

# Biographies, Prophecies, and Hidden Treasures: Preliminary Remarks on Some Early bKa' gdams pa Sources

ULRIKE ROESLER

(University of Oxford)

## 1. Introduction

In numerous publications, Franz-Karl Ehrhard has contributed a wealth of information to our understanding of the lives and works of Tibetan Buddhist masters, the transmission history of Buddhist texts and teachings, and the way these are located geographically and socially across the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas. What becomes clear from these studies is the interwoven nature of individual lives, Buddhist transmissions, written texts, their dissemination through blockprint editions, and regional centres where political power and religious expertise came together to facilitate such printing projects. The monumental series published by the dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang has recently made available new materials that enrich our picture of these networks, lineages, people, and texts. This small contribution will focus on one specific volume from the dPal brtsegs series on Tibetan historical and biographical writing (*Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgribs*), published in 2010. I offer it in gratitude to a true *kalyāṇamitra* of Tibetan Studies.

The volume to be introduced here is volume 5 (*ca*) in the *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar phyogs bsgribs* series. It contains materials related to the transmission history of the famous *bKa' gdams glegs bam* ("The Book of the bKa' gdams [Tradition]") as well as the lineages of the early bKa' gdams pa tradition more generally. The bKa' gdams pas trace their teachings back to the Indian master Atiśa Dīpaṃkāraśrījñāna (982–1054) and regard his Tibetan disciple 'Brom ston rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas (1004–1064)<sup>1</sup> as the founding father of the bKa' gdams tradition (*bka' gdams kyi mes po*). The early monastic seats of the tradition in Central Tibet (dBus) included 'Brom ston's monastery of Rwa sgren and a number of monasteries in the neighbouring regions such as 'Phan yul and Mal gro. In later times the bKa' gdams pa legacy was collected, preserved, and propagated at Lo dgon near

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<sup>1</sup> bKa' gdams pa biographies give "wood-dragon" as his year of birth, which corresponds to 1004, and I follow this tradition. According to the *Blue Annals*, on the other hand, he was born on 1005 ("wood-snake").

the Yar klungs gtsang po<sup>2</sup> and at sNar thang in gTsang, which in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries had become a powerful and prolific centre of Buddhist scholarship and textual production.<sup>3</sup>

The texts reproduced in volume 5 of the dPal brtsegs series are, according to the table of contents (pp. 1–2):

- 1) *Rin chen spungs pa'i lo rgyus*; *dbu med* manuscript, pp. 1–22, by Bla ma lHo pa Dar ma skyabs.
- 2) *dPal ldan a ti sha'i rnam par thar pa chos kyi 'byung gnas*; *dbu med* manuscript, pp. 23–146, by 'Brom rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas.
- 3) *Jo bo rje dPal ldan a ti sha'i rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*; blockprint, pp. 147–296, by mChims Nam mkha' grags.
- 4) *Jo bo rin po che dPal ldan a ti sha'i rnam par thar pa*; *dbu med* manuscript, pp. 297–358, by 'Brom ston pa.
- 5) *Jo bo chen po lha cig gi rnam par thar pa*; *dbu med* manuscript, pp. 359–532, tentatively attributed by the editors to Bya 'Dul 'dzin ("bya 'dul 'dzin yin nam snyam").
- 6) *Jo bo'i rnam thar kha skong zur tsam gleng ba thor bu ba*; *dbu med* manuscript, pp. 533–562, without indication of authorship.

From these titles as they are listed in the table of contents it does not immediately become clear which works we are dealing with, and therefore a closer investigation of the individual works is needed. It will turn out that most of these texts can be identified and are related to the famous *bKa' gdams glegs bam*, "The Book of the bKa' gdams [Tradition]." They provide interesting insights into the making of "The Book," as well as the figures involved in the early bKa' gdams pa circles more broadly.

<sup>2</sup> The valley of Lo branches off on the northern bank of the gTsang po river, west of bSam yas monastery, and not far from rGya ma on the southern side. The monastery was founded in 1093 by sPyan snga ba Tshul 'khrims 'bar, a disciple of 'Brom ston; later masters of Lo dgon include the author of the earliest comprehensive bKa' gdams history, bSod nams lha'i dbang po (1423–1496). On Lo dgon see Iuchi 2010.

<sup>3</sup> sNar thang had become a vibrant centre of Buddhist scholarship in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and flourished with patronage from the Yuan court. The scholars of sNar thang not only systematically collected the bKa' gdams pa legacy, but they also created the prototype of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, see for example Schaeffer and van der Kuijp 2009. On the rise and decline of sNar thang see Schuman 2016.

## 2. From Interlinear Glosses to an Established Text: The *rNam thar rgyas pa* (text 5)

To start with a relatively straightforward case, text number 5 from the dPal brtsegs volume can be easily identified: it is a manuscript of the *rNam thar rgyas pa* (“The Extensive Life-story”). This early biography of the Indian master Atiśa is well-known through the study, edition, and paraphrase by Helmut Eimer (1979). As he has shown, it largely overlaps with another early Atiśa biography, the *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* (“The Widely Known Extensive Life-story”) by mChims Nam mkha’ grags (1210–1285). According to a passage at the end of the work, both biographies go back to an oral account of Atiśa’s life given by Atiśa’s student and travel companion Nag tsho lo tsā ba Tshul khrims rgyal ba (1011–1064) to Rong pa Lag sor pa, who passed it on to four of his own students. Based on their notes it was finally committed to writing in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Bya ’dul ba ’dzin pa brTson ’grus ’bar (1091–1166), also known as Zul phu ba.<sup>4</sup> This version does not seem to have survived, but its content has been preserved in both the (undated) *rNam thar rgyas pa* (“The Extensive Life-story”) and the 13<sup>th</sup> century *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* (“The Widely Known Extensive Life-story”), which present largely the same text but are structured in slightly different ways. Their texts are so similar that Helmut Eimer produced a “synoptic edition” of the two biographies that presents them both in one single text, with variant readings and additional passages indicated.<sup>5</sup>

For his study and edition of the *rNam thar rgyas pa*, Eimer used a blockprint from dGa’ ldan phun tshogs gling that was probably produced around the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, bearing the marginal title *Lam yig* (“Travel Account”). The first part (*ka*, 23 folios) of this *Lam yig* collection consists of two chapters dealing with Atiśa’s early life and his journey to gSer gling (Sumatra); these two chapters are also included in the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*, and more will be said about them below. The second part of this blockprint, volume *kha*, comprises 108 folios and contains the *rNam thar rgyas pa*.<sup>6</sup>

The *rNam thar rgyas pa* in the dPal brtsegs edition is an *dbu med* manuscript of 87 folios with seven lines per page. It does not have a marginal title or volume

<sup>4</sup> The account of this transmission history is contained in the biographies themselves; for a detailed analysis see Eimer 1977: 279–292; for a convenient overview see Eimer 2008: 386–387; the main results are summarised in Sernesi 2015: 413.

<sup>5</sup> See Eimer 1979, vol. 1: 149–150 for the chapter outline; vol. 2: vii–xi on the editing principles of the synoptic edition.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed description of the *Lam yig* collection and its individual sections see Eimer 1979, vol. 1: 22–25, and Eimer 1977: 101–105, 110–111. The *Lam yig* blockprint is reproduced in Lokesh Chandra 1982, vol. 2.

number that would mark it as being part of a larger collection.<sup>7</sup> The most striking feature of the manuscript is the insertion of numerous glosses written in smaller script, with dotted lines and other insertion marks that connect them to the words or phrases they refer to.

