

## *Rgya gar skad du* – “in Sanskrit”?

### Indian Languages as Reflected in Tibetan Travel Accounts

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The vast majority of works from the Tibetan Buddhist canon open with a standard formula that gives the title of the work “in Indian language” (*rgya gar skad du*) — which many Western translators render as “in Sanskrit” — and “in Tibetan language” (*bod skad du*), which in this context refers to the standard Tibetan developed for the translation of Buddhist literature. We are fairly well informed about the enormous translation project that led to the production of these Tibetan translations and the creation of the Tibetan Buddhist canon.<sup>1</sup> However, we seem to know relatively little about the pragmatics of this process, for example how Indian Buddhist scholars and Tibetan translators actually communicated, or what language Indians and Tibetans would have used outside purely scholarly contexts. The present article hopes to shed some light on these questions. It is offered as a token of respect and appreciation to the recipient of this volume, who has contributed so much to our understanding of the spread of Buddhist Sanskrit literature in the wider Asian context.

There can be no doubt that the bilingual titles provided in the *Bka' 'gyur* and *Bstan 'gyur* serve not only to identify the works in question, but they also indicate the importance that was attributed to the Indian origin of the Buddhist scriptures. One might therefore wonder which was more important to the compilers of the canon – that they could provide a *Sanskrit* title, or that they were able to provide an original *Indian* title for the work.<sup>2</sup> We may find a tentative answer to this question by paying attention to Buddhist texts that were not translated from Sanskrit, but from other languages of the “Indo-sphere”. For example, a group of thirteen texts in the *Bka' 'gyur* goes back to Pāli originals.<sup>3</sup> Their titles have in some cases

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<sup>1</sup> For a convenient overview including relevant secondary literature see HALKIAS 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Tibetan has developed ways of referring specifically to Sanskrit, for example by transliterating the word (*sams kṛ ta*), or translating it verbatim as *legs sbyar* “well-composed”, or by calling it *lha'i skad* “the divine language”, Skt. *devavāṇī*. These terms, however, are not applied to the titles in the Tibetan canon.

<sup>3</sup> SKILLING (1993) provides a detailed discussion of these works. As he points out, earlier scholarship argued about whether these texts were indeed translated from Pāli, but we can be fairly certain that they are based on Pāli originals because (a) they were translated in collaboration with a Sinhalese monk, (b) at least two of the titles are rendered in their Pāli form rather than in standard Sanskrit, and (c) the texts agree with their Pāli counterparts; an additional hint is the fact that Bu ston studied Sinhalese script in the monastery where these texts were translated (SKILLING 1993: 101-102).

been Sanskritised, in other cases they have preserved their Pāli from, but all of them are introduced indiscriminately by the standard phrase *rgya gar skad du* “in the language of India”. The focus therefore seems to be on the Indian original rather than on its specific linguistic form.<sup>4</sup>

The assumption that language here serves as a marker for provenance, and thus for authenticity, is further supported by a comparative glance at the scriptures of the Bon tradition. While the Tibetan Buddhists were keen to demonstrate the existence of an Indian original for each of their canonical scriptures, the Bon canon provides similar bilingual titles, pointing to an origin in the sacred language(s) of Bon.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore probably fair to say that the primary function of the bilingual titles is to indicate the authentic origin of the text, not to identify precisely its original language.

Even if for Tibetan Buddhists Sanskrit was certainly the most important language of the *buddhavacana*, the linguistic picture of the transmission of Buddhism must have been far more complex. Tibet was well-connected through travel, trade, and pilgrimage with the multi-cultural and multi-lingual environments of Central Asia, China, the Gandhāra region, and India. In this environment, Buddhists were confronted with a rather wide spectrum of languages. A multilingual environment requires strategies for communication across the language boundaries. We know that in Indo-Tibetan translation teams it was usually the Tibetan translator (*lo tsa ba*) who was expected to know the “language of India” (*rgya gar skad*), while the average Indian *paṇḍita* did not need to speak Tibetan; his main role was to clarify the meaning of the work, and in this sense he was an exegete rather than a translator.<sup>6</sup> But how did the *lo tsa bas* communicate with the Indian *paṇḍitas*? Presumably in some vernacular, but this is hard to verify.<sup>7</sup> We need to look beyond the canon and the official

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<sup>4</sup> While Tibetan Buddhist translations were in the vast majority of cases based on South Asian originals, it should be kept in mind that the Tibetans also translated from a number of other, non-Indian languages. More than forty texts were translated into Tibetan from Chinese sources, see SILK 2014: 35. A comprehensive investigation of these translations is still lacking. Some editions of the canon also contain translations from the language of Bru sha (Burushaski), see DALTON 2016, esp. pp. 3-7, and from Mongolian (the *Do'u lon e bu gan ner thu ho dun nu su dur*, P vol. 40, no. 1028, *mdo sna tshogs*, ke 286b6-290a8; absent in D and N).

<sup>5</sup> The Bon canon gives many text titles in *g.yung drung lha'i skad du*, “in the divine language of eternal [Bon]”, i.e. the language of Zhang zhung, and *gang zag mi yi skad du* “in the language of humans”, i.e. Tibetan. Some texts also give titles in *ka pi ta lha'i skad du* “the divine language of Kapita”, see MARTIN 2007: 115-17.

<sup>6</sup> Several important studies on the Tibetan translations and their translators have been published in Tibetan, see in particular DBANG 'DUS TSHE RING & 'PHRIN LAS RGYA MTSO 2001 and KHRI BSAM GTAN 2005.

<sup>7</sup> This issue was already flagged up in KRAMER 2007: 46. The variety of languages at play in the transmission of the Buddhist scriptures has also been flagged up for a slightly different context, namely the early Chinese

documents on translation, such as the *Mahāvīyūtpatti* and the *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*, to gain some further information about the communication between Tibetans and Indians, however haphazard and impressionistic these details may be.

