of central Tibet:

Because I am the territorial god for the four regions of Tibet and since King Khri Srong lde btsan is the king of Tibet, we are connected by our great united force.¹⁵

Thang lha's *yul lha* status is praised in the invocation text of no.5:

Bear your commitment in mind in the future; it is time for you to act—you are the ruler of the obstructive demons. Perform the virtuous deeds that have been apportioned to you. You are the territorial god of the four regions of Tibet! You are the body god of Khri Srong lde btsan, the divine son, the protector of the Dharma!¹⁶

In the requests made to Thang lha in texts no. 3 and no. 9, the god is asked to perform his deeds as the *yul lha* of the four regions of Tibet:

He protects the subjects of the dharma king as if protecting his own children, he performs deeds as the territorial god of the four regions of Tibet, and he is the war god of all leaders. I praise you,

¹⁴ Translated from no. 12, p. 639, pp. l. 2-l. 4. (639: l. 2): *khyed kyi thugs dam bdag gis bskang/ bdag gis bcol ba'i 'phrin las mdzod/ de ltar mchod cing bskang ba yis/ bdag sogs dgon gnas rgyu sbyor gyi/ ngon skyabs dpung gnyen khyed kyis mdzod/[l. 3] bcol pa'i 'phrin las bsgrub pa dang/ bsgrubs shing bstan pa bsrung du gsol/ bswo bswo lha rgyal lo/ g.yag lug phul bas yon tan gyis/ nor la god kha med pa dang/ gling stod rta ra'i bdag po [l.4] mdzod | | | gling smad lug ra'i bdag po mdzod/ g.yag dang mdzo yi bdag po mdzod/ nor la 'phel kha khyed kyis thongs/ ci bsam 'grub pa'i 'phrin las mdzod/ bswo bswo lha rgyal lo.*

¹⁵ Translated from no.1, p. 323, p. l.1. (323: l.1): *bdag dbus gtsang ru bzhi'i yul lha lags pas/ rgyal po khri srong lde'u btsan bod kyi rgal po lags te/ che mnyam dpung gis 'brel lo.*

¹⁶ Translated from no.5, p. 373, p. l.3. (373: l.3): *dam tshig rje su dran par gyis/ las la babs so bgegs kyi rgyal/ bcol ba'i 'phrin las bsgrub par mdzod/ dbus gtsang ru bzhi'i yul lha khyod/ chos skyong rgyal po lha yi sras/ khri srong lde'u btsan sku lha yin.*

rDo rje 'bar ba rtсал, who are the lord of all great gods!¹⁷

In the exhortation section of text no. 11, Thang lha's identity as "great territorial god" (*yul lha chen po*) is addressed:

Hūm, hūm, hūm! In your dwelling place of 'Dam shod, you stand as Ya zhur gnyan po! By the power of the sacred lake's companionship, you stand as gNyan chen thang lha! On the peak of your awesome white rock, you stand up as the king of *gāndharva*! On the peak of your high snowy mountain, you stand as the great territorial god! Among the clouds and fogs, you stand up as The One with Five Topknots! You stand as the tamer of hostile enemies! You stand as the destroyer of *yakṣās*! You stand as the destroyer of gods that cause madness! You stand up as the magical displays! Your magical display is a divine white yak...¹⁸

Many scholars, such as Rolf Stein, Toni Huber, George Combe, and Samten Karmay agree that the *yul lha* is identical with the mountain divinity of a sacred mountain.¹⁹ We shall review some earlier scholars' explanations about the terminologies such as *yul lha*, and *gzhi bdag*. For example, Pascale Dollfus notes:

Yul lha signifies literally 'god of the land,' in the various meanings subsumed under this term 'land' in European languages: nation-state, province, region or village, and territory inhabited by a collectivity and constituting a defined geographic reality.²⁰

Writing at an earlier time, George A. Combe points out that mountain spirits are called *yul lha*, while the bad *yul lha* are called *gzhi bdag*, and

¹⁷ Translated from no.3, p. 344, p. 1. 4: *chos rgyal mnga' ris bu bzhin skyongs/ dbus gtsang ru bzhi'i yul lha mdzod/ rje dpon yongs kyi dgra lhar gyur/ rdo rje 'bar ba rtсал la bstod/ lha chen yongs kyi rje bo bstod*, and no.9, p. 557, l. 3: *chos rgyal mnga' ris bu bzhin skyongs/ dbus gtsang ru bzhi'i yul lha mdzod/ rje dpon yongs kyi dgra lhar 'gyur/ rdo rje 'bar ba rtсал la bstod/ lha chen yongs kyi rje bor bstod*.

¹⁸ Translated from no.11, p. 590, pp. 1.1-1.4: *hūm hūm hūm / bzhugs yul (1.2) bdam shod snar mo nas/ ya zhur gnyen (gnyan) po sku bzhengs shig/ bla mtsho 'khyil ba'i nang shed nas/ gnyan chen thang lha sku bzhengs shig/ brag dkar gnyen (gnyan) po'i rtse mo nas/ dri za'i rgyal po sku=/ gangs dkar mihon (1.3) po'i rtse mo nas/ yul lha chen po=/ sprin dang na bun gseb shod nas/ zur phud lnga pa=/ sdang ba'i dgra 'dul sku=/ gnod pa'i bgegs 'dul sku=/ smyo bas 'dre 'dul sku=/ sprul pa'i tshul du sku=/ sprul pa 'jig pa'i lus (1.4) po de/ lha g.yag dkar po zhig.*

¹⁹ Dollfus 1996, pp. 3-4. Pascale Dollfus illustrates this idea and reviews different scholars' identification of *yul lha* and *gzhi bdag* and their relationship with mountain gods and divine mountains.

²⁰ Dollfus 1996, p. 4.

the good *yul lha* are called *gnas* or *gnas ri*.²¹ After that, Rolf Stein identifies that the *yul lha* is the “god of the land,” and the sacred mountains are usually “the god of land” (*yul lha*) or “the master of location” (*gzhi bdag, sa bdag*):

The sacred mountains are the gods of the land (*yul lha*) or the masters of the location (*gzhi bdag, sa bdag*). (...) They are so intimately linked to the founder of the clan lineage that they are venerated under the name of ancestor (*a myes*). (...) Each community inhabiting a given site thus identifies itself with its ancestor and its sacred place.²²

Samten Karmay also says that in Tibetan popular traditions, mountain deities are known as “owner of the base” (*gzhi bdag*) or “deity of the local territory” (*yul lha*)²³. Therefore, it is clear that in Tibetan tradition, there is a close relationship between the mountain god/sacred mountain and the territorial god (*yul lha*), with both often being considered the same entity. In the case of gNyan chen thang lha, he is referred to as the *yul lha* of the four regions of Tibet and also as a mountain god, taking the form of a snow mountain located next to the gNam mtsho lake.

One nature/body and six names

Text no. 12 states that Thang lha is renowned for having “one nature and six names.” We can find this exact title, *don gcig la mtshan drug*, in no. 12 (613: 1.4), and a variant with the same meaning, *sku gcig la mtshan drug* (“one body and six names”), in no. 16 (675: 1. 3) and no. 7 (534: 1. 3).

In text no. 12, after a passage that describes the one nature (*ngo bo*) and the six names (*mtshan drug*) of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, it is stated that Thang lha is renowned for having one nature and six names:

In essence, he is a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha. He is the chief of the gods of pure lineage, the god rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal. As such (the manifestation of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal), Thang lha has six names: 1) Oath-bound White Scepter; 2) White Sky God; 3) Sky God Bodhisattva; 4) Brahman

²¹ Combe 1975, pp. 56-57.

²² “Les montagnes sacrées sont les dieux du pays (*yul lha*) ou les maîtres du lieu (*gzhi bdag, sa bdag*). (...) Elles sont si intimement liées à l’initiateur de la lignée du clan qu’on les vénère sous le nom d’aïeul (*a myes*). (...) Chaque communauté habitant un site donné se reconnaît ainsi dans son ancêtre et dans son lieu saint.” Stein 1981, pp. 177-185.