A comparison of the manuscript with the dGa' ldan phun tshogs gling blockprint used by Eimer reveals some interesting features. First of all, a comparison with Eimer's synoptic edition of the *rNam thar rgyas pa* and *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* shows that the readings of the manuscript in most cases agree with the *rNam thar rgyas pa*, but sometimes also with the *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* against the *rNam thar rgyas pa*. We must assume that in these cases the blockprint of the *rNam thar rgyas pa* contains small innovations (or, technically speaking, *errores separativi*) as compared to the shared readings, which must go back to the older account of Atiśa's life story that both the *rNam thar rgyas pa* and the *rNam thar yongs grags* are based on.

Secondly, even more interesting is a comparison of the glosses. Both the *dbu med* manuscript and the dGa' ldan phun tshogs gling blockprint contain glosses (*mchan bu*); our manuscript inserts them between the lines and in the margins, while the blockprint renders them in smaller script within the lines. These glosses are much more numerous in the manuscript. A cursory survey shows that some of the glosses in the manuscript also appear as glosses in the blockprint, while other glosses have been incorporated into the running text, and others (but fewer) are missing altogether.<sup>8</sup> When glosses have been integrated into the main text, they have not in all cases been inserted in exactly the place indicated in our manuscript. To give just one example from the beginning, in discussing Atiśa's good qualities the *rNam thar rgyas pa* inserts some lines from the famous *bsTod pa brgyad cu pa* ("Praise in Eighty [Stanzas]") by Nag tsho lo tsa ba into the text. Our manuscript reads:

... he had visions of the Buddhas of the ten directions. (*gloss A*: The *Praise* by the Lo tsā ba says: "These arose for you from the blessings of all Buddhas.") In particular, he had visions of six *yi dam* deities and was blessed [by them]. (*gloss B*: It is also said in the *Praise in Eighty Stanzas* by the Lo tsā ba: "Having been granted visions of Hevajra, Trisamayārāja, and the hero Lokeśvara, he was constantly listening to the profound and expansive noble dharma, even in his sleep.") The six are the Lady Tārā, the Noble Avalokiteśvara, Akṣobhya, Trisamayārāja, Cakrasaṃvara, and Hevajra, and he made these his main *yi dam* deities and was granted visions of them. In reality or in dreams he was listening to the profound and expansive dharma, it is said. (*gloss C*: Moreover,

<sup>7</sup> However, it closes on folio 87a with the remark: '*dis kyang jo bo'i bka' brgyud thams cad rgyas par gyur cig*//' "Through this *too*, may the whole tradition of the Jo bo become widespread," which makes me wonder whether it was originally preceded by another text.

<sup>8</sup> This means that either the blockprint has omitted some of the glosses, or the manuscript contains additional explanations that do not go back to the shared source.

the Jo bo [Atiśa] counted the six deities by counting each of the three jewels separately, the six *yi dam* deities as one, the lamas as one, and the six realms as one; these who [thus] become sixfold are called the six deities. Regarding this, it is said in the *Praise* by the Lo tsā ba: “He always said: The three jewels and the *yi dam* deities, the lamas and the five realms, these six are the main ones among my deities.”). And even if they did not easily appear in person, he prayed to them...<sup>9</sup>

In the blockprint used by Eimer, gloss A is not included in the text at this point, but appears in a slightly different form (namely, in prose instead of verse) in a different place (at the beginning of episode 007 in Eimer 1979). Gloss B was incorporated into the text in exactly the same place as indicated by a dotted line in our manuscript. Gloss C was also incorporated, but slightly earlier (at the beginning of episode 008 in Eimer 1979).

Finding glosses inserted in slightly different places is not surprising in itself, since it is not always easy to see in a manuscript where a gloss is meant to belong; what is interesting, however, is that the glosses give some further insights into the textual history of the Atiśa biography. Without having compared the two witnesses from beginning to end, my current impression is that the manuscript and the blockprint seem to go back to an exemplar which contained the glosses. These were treated in different ways by the two witnesses; while the blockprint tends to integrate the glosses into the text in the majority of cases, the manuscript has preserved them as glosses. Due to the different placement it seems unlikely that the manuscript itself was the exemplar for the blockprint, but a more detailed comparison would be needed to determine the exact relationship between the two witnesses.

The glosses also allow a better understanding of the relationship between the two early Atiśa biographies, the *rNam thar rgyas pa* and the *rNam thar rgyas pa*

<sup>9</sup> Folio 2b/p. 362.2–4 (abbreviated spellings are rendered in standard orthography, the colon renders a double dot that is used instead of a *shad* in the manuscript): *de bzhin gshegs pa'i yi ge sangs rgyas pa'i man ngag la brten nas phyogs bcu'i sangs rgyas kyi zhal gzigs* : (gloss A: *lo tstsha ba'i bstod pa na : khyed ni sangs rgyas thams cad kyi [ // ] byin brlabs thugs las skyes pa yin : ces pa'o/*) *khyad par du yi dam gyi lha drug gi zhal gzigs shing byin gyis brlabs pa yin te* : (gloss B: *lo tstsha ba'i bstod pa brgyad bcu pa nas kyang : dpal ldan dgyes pa'i rdo rje dang// dam tshig bkod pa'i rgyal po dang// dpa' bo 'jig rten dbang phyug dang// jo mo rje btsun sgrol ma sogs// zhal gzigs snang ba thob pa na// rmi lam na yang mngon sum du// zab pa dang zhing rgya che ba'i// dam chos rtag tu 'dzin pa'o/ ces so/*) *jo mo sgrol ma dang : 'phags pa spyān ras gzigs dang : mi g.yo ba dang : dam tshig gsum bkod pa'i rgyal po dang : bde mchog 'khor lo dang : dgyes pa'i rdo rje dang drug po de yin la thugs dam gyi gtso bo mdzad pas zhal gzigs snang ba thob/ dngos sam rmi lam du zab pa dang rgya che ba'i thos gsan pa yin gsung*: (gloss C: *yang na lha drug ni : jo bo nyid bzhed pas : dkon mchog gsum re rer 'dren : thugs dam lha drug gcig tu 'dren : bla ma gcig tu 'dren : 'gro drug gcig tu bsgrangs pas drug tu 'gro ba de la lha drug zer/ de la lo tsa ba'i bstod pa nas : dkon mchog gsum dang thugs dam lha// bla ma mams dang 'gro ba lnga// 'di drug nga'i lha dang ni// jo bo yin zhes rtag tu gsung/ zhes gsungs/*) *dngos ma bde ba byung na yang gsol ba btab pas...*

*yongs grags*. While many of the interlinear glosses are integrated into the text of the *rNam thar rgyas pa*, they are usually missing in the *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*, which otherwise largely contains the same text. Again, a more thorough investigation is needed to gain a comprehensive picture of the exact relationship, but even the brief comparison presented here shows that the manuscript helps to explain where the differences between the two biographies come from: the additional sections in the *rNam thar rgyas pa* seem to go back to original interlinear glosses from an earlier manuscript.

### 3. The Mosaic of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam*: From Separate Manuscripts to a Mainstream Collection

Turning from the textual micro-structure of the *rNam thar rgyas pa* and *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* to the macro-structure of the larger biography collections, the dPal brtsegs volume presents further intriguing material: texts number 2, 3, 4, and 6 are related to the famous *bKa' gdams glegs bam* (“The Book of the bKa' gdams”), a collection of biographies, legends, dialogues, and didactic texts of the bKa' gdams pa tradition.<sup>10</sup> To understand the relationship of the dPal brtsegs manuscripts to the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* it may be useful to briefly recall the textual history of “The Book of the bKa' gdams” so far as we can currently reconstruct it.