Some textual sources provide evidence of the lively exchange between the people from the Tibetan plateau and the various peoples and languages in the surrounding regions. For example, we know that travellers, traders, and pilgrims used glossaries and phrasebooks on their journey, not so different from medieval European language guides,<sup>8</sup> or indeed our modern *Lonely Planet* phrasebooks. Sam van Schaik has spotted some beautiful examples in Tibetan and Chinese, and in Sanskrit and Khotanese, among the Dunhuang manuscripts.<sup>9</sup>

In later centuries too Tibetan translators and pilgrims travelled to foreign lands, and in particular to the holy lands of Buddhism, such as northern India (the land of the Buddha) or Oḍḍiyāna (the land of the *ḍākinīs* and tantric adepts), and they needed to be able to communicate with the locals on their journeys. Luckily, some Tibetan biographies and travel accounts give us glimpses of actual conversations between Tibetan travellers and the Indians they met. The snippets of Indian language contained in these works demonstrate how important the issue of language, and in particular the language of the “holy land” (*’phags yul*) of Buddhism, was. At the same time, these accounts show that the Tibetan understanding of “Sanskrit” and “the language of India” is a fairly fluid concept, and that the vernaculars played an important role. The samples introduced below give us some glimpses of the range

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translations. KARASHIMA has discussed traces of middle Indian (Gāndhārī) in early Chinese translations, and BOUCHER has flagged up the possibility that such middle Indian forms do not necessarily always reflect a middle Indian original of the text, but could have crept into these Chinese versions because of what the translators heard, rather than what they read, i.e., it may reflect how the text was read and explained orally in the process of translation, see KARASHIMA (2006) and BOUCHER (2006) with further literature.

<sup>8</sup> See LAUXTERMANN 2011 on late medieval and early Renaissance European glossaries and phrasebooks. I thank Yannick Laurent (Oxford) for drawing my attention to this article.

<sup>9</sup> See VAN SCHAİK and GALAMBOS 2012: 30-31 and 140-43 on Chinese-Tibetan glossaries and phrasebooks and a Sanskrit-Khotanese phrasebook from Dunhuang. The Sanskrit-Khotanese phrasebook seems to have served the needs of a Buddhist travelling from India via Khotan to Wutaishan, since it contains model conversations such as: “And where are you going now? I am going to China. What business do you have in China? I’m going to see the bodhisattva Manjuśrī.” Slightly later the phrasebook turns to the topic of a Tibetan teacher who — from the viewpoint of an orthodox monk — seems to follow slightly dubious practices: “He is dear to many women. He goes about a lot. He makes love. ... Bring a bowl! The Tibetan teacher has become ill!” (VAN SCHAİK and GALAMBOS 2012: 141-43). Sample images can be found in van Schaik’s blog at [earlytibet.com/2014/05/12/silk-road-phrasebooks/](http://earlytibet.com/2014/05/12/silk-road-phrasebooks/) (accessed 15/09/2016). I thank David Pritzker (Oxford) for drawing my attention to this blog entry.

of vocabulary and grammar used, and of successful as well as less successful attempts to speak with each other. They will be introduced in chronological order, beginning with some important translators of the *phyi dar*, and ending in fairly recent times.

### **Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (982-1054)**

For Indian *paṇḍits* travelling in Tibet, the availability of good translators and interpreters was crucial for the success of their mission. Atiśa<sup>10</sup> Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna is one of the towering figures of the *phyi dar* (“second diffusion”) period of Tibetan Buddhism. He spent the last twelve years of his life in Tibet, with ample opportunity to become acquainted with the locals and their language; however, it seems that throughout his time in Tibet he relied on his Tibetan interpreters. His early biographies, the *Rnam thar rgyas pa* and the *Rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*,<sup>11</sup> contain some interesting episodes in this respect.

When Atiśa left the monastery of Vikramaśīla in India, he set out for Tibet with two translators, Rgya Brtson grus seng ge and Nag tsho lo tsa ba Tshul khriṃs rgyal ba (1011-1064). On the way to Tibet, Rgya Brtson grus seng ge passed away. Thereupon Atiśa complained that there was no point in continuing to Tibet since his tongue had been cut off.<sup>12</sup> Nag tsho lo tsa ba tried to reassure him that there were other translators, including himself. Atiśa replied that out of the others Nag tsho was the best, and moreover he had studied some [Tibetan] himself, which should be sufficient.<sup>13</sup> Shortly afterwards, while in Nepal, Atiśa was given four Buddhist works and we are told that they were translated jointly by the Jo bo

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<sup>10</sup> In Tibetan known as *jo bo* or *jo bo rje* “the lord”. Various authors have rendered the Indian honorary title with a long *ī* (Atiśa), but as EIMER has pointed out, *atīśa* “the one who surpasses *īśa*” does not make very good sense for a Buddhist monk. EIMER suggests that *a ti śa* is a Tibetan short form of Sanskrit *atīśaya* “eminence”, confirmed by the Tibetan equivalent *phul du byung ba* (EIMER 1977: 20-22), which can indeed render *atīśaya*, as for example in the work title \**Devātīśayastotra*, Tib. *Lha las phul du byung ba'i bstod pa*. Some Tibetan sources use a variant spelling *a dhi sha*, and ISAACSON and SFERRA (2014: 70, fn. 51) have recently argued for *adhīśa* as the most likely form of the honorific title. In this article, however, I shall follow EIMER’s fairly well-established convention.

<sup>11</sup> As demonstrated by EIMER in various studies of the biographies of Atiśa, the *Rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* was written by Mchims Nam mkha’ grags (1210-1285), the seventh abbot of Snar thang; it shares most episodes with the *Rnam thar rgyas pa*, which seems to be a slightly more archaic version of the same account, but with a different arrangement. For a convenient overview see EIMER 2008.

<sup>12</sup> *Ngas bod du phyin pa la don med / da nga’i lce chad pas bod la phan mi thogs ...* EIMER 1979, episode 246 (vol. 1: 229, vol. 2: 183).

<sup>13</sup> ... *lo tstsha ba de kun pas khyod rang drag nas ’ong / ngas kyang kha slob byas pas chog gis gsung /* EIMER 1979, episode 246 (vol. 1: 229, vol. 2: 183).