²³ Karmay 1996, p. 59.

king with Conch-Shell Colored Topknots; 5) King of Gāndharvas with Five Topknots; 6) and Viṣṇu, king of the Lake gNam mtsho.²⁴

This paragraph is also present in text no. 16 (668: l. 2-l. 4) and appears after a description of Thang lha's one nature and six names. However, that text declares (675: l. 3) that Thang lha has "one body and six names" (*sku gcig la mtshan drug*) instead of "one nature and six names" (*don gcig la mtshan drug*). Similarly, text no. 7 describes Thang lha as the incarnation of Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha and lists his six names. It then directly concludes that this characterizes Thang lha as having "one body and six names," just as in text no. 16:

He is Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha and is renowned as having one body and six names: 1) Oath-bound White Scepter who is the antidote of all noxious spirits, gods, spirits, and hateful beings; 2) White Sky God; 3) Sky god Bodhisattva; 4) Brahman king with Conch-Shell Colored Topknots; 5) King of Gāndharvas with Five Topknots; 6) and Viṣṇu, king of Lake gNam mtsho.²⁵

From above, we see that *don* ("nature") and *sku* ("body") both signify that Thang lha is the incarnation of Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha. *The Guardian Deities of Tibet* by Ladrang Kalsang states that "The deity known as gNyan chen Thang lha, one of the Nine Gods of the World (*srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu*), is said to be a wrathful manifestation of Bodhisattva Namkha Nyingpo".²⁶ Although this book does not point out the origin of this identification, it is likely to be from the Byang gter sources under consideration here.

Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha is a realized being, and Thang lha's identification with this realized being is evidence that in the Nyingma rNying ma tradition, Thang lha was considered a divine deity with a natural transcendental identity rather than solely a wild deity subdued by Padmasambhava and artificially transformed into a Buddhist protector.

In the beginning of text no. 4, the introduction narrates that, during

²⁴ Translated from no. 12, p. 603, l. 3-l. 4: ngo bo byang chub sems dpa' nam mkha'i snying po'i rnam par sprul pa tshangs ris kyi lha'i gtso bo mtshan drug rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal lam/ dam can shel geng dkar po/ lha gnam the dkar po/ gnam lha byang chub (l.4) sems dpa'/ tshangs pa'i rgyal po dung gi thor tshugs can/ dri za zur phud lnga pa/ khyab 'jug gnam mtsho'i rgyal po zhes bya bas rung ma chen mol lha chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal sku mdog.

²⁵ Translated from no. 7, 534, l. 1-l. 3: byang chub sems dpa' nam mkha'i snying po yin pa la rgyal bsen sogs lha srin ma rungs pa rnam kyi gnyen pos dam can shel gong dkar po/ lha gnam the dkar po/ gnam lha byang chub sems dpa'/ tshangs pa'i rgyal po dung gi thor tshugs can/ dri za zur phud lnga pa/ khyab 'jug gnam mtsho'i rgyal po ste.

²⁶ Kalsang 2007, p. 92.

the time of degeneration, the King of gods Pe dkar brought diseases and troubles to Tibet. To alleviate these problems, Padmasambhava introduced the *sādhana* cycle of the great god Thang lha. This text then goes on to describe the god's one nature and six names:

In this regard, the emanation of Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha is called 1) Oath-bound White Scepter; 2) White Sky God; 3) Sky God Bodhisattva; 4) Brahman King with Conch-Shell Colored Topknots; 5) King of Gāndharvas with Five Topknots; 6) and Viṣṇu, King of Lake gNam mtsho. By the attributes of this deity's names, dwelling places, and many emanations, the Buddha's teachings are protected.²⁷

Furthermore, the portrayal of *rgyal po* Pe har / Pe dkar as a malevolent force subjugated by Thang lha invites broader consideration of the ambiguous status of Pe har / Pe dkar within the Byang gter tradition. While later rNying ma systems—particularly those influenced by the Fifth Dalai Lama—often integrated Pe har as a protector, the Byang gter texts examined here consistently depict Pe har as a source of disease and disorder requiring ritual suppression. This divergence may reflect deeper doctrinal or sociological fault lines within Tibetan religious history: whereas Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer (1136-1204)'s earlier *gter ma* traditions accommodated Pe har as a legitimate though dangerous protector, the Byang gter cycle systematized by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem appears more cautious, aligning with certain conservative Buddhist critiques and even Bon perspectives that view *rgyal po* spirits as deceptive or harmful. Such a perspective is further corroborated by later Byang gter authorities such as 'Khor gdong gter chen (Nus ldan rdo rje 'gro phan gling pa, b. 1802), who maintained a critical stance toward Pe har worship.

This tension underscores that the “Buddhicization” of local deities was neither uniform nor teleological; rather, it was a dynamic process contingent upon lineage-specific interpretations, ritual pragmatics, and broader socio-religious negotiations over orthodoxy and authority, often involving complex interactions with Bon traditions. As demonstrated by Christopher Bell in his analysis of the Nechung Oracle, the institutionalization of protector deities like Pe har was far from a mere phenomenon of religious assimilation but rather a highly politicized act of construction. Bell argues that figures such as the Fifth

²⁷ Translated from no. 4, p. 348, l. 2-1. 3: *de yang byang chub sems dpa' nam mkha'i snying po'i rnam par 'phrul pa dam can shel ging dkar mo'i/ gnam the dkar po'o/ gnam lha byang chub sems dpa'/ tshangs pa'i rgyal po dung gi thor tshugs* (l.3) *can nam/ dri za zur phud lnga pa'am/ khyab 'jug gnam mtsho'i rgyal po sogs/ ming dang brten gnas dang/ sku du mar sprul nas sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa skyong zhing.*

Dalai Lama instrumentalized these entities for consolidating power and ideological integration, consciously transforming their potentially dangerous characteristics into a controlled force within official frameworks. However, as Bell astutely observes, this process of institutionalization did not eliminate profound disagreements among different sects and groups regarding the nature of “protector deities.” Even within the Gelug school, worship of Pe har and oracles like gNas chung was accompanied by doubts and debates, with some viewing them as transcendent wisdom protectors and others insisting on their mundane and dangerous nature, manageable only through ritual restraint. This tension finds resonance beyond the Gelug sect, echoing the critical stance of the Byang gter tradition and the Bon classification of Pe har as a deceptive spirit²⁸.

Thus, Bell’s research underscores that the diverse manifestations of Tibetan protector deity beliefs—including their rejection or cautious acceptance in certain traditions—often mirror deeper currents of doctrinal competition, political strategizing, and social memory. The so-called “Buddhicization” was not a monolithic or linear progression but a continually negotiated outcome, shaped by various actors—monastic institutions, political leaders, treasure revealers—within specific historical contexts, based on their respective authority claims, ritual transmissions, and social visions.

Different body manifestations

In text no.12, Thang lha is “renowned for one body and nine manifestations” (*sku gcig la rnam 'gyur dgu*, no.12, 613: l.4). In Byang gter texts, there are multiple descriptions of Thang lha’s human manifestations. They can be grouped into three general categories, within which there is a variety of minute differences.

1. The peaceful white man with five topknots

When Thang lha appears as a peaceful or respectful image, he is depicted as a young white man with five topknots, known as the king of Gāndharvas (*dri za'i rgyal po*) Zur phud lnga pa. In text no.1, Thang lha first appears as a white yak in front of Padmasambhava and Khri Srong lde btsan, but after meeting them, he transforms into a humble young man with five topknots, making prostrations to the master and the king and displaying his peaceful and respectful nature:

²⁸ Bell, 2021, 2020,

This white yak saw Dharma king Khri Srong lde btsan, and he transformed from the magical emanation of a white yak into a man with a handsome face, white like the color of a conch shell, and the head decorated with five turquoise-blue topknots. Having transformed into this form, he paid homage and prostrated to the king.²⁹

In text no.3, there is a section dedicated to performing a benediction (*mnga gsol*) for Thang lha's five topknots and its ornaments:

To the ornament of your topknots, this is the benediction! The top of your head is high with long hair bound with five topknots, as smooth as bee nectar, and the auspicious pattern on the five topknots is very variegated. For the stainless white silk on your head, this is the benediction!³⁰

The libation text no. 8 states that the god Thang lha is the king of Gāndharvas who has five topknots on the head and is followed by an entourage of 360:

In brief, I pray that all four auspicious deeds may be spontaneously achieved! Dri za'i rgyal po who has five topknots on the head and is the god Thang lha, together with your entourage of 360, please come and receive this offering tormā! Please receive the sacred item which is the nectar tormā!³¹