#### 3.1 Excursus: the Redaction History of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam*

As is well known, the work consists of two main sections, the *Pha chos* (teachings of the “father” of the bKa' gdams tradition, i. e. 'Brom ston pa) and the *Bu chos* (teachings to the “son,” i. e. rNgog Legs pa'i shes rab, as well as Khu ston). In all editions available to us,<sup>11</sup> the *Pha chos* section begins with a multi-part life story of the Indian master Atiśa that describes his early life in India, his training with his teacher gSer gling pa in Sumatra, his journey via Nepal to Western Tibet, and his travels and activities during the last part of his life that he spent in central Tibet.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The secondary literature on the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* is too numerous to be listed here; I therefore just mention Miller 2004 who provides an analysis of the role of “The Book” in the construction of the bKa' gdams pa legacy.

<sup>11</sup> On the known editions of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* see Eimer 1977: 72–80 and Roesler 2011: 90.

<sup>12</sup> For the sake of convenience I list the short titles from the *Pha chos* as they are given in the modern paperback edition of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* (1993/94). A contents overview of the respective sections in the earliest blockprint produced at Kun gsal sgang po che in 1538/39 is given in Sernesi 2015: 433.

1. *How the Lord [Atiśa] Gave up Royal Power and Strove for Liberation*, *Jo bo rgyal srid spangs nas thar pa ji ltar mdzad pa* (ed. 1993/94: 1–28). Title according to the beginning of the work: *Guruguṇadharmākara*, Tib. *Bla ma'i yon tan chos kyi 'byung gnas* ("The good qualities of the lama, origin of the *dharma*").
2. *Story of How the Lord Went to gSer gling (Sumatra)*, *Jo bo gser gling du byon pa'i rnam thar* (ed. 1993/94: 29–43).<sup>13</sup>
3. *The Widely Known Extensive Life-story of the Precious Lord, the Glorious Atiśa*, *Jo bo rin po che rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i rnam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* (ed. 1993/94: 44–228), composed by mChims Nam mkha' grags in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
4. *Travel Account of the Lord, Origin of the Dharma, Composed by 'Brom ston rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas*, *'Brom ston pa rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas kyis mdzad pa'i jo bo rje'i rnam thar lam yig chos kyi 'byung gnas* (ed. 1993/94: 229–290).<sup>14</sup>

After these biographical chapters the *Pha chos* continues with chapters relating to the transmission history of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* and instructions on the meditation system of the *bKa' gdams thig le bcu drug*.<sup>15</sup> It closes with the famous *Bodhisattvamaṇyāvali*, a poem on the qualities of a *bodhisattva* composed by Atiśa.

The second part of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* known as the *Bu chos* consists mainly of twenty-two pre-birth stories (Tib. *skyes rab*, Skt. *jātaka*) in which the previous incarnations of 'Brom ston pa play the role of the *bodhisattva*, exemplifying the qualities outlined in the *Bodhisattvamaṇyāvali*. In its final part the *Bu chos* also includes a couple of shorter texts known as "The Seal" (*bKa' rgya*), "Prophecies" (*Lung bstan*),<sup>16</sup> a "Vajra Song" (*rDo rje'i glu*), and "Supplement" (*Kha skong*).

As discussed in Ehrhard 2002, the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* goes back to a local central Tibetan tradition which reached sNar thang monastery in the late 13<sup>th</sup>/early 14<sup>th</sup> century through 'Brom Kumāramati (Tib. gZhon nu blo gros, \*1271). He had learned the text orally at sTabs ka monastery in Mal gro (Central Tibet) and came to sNar thang and recited the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* to mKhan chen Nyi ma rgyal mtshan, the 9<sup>th</sup> abbot of sNar thang, who undertook the compilation and redaction of the work in 1302.

<sup>13</sup> This and the previous chapter are also included in the biography collection with the marginal title *Lam yig*, the *Blo sbyong glegs bam*, and the *gDams ngag mdzod*; see Eimer 1977: 99–101 for the precise location.

<sup>14</sup> The work is ascribed to 'Brom ston pa, an ascription that most scholars regard as spurious, while it is defended by Decler 1996. Even though this chapter bears the title *Jo bo rje'i rnam thar lam yig*, it is paradoxically not contained in the dGa' ldan phun tshogs gling blockprint with the marginal title *Lam yig*. However, Eimer concludes that it must originally have been part of this collection, see Eimer 1977: 96–98.

<sup>15</sup> A detailed analysis is given in Ehrhard 2002.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that this chapter on prophecies has nothing to do with the prophecies discussed below; it contains prophecies from Atiśa to 'Brom ston pa, while the works under discussion in § 3.3 of this article contain prophecies from Atiśa's teachers about his activities in Tibet.

We have no surviving witness for this early 14<sup>th</sup> century redaction, but as other scholars have shown, there is evidence that it looked different from the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* as we know it.<sup>17</sup> First of all this is indicated in the work itself, which provides a chapter overview that is not identical with the known editions.<sup>18</sup> The same chapter outline is also given in the 1484 history of the *bKa' gdams* tradition written by bSod nams lha'i dbang po, the head of the *bKa' gdams* monastery of Lo dgon in Central Tibet.<sup>19</sup> According to these witnesses, the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* had the following structure:

- *Pha chos* (in 26 chapters):  
The *Bodhisattvamaṇyāvali* and the 23 chapters of the *Zhus len gyi dngos gzhi nor bu'i phreng ba; bKa' rgya ma*,<sup>20</sup> *Ma 'ongs pa'i lung bstan; 'Chi ba med pa rdo rje'i glu*.
- *Bu chos* (in 23 chapters):  
20 *jātaka* stories told to rNgog (*rNgog chos*); 2 stories told to Khu ston (*Khu chos*); "Supplement" (*Kha skong*).

bSod nams lha'i dbang po also mentions an introductory part (*sbyor ba'i chos*) that was not part of the *Glegs bam* proper; this contained the chapters *bKa' rgya* and *sKul ma'i 'debs pa* attributed to 'Brom, and the three texts *lHa chos bdun ldan gyi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*, *Thig le bcu drug bstan pa*, and *Phun sum tshogs pa'i gter*, compiled by Nyi ma rgyal mtshan in sNar thang in 1302 in the context of the transmission of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* by 'Brom Kumāramati.

This means that the Atiśa biographies that are nowadays found in the *Pha chos* were originally not part of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* at all, neither in its core part nor in its introductory section. The earliest witness known to us, the 1538–39 blockprint from Kun gsal sgang po che, on the other hand, already includes the biographies in the *Pha chos*. This blockprint is based on a manuscript copy obtained from central Tibet, but we do not know what the order of texts in this manuscript was, or where exactly it came from,<sup>21</sup> and therefore the question when and where the rearrangement took place is currently still open. Given that the work itself claims to have a different structure and bSod nams lha'i dbang po knew the work

<sup>17</sup> Eimer 1979, vol. 1: 53–58, Ehrhard 2002, Roesler 2011: 90–94, Sernesi 2015: 426–430.

<sup>18</sup> Ed. 1993/94: 829 f. (end of the *Kha skong* chapter).

<sup>19</sup> bSod nams lha'i dbang po's *bKa' gdams chos 'byung*, pp. 379–380.