[Atiśa] and [Nag tsho] lo tsa ba. “The Jo bo translated the *Stavavidhi* on his own, and the translation was bad.”<sup>14</sup> It was revised several times later on.<sup>15</sup> After Atiśa’s seemingly unsuccessful translation project, the early biographies do not mention any further attempts by him to translate Buddhist works into Tibetan on his own, but give the impression that Atiśa returned to the normal pattern of collaboration with a Tibetan *lo tsa ba*. It needs to be kept in mind that this biographical account was transmitted through Nag tsho’s disciples, who may have tended to highlight the importance of their teacher. Nevertheless, the colophons of Atiśa’s translations in the Tibetan canon largely seem to support this picture.<sup>16</sup> It appears that the scholar who travelled all the way from India to Nepal, Western Tibet, and finally Central Tibet performing rituals, preaching, writing works at the request of Tibetan kings and disciples, and collaborating with Tibetan scholars, never actually felt confident to compose works in Tibetan or to translate Indian works on his own, and it seems that the Tibetan translators and interpreters remained crucial for his success in Tibet.

### **’Brog mi lo tsa ba (993-ca. 1064) and Mar pa lo tsa ba (1012-1097)**

Tibetan travellers to the Indian subcontinent, on the other hand, are usually described as being well-versed in “the language of India”, and their travel accounts and biographies do not fail to highlight this point. It was obviously not sufficient to have studied Sanskrit, but the travellers also needed some familiarity with the spoken language(s) of the regions they visited. The biography of ’Brog mi lo tsa ba (993-ca. 1064) in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century *Zhib mo rdo rje* informs the reader that in his youth, when ’Brog mi was encouraged by his teacher to go to India, “he studied the Vivarta script and knew enough to be able to listen to the *dharma*”, but, as a gloss explains, at this stage “he only knew the vernacular (*’phral skad*)”.<sup>17</sup> In India he continued to study Indian grammar and finally became a famous translator.

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<sup>14</sup> *Stod ’grel la jo bos rang ’gyur mdzad pas ’gyur ngan zhig yod* / EIMER 1979, episode 249 (vol. 1: 230, vol. 2: 185).

<sup>15</sup> See EIMER 1979, episode 249 (vol. 1: 230-31, vol. 2: 185-86).

<sup>16</sup> See CHATTOPADHYAYA 1999 [1967]: 445-65 and 475-93 for a list of Atiśa’s translations contained in the Tibetan canon; in two cases (p. 477, no. 10: *Ārya-acala-sādhana*, p. 479, no. 16: *Kulika-mata-tattva-nirṇaya*) does Atiśa appear as a translator without naming a Tibetan *lo tsa ba*. This information would obviously need to be counter-checked in the available editions of the Tibetan canon, which I have not done for the purpose of the present article.

<sup>17</sup> *de nas bla chen gyis big pa rta bslabs pas chos nyan du ’dod pa tsam mkhyen* (gloss: *zer kyang ’phral skad tsam shes*)... (STEARNS 2001: 84).

Tsang smyon Heruka's biography of Mar pa lo tsa ba addresses a similar issue when it informs the reader at the very beginning that in his youth Mar pa stayed with 'Brog mi, who had recently returned from India, and "studied towards reading the Indian language (*rgya gar gyi skad*) and translating the spoken language (*'phral skad*), and within three years he became thoroughly familiar with the translation equivalents".<sup>18</sup> In this passage it seems likely that "the Indian language" is meant to designate Sanskrit, as opposed to the vernacular which was needed in order to travel and communicate in India.

### **Chag lo tsa ba Chos rje dpal (1197-1264)**

Some biographies and travel accounts contain direct quotations of dialogues between Indians and Tibetans and thus shed more light on the actual languages used in everyday conversation. The earliest example I have come across is the biography of Chag lo tsa ba Chos rje dpal, who went on a pilgrimage to the holy sites of India in the years 1234-36. Upon his return he gave a detailed description of his travels, which was written down and published by his disciple 'Ju ba Chos (dpal) dar (dpyang) under the title *Bla ma'i gsung dri ma med pa* "The Immaculate Speech of (my) Teacher".<sup>19</sup> This travel account provides an interesting eye-witness report about religious and popular customs and about the political situation in northern India at the time of the Muslim incursions that led to the destruction of the Buddhist monastic universities.

As befits a translator well-versed in Sanskrit, the travel account places great emphasis on Chag lo tsa ba's language skills and contains a fairly large number of Sanskritisms and explanations of Sanskrit expressions. It opens with a description of Chag lo tsa ba's scholarly training: "When he had reached his seventh year of age, he studied reading, translating Indian writing, Tibetan writing, and [writing in] Vivarta [or Vartula script], and the decrees [on translation] and calligraphy."<sup>20</sup> The travelogue itself contains vignettes of Chag lo tsa's ba conversations in India. For example, in Bodhgayā he meets some Theravāda monks who act as caretakers of the monastery, and he has a dispute with one of them about the scriptures of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Chag lo tsa ba carries a book containing the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñā-*

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<sup>18</sup> Gtsang smyon He ru ka ed. 1983: 6: *rgya gar gyi skad thad klog dang 'phral skad kyi lo tsā bslabs pas lo gsum la brda 'phrad nges mkhyen bar gyur to /*

<sup>19</sup> On Chag lo's and other early travel accounts see HUBER 2008: 66-72.

<sup>20</sup> 'Ju ba Chos dar, ed. Roerich 1959: 3-4/Zongtse 1981: 10-13: ... *dgung lo bdun bshes nas klog dang / rgya yig dang / bod yig dang / bi warta rnam par bsgyur ba dang bka' bcad bris thig bslabs /* For this and the following quotations I have consulted the editions Roerich 1959 and Zongtse 1981. I render the Tibetan text according to the ALA-LC transliteration system.

*pāramitā* with him, and the caretaker asks him what it is. Chag lo replies: *prajñāpāramitā ho*, “it is the *prajñāpāramitā*”.<sup>21</sup> The caretaker tells him that a monk should not carry Mahāyāna scriptures on his back, and that he should throw the book into the river. He says: “The Mahāyāna scriptures are not the word of the Buddha. They were made up by a clever person called Nāgārjuna.”<sup>22</sup> Chag lo tsa ba pays homage to the statues of Avalokiteśvara and Tārā, and another caretaker (again a Theravādin) says: “A monk like you should not venerate lay people!” He folds his hands and says: “*a rokṣa [\*aroga?] ho*”, which means, “May you be free from illness!”<sup>23</sup>