In text no. 11, Thang lha is depicted as the king of Gāndharvas with the topknots of wisdom:

I praise the manifestation of the king of Gāndharvas who stands in the country surrounded by eight divine mountains, within the palace decorated with precious jewels, above a lotus, sun and moon and with the nine moods of dance. By the moonbeam melting on the crystal Mt. Meru, you clasp the arrogant gods with

²⁹ Translated from no. 1, p. 322, l. 2-1. 3: *chos skyong ba'i rgyal po khri srong lde btsan mthong ba dang g.yag dkar po rdzus pa'i rdzu 'phrul bshig (nas)/ skyes bu bzhin bzang dkar po dung gi mdog can/ g.yu'i zur phud lnga 'is brgyan pa zhig tu byas nas/ rgyal po la zhe sa dang phyag phul lo.*

³⁰ Translated from no.6, p. 528, l.1-1.2: *rgyal ba'i rab sngags g.yas su 'khyil ba'i dung/ /thor tshugs mdzes pa'i rgyan du mnga'/ rtse mor zur phud lngar bcings ral pa'i khyon/ bung bas tang zil mig sman ltar snun pa'i/ /rtsa chings bkra shis ri mos rnam bkra ba'i/ /dar dkar dri med lwa bas mnga'.*

³¹ Translated from no. 8, p. 546, l. 3-547: l. 1: *mdor na 'phrin las rnam bzhi lhun gyis grub par mdzad du gsol/ dri za'i rgyal po zur phud lnga pa can/ thang lha mched 'khor sum brgya drug cur bcas/ 'dir gshegs mdos kyi mchod gtor 'di bzhes shig/ dam rdzas (547) bdud rtsi'i gtor ma 'dis bzhes shig.*

your body and deprive them [of their belongings]. Your hair of wisdom has topknots; I praise your honor and duty as the wish-fulfilling king.³²

In text no. 4, Thang lha appears as a young man with five topknots said to be the image of the great god [rDo rje] gZhon nu:

Furthermore, if you, the practitioner, wish to expand your political power and your lineage, you should visualize yourself in the form of the great god gZhon nu who has five topknots on his head, with in front his consort, the queen gNam mtsho rDo rje g.yu sgron ma. She is adorned with gold and turquoises. She wears a big beautiful silken cloth, and is surrounded by hundreds of thousands of beautiful ladies. Imagine that from yourself, white and red bodhicitta light rays radiate, like a crystal rosary. Think that by melting into the consort's [secret] place, they provide an experience of bliss, and you obtain it yourself.³³

*2. The reddish-yellow blazing man wearing
a black snake and tiger skin*

In text no. 4, Thang lha as rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal is described as a reddish-yellow man sitting in the midst of fire, holding a sword and a golden wheel, and wearing a black snake and tiger skin:³⁴

If you want your fame to pervade the ten directions and to accomplish the four activities without exception, you should visualize yourself as the manifestation of Padma Heruka. In front is the great god rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, who takes the form of the great Brahman king with conch-shell topknots on his head. He is reddish-yellow, with three eyes, teeth bared, a goatee and thick eyebrows, and the body blazing. His hair is vermillion colored,

³² Translated from no. 11, p. 584, l. 2-1. 3: *lha brgyad gangs ri'i phreng bas bskor ba'i ljongs/ rin chen rgyan gyis mdzes pa'i pho brang dbus/ padma nyi zla'i steng na gar dgu yi/ rnam rol dri za'i rgyal po khyod la bstod/ shel dkar zhun ma'i lhun po zla zer gyis/ 'khyud 'dra'i gzugs skus lha yi khengs pa 'phrog/ rnam dpyod dbu skra ral pa'i thor tshugs rtser/ yid bzhin dbang gi rgyal pos mtshan la bstod.*

³³ Translated from no. 4, p. 355, l. 3-1. 5: *yang srid dang rigs brgyud 'phel bar 'dod na/ rang nyid lha chen gzhon nu zur phud lnga dang ldan pa'i mdun du/ yum gnam mtsho yi rgyal mo rdo rje g.yu sgron ma gser g.yu rin po che'i rgyan dang dar gos chen mdzes shing yid du 'ong ba/ sman btsun mdzes ma bye ba 'bum gyis bskor ba cig bsam la/ rang las byang chub kyi sems dkar la dmar ba'i 'od zer shel gyi 'phreng ba lta bur 'phros pas/ yum gyi gnas su thim pas bde ba'i nyams dang ldan pa de rang gis gzung bar bsam la.*

³⁴ In terms of the four activities (*zhi rgyas dbang drag*), this reddish-yellow blazing male form of Thang lha refers to his "dbang" aspect, which is meant at magnetizing and increasing one's power and fame, rather than at "destroying" harmful enemies (the *drag* aspect).

decorated by white topknots on top of his head. The topknots are adorned by three white conch-shells curling to the right and ornamented with shining wish-fulfilling jewels. His right hand holds a sword of wisdom raised to the sky and his left waves a golden wheel with a thousand spokes pointing downward. He wears a full robe of purple silk and wears precious boots. He wears a shining necklace of lotus and jewels, decorated by a black snake and a tiger skin. His two feet stand immovably on top of the throne of lotus-sun-moon, enemies and obstacles. He has the shining brightness of hundreds of thousands of suns. He dwells in the space of the blazing fire of the world age, and as his retainers, there are the kings of pure lineages, the thirty chiefs of the haughty ones (*dregs pa*), and ten million of assemblies of *brtan ma* goddesses of the eight classes.³⁵

3. *The crystal horseman sitting in the royal ease posture*

In several texts of the Byang gter tradition, the most common image of Thang lha is not the peaceful Zur phud lnga pa or the wrathful rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal, but a crystal-colored man riding a white horse and sitting in the posture of royal ease in the center of a crystal palace. In both text no. 3 and no. 9, rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal is described as dwelling in a crystal palace situated within an ocean of nectar and reaching the high sky, surrounded by sky gods and blue-green grass. The image of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal is that of a shining crystal man riding on a swan-white horse, with three eyes and bared teeth, wearing a topknot and a wish-fulfilling jewel on his head, and the syllable A at the center of a moon disk in his heart. He holds a vajra horse-whip and a crystal garland, wears a full robe, sits in the posture of royal ease, and is accompanied by an entourage of three-hundred sixty and hundreds of thousands of troops:

Then, you should give orders to the divinities to let them do the

³⁵ Translated from no. 4, p. 357, l. 4-p. 358, l. 2: *snyan grags phyogs bcur khyab pa dang/ 'phrin las rnam bzhi ma lus pa sgrub par 'dod na/ rang nyid padma he ru kar gsal ba'i mdun du/ lha chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal/ tshangs pa'i rgyal po chen po dung gi thor tshugs can gyi ngo bo/ sku mdog dmar ser spyang gsum mche ba gtsigs pa ag tshom dang smin mag log stong 'bar ba/ dbu skra li khri'i mdog can thor tshugs can gyi rtse mor/ dung dkar po g.yas su 'khyil ba gsum tshoms kyi thor tshugs byas pa'i tog la nor bu 'bar bas mtshan pa/ phyag g.yas ye shes kyi ral gri 'bar ba nam mkhar 'phyar zhing/ g.yon pa gser gyi 'khor lo rtsibs stong thur du gdengs pa/ zab chen sngo dmar gyi (358) 'jol ber dang rin po che'i chil lhvam can/ pad+ma dang nor bu rin po che 'od 'bar ba du ma'i do shal dang/ sbrul nag dang stag lpags kyis brgyan pa/ zhabs gnyis padma nyi zla dgra bgegs kyi steng na drang tshugs su bzhangs pa/ nyi ma 'bum gyi gzi brjid can/ bskal me 'bar ba'i klong na bzhugs pa/ de'i 'khor du gtsang rigs kyi lha chen po rnam dang dregs pa'i sde dpon sum cu/ sde brgyad brtan ma'i tshogs bye ba mang po bsam zhing.*

work. So, in front of yourself, you should set an *accomplishment* tormā and visualize it as a crystal palace brightly shining with its doors and turrets and with a great variety of precious things. The base [of the palace] is surrounded by a brimming ocean of nectar. On its waist is pitched a tent of rainbow light fog. On its peak is a shining precious rain produced by white clouds. On its ground is a blue-green land filled with blooming flowers. The eight sky gods surround it as snow mountains surrounding a crystal. In the center, on a seat of lotus, moon and sun, on top of a swan-white horse with a beautiful saddle decorated by various precious jewels, sits the great god rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal. His body color is like a glorious crystal mountain. He smiles in a way that slightly bares his fangs. He has three shining eyes, and his topknots of hair are bound with a white silken scarf. His right hand holds a whip marked by a five-pronged vajra raising upwards to the sky, and his left hand pulls a crystal rosary. He wears a large cloak of white, red and blue. Above his head is a wish-fulfilling jewel, with various precious jewels as decoration. His youthful body abides in the posture of royal ease. Around him is his entourage of three-hundred sixty, and hundreds of thousands of myriads as his army, which is arranged in four divisions and has frightening strength and looks heroic. Above and in the intermediate directions are the magically manifested conch-shell white falcons, male and female conch-shell wolves, and many wild yaks with thick fur, gliding and powerful. At the heart of the god, on a moon disc, is the syllable *Ā* surrounded by the mantra *om badzra thang ka ra mun nyid khu sha li swA hA* like a conch-like white garland of letters.³⁶