<sup>20</sup> Confusingly, bSod nams lha'i dbang po (pp. 379–380) lists two chapters called *bKa' rgya (ma)*, one which is part of an introductory section that was not part of the *Glegs bam* proper, and one which is part of the *Pha chos*.

<sup>21</sup> Ehrhard 2000: 74–75, Sernesi 2015: 414. The central Tibetan master copy was obtained from the nephews of sNyug la paṇ chen Ngag dbang grags pa, who was a student of bSod nams lha'i dbang po (Sernesi 2015: 414, 429), which may imply that the master copy was from Lo dgon, but we cannot be certain.



in its older shape, it is possible that the rearrangement took place when the work was prepared for printing in Kun gsal sgang po che,<sup>22</sup> but there is currently no way of proving this.

In any case, this chronology can only be tentative because it is possible, and not even unlikely, that there were different regional versions that existed at the same time, some including the biographies and others without them. The geographical dimension is a crucial key to understanding this process, but unfortunately the dPal brtsegs manuscripts do not add much to our current knowledge in this respect because the manuscripts do not contain any information on the place and time when they were copied. Therefore, we are currently left with a slightly fragmentary picture: We know about a central Tibetan local tradition, preserved at sTabs ka and transmitted orally to sNar thang, as well as a tradition at Lo dgon, where bSod nams lha'i dbang po and his circle were based<sup>23</sup> and from where perhaps the exemplar of the 1538 blockprint was retrieved. Further research is needed to fill in the gaps and to investigate the personal networks of the Buddhist scholars involved in more detail.

Whatever the exact chronology of the process, what becomes amply clear from these observations is the composite nature of the collection and the fluidity of its arrangement until the work was widely disseminated in its present form, presumably facilitated through the 16<sup>th</sup> century blockprint from Kun gsal sgang po che in Mang yul Gung thang.

### 3.2 The *bKa' gdams glegs bam* in the dPal brtsegs Edition: Texts 2, 3, and 6

With this redaction history of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* in mind, it is now possible to determine the relationship between the texts from the dPal brtsegs edition and the “Book of the *bKa' gdams*.” To begin with the most straightforward case, text number 6 is identical with the *Kha skong* (“Supplement”) chapter in the *Bu chos* (part two) of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam*, at the very end of the collection.<sup>24</sup>

Text number 3 is also easy to identify. It is a blockprint of the above-mentioned *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Atiśa biography by mChims Nam mkha' grags, the 7<sup>th</sup> abbot of sNar thang monastery (introduced under § 2 above). Within the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* collection, it belongs to the first part known as the *Pha chos*. We nowadays know that the *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* was also part of a larger biography collection written by mChims Nam mkha' grags. This has been preserved in a recently discovered untitled *dbu can* manuscript that

<sup>22</sup> Thus also Sernesi 2015: 429.

<sup>23</sup> On bSod nams lha'i dbang po see in more detail Vetturini 2007, chapter 2; on Lo dgon see Luchi 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Ed. Zi ling 1993/94, vol. 2: 809–829.

is sometimes referred to as the *sNar thang gser phreng* (“Golden Rosary of sNar thang”). It contains thirteen life-stories, eleven composed by mChims Nam mkha’ grags and the last two by his successors at sNar thang monastery, sKyo ston sMon lam tshul khirms (1219–1299) and the above-mentioned sNar thang mkhan chen Nyi ma rgyal mtshan (ca. 1225–1305). The *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* is the fourth biography in this work.<sup>25</sup>

The blockprint of the *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* reproduced in volume 5 of the dPal brtsegs series has a brief colophon that informs us that it was printed in sGang chen in a *khyi lo* (dog year). It must therefore be part of the blockprint edition of the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam* produced at Kun gsal sgang po che in sKyid grong (Mang yul Gung thang) in the years 1538 (*khyi lo*) and 1539 that was introduced above.<sup>26</sup>

One further text in the dPal brtsegs volume is related to the biographies of the *Pha chos*, but its relationship to the received text of the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam* is less straightforward than in the previous cases. Text number 2 in the dPal brtsegs publication is listed in the table of contents as *dPal ldan a ti sha’i rnam par thar pa chos kyi ’byung gnas* (“Biography of the Glorious Atiśa, Origin of the Dharma”) and ascribed to Atiśa’s disciple ’Brom ston rGyal ba’i ’byung gnas. At the beginning (fol. 1b/p. 24) the title is given “in the language of India” (*rgya gar skad du*) as *Guruguṇadharmākara*, followed by the title in Tibetan (*bod skad du*): *Bla ma’i yon tan chos kyi [’byung] gnas*. “The Good Qualities of Lama [Atiśa], Origin of the Dharma,” which obviously corresponds to the beginning of the Atiśa biographies in the *Pha chos* of the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*. I cannot see any traces of a Tibetan volume number in the margins of the manuscript. The text ends on fol. 62a (p. 145) with the colophon:

Here ends the exposition of the accumulated jewels of the life stories of the lama, called “Origin of the Noble Dharma,” composed in the snowy mountain ranges, at the place of origin of the teaching in dBu ru, the glorious forest hermitage of Rwa sgrenḡ, by the Tibetan translator ’Brom rgyal ba’i ’byung gnas.<sup>27</sup>

This colophon agrees almost verbatim with the end of the *rNam thar lam yig* section in the *Pha chos* of the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*,<sup>28</sup> and a comparison shows that our manuscript largely corresponds to three biographical chapters from the *Pha chos* of the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*, namely chapters 1, 2, and 4 from the list given above (under § 3.1). As explained above, these chapters were not originally part of the *Pha chos*, but were added in the process of redaction. They are also contained in

<sup>25</sup> On the *sNar thang gser phreng* see Eimer 2008. It was published by dPal brtseg in vol. 62 of the *Bod kyi lo rgyus rnam thar* series; it is also available on TBRC.

<sup>26</sup> The colophon of the collection is rendered in full in Ehrhard 2000 on pp. 118 ff. (no. 10).

<sup>27</sup> Fol. 62a, the Tibetan text is quoted below.

<sup>28</sup> Ed. Zi ling 1993/94, vol. 1: 289–290.

a separate biography collection with the marginal title *Lam yig* (“Itinerary”) that was printed together with the *rNam thar rgyas pa* in dGa’ ldan phun tshogs gling. They must therefore have existed independently from the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam*, and the dPal brtsegs manuscript is further evidence for this independent transmission. The correspondences between the dPal brtsegs manuscript and the *bKa’ gdams glegs bam* are as follows:<sup>29</sup>

*rNam thar chos kyi ’byung gnas* (dPal brtsegs *bKa’ gdams glegs bam* (ed. 1993/94) ed.)

