

**Prophecies, Legends, and Histories
Concerning the Life of the Great Treasure Master:
sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po**

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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 be reborn in the Dark Age to restore the stupa. They further detail sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang

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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 & Kaḥ-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 IHo²⁷ 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*. Phyang 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

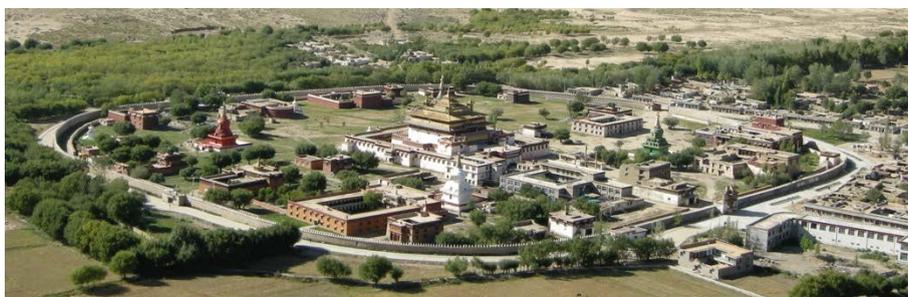


Fig. 1. — bSam yas Monastery with the red stupa from He po Hill. Photo: Zsóka Gelle, 2010.

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 bzhag/ 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 bzhag/ bu yig (insert: bsam yas) mchod rten dmar po'i seng khri'i/ lho nub mtshams su slar yang gter du sbas tel/ 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 prophesied in the *Avatamsaka 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 zhiig gsol 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 gTsub 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 Paṅ 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 Paṅ 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 Paṅ 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: *duš 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 kyis 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 gdung 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 (Petech, 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 Śāntarakṣita's incarnation, 'Bri gung Kun dga' rin chen (1475–1527); and King Khri srong 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 zhid 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 rnams dang mjal zhing byin gyis brlabs/ de dag gi rten 'brel las mchod rten chen po'i zhid gso lung bstan dang mthun par dka' tshegs med par Bya rung kha shor gyi zhid 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 (*mtshu*).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 kyī 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 ČHN, 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.

*gter*⁹⁶ 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 Phyang 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 action⁹⁷ 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 gnang 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 *gter 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 pheb 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 rnams 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.

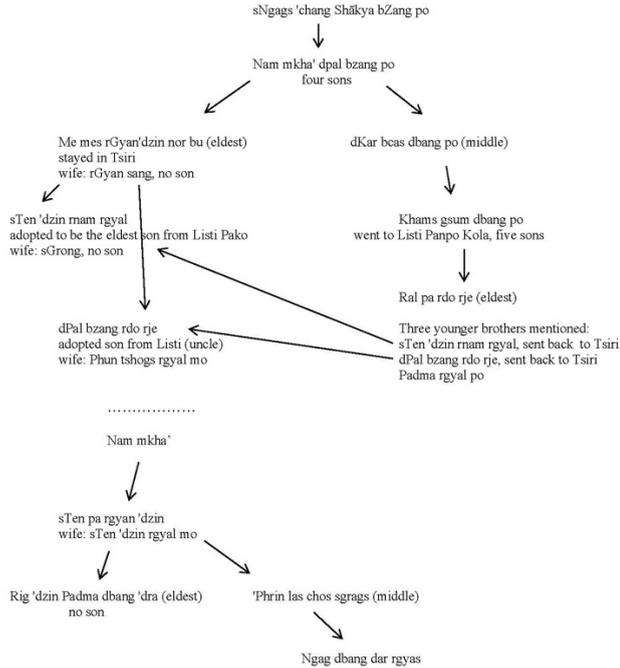


Fig. 5. —Chart showing sNgags 'chang Shākya bzang po's descendants in Yol mo according to the DANGPO¹³⁶

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 bzhugs 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 srong 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 srong 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 srong 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 srong 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.

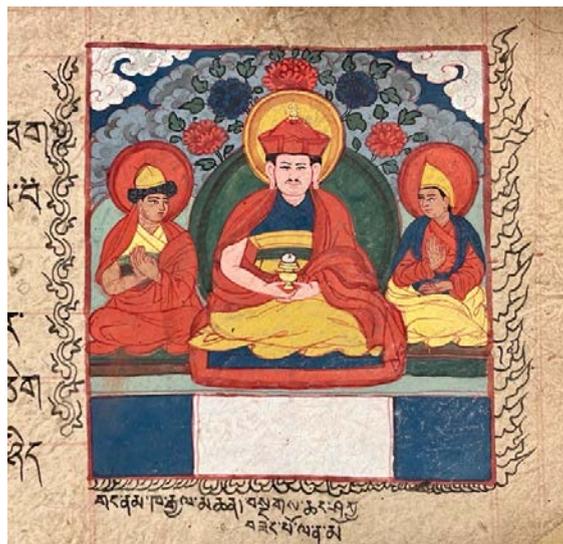


Fig. 6. – Illumination from an incomplete manuscript of the *Padma bKa' thang*, held in the British Library.¹⁵⁵

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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