Here, we can see that Thang lha is described as having an entourage

³⁶ Translated from no. 3, p. 341, l. 2-p. 342, l. 3; no. 9, p. 551, l. 3-p. 552, l. 6: *de nas lha las la 'khol ba yin no/ de nas rang gi mdun du sgrub gtor shel gyi khang bzang rin po che sna tshogs kyi sgo lcogs 'od 'bar ba/ rtsa bar bdud rtsi'i rgya mtshor 'phyur ba/ sked par 'ja' 'od na bun gyi gur phub pa/ rtse mor sprin dkar rin po che'i zil char 'bebs pa/ sa gzhi ljang sngon la me tog sna tshogs rgyas pa/ 'khor yug tu gnam lha brgyad kyis gangs ris shel gyi mchod rten ltar bskor ba/ de'i dbus su nyi zla padma'i gdan la/ stobs ldan rta mchog ngang dkar rin po che'i sga rgyan du mas mdzes pa'i steng na/ lha chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal sku mdog shel gyi ri bo ltar brjid pa/ zhal 'dzum zhing mche ba cung zad gtsig pa/ spyang gsum rab tu bkra ba/ dbu skra'i thor tshugs dar dkar pos bcings pa/ phyag g.yas rdo rje rtse lngas mthsan pa'i spa lcag nam mkha' la 'phyar ba/ g.yon pa shel dkar gyi phreng ba 'dren pa/ zab chen dkar dmar mthing gsum gyi ber gsol ba/ spyi bor nor bu 'bar ba'i tog dang/ rin po (342) che'i rgyan sna tshogs dang bcas pa/ sku gzhon zhing mdzes pa/ rgyal po rol pa'i cha lugs su bzhuks pa/ de'i 'khor yug du mched 'khor sum brgya drug cu/ dmag tshogs bye ba 'bum sde thams cad kyang dpung tshogs yan lag bzhi ba'i cha lugs su 'jigs shing dpa' ba/ steng dang phyogs mtshams kun nas/ sprul pa'i dung khra dkar po dang/ dung spyang pho mo dang/ 'brong g.yag zhol chen mang po lding zhing ngar ba/ de'i thugs kar zla ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi steng du ā dkar po'i mthar/ om badzra thang ka ra mun nyid khu sha li swA hA / zhes pa dung gi 'phreng ba lta bus bskor ba.*

of 360, which is not uncommon for deities in Tibetan religious texts. For example, the dharma protector rDo rje legs pa manifests with his 360 brothers, and the god Ge khod manifests with a retinue of 360 deities;³⁷ Tucci associates this number with the 360 days of the lunar year in astrology³⁸.

This image of rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal seated in the posture of royal ease also appears in texts no. 12 and no. 16:

By calling his names proper, the great god rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal appears. His body color is like the crystal mountain and his face like the white and shining moon, he smiles and slightly bares his fangs. His three eyes are extremely bright. His shining black hair topknots are tied with white silk, and on top of them, it is ornamented by jewels. His right hand holds an iron whip decorated by a five-pronged vajra raised up to the sky, and his left hand pulls a white crystal rosary towards his heart. He wears a big silk cloak of white, red and deep blue. Inside his cloak are two inner garments, and his waist is bound by many precious ornamented golden [belts], and the turquoise-blue jewel-stones of precious golden lotus decorates his head, his ears, and his neck. He is decorated with various ornaments like gold, necklace, garlands, and rings. His ears are adorned with *utpala* buds and his head wears a silk turban. His body is young and handsome. His two feet wear jeweled boots, and he sits in the posture of royal ease. To his left is his consort, the lady who arouses bliss and possesses pleasant radiance, the queen gNam mtsho, also called rDo rje g.yu sgron ma, whose body color is sky-blue. She has one face, two arms and two eyes. Her right hand holds a victory banner, her left hand holds a mirror. She has a topknot and the rest of her hair hangs down. She is the chief of the beautiful ladies with an attractive appearance, and she mounts a turquoise dragon that shows homage to her.³⁹

³⁷ Karmay 2009, p. 404, about the purification of Ge khod's pollution (*ge khod mnol bsang*): "Line 60: May the three hundred and sixty emanations of Ge-khod be purified! May the gods of the family ancestors be purified! May the solemn gods of the masters be purified! May Ti-se, the white mountain of the soul, be purified! May Ma-pang, the blue lake of the soul, be purified!"

³⁸ Karmay 2009, p. 395; Tucci 1949, p. 24.

³⁹ Translated from no.12, p. 603, l.4-604: l.4: *lha chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal sku mdog shel gyi ri bo la ston mtshan zla bas byugs pa ltar dkar la brjid pa/ zhal 'dzum zhing mche ba'i myu gu cung zad gtsigs pa/ spyang gsum rab tu bkra ba/ dbu skra gnag snum gyi thor tshugs dar dkar pos bcings pa'i rtse mor nor bu 'bar bas spras pa/ phyag g.yas rdo rje rtse lngas mtshan pa'i sba lcag nam mkha' la 'phyar zhing g.yon shel dkar gyi phreng ba thugs ka'i thad du 'dren pa/ zab chen dkar dmar mthing gsum gyi rtse ber dang yug gyen gsol ba/(604) ber nang ma gnyis la rin po che sna tshogs kyis spud pa'i gser sked bcings shing/ rin po che'i gsar pad la g.yu'i phra gyis mdzes pa'i dbu rgyan/ snyan rgyan/ mgul rgyan/*

According to Robert Beer, the horse-whip decorated with a vajra on top held in Thang lha's right hand is a common symbol found among "many horse-mounted warriors or protective deities, such as Gesar, Vaiśravaṇa, and Nyenchen Thanglha. The horse-whip of these divinities is fashioned from gold (*gser kyi rta lcag*) and is usually crowned at the end of its staff with a jewel or vajra, from which emanate the long rope strands of the whip in the form of a curving rainbow".⁴⁰

In text no. 5, Thang lha's posture of royal ease is called "resting in the attitude of meditation:"

What do you wear on your body? You wear white silk and white cotton clothes. What are you riding, if you are mounted? You ride a divine horse with white heels. You travel through the three worlds, and your white color is of a radiating brilliance. With your right hand you lift a whip that orders the seven *ma mo* to act. With your left hand you count the beads of a crystal rosary. You rest in the attitude of meditation! Which emanations are you sending forth? Hundreds of thousands of riders. Together with your servants and your train, come today to this place and carry out your work!⁴¹

This form of gNyan chen Thang lha was adopted in the dGe lugs tradition probably through the Fifth Dalai Lama's heritage. In the biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama, it is stated that Thang lha appeared to him in a vision as a smiling man mounted on a white horse.