***Jo bos rgyal srid spangs nas thar pa ji ltar mdzad pa***

*bla ma’i rnam thar rgya mtsho lta bu las; rgyal srid spangs nas thar par ji ltar byon pa’i yon tan rags rims tsam zhig re zhig rdzogs s+ho//*  
fols. 1a–12a (pp. 23–45)

*bla ma’i rnam thar rgya mtsho las// rgyal srid spangs nas thar pa bsgrubs pa yi// yon tan rags rims tsam cig gsungs pa’o//*  
(pp. 1–28)

***Bla ma’i lung bstan rnam dag shel gyi me long*** Absent

*bla ma’i lung bstan rnam dag shel gyi me long zhes bya ba; kun bzang ’thug po bkod pa’i nags khrod dben sar bkod pa legs par rdzogs so//*  
fols. 12a–15a (pp. 45–51)

***Jo bo gser gling du byon pa’i rnam thar***

*... bla mas chos btsal ba’i phyir dka’ ba ji ltar spyad pa’i rnam bzahag las; rgya mtshor lha dbang phyug chen po pham par byas pa’i lo rgyus kyi rnam bzahag rdzogs so//*  
fols. 15a–17a/b (pp. 51–55/56)

*... bla ma dang chos btsal ba’i phyir dka’ ba ji ltar spyad pa’i rnam gzahag la/ rgya mtshor lha dbang phyug chen po pham par byas pa’i lo rgyus kyi rnam gzahag rdzogs so//*  
(pp. 29–35)

Absent

The *Jo bo gser gling du byon pa’i rnam thar* continues with another section (pp. 35–43), ending with *...de thams cad kyang gser gling du chags phebs shing bla ma dang mjal ba’i tshul lags so//*

**[*Lung bstan shel gyi me long?*]**

*rgya gar du sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa’i bya ba ji ltar mdzad pa’i tshul legs par rdzogs s+ho*  
fols. 17b–35a (pp. 56–91)

Absent

Absent

*rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags* (pp. 44–228)

<sup>29</sup> I give short titles in bold print at the beginning, with centre alignment if the section is found in both texts, and in the respective column if it is only found in one text. I quote the titles given at the end of each section, followed by the folio and page numbers of the respective section. Abbreviated spellings of the manuscript are resolved into standard spelling. Colons render three dots and semicolons render a *shad* with two dots underneath; both are used in the manuscript instead of the regular *shad*.

*Jo bo rje'i rnam thar lam yig chos kyi 'byung gnas*

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>bla ma'i rnam par thar pa; rin po che'i tshogs bstan pa: dam pa chos kyi 'byung gnas zhes bya ba: ri bo gangs can gyi rgyud: dbu ru bstan pa'i 'byung gnas/ rwa sgrenge dpa'gyi nags khrod du: bod kyi lo tstsha ba: 'brom rgyal ba'i 'byung gnas kyis: sbyar ba rdzogs+ho:</i></p> | <p><i>bla ma'i rnam thar rin po che'i tshogs bstan pa/ chos kyi 'byung gnas zhes bya ba 'di nyid/ ri bo gangs can gyi rgyud/ dbu ru bstan pa'i 'byung gnas rwa sgrenge dpa'gyi gtsug lag khang du/ bod kyi lo tsā ba 'brom ston rgyal ba'i 'bung gnas kyis sbyar ba re zhig legs par rdzogs so//</i></p> |
| <p>fols. 35a–62a (pp. 91–145)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>(pp. 229–290)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

As becomes clear from this comparison, both compilations share several sections, but they also each contain sections that are missing in the other one. In particular, the manuscript contains two lengthy sections in which Atiśa's teachers in India make prophecies (*lung bstan*) concerning his activities in Tibet (fols. 12a–15a and 17b–35a). They are mostly written in nine syllable verse and as such stand out from the narrative prose of most of the other Atiśa biographies.<sup>30</sup> The prophecies are not contained in the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* in its current form, nor in any other collection known to me.

### 3.3 Biography as Prophecy: Texts 2 and 4

To complicate matters further, these prophecies also exist as a separate text, reproduced as number 4 in the same dPal brtsegs volume. In the table of contents, it is listed under the title *Jo bo rin po che dpa'ldan a ti sha'i rnam par thar pa*. The front page of the manuscript bears the title *Jo bo chen po dpa'ldan a ti sha'i rnam par thar pa bzhugs lags+ho* and, in a second line written by the same hand: *lung bstan pa'i tshul rags rims yin lags* (presented “in a sequence of prophecies”). It comprises folios 1–31a. Photographs of the same manuscript were kindly made available to me by Charles Ramble; these images show that the manuscript continues, but breaks off at the end of folio 31b; the beginning of the chapter following the prophecies corresponds to the *Jo bo rje'i rnam thar lam yig chos kyi 'byung gnas* (the “Travel Account of the Jo bo, Origin of the *Dharma*”). The dPal brtsegs publishers have obviously decided to conclude with the last available intermediate colophon rather than in the middle of the incomplete next section. We must therefore be aware that the facsimiles produced by the dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang do not necessarily in all cases present the full text.

It is quite likely that the prophecies were originally meant to precede the *rNam thar lam yig* chapter since it refers to these prophecies in its opening sentence, which reads:

<sup>30</sup> The same nine syllable meter is used in the very first chapter of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* which deals with Atiśa's youth and forms the beginning of the biography also known as *Gurugūḍharmākara*. The other Atiśa biographies, however, are written in prose.

Even though the lamas and the assembly of yidam deities had in this way made prophecies about the great renunciate [Atiśa] in the snowland of Tibet...<sup>31</sup>

Within the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* this remark makes no sense because the *rNam thar lam yig* is preceded by the *rNam thar rgyas pa yongs grags*, which does not end with any kind of prophecies. The sentence must therefore be understood as a remnant of an earlier arrangement of the sections in which the *rNam thar lam yig* immediately followed the prophecies, exactly as in our manuscripts 2 and 4.

The section containing the prophecies is itself subdivided into sub-chapters, with sub-headings inserted at the end of each section. Moreover, some sections appear in a different order in the two versions, which I indicate with letters. The correspondences between the two texts, and their sub-headings,<sup>32</sup> are:

## Text no. 2

a) fols. 12a–15a (pp. 45–51):

*de dag gis ni yi dam gyis<sup>33</sup> lung bstan pa dngos grub kyi 'od zer zhes bya'o// de ltar lung bstan rgya mtsho lta bu las// rnam dag sems la yon tan gang shar ba// rnam pa mdor bsdu tsam zhig bkod pa 'di// bod kyi brum rje bdag gis brnyed pa yin//...*

*bla ma'i lung bstan rnam dag shel gyi me long zhes bya ba; kun bzang 'thug po bkod pa'i nags khrod dben sar bkod pa legs par rdzogs so/*

pp. 51–56: *Gser gling du byon pa'i rnam thar* Absent

b) fols. 17b–18b (pp. 56–58):

*ri nag po'i<sup>34</sup> gtsug lag khang gi pho brang nas; gshin rje bshed kyi rnal 'byor pa ra hu la gu pa tas<sup>35</sup> ri bo gangs chen<sup>36</sup> gyi rgyud du lung bstan pa: rgyu mtshan gnad gyi sgron ma<sup>37</sup> zhes bya ba<sup>38</sup> rdzogs s+ho//*

c) fols. 18b–19a (pp. 58–59):

*de dag gis ni ri bo nag po'i khong seng nas rnal 'byor pa dharma rakši tas gangs chen<sup>39</sup> rgyud du lung bstan pa rbad (?) sngags rdo rje'i 'gur<sup>40</sup> zhes bya ba rdzogs s+ho<sup>41</sup>//*

## Text no. 4

h) fols. 26b–31a (pp. 348–357):

*bla ma dang yi dam rnams kyis a ti sha bod du 'byon par lung bstan pa rnam dag shel gyi mchod rten (!?) zhes bya ba kun bzangs mthug po'i nags khrod du bkod pa 'di yongs su rdzogs so//*

b) fols. 16a–18a (pp. 327–331):

c) fols. 18a–19a (pp. 331–333):

<sup>31</sup> *de ltar bla ma dang yi dam lha tshogs rnams kyis kyang/ rje btsun chen po bod kha ba can gyi rgyal khams su lung bstan na yang/ ... bKa' gdams glegs bam, Pha chos, ed. 1993/94: 229.*

<sup>32</sup> For the present purpose I have used the headings as they are found in text 2, rendering abbreviated spellings in standard spelling; variant readings from text 4 are provided in the footnotes.