Once, when Chag lo tsa ba was doing a circumambulation, someone asked him: “Who are you?” and he replied: “*Bhoṭa ho*”, “I am a Tibetan”. Those present did not believe him and thought that on account of his well-formed teeth and his proficiency in Sanskrit (*sams kṛ ta’i skad*) he must be Indian. But one of the caretakers of the monastery saw the horny skin on his feet and exclaimed: “*Deśa deśa!* Look, look, these are the marks of wearing boots. These are found in Tibet!” Then they understood that he had not been lying.<sup>24</sup> They said: “How can it be that so much Sanskrit (*sam kṛ ta’i skad*) has reached Tibet?” Chag lo tsa ba replied that he had studied it. And during the three months retreat of the rainy season, he was appointed as the interpreter for the monks “who all spoke their individual languages...”.<sup>25</sup>

If the references to Sanskrit above are meant to refer to Chag lo tsa ba’s fluency in the spoken language of these dialogues, rather than to his general knowledge of written Sanskrit, this passage must make us slightly wary of the term “Sanskrit” as it is used here: “*prajñāpāramitā ho*” and “*bhoṭa ho*” do not sound like Sanskrit at all, but like a relatively modern vernacular of northern India. *ho* is used for the third and the first person alike in these phrases. It is also used as a kind of hortative form in *\*aroga ho*. The only markedly different

<sup>21</sup> Ju Chos dar, ed. Roerich 1959: 18/Zongtse 1981: 82-83.

<sup>22</sup> Ju ba Chos dar, ed. Roerich 1959: 19/Zongtse 1981: 82-83: ... *khyod dge slong legs po cig ’dug pa la theg pa chen po’i chos rab tu khur ba de ma legs de bor la chu la gyur cig zer nas sna ’gebs su byung theg pa chen po bya ba sangs rgyas kyis ma gsung klu grub zer ba’i dbang po rno ba cig gis bcos pa yin zer /*

<sup>23</sup> Ju ba Chos dar, ed. Roerich 1959: 19/Zongtse 1981: 84-85: ... *khyod dge slong legs pa cig ’dug pa la / khyim pa la phyag byed pa ma legs so zer / kho rang de kun gyis phyag ’tshal ba’i phyag len pa ltar byed cing thal mo ya cig deng nge yas na a rokṣa ho nad med par gyur cig zer.*

<sup>24</sup> Ju ba Chos dar, ed. Roerich 1959: 19/Zongtse 1981: 84-85: ... *bskor ba mdzad pa la su yin zer / bho ṭa ho bod yin gsung bas ’khor rnams yid ma ches te chos rjes tshems legs pa dang sam kṛ ta’i skad la byang pa des rgya gar ba rang yin nam snyam ’dug khong rnams na re brdzun ma cig ’dug bod min zer ba la dkon gnyer gcig gis zhabs kyi sen mo kyong nge ba gcer ba mthong bas bod du ’dug lham gon pa’i rtags la de sha de sha ltos dang zer bas brdzun min par go /*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, ...*dge ’dun skad rigs mi cig pa cig lo tsā ba bcug nas ...*

verb form that occurs in this episode is the imperative *deśa deśa* “look, look”. Thus, the grammatical repertoire seems rather limited, although of course a written text is not a tape recording, and we cannot be sure whether it mirrors the conversation as it took place, or whether its grammar was simplified in the process of transmission. It is interesting that the biographer explicitly says that Chag lo tsa ba is admired for his knowledge of “Sanskrit”, *sams kr ta’i skad*, and not just “the language(s) of India” in general, *rgya gar skad*. If the author is indeed referring to the conversations cited above, it seems that for him “Sanskrit” is anything spoken in India.

### **Stag tshang ras pa Ngag dbang rgya mtsho (1574-1651)**

Plenty of interesting information is contained in Stag tshang ras pa Ngag dbang rgya mtsho’s account of his journey to O rgyan (Oḍḍiyāna).<sup>26</sup> Two other famous Tibetans had travelled to O rgyan before him: Rgod tshang pa Mgon po rdo rje (1189-1258)<sup>27</sup> and O rgyan pa Rin chen dpal (1229/30-1309).<sup>28</sup> Stag tshang ras pa set out in the footsteps of O rgyan pa, with whose travel account he was familiar, but he found his travels delayed by various events and adventures along the way and spent most of his journey in the Western parts of the Himalayas, visiting Pretapuri and Jālandhara and spending considerable amounts of time in Lahoul, Kashmir, and Zanskar, as well as in Ladakh on his way back, which established his role as one of the most popular religious figures there. O rgyan itself, at this time part of the Mughal empire under Jahāngīr, had become a Muslim domain, and Stag tshang ras pa stayed there relatively briefly. His account of his travels, known as *O rgyan mkha’ ’gro’i gling gi*

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<sup>26</sup> While O rgyan and Oḍḍiyāna are usually considered to be synonymous and are both often identified with the Swat valley, Stag tshang ras pa seems to differentiate between the region of O rgyan and Oḍḍiyāna, since he first reports to have arrived in *o ḍi yā ṇa* (Stag tshang ras pa ed. 2008: 283) and then says: “It is said that this region is the centre of the sacred land of O rgyan” (*yul de o rgyan gnas kyi mthil yin zer*, *ibid.*, 285). He also provides a rough geographical description of the location O rgyan (*ibid.*, 287-88).

<sup>27</sup> See HUBER 2008: 101-103.

<sup>28</sup> TUCCI published a translation of the travel account based on one biography of O rgyan pa as early as 1940, but not much was known about this material until Brenda LI’s doctoral thesis (Oxford 2011). She identified eleven biographies and recensions of biographies that can be classified into four groups: (a) three full-scale versions of the biography written by Bsod nams ’od zer, a disciple of O rgyan pa, presumably shortly after his death, (b) three versions of condensed biographies by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Karma pa and the 4<sup>th</sup> Zhwa dmar pa, (c) four “thematic biographies” by O rgyan pa’s disciples that focus on certain aspects of his life, and (d) one brief story about the early years of his next incarnation. This material is supplemented by a “biographical song” that is cited in biographies from groups (a) and (b). It is ascribed to O rgyan pa himself and records the different stages of his journey to O rgyan.

