

Sangs rgyas gling manuscript of the
rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum

Dedicated to the memory of Michael V. Aris:
true friend, wise mentor, generous colleague, and outstanding scholar.

This manuscript edition of the rNying ma'i rgyud bum (NGB) from Sangs rgyas gling dgon pa, Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, India, first came to the outside world's attention through the late Michael Aris, who knew of it as long ago as the late 1970's. As well as signalling the manuscript's existence, Aris also reported a local belief that the Sangs rgyas gling NGB manuscript was copied from an exemplar (*ma dpe*) that had been transported to Tawang from East Tibet. This belief is in fact still maintained by some local lamas. However, to our present knowledge, this idea remains unproven. Tawang is the corner of Arunachal Pradesh that borders Bhutan to its west and Tibet to its north. Given the geographic proximity to Bhutan, it should come as little surprise that doxographically speaking—in its numbering of volumes and ordering of texts—the Sangs rgyas gling NGB in fact follows the standard Bhutanese recension in 46 volumes, as most famously represented nowadays by the widely reprinted mTshams brag NGB edition. Unless it proves to be the very earliest example of the 46 volume Bhutanese recension, a greater likelihood would therefore seem to be that the Sangs rgyas gling NGB was copied from a Bhutanese exemplar. However, at this early stage, one must also sound a note of caution: very few of the individual texts from the Sangs rgyas gling NGB have yet been collated against their counterparts from the other NGB editions, so it still remains to be seen how the individual readings of individual texts might compare with those from other editions. As we have already demonstrated elsewhere, it can prove rash simply to assume that the patterns of readings within any individual NGB text will necessarily conform to the doxographical affiliations of its host collection as a whole. As we have found elsewhere, NGB editions can indeed be mixed, so that it is not by any means impossible that some texts from the Sangs rgyas gling NGB might after closer examination transpire to descend from East Tibetan exemplars, or perhaps from the tradition of the 28 volume gDong dkar NGB, which was preserved in Bhutan but originated in East Tibet.

The idea to make a digital copy of this endangered edition was first suggested to us by our valued colleague, Mr Ngawang Tsepag, of the Shantarakshita Library, Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, India. Ngawang Tsepag comes from Tawang and is a keen conservator of its cultural heritage. Before meeting us, he had already collaborated with some friends in rehousing and providing new cloth wrappings for the volumes of the Sangs rgyas gling NGB, which was at the time in danger of disintegration through years of neglect. Ngawang Tsepag is also a keen amateur photographer, and proved eminently capable of photographing all the volumes with a minimum of trouble or fuss. We procured funding for the project from the Oxford University John Fell Fund, who generously made available everything we needed. The actual photography was completed at Sangs rgyas gling in the spring and summer of 2013.

Although the Sangs rgyas gling NGB originally had 46 volumes, over the course of time, three volumes have gone missing: volumes 11, 12, and 41. In addition, many volumes have suffered varying degrees of water damage and worming, and much of the *dkar chag* has been lost. Nevertheless, given the paucity of surviving NGB editions, the publication of this easily accessible electronic edition in full colour is indeed a welcome additional resource for all those engaged in the study of the rNying ma'i rgyud 'bum.

Robert Mayer and Cathy Cantwell, Oxford, 2014.