<sup>33</sup> *yi dam gyis*] text 4: *yi dam gyi lhas*.

<sup>34</sup> *ri nag po'i*] text 4: *ri bo nag po'i*.

<sup>35</sup> *ra hu la gu pa tas*] text 4: *ra hū la guptas*.

<sup>36</sup> *chen*] text 4 correctly: *can*.

<sup>37</sup> *gnad gyi sgron ma*] text 4: *gnad kyi sgron me*.

<sup>38</sup> text 4 add. *re zhig*.

<sup>39</sup> *chen*] text 4 correctly: *can*; text 4 add.: *gyi*.

<sup>40</sup> *'gur*] text 4 correctly: *mgur*.

<sup>41</sup> *sho*] text 4: *so*.

d) fols. 19a–20b (pp. 59–62):

*de dag gis ni rje btsun dom bhi pas ri*<sup>42</sup> *nag po'i khong seng*<sup>43</sup> *nas; ri bo gangs chen*<sup>44</sup> *gyi rgyud du lung bstan pa; thugs rje chen po la bskul ma btab pa phan bde'i dbyangs*<sup>45</sup> *yongs su rdzogs so*<sup>46</sup>//

e) fols. 20b–22a (pp. 62–65):

*de dag gis ni ri bo*<sup>47</sup> *zom gyi rgyud nas; bla ma dam pa a wa*<sup>48</sup> *dhu ti pas; ri bo gangs chen*<sup>49</sup> *gyi rgyud du lung bstan pa; phan bde'i dbyangs su bkod pa*<sup>50</sup> *rdzogs s+ho*//

f) fols. 22a–23a (pp. 65–67):

*de dag gis ni dpal na len tra'i gtsug lag khang nas; ku su lu rin chen sdes; ri bo gangs can gyi rgyud du lung bstan*<sup>51</sup> *gnad kyi sgron ma*<sup>52</sup> *zhes bya ba legs par rdzogs so*//

g) fols. 23a–24a (pp. 67–69):

*de dag gis ni dpal na len tra'i gtsug lag khang nas; bla ma dam pa rigs pa'i khu byug gis; ri bo gangs can gyi rgyud du lung bstan pa; gzhan la phan pa'i dbyangs zhes bya ba ste; de yan chod kyis jo bo la bla ma bsam gyis mi khyab pa mnga' ba rnams gyi nang nas*<sup>53</sup> *bod mtha' 'khob kyi sems can la thugs brtse bar mdzad pa'i bla ma rnams kyis lung bstan tshul de lta mtshon pa tsam gcig; ri bo gangs can gyi rgyud kyi mal 'byor pa; bhrum dza yan a ka ras; mi mngon pa'i dbyings su sbyar ba*<sup>54</sup> *rnam dag shel gyi me long zhes bya ba legs par rdzogs s+ho*<sup>55</sup>//

h) fols. 24a–35a (pp. 69–91):

*de dag gis ni rgya gar du sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa'i bya ba ji ltar mdzad pa'i tshul legs par rdzogs s+ho*<sup>56</sup>

d) fols. 19a–21b (pp. 333–338):

e) fols. 21b–23b (pp. 338–342):

f) fols. 23b–24b (pp. 342–344):

g) fols. 24b–26b (pp. 344–348):

a) fols. 1b–16a (pp. 298–327):

(After this follows the *rNam thar lam yig*)

(After this follows the *rNam thar lam yig*)

The colophons claim that the prophecies were transmitted by 'Brom ston pa, who is here called by his “secret” name sometimes used in the *bKa' gdams glegs bam*, Bhrum or Brum rje (see text 2/a and 4/h as well as texts 2/g and 4/g). In both texts the prophecies precede the *rNam thar lam yig*, which seems consistent since the latter refers to prophecies. The prophecies themselves can be subdivided into two parts: a section containing prophecies by the *yi dams*, which is called *dNgos*

<sup>42</sup> *ri*] text 4: *ri bo*.

<sup>43</sup> *seng*] text 4: *bseng*.

<sup>44</sup> *chen*] text 4 correctly: *can*.

<sup>45</sup> text 4 add.: *zhes bya ba*.

<sup>46</sup> *rdzogs so*] text 4: *rdzogs s+ho*.

<sup>47</sup> *ri bo'i*] text 4: *ri bo nag po'i*.

<sup>48</sup> *wa*] text 4: *ba*.

<sup>49</sup> *chen*] text 4 correctly: *can*.

<sup>50</sup> *bkod pa*] text 4: *bstan pa* (add.): *re zhig*.

<sup>51</sup> text 4 add.: *rgyu mtshan*.

<sup>52</sup> *sgron ma*] text 4: *me long*.

<sup>53</sup> The whole phrase from *bla ma dam pa rigs pa'i khu byug gis*... until ...*nang nas* is missing in text 4, perhaps a homoioteleuton due to the similar ending of ...*khang nas* and ...*nang nas*.

<sup>54</sup> text 4 add.: *bla ma'i lung bstan*.

<sup>55</sup> *legs par*] text 4: *re zhig*.

<sup>56</sup> *legs par rdzogs s+ho*] text 4: *lugs cung zad bkod pa rdzogs s+ho*.

*grub kyi 'od zer* (text 2/a and 4/h),<sup>57</sup> and prophecies by Atiśa's teachers. Text 2 begins with the *yi dam* prophecies, followed by the lama prophecies, while in text 4 the two parts are arranged the other way round. Moreover, while the well-known Atiśa biographies and the otherwise unknown prophecies alternate in text 2, text 4 only consists of the prophecies followed by the *rNam thar lam yig*. The arrangement of text 4 seems more logical and may have been the original one, and I provisionally regard the repeated title *rNam dag shel gyi me long* as the title of the whole section on prophecies. My current assumption is that the prophecies and the *rNam thar lam yig* once formed a unit as in text 4 that was then combined with the two biographical chapters with the initial title *Guruguṇadharmākara* as in text 2, but an in-depth study of both versions would be needed to explore their textual history more thoroughly.

I cannot discuss the matter further within the framework of this article, but I hope that this short comparison has shown that the newly published dPal brtsegs materials give fascinating insights into the way the master narrative of the bKa' gdams pa tradition was assembled, arranged, and rearranged. The examples introduced here confirm the composite nature of the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* and the fluidity in the sequence of its sections, as well as the originally independent nature of the biographical texts in the *Pha chos*. The two biographical chapters with the initial title *Guruguṇadharmākara* seem like an originally independent collection dealing with the life of Atiśa before his journey to Tibet.<sup>58</sup> The prophecies may or may not have originated together with the *rNam thar lam yig*, but they were certainly transmitted together at some point, as our manuscripts show. Strangely, the prophecies were not included in the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* collection together with the *lam yig* chapter, even though the beginning of the *rNam thar lam yig* explicitly refers to them. The newly published manuscripts thus allow us to catch glimpses of "the *bKa' gdams glegs bam* in the making" and the materials on which it may have been based.

<sup>57</sup> The *dNgos grub kyi 'od zer* was known to bSod nams lha'i dbang po who refers to it in his *bKa' gdams chos 'byung*, see Vetturini 2007: 50, 62, 71. It has thus now become possible to identify this so-far unidentified text.