4. Thang lha's four body colors and four activities

In addition to the three general humanoid images above, the Byang

gser gal/ se mo do/ do shal gdu bu sogs rgyan sna tshogs kyis brgyan pa/ snyan gong au+ta+pa+la'i chun po dang dar dpyang can/ sku gzhon zhing mdzes pa/ zhabs gnyis nor bu'i mchil lham gyon nas rgyal po rol pa'i 'dug stangs kyis bzugs pa/ g.yon bde ba skyong ba'i dbang mo yid 'ong mdangs ldan gyi yum gnam mtsho'i rgyal mo rdo rje g.yu sgron ma sku mdog sngo bsangs zhal gcig phyag gnyis ma spyen gsum dang ldan pa/ g.yas rgyal mtshan dang g.yon me long 'dzin cing/ dbu skra thor tshugs lhag ma'i zar bu thur du 'phyar <'phyang> ba/ sman btsun mdzes ma yid du 'ong ba'i cha byad kyis gtso bo la 'dud pa'i rnam pa can g.yu 'brug bcibs pa. See also no.16, p. 668, 1.4-p. 669, 1.4.

⁴⁰ Beer 1999, p. 303

⁴¹ Translated from no.5, p. 372, 1.4-1.6: *sku la ci gsol na/ dar dkar ral ka gsol/ chibs su ci chibs na/ lha rta ngang pa cibs/ khams gsum kun tu rgyu/ mdog dkar 'od zer 'phro/ g.yas pa sba lcags 'phyar/ ma bdun las la 'gyed/ g.yon na shel phreng 'dren/ thugs dam dbyings su bzla/ sprul pa ci 'gyed na/ rta dmag 'bum sde 'gyed/ bran g.yog 'khor dang bcas/ 'dir byon 'phrin las mdzod.*

gter texts records that Thang lha has four different body colors and figures when performing the four activities: *zhi* (pacifying), *rgyas* (enriching), *dbang* (controlling), and *drag* (subjugating). These characteristics are described in texts no.12 (p. 605: l. 2-p. 607: l. 1) and no. 16 (p. 670: l. 1 -p. 671: l. 2).

a) Thang lha's white form while performing pacifying activity:

To the east is the divine immeasurable mansion made from white lapis with pagoda roof and precious squared courtyard surrounding it. Inside are innumerable medical flowers, grains and sprouts for destroying the hundred diseases. In the center, on a lotus and moon, is rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal who performs the pacifying activity, whose body is white. In his right hand he holds a medicinal tree at his heart, and in his left a pot filled with nectar above his knee. He sits in the cross-legged bodhisattva posture and is surrounded by hosts of yakṣas and wealth deities.⁴²

b) Thang lha's yellow form while performing enriching activities:

To the south is an ornamented mansion made of pure gold from the Jambu river and various jewels, with a pagoda-like roof. The mansion is surrounded by a square yard made of jewels, within which are the seven royal possessions, the eight auspicious symbols, the mountain of jewels, the vanquishing treasure-mongoose, the wish-granting cow, the grain that needs no toil and so on, and a gathering of all the wealth of gods and humans. In the middle, on a throne made up of lotus, moon, and a red-yellow mongoose, is the yellow god rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal performing enriching activities. He has one face and two arms. In his right hand, he holds a blazing jewel at the heart. In his left hand, he holds a small vessel above his knee. He sits in the cross-legged bodhisattva posture, surrounded by hosts of yakṣas and wealth deities.⁴³

⁴² Translated from no. 12, p. 605, l. 2-14; no. 16, p. 670, l. 1-1. 3: *shar du be Du+rya dkar po las grub pa'i lha'i gzhal med khang rgya phibs can rin po che'i ra ba gru bzhi pas bskor ba'i nang du nad brgya 'joms pa'i sman gyi me tog lo 'bras myu gu grangs med pas yongs su gtams pa'i dbus su pad zla'i steng na zhi mdzad rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal sku mdog dkar po g.yas sman gyi ljon shing thugs ka dang/ g.yon bdud rtsis gtams pa'i bum pa brla steng na 'dzin cing/ zhabs gnyis sems dpa'i skyil krung gis bzhugs pa sman lha drang srong gi tshogs kyis bskor ba.*

⁴³ Translated from no. 12, p. 605, l. 4-p. 606, l. 1: *lhor 'dzam bu chu bo'i gser sbyangs la rin po che'i sna tshogs kyis spras pa'i khang bzang rgya phibs can/ rin po che'i ra ba gru bzhi pas 'khor yug tu bskor ba'i nang du rgyal srid sna bdun/ bkra shis rtags brgyad/ rin po che'i ri yongs 'dul sa rdol 'dod 'jo'i ba/ ma rmos pa'i lo tog sogs lha mi'i dpal 'byor phun sum tshogs pas yongs su gang ba'i dbus na pad zla dang nee'u <ne'u> le dmar ser gyi gdan*

c) *Thang lha's red form while performing overpowering activities:*

To the west is a lotus ruby mansion with the pagoda-like roof and surrounded by a yard with excellent vases filled with nectar of immortality and medical substances coming from lakes, springs, pools, fountains and essence-extraction. In the center, on a lotus and moon seat, is the deity rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal who performs overpowering activities. His body color is red, he has one face and two hands in meditative equipoise holding a long-life vase made up of ruby. He is adorned with precious ornaments in vajra shape. His sits with his legs in the vajra-posture and is surrounded by hosts of great gods, vidyadharas and sages.⁴⁴

d) *Thang lha's black form while performing subjugating activities:*

To the north is a wrathful place with a blazing iron castle and a pagoda-like roof. It is surrounded by a yard inside which is a net linked by various weapons. In the center, on a seat made up of lotus, sun, and interlaced male and female hostile demons is the god rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal who performs wrathful activities. His body is black in color, he has angry eyes with red veins and bares his fangs. His orange hair lifts upwards. He is adorned by shining jewels and poisonous snakes. He wears a dark red cloak and, inside it, he wears gold on his neck. In his right hand, he holds a red spear, and in his left hand, he grasps an iron bow and arrow. Wearing Mongol boots, he rides a superior horse of a dark-yellow color as powerful as the wind. In the center of a fierce whirlwind of fire, he sits as a lord with the chiefs of haughty ones encircling him.⁴⁵

la rgyas byed kyi rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal ser po zhal gcig phyag gnyis pa/ g.yas nor bu 'bar ba'i thugs ka dang/ g.yon rin po che'i sgrom bu (606) pus steng na 'dzin pa/ zhabs sems dpa'i skyil mo krung gis bzhugs par gnod sbyin nor lha'i tshogs kyis bskor ba. See also no. 16, p. 670, l. 3-1. 4.

⁴⁴ Translated from no. 12, p. 606, l. 1-1. 4: nub tu padma ra ga'i khang bzang rgya phibs can khor yug dang bcas pa'i ra bar 'chi med bdud rtsis gtams pa'i bum bzang/ mtsho rdzing/ lteng ka/ lu ma/ chu mig dang bcud len snying por gyur pa'i rdzas sman gyis yongs su khyab pa'i dbus na pad zla'i gdan la dbang gi lha rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal sku mdog dmar po zhal gcig phyag gnyis mnyam bzhag gi steng na padma ra ga'i tshe bum 'dzin pa/ rin po che'i rgyan rdo rje'i dbyibs can/ zhabs rdo rje skyil krung gi bzhugs pa che'i lha dang rig 'dzin drang strong gi tshogs kyis bskor. See also no. 16, p. 670, l. 4-1. 6.

⁴⁵ Translated from no. 12, p. 606, l. 4-p. 607, l. 1: byang du drag po gnas lcags 'bar ba'i mkhar steng du rgya phibs dang khor yug ra bas bskor ba'i nang mtshon cha sna tshogs kyi dra bas sbrel ba'i dbus su pad ma nyi ma dgra bgegs pho mo bsnol ba'i gdan la ka+rma las kyi khro bo rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal sku mdog nag la khros pa mig rtsa dmar zhing mche ba gtsigs pa/ ral pa dmar ser gyen du brjis shing rin po che'i rgyan rnam dang dug sbrul gyis brgyan pa rtse ber dmar nag brtsigs pa'i nang ma gser sked can g.yas mdung dmar dang

5. Animal manifestations of Thang lha while taming rgyal po Pe dkar

Thang lha is not limited to humanoid manifestations, but also takes the form of divine animals. These include the white yak, which is his most frequent form, as well as the conch-shell falcon, the black scorpion, the white snake, and the nine-headed garuḍa. These animal forms correspond to Thang lha's various titles and identities.