*lam yig* “Account of the travels to O rgyan, the land of the *ḍākinīs*”, contains numerous verbatim quotations of his conversations with the locals.<sup>29</sup>

The first episode occurs when Stag tshang ras pa and his travel companions are on the way from Maloṭṭa to Rukāla. They meet a small group of people who had harvested salt from a salt mine (*tshwa kha*).<sup>30</sup> When Stag tshang ras pa mentions that he is a Buddhist, one of the salt miners says (I transliterate the following text as it is found in the original, with some tentative reconstructions provided in the footnotes):<sup>31</sup> “*kya hindu ha ramdza ti*”<sup>32</sup> which Stag tshang ras pa translates for his readers as “What a Buddhist with great self-esteem!” and hits him on the head with his salt grinding pestle. He replies: “*sa si lim sa partsha dharti / tu mi ha ramdza ti kya hu wa / tshu ḍi mu ha*,”<sup>33</sup> “Why do you behave so rudely in the land of the great truthful king? You should be killed with the knife.” He grabs him by the chest, threatening to stab him with a small knife; Stag tshang ras pa’s companion Zhi ba rnam rgyal tries to appease the opponents by saying: “*bha bha pha la / ha mi mo sur ma hu wa*,”<sup>34</sup> “Dear uncle, I am a non-Buddhist!” What Stag tshang ras pa renders as non-Buddhist (*phyi pa*) in Tibetan is clearly a Muslim (*mosulmān*). Stag tshang ras pa tears the garment of his opponent

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<sup>29</sup> On Stag tshang ras pa’s travels see SCHWIEGER 1996, on the journey to O rgyan *ibid.* pp. 99-102.

<sup>30</sup> For an overview of the itinerary see TUCCI 1940: 32-36. LI 2011: 175-178 locates the salt mountains mentioned in this episode between the Jhelum River and the Sindhu.

<sup>31</sup> As before I follow the ALA-LC transliteration system for the Tibetan text. I am deeply indebted to Prof. Imre Bangha (Oxford) for going through the Indo-Tibetan dialogues presented here and sharing his profound expertise on New Indo-Aryan languages with me. Much of the vocabulary and grammar is similar to Hindustani, which was a *lingua franca* in Mughal India, without entirely conforming to its standard grammar. The quotations do not seem to correspond to the local languages of the regions Stag tshang ras pa was travelling through, such as Kashmiri or Punjabi. It should be kept in mind that we are not necessarily dealing with any standard form of Hindustani, but potentially with the kind of “pigeon Hindustani” that a Tibetan traveller might have used. Needless to say, all errors in the tentative reconstructions below are my responsibility alone.

<sup>32</sup> This can be reconstructed as *\*kyā hindū harām-jātī* / “What an Indian bastard!”

<sup>33</sup> I am uncertain how to reconstruct the beginning. The rest might stand for something like: *\*[...] / tuṃhī harām-jātī kyā huā / churī muā* /

<sup>34</sup> The spelling *ha mi* is used for the singular “I”, as opposed to *ha ma ra* “we”. This pattern is not attested in Hindi, but Imre Bangha made me aware of a similar paradigm in Bengali (*āmī* “I” and *āmarā* “we”). KELLOGG has noted similar patterns, such as *ham* “I” and *hamaran* “we” in Bhojpūrī and *hammai* “I” and *hamanī* “we” in Maithilī (KELLOGG 1938, fold-out tables facing p. 196). In our text, *ha mi* “I” corresponds to the form *tu mi* “you”, and I have adopted the convention of rendering them more or less as they sound, as *hamhī* and *tuṃhī*. *tuṃhī* can be used as a polite 2<sup>nd</sup> person form in some New Indo-Aryan languages (Imre Bangha, oral communication, October 2016). Adopting this convention, the reconstruction would be: *\*bhābhā bhalā / hamhī mosulmān hue* /

open and says: “*sā pa kaṃ haṃ tsa le / til ka martu mi mu ha*,”<sup>35</sup> “Where do you go tomorrow? I’ll shoot you with an arrow and kill you!”<sup>36</sup>

After this unpleasant encounter they spend the night in a nomad camp, and the next day they meet another group of salt traders. An old man says:<sup>37</sup> “*tu mi a bo / e haṃ bhe ṭha / ro ṭi we la khā hi kyī nahī*”, “Come here! Stay here! Are you going to eat a meal or not?” He replies in the affirmative: “*khā hi khā hi*”, and they are given some food. During the meal the old man tells him: “*ha mi bram ze bai wa / tu mi thor ra hya ṭha / sanggi rdo no ho dza*,” meaning: “I am a Brahmin. Stay a little. We will go together.”<sup>38</sup>

One further example may suffice for an impression of the language as it is rendered in this travel account. The group of travellers has reached the Indus, and Stag tshang ras pa’s companions hesitate to continue the journey because they have heard that it is impossible to cross over. He takes three yogis and one householder called A tu ma as guides and successfully cross the river. On the other side, they meet a man who asks them where they are headed. His companions answer: “*bho ṭa nti dzo ki ka pu rti rta ca le*,”<sup>39</sup> which according to the Tibetan rendering means: “The Tibetan Yogi is on a pilgrimage to O rgyan.” The other person says: “*ha ma ra ā ci ka puṭ dhu yi / sub tsa lo / sanggi do no ho dza*,”<sup>40</sup> “Today we are washing our cotton clothes. Let us go tomorrow. Let’s be companions.” And a *yoginī* encourages them too: “*a tsi bai ṭha / su ba ā dha mi {/} sanggi dho no ho dza*,”<sup>41</sup> “Stay today. Go tomorrow with this man as your companion.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> \**subah kahāṃ cale / tīr [...] tumhī muā /*

<sup>36</sup> The passage reads in full (Stag tshang ras pa ed. 2008: 262): *kya hindu ha ramdza ti zhes / ci nang pa dran rgya chen po zer zhing nga’i mgo la tshwa rko ba’i tho ba rgyab byung / ngas sa si lim sa partsha dharti / tu mi ha ramdza ti kya hu wa / tshu ḍi mu ha / bden pa’i rgyal po chen po’i sa cha la khyod ham pa chen po byed pa ci yin / gris gsod dgos ’ong byas kho’i brang nas bzung / gri chung rgyag grabs byed pa skad byas pas / zhi ba rnam rgyal gyis bha bha pha la / ha mi mo sur ma hu wa zhes / a pa bzang nga phyi pa yin zer ’dug gzhan ma rnams kyis bar byas / nged gnyis phral byung / ngas kho’i steng gos de gshags pas / sā pa kaṃ haṃ tsa le / til ka martu mi mu ha ces / sang gang la ’gro mda’ rgyab nas khyed gsad gtong zer ’dug.*

<sup>37</sup> The following passage is also included in TUCCI 1940: 38.