<sup>58</sup> This is corroborated by the way they are treated in the *Blo sbyong glegs bam* and the *gDams ngag mdzod*, which both include these two Atiśa biographies, but no other parts of Atiśa's life-story, see n. 13 above.

#### 4. Hidden Books and Oral Transmissions: An Interwoven Lineage of rNying ma and bKa' gdams Masters

One more text from the dPal brtsegs volume needs to be addressed: number 1 in the volume, which in the table of contents bears the title *Rin chen spungs pa'i lo rgyus*. The manuscript consists of folios 1a–11a. It does not have a title page; the front page merely bears the remarks *sa gcod* (for *sa bcad* “contents, genre”?) *lo rgyus* (“history”) by a different hand, which gives the impression of a later attempt to classify the text. According to the colophon, the full title is *Thun mong ma yin pa rin po che dpungs pa'i bla ma brgyud pa'i lo rgyus lags s+h+yo*<sup>59</sup> “The Story of the Lineage of Teachers of the Pile of Precious Uncommon [i. e., Esoteric Instructions].” It is not dated, but it is striking to find certain irregular and archaic spellings throughout the text, which may indicate that it was copied from a relatively early manuscript.<sup>60</sup>

The work describes the transmission history of what the text characterises as *thun mong ma yin pa'i gdam* [\*gdams] *ngag rin chen dpungs* [\*spungs] *pa*, a “pile of precious uncommon [i. e., esoteric, non-public] oral instructions.” These instructions (*gdams ngag*) concern “view, meditation, and practice” (*lta bsgom spyod pa*). After a general introduction on the correct way of teaching and studying these instructions, the text moves on to an exposition of their *lo rgyus*, the history of their transmission, which serves the purpose of “generating a firm devotion [to the instructions] with faith that is free from any doubts.”<sup>61</sup> The story of the lineage masters of this transmission therefore serves to validate the instructions, and it must originally have been followed by the instructions themselves, which are not included in the volume.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Is this an uncommon spelling for *so*? Or, since the *ya btags* is also used to represent the combination *-ugs* (e. g. *th+ya* = *thugs*) in *dbu med* manuscripts, is it meant to be an abbreviation for *bzhugs so*?

<sup>60</sup> No *da drag* is used; however, we find *ma* with *ya btags*, for example p. 6.2 and 8.5: *myed*; p. 19.2: *rmyi lam*, etc.; frequent use of 'a as *rjes mjug*, for example p. 4.5: *bzhi'*, p. 8.6: *bcu'*, p. 9.3: *bde'*, p. 9.4 ff.: *dpe'*, etc. The place name Rwa sgren is spelled *Ral bsgren*, and the province of gTsang is spelled *rTsang*.

<sup>61</sup> Thus, for example, the introduction on fol. 1b.2: *...the tshom med pa'i yid ches pa'i gus pa brtan po bskyed pa'i ched du brgyud pa lo rgyus kyi gdam[s] ngag...*

<sup>62</sup> As discussed in Sørensen 1999, Tibetan authors mention three “piles of precious [instructions]” (*rin chen spungs pa*) in the context of the bKa' gdams legacy that all go back to the activities of lCe sgom Shes rab rdo rje: the *dPe chos rin chen spungs pa* “pile of precious *dharma* similes” containing Po to ba's instructions on the graded path, a *Man ngag rin chen spungs pa* “pile of precious oral instructions” containing a graded path exposition in combination with *mahāmudrā*, and a *Lag len rin chen spungs pa* “pile of precious practices” which is currently non-extant. Since *man ngag* and *gdams ngag* are very similar terms, one might suspect that the *gDams ngag rin chen dpungs pa* of our manuscript corresponds to the second of these three works, but since the dPal brtsegs publishers have not included the work itself this remains unclear.



According to the *lo rgyus* itself, which begins on folio 4b (p. 8), the lineage begins with Smṛtijñānakīrti,<sup>63</sup> an Indian master who according to some Tibetan authors marks the beginning of the “new” (*gsar ma*) translation period in the late 10<sup>th</sup>–early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. The account of Smṛti’s life is much more detailed than what is usually found in Tibetan *chos ’byung* literature.<sup>64</sup> It describes his adventurous life story from his youth in his homeland Magadha to his studies at Nālandā, and finally his journeys across the Tibetan plateau. When he first came to Tibet he went to the province of gTsang and spent some time living “incognito” as a goatherd because he did not speak Tibetan and the locals did not recognise his accomplishments as a *paṇḍit*, but he continued his meditation practice and protected the animals through rituals. He had brought books from India, but was worried that they would get damaged, and so he wrapped them in a cloth and hid them as a treasure,<sup>65</sup> an interesting real-life instance of a *gter ma*. Later on, he was recognised by some Indian travelling yogis (*a tsa ra*) and so people realised that he was a great Buddhist scholar. He had learned Tibetan and became a teacher and translator, but when his fame and his obligations as a teacher increased, he decided to go away to Khams. He took the books out of their hiding place; half of them were buried in a cave and the other half taken to ’Bri klung in Khams (folio 6a/p. 11). Gradually his fame grew there too and students assembled around him. He taught the *Abhidharmakośa* and Grammar, but to avoid too many distractions from his meditation he finally went away to Amdo.

The next lineage holder is rTa nag Tshul khriims snying po. He had studied with the yogi Shangs Ra bo che,<sup>66</sup> who had been trained in India and returned to Tibet, but his spiritual success remained limited. He then received instructions from

<sup>63</sup> According to our text (fol. 4b, p. 8) the teachings were transmitted from Maitreya via gSer gling pa, and from Vajradhara via Vajrapāṇi and the *dākinī* Dam pa rgyan to Jñānakīrti’s teacher Jñāna-bhadra, and then to Smṛtijñānakīrti himself.

<sup>64</sup> Only two short sections in the *Blue Annals* provide information on him, see pp. 160 and 204 f. *mKhas pa lde’u* and *Chos ’byung me tog snying po* relate the story of Smṛti in slightly more detail in the context of the beginning of the “new translations” of the tantras (*sngags gsar ma’i ’gyur*). A Nepalese called Padma rMe ru rtse had some limited knowledge of Buddhism; when asked for Buddhist teachings he recommended inviting an Indian *paṇḍit*. The king sent him off with some gold, and he invited the Indian scholars *a tsa ra* Phra la ring mo and Jo bo Smṛti. He himself died on the way and since the *paṇḍits* did not know the Tibetan language they were not recognised as scholars. The *Chos ’byung me tog snying po* adds the detail that Smṛti was caught by bandits and sold to become a goatherd. Smṛti went to Khams; he studied the language and collaborated with Tibetan *lo tsā bas* to translate tantric texts (Smṛti’s work as a translator and author is documented in the Tibetan *bsTan ’gyur*). See *mKhas pa lde’u* pp. 296 f.; *Chos ’byung me tog snying po* pp. 424–425. For further information on Smṛti see Cabezón’s biographical sketch on the “Treasury of Lives” website; on places in Khams associated with Smṛti see Iuchi 2013.

<sup>65</sup> *dpe rnam ras kyi na bzar dril nas gter du sbas*, fol. 5a (p. 9).

<sup>66</sup> For this yogi, see Vitali 2002: 90, fn. 6.