Text no. 4 recounts a story to the effect that in the time of degeneration (*snyigs ma'i dus su*) the *rgyal po* Pe dkar brought and sustained all diseases and the illness of the eight classes of demi-gods. To combat this, Padmasambhava revealed this *sādhana* cycle (*sgrub skor*) of Thang lha, and concealed it as the text of the protector of the copper treasury (*zangs mdzod dbang gi srung mar sbas*). The ritual practitioner should receive the authorization (*rjes gnang*)⁴⁶ and perform the ritual of approaching (*gong bsnyen*)⁴⁷ in front of the magical manifestation of Thang lha (no. 4, 348: l. 3-p. 349: l. 4). After this accomplishment comes the session of subjugating the eight classes of demi-gods, the gods that cause madness, and the *rgyal po* gods. In the following sections, the text describes how the practitioner should imagine himself as the three animal manifestations of Thang lha: the white yak, the conch-shell falcon, and the black scorpion. The three visualization methods are the antidotes for taming the *rgyal po* spirit Pe dkar (no. 4, p. 351: l. 2).

a) The wild white yak

First, in order to tame Pe dkar, in text no. 2-4, the practitioner visualizes himself as the most representative and frequent image of Thang lha, the wild white yak:

Then, as for subjugating the eight classes of [gods and

g.yon lcags kyi mda' gzhu 'dzin pa rin po che'i hor lham gyon nas rta mchog bra nag rlung shugs can la bcibs shing me rlung 'khrug pa'i klong na bzhugs par mnga' (607) bdag dregs pa'i sde dpon rnams kyis bskor ba. See also no. 16, p. 670, l. 6-p. 671, l. 2.

⁴⁶ A *rjes sgnang* is an authorization of practice or empowerment normally given as an appendix after (*rjes*) the main empowerment (*dbang*). In this context, that would be the empowerment of the form of Hayagrīva that is central to the *rTen 'brel chos bdun*, of which the gNyan chen Thang lha cycle is regarded as a section in modern editions.

⁴⁷ In this context, the ritual mainly consists of reciting a given number of the deity's mantras. More broadly, *bsnyen pa* (approaching) and *sgrub pa* (accomplishing) are the two primary stages of tantric practice. The approaching ritual is the preliminary stage focused on fostering proximity to the deity through recitation, offerings, and visualization to receive blessings and attain initial attainments (*siddhi*).

demons], the gods that cause madness and the *rgyal po* gods, assume the identity of the great god [Thang lha], and visualize your form as a wild white yak whose size is that of a mountain, with two horns like sharp fir trees rising up. The vapor of your breathing is like the mist, and your roaring is like the thundering of a dragon. The thunder is like a blazing flame, which terrifies the king who is the Lord of Property [dkor bdag rgyal po, that is, Pe dkar], who is like a little gray man, or a monkey, or a very thin little child trampled upon. The deity crushes this figure, making his inside organs burst out to show a red color. When licked by his tongue, his skin and flesh are completely separated, his bones are exposed pure white, and in the end he is completely scorched. *Om āḥ hūṃ hrīḥ badzra 'bar ba rtsal vīḡṇan rājā maraya phaḥ!* Recite this. Furthermore, you should perform this visualization wherever his representation or abode may be. Moreover, if a demon has caused harm to sick people, if you do perform this visualization you will unquestionably destroy the demon.⁴⁸

Here, this image of the white wild yak is similar to Thang lha's white yak avatar in text no. 1, but more specifically, this white yak taming Pe dkar stomps on little people and scoops out their guts, symbolizing the destruction of the demonic followers of Pe dkar.

The ritual taming of Pe dkar is also described in text no. 14. When he is being exhorted to action, Thang lha should be visualized as three animals, starting with the white yak:

In essence it is the great god Thang lha with the aspect of the wild yak with white long, thick fur. His body is like the highest mountain, his two horns like two sharp trees rising up, his breath like the cloudy mist, and his sound like thunder rumbling. Thunder and lightning are like a burning flame, causing fear and trepidation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Translated from no. 4, p. 349, l. 4-p. 350, l. 4: *de nas sde brgyad dang smyo 'dre rgyal po 'dul ba ni/ rang (350) nyid lha chen gyi ngo bo la/ rnam pa 'brong g.yag zhol chen dkar po ri bo tsam pa/ rwa gnyis thang shing rgyangs pa tsam rno ba/ kha rlangs na bum ltar 'thibs shing ngur sgra 'brug ltar sgrog pa/ gnam lcags kyi tshel po me ltar 'bar bam thong ba 'jigs pa gcig gi dkar bdag rgyal po de/ mi rang skya bo 'am/ spre'u 'am/ bu chung gi rnam pa shin tu rid pa gcig 'dug pa/ de'i steng du 'khrab kyin brdzis pa/ nang khrol thams cad phyir dmar rdzir 'don cing/ lce glog dmar lta bu des ldag pas sha lpags kun zul zul zhu nas rus pa dkar lhag lhag byung zhing/ mthar gzhib thul thul tshig par bsam zhing/ om āḥ hūṃ hrīḥ / badzra 'bar ba rtsal bi gnan rad zā ma ra ya phaḥ/ zhes pa bzlas la/ yang na kho rang gi rten dang gnas yod par de bzhin sgom/ nad pa la gnod na yang gong bzhin byas pas nges par thul lo.*

⁴⁹ Translated from no. 14, p. 657, l. 1-1. 2: *lha chen thang lha'i ngo bo la/ rnam pa 'brong g.yag zhol chen dkar/ lus ni ri rab rwa gnyis ni/ thang shing brgyang tsam shin tu rno/ kha rlang na bun ltar 'thib cing/ ngur sgra 'brug ltar sgrog pa/ gnam lcags 'chol po me*

The image of a white yak to represent a mountain god is quite widespread in Tibetan folk tales, such as the story of the famous mountain deities of Ti se and Sham po: “Ge khod, the mountain deity of Ti se in the Bonpo tradition, is said to have come to earth in the form of a wild white yak which then dissolved itself into the mountain”⁵⁰. “Yar lha Sham po in the form of a great white yak as big as a mountain tried to block the way of the Indian master (Padmasambhava)”⁵¹.

b) The conch-shell falcon

In text no. 4, the visualization procedure involves imagining oneself as another incarnation of Thang lha, the conch-shell falcon (*dung khra dkar po*), while imagining the *rgyal po* god Pe dkar as a small white bird. The visualization involves the falcon capturing and eating the bird:

Furthermore, you meditate yourself as being in essence the great god with the aspect of a white conch-shell falcon gliding in space, hunting for food while flying in the spacious sky. The *rgyal po* Pe dkar is a white little bird like a pigeon. The falcon grasps it with its claw, plucks his feathers, blinds it and eats it. Recite the mantra as before, and the demon will certainly be subjugated.⁵²

In text no.14, the second animal representing Thang lha is also falcon:

There is also the following visualization: the tormā is in essence the great god Thang lha with the aspect of a conch-shell falcon hovering in the sky. In the expanse of the sky, he hunts a prey. The *rgyal po* [spirit] is a white bird, like a pigeon. The falcon seizes the bird, and plucks out its feathers. Thus the bird is killed by the conch-shell falcon.⁵³

In Bon texts, Thang lha is also described as falcon or an eagle. As Karmay points out: “gNyan chen Thang lha, too, is described as a huge

ltar 'bar/ 'jigs shing ya nga'i skur gyur pa.

⁵⁰ Quoted from *Ti se dkar chag*, ff. 29a3-30a7. See Karmay 1996, p. 69.

⁵¹ From the *lHa 'dre bka' thang*, citing Blondeau 1971, p. 74.