<sup>38</sup> Stag tshang ras pa ed. 2008: 263, reconstructed: \**haṃhī bramhe bhayā / tumhī thora yahāṃ ṭha / saṅga donō hoja /*

<sup>39</sup> \**bhoṭānī jogi kabūl tīrtha calai /* The Tibetan rendering makes it clear that *ka pur* refers to O rgyan (for the Tibetan text see fn. 42 below, for further attestations of *ka pur* see the appendix). I therefore reconstruct it here as the place name *kabūr/kabūl*.

<sup>40</sup> \**hamarā āji kapaḍā dhue / subah calo / saṅga donō hoja /* While Tibetan *ha ma ra* could represent the regular Hindi genitive *hamārā* in this phrase, other passages make it clear that it stands for the nominative plural “we”. I render it tentatively as \**hamarā* without being able to point to an exact Indo-Aryan parallel (see also fn. 34).

<sup>41</sup> \**āji bhaiṭha / subah ādamī saṅga donō hoja /*

As these excerpts show, the lexical and grammatical repertoire of these conversations is relatively limited, and the phrases are repetitive. The vernacular used seems to be some form of Hindustani or Hindavi, which functioned as a *lingua franca* in northern India during this period.<sup>43</sup> Many elements are easily recognisable, but without strictly conforming to standard Hindustani. It is interesting to see that in this conversation the word *hindū* is used to designate the (Tibetan!) Buddhists, as opposed to the Muslims (*musulmān*), with the implication that Buddhism is here classified as an indigenous Indian religion as opposed to the foreign religion of Islam. Another intriguing element is the name for O rgyan or Oḍḍiyāna, which is nowadays usually understood to refer to the Swat valley (see fn. 26 above). The equivalent used here for both Tibetan terms is *ka pur*, presumably corresponding to Kabūl, which would include an area west of Swat. In terms of geography, it is also noteworthy how Stag tshang ras pa explains where he comes from. He says he is not a Kashmiri Tibetan, but a Tibetan from *mahācīna* (“greater China”), which is rendered as *dbus gtsang* in Tibetan.<sup>44</sup> This implies that *bhoṭa* was an umbrella term for ethnically Tibetan people, and the term *mahācīna* serves to clarify the geographical location of his homeland on the Tibetan plateau.

The *lam yig* contains further bilingual dialogues that have been rendered in the appendix of this article. All in all, it is striking to find so many lengthy quotations in a travel account that is otherwise relatively concise. The author does not comment on these scenes and it therefore remains unclear whether his attention to language is motivated by a curiosity in ethnographic detail, whether it is meant to enhance the exotic flair of the account, whether it is intended to highlight the language skills of the author, whether it was included for the benefit of future travellers, or any combination of the above. Stag tshang ras pa does not provide a designation for the language used and does not seem to worry about the relationship

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<sup>42</sup> Stag tshang ras pa ed. 2008: 264: *bho ṭa nti dzo ki ka pu rti rta tsa le zhes / bod kyi rnal 'byor pa o rgyan gyis (\*gyi) yul la 'gro ba 'dug zer / mi nag des / ha ma ra ā ci ka puṭ dhu yi / sub tsa lo / sanggi do no ho dza zhes / nged cag de ring ras 'khru / sang 'gro / rogs bya zer / dzo ki ni na re / a tsi bhai ṭha / su ba ā dha mi / sanggi dho no ho dza ces / de ring sdod / sang mi 'di dang mnyam du song / rogs byas 'ong zer /*

<sup>43</sup> On the trans-regional use of Hindavi see ORSINI 2012: 228-29, on Hindi as the vernacular used for oral communication in Moghul India see TRUSCHKE 2016: 9, 231.

<sup>44</sup> Stag tshang ras pa ed. 2008: 270: “*ha mi ka shi mi ri na hi / ha ma ra ma hātsinda hu wa / ka shi mi ri thi paṇḍa pa ra / da sha ma yi ni gha ya ha yi (\*haṃhī kāśmīrī nahīṃ / hamarā mahācīna huā / kāśmīra thī paḷḷa pār / daśa mahīnā gayā hai /*,” which is rendered in Tibetan as “*nga kha che min dbus gtsang nas yin / kha che nas phar la thag ring / zla ba bcu bud nas yin*”.

between Sanskrit and the vernacular(s), but what becomes evident is the importance of knowing the spoken language for the Tibetan traveller.

### **Dkar ru grub dbang**

The last example is taken from the life story of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bon po master Dkar ru grub dbang Bstan 'dzin rin chen (b. 1801). In 1838 he visited Svayambhunāth in the Kathmandu valley, and Charles Ramble has reconstructed his delightful conversation with a Sādhu in the following way:

“The chief of these sadhus, who was in a completely green palanquin with glass windows, said, “*O bābā, ghar kahā ho?*” which means, “Brother, what country are you from?” To which I replied, “*ghar mahācina ho*”, meaning, “My home is in China”. My disciples and I had our mandalas, staffs and bowls in front of us, and he remarked about them: “*vaise kyā ho? hāt ho ki?*” – “What’s that you have? Might it be your market stall?”

“*deutā pujā ghar ni ho*” I replied: “That’s the shrine for worshipping our gods”. At that he climbed down from his palanquin and said, “*Bābā, unka māl mero hami samāe holā?*” Meaning, “Is it all right if I handle these things of yours?” “*Chune holā holā,*” – “Yes, yes, you may touch them.” “*Accha ho, accha ho,*” he said – “Ah, you’re a good man!”