Smṛti, and these transformed him into a fully accomplished master. Due to this profound effect, the instructions were named *rin chen dpungs pa* “pile of precious [instructions]” (folio 7a/p. 13).

rTa nag Tshul khrim snying po gave the instructions to sBa sgom bSod nams rgyal mtshan from 'Phan yul (Central Tibet). sBa sgom is one of the highly non-sectarian Buddhist masters of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. He appears in the transmission lineage of the A ro lugs within the rNying ma *sems sde* teachings; at the same time, he also knew Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna and was an early teacher of the bKa' gdams pa master Po to ba Rin chen gsal (1027–1105).<sup>67</sup> According to our text, sBa sgom had studied yogic meditation techniques (*rtsa rlung*) in Rwa sgren with the Jo bo [Atiśa]. When he experienced difficulties in his meditation he asked the Jo bo's disciple 'Dzeng dGon pa ba (1016–1082) for advice, but he was not able to help in this matter. So he went to gTsang to ask rTa nag Tshul khrim snying po for advice, which he presumably received in the form of the gDams ngag rin chen spungs pa, which helped him to remove the obstacles; he practiced for some time in Mar yul (a designation for Ladakh or the Indus valley in the Western Himalayas) and became a great meditation master.

sBa sgom then went to Kha rag, where he met a certain gTsang bu bsgom chung who later turns out to be no other than Kha rag sgom chung dBang phyug blo gros, named after the region of Kha rag in gTsang.<sup>68</sup> He taught him the gDams ngag rin chen spungs pa, and together they went to Rwa sgren, where they met accomplished practitioners of the Lam rim, but the gDams ngag rin chen spungs pa was unknown—a small polemical side comment to highlight the accomplishments of the wandering yogi-ascetics against the monastic tradition. After sBa sgom's death, gTsang bu sgom chung<sup>69</sup> studied with 'Dzeng dGon pa pa dBang phyug rgyal mtshan who was the head of Rwa sgren (ca. 1078–1082), and after his death with a certain 'Go ma ba. After he died too, he left Rwa sgren to live as

<sup>67</sup> In the (rNying ma) *sems sde* transmission lineage he appears as a teacher who passed the instructions of the A ro lugs on to his student Kha rag sgom chung, see Biondo 2016: 91 f., 163 f., 175, 177 f., 182. sBa sgom is also mentioned in biographies of the bKa' gdams pa master Po to ba Rin chen gsal as the house priest (*bla mchod*) of Po to ba's father (Roesler 2011: 138); this is interesting since Po to ba's father is said to have been a Bon po. sBa sgom thus appears as a beautiful example of the eclectic Buddhist masters of this period, in which numerous crossovers between religious lineages and traditions seem to have been entirely normal and acceptable.

<sup>68</sup> On him see Sørensen 2002, who dates his lifetime approximately from 1040/45 to 1115–20, *ibid.* p. 243. As Sørensen has shown, Kha rag sgom chung—like his teacher sBa sgom—is one of the non-sectarian masters of this period who was trained in the bKa' gdams, bKa' brgyud, and *rdzogs chen* traditions. Dudjom Rinpoche 1991: 557–558 mentions Kha rag sgom chung in the context of the transmission of the rNying ma *man ngag sde*.

<sup>69</sup> I am a little confused about the use of names in this passage (fols 8b–9a, pp. 16–17) since it speaks of Sangs rgyas bsgom pa rather than Kha rag sgom chung. However, from the context this appears to be the same person.

a wandering ascetic, and in Zhu mkhan brag (also known as gZhung mkhan brag) he met dGe bshes Pu to ba (or Po to ba, 1027–1105). This must have happened during the period in the 1080s when Po to ba had left Rwa sgren and spent some time teaching in and around the area of 'Phan yul before settling down in his own monastery Po to dgon pa. Our text describes how Po to ba was impressed by Kha rag sgom chung's understanding of the graded path and praised his insights and qualities.<sup>70</sup>

Later in life Kha rag sgom chung taught his own students and finally retired in the “Black Cave” (*phug nag po*) of Kha rag in gTsang to meditate. There he passed the *gdams ngag* instructions on to lHo pa Dar ma skyabs. lHo pa had originally studied the “old tantras” and rDzogs chen with his teacher Rong pa Chos bzang (i. e., Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po, 1042–1136). The text describes how lHo pa had to wait for three years before he was admitted as a student and received the instructions of the gDams ngag rin chen spungs pa. Later he passed them on to his own students; among these, the text mentions “the three Myang,” namely Myang bsgom rGod po, dKar po, and Chos she, and other disciples including dGe bshes Ar, rGya dmar, and Jo btsun rje chung. These students asked lHo pa for permission to put the instructions down in writing. The written versions of lHo pa's instructions are specified as the “common (i. e., non-trantric) instructions on training the awakening mind” (*thun mong gi gdams ngag byang chub sems sbyong*), the “uncommon (i. e., esoteric) *rin chen dpungs pa*” (*thun mong ma yin pa rin chen dpungs pa*), and short “miscellaneous instructions that are like nails [pinning down] the core meaning” (*kha 'thor gyi gdams ngag gnad bsdu don gyi gzer bu*). The transmission lineage closes with three further students: the instructions are passed on from lHo pa to Jo sras lCags ri ba, from him to a Slob dpon Jo btsun, and from him to Bla ma Ba lam pa.<sup>71</sup> The dates of these figures are unknown to me, but a rough estimate would place the last teachers in this lineage approximately in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The reproduction of the manuscript ends with the remark that this is “the history of the teacher lineage of the uncommon *man ngag rin chen dpungs pa*,” after which the text of the *man ngag* itself would presumably have followed.

I have rendered this transmission history here in some detail because it gives interesting glimpses of the period of the early *phyi dar* in which the different “schools” of Tibetan Buddhism were still at a formative stage, and masters studied far across the field, and often across different lineages. One gets the impression that the difference between *gsar ma* and *rnying ma* teachings at this time may have

<sup>70</sup> This account seems to echo the content of another work known as *dGe bshes po to ba dang kha rag sgom chung gnyis ka'i rnam thar*. See Sørensen 2002, esp. 245–249; Roesler 2011: 112–113.

<sup>71</sup> Is he the same as Sangs rgyas Ba lam pa, a student of lCe sgom Shes rab rdo rje (see Sørensen 1999, fn. 31)? There may also be an overlap with the figures mentioned in Sørensen and Hazod 2007: 98–99, fn. 105 and 110.

been relevant for the question of the disputed tantras, but Tibetan Buddhists of this era were not trying to draw strict demarcations in other areas of Buddhist teaching and practice, or in the teacher-student lineages. This text in any case seems to reflect a fairly non-sectarian, or, perhaps better, pre-sectarian environment. The lineage masters mentioned here studied old tantras and rDzogs chen as well as Lam rim and Blo sbyong, epitomising the systems of the rNying ma pa and the bKa' gdams pa respectively, and some are also known for integrating Mahāmudrā which is normally seen as “typically bKa' brgyud.” The situation is complicated by the fact that not much is known about many of these figures, which makes it difficult to understand the broader background of this transmission lineage. At the same time, it makes the information contained in this short text even more precious, and it is to be hoped that further investigations will be able to fill in the gaps in the picture presented here.

This article has tried to open up some avenues of investigation into the wealth of material that has become available through the efforts of the dPal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang, although, “avenues” sounds much too grand and I should probably rather speak of “little lanes” or “footpaths.” This small contribution could only highlight some interesting points, without attempting to delve deeper. It has perhaps raised more tantalising questions than given satisfactory answers. However, I hope that it makes a good beginning for what promises to be a rewarding venture for future research.

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