⁵² Translated from no.4, p. 350, 1.4-1.6: *yang rang ngo bo lha chen la rnam pa dung khra dkar po mkha' lding tsam du sgom la/ de nam mkha'i dbyings nas zan la bshur ba bzhin byung la/ rgyal po de bya dkar chung phug ron 'dra ba cig tu 'dug pa de tsher gyis bzung nas spu long longs btogs nas dung khras zos par sgom zhing/ sngags gong ltar bzlas pas thul nges so.*

⁵³ Translated from no.14, p. 658, 1.1-1.2: *yang dmigs pa ni/ gtor ma ngo bo lha chen thang lha la/ rnam pa dung khra mkha' lding tsam/ nam mkha'i dbyings nas gzan la 'jug/ rgyal po bya dkar phug ron 'dra/ tshir gyis bzung nas spu btog go/ dung khras bsad nas zos par bsgom.*

and fearsome eagle which came down from heaven in search of a mountain as its dwelling place"⁵⁴.

c) *The black iron scorpion*

In text no. 4, the third visualization is of a black iron scorpion (*lcags kyi sdig pa nag po*), that catches Pe dkar in its net of light, takes out Pe dkar's heart, and bites off half of his body:

Furthermore, you visualize your own body as a black iron scorpion, its body pervading the earth, its belly and tail lifting up to the sky, and spreading rays of light like an iron net from its mouth. The Property Guardian is taken in the net. You draw this net towards you and then take his heart out with your scorpion's fangs, then eat half of the god's body.⁵⁵

In text no.14, the third animal representing Thang lha is also a scorpion:

Furthermore, as for the *gtor ma* of the meteoric iron scorpion, its black body pervades the earth, its horns and tail lift up to the sky, and rays of light spread from its mouth like an iron net. It spreads out, then the *dkor bdag* god is put into it.⁵⁶

The image of the scorpion is also an important motif in the Bon tradition. According to the 16th-century *Ya ngal gdung rabs*, which records the story of the first Tibetan sacred king, gNya' khri btsan po, the king first manifests as a crystal scorpion. The scorpion then transforms into a crystal man with turquoise hair and a white robe. He wears a white turban that protrudes the length of an arrow and holds a white scepter in his hand⁵⁷. It is noteworthy that this image of gNya' khri btsan po is similar to Thang lha's image of a crystal horseman described above.

In summary, Thang lha's three animal emanations—the white wild yak, the conch-shell falcon, and the black scorpion—represent his

⁵⁴ Karmay 1996, p. 69.

⁵⁵ Translated from no.4, p. 350, l.6-p. 351, l.1: *yang na rang lus lcags kyi sdig pa nag por lus kyis sa gzhi khyab cing lto dang mjug ma nam mkhar gdengs pa gcig gis kha nas 'od zer* (351) *lcags kyi dra ba lta bu 'phros pas/ dkor bdag de'i nang du tshud pa de tshur 'ub kyis drangs nas snying dkar nag mtshams su lcags kyi mche ba btab nas lus kyi phyed yan khong par tshud par sgom zhing.*

⁵⁶ Translated from no. 14, p. 658, l. 3-l. 4: *yang gtor ma gnam lcags sdig pa ni/ nag po lus kyis sa gzhi khyab/ rwa dang mjug ma nam mkhar gdengs/ kha nas 'od zer lcags drwa ltar/ 'phros pas dkor bdag de nang tshud.*

⁵⁷ Ramble 2013, p. 85

three identities of *gnyan*, *lha*, and *klu*. The yak represents the *gnyan* identity and lives on the land, the falcon represents the *lha* identity and flies in the sky, and the scorpion represents the *klu* identity and lives underground. Thang lha has a triple identity of *lha*, *gnyan*, and *klu*, and these three animals symbolize his purification of the harms caused by *rgyal po* Pe dkar in the vertical spaces of sky, land, and underground.

d) Nine-headed *garuḍa*

In text no.4, Thang lha is also envisioned as a nine-headed *garuḍa* (*khyung nag mgo dgu pa*) capable of eating all the *sa bdag* (earth-owner spirits) and all its enemies; its large wings cover the whole earth like a shining razor:

You are in essence the great god with the form of a *garuḍa* with nine black heads who devours all the earth-owner spirits, roar with the thunder calls of the *ki kang*, and with a burning beak and claws, and with the wings made of iron razors covering all earth-owner spirits.⁵⁸

The black *garuḍa* in the rNying ma tradition is “the enlightened deity for removing afflictions caused by nagas and earth spirits.”⁵⁹ The *sa bdag* is the earth-owner spirits, and *ki kang* is a puzzling non-Indic foreign word that appears very common in Yamāntaka literature. As mentioned above, the mountain spirits are called *yul lha*, while the harmful and dangerous *yul lha* are called *gzhi bdag* or *sa bdag*, and the good, sanctified *yul lha* are called *gnas* or *gnas ri*.

The image of Thang lha as a nine-headed *garuḍa* in text no. 4 symbolizes his enlightened and transcendental identity. This identity is revealed through his *don gcig* or one nature, as mentioned earlier, which is that of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha.

6. Animal images in signs of accomplishment

In text no. 2, there is a passage that describes the signs of successful accomplishment of the *sādhana* ceremony. These signs are indicated by the appearance of particular animals:

The signs of accomplishment are: In your meditation place you hear thunder; there is light glowing or the earth trembling; [you

⁵⁸ Translated from no. 4, p. 356, l. 3: *rang lha chen gyi ngo bo rnam pa khyung nag mgo dgu pa sa bdag kun za zhing ki kang gi sgra sgrog pa gnam lcags me'i mchu sder can/ sa lcags spu gri'i gshog pa can gyis sa bdag de bkab par bsam zhing.*

⁵⁹ Jeff Watt, <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/616>.

have a vision of] a white horse and a young man with turquoise hair-knots; of a white yak with conch-shell horns reaching upwards to the sky; of a white conch-shell falcon flying around, of a white conch-shell wolf roaming around; of a pale snow mountain shimmering, or of a turquoise-blue lake in fire, and so forth.⁶⁰

These visions indicating signs of accomplishment of one's practice—the white yak, the falcon, and the wolf—are emanations of Thang lha. For example, when Rig 'dzin yol mo pa finished writing the text *Thang lha'i phyi rten 'bul thabs* (see text no.13) during his journey to Chu glang 'on phu stag tshang, he met a little white yak who was an auspicious emanation of Thang lha. This was a sign of the success of Yol mo pa's meditation:

This text was written during my journey to Chu glang 'on phu stag tshang. At that time, while meditating, I met a white yak that was a manifestation of Thang lha. When we were riding along the road on our horses and chatting with the nomads, a little white yak endowed with the compassion of Thang lha was playing his horns in front of the road, so we tried to find his owners. Then we learned the name of the owner of the home where we were supposed to stay that night: he was called rDo rje, which was very coincidental and spontaneous. We returned the little yak to his owner with faith and respect, and immediately set the offering substances on the offering stage for the *sku lha* (Thang lha). This offering verse is written according to the sādhanā by Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las in 'Bra sgang rig 'dzin pho brang, the seat of the Great Vidyadhara from mNga' ris.⁶¹

The white yak's appearance—explicitly deemed an “auspicious sign”

⁶⁰ Translated from no.2, p. 327, 1.2-1.4: grub pa'i rtags/ gnas khang du thug choms dang/ 'od dang sa gzhi 'gul ba 'ong/ rta dkar po dang khye'u g.yu'i zur phud can dang/ g.yag dkar po dung ru gnam du zang nge ba dang/ dung khra dkar po lding ba dang/ dung spyang dkar po 'dur ba dang/ gangs ri skya ye re ba dang/ g.yu tsho sngon mo mer re rnams/ rab mngon sum du 'ong.

⁶¹ Translated from no. 13, p. 650, 1. 3-1. 5: ces pa 'di yang chu glang 'on phu stag tshang mjal bar phyin skabs thang lha'i rten g.yag dkar po zhig byung na snyams tel lam bar rta thog tu 'brog pa rnams dang 'phros gleng zhig yongs <yong> bas lha chen nyid kyi thugs rjes bkun pa'i g.yag phrug shin tu dkar ba zhig lam gyi mdun ngos nas rwa 'khyer dang bcas khrab cing 'dug pa'i bdag po rtsad bcad pas/ deng nub 'dug pa'i sbyin bdag de kha yin 'dug pa'i ming la yang rdo rje zer 'dug pa'i rten 'brel shugs 'byung du 'grigs par go nas ster dgos tshul smras pas dad gus dang bcas byin byung bas de 'phral lha bsangs thog tu sku lha'i sger gsol dang bcas 'dzugs pa'i mchod 'bul tshig tu dge slong padma 'phrin las kyi sgrub thabs dang mthun par rig 'dzin mnga' ris chen po'i gdan sa 'bra sgang rig 'dzin pho brang du de 'phral du bris pa'o.

(*rten 'brel*) and imbued with “compassion” (*thugs rje*)—serves to authenticate Yol mo ba’s ritual text. By framing the encounter as a sign of meditation success, it bridges personal experience and textual authority, a hallmark *gter ma* traditions where divine endorsement supersedes human authorship. The host’s name *rDo rje* (Vajra) directly echoes Thang lha’s secret name *rDo rje 'bar ba rtsal*.