After this point neither of us could really understand what the other was saying, and dPal 'byor of sKyid rong stepped in as interpreter (198-99).<sup>45</sup>

The language used in this conversation is remarkably similar to the passages quoted above. It does not conform to any standard grammar; as Ramble puts it: “The language in which they attempt to communicate [...] is a convincing pot-pourri of the mangled Hindi and Nepali in which an Indian cleric and a Tibetan pilgrim are very likely to have conversed”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> RAMBLE 2008: 497-98. The Tibetan text reads (ibid.): *de nang gu ru dzwa ki gtso bo yi / khri gang ljang la shel sgo yod pa'i nang / ho bha ba ghar gang ho zhes pa / de gang zhe na'ang / mched grogs pha yul gang nas yin zhes so / de la bdag gi ghar ma ha tsi ni ho zhes pas / de gang zhes na / pha yul rgya nag nas yin zhes-so / nged rang dpon slob rnams kyi mdun du ma 'dal mkhar sil lhung bzed sogs yod pa de la / yang kho'o u sī ca ho / ha kra ho ci zhes pa / khyod kyi de gang yin khrom bkram sa e yin zhes-so / de la bdag gis rde'u ta'i pu dzwa ghar ni ho zhes pas / lha yi mchod pa 'bul ba'i rten yin-no zhes so / der kho'o khri khar nas mar babs bha ba u nu ka mal me ro ha mi sa ma'i ho la / zhes pa khyod gyi bca' lags 'di la nga yi rags su rung ngam zhes so / bdag gis 'dzus na'i ho la ho la zhes pa / la legs so rag na 'ong drag zhes so byas pas / der kho rang a ca ho a ca ho zhes pa / ha ha khyod yag po red zhes so / de nas phan tshun go brda' ma khrol tshe / skyid rong dpal 'byor zhes pa'i lo tsa bsgyur /*

<sup>46</sup> RAMBLE 2008: 497.

## Conclusion

The excerpts from biographies and travelogues presented here, covering a period of about six centuries, contain passages in Indo-Aryan vernaculars that — we must assume — were in use in the respective areas and the respective times. They give us intriguing samples of what the vernaculars may have sounded like, of course as perceived and potentially distorted by the Tibetan travellers themselves, or their disciples who committed the account to writing, or subsequent copyists of the text.

The accounts are witness to the fact that Tibetan travellers were flexible and pragmatic in their choice of languages. While Sanskrit did play an enormous role as the holy language of Buddhism in northern India, for everyday purposes Tibetans resorted to the spoken language. In the samples presented here I cannot detect any clear evidence of regional variants, which raises the question whether the travellers were using a form of the *lingua franca*, or whether the regional features have simply been lost in the Tibetan rendering. Further samples would be needed before we can arrive at any conclusion in this regard.

The examples given here, and in particular the rather loose usage of the term “Sanskrit” in Chag lo tsa ba’s travel account, should serve as a note of caution. Even if some biographies make a distinction between Sanskrit and the vernacular (*’phral skad*), it seems that for the most part the Tibetan travellers were not particularly interested in linguistic distinctions between regional varieties, or between the language of Buddhist literature and the languages they spoke with the people they met along the way. While it may be true that in the case of the canonical scriptures *rgya gar skad* is *typically* meant to refer to Sanskrit (in any of its varieties), in contexts such as the ones introduced above it seems more appropriate to render the term literally: as “the language of India” — whatever that may be.

As a consequence, I would like to propose the adoption of the same convention when translating the term in the texts of the Tibetan Buddhist canon. First of all, we cannot blindly assume that all texts in the Tibetan canon are based on Sanskrit originals; on the contrary, we know of numerous texts where this was not the case. Secondly, if the attitude of the translators and compilers of canonical texts was similar to that of the Tibetan travellers introduced above, it may not have been essential to them whether a text was translated from standard Sanskrit, or from another South Asian language (such as Pāli, or any variety of middle Indo-Aryan), or even from languages used in Central Asia, so long as the work originally came from India. What matters seems to be first and foremost Indian-ness, not the precise language. Therefore, why not follow the convention of the translators and redactors of the Tibetan Buddhist canon themselves when they say: *rgya gar skad du* “in Indian language”

— just as the recipient of this volume himself did in his 1987 translation of the *Varṇārha-varṇastotra*, which begins with the title of this work “[i]n indischer Sprache”.<sup>47</sup>

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## Appendix: Text of the bilingual passages in Stag tshang ras pa's travel account

The passages below are quoted from Stag tshang ras pa's *lam yig*, ed. 2008. I provide

(a) the Tibetan transliteration of the Indian phrases

(b) Stag tshang ras pa's Tibetan translation

(c) English translation of the Tibetan phrases

{ } is used for editorial deletions.

**p. 262:** *kya hindu ha ramdza ti /*  
*ci nang pa dran rgya chen po /*  
“What a Buddhist with great self-esteem!”

*sa si lim sa partsha dharti / tu mi ha ramdza ti kya hu wa / tshu di mu ha /*  
*bden pa'i rgyal po chen po'i sa cha la khyod ham pa chen po byed pa ci yin / gris gsod dgos*  
*'ong /*  
“Why do you behave so boastfully in the land of the great truthful king! You should be killed with the knife!”

*bha bha pha la / ha mi mo sur ma hu wa /*  
*a pa bzang nga phyi pa yin /*  
“Dear father, I am a non-Buddhist!”

*sā pa kaṃ haṃ tsa le / til ka martu [= \*mar tu] mi mu ha /*  
*sang gang la 'gro mda' rgyab nas khyed gsad gtong /*  
“Where do you go tomorrow? I'll shoot you with an arrow and kill you!”

**p. 263:** *tu mi a bo / e haṃ bhe ṭha / ro ṭi we la khā hi kyi nahi /*  
*khyed tshur shog / 'di ru sdod / lto za'am mi za /*  
“Come here! Stay here! Are you going to eat or not?”

*khā hi khā hi /*  
*za /*  
“I'll eat!”

*ha mi bram ze bai wa / tu mi thor ra hya ṭha / sanggi rdo no ho dza /*  
*nga bram ze yin / khyod en tsam 'dug / mnyam du 'gro'o /*  
“I am a Brahmin. Stay a little. We will go together.”

**p. 264:** *bho ṭa nti dzo ki ka pu rti rta tsa le /*  
*bod kyi rnal 'byor pa o rgyan gyis [= \*gyi] yul la 'gro ba 'dug /*  
“The Tibetan yogi is travelling to the country of O rgyan.”

*ha ma ra ā ci ka puṭ dhu yi / sub tsa lo / sanggi do no ho dza /*  
*nged cag de ring ras 'khru / sang 'gro / rogs bya /*  
“Today we are washing our cotton clothes. We will go tomorrow. Let us be companions.”

