

The Role of Zur chen Chos dbyings rang grol in the Transmission of the Northern Treasures

Alexandra Sukhanova¹

(Independent Researcher)

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

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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 *maṅḍala*.

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 kyī thob yig ganggā'i chu rgyun*)¹⁹ contains a lengthy section (64 folios, 111r-173v) dedicated to 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 kyī 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 kyī 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 kyī spyi chings rin chen 'phreng ba* (BDRC, MW23375).

²² mNga' ris Pan chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487–1542). *Byang gter chos skor rnams kyī 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 Paṅ 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 Paṅ chen’s *Byang gter chos skor rnam ki 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 Paṅ 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 (Dudjom 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 g'Tsang (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 Yeshé 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, 直贡梯寺; 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 sgröl*) 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 mgon 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 kalyānamitras, 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 bsngos/ gsol 'debs/ smon lam/ brtan bzhugs/ snyan dar zhal byang / chab shog/ dri ba dris lan/ rtsod bzlog/ 'grel 'ñika 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 *sādhanas* 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 2025⁵²

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 rtsal gyi byin rlabs thugs dbang e ka dzā fi'i bka' gtad ljags lung thor bu gsan/ Ibid.*, fols. 62r6-

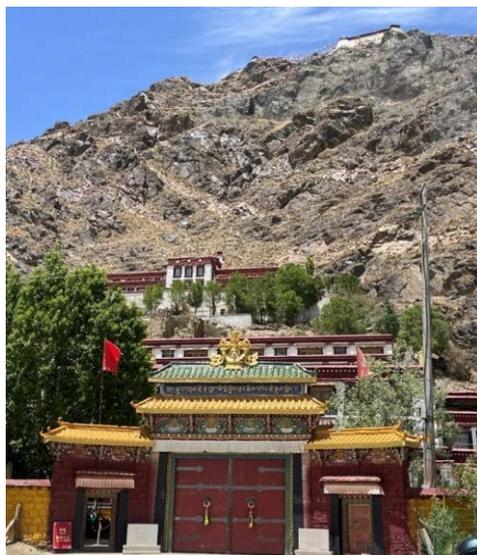


Fig. 6 — Entrance of the rDo rje brag monastery, May 2025

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*), sBrag 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 gzhag 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 'jabs 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 gсар 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 rtsal*) in 1624 and its *Eight Sādhana Sections* (*sGrub pa sde brgyad*) in 1636 in *rDo rje brag*;⁷³
- *Accomplishing the Lineage of the Vidyādharas* (*Rig 'dzin gdung sgrub*) in 1626;⁷⁴
- *The Smoke Offering Pleasing the Deities* (*lha rnam mnyes par bya ba bsangs mchod*) from the *Seven Dharmas of Profound Interdependence* (*Zab mo rten 'brel gyi chos bdun*);⁷⁵
- *Ekajaṭī, 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 Gyaltzen 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 nil 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 (mtha' 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 Sambhogakāya 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 Sambhogakāya 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 *Épitome 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 rnam 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 rtsal*).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 rtsal*, 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 rtsa / byang gter gyi chos tshan kha shas /*

(*lag len go bde bar bsdus 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 'khrīd*) on the Dharma[-cycle] of the Perfect Innate Saṃbhogakāya 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 'khrīd*) 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 'khrīd*) and on the mindstream transference at the time of death ('*pho ba'i nyams 'khrīd*) 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 Vajravārahī] of Dorje Drakpo Tsel (rTsa rlung zab lam gsang 'khrīd 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 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 gnang /*

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.

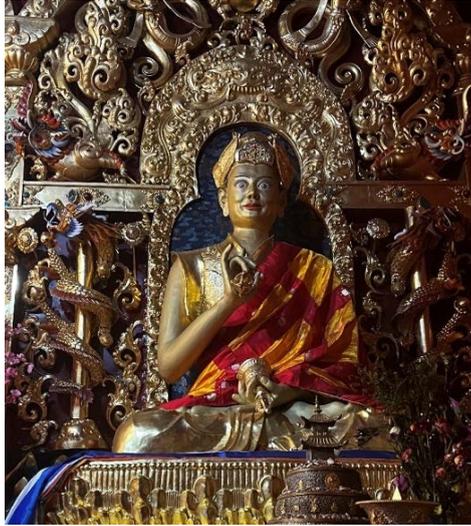


Fig. 8 — A modern depiction of the Fourth Rig 'dzin Padma 'phrin las in rDor rje brag, May 2024

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

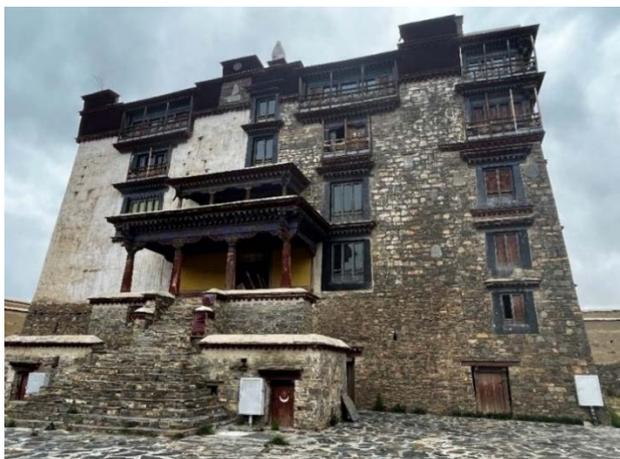


Fig. 9—The reconstructed Manor of rNam sras gling, an unusual architectural example combining the style of a lay household and a monastic residence, May 2024.

Padma ‘phrin las officially petitioned the Fifth Dalai lama, beseeching him to write Zur chen dPal ‘byor ‘phrin las rab rgyas’s biography. Pad ma ‘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 ‘prhin 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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