Moreover, Yol mo ba’s attribution of the ritual’s source to *Rig 'dzin* Padma 'phrin las (recognized as rGod ldem’s 4th reincarnation, 1641–1717) anchors innovation within received tradition. Such gestures reinforce *Byang gter*’s ethos: new revelations must be embedded in a genealogical chain extending from Padmasambhava to contemporary masters.

Thang lha’s family and retinue

Text no. 5 introduces the image of Thang lha’s consort, gNam mtsho, a sky-blue colored lady holding a victory banner and mirror, riding a turquoise dragon as well as his father and mother:

Hūṃ. If we were to name the father of the Body God, it is 'Od de gung rgyal. If we were to name the mother of the Body God, it is G.yu bya gshog gcig. If we were to name the Body God himself, it is Yar zhur gnyan gyi lha. And to give the name of his domain, it is 'Dam shod snar mo!⁶²

Here, the names of Thang lha’s father and mother evoke the myth recounted in the *Stod lha rabs* of the early Bon tradition, which records that Thang lha yar bzhur is one of the *lha dgu*, the nine worldly gods whose common father is the sky god 'O de gung rgyal from the Phywa clan; he generated numerous divine sons in the air, the midair and on the land. “In the land of Srin yul, the son he produced with Srin bza’ sbyar lcam ma is Thang la yar bzhur.”⁶³

Conclusion

The Byang gter tradition emerged in the 14th century as a mature phase within the rNying ma school’s *gter ma* systems, following the full development of the Upper Treasure (*stod gter*) tradition in the 12th century. The earliest textual descriptions of Thang lha’s transformation into a protective deity first appeared in the 12th

⁶² Translated from no. 5, p. 372, l. 2-1. 3: *hūṃ sku lha'i yab smos pa/ 'o de gung rgyal lags/ sku lha'i yum smos pa/ g.yu bya zhog gcig lags/ sku lha nyid smos pa/ yar zhud gnyan gyi lha/ bzhugs yul mtshan gsol ba/ 'dam shod snar mo lags.*

⁶³ Lde'u jo sras 1987, p. 230.

century in Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer's *gter ma* about Padmasambhava's life-story, the *Zangs gling ma*, and in his historical account called *Me tog snying po*. Subsequent accounts in the 13th-century *lDe'u chos 'byung* and the 14th-century *Padma bka' thang yig* maintained a similarly straightforward narrative structure. These early texts uniformly present a standardized account of Padmasambhava's subjugation of the mountain deity: the master's arrival, Thang lha's initial defiance, ritual combat culminating in the deity's defeat, oath-binding through Buddhist precepts, and final conversion into a dharma protector.⁶⁴ This narrative simplicity characteristic of 12th-century Upper Treasure literature underwent substantial elaboration in the Northern Treasure tradition from the 14th century onward.

This study examines the Byang gter tradition's sophisticated reconstruction of Thang lha's Buddhist conversion process. The Northern Treasure texts introduced significant innovations, particularly the concept of "threefold vow-taking" that transformed Thang lha from a conventional dharma protector into the Body God of the Dharma king and ultimately into a treasure guardian. This narrative strategy demonstrates both continuity with the Upper Treasure literary conventions as well as creative doctrinal development.

The Byang gter tradition's innovation extends beyond oath ritualization to construct a comprehensive Buddhist identity for Thang lha. The deity is reconceptualized as the antidote (*gnyen po*) and executioner (*gshed ma*) of oath-breakers and demonic forces, the ancestral protector (*pho lha*) of exceptional individuals, the wealth guardian and property protector, the territorial deity (*yul lha*) governing Tibet's four regions, and a transcendent manifestation of Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha. Furthermore, the Northern Treasure cycle elaborates intricate iconographic descriptions and meditation rituals, establishing Thang lha as a crucial protector within Vajrayāna practice. Philological and sociological analyses reveal this systematic textual development as a hallmark of literary maturation within Tibetan Buddhist literature during the post-14th century period. The Byang gter tradition thus exemplifies the dynamic interplay between doctrinal preservation and innovative exegesis characteristic of Tibet's later terma traditions.

⁶⁴ Nyang ral 1989, pp. 43-44; Meisezahl 1985, pp. 301v6-306r1; Nyang ral 1988, pp. 281-282; Lde'u jo sras 1987, pp. 342-343; O rgyan gling pa 1987, pp. 363-364. See Wang 2023.

Appendix

In my prior publication, I systematically catalogued and numerically indexed sixteen Thang lha-related texts from volume 15 of the *sNga 'gyur byang gter chos skor phyogs bsgrigs* (CNT 2015).⁶⁵ Building upon this foundation, the present study advances the analytical framework by adopting ritual typology as a taxonomic criterion to reorganize and examine these sixteen Thang lha texts.

The categories of these Thang lha texts in Byang gter are quite diverse: texts no. 1, 2, 3, and 4 are *sādhana*s; texts number no. 5, 9, and 13 are *mchod* (offering); no. 7 is a *srog gtad* (life force entrustment), no. 14 a *bka' gtad* (entrustment ritual), no. 6 a *mnga' gsol* (benediction), no. 8 a *gser skyems* (libation ritual), no. 11 a *bstod bskul* (praise and exhortation), and no. 16 a *mdos* (cross-thread ritual).

Ritual category	Text numbers
<i>sgrub</i> (<i>sādhana</i>)	- No.1. <i>gNyan chen thang lha'i phyi nang gsang gsum gyi sgrub pa las lo rgyus</i>, pp. 321-324. - No.2. <i>lHa chen thang lha'i phyi sgrub</i>, pp. 325-333. - No.3. <i>lHa chen thang lha'i gsang sgrub</i>, pp. 335-345. - No.4. <i>lHa chen thang lha'i las tshogs gsang sgrub shog dril</i>, pp. 347-367.
<i>mchod</i> (offering)	- No.5. <i>Gnyan chen thang lha'i mchod phreng las bzhi lhun grub ces bya ba</i>, pp. 369-374. - No.9. <i>Zangs mdzod gter bsrung rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi mchod sprin yid bzhin sprin phung</i>. 549-560. - No.13. <i>Thang lha'i phyi rten 'bul thabs</i>, pp. 647-650.

⁶⁵ Wang 2024, pp. 454-456.

<i>srog gtad</i> (life force entrustment) <i>bka' gtad</i> (entrustment ritual)	• No.7. <i>Rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi srog gtad kyi rjes gnang mu ti la'i 'phreng ba</i>, pp. 531-543. • No.14. <i>Thang lha'i bka' gtad smyo 'dre rgod kyi 'grim shul</i>, pp. 651-660.
<i>mnga' gsol</i> (benediction)	• No.6. <i>Sngags 'chang yol mo bas mdzad pa'i lha chen 'bar ba rtsal gyi mnga' gsol yid bzhin rgyal mtshan</i>, pp. 525-529.
<i>gser skyems</i> (libation ritual)	• No.8. <i>lHa chen rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi gser skyems sogs</i>, pp. 545-547.
<i>bstod bskul</i> (praise and exhortation)	• No.11. <i>Gnyan chen thang lha'i bstod bskul mu tig phreng ba bzhugs pa'i dbu phyogs lags mdzad byang med pa</i>, pp. 583-595.
<i>mdos</i> (cross-thread ritual)	• No.16. <i>Rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi rten mdos bzlog mdos kyi rim pa rgya 'bag mig gi rnam 'phrul</i> pp. 663-696.
<i>rten 'dzugs kyi rim pa</i> (steps of veneration)	• No.10. <i>Rdo rje 'bar ba rtsal gyi rten 'dzugs kyi rim pa gsal bar byed pa dwangs shel me long</i>, pp. 561-581.
<i>phrin las</i> (activity ritual)	• No.12. <i>Rgyal dbang lnga pa rin po ches mdzad pa'i lha mchog 'bar ba rtsal gyi phrin las brgya phrag nyi ngos 'dzin pa'i snang gsal</i>, pp. 597-645.
<i>rgyun khyer</i> (daily practice)	• No.15. <i>Dam can 'bar ba rtsal gyi rgyun khyer</i>, pp. 661-662.

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