*a tsi bhai ṭha / su ba ā dha mi {} sanggi dho no ho dza /*  
*de ring sdod / sang mi 'di dang mnyam du song / rogs byas 'ong /*  
“Stay today. Go tomorrow with this man. He will be your companion.”

*ā sa ma bha ta la ha ye / ka paṭ dhu nga na hi /*  
*nam mkha' 'khrigs song ras bkrus (gos lag) ma tshar /*

“The sky is clouded. We have not finished washing the cotton clothes.”

*deṃ dzha ngan [= \*nga na] hi / ka pur dhu da na hi /  
nyi ma dga' mo ma byung / ras bkru ma tshar /*

“The sun has not been not favourable. We have not finished washing the clothes.”

**p. 265:** *tu ma ra bhu ra ha mi tsa le /  
khyod sdug krad 'dug / nga 'gro /*  
“You are faint-hearted! I am going.”

*tu mi sub tsa le / sanggi dho no / a tsi bhai tha /  
khyed bsad<sup>48</sup> 'gro / mnyam du 'gro / de ring sdod /*  
“You'll get killed. Let's go together. Stay today.”

*ha ma ra a tsi a yi / a su sma bha ti la na hi / ka paṭār dhu nga na hi / tu ma ra bhu ra ha ram  
dza kya kar ta /  
de ring yongs tshe nam mkha' ni ma 'khrigs / ras mi 'khru 'dug / khyod sdug khrad ham pa  
chen po 'dug ci byed /*  
“When we came today, the sky was not overcast. You are not washing the clothes. You are  
awful. Why are you making such a fuss?”

*ka pur tsi'i kos na hi / pa ṭhan / bha bhas / paṃ bhu ra / tu mi mu gam tanggi la tsa lo /  
o ḍi yā na la dpe med mi thar / skyes pa thams cad sdug krad yin / khyod gsad 'ong / ghor kha  
ṭi la log song /*  
“Oḍḍiyāna is uniquely difficult to reach. The people are all unpleasant. You will get killed.  
Go back to Ghorkhati!”

*ka pur ha yi /  
o rgyan nas yin /*  
“I am from Oḍḍiyāna.”

**p. 266:** *bho ṭanti haramdza ri tso re ha yi /  
bod pa ham pa chen po da bzhog /*  
“Now, leave the fussy Tibetan alone!”

**p. 270:** *tu mi a yāgham ka hang te a yi /  
khyod 'ongs sam / yul gang nas yin /*  
“Have you come [from elsewhere]? Which country are you from?”

*ha mi bho ṭanti dzo ki hu wa /  
nga bod kyi rtogs ldan yin /*  
“I am a realised yogi of Tibet.”

*ka shi mi ri bhoṭa ṭi haa /  
kha che'i bod yin nam /*  
“Are you a Tibetan from Kashmir?”

*ha mi ka shi mi ri na hi / ha ma ra ma hātsinda hu wa / ka shi mi ri thi paṇḍa pa ra / da sha  
ma yi ni gha ya ha yi /*

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<sup>48</sup> Based on the Hindustani (*sub* = *subah*), the Tibetan should read \**sang* instead of *bsad*.

*nga kha che min dbus gtsan nas yin / kha che nas phar la thag ring / zla ba bcu bud (\*'bud)  
nas yin /*

“I am not from Kashmir. We are from Dbus Gtsang. That is far beyond Kashmir. It is ten months’ travel.”

*bho tanti dzo ki dzhang yi /  
bod kyi rnal 'byor pa yags po yin /*  
“The Tibetan Yogi is good.”

**p. 276:** *ka pur ra tir kir / ha mi sangga dho no ho dza /  
o rgyan gyi gnas bskor na ngas grogs byas mnyam du 'gro /*  
“If you are travelling to O rgyan, I’ll be your companion; let’s go together.”

*ha mi padma na pu rus si tsakhā / a lom pe lo ma ti ra hu wa / pa thaṅṅa lā ra yi / ha mi sma  
ri / tu mi satsakha / sanggi ho dzo / dzhang ha ya /  
dkon mchog mkhyen / dpal gyi ri bskor du 'gro ba yin / jag pas brdungs / khyed shes / mnyam  
du 'gro / bzang /*

“Oh dear! I am on the way to circumambulate Dpal ri. I was attacked by bandits. Please think kindly of us! We’ll go together, that will be good.”

*da sha din ma ya a haṃ bhaiṭha / ha mi ha so na gar tsa le / da sha ma yi gha ya / i ti a ya /  
sanggi dho no ho dza / ha mi tu mi mel la /  
nyi ma bcu 'di ru sdod / ngas ha so na gar phyin / zhag bcu song nas 'di ru log 'ong / de nas  
mnyam du 'gro / nga dang khyod nye mo byed /*

“Stay for ten days. I’ll go to Hasonagar. After ten days I’ll return here. Then we’ll go together. We will be close.”

**p. 283:** *andar a yes / tsu bte ka re /  
khang pa 'i nang la shog / 'dod pa spyod /*  
“Come into the house! We’ll make love!”

*andar na hi / ha mi dzo ki hu wa / dzu ru na hi / a li kḍha /  
khang pa 'i nang la mi 'ong / nga rnal 'byor pa yin / bud med mi byed / bsod snyoms blang /*  
“I won’t come into the house. I am a yogi. I don’t do women. I am begging for alms.”

*dzhadā ak na hi /  
dga' mo yin me ma sbar /*  
“Be gentle! Let the fire not blaze!”

**pp. 286-87:** *astu mi kaṃ hang dza / kya ka ta / a loṃ be loṃ tī ra kir / rā yi ṣār tī ra kir /  
mangga la wod tī ra kir / o ḍi tī ri kir / kā ma la tīr kir / hi dza kalpa padma na / su ru tī rahu  
wa / kaṇḍi 'i gha ya / u tsarhā wa / sa mu dra si tu ha yi / tīr ra koṣ nā hi / kya ka ta /  
da khyed gang la 'gro / ci byed / a loṃ pe loṃ sogs gnas dkon mchog gi yin / la rgyab nas yul  
med / sindhu rgya mtsho yod / gnas lar med ci byed /*

“Where will you go now? What is it good for? Alom, Pelom etc. are places of the [three] Jewels. When you have crossed the pass, there is no land. There is the Sindhu ocean. Again, if there is no land, what will you do [there]?”